

### Vítězslav NOVÁK (1870-1949)

*V Tatrách (In the Tatra Mountains)* Symphonic Poem, Op. 26 (1902) [16:30]

*Lady Godiva* – Overture, Op. 41 (1907) [15:40]

*O věčné touze (Eternal Longing)*, Op. 33 (1905) [20:37]

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra/JoAnn Falletta

rec. Kleinhans Music Hall, Buffalo, New York, 2016

**NAXOS 8.573683** [52:47]

Novák's tone poems first crossed my path in the form of a battered secondhand Supraphon LP of these two tone poems. The Czech PO were conducted by the redoubtable Karel Šejna. He served these two Novák tone poems with a visionary possessed zeal that paralleled that of Beecham in his classic version of Delius's *Song of the High Hills*. Indeed, in these Novák pieces there is something of that ecstatic immersion in nature's arcana. Novák never once lets the mood slip - nature meets the human condition. The approach also typifies Alfvén's similarly styled Fourth Symphony where the sea serves as a vivid metaphor for erotic love. It would not have surprised me if Novák had included a vocalising mixed voice element as Alfvén had - solo voices in his case - but he did not. It was the Tatra mountains that took the life of a Polish composer of similar tastes to those of Novák - Mieczysław Karłowicz - who knew the Tatras from the Polish side of the range.

The *Lady Godiva* overture has something of a turbulent mindset. Again, it's a romantic piece but it has more derring-do about it than these two heady mystic-ecstatic tone poems. Its sense of narrative action is rather like Elgar's *Froissart* or Tchaikovsky's *Hamlet* (of which I recently heard Constant Lambert's exceptional 1940s recording on an old Dutton CD). The overture – long, at more than fifteen minutes - ends *andante* in a quiet glow and in the gleam of high strings. The liner-notes remind us that this piece pictures the gentle yet courageous Lady Godiva. The music's black high-drama, heard early on, speaks of her despotic husband, Count Leofric.

*Eternal Longing* is a natural successor to *In the Tatra Mountains*. As to its mood and manner much the same can be said as of the *Tatra* piece. Were the titles to have been exchanged I doubt that anyone would have blanched. Based on the stories of Hans Christian Andersen about "the eternal longing" the score also links with a poem by Jaroslav Vrchlický. Edward Yadzinski in his taut little background note, proposes a link with the tone poems of Dvořák and Strauss but apart from the opulence of the orchestra in the case of Strauss I do not hear much of a resemblance. There is something of Strauss's *Alpine Symphony* in *Eternal Longing*. Perhaps a couple of episodes for solo violin also suggest the Strauss link. Intriguingly, around about 14:50, Novák sounds as if he had been impressed by Josef Suk's great and almost contemporaneous *Asrael Symphony* but given the dates it's mere coincidence. The ecstatic nature images - especially towards the end of this 20-minute piece - also prompt recollections of later British works also of a nature-hieratic temper: Bantock's *Pagan Symphony* (1923-28) and Bax's 1914 symphony *Spring Fire*.

This disc further buttresses and enhances the standing of Naxos, Falletta and Buffalo. Remember their [Schmitt](#), [Bartók](#), [Respighi](#), [Dohnányi](#) and [Griffes](#).

While the Novák enthusiast in me wished for his two late and completely neglected symphonies (*Autumn* and *May*) this is a noble entry into the Novák lists. It's a chance to show that this composer's music can and does shine in the hands of conductors and orchestras of other than Czech origin.

These are sound and sympathetic performances in eloquent recordings by Tim Handley. Even so, those who have caught the Novák bug should also add the classic [Šejna](#) recordings to their listening experience. This is in much the same way that Beecham's Delius demands to be heard even if you do have much better sounding recordings by Del Mar, Groves and Hickox.

There are alternatives (for example Chandos-Nosedá and Alto/ClassicO-Bostock) but none of them are coupled as per this Naxos disc which has the advantage of uniting two of Novák's strongest tone poems.

Falletta and her allies at Buffalo and Naxos central should now look out Joseph Marx's gorgeous hour-long *Herbstsymphonie*. They made a fine job of [Glière's \*Il'ya Mouramets\*](#). The otherwise practically unrecorded and luxurious Marx work would make a natural next step. The Marx is due to be heard in London in November 2017 with Jurowski and the LPO.

**Rob Barnett**

## **Wilhelm STENHAMMAR (1871-1927)**

### ***Music for the Theatre***

*As you like it* (1920) [27:09]

Introduction to *A dream play* (1916) (arr. Hilding Rosenberg) [16:30]

*Romeo and Juliet* (1922) (arr. Hilding Rosenberg) [16:43]

Peter Boman (baritone); Caroline Sjöberg (soprano); Helén Finnberg (soprano); Magnus Nilsson (bassoon); Hedwig Lagerkvist (narrator); Thomas Ungewitter (narrator); Carl Andersson (oboe)

Helsingborg Concert Hall Choir (members)

Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra/Arvo Volmer

rec. Helsingborg Concert Hall, Sweden, 2001

**STERLING CDS1045-2** [62:43]

This disc has been around a while but since we have appraised so many Sterling CDs it makes sense to fill a long-standing gap in our review coverage.

Stenhammar wrote quite a few sets of theatrical incidental music, as did [Sibelius](#). Here are three examples not otherwise represented in the catalogue. Two have been fashioned into concert formats by fellow Swedish symphonist, [Hilding Rosenberg](#). In one case he delivers up a suite and in the other a single continuous concert sequence. Two of the Stenhammar scores provide musical scaffolding for and around Shakespeare while the third underpins a Strindberg play. The first two are in precise and flowing romantic finery while the third - contrary to the passions implied and expected - is more emotionally curtailed. Stenhammar's *Romeo and Juliet* is a highly skilled score in neo-baroque finery.

Thirteen fairly brief tracks make up the *As You like it* music. These include some exciting fanfaring, sturdily delivered serenade-style songs, wistful pizzicato writing, moodily serene pages and rustic dances including a gracious and very exposed bassoon solo in the *Pastorale*. The choir mix it tastily with the horns in the *Allegro* (tr.18) - a huntsmen's serenade if ever there was one. This music, especially during the quicker silvery-sweet string writing, sounds like Sibelius. Two child-sweet sopranos create a rustic jejune effect in the *Allegretto* (tr. 11). Burred-tone baritone Peter Boman keeps things lively and endearing. The Restoration accents of the final *Danza* are preluded by yet more fanfaring.

Onwards to the Strindberg, *A dream play*. It amounts to a tone poem with acted narration between Hedwig Lagerkvist and Thomas Ungewitter but this ceases so that the second half of this single continuous piece is for orchestra alone. The music is often warm and taut yet reticent. Parts of it are akin to Delius's score for Flecker's *Hassan*. Later, the mood cools yet remains urgent - suggestive of gales gathering impetus. You will notice a touch of Sibelius's *Tempest* too - although written after this Stenhammar score. It can also be extremely romantic, suggestive of seascapes, and with some very otherworldly effects like the strangely seductive 'squeaking' in the last twenty or so bars. Stenhammar also wrote incidental music for Strindberg's *Saga of the Folkungs ... one day, perhaps*.

The *Romeo and Juliet* music, as represented here, is in five tracks with baroque titles and moods to match. It's a cousin to Grieg's *Holberg Suite*. Emotionally this music is on a much more passion-curtailed relaxed stage than Tchaikovsky's tone-poem. It is as if Stenhammar is saying that he will provide an archaic serenade backdrop; not something that arrogates to itself the role of the words and the actors. This is the only one of the three scores here to be solely for orchestra. The Petters Pipa movement features a rural reedy-toned solo oboe reflectively played by Carl Andersson.

The spoken words are given in the booklet, as heard, in Swedish and in English translation. Lennart Hedwall's essay is in Swedish, English and German.

This disc has a breathtakingly deep soundstage with plenty of lateral and front-back impact. For an example of its stunning impression try tr. 1. The Sterling team of Jan Lennart Höglund and Sylve Sjöberg can take a well-merited bow, as can all those involved.

It's a pity that this disc in Sterling's *Swedish Romantics* sequence was not a prelude to a whole series exposing all of Stenhammar's incidental music for the theatre. It is clearly a rich seam and there is more to be found. Those who cannot wait can track down CDs of his music for [Lodolezzi](#) and Tagore's [Chitra](#).

I should add that there is now a sampler disc of 19 tracks showcasing 19 Sterling CDs (including this one) out of their total complement of 150. Sterling have extended their reach to include romantic orchestral music from Sweden (a given), Denmark, Norway, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, the UK and Mexico. Established in 1980 by the redoubtable Bo Hyttner, Sterling stands as in effect the Swedish Lyrita.

The discs represented on the sampler (*Introducing Sterling Records*) which is being sent out to all purchasers of Lyrita discs from Wyastone have been reviewed by MusicWeb International. The sampler gives extracts from orchestral works by [Lindblad](#), [Bengtsson](#), [Weyse](#), [Olsson](#), [Huber](#), [Mielck](#), [Auber](#), [Suter](#), [Klughardt](#), [Cliffe](#), [Zweers](#), [Scharwenka](#), [Raff](#), [Flotow](#), [Alnaes](#), [Gernsheim](#), [Juon](#) and [Carrillo](#). A complete list of this site's Sterling reviews can be found [here](#).

### **Rob Barnett**

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##### ***Ett drömspel*** (A Dream Play)

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### ***Project Hungarica***

#### **Miklós RÓZSA (1907-1995)**

Sonata Op. 40 for solo violin [20:02]

Sonata Op. 15a for two violins [16:24]

#### **Zoltan KODÁLY (1882-1967)**

Duo Op. 7 for violin and cello [22:53]

Szymon Krzeszowiec (violin), Bartłomiej Nizioł (violin), Adam Krzeszowiec (cello)

rec. Concert Hall of the Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music, Katowice, Poland, 2011-2014

**CD ACCORD ACD 226-2** [59:32]

In his autobiography *Double Life* Miklós Rózsa explains how, though he became known principally as a 'film composer', his real love was to write music for the concert hall whether solo music or full scale orchestral works. He also explains that to coin a phrase 'it may be possible to take the boy out of Hungary but you can't take Hungary out of the boy', and anyone who hears his 'serious' compositions will always be aware of the musical heritage he shared in. On the other hand, when it came to his music for films, there are few composers who wrote for that medium that were more successful than he was in putting the audience in whatever time and place the film called for. He could take us to ancient Egypt or transport us to the war against the Mahdi in 1895. In almost 100 films he created memorable music that helped many of them to become classics of the cinema, including *El Cid*, *Ben Hur*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Asphalt Jungle* and *Ivanhoe*, gaining him three Oscars in the process. His facility for writing memorable tunes is just as evident in all of them as it is in his concert music.

Writing for solo violin cannot be easy and to maintain the interest over 20 minutes is some feat. Few apart from Bach managed it. Rózsa was certainly one who did. Grounded in the expressive folk music of his native country this sonata is endlessly entertaining.

Rózsa's *Sonata Op.15a for two violins* is a much earlier work, but shows the same innate ability to write 'a good tune', nay, a great one. The two violinists weave around each other magically and Rózsa integrates the folk elements brilliantly.

Zoltan Kodály, 25 years Rózsa's senior came, from the same tradition and along with Bartók was an inveterate collector of folk music from the Hungarian, Romanian and Slovak traditions. The influence can once again be heard throughout his compositions just as with both Rózsa and Bartók. With such rich sources, how could any composer resist using them? Kodály's *Duo Op.7 for violin and cello* is both rich and complex and the added cello gives the piece a special flavour. I couldn't help having the image in mind of the addition of plain chocolate for enriching gravy.

If there are readers who are wary of dipping their aural toe into music they may at first think of as spare, I would urge them to try this disc; for one is unaware of that element since the music is so gorgeously rich that they will soon be won over. If they know the composers' orchestral music they will feel at home with these chamber works. If not, then I recommend they search them out for they are consistently rewarding.

Both soloists here are excellent in their expressive renditions. They also understand the traditions the two composers came from, which helps bring that extra affinity to these performances.

***Steve Arloff***

### **Igor STRAVINSKY (1882-1971)**

The Firebird - complete ballet (1910) [50:25]

Petrushka (1911 rev. 1947) [37:52]

The Rite of Spring (1913) [37:56]

Sydney Symphony Orchestra/David Robertson

rec. live, Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House, 6-9 August 2008 (Firebird), 4-6 August 2016 (Rite), 17-19 August 2016 (Petrushka)

**ABC CLASSICS 481 4954** [2 CDs: 126:13]

Sets such as this always give me something of a dilemma. Every modern virtuoso orchestra and conductor worth their salt has contributed recordings of all or some of these three famous Stravinsky ballets. Likewise the scale of the works allows record companies to display their technical chops too. As a result there are multiple very fine recordings of all these pieces in their various revisions. So the dilemma is: do we *need* another set? For all the skill on display here, in all conscience I would have to say that there is not enough that is so exceptional that old stalwarts of a collection are surpassed.

The two main caveats are the engineering/recording location which is just a bit too airless, prone to picking up audience noise and with some odd internal balances, and some of conductor David Robertson's musical choices which work well in the *Rite* but lack fantasy in the *Firebird* and sheer rumbustiousness in *Petrushka*. The lack of any coupling with the *Firebird* results in a short measure disc - a counter to this argument is that the set is being offered at a very reasonable "twofer" price. As mentioned, the performances were all taken from concerts; *Firebird* back in 2008 and the other two from August 2016. The playing of the Sydney Symphony orchestra is consistently fine - indeed few orchestras find any terrors in Stravinsky's writing these days. There are points when the playing transcends fine; indeed the (uncredited) famous bassoon solo that open the *Rite* is as sensuously expressive as any I have heard - just listen to the beautifully graded use of vibrato - they find a sense of hypnotic poise that is surly exactly what Stravinsky had in mind. Through all three ballets Robertson plays down the 'display' element, favouring steady well-judged tempi. This works effectively in the *Rite* which can sometimes descend into a riot of unfocussed dynamism. Robertson's weight gives the music a sense of inevitability that makes the final sacrificial dance both dramatic and shocking in its implicit violence. Against that are these occasional odd choices made on the mixing desk - at one point trilling secondary trumpet lines overwhelm more important horn lines - indeed the horns seem to have been given the roughest deal throughout as far as balance is concerned. Overall this is the finest performance of the three in the set.

But then this same literalness in *Firebird* gives the music a kind of dry-eyed objectivity which perhaps emphasises its modernity but at the cost of the links back towards the fairy-tale works of Rimsky-Korsakov or the languid afternoons of Debussy. The transitions throughout the ballet are well handled, although the emergence of the heart-stopping horn melody at the end of the *Berceuse* lacks the subtle radiance the finest versions achieve. Certainly, if heard as a live performance this would be very enjoyable - although quite why a minute of enthusiastic applause is retained here by the ABC engineers after each performance I do not know. Of the three ballets, *Petrushka* - given in its 1947 revised form - is the least impressive. This work is such a kaleidoscope of musical/pictorial events that a performance needs to be bursting at the seams with colour and energy. I find Robertson rather too cerebral throughout - again, well-played though it is. The engineering again makes some curious choices - the closing 'mocking' trumpets representing Petrushka's ghost being very full-blooded and present.

As mentioned, many conductors over many years have recorded this triptych of works and with the exception of that opening solo of the *Rite* this set displaces none of them from Dorati on Decca, Rattle on EMI, Inbal on Warner/Apex, Boulez on DG or Sony/CBS or even Kreizberg in Monte Carlo to name relatively just a handful of the 'sets' which spring to mind. And that is before individual performances or historical ones. The accompanying notes for this new set are good - they read rather like the programme notes from the original concert reprinted but no worse for that. Solidly competent versions that fail to compete consistently with the best.

**Nick Barnard**

**Gordon GETTY (b.1933)**

*The Canterville Ghost* (2015) [62.08]

Matthew Treviño (bass) – Sir Simon: Alexandra Hutton (soprano) – Virginia: Jonathan Michie (baritone) – Hiram Otis: Jean Broekhuizen (mezzo-soprano) – Mrs Otis: Timothy Oliver (tenor) – Cecil Cheshire: Anooshah Golesorkhi (baritone) – Canterville: Denise Werly and Rachel Marie Hauge (mezzo-sopranos) – Twins, Boys, Voices: Oper Leipzig Gewandhausorchester/Matthias Foremny rec. Oper Leipzig, June 2015

Full text provided

**PENTATONE PTC5186541 SACD [62.08]**

Oscar Wilde's short stories have proved most fertile ground over the years for composers in search of opera libretti. Less wordy than his plays, they frequently plumb unexpected depths of emotion and symbolism which sets them apart from those of Hans Christian Andersen, even when their plots have surface similarities. But much of the text of these 'fairy stories' is given in reported speech or thoughts rather than in dialogue, and it becomes incumbent on the composer or adaptor to supply these in more tangible form for stage presentation. Gordon Getty, as usual, acts as his own librettist here, and it has to be said that he sticks pretty closely to Wilde's original even when this results in some over-melodramatic language. One remark amused me: when Virginia refers to the Americans as having "no ruins and no curiosities" the Ghost in the original responds "You have your navy and your manners." But, re-using exactly the same exchange two years later in his play *A woman of no importance*, Wilde substituted the word "mothers" for the word "navy". Getty, perhaps wishing to spare the sensibilities of American matrons in his audience, keeps the word "navy" – which makes far less sense – and I rather wish he had taken up Wilde's substitution.

Otherwise Getty has made a very good redaction of Wilde's text, condensing it into twenty scenes with some additional material added at the beginning and the end. But some of the scenes are very short indeed, three dispensing with sung text altogether; and each one is separated out into a self-contained unit. That was probably inevitable, especially in realistic scenery as appears to have been the basis for the production at Leipzig opera on which this studio recording was based. But it must have made for a very stop-and-start effect in the theatre. I see that there are proposals to give the opera in Los Angeles and New York as a double-bill with Getty's earlier *Usher House* (of which I reviewed the world première production in Cardiff for *Seen and Heard* three years ago, with considerable enthusiasm), and it seems to me that some revisions to provide a more continuous flow of music might be beneficial. As it is, far too many of the scenes seem to stop and start abruptly, often with only a couple of chords to begin or conclude the action.

The sheer wordiness of Wilde's text too seems to be the source of problems. Even in the extended scene between the Ghost and Victoria, where the words cry out for some emotional and lyrical expansion, much of the action proceeds in recitative-like setting over atmospheric but fundamentally static chords. Only in the final scene (where Getty provides his own lyrics) is there any sustained melodic writing, which in the event comes rather too late after the principal action is over. Nor does Getty seem to provide enough music to accommodate some of the stage action called for in the libretto, a failing which I had previously noted in his earlier opera *Plump Jack*.

The full text is provided in the booklet (although there appears to have been some considerable re-arrangement in the final scene) and, apart from a couple of minor alterations and fluffed lines, the singers put across the extended dialogue well. Matthew Treviño as the Ghost is particularly impressive, and brings plenty of light and shade to his beautiful description of his looked-for death. Jonathan Michie as the American millionaire Otis puts his comic lines over well, although he tends to punch the higher notes which pepper his vocal line; Alexandra Hutton as his daughter Virginia has more cloudy diction, but has a delectable tone. As Mrs Otis Jean Broekhuizen is a bit matronly in delivery, but the smooth tones of Timothy Oliver and Anooshah Golesorkhi as the English aristocrats are a pleasure to hear. It was a good idea to cast the tiresomely boisterous twin boys as two mezzos; Denise Werly and Rachel Marie Hauge blend well although they do not have a great deal to do. The orchestra, billed as

the Oper Leipzig Gewandhaus, sounds small (strings, brass and percussion only, I think) but Matthias Foremny obtains smooth and subtle playing from his players.

In the past I have thoroughly enjoyed much of Getty's music, especially when he allows himself to give his singers lyrical lines to sing; but, as I have observed, these seem to be in dangerously short supply here. Perhaps revision, including some expansion of the orchestral score to provide interludes between scenes, might give a more appealing impression.

While we are on the subject of settings of short stories by Oscar Wilde, can I yet again put in an appeal for someone to reissue the Argo LP recording of Malcolm Williamson's *The Happy Prince*, a superb performance by an excellent cast of one the very greatest of all of Wilde treatments?

***Paul Corfield Godfrey***



**Pascal DUSAPIN (b.1955)**

String Quartet No.6 "*Hinterland*" (*Hapax* for String Quartet and Orchestra) (2009) [20:37]

String Quartet No.7 "*OpenTime*" (21 Variations for String Quartet) (2009) [36:16]

Arditti Quartet (Irvine Arditti, Ashot Sarkissjan, violins; Ralf Ehlers, viola; Lucas Fels, cello)

Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France/Pascal Rophé

rec. 2014, Cité de la Musique, Paris (6); 2016, Ensemble Haus, Freiburg (7)

**AEON AECD 1753** [56:53]

About thirty years ago, I was friendly with a Philosophy undergraduate while studying at Leeds University. He told me that the first formal exam question he had ever had to tackle as part of his course was something along these lines: "How would one convey to a Martian, newly-arrived on Earth, what a cup of coffee tastes like?"

The kinds of issues raised in such a question seem very pertinent when compiling a classical CD review, especially so when discussing certain contemporary works. The old exam question re-occurred to me while reading the notes included with the present issue (written by Maxime McKinley, translated from the French by John Tyler Tuttle), a heroically performed and beautifully presented disc of two string quartets from 2009 by Pascal Dusapin.

I first encountered his music at the 1997 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and have fond memories of a thrilling, semi-staged performance of his 'opera-oratorio' *Romeo et Juliette* in the Town Hall, which at the time seemed to me to be a kind of 'missing link' between Honegger and Xenakis. I didn't really have much understanding of what the music was about (this work is very far from a narrative retelling of Shakespeare's play) but I found it exciting and moving, and the performance colourful and involving. I later obtained a recording (on the French label Accord) which described the 'plot' and the 'libretto' (by regular Dusapin collaborator Olivier Cadiot) in terms which were utterly impenetrable to me.

I have since become a big Dusapin 'fan' regardless of this – recordings of his other works regularly feature intellectually 'challenging', shall we say, analyses. The fact is I genuinely like the way his music sounds, I feel he has a unique 'fingerprint' and that he is certainly one of the most important composers of our time.

So reading the notes of this new issue really disturbs me. To cut to the chase, I absolutely loved the Sixth Quartet (it SOUNDS to me like one of his most tautly constructed and fascinating works) but found the Seventh a much tougher nut to crack, on the face of it a collection of deliberately harsh, microtonal motifs, gestures and textures in a seemingly random sequence. What am I missing? Well, I'm clearly missing EVERYTHING, if such notes truly matter. If the only way of grasping this music is by possessing a deep understanding of the work of Samuel Beckett and the French poet Frédéric Forté, and a thorough appreciation of the philosophers Deleuze, Agamben, and others, I am utterly scuppered, alas.

The Quartet No. 7 has the subtitle 'OpenTime' – the note explains what this refers to as follows: "Here, it is, perhaps among other things, the unquantified temporality of the anacrusis; the 'little note', this nomadic distribution that, even though noted, eludes the square of the metre". Well that clears that up. Is the purpose of this kind of 'guidance' to encourage a wider audience for the composer? Or is it in fact the opposite, designed to exclude intellectual 'lightweights' who lack the necessary grounding in French philosophy, a complete knowledge of the Beckettian aesthetic, and the vocabulary that encompasses words like *aporia* and *Wirkungsgeschichte* and phrases that trip off the tongue like "rhizomatic interconnections" and "perpetual de- and re-territorialisations".

What is the point of a record review? Presumably it's to give an idea of what the music sounds like and to remark on performing and recording standards. This is my mission then, hopefully along the way

persuading some readers who (like me) can't make sense of the accompanying notes that some of this music at least is definitely worth hearing.

It seems that the connecting thread between these two quartets is the idea of 'exhaustion' –not in the sense of 'fatigue' but rather in terms of using up every option within a finite set of compositional parameters (assuming I have unravelled some of the accompanying essay accurately!). I think I 'get' that in the Quartet No 6. Fascinatingly, (possibly uniquely) this is scored for string quartet with orchestra (albeit one lacking brass and percussion). The subtitle '*Hinterland*' seems to refer to the material that each entity contributes – in the sense that there are overlaps in texture, melody, rhythm which can link quartet and orchestra or indeed differentiate them (when one or other proceed alone). The orchestra seems sporadically to make the music 'three dimensional' - sometimes echoing the melodies, shapes and rhythms of the quartet, sometimes expanding them. I think it fulfils the function of adding an aural 'halo' to the quartet. The music is often urgent, perhaps nervous or agitated but always (to my ears at least) extremely interesting, attractive and really well laid-out for the two ensembles. It certainly helps that the particular forces involved here are the extraordinary Arditti Quartet (whose contribution to the development of the genre in the last four decades is unparalleled) and regular 'Dusapiniers' - L'Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France under Pascal Rophé. They are recorded in a sympathetic acoustic which lends itself superbly to the differentiation of the two unequal instrumental groups. It must have been a difficult work for the engineers to balance but I think they have done a brilliant job. The five 'movements' (or "attempts at exhaustion") are played without a break but each possesses a distinctive sound-world. The twenty minutes fly by and the whole is a model of concision and coherence. The work ends with an exhausted 'sigh' from the quartet - literally a last gasp.

The Quartet No 7 restores the traditional solo quartet and lasts twice as long as its predecessor. The 'OpenTime' subtitle is completed by the further descriptor '21 Variations for String Quartet' – each individually tracked. This helps, I think. The initial microtonal phrase is sort of 'spat out' by violist Ralf Ehlers with cellist Lucas Fels combining to provide extended pedal 'drone' notes as accompaniment. It seems that all of the material in this work is generated from these initial gestures, accurately (and comprehensibly) described in the note as 'hoarse and fierce'. These adjectives could be used pertinently at regular points of the work. While stylistically it could be by no-one other than Dusapin, there is an ugliness, a starkness to this music. Variations at once collide, contrast and overlap but the formal logic of this work has thus far eluded me. It has parallels in Dusapin's Quartet No 2 'Time Zones' (previously recorded by these performers) but I found that piece ultimately more coherent and satisfying. And despite the separation of the newer work's long span into twenty-one short sections, I still found it long-winded, and rather hard-going, if truth be told.

Other critics have been more generous about this piece than I but knowing my history with other works by Dusapin I suspect perseverance will ultimately reap some sort of reward. One can certainly only wonder at the commitment of the Ardittis to this tough music. It requires performers of their experience and enthusiasm to navigate it truthfully. I found the recording rather 'dry' in this work, but this may be a deliberate ploy to amplify the harshness of the sounds.

To summarise, don't let the blurb put you off trying this, or for that matter any other Dusapin. The 6<sup>th</sup> Quartet at least is intriguing and accessible to all. As for me, I'm off for a coffee. Hot. Strong. Black. Wet. Apologies to any Martians who may 'read' this.

**Richard Hanlon**

## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

### Mario CASTELNUOVO-TEDESCO (1895-1968)

*La danze del Re David* (1925) [16.12]:

*Vivo e tumultuoso* [1.47]; *Ieratico* [2.13]; *Rapido e selvaggio* [1.24]; *Lento ed estatico* [3.34]; *Rude e ben ritmato* [1.18]; *Malinconico e supplichevole* [3.18]; *Allegro guerriero* [2.37]

*Questo fu il carro della morte* (1913) [6.02]

*Alt Wien* (1923) [16.26]:

*Alt Wien* (Walzer) [4.06]; *Nachtmusik* [6.07]; *Memento mori* [6.13]

*I Naviganti* (1919) [7.41]

*Piedigrotta* (1924) [20.37]:

*Tarantella scura* [2.31]; *Notte 'e luna* [3.34]; *Calasciunate* [3.21]; *Voce luntana* (Fenesta che lucive) [6.42]; *Lariulà!* [4.19]

Mark Bebbington (piano)

rec. CBSO Centre, Birmingham, England, 2003

**SOMMCD 0172** [66.56]

It should be pointed out immediately that this is a SOMM reissue. It was reviewed on this site in 2004. Nevertheless its return is most welcome. I will declare my special interest in championing film music. In this context it will be remembered that Castelnuovo-Tedesco was an American immigrant, escaping the Fascist Europe of the 1930s, who settled in Hollywood, like Korngold. Here he taught film music and his students included Henry Mancini, Andre Previn, Nelson Riddle, Jerry Goldsmith and John Williams.

Best known for his Guitar Concerto in D, he wrote much piano music, often very challenging material for pianists. Christopher Morley, author of the erudite booklet notes (which I have shamelessly pillaged), writes that he preferred free-flowing, rhapsodic forms over – “a more rigorous sense of structure. In compensation, however, there is often a wonderful orchestral sense of colouring...”; added to which there is a marvellous sense of drama, and atmospheric and scenic evocation.

*The Dances of King David* was composed in tribute to his Jewish faith, It carries the subtitle, ‘Hebrew rhapsody on traditional themes’ and is headed by a quotation from Psalm 37, verse 25: “I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken.” The work opens with the shrill linking motif likened to the sound of the ancient Biblical instrument, the shofar. The opening *Vivo e tumultuoso* movement is tumultuous indeed: strong, determined and authoritative yet pliable and sympathetic too. The second ‘hieratic’ dance has a flowing beauty with bell-like figures predominating after Lisztian arpeggios; it is most beautifully evocative. Savagery comes next with an almost *Rite of Spring* intensity. This is followed by the sinuous, sensual, perfumed music of the fourth dance, gorgeously ecstatic. Proud, martial-like music follows and then comes the ethereal beauty and the sweet swaying melody of the ‘melancholy and supplicatory’ sixth dance. The whole is rounded off with ‘fast and warlike’ material.

*Questo fu il carro della morte* (‘This was death’s chariot’) takes its title from a passage in Giorgio Vasari’s *Vita di Piero di Cosimo*. It is a dramatic, macabre piece beginning quietly, solemnly in dotted rhythm but moving inevitably through fanfare figurations and three-octave surges and quasi-orchestral tremolandos as the chariot moves inexorably towards its horrifying journey’s end. In association, *I Naviganti* expresses the same sort of idea but this is a quieter more acquiescent picture of sailors attending the cadaver to the isle of the dead.

*Alt Wien* (‘Old Vienna’) is an affectionate yet wry tribute to the old Vienna of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its attendant pomp and glamour. The title movement sparkles and glitters but it has a bitter sweet irony bordering on the sardonic and is clearly influenced by Ravel’s *La Valse*. ‘Nachtmusik’, that follows, is a gentle, beguiling, dream-like, tenderly romantic nocturne with a hint of chinoiserie at one point and of ballet music at another – quite lovely. ‘Memento-mori’ (Fox-trot tragico) is a lament in ragtime-style

suggesting decay and death and evoking a hellish vision of a skeleton banjo-player. As Christopher Morley observes, "It signals the collapse of the old world order – with perhaps a hint of the horrors just over the horizon."

Sunnier vibrantly coloured music pervades *Piedigrotta*, a Neapolitan rhapsody. It is full of light, exuberance and emotion "depicting the life of a district in Naples where religious feast-days are celebrated with sentimental panache." The opening 'Tarantella' is exuberant and vivacious with some impressive coruscating runs and interesting accents. 'Notte é lune' is a gorgeous, gently rippling moonlit dream, 'Calasciunate,' depicting the sound of an ancient, guitar-like folk-instrument, is fun, skipping and rollicking along and 'Voce luntana' is a setting of a popular Neapolitan song that simply haunts. The final 'Lariulà!' gives the impression of an approaching marching band to bring the collection to a high-spirited end.

Very colourful and evocative piano music that is heartily recommended.

***Ian Lace***

Previous review: [Rob Barnett](#)

## Arthur Vincent LOURIÉ (1891-1966)

### *Solo Piano Works*

Moritz Ernst (piano)

Oskar Ansell (speaker: Dearth's mistake)

rec. 2013, Studio Gärtnerstrasse, 2016, RBB, Saal 3.

**CAPRICCIO C5281** [3CDs: 219:45]

My affection for the music of Arthur Lourié came about by chance when finding a sale copy of his *Concerto da Camera* on that Deutsche Grammophon recording with Gidon Kremer. He has always been something of a niche figure, but with releases such as the Cybele label's Russian Futurism collection ([review](#)), this rather excellent Capriccio recording and others there is at least an increasing availability of some of his finest piano music.

From the booklet notes for this release we learn about Lourié's slippery changes of identity and association before his years of exile in France. The influence of Chopin and Scriabin in particular, as well as some of the pianistic technique and impressionist language of Debussy characterise earlier works such as the *Cinq préludes fragiles*, and while there is a fascinatingly individual flavour to the lower opus numbers, titles such as *Deux Estampes* and *Mazurkas* point towards expressive forays that build on the examples of Lourié's musical forebears.

More overtly abstract are the *Quatre Poèmes*, with the *Masques* bringing in increasing modernity, but what intrigued me at this point was how Moritz Ernst's elegance of touch was transforming these works into something much more Romantic and Chopin-esque when compared to Thomas Günther on the Cybele recording mentioned above. Günther's playing had quite starkly brought the more edgy feel of Janáček to mind, so there are clearly myriad possibilities when interpreting these earlier works. Giorgio Koukl's ongoing set on the Grand Piano label ([review](#)) provides another view – generally brisker in timings than Ernst, and with a more heart-on-sleeve sense of drama, somewhere in between the two other recordings, but with a Rachmaninov style of pianism as another layer of expression.

Experiments with 'expanded tonality' are taken further in the *Synthèses*, but even with the abstract nature of these pieces Lourié always keeps a foothold with some kind of emotional connection, with colourful pianistic texture and a sense of theatricality which attracts and engages the imagination. Dedicated to Picasso and notable for the pictorial character of its score, *Formes en l'air* is one of Lourié's better known piano works. Moritz Ernst enjoys the freedoms here and delivers powerful playing, but comparing his 10:13 timing to Thomas Günther's 6:05 I can't help feeling the fragmented phrases hang together better in the latter's more compact performance.

Going beyond his flirtations with atonality there is much excellent music to be discovered further into this set. The variety of expression in *Dnevoj uzor* and the remarkable *3. Sonatine* offer plenty to get one's teeth into, always contrasting against lighter moods in the childish *Royal 'v*, quirky Satie-like *Upman* and other sometimes rebellious shorter works having great entertainment value. We get a taste of Oskar Ansell's voice in the interjections throughout *Nash Marsh*, but there is much of interest in *Death's Mistake*, Velemir Chlebnikov's 'Absurdes Dramolett', the text of which is printed in the booklet but not in translation beyond the German in which it is performed. Lourié's music is vivid and descriptive, the spoken text appearing on separate tracks which you can skip over if you like, but which are a poetic tour de force in their own right. Who doesn't want to hear what "Der fleischlosen Schar der Säufer / Auf die Schädel schlagen, wieder und weider." should sound like when spoken with appropriate accent, rhythm and alliterative weight.

Moritz Ernst's playing may not be as emotionally extreme as some, but Lourié's sharpness of wit and sheer breadth of character is well observed, and indeed it can sometimes help to soften the edges just a little here and there. The recording is quite close and in a relatively confined acoustic, but there

is much warmth and depth in the mid and lower registers, making for an attractive sound – Ernst’s skilful touch more than equal to close scrutiny.

As for other alternatives there’s a disc from the Telos label with 1990s recordings by Benedikt Koehlen which I haven’t heard, but its claim to have the ‘Complete Piano Works’ has long been overtaken even since its release in 2012. It would seem that, when finished, Giorgio Koukl’s Grand Piano survey will be more complete than most, with volume 1 already stealing an advantage with a piece called *Dialogue* not on this Capriccio set. With the added attraction of *Death’s Mistake* this Capriccio set is by any standards a generous collection of superbly played and glorious but rarely heard music worthy of anyone’s attention.

### **Dominy Clements**

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