

Balys DVARIONAS (1904-72)

Complete works for violin and piano

Pezzo elegiac (1946) [6:07]

Sonata-Ballade (1965) [13:00]

Elegia canzonetta (1960) [4:12]

Scherzino (1960) [3:35]

Meditation (1961) [2:32]

Pastorale and Presto (1965) [4:51]

Ballade (1960) [6:27]

Impromptu (1969) [3:59]

Adagio (1969) [3:15]

Allegro giocoso (1970)[5:28]

Recollection (1969) [3:59]

Three Pieces (1950-51) [4:36]

Romance (1962) [2:23]

Justina Auškelytė (violin), Cesare pezzi (piano)

rec. National Philharmonic Hall of Lithuania, Vilnius, February, 2016

NAXOS 8.573673 [64:24]

Baltic & Beyond**Balys DVARIONAS (1904-72)**

Pezzo elegiac (1946) [5:35]

Scherzino (1960) [3:30]

Elegia canzonetta (1960) [4:14]

Adagio (1969) [3:06]

Impromptu (1969) [4:06]

Meditation (1960) [2:43]

Giya KANCHELI (b.1935)

Time...and again [22:17]

Peteris VASKS (b.1946)

Music for a summer evening [6:13]

Arvo PÄRT (b.1946)

Fratres [10:41]

Piet Koornhof (violin)

Thomas Hecht (piano)

rec. Concert Hall of the Yong Siew Toh conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore,
October 2015

DELOS PRODUCTIONS DE 3529 [62:28]

Sometimes it happens that recordings can be compared to waiting for a bus for a long time only for two to arrive nose to tail, and that is the case here. Two recordings of music for violin and piano from different labels, both of which include 6 of the same pieces by Lithuanian composer Balys Dvarionas and which even have similar designs as their cover art. After that they diverge as the Naxos disc concentrates solely on Dvarionas while the Delos disc then includes works by two other Baltic composers, Vasks and Pärt plus one by Georgian Giya Kancheli (Baltic and beyond indeed!).

I must say yet again that considering the small size of the three Baltic States (Lithuania: population under 3 million; Latvia a shade under 2 million and Estonia only 1.3 million) they have produced a number of world-class composers whose contribution to music history is slowly being unveiled and which include the three here.

Reading about Dvarionas I learned that he was one of eleven children born to an organist, all of whom were taught music from an early age with Balys going off to Leipzig to music conservatory at hew age of 16. Having studied for four years under the likes of Siegfried Karg-Elert and a further two years in

Berlin studying piano under Egon Petri it is hardly surprising that he became one of the most significant composers in Lithuania of his generation. What struck me immediately with the very first piece was his facility with writing really memorable tunes the first of which has become my latest earworm; *Pezzo elegiac* from 1946 has a wonderfully bittersweet nostalgic mood about it that is compellingly attractive. After the main theme is stated the mood changes as it is treated to a folk inspired development before reverting to its original slightly sad state. It is followed on the first disc by what is described as his violin masterpiece, his *Sonata-Ballade* from 1965. The composer's son Professor Jurgis Dvarionas, who wrote the booklet notes, says that there are themes within it that describe "lyrical dreams and romance" which conflict with those of "grotesque opulence (representative of socialist realism)", but in any event it is easy to see why it is so highly thought of.

Reading what motivated his music sounds like a clarion call in these dark times we are all living through today as he wrote: "...I believe in the musician's vocational call to spread beauty, good harmony, to educate people and to raise them above the routine. I believe that those who say this type of view is behind the times are wrong. The ideals of human kindness have remained unchanged over many thousands of years, the foremost being love, truth, freedom and friendship. To serve them is not a step backwards". Amen to that! It is also noted that Dvarionas believed that an artist's "individuality is shaped by his national mentality. Thus he viewed Lithuanian folklore as "a key tenet of his artistic heritage" and that is indeed apparent whether the listener is acquainted with it or not since folk influences are evident throughout.

The words on the back insert that describe these miniatures cannot be improved upon for they are said to "encompass subtle charm and effortless virtuosity" and all 14 of them show these features in spades. The duo on the first disc clearly understand each other very well since they have been playing together for 8 years and violinist Justina Auškelytė has been laureate of the National Balys Dvarionas Violin Competition four times in succession and was Grand Prix laureate in the 8th International Balys Dvarionas Competition in 2008 so she is the perfect vehicle to bring his music to life, which she certainly does, while her colleague, Italian pianist Cesare Pezzi, is such a sympathetic partner that the music is given an extra edge of authenticity and I cannot imagine it will ever be likely to receive more impressive performances.

Turning to the second disc it was fascinating to read violinist Piet Koornhof's booklet notes which he begins by explaining why he seeks music "that is off the beaten path" giving the reason as both wanting to "share the freshness of new discovery" as well as the fact that he feels that recording yet another performance of a work from the standard repertoire would add nothing new to it. If I change the word performance to piece of writing then his motivation for seeking out works such as those on the disc are much the same as mine for choosing to review those discs I do. I like to write about the music as well as the performance and what else is to be said about Beethoven's 5th Symphony or a Schubert song that hasn't already been said by many who are more eloquent than I?

Piet Koornhof writes that all four composers on his disc "share a fundamental conviction that music has the power to transcend suffering and heal the human spirit" which reinforces Dvarionas' message quoted above. That conviction is certainly fully in evidence in all the pieces here and is what makes them so attractive to the listener. Both Koornhof and Thomas Hecht are excellent conduits for the music of Balys Dvarionas and coming straight after the previous disc it is difficult to choose between performances, except to say that Justina Auškelytė and Cesare Pezzi bring a youthful freshness that edges theirs ahead just a touch.

The second composer on their disc is Georgian Giya Kancheli whose music is finding much greater exposure than hitherto and deservedly so for it is quite unique. Piet Koornhof, in his booklet notes, quotes from each composer about what motivated them to write music and I have already quoted what he uses to illustrate Dvarionas' ideals and similarly Kancheli is just as profound when he says "A force of invincible beauty towers above, and conquers, the forces of ignorance, bigotry, violence, and evil". His piece entitled *Time...and again* is a wonderful and ethereally beautiful work that expresses

feelings of nostalgia and loss in the most unmistakable way. It is an incredibly powerful work and there is a luminosity that shines within the music which I found made my hair stand on end with its hugely effective evocation of those feelings he seeks to describe.

Beauty is another key feature of all the works on this disc and that is illustrated in Peteris Vasks' fabulous piece *Music for a summer evening* for solo piano which evokes the quietness of the end of a summer's day and which incorporates some echoes of folk music which further enhance the feeling of timelessness. It is the most satisfyingly relaxing work I have heard in a long time which chimes with his declared aim "to provide food for the soul". I was privileged to meet the composer last year at the Vale of Glamorgan Festival when I heard his 3rd string quartet and since then have sought out his music at every opportunity.

Arvo Pärt is by far the most renowned composer from the Baltic States and his unique tintinnabuli style of composition which as he says "evokes the pealing of bells, (their) complex but rich sonorous mass of overtones, the gradual unfolding of patterns implicit in the sound itself, and the idea of a sound that is simultaneously static and in flux" has led him to compose music that holds a special place in contemporary culture. *Fratres* ('brothers' in Latin) is undoubtedly his best known and most often repeated work which has since 1980 been adapted for a huge variety of different instruments and ensembles and now exists in no less than 17 versions as diverse as the present and original version to one for 3 recorders, percussion and cello. The fascinating thing is that it works in every case and reveals different elements in each. The duo of Koornhof and Hecht bring this music vividly to life in sympathetic performances that serve it well and anyone who, like Piet Koornhof and I, relishes new discoveries will find that both these discs exemplify all that is best in music from the Baltic and beyond.

Steve Arloff

Previous review (Naxos): [Rob Barnett](#)

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Anton BRUCKNER (1824-1896)

Symphony No. 4 'Romantic' (version 1878/80, edited Robert Haas)

Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden/Christian Thielemann

rec. live 17th May 2015 Semperoper, Dresden, Germany

Edition Staatskapelle Dresden – Volume 42

PROFIL PH 16064 [73.06]

This Profil release, volume 42 in the Edition Staatskapelle Dresden series, consists of a broadcast recording of Bruckner's *Symphony No. 4 'Romantic'*. In May 2015 I attended this particular concert at Semperoper, Dresden. The combination of Bruckner's *Fourth Symphony* together with a selection of Wagner and Schubert opera arias sung by Christian Gerhaher was a most enticing prospect especially when performed by the Staatskapelle Dresden. In this repertoire seeing Christian Thielemann eagerly mount the podium was a reassuring sight with the audience guaranteed a resolute, no-nonsense approach. Unfortunately this particular album does not include Gerhaher's memorable performance of the opera arias.

The Bruckner tradition cultivated by the Staatskapelle Dresden is a long and distinguished one. In December 1885 the orchestra first performance of a Bruckner symphony was the *Third* in Dresden under Ernst von Schuch. Then in November 1895 the orchestra first performed the *Fourth Symphony* under Adolf Hagen. It was with the *Fourth Symphony* that Fritz Busch gave his last Dresden concert in February 1933 before fleeing into exile from the Nazi regime. Karl Böhm gave the première of the "original version" of the *Fourth* at Dresden in October 1936, part of the recently published Bruckner Complete Edition. During the years 1945-49 Joseph Keilberth is thought to be the first to conduct the entire cycle of Bruckner symphonies in their original versions. With the Staatskapelle Dresden a number of conductors have all released acclaimed Bruckner recordings including: Eugen Jochum, George Szell, Otmar Suitner, Giuseppe Sinopoli, Herbert Blomstedt, Bernard Haitink, Fabio Luisi and more recently Yannick Nézet-Séguin. The Bruckner tradition continues to go from strength to strength at Dresden and principal conductor Christian Thielemann is working his way through the complete cycle of symphonies.

Known as the '*Romantic*' Bruckner's *Fourth Symphony* was written in 1874 and revised a number of times through to 1888. One of the composer's most performed and recorded symphonies, the *Fourth* is the only one to which he appended a title. Maestro Manfred Honeck in 2013 stated that he believed that the *Fourth Symphony* was "*almost a tone-poem in the robe of a symphony.*" More than any other of Bruckner's works the *Fourth* has been subject to wholesale revisions at various times appearing in various editions which is almost a subject in itself. Here on this Profil recording Thielemann is using the orchestra's customary "original version" of 1878/1880 edited by Robert Haas described in the notes by Tobias Niederschlag as "largely cleansed of extraneous emendation as part of the first critical edition of his complete works by Robert Hass."

Sounding stunning in the marvellous Semperoper acoustic I relish every second of this captivating Thielemann performance that achieves such an elevated standard of performance. It's not long before the sheer force of the symphonic power generated by the Staatskapelle almost pins me back in the seat. Thielemann's decisive grip of structure is majestically assured, the textures feel ideally layered and impressive too is how the orchestra builds and sustains its crescendos. But Thielemann knows it's not all about raw energy delivering outstanding subtlety in the contrasting episodes of nature music. On the surface the *Adagio* conveys all the satisfying calmness of a gentle Tyrolean stroll, evoking verdant pastures and ice-cold streams but Thielemann is able to develop an often elusive, tension-laden undertow. The great climax is accomplished magnificently without any sense of strain. Tuned to perfection, the Dresden brass in the *Scherzo* blaze boldly to stunning effect; I doubt the heavily engaged trumpets and horns have ever sounded better. One can feel the adrenaline being generated with a tumultuous weight of sound as Thielemann is able to drive the

Staatskapelle hard in a way that lesser orchestras would fold. Bold, decisive and determined Thielemann presides over a magnificently inspiring Bruckner performance of an unquestionably enduring quality.

There are several recordings in the catalogue of Bruckner's *Fourth* deserving of special praise. My benchmark recording has been the live 1998 Berlin account from Günter Wand with the Berliner Philharmoniker on RCA Red Seal. Wand uses the 1878/1880 version edited Haas which according to music writer Wolfgang Seifert was the only version of the work the maestro ever conducted. I find Wand's interpretation both visionary and magnetic in its effect. All the components are handled with the utmost care and control by Wand based on decades of experience. In addition Wand's live 2001 Philharmonie, Munich interpretation with the Münchner Philharmoniker, very similar in approach, is also of elevated quality. Newly released Valery Gergiev and his Münchner Philharmoniker, using the 1878/80 version edited Nowak, are in quite excellent form creating a glorious sound with a formidably compelling live 2015 Philharmonie, Munich account on [MPHIL](#). Worthy of admiration too is the live 2013 Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh recording performed by Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under Manfred Honeck using the 1878/80 version edited Nowak. Impeccably paced and carefully shaped Honeck has created a magnificently inspiring Bruckner interpretation with glorious sound on [Reference Recordings](#). Unquestionably one of the finest Bruckner recordings I have heard, the Staatskapelle Dresden under Christian Thielemann on such exceptional form is a match for any account on Profil.

Michael Cookson

Frédéric CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Étude Op. 25 No.7 in C-sharp minor [5:20]

Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 35 in B-flat minor [26:04]

Ballade No.3 Op. 47 in A-flat major [7:51]

Nocturne Op. 48 No.1 in C minor [6:13]

Nocturnes Op. 27 No. 1 in C-sharp minor [5:30]

Nocturnes Op. 27 No. 2 in D-flat major [6:19]

Mazurka Op. 63 No.3 in C-sharp minor [2:09]

Mazurka Op. 63 No.2 in F minor [1:39]

Mazurka Op. 68 No.4 in F minor [1:50]

Mazurka Op. 41 No.2 in E minor [2:18]

Mazurka Op. 67 No.4 in A minor [2:52]

Ballade No.4 Op. 52 in F minor [11:42]

Waltz Op. 69 No.2 in B minor [3:01]

Naum Grubert (piano)

rec. Westvest 90, Schiedem, no date given

NAVIS CLASSICS NC17005 [45:31 + 37:23]

The Latvian pianist Naum Grubert (b.1951) studied with Theodore Gutman in Moscow. He was a prize-winner in the 1978 Tchaikovsky Competition, and was a laureate in both the Montréal Piano Competition and the Russian National Competition. After touring extensively, he now resides in The Netherlands, where he holds professorships at the Amsterdam Conservatory and the Royal Conservatoire in the Hague.

He's put a great deal of thought and planning into this finely balanced Chopin recital. There's an element of tristesse running throughout, beginning with the Étude Op. 25, No. 7 in C-sharp minor. This has to be one of the most expressive pieces the composer ever penned, and Grubert contours the left hand melody with poetic intensity. It's a fitting opener and provides a curtain-raiser for the Second Piano Sonata, which Alfred Cortot espoused as a poem of death. At its centre is the famed funeral march whose "dark rays", according to Grubert, "are cast in all directions". Grubert's bold and forthright opening to the first movement states that he means business. He achieves some powerful, rich sonorities, but can scale his playing down when required. Rubato never intrudes. The lyrical second subject is elegantly phrased. The Scherzo has a demonic quality, and sufficient contrast is made in the song-like trio section. The Funeral March owes its success to the avoidance of any hint of sentimentality. In the enigmatic finale, Grubert unleashes a torrent, evoking the words of Arthur Rubinstein: "One hears the winds of night sweeping over churchyard graves, the dust blowing and the dust that remains". The doleful element carries through into the Nocturne Op. 48 No. 1. Introspective like the Étude, its opening theme could almost be a funeral elegy. At its centre is a solemn chorale, with the piece ending in despair. Nestled between it and the Sonata is the Third Ballade, a convincing reading, which surfs its ebb and flow with surety and conviction.

The bleak outer sections of the Nocturne Op. 27 No. 1 are captured with vivid starkness, and the central section truly packs a punch. Op. 27 no. 2, with its fioritura style, is delicately refined and shaded. It is significant that the five Mazurkas selected are in minor keys, and each imparts a soulful and nostalgic vein, and speaks with simplicity and directness. The Mazurka in F minor, Op. 68, No. 4 may have been Chopin's very last composition. I enjoyed the performance of the the Fourth Ballade, my favorite Chopin work. Grubert brings rhythmic freedom and a wide dynamic range to its, at times, turbulent narrative. The fiendish coda is negotiated with passionate ardour and breathtaking virtuosity. The encore which concludes the recital is the B minor Waltz, Op. 69, No. 2, wistfully etched.

This is a deeply satisfying and well-conceived programme. Grubert has the advantage of a superb Steinway, and the engineers have successfully captured his warm, tonally diverse sonorities to marvellous effect.

Stephen Greenbank

Cifras Imaginarias

Ariel Abramovich and Jacob Heringman (vilhuelas)

rec. 2-4 September 2014 at the Holy Trinity Church, Weston, Hertfordshire

ARCANA A428 [53.21]

The *Cifras* refers to sixteenth century lute tablature and the '*imaginarias*' is the speculative way in which Ariel Abramovich and Jacob Heringman have put together a programme of pieces for vilhuela duet that were never conceived of for such a rare combination.

They have based their work, initially at least, on a publication of 1547 entitled *Silva de Sirenas*, with music by or arranged by Enriques de Valderrábano (d.1557 i.e. 450 years ago). This complete book, published in the royal city of Valladolid was recorded by Armoniosi Concerti in 2005 (HM 987059) and it is noticeable that of the twenty-six pieces six are songs but only two are described as for two vilhuelas. One is a '*Contrapunto*' on a bass line and the other an arrangement of a Morales motet.

On this new CD the two, Abramovich and Herringman have take sixteen contrasted pieces just as Valderrábano did, and made a recital of gently civilised, domestic listening of great sensitivity and elegance.

The disc is bookended as it were, by mostly well-known Josquin motets with the almost as famous *Dulces exuviae* at the centre of the programme. In a way these come off least well, as it is difficult to delineate the complex 4 or 5 voice counterpoint when there are just two instruments of either the same pitch (in unison) or even when a bass vilhuela is used as in the opening track Josquin's *Illiberata Dei Virgo nutrix*. There are pieces called *Ricercar* including one by Willaert ingeniously arranged following Valderrabano's model. Cabezon's *Pavana Italiano* is a keyboard piece but it works well for a bass vilhuela and an alto. There are secular songs of the first half of the sixteenth century, some of them. unsurprisingly, Spanish. The beautiful *Dizen a mi que los amores* here is given as by Vasquez but in the 'Palace Songbook' it is credited to Badajoz. Also represented is 'il divino' Francesco da Milano with two of his *Fantasias* played here on a solo vilhuela to add a little contrast.

The recording, made in a quiet medieval church not too far from London, known for its music and its recordings, is close and suitably intimate and its possible to imagine yourself in some delicious renaissance drawing room surrounded by tapestries and young, beautiful people, - hope you don't mind the sentimentality. If you have a copy of *The Book of the Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione in your hand, then all the better. More's the pity we don't get our expected hour's worth of entertainment.

As they say in all restaurants nowadays..... enjoy.

Gary Higginson

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Raul KOCZALSKI (1885-1948)

Chamber Works Volume 1

Impressions de Pologne, op. 86 (1915) [20:37]

Romance, op. 142 (1942) [4:49]

Ballade in G minor, op. 87 (1915) [7:30]

Sonate for Violin and Piano No. 1 in E minor, Op. 74 (1915) [25:40]

Monika Dondalska (violin)

Krzysztof Figiel (piano)

rec. Szczecin, Poland, December 2016

ACTE PRÉALABLE APO383 [58:41]

I dare say that the music of Raul Koczalski will be new to just about everyone who reads this review, at least it was certainly new to me. I do however have a few other Acte Préalable discs so I sort of knew what I was to expect, and I was not disappointed.

Here was a composer born in Warsaw when it was still under Russian control, and who therefore held a Russian passport, something that would see him interned in Germany during the First World War. He was a child prodigy who gave his first public performance as a pianist at the age of four; this led to lessons with Anton Rubinstein. By the age of six he had some 40 compositions to his name, and by nine he was giving concerts in the major cities throughout Europe which led to him being described as the "Polish Mozart". At the age of eighteen he took a break from performing to concentrate on composing, returning to the concert hall a few years later to great acclaim, when he was regarded as the greatest interpreter of Chopin of his generation. As a composer, Koczalski composed in most genres, gaining great success for his opera *Raymond* of 1902, a work that was performed 147 times in the first half of the twentieth century. Sadly most of Koczalski's compositions remain unpublished and this led to his music being almost completely forgotten after his death in November 1948.

When it comes to his music, Koczalski was a man who believed that composing had reached its zenith during the romantic movement of the late nineteenth century, with this being clearly borne out by the works presented on this disc. They are richly melodic and romantic in nature, indeed the first time I listened to this music I was reminded of Alexander Borodin, no mean comparison, as both sought to further nationalistic movement in their respective homelands, with Koczalski sort of bridging the gap in Polish music between Chopin and Szymanowski.

The majority of the music presented on this disc was composed during his internment in Germany in 1915, with the wonderful E minor Violin Sonata being the earliest, this is a beautiful work, the first of four sonatas, and leads me to anticipate the following releases in this series. It is a characterful work which I think reflects Koczalski's longing for his home. This longing is even more prevalent in his Impressions de Pologne, here we have a suite of five movements that offer the listener stylised Polish dance music which left me wishing for more. The G minor Ballade is the final work from 1915 and could be said to take its lead from Chopin in that here we have Koczalski at his most poetic with the violin acting as a voice in this poem without words. The opus 142 Romance, was composed in 1942, when Koczalski once again found himself interned, in a sort of house arrest, in Germany, it is once again possesses a romantic character and charm, with its distinctly Polish violin sound playing over some innovative piano writing. This is wonderful music, music for anyone who loves the romantic idiom. The term 'Unjustly Neglected Composer' is bandied around all too often these days, but in this case I believe it justified.

The playing of Monika Dondalska and Krzysztof Figiel is excellent throughout and I hope they get to perform the remaining violin sonatas as this series progresses. The recorded sound is very good, as are the notes by Maryla Renat, although on occasion they read as if they have been put through Google Translate.

Stuart Sillitoe

This is wonderful music; Raul Koczalski is truly an unjustly neglected composer, one whose music is for anyone who loves that of the Romantic Movement.

Max REGER (1873-1916)

Maximum Reger

Documentary 'Max Reger – The Last Giant', directed by Will Fraser, and performances by various artists including Bernhard Buttman, Bernhard Haas & Graham Barber (organ), Egidius Streiff & Katharina Wildermuth (violin), Markus Becker & Rudolf Meister (piano), Frauke May (mezzo-soprano), Julius Berger (cello), Roland Glassl (viola), Aris Quartet, Diogenes Quartet, Hyperion Trio, Brandenburgisches Staatsorchester / Ira Levin, WDR Funkhausorchester / Wayne Marshall.

Filmed at the Royal College of Music, London, and at various venues in Germany.

FUGUE STATE FILMS FSFDVD011 [6 DVDs: ca 15 hrs]

The centenary of Max Reger's death, which fell in 2016, was barely marked in the English-speaking countries. All that I noticed in Britain was a slow performance of the Mozart Variations at the Proms, with massive gaps between the variations. Any residual resentment has been thoroughly assuaged by this magnificent set of DVDs from the film-maker Will Fraser. When it was first mentioned to me, it came as a bolt from the blue – I had to pinch myself a few times to ensure that I was not dreaming. I now know it has been crowdfunded. Had I been asked at the time, I would definitely have contributed, but that would have disqualified me from reviewing it. As it is, I can confidently say that if you have any interest in the music of the first 17 years of last century, you should buy this set. Mortgage your house, sell your relatives into slavery, but get it!

First, a few generalities about what we are offered in this cornucopia. Three of the six discs each feature one section of a three-part, 210-minute documentary, plus filmed performances. The other three are totally devoted to performances. In the course of our journey, we get acquainted with Reger's often-tumultuous life and are led through various works from his large *oeuvre* – which totals around 1,000 works in 147 opuses – in order of their composition. The performers are all first rate and with minor blips, noted below, the performances are superb, helping to show Reger in the best light. The main thread of the documentary is a long conversation between the mezzo-soprano Frauke May and Dr Susanne Popp of the Max-Reger-Institut, a leading Reger scholar and a most sympathetic personality. We also hear from the Institut luminary Dr Jürgen Schaarwächter, another pleasing character who wears his learning lightly. Frauke May, who performs all the songs that we hear, clearly knows a great deal about Reger and often chips in with shafts of enlightenment, as do other performers such as the organist Bernhard Haas and the pianist-conductor Ira Levin.

Disc 1: The first part of the documentary deals with Reger's Bavarian childhood and adolescence, his early struggles and setbacks, his drinking – a *leitmotif* throughout his adulthood – and his gradual emergence. Getting a little ahead of himself, Haas points out that in the years 1901-5 Reger was 'at the top of the avant-garde'. We see snippets of performances which will later be heard in their entirety, and some of the performers make telling points. The rest of the disc consists of the three Fantasies for organ, Op. 52. Bernhard Haas, the only organist to perform from memory, plays 'Alle Menschen müssen sterben' on the Walcker instrument of the Stadtkirche, Ludwigsburg; Bernhard Buttman plays 'Wachet auf' on the Link organ in the Pauluskirche, Ulm, taking the lovely Fugue at a good lick and making the most of the fine Halleluja; and Graham Barber plays 'Halleluja! Gott so loben' on the Weimbs organ at the Michaeliskirche, Weiden – the Fugue is almost jazzy and it reaches a tremendous climax, crowning the whole opus. Will Fraser sets the cameras so that we see all three organists from the left but also from the top: not only are we shown their hands but also their feet on the pedals. The chorale texts are printed as captions, each line in its correct place, which is an aid to enjoyment, and the performances set the bar very high for what is to come.

Disc 2: The Hyperion Trio introduce me to the Largo of 1889, a nice late Romantic piece very pleasingly played. Songs performed by Frauke May and the pianist Bernard Renzikowski are scattered through the disc: this duo have recorded a number of Reger's *Lieder*, including the complete Op. 76, and their renderings feature glowing tone from the singer, sensitive playing from the pianist and excellent ensemble. Piano pieces are contributed by Andrew Brownell, Oliver Kern and the superb Markus Becker, who has recorded all of Reger's output magnificently: he shines out from the other pianists

whenever he appears. Organ pieces include the impressive Passacaglia from the Suite, Op. 16 (Barber); the Fantasy on 'Freu' dich sehr', Op. 30, which Buttman keeps moving right up to the terrific ending; the Symphonic Fantasy & Fugue, Op. 57, also given a fine performance by Buttman with a tremendous Fugue; and some of the Op. 59 set, shared between Barber and Buttman. The young Aris Quartet play the A major Quartet, Op. 54/2: the violin tone sounds a little thin but this is a delightful, committed reading of a buoyant, airy work.

Disc 3: The documentary continues with a fragment of the String Sextet and other intriguing snippets. We hear that Reger set 13 of the same poems as Strauss in his *Lieder*, something I had not noticed before. His uneasy relationship with the critics is exemplified by his 1904 Violin Sonata in C major, Op. 72, with its use of the notes (in German notation) AFFE (ape) and SCHAF (sheep), of which we get a preview. The Variations & Fugue on an Original Theme is said by its performer Barber to be the most modern work he wrote – we are shown some of the score, with its profusion of red expression marks. Will Fraser, who writes and narrates the links, speaks of 'a diary of the self' in Reger's works; and Haas points out that at this stage, Freud was producing his first writings. We see the Aris Quartet playing some of the opening movement of the massive D minor Quartet, Op. 74: they play another extract on Disc 5 but sadly we do not hear even one complete movement of it. The point is made that Reger participated, Janus-like, in both the Baroque revival and the modernist tendency. Popp and Levin look at his use of sonata form and the way he made it over-complicated. Performances on this disc include Barber and Buttman in six of the Op. 65 pieces; Barber in five of the Op. 67 pieces on chorales; Haas and Buttman in two from Op. 69; and Haas and Buttman in three from Op. 80. Levin conducts the Brandenburg State Orchestra in his own orchestration of the Bach Variations, Op. 81, one of the few exercises in the set which I find redundant. He does the job neatly and conducts it tidily enough, but he cuts four variations. In the documentary section he argues that Reger did this sort of thing when transferring a work from one medium to another. Yes, but it was his own music that Reger was altering. I always find it puzzling when someone feels the compulsion to orchestrate someone else's music, as if there is a sort of hierarchy in which the orchestra ranks higher than the piano. I would rather the space and effort had been devoted to genuine orchestral Reger, perhaps *A Romantic Suite*.

Disc 4: A number of songs are well performed by May and Renzikowski, including Reger's setting of *Morgen* and four from Op. 76, among them the delectable *Zwei Mauschen* and Reger's 'greatest hit', *Mariä Wiegenlied*. Sayaka Shoji and Julien Quentin play two Romances for violin and piano, the G major from 1901, very nicely done, and the 1905 one from Op. 87, pleasantly negotiated for the most part although Shoji produces some rasping G-string tone. The revelation is the interpretation of the AFFE-SCHAF Sonata by Egidius Streiff and Alessandro Tardino, which makes me take the work much more seriously. Streiff has the ability to seek out Reger's little passages of wistfulness or nostalgia in the opening *Allegro con spirito*, and Tardino backs him to the hilt. The sprightly, witty *Prestissimo* has a heartfelt slower Trio; the *Largo* is inwardly played; and the *Allegro con brio* brings more wistful and witty touches. In all, it is a lovely performance. These artists also give us the three pieces of Op. 79d, very fine; and on his own Streiff gives a magnificent rendering of the B flat Sonata for solo violin, Op. 91/3, throwing off nifty staccato along the way. The last of the three movements incorporates a Bach quotation. Barber switches to the Sauer organ at the Lutherkirche, Chemnitz, for the Variations and Fugue on an Original Theme, Op. 73: there is a marvellous toccata-like variation amid a wealth of invention, and Barber finds a good tempo for the mighty Fugue. The Bach Variations are played in their correct form by the solidly competent pianist Rudolf Meister, with a sturdy Fugue. I do miss the more mercurial touch of Markus Becker, who is allotted two pieces from *Aus meinem Tagebuche*, Op. 82. These are arrangements of movements from the First String Trio and, well as Becker plays them, I would far rather have the entire String Trio, one of Reger's most magical creations. Becker is on safer ground with the D major Sonatina, Op. 89/2, a delight from beginning to end. The Aria from the A minor Suite, Op. 103a, which exists in several instrumentations, is beautifully played by the cellist Julius Berger, with Oliver Kern.

Disc 5: We enter Reger's Meiningen period. His conducting is discussed and we hear him playing the organ, via an organ roll. Haas says that people today perform Reger too correctly – it may even be

better to play him a little incorrectly. Barber suggests that writing Preludes and Fugues at this time in history was an expression of hope. The astonishing 'Dies Irae' from the unfinished *Requiem* makes a great impression – what a pity his friend Karl Straube dissuaded him from completing the work. Haas quotes Alban Berg on the irregularities in the compositions of both Schoenberg and Reger; and Dr Popp says the latter combined intellect and emotion. Will Fraser's take on him is 'conservative form but radical content', a good summation in my view. Complete performances include the leader of the Aris Quartet, Katharina Wildermuth, and pianist Evgenia Rubinova playing the complete Op. 103a Suite splendidly in its violin version – apart from the Aria, it features five more charming movements and ends with a Gigue. Berger and Kern tackle the big A minor Cello Sonata, Op. 116, very convincingly, differentiating its shifting moods. Shoji delivers the G minor Prelude & Fugue from Op. 117 quite well. Finally we hear the String Sextet, Op. 118, complete, with the Diogenes Quartet joined by Roland Glassl and Wen-Sinn Yang, an exemplary reading.

Disc 6: Frauke May gives a lovely performance of the large-scale orchestral song *An die Hoffnung*, Op. 124, a superb Hölderlin setting fit to be mentioned in the same breath as any of Mahler's similar pieces: Wayne Marshall conducts the excellent WDR Funkhausorchester. May also sings Reger's last, very simple, song, *Bitte*, with Renzikowski. Bernhard Haas takes to the Sauer organ of St Petri Dom, Bremen, for the massive Introduction, Passacaglia & Fugue in E minor, Op. 127: it is a magisterial performance, with the great Fugue given full value. Then we return to Ira Levin and the Brandenburg State Orchestra for one of Reger's best orchestral works, the *Four Tone Poems after Arnold Böcklin*, Op. 128: this is a fine exposition of the differing pieces, with leader Klaudina Schulze-Broniewska a splendid soloist in 'Der geigende Eremit', but it would have been helpful to have the four Böcklin paintings on screen. Conductor and orchestra also give a good account of Reger's orchestration for strings of Bach's BWV 622, 'O Mensch, bewein dein Sünde gross'. Does it add to our knowledge of Reger? Not really. Buttman offers two pieces from Op. 129 and Barber – at the Chemnitz instrument – performs both the shorter (authorised) and longer (manuscript) versions of the Fantasy & Fugue in D minor, Op. 135b. Again, I am unsure of the benefits of this doubling up. Markus Becker gives great pleasure with the Molto adagio, Op. 143/3; and Roland Glassl is superb in the first and best of the Suites for solo viola, Op. 131d, the G minor.

I hope I have made it clear that there is an enormous amount of worthwhile music, in worthy performances, in this set of DVDs. Organ pieces abound, and if I were starting such a project from scratch, I would include a little more chamber music: I have already mentioned the First String Trio but the E flat String Quartet, the Clarinet Quintet or one of the flute Serenades would have helped to lend variety. Anyone who goes through the set systematically will form his or her view of Reger's output. My own opinion is that only Elgar surpassed him in his great years, 1901 to 1916 – and yes, I am aware of the other opposition! Dr Popp comments that Reger did not found any school, even though he had 300 pupils. That is strictly true, but he had a huge influence on the compositions of Adolf Busch, Karol Szymanowski, Josef Suk I, Arthur Honegger, Paul Hindemith and many others who did not study formally with him. I am sorry that no mention is made, in the documentary strands, of the great Reger interpreters such as the Busch brothers, Marteau, Kwast-Hodapp and so on. This glorious, occasionally frustrating composer certainly deserves this tribute; and newcomers will find that once they get on to his wavelength, his harmony will enter their bones. The booklet is handsomely produced, with photos of all the artists and several pictures of Reger. It functions as a complete listing of his compositions, with the works that are performed picked out in bold type. It would have been useful to have movement timings but organ enthusiasts will find the specification of each instrument listed. The attractive packaging reproduces some of the famous drawings of Reger conducting, among other pictures.

Tully Potter

Salvatore SCIARRINO (b. 1947)

Un' imagine de Arpocrate (1974-1979) [46:51]

Giorno velato presso il lago nero (2012) [18:52]

Tamara Stefanovich (piano: Arpocrate)

Chorwerk Ruhr/Florian Helgath (Arpocrate)

Carolin Widmann (violin: Giorno)

Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks/Susanna Mälkki (Arpocrate), Jonathan Nott (Giorno)

rec. live, 26 April 2013 (Giorno), 28 March 2014 (Arpocrate), Herkulesaal de Residenz, Munich
NEOS 11626 [65:42]

I first properly came across Salvatore Sciarrino's work quite recently, taking part as one of the '100 flute players' (we made it to about 50) at a performance of his *Studi per L'intonazione del Mare* at The Hague's 'Dag in de Branding' festival. The individual parts look as if there is hardly anything there in terms of actual music, but the collective effect with percussion, '100 saxophones' and vocal soloist was magical indeed.

With spatial effects such an important element in Sciarrino's work, the SACD surround-sound format is very useful in recreating the effect of such an experience. *Un' imagine de Arpocrate*, "an unusual piano concerto" initially rests upon a kind of ambient 'mood' created by percussion, that "fills the room like a faraway rumble of thunder." Strings trill and flutter, emerging and receding like flocks of muted birds, and the solo piano's flourishes shine through like glimpses of starlight through slowly moving clouds. The storm clouds eventually break, and notes come tumbling down like rain in an extended crescendo that returns us to a quasi-silence from which heaving breaths create an unsettling ostinato. This work was originally intended for the pianist Dino Ciani, but he died before the composition of the piece was even started. The result "became more a large-dimensional sound painting with the character of funeral music than a traditional piano concerto." There are plenty of chilling effects, building up a remarkable intensity of atmosphere and maintaining a feel of anticipation the whole way through. The addition of a choir toward the end of the piece might lead to associations with Beethoven or Busoni, especially given the parallel with the premature decease of Busoni's intended dedicatee. Sciarrino's voices become part of the instrumental texture, adding a heightened feeling of celestial turmoil as the music's intensity of action grows and the final, slow-motion cataclysmic apotheosis unfolds.

Giorno velato presso il lago nero, announced as a world première, is an entirely different kettle of fish. If the previous work was an 'unusual piano concerto', then this one is an 'unusual violin concerto.' The superb Carolin Widmann plays a character role, perhaps Orpheus; the 'black lake' of the title part of the rising and falling tides of the orchestra. Composed during restless times for the composer, there is a feel of agitation in the music, though this is something in the nature of the material – an underlying sensation of unease rather than overt expressions of loss of control. There are associations with visual art and poetry referred to in Sciarrino's own comment on the piece, and to my ears there is also a cinematic quality – extremes of dynamic providing shocks, the character of the violin talking to us in a stark and at times emotion-filled monologue illustrated and enhanced at times by the orchestra, as well as adding its own vocalisations and projecting imagery of the imagination through musical gestures reflecting on or antagonising the soloist's phrases.

These live performances are very well recorded. There are one or two coughs and bumps, but nothing too serious. Certainly for *Un' imagine de Arpocrate* I would recommend hearing this through the best surround-sound system you can muster. The spatial effects are an essential part of this kind of score, and the very thing for which such reproduction technology is the most useful. The stereo mix is also very good, and with superb clarity capturing the remarkable nuances in these excellent performances this is a contemporary music experience well worth seeking out.

Dominy Clements

John Philip SOUSA (1854-1932)

A Sousa Celebration

Royal Scottish National Orchestra/Kristjan Järvi

rec. Royal Concert Hall, RSNO Centre, Glasgow, Scotland, 22-23 September 2016

CHANDOS CHSA5182 SACD [68.26]

John Philip Sousa is, of course, best known as America's March King, and most of his music was written for the bands that he led. He also wrote for the theatre, too, and this Chandos collection gives us a very useful survey of what he was capable of.

Very welcome it is, too. There's something slightly strange, but also rather wonderful, about hearing this music played by a full-on symphony orchestra (rather than, say, a brass band). In fact, the whole thing sounds rather more classy than Sousa really has any right to be! Of course, in most of the marches the bulk of the action still takes place in the brass and percussion, but the presence of a full string section adds a whole layer of colour that could otherwise be totally absent, and it is all to the gain.

To be fair, much of this is due to the people who have arranged them (see details below), and it's ever-so-slightly dishonest of Chandos not to make more of the fact that many of these tracks are only heard by an orchestra because they have been thus arranged by someone who came later. In fact, you don't find that out until you've bought the disc and get to look at the detailed booklet inside.

However, that's by no means a huge obstacle, and once you make your piece with it you'll find a huge amount to enjoy. In fact, the thing that struck me again and again as I listened to the disc was how close Sousa is to the *gemütlich* sound that we associate with Imperial Vienna, something that conductor Kristjan Järvi also points out in the booklet notes. Repeatedly, I kept on making comparisons in my head to the Strauss family. *The Washington Post* sounds like a march by Josef, while even *The Liberty Bell* comes closer to one of Johann's polkas when it's played like this. Big sections of *Sandalphon* had me thinking of Waldteufel's *Skaters' Waltz* and, even if its sound world is inevitably different, you can easily imagine the numbers from *The Irish Dragoon* fitting into a Viennese operetta.

The Humoresques, on the other hand, feel as though they could have been lifted from a popular West End show, such is their hummable spark and slight sense of the far off. The extra-musical effects (see for yourself!) sound daft but fun, and the low brass ham things up brilliantly in *Look for the Silver Lining*. Elsewhere there is a lovely sense of rum-ti-tum in marches like *The Invincible Eagle*, but they are always carried with a lovely sense of forward momentum. *Nymphalin* is utterly beguiling, and if we might not like the racial stereotyping of *Dwellers of the Western World* then we can still admit that it contains good music.

The RSNO have ventured into the not-at-all-dissimilar worlds of [Suppé](#) and [Fučík](#) on Chandos with Neeme Järvi, and I'm told that he was lined up for this recording too, before ill health forced him to stand aside. Getting Järvi *fills* to fill the gap was a coup, however, and he fills his father's shoes with aplomb. It's music he seems to have developed a bit of an affinity for, and he doesn't hang around! The tempi for the marches are swift, almost (but not quite) to the point of rushing, and he takes a pretty nippy approach to many of the other pieces too. If he doesn't quite have his father's bandmaster credentials, however, then he still comes pretty close, and he makes the music breathe organically, allowing the full gamut of orchestral sound to flow through every ounce of space and to create a sound of great sophistication.

It goes without saying that the orchestra are with him every step of the way. They've almost developed into specialists in this sort of repertoire: lightish music that's on the fringes of the repertoire but that deserves a wider hearing, and they're as convincing advocates for Sousa as they were for [Suppé](#) and [Fučík](#). The recording is lovely, too, not only because of the predictable

excellence of the Chandos engineers, but also because of the RSNO's new home and recording studio in Glasgow, which adds a whole layer of warmth and comfort around the sound.

So this is great fun, something to make you reassess Sousa as a composer, and also to make you grateful for the joy of a jolly good tune.

Simon Thompson

Previous reviews: [Dan Morgan](#) ~ [Dave Billinge](#)

Track list

The Washington Post (1889) [2:51] Ed. Clark McAlister

Sandalphon (1870s, rev. 1886) [8:25]

The Irish Dragoon (1915)

Overture [3:25]

Circus Galop [1:26] Ed. Loras John Schissel

The Thunderer (1889) [2:22] Orch. Keith Brion

Humoresque on 'Swanee' (1920) [5:08] Arr. for orchestra Keith Brion

The Invincible Eagle (1901) [3:20] Arr. for orchestra Keith Brion

Nymphalin (1880) [3:12]

On Wings of Lightning (1876) [2:04] Ed. Loras John Schissel, arr. Harold Sanford

Humoresque on 'Look for the Silver Lining' (1922) [4:56] Sousa's original version combined with Ray Dvořák's by Keith Brion

Semper Fidelis (1888) [2:22] Ed. McAlister

Dwellers of the Western World – Suite (1910) [12:31] Orch. Otto Merz

The Red Man [3:42]

The White Man [5:21]

The Black Man [3:20]

The Liberty Bell (1893) [3:15]

El Capitan (1896)

Waltzes [3:46] Orch. Keith Brion

March [2:03] Arr. Harold Sanford

The Gliding Girl (1912) [2:48] Ed. Loras John Schissel

The Stars and Stripes Forever (1896) [3:20] Arr. and adapted for full orchestra 'in the Sousa style' by Keith Brion and Loras John Schissel

Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56a (1) [17:23]

Alto Rhapsody, Op. 53 (sung in English) (2)[11:02]

Piano Concerto No 1 in D minor, Op. 15 (3)[45:14]

Academic Festival Overture, Op. 80 (4) [9:07]

Ein Deutsches Requiem, Op. 45 (sung in Italian) (5) [68:29]

Enid Szanθο (contralto)

Clifford Curzon (piano)

Rosanna Carteri (soprano), Boris Christoff (bass)

Hollywood Bowl Orchestra (1, 4), New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra (2, 3), Rome

Symphony Orchestra and Chorus/Bruno Walter

rec. Carnegie Hall, 9 November 1941 (2), 28 January 1951 (3); Hollywood Bowl, Los Angeles, 10 July 1947 (1, 4); RAI Auditorium, Turin 16 April 1952 (5)

PRISTINE CLASSICS PASC494 [73:41 + 77:56]

Although the three volumes of Pristine's *Bruno Walter conducts Brahms* series are based around the concerts he gave with the NYPSO in 1951 ([review](#)), this final volume contains only one performance from that series, though I doubt that this will put off any prospective buyer. Walter is often thought of as a rather soft-centred conductor, a bit *gemütlich*, but these performances show this idea as far too simplistic.

The first CD begins with the *Haydn Variations*, a piece which can respond very well to a *gemütlich* approach, but this is not at all Walter's way. In the opening chorale the perky, almost staccato, woodwind articulation sets out the performance's stall very clearly, and the first variation has an almost Toscaninian momentum and brio, with the brass ringing out. In Var 2 the 'sforzati' are positively fierce, and in Var 3 the "con moto" marking is followed a little too much for my liking; there is no relaxation and the "dolce" markings in the woodwind are short-changed. Var 4 again prioritises "con moto" above "andante" and the sense of mystery and foreboding which the music should have is rather glossed over - there is almost always an undercurrent of unhappiness in Brahms. Var 5's 'vivace' marking finds Walter at his best, with excellent woodwind staccati, but Var 6, although also marked "vivace" is all a bit fierce for my taste. Var 7's lovely 'grazioso' is a little stiff and lacks the sense of ease it really needs, but Var 8's sense of disquiet is nicely caught, though Walter rather ignores the "non" in "Presto non troppo". The start of the Finale lacks the saturated sound that the strings should produce (and I do not think this is just the fault of the recording), and, as earlier in the piece, the 'dolce' marking for the phrases which are first given the flute and then taken up by clarinets and bassoons is not fully realised. There is insufficient sense of well-being and the sort of well-nourished orchestral sound which Furtwängler achieved here for the finale to be fully satisfying - I suppose what I am saying is that Walter isn't *gemütlich* enough for me, though you may respond more favourably.

The *Alto Rhapsody* which follows is by far the poorest recording in this set, and the sonic complexity of soloist, chorus and orchestra in the later parts taxes it sorely. However, the performance is worth the effort, especially as this first release adds a major work to the very meagre recorded output of Enid Szanθο. This Hungarian contralto, born in 1908, had a fine career, appearing the Vienna Staatsoper, Bayreuth, Salzburg, Covent Garden and the New York Met in the 30s, but made few commercial recordings, which are supplemented by a small number of surviving live broadcasts. Fortunately the voice comes over quite well in this recording, though I was at first confused by what she was singing, as the fact that the performance is in English is not mentioned anywhere in the documentation. The performance uses the translation by Robert Hugh Benson printed in the 1896 Simrock edition, slightly improved occasionally (for example the translation of the first word of "Öffne den umwölkten Blick" is changed from "Lift up" to "Open", which is a more accurate rendering and fits the music equally well). I would imagine that Szanθο learned this translation especially for this performance, and it perhaps hobbled her interpretation slightly, as, though it is beautifully sung with a warm, rich timbre, it is a little broad-brush. Her English is generally good, though there are one or two very odd vowel sounds. As is the case with many singers, she is at her best in the broad legato of the "Ist auf deinem Psalter"

section. Walter conducts a lovely, affectionate performance, with the occasional string portamento adding greatly to the emotional impact.

The most important item in this set is undoubtedly the one that concludes the first CD: the *First Piano Concerto*. Walter never recorded this commercially and the only other known surviving live performance is the one with Horowitz from the Concertgebouw in 1936, which not only has a large chunk of the first movement missing, but has a rather facile performance from the pianist. This first issue of Walter's performance with one of the great Brahms pianists, Clifford Curzon, is therefore of huge importance. Right from the opening *tutti* Walter shows his appreciation of the inherent tragedy of much of the concerto. The 'con sordini' violin phrases are suffused with sadness, but neither does Walter stint on the passionately dramatic element (in this concerto the hysteria is only just under the surface of the music). Curzon's entry seemed to me at first to be a little bland, but he is simply keeping his powder dry for later. He shows his true mettle in the first long solo passage beginning at bar 158 where the poetry of his playing is breathtaking. Nor does he fail in the big-scale moments; the section after the tempestuous call to arms at bar 226 is tremendously exciting (despite a rather large number of wrong notes), as is the final peroration of the first movement from the 'tempo I più agitato'. In the opening of the second movement, I found Walter too fast and prosaic, but as soon as Curzon enters he slows the tempo markedly. Curzon takes complete control of the performance, entering a whole new world of expressivity, to which Walter then responds. Just listen to the perfect realisation of the piano reveries at the *dolce* section from bar 30 and at its reappearance at the end of the movement, though, as with the first movement, Curzon is fully conscious of the underlying despair of other parts. The third movement comes almost straight on the heels of the second, wrong-footing the coughers in the audience. This movement is characterised by a tremendous momentum - there is no slowing down for the 'noble' piano solo between bars 66 and 90 or at the 'espressivo' after the double bar at 181; the expressivity is conveyed through dynamic shading and phrasing rather than tempo. After a wonderfully free cadenza, which takes Brahms' *quasi fantasia* marking fully to heart, the performance ends with a tremendously exciting coda. This great performance is alone worth the price of the set.

The second CD begins with an *Academic Festival Overture* from the same concerts as the *Haydn Variations* on CD1, and is played in much the same way as that is. It is fast and lively, with perky rhythms, though perhaps without the sense of exuberant joy that the piece really needs - a little more of the "Festival" would not go amiss.

The most substantial work concludes the set, though in a rather unexpected guise. This is Brahms' *Requiem Tedesca* as it is sung in Italian by the RAI chorus with two singers whom one does not immediately associate with Brahms, Boris Christoff and Rosanna Carteri. It is surprising just how much difference the use of the Italian language makes to the feel of the piece. Italian's open vowels and significantly fewer hard consonants compared to German make for a much less sombre palette of colours. These are further enhanced by the type of vocal production to which these linguistic features lead, making for a very different experience. Performances of the *Requiem* can be polarised to an extent that is true of few pieces. The zeitgeist of the present day is in favour of a fast tempo approach with timings of around an hour; we live in a time which is highly suspicious of solemnity and which values lightness and clarity above almost anything else. The plethora of performances using "authentic" instruments, all of which adopt this approach, has also helped to make this way the "right" way to modern critics. Performances such as those Herreweghe, Norrington and Eliot Gardiner epitomise this approach. An older school is identified with such conductors as Furtwängler, Celibidache, Tennstedt and Giulini (all of whom, significantly, are now dead) who saw the piece in a much more metaphysical light with much slower tempi and timings of around 80 minutes, and it is this approach which I personally find much the more satisfying. Walter's affectionate, thoughtful performance charts a way between these extremes at 67 minutes, and as a result is unlikely to alienate adherents of either side. The technical side of the performance is, surprisingly, rather fine. The only aspect of music where the past has virtually nothing to teach us today is in the technical and stylistic aspects of choral singing. Even the finest choirs of 50 years ago sound woolly and ill-blended to ears accustomed to the sound of the professional and semi-professional choirs which are now common. I

did slightly blanch at the thought of an Italian choir of the early 50s in this music (being grateful only that it wasn't a French choir of the same vintage!), but in fact they are not at all bad and sing very musically. The sound is more open-throated and "operatic" than that of a north European choir, but by this I do not mean that there is any overt emotionality or exaggeration, merely that the Italian voice production I mentioned earlier is apparent, especially in the louder passages. The male voices in particular have a rounded depth of tone not usually encountered (I suppose a point of comparison would be Domingo's sorties into Wagner and Strauss) and the female ones are not shrill or wobbly. The pianissimo singing is beautifully rich and sustained. There is a lot of light and shade in the singing, the dynamic variety being very impressive throughout the performance. One surprising disappointment is the rather poor diction; I spent a long time unsuccessfully trawling the internet trying to find the Italian translation used, which was made doubly difficult by often not being able even to guess at what the choir was actually singing. Obviously they do not approach the technical quality of, say, the Monteverdi Choir, but I had no problem with what I was hearing. The orchestra is very fine, with some exquisite woodwind phrasing, for example in the last movement, though the recording quality makes any real judgement of the string tone impossible.

Boris Christoff was in his late 30s and at the height of his vocal powers in 1952, and the top Fs and F sharps hold no terrors. In its different way, his timbre is also quite unlike that which we are used to, with that typically Russian (or, more accurately in his case, Bulgarian) slightly gritty and back-of-the-throat vocal production. There were times, especially in "Herr, lehre doch mich" which brought "I have attained the highest power" from *Boris Godunov* strongly to mind. He is certainly not overtly operatic or in any way "hammy", as he was in Gounod's *Faust*, and, after a while getting acclimatised, I found his performance very impressive. Rosanna Carteri was only 21 in 1952, having had made her debut as Elsa in *Lohengrin* at the Baths of Caracalla in Rome at the age of 19! In the same year as this recording she sang Desdemona in *Otello* with Furtwängler at Salzburg and was to become an exquisite Mimi, Violetta and Adina, but retired in the mid-1960s to devote herself to her family. The traditional voice type for "Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit" is a very pure, floating tone with minimal vibrato. Carteri's tone is pure with an absolutely lovely top A in bar 43, but the tone is more vibrant than we are used to. As with all aspects of this performance, there is nothing overtly operatic - no gulps or sobs or even much portamento - but there is a certain lack of the ideal sense of repose, though this is as much the result of Walter's rather swift tempo as anything to do with Carteri.

A performance like this is a very good thing to experience. Its differences from the usual make one reassess one's expectations, and brings home a truth which is too often forgotten in today's obsession with the chimera of "what the composer intended": one of the defining characteristics of a masterpiece is that is amenable to many different approaches. Although, obviously, this performance could never be a first choice version, I am very glad to have it.

The recordings in this set are all at the very least acceptable, but hardly hi-fi even for their dates. Andrew Rose has done his usual excellent job with them, but even he cannot completely tame their stridency or unclog their congestion. But, of course, anyone who is likely to buy this set knows what to expect, and the performances triumph over any inadequacies in the sound. One little irritation I had concerned the very short gaps between the movements of the *Requiem*; each movement flowed almost without a break from the previous one, which I found at times positively jarring.

Post Script - By pure chance I recently came across a recording of the 1937 Toscanini Queen's Hall performance which someone has put on YouTube. I had not thought that this performance had survived, and indeed the recording quality is absolutely appalling, but the performance is utterly spell-binding (and I speak as someone who is no great fan of Toscanini). Why I bring this up is that it clocks in at an astonishing 84 minutes, over ten minutes more than his 1943 broadcast and only 3 minutes less than Celibidache's Munich performance issued by EMI. The sound makes it hard work to listen to, but I do urge you to give it a try as the rewards are huge.

Paul Steinson

Romanus WEICHLIN (1652 - 1706)

Opus 1, 1695

Sonata III in a minor [10:19]

Sonata XI in b minor [5:47]

Sonata IX in d minor [5:17]

Sonata VI in F [8:03]

Sonata II in g minor [8:09]

Johann KUHNAU (1660-1722)

Sonata VI in B flat: Ciaccona, (arr. for 2 harpsichords) [3:29]

Georg BÖHM (1661-1731)

Capriccio in D [5:14]

Johann PACHELBEL (1653-1706)

Ciaccona in d minor, (arr. for 2 harpsichords) [4:53]

Johann Caspar KERLL (1627-1693)

Ciaccona in C, (arr. for 2 harpsichords) [2:51]

Georg MUFFAT (1653-1704)

Passacaglia in g minor [6:56]

Ensemble Masques/Olivier Fortin (harpsichord)

Skip Sempé (harpsichord 2)

rec. 5 September 2014, church of Laval en Brie, France DDD

ALPHA 212 [61:01]

Strictly speaking this disc has no title. The frontispiece mentions the name of the composer and in much smaller characters "Opus 1, 1695", referring to the single collection of instrumental music from the pen of Romanus Weichlein. However, in fact this disc offers more than the title suggests. As the track-list shows the *ciaccona* and the *passacaglia* take a major place in the programme. That is no coincidence: these two *bassi ostinati* also appear in four of Weichlein's sonatas, three of which are included here.

It is likely that few music lovers are familiar with the name of Romanus Weichlein. He was born as Andreas Franz Weichlein in Linz from parents who were both musicians and who gave him a good musical education. He received his first musical training at the abbey of Lambach and entered the Benedictine Order in 1671. At the profession of his vows he received the monastic name of Romanus. He went to Salzburg to study at the University, where he became a doctor of philosophy in 1673. Here he also got acquainted with Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber. He returned to Lambach, and later became chaplain and musical director of the Benedictine convent of Nonnberg in Salzburg.

Only two collections of his music were published. In 1695 his Op. 1 came from the press, under the title *Encaenia musices*, meaning literally "musical dedication". In this case this has to be interpreted as "musical gift". In his preface the composer dedicates the collection to emperor Leopold I, "in the firm hope that they will be used in his court chapel". He adds that they can be played both in sacred and in secular surroundings. In 1702 he published a collection of seven masses, *Parnassus ecclesiastico-musicus*, as his Op. 2. In addition works from his pen have been preserved in manuscript.

The sonatas are scored for two violins, two violas and basso continuo. In three sonatas these are joined by two trumpets. The track-list of the present disc omits any mention of movements. In the time these sonatas were written, instrumental sonatas did not have a formal structure yet. The booklets to the two recordings of these sonatas by Ars Antiqua Austria (Symphonia, 1994/95 and 2008 respectively) include the titles of movements or sections. Often they are not strictly separated, but follow each other *attacca* as was common in sonatas from the first half of the 17th century. Several 'movements' are divided into sections of a contrasting character. The *Sonata IX in d minor*, for instance, ends with a sequence of adagio - presto - adagio - allegro - grave. As I said, four sonatas

include a *passacaglia* or *ciaccona*. Three of them are played here; the exception is *Sonata I*, because it includes parts for two trumpets.

The use of ground basses, such as *passacaglia* and *ciaccona*, dates from the 16th century, but was especially popular in the *stile nuovo* which emerged in Italy around 1600. Part of it was the introduction of the basso continuo, which became the foundation of almost any composition, either vocal or instrumental. Another feature was instrumental virtuosity, especially for cornett and violin. These developments resulted in a large repertoire of pieces, in which one or more treble instruments weave an increasingly virtuosic web over a repeated bass pattern.

The inclusion of such ground basses in three of Weichlein's sonatas induced the performers to add separate pieces with a ground bass by other composers. These pieces were all scored for keyboard; three of them have been transcribed for two keyboards. That is very well done, but I don't see any reason for such transcriptions. The only piece, whose title does not indicate that it is in fact based on a *basso ostinato*, is the *Capriccio in D* by Georg Böhm. That can be explained by the fact that the ground bass is only used in one section of this piece, which also includes a fugue.

I already mentioned the recordings of Ars Antiqua Austria. Under the direction of Gunar Letzbor it was the first ensemble to pay attention to the oeuvre of Romanus Weichlein. Some may find it too much to purchase a complete recording of his sonatas; they are served well by this disc which includes five of them. They are given very fine interpretations by the Ensemble Masques; the contrasts between the movements or sections are well realised and the string parts are played in a speech-like manner. The keyboard items are nice additions which receive engaging performances by Olivier Fortin and Skip Sempé.

Weichlein deserves to be better known and this disc does its part.

Johan van Veen

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