

Giuseppe VERDI (1813-1901)*Un Ballo in Maschera*

Gustavus III – Plácido Domingo

Amelia – Katia Ricciarelli

Anckarström – Piero Capuccilli

Oscar – Reri Grist

Madame Arvidson – Elizabeth Bainbridge

Conspirators – Gwynne Howell & Paul Hudson

Orchestra & Chorus of the Royal Opera House/Claudio Abbado

Otto Schenk (director)

Jürgen Rose (designer)

Recorded live at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 17 February 1975

Region Code: 0; Aspect Ratio 4:3; LPCM 2.0

OPUS ARTE OA1236D DVD [138 mins]

They don't make 'em like this anymore! This is something from deep in the Royal Opera House archives, a recording from the first run of their classic Otto Schenk production of *Ballo*. This is an opera that hasn't been particularly lucky at Covent Garden recently. Their 2005 production wasn't particularly popular and was only revived once (I thought it was OK, as I said in [this review](#) of the same production in Madrid). I didn't see their most recent 2014 production, but it was pretty universally panned, so looking back on this Schenk production feels like an insight into another universe.

It's ultra, ultra-traditional, with beautiful flats, lovely costumes and naturalistic sets. Ulrica's cauldron comes complete with ghoulish lighting and dry ice, and the set for the ball scene draws wowed applause from the Covent Garden audience. Schenk opts for the Swedish setting, for all that it matters, and he conjures up the kind of show that Covent Garden just doesn't do any more. Thus the target market seems to be the nostalgia brigade, and that's reinforced by the fact that the three leads and the conductor were all in their youthful prime when this was filmed.

Abbado looks like he's fresh out of school but he primes the orchestra to give of their best and he is a wizard with this score, as you can already hear in his DG recording with the same two principals. Plácido Domingo brings sunshine and verve to the part of Gustavus, with a perpetual smile in his voice, not just in the laughing ensemble that brings Ulrica's scene to an end. He never sounded better than he did at this point, and his fans will want to see as well as hear him during this golden period for him. The same applies to Piero Cappuccilli, who sings the role of Renato with golden passion and honeyed vigour. His *Eri tu* is outstanding, a model of control and precision. Katia Ricciarelli was often criticised, both in her day and later, but you won't hear her better than here. True, she is a little pressed at the end of her big Act 2 aria, but *Morro, ma prima in grazia* is meltingly moving, and she floats *Consentimi, o Signore* most beautifully. Elizabeth Bainbridge hams it up brilliantly as Ulrica (or should that be Madame Arvidson?), and Reri Grist is a real treat as Oscar, every bit as good as she is on CD for Muti.

The feelings of warmth for a bygone era might just help you to overcome the DVD's technical imperfections. The picture quality is grainy and much too dark – parts of Act 2 are almost invisible – and the sound is very limited too: I couldn't swear to it, but it sounds as though it's in mono, despite the LPCM 2.0. Furthermore, it's one of those strange broadcasts that has the English subtitles embedded into the picture so that you can't switch them off, and it's ever so slightly dishonest of Opus Arte not to make more of this on the case, barring a gentle allusion. However, the subtitles are very minimalist – often a whole aria gets just one line of subtitling at the beginning – and their compulsory nature didn't bother me unduly.

So this is very much a niche *Ballo*, and only you will know if it will suit you. It's in no way a top choice (the best DVD is from the Met, and the best CD is Solti's with Pavarotti and Price), but I felt well

disposed towards it nonetheless. When you can hear Domingo, Ricciarelli and Grist sounding clearer on CD, however, I'm not sure I'll watch this again. Nostalgia can only take you so far.

Simon Thompson

Eduard NÁPRAVNIK (1839-1916)

Complete Piano Trios

Piano Trio in G minor, op. 24 (1876) [36:50]

Mélancolie, from Piano Pieces, op. 48/3 (1886, arr. piano trio) [4:51]

Piano Trio in D minor, op. 62 (1897) [27:49]

Spyros Piano Trio (Tatiana Korsunskaya (piano), Bartek Nizioł (violin), Denis Severin (cello))
rec. August 2016, Konzerthaus der Abtei Marienmünster

Reviewed as stereo

MDG 9031996-6 SACD [69:32]

Eduard Nápravnik, while born east of Prague, spent most of his adult life in Saint Petersburg. He began his musical career as a rehearsal pianist at the Russian Opera in 1863. Within six years, he had become principal conductor, a post he held until stepping down in 1914. He helped make the Mariinsky the hub of musical activity in the Russian capital, and his time there is remembered as the “Nápravnik era”. He succeeded Anton Rubinstein and Mili Balakirev as director of symphonic concerts for the Imperial Russian Music Society. His development of the opera orchestra was such that Mahler said it reminded him of the Vienna Philharmonic. He was a friend of Rachmaninov and Tchaikovsky – clearly then an important figure in the development of Russian music.

He was also a prolific composer, mostly in the summer months. His piano concerto appeared in Volume 37 of Hyperion’s Romantic Piano Concerto series ([review](#)) and was described by John France as enjoyable but also as a written-to-order potboiler. A few orchestral pieces, including a version of *Mélancolie* also presented here, were part of an Evgeny Svetlanov release ([review](#)). Our reviewer commented that *Mélancolie* was a work that deserved to be better known.

On the evidence of these two trios, I would side with the music critics of the day who were quite scathing about his compositions, though I would agree that *Mélancolie* is a fine work. At in excess of thirty-five minutes, the first trio is far too extended for its very slight musical foundations, a common fault of the unsung composer. There are some good moments, but too quickly they fade into blandness or banality (or both). The later trio is better, partly for its relative brevity, but also for holding the interest for somewhat longer. I don’t hear any particularly Russian quality to them; they strike me as more influenced by Brahms. The slow movements, including *Mélancolie*, are unquestionably the best.

The Spyros Piano Trio was a new name to me, but a little research found that they had recorded for MDG as a trio under their individual names. I did recognise that of the violinist, Bartek (also known as Bartłomiej) Nizioł, who has recorded as a soloist for Hyperion and other labels. I don’t think my disappointment with the music was a consequence of their performance. The booklet notes are very comprehensive, though they imply more musical interest than there is. The sound quality is good – I couldn’t listen to the SACD format – but I could have done without the rather prominent sniffing.

Sometimes one finds an unsung composer whose obscurity is undeserved; sadly, that isn’t so here.

David Barker

Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)

L'enfant et les sortilèges (1925) [43.42]

Ma Mère l'Oye, five pieces for children (1911) [17.50]

Camille Poul, soprano (Child), Marie Karall, mezzo-soprano (Mother, Chinese cup, Dragonfly), Julie Pasturaud, mezzo-soprano (Bergère, Shepherd, She-cat, Squirrel), Annick Massis, soprano (Fire, Princess, Nightingale), Mailys de Villoutreys, soprano (Shepherdess, Bat, Owl), Paul Gay, bass (Armchair, Tree), Marc Barrard, baritone (Clock, Tomcat), François Piolino, tenor (Teapot, Little old man, Frog)

Stuttgart SWR Vocal Ensemble, Karlsruhe Youth Choir

Stuttgart SWR Radio Symphony Orchestra/Stéphane Denève

rec. live, Sindelfingen Town Hall, 14-15 December 2015 (*L'enfant*); Beethovensaal, Stuttgart

Liederhalle, 19-20 September 2013 (*Ma Mère*)

SWR MUSIC SWR19033CD [62.21]

Ravel was always the most conscientious of orchestrators, who meticulously indicated exactly the internal balances he sought. In so doing he set some major problems for conductors and recording engineers in the realisation of his intentions! His early scores, such as *Daphnis et Chloé* or the *Rapsodie espagnole*, tend to balance themselves, if the performers stick closely to Ravel's indications. When one comes to later works such as the opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges* matters are not always so easily resolved. The first stereo recording of the score, made by the crack Decca team in Geneva with Ernest Ansermet conducting, attracted severe criticism for the recorded balance of the orchestra which frequently reduced the singers to inaudibility. Some years later DG went to the opposite extreme for Maazel, bringing the voices forward and close to the microphone; this meant that some of the more bizarre details of Ravel's instrumentation – the slide flute, the cheese grater, the piccolo timpani, the *piano luthéal* – were somewhat short-changed in a rather dry acoustic. Later recordings have generally managed a compromise between these two approaches, but it remains the case that the score is extremely tricky to balance outside the confines of the recording studio. Live performances inevitably entail the loss of some detail or other.

Ravel made greater concessions to practicability in the arrangements he made for the many small vocal roles to be doubled (and even trebled) between a limited cast of singers. Nearly all the recordings of the score follow his recommendations for these; but some, including Ansermet's pioneering stereo recording, not only make adjustments but also make out a good case for these. In particular, although the roles of the Fire and the Nightingale clearly call for the employment of the same singer, a stratospheric coloratura soprano, that of the Princess with its tricky use of duet between the voice and the solo flute can sound rather thin in the same hands. A number of the recordings fail to realise the sense of passion which emerges in these pages – which produce the first signs of emotion and regret in the naughty child. There is no such problem here with the warm-voiced Annick Massis, but she is fatally undermined by the rapid traversal her duet with the child is delivered in the hands of Stéphane Denève, reducing the *Daphnis*-like tracteries of the woodwind to a generalised wash and the words to a gabble (track 11). This is the only serious error of pacing in the conductor's otherwise sympathetic treatment of the score, although the unaccompanied chorus in the closing pages might also have benefited from a rather more serene pace. But many other sections blossom in his hands, notably the chorus for the wallpaper shepherds and shepherdesses (with delightfully piquant woodwind, track 10) and the slow waltz for the creatures in the garden (track 22). Time and again problems of balance are solved seemingly without effort, and the foxtrot for the cup and teapot (tracks 6-7) has all the zany sense of caricature that one could wish. Even the tricky opening, with its solo double-bass harmonics set against a pair of oboes (track 1), comes near to the ideal.

The other singers here are generally a well-characterised and accurate group, headed by Camille Poul's boyish tones as the child. François Piolino manages well with his fiendishly difficult vocal line (his falsetto perhaps slightly weak, but clear enough) and even manages to make his cod-English as the Wedgewood teapot clear. Marie Karall is properly matronly as the mother, less so as the Chinese

cup; Julie Pasuraud and Marc Barrard assume their feline guises with nonchalance; and Mailys de Villoutreys and Paul Gay in more minor roles nevertheless manage to make their mark. The choir seem to come and go in the overall balance – sometimes more forward than at others – but are always in the picture when required, although even they have difficulties making themselves heard in the turmoil of the ‘arithmetic’ scene (track 13).

Ravel’s complete ballet *Mother Goose* was already included in an earlier volume of Denève’s series of orchestral music, so it seems an odd choice to supplement the opera here with a live performance of the suite which formed the basis of the later expanded score. Again the conductor and his players show a lively awareness of the internal balance of the instrumentation – the dialogues of Beauty and the Beast in violin harmonics and double bassoon (track 29) are characterised with humour – and although I prefer the tranquil final movement (track 30) to be rather slower, the conductor can justify his approach here by reference to Ravel’s unexpectedly quick metronome mark.

The recorded sound, whether from the studio or the live performances, is excellent throughout, clear and warm. The booklet notes, in English and German only, are however far from satisfactory and definitely let the side down. Of the twelve pages in English, over half are devoted to biographies of the performers and only just over one page is given over to a very brief synopsis of the plot of the opera. No text, no translation, nor even any directions to where such essential material could be found on the internet. Ravel and Colette would not have been pleased. And is “The child and the spirits” *really* an accurate translation of the French title?

Paul Corfield Godfrey

Sir Edward ELGAR (1857-1934)

[Cello Concerto](#) in E minor, Op. 85 [28:00]

Pyotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840-1893)

Variations on a Rococo Theme, Op. 33 (Original Version) [18:44]

Nocturne (from 6 Pieces for Piano, Op. 19/4 transcr. composer) [4:12]

Andante Cantabile (from String Quartet No. 1, Op. 11 transcr. composer) [6:47]

Pezzo Capriccioso, Op. 62 [6:23]

Johannes Moser (cello)

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande/Andrew Manze

rec. Victoria Hall, Geneva, Switzerland, July 2016

Reviewed in stereo and surround

Booklet notes in English and German

PENTATONE PTC5186570 SACD [64:46]

Here is a direct but compelling reading of the Elgar Cello Concerto, one that bares the work's soul without necessitating a dry handkerchief. Its immediacy is in no small part due to the Pentatone recording, closely balanced, but in the warm and generous ambience of the Victoria Hall in Geneva. Listening in surround, it's a very satisfying wash, with Johannes Moser slightly left of centre and projecting into the listening space, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande layered behind him but not getting lost in the acoustic. It's one of the best SACDs I've heard in this respect, also expunging memories of the often wiry OSR sound in Ernst Ansermet days when Decca, however admirably, made it one of their European trademarks.

Moser couldn't make a better start to the concerto, the opening chords commanding attention to the music that is to follow. The big tune arrives and ascends to the first orchestral climax which sets the scene for dialogue throughout the concerto; it is dynamic, dramatic and vital, avoiding the nostalgic overload which so often can cloud this work. Andrew Manze keeps to his recent form in providing support that is keenly aware of the composer's feelings but without injecting his own – the sentiment, you feel, is all Elgar's. Moser likewise keeps the narrative free of indulgence, the second subject a delicious interplay between soloist and orchestra. The dialogue, much brisker, continues in the second movement, a cleansing tonic before the aching beauty of the *Adagio*, Moser telling it all in glorious and graceful tone. The finale is the emotional roller-coaster it should be – drama, melancholy, and the return of the signature themes – bringing the work back to its opening statement and, so it seems, perfect symmetry. Again, Moser and Manze just go with the spirit of the music rather than getting lost in it, balancing its emotional thrust with the intellectual force of its creator.

The same approach informs the Tchaikovsky *Rococo Variations* and shorter works, clear-headed but sensitive and impeccable musicianship bringing justly satisfying results. For the variations, Moser plays the original version rather than the oft-performed Fitzenhagen edition, which along with reversing several changes also restores their ordering. He's not alone among recent interpreters in his choice, [Jamie Walton](#) on *Signum*, say, also opting for the original version. Moser's full expressive beauty is brought to bear on the gentler *Nocturne* and *Andante Cantabile*, and if the mood of luxuriant repose seems to be taking over, his quicksilver dexterity in the concluding *Pezzo Capriccioso* then recalls the second movement of the Elgar, rounding off the programme in spirited style.

So where do the Moser/Manze performances sit? In the top echelon, I suggest, but without displacing any of the other contenders. Great works such as the Elgar can withstand a wide range of interpretation, from the rapt intensity of [du Pré/Barbirolli](#) or the cooler but aristocratic [Tortelier/Boult](#) in earlier stereo days, to the more recent accounts by [Stephen Isserlis](#) and [Sol Gabetta](#), among others. Neither would Moser displace Rostropovich in the Tchaikovsky, but would surely sit beside him, having the added virtues of superb accompaniment, fine sound, and last but not least an account of the work's original version. As a pairing, the Elgar concerto and Tchaikovsky variations is a relatively common one, but apart from Tortelier's coupling on a budget Alto CD (not with Boult), currently available competition appears limited* to Jean-Guihen Queyras on HM, who includes two Dvorák makeweights.

He uses the Fitzenhagen edition of the Tchaikovsky and his disc, compared with Moser's, is without the features of SACD.

Bottom line, then: in the top echelon for both major works and, as a combination, probably unbeatable when the sound is also factored in.

Des Hutchinson

*The Mischa Maisky coupling on DG is still available through [ArkivMusic](#) and [Presto](#) as an in-house reissue.

Giovanni Benedetto PLATTI (1697 - 1763)

Sonata No. 8 in c minor [10:09]

Sonata No. 7 in F [11:13]

Sonata No. 1 in D [8:14]

Sonata No. 3 in F [11:36]

Sonata No. 4 in g minor [11:45]

Sonata No. 9 in G [11:25]

Sonata No. 10 in a minor [8:13]

Elaine Funaro (harpsichord (1, 3 & 4), fortepiano (7-9))

rec. October 1997, Mankato, Minnesota; January 1998 Durham, North Carolina. DDD

WILDBOAR WLBR9901 [77:20]

It is remarkable that some composers are virtually neglected for a long time and then, all of a sudden, receive much interest. That is what has happened with Giovanni Benedetto Platti. Until the beginning of this century I had hardly seen his name on disc. I can't even remember having heard any of his music, except probably one or two sonatas. In the last fifteen years or so a considerable number of recordings have been released, especially with music for oboe and for cello. Some musicologists stated that Platti was an important link between the baroque era and the classical period. This view met with much scepticism, but today his role in the mid-18th century is recognized and his music pretty well documented on disc.

Platti was born in Venice in a time when many famous masters of music were active. These included Vivaldi, the Marcello brothers, Gasparini and Albinoni. It was perhaps because he felt that under these circumstances his chances to make a career were rather slim that he moved to Germany. Here he became the principal oboist at the court of Prince-Archbishop Lothar Franz von Schönborn in Würzburg. He was held in high esteem by his new employer, who in a letter called him an "incomparable oboist". He not only played the oboe, but also the violin, the cello, the flute and the harpsichord and was active as composer and as teacher. He was the best-paid musician at the court, earning more than twice of what the *Kapellmeister* received.

However, in 1724, just two years after his appointment, his employer died, and his successor disbanded the court orchestra. But Platti had the fortune of having built a good relationship with the former prince-archbishop's brother, Rudolf Franz Erwein. The latter was an avid player of the cello, and this inspired Platti to write pieces with obbligato cello parts. It was thanks to this connection that he was able to spend the next years at Rudolf's court in Wiesentheid. In 1729 the new prince-archbishop of Würzburg re-established the court orchestra, which now contained no less than 49 members. Platti returned to Würzburg, and in 1732 he was appointed second violinist and Kammertenor. The appreciation of his employers through the years, his excellent salary and his marriage to Maria Theresia Lambrucker, first soprano in the court chapel, were all good reasons to stay the rest of his life in Würzburg, despite the fact that it wasn't exactly one of the main cultural centres of Germany. That did not harm his reputation: in 1764 an Italian musician reported Platti's death in a letter to Padre Martini, mentioning him in the same breath as Geminiani and Locatelli.

As I wrote it is mostly Platti's chamber music which has received attention. Especially his sonatas for cello have appeared on disc. That is easy to understand: his contributions to the 18th-century repertoire for this instrument are substantial, largely due to the considerable skills of Rudolf Franz Erwein von Schönborn. The latter's musical library still exists and includes some of the best music for the cello, such as sonatas by Vivaldi and Caldara. In contrast, his keyboard music is far less well-known. About ten years ago Filippo Emanuele Ravizza recorded the 'complete' keyboard sonatas. However, that recording included 14 sonatas, whereas according to the liner-notes to the present disc he left 18 sonatas: twelve were published in two collections of six each in Nuremberg as his Op. 1 (1742) and Op. 4 (undated) respectively. In addition six sonatas have been preserved in manuscript.

There is some development within Platti's oeuvre for the keyboard. In the Op. 1 he generally prefers

the four-movement form whereas later sonatas are often in three movements. There is much variety within the corpus of the sonatas. Movements have either a bipartite or a tripartite structure and are either monothematic or bithematic. Whereas in the mid-18th century the right hand has most of the thematic material and the left hand is often reduced to a mere accompanying role, including the playing of Alberti basses, Platti's sonatas show more differentiation in this regard. In some movements the left hand only plays chords, but for instance in the allegro which closes the *Sonata in g minor, op. 1,4* the role of the left hand is substantial. The titles of the movements indicate only a general tempo, such as allegro or adagio. However, the adagio from the *Sonata in F, op. 1,3* is in fact a menuet with trio.

Ravizza played all the sonatas on the harpsichord. That is certainly the most obvious choice, but there are reasons to consider the fortepiano as well. In the liner-notes it is argued that some sonatas profit from the use of such an instrument. It is notable that Platti knew the instrument which Bartolomeo Cristofori developed around 1700. He could have become acquainted with this instrument in Siena. Alberto Iesué, who published a catalogue of Platti's oeuvre, states: "In Siena (...) from 1717 until her death in 1731, Violante Beatrice di Baviera, widow of Grand Prince Ferdinand, was 'Governor of the City and the State' (...). Violante was a cultured, intelligent and well-read woman who also played the harpsichord and the flute; it was thanks to her, who had known Cristofori in Florence and probably possessed one of his instruments, that Platti was able to familiarise himself with the increasingly popular newcomer". A letter by a contemporary of Platti includes a passage which says that he "composed celebrated sonatas for the *Cembalo a martelletti* with which he became acquainted in Siena (...)". Moreover, Platti's keyboard works never exceed the range of four octaves (C-c^{'''}), which is the range of all of Cristofori's extant instruments. Iesué suggests that Gottfried Silbermann, the first German to build fortepianos, may have become acquainted with Cristofori's instruments through Platti. From that perspective it is most interesting that Elaine Funaro decided to play the sonatas from the Op. 1 on the harpsichord (a modern instrument based on 18th-century models) and the Op. 4 sonatas on a copy of a fortepiano by Cristofori, his last surviving instrument of 1726.

This disc dates from 1999. I wondered why it was included in a list of review discs as I can't find any indication that this is a reissue. Whatever the reason may be, it is good news that this disc is - still or again - available, not only because of the use of a fortepiano, but also because of the engaging performances by Elaine Funaro. I have greatly enjoyed her playing and her fine handling of both instruments. She adds some tasteful ornamentation, especially in the slow movements, which receive an imaginative and expressive performance. This disc was welcomed with enthusiasm by Kirk McElhern here ([review](#)). It has lost nothing of its appeal since, and if you have missed it, this is the time to make up for it.

Johan van Veen

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Entrez dans la Danse...

Anne Queffélec, Gaspard Dehaene (piano)

rec. October 2016, Arsenal, Metz

MIRARE MIR320 [82:23]

This is a beautiful CD. Lovely music, elegant playing, sympathetic recording. An enticing bit of programming, too, bringing together two dozen dance-inspired piano pieces by French composers from the *belle époque* and the interwar years, with a visitor from Spain thrown in for good measure.

The trouble is, it is in grave danger of suffocating under the very weight of its own niceness. That danger was brought home to me the very first time I played the disc through. My reviewing practice is to play a disc right through in the kind of situation so many people hear their music, before sitting down and doing a prolonged bit of concentrated listening. With this disc that initial hear-through took place on a rail journey through the borders of Scotland and into the Lake District. It was a stunning late Spring day, not a cloud in the sky, and as we whizzed through the spectacular scenery of daunting mountains, rolling hills, deep valleys, sparkling rivers and lush farmland, the view from my window of lambs gambolling in fields and everything looking green and fresh was of such intense loveliness that I felt myself wholly open to the charms of Ravel, Fauré, Debussy *et al.* The music proved to be the perfect accompaniment to such visual beauty. The only problem was, when the disc ended, I realised I had been totally unaware of any changes in the music – 24 pieces with an average playing time of just around three minutes had coalesced into a single, beautiful whole.

A second attempt to listen through the disc yielded the same, slightly languorous effect. Only Debussy's *Ballet* stood out in a scintillating performance, one of several in which Anne Queffélec is joined by Gaspard Dehaene in duo playing which is so perfectly coordinated that the effect is of a single brain controlling a disproportionate number of fingers.

Back home, concentrating exclusively on the disc, the same slightly hypnotic trance was quickly induced, with tiny touches of spice from Poulenc the only clear indications of a distinct musical personality. A further listening tempted me to check the track-listing to see who had composed one particularly delightfully well-mannered waltz (Gabriel Pierné) and a more vigorous one with just a whiff of virtuosity – which Queffélec tossed off with complete insouciance (Jules Massenet). But while a few old friends did make their presence felt (in one of whom – *Pavane pour une infant défunte* – I felt mildly disappointed in the rather dry performance) it was nigh on impossible to identify distinct musical personalities emerging from the beautiful sound-world of this musical era. I had to isolate pieces by Hahn and Schmitt to make sure I recognised them, and I never did catch the real personality behind Franck's *Danse Lente*. Queffélec's playing is delightfully unobtrusive, delicate and graceful, the pedal used sparingly and the dynamics shaded with infinite subtlety, but her interpretative discretion goes just a shade too far in a programme where variety is not the most obvious characteristic.

For many, a disc of beautiful piano music which requires no effort in listening, presents no challenge in accepting and makes no demands on the hearer, is an attractive proposition. For them, this disc is a Godsend – although I fear they already have their own self-assembled or bought-in playlists and will not see the point in adding another – but it is worth far more than that.

Julie Sandler goes all out in her booklet notes to elevate this easy-listening programme to something psychologically, sociologically and historically significant, managing to obscure everything in writing which is almost mind-numbingly complicated in the English translation, and hardly any less obtuse in the original French. Queffélec does not do much better in her purple-prosed introduction. Yet her playing is insightful and intelligent, her delivery of the music's detail precise and measured and her technical command flawless. Piano buffs should love this – if they can manage to keep themselves focused on the single-minded pursuit of listening to an uninterrupted diet of beautiful music and playing.

Marc Rochester

Contents

Emmanuel Chabrier (1841-1894)

Feuillet d'album [2:11]

Ernest Chausson (1855-1899)

Pavane, Op. 26 [5:02]

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Children's Corner - The Snow is dancing [2:49]

Epigraphes antiques - Pour la danseuse aux crotales [2:34]

Khamma – Danse [4:14]

Petite Suite – Ballet [3:05]

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Dolly Suite, Op. 56 - No. 6 Le Pas Espagnol [2:04]

César Franck (1822-1890)

Danse Lente [2:34]

Reynaldo Hahn (1875-1947)

Le rossignol éperdu - La Danse de l'Amour et de l'Ennui [4:08]

Le rossignol éperdu - Danse de l'Amour et du Danger [3:23]

Jules Massenet (1842-1912)

Valse folle [2:58]

Federico Mompou (1893-1987)

Cancion y danza No. 4 [4:34]

Gabriel Pierné (1863-1937)

Valse-impromptu, Op. 27 [3:24]

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Nocturne No. 4 in C minor 'Bal fantôme' [1:58]

Suite Française -Pavane [3:08]

Suite Française - Bransle de Champagne [2:30]

Suite Française – Sicilienne [1:59]

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Menuet antique [6:39]

Pavane pour une infante défunte [7:06]

Valses nobles et sentimentales No. 2 [2:39]

Guy Ropartz (1864-1955)

Dans l'ombre de la montagne – Ronde [4:40]

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

Valse nonchalante, Op. 110 [4:21]

Erik Satie (1866-1925)

Danse de travers [2:39]

Florent Schmitt (1870-1958)

La ronde des lettres boiteuses, Op.58 [1:38]

***Pange lingua* - Music for Corpus Christi**

Pange lingua gloriosi – plainchant [2:16]

Josquin DESPREZ (c.1440/55-1521)

Missa Pange Lingua [29:36]

Tomas Luis de VICTORIA (c.1548-1611)

Lauda Sion salvatorem [2:27]

Pierre de LA RUE (c.1452-1518)

O salutaris hostia [3:05]

William BYRD (c.1539/40-1623)

Cibavit eos [2:53]

Edward BAIRSTOW (1874-1946)

Let all mortal flesh keep silence (1925) [3:41]

Pierre VILLETTE (1926-1998)

O sacrum convivium (1959) [3:37]

Olivier MESSIAEN (1908-1992)

O sacrum convivium (1937)[4.51]

Francis GRIER (b.1955)

Panis angelicus (2015) [3:27]

Graham ROSS (b.1985)

Ave verum corpus (2009) [3:54]

Gerald FINZI (1901-1956)

Lo, the full, final Sacrifice (1946) [14:49]

Choir of Clare College, Cambridge/Graham Ross

Michael Papadopoulos (organ)

rec. June/July 2016, Norwich Cathedral; Lady Chapel of Ely Cathedral

Texts and translations (English, French, German) included

HARMONIA MUNDI HMU907688 [75:19]

The Feast of Corpus Christi (the Body of Christ) is celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday so, depending on when Easter falls, it occurs between late May and mid-June. It feels rather appropriate to write this review shortly before the feast day falls in 2017 (on 15 June.)

This latest release from Graham Ross and the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge focusses on that liturgical feast and specifically the programme is built round the five Eucharistic hymns that St Thomas Aquinas wrote in 1264 at the request of Pope Urban IV. Almost all the pieces here recorded set texts that use Aquinas's words – Richard Crashaw's words that Finzi set as *Lo, the full, final Sacrifice* are based on Aquinas. The exceptions are *Ave verum corpus*, heard in a recent setting by Graham Ross himself, and the Ordinary of the Mass though Josquin used as his *cantus firmus* the Phrygian mode chant to which Aquinas's hymn *Pange lingua gloriosi* is sung.

Graham Ross prefaces the performance of the Josquin Mass with the plainchant melody on which the Mass is based. I always find it helpful to hear the *cantus firmus* melody immediately before a polyphonic Mass though in this particular case the melody is so well known that it's a little less vital than is sometimes the case. The Mass itself is very well sung. I approve of the way that Ross uses solo voices at times for textural variety. No less than 10 members of his 29-strong choir are allotted solo roles and all acquit themselves very well. Worthy of special mention are the two fine female soloists, Alice Halstead and Catherine Clark, who give an expert account of the extended two-voice 'Pleni sunt caeli' section of the Sanctus (1:12 – 3:32). Later in the same movement tenor and bass soloists sing the two-part Benedictus (4:51 – 6:45) and here Lawrence Booth-Clibborn and Joshua Pacey also do a fine job. A highlight of the entire composition, rightly singled out by Graham Ross in his booklet note, is the central section of the Credo. The homophonic 'Et incarnatus est' (2:46) is beautifully balanced in this performance and Josquin's moment of stillness and mystery is heard to fine effect so that the exuberant polyphony with which the Resurrection is then announced really makes its mark. This is a

very different sort of performance as compared to a consort performance by an ensemble such as The Tallis Scholars, of course, but I enjoyed it and I admired the skill that the choir brings to the music.

More polyphonic pieces follow. Sandwiched in between the joyful pieces by Victoria and Byrd is the beautiful setting of *O salutaris hostia* by Pierre de la Rue. This is spacious, devotional music and Ross's choir gives a lovely performance of it.

All the unaccompanied pieces, which is to say everything except the Finzi, have been recorded in the wonderfully sympathetic acoustic of the Lady Chapel at Ely Cathedral. I'm not surprised at this choice because the producer/engineer of the disc is, once again, John Rutter and I recall that years ago it was his venue of choice for many of the recordings he made with his Cambridge Singers. The acoustic makes a very welcome contribution to the sound and nowhere more so than in Bairstow's *Let all mortal flesh keep silence*. This is given a fervent performance in which the ringing sound of the tenors is noticeable – in a wholly beneficial way, I hasten to add.

It's fascinating to hear in succession the settings of *O sacrum convivium* by Villette and Messiaen. They contrast in a most satisfying way. Villette uses very full, luxuriant harmonies. His is a fine, ecstatic setting but I feel that Messiaen achieves even more in his very intense, beautiful piece. Villette's piece is more overtly celebratory in tone whereas I have the impression that Messiaen is metaphorically on his knees in humble adoration. His rapt, slow-moving music conveys the eternal mystery behind the text.

Of the two recent compositions Graham Ross's setting of *Ave verum corpus* here receives its premiere recording. Francis Grier's *Panis angelicus*, though even more recently composed has already received a recording. It was one of a number of pieces written in memory of the late David Trendell and it has previously been recorded by Trendell's former choir at King's College, London ([review](#)). Grier's piece includes very taxing soprano and tenor solo roles which Alice Halstead and Lawrence Booth-Clibborn deliver very well

The only piece in the collection that requires an organ accompaniment is Finzi's *Lo, the full, final Sacrifice*. This was recorded separately in Norwich Cathedral and Michael Papadopoulos, formerly the Assistant Organist at Clare College, plays the demanding organ partly marvellously – his atmospheric account of the long introduction is memorable and establishes the atmosphere in an ideal fashion. This piece is, I believe, one of Finzi's finest achievements and the present performance is first rate in every respect.

Indeed, all the performances here are first rate. The choir is flexible and responsive. The programme requires them to master a variety of musical styles and under the assured direction of Graham Ross I don't think they put a foot wrong. This is another fine and discerningly planned addition to their discography. The documentation is very good, as usual. John Rutter has an expert ear for choral sound and knows the Ely acoustic very well so it's no surprise that he has captured the sound of the choir expertly in a sympathetic and well-balanced recording.

[John Quinn](#)

Previous review: [Simon Thompson](#)

Jeffrey RODEN

the field [12:41]

as we rise up [7:46]

threads of a prayer [7:16]

6 pieces for the unknown [24:58]

Sandro Ivo Bartoli (piano)

Jakub Fišer (violin)

Szymon Marciniak (double bass)

Wolfgang Fischer (timpani)

Tobias Fischer (organ)

rec. 20-22 May 2016, Reitstadel, Neumarkt i.d. Oberfalz.

SOLAIRE RECORDS SOL1004 [53:30]

This release follows on from Solaire Records' first volume of music by Jeffrey Roden ([review](#)), appearing in black to partner the previous volume's white, and in this label's signature glossy heft with cardboard sleeve for the jewel case and a substantial booklet with notes and an extensive interview with the composer. As with the previous volume, information on the actual pieces is sparse, but there is plenty of context to orientate the listener towards Roden's creative worlds and the route he took to reach this point.

This recording further extends our insights into Jeffrey Roden's chamber works, starting with *the field*, a trio for violin, double bass and timpani. Morton Feldman once said, "I've been living with the minor second all my life and I finally found a way to handle it." This might indeed apply to *the field*, in its sparse exploration of a very few notes, that minor second opened out into 9th intervals, the juxtaposition of timpani and lonely sounding strings taking us some way into *Rothko Chapel* territory and even into that of Shostakovich in the chill austerity of his final musical statements. Melodic shapes emerge and unfold slowly, the whole taking on a kind of symmetrical purity, from silence and back.

In *as we rise up* an organ thrums a deep pedal tone under a slow melodic solo from the double bass. This elegiac tune is joined by the violin, the two strings playing in octaves and unison with impressively accurate intonation, the violin taking over, and the whole thing concluding as a mournful, all too brief duet. The first low note of the piano in *threads of a prayer* takes its cue from that organ pedal note, now becoming the slow tolling of a bell, above and beyond which Roden works his magic with the slightest of means. The sonority of the piano is crucial, but with so few notes this is also an 'essence of' – and that 'something' can be whatever you make of it. This is music that has the contemplative effect of a Japanese rock garden in its static beauty.

6 pieces for the unknown extends this atmosphere, but also shows how much transformative effect can be had from a change in register on the piano, a new tonality and the minutest examination of the fewest of notes. As with all of the players here, Sandro Ivo Bartoli is entirely within these pieces and entirely convincing with every note. We know he can bring down the house with [Liszt](#), but also here by drawing us in rather than having smoke rising from the piano with technical fireworks. These minimal but quietly magnificent *pieces* also draw us in, captivating through poetic expressiveness and a compelling openness and honesty.

I can imagine people listening to this and asking, 'where's the music? – there's nothing *here*...' If you are not prepared to give this recording time and become immersed then yes, it will pass you by. These are works that, like all good art, demand of us that we raise our game to meet them at least half way. This expectation and our response to it is our gain, our evolution towards new realms of beauty, and as with its partner volume I feel privileged to have been allowed access to its special qualities.

Dominy Clements

Horn Concertos

rec. 1979-2015

BRILLIANT CLASSICS 95412 [10 CDs: ca 11 hrs]

The horn has undergone a few transitions from the posthorn to the modern-day French horn. This wonderful box set covers most of these developments, showcasing as it does music spanning four centuries: composers presented here were active between the 17th and the 20th century. Yes, there have been well-known compositions along the way, most represented in this box. There also is a lot of lesser-known but equally attractive works which deserve recognition and which are included here. Many of the recordings have been licensed from the Edel stable of recordings (the company owns the Berlin Classics record label), but also Olympia, Naxos, Hänssler and Brilliant's own recordings. The result is a really useful and enjoyable collection, which will fill gaps in collections and introduce new composers.

The Edel discs are marked by the inclusion of many recordings by Peter Damm. He has been principal horn of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and the Dresden Staatskapelle, and is regarded as one of the greatest horn players of his generation. He is represented on four discs with music ranging from the baroque to the romantic repertoire. There are some fine recordings here, but surprisingly not the Richard Strauss concertos, of which Damm is a renowned interpreter.

The first disc has him performing Telemann, Förster, Joseph Haydn and Beer, and shows his versatility as a performer, playing as he does the horn, piccolo horn, posthorn and hunting horn. This is a beautifully played disc, an ideal opening to the set as a whole. From here he moves on to a disc of Vivaldi, Fick, Reicha and Sperger, showing again that he is a master of the idiom. Two discs in and there are already three composers new to me, whose music is well worth investigating. The third disc represents an area where Damm really made his name, the romantic repertoire. The disc includes Weber, said to be the father of romanticism, Lortzing, Saint-Saëns and Schumann. The Lortzing comes as a surprise. I know his operatic works, but none of his instrumental works. Here we have a *Konzertstück*, a real joy. It probably also presents the horn in its lowest register, something Damm plays with ease. In the Schumann he is joined, I think, by three other players from the Staatskapelle Dresden, in a wonderful recording of the *Konzertstück* for four horns. The final disc is one I have cherished for a long time, *Horn Concertos from the Dresden Court* (001 1772BC). It presents wonderful music from the golden age of music-making in Dresden, by Quantz, Zelenka, Heinichen, Telemann and Fasch.

Disc five presents a disc of music by Joseph and Michael Haydn and by Mozart. It is performed by Felix Klieser. Whilst he gives a fair performance of the Horn Concerto No. 1, I find Peter Damm's performance on the first disc a little more insightful. The item I found most interesting on this disc was the Mozart, here a reconstruction of the Horn Concerto in E flat Major K370b/371. It is not stated who reconstructed it, but it appears on the next disc where it is said to have been reconstructed and orchestrated by Herman Jeurissen. This is interesting, because one normally only gets the opening *Allegro*, yet here we have the second movement *Rondo* as well. It sounds to be the same *Rondo* as that reconstructed by John Humphries on Michael Thompson's fine recording (8.553592), but Thompson treats them as separate pieces. Here they are presented as two movements of a single concerto.

As stated above, the following disc presents the music of Mozart, originally released on the Olympia label. Herman Jeurissen performs the usual four concertos and the three fragments, but not the famous *D Major Rondo* completed by Süssmayr. What Jeurissen offers instead is intriguing. We have the opening movement from the *Concerto No. 1 in D major*, here with the addition of Mozart's comments theatrically voiced by Giorgio Mereu, but it is not for everyday listening.

Disc seven is Brilliant's own recordings of the music of Telemann. Here we are treated to two concertos and three overtures for various combinations, from one to four horns. The inclusion of this

music is timely—this year marks the 250 anniversary of the composer’s death—but this music is here in its own right. Telemann was an important figure in the development of horn music. The music presented here is bright and colourful, in recordings to match; they are bright if a little reverberant at times, but good on the whole.

This is followed by a disc of concertos for two horns originally released by Naxos as *Czech Horn Concertos*. The first two names, Joseph Fiala and František Xaver Pokorný, are new to me, or at least their music is. However, they prove to be ideal companions for the two concertos by Francesco Antonio Rosetti—one in F C61, the other in E flat C57—who is perhaps better known for his concertos for a single horn that follow on the next disc. The performance by Zdeněk Tylšar and Bedřich Tylšar with the Capella Istropolitana and František Vajnar is excellent; they give a well-measured and detailed performance.

As already stated, the following well-filled disc offers four concertos by Rosetti, the E flat C49, D minor C38, E Major C51 and the F Major C53. If anything, Zdeněk Divoký and the Czech Chamber Orchestra under Ondřej Kukul are on better form than the performers on the previous disc. This disc was originally released on Hänssler Classics, and the added production values show through. I have enjoyed Rosetti’s music ever since I stumbled across an old Supraphon Gem LP in the late 1970s. This recording only serves to heighten my enjoyment.

The tenth and final disc, licensed from Naxos, was originally released on Capriccio. It presents Andrew Joy performing the concertos by Richard Strauss, Othmar Schoeck and Hans Georg Pflüger (C 10443). I have, I think, Peter Damm’s earliest recording with the Staatskapelle Dresden and Rudolf Kempe (CZS 5736142), a recording I cherish. Damm’s musicianship is impeccable. Even if the mid-1970s recording quality does not stand up against more modern recording techniques, it is still my favourite recording of these two masterpieces. Still, Andrew Joy and the Kölner Rundfunk-Sinfonie-Orchester with Wolf-Dieter Hauschild are very very good and give a committed performance, up there with the best. There is a first-rate performance of the Othmar Schoeck concerto, a work which if not neglected, is certainly overlooked. The Concerto for Horn and Orchestra by Hans Georg Pflüger brings this box set bang up to date. Dating from 1983, this is the only work that some listeners might have difficulty with. From its very opening, it moves the horn forward in time, placing it firmly at the end of the 20th century. It is a relatively short work, just two movements lasting a total of just over fourteen minutes, but it is a powerful and sometimes aggressive work that employs every ounce of the colour available from the horn. This is an excellent disc, one to savour. If you are like me, you would start here your survey of this box set.

This is an excellent box set, one which sets out to highlight the horn as a solo instrument, and achieves it with flying colours. It is well conceived and executed, although I would have liked to see more 20th century music presented. The recordings are at least good, as is the recorded sound, and many are first-rate. The booklet notes, whilst not in-depth, manage to discuss every work presented here, making this a most valuable release.

Stuart Sillitoe

Anon

Sonata da caccia

Peter Damm (horn), Kammerorchester Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Hartmut Haenchen

Johann BEER (1655-1700)

Concerto à 4 for posthorn, corno da caccia, 2 violins & continuo in B flat major

Peter Damm (horn), Kammerorchester Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Hartmut Haenchen

Johann Friedrich FASCH ((1688-1758)

Concerto FWV L:D18 in D major for 2 horns, 2 oboes, strings & b.c.

Peter Damm (horn), Dieter Pansa (horn), Cappella Sagittariana, Eduard Melkus

Joseph FIALA (1748-1816)

Concerto for 2 Horns in E flat major
 Zdeněk Tylšar & Bedřich Tylšar (horns), Capella Istropolitana, František Vajnar
Peter Johann FICK (d. 1743)
 Horn Concerto in E flat major
 Peter Damm (horn), Staatskapelle Dresden, Siegfried Kurz
Christoph FÖRSTER (1693-1745)
 Horn Concerto No. 1 in E flat major
 Peter Damm (horn), Kammerorchester Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Hartmut Haenchen
Joseph HAYDN (1732-1809)
 Horn Concerto No. 1 in D major, Hob.VIId:3
 Peter Damm (horn), Kammerorchester Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Hartmut Haenchen
 Horn Concerto No. 1 in D major, Hob.VIId:3
 Horn Concerto No. 2 in D major, Hob.VIId:4
 Felix Klieser (horn), Württembergisches Kammerorchester Heilbronn, Ruben Gazarian
Michael HAYDN (1737-1806)
 Horn Concerto (Concertino) in D major, MH 134, P. 134
 Felix Klieser (horn), Württembergisches Kammerorchester Heilbronn, Ruben Gazarian
Johann David HEINICHEN (1683-1729)
 Concerto in F major
 Peter Damm (horn), Dieter Pansa (horn), Cappella Sagittariana, Eduard Melkus
Albert LORTZING (1801-1851)
 Konzertstück in E major
 Peter Damm (horn), Staatskapelle Dresden, Siegfried Kurz
Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)
 Rondo for Horn & Orchestra in E flat major, K371
 Felix Klieser (horn), Württembergisches Kammerorchester Heilbronn, Ruben Gazarian
 Horn Concerto No. 2 in E flat major, K417
 Horn Concerto No. 3 in E flat major, K447
 Fragment in E, K494a completed Herman Jeurissen
 Horn Concerto No. 1 in D major, K412 (K386b)
 Fragment in E flat major, K370b reconstructed & orchestrated by Herman Jeurissen
 Horn Concerto No. 4 in E flat major, K495
 Horn Concerto No. 1 in D major, K412 (K386b)
Allegro with Mozart's original text
 Herman Jeurissen (horn), Giorgio Mereu (narrator), Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Roy Goodman
Hand Georg PFLÜGER (1944-1999)
 Concerto for Horn and Orchestra
 Andrew Joy (horn), Kölner Rundfunk-Sinfonie-Orchester, Wolf-Dieter Hauschild
František Xaver POKORNY (1729-1794)
 Concerto for 2 Horns and Orchestra in F Major
 Zdeněk Tylšar & Bedřich Tylšar (horns), Capella Istropolitana, František Vajnar
Johann Joachim QUANTZ (1697-1773)
 Horn Concerto in E flat major
 Peter Damm (horn), Cappella Sagittariana, Eduard Melkus
Joseph REICHA (1752-1792)
 Concerto for two violins (or violin & cello) in D major, Op. 3 (arr. two horns)
 Peter Damm (horn), István Vince (horn), Staatskapelle Dresden, Siegfried Kurz
Francesco Antonio ROSETTI (c.1750-1792)
 Concerto for 2 Horns & Orchestra in F major Murray C61/Knaul III:49
 Concerto for 2 Horns & Orchestra in E flat major C56Q & C57
 Zdeněk Tylšar & Bedřich Tylšar (horns), Capella Istropolitana, František Vajnar
 Horn Concerto in E flat major, Murray C49
 Horn Concerto in D minor, Murray C38
 Horn Concerto in E major, Murray C51

Horn Concerto in F Major, Murray C53
Zdeněk Divoký (horn), Czech Chamber Orchestra, Ondřej Kukul
Camille SAINT-SAËNS (1835-1921)
Morceau de concert in F minor, Op. 94
Peter Damm (horn), Staatskapelle Dresden, Siegfried Kurz
Othmae SCHOECK (1886-1957)
Horn Concerto in E flat major
Peter Damm (horn), Staatskapelle Dresden, Siegfried Kurz
Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)
Konzertstück for four horns, Op. 86
Peter Damm (horn), Klaus Pietzonka (horn), Dieter Pansa (horn), Johannes Friemel (horn),
Staatskapelle Dresden, Siegfried Kurz
Johannes SPERGER (1750-1812)
Horn Concerto in E flat major
Peter Damm (horn), Staatskapelle Dresden, Siegfried Kurz
Richard STRAUSS (1864-1957)
Horn Concerto No. 1 in E flat major, Op. 11
Horn Concerto No. 2 in E flat major, AV132
Andrew Joy (horn), Kölner Rundfunk-Sinfonie-Orchester, Werner Andreas Albert
Georg Philipp TELEMANN (1681-1767)
Concerto TWV 51:D8 in D major for horn, strings & b.c.
Peter Damm (horn), Kammerorchester Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Hartmut Haenchen
Concerto TWV 52:D2 in D major for 2 horns, strings & b.c.
Peter Damm (horn), Dieter Pansa (horn), Cappella Sagittariana, Eduard Melkus
Concerto TWV 51:D8 in D major for horn, strings & b.c.
Ensemble Cordia, Stefano Vegetti
Concerto TWV 52:Es1 for 2 Horns, 2 Oboe ripieni, Strings & B.c.
Teunis van der Zwart & Erwin Wieringa (horns), Rémy Baudet & Sayuri Yamagata (violins), Musica
Amphion, Pieter-Jan Belder
Overture (Suite) TWV 55:F11 in F major for 4 horns, 2 oboes, 2 violins & b.c. 'Alster'
Overture (Suite) TWV 55:F4 in F major
Overture in E flat major, TWV 55:Es1
Ivo Hadermann, Johan van Neste, Rik Vercruyssen & Bart Cypers (horns), Elisabeth Schollaert & Jan
Maebe (oboes), Koen Coppé (bassoon), Collegium Instrumentale Brugense, Patrick Peire
Anton VIVALDI (1678-1741)
Concerto for 2 horns, strings & continuo RV539
Peter Damm (horn), István Vince (horn), Staatskapelle Dresden, Siegfried Kurz
Carl Maria von WEBER (1786-1826)
Horn Concertino in E minor, Op. 45
Peter Damm (horn), Staatskapelle Dresden, Siegfried Kurz
Jan Dismas ZELENKA (1679-1729)
Capriccio No. 3 in F major, ZWV 184
Peter Damm (horn), Dieter Pansa (horn), Cappella Sagittariana, Eduard Melkus

Mieczyslaw WEINBERG (1919-1996)

Violin Sonata No.1, Op.12 [21:19]

Violin Sonata No.2, Op.15 [20:07]

Violin Sonata No.3, Op.37 [20:45]

Violin Sonata No.4, Op.39 [17:50]

Violin Sonata No.5, Op.53 [22:37]

Violin Sonata No.6, Op.136bis [12:00]

Violin Sonatina, Op.46 [14:01]

Grigory Kalinovsky (violin)

Tatiana Goncharova (piano)

rec. 2010, L. Brown Recording, New York

NAXOS 8.572320-21 [62:11 + 66:28]

I first came across the music of Weinberg (then styled Vainberg) about thirty years ago, on a memorable HMV/Melodiya LP of his Fourth Symphony and his Violin Concerto, and was struck by the many similarities of style these pieces have with the music of the composer's friend and mentor, Shostakovich. That said, particularly judging by his later works, Weinberg is not a clone and, in the last few years, he has very much emerged from the long shadow of the older composer. Whilst his music has yet to achieve regular performances in the concert hall (at least in the West), plenty of recordings of it have been made. For the uninitiated, Weinberg's works for violin and piano probably provide as good a starting place as any. With the exception of the Sonata No 6, a late work, all the other works here come from a turbulent period of 11 years between 1943 and 1953.

The first three sonatas all follow the fast-slow-fast pattern of movements. The first sonata (1943) begins with an *Allegro*, quietly - with the instruments in unison – almost like music from the early Classical period, before moving rapidly into a style that is more recognisably Soviet (a word which, somehow, keeps coming to mind). This is particularly characterised by the use of unison hands in the piano - there are very few chords. Of course this is a device Shostakovich frequently employed (think of the Piano Quintet *Scherzo* or the first movement of the Piano Concerto No.2). Whilst there is some variation of mood, Weinberg particularly seems to use the bare notes to achieve an effect of bleakness, bereft of warmth. Perhaps this is not surprising, given the wartime circumstances surrounding the music's composition, but it becomes a little wearing. The performers begin the second movement *Adagietto* at a tempo that can only be described as Andante, although I suspect the reason for this is to provide contrast with what follows. By the excitable third movement *Allegro* we get what the booklet note refers to as a "lively discussion", which becomes a "heated confrontation" before the music subsides to a quiet ending (the strenuous climax followed by a quiet ending being a frequent characteristic of these sonatas). By this early stage I was a little concerned at the tendency for loud passages to remain solidly loud – there being relatively little in the way of light and shade. Without the score it is difficult to know, whether this is the composer's intention or not, but, for me, this feature doesn't help the music's cause. Whilst this work comes from a recognisably similar school to that of Prokofiev, it rather lacks that composer's textural variation and interest.

The second sonata of 1944 is dedicated to David Oistrakh and Frieda Bauer (who were to give it its premier performance as late as 1962). The opening *Allegro* strikes me as more successful – with greater variation of dynamics and texture. There is a rhapsodic opening, which could almost be Brahms for a few seconds, but this soon builds to a powerful climax. An incisive "rat-a-tat" passage left me feeling a bit shell-shocked (again possibly appropriately - given the date of composition) but we then head into calmer waters and a quiet pizzicato ending. The *Lento* that follows has deep piano bass notes supporting an elegiac violin theme. Once again, this struck me as starting out too loud – although it does get quieter, before building to a thundering piano climax. As before, I assume the artists were seeking to achieve contrast, but I feel they were not entirely successful in this respect. The following linked *Allegro* starts nonchalantly and rapidly moves to "an intense discussion" (uniformly loud), which incorporates harmonics and pizzicato passages, before going through a

transition (described by the notes as “ironic”, but where the irony escaped me) back to the main theme and a rather aggressive and pummelled ending.

The third sonata of 1947 is described as deploying “Jewish melodic elements”, although these were not particularly evident to me. Its *Allegro Moderato* first movement starts with an undulating theme that sounds a bit like Prokofiev – but with odd outbursts of notes which suggest the composer was deliberately disrupting the melodic line. The *Andantino* that follows starts quietly in the piano with a discursive theme that is to be taken up by the violin before being developed into an “impassioned dialogue” – eventually sinking into a more gentle pizzicato exchange. Finally, we get an excitable *Allegretto*, which starts with a gentle theme that develops into a “confrontational martial section”, followed by a “cadenza” passage and a recall of the opening theme with an affecting quiet ending. Get the picture? Rather regular deployment of similar structures and little evidence of any evolution of style so far – a potential problem when attempting to provide comprehensive coverage of a composer’s similar works in chronological sequence.

What about performance and recording? Well, lest my comments so far be taken as unduly critical, I feel that, technically, the two artists are fine. The violinist is excellent, with a pure tone and secure intonation and none of those slightly distracting technical foibles one often finds – even with well-known performers. The pianist is equally secure and reliable – especially as an accompanist (she can sound less confident in solo passages). So far, my main concern is that they both have the occasional tendency not to vary the attack in some loud passages. The recording is vivid and close but airless. I could have done with a bit more space and distance around the performers and I think that might have helped the atmosphere of some of the quieter music. By this stage I was beginning to despair that CD2 might simply provide more of the same – which would have been a lot to consume in a single sitting. Fortunately, I was to be pleasantly surprised.

The fourth violin sonata of 1947 is dedicated to Leonid Kogan. Here we get a slow-fast-slow movement structure. The opening *Adagio* begins with a sombre piano introduction for 2 minutes or so, followed by “introspective dialogue”. This successfully bucks the trend of a lack of variation. Moreover, there seems to be a little more air around the performers here – and this is welcome. The second movement *Allegro ma non troppo* is in best hectic Soviet style but quite memorable. It subsides into a linked third movement *Adagio* which revisits the mood of the opening movement.

The Sonatina of 1949 is placed last on the disc but I wanted to sample it next because its composition followed two significant events in Weinberg’s life in 1948. These were the murder of his father-in-law, the actor Solomon Mikhoels (on the orders of Stalin) and the Zhdanov decree – whereby the Communist party sought to curtail artistic freedom and meet the “demand for music of a more accessible and even compliant nature”. Of course, the decree had a profound influence on many Soviet composers - notably Shostakovich and Prokofiev. Weinberg’s works were not banned but he was simply ignored by the Soviet musical establishment and the Sonatina gives us an early example of his reaction. Whatever one may feel about politicians meddling in artistic matters, it is undeniable that some good came of the “Zhdanovshchina” and I suspect that Weinberg’s music following the event probably was more widely accessible and listenable than it otherwise might have been. As the name suggests this work is lighter in tone than the sonatas preceding it and largely avoids their bleakness – in spite of the events preceding it. It certainly provides some contrast and I very much enjoyed it.

The fifth sonata of 1953 was the first work written immediately following Stalin’s death and the composer’s release from a three-month spell of imprisonment (for alleged “Jewish subversion”), but the work is not as bleak as one might expect – and we probably have Zhdanov to thank for that as well, although the work may be actually be a thank you to Shostakovich, who had agitated for Weinberg’s release. The opening elegaic *Andante* provides a complete contrast to the other sonatas and the music could almost be English – except that there is no trace of the serialist tendencies characterising much English music of the time. This is followed by a playful *Allegro*, which develops to

a vehement climax, followed by a murmuring piano passage and a thudding coda before coming to an abrupt halt. Much of this music sounds like something Prokofiev could have written. After a further cantering *Allegro moderato* third movement, the last movement begins like the opening of Prokofiev's First Violin Sonata – the one where the composer refers to “the wind in the graveyard” (although it is not played quite softly enough here to achieve that effect).

It is not clear, why the composer abandoned the duo medium at the end of the 1950s. The sixth sonata dates from as late as 1982 and was the only one the composer was not to hear performed. This is quite different again – being in a single movement. The opening violin solo makes it sound like a solo violin work for 90 seconds or so and this is followed with piano accompaniment (some in unison) that begins to sound like Janáček in places. We do get some bare and bleak music, but it is dissonant and more like Bartók than Shostakovich. There is a false ending and (again!) a quiet close. Not very congenial but certainly marking a further evolution in style from what had gone before.

As a whole the second CD has some slight variability of recording acoustic. Generally there is greater openness except for the recording of the fifth sonata, where the piano bass is not so sonorous and the effect is to make it sound slightly like a home recording in a living room.

These works have fared very well in terms of relatively recent recordings. The complete works - including, but not limited to, the six sonatas and a sonatina included here - are available (or will soon be available) on no fewer than three alternative labels: Challenge, with Linus Roth and Jose Gallardo; CPO, with Stefan and Andreas Kirpal; and Toccata, with Yuri Kalnits and Michael Csányi-Wills. Of course, several individual sonatas are available elsewhere – e.g. on Warner Classics (featuring a performance by Gidon Kremer and Marta Argerich – no less) but, for the sake of simplicity, I'll restrict comparison to the competing labels aiming to provide the complete violin and piano works.

The CPO set strikes me as achieving the best compromise in terms of acoustic – although the piano tends to overpower the violin in places. Also, I find Stefan Kirpal's under-nourished violin tone distracting, especially in the higher registers. The present Naxos set offers strong performances - sometimes lacking in subtlety but, as I have indicated, the Naxos recording generally is a bit of an issue. Of course anybody prepared to put the individual movements through an audio editor and add a little reverberation could probably make the end result more listenable (but why didn't Naxos do that?). The 2-volume Challenge set has a similarly dry acoustic, although the performers are set back a bit further, which helps. I found these performances slightly more refined than those on the Naxos disc – with the possible exception of No 6, which is significantly slower at 15:03. The Toccata set, offering all the works for violin and piano - of which only volumes 1 and 2 have so far been released ([review](#) ~ [review](#)) suffers from the opposite problem. Whilst the playing is very fine the recording is slightly over-reverberant – which is an equal distraction for me.

In the final analysis your choice may also be guided by comprehensiveness of coverage. For the six violin and piano sonatas and sonatina alone I would probably go for the Challenge set but, at bargain price, the present Naxos performances are pretty good – and you do get used to the sound.

Bob Stevenson