

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Louis GLASS (1864-1936)

Symphony No. 5 in C major Op. 57 *Sinfonia Svastika* (1919-1920) [35:36]

Fantasy for piano and orchestra, Op. 47 (1913) [24:43]

Marianna Shirinyan (piano)

Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie/Daniel Raiskin

rec. 2013, Rhein-Mosel-Halle, Koblenz

CPO 777 494-2 [60:22]

This is volume 2 in CPO's complete cycle of Danish composer, Louis Glass's six symphonies. This Fifth Symphony is stunningly good as both music and performance. The earlier volume which includes the Third Symphony has been reviewed [here](#) and [here](#).

It's not the first such cycle. As the few avid Glass enthusiasts will know, that honour fell to Danish label Danacord which, in the earlyish 2000s, arranged pioneering sessions with the Plovdiv Philharmonic conducted by Nayden Todorov. The other discs in that series are CD544 (Nos. 1 and 5), [CD541](#) (No. 4), [CD542](#) (Nos. 3 and 6), [CD453](#) (Nos. 2 and *Fantasia*). These remain the only way to get to hear Glass's symphonies 1, 2 and 4 although as readings they were at times prone to an enervating torpor which has not helped them to make their way in the world. Part of the story - the part that counts against the Todorov cycle - can be found in the fact that the Raiskin reading of No. 5 (the finest of the six) takes 35:36 against Todorov's 41:37. There are several isolated discs outside these cycles. Marco Polo recorded the last two symphonies with Peter Marchbank and the South African Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra (1993, Johannesburg, 8.223486). There's also Launy Grøndahl with the Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra whose Glass 5, in less than succulent mono, from 1957 was in their double set of four late-Romantic Danish symphonies; again, that was on Danacord ([review](#)).

Late-Romantic Glass combines in the Fifth Symphony indelibly memorable ideas with a Tchaikovskian refulgence. Time after time his inspirations strike home and convince with searing sincerity. When this work is played 'on song', as it is here, nothing is better calculated to induce that frisson of excitement or to have you "air-conducting" with an abandon you may have doubted would ever return.

The Fifth Symphony is in four movements: I *Dayswork*; II *Rest*; III *Shadows*; IV *Dawn*. *Dayswork* has the vivacious rush of Elgar's *In the South* and Second Symphony but also there in the mix is Tchaikovsky spliced with Nielsen. The exultantly whooping horns in the first movement recall similar moments in Nielsen's Fifth. The movement's horn-lofted ecstasy could have been lent more immediacy in Raiskin's case but it's the most effective of all the commercially recorded versions. The other movements occupy seraphically contented Delian uplands, heat-hazed countryside days, dappled woodlands and the abandoned swoon of a dazzling dawn. Balletic material in symphonies can be hazardous but has been carried off with success in Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* and George Lloyd's Fourth. The third movement of Glass's Fifth does this also. My only criticism, in this case, would be the strangely unresonant and dead-sounding xylophone at 2:12.

In the gorgeously triumphant and superbly weighted finale Glass establishes a shuddering and shivering tension. Long-lined climactic statements are built, sustained, roughened and spun. The movement's darting upward and downward 'slashes' are reminiscent of Elgar's Second and pave the way for what amounts to a victorious sunset, squat and almost Baxian in its grip and grandeur.

The Symphony carries one tombstone around its neck. It is ominously entitled *Sinfonia Svastika* but Glass was no Nazi sympathiser. For a start consider his dates and the date of this symphony. The title here has nothing to do with the Swastika as arrogated by the Nazis. Glass intended to refer to the symbol for "good to be" or the Wheel of Life. It links with his theosophical sympathies. In this he was not alone. The following composers all had Theosophical leanings to one degree or another: Rubbra, Scriabin, Holst, John Foulds, Cyril Scott, Henry Cowell, Dane Rudhyar and fellow Dane, Rued Langgaard.

The Swastika symbol also appears in Hindu, Brahmin, Jain and earlier cultures. If you frequent secondhand bookshops you will have seen it on the spine of many a Rudyard Kipling book. Kipling was steeped in Indian culture.

Apart from its commercial recordings the Fifth Symphony has been taken up by conductors Michael Schönwandt (1982) and Leif Segerstam (1990). When in years to come a Schönwandt Edition is being put together I do hope that his 1982 off-air broadcast with the Danish RSO will find a home there.

The other work here is Glass's *Fantasia for Piano and Orchestra*. It's an eccentric piece; something of a statuesque statement. It starts with a raw natural-world call-to-arms from the brass followed by a determined four-square piano solo. A ticking and dripping figure recalls the slow chattering dewdrop fall at the start of Bax's *Spring Fire*. There's a sentimental viola and piano duo at 4:30 and musing Fauré-like calm up to 09:00. More troubled and turmoil-rocked waters are at 9:26. These sound a little like the preamble to Berlioz's *Marche au supplice*. There's a triumphant passage for piano (10:53) and that sentimental melody voiced by the viola is heard again at 16:12 over the constant trilling of the piano. At 18:15 Glass returns to the persistently chugging note-cell heard at the start - a sort of Mobius loop in sound. The *Fantasia* has its fascinations but its currency can be counted in intrigue and interest rather than in glorious statement.

The excellent, tightly written note is in German and English and is by Claus Røllum-Larsen.

I hope that CPO and Raiskin will next give us the Brucknerian Fourth Symphony.

The *Fantasy* is an enigmatic oddity but this Fifth Symphony is played on-song with frisson-inducing excitement that hits home top-dead-centre. Trying not to air-conduct? Resistance is futile.

Rob Barnett

Music for Winds by Latvian Composers

Pēteris PLAKIDIS (1947-2017)

Two Sketches for oboe solo (1975) [5:01]

Prelude and Pulsation, for wind quintet (1975) [6:47]

Interplay, Concerto for soloist group and orchestra (1977) [18:18]

Pēteris VASKS (b.1946)

Music For Fleeting Birds for wind quintet (1977) [7:49]

In Memory of a Friend for wind quintet (1982) [10:25]

Artūrs GRĪNUPS (1931-1989)

Three Visions for wind quintet (1976) [9:14]

Imants ZEMZARIS (b.1951)

Four Preludes on an Alfrēds Kalniņš Theme for wind quintet (1981) [12:53]

Rihards DUBRA (b.1964)

Lux Aeterna for saxophone quartet (2003) [9:44]

Indra RIŠE (b.1961)

Interaction for flute and organ (1999) [15:50]

Rolands KRONLAKS (b.1973)

Ice Age for clarinet solo (2007) [7:07]

Eriks EŠENVALDS (b.1977)

Impressions of Saaremaa for clarinet and cello (*Pensieroso*) [5:40]

Loneliness of the Junipers [2:27]

The Sea and the Cliffs [4:06] (1999) [12:13]

Santa RATNIECE (b.1977)

Seven Steps for clarinet quintet (2000) [7:07]

Marina GRIBINČIKA (b.1966)

Concerto for Oboe and Chamber Orchestra *Voyager* (2006) [11:17]

rec. Latvia, 1976-2008

SKANI LMIC016 [70:31 + 63:21]

This two-CD anthology cuts a selective swathe through Latvia's classical music for wind instruments over the period from 1975 to 2007.

Of the *Two Sketches* for solo oboe by **Pēteris Plakidis** the first is a cool and musing *Rubato*. It's companion, the *Poco vivo*, proceeds charmingly in little clucks, flurries and chuckles. His *Prelude and Pulsation* for wind quintet has a more dissonant cut-glass edginess. The *Prelude* mixes chaste musings with clashing note-centres. *Pulsation* is at first easier to digest. It steps out with a will but soon becomes complex.

Pēteris Vasks' *Music for Fleeting Birds* and *In Memory of a Friend* are more wild, woolly and modernistic than Plakidis. Each tends towards sometimes dramatic changes in tempo, subject or dynamic. *In Memory of a Friend* alternates nervy blurted-out defiance with gentle, plangent and lyrical waters. *Music for Fleeting Birds* can be thought of as a self-possessed cousin under-the-skin to Rautavaara's *Cantus Arcticus* although it is a tougher work and one given to some pretty dissonant extremes. Vasks has taken a close interest in birds and ecology and this occasionally angular piece is part of that stream of inspiration.

Artūrs Grīnups - already the subject of one of LMIC's portrait discs including symphonies 3 and 9 - is represented by his *Three Visions*. This work, in three tracks, is a product of the mid-1970s when Grīnups tended to work in chamber groupings rather than full orchestra. The music is by turns desolate and melancholy, inwardly musing and then cheery, in a rather uptight Malcolm Arnold shanty manner.

Imants Zemzaris's *Four Preludes on a Theme by Alfrēds Kalniņš* is for wind quintet. This is slow-blooming, affable and amiable. Three smiling *Allegrettos* precede a slightly cooler and questing *Andante*. All in all, in this performance, this is intelligent and only lightly challenging music-making.

The disc ends with **Plakidis**'s two-movement 18-minute concerto for 'soloist group' and orchestra. This opens with the solo clarinet 'speaking' at some length. This makes way for a succession of little panels, each spirited, self-contained and not dependent on its neighbours. Many are islands of bright-eyed hustle-bustle activity. The music is lively, not dissonant, and enjoys a pellucid clarity. There's some debt to Stravinsky along the way.

The second disc opens proceedings with the prize of the set, **Rihards Dubra**'s *Lux Aeterna* for saxophone quartet. This composer combines the influences of minimalism with Gregorian chant. You can hear both in this little piece which is never-overheated yet casts a quick spell. There's certainly minimalism in the initial sustained chatter of the flute and a straight-speaking kinship with Michael Nyman's *Where The Bee Dances*. This is a really heart-conquering piece which I can see appealing to any young saxophonist. The way is open for saxophonists of the international calibre of Jess Gillam.

Indra Riše's awed *Interaction* for flute and organ operates at a low temperature and at first quietly. The distanced recording perspective accentuates that effect. About half way through the organ takes on gothic gargantuan rhetoric. This piece has been written under the influence of Georg Franck's words: "... there is nothing that does not unceasingly move with the flow of time." *Interaction* - a rather cold title - ends in quietude as it began. Riše has lived in both Denmark and Latvia.

Rolands Kronlaks' *Ice Age* is a questing, halting and faltering clarinet solo. A more humane aspect could have been cut by **Eriks Ešenvalds**' *Impressions of Saaremaa* - a triptych for clarinet and cello. In fact, it is uncompromising, motoric, angular and with some geiser-like updraughts. The music of UNESCO-award winning **Santa Ratniece** was unknown to me until I heard an LMIC disc of four of her choral works. Her *Seven Steps* for clarinet quintet can be both moody and glum with some magically poised islets of calm among the crags. As it proceeds it becomes more fixated on a supple melody which provides the curve along which the score finds its final silence.

Marina Gribinčika's Oboe Concerto *Voyager* is among the more recent scores in this collection. Its inventive modernity is never in doubt but neither is its succinctness. It has winning ways. The oboe, after introducing itself in a vinegary light, soon settles into its role as the singer although this keeps being subverted by a scored tendency to solo abrasion and harshness. What I can only describe as 'jungle sounds' hem in the solo line and quiet upsweeping cells from the violins recall the music of Alan Hovhaness.

This disc overlaps slightly in repertoire with a single CD LMIC product: Skani 050.

The useful liner notes are by Inara Jakubone and are in Latvian and English. They provide context for the music and the composers. There are also profiles of the host of performers whose permission to allow their work to be shared with the wider world is surely appreciated.

Plenty to challenge the ear here but even among the more thorny choices there are enclaves of melody or fascination.

Rob Barnett

Performers

Imants Sneibis (flute); Vilnis Strautins (flute); Vilnis Pelnens (oboe); Normunds Sne (oboe); Guntis Kuzma (clarinet); Česlavs Grods (clarinet); Agnese Argale (piccolo flute); Alfreds Neimanis (bass clarinet); Arvids Klisans (french horn); Baiba Jūrmale (cello); Ligita Sneibe (organ)
Clarinet Quartet "Contraverso"; Wind Quintet of the Danish National Symphony Orchestra Ensemble; Wind Quintet of the Latvian National Symphony; Latvian National Symphony Orchestra/Vassily Sinaisky; Rova Saxophone Quartet Ensemble; Sinfonietta Riga Chamber Ensemble; Riga Saxophone Quartet

Francis JACKSON (b. 1917)

Sing a new song to the Lord (1970) [7:57]
Domine Ihesu Christe (1976) [3:59]
O people of Sion (1975) [4:17]
Blow ye the trumpet in Zion (1963) [9:52]
O salutaris hostia (1989) [3:32]
Tantum ergo (1986) [4:21]
Benedicite in G (1949) [6:54]
Jubilate Deo in G (1964) [2:5]
Word made flesh [3:06]
Remember for good, O Father (1955) [8:0]
Laetentur coeli (1958-70) [1:52]
Magnificat (Hereford Service) (1961/1979) [4:15]
Nunc Dimittis (Hereford Service) (1961) [2:51]
Audi, Filia (1950) [8:25]
The Choir of York Minster /Philip Moore
John Scott Whitley (organ)
rec. 1997, York Minster. DDD
Texts included
PRIORY PRCD 841 [72:16]

It's not often that one can mark the centenary of a musician during his or her lifetime. Happily, however, that is the case with Dr Francis Jackson who celebrated his 100th birthday on 2 October, 2017.

Born in the North Yorkshire market town of Malton, midway between York and Scarborough, Francis Jackson was a pupil of Sir Edward Bairstow (1874-1946). Bairstow served as Organist of York Minster from 1913 until his death. Jackson was a chorister at the Minster and then a pupil of Bairstow, for whom he had an enduring respect and regard, Before the Second World War he was organist of the parish church in his home town of Malton and following military service during the war he was invited to become Assistant Organist at York in 1946. By then Bairstow was in failing health and it was envisaged that his new assistant might have a heavier workload than was customary. In fact, Bairstow died on 1 May 1946, within weeks of Jackson receiving the offer to serve at York. Though other candidates were considered, I believe, Jackson was formally appointed to succeed his mentor after a few months. He remained in the post until his retirement in 1982, serving for some 36 years.

His retirement from the daily responsibilities at the Minster gave him the opportunity to devote even more time both to composition and to giving organ recitals all over the world. He continued to be highly active as a composer in many genres and the list of compositions in his autobiography goes up to 2013. He gave his final organ recital in 2012, shortly after his 95th birthday. So, Francis Jackson has had a long and very active life as a musician and to those wishing to find out more I commend his kindly-toned autobiography. This was published in 2013, when he was well into his 90s, under the witty title *Music for a Long While*.

The present disc is not new; indeed, I suspect it may have been recorded to mark Jackson's 80th birthday in 1997. However, we haven't reviewed it before and Jackson's centenary seems an appropriate time to do so. The Choir of York Minster were the obvious choice to record this selection from Jackson's church music. They are conducted by Philip Moore who was Jackson's successor, serving as Organist and Master of the Music at the Minster from 1983 until 2008. The organist is John Scott Whitley who served as Assistant Organist and later as Organist of the Minster from 1975 until 2010. He therefore worked with Dr Jackson as well as with Philip Moore.

The chosen pieces are all very good compositions in their own right. More than that, they evidence a deep knowledge of choirs and their inner workings as well as a consummate understanding of the

organ as an instrument. Furthermore, in his selection of texts Francis Jackson demonstrates a perceptive knowledge and appreciation of scriptural texts, not least from the Old Testament.

The programme opens in arresting fashion with *Sing a new song to the Lord*. This was composed for a service in Leeds Parish Church to mark the 150th anniversary of the Leeds Philharmonic Society. The piece sets verses from Psalm 98 in a suitably jubilant fashion. The organ part is spectacular at times – Jackson no doubt took advantage of the fact that Leeds Parish Church boasts a fine Harrison & Harrison instrument which was designed by his mentor, Sir Edward Bairstow. John Scott Whiteley here conjures some formidable sounds from the York Minster organ and the choir sings with great gusto. Notwithstanding the celebratory nature of the piece there a hushed and awestruck episode not long before the end ('He will judge the world with righteousness') and this ushers in some very soft music before the concluding 'Glory be', which is exultant.

By contrast the following two items are much more restrained. *Domine Ihesu Christe* is a calm unaccompanied setting of a Latin prayer of King Henry VI. *O people of Sion* is an Advent introit for ATB voices and organ. For most of its duration this appealing piece is reflective in tone.

Blow ye the trumpet in Zion takes us back to big, celebratory music. This was composed for the 1963 St Cecilia's Day service at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, High Holborn. It is a substantial piece. The music is fine and varied and it includes some mighty and dramatic moments. Here again the York Minster organ sounds terrific, especially when pushing out trumpet-like fanfares. The work achieves a tranquil, contemplative conclusion, however.

When Francis Jackson succeeded Bairstow at York Minster the Dean was Eric Milner-White (1884-1963). Milner-White was a major figure in the twentieth century Anglican church; among his lasting achievements was the introduction of the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at King's College, Cambridge in the year that he became Dean of the College – he served in that capacity from 1918 to 1941. He moved to York as Dean in 1941 and remained there until his death. Francis Jackson relates in his notes accompanying this CD that Milner-White, an avid liturgist, had been keen for some time to get someone to write a musical setting of the Benedicite that would telescope what can be a long and repetitive canticle while retaining all the words. His idea was that the Decani singers in the choir might sing the first half of each verse while the Cantores sang the second half simultaneously. Jackson took up the challenge and, amazingly, wrote his *Benedicite in G* in just three and a half hours one evening.: he says "It fell onto the paper, as it were, in its definitive form without effort." It works well, I think, giving the words a compact setting. The music is confident in tone and culminates in a big-hearted doxology.

Milner-White was also instrumental in the composition of *Remember for good, O Father*. It was his idea to install an astronomical clock in the Minster to commemorate the sacrifice of members of the Royal Air Force who perished in the 1939-45 war This piece was written for the service in 1955 at which the Duke of Edinburgh unveiled the clock. The text was compiled by Milner-White. Words and music marry together here in a thoughtful and impressive piece, most of which is suitably subdued in tone.

Francis Jackson is not just an inventive composer of church music, as this programme demonstrates; he's also very practical. In 1961 he was invited to write a 'Mag' and 'Nunc' for that year's Three Choirs Festival in Hereford. Some composers, faced with such a high-profile opportunity, might have written an elaborate set of canticles. Instead Jackson wrote music which could be used on occasions when a church could field less than a full choir. So, as he explains in the notes, the music was written on two staves with the trebles and tenors singing one line an octave apart and the altos and basses doing the same with the second line. The beauty of this approach was that it enabled the music to be performed convincingly by reduced forces. In 1979 he provided an alternative SATB version which is what is performed here. The result is a good, eminently sing-able set of Canticles.

The recital ends with *Audi, Filia* which, despite its Latin title has an English text, comprising words from Psalm 45. This must surely be a piece dear to Francis Jackson's heart since he wrote it for his own wedding in York Minster in November 1950. Naturally, it is dedicated to his wife, Priscilla. It's an excellent anthem which includes some important treble solos, here very well sung by Alistair Hewish. The piece builds to a big, broad and confident end. The last word is given, fittingly, to the organ of York Minster which here sounds majestic in the hands (and feet) of John Scott Whitley.

Francis Jackson's long and distinguished life has been devoted to music and this disc gives an excellent representation of his church music which is in the finest tradition of the genre. It's worth mentioning, though, that his substantial output – he'd reached Op 164 by 2013 – encompasses other fields as well, including songs, chamber music, orchestral works and, of course, pieces for solo organ. His choral music rightly features in many mixed recital discs, such as a recent one by the Exon Singers ([review](#)). That fine choir has also made a disc of Francis Jackson's choral music, though I've not heard that particular release (Delphian DCD34035).

Philip Moore, John Scott Whitley and the York Minster Choir do Francis Jackson proud in this programme. Neil Collier has recorded them well, with the sound of the organ being especially well conveyed. This disc gives a very good overview of the tremendous contribution which Francis Jackson has made to the music of the English church.

[John Quinn](#)

Beat FURRER (b. 1954)

Works for Choir and Ensemble

enigmas I–VI for mixed choir a cappella [32:08]

voices – still for mixed choir and ensemble [13:19]

... *cold and calm and moving* for flute, harp, violin, viola and cello [20:07]

Helsinki Chamber Choir

Uusinta Ensemble/Nils Schweckendiek

rec. 2014, Sellojali, Espoo, Finland

TOCCATA TOCC0360 [65:44]

The Swiss-born composer Beat Furrer settled in Austria in 1975, when still in his early twenties, and is now a professor of composition in Graz, a post he's held since 1991. A protégé of Roman Haubenstock-Ramati and Otmar Suitner, he has found his niche in teaching and performing contemporary music as well as composing. He has a particular fascination with the human voice and its potential, and this has informed his compositional trajectory. What is immediately noticeable in the music here is the spectrum of sound achieved by the voice, from barely inaudible sounds such as breath, to speech, song, and progressing to screams. This kaleidoscopic panoply of auditory sensation is expertly and imaginatively harnessed to striking effect in the music featured on this disc.

Furrer turned to the writings of Leonardo da Vinci for his *enigmas I–VI*. The work in question is *Profezie*, in which the Italian master ponders everyday subjects such as dreams or metal. The *enigmas* began with the first in 2006, with the composer building up his collection of six over seven years. Each demands a different configuration of singers with *enigma I* requiring a choir divided into four equal parts, in *II* the singers are marshalled into three lines, and *V* into two separate choirs. *enigma I* 'Of Dreaming' has the voices almost running on the spot, confined to a narrow vocal range. *enigma II* 'Of Metals' contemplates some of the awful uses to which mankind has put metal. It opens with hesitant, low-pitched spoken words, enunciated in irregular rhythms. The overall effect is eerie, reinforced by some strange glissandi. High chords alternate with low ones in *enigma III*, which returns to the dreaming theme of *I*. *enigma IV* contrasts bustling dialogue with luminous stillness. *V* is the longest at 15 minutes. The two choirs called for offer Furrer much scope for multi-layered textures and endless flights of fancy. In *enigma VI*, the composer revisits the subject of metals, reworking some of the text of *II*.

voices – still had an interesting gestation. It started life as *still* in 1998, scored for an ensemble of fourteen players. In 2000, for a Salzburg performance, he added a twelve part choral section - thus, *voices – still* came about. In its third incarnation this combined choral/instrumental version became a scene in a music-theatre work *Begehren* (Desire). The text is drawn from Virgil's *Georgics*, relating the story of the disappearance of Eurydice after Orpheus disobeyed the gods by looking back at her. Furrer uses multi-layered textures in this ingeniously scored canvas. His violent and, at times, frenzied brush strokes, resemble, for me, a Joan Miró painting in sound. Yet, it is not without its fleeting glimpses of calm.

The choir are given a well-earned rest in the final piece *...cold and calm and moving* for flute, harp, violin, viola and cello. It dates from 1992 and is the earliest composition on the disc. Originally it consisted of loose sheaves of manuscript, with the performers given carte blanche to perform them in any order. Then, rather like Stockhausen in *Stimmung*, a definitive version emerged where a preferred ordering was established. This is now how Furrer likes it performed. The texture is quite sparse and pared down, with each instrument given its moment. The work is inspired by Petrarch's sonnet '*Hor che 'l ciel e la terra e 'l vento tace*' (Now that heaven and earth and the wind are silent). As the music unfolds, the listener is drawn into the emotions of the poet's love-sick world.

The Helsinki Chamber Choir's immaculate ensemble, well-enunciated diction and rhythmic acuity, under the inspirational direction of Nils Schweckendiek all add up to a winning combination. The Uusinta Ensemble's alert playing and profound musicianship are convincing and compelling.

Schweckendiek's booklet contribution is informative and successfully fills in the background. All are first recordings except for *...cold and calm and moving*. Well-recorded, these adventurous scores are showcased at their very best.

Stephen Greenbank

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Let Beauty Awake

Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872-1958)

Five songs from 'Songs of Travel' (1901-04) (transcr. E Nisbeth for viola and piano) [12:48]

Romance (c.1914) [6:29]

Rebecca CLARKE (1886-1979)

Sonata for Viola and Piano (1919) [23:32]

Benjamin BRITTEN (1913-76)

Third Suite for Cello, Op 87 (1971) (transcr. Nisbeth for solo viola) [21:58]

Lachrymae, Reflections on a song of John Dowland, Op 48 (1950) [13:55]

Ellen Nisbeth, Viola; Bengt Forsberg, Piano

rec. May 2016, Grönwaldsalen, Konserthuset, Stockholm

Reviewed in stereo and surround

BIS BIS-2182 SACD [80:18]

As I played this album for the first time, the evening was drawing in, the big autumn Lancashire sky, a patchwork of peach and pencil grey stretched into the far distance toward the shadowy contours of Pendle Hill. At this stage of the year the day's end doesn't tarry unduly but on this occasion it augured a divine serendipity of sound and sight. 'Let Beauty Awake' is especially an album to cherish for those of us lucky enough to have the seed of North in our DNA. But I can't imagine anyone from beyond those confines failing to respond to this meticulously crafted recital.

The sonic contribution lies firstly in the sound of Ellen Nisbeth's viola. For those readers who wish to know about such things the booklet tells us that she uses a Dom Nicolò Amati viola dating from 1714. I don't pretend to be an expert but this viola makes a ravishing, burnished sound in this young soloist's hands. The BIS engineers have captured an extraordinarily truthful sonic image – utterly convincing in both surround and stereo. It's probably the most 'alive' viola disc I've ever heard. The balance between viola and piano is perfect.

The latter remark also applies to the playing. Bengt Forsberg is an extremely experienced accompanist, of course, in both lieder and in chamber music. It must be a daunting prospect for any relative novice (in terms of recording at least) to be paired up with such a legend but frankly they sound as though they have been performing together for aeons. Not only that but Forsberg is one of the most generous of partners and that quality shines through on this disc.

Ellen Nisbeth has transcribed five of the first six of Vaughan Williams' early Songs of Travel for viola and piano and these are wisely interspersed throughout the disc (The second one provides its title). Hence 'The Vagabond' (the most famous of the songs included here) acts as a kind of prelude, and 'The Infinite Shining Heavens' as a postlude. The other transcriptions act as interludes which separate the four extended items. I think this arrangement works splendidly in this context – we are often told that the cello is the most vocal-sounding of instruments but hearing these transcriptions may well convince listeners that the viola is even more songful. Indeed Nisbeth justifies their inclusion in a brief introductory note – she inherited a love of Robert Louis Stevenson from her Scottish forbears and her soulful playing of these lovely songs belies the absence of his words. (The texts are thoughtfully included to remind us). Forsberg's contribution is quite beyond reproach.

There's more Vaughan Williams in the shape of the wistful Romance, a lovely piece that is often overlooked presumably because its six and a half minute duration makes it hard to programme. It inhabits the same world as 'The Lark Ascending' and is thought to have been composed at around the same time. The uneasy and short-lived intensity of the central section is brought off splendidly by Nisbeth and provides a dramatic contrast to the limpid and eerie opening and close. Again the tact of Forsberg's accompaniment is clear – it truly pays dividends in this all-too-brief mini-masterpiece.

The centrepiece, and perhaps the highlight of the disc for this listener is Rebecca Clarke's still underappreciated Viola Sonata. 'Underappreciated' is an adjective which could be linked to any of Clarke's works. I am familiar with recordings by Philip Dukes and Sophia Rahman on an extensive Naxos survey of her chamber music (8.557934 - Michael Cookson's MusicWeb review can be read [here.](#)), and with Tabea Zimmermann and Kirill Gerstein's performance on Myrios (MYR004 -in a mixed recital with Vieuxtemps and Brahms sonatas- Jonathan Woolf's review is [here.](#)). In my view Nisbeth and Forsberg trump both of these still excellent accounts. Zimmermann is undoubtedly a superb violist but her account on Myrios, good as it is, misses something of the work's English essence. That is a criticism that can't be levelled at the Dukes/Rahman account, but I feel that the Swedish duo ultimately provide greater technical security, produce a more variegated range of colours and are certainly better recorded. They also in my view more convincingly capture the elusive core of this great work. At the point in the finale where Adagio becomes Agitato via a long *tremelando* (actually marked *ponticello tremolo* in the score) Nisbeth unleashes a veritable sonic rainbow. It is an unforgettable passage.

After 'The Roadside Fire' we get a transcription (again by this soloist) of Britten's final Suite for solo cello. While such an arrangement could never displace the original (nor any recording truly challenge Rostropovich's legendary account) the piece really doesn't seem out of place on the viola. I was once again drawn to the amazing palette of sounds Nisbeth coaxes from her instrument, not least in the mighty Passacaglia that closes the work, in which the three folk songs and the *Kontakion* upon which the whole edifice is built are revealed. Nisbeth builds up the tension masterfully.

Britten also contributes the final extended work on the programme, the more familiar *Lachrymae* after Dowland's song 'If my complaints could passions move', whose melody again emerges only towards the work's conclusion. Another measured and deeply-considered reading from both players further amplifies the charms of this generously filled issue.

As viola and piano recitals go, the imagination that has informed the planning and layout of this one takes some beating. If the repertoire appeals, the performances are exemplary. The engineering for both formats is well-nigh ideal. I certainly look forward to hearing much more from Ellen Nisbeth and her wonderful viola.

Richard Hanlon

Gustav MAHLER (1860-1911)

Symphony No. 5 in C sharp minor (1901-1902) [63:38]

Four songs from Des Knaben Wunderhorn (1892-1898) [20:19]

Revelge [6:18]

Der Schildwache Nachtlied [4:44]

Der Tamboursgeißel [5:23]

Lied des Verfolgten im Turm [3:54]

Fünf Rückert-Lieder (1901-1902) [20:30]

Siegfried Lorenz (baritone)

Staatskapelle Berlin/Otmar Suitner (symphony, DKW)

Berliner Sinfonie-Orchester/Günther Herbig (Rückert)

rec. 1-2 March 1982 (DKW); 24-25 September (Rückert) & 10-13 December 1984 (Symphony no. 5);

Christuskirche Studio, Berlin

No texts

BERLIN CLASSICS 0300922BC [63:38 + 40:54]

My MusicWeb colleague Dan Morgan has already reviewed this double CD issue from Berlin Classics but I part company with him regarding its merits – or rather, lack of merit according to Dan; such is the subjectivity of musical taste. He found more pleasure in the songs than the symphony; for me the reverse is true, although I enjoy baritone Siegfried Lorenz' sensitive singing. Nor do I object to the early 80's digital recording quality – again, different playback set-ups can often account for that – finding it bright but not shallow and in fact first rate.

It is likely that my greater familiarity with Otmar Suitner's discography predisposed me to enjoy his Mahler; he was of Viennese background but became a prominent musical figure in East Germany, where he was, among other things, director of the Staatsoper Berlin and thus simultaneously the Staatskapelle. He amassed a sizeable discography, particularly strong in Mozart, Dvorak, Beethoven, German opera in general and, of course, Mahler. Suitner's devotion to the composer was no doubt enhanced by both men being Austrian and must have lent credibility and authenticity to Suitner's conducting of Mahler. The other conductor here, Günther Herbig, is less well-known but was chief conductor of both the Berlin Sinfonie-Orchester and the Dresden Philharmonic. Thus, both conductors were highly apt and experienced Mahler conductors despite the relative novelty of recording him in East Germany in the early 80's.

Dan is of the opinion that the *Rückert Lieder* were recorded over three years and the symphony in 1982, but I think closer scrutiny of the recording dates shows that both the *Rückert Lieder* and the Fifth were recorded in late 1984 and it was *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* that was made in 1982; it matters little as they are of a piece in sound and style.

Reminiscences from the vocal soloist here and the leader of the BSO, in combination with Suitner's obituary by Rob Cowan in the "Gramophone", testify to the joy of working with him and reflect my own reaction to his recordings here. The latter speaks of his "fresh, spontaneous conducting style...verdant and musically gripping" and how his studies under Clemens Krauss influenced "his feeling for precisely the 'right' phrase or tempo", while Lorenz remembers that "[h]e was very relaxed, not over-focussed – a fantastic conductor, always at ease and enthusiastic. These songs needed an orchestra that produces pure expression". Lothar Friedrich, speaking of the recording of the Fifth Symphony, observes, "Suitner struck an excellent balance between his emotional side on the one hand and his intellectual approach on the other."

It is the unaffected naturalness of Suitner's direction that is so appealing; he was never an obtrusive conductor and for the most part I find his approach to the Fifth similar to Barbirolli's without being so indulgent. Having generated great tension in the brisk, propulsive first movement and the stormy second, Suitner is by contrast free and affectionate in his lilting, very Austrian treatment of the waltz sections in the Scherzo. The Adagietto is free and flowing, considerably briefer than my favourite

versions by Karajan and Shipway; the harp is rather too prominent but I love the surge and swoon of Suitner's phrasing, again betraying his Viennese roots.

The Lieder are undoubtedly authentic in feeling; Lorenz' baritone is typically German: light, steady and velvety, similar in timbre to Fischer-Dieskau's but "cleaner" in tonal production, slightly grainy up top with rather too pronounced a vibrato at times but invariably elegant and patrician in manner. The orchestral accompaniment in both sets of songs is lovely under both conductors, especially the woodwind in "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen" which concludes with a sumptuous string glissando upwards.

The presentation of this slim, cardboard digipack is attractive and the notes are entertaining and informative, but unfortunately no texts are provided.

Ralph Moore

Previous review: [Dan Morgan](#)

Milstein Rarities

Edouard LALO (1823-1892)

Symphonie espagnole in D minor, Op. 21 (1874) [24:05]

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Violin Concerto in E minor (excerpts): Andante and Allegro non troppo; Allegro molto vivace (1844) [5:34 + 5:54]

Antonín DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Violin Concerto in A Minor, Op. 53 (1884) [30:35]

Nathan Milstein (violin)

Philadelphia Orchestra/Eugene Ormandy (Lalo)

Philharmonic-Symphony of New York/Arturo Toscanini (Mendelssohn)/Leopold Stokowski (Dvořák)
Mono

rec. March 1936, Carnegie Hall (Mendelssohn), 1944-45, Academy of Music, Philadelphia (Lalo) and
October 1947, Carnegie Hall (Dvořák)

PRISTINE AUDIO PASC 503 [66:15]

The word is rarity. As Mark Obert-Thorn points out, the Lalo with Ormandy hasn't been reissued officially since the days of 78, the live Mendelssohn torso is the only example of a meeting between Milstein and Toscanini, whilst the Dvořák is both live and never-before-issued and thus the biggest prize of all in the rarity stakes.

Like many Auer students Milstein omitted the Lalo Intermezzo in his 1944-45 Columbia recording in Philadelphia. The presence of the 1955 St Louis/Golschmann Capitol LP has tended to relegate this earlier set to the back of reissue maestro's minds whilst live survivors such as the Cluytens-directed version in Paris ([see review](#)) in the same year as the St Louis studio reading, have served perhaps only to make things more awkward for the 78rpm set, which has been a pity - until now. Ormandy, himself a decent fiddler in his youth - try listening to those old Cameo sides that have been transferred to CD - knows the terrain perfectly, bringing the winds forward when required and drawing out the lower strings powerfully: it helps to have so superbly virtuoso an instrument at the Philadelphia Orchestra playing, of course. Milstein remains everything Hugh Bean said he was; the embodiment of perfect violin playing. His poise and unruffled bowing, the scintillating clarity of his articulation and the lyrical purity of his phrasing are always treasurable. Those few succulent slides in the finale serve notice of his piquant elocution here, and the droll exchanges between winds and soloist cap a reading of cosmopolitan, though admittedly hardly Gallic sensibility.

The Mendelssohn preserves almost all of the slow movement and the finale of what proved to be one of Toscanini's final performances with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York given in March 1936 in Carnegie Hall. I grew up with Milstein's Pittsburgh recording with Steinberg, working backwards to the Bruno Walter New York recording of 1945 - I didn't hear their V Disc recording until much later - before briefly acquainting myself with the Barzin/Philharmonia and not getting around to the late Abbado in Vienna. The sound of the torso is rough, with big overloading at fortes and a brief dropout. Toscanini could be brutal with Mendelssohn, as he could with Dvořák and he's too rugged. Milstein responds with some elfin sentiment along the way, and the finale is duel-like, in the manner of Heifetz/Cantelli - or indeed Heifetz/Toscanini. This once appeared on an Arturo Toscanini Society LP.

The Dvořák, again with the Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York, dates from October 1947 but features Stokowski, hitherto known only for his performances of the composer's Ninth Symphony, Serenade for Strings and a solitary Slavonic Dance, though another tidbit or two exist in the vaults. Milstein was notable among Russians - as was, later, Oistrakh - for his highly persuasive performances of this concerto (if only he hadn't been quite so cavalier in his dismissal of the Sibelius and Elgar). His Steinberg, Dorati and Burgos studio performances have their adherents, and I liked his live performance as well on Music and Arts with Kletzki in 1956. Stokowski encourages greater breadth in the slow movement than in any of these other collaborations and proves a supportive colleague. As

ever Milstein brings out the agile rhythms, though not quite with the rusticity of a Suk or the potent incision of a Příhoda. There's the bonus of hearing Stokowski's 'bravo' at the end.

This finely transferred disc has done all it can for the Mendelssohn and its appreciable best for the companion concertos.

Jonathan Woolf

Luigi BOCCHERINI (1743-1805)

String Trios Op. 6

Trio No. 4 in F G92

Trio No. 2 in E flat G90

Trio No. 5 in G minor G93

Trio No. 6 in C G94

The Lubotsky Trio (Mark Lubotsky, Katarina Andreasson (violins), Olga Dowbusch-Lubotsky (cello))
rec. 2016, Konserthus Örebro, Sweden

BRILLIANT CLASSICS 95493 [56:37]

The Italian composer Luigi Boccherini was born in Lucca into a musical family. His father was a cellist. He first learnt music at his father's side, and that probably gave the young Luigi his love for the cello. At a young age, he was sent to Rome for further study. After his studies he entered various posts before in 1770. He took a position in Spain at the court of Infante Luis Antonio, the younger brother of King Charles III. Here he flourished and soon became one of the most important figures in Spanish music of the period. During this period he would buy popular sheet music from northern Europe, especially that of Haydn, and he would use these pieces to colour his own music; that would earn him the nickname "Haydn's wife". His music was categorised by the gallant style, something he brought to the Spanish court. He was a victim of the Napoleonic wars. He found that his income was drastically cut. With the borders closed and his exit from Spain blocked, he died in relative poverty in Madrid.

"The *String Trios Op. 6 (1769)* are characterized by their high expressiveness, richness of melodic language, virtuosic brilliance and elegance. The sound of the two violins and cello in its plenitude often approaches to that of the quartet. Listening to the Boccherini's masterpieces, it is impossible not to notice the indubitable impact of his music on the great Viennese classics, first of all on Mozart." So writes Mark Lubotsky. Indeed that is all he writes concerning the music presented here. The booklet notes are lamentably poor concerning both composer and his music. Nowhere do they mention the composer's indebtedness to mainstream European music. Haydn is ever present here, a lot more so than in Boccherini's other compositions, but there is also a hint of C. P. E. Bach. If anything, the *String Trios Op. 6*, rather than showing Boccherini's influence on Mozart, show the northern European influence on the composer himself.

I have greatly enjoyed Brilliant Classics survey of Boccherini's string quintets over the years and had high hopes for this recording. The playing is good enough, but it cannot compare to that of La Ritirata in their recording of the Op. 34 String Trios for Glossa (GCD 923105), a performance of perfection. Here the occasional slip in balance and overbright violin sound at times mar the performance. For example the violin in the opening of the E flat Trio can sound a little too forward, somewhat overshadowing the cello. This is a perfectly eversible recording, an introduction to the string trios of a much maligned composer. If, however, you want to buy just one recording, go for the Glossa recording.

The recorded sound is good if not the best. As mentioned, the booklet notes are sparse: three quarters of a page dedicated to the composer and his music compared to the six pages dedicated to the performers. A slight imbalance there!

Stuart Sillitoe

George TSONTAKIS (b. 1951)

Anasa for clarinet and orchestra (2011) [23:42]

True Colors for trumpet and orchestra (2012) [18:06]

Unforgettable for two violins and orchestra (1009 revised 2013) [21:24]

David Krakauer (clarinet), Eric Berlin (trumpet), Luosha Fang and Eunice Kim (violins)

Albany Symphony Orchestra cond David Alan Miller

rec. 2011-2013, Troy Savings Bank Hall; EMPAC Concert Hall, Troy, USA

NAXOS 8.559826 [63:12]

This is my first encounter with the music of George Tsontakis. He is an American composer of Greek, specifically Cretan, background. He studied with Roger Sessions and Franco Donatoni and his music has apparently been widely performed. He has won one of the most prestigious awards for classical music, the Grawemeyer Award, which he received for his second violin concerto in 2005. He writes in an attractive tonal idiom and accepts influences not only from Greek music but also from klezmer, the Jewish music of Eastern Europe, which has been revived in the USA, and from jazz.

We have here three concertos, each with an evocative name. The individual movements also have individual names. *Anasa* is for clarinet, and Tsontakis was inspired in writing it by the playing of David Krakauer. I think of how Mozart was inspired to write his clarinet concerto by the playing of Anton Stadler and Brahms his clarinet works by the playing of Richard Mühlfeld. *Anasa* is nominally in three movements, but the first divides into two: a slow and languid introduction named Doyna followed by a fast dance called Pistoli, as pistol shots are fired into the air at Cretan weddings. There follows a substantial slow movement named Soliloquy in a meditative post-romantic idiom, which reminded me distantly of Berg. The short finale is Bir-Zirk! which is both celebratory and serious.

I found this work quite delightful and was greatly charmed by the playing of David Krakauer, who can squeeze notes and produce slides and inflections as do klezmer players but, unlike some of them, without rough edges, squawks or occasional duff notes.

I was less taken with the second work, the trumpet concerto *True Colors*. This is in two movements. Here the influence of jazz replaces that of Greek music and klezmer. Nothing wrong with that, and I enjoyed the first movement, Prologue: Echoing, which is a kind of fantasia on fanfares, with the orchestral brass responding to calls from the solo trumpet. There are two quieter interludes featuring the glockenspiel. Towards the end a three note descending theme appears, which will be important in the second movement, Magic Act. This begins quietly, and the solo trumpet is muted, an interesting feature. There is then a kind of slow jazzy rhapsody. This goes on and on, and the eventual arrival of some faster music came too late to balance the movement. Eric Berlin plays with fine control and tone.

With the double violin concerto *Unforgettable*, we have a return to form. The title seem rather pretentious, even when the composer tells us it 'is more imbued with irony than any other musical references'. The two soloists are throughout more colleagues than rivals. In the opening movement they duet over what are rightly called Changing Landscapes, constantly changing scenery which varies in mood and speed. The second movement, Leapfrogging, finds them jumping over one another in a way which is basically playful, though with some darker moments and a hint of melancholy. The finale, Ballade, is rhapsodic and jazzy, but more successful than the corresponding movement of *True Colors*, partly because it is half the length. The two soloists are well matched, play with a sweet tone and strike sparks off each other.

David Alan Miller and the Albany Symphony orchestra supports these varied soloists with confidence and the performances have been well prepared. The recording is admirably clear and sustains the climaxes without congestion. The sleeve note is helpful but in English only. This trio of concertos comes in Naxos's invaluable American Classics series. Are these works classics? I don't know, but at the Naxos price, you can afford to take a punt. Now, what about that second violin concerto?

Stephen Barber

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Psalmen (Psalms)

Psalm 115, *Non nobis Domine* (Not unto us, O Lord) for soloists, choir and orchestra, Op. 31 (1829/30) [15.30]

Psalm 42, *Wie der Hirsch schreit* (As pants the hart) for soprano, choir and orchestra, Op. 42 (1837/38) [22.59]

Psalm 98, *Singet dem Herren ein neues Lied* (Sing to the Lord a new-made song) for soloists, choir and orchestra, Op. 91 (1844) [07.06]

Psalm 55, *Hear my Prayer*, hymn for soprano, choir and orchestra (1844) [09.33]

Chorale cantata: *Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich* (Give us Thy blessed peace) for choir and orchestra (words by Martin Luther) (1831) [04.08]

Johanna Winkel (soprano), Hanne Weber (alto), Julian Prégardien (tenor), Krešimir Stražanac (bass-baritone)

Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks

Münchener Rundfunkorchester/Howard Arman

rec. live, 17 December 2016 Prinzregentheater, Munich

Performer details at end of review

BR KLASSIK 900519 [59.16]

It's always pleasing to have a new album of Mendelssohn's exalting psalm settings which sadly are an all too neglected part of his oeuvre. It is sometimes said that the German composer's greatest accomplishment lies in this field. Here we have a judiciously chosen programme of four psalm settings and a single chorale cantata. Especially gratifying too is that these live performances, from a quartet of soloists, Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks and Münchener Rundfunkorchester under Howard Arman, feel so inspiring.

Completed more than 50 sacred works throughout his life Mendelssohn was greatly inspired by psalms composing 5 great psalm settings with orchestra. The uplifting setting of Psalm 115, *Non nobis Domine* was composed for soprano, tenor and bass soloists, choir and orchestra. With Handel's *Dixit Dominus* serving as the likely motivation the Latin setting was started by Mendelssohn probably whilst in England late in 1829 and completed the next year in Rome. This was Mendelssohn's only psalm setting to use a Latin Vulgate text from the Catholic service based on from psalm 113 rather than the Lutheran text. For its publication in 1835 Mendelssohn felt it advantageous to also provide a German translation of the text employing psalm 115 from the Luther Bible. Of its type, this is Mendelssohn's earliest of his great orchestral psalm settings although its première had to wait until 1838 when given at the Leipzig Gewandhaus. Highlights are the lovely duet *Donus Israel hofft auf dich* with soprano Johanna Winkel displaying her striking voice and pious expression and tenor Julian Prégardien his honeyed tone. In the bass arioso *Er segne euch je mehr und mehr* the splendid diction and meaningful expression of Krešimir Stražanac is decidedly imposing.

Mendelssohn's setting of Psalm 42, *Wie der Hirsch schreit* scored for soprano, choir and orchestra has endured as one of his most popular sacred choral works. Composed in 1837-38 Mendelssohn described his German setting as "my best sacred piece... the best thing I have composed in this manner" a work that, "I hold in greater regard than most of my other compositions." Robert Schumann also prized the work highly considering it worthy of great praise. Inspiring is Winkel in her soprano aria in *Meine Seele dürstet nach Gott* featuring splendid accompaniment from the solo oboe. Uplifting singing too from the Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks clearly savouring the sacred text.

Composed in 1843/44 during his short-lived tenure as Generalmusikdirektor at Berlin Cathedral for the newly formed Berlin Cathedral Choir the setting of Psalm 98, *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* is scored for soloists, choir and orchestra. Patterned in the manner of Handel's great oratorio choruses it was intended as an Introit psalm for use before the service proper. According to Prof. R. Larry Todd this setting of *Psalm 98* was "Mendelssohn's attempt to circumvent the restrictions on music in the

Prussian liturgy, and the King's (Friedrich Wilhelm IV) preference for a-cappella music." Stirring is the opening movement *Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied* requiring only an unaccompanied chorus who convey a near searing sacred dedication. Employing chorus and orchestra complete with trombones and harp the *Jauchzet dem Herrn alle Welt* is powerful and dignified. The contributions of alto Weber, tenor Prégardien and bass-baritone Stražanac feel coherently involving. In the final movement *Er wird den Erdkreis richten* the chorus is joined by the orchestral forces to accentuate the exultant conclusion with the text *Denn er kommt, zu richten das Erdreich*, strongly reminiscent of a Handelian finale.

A short work premiered in London in 1845 *Hear my Prayer* scored here for soprano, choir and orchestra is a setting of an English translation by William Bartholomew an adaptation of the text of Psalm 55. One of his celebrated sacred works the anthem *Hear my Prayer* containing the much-loved solo *O for the wings of a dove!* was extremely popular in Victorian England. Although many are enamoured by the solo part being taken by a boy treble here Winkel makes a strong case for the soprano voice.

Under tutelage of Carl Zelter, Mendelssohn was inspired by the music of J.S. Bach that he had experienced at the Berlin Singakademie. This stimulus led to the young composer around 1827-32 writing a set of eight chorale cantatas on German hymn tunes. From that set of chorale cantatas, included in this programme, although not a psalm setting like the 4-other works, is *Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich* for choir and orchestra which uses words by Martin Luther. This is engaging singing from Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks firm and polished, conveying persuasive dynamic control.

With utmost conviction from beginning to end the renowned Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks deliver appropriately devout singing, well focused and eminently unified. Conductor Howard Arman pulls everything together with calm assurance, adopting sensible speeds and dynamics. Of high order too is the playing of Münchner Rundfunkorchester such a versatile ensemble that seems completely at home with Mendelssohn's music.

Recorded in live performance at Prinzregentheater, Munich the engineering team has produced gratifying quality sound that is clear with presence and well balanced. There is virtually no audience noise and the applause has been removed. Sung texts are not included in the booklet which is a substantial disappointment although there is an essay by Judith Kaufmann. Curiously there is no biographical information in the notes about soprano Johanna Winkel who features on four of the five works or any of the other soloists either. With a total timing lasting just under 60 minutes an additional psalm setting or chorale cantata could easily have been accommodated on the disc.

For those wanting to further explore Mendelssohn's sacred choral music highly recommendable is the 12-volume set from conductor Frieder Bernius that also includes the *Lobgesang – Hymn of Praise (Symphony No. 2)* and oratorios *St. Paul* and *Elijah*. On the Carus label Bernius' mammoth undertaking commenced in 1983 and continued right through until 2008 using a roster of impressive soloists, several choral and orchestra ensembles that were recorded in German churches. Performed to a consistently high standard all but one of the volumes have the benefit of sung texts, mostly with English translations provided ([review](#)).

On BR Klassik this absorbing Mendelssohn album, comprising of a quartet of great orchestral psalm settings and a single chorale cantata, is distinguished by outstanding performances that are both convincing and revealing.

Michael Cookson

Performer details

Psalmen (Psalms)

1-4. Psalm 115, Non nobis Domine (Not unto us, O Lord) for soloists, choir and orchestra, Op. 31 (1829/30) [15.30]

Johanna Winkel (soprano)

Julian Prégardien (tenor)

Krešimir Stražanac (bass baritone)

5-12. Psalm 42, Wie der Hirsch schreit (As pants the hart) for soprano, choir and orchestra, Op. 42 (1837/38) [22.59]

Johanna Winkel, soprano

13-16. Psalm 98, Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied (Sing to the Lord a new-made song) for soloists, choir and orchestra, Op. 91 (1844) [07.06]

Johanna Winkel (soprano)

Hanne Weber (alto)

Julian Prégardien (tenor)

Krešimir Stražanac (bass baritone)

17. Psalm 55, Hear my Prayer, hymn for soprano, choir and orchestra (1844) [09.33]

Johanna Winkel (soprano)

18. Chorale cantata: Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich (Give us Thy blessed peace) for choir and orchestra (words by Martin Luther) [04.08]

Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks

Münchener Rundfunkorchester/Howard Arman