

Frederick DELIUS (1862-1934)

String Quartet in E minor (1917) [27.21]

Two movements from original three-movement version of String Quartet (1916) reassembled by Daniel M. Grimley (2016) [16.10]

Edward ELGAR (1857-1934)

String Quartet in E minor (1918) [27.54]

Villiers Quartet

rec. July/October 2016 St. Silas Church, Pentonville, London

NAXOS 8.573586 [71.24]

This splendid Naxos release by the Villiers Quartet, comprising string quartets from Delius and Elgar, deserves to be welcomed with open arms. The Delius was written in the midst of the horrors of the First World War while the Elgar was composed during the concluding months of the conflict. The quartets are impressive examples of the genre and the Delius quartet deserves to be heard far more than it currently is. Both quartets are in E minor and each employs some material from earlier discarded attempts at string quartets.

Delius was around fifty-four years of age and living permanently in Grez-sur-Loing, France when he completed the original three-movement version of his String Quartet in 1916. The work was premièred that same year at the Aeolian Hall, London. Disappointed with the results, the next year Delius subjected the score to major revision which included reworking the outer movements, adding a Scherzo and entirely rewriting the slow movement titled *Late Swallows*. Delius must have been pleased with the new *Late Swallows* as he asked his amanuensis, Eric Fenby to make an arrangement for string orchestra. Here the Villiers Quartet has recorded the customary 1917 version of the string quartet.

They have also included two movements from the original 1916 version: these are the opening movement and the first version of *Late Swallows* which have been compiled by Daniel M. Grimley from manuscripts held at the British Library. These make an interesting comparison with the revised versions. Incidentally these are highlighted in the booklet notes as world première recordings. Playing with a deep fondness for the work the Villiers feels in complete harmony with the predominantly gentle and bucolic character of the writing. Especially engaging is the playing of the lovely *Late Swallows* movement, both in the original and rewritten versions. This is a piece I have heard performed several times as a standalone work in chamber recitals. In the Delius String Quartet the commendable playing by the Villiers Quartet is worthy of comparison with the beautifully played 1995 account from the Britten Quartet on EMI. The Britten Quartet release has the highly desirable coupling of Howells' Fantasy String Quartet and String Quartet 'In Gloucestershire' (No. 3).

In 1918 Elgar wrote three major chamber music works: *Violin Sonata*, *String Quartet* and *Piano Quintet*, all of which were products from the peaceful rural retreat at Brinkwells near Fittleworth in Sussex. Here the Villiers Quartet is performing the three-movement String Quartet. Lady Elgar especially admired the *Piacevole (Poco andante)* movement, describing it as "captured sunshine" and it was subsequently performed at her funeral. The slow movement is quite ravishingly played, avoiding any cloying heart-on-sleeve quality. To close the squally writing of the *Allegro molto* feels joyfully uplifting. This elegantly played performance from the Villiers Quartet feels more captivating and sensitive than the 1995 account from the Maggini Quartet, also on Naxos, and it is now my first choice.

Successfully recorded at St. Silas Church, Pentonville, London, the players benefit from vividly clear, well balanced sound. Also included is an extremely helpful essay titled *Chamber Music in the Shadow of War* by Daniel M. Grimley.

This is a desirable chamber release with convincing and stylish playing from the Villiers Quartet who offer endearing expression and impeccable intonation throughout.

Michael Cookson

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

The Motets

Komm, Jesu, komm BWV 229 [9:19]

Fürchte dich nicht, ich bin bei dir BWV 228 [8:17]

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden BWV 230 [6:03]

Der Geist hilft unsrer Schwachheit auf BWV 226 [8:12]

Jesu, meine Freude BWV 227 [21:12]

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied BWV 225 [12:51]

La Petite Bande, Sigiswald Kuijken (conductor)

rec. live, Sint-Carolus Borromeuskerk, Antwerp, June 1992

ACCENT ACC24331 [64:51]

The interesting thing about Kuijken's performances of the Bach motets is that he gives us the version with orchestral accompaniment. This means that the music feels very different from those *a capella* versions that have become much more common these days, or even those with organ alone. The extra instrumental layer gives the choral line extra support that I found very enjoyable, even if I wouldn't want to discard my version from *The Sixteen*. The strings provide a warm cushion, and they blend well with both the organ and the voices.

The real treat comes when there are winds too, though, as there are in three of the motets, and those oboes deserve the most credit of all. They add an extra air of plangency to the penitential *Komm, Jesu, komm*, and they add a fruity, almost aristocratic air to *Der Geist hilft Unser Schwachheit an*. They then veritably chuckle their way through the opening of *Singet dem Herrn*, and they are, on the whole, a huge gain.

The choral singing is excellent throughout, and the recording setup helps, too, with the two choirs very keenly balanced in the left and right speakers so that Bach's antiphonal effects are given just the right level of impact.

In *Komm, Jesu, komm* they are precise and weighty, while achieving just the right level of swing, if that's the word, in "Du best der rechte Weg". *Fürchte dich nicht*, on the other hand, feels warmer and more mellow, as befits the tone of the words. *Lobe den Herrn* bounces along delightfully. I didn't like the way Kuijken plays with tempo at "Seine Gnade unde Wahrheit", but that's primarily a matter of taste.

Der Geist hilft begins with a very upbeat tempo, but then relaxes into something pleasingly expansive at "Du heilige Brunst", which I really liked. *Jesu meine Freude* takes the listener on a real journey. The repetitions of the chorale tune anchor the work's structure, but the intervening music becomes ever more ambitious in a way that had me marvelling at its scale by the end. *Singet dem Herrn* is a lovely way to end the disc, bustling with jolly good humour, but sounding broad and open for the interlude of "Wie sich ein Vater erbarmet."

Like I said, I wouldn't want to get rid of my unaccompanied versions of these miniature masterpieces, but Kuijken provides a very welcome alternative in good sound and excellent diction. The performances are live, but there isn't a peep out of the audience. The booklet includes a useful essay, together with German texts and English translations.

Simon Thompson

Nikolai MIASKOVSKY (1881-1950)

Cello Sonata No. 1 in D major Op. 12 (1911 rev. 1935) [22:22]

Cello Sonata No. 2 in A minor Op. 81 (1938) [23:46]

Luca Magariello (cello)

Cecilia Novarino (piano)

rec. 2015/16, Atelier Passadori, Brescia, Italy

BRILLIANT CLASSICS 95437 [47:02]

I came to Miaskovsky, or Myaskovsky as he is spelled on this disc, after knowing Prokofiev and Shostakovich, but having now heard all his symphonies, concertos and quartets he seems to me to be the norm from which those composers deviate. He is a great representative of continuity in Russian music, having first made a name for himself before the revolution and living long enough to be denounced in the 1948 purge of 'formalism'. He did not keep to the idiom of his youth but was never as adventurous as his friend Prokofiev. There is an old (2002) but still valuable survey of recordings of his work by Jonathan Woolf [here](#).

His major contribution to chamber music is his cycle of thirteen string quartets. Apart from these, there are these two cello sonatas and one violin sonata. (The latter is currently unrecorded, but a recording is due out this autumn.) The two cello sonatas come from opposite ends of the composer's career, though the fact that the first was revised in 1935 means that we are not hearing his first unvarnished thoughts. It is in two movements. The first is very lyrical, rather in the Rachmaninov idiom – Rachmaninov's own cello sonata dates from ten years earlier – and none the worse for that. This leads directly into an Allegro Appassionato. This is quite varied and discursive. I was immediately taken by Luca Magariello's lovely tone and the way he worked well with his pianist. I discover that they are in fact a husband and wife team so that is perhaps not surprising.

The second sonata is one of Miaskovsky's last works, written after the notorious denunciation of him and other leading composers and when he was already ill. This is a three movement work: the first two movements are predominantly lyrical while the third is much more athletic and virtuosic. Nevertheless, there is a withdrawn quality about it: I feel it is essentially a private work, and it perhaps not a coincidence that in this late work the composer returned to the form and also to some of the mood of his earlier work.

The virtues this team have demonstrated in the first sonata are also evident in the second. I should add that they give the themes time to expand, so there is no sense of hurry or rush. As well as working as a duo, each player has a separate reputation, Luca Magariello as a concerto soloist and also a chamber music player with a range of ensembles, and Cecilia Novarino in chamber music and also as an operatic répétiteur. This is their debut recording as a duo.

The recording is good and the sleeve note is in English and Italian. Although Brilliant Classics is an economy label this neither looks nor sounds like a cheap issue.

There are several other recordings of these sonatas, both separately and in mixed programmes, and also some which add Miaskovsky's cello concerto, which may be convenient but seems to me untidy for a chamber music disc. The standard recommendation for this coupling, including the concerto, is for Alexander Rudin and Victor Ginsburg ([review](#)). I must admit to not having heard this. However, on its own terms this new version is very satisfying, and the shortness of the timing is offset by the low price.

Stephen Barber

The Piano at the Ballet - Volume II

Francis POULENC (1899-1963)

Les Biches (The Darling Girls) excerpt (1923/1947) excerpts [11:19]

Henri SAUGUET (1901-1989)

Les Forains (The Fairground Entertainers) (1945) excerpts [18:44]

Jean FRANÇAIX (1912-1997)

Serenade for small orchestra (1934) [10:17]

Maurice THIRIET (1906-1972)

L'Oeuf à la coque (The Boiled Egg) (1949) excerpts [10:09]

Boris ASAFIEV (1884-1949)

The Flames of Paris (1931) - Pas de deux [5:39]

Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

Printemps (Suite Symphonique) (transcr. Henri Busser, 1887/1904) [15:23]

Igor STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)

Pulcinella (1920) excerpts [8:21]

Anthony Goldstone (piano)

rec. St John the Baptist Church, Alkborough, Lincolnshire, 2016

DIVINE ART DDA25148 [79:54]

Three things to say straightaway. Firstly, the playing on this disc by the late Anthony Goldstone (1944-2017) is stunning from the first note to the last. Secondly, do not try to hear this disc at a single sitting. Enjoy each ballet (or excerpt) at a time, and then come back a wee bit later for the next round. And, finally, despite point '1' above, I would rather listen to the original orchestra version in every case. It is not the forum too argue for/against transcriptions, but there is a tendency for the music to appear less like a recital than a répétiteur in the ballet school. (I think someone else made this remark re. an earlier disc in this series.) On the other hand, a transcription can allow the listener to better appreciate the structure of a work: harmonic, formal and melodic. It is all a matter of opinion. But let me reiterate that this is a superb disc.

I do not wish to give details of each ballet's plots, business and action. Nor will I present a detailed description of the progress of the music. However, a few words on each piece may be of interest, as some are not quite as familiar as others.

Poulenc's *Les Biches* was first performed in Monte Carlo during January 1924 and explores the relationship between a group of 'bright young things' living in the South of France. The original featured choral settings of 17th century texts. Poulenc arranged the score for orchestra in 1939-40. The word 'Biche' is usually translated as does (adult female deer). It was also a slang French word for a 'coquettish woman.' (Wikipedia). The music is subtle, sparkling and largely neoclassical. There are many sly references to older composers: Mozart, Scarlatti, Tchaikovsky and even Stravinsky. Three movements are given here: Rondeau, Andantino and Final.

Henri Sauguet's contribution to this selection of French ballet music is the 'charming' score to *Les Forains* (The Fairground Entertainers or The Fairground People). This was a one-act ballet written in 1945 and first presented at the Theatre des Champs-Élysées in March 1945. The war was still raging, though Paris had been liberated on 25 August 1944. The music has nothing complex or modernistic about it. In fact, it has been said that the score is 'sometimes verging on the trivial but never falling into vulgarity.' I found it all a little dull.

Jean Françaix is a composer who is sadly forgotten these days. Writer of much good, 'neo-classical' music for a wide range of genres whose influences included Ravel, Stravinsky, Chabrier and Poulenc. The present Serenade for orchestra was composed in 1934, when the composer was twenty-two years old. It is a delightful work and seems to have transcribed well for piano solo. I have never heard the original version. There are four short movements. The Serenade was used in the ballet *A la Françaix* which was devised by George Ballachine, and was premiered in New York in 1951.

My musical discovery on this CD is the *L'Oeuf à la coque* (The Boiled Egg) (1949) by Maurice Thiriet (1906-72). I had previously heard of neither composer nor his music. Listening to this ballet score, there is much in common with Jean Françaix and Francis Poulenc in their exploitation of neo-classicism. To these allusions Thiriet adds jazz and popular song. Never mind the 'book' of the ballet: just enjoy this is a sparkling and often catchy score. Any of the four extracts presented here by Anthony Goldstone would make an ideal piano recital encore.

St Petersburg-born composer Boris Asafiev (1884-1949) provided the score for the ballet *The Flames of Paris*. This is a work based on the French Revolution. Asafiev made use of songs from that era. Anthony Goldstone has presented a short suite of extracts from the original four act ballet. Not a particularly inspiring piece, although the 'Introduction' has a memorable tune.

Printemps, by Debussy has seen several incarnations. Originally for choir, piano and orchestra, it was written whilst the composer was living in Rome. The score was destroyed by fire. Debussy rewrote the work for orchestra and piano but without the chorus (with the help of Henri Busser) and created a four-handed piano version. The work was inspired by Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* (Allegory of Spring): it is often deemed to represent one of the earliest examples of musical impressionism. It was adapted by the composer for piano duet and was further arranged for piano solo by Henri Busser in 1904. This is the version that is played on this disc, with many extra 'twiddly bits' by Anthony Goldstone. *Printemps* was used as a ballet score for the Alhambra Theatre in London. It was a part of a revue called *Not Likely!* The liner notes point out that this important early essay in impressionism was heard alongside performances by Minnie Kaufmann, the trick cyclist and 'Chinko, the Chinese juggler. Apparently, Debussy had been commissioned to write a new piece for this venue, but failed to make headway. He offered *Printemps* instead, so as not to lose his fee.

Finally, Igor Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* makes use of the music of the Italian composer Giovanni Battista Pergolesi. The ballet tells of the adventures of Pulcinella, who is a stock character of Neapolitan theatre. In 1922 the composer presented an eight-movement orchestral suite of the ballet. It is well-known music that transcribes well for the piano.

The liner notes by Jeremy Nicholas are excellent and give detailed information about these works which is often not easily available elsewhere. The sound quality of this Divine Art disc is first-rate.

As noted above, despite my reservations about 'transcriptions' this is an outstanding disc that introduces the listener to a wide conspectus of French ballet music, either specifically composed for the genre, or skillfully adapted by the choreographer. I reiterate: every note is played with style, technical ability and downright enthusiasm.

John France

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Complete Piano Sonatas

Eduardo del Pueyo (piano)

rec. 1976-77, location not given

PAVANE RECORDS ADW7073/81 [9 CDs: 653:17]

Who was Eduardo del Pueyo, you may ask? He was born in Zaragoza, the capital of northeastern Spain's Aragon region in 1905, and died in Brussels in 1986. He was an alumnus of the Madrid Conservatory, where he won a 1st Prize at the age of only fourteen. A year later he relocated to Paris to further his studies. For twelve years he studied composition with Raoul Laparro and Amadeo de Montrichard. In 1927 he gave a commemorative concert to mark the centenary of Beethoven's death, featuring three 'named' sonatas: the *Pathétique*, *Appassionata* and *Hammerklavier*. He later spent four years studying piano with Juana Bosch, a pupil of Marie Jaëll, and consolidated his technique. In 1935 he moved to Brussels and returned to a concert career, becoming something of a Beethoven specialist, performing his first sonata cycle in 1938. His repertoire, however, ranged from Bach to Stravinsky, with a fair smattering of Spanish music. His discography is meagre, containing concertos by Beethoven, Liszt, Ravel (Left Hand) and music by his native composers. It seems that he wasn't a great fan of the recording studio, preferring the 'live' event, and the inspiration he gleaned from an audience. He set down this cycle when he was in his seventies.

The cycle was del Pueyo's last, and to it it brings a lifetime of wisdom and experience. For a man in his seventies, his technique is still very much in fine fettle and can deliver speed and power when required. However, there's much more than mere empty virtuosity. Intelligence, spirituality, a sense of architecture and structure and a probing awareness are all compelling attributes he brings to this rich corpus. To get some indication of profundity, the last three 3 sonatas for me provide the litmus test. Intimate and intense, he truly conveys the spiritual depth of this music, offering a wealth of poetic insights. As with many pianists of his generation he achieves a kaleidoscopic array of tone colours, with sensitive nuancing of light and shade. Voicing of chords, delicate gradations of tone and a rich keyboard sonority all add to the allure. It should also be noted that he takes the repeats.

It's not my intention to discuss every sonata, but to focus on some of the highlights of this wonderful cycle. The Sonata Op 2 No 3 is a virtuosic tour-de-force, which del Pueyo addresses with adept technical skill and authority. The outer movements are excitingly driven, with the Adagio evincing some luminous cantabile playing. The dotted rhythms of the opening of Piano Sonata no. 5 in C minor, Op. 10, No 1 are crisply incisive, with the slow movement offering balm to the ears before the boisterous finale. The Piano Sonata Op. 10 No.3, opens with energy and gusto, but it's in the eloquent Largo e mesto where del Pueyo reaches sublime heights, imbuing the music with melancholy and anguish. After an elegant Menuetto, the Rondo is playful, based on that teasing three-note question. Emphasizing it's song-like character, there's a notable Schubertian flavor to the second movement of the Op. 90.

The *Moonlight* Sonata I particularly like. The opening movement is satisfyingly contained. There's some stunning passagework in the finale, delivered with fire and zeal. The landscape of del Pueyo's *Appassionata* is etched in starting contrasts. The outer movements are intensely dramatic, separated by a slow movement of telling eloquence. The mood of farewell is vividly portrayed in the first movement of *Les Adieux*, followed by a tangible sense of loss in the second. The finale exudes joy and celebration at the homecoming. There's some pretty impressive fingerwork in the Prestissimo third movement of the *Waldstein*. The *Hammerklavier* is of epic proportions. The first movement has nobility and grandeur. After a rhythmically propulsive Scherzo, the Adagio Sostenuto is exquisitely contoured. To the fugue he brings authority, energy and vigour.

The performances are so consistently fine throughout that it seems rather churlish to find fault. However, I have just two small reservations. The first movement of Sonata No. 11, Op. 22 for me lacks the essential '*con brio*' element. It begins ok, then at bar 10 loses momentum for some reason,

never fully recovering. My other nit-pick is the opening movement of Sonata No. 28 in A major which seems a little too urgent and glossed over. I compared it with versions by Gilels, Goode and Pollini, who take a more spacious view, more favourable in my opinion.

As I've already said, del Pueyo was already in his seventies when he committed this cycle to disc between 1976 and 1977. It was originally issued in stereo by Pavane in 1981 on 14 LPs (ADW 7071/7084), and now has been newly remastered for CD on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the pianist's death. Although the recording venue isn't given, I have read somewhere that the sonatas were set down at the Conservatory in Belgium, where the pianist taught. The acoustic confers an attractive, warm halo of sound around the music and pleasing sense of intimacy. The piano is brightly voiced, but never overly so. I must commend Pavane Records on their excellent presentation, especially the booklet (in French, English and Spanish). It provides a comprehensive biographical account of the pianist, and there's an array of beautifully produced black and white photographs. The annotations are courtesy of Manuel Maynar, President of the 'Association of friends of Eduardo del Pueyo' and Bertrand de Wouters d'Oplinter, Director of Pavane Records.

On the basis of this compelling release, I hope some of del Pueyo's deleted discography will make a comeback to the catalogues. He's certainly a pianist worthy of more attention.

Stephen Greenbank

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CD 1 [73:23]

- No. 1 in F minor op. 2 no. 1 (1793-5)
- No. 2 in A major op. 2 no. 2 (1794-5)
- No. 3 in C major op. 2 no. 3 (1794-5)

CD 2 [77:40]

- No. 5 in C minor op. 10 no. 1 (1795-7)
- No. 6 in F major op. 10 no. 2 (1796-7)
- No. 7 in D major op. 10 no. 3 (1797-8)
- No. 19 in G minor op. 49 no. 1 (1797)
- No. 20 in G major op. 49 no. 2 (1796)

CD 3 [78:04]

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- No. 8 in C minor op. 13 "Pathétique" (1797-8)
- No. 9 in E major op. 14 no. 1 (1798)
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- No. 12 in A flat major op. 26 "Funeral March" (1800-01)
- No. 15 in D major op. 28 "Pastorale" (1801)

CD 5 [69:11]

- No. 13 in E flat major op. 27 no. 1 (1800-01)
- No. 14 in C sharp minor op. 27 no. 2 "Moonlight" (1801)
- No. 21 in C major op. 53 "Waldstein" (1803-04)
- No. 22 in F major op. 54 (1804)

CD 6 [72:11]

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- No. 17 in D minor op. 31 no. 2 "Tempest" (1802)
- No. 18 in E flat major op. 31 no. 3 (1802)

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- No. 23 in F minor op. 57 "Appassionata" (1804-05)
- No. 24 in F sharp major op. 78 (1809)
- No. 25 in G major op. 79 (1809)
- No. 26 in E flat major op. 81A "Les Adieux" (1809-10)
- No. 27 in E minor op. 90 (1814)

CD 8 [65:32]

- No. 28 in A major op. 101 (1816)
- No. 29 in B flat major op. 106 "Hammerklavier" (1817-18)

CD 9 [65:45]

- No. 30 in E major op. 109 (1820)
- No. 31 in A flat major op. 110 (1821-22)
- No. 32 in C minor op. 111 (1821-22)

Michael HURD (1928-2006)

Choral Music Volume 1

A Secular Anthem (1987) [7:54]

Genesis (1987) [6:07]

Five Spiritual Songs (1996) [9:55]

Rejoice with us (1987) [3:00]

Night Songs of Edward Thomas (1994) [20:14]

Missa Brevis (1966) [11:14]

Merciles Beaute (1980) [5:39]

A Parley of Owls (1987) [3:38]

Praise Ye the Lord (1966) [2:53]

Martin Ford (organ)

Vasari Singers/Jeremy Backhouse

rec. February 2016, St Jude-on-the-Hill, Hampstead Garden, London. DDD

Texts included

LYRITA SRCD 363 [70:47]

Michael Hurd, the composer, writer and communicator about music in a variety of ways, was born and raised in Gloucester. Perhaps it's no surprise, therefore, that his most celebrated book was his biographical study, *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney* (1978). I mention that because I think Hurd's choice of that particular subject is relevant to this present CD in a couple of ways: firstly it evidences his roots in English music; secondly, the contents of this disc show that, like Gurney, Hurd had a discerning eye for a text to set to music. Hurd moved away from Gloucestershire after university and national service and from 1959 onwards he made his home in Hampshire. It's also worth noting that among his teachers were two fastidious musicians, Bernard Rose and Lennox Berkeley.

In recent years Hurd's music has begun to make some headway on CD. For example Lyrita's recordings of his chamber operas, *The Aspern Papers* (1996) and *The Night of the Wedding* (1998) were warmly greeted by Paul Corfield Godfrey, who especially admired *The Aspern Papers* ([review](#)). An earlier chamber opera, *The Widow of Ephesus* (1971) was recorded by Dutton Epoch ([review](#)). The same label issued his attractive *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1975) ([review](#)). In a lighter vein, Naxos issued a disc of his [pop cantatas](#), which includes the *Jonah-Man Jazz* which I vividly remember singing as a schoolboy.

As Paul Conway points out in his informative booklet notes, vocal and choral music figured very largely in Hurd's compositional output. This CD is announced as Volume 1 and I wonder how many more recordings are planned. I believe that there are quite a number of additional choral pieces, though several of these remain in manuscript. All the pieces here recorded were new to me but they deserve to be better known.

The most substantial offering is *Night Songs of Edward Thomas*, a collection of eight settings for unaccompanied SATB choir of poems by Thomas. These settings, it seems to me, are worthy to rank highly in the list of English part songs. I noted with interest before I listened for the first time Paul Conway's comment that these pieces "illustrate Hurd's concern to allow the words to guide the music." All of them are impressive responses to the poetry of Thomas. I particularly liked the fluent, lovely setting of *Two Pewits* while the spare, eloquent music to which Hurd sets *Lights Out*, one of Thomas's most celebrated poems, strikes me as an inspired response to the text.

Five Spiritual Songs uses poems by George Herbert: three of the poems were also used by Vaughan Williams in his *Five Mystical Songs*. Hurd's music is for unaccompanied SATB choir. . He opens with a strong setting of *Antiphon* ('Let all the world in ev'ry corner sing'). The second piece, *The Pulley*, is a mellifluous composition and I like the use of a most unexpected chord on the very last word in the piece. Hurd's response to *The Call* is, as Paul Conway says, resolute while the concluding *Exultation* ('Rise heart, thy Lord is risen') is properly exultant. These are very good settings.

The *Missa Brevis* is for upper voices (SSAA) and organ. It was dedicated to Lennox Berkeley and his wife. Sir Lennox was enthusiastic about the piece, describing it as “skilfully written for the voices” and expressing particular admiration for the Agnus Dei. As will be seen from the overall timing, it’s a concise composition. The Gloria is the longest movement; its outer sections are festive in tone. I can see why Hurd’s former teacher admired the Agnus; here the music seems to me to evidence what I might call poised fervour. As befits a work dedicated to Berkeley, the music is attractive and elegant throughout.

Merciles Beaute is a collection of three Chaucer settings for unaccompanied SATB choir. Thoughtfully, Hurd provided a modern English paraphrase of Chaucer’s texts for choirs who might be daunted by medieval English: rightly, the original texts are sung here. A Parley of Owls is the witty title for a set of three unaccompanied SATB songs in which Hurd uses poems by three different writers on the subject of owls. These are short, attractive compositions.

The opening piece, *A Secular Anthem*, conflates two poems by seventeenth century English poets, Robert Herrick and Andrew Marvell. The texts sit well together and the piece, which is for SATB and organ, is a fine one.

I’ve enjoyed making the acquaintance of all the pieces on this disc. Jeremy Backhouse and the Vasari Singers are enthusiastic advocates for the pieces. I was mildly surprised to see from the booklet that only three tenors are listed in a choir of 30 (11/8/3/8). In fact those three singers hold their end up well and generally the tenor line comes through well. If I have a criticism of the choir it would be that the sound tends to be rather soprano-dominated. It must be said, though, that the singing is well disciplined, as I’ve come to expect from this choir’s recordings, and the diction is very good. Inexplicably the name of the organist has been omitted from the documentation but I was able to establish that the organist is Martin Ford; he does a very good job.

That’s the only flaw that I could detect in documentation that is otherwise excellent, as we’d expect from a Lyrita release. The recorded sound is very good.

Noting that this is described as Volume 1, I look forward to discovering more of the choral music of Michael Hurd in future releases. If you take a look at this [website](#) devoted to Michael Hurd you’ll see that there appears to be quite a lot more music to explore in this series.

[John Quinn](#)

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)

Symphony No. 35 in D major, K385 *Haffner* (1783) [18:35]

Symphony No. 38 in D Major K504 *Prague* (1786) [31:51]

Symphony No. 41 in C major, K551 *Jupiter* (1788) [32:26]

Anton BRUCKNER (1824-1896)

Symphony No. 4 in E flat major *Romantic* (version 1878/80 edited Nowak) [64.16]

NHK Symphony Orchestra/Hiroshi Wakasugi

rec. live 27 June, 1986 (Bruckner), 18 May, 1995 (Mozart |), NHK Hall, Tokyo

KING INTERNATIONAL KKC2108 [73:23 + 75:37]

Although they were recorded in concert nine years later, the three Mozart symphonies offered here serve as an appropriate leading partner to Bruckner's "Romantic" symphony, played as they are in a bold, unrepentantly Big Band style which I suspect would have heartily pleased the composer himself had he been able to hear them performed by such a large orchestra on modern instruments. The sound is gratefully rich in bass and timpani and conveys the immediacy of the concert hall as well as any recording can; Wakasugi directs with real drive and energy but gives the minuettos a beguiling lilt to complement the momentum of the Presto and Allegro movements.

The Bruckner symphony is similarly driven and energised, played with ample weight and impetus, enhanced by the sturdy bass line already heard in the Mozart. Despite the gravitas of Wakasugi's phrasing, his speeds are on the brisk side, almost identical to those of Karajan, and there is no sense of stasis or indulgence; in fact, the mood here recalls a kinship with another sylvan-pastoral symphony, Mahler's First which also conjures up aural impressions of hunting, forests, birdsong within a chivalric, hyper-Romantic sensibility. The difference between Wakasugi's and Karajan's approaches lies in the latter's command of a more responsive orchestra which is more able to execute its conductor's bidding and play with subtlety and nuance in quieter passages. The NHK are thrillingly gung-ho but not as refined or virtuosic, and thus unable to grade dynamics as smoothly and sophisticatedly as the Berlin Philharmonic. There is the occasional split note from the horns and slight lapses in intonation from the trumpets but no more than is tolerable in a single take of a live performance. Ambient noise is minimal with very little audience intrusion.

This is a very direct performance; thus, the Andante is marginally lacking in some of the mystical ambience Karajan generates but still serene and mesmeric, beautifully controlled and shaped. The coda to the finale is especially imposing; ultimately this performance emerges as highly satisfying in its unfussiness and replete with the *Schwung* the music demands.

Ralph Moore

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Requiems for Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette

Luigi CHERUBINI (1760-1842)

Requiem in C minor [37:35]

Charles-Henri PLANTADE (1764-1839)

Requiem Mass in D minor [30:56]

Le Concert Spirituel, Hervé Niquet (conductor).

rec. 21-22 January 2016, Chapelle Royale du Château de Versailles

ALPHA CLASSICS 251 [69:14]

Hot on the heels of one Requiem inspired by a change in direction in the French political climate, come two more. Indeed, while the forces recording these two Requiems are different from those which recorded the Requiem by Sigismund Neukomm ([review](#)), the recording of the Neukomm was made in the same venue and on the very next day to these by Cherubini and Plantade. The sound was pretty sumptuous in the Neukomm disc, and it is equally so here, fully capturing the rich acoustic warmth of this historic regal cloister.

Neukomm had, at the behest of Congress of Vienna, hurriedly rearranged an earlier Requiem Mass (intended to honour the memory of the Haydn brothers) as a memorial to King Louis XVI, beheaded at the height of the French Revolution and given a kind of posthumous re-elevation in 1815. Not to be outdone by this Austrian-born protégé of Prince Talleyrand or allow Versailles to be overshadowed by events in Vienna (where the Neukomm Requiem was performed on the 22nd anniversary of Louis XVI's execution), Cherubini, who had only recently been appointed Superintendent of the Royal Chapel, clearly felt he should contribute a Requiem of his own for Versailles' own commemoration on the anniversary of Louis XVI's execution (some sources suggest this was in 1817, while the booklet with this disc states that it was in 1816). Whether Cherubini wrote an entirely new work or, as the booklet notes suggest, reused material from one drafted as early as 1808, the work is a curious mixture of almost routine sacred music, typical of Cherubini's craftsmanlike but uninspired approach to composition, and moments of powerful drama such as the appearance of the tam-tam in the *Dies irae* – uncannily prescient of Verdi – and the strangely ominous mood of the *Agnus Dei* with its eerily monotone ending. The choral writing follows the Italian SATB style, not commonly in use then in French, and dispenses with soloists.

Far more arresting throughout – there is a dramatic crash of the gong heralding the voices' first entry of the *Introit* as well as, in the closing *Agnus Dei* an absolutely astonishing bit of pitch-bending from a horn - is the Requiem by Charles-Henri Plantade. A colleague of Cherubini (both were associated with the Paris Conservatoire, and both assisted in the music for the Coronation of Charles X) Plantade was invited at short notice to provide a Requiem to be sung in the Chapel of the Tuileries in 1823 marking the 30th anniversary of the execution of Marie-Antoinette. Plantade had already completed a Requiem in D minor which remained unpublished at the time, and this was used for the Marie-Antoinette memorial. The thrilling opening to the *Dies irae* must have been a source of huge admiration for Berlioz, who had just arrived in Paris, and while the choral writing follows the archaic French tradition of three male voices and a single soprano line, providing a clear link with the traditions of Lully and Rameau, the music is far more forward-looking and adventurous than the Cherubini Requiem.

Hervé Niquet directs his forces with tremendous verve and consummate timing, extracting every last drop of drama from these two very different yet deeply intriguing scores. Le Concert Spirituel (comprising orchestral and choral musicians) respond vividly, the female voices intoning the occasional passages of unadorned plainchant in both works with exceptional sensitivity. These exquisite performances make this disc far more than just a celebration of a unique moment in French political history; it presents an invaluable glimpse into an area of the repertory which is generally overshadowed by what came before, what came after and what was going on in other European centres.

Marc Rochester

Niels GADE (1817-1890)

Aquarellen, Op. 19 Vol. 1 (1849) [7:24]

Piano Sonata in E minor, Op. 28 (1839-54) [21:31]

Aquarellen, Op. 19 Vol. 2 (1850) [8:41]

Volkstänze. Phantasiestücke, Op. 31 (1855) [10:42]

Aquarel, (1876) [1:48]

Aquarellen (Neue Folge). Kleine Tonbilder, Op. 57 (1881) [12:09]

Chanson danoise (Danish song), (1885) [1:54]

Marianna Shirinyan (piano)

rec. The Queens Hall, The Black Diamond, The Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen, December 2016/January 2017.

DACAPO 8.226122 [64:09]

The piano music of Niels Gade played an important role in fostering his popularity as a composer, and this despite the fact that he was not a pianist composer, his own instrument being the violin. Indeed, the first CD that solely presented his music that I bought was a disc of his piano works performed by Elisabeth Westenholz on the Kontrapunkt label (32097). Despite his preference for the violin over the piano, his piano music is rich and colourful. It has been suggested that his affinity with the piano was honed by his many years as an organist.

Most of the music presented on this CD is duplicated on the Westenholz disc, and there is an automatic preference here in the way that the Dacapo engineers have given a separate track to each piece of music, something lacking on the Kontrapunkt where even the four movements of the Piano Sonata only receive a single track. This makes the Shirinyan recording preferable from the start, and that is before we get to the performance.

The Piano Sonata is the most important work here. It was composed over many years and many revisions were made until Gade was finally satisfied. Some of these revisions came about after seeing Franz Liszt, the work's ultimate dedicatee, perform in Copenhagen in 1841. Liszt later stated that he thought the Sonata to be beautiful. The Sonata is cast in the style of Schumann and stands well alongside his sonatas, with both Westenholz and Shirinyan giving very good performances. Shirinyan, unlike Westenholz, places the Sonata between the two books of the op. 19 Aquarellen. I feel this works better than presenting it first, since it gives the Sonata more prominence whilst also placing it in context with the other piano pieces presented here.

The rest of this disc is mainly taken up with Gade's three books of Aquarellen. These "Little Tone-Pictures" have been likened to the Lieder ohne Worte by his great friend Felix Mendelssohn. This is no mean comparison, as it was these pieces which fuelled the latter's popularity, since they were seen as being for the gifted amateur and professional pianist alike. Gade's are charming miniatures. Like the Mendelssohn, they are rooted in the romantic idiom and deserve a wider audience. Here they are given a sparkling performance by Shirinyan.

The Volkstänze, Phantasiestücke and the Chanson danoise can be described as folk inspired Aquarellen, their seemingly effortless charm winning me over from my first hearing. Unlike the Aquarellen, which are grouped in fives, the Volkstänze is a group of four very attractive pieces which are again romantic in nature.

The performances by Marianna Shirinyan are slightly preferable to those of Elisabeth Westenholz. When we take into account the improved sound – the 1991 Kontrapunkt recording now sounds a little dated in comparison – and the banding issue already discussed, this Dacapo disc is a real winner. Excellent and informative notes accompany the recording. Let us hope that Dacapo and Marianna Shirinyan get together to present more of the piano music of Niels Gade.

Stuart Sillitoe

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Alessandro SCARLATTI (1660 - 1725)

Opera omnia per tastiera - Volume V

[Toccatà] 4.a in e minor (ASOT 83) [11:36]
Toccatà 3.a in d minor (ASOT 82) [5:56]
Follia in d minor (ASOT 92) [3:15]
[Toccatà] in d minor (ASOT 37) [3:21]
[Allegro] in d minor (ASOT 131) [1:52]
[Andante] in a minor (ASOT 133) [1:17]
Toccatà per cembalo in D (ASOT 74) [8:26]
Fuga (Kyrie) & Fuga (Christe) in e minor (ASOT 89) [4:12]
[Allegro] in g minor (ASOT 135) [3:03]
[Andante] in G (ASOT 34) [4:20]
[Sonata] in F (ASOT 81) [9:36]
Toccatà per Cembalo in D (ASOT 75) [4:01]
Toccatà per Cembalo in G (ASOT 80) [3:09]
Toccatà in D (ASOT 66) [2:56]
All[egr]o in D (ASOT 132) [3:19]
Toccatà in B flat (ASOT 67) [4:07]
(ASOT refers to Alessandro Scarlatti Opera per Tastiera)
Francesco Tasini (organ)
rec. November 2014, Chiesa di S. Maria di Campagna, Pidenza, Italy DDD
TACTUS TC 661915 [75:37]

Alessandro Scarlatti was one of the main Italian composers in the decades around 1700. His fame came primarily from his vocal works: operas, oratorios, serenatas and chamber cantatas. It seems that instrumental music played a minor role in his compositional activities. His oeuvre includes some pieces for instrumental ensemble; the best-known of these being twelve *sinfonie di concerto grosso* and some sonatas for recorder and strings. Keyboard works constitute the least-known part of his oeuvre and also the probably least-appreciated. The verdict of Malcolm Boyd in *New Grove* is telling: "One would hardly recognize the father of Domenico Scarlatti from the keyboard works that have survived, most of which seem to have acted as pupil fodder." In contrast, the Canadian harpsichordist Alexander Weimann, in the liner-notes to the first volume of his planned complete recording ([review](#)), states that "as a composer for the keyboard, Alessandro Scarlatti (...) deserves the same respect that we show for his vocal works." So far only two volumes in that project have been released. In addition single discs with Scarlatti's keyboard music have appeared, for instance from the Italian harpsichordist Rinaldo Alessandrini (Arcana, 1992). His colleague Francesco Tasini is a specialist in this repertoire: he is the editor of a complete edition of Scarlatti's keyboard works, which is published by Ut Orpheus Edizioni in Bologna; the first volume appeared in 2000. So far five discs have been released by the Italian label Tactus. In the liner-notes to the present disc he writes that with this volume "we are carrying on the project". This suggests that more is to come.

Only a very small part of the keyboard oeuvre was published during Scarlatti's lifetime. Most pieces have survived in manuscript, and this makes it almost inevitable that some pieces are of doubtful authenticity. Copyists were not always sure about who was the composer of a specific piece. Because of that it is hard to know exactly how many pieces are really from Scarlatti's pen. Tasini is also preparing a thematic catalogue, and that will certainly shed more light on this matter. The present disc includes several pieces which are spurious and even some which were definitely not written by Scarlatti, but are included here because they show similarities to his style.

If one doesn't know any of Scarlatti's keyboard oeuvre, one is probably inclined to expect something like the sonatas of his son Domenico. Considering that some of them are quite virtuosic, they certainly show that the son got his talent from his father. Stylistically Alessandro's keyboard works belong rather

to the 17th century. The frequent use of the form of the toccata attests to that. However, there are also some more modern pieces. That goes especially for several pieces in four movements which adopt the form of the trio sonata. Tasini suggests that they may in fact be transcriptions of pieces originally written for treble instruments and basso continuo. The disc opens with a piece in e minor which is called *Toccata* in the track-list. The fact that this word is put between brackets seems to indicate that in the source the piece comes without a title. I don't know why it is called a toccata; 'sonata' would probably be the most appropriate term here. There is no fundamental difference between this piece and the piece in F, called *sonata* (track 11). Two fugues (track 8) are certainly transcriptions. In this case they are taken from a vocal work: a mass, called *Missa Ottoboniana*, written by Scarlatti in the style of Palestrina and dating from the time when he was *maestro di capella* of the Royal Chapel in Naples.

It is notable that the pieces on this disc, despite their stylistic similarity, show quite some differences. It is certainly not 'more of the same'. The opening [*Toccata*] in e minor comprises three movements; the second (*adagio*) is dominated by a descending four-note figure. It ends with a minuet. *Follia in d minor* is a series of variations on a frequently-used subject. Scarlatti seems to have written three sets of such variations: one with 29 and one with 22 variations. The version included here comprises only four variations. The ensuing [*Toccata*] in d minor has an improvisatory character and comes very close to the 17th-century model of the toccata. The *Toccata per Cembalo in D* (track 7) consists of three sections; the second of which is a fugue. This piece includes various passages with pedal points. That makes it a logical decision to perform it on the organ, despite its title. The [*Andante*] in G is a splendid example of Scarlatti's mastery of counterpoint. This reminds me of some of Domenico's sonatas in slow tempi which are also well suitable for a performance on the organ.

Tasini rightly points out that "the organ and the harpsichord were traditionally regarded as interchangeable". Therefore the choice of instrument is up to the interpreter, on the basis of what he thinks works best. In every case I found the option of the organ very convincing. The benefit of the organ is the variety of colours due to the different registers the organist has at his disposal. Tasini has chosen an organ of 1836, built by Carlo Serassi, a member of a dynasty of organ builders who were active for about 150 years. This choice may surprise, but one of the features of the organs by the Serassi dynasty is that they kept the characteristics of the traditional Italian organs, and the sound of this organ is very 'baroque', not fundamentally different from organs built in the 17th and early 18th centuries.

Tasini is an outstanding interpreter. He uses the possibilities of the organ to the full. The fast movements are played with much zest and imagination; in the slow movements he creates a maximum of expression, partly through a creative use of the registers of the organ. The recording also leaves nothing to be desired.

This is a splendid disc because of the music, the performance and the organ. That justifies its being labelled Recording of the Month. It would not surprise me if those who purchase this disc, want to have the previous volumes as well.

Johan van Veen

<http://www.musica-dei-donum.org>

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