

Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Viola Sonatas Op. 120: No. 1 in F minor [21:22]; No. 2 in E-flat [19:23]

Karl WEIGL (1881-1949)

Viola Sonata in E-flat, Op. 32 [19:52]

Paul HINDEMITH (1895-1963)

Viola Sonata in F, Op. 11, No. 4 (first measure not recorded) [15:03]

Paul Doktor (viola)

Nadia Reisenberg (piano)

rec. January 1955 (Brahms); c.1952-53 (Weigl); 8 May 1963, live, Mannes College, (Hindemith)

ROMÉO RECORDS 7317 [76:01]

This disc serves as reminder of, and advocacy for, two artists; neither subservient to the other.

Paul Doktor (1919-1989) will be known to some as the violist in the Busch Quartet. Music-lovers of my generation may also recall his name from the CBS LP (61584) of one of Walton's most problematic works, the Viola Concerto. This was the first recording of the 1961 version of the Concerto. The orchestra was the LPO conducted by the young Edward Downes. Although seen as in competition with another ex-pat, William Primrose, Doktor became a major figure when he moved to the USA, recording Piston's Viola Concerto and premiering the Quincy Porter Concerto.

Doktor's deliberate and husky-grained viola serves as his signature. It's far from pasty-faced and matches well the warm and flowing readings accorded to the two Brahms works. The gracious playing of Doktor and [Reisenberg](#) radiates outwards in the first of the two sonatas. The *Andante* of No. 1 has a Bach-like serenity. The Second Sonata adopts a vulnerable Kreislerian smile but here Reisenberg finds the sort of craggy drama encountered in the First Piano Concerto. Doktor assumes a winning lilt for the *Allegro appassionato*.

As for the Karl Weigl Sonata there have been at least two other recordings. I have heard the one by Garth Knox issued by the [Karl Weigl Foundation](#). Weigl, another ex-pat has been making a snail's-pace re-emergence. Part of this has been down to BIS with the last two symphonies ([review review](#)). Weigl's six symphonies are as follows: 1, 1908; 2, 1922; 3, 1931; 4, 1936; 5, 1945; 6, 1947. His cause will also have been helped by two more recent discs from Capriccio: one of the [concertos](#) and the other of a selection of *lieder*. Weigl's circle of champions included the violinist Sidney Harth (1925-2011) whose private recording of the Weigl Violin Concerto with Musica Aeterna conducted by Frederic Waldman (1903-1955), kept Weigl's name alive for many years. In the case of the Viola Sonata Weigl wrote two subdued and even fearful movements. These frame an *Allegretto ma non troppo*, clearly determined to clear away the cobwebs and attain the sunshine. The final *Allegro* is sober yet restlessly energetic. The tone of Doktor's viola, running true to form, is not fleshy and that effect is underscored by the age of the recording.

The short Hindemith Sonata, as befits a composer who was a violist and who premiered the Walton concerto in its original form, is compact and entertaining. It lets in the lighter emotions after the Brahms and Weigl. There's even some most surprising Hollywood 'star-shine' at 12:00. The ear soon adjusts to the recorded sound which simulates a high vantage point looking down on the performers. There's applause at the close.

Trivial maybe, but it's a shame that the spine of the disc case - the bit that most music-lovers are likely to see on their shelves - jarringly miscalls two of the composers as "Brahms" and "Weigl".

The 18-page note is a *de luxe* piece of work, done to a most pleasing and professional standard, as is the gallery of photographs. These have been chosen with every sign of affection and good judgement. Robert Sherman, Reisenberg's son, is the author. Some impression of the scale and reach of the [Reisenberg Archive](#), including many reels and phonographs, can be gained by looking at two [sites](#).

The transfers have been made to good effect by Seth B Winner in June and July 2015. Hum has been removed, as have dropouts and groove noises, while scratches, ticks and pops have been removed or attenuated.

This is a most agreeable listening experience unless you kick against 1950s LP sound and must have a closer approach to modern audio perfection.

Rob Barnett

Manolis KALOMIRIS (1883–1962)

Complete Works for Solo Piano

Ballades: No. 1 in E minor (1905 rev 1933) [4:36]; No. 2 in A flat (1905) [4:29]; No. 3 in E flat (1906 rev 1958) [4:56]

Rhapsodies: No. 1 (1921) [6:06]; No. 2, *Chant à la Nuit* (1921) [8:02]

Five Preludes (1939) [10:28]

Nocturne (1906 rev 1908) [5:15]

Patinada (Serenade) (1907) [3:35]

Ya Ta Hellinopoula (For Greek Children), Vol. 1 [6:20], Vol. 2 [5:49], Vol. 3 [4:56]

Anatoliki Zografia (Oriental Picture) (1902) [5:11]

Olivier Chauzu (piano)

rec. 2016, Studio 4'33, Pierre Malbos, Ivry-sur-Seine, France

GRAND PIANO GP748 [69:43]

Manolis Kalomiris stands as the composer-statesman of Greek music. Nationalism laid an unshakeable grip on his shoulder. He did not seek to espouse other countries' styles although quite naturally other strains do emerge, especially among the earlier works. His Greek credentials were no obstacle to his adoption of non-Greek forms such as the Ballade, Prelude, Rhapsody and Symphony as the channels for what he had to say.

His early piano music bears signs picked up during his scholar years in Vienna. An admiration for Liszt, Chopin and Tchaikovsky is there to be noticed in the romantic throes of the three Ballades. Revisions in the 1930s and 1950s did little to attenuate that. The exciting Third Ballade heaves and lays about it with dark-fisted determination. It may be that the 1958 revisions injected the colourful rainbow spray of notes around 1:40. The *Nocturne* looks forward as an augury of the later folksong style. The *Patinada* comes closest to salon fodder but even here Kalomiris finds himself introducing quietly swirling figures. The *Anatoliki Zografia* revels in the turbulent passions of the Ballades but also looks forward to the folksong element.

Twenty years later - in fact from around the time he completed his First Symphony, *Levendia* - the more impressionistic *Rhapsodies* show emphatically more folk-nationalistic strata. The second of them, with its allusive nocturnal title, takes us into the sort of misty fragile territory also occupied by Griffes, Baines and Szymanowski. The First Rhapsody is dedicated to José Iturbi. The Five Preludes, written on the brink of World War II and all of them short, assert a range of emotional material from the suggestive lacework of No. 2, to the Rachmaninov-like turmoil of No. 1 and *pesante* stomp of No. 5. There's a folksy, Kodály-style, peacock-fan brilliance and melody at play as well.

The three volumes of *Ya Ta Hellinopoula (For Greek Children)* were written throughout his life and comprise eleven very short miniatures. They are not written for children to play but belong among the literature that conjures nostalgic visions of childhood. They permitted him to patter through and ring out the nationalist folksong element which found out-and-out expression among his piano music in the Rhapsodies.

Naxos has two Kalomiris orchestral albums in its *Greek Classics* series. There's the Third Symphony ([review](#) [review](#)) and a programme that includes orchestrations of the two piano Rhapsodies ([review](#)). In addition, Koch International issued a recording of his Symphony No. 1 *Levendia* (1921) in which Bruno Fidetzis conducted the Sofia State Philharmonic Orchestra and Bulgarian Nation Choir. His other two symphonies date from 1931 and 1955.

Olivier Chauzu is a dedicated musician, willing to surrender his skills and sympathies to advocate the music of composers whose reputations have been washed away by time or compromised by clouds of inimical witnesses. He has recorded piano music by Louis Aubert (GP648) and [Gustave Samazeuilh](#) for Grand Piano and [Emile Goué](#) for Azur Classical. Chauzu trained at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris, studying with Gabriel Tacchino, Théodore Paraskivesko, Jean-Claude Pennetier

and György Sebök. At other times he was taught by Leon Fleisher, Vitaly Margoulis and Dimitri Bashkirov.

The recording choices made by the GP team are unlikely to dismay you. Chauzu is afforded warmth, clarity and room for the more clamant moments to expand.

Everything is laid out with satisfying typographical clarity in the booklet and there's an indulgently detailed six-page essay in English and French by Gérald Hugon.

Rob Barnett

Antonio CESTI (1623-1669)

L'Oronthea (1656)

Oronthea – Paula Murrihy

Creonte – Sebastian Geyer

Tibirno / Amore – Juanita Lascarro

Aristea – Guy de Mey

Alidoro – Xavier Sabata

Gelone – Simon Bailey

Corindo – Matthias Rexroth

Silandra – Louise Alder

Giacinta – Kateryna Kasper

Filosofia – Katharina Megiera

Frankfurter Opern- und Museumorchester & Monteverdi-Continuo-Ensemble/Ivor Bolton

rec. live, February – March 2015, Oper Frankfurt

Libretto only in Italian enclosed

OEHMS CLASSICS OC965 [3 CDs: 175:21]

L'Oronthea was one of the most popular operas of the 17th century, when that genre was still in its relative infancy. Antonio Cesti's later, slightly better known stage work, *Il pomo d'oro*, was one of the most lavish of that era. As a musical heir to Monteverdi and a younger contemporary of Cavalli, honing his operatic skills in Venice, Cesti built upon that experience to compose a series of operas for the court of Archduke Ferdinand Karl in his Tyrolean capital, Innsbruck, including *L'Oronthea* in 1656 (though other, contested sources, suggest that it had been written in Venice in 1649).

Its style and structure will be familiar to those who already know any of the operas of Monteverdi, and Cavalli in particular—it bears all the elements of *opera buffa* with its conflicting love interests, a comically drunken servant, disguises, the coincidental discovery of the royal origins of Alidoro's birth making him a suitable consort for Queen Oronthea, and a *travesti* role for tenor taking on the role of a mature, lusty woman. But it also anticipates the conventions of high Baroque *opera seria* with such contortions in plot, and increasingly expansive monologues reflecting upon the action of the drama that would come to be formalised in the regular structure and pattern of the *da capo* aria. Indeed Oronthea's melancholic arioso *Intorno all'idol mio*—in which she muses upon her emotional instability, having fallen in love with Alidoro—almost sounds as though it comes from one of Handel's operas. Perhaps that it is what prompted Charles Burney to print it in his famous history of music when Handel's shadow still loomed large, preserving the only fragment from the work until the rediscovery of four manuscript sources in the 1950s.

This live recording from Frankfurt's opera house is based upon a more recently discovered score held at Wellesley College, and so there are some differences from the previous recording of the work by René Jacobs in 1982. There is a lot of presence on this new set, capturing the cut and thrust of a real performance, but picking up minimal noise from stage or audience (applause is only retained at the end of the last Act). In particular Ivor Bolton generally secures musical variety and urgency from the Frankfurter Opern- und Museumorchester in the numerous instrumental interludes which punctuate the action. But there is less of a sense of dramatic occasion in Act Two than in those on either side of it. That is perhaps on account of a less committed performance on the particular night of its run from which that part of the recording was taken, although another cause may be the fairly static structure of this Act, with a lot of dialogue, broken up by monologues from time to time, but little real incident.

The soloists are well cast, inhabiting the frequently mercurial demands of their parts with a good, sprightly temper, not least Paula Murrihy as Oronthea. She manages to be playful even as she high-mindedly disavows the distractions of love, before expressing the sincere ardour of her passion as she succumbs to her feelings for Alidoro. Xavier Sabata sings the latter part with an attractively quiet but authoritative manner which makes sense of the allure he holds for Oronthea, as well as other characters. Silandra is one such, and Louise Alder wins the listener's sympathy in her expressive,

though ultimately futile, yearning for the young soldier, but Matthias Rexroth makes the part of Corindo a more than second best as the character with whom she is eventually paired off. Simon Bailey's comic virtuosity in realising the dishevelled servant Gelone deserves to win plaudits for the way that he brings to life his tomfoolery convincingly, sometimes shifting between two musical registers within a single passage. Guy de Mey demonstrates similar agility in the drag role of Aristeia.

The voices sometimes sound recessed in relation to the orchestra—doubtless inevitably so as they move around the stage—and so Jacobs's recording gives a more consistently immediate ambience, but Bolton's is clearly the more dramatic reading, responding to the action taking place on stage. Jacobs's instrumental interludes sound somewhat better upholstered, perhaps with a slightly larger ensemble, but those provided by the Frankfurt house ensemble create an opulent enough sound and, more to the point, are animated with more vigour. The continuo accompaniment—by far the most important non-vocal strand in this as in every other opera in this period—is realised with lithe, but undemonstrative sobriety so as not to detract from the singers, and sustains the pace and tension of the performance admirably. Jacobs's recording might still retain a place for its measured, respectful approach to the score, but those listeners who prefer the grit of an animated performance in the theatre will warm to this new version more. It is a shame, however, that no English translation is made available, either in the booklet or online, as that would aid appreciation of the opera's intricate, fast-paced action. A minor compensation is the selection of pictures from the production in the booklet, peopled with figures wearing wings, and garish, over-sized heads of cupids (resembling a puffed-up, cherubic Doris Day with their rouged cheeks and blond curls), and seemingly haunting every scene.

Curtis Rogers

Marcel DUPRÉ (1886-1971)

Complete Piano Works

Variations in C-sharp minor, Op. 22 (1924) [15:12]

6 Preludes, Op. 12 (1916) [20:02]

4 Pieces, Op. 19 (1921) [14:27]

Gracieuse (four-hands) [1:44]

Berceuse [4:03]

Ballade pour piano et orgue, Op. 30 (1932) [10:33]

François-Michel Rignol (piano), Lorraine Lacaze (piano) (*Gracieuse*), Marguerite Dupré (piano) & Pierre Cochereau (organ) (*Ballade*)

rec. 2017, L'église St-Félix du Domaine de Bayssan à Béziers, 1956, in the home of Pierre Cochereau, Paris (*Ballade*)

SOLSTICE SOCD348 [66:12]

Like many others, I always tend to associate the name of Marcel Dupré exclusively with the organ, in the roles of composer, performer and pedagogue. Reading Michel Roubinet's excellent accompanying liner notes, it's obvious that the doyen of the French organ wasn't for having his wings clipped as far as composition was concerned. A cursory glance at his oeuvre reveals choral, vocal and chamber music and a *Fantasia* for piano and orchestra. The solo piano music was written between 1916 and 1924 when he was in his thirties, with the *Ballade* for piano and organ coming slightly later in 1932. I'm surprised that none of this music has seen the light of day before on disc, at least I'm assuming this is so, as the CD cover states that these are premiere recordings.

The most substantial work here, at just over 15 minutes, is the *Variations in C-sharp minor*, Op. 22, dedicated to the Québécois composer Alfred La Liberté. The theme has a solemn, wistful quality and the twenty variations that follow are all relatively brief. Various aspects of piano technique and diverse rhythmic patterns are explored. François-Michel Rignol's imaginative characterization of each cannot fail to win you over.

The *Six Preludes*, Op. 12 from 1916 eschew the virtuosic bombast of much post-Romantic piano music. They favour instead a more intimate approach, where sensitive colouring of sonority and subtle nuancing of lines is paramount. In the ordering of the six pieces, Dupré alternates slow preludes with more animated ones, thus providing suitable contrast. Nos II and V1 require a high level of virtuosity. The first Prelude is dark and sombre, probing the deep recesses of the keyboard, and the overall effect is one of disquiet. In No. III, Rignol achieves marvellous fluidity and luminous colour in the cascading roulades, and in V his delicate voicing of chords offers some welcome diaphanous sheen.

The *Four Pieces*, Op. 19, date from 1921 and were dedicated to Clara Haskill. *Étude*, chromatically complex, presents a challenge to any pianist. In *Cortège et Litanie*, Rignol's arpeggiated chords at the start truly glisten and, as the work progresses, he skilfully builds the music up to a potent climax. *Chanson* gives testimony to Dupré's melodic gifts, and *Air de ballet* to his rhythmic imagination.

Gracieuse (for four hands) and *Berceuse* are recently discovered manuscripts by the composer's granddaughter, and remain unpublished and undated. They were both dedicated to his daughter. Both are suffused with elegance and charm. The *Ballade* is an intriguing bonus. It was recorded in 1956 in the home of Pierre Cochereau, Paris, with Marguerite Dupré, the composer's daughter, on the piano. The piano appears to be the leading light, and is forwardly projected in the balance. Nevertheless, both instruments blend well in this unusual combination, one I certainly have never encountered before.

For anyone, like myself, with an interest in French piano music, this release will be welcomed with open arms. François-Michel Rignol's infectious enthusiasm and cultivated musicianship should win this wonderful music many new acquaintances. I salute Solstice.

Stephen Greenbank

Kara KARAYEV (1918-1982)

The Seven Beauties, Suite for orchestra (1949) [32.53]

Don Quixote, Symphonic Engravings (1960) [20.32]

Leyla and Mejnun, Symphonic Poem (1947) [15.17]

Lullaby from 'Path of Thunder' (1957) [4.02]

All are premiere recordings

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/Kirill Karabits

rec. The Lighthouse, Poole, Dorset, 2017

CHANDOS CHSA5203 SACD [73.10]

Kara Karayev (full name Kara Abdul'faz-ogli Karayev) was an Azerbaijani composer, teacher and folklore authority. He led his country's musical life from the end of World War II until his death. His compositions are suffused with Azerbaijan folk music, with its rhythmic inflections and melody. His works are distinguished by his gift for vivid colourful orchestration. It has to be said that he was something of a musical magpie, his music being eclectic and influenced by many sources – the most common being Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky.

Since 2008, Kirill Karabits has been Chief Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (BSO). Many of his concerts with the BSO continue to be broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. Karabits has been championing the music of Karayev for several years. This new recording, in warm bright sound, reveals Karayev's masterly, extraordinary, colourful sound world.

The Seven Beauties music was inspired by the writings of the Persian Sunni Muslim poet Nizami Ganjavi (1141-1209). *The Seven Beauties* is a long narrative poem. Karayev's symphonic suite was subsequently recast by the composer as a ballet, which proved such a success that it was performed all over the USSR. The music's story concerns the doomed love between an artisan girl, Aysha and Bachram Shah, the ruler of an oppressed people, and his evil, manipulative Vizier. The opening *Waltz* begins as a wild, abandoned creation until a glittering stately, sweeping, then tender, waltz takes over, that instantly recalls Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev. The *Adagio* that follows signifies the first rapturous meeting between the lovers. It is distinguished by a gentle, tender horn solo. The strings' contribution is delectably romantic, yearning and passionate. These introductory episodes are rounded off with the wryly comic, riotous *Dance of the Clowns*.

The gist of *The Seven Beauties* is now revealed. The Vizier has shown Bachram a cloth with images of seven beauties, presumably in an effort to distract him. First is *The Indian Beauty*, her music sinuous, sensual, perfumed; full of eastern promise. *The Byzantine Beauty* music seems to suggest her travelling across the desert – one imagines the ungainly gait of the camel; then she dances to tambourine and tamtam. *The Khorezmian Beauty* is a bit of a madam; the woodwind figures suggest her flirtatious nature. *The Slavonic Beauty* is graceful and seemingly more demure; she has a flowing violin melody accompanied by syncopated horns. The colours and action might suggest her dancing twirls with long voluminous skirts swirling around her. *The Maghrebian Beauty's* music is darker, more dangerously enticing. The rhythm is that of a seductive, insistent Bolero implying she should be the most feared of all the beauties. As light relief we meet *The Chinese Beauty* and Karayev weaves his own pentatonic chinoiserie exoticism around her dance with flute and bass clarinet subtleties. Finally there is the delicate loveliness of *The Most Beautiful of the Beauties* with solo oboe prominent accompanied by alluring wind and harp arpeggios.

The Procession rounds off the work. It is a brutal picture of oppression as the people are suppressed. Sinister tam-tam strokes underline a malicious march that gains momentum reaching a horrifying climax.

Karayev wrote his *Don Quixote* music initially for a 1957 film of Cervantes's celebrated novel. Then, in 1960, he reshaped the music as this concert item. Pointedly described as Symphonic Engravings, Karayev intended this Don Quixote work to be concerned with character rather than incident. The

opening movement, the first of three labelled *Travels* seems to be preoccupied with a portrait of the unworldly, rather ridiculous Quixote (perhaps astride his skinny clumsy horse, Rocinante) as he sets out on his imagined heroic quests. The other two 'Travels' movements act like intervals as Quixote roams from one encounter to another. The second movement portrays Quixote's stout partner, *Sancho Panza*, affecting pride and pomposity and ready for any adventure or combat. His march, recalling Shostakovich. *Aldonse*, is a portrait of the old knight's ideal woman. It is tenderly romantic with a stunning flute melody. Also affecting, is the final *Don Quixote's Death*, a truly fond farewell full of refined pathos and recalling Tchaikovsky. On the way the extrovert *Cavalcade* merits coverage. This is perhaps a kaleidoscopic evocation of the Quixotic adventures? Whatever; it is a mock heroic picture, the music charging along at the gallop (or at points, cantering) with the Don lunging into battle. The music reminds one of Prokofiev here.

Karayev's Symphonic Poem, *Leyla and Mejnun*, won him the Stalin Prize. Its story is of another pair of star-crossed lovers: the young poet Quays and his cousin Leyla. They are children of feuding parents. (In fact Byron referred to them as the 'Romeo and Juliet' of the East.) The quarrelling families' sparring music is unrelentingly hostile. Brass and strings are used in clashing canon figures. Tchaikovsky is the quite obvious influence in his *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* modes. The love music is rapturous. Its long-breathed melody, is not far off from the Hollywood indulgencies of Max Steiner, and Rachmaninov would not have been disgraced by it; nor would Howard Hanson whose own 'Romantic' Symphony No. 2 also came to my mind.

The Path of Thunder was set in Apartheid-period South Africa. It was based on a story by Peter Abrahams that dealt with the frowned upon love between a mixed-race man and a white woman. Karayev scored his second ballet on this subject. His *Lullaby*, from that work, provides a momentary peace before the ballet's shockingly violent conclusion. It is softly gentle and tender but there is an eerie unsettling edge to it.

Extremely colourful and evocative music, brilliantly orchestrated. The ear is unfailingly captivated. The music has melodic charm. But there is, to my ear, no one melody that really lingers in the mind and that, for me, coupled with the derivative nature and eclecticism of this material, separates the good from the great.

Ian Lace

Previous review: [Dan Morgan](#) (Recording of the Month)

Jean-Baptiste ARBAN (1825-1889)*Fantasies on Verdi Operas*

Rigoletto [8:54]

La traviata [8:49]

Il trovatore [8:37]

Don Carlos [10:12]

I Lombardi all prima crociata [5:56]

Simon Boccanegra [8:15]

I vespri Siciliani [9:04]

Attila [7:59]

Un ballo in maschera [8:00]

Il trovatore – Miserere [8:08]

Luisa Miller [7:53]

Ernani [9:48]

Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio [6:58]

La forza del destino [10:53]

Angelo Cavallo (cornet)

Michele Fontana (piano)

rec. Casa Museo Barezzi di Busetto, Italy, 2016

DYNAMIC CDS7784.02 [2 CDs: 120:01]

Before the days of iPads and digital downloads of sheet music, brass players associated Jean-Baptiste Arban with an horrendously vast book of studies which, in many circles, was nicknamed the “music-stand-buster”. Bad enough to travel to lessons lugging around an unwieldy black case moulded to an equally unwieldy instrument, but to add insult to injury, to have to add to one’s burdens possibly the heaviest volume of music known to mankind, surely put plenty of prospective brass players off for life. And when the book was opened, I was never sure that all that weight-lifting had been worthwhile; prodigiously prolific as Arban was, his ability to approach every imaginable technical challenge from every conceivable angle hardly endeared him to generations of students. And once you had mastered the studies contained within his massive and opulently-entitled *Grande méthode complète*, there was the monumentally challenging *Carnival of Venice* to get through, with its endless variations and lip-destroying absence of rests. As a young brass student I have to confess my relationship with Arban was never an happy one, and while I knew, had I persevered with it, it would have done me good, rather like a diet of carrot juice and raw lettuce, a loathing for the medicine overcame any faith in its ultimate beneficial qualities. Had I known then that there were these 14 extended *Fantasies* using themes from Verdi operas to put the lip under even more strain, I might not have progressed as far as I did brass-wise.

For all the student horror of Arban, he was a significant figure in the history of brass instruments, and possibly the leading figure in the development of the *cornet à piston*, for which his studies and various *fantasies* were originally written (even if his posthumous influence has spread over the entire spectrum of brass). He first made his name, however, conducting salon orchestras and later at the Paris Opéra, before being appointed professor of saxhorn at the Ecole Militaire, and establishing the first ever cornet class at the Paris Conservatoire, taking the instrument away from its previous place as a kind of substitute trumpet and building up a repertory all of its own. He also worked alongside various instrument makers and engineers to improve various aspects of the instrument. His *fantasies* were intended to demonstrate many of the devices and techniques he himself was responsible for introducing to the cornet.

For this (what appears to be) first recording of the complete set of Verdi opera *Fantasies*, Angelo Cavallo produces a suitably mellow tone from his *cornet à piston* and handles all the technical challenges with ease, adding a pleasing military crispness to the jaunty rhythms such as that which concludes *I Lombardi*. A very restrained vibrato, a somewhat limited dynamic range and a general absence of dramatic gesture does nothing to dispel the overriding feeling that this is music more

intended for private technical work-out rather than public consumption. When familiar themes pop up – the *Rigoletto fantasie* is particularly full of them – they seem grey and uneventful, and the principal interests Cavallo seems to find in the music are the very predictable alternating fast and slow variations, as well as the obligatory sets of running triplets. Michele Fontana is a suitably supportive pianist who sets the scene in his introductions, touches base with some firmly planted rhythmic support, and only occasionally seems inclined to add his own touch of drama - there are spectacular if short-lived bursts of virtuosic personality in *I vespri siciliani*. The recording sets it all in a slightly hazy environment, which is probably only to the benefit of music which, with the best will in the world, is of rather more interest to those performing it than it is to those listening to it.

Marc Rochester

Ned ROREM (b. 1923)

Our Town. An Opera in Three Acts (2005) [123:25]

Libretto by J D McClatchy after the play by Thornton Wilder

Stage Manager - Matthew DiBattista; Emily Webb - Margot Rood; George Gibbs - Brendan Buckley; Dr. Gibbs - Donald Wilkinson; Mrs. Gibbs - Krista River; Mr. Webb - David Kravitz; Mrs. Webb - Angela Gooch; Mrs. Soames - Glorivy Arroyo; Simon Stimson - Stanley Wilson.

Chorus

Monadnock Music/Gil Rose

rec. ????, Rogers Center for the Arts, Merrimack College, North Andover, USA. DDD

English libretto included

NEW WORLD RECORDS NW80790 [55:00 + 68:25]

Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) won a Pulitzer Prize in 1938 for his play *Our Town*. The town in question is the fictional Grover's Corners in Sutton County, New Hampshire. However, the physical inspiration came from the town of Peterborough, New Hampshire, situated near to the MacDowell Colony where Wilder wrote the play. Thus, it's highly appropriate that the cover image of this CD set is Gregorio Prestopino's painting *Main Street Peterborough 1935*. It's even more appropriate that this first recording of the opera should be made by Monadnock Music since this organisation is based in Peterborough and its surrounding area. The play was turned into a 1940 film by Sol Lesser for which Aaron Copland wrote a highly evocative score.

The invaluable booklet includes a comprehensive essay from the composer and Rorem pupil, Daron Hagen. In it he traces the background to Rorem's composition, explaining that an earlier attempt – by Rudolf Bing in 1951 – to have the play turned into an opera for which Copland would write the music was vetoed by Wilder, who was notoriously cagey about musical settings of his plays. After his death his estate softened the line somewhat and J D McClatchy, a highly experienced librettist, was able to secure agreement to fashion an operatic libretto out of the play. It seems that Daron Hagen played some part in McClatchy's selection of Ned Rorem to write the music. The opera received its first performance at Indiana University, the lead commissioner, in February 2006. Designed as a chamber opera, Hagen says that *Our Town* is best suited to young voices.

One of the first things that struck me when I listened to this opera was the lightness of the orchestral scoring. I'm not quite sure of the scoring but it sounds to me as if no more than woodwind, a trumpet, piano and a small band of strings is involved. Certainly, there's a complete absence of heavy brass and percussion. This scoring imparts a transparency and an outdoor feel to the music. Another striking feature is that this is a dialogue opera. For most of the time there are no arias – except for three or four aria-like solos in the final act – and the chorus is mainly restricted to the singing of hymns, as the church choir, at certain key points in the score. Otherwise, the opera takes the form of conversations between various characters. In that regard it's a huge help that Rorem, who is such an experienced opera and song composer, has written vocal music that so naturally follows speech patterns.

Before considering the performance, it may be appropriate to say a little about the action of the opera. Wilder's play is, if you will, a play within a play in the sense that the action takes place in the theatre. Within this scenario the Stage Manager has a pivotal role. He guides the audience through the action, helping us get acquainted with Grover's Corners and with some of its leading inhabitants. Along the way he assumes in this opera version one or two important small roles such as Mr Morgan, the drug store proprietor, and the Minister who marries Emily and George. All the action takes place in Grover's Corners. In Act I it is 1901. We meet – on the introduction of the Stage Manager – two neighbouring families: the Gibbs family and the Webbs. Dr Gibbs is the town doctor while Mr Webb edits the newspaper. Their respective children, George and Emily, are schoolfriends. She's the academically conscientious one while he's more interested in playing baseball but already you can tell there's a burgeoning attraction. Act I moves forward to 1904 and our intuition about a burgeoning attraction was correct: George and Emily are about to get married, though they seem *very* young – George's age is never stated but in Act III we learn that Emily was 13 in February 1900. Within the second Act there's

a flashback to 1902 and the point at which it becomes clear that Emily and George are destined for each other after she points out flaws in his behaviour and he thanks her for it. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, on the wedding day itself the very young bride and groom have a last-minute wobble of apprehension but they go through with the ceremony and by the time the wedding is over at the end of the act they are happy together.

Act III takes on a darker hue. It is 1913 and we are at the town cemetery for a funeral. It's Emily's funeral; she has died giving birth to her second child. Waiting, invisibly, at the graveyard are some of the town's inhabitants who have died since the wedding nine years ago: George's mother, Mrs Soames and the alcoholic church choirmaster, Simon Stimson who took his own life. After her body has been laid in the ground Emily joins them and immediately conceives a desire to go back to her life. Despite warnings she does so and she goes back to be part of – and at the same time to observe – her 13th birthday. Despite the surface happiness of the birthday morning she's distressed that her parents and George are so caught up in the cares of the day. She exclaims "I didn't realise. It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another." The Stage Manager takes her back to rejoin the Dead before he brings the story to an end.

Those who are familiar with the play or the film will realise from this brief outline that McClatchy's libretto compresses some of Wilder's action and characters. However, that's entirely logical and practical in the context of an operatic version and the libretto seems to me to hang together very convincingly. The music enhances the words in two ways. Firstly, the sung lines, often almost *parlando* in style, fit the words like a glove. Secondly, the orchestral accompaniment is consistently full of interest, either reinforcing a point that is being made – or has just been made – verbally, or else providing illuminating illustrative detail. The orchestral writing doesn't draw attention to itself in an ostentatious fashion but on the other hand it consistently enriches the action. The harmonic language is piquant and full of interest while the vocal lines always flow very naturally.

Like Wilder, Rorem succeeds, I think, in giving us a drama on two levels. Superficially, at least in the first two acts, we get a homely vision of small town America in a much more innocent age. However, there are currents beneath the surface. For instance, the drink problem of Simon Stimson is only manifest twice during the first two acts – in other words, while he's still alive – but Dr. Gibbs says of him "Some people ain't made for small-town life." Later, in Act III, the dead Stimson makes clear his bitterness towards those who shunned him in life. It's in this third Act that we see the flip side of homely Grover's Corners. Emily realises that everyone is so wrapped up in their individual routines and little worlds that they can't and don't make the time to savour the people and things around them while they have them there. If Wilder thought that was true when he was writing 80 years ago, what would he say of 21st century life?

So, we have a tautly dramatic scenario and fine, accessible music combining to make a thoughtful and thought-provoking whole. What of the performance? The first thing on which to comment is the orchestral accompaniment. I think I'm right in saying that the players of Monadnock Music are not a year-round ensemble but, rather, that they come together for a summer season each year in the area around Peterborough New Hampshire. They may not be a permanent ensemble but on this recording, they play like one, offering crisp, stylish playing that's either tight as a drum or lyrically expansive according to the demands of the score. Their playing is impressive.

Several, in fact most, of the singers don't sound to me to have quite the young voices to which Daron Hagen says the music is well-suited but to be honest I don't think that's a bad thing at all, especially for a recording. What one might lose in terms of youthful freshness one gains in terms of vocal experience and tone quality. Actually, there is one singer who *sounds* quite young – I don't know his actual age. That's tenor Brendan Buckley. He sounds very credibly like the very young man he's portraying but the trouble is his voice sounds *too* young. His voice lacks body and variety of tonal colour. As a singer/actor he does well in the role but, ideally, I would have preferred a rather fuller voice.

The two leading roles are very well taken. Tenor Matthew DiBattista is characterful in the demanding role of the Stage Manager and he possesses a pleasing, mature voice. I found his portrayal very convincing and enjoyed his singing a lot. He does very well throughout but shines most brightly in the three aria-like extended solos that he has in Act III. Margot Rood is convincing as Emily Webb. This must be a difficult role to deliver because the singer has to portray Emily as a schoolgirl of about 13 years old and also, in Act III, a woman of twice that age. (Incidentally, there isn't a comparable age-range problem for the character of George because the only time he sings in Act III he's still in the character of a young boy.) Rorem has given his principal soprano a demanding role with a tessitura that's often very challenging. Miss Rood copes with the demands of the role very well. She gives a moving account of Emily's main aria – indeed, the main aria in the opera – 'Take me back', near the end of Act III. Once or twice I detected a slight edge to her tone but this is in keeping with the youth of her character so it's perfectly in order, I think. The remainder of the cast all do very well with particular plaudits for Krista River as Mrs. Gibb and Donald Wilkinson as her husband, the doctor. Without exception the singers' diction is crystal clear and that's vital in a work such as this.

Gil Rose is well known as a highly effective champion of recent American music, especially with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project ([review](#) ~ [review](#)). I've encountered him previously as the excellent conductor of a recording of Barber's *Vanessa*, so I know he's a fine opera conductor ([review](#)). In the case of the Barber opera I knew the piece already so I had a yardstick against which I could judge his conducting. Here I'm faced with a score that is completely new to me. However, at all times the ensemble seems tight and well-focused and I found the pacing of the music – and of the drama – sympathetic and convincing at all times.

I should say a word or two about New World's presentation. The booklet is a model of its kind. As I've already said, Daron Hagen's essay is comprehensive and evidences a deep knowledge of the score and of Rorem's music in general. There's also a short note by the composer himself, a synopsis of the action, the libretto – very clearly laid out – and biographies of all the principals. The recording itself, made under studio conditions, is a bit close for my taste; I had to adjust the volume downwards a little and even then the singers and players are a bit too close. The recording seems a bit hemmed in; I would have liked a greater sense of space around the voices and instruments. On the other hand, the recording has the virtue of great clarity; you won't miss a thing.

I've admired Ned Rorem's orchestral, choral and solo song compositions for many years. I'm embarrassed to say, though, that this is the first time I've encountered one of his operas. In my defence, however, I believe that only one other opera, *Miss Julie*, has so far been recorded (Albany 761/2). I'm delighted to have heard at last an example of his operatic output and it was worth the wait: I found *Our Town* most rewarding.

Given that this great American composer is now in his nineties I fear that *Our Town* is likely to be his last opera. If so, he's finished his operatic career on a high note. This is an engaging, accessible and very rewarding score and Gil Rose and his colleagues have done it and the composer proud with this committed first recording. This is an important release.

[John Quinn](#)

Heinrich von HERZOGENBERG (1843-1900)

Piano Trio No 1 in C minor, Op.24 [35:17]

Piano Trio No 2 in D minor, Op.36 [30:21]

Vienna Piano Trio

rec. 2016, Konzerthaus der Abtei, Marienmünster, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany.

MDG 9422017-6 SACD [65:38]

Being very fond of the music of Brahms and his school, I am always keen to hear compositions by his followers and I have listened to a large number of works by composers such as Jenner, Fuchs, Tovey and Pfitzner. All of these manage to inhabit the sound world of the master quite convincingly. Unfortunately, despite one or two exceptions, they also seem to lack Brahms' gifts of melody, architecture, light and shade and knowing when to stop. Spotting the name of Herzogenberg, another Brahms acolyte, in the list of discs requiring review I was pleased to offer my services in the hope that I might find some works genuinely worth resurrecting or, better still, some works of real originality.

Heinrich von Herzogenberg came from the generation just after Brahms - being born in 1843 in Graz, Austria's second-biggest city. His academic orientation was initially towards law and philosophy, which he briefly studied at the University of Vienna, but he abandoned these subjects in 1862 in favour of composition, in which he took classes at the Vienna Conservatory for two years. It was at the house of his composition teacher, Felix Dessoff, that Herzogenberg first came across Brahms. He was to marry Elizabeth von Stockhausen, who had been a piano pupil of Brahms, in 1866. This was a move which seems to have irritated the older man, who was fond of her, and it may have been responsible for Brahms only expressing any approval of Herzogenberg's music towards the end of his life. Nevertheless, the two composers became life-long friends and corresponded a great deal. Initially, Herzogenberg's compositions were heavily influenced by Wagner but, after moving to Leipzig in 1872, he formed another enduring friendship, with the Bach biographer Philipp Spitta, and brought his own composing more into line with the heritage of the classical tradition – eventually renouncing the music of Liszt and Wagner in favour of that of Brahms. Herzogenberg dedicated several of his compositions to Brahms (three string quartets, Op.42, and a Piano Quartet, Op.95) and it is probably no coincidence that these were chamber works – a genre in which Brahms excelled – and which became a major feature of Herzogenberg's output. With Spitta, Herzogenberg was co-founder of the Leipzig Bach-Verein and he was its artistic director for ten years (with Ethel Smyth amongst his composition pupils). In 1885 he moved to Berlin to become Professor of Composition at the Hochschule für Musik. He died in Wiesbaden in 1900, aged only 57 and his music fell quickly into neglect until the beginnings of a revival in the last few years.

Herzogenberg's *First Piano Trio, Op. 24*, appearing in 1876 and published in 1877, was actually his third contribution to the genre – he regarded his first two efforts as merely “the shedding of an old musical skin”. There are four movements, of which the opening one is marked *Allegro*. From the start, which opens promisingly with a low cello melody, the work sounds very Brahmsian, with traces of Schumann. That said, in spite of several playings, I feel that the three main themes of the movement are not particularly memorable and the structure (ostensibly a sonata-form) is not very evident – although it all builds to a satisfying conclusion. A modestly varied *Andante* theme and five variations takes the slow-movement position and this is followed by a genial *Presto*, which trundles along rather than scurrying – at greater length than would probably be ideal. The final movement is marked *Lento* - although this probably applies only to the introduction since most of the movement is more of an *Allegro moderato*. The booklet notes indicate that its introduction draws on the main theme of the first movement but it reminded me rather more of the slow movement of Brahms' *Horn Trio, Op.40* (of 1865). At any rate, this is probably the most interesting movement of the four. Themes emerge clearly and the music is reasonably varied, building to a climax with a short and ferocious cadenza-like passage for piano before being rapidly brought to a virtuoso conclusion. A gushingly favourable review of the printed edition of the work appeared in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in August 1878, two months prior to the premiere, but the trio seems to have attracted little attention after this.

The rather more mature *Second Piano Trio, Op.36*, which appeared in 1882 and was published in 1884, is a slightly shorter work – reflecting (as the booklet notes put it): “Herzogenberg’s endeavouring toward motivic-thematic concentration and formal tightening”. As with Op.24, there are four movements, which are in the same sequence - although the *Andante* second movement (effectively the slow movement) was originally placed third. The *Allegro* first movement “begins melancholily” [*sic*], again with a cello melody, and “continues to be stamped by a mild seriousness”. The original performers obviously had problems with it because of a lack of tempo markings. The composer himself, in a humorous poem he wrote for the benefit of potential performers, said of the *Andante*: “Please do make it as short as possible – then perhaps it’ll be supportable!” The *Scherzo* third movement sounds close to Brahms, with nicely varied use of pizzicato, and the composer’s own description of the music (suggesting “a demented demon”) seems unwarranted. The final *Allegro moderato* is even more Brahmsian and has two decent cantabile themes “striding along in a relaxed manner ...[which are] developed to powerful climaxes here before the movement concludes with majestic sublimity”. One of Pittas’s observations relating to the last movement was that: “...all the instruments are too unintermittently occupied” and, whilst that sentiment could probably equally well be applied to the whole work, there is plenty of variety and interplay.

To the first potential performers of the just-published trio, Herzogenberg said of the work: “It has grown unforgivably dear to my heart. Play it through, please, a few times (I do mean a few times!) before you say anything”. He obviously recognised that the trio would not necessarily communicate well at a first hearing, but the performers found the work virtuosic and difficult and it was all of seven months before they could manage repeated playings of it. I gave it several hearings, though, and was pleased to find that it grew on me too. There is more light and shade than I initially thought and, although the music is rather earnest, its themes lodge in the memory better than those of, say, Taneiev - and it does not deserve to be neglected. My feeling is that it occupies the space somewhere between the trios of Brahms and those of Tovey – albeit without the genius of the former but also without the somewhat tedious length of the latter. As the booklet notes observe: “The success enjoyed by the Piano Trio No. 2 on its premiere can hardly be determined on the basis of the very few mentions of the concert.” Perhaps not surprisingly, it was not taken up at the time and this recording is probably one of its few outings since.

The Vienna Trio’s performances are really very fine and fluent, with no distracting mannerisms, and probably represent the best that can reasonably be expected from these works. The recordings are extremely good and lifelike. As will be evident from passages quoted above, the booklet notes are informative but poorly structured and translated, so they make laborious reading.

So, booklet notes aside, this is an interesting and very well-produced release. It provides further confirmation that, whilst the followers of Brahms never equalled him, some were obviously more equal than others - and Herzogenberg stood out.

Bob Stevenson

The Fiery Genius - Neapolitan Instrumental Music for 1,2,3, and 4 violins

Leonardo LEO (1694-1744)

Concerto per 4 violini & basso continuo [12.54]

Giovanni Carlo CAILÓ (1659?-1722)

Sonata per violino e basso continuo [8.22]

Pietro MARCHITELLI (1643-1729)

Sonata VIII per due violini e basso [8.55]

Nicola FIORENZA (c.1700-1764)

Concerto di violini e basso [7.30]

Francesco Paolo SUPRIANI (1678-1753)

Toccata V a violoncello solo con la sua diminuzione [5.05]

Giovanni Carlo CAILÓ

Sonata a tre violini e organo [8.48]

Sonata à due violini e cembalo [7.57]

Pietro MARCHITELLI

Sonata II per tre violini e basso [9.03]

Enrico Gatti (violin/director), Ensemble Aurora

rec. Church of Santa Caterina de Siena, Naples, 2016

ARCANA A429 [68.35]

The term 'fiery' in the title of this CD might seem excessive for this charming music, which is not angry, though often brisk and demanding versatility. It is, in reality, a title best ignored: attention belongs to the delightful music by composers unfamiliar to most listeners. There is so much to admire in this release.

Several of the composers have left us only a few pieces from presumably prolific careers. We know more of the life of Giovanni Carlo Cailó than of his works, of which only three sonatas are extant. All are on this disc, leaving one to regret the absence of more of his music. Cailó, himself a violinist, was born in Rome but moved to Naples when musicians of the Royal Chapel in Naples were dismissed and replaced by Roman virtuosi. He was close to both Scarlatti and Corelli, which is helpful as a guide to his own style. In Naples, he became known as the foremost teacher of violin in the city. The *Sonata a tre violini e organo* has delightful sonorities as well as great technical facility. The *Sonata per due violini e cembalo* is more conventional in its use of counterpoint, but has many felicities in execution. The *Sonata per violino e basso continuo* offers a rare combination of sounds and is marked by remarkable virtuosity. These are world-premiere recordings, and it is difficult to imagine better performances.

More has survived – perhaps 30 pieces – of Pietro Marchitelli who played a major role in Neapolitan musical life, not only as leader for five decades of the musicians of the Royal Chapel, but elsewhere, including the San Bartolomeo Theatre. *Sonata VIII* is traditional in its four-movement structure with striking contrasts between and within the movements. The *Sonata seconda* is strongly contrapuntal. The first movement is marked *Adagio-Allegro-Adagio-Allegro –Adagio*, all within a span of a minute and a half. No time for boredom here.

Less is known of Nicola Riorenzo, though he became first violin at the Royal Chapel in 1758. As a teacher he seems to have been robust: complaints surviving say that he would 'beat [the students] indiscriminately and ... draw his sword upon them'. Some listeners compared his music with Haydn's and the *Concerto per violini e basso* shows why, especially in the beauties of the largo, which has some of the unexpectedness of a Haydn quartet, with similar audacity.

Leonardo Leo's *Concerto per 4 violini & basso continuo* demands attention in its almost peremptory opening, and the concerto as a whole has a theatrical quality, again with the dramatic contrasts found throughout this programme. An exception to the violins of the other composers, Supriani's *Toccata V a violoncello solo con la sua diminuzione* is a touching and elaborate work. Designed as a practical exercise, and demanding a substantial technique, it is a lovely piece.

Production values are high, sound quality excellent, and the quality of playing by Enrico Gatti and his colleagues extraordinary in clarity and precision. I shall return often to this recording.

Michael Wilkinson

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

Ich ruf' zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV 639 [2:54]

[Ich habe genug](#), BWV 82 [23:12]

Orchestral Suite No. 2 in B minor, BWV 1067 [20:27]

Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor, BWV 582 [18:33]

Stephan Genz (baritone)

Alya Vodovozova (flute)

Russian National Orchestra/Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev

rec. 2015, Moscow

Reviewed in stereo & surround

Booklet notes in English & German, no texts

PENTATONE PTC5186593 SACD [65:52]

Tear off your hair shirt for some good old-fashioned, big-band Bach.

If, though, you want to get fully into Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev's Bach party, you may have to don some vestments instead. As Alfeyev seems to suggest in his rather pious liner note, it helps to have the God gene to properly appreciate Johann Sebastian's gift – it's above all about "spiritual symbolism and spiritual content", and "music (that is) deeply mystical because it is based on an experience of prayer and ministry to God". Very little, apparently, to do with indelible melodies, unique harmonies, perfect form, or any of those other absolute, abstract touches of genius that make for great music from anybody, anywhere, at any time. I also detect in Alfeyev's approach to Bach a Brucknerian view that "grandeur and truly symphonic scale" will more likely get the Almighty's attention. Hmm ... while Bach, by the way, is one of my musical gods, I have a hunch that someone as smart as JSB, if enlightened by today's knowledge of reality, would see life, the universe, and everything else quite differently. And still compose indestructibly great music.

Perhaps adding to the whiff of hubris, Alfeyev is extolled in the publicity blurb as "Russia's foremost composer". Really? That's news to me. My research comes up predominantly with references to him as a bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church, author of many books on theology and, coincidentally, a composer. Such aggrandizement can't be blamed on Alfeyev, I suppose, but you would expect at least a substantial discography to back it up – there isn't one. Further, the only recording of his music [reviewed](#) on this site was a bit of a stinker, it seems.

Alfeyev and I, however, may have some common ground on music performance. He says in the liner note:

"I am not at all fascinated by the modern fashion to play Bach in the so-called 'authentic' style, whatever it may mean, when the orchestra is tuned one tone lower (which is unbearable for people with perfect pitch), the tempos are too fast, and the entire manner of performance is artificially oriented towards what is believed to be peculiar for Bach's epoch. Bach's music is not a museum piece. Living in modern times, we have full rights to use the scale of modern means of expression in order to translate to the listener the outstanding grandeur and timeless beauty of his music."

Amen to that, and for Bach substitute just about every composer of note before or since, as I see the authenticity juggernaut has now reached [Ravel](#).

Given his expansive view though, Alfeyev's choice of centrepiece in this Bach concert may seem a little bizarre. The cantata for baritone solo *Ich habe genug* ("I have enough") has humbly minimalist connotations; to then throw the full weight of the Russian National Orchestra behind it is rather to say "I have more than enough, and then some ...". Here, contrary to Alfeyev's proselytising about the deeper meanings of Bach's music, it's probably better not to know what the music is about (no texts, anyway), and just enjoy it for what you hear. And lovely it is, my only vision being of soloist Stephan Genz in tuxedo floating on a cloud of lush string harmony. Genz has a beautiful voice, if just lacking a little power in its lowest reaches. Plaudits also to the unnamed oboe soloist. Despite his protestation

about fast tempos, Alfeyev doesn't wallow, despatching the work in significantly less time than the classic 1965 [account](#) with John Shirley-Quirk and the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields under Neville Marriner. Shirley-Quirk, with greater tonal weight and palpable gravitas, gives us the sackcloth-and-ashes version. I can take either.

Over to the secular side, the second major work on the disc is the Orchestral Suite No. 2, with the prominent flute part, and here I couldn't help getting some *déjà vu* of James Galway in his efforts to popularise classical music. There's nothing new about big-band Bach for this work, witness Otto Klemperer and Herbert von Karajan for example, but again there's an *élan* about the present performance that clearly places it in a more modern context. Alfeyev as before doesn't hang about, his movement timings on a par with, and overall quicker than, the 'authentic' Masaaki Suzuki with the Bach Collegium Japan. And to their credit, Alfeyev and his multitudinous players don't sound at all rushed, just nicely buoyant. This time the excellent soloist, flautist Alya Vodovozova, is named. If there is a downside, this is not the lithest performance of the Suite you'll hear, the mass of forces involved militating against the sharpest attack and pointing of detail.

Alfeyev's own orchestrations of two Bach organ works begin and end the programme. The chorale prelude *Ich ruf' zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ* is tastily presented with the voices of trumpet and oboe as toppings on a vanilla string base. With his arrangement of the *Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor*, however, Alfeyev joins the major league, other members including [Leopold Stokowski](#), [Ottorino Respighi](#), [Eugene Ormandy](#) and, yes, [Sir Andrew Davis](#). The first two transcriptions I know well, so how does Alfeyev do? Simply, wow! I'm trying hard not to be overly swayed by the stunning Pentatone recording, which in surround sound is quite overwhelming, but Alfeyev's is a masterful effort, using the full resources of the orchestra, appropriately, colourfully, and to maximum effect. Very Russian is the prominent use of bells and, paradoxically, the only missing element, I suggest, is an organ. Some subterranean pedal tones underpinning all that glorious noise might have converted me – well, not really, but I think you know what I mean. Whether or not Alfeyev's transcription gets into the general music literature for this piece, time will tell. *Prima facie*, it deserves to.

Dutifully reading the liner notes possibly set me off on the wrong foot with this review, expecting certainly some explanation of the religious roots of Bach's music, but not a mini-sermon. I suppose I should have taken a clue from the cover artwork. Using just my ears, though, Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev delivers a rich feast which resoundingly conveys the grandeur and beauty of Bach's music and, for me, its genius and universality. The epiphanies are optional.

Des Hutchinson