

### **Dmitri KABALEVSKY (1904-1987)**

String Quartet No. 1, Op. 8, in A minor (1928) [29:31]

String Quartet No. 2, Op. 44, in G minor (1946) [33:23]

Stenhammar Quartet (Peter Olofsson (violin I); Per Öman (violin II); Tony Bauer (viola); Mats Olofsson (cello))

rec. 2015, Petruskirche, Stockholm

**CPO 555 006-2** [62:58]

Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 9 (1928) [32:25]

Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 23 (1935) [23:39]

Piano Concerto No. 3 in D major, Op. 50, *Dedicated to Soviet Youth* (1948) [17:39]

*Fantasy after Schubert* D940 (1961) [24:37]

*Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra* on the theme of the song *School Years*, Op. 75 (1964) [11:46]

Piano Concerto No. 4, Op. 99 *Prague* (1979) [12:41]

Michael Korstick (piano)

NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover/Alun Francis

rec. 2010, Großer Sendesaal, NDR Hannover

**CPO 777 658-2** [56:04 + 66:43]

Cello Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 49 (1949) [19:13]

Cello Concerto No. 2, Op. 77 (1964) [29:10]

*Colas Breugnon* Suite (1938 rev 1953, 1969) [20:23]

Torleif Thedéen (cello)

NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover/Eiji Oue, Adrian Prabava (*Colas*)

rec. 2009, Großer Sendesaal, NDR Hannover

**CPO 777 668 2** [68:53]

Some years ago, I wrote that the Olympia label was the home of Kabalevsky on record. There were at least ten volumes for this composer; almost as many as Olympia produced for the now flourishing Vainberg. Olympia even commissioned its own Hungarian recording of the first two symphonies and licensed a complete *Colas Breugnon* opera from Russian sources while the rest of the crowd were wading in the shallows with just the glitzy blitzy overture. Now long gone, that label - with its deep and wide Melodiya connection - has been relegated to Amazon/Ebay and sporadic licensing deals. CPO have stepped forward. The latest issue from Osnabrück is of the otherwise unknown string quartets. These have been newly recorded by CPO. I have taken this as the cue to note the existence of CPO's other Kabalevsky discs, all of which have been freshly and sympathetically recorded. The Four Symphonies have been [reviewed](#) here already but what about the concertos for cello and for piano?

Taking the String Quartets first. There are only two, of which the First is a product of the young composer's final study years with Myaskovsky. It's in four movements (I. *Andante - Allegro Moderato*; II. *Vivace*; III. *Andantino*; IV. *Allegro Assai*) which feel thematically linked. It is a most accomplished and eloquently communicative piece, yearning and rippling with Slav melancholy. Its finale, with eyes aglint, is a whirling Bartókian catherine wheel of sparks and stamping dances - half Russian-half gypsy. It has a haunting beauty that is singing and aspirational when it pauses to gather its lyrical breath. Next time you would like to rest Borodin 2 then you need look no further.

His Second Quartet is in an unconventional five movements (I. *Allegro Molto ed Energico*; II. *Andante non Troppo*; III. *Scherzando Leggiero*; IV. *Adagio Molto Sostenuto*; V. *Adagio - Vivace Giocoso*). It dates from just after World War 2; the same era as the same composer's Cello Concerto No. 1 and his teacher, Myaskovsky's, famously autumnal Cello Concerto. It is another lyrical and straight-speaking work, easy of access but with a more acidic tone than the 1928 quartet. I should just note that the first movement is full and broad of tone yet with wildness not undersold. It attains something close to haunting desperation above which a melody fully worthy of Myaskovsky unwinds over top. The fourth

movement is resonant and vibrant. The Stenhammar Quartet, who have already established strong credentials with their [Atterberg](#), [Larsson](#) and [Stenhammar](#), hold nothing back.

If this recording and these performances had skin they would have vitality springing from every pore. I have not heard the long-deleted Olympia CD (OCD293) of the quartets as played by the Glazunov quartet. In any event, it's only obtainable secondhand at a very high price via Amazon.

Kabalevsky is better known for his piano concertos. Listeners will become instant conquests for these works unless they must have a stiffening of gloom and tragedy. Not quite in the same constituency as Shostakovich's Second Piano Concerto they are close cousins. My first experience of them was of the Third in on a Supraphon LP (SUAST 50 488) where Pavel Stepan was the pianist with the Prague RSO conducted by the much underrated Aloys Klima. I needed no further encouragement and while Naxos, Olympia, Russian Revelation and Chandos have weighed in over the years only CPO have given us a set with the complete works for piano and orchestra.

Michael Korstick and Alun Francis start with the three-movement First Piano Concerto - the longest of the four. In its sweetly countenanced temperament it feels disarmingly English at first. Soon it rises to emotional eminence and then spatters along like a super-fast Rachmaninov. Derivative it may be, but it's calming, mercurial, sparkling and entertaining with the singing heights of romance securely tapped into the Russian soul. The next movement finds peace but it's a bit faceless until it launches into a set of brilliantly expressive variations. These delve into an indomitably Russian spirit. The finale leans on Prokofiev's cut-glass diamantine brightness and glances back to the first movement - stern, grand, gemlike and exciting.

The Second Concerto, in its original 1935 version, is strenuous but not at all as engaging as its predecessor. As compensation, it rises to some sumptuous string writing rather like Myaskovsky at best (5.03, I). Soon the sparks begin to dance and the jaunty writing for orchestra captivates. Was Shostakovich inspired by this in the late 1950s when he turned to writing his own Second Piano Concerto? There's an *Andantino Semplice* with a sweet and mournful melody typical of Balakirev, swirled over by creamy pianistic complexity. Listen to that lovely light melody from the violins at 2.18 followed by some fantastic grandstanding leading to a sumptuous slow brimming climax. The finale is a splintery sprint of an *Allegro Molto* complete with chattering xylophone. Pessimism about the work based on impressions at the start of the first movement are utterly confounded.

Disc 2 launches with the well-known Third Concerto which, like the Violin Concerto and First Cello Concerto, was dedicated to Soviet Youth. Have you noticed how each of the piano concertos is shorter than its predecessor? The first movement flashes along cheerfully and boasts a great counter-melody. Kabalevsky was a masterly tunesmith. The writing is not subtle but who cares? It's exultantly brash and when it's being pensive it is part-Rachmaninov and part-Balakirev - every bit the melancholy Slav. The second movement, with its pizzicato, evokes icy winter bonfires and the plucked instruments have nicely varied and distinctive dynamics: delicate but resilient. After more *Nutcracker* innocence at 2.51 the music rises to a viscous grandeur. The rapped-out lighter finale is all joyous chatter which is honeyed around with woodwind and accentuated by the xylophone. The vainglorious circus jollity is cast off at 4.46 for a moment of climactic gold.

The *Fantasy after Schubert D940* rings out from the piano while the background writing for orchestra is tense and hushed. After some Lisztian bravura there are some stormy and haughty Brahmsian trills and the whole thing goes up in a phantasmagoric display. Never fear though, there is some still magic offered along the way.

The *Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra on the theme of the song "School Years"*, Op. 75 is suitably playful and surprisingly purposeful. There is some nice use of woodwind, again typical of Balakirev. After some dreamy paragraphs the piano raps out with raucous alacrity and there's a cheekily snatched end to remind us that Kabalevsky knew his craft.

We conclude with the shortest of the piano concertos: No. 4, Op. 99 *Prague*. Aristocratic piano writing contrasts with the peasant grunt of the orchestra. A pensive middle movement conveys a degree of discord and grainy sorrow before a libation of pulse accelerant and machine-gun side-drum suggest echoes familiar from Shostakovich 2 and the hustle-bustle of the Easter Fair. The finale ends brutally abrupt.

Recording and performances do not disappoint and although the orchestra sometimes seems a mite backwardly set everything is clear. The documentation by Charles K Tomicik is finely detailed and out of the academic solipsistic quagmire once found so often in CPO liner notes. These are good on facts and observation rather than plunging into cerebration. They run to 14 pages and are in German and English. The notes for all the discs addressed here are good.

Don't turn your nose up at this fine set of straight-talking piano concertos.

Kabalevsky's two Cello Concertos were first bracketed by Olympia in 1993 (OCD 292) with a cellist much patronised by that label, Marina Tarasova. There the conductor was Veronika Dudarova. These reappeared on [Regis](#) and [Alto](#). Before that there had been separate LPs of the two concertos by Daniil Shafran, both conducted by the composer, in the case of the [First](#) dating from April 1952 and the sombre and gritty [Second](#) from 1967; this time in Leningrad. Raphael Wallfisch recorded the Second for [Chandos](#).

Right from the outset, Torleif Thedéen's articulation is meticulous and achieved often under pressure. He also delivers a thriving richness of tone. The First Concerto (another Youth product) has all the vital and poetic virtues of the middle two piano concertos. Thedéen and Eiji Oue are at one also in giving voice to the score's abundantly rewarding lyrical side. It is the most Myaskovskian of the works so far. After a measured and gently weighted middle movement the finale bristles and virtually throws its hat high in the air. The Second Concerto dates from fifteen years later. This is a more subtle, oblique, stern and even desolate work by comparison with the First. The difference has parallels with the contrast between Shostakovich's First and Second violin and cello concertos. Thedéen and Oue do nothing to underplay that this score inhabits a very different world as the *niente* fade of the finale proclaims. That change of gear is not softened in the least by the vigour of the central movement which bespeaks a merciless chase rather than the skip-games of the piano concertos.

The *Colas Breugnon Suite* is driven taut and fast. The leash strains and the coachman's whip snaps. Adrian Prabava mixes acid and adrenaline, recalling the outer movements of Shostakovich 2 and the same composer's *Festive Overture*. The *Colas Overture* has been done repeatedly - the equivalent of Rachmaninov's famous Prelude. Here we get three other movements: a bouncy *Fête Populaire*, a *Fleau Publique* in the form of a drum-dominated, catastrophically louring *Largo* and a final *Insurrection* - a conspiratorial march with nightmare echoes of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*. One can sense the paving stones being loosened and hauled up by the mob.

Will we ever hear the other Kabalevsky operas or for that matter the orchestral works *To the Memory of the Heroes of Gorlovka* (1965); *The Eternal Flame in Bryansk* or *The Heroes of the Revolution*? There are also some seemingly imposing choral-orchestral scores, including *Poem of Struggle* (1930–1931); *Vast Motherland*, a cantata (1941–1942), *On the Motherland*, another cantata (1965); and *A Letter to the 30th Century*, an oratorio (1972). You may shudder at the titles but we seem to have overcome such unmusical scruples for Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Khachaturian.

There we have it: across these three CPO volumes and the four symphonies aspects of a composer that are predominantly superior entertainment with a heart but in a few cases subtle, oblique and chastening.

**Rob Barnett**

**Ale MÖLLER (b.1955) and Hans EK (b.1964)**

***The Nordan Suite*** (1994?) [48:12]

Lena Willemark (vocals, fiddle, wooden whistle)

Ale Möller (flutes, mandola, cows-horn, shawm (skalmeja), accordion, wooden trumpet, hammered dulcimer, harmonica, kantele)

Rafael Sida Huizar (percussion)

Västerås Sinfonietta/Hans Ek

rec. Västerås Concert Hall, 2013

**PROPHONE PCD-153** [48:12]

*The Nordan Suite* is a vivid sequence in fourteen movements (and tracks). The disc terms it a "Suite for Orchestra and Folk Music Soloists based on ancient Scandinavian myths, as preserved in three medieval ballads". As far as I can make out, this is the latest evolutionary iteration of what amounts to a Nordic folk legend cycle. It first broke the surface in recorded form in 1994 with two discs from the ever-original ECM Records. ECM's Manfred Eicher is cited in the very scanty documentation that comes with this Prophone CD. You also get a track-list with the sung words and a title or a very pithy line or two of explanation for each sung track. Also present and correct is a list of artists, credits and discographical essentials.

What's the music like? The presence of folk instruments alongside the orchestra and Lena Willemark's resinous voice lend an ancient or timeless flavour to what we hear. I have seen the disc categorised as a 'jazz suite' but I would reject that completely. It sits somewhere along the same bench as Shawn Davey's glorious *Granuaile* (Rita Connolly's voice is neglected bullion), Luciano Berio's *Folksongs* (Cathy Berberian taking the lead there), Robert Lamb's *The Children of Lir* (the Ferdy Mayne version on a 1960s Saga Psyche LP), [Toss The Feathers](#) by Dermot Crehan and Paul Honey and Vicente Pradal's [El Divan del Tamarit](#), the third of Pradal's Lorca cycles. Anyone know of any kindred works to join this short list? I would be interested in hearing any work cognate with these.

The recording is forwardly balanced. The singing by the gifted Lena Willemark leans on folk examples. Operatic conventions would have been completely inappropriate. The words are Swedish and some are given in translation on the insert. Exciting rhythmic abrasion is at times the order of the day as in *The Flight of the Swans*. It's a sort of ethnic Nordic meets *Petrushka*. As for the opening track, it's a gaudy and angry panoply like some ancient procession. *The Maiden and the Magic Snake* and *Dance of the Snakes* make good and obviously sinuous use of pipes, drums and groaning brass - the latter definitely reminiscent of Alan Hovhaness. The pipes return but with more of a Moroccan skirl in *The Chase*. Orcadian fiddle sounds shake their way through *The Awakening*. Willemark is heard in scorching nasal duet with Möller in *Aglaria* which is a stark bell-accompanied incantation to turn away enemies. The weird shouts, shrieks and groans of *Herding Calls* is followed by Willemark's way with *The Blessing* - part folksong and part spell. *The Golden Harp* has strangely Hispanic-Berber facets with sounds that might have made their way out of a Chieftains collection. The Suite ends with the liquid plangent *Roses and Sage*. It's the last chance to hear Willemark as, with harp and silvery bells, she deftly and peacefully lulls the listener towards vulnerable silence.

**Rob Barnett**

## **Bob CHILCOTT (b. 195)**

### ***All Good Things***

Ophelia, Caliban and Miranda (2016) [12:50]

Marriage to My Lady Poverty (2012) [4:44]

Scarborough Fair (2008) [2:04]

The Real of Heart (2016) [3:55]

Jazz Songs of Innocence (2011) [17:29]

Thou, my love, art fair (2015) [4:12]

The House of the Rising Sun (2008) [4:27]

Weather Report (2005) [4:47]

Nidarus Jazz Mass (2012/14) [17:12]

Sue Greenway (saxophone); Raphael Mizraki (double bass); Alexander Hawkins (piano); Jon Scot (drums)

Commotio/ Bob Chilcott & Matthew Berry

rec. 2016, Church of St John the Evangelist, Oxford. DDD

Texts included

**NAXOS 8.573383** [71:40]

Throughout his career Bob Chilcott seems to have been effortlessly at home, both as a performer and as a composer, in both the fields of 'serious' and 'light' music. Membership of the Choir of King's College Cambridge and, later, a long conducting association with the BBC Singers have been important examples of his more 'serious' side and have been key influences on his compositional style. No less crucial, however, was his period as a member of The King's Singers which nurtured the lighter side of his compositional and arranging style. The key thing about Bob Chilcott, though, is his unquenchable enthusiasm: he wants to help people – performers and audiences alike - to *enjoy* music, whether he's working as a composer, arranger or conductor. This enthusiasm shines like a beacon in the music on this disc.

The Oxford-based chamber choir Commotio, founded in 1999, has a specific brief to promote contemporary choral music. To this end they've already made recordings for Naxos of music by [James Whitbourn](#) and [Francis Pott](#). They've also taken Chilcott's music into the recording studio: I enjoyed very much their disc of some of his Christmas music ([review](#)). Here, they join forces with four leading jazz musicians in a programme of Bob Chilcott's jazz-influenced output.

The first four tracks all feature settings of words by the British poet, Charles Bennett, one of Chilcott's favourite collaborators. *Ophelia, Caliban and Miranda* is a set of three songs in which Bennett takes three of the principal characters from *The Tempest* and imagines 'what might have happened if....' In the set, 'River Bride' (Ophelia's song) is sprightly and upbeat, the sung parts crisply delivered by Commotio. Caliban's 'Ariel taught me how to play' has nice, relaxed lines for the choir interspersed with smoky saxophone solos. Finally, 'All good things come to an end' imagines what might have happened if Miranda had forsaken Ferdinand and returned to Prospero's island and life with Caliban. This returns us to upbeat music.

Bennett also provides the words for *Marriage to My Lady Poverty*, a piece I've heard before. This is unaccompanied. It's a very attractive piece in which the choral lines intertwine most effectively. Commotio make a fine job of what is, to my taste, one of the best pieces on their programme.

*The Real of Heart*, on which Bob Chilcott plays the piano part, was composed for Chorus America, a choral organisation based in Washington DC. The invitation to compose it came just after the sudden and premature death of John Scott, Director of Music at St Thomas, Fifth Avenue, New York and before that at London's St Paul's Cathedral. Scott was a Cambridge contemporary of Bob Chilcott who wrote this piece in his memory. It sets anonymous words which I'd not encountered before. The words are so appropriate as a tribute and Chilcott sets them to very lovely music. This is a fine musical memorial.

*Jazz Songs of Innocence* is a set of five songs to poems from William Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. The songs are for SSA choir and were originally composed for a children's choir festival in New Orleans. They're all most attractive settings and the lovely, fresh sound made by the female voices of Commotio is a delight. 'Piping down the valleys wild' is jolly and upbeat. Setting 'The Lamb' must be a bit of a challenge for any composer nowadays thanks to John Tavener. Chilcott's solution is to provide a winning, slow melody accompanied by a smoochy jazz trio: it works! The last of the set, 'The Divine Image', is the one which the composer says motivated him to write these songs. It's the longest of the five and it features an archetypal Chilcott slow melody. The result is most touching.

*Weather Report* was composed as a showstopper conclusion to a programme that the BBC Singers and Stephen Cleobury were to perform in Kyoto, Japan. Chilcott tells us that he decided to write in a big band style – for a *cappella* choir! For his text he selected some traditional rhymes on that most British of preoccupations, the weather. The result is ingenious and, given the ensemble for which it was written, far from easy. Commotio bring off this very clever piece splendidly.

There's a Japanese connection, too, to *Nidarus Jazz Mass* – I believe Bob Chilcott's music is very popular in that country. The mass, which is sung in Latin, was originally written for a Norwegian SSA choir but Chilcott re-wrote it for SATB choir at the request of the Kyoto Echo Choir in Japan. I must confess, I don't usually go for jazz masses – Will Todd's terrific *Mass in Blue* being the exception that proves the rule – but this one strikes me as being pretty successful and I should imagine it's fun to sing. The choir, superbly supported by the jazz trio, does it very well indeed. Incidentally, this mass should not be confused with Chilcott's *Little Jazz Mass* (2004/06).

I've considered most of the tracks in order but I've deliberately held back to last my out-and-out favourite among this programme. *Thou, my love, art fair* was written for The King's Singers to perform at a charity concert in Minneapolis and is designed for unaccompanied AATBarBarB voices, though I presume Commotio have adapted it to fit their own vocal line-up. The words are by the sixteenth-century British poet, William Baldwin. The piece is slow and has a lovely melody, beautifully harmonised. This is Chilcott at his best, the music simple of utterance yet sophisticated. It receives an outstanding performance from Commotio under the composer's direction. All I can say is that the first time I played this disc I immediately replayed this track before moving on. It's a winner.

This is a most enjoyable disc, full of attractive and entertaining music. As a matter of purely personal taste I think that it's the slower tempo items that are the most successful. That said, Chilcott in up-tempo mood is thoroughly engaging so other listeners may react differently. I doubt there'll be any debate, however, about the quality of the performances. The jazz musicians are slick, tight and professional. Their contributions seem right on the money to me. As for the singing of Commotio, it's consistently fine. The choir numbers 28 (7/9/6/6) and they produce a fresh, attractive and well-focussed sound. The choir is disciplined and well-balanced and diction is very good. It's clear that they've been expertly trained by Matthew Berry who on this occasion shares the conducting duties with Bob Chilcott.

Mike Hatch has produced an excellent recording in which all components - instruments and singers – are clearly heard. The very good documentation includes useful notes by the composer and all the sung texts.

Buy this disc to blow away the cobwebs and put a smile on your face

[John Quinn](#)

## ***Sequentia!***

### **Joseph Marie Clément Ferdinand DALL'ABACO (1710-1805)**

Eleven Capriccios for Solo Cello [29:25]

### **Carlo Alfredo PIATTI (1822-1901)**

Twelve Caprices for Solo Cello, Op. 25 [48:11]

Joachim Eijlander (cello)

rec. 2017, Jurriaansezaal, De Doelen, Rotterdam

**NAVIS CLASSICS NC17009** [77:41]

As a sequel to his recordings of the Bach Solo Cello Suites, which I [reviewed](#) last year, Joachim Eijlander turns his attention to two relatively unknown composers who have likewise made contributions to the solo cello repertoire. I have to admit that both are new names to me.

The cellist and composer Joseph Marie Clément Ferdinand dall'Abaco was born in Brussels, then capital of the Spanish Netherlands. He studied with his cellist father Evaristo Felice dall'Abaco. He lived to the ripe old age of ninety-five. He composed nearly forty cello sonatas and these eleven solo Capriccios, in addition to other works. Despite living well into the Classical era, much of his music retained a Baroque style.

The original manuscript of the eleven Capriccios is lost, and performers have to rely on a less than satisfactory copy with no movement titles or indications. This, undoubtedly, gives the performer a great deal of scope to make performance choices. Eijlander takes full advantage, applying pizzicatos in No. 5 and ponticello bowing in No. 3. In No. 8 his double stops have a rich vibrancy which is compelling. The Capriccios are imaginatively constructed, and offer charm and lyricism in good measure. I can't say that I find quite the same wealth of inspiration in them as in the Piatti Caprices, but that's only a personal opinion.

Carlo Alfredo Piatti was an Italian cellist, teacher and composer. He initially started off on the violin, as his father was a violinist. Soon the cello began to interest him, probably drawn to that instrument by the fact that his great-uncle, Gaetano Zanetti, was a famous cellist, who gave Carlo Alfredo his first lessons. He later studied with Vincenzo Merighi at the Milan Conservatory. Early on he was forced to sell his cello to pay medical bills but, as luck would have it, a chance encounter with Liszt, who was greatly impressed with his playing, resulted in the older composer presenting him with a new instrument. At one time Piatti played in a string quartet with the renowned Joseph Joachim. In addition to the 12 Caprices for Solo Cello for which he is best remembered today, he composed two concertos, one concertino, and six sonatas for the instrument.

His Twelve Caprices Op. 25 were published in 1875. Paganini's 24 Caprices immediately spring to mind when I listen to them. Although they fulfil a didactic role, I was surprised how much melodic interest they contain. No. 2, for instance, radiates an ardent lyricism whilst No. 6 has an almost operatic cast. In No 7, marked Maestoso, the string crossing could sound dull, pedantic and monotonous, but not here. Eijlander shapes the line, bringing out the beautiful melody and subtly applying just the right amount of rubato. In the Caprice that follows, his tone in the upper reaches of the instrument never sounds strained, but rings out with crystalline purity. No. 9 is crisply articulated. As a violinist and not a cellist I would imagine that no. 3 throws up some intonation challenges for the player. Eijlander's dead-centre accuracy is to be admired.

Eijlander addresses the technical challenges of these works with unruffled ease and consummate musicianship. He's playing an anonymous Italian cello from around 1730. It has a rich, burnished tone, which is well-projected and superbly recorded. The warm, intimate acoustic of the Jurriaansezaal provides just the right amount of resonance, allowing nuance and detail to be heard.

***Stephen Greenbank***

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- Allegro quasi presto [1:54]
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**Edgard VARÈSE (1883-1965)**

*Ionisation* (1931) [6:00]

**Steve REICH (b. 1936)**

*Music for Pieces of Wood* (1973) [11:39]

**Carlos CHÁVEZ (1899-1978)**

*Toccata* (1942) 12:43]

**Henry COWELL (1897-1965)**

*Pulse* (1939) [4:20]

**Lou HARRISON (1917-2003)**

*Song of Quetzalcoatl* (1941) [7:00]

**John CAGE (1912-1992)**

*Third Construction* (1941) [12:10]

Tetraktis Percussion

rec. 2015, Chiesa di San Vitale, Assisi, Italy

**BRILLIANT CLASSICS 95134** [54:22]

The sudden flowering of the percussion family as instruments worthy of serious musical expression was one of the great developments of music in the first half of the last century. And given the wonderful repertoire that burgeoned in that time (and for many years after) it's not surprising that the world is now full of stunning ensembles willing and able to perform the masterworks of the genre.

This recording contains at least two of the most important works in the literature; Varèse's *Ionisation* and Cowell's *Pulse*. In a sense, these two masterpieces delineate very clearly the areas composers could explore; Varèse is principally concerned with timbre and texture, while Cowell's piece is chiefly about rhythm (though timbre, too, naturally plays an important part). It is also very striking that four of the works recorded here were composed within a period of three years or so.

As the booklet notes point out, we have four American composers (Reich, Cowell, Harrison and Cage), a Mexican, and a Frenchman who took American citizenship. This last is of course Edgard Varèse, one of the true authentic originals of 20<sup>th</sup> century music. He wrote of *Ionisation* that it represented '...the mystery of the skies of America'. I've always found it a vivid urban landscape, with those screaming sirens conjuring up the brutalist architecture, the traffic, the sometimes hostile, violent atmosphere of the Manhattan where Varèse settled when he arrived in the US in the 1930s.

The Italian ensemble Tetraktis deliver their impressive credentials in Varèse's short but epoch-making piece. Not only are they alert to every detail of the music, they have selected their instrumental tones carefully; the lower of the two sirens, in particular has a disturbingly human vocal tone, howling out as it does over the fragmented percussion sounds.

Steve Reich's *Music for Pieces of Wood* was inspired by his in-depth study of African music, and is a close ally of his *Clapping Music* of the previous year. But, although it is of course hypnotically repetitive, it is a more rewarding listening experience than the earlier piece, because Reich, having set in motion his multi-layered *ostinati* allows them to become a background against which other more isolated sounds are thrown into relief.

Carlos Chavez's *Toccata* can be seen – again as hinted by the excellent booklet notes – as a reflection of the three-movement classical sonata pattern – quick – slow – quick. But of course, that is far from the complete picture, and this is a fascinating and subtle work, whose middle movement features the most magical use of tuned percussion.

Cowell's famous study in 7-time (surely the finest piece to have been written during a prison sentence?) is done superbly, as is Lou Harrison's *Song of Quetzalcoatl*; but it was John Cage's *Third*

*Construction* that I found the most stunningly memorable piece on the disc. The conch-like call that sounds out two thirds of the way through made me think of this piece as a counterpart to *Lord of the Flies*, for it shares with Golding's novel a slowly evolving yet explosive violence that is quite brilliantly realised by this fine ensemble. The sense of shock when the piece crashes to its sudden conclusion says it all.

Each of these works is a masterpiece in its own way. This is a beautifully conceived and executed programme; congratulations and thanks to all involved.

**Gwyn Parry-Jones**

### **Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-91)**

Flute Quartet in D major, K285 [14:16]

Flute Quartet in G major, K285a [9:26]

Flute Quartet in C major, K285b [17:35]

Flute Quartet in A major, K298 [12:07]

Aurèle Nicolet (flute)

Munich String Trio [Ana Chumachenco (violin), Oscar Lysy (viola), Walter Nothas (cello)]

rec. Phonag Tonstudio, Lindau, Switzerland, 1978

**TUDOR 7501** [53:45]

For someone who affected not to like the flute, Mozart wrote quite a lot of good music for it: a concerto (plus a flute arrangement of his Oboe Concerto), a sinfonia concertante with harp and three-and-a-bit quartets. Most of it was intended for the wealthy amateur flautist Ferdinand de Jean, a Dutch East India Company employee, who actually wanted three concertos. I imagine the reissue of these almost 40-year-old recordings was occasioned by the death last year of Aurèle Nicolet.

He was one of the most sympathetic characters among the plethora of flautists, many of them pupils of Marcel Moyse, who emerged after World War II. Born in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, on 22 January 1926, Nicolet studied flute with André Jaunet and theory with Willy Burckhard in Zurich, then during the war had the great good fortune to be taught by Moyse, who spent the years after the fall of France at St Amour in the Jura. Having had his first lessons from Moyse in a Geneva café, Nicolet attended the conservatoire at La Chaux de Fonds, where the Frenchman had a class. When the war ended he entered the Paris Conservatoire, studying first with Gaston Crunelle and Yvonne Drappier, then transferring to Moyse's class when the latter finally returned for a time before emigrating in disgust. Nicolet kept in touch with Moyse for the rest of the master's life and was considered his major pupil. While still a student he played in the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra; he won the Concours de Genève in 1948 and also worked in Winterthur. In 1950, with Wilhelm Furtwängler's support, he became principal flute of the Berlin Philharmonic (many sources, including the English note in the booklet with this CD, claim that the conductor appointed him, but as we know from the fracas over Sabine Meyer and Karajan, it is the BPO players who run the orchestra). Nicolet stayed in Berlin for nine years, teaching there from 1952 to 1965 and also heading a famous masterclass in Freiburg until 1981. It was in Freiburg that he died, a week after his ninetieth birthday.

It is no surprise to find him collaborating with Munich-based musicians, as he had many friends in that city. One of his closest collaborations was with Karl Richter – he gave the oration at Richter's funeral. His colleagues here include members of two famous string-playing families. Born in Italy of Ukrainian and German descent, Ana Chumacenco – like her brother Nicolas – studied first with their father, an Auer pupil. She then worked in Buenos Aires with Ljerko Spiller until she was 18, when she returned to Europe and won prizes in several major competitions. Today she is best known as a teacher, in Kronberg and Munich. Oscar Lysy, brother of the violinist Alberto, was born in Argentina and also studied with Spiller, before continuing with Umberto Carfi and in Switzerland with Georges Janzer. He was a member of the Bavarian Radio SO for some time, as was Walter Nothas, a pupil of André Navarra and Pablo Casals and himself a well-known teacher. I mention these things because there is nothing about these distinguished artists in the CD booklet, although there is a very nice photo of the trio.

I imagine the players decided the ordering of the works on the disc. They begin with the C major, originally thought to have been written in Mannheim in 1777-78 like the D major and G major. Mozart scholars long doubted its origins, but relatively recently a sketch of part of the first movement in the composer's hand turned up, so it appears that the Allegro is authentic, even if another person had to complete it. The Andantino is a set of variations, virtually the same as the variation sixth movement of the Gran Partita for 13 winds, K361 (in the third variation of the Flute Quartet score you get more repeats). At first it was thought to be the original version of the wind variations, but it is now considered an arrangement by an expert professional – probably asked to carry out this task by Heinrich Philipp Carl Bosler, who published the Quartet in 1788 (I am grateful to Roger Hellyer's note

in *The Compleat Mozart* for this information). The players make quite a firm statement with the first phrase of the Allegro, adopting a nice tempo, and it quickly becomes apparent that the string players know how to alternate tact and assertion. The variations are lovingly played, after a pleasing statement of the theme, and I do not miss the greater weight and variety of the wind-band version. The editors of the Köchel catalogue have relegated this work to the Anhalt, with the number K. Anh. 171, but good players always make it sound like a masterpiece – and that is what we get here.

The G major Quartet, also in two movements, is quite modest – Dr Hellyer draws comparisons with the chamber music of J. C. Bach, a major influence on Mozart. Again the musicians make quite a firm statement at the start of the Andante and there is lovely interplay between Nicolet and the strings. The Minuet, with a contrasting central section rather than a formal Trio, is delightfully done.

It used to be thought that the three-movement A major Quartet was contemporary with the Mannheim pieces, but we now know it was written in Vienna almost a decade later, in late 1786 or 1787: Dr Hellyer suggests it was for domestic music-making at the home of Mozart's Viennese friend Gottfried von Jacquin. The theme of the opening variations – based on Franz Anton Hoffmeister's song *An die Natur*, to words by Wilhelm Gottfried Becker – is firmly yet sensitively delineated and the players introduce dynamic variation into the repeats, something they do throughout these performances. The Minuet probably caused mirth at Jacquin's as it is based on an old French rondeau which translates as 'He has some boots, has Bastien'. It is played here at an ideal tempo with subtle rhythm: the Trio is delectable. More laughs come with the finale, which Mozart heads 'Rondieaux / Allegretto grazioso, *mà non troppo presto, però non troppo adagio. Così – così – con molto garbo ed espressione*'. Based on an aria from Paisiello's opera *Le gare generose*, which was first performed in Vienna on 1 September 1786, it is beautifully played, with a light touch.

The D major Quartet is a superb miniature masterpiece, although like so much of Mozart's music it took a while to become well known. In 1935 Fritz Busch wrote to his brother Adolf: 'Do you know a Mozart quartet for flute, violin, viola and cello in D major? It is something especially beautiful.' He had clearly come across K285 for the first time. Adolf Busch, who played more Mozart than any other violinist of his era, probably knew of it but had not performed it. A year later he and Marcel Moyse gave two performances in Italy with brother Herman Busch, cello, and Karl Doktor, viola, both members of his Quartet. Another French flautist, René le Roy, recorded it for the NGS with members of the International Quartet, and later did K298 for HMV with the Pasquier Trio, but that was the extent of the pre-war recording interest. It was with the coming of the LP disc that the Flute Quartets found their place in the scheme of things, although Nicolet's first recording was just K298, on a Columbia disc with other Mozart works for winds and strings. Nowadays K285 is recognised as one of Mozart's most popular chamber works, a little gem with memorable themes perfectly put together. One thing I like about the performance under review is the tempo for the initial Allegro, not too fast – Rampal in particular used to rush it off its feet. Nicolet and his colleagues find room for subtle dynamic variations. The flautist produces a gorgeous tone and splendid legato for the Adagio, against characterful pizzicati from the strings. Mozart teases us by letting us think the Rondo is almost upon us, then holding it back with another few phrases of the Adagio. When the witty Rondo does arrive, the players once again do not rush it: the marking is Allegretto, after all. They make the most of all the humorous moments and there is further enjoyable interplay between flute and strings.

The recordings are excellent overall and the tape has survived quite well: there are one or two patches of tremulousness in the string tone, but it is very slight and does not affect the flute's sound. Sometimes when the players drop down to pianissimo they seem farther away, a phenomenon I have encountered with other recordings – I am not technically minded enough to explain it. None of these tiny niggles affects my enjoyment of these fine performances. Of course there are many competitors, including a digital disc by Nicolet with the Mozart String Trio on Denon. Many people like William Bennett with the Grumiaux Trio. The most beautiful piece of flute playing I ever heard was by Bennett, in a performance of Debussy's *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune* with the LSO under Markevitch; but I do not like the Philips recording for his Flute Quartets, which emphasises the breathiness of his tone,

nor do I find the readings especially illuminating. I enjoy the late 1970s interpretations of Richard Adeney and fellow Melos Ensemble members Hugh Maguire, Cecil Aronowitz and Terence Weil (the most recent issue, on a Resonance CD, does not name the string players); and the digital Claves recording by Peter-Lukas Graf, another Moyse pupil, and members of the Carmina Quartet. A good up-to-date recording is that by Emmanuel Pahud, a Nicolet pupil, with Christoph Poppen, Hariolf Schlichtig and Jean Guihen Queyras, on EMI/Warner: it comes with an essay by Roger Hellyer. Rightly or wrongly, I get the feeling that the players on this new Tudor reissue knew each other well, rather than representing a shotgun marriage for the studio, and I value that.

***Tully Potter***

**Antoine REICHA (1770-1836)**

***Complete Piano Music - Volume 2***

**Six Fugues, Op.81 (pub.c.1810) [25:38]**

**Étude de Piano ou 57 Variations sur un même thème, suivies d'un Rondeau, Op.102 (pub. c.1824) [42:28]**

Henrik Löwenmark (piano)

rec. 2007, Hurstwood Farm, Borough Green, Kent and December 2015, Llandaff Cathedral School, Cardiff, UK

**TOCCATA CLASSICS TOCC0017 [68:05]**

The first volume in Toccata's Reicha piano series (see [review](#)) – there have a simultaneous String Quartet marque on the go as well – presented three sonatas, Op.45 and two Fantasies, Op.59. It's part of a project to record all the composer's piano works, an adventurous and worthwhile undertaking. Like so much else in the label's undertakings both the works in volume two are heard in premiere recordings.

The Six Fugues were published around 1810 in Paris soon after the composer's return to the city after a period of years away in Vienna. In his erudite notes, peanuts Henrik Löwenmark refers to Reicha's autobiography in which he relates that he wrote fugues whenever there was a compositional lull. This means accurate dating of the works is all but impossible but conjecturally they may have been written during his Viennese sojourn between 1802 and 1808. In any case Reicha was an inveterate, almost obsessive composer of fugues and whilst the Op.81 set is hardly revolutionary, a case can be made for their being 'concert fugues'. It's noticeable that textures are fuller here than one might otherwise expect from him and the keyboard compass is exploited more dramatically. The first fugue is notably powerful, the second has romantic affiliations and the fourth – playful and fast – develops a confident profile possibly reminiscent of Fux. The final fugue's elegance is enhanced by a strongly introspective element. Given various interrelations between the fugues it's likely they were written at around the same time and not piecemeal.

After the well-developed fugues come the little-known *Étude de Piano ou 57 Variations sur un même thème, suivies d'un Rondeau, Op.102*. The title alludes to the far better known *L'Art de Varier ou 57 Variations pour le Piano-Forte, Op.57* which had been published two decades before. It's only in recent years that a modern edition of the Op.102 has been published so perhaps that and this recording will stimulate interest in what is one of the relatively few large-scale variation cycles between the Goldbergs and Schumann's Symphonic Etudes of 1834-35. The theme is by Grétry and the variations offer succinct - in this recording only two variations breach the 60-second mark – pleasures. These elements include the delicious melody line of variation 23, or the deft, dappled treble in Variation 31, the undulating bass line of No.38 – one of a number of variations to bear a name, in this case Pastorale. There's a country feel to No.41 and a witty pairing of Nos. 50 and 51, the latter marked *Le Badinage* and with good reason. No.54, *Le Désespoir* is urgent and dynamic. In outline the model is far more Beethoven's 32 Variations in C minor, or maybe the Eroica variations, than the Goldberg. The music is charming, full of musical panache and key interrelations and alternations.

The performances make the best case possible for the music with sympathetic playing throughout. A brief postscript: don't be confused by the disc's total timing. It's actually 68 minutes, not the claimed 78.

***Jonathan Woolf***

## **Petr EBEN (1929–2007)**

### ***Labyrinth***

String Quartet "*Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart*" (1981)[22:46]

Piano Trio (1986) [21:30]

Piano Quintet (1992) [23:51]

Martinů Quartet

Karel Košárek (piano)

rec. 2016, Domovina Studio, Prague (Quartet), 2017, Martinů Hall, Academy of Performing Arts,

Prague (Trio & Quintet)

**SUPRAPHON SU42322** [68:33]

Thought of by some as the greatest Czech composer after the death of Martinů, Petr Eben was born in Žamberk in Bohemia, and studied organ, an instrument he was to become for ever associated with, cello and piano. Although a Catholic, Eben's father was Jewish and this led to him being sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1943, an event which coloured his later life. After the war he continued his studies, eventually entering the Prague Academy of Music where he studied piano and composition. On graduation he found his professional and academic progression hampered by his refusal to toe the line and join the Communist Party, this ultimately led to his cultural isolation, something that helped his musical language, one based upon the great Czech tradition. Despite this he began to be recognised outside his homeland and in 1977 he was appointed as a visiting professor at the Royal Northern College of Music. It was only on his return home that he started to find that his situation began to ease, earning him more recognition for his work. However, it was not until the fall of the Communist regime that he was recognised by the state; it was only then that he began to gain important teaching positions and was named President of the Prague Spring Festival.

My introduction to the music of Petr Eben took an unusual path, I first came to his music through the Five songs from 'About swallows and girls' (*CHAN 9257*), followed by the wonderful Panton disc of his *Vox clamantis*, *2<sup>nd</sup> Organ Concerto* and *Missa com populo* (81 1141-2), the final work exemplifying the composer's deeply held Catholic faith. It was only then that I came to his organ music, the medium he will forever be most associated with, and even then it was through his fascinating Chagall inspired work, *Windows*, for trumpet and organ (09026-61186-2), it was only then that I invested in some of the wonderful Hyperion series of his organ music.

I have greatly enjoyed all of Eben's music that I have heard so far, it always seems to me to have a great sense of purpose and momentum, and this is clearly evident in the opening movement of the earliest work presented here, his *String Quartet "Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart"*. *The title refers to a work by the seventeenth century Czech philosopher and theologian, Jan Amos Komenský, a work which was also to inspire a later organ composition. Unlike most string quartets which place the scherzo third, here Eben structures the quartet in kindred pairs of movements, with the two outer faster and more dramatic movements surrounding the slower and more soulful music of the second and third movements. The result of this is very interesting and exciting, with the cyclical form contrasting the more dissonant music of the outer movements with the inner.*

*The Piano Trio also differs from the conventional concept of the form in that Eben strips away the concept of unity, here the piano is almost in battle with the strings, and the work is "More than a trio, it is a cycle for string duo and piano". Here again the opening movement is key, with the staccato like piano the driving force behind the momentum of the work. Again it has a four movement structure, where the outer movements present the faster more dramatic music with the slower music in the central two movements. I quite enjoyed the third movement with the piano playing a funeral march whilst the violin and cello play a waltz, producing some unusual effects.*

*This contrast between the piano and strings is continued in the wonderful Piano Quintet, and despite my being a lover of string quartets I find this my favourite work presented here. The juxtaposition of piano and strings makes for some fascinating climactic episodes and contrasting soundscapes. The*

*work contains some unusual features; the second movement is largely performed in pizzicato by the strings alone, with the piano only joining in towards the end of the movement. The third movement, although it presents the slowest music, could also be said to be the most dramatic. Although in this recording the work's structure is fast-fast-slow-fast, it can also be seen as placing the slow movement as the central feature of the work, as here the performers opt to present the original five movement work as a four, playing the short fourth and fifth movements without a break, which whilst usual, is here given just the single track. The resulting music is fascinating and highly rewarding.*

*The playing of the Martinů Quartet and its constituent members is excellent and in Karel Košárek they have a wonderful collaborator, theirs is an intelligent and well measured performance, one which enables the composer to speak through his music. The recorded sound is clear and well balanced and the booklet notes are informative. A most impressive release.*

**Stuart Sillitoe**

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

Concerto in D major for Oboe & small orchestra TrV292 (1945) [25:10]

Serenade in E flat major for 13 wind instruments Trv106 (1881) [9:15]

Sonatina No.2 in E flat major 'Fröhliche Werkstatt' for 16 wind instruments TrV291 (1944-45) [38:46]

Andris Nelsons conducting the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (concerto), Alexei Ogrintchouk (oboe & direction), Winds of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (Serenade & Sonatina)

rec. Het Koninklijk, Concertgebouw, Amsterdam 2014 (concerto), Singelkerk, Amsterdam 2016

**BIS BIS-2163 SACD** [74:12]

The early fame of BIS rested on their launching onto the world stage - in state of the art sonics - primarily Scandinavian orchestras playing often unfamiliar repertoire. Over the years, individual artists and ensembles have achieved world-wide recognition through the quality of these recordings and it is a model that - with the inclusion of South American orchestras - still produces discs of the very highest order. I am not sure I have seen a BIS disc before featuring one of the world's super-elite orchestras conducted by possibly the most in-demand conductor. Their presence combined with the ever-reliable BIS technical quality would seem to guarantee a perfect-storm of excellence.

Certainly these Strauss performances from the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, with superstar oboist Alexei Ogrintchouk and conductor Andris Nelsons is very fine indeed. The disc opens with the late Oboe Concerto, taken from three days of live performances. The concert provenance need not concern anyone concerned about any audience participation. Ogrintchouk is a superb player - the technique is a given - the thing that is so impressive is his subtle phrasing, which repeatedly gives the melodic line a vocal quality. And this is surely what is central to *all* Strauss's music post the early orchestral tone poems. He was a composer fascinated, if not obsessed, by the human voice and this needs to imbue any performance. My only observation about this current performance is that it sounds quite "big" and hearty. Given music this glorious, that is a perfectly valid interpretation, but I do wonder if occasionally Nelsons encourages the Concertgebouw to play with more energetic weight than is ideal. Ogrintchouk possesses a rich and warm tone, too, which adds to this impression. A relatively lesser-known performance of this concerto comes from Jonathan Small with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic with Gerard Schwartz and his naturally lighter tone, allied to a more reflective, often pensive interpretation, seems to me closer to the Autumnal twilight that this work embodies. If any admirers of this concerto do not know Small's recording I strongly recommend seeking it out. Another fine version which favours a lighter solo sound is the recording led by David Zinman and his [Tonhalle Orchester Zürich](#) with soloist Simon Fuchs. Interesting to hear the performance by John de Lancie - the American GI who prompted Strauss into writing the work. de Lancie joined the Philadelphia Orchestra after the WWII, but did not record the concerto until 1987. There are a couple of textual changes de Lancie made, including a brief cut and redistributing solo lines to woodwind colleagues - the most telling is de Lancie's choice of playing the original, slightly shorter ending as opposed to the extended revised version preferred by nearly every other recorded performance.

Ogrintchouk is more in the honoured tradition of Lothar Koch's famed recording with Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic - a performance that I have long admired. Next to Karajan I would have to say that Nelsons is more forthright and less nuanced as an accompanist - there is a directness to his Strauss interpretation that I noted elsewhere, when reviewing tone poems recorded with the CBSO. The very end of the work is a case in point - Nelsons, presumably because this is what Ogrintchouk wanted to - pushes the tempo to an extreme. Of course the Concertgebouw plays this tricky passage with nonchalant ease, but it does sound fundamentally too fast to me. So a very enjoyable, very impressive performance, but one that does not delve into the deeper emotional recesses of the work.

As an interlude before the disc's other main work, Ogrintchouk takes on directorial as well as playing responsibilities to perform alongside his Concertgebouw woodwind colleagues the very early E flat Serenade for 13 Wind Instruments. Strauss was just seventeen when he wrote this work and it is a mellifluous delight. The care of the instrumentation is remarkable for such a young composer - no doubt his father was a critical judge of his writing. Both here and in the big Sonatina No.2 "Happy

Workshop" there is a sense of collaborative delight in the playing. If I was concerned that the concerto 'pressed' the music too much, here the sense of relaxed pleasure in the playing is palpable. The large-scale Sonatina - Strauss quite deliberately using a diminutive in the title to imply that somehow this was a minor work - runs to nearly forty minutes - is easily the most substantial of Strauss's late works. If the voice is a key inspiration, then the other abiding influence is the benevolent shade of Mozart. Indeed the work is dedicated "to the spirit of the immortal Mozart at the end of a life full of thankfulness". Mozart, like Strauss, wrote most of his music influenced to some degree by the human voice. Allied to that, after the traumas of the previous decade it is surely not hard to hear in this music a desire to seek out the universal values of beauty and purity that Mozart's music embodies.

While the writing in the early Serenade shows remarkable promise and control, the Sonatina from more than sixty years later is a virtuoso display of woodwind textures and lyrical/contrapuntal writing. Strauss chooses an ensemble, which skews the timbral centre of the ensemble quite low. Only seven of the sixteen instruments could be termed fully 'treble' voices with a basset horn, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contra-bassoon and four horns ranged against them. This helps give the work a tonal richness which this performance brings out to the full. But again, both the composition itself and this performance is excellent at *not* making the music sound clotted or thick. A particular pleasure is the fluidity of the playing. I imagine this must be a delight to play and as such it has benefited from many fine performances over the years. I remember the performance led by another oboist with Dutch players - Heinz Holliger and the Netherlands Winds - dominating the catalogue for many years. I must admit to not having listened to that version since the days of LP because I have an abiding memory that its quality resulted in a slightly homogenised, levelled out textures and dynamics with much of the work's remarkable energy and joyfulness reduced.

There is a very fine set of the complete Strauss music for winds on Hyperion featuring an elite group of London players led by Michael Collins, which again features typically fine engineering from that label to match the calibre of the playing. That said, hard not to hear in this new recording a level of ensemble playing that comes from regular performing together. BIS present this as an SACD disc. I listened to the stereo SACD layer, not the 5.1 option, and it sounds very fine in that format - more so in the Sonatina/Serenade than in the Concerto. Indeed the soundstage for these wind ensemble works is of demonstration quality. In the concerto, I found the oboe to be a fraction too forward and full for the nature of the music itself. For those put off by the perceived bombast of the early tone poems or the nature of the operas, the late Sonatinas might well be a point of entry into the enduring genius of Strauss's music. The 2nd Sonatina receives as good a performance as I have heard, so good that one hopes that Ogrintchouk will be able to return to the studio with his colleagues to complete the set or perhaps couple the 1st Sonatina with the Mozart Gran Partita.

**Nick Barnard**

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

*Messa da Requiem* (1874) [98:00]

Juliana DiGiacomo (soprano); Michelle DeYoung (mezzo-soprano); Vittorio Grigolo (tenor); Ildebrando D'Arcangelo (bass)

Los Angeles Master Chorale; Los Angeles Philharmonic/Gustavo Dudamel

rec. live 13 and 15 August 2013, Hollywood Bowl, Los Angeles, USA

Bonus feature: Behind the Scenes Interview and Rehearsal with Gustavo Dudamel [18:00]

Video Director: Michael Beyer

Subtitles: Latin, German, English, French, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Japanese

Sound format: PCM Stereo, DTS-HD MA 5.1; Picture format: 1080i, 16:9

**C MAJOR 714804 Blu-ray** [116:00]

This appears to be the same recording as that issued in 2014. The DVD was reviewed here by John Quinn and the Blu-ray by Dave Billinge. I refer the reader to their reviews for more detailed information on the audio and video aspects of the recording. Both expressed reservations about the performance, many of which I share with them. Dudamel's is a good account that does not sound quite settled to me. Parts of it are very good, indeed. For example, the orchestra and chorus leave little to be desired in their technical excellence, whereas the vocal soloists are more of a mixed bag. Dudamel's tempos are on the slow side, but it is not speed per se that results in an impression of sluggishness. Right from the beginning there is a notable lack of tension, but then the *Dies irae* comes bursting in with all the power one could ask, and the choir and orchestra seem fully engaged. A highlight is watching the percussionist whack the bass drum here—one of the more memorable moments in the video presentation.

Of the soloists the soprano Juliana DiGiacomo impresses most and the tenor Vittorio Grigolo least. DiGiacomo has a wonderfully pure, yet strong voice and manages the high B-flat in the *Libera me* as perfectly as I have heard it. She also blends well with mezzo Michelle DeYoung. When DeYoung is on her own she is certainly fine, but can become rather theatrical—at least visually. However, her theatricality is nothing compared to tenor Vittorio Grigolo's emoting in the *Ingemisco*. His vocal quality is okay, but watching him one would think he momentarily stepped out of a Verdi opera. Bass Ildebrando D'Arcangelo is quite impressive with his firm, Italianate voice that lacks only something in richness.

While Dudamel generally seems to prefer broad tempos and is more comfortable with the more restrained music, he occasionally works up a head of steam. I had high hopes at the beginning of the *Sanctus* where the brass introduction was exciting, only for him to slow the tempo considerably when the choir enters. Likewise at the end of the *Libera me* fugue he exaggerates the theme by noticeably reducing the tempo. As Dave Billinge notes, Dudamel may have "a fine Verdi Requiem in him, but this is not it." It is a pity that C Major decided to re-release this recording when they might have waited for a more seasoned account from this dynamic conductor.

This is in no way a bad performance, but with so much competition I think it should be viewed more as memento of what was undoubtedly a memorable occasion than as a library choice—particularly for those who failed to snap it up on its first release. The video aspect really does not add that much either, with the camera jumping from one shot to the next with little apparent thought. The bonus documentary gives some indication of Dudamel's approach to the score, but not enough to really recommend watching it more than once. If I want to hear his performance again, it will be as an audio-only experience. In the meantime for Verdi's Requiem I would recommend CDs of Muti (his first EMI recording from 1979), Giulini, or Robert Shaw with the Atlanta Symphony on Telarc. Shaw's work as a choral conductor for Toscanini is everywhere present in his monumental and vital account recorded in resplendent sound.

## **Leslie Wright**

Previous reviews: [Dave Billinge](#) ~ [John Quinn](#) (DVD)