

Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Four Preludes and Serious Songs Op. 121 (1896 arr. orch. Detlev Glanert, 2004-5) [24:28]

Detlev GLANERT (b. 1960)

Weites land (2016) [11:25]

Johannes BRAHMS

Clarinet Sonata in F minor Op. 120 No 1 (1894 arr. Luciano Berio, 1986) [22:45]

Michael Nagy (baritone)

Kari Kriikku (clarinet)

Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra/Olari Elts

rec. November 2014 (*Songs*), June 2016 (*Weites Land*, sonata), Helsinki Music Centre

ONDINE ODE1263-2 [59:12]

The presiding spirit of this disc is Brahms, but Brahms as seen by two more recent composers. First we have an orchestral transcription of Brahms's *Four Serious Songs* by Detlev Glanert. Glanert was born in Hamburg, as was Brahms, became a pupil of Hans Werner Henze and has concentrated, as only a German composer can, on writing operas. So far there have been ten of these, and his *Caligula* has been widely admired and also recorded. His idiom, like that of his mentor, starts from late romanticism and moves in the direction of expressionism, but the expressionism of Zemlinsky and Korngold rather than that of Schoenberg or Berg.

He has a particular enthusiasm for Brahms, of which this version of the *Four Serious Songs* is one of the fruits. The songs were one of Brahms's last compositions. The immediate occasion for them seems to have been last illness of his dear friend Clara Schumann, linked with a premonition of his own death. The texts are from the Bible, three sombre ones from the Old Testament (*Ecclesiastes* and *Ecclesiasticus*) and St Paul's well-known hymn to love from the New (*1 Corinthians*). Glanert scores the songs for a Brahms-sized orchestra though with a harp, an instrument Brahms himself never used. He added a Prelude to each song and a Postlude after the last one. These pieces are all about two minutes long and they start from a Brahmsian idiom, though moving forwards as I have mentioned, and they provide a frame for the songs. They are sombre, as suits the work, but introduce some rhythmic variety, variety of timbre and some augmented harmony (the expressionist effect), but none too much. They are not in the least like a piece of concrete brutalism set next to a gracious old Palladian building. I like them very much.

There follows *Weites Land* (distant country), an orchestral work written "with Brahms's fourth symphony firmly in view" as the sleeve note says. I think it must be a curtain raiser for that work and it uses the opening motif of the symphony as its basis. It is an impressive single movement. Again it is written for a Brahms-sized orchestra, without the harp this time but with an extra trumpet.

Finally, we have Luciano Berio's version of Brahms's first clarinet sonata. Brahms had been thinking of giving up composition when he came across the clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, who inspired him to compose the two clarinet sonatas, the clarinet trio and the sublime clarinet quintet. To the great regret of all clarinetists and many Brahmsians he did not write a clarinet concerto. This transcription by Berio of the first sonata is not even covertly a concerto, either, as the clarinet writing is of a kind appropriate to a chamber work. The first movement is sombre but the other three more light-hearted. Berio's orchestration of the piano part is discreet – like Glanert's of the songs it uses a Brahms-size orchestra – and the only addition I noted was a short orchestral introduction; in the original the clarinet starts with the piano straightaway. Although I am normally enthusiastic about transcriptions I don't find this as successful as that of the songs by Glanert as the inflation of the piano part sits oddly with the solo clarinet line. However, I am clearly in a minority here as many people like it and there are several previous recordings.

The performances all seem to me exemplary. Michael Nagy sings well; he has a rich

fruity baritone and he really projects the words. The final song in its orchestral version sounds like a riposte to Alberich's renunciation of love which sets the tragedy of Wagner's *Ring* in motion. Karl Kriikku is a kind of modern Mühlfeld, having inspired a number of concertos and other works for his instrument from Scandinavian composers. He knows his way round the Brahms, a core work for the instrument. Olari Elts and the Helsinki Philharmonic sound thoroughly inside the idiom, or combination of idioms. The recording needs slightly careful balancing; I thought at first that Kriikku's clarinet needed a bit more help from the engineers, but with care I found I got a very natural sound suggestive of a medium-sized concert hall. One might have expected a German label to mount this programme; all credit to Ondine for taking it on. The sleeve note is in English and Finnish; the texts of the songs, however, are in German and English only.

There are of course many recordings of Brahms's *Four Serious Songs* in their original piano version. There is another recording of the Glanert version by Teddy Tahu Rhodes (ABC 4764363), with other orchestral songs and excerpts from the Brahms *German Requiem*. There have also been other orchestrations: my shelves turned up a fine version with Robert Holl, in an orchestration by Erich Leinsdorf (Ottavo OTR C98402). Of the other recordings of the Berio version of the clarinet sonata I suppose the front runner is the one in which Chailly conducts a whole programme of Berio transcriptions (Decca 4762830) with Fausto Ghiazza on the clarinet for the sonata. This is the only version so far of *Weites Land*. I hope to hear more of Glanert.

Stephen Barber

Benjamin BRITTEN (1913-1976)

[First Suite for Cello](#), Op. 72 (1964) [26:42]

Second Suite for Cello, Op. 80 (1967) [23:01]

Third Suite for Cello, Op. 87 (1971) [23:43]

Noémi Boutin (cello)

rec. April 2016, Arsenal, Metz

NOMADMUSIC NMM039 [74:05]

In the early 1960s, Britten forged several Soviet friendships. His first encounter with Mstislav Rostropovich was in September 1960, backstage after a concert at the Royal Festival Hall in London. The cellist had just given the London premiere of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto, and the Soviet composer introduced Britten to the performer. The rest is history. As the friendship developed, Rostropovich's charismatic personality was to work its charms, and Britten's creative instincts responded accordingly. In the next decade came a Cello Sonata, a Cello Symphony and, finally, three Cello Suites.

The omens appear favourable from the outset with the rich, burnished double-stops which herald in the *Canto Primo* of the First Suite. I admire the way in which Boutin contrasts the characters of the subsequent *Cantos*. The Fuga is invested with a skittish quality. In the *Lamento*, she paints a desolate and dark landscape, and this doleful quality spills over into the *Canto Secondo*. The pizzicatos of the *Serenata* are vibrant and truly resonate, and the *Marcia* is delivered with a wealth of tonal lustre. In the *Canto Terzo* the darker recesses are explored, and a sense of mystery informs the *Bordone*. Finally, Boutin meets the virtuosic demands of the *Moto perpetuo* with deft skill and accomplishment.

Boutin's *Declamato*, which opens the Second Suite, is a heartfelt narration, spontaneously improvised, with the *Scherzo* suitably trenchant. She is particularly successful in the *Andante* which follows. The haunting, ghostly melody with pizzicato accompaniment is built up from nothing to striking potency and then back to silence. The *Ciaccona* carries the most emotional weight of the movements, and she contours the ebb and flow of its undulating narrative with a true sense of style and formidable communicative power.

The Third Suite is an intensely personal reading. Boutin traverses the changing moods with profound insight and instinctive understanding. The Suite consists of ten thematically connected movements, resembling a set of variations. Russian folksongs and Eastern Orthodox liturgy permeate the score. These are glimpsed at throughout and presented in their full finery at the end. In Boutin's hands the music is allowed to unfold naturally. There is a profound resignation in the opening *Lento*, and the *Marcia* which follows is crisply articulated. In the *Canto* and *Barcarola* there is a deep-seated anguish. The *Fantastico* is mercurial and the *Moto perpetuo* capricious. The *Passacaglia* is fervidly passionate, leading into an intensely declaimed *Mournful Song*.

The Suites have been well-served on CD. Recordings I have particularly enjoyed have been by Tim Hugh, Truls Mørk, Jamie Walton and Pieter Wispelwey. Sadly, Rostropovich only recorded the first two Suites. Noémi Boutin's latest version is equally impressive, and one that I will most certainly be returning to. Her rich cello tone has been warmly captured in this vivid and immediate recording.

Stephen Greenbank

Philip GLASS (b. 1937)

"Opening" from Glassworks (1981) [7:45]

Études (1991-2012)

No. 9 [2:32]

No. 2 [6:00]

No. 6 [4:26]

No. 5 [8:55]

No. 14 [4:37]

No. 2* [6:02]

No. 13 [3:28]

No. 15 [7:40]

No. 3 [4:01]

No. 18 [6:02]

No. 20 [11:24]

"Opening" from Glassworks (1981)* [6:39]

Víkingur Ólafsson (piano)

Siggi String Quartet*

rec. October 2016, Harpa Concert House, Reykjavik

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 479 6918 [79:39]

Víkingur Ólafsson has worked closely with Philip Glass in the past, and this very nicely produced selection of the *Études* has impeccable musicianship and an air of quiet authenticity stamped all over it. His booklet notes open with an anecdote that sums up Glass's unstoppable energy, the core of his attitude to the *Études* being that, "on the surface they seem to be filled with repetitions, but the more one plays and thinks about them, the more their narratives seem to travel along in a spiral. We never hear the same music twice as long as time continues to move forward, even if the chord progressions look the same on the page." Like that old saying about never being able to step into the same river twice, this is the kind of background thought that can help us as listeners, though Ólafsson also warns about "the very real danger of saying too much." It doesn't pay to over-think this music. Perhaps there are secrets to be discovered, but the secrets to be revealed are probably as much in ourselves as they are in the pieces themselves.

Dynamic contrast and phrasing is a vital aspect of these pieces, and Ólafsson's touch is impeccable in this regard. The dramatic moments, such as the middle section of *No. 2* are hard-hit and weighty, given the kind of orchestral sonority that sits alongside quieter, more chamber-music sections to turn this and the following *No. 6* into kinds of mini *concerti grossi*. Talking of mini *concerti grossi*, what we also have here are a couple of reworkings of *No. 2* and the second of the bookend tracks of *Opening* from *Glassworks* by Christian Badzura, whose name also pops up as Executive Producer of this recording. His addition of sustained string quartet notes in *Etude No. 2* fill-in and enhance Glass's progressions, ramping up their cinematic appeal. The arrangement with *Opening* gives more independence to the strings, which develop their own ostinato patterns and add expressive elegance to the melodic line. This music works well in these kinds of arrangements, though we can argue as to whether this is an enhancement or just additional baggage until the bar closes and beyond.

If you want Glass's complete *Études* then Maki Namekawa on Orange Mountain Records is pretty much unbeatable in terms of performance, though issues with regard to the recording quality also have to be noted ([review](#)). As a well chosen selection and a sublimely well performed and produced album this Deutsche Grammophon release has much to recommend it. With perfectly chosen tempi, Víkingur Ólafsson's playing combines late-romantic expressiveness, without too much rubato messing around, with the beating-heart-of-the-big-city energy which is exactly what this music needs. This kind of beautifully slick production won't change the anti-Glass lobby's mind in any way, but for fans this will be a juicy treat in which to wallow for a long time to come.

Dominy Clements

Leopold KOŽELUCH (1747-1818)
Complete Piano Sonatas - Volume 7

Piano Sonata No. 25 in D major, Op. 26, No. 1, P. XII: 26 (1788) [15:12]

Piano Sonata No. 26 in A Minor, Op. 26, No. 2, P. XII: 27 (1788) [20:17]

Piano Sonata No. 27 in E flat Major, Op. 26, No. 3, P. XII: 28 (1788) [15:59]

Piano Sonata No. 28 in B flat Major, Op. 30, No. 1, P. XII: 29 (1789) [16:55]

Kemp English (fortepiano)

rec. August 2012, Mobbs Early Keyboard Collection, Golden Bay, New Zealand

GRAND PIANO GP731 [68:22]

Kemp English's wonderful cycle of piano sonatas by Leopold Koželuch has reached mid-point (he aims to record 50 works, written between 1773 and 1810) (reviews of [Volume 3](#), [Volume 4](#), [Volume 5](#), [Volume 6](#)). Enthusiasts for the keyboard music of high classicism should try one of these recordings, whose richness and invention may well make you reach for another.

As a Vienna-based piano virtuoso in the 1780s, Koželuch was a colleague and rival to Mozart. The two pianists were apparently neither enemies nor friends. Mozart was pleased when mutual friends told him that Koželuch refused an invitation to fill his old post in Salzburg, on account of the Archbishop's prior ill-treatment of Mozart. Later, Mozart had music-printing entrepreneur Koželuch engrave his Prussian String Quartets.

In his informative notes, English makes the case that Koželuch should not be regarded merely as a forgotten contemporary of Mozart, but was an important influence on the piano compositions of Beethoven and Schubert.

On this disc are four works from 1788 and 1789, the three sonatas of Op. 26 and the first of three from Op. 30. They are marked by clarity, melodic invention, and sophisticated display. It is no wonder Mozart regarded him as a serious competitor.

Sonata No. 25 in D major opens with a rather galumphing tune, which quickly turns into florid and sophisticated music for the hunt. A gentle *Adagio* provides a calmer, more yearning mood, followed by a jaunty rondo.

There are only two movements in Sonata No. 26 in A minor. The minor key signals music that is not tragic, but certainly melancholy. An *allegro* sounds Mozartean, with an underlying current of unease. The second movement is a lengthy set of variations on a slow and steady theme. Eight rather routine variations follow in what is the only disappointing movement on the disc.

My favorite among these works is the Sonata No. 27 in E flat. The opening *Allegro* starts with a plain but emphatic theme, quickly turning into something much more energetic, and at times dazzling. A *Larghetto alla Siciliano* provides unexpected emotional depth. The final rondo is marked *Allegro con fuoco*, and continues the brilliance of the work to its end.

Sonata No. 28 in B flat opens with a suave and knowing *Allegro*, continues with a more serious and probing slow movement, and ends with a happy rondo. This is the only work for which there is an alternative recording, by Diane Andersen on Talent. Andersen plays well, but English is more nuanced. Andersen offers a zippier pace for the final *Allegretto*.

English plays a modern fortepiano by Paul Downie, after an Anton Walter instrument from around 1795. English coaxes an astonishing variety of timbres from this piano over the course of four sonatas. If you have multiple Haydn and Mozart sonata recordings, you will probably enjoy these fine pieces as well. English plays them with obvious pleasure and respect.

Richard Kraus

Gustav MAHLER (1860-1911)

[Symphony No. 3](#) (1893/96) [101.28]

Gerhild Romberger (contralto)

Augsburger Domsingknaben,

Frauenchor des Bayerischen Rundfunks

Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks/Bernard Haitink

rec. live, 15/17 June 2016 Philharmonie, Munich

German texts included. No English translations.

BR KLASSIK 900149 [35.49 + 65.39]

I approached this new recording of Mahler's Third with some caution. On the one hand Bernard Haitink is a conductor, who I've admired greatly for decades; he was one of the conductors through whom I first got to know the symphonies of Mahler – and Bruckner – getting on for fifty years ago. On the other hand I remember a performance of this very symphony that he gave at the 2016 BBC Proms with the LSO. That concert, on 29 July 2016, was given just a few weeks after the performances in Munich, from which this recording is taken. My Seen and Heard colleague, Colin Clarke, was impressed ([review](#)) but I'm afraid that, watching the subsequent TV broadcast, I was disappointed, despite the excellence of the LSO's playing. Indeed, the vast incident-packed first movement seemed strangely earth-bound and I gave up after that, even though I still retain the programme, unwatched, on my video recorder. Perhaps my impression was coloured by the sight of Haitink, who often appeared to be beating time dutifully rather than energising his players.

I think your reaction to Haitink's account of the huge first movement will depend on how you view the piece. There's a lot going for this performance. For a start the playing of the BRSO is superb in every department and the excellent recording does their playing justice: we can hear lots of vivid detail and the weight and heft of the performance really registers. But therein may lie a problem. To my ears this is a performance that focuses on weight and heft, starting with the darkly dramatic opening. The potent sound of the phalanx of horns really grabs the listener's attention and in the opening few minutes – and at other times in the movement – the music sounds properly primeval: this is 'big stuff' and you really feel the forces of nature stirring. The important trombone solos (the first occurring at 7:40) are properly imposing. That's all fine, but elsewhere, despite the admirably deft playing, I feel that the more delicate stretches, such as the passage beginning at 6:13, are not as light and fantastic as I'd like to hear them. Much later on in the movement (from 20:40) there's a section for solo horn and violin over pizzicato strings. The playing is expert but I don't hear the element of fantasy that there ought to be in the music.

It's not just these delicate, lyrical sections that seem a bit earthbound. From around 13:00 to 15:00 Mahler has a confident, big march; it's a really colourful parade. In this performance the march is purposeful and strong, but should there not also be a feeling of hedonism? This one of several passages that lack the swagger and panache – the element of risk-taking – that [Leonard Bernstein](#) so memorably provides in his 1961 NYPO recording and which James Levine emulates in his 1975 account with the Chicago Symphony (BMG/RCA). These conductors give you a sense of living on the edge. Haitink, for all the virtues of his performance – and there are many – doesn't let go in the same way. Though timings don't always tell the whole story, I think it's instructive that Haitink takes 35:49 over the first movement whereas Bernstein clocks in at 33:16 and Levine at 32:47. [Klaus Tennstedt](#), in a memorably intense live reading takes 32:15. A 2006 live Haitink recording with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO Resound CSOR 901 701) is interpretatively pretty consistent with the new BRSO reading; there the first movement plays for 35:10. We don't seem to have reviewed that performance; it is rather consistent with the Bavarian rendition. On both occasions Haitink had a world class orchestra at his disposal, and the CSO Resound recording has even more body and impact than the excellent B R Klassik recording.

Though Haitink has never been the most flamboyant Mahler conductor, it's interesting to

find that, earlier in his career, he did take a rather different and more dynamic view of this movement. During his long period at the helm of the Concertgebouw Orchestra he would often play Mahler symphonies at their annual Christmas Day concerts. Philips issued a box of live recordings from these concerts as a near-complete symphony cycle, which the late [Tony Duggan rightly praised](#). Sadly that box is long deleted, but it would be wonderful to have it reissued, for it contains some fine performances. One such is the Third in a 1983 performance. There the first movement lasts for 32:38 and it has the thrust and dynamism that I find lacking in this 2016 traversal.

Though I have reservations about the first movement I'm much happier with the remainder of the performance. The second movement is very nicely shaped by Haitink – and ideally paced. The deftness and lightness of the orchestral playing is admirable. The third movement is also a success. Here the opening music is sharply pointed and articulated and the BRSO bring out the tang in the music very well. Haitink prepares the way for the first posthorn episode superbly and the posthorn section itself (from 5:55) is very well done. It's good that the player, Martin Angerer, is named for in each of these passages he plays very well indeed, his sound nicely distanced. (In Haitink's Chicago recording the posthorn is even more magically distanced.) Haitink creates the mood of nostalgia really well in these posthorn episodes. Either side of these sections the conductor and engineers work in alliance to bring out many details of Mahler's piquant scoring, and the movement is brought to a strong conclusion.

Haitink gets the dark mystery of the fourth movement just right. He has a very good soloist in Gerhild Romberger, though Michelle DeYoung, who sings for him in Chicago, seems marginally more expressive. The orchestral material is demandingly exposed and the BRSO plays with exemplary control and with an equally fine appreciation of the ambience that Mahler is seeking to create. There are good choral contributions in the buoyant fifth movement – the boys have real bite in their tone.

It's in a movement like the great concluding adagio that the patience and ability to take a long view, which one associates with Bernard Haitink, really pays dividends. Just as in his Chicago recording, his view of the movement is served by a wonderful orchestra. Here the BRSO strings are just superb, their playing sensitive and refined. Later in the movement, as it builds towards the epic conclusion, it's the brass, who take centre stage and the BRSO brass section is just as distinguished as the string choir had been earlier. Haitink leads a very eloquent, unforced performance of the movement, one which is characterised above all by dignity. He and his players build the music incrementally until the last few minutes, which are glowing and noble.

Whilst I can't quite overcome my reservations about Haitink's way with the first movement, either here or in the Chicago recording I readily acknowledge that on its own terms it's an interpretation of the movement that commands respect, especially since this BRSO performance is technically very fine. The remainder of the symphony is marvellously done. If you already have the CSO Resound recording I think you can rest content; the differences between the two are not significant. This B R Klassik release, expertly engineered and wonderfully played, offers a distinguished reading of Mahler's Third. Haitink's performance may not shake the rafters but it is clearly the product of decades of accumulated Mahlerian wisdom.

John Quinn

Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de MONDONVILLE (1711-1772)

Isbé (Paris 1742)

Katherine Watson – *Isbé*

Reinoud Van Mechelen – *Coridon*

Thomas Dolié – *Adamas*

Chantal Santon-Jeffery – *La Volupté*, *Charite*

Alain Buet – *Iphis*, 3rd *Hamadryade*

Blandine Folio Peres – *La Mode*, *Céphise*

Rachel Redmond – *L'Amour*, *Clymène*, *une Bergère*, *une Nymphé*

Artavazd Sargsyan – *Tircis*, 1st *Hamadryade*, *un Dieus des bois*

Márton Komáromi – 2nd *Hamadryade*

Purcell Choir, Orfeo Orchestra, György Vashegyi

rec. Müpa Budapest, Bartók Béla National Concert Hall, Hungary, March 2016

GLOSSA GCD924001 [3 CDs: 61:25 + 48:55 + 63:04]

Of all the composers of the French baroque, Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville seems to have suffered most from the vagaries of time. Born in Narbonne in southwest France, he was a gifted violinist and composer, who made his way through the ranks to become, on the death of Pancrace Royer, the musical director of the Concert Spirituel, enjoying the patronage of Madame de Pompadour, the official chief mistress of Louis XV. Mondonville was an important figure in the development of the instrumental sonata and one of the first to pair the violin with the keyboard alone. Yet these days he is largely forgotten, with only his Grande Motets, sonatas and a couple of operas represented in the catalogues, examples of all I am happy to have in my collection. He also warrants just a cursory mention in the books I own on the music of the period. All this neglect, despite him being regarded in his day, as second only to the great Rameau, has always baffled me, as there is some very fine music of his out there, especially Christophe Rousset's excellent recording of his opera, *Les Fêtes de Pathos*, on L'Oiseau-Lyre (455 084-2).

Mondonville composed at least nine operas. *Isbé* was his first, premiered in Paris on the 10th April 1742, and was, to all intensive circumstances, a flop. When one listens to this recording, the idea of this work being a flop seems hard to believe. In reality it is a Pastorale Héroïque in five acts and a prologue. It deals with the story of *Adamas*, The Chief Druid, and his love for the title character *Isbé*, and *Isbé's* other suitor *Coridon*: a classic love triangle. It has all the characteristics of French opera of the time. A Prologue, whilst dealing with the subject of love, does not really relate to the action of the opera. The rest of the work is stuffed with great tunes and dance music with arias of great merit, some of which tug at your heartstrings. The booklet points to the failure of the premiere possibly down to the inept performers on the day leading to bad reviews, something that would not have happened if the performance was as good as this recording. Another possibility is the political nature of opera in France; often rival theatres would hire hecklers to disrupt performances at a different venue. This was especially so during the so called "Querelle des Bouffons", when people argued about the way music should develop in France: the primacy of French or Italian musical ideas. Mondonville was a supporter of the French side. The premiere of his opera *Titon et l'Aurore* is said to have had the audience swelled by a number of army officers in the pay of those who sought to proffer French ideals.

The Prologue to *Isbé* and opera proper offer the listener great enjoyment. There is everything you want from an opera: drama, excitement, pathos and musical excellence. In the Prologue, both Chantal Santon-Jeffery as *La Volupté* and Rachel Redmond as *L'Amour* stand out. In the opera, the main protagonists are all in fine form: Katherine Watson as *Isbé*, Reinoud Van Mechelen as *Coridon* and Thomas Dolié as *Adamas*. If truth be told, there is no weak link in the singing of this production. All the soloists and chorus are in excellent voice. The period orchestral playing of the Orfeo Orchestra under the direction of György Vashegyi is wonderful, producing some really dramatic effects. Indeed, it is hard to believe that this is not a French band. It is as if they have uprooted Paris and placed it next to the Danube. This is a first-rate performance, one which would

have secured Mondonville's *Isbé's* place in history as one of the finest French operas of the 1740s. A recording highly recommendable to anyone who enjoys eighteenth century opera, but especially to those who, like me, love the splendour of the French baroque and its music, one that would fit well in anyone's collection of this diverse genre.

Stuart Sillitoe

Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G major, Op. 44 (Original Version) [42:46]

Concert Fantasia in G major, Op. 56 [29:35]

Eldar Nebolsin (piano)

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra/Michael Stern

rec. Michael Fowler Centre, Wellington, New Zealand, 10-12 November 2014

Booklet notes in English

NAXOS 8.573462 [72:20]

Here we have the original version of the Tchaikovsky Second Piano Concerto with all the disfiguring cuts fully restored. The opening *Allegro brillante* is probably the work's least convincing movement but the pianism of Eldar Nebolsin is full of fire and virtuosity and it's very hard not to be captivated and brought under his spell. This is romantic piano playing par excellence with a cracking central cadenza. Throughout this admittedly melodious and sumptuous opening movement the soloist really goes for it with a no holds barred approach and he is admirably supported by the orchestra and Michael Stern. The *Andante non troppo* includes superb contributions from the solo cellist and violinist of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. They should really have been named in the CD booklet. This is a lovely slow movement, full of rapture, poetry and a hint of melancholy and Nebolsin shows that there is more to his playing than flashy virtuosity. The partnership between soloist and orchestra is at its peak here. The concluding *Allegro con fuoco* sets off at one heck of a pace and the level of pianism is of the highest order. Yet again he is matched by the orchestral players who are clearly on their toes and loving every minute of it. What a fantastically thrilling way to bring the concerto to an end. Maybe as a work it falls short of the composer's famous First Piano Concerto but this new recording will attract many admirers.

The *Concert Fantasia in G* has is another of the composer's neglected pieces and I find that to be quite astonishing. It's tuneful, energetic and full of Tchaikovsky's characteristic plush orchestration. The piano writing is more exposed than in the Second Concerto and Nebolsin gives another fine performance. The filigree elegance of his finger work at around six minutes into the first movement *Quasi rondo* is something to behold. The solo string contribution in the second movement is excellent as is much of the orchestral playing. The concluding *Molto vivace* is lively and committed but it has to be admitted that this isn't Tchaikovsky at his most inspired, despite some interesting moments of repose followed by passages of extreme virtuosity. It's still good fun to wallow in the tunes though.

The slightly two dimensional recording is easy to reproduce, nicely balanced and satisfying to listen to. It suits the romantic music very well. Woodwind detail is a joy in both works and the strings are full toned. Nebolsin is in tremendous form and the orchestral playing in the concerto is exemplary. In the *Concert Fantasia* there are a few passing moments that suggest that the music wasn't rehearsed as fully as the concerto but there are no serious clangers, just moments where the ensemble isn't perfect. The concerto is up there as a primary choice for the work on CD and the *Fantasia* should be considered to be a generous and laudable 29 minute bonus. This is another winner from Naxos offering quality music making and great value for money.

John Whitmore

Ballet Hispánico

CARMEN.maquia (2012) [68:45]

Music: Georges Bizet (1838-1875) and Pablo de Sarasate (1844-1908)

Choreography: Gustavo Ramírez Sansano

Don José - Christopher Bloom

Carmen - Kimberly van Woesik

Michaela - Melissa Fernandez

Escamillo - Mario Ismael Espinoza

Club Havana (2000) [24:45]

Music: Israel López (1918-2008), Rubén Gonzales (1919-2003), A.K. Salim (b. 1922), Perez Prado (1916-1989) and Francisco Repilado (1907-2003)

Choreography: Pedro Ruiz

Dancers: Martina Calcagno, Shelby Colona, Cassandra Kruz, Mario Ismael Espinoza, Melissa Fernandez, Mark Gieringer, Christopher Hernandez, Johan Rivera Mendez, Eila Valls, Lyvan Verdecia and company

Orchestras: Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, Prague Philharmonic Orchestra, New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, Apollo Symphony Orchestra and Arte Ensemble [conductors not specified]

rec. Mesa Arts Center, Arizona, 16 September 2016

Filmed in High Definition

Mastered from an HD source

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C MAJOR Blu-ray 738904 [104 mins]

Almost five decades after its first release, I suspect that many MusicWeb readers will still recall the 1968 Melodiya LP *Carmen ballet*. On that disc the strings and percussion of the Bolshoi Theatre Orchestra, directed by Gennady Rozhdestvensky, presented the world premiere recording of Rodion Shchedrin's ballet *Carmen suite*. Featuring a dramatic cover image of charismatic ballerina Maya Plisetskaya - the composer's wife - posed against a blood-red background, and boasting demonstration-quality sound that seemed to jump right out of the speakers, that fondly-recalled LP had a place in virtually all my friends' collections at that time.

Premiered at the Bolshoi in Moscow in 1967, *Carmen suite*, as choreographed by Alberto Alonso ramped up the story's erotic aspects. That was enough to outrage the opinionated and notoriously prudish Soviet culture minister Yekaterina Furtseva ("We cannot allow them to make a whore out of Carmen, the heroine of the Spanish people"). She initially tried to suppress the ballet completely (the hilarious story of the standoff between minister Furtseva and *prima ballerina assoluta* Plisetskaya may be found at Wikipedia) but, with the proposed ban quickly overruled by her more temperate superiors, *Carmen suite* - with the assistance of that best-selling LP - soon became the most popular balletic version of Bizet's familiar opera.

It is, however, by no means the only one. *Carmen's* dramatic story and its colourful score offer well-nigh irresistible opportunities to choreographers, (re)arrangers of the music and dancers keen to exploit flashy opportunities to make their mark. It wasn't too long ago, after all, that I reviewed Carlos Acosta's 2015 production, choreographed for the Royal Ballet, when it made its appearance on DVD ([review](#)).

CARMEN.maquia, choreographed by Spanish-born Gustavo Ramírez Sansano and premiered in 2012, is certainly one of the more interesting recent versions of the story. Slightly longer than Acosta's - and markedly more so than Alonso/Shchedrin's - it still pares the story to its essentials. Whereas *Carmen suite* had clearly been designed by her husband as a showcase for Madame Plisetskaya, *CARMEN.maquia* gives just as much emphasis to Don José as to the eponymous seductress. Indeed, it's the emotionally traumatised and physically wrecked lover who actually bookends the piece, thanks to yet another instance of the currently fashionable directorial conceit of opening a production

and closing it with identical tableaux. Only two other roles make any significant individual impression: toreador Escamillo emotes and strides lustily about the stage like nobody's business, while Micaela simpers meekly in the manner of someone who knows that she's never going - and quite frankly doesn't deserve - to get her man. It's worth pointing out, however, that Ballet Hispánico has an excellent corps de ballet, several of whom, playing for gentle laughs with some inventive stage business, make a positive impression.

The quality of the dancing is, I'm pleased to say, uniformly high. The two principals, Kimberly van Woesik and Christopher Bloom, have been well cast, are technically highly proficient and interact well together. While the choreography of the piece is angular and often abrupt rather than flowing and overtly beautiful, this isn't one of those modern productions that will frighten the horses - and it certainly doesn't seem to faze the enthusiastic Arizona audience. The set is kept very simple and the decor is entirely black and white, so that at times only the dancers' skin-toned faces give away the fact that we're not watching a recording in high-quality monochrome. The occasional use of some famous images on cloths hung above the stage references Pablo Picasso: perhaps I missed the point there, but I'm not sure that they necessarily added anything extra to the production.

The disc is filled out with another Ballet Hispánico production, *Club Havana*. There's no discernible story to this one. It's simply a sequence of short numbers - a son, a mambo, a cha-cha-cha, a bolero, a rumba and a conga - such as might have been played and danced to in a Havana nightclub in 1950s pre-Castro Cuba. Some are performed by a small number of dancers, others by the whole company. Just as in *CARMEN.maquia*, the music is not performed live but on a pre-recorded soundtrack.

I have to say that *Club Havana* proved something of a disappointment. Quite inappropriately, it kept reminding me of nothing so much as the Latin American round in the old BBC TV *Come dancing* contests hosted by the late Peter West. While the individual dance numbers are undoubtedly well choreographed, they emerge, at least to my own mind, as staged exhibitions of technique rather than something that can be described as ballet. As a result, I was quite glad when, in a shower of confetti falling from the rafters, it was over in less than half an hour. *Club Havana* is probably something of a crowd pleaser when seen live - the enthusiastic Arizonans give it a standing ovation - but I can't help feeling that it's an essentially meretricious and ultimately rather vacuous creation.

Even if *Club Havana* wasn't to my taste, the way that both it and *CARMEN.maquia* have been filmed for this release is first class. Top quality sound is married to superb Blu-ray picture definition, with no hint of the juddering that sometimes affects quick lateral tracking shots in that format. A skilled director has clearly supervised the filming, using mainly long- and medium-shots that keep the dancers' full bodies on display so that we don't lose any of their all-important footwork. Where close-ups are employed, it's generally when the on-stage action has come to a temporary halt. As a result, we don't miss any important details of the dancing.

One deficiency with this release is, however, worth noting. In the past few months I have reviewed two discs in the C Major *Lincoln Center at the movies* series (the other was the New York City Ballet's *George Balanchine's The nutcracker* - [review](#)). While the actual performances were very enjoyable, they were both marketed with totally inadequate accompanying booklets. When a greater amount of space is given over to listing the backstage executives of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, Ballet Hispánico and the Mesa Arts Center, Arizona, than to providing any useful information about the actual productions on the disc, the choreographers or the dancers, something isn't right.

Nonetheless, this release deserves a hearty welcome.

Admittedly, *CARMEN.maquia* wouldn't have been to the taste of Comrade Furtseva - who, incidentally, retired in disgrace within a few years of her clash with Maya Plisetskaya. The rest of us, however, will relish the opportunity to watch an innovative

and enjoyable new danced version of *Carmen* that certainly deserves to become better and more widely known.

Rob Maynard

Bologna 1666

Kammerorchester Basel/Julia Schröder (violin)

rec. February 2016, Martinskirche, Müllheim

Track-listing at close of review

DEUTSCHE HARMONIA MUNDI 88985 315592 [66:35]

Well, I'd heard of Torelli, but the others were new names to me, and I doubt I will be alone in that.

Bologna in the seventeenth century had a rich musical culture, and in 1666, the founding of the Accademia Filamonica in 1666 – still in existence today – cemented what became known as the "Bologna School", a distinctive style of composition and singing that set it apart from other centres such as Rome and Venice. Despite this, many of the works written in the city have been lost or dispersed throughout Europe. The founding fathers of this school were Giovanni Colonna and Giacomo Perti, whose works were predominantly vocal in nature. They are represented in this fascinating collection by sinfonias from masses and oratorios.

Presto Classical lists no alternative performances of any of these, though there are no claims of world premiere recordings anywhere in the booklet. My personal favourites are the two concertos by Alberti, an almost exact contemporary of Bach, which have a Vivaldian feel to them. His set of concerti was published in 1713, two years after Vivaldi's *L'Estro Armonico*, and was acclaimed around Europe. The notes propose an unusually high level of technical brilliance in the solo part of the Laurenti concerto, though as a non-violinist, it doesn't strike me as any more challenging than numerous Vivaldi works. Not surprisingly, the sinfonias of Colonna and Perti are simpler than the concerted works.

This is my first encounter with the Basel Chamber Orchestra, numbering fourteen for this recording, and I am very impressed by their vibrant playing but also by the fact that they avoid the extremes in tempos and dynamics that some period instrument ensembles display. The booklet notes do well to supply such a good amount of information on such little-known composers. The sound is excellent indeed.

While there may not be any lost masterpieces here, those interested in the outer reaches of the Baroque era will find much to interest them.

David Barker

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Giovanni Paolo COLONNA (1637-1695)

La caduta di Gerusalemme sotto l'imperio di Sidecia ultimo re d'Israelle – Sinfonia [2:41]

Messa a 5 – Sinfonia Avanti la messa [2:24]

Giuseppe TORELLI (1658-1709)

Violin Concerto, A.2.3.10 [8:02]

Giuseppe Matteo ALBERTI (1685-1751)

Concerti per chiesa e per camera, op. 1: Concerto VII [7:39]; Concerto IX [7:33]

Giacomo Antonio PERTI (1661-1756)

San Galgano Giudotti – Sinfonia (attr. Torelli) [2:10]

Gesù al sepolcro – Sinfonia [2:45]

La lingua profetica del taumaturgo di Paolo – Sinfonia Avanti l'Oratorio (attr. Torelli) [2:36]

Lorenzo Gaetano ZAVATERI (1690-1764)

Concerti per chiesa e per camera, op. 1 - Concerto XII 'A tempest di mare' [13:06]

Girolamo Nicolò LAURENTI (1678-1751)

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Anonymous

Violin Concerto in honorem Divi Petronii [7:03]

Ouverturer å Kongl. Theatern

Jacopo FORONI (1825 – 1858)

1. Uvertyr Nr. 3 A-dur (Overture No. 3 in A major [8:20]

Franz BERWALD (1796 – 1868)

2. *Modehandlerskan* / The Dressmaker [6:00]

Ludwig NORMAN (1831 – 1885)

3. *Festouverture* / Festive Overture, Op. 60 [9:00]

Andreas RANDEL (1806 – 1864)

4. *Värmlänningarna* / The People from Värmland [10:04]

August SÖDERMAN (1832 – 1876)

5. *Hin ondes lärospån* / The Devil's First Tentative Efforts [9:25]

Franz BERWALD

6. *Jag går i kloster* / I Enter a Monastery [8:50]

Joseph Martin KRAUS (1756 – 1792)

7. Proserpine [9:30]

St. Petersburg Hermitage Orchestra/Mats Liljefors (tr. 1-2)

Kung. Hovkapellet/Stig Westerberg (tr. 3-7)

rec. Concert Hall of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, Stockholm, August 1995 (1-2);

Danderyd Grammar School, Sweden, June 1985 (3-4); Studio 2 of the Swedish

Broadcasting Corporation, Stockholm, November 1985 (5-7).

STERLING CDS1009-2 [61:10]

In November 1782 the Royal Opera House at Gustav Adolf Square in Stockholm was inaugurated. It was commonly known as King Gustav III's theatre and it was in this house that the King was murdered less than ten years later at a masked ball. This occurrence later became the subject of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*. For 110 years, until it was pulled down in 1892 to make way for the present opera house, this theatre was the venue not only for operas but also for the official music life of Sweden. The Royal Orchestra was, during that period, the only professional orchestra in the country. All the composers represented on this disc had positions with the orchestra, most of them as conductors, Berwald and Randel as violinists.

Jacopo Foroni was Italian and arrived in Stockholm as conductor of an Italian opera company. He immediately became very popular and within months was elected court conductor and revitalised the activities in the house, introducing Verdi, establishing Mozart, and giving symphony concerts of which Beethoven's works were the backbone. Unfortunately he contracted cholera and died after only nine seasons at the tender age of 33. He wrote several operas, of which *Cristina, regina di Svezia* has been recorded by Sterling and will be reviewed within a couple of months. Several decades later three concert overtures by him were discovered and published in Milan, but they had all been performed in Stockholm around 1850. The third of them, recorded here, has a slow introduction, based on a Bohemian song by Friedrich Franz Hurka, but the rest of the work is a symphonic development of a Swedish dance tune, a polska. This is probably the first example of folk-music material in a Swedish symphonic movement – ironically enough by an Italian! That Foroni was a skilled composer is beyond doubt and the forthcoming review of his opera will offer further proof of his talent.

Franz Berwald, today commonly regarded as one of the most important symphonists of the 19th century, but during his lifetime he never got the esteem he deserved. He had an unrequited love of opera, the main problem being the texts. His two most important works in the genre, *Estrella de Soria* and *The Queen of Golconda*, never entered the standard repertoire. *Estrella* was seen in five performances in 1862 and was revived in 1898 and 1946 and excerpts have been recorded. *Golconda* was first played in 1968, 100 years after the composer's death. The two works represented on this disc were also failures. *I Enter a Monastery* was premiered on 2 December 1842 with Jenny Lind in the principal role and had a total of just five performances. The operetta *The Dressmaker* was played only once, on 26 March 1845 and was judged "an ideal remedy for insomnia". The overtures are well-written and Berwald's orchestration can be admired, though they hardly belong to his masterpieces. On the other hand anything that

Berwald wrote is worth knowing, and *The Dressmaker* is a first recording.

Ludvig Norman ranks as one of the most important Swedish symphonists of the 19th century. He was court conductor from 1860, when he was 30, and as such he was commissioned to write his *Festive Overture* for the 100-year jubilee of the Royal Opera in 1882. The liner notes suggest that he was inspired by Brahms' *Academic Festival Overture*, premiered a year earlier. Whether new works reached Sweden that quickly in those days is an interesting question. Anyway, it is a well-written piece of music based on two central motifs. One is a variation on the Swedish National Anthem, the other an aria from Naumann's opera *Gustaf Wasa*, regarded as the Swedish national opera, premiered in 1786 and having 177 performances at the Royal Opera.

The most popular "opera" in Stockholm has, however, been Andreas Randel's folksy comedy *Värmlänningarna* (The People from Värmland). Premiered in 1846 it was played 839 times by 1964. Randel made use of folksongs and rural dances besides a lot of music he composed himself and the potpourri overture quotes many of them, including the much-loved 'Ack Värmeland du sköna', a song of unknown origin that spread over the world in the 1950s when Stan Getz adopted the melody and played on records and in concert under the title 'Dear Old Stockholm'.

August Söderman is regarded as one of the most important Swedish composers of the romantic era. He based a lot of his songs, choral pieces and also orchestral works on folk music and in that respect Hugo Alfvén named him "The Father of Swedish Music". He wrote several operettas and incidental music for about 80 plays. *The Devil's First Tentative Efforts* from 1856 was his third operetta, based on a comedy by Scribe. In *New Magazine for Music* the reviewer wrote: 'Mr. Söderman's music is the work of a novice (he was 24 at the time) and has the usual characteristics of technical weakness, in addition to the unusual ones of a lively imagination and a not inconsiderable power of musical invention. This advantageous aspect of his work is especially evident in the splendid and rather interesting accompanied prayer which also forms the introduction to the overture'. Being a 'novice', he is uncommonly surefooted in his handling of the orchestra, but what we hear here is probably not the original version but a revision he made fifteen years later for a production at the Royal Theatre. In the meantime he had studied at the Leipzig Conservatory.

The earliest composer in this collection is German born Joseph Martin Kraus, who came to Sweden aged 21 and had his breakthrough in 1780 (or 1781) with the one-act opera *Proserpine* at a concert performance at the Ulriksdal Castle Theatre. He wrote several stage works, a number of outstanding symphonies, chamber music and sacred works. Unfortunately his life was cut short when he died of tuberculosis in 1792, aged 36. The overture has a beautiful opening with oboe solo and continues dramatically with skilful orchestration. 'The Swedish Mozart' as he has been called, was an extraordinary composer and this overture is a worthy conclusion to this interesting traversal of music connected with The Royal Opera in Stockholm from bygone days. The playing of the two orchestras is outstanding, the recording first-class and Carl-Gunnar Åhlén's liner notes, from which I have quoted extensively, exceptionally informative.

Göran Forsling