

Mieczysław WEINBERG (1919-1996)

Concertino for Violin and Piano, Op. 42 (1948) [18:15]

Sonatina for Violin and Piano, Op. 46 (1949) [14:58]

Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes, Op. 47/3 (1949/52) [10:13]

Ewelina Nowicka (violin)

Milena Antoniewicz (piano)

rec. 2012-13, Jerzy Rybiński concert hall of the Pedagogical-Artistic Faculty of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Kalisz, Poland

RECART 0006 [43:25]

The Polish violinist Ewelina Nowicka is no stranger to the music of her fellow compatriot Mieczysław Weinberg. She became acquainted with his compositions whilst researching Dmitri Shostakovich, and was immediately won over to this, at the time, little-known composer. Since then, Weinberg has become a force to be reckoned with, and record companies have awakened to the fact that this Polish-Jewish composer ranks amongst the greatest of the twentieth century. There has been a tidal wave of recordings of late from such labels as Chandos, Naxos and CPO, not to mention the now defunct label Olympia. In 2015 I [reviewed](#) a CPO disc containing two of the works featured here, the Concertino, Op. 42 and the Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes, Op. 47/3. Again the violinist was Ewelina Nowicka, who had arranged the Rhapsody for violin and orchestra, so it's interesting to have the opportunity to hear it in two guises.

The Concertino exists in two versions, where the violin is pitched against either the piano or an orchestra. The original manuscript is lost. It was composed in 1948, a time when Andrei Zhdanov's 'anti-formalist' campaign was in full swing. This meant that music had to be composed in a style accessible to the people. The work is cast in three movements, and throughout an attractive, beguiling lyricism pervades. In the opening movement the violin spins its heart-warming melody against a fairly simple piano accompaniment. This is followed by a cadenza, where the violinist is put through her paces; she steps up to the mark admirably. There is a hint of wistfulness in the slow movement. The Rondo finale is more generous to the pianist, offering more involvement. Although beginning fairly unruffled, Weinberg ups the rhetoric as the movement progresses, with scintillating double-stops adding some sparkle to the flourish at the end.

A year later, the composer penned his Sonatina, Op. 46, dedicating it to the Russian composer Boris Tchaikovsky. It was premiered in 1955 by Leonid Kogan, partnered by Andrei Mitnik in Moscow. The opening movement has a naive charm. There follows a Lento with a bittersweet quality, which becomes more animated in the middle, only to return to a more sombre mood. This is all assuaged in the folk-inflected finale, delivered with panache and verve.

David Oistrakh, no less, did much to champion the Rhapsody on Moldavian Themes, providing fingerings. Its Jewish character and flavour has more than a hint of Enescu's Romanian Rhapsody No. 1 and Kodály's Dances of Galánta. Weinberg's deft skill in the use of Moldavian themes and folk rhythms is inspired and resourceful. Nowicka and Antoniewicz have a real feel for the character of the piece, and deliver a performance, which is both idiomatic and oozing with personality.

The performers obviously have a deep love for and commitment to Weinberg's music, and this translates into these authoritative and assured performances. Added to that, the balance between the two instruments is spot on. Well-recorded, fulsomely annotated in English, Polish and German with a cache of fascinating photos to boot, well ... there's the nub of it.

Stephen Greenbank

Charles Martin LOEFFLER (1861-1935)

Divertissement Espagnol for saxophone and orchestra (1900) [8:53]

La Villanelle du Diable op.9 (1901) [12:27]

Une Nuit de Mai for violin and orchestra (No.2 of *Veillées de l'Ukraine* (Evenings in the Ukraine)) (1891) [16:58]

Divertissement in A minor for violin and orchestra (1894) [29:25]

Amy Dickson (saxophone)

Lorraine McAslan (violin)

BBC Concert Orchestra/Johannes Wildner

rec. Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London, 2013

DUTTON EPOCH CDLX 7313 [67:56]

While the music of American composer Charles Martin Loeffler escaped Karl Krueger's 1960s LP onslaught funded by the Society for the Promotion of the American Musical Heritage (SPAMH) it enjoyed other attention. His chamber music did well, including the *Music for Four Stringed Instruments* and his *Two Rhapsodies* for oboe, viola and piano. One orchestral work kept the flag flying: the suite *Memories of my Childhood (In a Russian Village)* which was recorded by Toscanini ([review](#) [review](#)) and [Hanson](#). *Pagan Poem* was recorded by Stokowski. The same poem was included, with *Evocation* for women's voices and orchestra, by Maazel in the Cleveland Orchestra's concert programmes.

His representation in more recent times has not been lavish but there have been landmarks, including one chamber disc from [Naxos](#) and a sumptuous Edwardian extravaganza on New World 80332-2 (*La Mort de Tintagiles* and *Five Irish Fantasies*) from the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra conducted by John Nelson. Dutton have concentrated on works they can source from Philadelphia's Fleisher Library. These happen to be products of the era 1894-1901.

Loeffler escaped the Leipzig-Berlin school as exemplified by Chadwick and Paine. His music was of a more liberated type with some Gallic-Russian-exotic aspects. There is not one work here that does not carry a French language title. The music can be broadly grouped with that of Farwell, Hill and Converse. There are also parallels with Bantock, whose poetic and imaginative work looked increasingly dated after 1918. Both composers were drawn to sultry topics and both found inspiration in Celtic subjects. Bax, who also had Celtic facets, also crosses territory favoured by Loeffler in terms of inspiration. Bax's Russian sympathies are tracked in his piano solo [May Night in the Ukraine](#) (1912) which was written within two decades of Loeffler's *Veillées de l'Ukraine* (1891). The same piece, but orchestrated by Graham Parlett, appears as the central element of Bax's [Russian Suite](#).

Loeffler took a shine to the saxophone and gave it an exposed place in the spotlight in the nine-minute Hispanic *Divertissement Espagnol*. Its smoochily serenading ways are indulged. Star player [Amy Dickson](#) who has also worked for Dutton in the Holbrooke concerto (CDLX7277) is capable, confident and creamy of tone.

Lorraine McAslan also has the gifted resilience of a musician who is prepared to lend her name, inspiration, hard work and coruscating skills to neglected music. One of her finest forays was the [Lyrita](#) Coleridge Taylor Violin Concerto with Julius Harrison's *Bredon Hill* even if they did have to wait a very long time before being issued. She also gave us the Alwyn Concerto on [Naxos](#). Dutton have worked with her on many occasions, including in concertos by [Bowen](#), [Brian](#), [Sainsbury and Haydn Wood](#) and [Creith, Pitfield and Arnell](#). It's quite a track-record and we can hope that there is more to come.

The BBC Concert Orchestra are conducted by Johannes Wildner who has been their and Dutton's muse for the Braunfels series ([review](#) [review](#)). Everyone rises with conviction to best these unfamiliar challenges.

The florid show-piece, *La Villanelle du Diable*, in two movements, has points of comparison with early Florent Schmitt and with the Ravel of *Boléro*, lying way in the future. It's lusciously orchestrated,

complete with concert organ, and its cholesterol count is lavish. It drifts perilously close to turgid in the second panel but when about to go over the edge saves itself at the last moment.

There's a caramel-sweet Bruch-like aspect to Loeffler's *Nuit de Mai* but it also sits comfortably alongside such works as Saint-Saëns' *Havanaise* (when will someone issue the Kogan recording?) and *Caprice Andalou* (Hoelscher is excellent in this). The Loeffler work carries a dedication to Sarasate. *Nuit de Mai* is the second of four pieces from *Veillées de l'Ukraine* after Gogol's book. This score is a predecessor to the lighter confection that is *Memories of my Childhood (Life in a Russian Village)*.

Much the same applies to the *Divertissement* - another work whose title does the music less than justice. It would have travelled further and its concert life endured longer had it been called *Concert Parisien* or *Symphonie Française*. It might then have done at least as well as Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole*. As Lewis Foreman remarks, this is a half-hour Violin Concerto but one masquerading needlessly under a pseudonym. Its first two movements are opulently loquacious rather than craggily dramatic. That Spanish *étincelante* material is handled with silvery brilliance by McAslan who has all the eloquent resource of a Kogan or a Haendel. Drama makes few appearances in this score but returns complete with the *Dies Irae* in the 14-minute finale. True, the invention in this extended finale can become inert but there is plenty by way of compensation. This includes a subtle needle-sharp piece of valedictory lacework and delicate terpsichore. The solo violin dances like a pin-bright rapier into silence.

Lewis Foreman's English-only programme note touches on and delves into all the right bases and does not neglect factual essentials.

These are premiere recordings. Perhaps we can hope for other Loeffler works to be ushered out in our direction for appraisal. My own priorities would include his *Evocations* for women's voices and orchestra (1930), the *Fantastic Concerto* (cello) (1891), *Clowns* for jazz orchestra (1927) and *Beat! Beat! Drums!* for unison men's chorus, three saxophones, brass, drums and two pianos (1917). Beyond that there are other early-mid 20th century American works with potential for merit and magic. These include the tone poems *Norge* by Philip Greeley Clapp and *The Pit and the Pendulum* by Edgar Stillman Kelley, Farwell's mammoth, Brucknerian-scale *Rudolph Gott Symphony* and the Symphonies 3-5 and oratorio *Saul of Tarsus* by Cecil Effinger.

The Americans have been as neglectful and fame-myopic as the French and English. This Loeffler anthology is a delight and has done good work at redressing scales that need to be rebalanced. Thanks to Dutton and their collaborators for making recordings among works that for years people considered were mere encyclopedia entries.

Rob Barnett

Carl MILLÖCKER (1842-1899)

Waltzes, Marches, Polkas

Overture E flat major (1877) [4:31]
Polka française - Ida (1878) [4:29]
Polka schnell *Cyprienne* (1881) [2:45]
Sunday children's waltz (1892) [10:00]
Polka mazurka *Melitta* (1878) [4:43]
Apajune-Marsch (1881) [2:39]
Probekuss Waltz (1894) [9:55]
Ringstrasse Polka (1878) [3:11]
Eilgut Galop 1896) [2:47]
Carnevalslaunen - polka schnell [2:58]
Der Bettelstudent overture (1882-84) [8:56]
Pizzicato-Walzer (1879) [4:44]
Quecksilber - Polka schnell (1878) [2:34]
Nürnberger Symphoniker/Christian Simonis
rec. Stadthalle Fürth, Nürnberg, 2015
CPO 555 004-2 [65:21]

Vienna-born Carl Millöcker would be pretty much unknown but for his operetta *Der Bettelstudent*. In that sense, for the time being, he finds himself in the company of other Strauss contemporaries whose works have their place in Marco Polo's [Contemporaries of the Strauss Family](#) series and Tonstudio's [Spirit of Vienna](#) volumes. CPO have here helped him take one further step forward as they have done for [Eilenberg](#), [Gung'l](#) and [Bilse](#) (777 341-2), all conducted by Christian Simonis although not necessarily with this orchestra. [Ivanovici](#) is also of this school and his music can be heard on an Electrecord disc. Why have there not been any Robert Stolz collections like this? Millöcker has scored prominence with complete recordings of three of his operettas. I have already mentioned *Bettelstudent* ([review](#) [review](#) [review](#)) but we should not forget *Gasparone* ([review](#) [review](#)) and [Dubarry](#).

The Nürnberger Symphoniker and Christian Simonis, openly and clearly recorded, are practised hands when it comes to the nineteenth century courtly ballroom dance genre. It is not just that they are technically honed but they also demonstrate their ability to keep their music-making supple and airborne. This is sumptuous and 'floaty' playing and it makes for delightful listening. Control and romance are held in equipoise.

The *Overture* with its Dvořák, Offenbach, Smetana and Rossini pre- and post- echoes is a rattling discovery and would surely have made its way in the world if only Millöcker had given it a proper name. Its central waltz passage presents impeccably beguiling credentials. *Cyprienne* - one of many a *Polka schnell* on this disc - races along, flounces flying, with confidence at high port and a polished sheen. In the *Probekuss* Waltz serene violins proclaim the airy defeat of gravity. We cannot escape *Bettelstudent* which here is represented by an extended and magically sedate concert overture. A particular treasure is the *Pizzicato-Walzer*, a grand companion to Josef Strauss's famous Polka. Here it is given with fairy-feathered attention to tempi and zephyr-delicate dynamics. It's a real charmer and would make a revivifying choice for the Viennese New Year. We end with another whirlingly seductive brief Polka schnell, *Quecksilber* (Mercury).

The only mystery here is that the booklet lists 14 tracks but the insert and the disc sport only thirteen. Missing is *Valerie* - polka mazurka (1882). I am not sure what happened there.

If you are partial to the orchestral dance music of Vienna's golden decades before the Great War then you need look no further. Certainly, Norbert Rubey's supporting liner-notes (German and English) are no reason to turn away; quite the contrary.

Rob Barnett

Sergei RACHMANINOV (1873-1943)

Virtuoso Arrangements by Earl Wild

Martin Jones (piano)

rec. 2016, Wyastone Leys, Monmouth, Wales

NIMBUS NI 5965 [72:55]

I never heard Earl Wild in the flesh, nor have I heard his recordings: I know him only by reputation, as a virtuoso pianist in the Liszt tradition. There is a website dedicated to his work and legacy which you can find [here](#), and many of his recordings have been reissued on their Ivory Classics label. Like Liszt he made many transcriptions. Here we have one containing thirteen of his versions of Rachmaninov songs (there are fourteen in all) along with a few others based on other composers.

The general style is that of Rachmaninov's writing in his solo piano works and the concertos: a very flexible and mobile bass line supports melodic writing in the treble which is often very full indeed, with complex textures involving scales and filigree decoration of all kinds. There is a copious use of the sustaining pedal so that the instrument is flooded with sound. However, the harmonies should not blur and the main melody should always stand out strongly.

Some of these versions are good old barnstorming versions in the virtuosic tradition, but by no means all. Fairly typical is the *Vocalise*, well known from other arrangements. Here the familiar melody gets gradually more and more elaborate accompaniment. *Floods of Spring* is an exuberant number which does indeed flood the piano with sound but has a quieter but scarcely less elaborate middle section. *Do not grieve* is somewhat similar.

However, a greater number, while still with elaborate and complex textures, are actually much gentler, for example *The Muse*, *To the children*, the final *Dreams* and my favourite of all of these, *On the death of a linnet*, an exquisite piece.

Of those pieces not by Rachmaninov, the opening *Mexican Hat Dance* is based on a silly tune everyone knows, which acquires more and more complications as it proceeds, and Tchaikovsky's *At the ball* does something similar to what starts out as a simple song. I suppose I must have seen Disney's film of Snow White at some time, though I don't remember it; Wild's *Reminiscences of Snow White* is a pot-pourri of themes from the film worked up in the manner of Liszt's operatic fantasias. I could have spared this in favour of the missing Rachmaninov song transcription, *Harvest of Sorrow*. *J. S. Bach Hommage à Poulenc* is a piece of parodic pastiche which struck me as not nearly as amusing as Alec Templeton's *Bach goes to Town*. And Wild's version of the *Dance of Four Swans* from *Swan Lake* I found frankly horrible: the charm, innocence and melancholy of the original were sacrificed to meaningless bows and flounces.

No praise can be too high for Martin Jones's rendering of all these works, including the ones I didn't care for. Not only does he have a prodigious and immaculate technique, in which every note is clear, the right lines are brought out or subdued, he never goes through his tone or blurs the harmony, but he is also a feeling musician who phrases sensitively and enters into the spirit of these very difficult pieces. He is superbly recorded, which is not surprising as he has recorded a great deal for Nimbus, over a very wide range, which includes a great deal of Spanish music as well as such exotica as the complete piano works of both Stravinsky and Szymanowski. The sleeve note, in English only, gives useful background. Fans of Earl Wild's transcriptions should know that Jones has also recorded a disc of his Gershwin versions (Nimbus NI753).

So this is a disc mostly of delights. But it should be sampled one a time – you should no more listen to it straight through than have a meal consisting entirely of cream buns.

Stephen Barber

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Rachmaninov

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Tchaikovsky:

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Giovanni Lorenzo LULIER (1669-1700)

Aria in G minor 'Amor di che tu vuoi' (transcr. for two cellos and continuo) [5:17]

Accademia Ottoboni (Rebeca Ferri (cello), Francesco Romano (theorbo, guitar), Anna Fontana (harpsichord))/Marco Ceccato (cello)

rec. 2016, Cori, Italy

Reviewed as 16-bit lossless download from [eClassical](#)

ALPHA 368 [63:26]

The cardinals referred to in the title of this release are Benedetto Pamphili and Pietro Ottoboni, who were in Rome as the seventeenth century closed and the eighteenth opened. They presided over a time when the city played host to three of the greatest names in Italian music: Corelli, Alessandro Scarlatti and Handel. The former directed a major orchestra which included four of the composers on this recording, all of whom were cellists: Amadei, Haym, Lulier and Perroni. I doubt that I'm alone in not knowing any of these names. Indeed, the only name I recognise at all is that of Bononcini, but I believe this to be the first of his music that I've heard.

I'm not going to attempt to describe each work individually, partly because I'm sure you already have a fair idea of what late Baroque cello and basso continuo music will sound like, but mostly because the works have tended to rather merge into one another. This is my main criticism of the release: whether by choice or by necessity, there is not a lot of variety in the works that have been selected. More than half of the 63 minutes are occupied by slow, fairly sombre music, and even the contrasting faster movements seem to blend in, lacking as they do much in the way of dynamic variation. Is that a choice made by the performers or imposed upon them by the scores? I don't know. My colleague Johan van Veen, in a [review](#) of Vivaldi sonatas by these players, commended them on their very clear distinction between different tempi. I have to say that I don't hear that clearly here. If andante is akin to walking pace, then these are very stately walks indeed, taking us too close to adagio. Admittedly, the allegros and prestos are about right, but as I have already remarked, some of that energy is lost by the uniform dynamics. If I was to pick a single work as the best, it would probably be the Bononcini sonata, which might also suggest why his name has survived slightly better than the others down the centuries.

The Vivaldi cello sonatas mentioned above were initially released on Zig-Zag Territoires and then reissued on Alpha ([review](#)). As far as I can tell, this is a new recording. I am impressed by the timbre of the instruments. Marco Ceccato's cello is beautifully rich, and the harpsichord is not at all jangly, though I suspect this is partly the effect of careful microphone placement – thank you to the engineer. The booklet notes provide good biographical and historical detail.

If you have gained an impression that I haven't enjoyed this release, please let me assure you that this is an interesting selection, given the obscurity of the composers, and lovingly performed. All I would have liked is a little more variety, especially in the playing.

David Barker

Paul CORFIELD GODFREY (b. 1950)

Daeron, Op. 45 [6:30]

Tolkien Songs, Op. 9 [20:05]

Mysteries of Time, Op. 44 [23:46]

Akallabêth, Op. 42 [17:09]

Tara McSwiney (soprano), Andrew Henley (tenor), Adam Jondelius (baritone)

Nicola Loten (flute), Niamh Ferris (viola), Immanuel Carl Maria Vogt (piano), Connor Fogel (piano)

Sung texts are available online

rec. at Holy Trinity Church, Hereford, 2015

PRIMAFACIE PFC059 [67:30]

I must admit that I'm a novice when it comes to Tolkien and his highly personal world. I heard the novel *The Hobbit* being read on the radio almost fifty years ago and remember that I found it entertaining and quite fascinating, but I never went any further in exploring the Tolkien legacy. Consequently I may be the least suitable person to review the present disc, the music of which is so closely related to Tolkien. But my philosophy is that music should be possible to enjoy in strictly musical terms, and that's the way I approached this disc. Moreover two colleagues have already reviewed it ([review](#)) ([review](#)) and Tolkienists (if such a word exists) are advised to read them as well.

The opening piece, *Daeron* for flute and piano, is a beautiful pastoral, melodious and soothing, but there are ominous chords in the piano that give signs of something unknown menacing. Nicola Loten plays with strong feeling. This is also the most recent composition on the disc. The *Tolkien Songs* Op. 9 that follow are instead the earliest. *Strider* is clearly indebted to folk music, as are several of the others. *Song of the Eagle* is as majestic as the bird in question, and *Alive without breath* is truly beautiful. *Drinking Song* is a duet for tenor and baritone, a bit boisterous and near the end of the song there is a bell signal: "Time, Gentlemen, please!" isn't it? *In Western lands* has an unmistakable Britishness about it. Best of all, to my mind, is the concluding *Roads go ever ever on*: soft very beautiful and magical.

Shadow-Bride for soprano, viola and piano may be influenced by Johannes Brahms, not in musical terms but in the combination voice, viola and piano. Again there is British atmosphere and again there is something mysterious around it.

Mysteries of Time is the only work here with no references to Tolkien. Here I was fascinated by the darkness and cold of *Graveyard*, Adam Jondelius's deeply involved reading of the highly atmospheric Yeats setting *The seven woods of Coole*, growing to a thrilling climax, yes, even two! And in the dramatic and intense *The Queen of Air and Darkness* the three singers join forces to great effect.

The final number, *Akallabêth* for solo piano, is also the longest. It is strong and powerful but with lyrical moments of great beauty. A fascinating composition, where the final section is a funeral march. Technically it must be a challenge for any pianist – and also for the instrument. Connor Fogel plays it with verve and commitment. Commitment is in fact something that characterises all the musicians involved in this programme, which was recorded on one single day. Paul Corfield Godfrey's extensive liner notes are excellent and the song texts are available online.

Accessible and captivating music that should appeal to a wide audience.

Göran Forsling

Previous reviews: [Stuart Sillitoe](#) ~ [Brian Wilson](#)

Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Symphonies Nos 1-8 (Neue Schubert-Ausgabe numbering system)

Berliner Philharmoniker/Nikolaus Harnoncourt

rec. live, 2003/06 Philharmonie, Berlin, Germany

BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER RECORDINGS BPHR 150063 [5 SACD: 273.00]

"Music, with Schubert at its heart, is my daily bread. Schubert has been my constant companion. For me, he was the personification of music." Nikolaus Harnoncourt

In 2015 Berliner Philharmoniker Recordings released the 'Franz Schubert Edition' containing live performances under Nikolaus Harnoncourt of the complete Symphonies, the late Masses No's 5 and 6 and a concert performance of the opera 'Alfonso und Estrella'. A high-end product the hardcover edition contains 8 audio CDs, a single Pure Audio Blu-ray disc, a download code for high resolution studio master audio files and a video interview with conductor Harnoncourt ([review](#)). Since the release of the 'Franz Schubert Edition' Harnoncourt, who had recently retired from conducting, died in March 2016 aged 86. The Berliner Philharmoniker held Harnoncourt in high regard awarding the conductor the Hans von Bülow medal in 2000 and granting him honorary membership in 2014.

Now newly issued here are those live Harnoncourt performances of the 8 Symphonies only, taken from the 'Franz Schubert Edition' on a 5 CD (hybrid-SACD) box set. I notice there is also a vinyl edition of the 8 symphonies available as a limited collector's edition on 8 LPs. Employed throughout the sets is the Neue Schubert-Ausgabe system favoured in Germany numbering the symphonies as 1-8 rather than the more usual UK/American scheme using the numbering 1-6, 8 and 9. With the German scheme, there is a Symphony No. 7 as the Symphony No. 8 'Unvollendete/Unfinished' becomes No. 7, the Symphony No. 9 'Große/Great' becomes No. 8 and there is no Symphony No. 9.

Berlin born and bred in Styria, Austria, Nikolaus Harnoncourt was a conductor particularly known for his historically-informed performances and in 1953 founded the period-instrument group Concentus Musicus Wien. A fervent Schubert devotee Harnoncourt said in 1997 "Schubert is the composer who is closest to my heart." My first comprehensive exposure to Harnoncourt conducting Schubert was in 2005 with his reissued live set of the complete Schubert symphonies with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra recorded in 1992 at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam coupled with the 2 Overtures in the Italian Style on Warner Classics.

For an orchestra firmly rooted in the Austro/German, Classical/Romantic tradition it was surprising for Rudolf Wetzal, who played bass with the Berliner Philharmoniker, to explain that except for the 'Unfinished' and 'Great' the orchestra had "played so little Schubert in the past." It is certainly the case that the early Schubert symphonies are often grievously overlooked as lesser examples of Schubert's symphonic writing. Nevertheless, the Berliner Philharmoniker has steadfastly championed Schubert in the recording studio with sets of the complete symphonies under Herbert von Karajan, Karl Böhm and Daniel Barenboim.

Sounded out as a possible guest conductor by orchestra management during Karajan's time as chief conductor Harnoncourt first worked with the Berliner Philharmoniker in 1991. He knew this famous Berlin orchestra well performing 29 concert programmes and giving over 90 concerts in Berlin and Salzburg. Meticulous by nature, wherever possible Harnoncourt made lengthy and serious study of Schubert's own manuscripts removing the unauthentic revisions that have become part of the scores. Under Harnoncourt the Berliner Philharmoniker recorded Schubert's 8 symphonies at live concerts over three seasons 2003-06 at the Philharmonie, Berlin. Although the players use modern instruments Harnoncourt adopts certain aspects of the broad model of period informed practice that he believes comes closest both technically and stylistically to Schubert's true intentions. Despite Harnoncourt's extensive research there is nothing academic or stuffy here with these constantly enjoyable performances containing a fresh and spontaneous feel. When hearing these Schubert

recordings, it is not surprising that Harnoncourt concentrated his rehearsal sessions on “dynamics, phrasing, tone and tempi.”

Harnoncourt makes a persuasive return to what he considers to be Schubert’s own intentions in his scores. Throughout the set Harnoncourt directs magnificent playing from the Berliner Philharmoniker and displays an impressive sensitivity to the detail in the scores that allows the listener to appreciate nuance and tone colour together with a natural flow of unforced forward momentum. Praiseworthy is the degree of rhythmic metrical and dynamic detail he uncovers which is not always evident in other readings. Without overemphasising individual instruments Harnoncourt reveals plenty of detail and surprising points. I find these to be incisive performances that seem to extend the deeply imbedded bitter-sweet quality sensibly without being excessive. In the symphonies, the stream of lyricism is paramount with Harnoncourt’s interpretations so often infused with Schubert’s innate Viennese character. The tempi changes can seem quicksilver with rhythms and accents crisply and cleanly articulated. Harnoncourt’s speeds can vary from the exceedingly brisk but never breathless to unhurried yet certainly never feeling laboured. Overall, I find these perceptively conceived accounts from Harnoncourt enable me to experience Schubert’s writing from a new perspective.

Of the earlier symphonies Symphony No. 1 from 1813 written by the 16-year-old prodigy is especially engagingly performed, infused with distinct Viennese dance elements that were inherent in the composer’s consciousness. Harnoncourt’s reading of the opening movement feels incisive and beguiles with its brilliance. I also relished the sweet and tender Andante which could easily depict a breath-taking scene on the Alpine foothills close to Schubert’s Vienna home. Composed 3 years later in 1816 the Symphony No. 4 is sometimes titled the ‘Tragische/Tragic’ for its sombre strain. Especially noticeable in the opening movement is the recurring intensifying, then relaxing, of tension that adds to the discernible tragic predilection. In the Andante the underlying melancholic rather introspective quality of the writing lays deep in Harnoncourt’s reading. By contrast the final two movements are optimistic in character especially the invigorating and determined Finale with its imposing Coda almost regal in disposition.

Regarding the enduringly admired Symphony No. 7 (No. 8) ‘Unvollendete/Unfinished’ from 1822, Harnoncourt acknowledges this iconic work was intended as a four-movement score although he is convinced there must have been a point when Schubert decided the two completed movements were perfect on their own. Immediately in the first movement Allegro moderato Harnoncourt engages the listener with Schubert’s enchanting sound world in a reading that maintains an exceptional inner tension. Remarkable in the second movement Andante con moto is the bitter-sweet quality of dramatic expression and sheer beauty that Harnoncourt imbues into the performance. Harnoncourt believes the Symphony No. 8 (No. 9) ‘Große/Great’ composed in 1825/26 is a colossal edifice in which Schubert remakes the symphony. He states, “anyone who has experienced this masterpiece is no longer the same as before.” This is a magnetic reading from Harnoncourt combining biting drama with deep sensitivity. Bold and confidently rendered in the first movement I don’t think I’ve noticed before how Wagnerian the opening horn calls sound. In the slow movement, it is easy to admire the invigorating encounter between the primarily pastoral quality of the march-like writing and the dramatic extremes. Relishing the dance melodies in the Scherzo Harnoncourt is spirited without ever feeling frantic and the bold and courageous Finale: Allegro Vivace concludes incisively with pulsating energy.

On hybrid SACDs, there are no problems whatsoever with the sonics of these live performances from the Philharmonie, Berlin, satisfyingly recorded, vividly clear with plenty of presence. There is virtually no extraneous noise and the applause has been taken out. Excellent, detailed booklet notes are provided to the high standard expected from this label.

Under Nikolaus Harnoncourt the Berliner Philharmoniker plays magnificently from start to finish with a sense of spontaneity that carries the listener along on an enthralling journey. Providing inspiration at every turn Harnoncourt makes a persuasive case for these treasurable Schubert symphonies.

Michael Cookson

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Berliner Philharmoniker/Nikolaus Harnoncourt

Recorded live at Philharmonie, Berlin, Germany

Symphonies No's 3 and 4: 22/25 October 2003

Symphony No. 1: 22/24 April 2004

Symphonies No's 6 and 8: 2/3 December 2004

Symphony No. 2: 14/16 April 2005

Symphonies No. 5 and 9: 22/24 March 2006

Charles-Marie WIDOR (1844-1937)

Suite Florentine (arr. for flute and piano) [11:38]

Introduction and Rondo for clarinet and piano, Op.72 [7:51]

Suite for flute and piano, Op.34 [17:33]

Suite for flute and piano, Op.34; 1st version of final movement [4:39]

Trois Pièces (arr. for oboe and piano) [11:48]

Sérénade for flute, violin, cello, harmonium and piano, Op.10 [8:21]

Thies Roorda (flute), Alessandro Soccorsi (piano), Olivier Patey (clarinet), Alexei Ogrintchouk (oboe), Bert Mooiman (harmonium), Junko Naito (violin), Benedikt Enzler (cello)

rec. Concertzaal Ede, The Netherlands, 2015 (Sérénade), Studio Van Schuppen, Veenendaal, The Netherlands, 2014-16 (other works)

NAXOS 8.573764 [62:16]

For decades Widor was known, not so much as a one-work composer as a one-piece composer – everyone knew his *Toccata* but only a handful of organists knew the complete Symphony from which it came. One of the great changes that the CD brought to musical life was a fundamental change in the relationship between recorded and live music. Previously, recorded music had reflected what was going on in the recital room, the concert hall and the opera house, but CD recordings became primarily a self-sustaining musical experience. Innovative companies – Naxos very much then, as now, at the vanguard of such innovation – realised that the CD presented an opportunity to go beyond what was being offered to live audiences and explore areas of the repertory which were both neglected and obscure. Added to this the growing Cult of Comprehensiveness – a desire to commit to record every single note committed to paper by any given composer – and the inevitable result was a world of music available on CD which not even the most adventurous performer or music lover would ever otherwise have encountered. One of the greatest beneficiaries of this (for want of a better phrase) explosion of exposure, has been Charles-Marie Widor.

Organists have long known Widor, even if it has taken the CD to bring all his organ music into the public arena, but until the advent of the CD very few people were even aware that he had produced a huge body of music never intended either for the organ console or the church. The CD catalogues now include recordings of songs, chamber music with piano, violin music and piano concertos, to which Naxos have added this disc which describes itself as the “Complete Works for Woodwind”.

To be totally correct, this disc actually goes rather beyond its scope by including a work for violin and piano in an arrangement made, not by the composer or any of his contemporaries, but by the Dutch flautist Rein de Reede, who has also written the booklet notes for this CD. (The *Suite Florentine* can be heard in its original guise on a Centaur disc (CRC2475) with Janet Packer and Orin Grossman.) However, there is some anecdotal evidence that a version for flute and piano appeared in Widor’s own lifetime, so its inclusion here is possibly justified on historic grounds. It is more than amply justified on musical grounds, however, for Thies Roorda makes an incontestable case for it as a fine flute work, and his is both a wholly idiomatic performance and an utterly convincing one – to the extent that it is difficult to imagine this music played on the violin. In particular the sprightly, and delicately dance-like final movement (oddly entitled “Tragica” – evidence of the music’s actual origins in some incidental music Widor wrote for a stage play about Vicomte de Borelli, which is, interestingly, not one of the seven works for the stage *Grove* gives in its work list for Widor) is as perky and impish a bit of flute writing as you will find anywhere in the repertory. With neat and impeccably balanced support from Alessandro Soccorsi, this is a performance which should win over any of those who still hold to the belief that Widor is nothing other than a staid and stolid composer of hefty organ works.

An original Widor work for flute and piano is the *Suite Op.34* which preceded the *Suite Florentine* by around 40 years. Composed in 1877, it is dedicated to Paul Taffanel, who performed the work in April 1884 at a concert given by the *Société des instruments à vent* in Paris, where it was highly praised. Certainly this is a distinctly virtuoso work, with a highly dramatic opening movement followed by an almost Mendelssohnian *scherzo*, full of fluttering figures and delicate textures which, on this recording, Roorda flies over with remarkable agility and impressive breath control. Only with the third movement

do we recognise Widor the organ composer, with a solemn “Romance” which, for those in the know, could easily have been lifted from one of his organ symphonies but which, nevertheless, seems completely at home on flute and piano.

The final *vivace* movement appears twice on the CD. The first time it appears in the 1884 version which Taffanel performed in Paris (and repeated on several subsequent occasions) while the original 1877 version is also included. An example, I fear, of the Cult of Comprehensiveness, for while the second version extends the movement by around a minute and a half – presumably to allow Taffanel greater opportunity to build up to a closing virtuoso flourish – musical differences seem merely cosmetic.

A feature of Widor’s writing, as revealed in this CD, is his innate understanding of the character of the various instruments he selects as soloists. The *Introduction et Rondo* is a prime example of utterly idiomatic clarinet writing, with its long-breathed melodies interrupted by agile flourishes across the range and clever use of the various tone qualities at different registers of the instrument. It was written as an examination piece for Conservatory students and used as an orchestral audition piece for applicants to the orchestra of the Paris Opera; with some gratuitous scales and technical challenges its origins are clear. Nevertheless, it remains a fine piece of music in its own right, and Olivier Patey is a splendidly demonstrative player, introducing a degree of elasticity to the tempo which might seem simply self-indulgent in other players, but makes absolute musical sense here. As ever, Soccorsi is absolutely on the ball in shadowing Patey’s extreme rhythmic byways and outbursts, and the only disappointment is that on the day this recording was made (5 March 2015) nobody had thought to fine-tune the piano.

While Widor did not actually write any music for oboe solo, the arrangement of three pieces for the instrument by Albert Rey was done with the composer’s full knowledge and, we assume, approval. The first, *Pavane*, was originally for solo piano, and is a graceful, gentle movement spiced up by a few small harmonic surprises. The other two – *Elégie* and *Pastorale* - come from original organ works. The former appears as the sixth movement (“Meditation”) of the First Organ Symphony, where the solo line is designated for the *flûte* stop, and in this arrangement takes on a distinctly melancholic character because of the nature of the oboe, while the latter, taken from the Second Organ Symphony, is given a faster tempo marking and a more animated accompaniment (the organ original designated this line to the *Hautbois* stop). Alexei Ogrintchouk’s fluent and well-poised playing makes all three sound totally convincing as oboe pieces.

Widor is shown through these works to be a fine craftsman whose musical ideas are clearly delivered and elegantly proportioned. With the intriguingly scored *Sérénade* for flute, violin, cello, harmonium and piano, we get a glimpse of something rather more individual and witty. It begins elegantly enough, much in the manner of a ballroom waltz (reminiscent of Schoenberg’s rescoring of Johann Strauss for string quartet, piano and harmonium). But a bouncy fugue subject introduced by the harmonium (3:09), which seems to be an off-cut from an organ symphony, leads the music into something altogether more witty and bubbly. The interplay between the five instruments is magnificently handled in a fine exhibition of masterly manipulation of instrumental colour. Here is the master-organist at work, blending and mixing his colours, drawing together seemingly opposing musical timbres to create an entirely new and distinctive sound. The booklet notes suggest that the piece “languishes rather too extensively in the ambience of salon music”, but its elegant charm and distinguished proportions, so eloquently delivered by these performers, make it a pure moment of joy to be savoured in that unique environment in which each of us listens to our CDs.

Marc Rochester

Józef ŚWIDER (1930–2014)

Lyrical Miniatures for flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon (1975) [12:20]

Allegretto for flute and piano (1952) [7:38]

Scherzo for flute and guitar (2007) [5:15]

Andante for oboe and piano (1951) [5:15]

Improvisation for clarinet and piano (1991) [7:53]

Sonata for bassoon and piano (1954) [13:35]

Mini-Quintetto for flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon (1993/2005) [16:43]

Maria Grochowska (flute), Piotr Pyc (oboe), Roman Widaszek (clarinet), Marek Barański (bassoon), Mariusz Ziętek (horn), Eugeniusz Knapik (piano), Wanda Palacz (guitar)

rec. 2016, NOSPR Chamber Hall, Katowice

CD ACCORD ACD228-2 [68:53]

Though he is often associated with choral music and with opera the Polish composer Józef Świder has also written a strong body of music for wind instruments. A fellow graduate from the School of Music in Katowice in 1955 was Górecki, as indeed was Wojciech Kilar, but Świder was never taken by the lure of the avant-garde, prefer a more moderate, occasionally neo-classical influenced *métier*. The notes to this release can barely conceal their distaste for the 'achievements' of Modernist art, preferring instead to applaud Świder's 'music in waiting for Post-Modernism'. If this is too many isms or anti-isms for you, then his music may offer a corrective.

The Lyrical Miniatures of 1975 are rich in texture and mobile colour and there's a lyric, curlew-like passion in the third of the seven – forlorn and questing. There's a loquacious, scherzo-like fourth miniature, a touch Francophile in orientation, and some Mahlerian cadences in the Lento of the fifth. As those influences, or putative influences indicate, Świder's music is anything but unapproachable. The much earlier Allegretto for flute and piano amplifies those French hues, as its pastoral qualities reflect the influence of Poulenc and the ever-influential Roussel. A quarter of a century later he wrote a Scherzo for flute and guitar - a Berceuse-like affair of avuncular warmth. One of the loveliest of the pieces to be encountered is the Andante for oboe and piano which, like several other pieces, was found only after the composer's death. Far more than a mere 'academic paper' it reflects his abiding love of melody and balance.

The skirling vitality of the Improvisation for clarinet and piano of 1991 is vivid but incrementally slows. Higher and lower registers are duly explored as the music ends. In 1954 he wrote a Bassoon Sonata, youthfully neo-classical and full of incident with a pawky but witty quality that perhaps reflects the influence of the recently deceased Prokofiev's more barbarous writing. To finish there is the Mini-Quintetto for the combination of flute, oboe, clarinet, horn and bassoon. Composed in 1993 and revised in 2005 it draws on some Baroque cadences to present fanfare-like moments, and conjures up piquant sonorities and conjunctions of colour. And here, too, the droll and waggish suggests the abiding lure of Les Six and the jocular, nose-thumbing French school in this repertoire. This is the world premiere recording of the seven-movement version of the work.

Świder frequently wrote for friends and colleagues and the performers here don mantles with great assurance. There's a vivid and often infectious sense of communication here, accentuated by the recording and the excellent notes.

Jonathan Woolf

Anton BRUCKNER (1824–1896)

Symphony No. 6 in A major, WAB 106 (1879-1881) [55:15]

Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks/Bernard Haitink

rec. live, 4 & 5 May 2017, Philharmonie im Gasteig, Munich

Reviewed as a press download (16-bit lossless)

BR KLASSIK 900147 [55:15]

In recent years I've heard Bernard Haitink give career-crowning performances of two Ninths, one by [Mahler](#), the other by [Bruckner](#). Lofty and profound, that's precisely what one expects from a lifetime devoted to great music; but, unlike other conductors of advancing years, this quiet, self-effacing Dutchman hasn't run out of ideas or stamina. Admittedly, I characterised his BRSO Mahler 3 as 'old school [and] as comfortable as a favourite armchair', but then I was comparing it with Iván Fischer's paradigm-shifting performance with the Budapest Festival Orchestra ([Channel Classics](#)).

Haitink is no stranger to Bruckner, having recorded all the symphonies for Philips in the analogue era, not to mention a scorching *Te Deum* with the Wiener Philharmoniker in the digital one. The latter really storms the citadels of heaven, the final shouts hurled into the empyrean with overwhelming strength and certainty. That confidence is also present in the Sixth Symphony, which, inexplicably, is still one of the least played of Bruckner's later works. Mahler, inveterate interventionist that he was, made extensive changes to the score at the premiere in 1889, but the composer himself wasn't tempted to tinker.

Of the versions of the Sixth that I've heard over the years, Otto Klemperer's classic [EMI-Warner](#) one with the New Philharmonia remains very special. As it was my first recording of the piece, I suppose I've 'imprinted' on it; and yet, the performance still delights and moves me every time. True, the sound overloads in the tuttis, but then Klemperer brings an aristocratic mien to the music that I've not encountered elsewhere, even from the likes of Eugen Jochum and Günter Wand. The horn playing in the *Maestoso* is out of this world, too.

In the 21st century, we've had recordings from, among others, [Haitink](#) in Dresden, [Simone Young](#) in Hamburg, [Mariss Jansons](#) in Amsterdam, [Yannick Nézet-Séguin](#) in Montreal, [Mario Venzago](#) in Berne, [Rémy Ballot](#) in St Florian, and [Gerd Schaller](#) with the Philharmonie Festiva. Also, [Christian Thielemann](#); his Dresden video from 2015 was much praised by John Quinn. As a quick perusal of our [Review Index](#) will confirm, there's no shortage of fine Sixths out there. My comparatives – both live – are from Young and [Wand](#); the latter, a live Munich Phil recording from 1999, strikes me as the most satisfying of his several Sixths.

So, on to Haitink, whose *Maestoso* is characterised by startling clarity and a powerful sense of purpose. The lower strings have exceptional body, and the testosterone-fuelled timps are simply splendid. Even more important, Bruckner's paragraphs are nicely segued and not, as so often happens, needlessly parenthesised. Most striking, though, is the *very* strong pulse, notably in those timp-laced tuttis; this is the heartbeat of a strapping young yeoman, alive to life and all its possibilities. That youthful vigour is underlined by the bright-eyed playing and sound. And those horn figures? Well, they're no less magical than Klemperer's, the movement's final peroration as emphatic as I've ever heard it.

The *Adagio* is certainly *feierlich*, yet it's also mobile and wonderfully transparent; indeed, Haitink drives, details, shapes and terraces this music with a sure and steady hand born of decades on the podium. There's not a flat spot anywhere, and the unfolding narrative – so full of gentle incident – is quietly compelling from start to finish. If the quality of the BRSO's playing here is an index of their respect for this conductor – have the closing bars of this movement ever sounded so rapt? – then they must venerate him like no other. Really, this is music-making of the highest order, caught on the wing and completely free of pulled perspectives or audience interruptions.

Surely this performance can't get any better, I thought. Oh, but it can, and it does. The *Scherzo* is as ebullient – and as skittish – as any, and the interplay of instruments is superbly rendered in Peter Urban's deep, wide and realistically balanced recording. There's wit and wonder too, Bruckner's bucolic tunes bouncing around like echoes in a sun-dappled valley. As expected, the *Finale: Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell* is sensibly paced and proportioned. And while our yeoman strides on – where *did* he get those seven-league boots? – he still has time to rejoice in the beauty that surrounds him. The applause has been edited out, but I bet it was thunderous.

After such an engaging and uplifting performance, comparisons seem almost superfluous. But, I did promise. The Munich Phil play well for Wand, whose architectural skills – so vital in this vaulted and vaulting repertoire – are never in doubt. Wand, 87 when this recording was made, now sounds a little measured next to Haitink; then again, he's resolutely 'old school' in his emphasis on refinement and nobility, qualities that make his accounts of Nos. 7, 8 and 9 so memorable. Trouble is, after Haitink's hot-blooded Sixth he's apt to sound a little cool. Still, momentum never flags, and the Profil recording – although not as immediate as the BR one – is warm, detailed and suitably spacious.

No, I wouldn't want to be without the slow-burning Wand; his Bruckner is always so impeccable, so seamless, and so eloquent and *innig* when it matters. In those respects, Haitink may seem a tad impetuous – dishevelled, even – but both are strong and very convincing performances that deserve space on your shelf or hard drive. As for Young, she's closer in spirit to Haitink than she is to Wand. The Oehms recording is clear and forthright too. Alas, in this company her Sixth now seems rather rushed, episodic and, at times, lightweight. Ultimately, though, these recordings underline just how good the Dutchman's is, and why it should be at the very top of your to buy list.

Haitink may be in the late autumn of his life and career, but his new Bruckner Sixth basks in the heat of high summer. A remarkable achievement all round.

Dan Morgan