

### **Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)**

Harpichord Concerto in D minor, BWV 1052 [24:48]

Harpichord Concerto in E major, BWV 1053 [22:11]

The Art of Fugue, BWV 1080 (arr. Isaacs) [87:20]

George Malcolm (harpichord/director (art))

Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra/Karl Münchinger (concertos)

Members of the Philomusica of London (art)

rec. Mozart-Saal, Stuttgart, October 11-18, 1963 (concertos); Decca Studio 3, West Hampstead, London, April 15-17, 1964 (art)

From Decca SXL 6101 (concertos) and Argo ZRG 5421/22 (art)

**ELOQUENCE 482 5187** [2 CDs: 134:36]

First released in May 1964, George Malcolm's performances of two Bach keyboard concertos re-released here are very much of their time. While we may enjoy sprightlier tempos these days, there is no doubting their age. While Malcolm re-recorded the two concertos on show here in the 1970s for EMI with the Menuhin Festival Orchestra and Yehudi Menuhin with slightly brisker tempos, it is good to have these earlier Stuttgart accounts. Münchinger in turn was to go on to record the Bach harpichord concertos (including those for multiple instruments) with Igor Kipnis and his students.

There is an interesting dynamic between the soloist and conductor in the Bach Concertos. Münchinger is indeed, as the booklet notes imply, the more sober of the two. One can hear that not only in the opening of the first movement of BWV 1052, but also in the central Adagio—and it really is an Adagio. Münchinger finds magic when the dynamic drops in the opening of the movement, and he teases a gossamer sound from his strings to accompany George Malcom on his journey. Malcolm seems to revel in the melodic line, as if every twist and turn is a surprise. The finale is a joy, Malcolm's fingerwork perfectly judged, his timing and rhythms exemplary. Roy Minshull, the producer for the concerto recordings, has made a fine fist of balance issues; the transfer, too, allows detail to come through staggeringly clearly. The recording itself is fabulous, warm and detailed.

The second concerto, BWV 1053, exhibits a generally lighter touch, although the legato ways with downward scales in the strings in the first movement might still grate some people. Malcolm's fingerwork is the source of much delight. If the central Siciliano remains on the stodgy side, it nevertheless has some lilt.

Malcolm recorded the *Art of Fugue* with the Philomusica of London, a group that originated in the Boyd Neel Orchestra. The 1952 arrangement captured here, an arrangement made by Leonard Isaacs (1909-1987), was released on Argo. It is remarkable: the tissue delicacy of the "Contrapunctus 1" is sustained with such charge because of the attention given to every line. A clear, analytical ear is evidently in charge, and the result is that of a chamber performance of the highest order. The woodwind "Contrapunctus 2" sounds like proto-Stravinsky here (rather delightfully so) while the "Canon" that opens the second disc featuring the solo flute has all the chamber intensity the music demands. The recording, produced this time by Christopher Raeburn, is wonderful: clear, warm and supportive. Bach's rigorous counterpoint is beautifully sustained. The orchestration enables the ear to follow the various strands with ease. The appearance of solo harpichord for the "Canon at the Octave" works beautifully, and Malcolm's playing is rewarding indeed.

This arrangement will not be to everybody's taste: the sustaining of such clarity within the context of what emerges as rather severe counterpoint is an astonishing performance feat and it requires input from the listener, too. But those who do will be richly rewarded. "Bachian" might not be the correct word for the arrangement, as it has plenty of Issacs about it, but that is the appeal. Take it for what it is and you will not be disappointed.

The recording of *Art of Fugue*, overseen by Andrew Raeburn, supports the veneer of intimacy and mystery, partly in its slightly recessed aspect. Yet focus is there in the lines: listen to the clarity of the bass in "Contrapunctus 9".

A most stimulating coupling, therefore. Bach purists may wish to give it a wide berth, but those who cherish memories of another time in Bach scholarship and who can enjoy the musicality on display for what it is will not be disappointed.

***Colin Clarke***

**Gregory W. BROWN (b.1975)**

***Moonstrung Air***

Five Women Bathing in Moonlight [5:05] (1)

Vidi Aquam [15:58] (1)

Spring [4:51] (2)

Missa Charles Darwin [22:28] (3)

Entraí, Pastores, Entraí [5:23] (1)

Three American Folk Hymns [11:18] (3)

The Crossing/Donald Nally (1)

The Spring Ensemble/Eric Dudley (2)

New York Polyphony (3)

rec. 2014, Saint Peter's Church in the Great Valley in Malvern PA (1); 2013, American Academy of Arts & Letters in New York NY (2, 3)

**NAVONA RECORDS NV5989** [64:58]

Missa Charles Darwin [22:28]

New York Polyphony

rec. 2013, American Academy of Arts & Letters in New York NY

**NAVONA RECORDS NV6126** [22:28]

Gregory W. Brown is a Western Massachusetts-based composer, who studied at the Hugh Hodgson School of Music (University of Georgia), Westminster Choir College and Amherst College, where he had tuition from the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Lewis Spratlan. His brother is the thriller writer Daniel Gerhard Brown, author of *Angels & Demons* (2000) and *The Da Vinci Code* (2003).

Brown's music is tonally based and easily accessible. Although he has an instinctive grasp of the workings and range of the voice, there are times when, I am sure, his music is challenging for the singers. The recording features three choral ensembles: The Crossing, under its director Donald Nally, Spring Ensemble, directed by Eric Dudley and New York Polyphony (Geoffrey Williams (countertenor), Steven Caldicott Wilson (tenor), Christopher Dylan Herbert (baritone) and Craig Phillips (bass)). Brown composed his "*Missa Charles Darwin*" specifically for this last group.

I love the dream-like atmosphere that Brown conjures in the *Five Women Bathing in Moonlight*, enhanced by his rarefied, diaphanous scoring. *Vidi Aquam* draws on 16th century texts and utilizes a piano. *Spring*, a particularly attractive piece, explores some adventurous harmonies. *Entraí, Pastores, Entraí* is a traditional Portuguese Christmas carol, and *The Three American Folk Hymns* are given added potency with their sparse harmonies.

The centrepiece of this intriguing disc is the "*Missa Charles Darwin*", which was composed in 2010-11. Scored for four unaccompanied male voices, its stark harmonies are cast in the style of Renaissance polyphony. Whilst retaining the structure of the Roman Catholic mass, Brown has substituted texts culled from the writings of Charles Darwin, particularly *On the Origin of Species*. The composer holds Darwin in high esteem, and wanted to express his admiration for him in musical form. Of interest is that Daniel Gerhard Brown's new novel *Origin* (2017) was initially inspired by his brother's *Missa Charles Darwin* and, as far as I can gather, the work is referred to in the book.

Navona Records have also released "Missa Charles Darwin" as a box set. Profits from the sale of this set will go to charity in support of musical education.

All three choral ensembles are on fine form, offering clear and incisive performances. Dynamics are sensitively varied and intonation is pristine. The sound quality is pleasing and acoustics sympathetic, with the music shown to good advantage. Texts for the works are provided.

**Stephen Greenbank**

## **Giuseppe VERDI (1813-1901)**

### ***Il Trovatore*, Opera in Four Parts (1853)**

Manrico, Piero Pretti (ten); Leonora, Anna Pirozzi (sop); Count Di Luna, Marco Carla (bar); Azucena, Enkelejda Shkosa (mezzo soprano); Ferrando, Alessandro Spina (bass); Ines, Rosanna Lo Greco, (sop); Ruiz, Augusto Celsi (ten)

Coro Lirico Marchigiano V. Bellini. Marchigiana Philharmonic Orchestra/Daniel Oren

Director, Francisco Negrin. Set Designer and costume Designer Louis Désiré.

Video Director, Tiziano Mancini

Rec. Arena Sferisterio, at the Macerata Opera Festival, 31 July, 6 and 12 August 2016

Sound Formats, DTS-HD MA 5.1. PCM Stereo. Surround sound DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1

Filmed in HD 1080i. Aspect ratio 16:9

Booklet languages, English and Italian

Subtitles, Italian (original language) and English

**DYNAMIC DVD 37769** [138 min]

Verdi had considerable troubles in respect of both the composition and staging of *Il Trovatore*. It was the second of his great middle period trio of *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore* and *La Traviata*, all premiered over a two year period from March 1851. *Il Trovatore* was originally intended for librettist Cammarano's hometown theatre, the San Carlo in Naples. However, the theatre found Verdi's fee too steep for their cash strapped situation. The composer then proposed the opera be premiered in Rome on condition the censors there accepted Cammarano's libretto. At that point Verdi learned, through a friend, of Cammarano's death. The Young poet Emmanuele Bardare, who had converted *Rigoletto* into *Clara di Perth* for Naples, undertook the completion of the libretto. Verdi paid Cammarano's widow the full fee, plus a premium, as she was poorly provided for. These delays explain why parts of *Il Trovatore* and *La Traviata* were contemporaneously composed reaching the stage within six weeks of each other.

The various additions to the libretto of *Il Trovatore* required of Bardare show Verdi was intent on a two-diva opera, with the voices concerned being of distinctly different ranges and colour. Needless to say the Rome censor quibbled about details. Their view was that a burning at the stake might be too vivid a reminder of the Inquisition. Also the words of the 'Miserere' had to be altered, as strict Liturgical phrases were not allowed. With these relatively minor problems sorted, *Il Trovatore* was premiered at the Teatro Apollo, Rome, on January 19<sup>th</sup> 1853. It was a resounding triumph with the final scene being encored in its entirety. There were odd cavils about the gloomy subject and the number of deaths. The opera spread rapidly and was even parodied with baby swapping figures in two of Gilbert & Sullivan's most popular works. Six weeks later, in an entirely different orchestral patina and key, and vastly different requirements for the tenor and soprano, *La Traviata* was premiered in Venice.

The *Dynamic* recording label regularly bases their recordings on performances in Italy, often from the architecturally elegant smaller theatres to be found around that country. In the era of Rossini and Donizetti Italian towns and cities had more than one theatre offering opera, often on a social class basis as in Venice for example. The use of the open-air Macerata theatre for the annual Sferisterio Festival in July and August each year brings to focus a very different location, even than the use of one time Roman Arenas. The venue of the awesome arena at Macerata was built in the nineteenth century to accommodate a ball game called *pallone col bracciale*, an ancient Italian pastime of the day. The stage is 14.5 metres deep and 40 metres wide, with 10 metre wings each side of that. It is rather unusual shape for musical performances albeit the acoustics are reputedly good. It holds an audience of over 3,000 and is a formidable venue for performers and audience alike and can be seen in the introduction.

However, along with the auditorium for the singers, the biggest challenges are the stage size for the stage director Francisco Negrin and set designer Louis Désiré. The problem being how to accommodate the big scenes involving chorus, as when in the opening Ferrando addresses his

troops, and the immediately following more intimate duet between Leonora and Inez her maid and confidante. Similar problems abound in this opera as when after the chorus of the gypsies Azucena and Manrico share their memories and similarly in the prison scene. I regret that for me neither the set, comprising long trestle tables, provide a basis for overcoming the problems. Nor do the additional dumb shows add to the clarity of the narrative, particularly the young boy parading up and down like the grim reaper complete with scythe. The costumes are indeterminate time scruffy!

On the musical side, particularly the singers and chorus, matters are altogether far better even though Daniel Oren, his yarmulke very visible in the darkened pit, does sometimes tend to vary tempi more than modulation. However, he lets Verdi's stirring vibrancy off the leash for the 'Anvil Chorus' although his gypsies do not strike any anvils, unusually in a staged production they are not visible. Oren paces the tenor's vocal efforts into 'Di quella pira', and the infamous concluding note at the end of part three, with some aplomb. As the hero Manrico the lyric toned Piero Pretti does as well as many tenors with Verdi's vocal demands, albeit his acting leaves something to be desired. As his implacable foe Count Di Luna, really his brother as neither realise, Marco Carla does not sound the Verdi baritone we are all waiting for in terms of vocal heft, tonal beauty or depth of characterisation. As Fernando, who Caruso missed out of the reckoning when he famously said *Il Trovatore* required the four greatest singers in the world, Alessandro Spina is suitably tall and sings with evenness and beauty of tone if without the ideal sonority.

The ladies of the cast provide much greater satisfaction in terms of both their acting and tonal portrayals. The most distinguished singing comes from the Albanian mezzo Enkelejda Shkosa as Azucena. Her voice and acted portrayal made the remaining few hairs on my head rise. Her command of the music and the role reminded me of seeing the formidable Fiorenza Cossotto as Azucena in the 1970s when her qualities brought the house down at Covent Garden. Here Shkosa's vocal warmth, vibrancy and strength in 'Stride la vampa' and 'Ai nostri monti' were a delight to hear. If Anna Pirozzi as Leonora did not quite match her, she sang very well with warm tone and even legato throughout, floating some delightful high notes in both 'Tacea la notte' and particularly in 'D'amor sull'ali rosee'. She came to the Macerata performances after having stood in at Covent Garden in the role the previous month after Carmen Giannastasia withdrew. She has a varied repertoire of Verdi spinto roles and I look forward to hearing her again, preferable in a more traditional theatre setting. Rosanna Lo Greco coped well as Ines.

**Robert J Farr**

## Heinrich SCHÜTZ (1585-1672)

### *Psalmen*

Dorothee Miels, Isabel Jantschek, Ulrike Hofbauer, Magdalena Kircheis (soprano), Aneta Petrasová, David Erler, Stefan Kunath (alto), Georg Poplutz, Tobias Mähnger (tenor), Martin Schicketanz (bass)  
Dresdner Kammerchor

Dresdner Barockorchester/Hans-Christoph Rademann

rec. 2006-16, Weinbergkirche 'Zum Heiligen Geist', Dresden-Pillnitz; Trinitatiskirche, Zwönitz;  
Lukaskirche, Dresden; Stadtkirche 'Zum Heiligen Namen Gottes', Radeberg

Full German text

**CARUS 83.016** [74:50]

This is not a single complete set of Psalm settings which Schütz made in any of his published collections, but rather a compendium of assorted compositions from various volumes, drawing upon the complete edition of his music performed under Hans-Christoph Rademann's direction and recorded on the Carus label. Schütz compiled two collections of Psalms – the *Psalmen Davids*, op. 2, and the 'Becker' Psalter, op. 5 – but this disc also includes other Psalm settings which happen to feature in his *Kleine geistliche Konzerte*, op. 8, and the *Geistliche Chormusik*, op. 11. This release orders its selections by theme, framing the set with the two versions of Psalm 98 from the op. 2 and 5 collections: its opening phrase 'Sing to the Lord a new song' therefore acts as a joyful motto for the whole compilation.

This recorded compendium comprises an eclectic range of styles and genres which Schütz cultivated in his long and fruitful musical career. The Dresdner Kammerchor sing the simpler, chorale-like settings from the Becker Psalter with a generally brisk efficiency, ringing the changes in the repeated strophic structure by alternating full choral verses with others which feature differing combinations of solo voices singing their given vocal lines rather than taking the soprano line, thereby revealing the counterpoint inherent in the homophonic textures. That is particularly helpful in the long 25 verse setting of Psalm 136, although use of the full choir throughout Psalm 137 becomes enervating in comparison, but arguably it makes sense of the communitarian nature of this great affirmation of the Israelites' hopefulness and faith during the desolation of their exile in Babylon – and perhaps, by extension, that of the beleaguered Protestant cause during the long, bloody Thirty Years' War which raged when Schütz assembled this set.

In the concertato settings for just a couple of parts and continuo, the vocal soloists bring a suitable restraint and intimacy, matched by the close recording which mimics the atmosphere of private devotion. In comparison there is a more resonant, open acoustic for the a cappella settings of Psalms 19 and 71 which are like a Palestrina motet in their polyphonic textures, but are sung by the choir here with more fervour and earnestness than is ordinarily encountered in the serene Latin church music of the latter. However, they share with such repertoire a crispness and clarity of timbre, and an organic fluidity of tempo.

The more small-scale settings do not entail any less degree of interest, in either the music or the performances they receive here. 'Bringt her dem Herren' for soprano, and conflating verses from Psalms 29 and 66, virtually constitutes an operatic arioso with its free rhythmic structure devoid of bar lines. Ulrike Hofbauer evinces a pleasing variety of colours in her interpretation as well as an edgy dramatic sensibility that comes close to the world of the theatre. In the delicious suspensions of 'Erhöre mich, wenn ich rufe' Hofbauer and Dorothee Miels produce the ravishing sort of tonal lustre which looks ahead to the melismas in the third part of Couperin's *Leçons de ténèbres* for example, whilst Psalm 27 for two tenors proceeds in an almost pompous manner in George Poplutz and Tobias Mähnger's reading.

The full eight-part setting of Psalm 98 which rounds off the disc makes for an ideally arresting conclusion, sung with a grandeur that befits the scope and ambition of a score which virtually equals Bach's motets more than a century later, and those by Bruckner a further century still, in the breadth

and boldness of its homophonic chordal sequences. It contrasts strikingly with the almost madrigalian charm which Rademann brings out of the version of the same Psalm at the opening of the CD. In short, the release makes a good introduction to the achievement of perhaps the greatest German composer before Bach, but also serves as a useful sample of Carus's complete edition of Schütz's works for those who do not want to commit to the whole cycle.

### ***Curtis Rogers***

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**Domenico SCARLATTI (1685 - 1757)**

Sonata in B Minor K27 [3.41]

Sonata in F Minor K466 [6.29]

Sonata in D Minor K1 [2.07]

Sonata in D Minor K141 [3.31]

Sonata in D Minor K32 [2.37]

**Sergei PROKOFIEV (1891 - 1953)**

Sonata No. 2 in D Minor Op 14 [18:19]

**Dimitri SHOSTAKOVICH (1906 - 1975)**

Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Major Op 102 [18:14]

Elegy from the Ballet Suite No. 3 (arr. Dimitry Masleev) [3.08]

Dimitry Masleev (piano)

Tartarstan National Symphony Orchestra/Alexander Sladkovsky

**MELODIYA MELCD1002517** [58.15]

This disc is a calling card for the brilliant young Russian pianist, Dimitry Masleev, who won the First Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in 2015. He has won rave reviews for his concert performances and, on the evidence of this recording, his First Prize at the Tchaikovsky competition was well deserved.

Masleev's new recording opens with five of Scarlatti's more popular piano sonatas. Scarlatti may at first seem a strange bedfellow for a recording dominated by Shostakovich and Prokofiev. However, the programme notes point out that Shostakovich made arrangements of Scarlatti's sonatas while Prokofiev frequently performed the Italian composer's keyboard works. Masleev approaches these works in a Romantic way, using all the resources of the modern concert grand although he does not over-egg the pudding in the way that Horowitz and Pletnev sometimes do. The opening B Minor Sonata is stylish and graceful and Masleev's control of phrasing, touch and articulation is excellent. The F Minor is a gorgeous Romantic nocturne very much in Horowitz-mould while the first of the D Minor sonatas is played with considerable charm. The D Minor Sonata K141 is a favourite encore piece of Martha Argerich and in some of the early recordings she plays the repeated notes at a blistering pace. Masleev is slower but I was impressed with the extraordinary control he brings to the repeated notes which are exceptionally clean and even. The Scarlatti selection finishes with the Sonata in D Minor K32 where Masleev gives a rapt, poetic performance sustaining the slow moving line beautifully.

From Scarlatti we moved to Prokofiev's D Minor Piano Sonata which the composer wrote in 1912. The work is dedicated to Prokofiev's friend from the St Petersburg Conservatory, Max Schmidhof, who committed suicide in 1913. This is a monumental performance from Masleev and shows that he is destined to become a front-rank Prokofiev interpreter. The first movement is strongly characterised and sees Masleev move seamlessly from wistful romanticism to Prokofiev's trademark spiky and sardonic utterances. The scherzo is a dark fairy tale propelled by enormous rhythmic energy, while the trio shows Prokofiev as his most witty and playful. Masleev shows us his extraordinary dynamic range in the slow movement where he carefully observes the composer's markings. The textures are layered beautifully and one became increasingly caught up in the melancholy sweep and intensity of the movement. The finale is a whirling tarantella which Masleev plays at full throttle while having fun with Prokofiev's slapstick histrionics. There are many great recordings of this sonata and this very fine performance from Masleev stands comparison with the very best of them.

The final major work on the recording was Shostakovich's perennially popular F Major Piano Concerto which the composer wrote for his son Maxim's graduation at the Moscow Conservatory. Masleev recorded the work in 2016 with the Tartarstan National Symphony Orchestra and Alexander Sladkovsky as part of a tribute on the 100th anniversary of the composer's birth. My favourite recording of this concerto is the one which Alexeev made with Maksymiuk and the English Chamber Orchestra. I have to say, however, that this new recording by Masleev and Sladkovsky is every bit as good. In the opening movement one cannot not help but be swept up in the infectious exuberance of Masleev's playing and

the tight interplay between him and his orchestral partners makes for an exciting performance. The balance between orchestra and soloist is excellent throughout and I was struck with the exceptional clarity of Masleev's playing. The Tartarstan Symphony Orchestra's strings produce a beautifully textured sound in the opening section of the Andante second movement. Masleev allows Shostakovich's famous melody to ring out, producing a glorious string of pearl-like notes. There are some lively exchanges between orchestra and soloist in the final Allegro and Masleev does a superb job keeping the passagework crisp and light.

Masleev includes his own transcription of the Elegy from Shostakovich's Third Ballet Suite as a bonus track. This is an outstanding disc and it is clear that Dimitry Masleev is a major new talent.

***Robert Beattie***

### **Richard STRAUSS (1864-1949)**

*Ein Heldenleben*, Op. 40 (1898) [44:43]

*Tod und Verklärung*, Op. 24 (1888/89) [25:48]

Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra/Kent Nagano

rec. 2016, Gothenburg Concert Hall, Sweden

**FARAO CLASSICS B108092** [70:43]

Released on Farao Classics this is the second recording of the Richard Strauss trilogy played by the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra under its principal guest conductor Kent Nagano. It was during his seven-season term as general music director of Bayerische Staatsoper that Nagano developed an understanding of Richard Strauss' music and the long and enduring performing tradition in the city of Munich's famous son. The Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra also has a tradition of playing Strauss going as far back as its first concert season in 1905/06 with *Don Juan* and later playing [Tod und Verklärung](#) (*Death and Transfiguration*) under Wilhelm Stenhammar in 1912.

Buoyed by visiting the Strauss house at Garmisch, Bavaria during the 2013/14 season I attended several concerts celebrating Strauss's 150th anniversary and was fortunate to hear *Eine Alpensinfonie* (*An Alpine Symphony*) and *Ein Heldenleben* (*A Hero's Life*) each on three separate occasions. *Ein Heldenleben* such an irresistible orchestral showpiece, including love and battle scenes and requiring a massive orchestra, tells the story of a romantic imaginary hero. It can be interpreted as a musical portrait of Strauss himself who was thirty-four when he conducted the première in 1899. A challenging score for orchestral players it is cast in six broad sections (divided on this release into ten tracks) played without a pause. Strauss left no written programme but did give a descriptive title to each section. The massive orchestra with the extended wind and brass sections which Strauss requires for his imaginary hero is bonded together with unwavering assurance. This vibrantly colourful score, crammed with incident, has the California-born Nagano revealing an astonishing amount of otherwise imperceptible orchestral detail. Distinguished is the performance of the third section *Des Helden Gefährtin* (*The Hero's Companion*) a love portrait of Strauss's wife, Pauline de Ahna effectively depicted by the solo violin. Another special passage is *Des Helden Weltflucht und Vollendung* (*The Hero's Retirement from this World and Completion*) displaying Strauss at his most generous in spirit. Achieving an elevated level of performance, the Gothenburg players achieve an often spine tingling level of expression seldom achieved. Sticking in the memory is the sound of the unified strings, the detail of the woodwind motifs, the bank of nine horns and the effective off-stage trumpets.

There are several recommendable recordings of *Ein Heldenleben* namely the 1957 Dresden Kreuzkirche account from the Staatskapelle Dresden under Karl Böhm on Deutsche Grammophon, the 1974 Philharmonie Berlin account from Berliner Philharmoniker under Karajan on EMI, the 1954 Chicago Symphony Orchestra version under Fritz Reiner on RCA Victor Red Seal and the Dresden Lukaskirche 1972 recording with Staatskapelle Dresden under Rudolf Kempe on EMI Classics. Of the newer recordings especially worthy of attention is Ingo Metzmacher's 2007 Philharmonie, Berlin account with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin who has chosen to use Strauss's original ending to *Ein Heldenleben*. This takes out the final brass-dominated climax to allow the writing to decay away to nothing.

In 1888/89 Strauss wrote the tone poem [Tod und Verklärung](#) (*Death and Transfiguration*) his attempt to depict the last moments of an artist on his deathbed reflecting on his youth. Here Strauss was unable to draw upon his own personal experience of serious illness and was using his imagination. At the behest of Strauss, his friend Alexander Ritter wrote an interpretation of *Tod und Verklärung* in a poem; in effect a programme note which Strauss later appended to the score. Nagano's reading feels judiciously paced and in a moving, often dramatic performance he achieves a splendid internal balance of sound. Striking too is the glorious wash of orchestral colour the Gothenburg players achieve.

My first-choice recommendation of *Tod und Verklärung* is the penetrating 1982 Berlin account by the Berliner Philharmoniker under Herbert von Karajan and his earlier 1972/73 Berlin account with the same forces each released on Deutsche Grammophon. Although Karajan holds sway I can't easily dismiss the 1970 Dresden Lukaskirche recording with the Staatskapelle Dresden under Rudolf Kempe on EMI Classics and the live 1972 account from Salzburg Festival with the Staatskapelle Dresden under Karl Böhm on Deutsche Grammophon. Of the newer recordings there is the enthralling live 2012 Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh account by Manfred Honeck with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra on Reference Recordings. Another worthy and engaging recording is the live 2014, Herkulesaal, Munich account from the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks under Mariss Jansons on BR Klassik.

Recorded at Gothenburg Concert Hall, the orchestra, one assumes under studio conditions, is reasonably well recorded with a dry, clear and pleasingly balance. For my taste, nevertheless, I feel these works profit from a rather warmer sound and unfortunately the stunning high strings and woodwind are slightly too bright for my taste, robbing them of richness.

On Farao Classics Kent Nagano presides over quite outstanding performances at Gothenburg but overall the finest of the competition is more gratifyingly recorded.

**Michael Cookson**

Previous review: [Stephen Greenbank](#)

## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

### Sir William WALTON (1902-1983)

Symphony No. 1 in B flat minor (1931-1935) [43:03]

Symphony No. 2 (1957-1960) [30:15]

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/Kirill Karabits

rec. Lighthouse, Poole, Dorset, 2016

**ONYX 4168** [73:50]

Until I heard this Karabits reading, André Previn's recording of Walton's First Symphony had always been for me the one against which others were to be judged. It is well known that Previn was a passionate champion of Walton's orchestral music. The composer particularly admired [Previn's recording](#) of his First Symphony with the London Symphony Orchestra. Now this Onyx recording can be set beside Previn's. It probably outshines it in sheer emotional charge and certainly in terms of outstanding recorded sound.

It is generally thought that the first three movements of Walton's First Symphony were a reaction to the troubled relationship he had endured with the highly strung Baroness Imma von Doernberg. Certainly the first three movements are a tempestuous ride. Previn's reading of Walton's opening movement spans just a second or two more than Karabits's, at 13:50 minutes. Karabits realises all the anguish and white heat fury that Previn unleashes, and more. Both conductors allow just a flicker of self-pity to show in the music about half way through. This, though, is quickly extinguished in seething pent-up rage that grows and grows until the tremendous outburst that is the blistering climax of the movement. The second Scherzo movement is marked *Presto con malizia*; and malicious it certainly is. Previn's reading makes one's hair stand on end, and Karabits is every bit as chillingly exciting. The third movement marked *Andante con malinconia* continues the sourness, delving deeply into the shadows with quivering strings and plangent woodwinds. Self-pity is again held at bay by defiance and remonstrance. The profoundly tender melody at the heart of the movement is ultimately overtaken by material of increasing vehemence.

There was a lengthy gap between the composition of these first three movements and the Symphony's Finale *Maestoso - Briosso ed ardentemente*. In 1934 William Walton began a new much happier relationship with Alice, Countess Wimborne. The complete symphony was first performed in November 1935, and it was noticeable how much more positive this finale was. It was optimistic, life-affirming, thrusting and in the end heroic. Both Previn and Karabits deliver exciting sweeping performances. Previn is just slightly ahead in commitment and warmth but there is so very little in it.

Karabits's new recording of Walton's First Symphony can be placed alongside Previn's much admired recording but Previn's is outclassed now in terms of this splendid Onyx recorded sound: warm, spacious, with wide perspectives and so full of detail.

Walton's Second Symphony came as something of a disappointment after the tremendous impact of the First Symphony. By 1960 Walton had settled in Ischia, in the Bay of Naples, with Lady Susana. The music of the Second Symphony has a brightness and vividness of colour (if not the overt romance and lyricism of the Violin Concerto) that reflects the brilliance of the Mediterranean light. It is less emotionally raw than the First Symphony but tighter. The opening movement is somewhat enigmatic—sometimes assertive, bombastically so, sometimes restless and mysterious. There is a brooding tenderness too. But it is the central *Lento assai* movement that captures the ear, and Karabits weaves magic here. There is a plaintive poignancy and an agitated questioning tartness but also a lyrical almost out-of-this-world mood of solace. The symphony's final movement is a complex Passacaglia taking in a Theme and ten variations, a fugue and a Coda scherzando. The music is powerful and dogmatic with strident, whip-like staccato chords, sardonic in mood. The whole rounds off in jubilation.

### ***Ian Lace***

Previous review: [John Quinn](#)

### ***Lieder im Volkston***

Regula Mühlemann (soprano)

Okka von der Damerau (mezzo-soprano)

Wolfgang Schwaiger (baritone)

Tareq Nazmi (bass)

Adrian Baianu (piano)

rec. 2016, Studio 2, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Munich

Sung texts enclosed

**OEHMS CLASSICS OC1875** [66:19]

Around the turn of the century 1900 the interest in folksong blossomed in the German speaking world. Folksong collections were issued en masse and this spurred the journal *Die Woche* in 1903 to invite well-known composers to write *Lieder im Volkston* (songs in the popular style) to be published in a special issue. This was followed by another issue, to which the public was invited to submit simple songs in popular style lasting no more than 50 bars. The interest was enormous: 8,859 songs were submitted for a jury to choose the best 30 from. There was even a third round. What is recorded on this disc is almost all the songs of the first issue *Im Volkston*. A four-part choral song was excluded and replaced by a song by Max Reger that the jury had rejected. Reger naturally reacted to that decision and had it published through the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*. The many turnabouts in this matter are vividly described in the liner notes. Anyway, on the present disc Reger's *Waldeinsamkeit* is presented first, followed by the more fortunate composers in strict alphabetic order. Browsing through the list you will probably find a lot of today unknown names but also some that have survived, although rather marginalized in several cases. Eugen d'Albert's opera *Tiefland* – premiered the same year that the *Im Volkston* project took place – is still played once in a while and it has been recorded a couple of times. Leo Blech is best remembered as an important conductor. Friedrich Gernsheim's four symphonies were recorded some years ago and other works have also been issued fairly recently. Eugen Hildach wrote a lot of songs of which *Der Lenz* was very popular and it was frequently recorded in olden times. Engelbert Humperdinck became a well-known name in the popular music world when Arnold George Dorsey adopted it. But the original Humperdinck's music is still played, in particular his Wagner-influenced opera *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893). Wilhelm Kienzl is also remembered for an opera, *Der Evangelimann* (1894). Also Hans Pfitzner's fame rests on an opera, *Palestrina* from 1917. Carl Reinecke is the oldest of the composers represented here. He was 79 when *Im Volkston* was published and when he was born in 1824, Beethoven and Schubert were still alive. His total oeuvre is enormous and a lot of it has been recorded, but possibly his greatest achievement was his teaching. Bruch, Sullivan, Grieg and Svendsen were among his pupils. Max von Schillings has also left some imprints in music history: His opera *Mona Lisa* (1915) was an international success and was performed at the Metropolitan Opera. Ludwig Thuille's music has also been fostered by the record companies: chamber music, the complete piano music and several volumes of songs are available. Finally Siegfried Wagner, besides being the son of his famous father he was deeply involved in the Bayreuth Festival and took over the leadership after his mother Cosima in 1908. But he also composed about a dozen operas. Further research concerning the remaining composers would have been interesting – and time-consuming, so I leave that to the individual readers.

Instead – over to the songs. Generally speaking they are attractive, rather simple – as they should be according to the instructions – melodious and – often – unpretentious. What you like or dislike depends of course on your personal taste. I have picked some that I felt tempted to return to, but I'm sure other listeners will find their own favourites. The opening Reger song is beautiful and I can understand his disappointment when it was returned to him "with simple thanks". Reinhold Becker's *Niederländisches Wiegenlied* is also very beautiful. Ignaz Brüll's *Nachtwandler* is lively and humoristic, a breath of fresh air indeed. That's also the case with August Bungert and *Frau Holle*. Philipp zu Eulenburg has two songs – very short – and the second of them, *Treuedenken*, goes to my list. I only knew Friedrich Gernsheim through his four symphonies, solid but not so inspired. *Abendlied* has a great deal of charm. Having liked Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* for many years, and also enjoyed some of his other operas as well, it came as no surprise that *Rosmarin* was a real charmer, especially when

so glitteringly sung by Regula Mühlemann. Lively and sprightly is Kienzl's *Rieke im Manöver singt*. Eduard Lassen, born in Denmark, has written a song that is just as fun as its title, *Hoppoldey*. Not least the accompaniment is fresh and personal. Pfitzner's *Untreu und Trost* is attractive and old Reinecke's *Rheinisch Volkslied* is beautiful. Finally Bogumil Zepler's *Im Laubengang* deserves a place on my list.

What is a further asset with this production is the outstanding singing of the four soloists. Regula Mühlemann is the only one I have encountered before. She was a "cute and innocent" Barbarina in Nézet-Séguin's recent *Le nozze di Figaro* from Deutsche Grammophon, and I greatly admired her recital disc with, mostly, fairly rare Mozart arias, on Sony. She is just as beguiling here. But her colleagues are just as expert at investing these songs with life, meaning and vocal beauty. I would even go as far as saying: even though you are not the least interested in the repertoire you will find great pleasure in savouring these fresh, youthful, well-schooled and expressive singers. Adrian Baianu accompanies meritoriously and the recording, set down in three days, is all one could wish.

### **Göran Forsling**

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## **Cat HOPE (b. 1966)**

### *Ephemeral Rivers: Chamber Works*

Miss Fortune X for AM radio, viola, cello, piano and cymbals (2012) [7:07]

Cruel and Usual, for string quartet, live electronics and four bass amplifiers (2011) [8:03]

Broken Approach, for bass drum kit, AM radios and wind-up mechanisms (2014) [12:02]

Dynamic Architecture 1, for solo double bass and electronics (2015) [21:36]

Sogno 102, for bass clarinet, bass flute, viola, cello, piano and live electronics (2013) [7:02]

Decibel (*Miss Fortune X, Sogno 102*)

Zachary Johnston (violin), Lizzy Welsh (violin), Phoebe Grey (viola), Judith Hamman (cello), Samuel Dunscombe (electronics) (*Cruel and Usual*)

Vanessa Tomlinson (percussion soloist) (*Broken Approach*)

Mark Cauvin (bass soloist) (*Dynamic Architecture 1*)

rec. 2014-15 Soundfield Studio except Cruel and Usual, rec. May 2011 North Melbourne Town Hall

**HAT[Now]ART 200** [55:53]

Acknowledged as a portrait of the artist this CD is also a canvas for her regular colleagues. It promotes the chamber-scaled works of Cat Hope in a way that convincingly charts her compositional directions in a half-decade period between 2011 and 2015.

Those directions embrace the electronic and acoustic in a profitable symbiosis, as one can hear in *Miss Fortune X*, the name of the radio-controlled model aeroplane owned by Hope's late father. Scored for viola, cello, piano, cymbals and AM radio, this sonically invigorating music both suggests and incarnates elements of the triumphalism of the model, the harp-like strumming of the piano and the instrumental drone effect – clearly a reference to the engine - building up a sound picture in the listener's mind. The dynamics carefully reference the soaring and return of the model, the music evoking with suggestive intensity: in this respect the AM radio is a perfect integratory sound.

The live electronics, four bass amplifiers and string quartet that play *Cruel and Usual* – there is significant distortion of the acoustic instruments – generate a kind of overlapping sonic wail effect which is not surprising when one reads that the music was given its impetus via news reports of incarceration practices in American prisons. The amplification of the writing - with sawing cello to the fore - and its unremitting insistence is both unsettling and disturbing. The steady disparate soundworlds of *Broken Approach* – scored for bass drum kit, AM radios and wind-up mechanisms – sees the music move from an intense static quality to percussive-active elements. The use of toys and clocks seems to amplify the idea that this is indeed music about the movement - and perception of - time. It's performed by its commissioner, Vanessa Tomlinson.

The longest piece is *Dynamic Architecture I* for solo double bass and electronics, the bass being played in the 'lying down' position with three bows. Layering of sound is paramount here, the bass's gnarls and grinds – one of the bows is strung with a guitar string, not horsehair - seemingly encapsulating the architectural elements at the heart of the music. The resonant, uneasy long-term droning, that gets incrementally louder, is one aspect of a piece that explores the sonic implications of bass and embedded electronics. Finally, there is *Sogno 102* in which the bass clarinet, bass flute, violas, cello, piano and live electronics generate their own sampled impression, a procedure originating via Scelsi.

The notes by Christopher Hope explain these complexities in helpful detail. Sound quality is exceptional and card booklet a pleasure to open.

## **Jonathan Woolf**

**Franz LISZT(1811 – 1886)**

**Complete Piano music volume 46 – Berlioz Transcriptions**

Danse des Sylphes de *La damnation de Faust*, S475/R142 [4:19]

*Benvenuto Cellini*: Bénédiction et Serment, S396/R141 [7:27]

Ouverture du *Roi Lear*, S474/R140 [16:22]

*Symphonie fantastique*: L'idée fixe: Andante amoroso, S395/R135 [5:11]

*Symphonie fantastique*: IV. Marche au supplice, S470a/R136 (final version)

Introduction L'idée fixe [2:55] and Marche au supplice [5:16]

*Harold en Italie*: II. Marche des pèlerins chantant la prière du soir, S473/2/R139 (2nd version) [9:44]

*Les Francs-Juges*: Ouverture, S471/R137 [12:56]

Feng Bian (piano)

rec. Morse Recital Hall, Yale School of Music, New Haven, 2015

**NAXOS 8.573710** [64:10]

Naxos now reach the 46<sup>th</sup> volume of their travail through Liszt's piano works and this volume includes some of the Berlioz transcriptions – obviously, the complete *Symphonie fantastique* will take up a disc on its own at a later date. I should point out that I'm not really much of a Berlioz fan, however I do find some (but not all) of his music very captivating and interesting. However, Liszt was obviously a great admirer (and friend) of Berlioz as he transcribed a number of pieces for piano.

This disc begins with Liszt's marvellous recreation of the 'Danse des Sylphes' from *La damnation de Faust*. The original orchestral version of this is subjected to a wide variety of tempos by various conductors as recordings of the piece vary between 2 and 4 minutes! Anyway, there is no need to play the piano transcription at supersonic speed and the incredibly delicate and beautiful playing here comes across marvellously with the speed striking me as just about right.

Next follows a rather powerful account of the 'Benediction and Serment' from the opera *Benvenuto Cellini* – here Liszt takes one specific scene and arranges it. Liszt does a superb job and none of the detail is lost - the same could also be said of the performer here, as nothing is missed and the overall effect is wonderful.

Liszt transcribed three of Berlioz's overtures (only 2 of which have survived - sadly the transcription of *Le Carnaval Romain* remains missing) and next follows the one written for *King Lear*, published as Berlioz's Op.4 and first performed in 1833. This is an odd work, quite long, rather complicated in structure and with some amazing detail which somehow Liszt manages to replicate at the piano. Again, the performance here is marvellous and makes you realise quite what an accomplished composer Berlioz was and Liszt was for transcribing this so faithfully.

Liszt's piano transcription of the *Symphonie fantastique* was used by Schumann for his review published in 1835 and Liszt was obviously very fond of the work as he returned to the main L'idée fixe of the work twice after the initial publication of the transcription of the whole work. The first version was subtitled 'Andante amoroso after a melody by Berlioz' and is a ravishing treatment of the "l'idée fixe" with hushed romantic sounding accompaniment. This is very atmospherically played here with everything judged perfectly. The later version also includes the Idee fixe but shortens it somewhat and follows it with a transcription of the 'March to the Scaffold' – in a markedly different version to that found in the original transcription from the whole Symphony. The whole history of the 3 connected works is quite detailed and complex! Here the pianist copes very well with the myriad difficulties which Liszt throws at the performer, giving a very powerful and hair-raising performance of this menacing work.

Things are much more reflective and peaceful for the following track – the 'March of the Pilgrims' from the Symphony inspired by Byron's *Childe Harold*, for viola and orchestra. Liszt arranged the whole work for viola and piano but also transcribed the march for solo piano (which actually exists in 2 versions, this is the later one). Despite the calm atmosphere and the pious nature of the piece, there

is still a lot for the pianist to do and Mr. Bian deals with everything extremely confidently and dispatches all of the complexities with minimal fuss. Wonderful stuff!

The final track on the disc is another overture transcription, this time of another early work by Berlioz, the overture to *Les Francs-Juges* (Op.3) originally intended for an opera which was never completed. This is another fire and brimstone type of piece with some amazing detail in the orchestral version which again is faithfully reproduced by the 10 fingers of Feng Bian in this recording. The opening Allegro section is grim and determined sounding before the music brightens in character at about 3 minutes. Again, there is much detail here, all of which is coped with superbly. There is also some incredibly delicate playing here and there in this work and Mr. Bian is able to make this sound very musical. He also seems to be able to make the piano “sing” when this is required as he has a very tuneful way of playing. The work progresses through several different sections, ending with a commanding statement of a variation on the theme heard at the outset, followed by some quite crazy sounding music to round off this remarkable work.

The disc is quite generously filled; the cover notes are slightly short but contain interesting and useful information about the works and their genesis, both in the original version and the exceedingly effective transcriptions by Liszt. I should also say that having listened to this CD many times; I perhaps ought to have another go at listening to more works by Berlioz as this disc of Liszt’s masterly transcriptions has re-fired my interest in his works. I would also be interested to hear further recordings by this superb pianist and I hope Naxos engage him to record the ‘Symphonie Fantastique’ transcription as he clearly has the technique and temperament to deal with that complex and interesting work.

***Jonathan Welsh***