

Second Thoughts and Short Reviews: Spring 2020/#1A
By Brian Wilson, Johan van Veen and David Barker

Reviews are by Brian Wilson except where otherwise stated.

Winter 2019-20/3 is [here](#) and Winter/2 is [here](#). Earlier editions are archived [here](#).

This edition has grown over-long, so I have decided to divide it into two parts, 1A and 1B, to be published at the same time and with a common index.

With such a large edition, the links to CD/download sources sometimes become inadvertently misplaced; please check that they have taken you to the right place. And remember always to shop around: prices for the same recording or even for the same label from the same supplier can vary enormously – Naxos CDs from the same dealer can cost anything from £5.99 to £9.99.

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Those who have followed the long saga of my appraisal of **emusic.com** will know that I have been on the verge of advising against joining for some time. At £0.42 per track or less, depending on monthly subscription, it used to be quite attractive, especially as all downloads come at 320 kb/s, better than some that I could name. Some time ago, however, they lost almost all of the most important labels – only Gimell now remains of what was once an impressive roster, and anyone would have to be mad to pay the per-track price for those recordings, which usually contain many tracks and thus cost more than buying a 16- or 24-bit lossless download of this label, with booklet, from Hyperion. Emusic.com provide no booklets or notes and often don't even specify the performers, or they mis-spell them.

I'm still (just) hanging on, paying monthly for music that I could get elsewhere, for the sake of informing readers of the few worthwhile classical and jazz recordings that are left. Recently, and in this edition, that mainly means Polish music from BeArTon and British music from EM Records, the latter especially valuable.

RECOMMENDED

Francisco DE PEÑALOSA (1470-1528) *Lamentationes*

Lamentationes Jeremiae Feria V [11:34]

Pedro DE ESCOBAR (1465-after 1535)

Stabat mater dolorosa [03:58]

Francisco DE PEÑALOSA

Lamentationes Jeremiae Feria VI [11:21]

Missa L'homme armé (Gloria) [04:39]

Sancta Maria, succurre miseris [02:18]

Unica est columba mea [02:25]

Missa L'homme armé (Credo) [07:20]

Francisco GUERRERO (1528-1599)

Quae est ista [05:20]

Antes que comáis a Dios [02:17]

Francisco DE PEÑALOSA

Missa L'homme armé (Agnus Dei) [03:20]

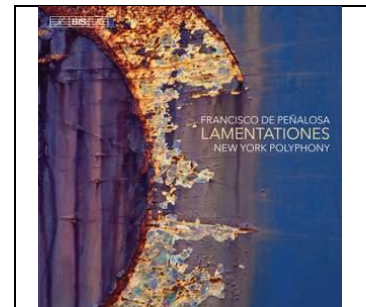
New York Polyphony

rec. 2018 Princeton Abbey, Princeton, New Jersey, USA DDD

Texts and translations included

Reviewed as a stereo 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [eclassical](#)

BIS-2407 SACD [56:41] For purchase links see review by BW in [Winter 2019-20/3](#)



The 16th century was the Golden Age of Spanish polyphony. In our time most attention has been given

to the last representatives of that era, Victoria and Guerrero. In comparison, its earliest composer, Cristóbal de Morales, is much less known. His predecessors fare even worse, and that certainly goes for Francisco de Peñalosa. As far as I know only one mass is available on disc, and Pro Cantione Antiqua recorded his complete motets. From that perspective it is a bit disappointing that this recording by New York Polyphony offers only three sections of the *Missa L'homme armé*. The main items are the two settings of the *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday respectively, which may be new to the catalogue and are substantial additions to the Lamentations repertory. In addition we get two motets by Peñalosa, and a *Stabat mater* by his contemporary Escobar, which is rather short, as it includes only the first two lines of this poem. The end of the Golden Age is represented by Guerrero. Especially interesting is one of his little-known villancicos, *Antes que comáis a Dios*. New York Polyphony treats it in such a way that the difference from the liturgical repertoire comes off clearly. In previous recordings, it has proven to be an excellent ensemble, a worthy successor to the late Hilliard Ensemble, and it shows its qualities here once again. The Lamentations are performed in a contemplative manner, and that works very well. Strongly recommended. [JV]

Diego ORTIZ (c1510-1570)

Trattado de Glosas

- Recercada terceira para violone sola [01:42]
- Recercada primera sobre el canto llano La Spagna [01:42]
- Recercada segunda sobre el canto llano La Spagna [01:26]
- Recercada terceira sobre el canto llano La Spagna [01:31]
- Recercada quinta sobre el canto llano La Spagna [01:45]
- Recercada quarta sobre el canto llano La Spagna [01:30]
- Recercada sexta sobre el canto llano La Spagna [02:16]

Luis MILAN (1500-1561)

- Fantasia XIII por el primer y segundo tono [01:37]

Diego ORTIZ

- Recercada primera sobre el madrigal O felici occhi miei (Jacques Arcadelt) [01:41]
- Recercada terceira sobre el madrigal O felici occhi miei (Jacques Arcadelt) [01:49]
- Recercada segunda sobre el madrigal O felici occhi miei (Jacques Arcadelt) [01:52]
- Recercada quarta sobre el madrigal O felici occhi miei (Jacques Arcadelt) [02:02]

Antonio DE CABEZÓN (1510-1566)

- Diferencias sobre la gallarda milanesa [01:40]

Tomás Luis DE VICTORIA (1548-1611)

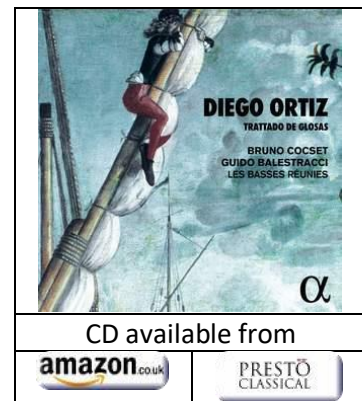
- O magnum mysterium [02:48]

Diego ORTIZ

- Recercada quarta para violone sola [01:12]
- Recercada primera sobre el cancion Doulce memoire (Pierre Sandrin) [02:40]
- Recercada segunda sobre el cancion Doulce memoire (Pierre Sandrin) [02:53]

Luis MILÁN

- Fantasia I por el primer tono [01:48]
- Recercada terceira sobre el cancion Doulce memoire (Pierre Sandrin) [02:25]
- Recercada quarta sobre el cancion Doulce memoire (Pierre Sandrin) [02:29]
- Recercada primera para violone sola [01:48]
- Recercada segunda para violone sola [01:09]
- Recercada primera sobre tenore El passamezzo antiguo [02:05]
- Recercada segunda sobre tenore El passamezzo moderno [01:13]
- Recercada terceira sobre tenore El passamezzo antiguo [01:43]
- Recercada quarta sobre tenore La folia [01:21]
- Recercada quinta sobre tenore El passamezzo antiguo [02:06]
- Recercada sexta sobre tenore La Romanesca [01:15]



Recercada settima sobre tenore La Romanesca [01:09]

Recercada ottava sobre tenore La folia [01:38]

Antonio DE CABEZÓN

Diferencias sobre El canto del Caballero [03:09]

Diego ORTIZ

Recercadas sobre tenore Aria di Ruggiero Quinta pars [01:55]

Les Basses Réunis/Bruno Cocset

rec. 2019, Chapelle des Carmes, Vannes (Morbihan), France DDD

Reviewed as a stereo 16/44 download with pdf booklet from Outhere

ALPHA 563 [59:31]

In 1553, Diego Ortiz, born in Toledo, who worked for most of his life in Italy, published his treatise *Trattado de Glosas* in 1553 in Rome, in a Spanish and an Italian edition. It is a “treatise on the ornamentation of cadences and other types of passage in the music of viols”. With this work he laid the foundation of the practice of diminution – the subdivision of melodic notes and their ornamentation. This was one of the main genres in instrumental music in the second half of the 16th and the first half of the 17th century. The second book includes a number of *recercadas* on different subjects, which are illustrations of the instructions given in the first book. Bruno Cocset and Guido Balestracci have recorded the entire second book.

This disc is interesting not only because of the music and the excellent way it is performed here, but also for the instruments that are used. These are reconstructions of instruments from the 16th century, of which no copies in their original state have been preserved. They are based on iconographical evidence as well as some instruments which in the course of time have been changed. In addition, we hear some pieces by contemporaries from Spain, among them Antonio de Cabezón, who also wrote *diferencias* on popular tunes. Obviously, this is not so much a disc for average music lovers, but rather for those who have a special interest in the viola da gamba and the practice of diminution. They should not miss this fine disc with some of the best instrumental music written in the late Renaissance. [JV]

Antonio VERACINI (1659-1733)

Sonate da Camera, Op.2 (Modena, 1694)

Sonata No.1 [7:44]

Sonata No.2 [7:35]

Sonata No.3 [8:24]

Sonata No.4 [4:03]

Sonata No.5 [6:41]

Sonata No.6 [6:43]

Sonata No.7 [5:19]

Sonata No.8 [7:49]

Sonata No.9 [8:21]

Sonata No.10 [5:59]


First complete recording

Fabrizio Longo (violin), Marc Vanscheeuwijck (violone), Domenico Cerasani (theorbo / Spanish guitar), Anna Clemente (harpsichord)

rec? DDD.

Reviewed as lossless (wav) press preview.

DYNAMIC CDS7860 [69:03]



CD available from

amazon.co.uk | ArkivMusic

PRESTO CLASSICAL

Stream from

NAXOS MUSIC LIBRARY

Recordings of the music of Antonio Veracini – not to be confused with the better-known Francesco Maria – are few and far between. So far as I am aware, Dynamic’s claim to be first in the field for the complete Op.2 is correct, though Brilliant Classics have a selection of his sonatas, Op.1 to Op.3, on

which members of El Arte Mvsico perform Op.2/1 and 8 (**95423** – [review](#)). Stuart Sillitoe wished that they would have performed one whole book of the sonatas – here it is.

The title page describes these sonatas as *per violino solo* – there’s an alternative for harpsichord or violone – but both recordings add continuo, in defence of which the Dynamic booklet mentions nephew and pupil Francesco Maria recommending the use of a firm bass. Both offer bright and lively accounts of music which, while attractive, hardly matches the achievement of Corelli. I found the Brilliant recording more enjoyable; on both the violin tone is bright, but I didn’t find the sound of the restored 1792 instrument on Dynamic as amenable as those of the two (different) violinists, playing unspecified instruments, on Brilliant, and I preferred the slightly less elaborate continuo there. Both recordings are a trifle close. The Dynamic booklet is detailed and scholarly, with a bibliography, but the shorter notes on Brilliant are all that most will need. I add my plea to Stuart Sillitoe’s – more from the Brilliant Classics team, please. There’s nothing wrong with the Dynamic, but the Brilliant has the edge as well as the price advantage.

Tomaso ALBINONI (1671-1750)

Oboe Concerto in d minor, Op.9/2 [7:03]

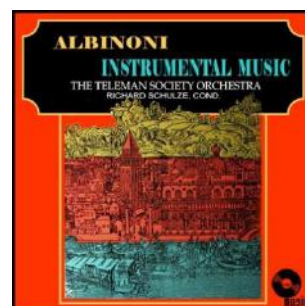
Sonata in b minor for oboe and harpsichord [6:27]

Oboe Concerto in D, Op/7/6 [10:52]

Violin Concerto in a minor, Op.5/5 [5:46]

Telemann Society Orchestra/Richard Schulze

B-SIDE MUSIC [30:10]



This recording is presumably from a Vox original – The Telemann Society Orchestra and Richard Schulze recorded for that label and the sleeve even looks like a Vox Turnabout release, though I can’t trace it. It’s cheap – £1.26 or less from [emusic.com](#) – and cheerful, and it’s bright and breezy, but not very subtle, partly owing to the over-lit and over-close recording. There’s much better to be had out there, but this is just about worth its price, especially if it encourages listeners to investigate these wonderful Albinoni works in more detail in superior recordings, such as those on Chandos.

These performers recorded Arbeau’s French Court Dances *Orchésographie* in rather rough and ready but generally enjoyable performances on a Vox Turnabout LP which must have sounded better than the Albinoni because I recall playing it frequently. There’s a more recommendable Alto CD which contains the ‘Thoinot Arbeau’ (anagram of real name Jehan Tabourot) dances, with music from Prætorius (*Terpsichore*) and others (**ALC1076**, budget price – [June 2011/1](#)).

Antonio VIVALDI (1678-1741)

Concerti per La Pietà

Concerto per due violini in D, RV513 [15:03]

Concerto per violino ‘per la Signora Chiara’ in D, RV 222 (world premiere recording of Edition of the Conservatorio di Venezia) [11:39]

Concerto per violino, organo e violoncello in C, RV554a [12:22]

Concerto per viola d’amore, liuto ed archi in d minor, RV540 [12:37]

Concerto per archi ripieno in g minor, RV152 [6:07]

Concerto per violino ‘per Anna Maria’ in E flat, RV349 (world premiere recording of Edition of the Conservatorio di Venezia) [13:25]

Europa Galante/Fabio Biondi (violin, viola d’amore) (30th Anniversary recording)

rec. Villa San Fermo, Lonigo (Italy), 20-22 May 2019. DDD

GLOSSA GCD923414 [70:55]

CD available from

amazon.co.uk | ArkivMusic

PRESTO CLASSICAL

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I can think of no better way for Europa Galante and Fabio Biondi to celebrate their thirtieth birthday than with this new recording of Vivaldi, containing two first recordings of works in this edition. Having already recorded much of the Red Priest's music for Virgin (now Erato) and Naïve, they transferred to Glossa some time ago and have produced equally first-rate recordings there. I was not alone recently in praising their recording *The 1690 Tuscan Stradivari* (**GCD923412**), and this is a worthy successor, initially available as a download only.

The Godfather - Masters of the German & Italian Baroque

Georg Philipp TELEMANN (1681-1767)

Concerto for 3 trumpets, timpani and orchestra in D (TWV 54, D3) [11:15]

Johann Georg PISENDEL (1687-1755)

Concerto movement for violin, strings and basso continuo in a minor (Jung deest) [04:18]

Concerto movement for 2 oboes, bassoon, strings and basso continuo in E flat (Jung II,1) [06:13]

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

Concerto movement for violin and orchestra in D (BWV 1045) [06:31]

Giuseppe Antonio BRESCIANELLO (c1690-1758)

Concerto for violin, bassoon, strings and basso continuo in B flat [12:07]

Antonio VIVALDI (1678-1741)

Concerto movement for violin, strings and bass continuo in B flat (RV 745) [03:52]

Concerto for strings and basso continuo in A (RV 158) [08:30]

Johann Friedrich FASCH (1688-1758)

Concerto for violin and orchestra in D (FWV L, D3) [11:21]

La Serenissima/Adrian Chandler (violin); Peter Whelan (bassoon)

Recorded 2019 in Cedars Hall, Wells Cathedral School, Wells, UK DDD

Reviewed as a stereo 24/96 download with pdf booklet from Hyperion

SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD602 [66:09] For purchase details see Recommended [review by Chris Ramsden](#) and [review by BW](#).



Networking is not a modern phenomenon. Composers and performers of the baroque period were quite busy establishing and keeping alive contacts with colleagues at home and abroad. This disc from La Serenissima is a good example of such a network. Johann Georg Pisendel, the leader of the famous Dresden court chapel, was the spider in a web of composers and performers. He knew all the composers included in the programme, probably with the exception of Brescianello. The godfather was Antonio Vivaldi: his concertos became the model of many composers across Europe, and especially in Germany. His influence is noticeable in every piece performed here. One of the nice things about this disc is that nearly all the concertos and concerto movements are little known. Even Bach's *Allegro BWV 1045* is not that often performed. Fasch is one of his contemporaries who has yet to be rediscovered, and Pisendel's small oeuvre is also anything but familiar stuff. The combination of violin and bassoon in Brescianello's concerto is particularly nice. This is a most interesting programme, which is given pretty good performances by La Serenissima. However, these are also very British performances. I am sure that top-class German ensembles, such as the Freiburger Barockorchester, would play this music differently. And Italians would play Vivaldi with more passion than is the case here. Even so, I urge anyone to investigate this disc which will give you as much pleasure as it gave me. [JV]

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)[Concerto for Two Harpsichords](#) in c minor, BWV1060 [13:22]

Concerto for Two Harpsichords in C, BWV1061 [17:43]

Concerto for Two Harpsichords in c minor, BWV1062 [14:27]

Prelude and Fugue in E-flat, BWV552 [14:12]

Olivier Fortin and Emmanuel Frankenberg (harpsichords), Ensemble Masques [Sophie Gent, Tuomo Suni (violin), Kathleen Kajioka (viola), Mélisande Corriveau (cello), Benoît Vanden Bemden (double bass)]/Olivier Fortin

rec. 2018, Temple Notre Dame de Bon Secours, Paris

ALPHA CLASSICS 572 [59:46] See [review](#) by Dominy Clements.

Apart from wondering what the lobster on the cover has to do with the music – did they serve it at Zimmermann’s coffee house where we believe these concertos to have been first performed? – this is one of the finest recordings of these concertos in their published format for two harpsichords. Alpha are here competing with another set of recordings from their own stable: on a series of six single releases, now download only, Café Zimmermann offered the Brandenburg Concertos with the multi-instrument concertos. Those recordings are now part of a 16-CD collection of the group’s recordings of Bach, CPE Bach, Vivaldi, Avison, etc., at an attractive price (Alpha 434, around £43). The Brandenburgs have been reissued on a budget-price twofer (Alpha 300, around £8.50 – [DL News 2015/9](#)).

RECOMMENDED**Johann Sebastian BACH (1685–1750)***Johannes-Passion* (St John Passion), BWV245 (1724-1749) [107:08]

Maximilian Schmitt (tenor) Evangelist

Krešimir Stražanac (bass) Jesus

Dorothee Miels (soprano) Arias

Damien Guillon (countertenor) Arias

Robin Tritschler (tenor) Arias

Peter Kooij (bass) Pilatus & Arias

Philipp Kaven (bass) Petrus

Stephan Gähler (tenor) Servus

Magdalena Podkościelna (soprano) Ancilla

Collegium Vocale Gent/Philippe Herreweghe

rec. 20–23 March 2018, deSingel, Antwerp, Belgium

Text and translations included.

Reviewed as press preview

PHI LPH031 [33:29 + 73:39] See also [review by John Quinn](#): ‘stylish and compelling’.

This is third time lucky for Philippe Herreweghe with the St John Passion, not that there was much wrong with his two earlier recordings for Harmonia Mundi (1987 and 2001). As before, he gives us the original 1724 version – Bach never seems to have settled on a ‘final’ edition, though he started to do so in 1739: the notes in the booklet, aptly entitled ‘Incomplete Complete’, explain the details.

It’s rare to listen to a new recording of such a well-known and well-loved work as the St John Passion without feeling annoyed or exasperated at some point – why did they do that? This is one of those rare examples: everything here sounds just right, without any dazzling new insights. This will be part of my Holy Week listening this year, but in the future I shall also continue to listen to Sir John Eliot Gardiner (DG **4193242** or 9-CD budget set of Bach choral music, **4697692**, and **SDG712: Recording of the Month** – [review](#)) and John Butt (Linn). Butt is special in placing the Passion within a liturgical

context (**CKR419: Recording of the Month** – [review](#) – [DL News 2013/4](#). Please note new catalogue number.)

Giuseppe TARTINI (1692-1770)

Violin Concertos

Concerto in e minor (D 56) [16:29]

Concerto in A (D 96) [15:10]

Concerto in d minor (D 45) [17:34]

Concerto in G (D deest) [15:16]

Concerto in d minor (D 44) [14:51]

Chouchane Siranossian (violin)

Venice Baroque Orchestra/Andrea Marcon

rec. 2019, Teatro Eden, Treviso, Italy DDD

Reviewed as a stereo 16/44 download with pdf booklet from Outhere

ALPHA 596 [79:20]



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One could consider Tartini the instrumental counterpart of Christoph Willibald Gluck, who aimed at a greater naturalness in opera. Tartini, whose ideal was the same in instrumental music, criticised virtuosity as a quality in itself and was strongly influenced by literature, in particular poetry. He usually read from the writings of Metastasio, Petrarch or Tasso before starting to compose and quotations from these writings are often included in his manuscripts. That is also the case with the violin concertos recorded by Chouchane Siranossian. This is an important release, especially because Tartini’s violin concertos are not that often performed and recorded. This disc even includes a concerto that was only recently identified as a work by Tartini. The performers have been guided in their interpretation by two treatises from his pen and in ornamentation and cadenzas they have tried to come as close to Tartini’s style as possible. His ideal of naturalness did not prevent Tartini from writing virtuosic solo parts, which don’t give Chouchane Siranossian any problems, as she is a brilliant performer. However, she never puts herself in the centre: there is some wonderful and subtle playing here, for instance in the cadenzas and in the slow movements; there is certainly no lack of poetry in these performances. Add to that the perfect partnership of Andrea Marcon’s Venice Baroque Orchestra, and we have here an exciting disc, and pretty much ideal interpretations of Tartini’s violin concertos. [JV]

Carl Philipp Emanuel BACH (1714-1788)

Oboe Concertos

Concerto for oboe, strings and bc in E flat (Wq 165 / H 468) [19:38]

Symphony in F (Wq 181 / H 656) [11:37]

Concerto for oboe, strings and bc in B flat (Wq 164 / H 466) [19:51]

Symphony in G (Wq 180 / H 655) [12:07]

Xenia Löffler (oboe)

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin

rec. 2018, Teldex Studio, Berlin, Germany DDD

Reviewed as a stereo 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [eclassical](#)

HARMONIA MUNDI HMM 902601 [63:11]



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The solo concertos are probably not the best-known part of CPE Bach’s oeuvre, except the cello concertos and a few for keyboard. The oboe concertos, which are not often performed and recorded date from 1765; it seems that it is not known for sure for whom Bach has written them. It could be Johann Christian Fischer, the star oboist, who was in the service of Frederick the Great at the time. CPE Bach focuses on elegant melodies, and avoids counterpoint. According to Peter Wollny, in his liner-notes, it is a challenge to the soloist to provide a

“richly nuanced performance”. Xenia Löffler, one of the most brilliant players of the 18th-century oboe of our time, succeeds with flying colours. She produces a lovely tone, and her playing is very differentiated, dynamically and in articulation. Her cadenzas are substantial, but never exaggerated. These performances are the best of those that I have heard over the years. CPE Bach’s experimental side is represented by the two symphonies, which are full of melodic and harmonic surprises and include strong dynamic contrasts. One can leave it to the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin to explore these features to the full. A superb disc. [JV]

Carl Philipp Emanuel BACH (1714-1788)

The Solo Keyboard Music - 39

[*Clavierstücke verschiedener Art, 1765 (Wq 112)*]

Concerto in C (Wq 112,1/H 190) [23:13]

Fantasia in D (Wq 112,2/H 144) [00:39]

Minuetto 1 & 2 in D (Wq 112,3/H 165) [02:37]

Solfeggio in G (Wq 112,4/H 145) [00:47]

Alla polacca in a minor (Wq 112,5/H 166) [01:35]

Sonata in d minor (Wq 112,7/H 179) [14:18]

Fantasia in B flat (Wq 112,8/H 146) [01:03]

Minuetto 1 & 2 in D (Wq 112,9/H 167) [02:47]

Solfeggio in C (Wq 112,10/H 147) [01:04]

Alla polacca in g minor (Wq 112,11/H 168) [01:46]

Sinfonia in G (Wq 112,13/H 191) [14:22]

Fantasia in F (Wq 112,15/H 148) [03:02]

Minuetto 1 & 2 in A (Wq 112,16/H 169) [02:49]

Alla polacca in D (Wq 112,17/H 170) [01:37]

Solfeggio in G (WQ 112,18/H 149) [02:16]

Fugue in g minor (Wq q112,19/H 101,5) [04:52]

Miklós Spányi (harpsichord)

rec. 2018, Christ the King Church, Rószadomb, Budapest, Hungary DDD

Reviewed as a stereo 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [eclassical](#)

BIS-2370 SACD [80:21]



Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, the main German composer of the second half of the 18th century, was particularly famous for his keyboard music. Some of it has become well-known in our time, such as the pieces he wrote for *Kenner und Liebhaber*. The recording of his complete output for solo keyboard by Miklós Spányi is an excellent case for such ‘complete recordings’, as they include so many pieces that are mostly overlooked in recital recordings. The present disc, devoted to a collection of pieces published in 1765, shows the versatility of the composer. On the one hand we have small pieces, including educational material like *Solfeggi*, but also such substantial works as a concerto and a sinfonia, both reductions of orchestral works.

Spányi has used different instruments in this series: harpsichord, clavichord, fortepiano and tangent piano. Here he turns to the harpsichord. One may have different opinions with regard to the practical solution he has chosen to do justice to the dynamic contrasts these pieces include. There can be no doubt, though, about the artistic standard of this recording. The project is nearing its completion, and when it is finished, Spányi and BIS have erected a major monument for one of the great composers of the 18th century. [JV]

Tullochgorum: Haydn - Scottish Songs

Franz Joseph HAYDN (1732-1809)

O Poortith Cauld (H XXXIa,17bis) [03:14]

Auld Rob Morris (H XXXIa,192) [03:26]

John ELOUIS (1758-1833)

Prelude in c minor [00:41]

Roxolane d'Haydn [04:00]

Franz Joseph HAYDN

The Mucking of Geordie's Byer (H XXXIa,51) [03:09]

The Siller Crown (H XXXIa,260) [02:51]

Up in the morning early (H XXXIa,28) [02:34]

Deil tak' the Wars (H XXXIa,229) [02:21]

François DE FOSSA (1775-1849)

Grand duo pour deux guitares tiré de l'oeuvre de Haydn [13:31]

Franz Joseph HAYDN

MacGregor of Ruara's Lament (H XXXIa,81bis) [03:13]

Morag (H XXXIa,143bis) [03:13]

John ELOUIS

Prelude in Gg [01:25]

Romance de Haydn [05:57]

Franz Joseph HAYDN

Lizae Baillie (H XXXIa,83) [02:17]

Oran Gaoil (H XXXIa,228) [02:07]

Tullochgorum (H XXXIa,270)/

Trad.

Puirt A Beul/Tullochgorm's Reel [03:08]

Niel GOW (1727-1807)

Niel Gow's Lament for the Death of his 2nd Wife [03:21]

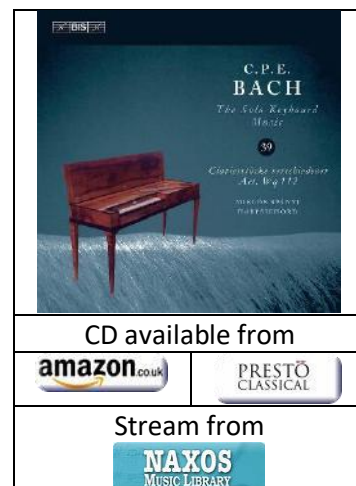
The Poker Club Band/Masako Art

Recorded 2016 at the St German Church, Seewen, Switzerland DDD

Texts and translations included

Reviewed as a stereo 24/88 download with pdf booklet from eclassical

BIS-2471 SACD [61:38]



The 18th century saw the emergence of a lively interest in music that was characteristic of a particular country or region. It was the time of the Enlightenment, and part of its philosophy embraced a wish to increase knowledge and an emphasis on the importance of learning. At the same time, 'naturalness' was greatly appreciated, and this resulted in an idealization of life in the countryside and its music. Some composers showed interest in traditional music, and Joseph Haydn, one of Europe's most famous composers, took up the challenge of writing accompaniments for keyboard, violin and cello to traditional tunes from Scotland. However, some Scottish musicians considered these arrangements too sophisticated and too far away from what Scottish music was about. This inspired the harpist Masako Art to put together a programme of Haydn's arrangement and some original Scottish songs and perform it in the manner of a 'historical crossover'.

The members of the ensemble play period instruments, among them a guitar and a harp, and James Graham, a seasoned singer of traditional music, takes care of the songs. In between we hear some instrumental pieces, all inspired by Haydn. Art's idea has resulted in a most interesting and highly entertaining programme, excellently executed by singer and instrumentalists. It will appeal not only to lovers of traditional music, but also to Haydn fans. [JV]

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) Beethoven 2020

Mark Zimmer has recently undertaken the massive task of itemising everything on the three recent bumper-size Beethoven boxes from DG, Warner and Naxos. His article has been much perused; I'd call it a best-seller, except that we don't charge for it – [How complete was my Beethoven?](#) In this and subsequent editions, I shall be looking at some of the more manageable downloads from the DG box and several other recent recordings. Before you choose one of those huge sets, you may wish to look especially at these smaller – but still substantial – offshoots of the DG: in addition to those listed here, you can find them on the [Presto website](#). They are available there in lossless flac, which is preferable to the mp3 offered by other dealers.

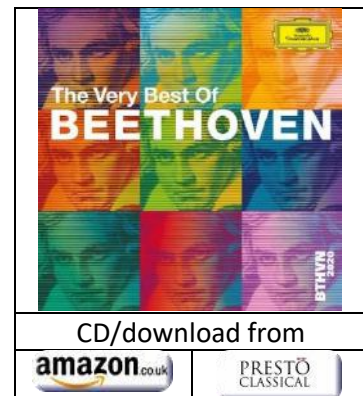
Here's a start. Read it in conjunction with my [recent article](#) detailing Beulah's celebration of Beethoven 250, Philharmonia 75 and Decca 90. I can't hope to offer a path for all to follow through the maze of recordings on offer, but one thing is sure with all this material: no longer could any music student tell his tutor that Beethoven wrote three symphonies – the Third, Fifth and Ninth, all that he had been able to hear on record.

Some short samplers first.

Beethoven 2020: The Very Best of Beethoven

Für Elise (Lang Lang); excerpts from 'Moonlight' Sonata (Perahia), 'Spring' Sonata (Garrett/Markovich), 'Appassionata' Sonata (Barenboim), 'Tempest' Sonata (Gilels), Violin Concerto (Mutter/Karajan), Piano Concerto No.4 (Kempff/Leitner), 'Eroica' Symphony (Karajan), 'Pastoral' Symphony (Bernstein), Symphony No.7 (Karajan), 'Choral' Symphony (Böhm), Symphony No.5 (complete, Carlos Kleiber), 'Emperor' Concerto (complete, Zimerman/Bernstein)

DG 4837841 [2 CDs: 150:12]; **4837844** [download, no booklet]



This is a useful 2-CD sampler at super-budget price (around £8) for the complete Beethoven collection. Whether it's equally valuable as an introduction to the composer is another matter – it's too bitty for my liking, but people hovering on the verge of committing to classical music seem to like bits, such as collections of arias but not single-CD highlights of an opera. As a download, however, for around £16 in lossless format, almost twice the price of the CDs, with no digital booklet, it's over-expensive. The excerpt from Karajan's *Eroica* serves as a reminder why, for all my reservations, his Beethoven is an essential experience. The following excerpt from Bernstein's live VPO *Pastoral* ends abruptly at the point where the third movement should segue seamlessly into the fourth.

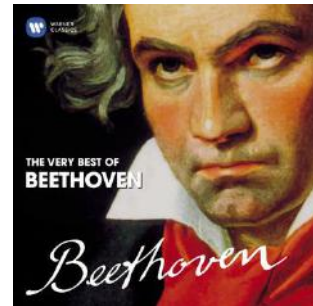
Lang Lang's *Für Elise* gets the show off to an encouraging start. For once I can't complain about the bittiness – it's a short piece that's often included in anthologies, as in *Lang Lang's Piano Book* (DG 4797441, CD, or 4797528, 2 CDs). The *adagio sostenuto* which follows, however, surely yearns for reunion with the rest of Murray Perahia's *Moonlight* Sonata, an award-laden recording, with the *Hammerklavier* Sonata (**4798353: Recording of the Month** – [review](#)). The same applies to the rest of the programme, with the honourable exception of the two works included complete.

Carlos Kleiber's multi-award-winning recording of **Symphony No.5** is one of the classics of the catalogue. It's available coupled with the equally successful account of No.7 (DG Originals **4474002**, or **4716302**, SACD), but that No.7 is also available in the new *Symphonies and Overtures* collection, so

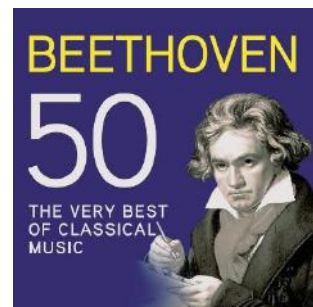
this super-budget-price collection could be the best way to obtain the Fifth. It certainly gave me a welcome opportunity to hear it again.

The recording of the **Emperor Concerto** was one of a complete series planned with Krystian Zimerman and Leonard Bernstein. Only three were completed before Bernstein's death, with Zimerman completing the first two sitting in both seats. It's still available, with no coupling, as a poor-value full-price CD, so this is an inexpensive and preferred alternative, unless you go for the Concerto collection, where it's also included. It's also available as a very inexpensive download (**E4297482**, £4.96 in lossless sound from [Presto](#), no booklet).

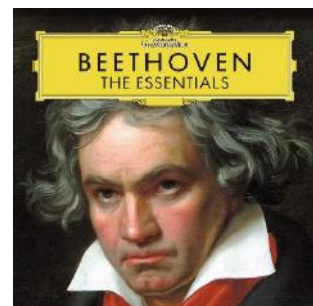
Better value for downloaders comes from a similarly named **Very Best of Beethoven** from Warner, costing as little as £5.49 in lossless sound from some dealers (no booklet). It's equally bitty but the performances are mostly in the same league as the DG selection, with the likes of Sir Roger Norrington and the London Classical Players (Symphony No.5: *Allegro*; Symphony No.7: *Allegretto* and *Allegro con brio*), Dmitry Sitkovetsky (Violin Concerto: *Rondo*; Romance No.1), Mikhail Pletnev ('Waldstein' Sonata: *Allegro con brio*), The Nash Ensemble (Septet: *Minuet*), Nikolaus Harnoncourt (*Choral Fantasia* excerpt) and Sir Simon Rattle (*Fidelio*: Prisoners' Chorus). (**9029539512** [147:42]). Once again, this is best regarded as a sampler for the bumper box **Beethoven: The Complete Works** (**9029539882**, 80 CDs, target price £75).



Still consisting of excerpts or short works, a Decca collection, drawn from the catalogues of the Universal stable (including some of the recordings on DG's Beethoven 2020), casts its net wider: **Beethoven 50** contains over seven hours of music (**4807047**). Performances come from the likes of Vladimir Ashkenazy, Herbert von Karajan, the Lindsay Quartet, Radu Lupu, the Amadeus Quartet, Sviatoslav Richter, Claudio Abbado, Fritz Wunderlich, the Takács Quartet, Julius Katchen, Sir Colin Davis, Dame Janet Baker, Sir Georg Solti, Herman Krebbers, Bernard Haitink, Mstislav Rostropovich, Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt and Cecilia Bartoli. It costs around £10 in lossless quality; again, there's no booklet.



An earlier (2015) 3-hour DG selection entitled **Beethoven: The Essentials** (**4796898**, download only, around £10 in lossless sound) also offers more music than many such introductions, but there are no complete longer works – just short pieces and single movements. It may be more appealing to beginners who would like to start collecting Beethoven recordings: with the opening *allegro* of Carlos Kleiber's Fifth, the *Allegretto* of his Seventh, Wilhelm Kempff in the *Adagio sostenuto* from the 'Moonlight' sonata and the *Andante con moto* of Piano Concerto No.4 (with Leitner), the *Allegro molto* of Sir John Eliot Gardiner's period-instrument Second Symphony, Martha Argerich and Giuseppe Sinopoli in the *Rondo* of Piano Concerto No.1, the Emerson and Hagen Quartets, Emil Gilels ... you could hardly go wrong if you followed up these and many other extracts by obtaining the parent recording. The lack of guidance from a digital booklet, however, makes this less valuable for the kind of clientele that I envisage being attracted.



The very worst value must come from a collection **The Very Best of Beethoven** Volume 2 from the YSA Classical Players (who they?) on offer for the 'bargain' price of £94.02. Where do they get these outlandish prices – include the £0.02 – and is anyone foolish enough to pay them?

Beethoven 2020: Complete Symphonies

Symphony No.1 in C, Op.21 [27:55]

Symphony No.2 in D, Op.36 [34:30]

Symphony No.3 in E flat, Op.55 'Eroica' [52:23]

Symphony No.4 in B flat, Op.60 [34:17]

Symphony No.5 in c minor, Op.67 [34:43]

Symphony No.6 in F, Op.68 'Pastoral' [40:53]

Symphony No.7 in A, Op.92 [36:17]

Symphony No.8 in F, Op.93 [26:28]

Symphony No.9 in d minor, Op.125 'Choral' [68:19]

tenor), Georg Zeppenfeld (bass), Wiener Singverein; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra/Andris Nelsons

rec. Musikverein Großer Saal, Vienna, 2017-2019. DDD.

DG **4837071** [5 CDs + 1 blu-ray audio; 5 hours: 55 minutes]

Trying to recommend a 'best buy' for the complete Beethoven symphonies would be like chasing the wind. Just for starters, the many admirers of Nikolaus Harnoncourt would argue for his period-performance-aware Warner recording with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe (**0927497682**); the outright period-performance brigade would want something like what Sir Roger Norrington gives us with the London Classical Players (Symphonies, Overtures and Piano Concertos, Erato **0834232**, download only: good value at around £24 in lossless format) or Sir John Eliot Gardiner with the ORR (below) while two recent releases have brought fine 'mainstream' recordings from Sir Simon Rattle (BPO **BPHR160091**) and the inexpensive Naxos set from Ádám Fischer – [review](#).

The new recordings conducted by **Andris Nelsons** come hard on the heels of his inclusion of Beethoven's music in the New Year's Day 2020 concert – [review](#). Whether the set as a whole is really competitive when the complete DG Beethoven 2020 box set contains so many classic recordings is debatable. No.9 has already been released separately (**4837505**), and many potential collectors may choose to wait to see if other parts of the collection are also hived off.

Like most conductors on New Year's Day, Nelsons largely allowed the Vienna Philharmonic to play things their way, and the same applies to some extent to his Beethoven symphony cycle. The VPO in their many incarnations have recorded these works many times, singly or in complete sets, with the likes of Böhm, Bernstein and Abbado, examples of all of them included in the complete box and the Symphonies offshoot (below), so a minimal-interventionist approach can work well. The *Pastoral* symphony from the new set, for example, has been widely praised, the *Eroica* and the Fifth less so.

DG are really competing with themselves: the 1962 **Karajan** set is available on 5 CDs and blu-ray audio, around £43, or as a download, around £21 in lossless format (DG **4793442**). The blu-ray discs are also available in the complete *Beethoven 2020* collection (**4836767**, 118 CDs + 2 DVD + 3 blu-ray audio: target price £220; see [Mark Zimmer's article](#) for details.). The 1962 Eighth and the 1977 Ninth feature in the **Symphonies and Overtures** selection (below). To add to the confusion, the 'Vienna cycle' in the complete box set includes Nelsons' recording of No. 8.

Simon Thompson thought the **Adám Fischer** set with the Danish Chamber Orchestra (Naxos) worth dipping into and trying – not ideal, but with the 'Choral' Symphony the only weak link – [review](#). Others have been even more enthusiastic. It's currently on offer for £21 and can be downloaded in lossless sound for around £18.

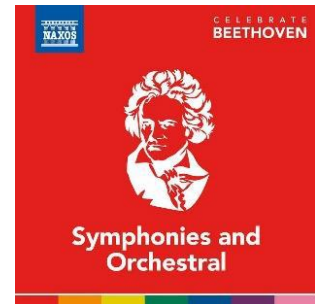
With Erich Kleiber's recording in mind (Beulah, recently reissued on **3PS57**), I listened to Nelsons and Fischer in the *Pastoral* symphony and No.8 and enjoyed both. For No.7, see Manze (Pentatone, below).

For a very fine recording with a modern orchestra from a conductor with an awareness of period style, don't overlook **Sir Charles Mackerras** with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and (in No.9) the Philharmonia (Hyperion **CDS44301/5: Recording of the Month** – [review](#) – [review](#)). If you choose to download the Mackerras, go to hyperion-records.co.uk, where it costs £25 in lossless sound; some dealers are asking a ridiculous £50. The CDs cost around £27. I used that set as my benchmark for some individual recordings in [March 2010](#) and it remains one of my favourites.

Since way back in the day when **Naxos** CDs sold for £3.99 in Woolworths, they have had a series of recordings of Beethoven symphonies, mostly with Central and Eastern European orchestras – in the main, decent but not as outstanding as their recordings of the Haydn string quartets. Many of these are now download only and still a bargain in that form – as little as £3.79 for lossless sound. They featured in editions of the Penguin Guide to Bargain CDs, but had not survived into the final Penguin Guide (2010). If you are looking for a bargain of bargains, you might consider the 5½-hour set of all nine symphonies from the Zagreb Philharmonic and Slovak Radio Orchestras conducted by Richard Edlinger and Michael Halasz in 1988, download only, for just £3.79 (Naxos **930187**). I listened to the recording of Nos. 7 and 4, two of the symphonies which I like the most. While you would get a decent idea of what they were about, you might wonder why Wagner called No.7 the apotheosis of the dance from this rather penny-plain recording. If you cut your teeth on Bruno Walter's mono NYPO recording of No.7 and later got to know Carlos Kleiber's No.5 and No.7, this Naxos is pretty small beer. These are the recordings of the symphonies in the complete Naxos Beethoven box set and you'll find from Mark Zimmer's [survey](#) that he has a rather higher opinion of them than I do. The new **Ádám Fischer** (also Naxos, above) is much to be preferred.



Some of these older Naxos recordings have been mined for a bits-and-pieces 92-minute collection **Celebrate Beethoven: Symphonies and Orchestral (930209)**. One attractive aspect of this is that the symphony extracts are interspersed with some of the lighter music, such as one of the *Contredanses*; we even have an extract from *Wellingtons Sieg*, a depiction of the battle of Vittoria which anticipates many aspects of the 1812 Overture.



It might be worth downloading for around £5.50 in lossless sound to play in the car on a long journey when you don't want to concentrate on this music too much. If your car player can manage only mp3, that's around £4.50, but most recent 'Infotainment' systems can cope with lossless and even 24-bit. Further instalments are promised monthly.

Beethoven 2020: Symphonies and Overtures

Symphony No.1 in C, Op.21 (VPO/Bernstein, 1978) [26:44]
 Symphony No.2 in D, Op.36 (VPO/Bernstein, 1978) [35:5]
 Symphony No.3 in E flat, Op.55 'Eroica' (BPO/Abbado, 2001) [48:46]
 Symphony No.4 in B flat, Op.60 (Gewandhaus/Chailly, 2009) [29:38]
 Symphony No.5 in c minor, Op.67 (LAPO/Giulini, 1981) [36:35]
 Symphony No.6 in F, Op.68 'Pastoral' (VPO/Böhm, 1971) [45:43]
 Symphony No.7 in A, Op.92 (VPO/C Kleiber, 1976) [38:36]
 Symphony No.8 in F, Op.93 (BPO/Karajan, 1962) [26:29]
 Symphony No.9 in d minor, Op.125 'Choral' (BPO/Karajan, 1977) [66:52]
 Overtures *Prometheus*, *Coriolan*, *Leonore I-III*, *Egmont*, *Ruins of Athens*, *Namensfeier*, *König Stephan*; *Wellingtons Sieg*
DG 4837652 [7 hours: 22 minutes]



I'm pleased that room was found to include that quirky piece *Wellingtons Sieg*, depicting the battle of Vittoria long before Tchaikovsky thought of doing the same thing for the events of 1812. **Karajan** and the BPO (1969) bring just the right light-hearted approach to this 14-minute work.

Most of these recordings have swum across my ken at various times in the past. I even owned this recording of *Wellingtons Sieg* on a sampler LP for a much earlier DG Beethoven box set, so I simply dipped into what's on offer to confirm that there isn't a dud among these recordings. I'm just a little surprised that Carlo Maria Giulini's No.5 was chosen in preference to Carlos Kleiber's, whose No.7 has very wisely been included. The easiest way to obtain his classic No.5 is on DG Originals, which means duplicating No.7, unless you obtain No.5 in the *Very Best of Beethoven* set (above). At around £23 in lossless sound, I imagine that this will be the most popular download subset from the complete box. Very few of these releases, including this, come with a booklet, which seems like unnecessary penny-pinching when the complete box is so lavishly presented.

Karl Böhm's Mozart can seem old-fashioned today, though I still turn to some of his recordings. His *Pastoral* symphony, however, remains a model of how to perform the work.

Beethoven 2020: Concertos

Piano Concerto in E-Flat, WoO4 (Brautigam, 2008) [23:17]
 Piano Concerto No.1 in C, Op.15 (Lang Lang, 2007) [38:57]
 Piano Concerto No.2 in B flat, Op.19 (Gulda, 1970) [28:39]
 Piano Concerto No.3 in c minor, Op.37 (Brendel, 1998) [36:02]
 Piano Concerto No.4 in G, Op.58 (Brendel, 1997) [33:07]
 Piano Concerto No.5 in E flat, Op.73 'Emperor' (Zimmerman, 1989) [40:40]
 Violin Concerto in D, Op.61 (Mutter, 1979) [48:24]
 Romances No.1 [7:11]; No.2 [8:25] (Mutter, 2002)
 Triple Concerto, Op.56 (Chung Trio, 1996) [35:09]
 Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in D (Barenboim) [44:49]
 Choral Fantasia, Op.80 (Grimaud, etc., 2003) [19:07]
 Romance cantabile Hess 13 (Gallois, etc., 1996) [4:59]
 Rondo in B flat, WoO 6 (S Richter, 1962) [9:23]
 Piano Concerto No.1 in C: *Allegro con brio* (Arrau, 1987) [4:34]
 Concerto Movement in C (Kremer, 1978) [15:45]
 Mozart: Piano Concerto No.20, K466 (Serkin, 1981) [32:47]
DG 4837653 [7 hours: 11 minutes]



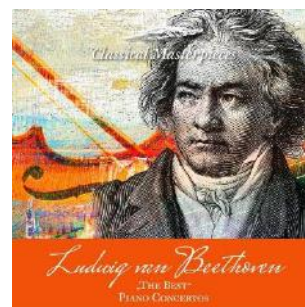
It's slightly disappointing that whereas the complete Beethoven 2020 box set contains both Krystian Zimerman and Wilhelm Kempff in the *Emperor* Concerto, the former was preferred for this offshoot. My choice would have been Kempff, with Paul van Kempen (mono) or Ferdinand Leitner (stereo).

Lang Lang's recording of **Piano Concerto No.1** appeared with No.4, with the Orchestre de Paris and Christoph Esechenbach in 2008. The recording was praised by Michael Cookson for 'sparkling playing and considerable insights' – [review](#).

For **Piano Concerto No.2** we return to Friedrich Gulda from 1970, part of a series which he made with the Vienna Philharmonic and Horst Stein and borrowed from DG's sister label Decca, originally on a well-regarded 5-LP set, later on a single Decca Jubilee release, with No.3.

Piano Concertos No.3 and No.4 are in the hands of Alfred Brendel, again with the VPO, this time with Simon Rattle, and again a borrowing from within the Universal Empire, from a 3-CD Philips set. It was Brendel's fourth set; the two concertos excerpted from it received the highest praise and Michael Cookson reviewing a reissue of No.4 found himself 'impressed by Brendel's assurance and artistry' – [review](#).

Among the very few interesting classical and jazz recordings left on emusic.com, there's an album entitled Ludwig van Beethoven "The Best" Piano Concertos, mp3 only (320 kb/s) for £2.52. Hidden behind this anonymous façade lurk two recordings with the West German Radio Orchestra and Günter Wand, with Emil Gilels in No.5 [39:58] and Robert Casadesus in No.4 [30:06]. There's no documentation, but I take this to be the same recording of the Fourth that is also available on Profil Meridien's Günter Wand Edition (PH6006, with Haydn and Bach), with the 'Emperor' on PH04052 (with *Coriolan* and *Fidelio* Overtures).



I'm not sure of the provenance of these recordings – CFClassics doesn't seem to exist other than on emusic.com – but the transfers are pretty good. Gilels with Leopold Ludwig in the 'Emperor' (Warner 9937212, or Regis RRC1367 – [review](#) – [review](#) – [April 2011/1](#) – download only, both with No.4) is preferable to this Wand recording, but it's not at all bad and the Casadesus Fourth is very good indeed.

I mention the recent BIS recording of all five piano concertos from Rudolf Brautigam on p.21 below in reviewing the period-instrument collection. Another recent release has been highly praised, including by me: Martin Helmchen and Andrew Manze in Nos. 2 and 5 (Alpha 555 – [review](#) – [Winter 2019/20 #1](#)). But my chief comparison would be with a Chandos collection of all five recognised concertos, plus the piano arrangement of the Violin Concerto, the Triple Concerto, the Choral Fantasia, the Rondo, WoO6 and the Concerto WoO4, from Howard Shelley and Opera North Orchestra, with Tamsin Little and Tim Hugh in the Triple (CHAN10695, 4 CDs, around £37, or 16- and 24-bit download from [chandos.net](#) – [review](#) – [review](#) – [November 2011/2](#)). That's not quite as comprehensive as the DG collection, but not far off, and the price is attractive; at around £23, however, for the lossless download – there's no CD or 24-bit equivalent – the DG offers even more for less.

Even more relevant than the Chandos, however, is DG's own release of the five 'regular' piano concertos with Jan Lisiecki (p.19, below). The best – and least expensive – way to obtain that is on blu-ray, selling for around £18, with the CDs around £32 and lossless download around £18.

Beethoven 2020: Period Instrument Recordings

Piano Concertos Nos.1, 2 and 4, Rondo for Piano and Orchestra, Choral Fantasia (Levin; ORR/Gardiner, 1995, 1996, 1997); Violin Concerto and Romance No.2 (Zehetmair; O of the C18/Bruggen, 1997); Piano Sonatas Nos.8, 14 ('Moonlight') 17 ('Tempest') (Lubin, 1989); Songs (von Otter/Tan, 1999); Horn Sonata (Halstead/Levin, 1996); String Quartet Op.59/3 (Schuppanzigh Quartet, 1999); Quintet for piano and winds (Levin, etc., 1996); Symphony No.2 (trio arrangement, Levin, etc.); Piano Concerto No.4 (chamber arrangement, Levin, etc.); *Ah Perfido!* (Tilling, Gabrieli Players); *Prometheus* Finale (Armonea Atenea, 2013); *Missa Solemnis* (Gardiner, 1989). All DDD.

DG 4837667 [7 hours: 37 minutes]

This is another offshoot from the Beethoven 2020 collection, 7½ hours for around £29 in lossless sound.

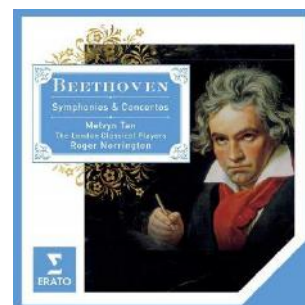
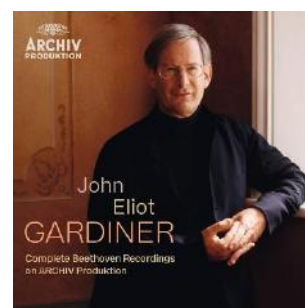
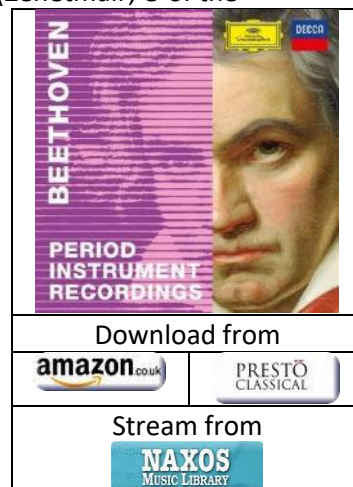
It's all (very) worthwhile, but in a complementary release, DG Archiv have given us all Sir John Eliot Gardiner's period-instrument Beethoven recordings (**4837269**, 15 CDs, around £34). That includes all the symphonies and piano concertos, with the Orchestra Révolutionnaire et Romantique, and Robert Levin in the concertos, Victoria Mullova in the Violin Concerto, the *Missa Solemnis* and Mass in C, with the Monteverdi Choir, *Leonore*, and the trio arrangements of some of the orchestral works.

Gardiner's 5-CD set of the symphonies remains available, as also the single-CDs of the Violin Concerto (now download only), the Piano Concertos (download only) the Masses, *Leonore*, with and without *Fidelio* (download only). So, too, the more recent recordings of Beethoven and others on his own SDG label. But, given that you could pay £45 to download the earlier box of the symphonies and the same to download the older box of the concertos, the new set (CD only) is more attractive.

You may expect the distinguishing feature of these period-instrument performances to be fast tempi, especially in the earlier works. In fact, only in the finale are his tempi in Symphony No.1 as fast as those of Fricsay ([Beulah](#)); he achieves lightness of touch without excessive speed. Without diminishing the power of the music, Gardiner and his team make the finale of the *Eroica* dance along – after all, the theme originated in the *Prometheus* ballet. Fans of these recordings, however, will be less than grunted that these two DG releases overlap so much with each other: Piano Concertos Nos. 1, 2 and 4 and the Rondo WoO6 feature on both. Both DG sets are very attractive for period-performance fans, but the considerable overlap is regrettable.

Sir Roger Norrington's rival and equally thought-provoking period-performance set of the Symphonies and Piano Concertos (with Melvyn Tan in the latter), formerly on EMI, is now a download-only bargain from Erato (**0834232**, 8½ hours, around £24 in lossless sound – [review](#) of earlier Virgin set of the symphonies). You'll find some extracts from it on the Warner *Very Best of Beethoven*, mentioned above. The Piano Concertos come on an Erato Veritas twofer (**95220142**, download only, around £11 in lossless sound).

Rudolf Brautigam's recent BIS recordings on the fortepiano, with Kölner Akademie and Michael Willens is also well worth considering (p.21, below).



Beethoven 2020: Complete Piano Concertos

Piano Concerto No.1 in C, Op.15 [37:42]
 Piano Concerto No.2 in B-flat, Op 19 [29:15]
 Piano Concerto No.3 in c minor, Op.37 [35:30]
 Piano Concerto No.4 in G, Op.58 [33:09]
 Piano Concerto No.5 in E flat, Op.73, 'Emperor' [37:55]
 Jan Lisiecki (piano)
 Academy of St Martin in the Fields
 rec. live Konzerthaus Berlin, December 2018. DDD
DG 4837637 [3 CDs 2hours: 53 minutes] Also on blu-ray (**735755**) and DVD (**735742**)



CD/Download from	
	
	
Stream from	
	

How does this set compare with the older recordings in the DG Concertos collection? I wondered at first why **Jan Lisiecki** has not only chosen to set down his thoughts on Beethoven at the tender age of 24, but has also opted to perform and direct the orchestra. As common as that is for Mozart – and Beethoven filled both roles for the first four concertos – even the two period-performance pianists, Melvyn Tan (Erato) and Robert Levin (DG) didn't attempt it, nor does Ronald Brautigam on his new BIS recordings or Kristian Bezuidenhout (Harmonia Mundi).

Whatever my first thoughts, in the event I enjoyed these recordings; if I had any reservations, I had forgotten them by the time that I came to the end of the *Emperor*. Having planned to do just some spot checks, I stayed the complete course in one sitting. So the answer must be in the affirmative; at the very least I recommend streaming these recordings if you can.

Beethoven 2020: Historical Recordings

Excerpts and complete recordings of Symphonies Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9; *Leonora* Overture, Nos. II and III, *Coriolan* Overture, *Große Fuge*, *Egmont* Overture, Piano Concerto No.3, Violin Concerto, Piano Sonatas Nos. 8, 11, 18, 23, 30 and 31; Cello Sonatas Nos. 3 and 5; Piano Trio No.7 ('Archduke'); String Quartet No.15; *Fidelio* (excerpts). Includes complete Symphony No.5 (Furtwängler, 1943) and No.6 (Erich Kleiber, 1953).
 rec. 1913 – 1967. ADD/mono/stereo
DG 4837666 [12 hours: 26 minutes]



Download from	
	
Stream from	
	

This side-order from the complete Beethoven 2020 box set makes the obvious comparison with the Beulah reissues which I [reviewed](#) recently. At around £45 in lossless sound, it offers a total playing time of 12½ hours; the Beulah series will run to about 16 hours, at £7.99 per throw. That means that it will cost more overall than the DG, but it does allow you to pick and choose.

As with the Beulah reissues, it's best to treat these recordings in their own right, though some, like **Annie Fischer's** Third Piano Concerto and **Wolfgang Schneiderhan's** Violin Concerto can stand comparison with any. Perhaps, however, the BPO/Nickisch seven-minute excerpt from Symphony No.5 (1913) is more something to stream from Naxos Music Library – very little emerges from the fug of time.

After that we are in the same historic range as the Beulah, beginning with 4½ minutes from Symphony No.7 (Richard Strauss, 1926), the same movement from Karajan and the Staatskapelle (1941), *Leonore* III, again with the Staatskapelle (Klemperer, 1927), *Leonore* II from Fritz Busch in Copenhagen (1950), Paul van Kempen with the BPO in an excerpt from the 'Eroica' Symphony (1951) and the first of the complete recordings, Symphony No.8 from the RPO and Hermann Scherchen (1954).

Back to 1944 for the *Egmont* Overture (VPO/Furtwängler), 1943 for the *Coriolan* Overture (BPO/Furtwängler) and a complete Symphony No.5 from the same team (1943).

The 1926 *allegro con brio* from Symphony No.7 is a big improvement on 1913, but still sounds shrill. **Strauss** chooses a fairly fast but not over-driven tempo that suggests that the whole symphony would be worth hearing. There's less *brio* from **Karajan** in the same movement; considering how well regarded his later Beethoven recordings have been, this sounds a little dutiful, though the sound is again an improvement on 1926. The 1963 recording – the lively finale contained on the DG 2-CD set (p.12, above) – is a different beast completely.

It's interesting that DG have chosen the 'little' Symphony No.8 for their first complete work here. The 1954 sound is again an improvement on wartime Dresden. I take this to be the recording released in Nixa WLP9362 with the 'Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra of London', apparently a pseudonym for the RPO. Whoever they were, they play well for **Scherchen** at tempi close to Beethoven's metronome markings, then usually considered too fast, but now normal, and they do so without the show coming off the road, even in the finale. With sound not too dated for enjoyment; this could well come to be my benchmark for this symphony.

It's hardly surprising that **Furtwängler** gets a considerable look-in. His 1943 **Symphony No.5** is, understandably, less well recorded than Scherchen's Eighth, but it's well worth persevering with the dated sound to hear what must have been a moving experience in a Berlin where the war was already not going well. This is not as famous as the 1944 VPO *Eroica*, available on several labels, including Fono (AB78538, with Grieg Piano Concert, download), but equally well worth hearing. Forget the conductor's presumed Nazi sympathies and enjoy this in the same spirit as Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen*, a work inspired by Beethoven's Fifth and the destruction of the latter years of the war.

Erich Kleiber's 1953 **Fifth** with the Concertgebouw Orchestra has achieved classic status, rivalled only by his son Carlos' accounts of No.5 and No.7 (DG Originals **4474002**; No.7 on *Beethoven 2020 Symphonies and Overtures* – below; No.5 on *The Very Best of Beethoven*, mentioned above). MM in Gramophone (1/54) thought that this recording would 'take some superseding' and it still makes very enjoyable hearing. Bear in mind that when this appeared on a full-price LP, with no coupling, it cost 36/5½ – well over £40 in today's values, which is not much less than the cost of the complete download set. Anyone planning to perform the Fifth could do much worse than to regard this as a model.

Kleiber's Pastoral, again with the Concertgebouw (Decca, 1953), is also well worth having. I like his 1948 recording with the LPO ([Beulah 3PS57](#)), but that's coupled with a less recommendable Sargent Fifth and, though the earlier recording is perfectly tolerable, the 1953 sound is much better.

Ferenc Fricsay's 1958 **Ninth** – the first to be released in stereo – may not have the intensity of the 1942 Furtwängler (Beulah) but there are some hints that he may have been influenced by his great predecessor's recording, and the finale features some especially fine singing. As first released, the stereo was something of a disappointment, especially failing to open out in the finale. Whatever the

problem was, it seems to have been overcome for this transfer, though the balance between soloists, choir and orchestra is not quite ideal.

Annie Fischer's recording of **Piano Concerto No.3**, with the Bavarian State Orchestra and Ferenc Fricsay (1957) is one of the highlights of this collection. Recorded in stereo, as few Fricsay recordings were, sadly, it remains well worth hearing in its own right. As, too, does **Wolfgang Schneiderhan** with the BPO and Eugen Jochum in the **Violin Concerto**, from 1962, which also remains available with Mozart Violin Concerto No.5, on DG Originals (**4474032**). Both of these recordings sound too fresh to be labelled 'historical'; both are still competitive. Fischer bears comparison with Solomon of much the same vintage in the piano concerto ([Beulah 7PS57](#)).

The **Quartetto Italiano** in **Quartet No.15** from 1967 also hardly sound 'historical'. Theirs is not the last word in late Beethoven – a little too 'straight' for me – but well liked in their time and still worth hearing. Much the same is true of the Allegri Quartet in No.14 on a recording made by the Naim company to demonstrate their audio equipment – interestingly coupled with Britten (**NAIMCD07 – Winter 2019-20/#3**).

Piano Concerto No.1 in C, Op.15 [37:51]
 Piano Concerto No.2 in B-flat, Op.19 [30:24]
 Piano Concerto No.3 in c minor, Op.37 [37:41]
 Piano Concerto No.4 in G, Op.58 [35:46]
 Piano Concerto No.5 in E flat, Op.73, 'Emperor' [39:41]
 Dame Mitsuko Uchida (piano)
 Berliner Philharmoniker/Sir Simon Rattle
 rec. live Philharmonie Berlin, 4-20 February 2010. DDD.
BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER BPHR180241 [181:23]



Piano Concerto No.1 in C, Op.15 [30:55]
 Piano Concerto No.2 in B-flat, Op.19 [25:59]
 Piano Concerto No.4 in G, Op.58 [30:57]
 Piano Concerto No.3 in c minor, Op.37 [33:10]
 Piano Concerto No.5 in E-flat, Op.73, 'Emperor' [36:03]
 Ronald Brautigam (fortepiano)
 Kölner Akademie/Michael Alexander Willens
 rec. July 2017 (Nos 1 & 3) and July 2018 (Nos 2, 4 & 5),
 Deutschlandfunk Kammermusiksaal, Cologne. DDD/DSD
 Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from [eclassical.com](#)
BIS BIS-2274 2 SACDs [87:56 + 69:17]



Piano Concerto No.1 in C, Op.15 (Cadenza: Beethoven) [33:24]
 Piano Concerto No.2 in B-flat, Op.19 (Cadenza: Beethoven) [30:18]
 Rondo in B-flat for piano and orchestra, WoO6 (Cadenza: Giltburg)
 [10:01]
 Boris Giltburg (piano)
 Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Vasily Petrenko
 rec. 10-13 May 2019, The Friary, Liverpool. DDD.
 Reviewed as press preview.
NAXOS 8.574151 [73:46]



For CD availability see also [Recommended review](#) by Robert Cummings and [Recommended review](#) by Michael Greenhalgh.

Piano Concerto No.1 in C, Op.15 (c.1796) [38:10]
 Piano Concerto No.2 in B-flat, Op.19 (c.1795, rev. 1798) [32:00]
 (Volume 1)
 Elizabeth Sombart (piano)
 Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Pierre Vallet
 rec. 14-17 July 2019, Cadogan Hall, London. DDD.
 Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from hyperion-records.co.uk.
SIGNUM SIGCD614 [70:20]



Piano Concerto No.5 in E-flat, Op.73, 'Emperor' [36:26]
 Piano Concerto No.2 in B-flat, Op.19 (Cadenza Robert D Levin) [26:58]
 (Volume 1)
 Kristian Bezuidenhout (fortepiano, after Conrad Graf, 1824)
 Freiburger Barockorchester/Pablo Heras-Casado
 rec. December 2017, Ensemblehaus Freiburg. DDD.
 Reviewed as 24/96 download with pdf booklet from eclassical.com
HARMONIA MUNDI HMM902411 [63:24]



Though in her second tranche of the Mozart concertos, with the Cleveland Orchestra, even better than the first series with Geoffrey Tate, **Mitsuko Uchida** performed both roles, here she benefits from concentrating on the solo part. Not surprisingly, in view of those Mozart recordings, the early concertos where Beethoven was still receiving 'the spirit of Mozart at the hands of Haydn' come over extremely well, with wonderfully clear articulation and sensitive support from Simon Rattle and the BPO. In a sense, Uchida is sitting in both seats, with Rattle largely content to follow where she leads.

Uchida and Rattle make Concerto No.3 sound like Beethoven at his best, a quality which they share with the classic Annie Fischer/Ferenc Fricsay recording (included in the *Beethoven 2020 Historical Recordings* and also available from Beulah on [7PS57](#)). That has remained one of my very top Beethoven recordings since it was reissued on the budget Heliodor label – one of the few in stereo. If anything, Rattle's unobtrusive accompaniment with the 2010 BPO outshines Fricsay's with the 1960 Bavarian State Orchestra and the sound is superior.

Why have we had to wait so long for these **Uchida** recordings – and why did I not pick up on them when they were released in early 2019? [Michael Cookson](#) and [John Quinn](#) reviewed the set very favourably and I still didn't check it out. It may be a high-end product, costing around £47, but if you're willing to forego the blu-ray audio and video, which include an interview with Uchida, it can be downloaded, complete with the de luxe booklet, for around £18 in lossless sound.

The recent release, from **Rudolf Brautigam** (fortepiano), the Kölner Akademie and Michael Willens, of the five regular piano concertos makes a relevant comparison with the Levin-Gardiner recordings on DG (see *Beethoven 2020 Period Instrument Recordings*). Costing around £20 on two SACDs or \$23.56 for 16-bit, \$37.70 for 24-bit (stereo or surround) from [eclassical.com](#), it includes the two 'missing' concertos not included in the DG set, Nos. 3 and 5. It's well worth considering if you are looking for HIPP Beethoven. Apologies for giving the wrong eclassical link in [Winter 2019/20 #2](#), where you will find more detail.

If you listen to Brautigam straight after Uchida, the fortepiano may at first sound dry; it's impossible to make detailed comparisons for that reason, though the chosen instruments – two of them – will deter only the greatest fortepiano haters. The real comparison is with the DG and Erato recordings (*Beethoven 2020 Period Instrument Recordings*). There I note that period practice doesn't necessarily imply fast tempi, but even a cursory look at the sets of timings shows that Brautigam and Willens do take things consistently faster than most but, with fleet-fingered solo playing and sympathetic support, nothing sounds rushed. In fact, there are no bombshells to be dropped into the listener's lap, even by comparison with older recordings such as Backhaus and Schmidt-Isserstedt on Beulah. With a less resonant sound from the fortepiano, it makes sense to take the music, especially in the slow movements, a little faster than usual. Faster, yes, but no less magical, and magically recorded by BIS, especially in 24-bit format.

A good case in point is the finale of No.4, which Brautigam and Willens take at quite a lick, yet Uchida and Rattle take only a second longer, Brendel and Rattle (*Beethoven 2020 Concertos*) a few seconds longer, while Lisiecki is faster still, even allowing for the different choices of cadenza. How would I pick a top recommendation when I enjoyed hearing all of these? If I had to plump, it would be for Uchida and Rattle for the combination of performance and recording.

It's impossible to name 'best buy' recordings of even Beethoven's first two piano concertos – 'No.2' in its original form actually predates 'No.1' – but if it's very satisfying accounts from a comparatively large modern orchestra on a modern concert grand that you want, the **Naxos** and the **Signum** will both do very nicely. You won't find earth-shattering revelations from either, but I enjoyed hearing both and both are well recorded, the smaller-size Cadogan Hall, used for BBC Proms concerts, working very well for **Signum**. Full marks to Naxos for specifying Beethoven's own cadenzas; Signum don't say, in an otherwise informative booklet. The Naxos is less expensive in all formats, though the Signum doesn't cost much more, even in 24-bit, as downloaded from [Hyperion](#). Both are welcome harbingers of complete sets to come.

Two 'Recommended' reviews can't be wrong – see details above – and there have been equally enthusiastic reviews of the **Boris Giltburg** recording elsewhere. I've already praised several recordings of these two concertos, from Backhaus's vintage No.1 ([Beulah](#)) through to the recent Brautigam on period instruments. Whichever, if any, you have picked, download this Naxos release for less than a fiver – Naxos CDs may not be the bargain they were, but lossless downloads can still be obtained inexpensively, and they put some other labels to shame by including the pdf booklet.

Beethoven on the fortepiano is unlikely ever to become the norm, but it's becoming more normal. The recording of concertos nos. 2 and 5 from Martin Helmchen and Andrew Manze (**Alpha 555**) which

has won golden opinions – [review](#) – meets its period-performance opposite number on the new **Kristian Bezuidenhout** recording from Harmonia Mundi, which is billed as ‘#1’. The choice of recent HIP recordings available in 24-bit sound is between Bezuidenhout and Brautigam; it depends whether you want the whole set in one go (BIS) or are prepared to wait for the separate releases (Harmonia Mundi). The latter is available initially in 24-bit for the same price as 16-bit (\$13.33) from [eclassical.com](#); expect the high-def price to rise in due course. That means that buying the Bezuidenhout set will cost about twice the price of the Brautigam package. Those who find the fortepiano a bit of a trial will probably prefer the Bezuidenhout.

Continued as Spring 2020 #1B.