

Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)

[Piano Concerto No. 1](#) in D minor, Op. 15 (1854/58) [48.13]

[Piano Concerto No. 2](#) in B flat major, Op. 83 (1878/81) [50.54]

Sunwook Kim (piano)

Hallé/Sir Mark Elder

rec. March/April 2016, Hallé/St. Peter's, Ancoats, Manchester, U.K.

HALLÉ CD HLD 7546 [48.13 + 50.54]

With this new release Sir Mark Elder, music director of the Hallé, has turned to Brahms with the two piano concertos in studio recordings from 2016. There is an abundance of recordings of these Brahms works in the catalogue which seem to have been a rite of passage for many concert pianists but there is always room for another set especially when played as well as in these performances by the Korean, Sunwook Kim.

Brahms started writing his three-movement *First Piano Concerto* in 1854 around the time of the suicide attempt by his friend and mentor Robert Schumann. It was Brahms' first large-scale work for orchestra and had its origins in the first movement of a *Sonata in D minor for Two Pianos*. It would be another seventeen years before Brahms was to complete his *First Symphony*. The *D minor Piano Concerto* was introduced in January 1859 at Hanover under Joseph Joachim with Brahms as soloist.

Elder and the Hallé provide a dramatic orchestral introduction to commence the massive and dramatic first movement, *Maestoso*. It just pulsates with drama. One immediately notices how decisively Kim strikes the keys and everything is shaped with clarity and immediacy. The glorious lyrical theme with Kim's playing alone is near spine-tingling, so introspective. Striking is the secure performance throughout from both soloist and orchestra whilst maintaining a high level of intensity.

In the *Adagio* Kim provides engaging playing of near reverential quality if at times the tempo borders on the unpalatably languid. The final movement *Rondo - Allegro non troppo* sees Kim playing the syncopated rhythms robustly with urgency, astutely bringing out the nervy character of the writing. Playing with distinct confidence and high levels of concentration, overall Kim creates a captivating sense of awe.

After the *First Piano Concerto* it was more than twenty-two years before Brahms completed his *Second Piano Concerto*. Much of the writing was undertaken at his Austrian holiday home in the Alpine resort of Pörtschach am Wörthersee on the shore of Lake Wörth. The score was completed in January 1881 and premièred in November that year in Budapest under Alexander Erkel with Brahms once again as soloist. Cast in four movements the *Second Piano Concerto* is very different from the *First* being more symphonic in nature with the soloist more integral to the orchestra yet the work is just as challenging for performers.

From his first note to the last Kim is able to convey considerable tone colour yet still communicate an authentic sense of spontaneity. Opening the score the short weeping horn solo, nicely in tune, seems a touch tentative. Terse and rather angry, the piano part of the substantial opening movement *Allegro non troppo* is interpreted urgently by Kim in a performance of compelling concentration. Striking is the sensation of angst and anxiety generated by Elder and the Hallé with an elevated degree of drama in the *Coda*. With seemingly effortless technical command Kim provides impressive dynamics in the anxiety laden writing of the stormy *Scherzo*. There's also an impressive *rubato* that feels completely instinctive. Elder ensures that the orchestral section at the conclusion conveys the necessary breathtaking excitement.

In the *Andante* the song-like cello solo, imbued with melancholy, is gloriously played by the principal although slightly recessed in the recording balance. Kim's sense of introspection is marked with poetic

playing imbued with a keen sense of yearning which contrasts beautifully with the unsettling and windswept nature of the writing. In Kim's hands the *Finale: Allegretto grazioso* is vibrant and uplifting while the Hallé too revel in such joyful writing. Firmly assured, Kim takes in his stride the broad rhythmic contrasts and the splendid succession of memorable themes. Throughout Kim's interpretation feels remarkably invigorating providing impressive lyricism and a wide palette of colour.

Recorded under studio conditions at Hallé/St. Peter's, Ancoats the dynamic range of the release is wider than my ideal resulting in considerable volume adjustment. Nevertheless the clarity is good and the balance between piano and orchestra is generally satisfying too.

These are high quality performances from Sunwook Kim and the Hallé which I will play often, however the competition in the record catalogue is fierce. My principal recommendation remains the evergreen account from eminent American pianist [Leon Fleisher](#) with the Cleveland Orchestra under Georg Szell. Recorded four years apart in 1958 (No. 1) and 1962 (No. 2) Fleisher was in his early- to mid-thirties when he made these stereo recordings whose majestic performances have great drama and poetic slow movements. Fleisher is well paced in the faster movements with a wide range of dynamic and significant power. I have no major reservations over the sound in either of these recordings produced at Severance Hall, Cleveland, Ohio although they are not perfect in terms of clarity and balance. Commendable too is [Maurizio Pollini](#) accompanied by the world class Staatskapelle Dresden under Christian Thielemann on Deutsche Grammophon. The Italian soloist's masterful Brahms performances are full of intensity and character. Recorded live in 2011 and 2013 in the marvellous acoustic of the Semperoper, Dresden the sound engineers excel, providing a reasonably close recording with excellent detail and balance.

Released on the Hallé's own label the two piano concertos are accommodated on a pair of discs which has ample space left to have accommodated other Brahms works. How splendid to have included the *Alto Rhapsody*, a favourite work, and either the *Schicksalslied*, *Gesang der Parzen* or *Nänie*, all opportunities to hear the outstanding Hallé choir sing Brahms.

Michael Cookson

Jean FRANÇAIX (1912-1997)

Clarinet Concerto [24:53]

Tema con Variazioni [8:39]

Trio for Clarinet, Viola and Piano [23:21]

Dmitri Ashkenazy (clarinet)

Yvonne Long (piano)

Ada Meinich (viola), Bernd Glemser (piano)

Cincinnati Philharmonia Orchestra/Christoph-Matthias Mueller

rec. Sept. 1992, Aula Cher, Sarnen, Obwalden, Switzerland (Tema con Variazioni);

19 April 2016, Alte Kirche Fautenbach, Achern, Germany (Trio); 28 May 1995, Corbett Auditorium,

College of Music, Cincinnati (Concerto)

PALADINO MUSIC PMR0074 [55:58]

This is a feel-good CD on two counts. The music is so captivatingly charming and the playing is so unutterably good.

Was there ever a composer in the last century more gifted in writing for woodwind instruments than Jean Françaix? Everything he wrote, whether solo, chamber or orchestral, seemed so ideally suited to woodwind that it is little wonder that his music remains a cornerstone of the woodwind repertory 20 years after his death – a period during which we would normally expect any composer's light to dim in the public consciousness until revived by a centenary or two. Here we have a CD devoted to works for clarinet in various settings (and, in this recording, in various countries and various centuries) and played by one of the great clarinet players of our time.

All the hallmarks of the Françaix style are here in full measure. Jaunty, cheerfully uplifting movements, often carrying his trademark tempo indications (*allegro*, *presto*, *scherzando*) are juxtaposed with sentimental slow movements which keep emotion at arm's length and simply relish the propensity of these instruments to create long, mellifluous lines. Indeed, so distinctive and personal is the Françaix idiom that his music runs the risk of all sounding a bit the same. But his innate ear for colour and delicate effect - one notices the delicate, glittering piano introduction to the last movement of the Trio - ensures that actually it always sounds fresh and original. Humour is never far from the surface, and the almost comedic changes of speed, musical direction and texture keep the listeners on their toes every bit as much as the players.

Son of such an eminent musical father, it is little wonder that Dmitri Ashkenazy impresses most by the musicality of his playing rather than his virtuosity. But the technical challenges of this music are so deftly handled that he is clearly an extraordinarily gifted player. Evoking the jazz characteristics of the clarinet, particularly in the Trio, Françaix sends the instrument up and down its register, and Ashkenazy runs across its huge range with an athleticism which is as astonishing as it is effective.

The four-movement Concerto dates from 1968 and sets off on a jaunty journey in which the clarinet is never allowed any real respite. Rapid passages, chattering ideas and extraordinary leaps across the range are all masterfully controlled by Ashkenazy, who still conveys a wonderfully impish sense of humour, not least in the marvellously throw-away ending to the first movement's first subject and the extraordinarily mischievous cadenza passages. There is a glorious moment in the finale [5:29] where the clarinet passes up so high that its note is imperceptibly handed on to the piccolo.

English readers of a certain vintage will remember with great affection Jack Brymer, who declared the Concerto unplayable until such time as "the instrument has developed further or the human hand has changed". Even the composer knew it stretched players beyond their limits, writing of the work that "it is

like an acoustical aerobatics show” (which explains the delightful CD cover picture) “with loops, spins, and quite frightening dives for the soloist”. If this frightens Ashkenazy, he is clearly a man who likes to live dangerously – he does not so much take risks here as positively revel in them.

Whatever and whoever the Cincinnati Philharmonic Orchestra might have been in 1995 (and do I seem to recall a wave of strikes hitting US orchestras back then – or was that yesterday?), they certainly pulled together to support Ashkenazy with some gloriously nimble playing, superbly directed by Christoph-Mathias Mueller.

The charming set of Variations, twisting itself around in complex but always light-hearted rhythmic contortions – not unlike a trio of circus clowns - and lurching with complete insouciance into moments of rich sentimentality (which Ashkenazy suggests in his booklet notes, show an introspective character) finds Ashkenazy perfectly paired with pianist Yvonne Long.

Both the Concerto and the Variations were recorded more than 20 years ago, but this CD includes a much more recent recording of the Trio, made in April 2016. The Trio has few commercial recordings, which is surprising given its arresting musical qualities. This is, by any standards, an outstanding performance in which Ashkenazy is joined by pianist Bernd Glesmer and violist Ada Meinich, both of whom clearly share his affection for the work’s jazz-infused acrobatics.

Marc Rochester

Michael KIMBER (b.1945)

Music for Viola – Volume 5

Ten short pieces [20:42]

Six Étude-Caprices [9:11]

Sonata for solo viola [10:50]

Dark woods for viola and marimba [13:42]

Lullaby for Maksymilian [1:36]

Marcin Murawski (viola)

Alicja Guściora (viola)

Martyna Kowzan (viola)

Eugeniusz Dąbrowski (viola)

Pawel Michałowski (viola)

Pawel Rys (marimba)

World premiere recordings

rec. Aula Nova, I.J. Paderewski Academy of Music, Poznań, Poland, November 2014/February 2015

ACTE PREALABLE AP0346 [56:14]

This is a disc that proves two things at least, firstly that Michael Kimber writes extremely tuneful music and secondly that while the viola is still underrated as an instrument it produces the most gorgeous sounds. That said Michael Kimber is not one of those contemporary composers who believe that music must always sound challenging because it is written now and as a result several of these compositions could have been written a century ago. Some critics would no doubt look down their noses at music composed contemporaneously that sounded as if it had been composed in the early years of the twentieth century or before though I don't understand why that should be. I recently reviewed another disc of music written this century that sounded as if it had been written in the last and in it I said it was the kind of music I would compose if I could. Fortunately tunes are back in fashion and not looked down upon in that emperor's new clothes are the best way that some in the music establishment pursued at one time 70 years ago.

In a way these mostly solo viola works by Michael Kimber are perhaps best appreciated by fellow violists who understand the secrets that can be unlocked by this singular instrument as well as its complexities but for those of us who cannot know those aspects there is much to enjoy. First up are Kimber's *Ten Short Pieces* which sound for all the world like something from the 18th century and which, as all the pieces do, remind us just how richly melodious the viola can sound with its mellow tone that those who often find the violin too 'screechy' for their tastes will find just right for them. These particular short pieces are the most complex to play out of the works on the disc and as such are played on it by teacher Marcin Murawski who is Professor at the same Academy of Music in Poznań, named after the great composer President of Poland Ignacy Jan Paderewski, which he also attended. In fact he explains in the booklet notes these pieces are meant to test the ability to play in the high fifth position and which he has extended in places to push himself even more.

The responsibility for playing the rest of the works on the disc Murawski delegated to four of his students who rise to the challenge admirably. Two of them, Alicja Guściora and Martyna Kowzan, are tasked with playing Kimber's *Six Étude-Caprices* which test ability as well as allowing for expression that these two young players, manage to find in spades. Surely listening to these even the harshest critic of the viola's status in the instrument spectrum cannot fail to be won over by its inherent charms.

Michael Kimber's *Sonata for solo viola* is the most overtly contemporary work on the disc and which is imbued with a depth of poignancy which makes it extremely attractive and which the young Ukrainian

Eugeniusz Dąbrowski brings out superbly. The final work here is for the unusual combination of viola and marimba though it's one that works incredibly well with the lush tones of the marimba woven around the contrastingly 'sharper' sound of the viola. This is another composition that is firmly rooted in the 21st century rather than harking back to an earlier age. Played by Pawel Michałowski, another Ukrainian violist (from the same town as Dąbrowski) and Belarusian marimba player Pawel Rys it is highly enjoyable. It is apparently common with all the discs in the series of works by Kimber that there is a bonus track and this time it falls to Rys to play the tiny minute and a half *Lullaby for Maksymilian* written for Marcin Murawski's nephew's birthday, a charming take on *Hush-a-bye Baby*.

It is a disc that the players will forever remember fondly as forming part of their musical education and will be readily received by viola lovers everywhere and hopefully will help convert more who are yet to discover the obvious charms and richly rewarding sounds of this unjustly regarded Cinderella instrument.

Steve Arloff

Anton ARENSKY (1861-1906)

Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor, op. 32 (1894) [32:43]

Piano Trio No. 2 in F minor, op. 73 (1905) [33:14]

Wilkomirski Trio (Łukasz Trepczyński (piano), Celina Kotz (violin), Maciej Kułakowski (cello))

rec. April-June 2016, Concert Hall, Krysztof Penderecki European Centre for Music, Luśławice, Poland

DUX 1320 [65:58]

This is the first recording for this trio of well-credentialed young Polish musicians. They have adopted, with the Wilkomirski family's permission, the name of a very long-lived Polish trio. The choice of the two Arensky trios for their debut is not an obvious one, and for that, we should be grateful. I reviewed another debut recording of a young Polish trio - the Daroch - on Dux last year. They opted for very standard repertoire indeed - the Dvorak Dumky and the Ravel, as well as the Debussy - and I remarked then that I wondered who would purchase it. The Wilkomirskis have given themselves a much better chance of success here, I feel.

The D minor trio is, far and away, Arensky's most popular work, and with good reason. It overflows with a torrent of glorious melodies and infectious rhythms. Part way through the first movement of this recording, I thought I would be writing a rather critical review, as there were some awkward moments and a rather lumpen approach that I wasn't finding at all satisfactory. However, things improved markedly in the Scherzo, and by the end, I was enjoying the performance greatly. What a shame about the first seven minutes or so. There are, of course, numerous outstanding performances of this trio, Trio Wanderer being perhaps the best.

The F minor trio is the ugly duckling of the pair, not blessed with those melodies that make the D minor one of the most beautiful in the trio catalogue. The Second is, however, still a fine work; it's just that you need to give it time to reveal its qualities. It finishes with a theme and variations movement, which is always a good thing with Arensky. There aren't many recordings of it, and all of them feature this same coupling. The best by some distance is that of the Beaux Arts Trio, but it is no longer available separately, only in a very large boxset. This has rather left the field wide open, as none of the other options are particularly good. I refer you to my comments on these in my [Trio Survey](#), but suffice to say that I feel that the Wilkomirskis give a reading that makes a very good case for this under-appreciated work. Despite being a minute slower than the Leopold Trio (Hyperion), the Wilkomirskis imbue the work with greater drama and intensity.

Of the performers, I am very impressed by the cellist particularly, whose tone is quite glorious. The booklet notes, in Polish and English, are beefed out by a biography of the Wilkomirski family, which is in fact more extensive than the section on Arensky and the trios. The sound is all one could ask for.

Given the paucity of options for the second trio, this new release definitely has its attractions.

David Barker

Classics on Marimba

Mario CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO (1895 – 1968)

Toccata, Op. 83 [11:48]

Notturmo sull'acqua, Op. 82 a [8:05]

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685 – 1750)

Partita No. 2 for solo violin in D minor, BWV 1004:

Chaconne [13:48]

Sonata No. 2 for solo violin in A minor, BWV 1003:

Andante [5:11]

Frédéric CHOPIN (1810 – 1849)

Barcarolle in F-sharp major, Op. 60 [8:21]

Franz WAXMAN (1906 – 1967)

Carmen-Fantasie [10:46]

Randall THOMPSON (1899 – 1984)

“Choose Something Like a Star” from *Frostiana* [6:35]

Fumito Nunoya (marimba)

Hiroya Honda (marimba)

Momoko Shano (piano)

rec. September 2015, Inagi i-plaza Hall, Tokyo; March 2016, Biwako Hall, Shiga, Japan

OEHMS CLASSICS OC1859 [64:42]

“The marimba is a percussion instrument consisting of a set of wooden bars struck with mallets to produce musical tones. Resonators suspended underneath the bars amplify their sound. The bars of a chromatic marimba are arranged like the keys of a piano, with the groups of 2 and 3 accidentals raised vertically, overlapping the natural bars to aid the performer both visually and physically” (Wikipedia).

The instrument was developed in Central America by African slaves and it is first mentioned in historic sources in 1680. In 1821 it was proclaimed the national instrument of Guatemala. In classical music it has been in use since the mid-1900s. The pioneer was Darius Milhaud with his Concerto for Marimba and Vibraphone in 1947. Among other important composers for the instrument can be mentioned Janáček, Orff, Henze, Boulez and Steve Reich.

My interest in the instrument is derived from my many visits to Helsinki, where one can frequently see and hear marimbists on street corners in the city centre.

None of the compositions on the present disc were conceived for marimba and admittedly they sound very different from the originals. Fumito Nunoya describes in the liner notes how he got the idea for the album. He heard on the car radio a cellist playing Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Toccata* and was so fascinated by what he heard that he had to stop the car to listen. The composition was written in 1935 for the famous cellist Gregor Piatigorsky but Nunoya heard it played by Nancy Green and was fascinated by the way she 'sings' on the cello. The marimba is not a 'singing' instrument. When you hit a note the sound decays quickly and if you want to sustain the sound you have to strike several times to fill the space between the notes. This made it necessary to adjust the music slightly to reach the goal, a singing marimba.

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco is probably best known for his many compositions for guitar, triggered when he met Segovia in 1932. He also wrote a cello concerto for Piatigorsky. In 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II he left fascist-ruled Italy and settled in the US, where, with the help of Jascha Heifetz, he got a contract with MGM as composer of film music. The *Toccata* is a tripartite work: Introduction, Aria and Finale played without a break. It opens quite mysteriously, slowly but then follows the Introduction

proper, fast, rhythmical and quite virtuosic and here the motifs are introduced, motifs that are repeated and varied throughout the composition. The Aria is slow and dreamy, while the Finale is again fast, rhythmic and virtuosic.

Notturmo sull'acqua, composed in the same year, 1935, has a subtitle, 'on the banks of the river Arno at Gonfolina, one evening in June'. It is an atmospheric piece; one can feel the water shimmering in the rays of the setting sun.

These two pieces are accompanied by piano. In the two Bach pieces the marimba is all on its own. The famous D minor Chaconne is of course a challenge for every violinist and transcribing it for marimba is a bold adventure. But Mr Nunoya has all the technical accomplishment needed and the almost 14-minute-long work is a *tour de force*. The *Andante* from the A minor sonata is poetic and calm and here the marimba sings again. In Chopin's *Barcarolle*, one of his last major works, a second marimba is introduced and we get a fuller sound and wider dynamics.

Like Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Franz Waxman was one of many Europeans who left for the United States when the fascist powers grew stronger, and like his Italian colleague he came to Hollywood and became one of the foremost film composers, winning two Academy Awards. He also worked for MGM for some years. The *Carmen Fantasie* for violin and orchestra was composed in 1946 for Jascha Heifetz and is probably his best known work. It has been recorded numerous times, not only in the original form with orchestra, but also with piano and transcribed for viola and cello, but this is probably the first time for marimba and piano. It is a splendid showpiece also with the timid marimba in the foreground and should become a favourite piece to demonstrate the instrument's capacity with a first-class player.

The final piece, *Choose Something Like a Star*, is the seventh movement from *Frostiana: Seven Country Songs*, composed in 1959 for mixed chorus and piano by Randall Thompson, the American composer best known for his choral writing. Thompson was a great melodist and this music rounds off this interesting disc very charmingly.

If you are a marimba fan, this disc should be obligatory listening; if you are not, you might well become one after hearing it.

Göran Forsling

Consolation

Natalya Pasichnyk (piano)

Jakom Koranyi (cello)

Luthando Quave (baritone)

Emil Jonason (clarinet)

Christian Svarvar (violin)

Olga Pasichnyk (soprano)

rec. August/September 2015, Studio 2, Sveriges Radio, Stockholm, Sweden.

BIS BIS-2222 SACD [76:18]

The BIS label does a neat turn in unusual quasi-folk or classical National music programmes, and this one takes us to Ukraine, another Eastern European country that has taken more of its fair share of occupation of one kind or another. Pianist Natalya Pasichnyk's note at the back of the booklet sums up the title for this album: "music that was possibly the only consolation available for those who composed it during different periods in the tragic history of Ukraine."

This is indeed a 'beautiful, melancholy and emotive world.' The first three piano solos are in minor-key or rhapsodic modes in the romantic styles of 'Ukraine's Chopin', Viktor Kosenko, and Mykola Lysenko, the latter regarded as a founding figure and forceful influence in Ukrainian national music up to and beyond his death in 1912. Several of the composers here were his students. Lysenko's *Sorrow* for cello and piano and the sorrowful expressiveness of the song *Meni odnakovo* further establish the Ukrainian view on the oppression of Tsarist Russia.

There is of course plenty of folk-music influence throughout the programme, and the rhythmic dance and klezmer feel of Myroslav Skoryk's *Carpathian Rhapsody* lightens the mood while keeping faith with the 'soul' of the whole. This is also true of the Bartók-like virtuoso *Allegro* for violin and piano by Yuliy Mejtus. Skoryk's *Melody*, a vocalise for soprano, violin and piano is another piece that is striking for the emotive effectiveness of its simplicity.

Levko Revutsky's *Preludes* have a Rachmaninov/Scriabin vibe, while the first movement of Borys Lyatoshynsky's *Shevchenko Suite* is rather special, a 'song without words' descriptive of vast landscapes and poignant memories. Founder of the Lviv conducting school, Mykola Kolessa is represented by three *Kolomyjky* or Carpathian Dances, folk dances of the ancient Hutsul people from the Carpathian mountains which, heard blind, no doubt most would ascribe to Bartók. Vasyl Barvinsky, the founder of the Lviv compositional school, had his works burnt by the KGB and he spent his later years reconstructing as much as he could. The *Prelude Op. 1 No. 2* is a real miniature gem.

Valentyn Sylvestrov is the most internationally known of the composers here. His music was banned by the Soviets in the 1970s. His ethereal *Bagatelle* is described as "representative of his rebellion late in life against the pompous inhumanity and heroism of Soviet aesthetics." The programme is closed with Arkady Filippenko's spectacular *Toccata*.

This recording opens an entire world of music that will be unfamiliar to even the most seasoned of collectors, but the world revealed is indeed one of rare beauty that deserves wider recognition. There are of course a variety of influences colouring many of these pieces but they all share a unique link in terms of their character – indicative both of suffering and resilience in an existence few of us can comprehend. Exemplary performances and the usual very high BIS recording standards complete the picture.

Dominy Clements

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Moonkyung Lee (violin)

London Symphony Orchestra/Miran Vaupotić

rec. The Angel Studios, London, June 2016

Booklet notes in English

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Sérénade mélancolique in B-flat minor, Op 26 [10:32]

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Jennifer Koh (violin)

Odense Symphony Orchestra/Alexander Vedernikov

rec. Carl Nielsen Hall of the Odense Concert House, September 2015

Booklet notes in English

CEDILLE CDR90000166 [74:20]

In the popularity stakes, Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto seems to be doing very well lately. Certainly from the performance side, anyway. The other night I happened to catch it on TV as the musical centrepiece of Radu Mihaileanu's 2010 film *The Concert* – watered-down, of course. It could also be said that the work is a calling-card for violinists from Korea, not least Kyung Wha Chung in earlier days, and now we have two new recordings from Moonkyung Lee and Jennifer Koh. While Koh is American-born, her parents are Korean.

There seems as well to be a gender preference for this suite of Tchaikovsky violin works, with Julia Fischer's 2006 Pentatone release ([review](#) ~ [review](#)) also in the mix. Fischer and Koh play all the same pieces, though Fischer plays the original Op. 42 with piano accompaniment, while Koh plays the Glazunov-orchestrated version. Lee omits the Op. 34 *Valse-Scherzo* and provides only the *Méditation* from Op. 42, also in the Glazunov orchestration. Koh's disc is sub-titled 'Complete Works for Violin and Orchestra', which rather presumes Tchaikovsky would have embraced Glazunov's ministrations!

Comparisons are indeed odious when it comes to releases of this kind, such are the number of variables. The unassailable truth is that Koh offers more content, but from there things get much more subjective, so I will try to provide some guidance. While neither soloist lacks for technique, I found Koh's playing rather cool and detached. This was apparent from the opening *Sérénade mélancolique*, which did not bode well for the concerto. Lee sounds more involved, passionate even, in what she's doing, while keeping a firm grip on the musical elements. Perhaps it's her stronger vibrato that conveys this impression, but I found her concerto the more engrossing experience. I listened to Koh more with objective appreciation.

Both, to an extent, are hampered by their musical and technical support. Koh is caught rather closely and drily, with the orchestra receding into a voluminous space behind her. This only exacerbates the sense of detachment. Lee sounds better integrated with the orchestra, but in a studio environment where the limited acoustic is 'helped', or so it appears, by lashings of artificial reverberation. Neither orchestral accompaniment ever rises above the serviceable, and whether that lies at the feet of Messrs Vaupotić and Vedernikov, or the exigencies of modern recording practice, I can only guess – but either way I can't help feeling both soloists were a little short-changed. While Lee has the London Symphony Orchestra, as does

Kyung Wha Chung with André Previn, the close-miked sound and session photos suggest this is the LSO-lite, in session mode, frisson-free.

When it comes to Julia Fischer for this programme, I'm afraid things get so much better. Some may find exaggeration in her rubato and moments of indifference from her accompanists, but it's a performance that breathes a Tchaikovskian spirit so collectively absent from the current pair. Sonically also, Fischer is beautifully integrated into the musical canvas. With the concerto itself, and at last count 66 recordings listed on the Musicweb International Masterwork Index, something extra special is needed, and it's not to be had here. Perhaps Moonkyung Lee with a full and fully-engaged LSO – but that's only hypothesising. Among the company mentioned in this review, it has to be Chung, foremost with the LSO and Previn, otherwise with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra under Charles Dutoit.

Tchaikovsky twice played well, yes, but competitive in such a crowded field? Not really.

Des Hutchinson

John IRELAND (1879-1962)

A Downland Suite (arr. Ireland and Geoffrey Bush) (1932) [18:17]

Orchestral Poem in A minor (1904) [13:30]

Concertino Pastorale (1939) [19:52]

Two Symphonic Studies (arr. Geoffrey Bush) (1937) [11:38]

City of London Sinfonia/Richard Hickox

rec. October/November 1994, St Jude on the Hill, Hampstead, London

CHANDOS CHAN10912X [63:50]

John Ireland wrote his *Downland Suite* in 1932 for the National Brass Band Championship of Great Britain at a time when original pieces were regularly commissioned for major contests. It is dedicated to Kenneth Wright and the winning band at the work's debut was the Fodens Motor Works Band conducted by Fred Mortimer. The suite, pastoral in nature, was inspired by the Sussex countryside and in its arrangement for string orchestra it is a gem of the British string music repertoire. The two central movements - a tuneful *Minuet* and the absolutely magical *Elegy* - are the suite's highlights. This is English romantic music at its very best.

The second work for string orchestra featured on the disc, the *Concertino Pastorale*, is a somewhat more serious work when compared to the *Downland Suite*. The music is more dark and melancholy, especially in the central *Thredony* which probably reflects the more pessimistic mood of England in 1939. The final *Toccata* is somewhat more optimistic with its bustling rhythms and forward momentum.

The *Orchestral Poem* is romantic piece lasting for just over 13 minutes. It was written when the composer was aged 24. The CD booklet refers to the influence of Brahms and Stanford and that is a fair summary. It's a well-constructed, atmospheric piece that demonstrates a clear mastery of the orchestra. Although no massive claims can be made for it I was very pleased to have come across it for the first time.

The *Two Symphonic Studies*, arranged by Geoffrey Bush, are taken from the music written for the film *The Overlanders*. The opening *Fugue* is dramatic and exciting. The *Toccata* that follows is a menacing romp of a movement that indeed sounds like film music.

Richard Hickox and the City of London Sinfonia play brilliantly throughout and the sound is a typical Chandos production offering warmth, depth and a sense of spectacle.

John Whitmore

Previous review here: [Rob Barnett](#)

Richard STRAUSS (1864-1949)

Le Bourgeois Gentlehomme Suite [36:17]

Ariadne auf Naxos Symphony-Suite (arr. D. Wilson Ochoa) [39:17];

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra/ JoAnn Falletta

rec. 3 November 2014 (*Le Bourgeois Gentlehomme*); 20 March 2016 (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Kleinhans Music Hall, Buffalo

NAXOS 8.573460 [75:34]

The incidental music to Molière's famous play *Le Bourgeois Gentlehomme* is a marvellous score dating from 1912. The music is inspired by Jean-Baptiste Lully and Strauss draws on some of that composer's melodies and blends them with his own. Strauss has cleverly captured the spirit of the 17th century in his score. This is Strauss at his charming intimate best, the baroque (neo-classical) style being a million miles away from some of his huge symphonic poems that some listeners find overblown. *Le Bourgeois Gentlehomme* is to Strauss what *Pulcinella* is to Stravinsky. There is a striking similarity. Both scores were inspired by composers from days gone by and both suites contain attractive, chamber-like sonorities and good tunes. This new performance from Buffalo is a great credit to the orchestra and its front desk soloists, all of whom play spectacularly well. The woodwind playing is especially good but mention must be made of the delicious passages for the solo strings - those melting cello solos are gorgeous. The solo violin is expertly played by William Preucil, the leader of the Cleveland Orchestra. The recording is perfectly balanced, combining clarity with a soft edged glow. This really is a top recommendation for the suite.

The Symphony-Suite from *Ariadne auf Naxos* by D. Wilson Ochoa was commissioned by Giancarlo Guerrero and the Nashville Symphony Orchestra in 2010 and it is here receiving its first recording. *Ariadne auf Naxos* uses an orchestra of chamber-like proportions and it makes an unusual, sensible coupling on this CD. This expertly crafted arrangement consists of seven separate sections - the opera's highlights - played as a seamless whole. The original Strauss orchestration remains intact with the solo singers being replaced by orchestral instruments. What luxurious music this is. Maybe at 39 minutes it is over long and the relative lack of fast, loud passages does begin to make the suite too much of a good thing after a time. Then again, can one really become bored with such beauty, intimacy and romanticism? The solo violin part is sensitively played here by Dennis Kim. The performance by JoAnn Falletta and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, again beautifully recorded, really hits the spot and does full justice to the special melodic sound-world of Strauss. The words opulent and passionate readily spring to mind. The highlight is undoubtedly the aria *Es gibt ein Reich*, providing the listener with 6 minutes of sheer joy. Maybe there's a slight (and I mean slight) lack of string tone compared to the likes of the Vienna Philharmonic in full flight but the Buffalo strings still sound very beautiful in their own way, as does the recording as a whole.

To summarize, this is a fine addition to the Strauss discography. Maybe hearing this *Ariadne auf Naxos* suite will make some listeners return to the original just to find out what a lovely opera this is.

John Whitmore

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)

Zaide

Sophie Bevan, Zaide

Allan Clayton, Gomatz

Jacques Imbrailo, Allazim

Stuart Jackson, Sultan Soliman

Darren Jeffery, Osmin

The Orchestra of Classical Opera/Page

rec. St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, London, March 2016

SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD473 CD Stereo [77:54]

Classical Opera's complete Mozart cycle continues by mining another rare gem in the young composer's output. Mozart began *Zaide* in 1779 while living in Salzburg, intending to use it to pitch his talents to the Emperor in Vienna who had just created a new German opera company. In the end, circumstances intervened so that he never finished it, and he set it aside for good when he realised there was no prospect of a performance. Interestingly, however, the plot bears a lot of similarities to the opera that Mozart eventually did compose for Josef II's German Opera: *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. Only fifteen musical numbers exist, and it doesn't tend to be successful in stage realisations, not least because the ending is left hanging, so a recording appears to be the best way to experience it, and this one is a good addition to Classical Opera's series. As with other barely known pieces like [Die Schuldigkeit des Ersten Gebots](#) or [Apollo et Hyacinthus](#), Ian Page shows that he believes in this music by giving it a performance of rare distinction, bringing out all the fizz of the music and repeatedly revealing that this is a composer on his way to greatness, not just filling time in the provinces.

With one exception, the young cast are on very good form. Allan Clayton is fantastic as Gomatz, the slave who falls for the Sultan's concubine, Zaide. His first aria, *Rase Shicksal*, zips along, full of passion and vigour, and he is just as convincing a lover in the ensembles, bringing lots of colour to his part. Stuart Jackson, the other tenor, gives him competition, however, as a hugely exciting Sultan Soliman, the wrathful villain who goes after the fleeing lovers. He throws himself into his Melodrama and arias in a most appealing way, and it helps that Mozart gives him such exciting music to accompany his railings. His second aria is much more restrained than the first, and Jackson makes the most of the character, making him seem more sympathetic than many would. Bass Darren Jeffery gets just one aria as the Sultan's servant Osmin, but he's much more benevolent than his namesake in *Entführung*, and Jeffery sings the aria with the right balance of humour and lyricism.

The only major weakness is Sophie Bevan, who just doesn't sound herself in the title role. The voice is still sweet and attractive, but she sounds stretched through the higher-lying sections of the famous *Ruhe Sanft*, with a touch of paleness in those passages. Unfortunately, that trait reappears in her later arias – she sounds really very uncomfortable in some of the quick passages – and in the ensembles too, and it's only in the (slightly lower-lying) trio *O selige Wonne* that she sounds fully comfortable with the part. Oddly, the same is true for the normally reliable Jacques Imbrailo, who sounds a little off colour in his first aria. He's the harem guard who dreams of a better life and so plans escape with the lovers, but his usually warm and lyrical baritone here sounds a little gruff and uncomfortable though, thankfully, he seems back to his normal self by the time of his last aria.

If ultimately this is a mixed bag for the singers, then unarguably the most consistently rewarding musical stars are the orchestra, who live up to the extremely high standards they've set in previous recordings. There is energy, fizz and juice aplenty, as well as rewarding lyricism in many of the slower moments, and the whole is captured beautifully in the excellent acoustic of St Augustine's, Kilburn. Mozart didn't get as

far as writing an overture, and Ian Page's choice of an Entr'Acte from Mozart's music for *Thamos, King of Egypt*, is inspired, sounding strident, urgent and vigorous, with a real sit-up-and-take-notice quality to it that kicks the whole thing off brilliantly.

Simon Thompson

Previous review: [Göran Forsling](#)