

Michel LEGRAND (b.1932)

Concerto pour piano et orchestre (2016?) [30:24]

Concerto pour violoncelle et orchestre (2012) [33:29]

Michel Legrand (piano); Henri Demarquette (cello)

Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France/Mikko Franck

rec. 5-6, 25-26 Sept 2016, Auditorium de la Maison de la radio et Salle Colonne, Paris, France

SONY CLASSICAL 88985393722 [63:53]

Michel Legrand is a French composer, born in Paris. He studied at the Paris Conservatoire (1943-1950) where his teachers included Nadia Boulanger. He attained world fame primarily through his music for large and small screen - some two hundred scores. Among his cinema scores *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968) with its song *Windmills of Your Mind* set the seal on his reputation. Before that his musical film *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (1964) - years later worked over to make a stage musical - carried his name far afield. He is also a jazz pianist and it is in jazz and more popular fields that he has been most active.

Here we are introduced to two of his concert works - concertos, one each for piano and for cello. They date from the present decade. The Piano Concerto enjoys the distinction of having the piano part played by the composer whose playing shows no sign of decline. Cellist Henri Demarquette who has been a tireless collaborator with the French Timpani label in giving new life to the music of Cras, Ropartz, Schmitt, Gaubert and Ibert here steps into a brighter international light. The Legrand Piano Concerto is a high tension, turbulence-driven romantic work while the Cello Concerto is a thing of elegance but again romantically inclined. Neither work carries even a hint of the stigmata of modernism.

In three movements the Piano Concerto, richly soured in romantic spirit and with a dreamy wander of a second movement, inhabits a bluesy world between Rachmaninov and Ravel. Its two outer movements bristle with heaving euphoria and melodic brilliance. The romance of the first movement contrasts with the edgier rhythmic emphasis of the finale and its Prokofiev-meets-Gershwin style brilliance. Unusually enough the aristocratic Cello Concerto is in five movements. The first of these has a merciless rhythmic bite accentuated by the orchestra. This extends the mood of the finale of the Piano Concerto. Much of this music is given savage teeth and merciless propulsion although Legrand does sometimes relent and allow the slightly unfocused dreamy quality to be found in the central movement of the Piano Concerto. Henri Demarquette's cello is kept in almost incessant song when it is not being driven. One of the most moving pieces of writing, despite its repetitive use of material, is the second movement which basks in exultant silver screen tendencies. The third movement casts aside immersion in the static and the surreal. We are back to thudding Stravinskian writing (*The Rite of Spring*) to which there's added a strong vein of desperation. The next movement mixes elements of the previous two with a more carefree liberation. Legrand's finale traces a steady descent into silence: musing, slightly melancholy, dreamy, sauntering, taking in the view, atmospheric and Delian. He gives the movement a title that is familiar from another context, *La plus que lent*. All credit to Legrand for ending the Cello Concerto in quiet self-effacing sincerity.

This Sony album is swish in every aspect: excellent sound, performances and design presentation. There are liner-notes by the composer, Demarquette and Frank. These are in French and English side by side. It's just a shame that the documentation leaves me guessing when these works were completed. This disc should draw in both Legrand fans, cinema music enthusiasts and those who like their contemporary classical music to have some sweet give and take. They will not be disappointed.

Rob Barnett

John WILLIAMS (b. 1932)

Raiders of the Lost Ark - Raider's March [5:25]

Jurassic Park - Theme [3:06]

Born on the 4th of July - End Credits [6:36]

E.T. - Flying theme [3:46]

Schindler's List - Theme [4:35]

Stepmom - Horseplay [1:30]

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone - Hedwig's Theme [5:16]

Jaws - Theme [2:52]

Star Wars Suite: [21:30]

Filmharmonic Brass

rec. Gene & Shelley Enlow Recital Hall, Kean University, New Jersey, 2016

ROVEN RECORDS RR10017 [54:36]

Another disc to prove, if proof were needed, that the standard of brass playing around the world, from band to symphonic and all points between has never been higher. This is the debut disc by Filmharmonic Brass - a seven-piece New York based group. The ensemble is an evolution from the New York Filmharmonic Brass Quintet, which was drawn, in turn, from a session orchestra of the same name, which recorded music for film, TV and commercials into the early part of this century. By expanding from a standard brass quintet to a septet, the additional trumpet/flügelhorn and trombone fills the texture substantially - greatly to the benefit of the music.

The disc - perhaps somewhat short at under 55 minutes - is devoted wholly to the film music of John Williams. Williams has long been admitted to the pantheon of film composer greats and this disc serves to remind the listener of just how many extraordinarily memorable scores he has written. All the arrangements here are 'in-house' by trumpeter Charles Porter with the exception of the excerpt from *Born on the 4th of July* which is brilliantly arranged by Jihwan Kim. Any disc such as this will always provoke debate amongst film music admirers about the music chosen and the selections omitted. So rich is Williams's catalogue that favourites *have* to be overlooked, but most of the most famous Williams film scores - with the exception of *Superman* and *Close Encounters* perhaps - are included.

As mentioned, the playing from start to finish is of sovereign technical brilliance and the interpretative music-making is excellent, too. That said, I do feel that some of the selections are more successful than others. Williams in heroic and valedictory mood is a shoe-in for brass so *Raider's March*, *Theme from Jurassic Park* and the famous *Star Wars* excerpts: *Main Title*, *Imperial March*, and *Throne Room* are superb, even if they do not erase the sonic splendour of the original full orchestral versions. The quick-silver flitting scherzi of the *Flying Theme* from *E.T.* and *Hedwig's Theme* from *Harry Potter* are less convincing, simply because no matter how virtuosic the playing - which this certainly is - the brass instruments cannot create the light scurrying agility of the original. Likewise the theme to *Schindler's List* needs to be a violin - the awkwardly angular but memorable theme which lies rather well under a violinist's fingers sounds less flowing here. But then *Jaws* is a resounding success. One thought on the arrangements - the inclusion of a percussionist (or two) could have rounded out the music even more - Williams's music is so full of rolling pedal notes and cymbal crowned climaxes that they are sorely missed.

In some ways the 'rarities' of *Born on the 4th of July* and *Horseplay* from *Stepmom* are some of the most enjoyable, possibly because the originals are not so deeply embedded into the listener's memory. The engineering is very good - quite close so that occasional gasps for breath are caught, but with enough hall resonance to give the instruments a gorgeous bloom. The liner includes a session photograph of each player and a very brief - too brief really - note. The track listings are a little confusing in that they do not always give the full or correct title of the film. I do like the rather witty CD cover - an unsuspecting horn floating in the sea with *Jaws* beneath. All in all a very enjoyable

addition to my collection of brass *and* film music. Not a disc to replace OST's or favourite orchestral collections, but certainly an excellent appendix to such discs.

Nick Barnard

Poetic and Romantic Songs

Iwa Sörenson (soprano)

Lennart Hedwall (fortepiano, piano)

rec. Musikmuseet, Stockholm, 1982 (tr. 1-6); Sveriges Radio, Studio 2, 1984 (tr. 7-24) and 1986 (tr. 25-38)

Sung texts with English translations enclosed

STERLING CDA1819-2 [74:05]

There are two categories of Swedish songs here: early romantic from the mid-19th century and 'modern' composers from the mid-20th century. Both categorisations must be modified, and I'll come back to that but what is common for all 38 songs in this collection is that they are short – only one exceeds three minutes and more than half of them have a playing-time of less than two minutes. It is fair to call them miniatures. All the songs have been available on LP before and it is good to have them back now in CD-format, licensed from Bluebell.

Carl Jonas Love Almqvist is regarded as one of the greats in Swedish literature, but he was a true polymath. He worked for many years as teacher, founded his own school and was headmaster with new pedagogical methods, he wrote schoolbooks, he wrote religious and philosophical books and worked on an extensive collection, titled *The Thorn Rose Book*, where he wanted to put together prose, poetry, pictures, music and scripts in what is often called Gesamtkunstwerk. He was a true romantic but also became the first realist in Swedish literature. His *Songes* (Dreams) were small poems that he himself set to music. Some of them have become very popular and are frequently performed. They were collected and published in 1849. Musically they are rather simple – Almqvist had no formal musical training but he had musical instincts and *Songes* still seem rather modern or, if anything, timeless. Iwa Sörenson sings these a cappella songs very beautifully, simply, and lets the music speak for itself. Elisabeth Söderström recorded some of them back in the 1950s and that recording has been my bread and butter ever since, but Sörenson has even more of the innocent simplicity that seems ideal for this music.

Adolf Fredrik Lindblad was a few years younger than Almqvist and he became one of the most popular composers of his time, primarily for his songs, many of them to his own texts. But his aim was to become a 'real' composer with Beethoven as his model. He wrote some chamber music and also two symphonies. But the public wasn't ready for this kind of music, just as Berwald also found little response for his symphonies. So Lindblad had to relinquish his plans to earn his living as a 'serious' composer and devoted himself to the production of more than 200 songs. All of them haven't stood the test of time, but many are well worth rescuing from oblivion. And several singers have contributed to that, including Elisabeth Söderström and Catharina Olsson. But neither of them recorded as many as Iwa Sörenson, 18 songs. And they are melodious and attractive. *En sommardag* (tr. 7) is no doubt the best known of them, but there are little gems galore here, and they are not always carefree and idyllic. Several of them mirror his unrequited love to the famous soprano Jenny Lind (tr. 8, 11, 14 and possibly 17), a couple are religious meditations (tr. 14 and 21) and the gloomy Runeberg setting *Höstkvällen* (tr. 18) is truly serious. All these songs are expertly accompanied on a fortepiano by Lennart Hedwall, who also wrote the deeply informative liner notes.

For the remaining songs he changes instrument to a modern grand. And here we meet composers active during the 20th century and, when it comes to Kerstin Jeppsson, still active. Torbjörn Iwan Lundquist wrote a lot of film music during the 1950s and 60s. *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa*, based on Selma Lagerlöf's novel, should be the internationally best known, but he was an important symphonist – his first presented in 1956 and his breakthrough was in 1976 with his third symphony, *Sinfonia dolorosa*. His seventh symphony from 1990 was subtitled *In memoriam Raoul Wallenberg, Folke Bernadotte and Dag Hammarskjöld*. *Six små sommarsånger* (Six small summer songs) to old Swedish poems, from which the three songs on this disc are culled, were written in 1949, and they are simple and melodious and permeated by a personal style.

Ingemar Liljefors was a generation older than Lundquist. He was the son to composer and conductor Ruben Liljefors, whose music is featured on a [Sterling disc](#), and father to conductor and violinist Mats Liljefors. He is represented here by three settings of Hjalmar Gullberg, a Swedish poet whose poetry has attracted many composers. These three poems are derived from a collection of poems, titled *Andliga övningar* (Spiritual Exercises), published in 1932. Within that collection is a suite titled *Den utvalda* (The chosen one), and these songs are from that suite. Ture Rangström set that suite for voice and orchestra in the late 1930s, and parts of it were included in a disc with Margareta Dellefors, which I reviewed quite recently. I presume that Liljefors' songs also were composed in the 1930s. They are deeply involving and has a very tangible intensity, in particular the third of them, *Soluppgång* (Sunrise) (tr. 30). According to Hedwall's notes there are more Gullberg songs by Liljefors, and it would be very interesting to hear those too.

In the late 1940s some progressive musicians formed the influential "Monday Group", which functioned as trend-setters for the new music after WW2. Among the members were choral conductor Eric Ericson, pianist Hans Leygraf, musicologist Bo Wallner and composers Karl-Birger Blomdahl, Sven-Erik Bäck and Sven-Eric Johanson, The latter two are represented here with early songs. Bäck composed his *Tre kinesiska dikter* (Three Chinese Poems) as early as 1945 in translations by Erik Blomberg, a poet that also inspired many composers through his expressive language. The aching beauty of the songs may come as a surprise for those who only know his later atonal music. His colleague Sven-Eric Johanson was a profile also visually, with conscious Salvador Dali-looks. He adopted the twelve-tone principle, and the two settings of poems by Bo Setterlind, written in 1949 and 1952, are based on strict dodecaphony. This in itself can be like a red rag to some listeners, but unawares of the principle behind the composition of the songs, one can't help enjoying them enormously. Principles are principles, but they are uninteresting for the general listeners, as long as the result is palatable.

Remains now the last and youngest composer, Kerstin Jeppsson (the spelling of her family name has double-s in all the sources I've seen). Born in 1948 she studied composition in Stockholm with Maurice Karkoff and later in Krakow with Krzysztof Penderecki. Her *Kvinnosånger* (Women's Songs), are early works, composed in 1973. They are short, epigrammatic and intensely dramatic with the piano part carrying much of the substance independently. My only previous acquaintance with Kerstin Jeppsson's music is a piano piece from 1980, *En dröm* (A Dream). There is intensity there as well, but of a more recessed kind, most of the action takes place in the descant, glittering, and often with a lot of space between the notes. Silence is important. Her songs made me wish to hear more of her.

Iwa Sörenson was one of the most versatile of lyric sopranos during the last two decades of the 20th century, when I heard her frequently at the Stockholm Opera and also as a song interpreter. I particularly remember a Satie programme which she performed with pianist Olof Höjer. As deeply involved as she was then she is also here. Her crystal clear soprano is a joy to hear, but also the care with which she interprets the poems. This delightful disc should appeal to everyone with even the slightest interest in Swedish art songs.

Göran Forsling

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Carl Jonas Love ALMQVIST (1793 – 1866)

1. *Du går icke ensam* (You do not walk alone) [1:04]
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3. *Marias häpnad* (Mary's amazement) [1:05]
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5. *Hjärtats blomma* (Flower of the heart) [1:51]
6. *Tintomaras sang* (The song of Tintomara) [2:34]

Adolf Fredrik LINDBLAD (1801 – 1878)

7. *En sommardag* (A Summer day) [2:35]
8. *Mån tro? Jo, jo!* (What do you believe? Well, well!) [2:54]
9. *I en ung flickas minnesbok* (In a young girl's memory book) [1:38]
10. *Obesvarad kärlek* (Unrequited love) [2:37]
11. *Om aftonen* (In the evening) [1:32]
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14. *Föresats* (Resolve) [1:42]
15. *Förtröstan* (Confidence) [1:38]
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Sven-Erik BÄCK (1919 – 1994)

Tre kinesiska dikter (Three Chinese poems)

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34. *Poem* (Poem) [2:25]
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Kerstin JEPPSSON (b. 1948)

Kvinnosånger (Women's songs)

36. *Rosen* (The Rose) [1:25]
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Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)

Serenade No. 10 for winds K. 361, "Gran Partita"

LSO Wind Ensemble

rec. live, LSO St Luke's, October 2015

LSO Live LSO5075 SACD [47:43]

After the LSO Strings' recent recordings for LSO Live ([review](#)), the LSO winds have followed suit with what is, as far as I can see, their debut recording. And what greater work to begin with than Mozart's wonderful *Gran Partita*? It's a two-fold sign of their ambition that they have gone straight for this summit of the wind repertoire: firstly because of its challenges, and secondly because there is so much competition out there for it.

They stack up pretty well in the field. The recorded sound is lovely and they use the friendly acoustic of LSO St Luke's very much to their advantage. They also play the version that uses a double bass at the bottom, and you can hear that particularly convincingly at the start of the third movement.

Their playing is characterful and masterful throughout. However, it's also rather "standard", and it doesn't have a huge amount to make it stand out from the competition. The first movement is amply energetic and the Menuetto of the second movement moves with great charm. The famous Adagio third movement unfolds with a gently rhapsodic feel, unhurried and blissfully living in its own moment, with particularly impressive oboe tone. The second Menuet has a beautifully rustic tone to it, sounding as much like a peasant wedding as I've ever heard it. The Romance is more emotionally intense than the first Adagio, and has a wonderfully poignant sense around the upper lines. The variations are strongly played, with a beautiful, singing oboe line developing as the movement progresses, and the finale is full of bounce.

All of which is very good, but the performance doesn't really have enough to make it stand out. It doesn't have the juice of Herreweghe's period performance ([review](#)), for example, nor the great (some might say too great) character of Jack Brymer's 1962 recording with the London Wind Soloists. It's also dangerously uncompetitive to offer the serenade alone without a coupling, and not even at bargain price. Still, it's good nonetheless, and those with surround sound will probably be more tempted.

Simon Thompson

Johann Georg PISENDEL (1687-1755)

Violin Sonata in C minor [14:22]

Violin Sonata in G minor [14:34]

Sonata for Violin Solo in A minor [18:34]

Violin Sonata in C minor [13:06]

Silvius Leopold WEISS (1687-1750)

Lute Sonata No. 39 in C major 'Partita Grande': Overture [4:46]

Sonata No. 40 in C major: Sarabande [7:18]

Lute Sonata No. 39 in C major 'Partita Grande': Presto [6:30]

Thomasz Aleksander Plusa (violin)

Robert Smith (cello)

Earl Christy (lute)

Ere Lievonen (harpsichord)

rec. Oude Dorpskerk, Bunnik, the Netherlands, January 2016

BRILLIANT CLASSICS 95432 [79:20]

The name of Johann Georg Pisendel may be new to many, but he was regarded as one of the greatest violin virtuosos of his day. He was born in Cadolzburg near Nuremberg and as a boy he sang in the choir of the court of Georg Friedrich II, Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach. It was in Ansbach that he was taught to play the violin by the celebrated composer and violinist, Giuseppe Torelli who was the maestro di concerto there. After leaving Ansbach, Pisendel moved to Leipzig for further musical studies, meeting Johann Sebastian Bach on his way, and Georg Philipp Telemann when he arrived there. He became friends with both men. He took an active role in the musical life of Leipzig and was offered a position in the court orchestra at Darmstadt in 1711, which he declined. The following year he was offered a place in the Dresden court of Crown Prince Augustus, the future King Augustus III of Poland. Dresden then boasted the finest orchestra in the world. This time Pisendel accepted the job, staying in Dresden until his death. It was whilst at Dresden that Pisendel began compositional studies with the concert master of the court, Johann David Heinichen, Later he succeeded Heinichen as concert master. Augustus III often travelled, taking a small retinue of musicians with him, and it was on one of these trips that Pisendel first met Vivaldi, studying with him for a short time. It has been said that it was Pisendel who introduced the music of Vivaldi and the Italianate style to his friends Bach and Telemann.

In Pisendel's own music the influence of the Italian school is clear, but it is tempered with that of the German baroque, a synthesis of the two great traditions making his music something new and different. Of all his works the [Sonata for Violin Solo in A minor](#) is his best known, and this is probably why it has been suggested as an influence of Bach's own solo violin writing. It is in four movements, the final one being a set of variations and it is easy to see why the link with Bach has been made. Of the three violin sonatas with bass continuo also presented here, the Italian influence is clearly there, but the sonatas lack some of the more bravura writing that was coming out of Italy at the time. Nonetheless these are still attractive and important works that show the progression and development of the later German baroque style.

Thomasz Aleksander Plusa gives some good performances, although he sounds a little weak in the first [Violin Sonata in C minor](#) presented on this disc. In fact, he sounds more at home in the *Sonata for Violin Solo*; there he sounds more secure and relaxed in his playing. I have other recordings of Pisendel's sonatas, mainly those by Martina Graulich on Carus ([review](#)) and Anton Steck on CPO ([review](#)), with Graulich being my first choice; Steck's decision to have a continuo limited just to a harpsichord detracts a little from the music. That being said, this present disc would make an ideal investment for anyone interested in music of the period and looking to experiment.

The Pisendel sonatas are interspersed with movements from lute sonatas by his almost direct contemporary, Silvius Leopold Weiss. The playing of these by Earl Christy is excellent and they make

good foils to the violin pieces. I just wish that Brilliant had chosen to include a whole sonata rather than movements from two.

To sum up then, this is a good disc, one which might leave the listener wanting more. Happily although Pissendel composed relatively few works, there is more music to investigate out there, such as concertos, and I can tell you that it is well worth investigating,

Stuart Sillitoe

Dmitri SHOSTAKOVICH (1906-1975)

[Violin Concerto No 1](#) in A minor, Op. 99 (1947-48, rev. 1955) [36:29]

Violin Concerto No 2 in C Sharp minor, Op. 129 (1967) [29:45]

Suite from the film Alone, Op. 26 (1931) [12:33]

David Oistrakh (violin)

Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra/Yevgeny Mravinsky (op. 99)

Moscow Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra/Kirill Kondrashin (op. 129)

USSR State Symphony Orchestra/Gennadi Rozhdestvensky (op.26)

rec. 1956, Leningrad (op. 99); 1967, Great Hall, Moscow Conservatory (op. 129); 1970 Studio 1, Moscow Radio (op.26)

ALTO ALC 1337 [79:00]

Not long ago I [reviewed](#) a recording of the Shostakovich First Violin Concerto by Frank Peter Zimmermann in which he went back to the composer's original manuscript – even to the extent that the recording carried the original opus number, Op 77. Seeking to make comparisons with Shostakovich's final thoughts on the work, to which he allotted the fresh catalogue number Op 99, I was embarrassed to discover that I didn't have in my collection a recording by David Oistrakh, the dedicatee of the concerto. By happy chance Alto have now issued the premiere recording of the concerto which has enabled me to plug that gap in my collection. I've heard the Oistrakh recording before but the opportunity for more detailed appreciation of it was not to be missed.

The key premise of Zimmermann's recording was that the original version of the concerto contained some different bowings and, crucially, some different, swifter metronome markings, primarily in the first and third movements. In the revision of 1955, into which Oistrakh provided significant input, the basic speeds of those two movements were broadened significantly and as a result this Oistrakh recording, made very soon after the 1955 first performance, plays for almost exactly five minutes longer than the Zimmermann version.

I don't resile from my admiration for the Zimmermann recording which sheds fresh – or should I say original – light on this masterpiece. However, there's no doubting that Oistrakh's approach, which was the key to establishing the performance tradition of the concerto, is essential to an understanding of the music. The performers who are involved in this recording gave the first performance of the work in October 1955 so this recording, made the following year – in November 1956, I think – has a unique authority. The orchestral sound right at the start is somewhat muddy and although things improve the orchestral parts don't get the clarity that one experiences with modern recordings. Oistrakh is pretty forwardly balanced and while ideally I'd prefer a better balance between soloist and orchestra we are considering here a sixty-year-old recording and overall the sound isn't at all bad for its vintage. What matters most, though, is that this recording gives a vivid impression of Oistrakh's uniquely intense way with the music. Sometimes he seems to be communing with himself, at other times he's searingly eloquent; in every respect his playing is utterly compelling. The cadenza (around 8:00) is highly strung – no pun intended – and at times the sound of his violin is a bit harsh but that's a function of the recording and balance.

I'm sure it's interventionist engineering that results in the woodwind being almost as prominent as the soloist in the tart scherzo. Here the spiky music is strongly articulated by all the performers and we get the opportunity to admire Oistrakh's steely virtuosity. The third movement is a passacaglia. This was a favourite form for Shostakovich and I'm inclined to think that this movement is the greatest example of a passacaglia in his output. There's real foreboding in the way that the Leningrad Phil begin the movement. Throughout the concerto Mravinsky exercises a steely grip on the proceedings but nowhere more so than in this movement. Oistrakh is simply magnificent in this music; his playing is commanding and deeply felt yet despite the emotional intensity his tone is penetrating and strongly focussed. I rather think that this movement is even more eloquent than the first movement, especially when played like this. The cadenza (from 8:49) is no mere display opportunity; rather it's a profound reflection on what has already been heard. Later it becomes more virtuosic as Shostakovich anticipates

his finale and in that section the sparks really fly from Oistrakh's bow. The finale is fast, furious and full of bite.

It's true that the recording has its sonic limitations but these are not sufficient as to detract from the magnificence of the performance. This is a recording of the concerto that should be in every self-respecting Shostakovich collection.

Oistrakh gave the first performance of the First Concerto and it was dedicated to him. The composer paid him a similar compliment with the Second Concerto which he premiered with Kondrashin and the Moscow PSO at the end of September 1967.

Alto give the date of the recording of the Second Concerto as 1974 but I doubt this is correct. I'm as sure as I can be from sample comparisons that it's the same recording that I have in a Melodiya set of the Shostakovich symphonies conducted by Kondrashin where it's dated 1967 ([review](#)). Furthermore, Alto themselves have previously issued an Oistrakh/Kondrashin recording of the work, dating it from 1967 ([review](#)). Therefore I'm pretty confident that this present recording was made shortly after the first performance.

The Second Concerto is not quite on the same level of distinction as its predecessor but it's still a very fine work. This time Shostakovich opted for a three-movement structure. Sonically this rather more recent recording is an advance on the recording of the First Concerto. Oistrakh is still well to the fore in the balance but I hear more space round his sound and that of the orchestra than was the case in the earlier recording. Oistrakh gives a very powerful performance of the first movement and receives fine support from Kondrashin whose orchestra is clearly committed to the cause. The cadenza (8:12-9:37) is not on the same scale as the cadenza in the First Concerto but it's still a serious test of technique. Needless to say, Oistrakh despatches it with great assurance. The slow movement is a searching *adagio* and it's music to which Oistrakh is ideally suited.

At the start of the finale there's an exchange between the soloist and a muted horn. The two players here make it sound truly argumentative; one can almost imagine tongues being put out. The music which follows is bitterly sardonic and the edgy performance here is well-nigh ideal; the orchestral playing is razor-sharp. All the grotesquerie of the music is projected in a vinegary performance. Oistrakh's account of this concerto is just as indispensable as is his traversal of its sibling.

As a filler we hear a three-movement suite from the music that Shostakovich wrote for the 1931 film *Odna* (Alone). This appears to be scored for woodwind, brass and percussion. The titles of the movements give little clue as to what is to follow. The first movement, *March*, starts off as a bright, brash march but within less than a minute we hear slower, dark and mysterious woodwind chords. Eventually these yield to a doleful cor anglais solo before a light and nimble woodwind dance. It's only at the end that the march is reprised. Quite what all this illustrated in the film I don't know. The second movement is a *Largo* but the music seems anything but that. There's a good deal of work for perky woodwinds, for example, and then the woodwind section have a waltz episode before we revert to the opening material. The last movement, *Allegretto*, consists of a series of episodes, primarily in Shostakovich's cheeky mode. The suite is well worth hearing and it is put across with relish by Rozhdestvensky and his players.

The recordings have been remastered by Paul Arden-Taylor. Assuming that the recording of the Second Concerto is indeed the 1967 version then I'd say he's made the original Melodiya sound somewhat smoother and extracted more detail. All the transfers are good and James Murray's notes are useful.

These are indispensable recordings of the Shostakovich violin concertos and it's very convenient to have them together on one modestly priced CD.

John Quinn

Minimalist Dream House

Katia & Marielle Labèque (pianos)

David Chalmin (vocals, guitars, bass & electronics)* and Raphaël Séguinier (drums, percussion & electronics), Nicola Tescari (keyboards, electronics)**

Rec. July-December 2012, Studio KML, Rome

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4814468 [2 CDs: 61:06 + 68:09]

Katia and Marielle Labèque have long been part of our musical furniture, making recordings for Philips and others back in the 1980s and '90s and carrying on as a creative powerhouse ever since. This Deutsche Grammophon release is a reduced re-release of a 2013 title on 3 CDs from the sister's own label KML Recordings, which also included some Debussy and Satie tracks. This new alliance will of course give their more recent recordings greater exposure, but is it all good?

Attracted by the prospect of this *Minimalist Dream House*, I have to say I'm not entirely bowled over by this curate's egg of a collection. There are very good things here, but also something of a mismatch of genres, and misfires when it comes to certain pieces. Such criticism is of course a matter of taste, and as usual I freely acknowledge my subjective point of view. Listeners make up their own minds, thank goodness, and long may this remain the case.

I've been sparring with minimalist music ever since I was a teenager, and as a composer have had plenty of fun working in an idiom which has thankfully managed to escape any kind of idealistic cul de sac – despite the 'ism' of its name. Writing a true minimalist piece these days is a tough challenge, but the freedoms of the style has opened up world of possibilities for all composers. Approaching it from the inside out makes little difference, however, if you can embrace music with minimal origins in the same way as you would any other music or performance from the point of view: 'am I enjoying it?' and 'if not why not?' – the latter of course bearing the weight of one's own limitations in terms of experience.

Things get off to an unpromising start with a rather hacked first part to Philip Glass's *Four Movements*. This is the kind of writing that needs more dynamic layering and subtlety, and our ears are rather assaulted from a place, from which there is no retreat. This may be a side-effect of the rather hard recording quality, as things are less troublesome, when the dynamics drop, as in the sweetly resonant piece for film *The Poet Acts* further on in CD 1. Flow is however another issue in this piece, as it sounds rather lumpy, when compared to Maki Namekawa and Dennis Russel Davis on their Orange Mountain Music recording. I would be the last person to claim rhythmic weakness in the playing throughout this piece, but it's hard to find the 'schwung' here and in other comparable pieces such as the more energetic of Michael Nyman's *Water Dances*. Things just sound loud and leaden.

John Cage's *Experiences, I* is a charming and somehow deeply American piece written for one of Merce Cunningham's choreographies. Also apparently in little danger of criticism is Arvo Pärt's *Hymn to a Great City*, though this is rushed through with about as much devotional feeling as a commuter tearing into a bar of chocolate.

Contrasting with Bruce Brubaker and his Arabesque label recording, Marielle Labèque is fearsome in her performance of William Duckworth's first *Time Curve Prelude*, Katia also quickening the pace and shaping the second into a more extreme dynamic shape. *Prelude XVII* is given a nicely poetic turn of phrase by Marielle. Over on CD 2 the Erik Satie-esque *VII* comes across nicely, and *XII* is back into heavier mode, the groove not quite jumping but with good contrasts of colour. Marielle also plays all of the four selected *Images* and *Postlude* by Howard Skempton, all of which are musical gems in their simple directness and which to my mind are a highlight of the set.

David Chalmin's *Gameland* is a bit of an odd fish in this collection, adding starting out as a bit of free jazz and moving through a section of cinematic tension building, before establishing a high-tensile

ostinato. This builds into a heavy-rock conclusion that reminds me of my least favourite aspect of Glen Branca's *Symphony No. 3*. Minimalism can take all forms and long may it be so, but if I want heavy drums and distortion guitar then I would tend to look elsewhere and in any case, this is what a former colleague would have termed 'a bit thin.'

Those of us who know Radiohead's 'Amnesiac' album will be familiar with the meanderingly expressive *Pyramid Song*; David Chalmin's vocals work very convincing over a warmly undulating piano backdrop. Brian Eno's *In Dark Trees* comes from his classic album 'Another Green World', and while a fair stab is made at creating a comparable driving rhythmic pattern this misses the original's sense of subdued menace, and I wonder quite how the harmonies relate from original to remake. Aphex Twin's gentle *Avril 14th* has been given a few different arrangements over the years, and this one is a fairly straight transcription, exchanging an expensive big piano for the innocent twang from the upright of the original.

Michael Nyman's *Water Dances* were written for the Peter Greenaway film 'Making a Splash' and released on the EG label in 1985. This version takes the Nyman Band recording into a brand new arrangement for two pianos, which sounds very promising. Nyman's music can take a fair bit of mauling about, but where the quieter pieces work well, I'm again not comfortable with the rhythmic character of something like the final *Synchronising*, which just doesn't seem to gel, the syncopations tripping over each other and the whole thing sounding rather hacked.

Good music in good performances should make you want to lean in, want to hear more and access ever more detail. With its jangly synths, drums and rock-extras this, for me alas, is one version of Terry Riley's *In C* which, the more I hear, the further away from it I want to be. There are some odd moments of probably unintentional phrasing, one of the pianos losing the plot around 18.30, for instance, and, well, let's just say the bits that actually do sound half decent seem more like happy accidents than anything else.

Free to X by Raphaël Séguinier is a drum beat with an electronic drone, the latter of which ultimately "ceases to be so friendly and swallows the rhythmic pulse in a cacophony of electronic noise." Really? Hmmmm...

As suggested near the beginning this is a rather odd mixture, unable to decide whether it wants to go crossover or present something that will fit nicely into the kind or architectural interior that the cover design suggests - you know, the sort, in which the effect is ruined if you leave a mug of tea and the newspaper on a table. It would be trite to exchange 'dream' for 'nightmare', but with such disparate idioms on a single album you'll not be giving this as a gift on Mothering Sunday. There are some pianists who seem born to create magic with minimalist music of the repetitive kind, but on this showing I don't feel this as genuinely being the Labèque sisters' kind of music. If aspects of the programme attract, then download those tracks that appeal the most. If you're keen on drums and effects then you'll probably be bored by Skempton, and if you adore Skempton then you'll be likely to want to avoid some of the rough and tumble elsewhere.

Dominy Clements

A curate's egg of a collection.

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Mozart Anniversary Orchestra/James Ehnes (violin)

rec. George Weston Recital Hall, Toronto Centre for the Arts, 18-21 August 2005

ONYX 4164 [64:57 + 78:14]

James Ehnes recorded this set of the Mozart Concertos back in 2005 with a contingent of players drawn from prestigious North American orchestras. It first appeared on CBC Records but had relatively limited distribution, and now, after more than a decade and with Ehnes more prominent on the world's stages than ever before, it's been taken over by Onyx Classics.

The balance between the relatively small band – there are no details of the orchestra's string distribution but it's chamber sized – and Ehnes' solo violin has been finely judged. The bass line is strongly defined but not overpopulated and there's real elegance and precise articulation throughout. In the G major concerto Ehnes' focused line and patrician instincts as regards phrasing are products of a mature and sophisticated approach to the music. He ensures the orchestral pizzicati in the finale are together, given that he hasn't employed a conductor, and he never overdoes things, remaining almost Grumiaux-like in his stylistic accomplishment.

The D major is buoyant and its slow movement is lightly bowed, with vibrato reduced both in width and speed. There's a classical serenity about this kind of performance, where expression derives from clarity, not weight. The drone effects of the Turkish are once again not overdone, and there's real lyric pliancy in the Adagio. Predictably the Janissary music in the finale is pointed but not, as it is sometimes, over-nuanced or made to sound operatically comic. The playing remains crisp, clean, refined, clear – sometimes, therefore, missing some of the wittier inflections or – as in the slow movement of the D major, K. 218 – some of the more expressively open-hearted writing. Ehnes contributes all the cadenzas and they are stylish and tactfully brief.

There's an especially compellingly voiced B flat major slow movement that reflects all of Ehnes' virtues in this repertoire. He draws its aria-like beauty with pellucid sympathy and is similarly pliant in K. 211. The three concerted pieces – the Adagio in E major, and the two Rondos – are also persuasively realised. Though these are modern instrument performances, they have a clarified quality that shows that Ehnes has been listening to, and has to an extent absorbed, the priorities of period instrument performance. It remains an attractive set.

Jonathan Woolf

Gaetano DONIZETTI (1797-1848)

Johann Simon MAYR (1763-1845)

Messa di Gloria and Credo in D [86:11]

Siri Karoline Thornhill, Marie-Sophie Pollak (sopranos), Marie-Sande Papenmeyer (mezzo-soprano), Mark Adler (tenor), Martion Berner (bass).

Simon Mayr Choir, Members of Bavarian State Opera Chorus, Concerto de Bassus. Franz Hauk (conductor)

rec. 22-26 September 2014, Asamkirche Maria de Victoria, Ingolstadt, Germany

NAXOS 8.573605 [86:19]

This is not a conscious collaboration between composers to produce a single coherent work in the manner of the *Stabat Mater* by Rossini and Tadolini, the *Messe des pêcheurs de Villerville* by Fauré and Messager, or the *Messa per Rossini* by Verdi and his dozen compatriots. It is a work concocted from various – often questionable – sources by Franz Hauk, that was almost certainly never intended as a single entity. Indeed, there are serious doubts as to the legitimacy of some of this music, and in cobbling it together as a Mass, Hauk has gone beyond mere editing into the realms of proxy composing.

The story as the booklet notes tell it: Donizetti had, “under Mayr’s patronage, set his sights mainly on writing church music”. Unfortunately, only one *Messa di Gloria e Credo* in C minor and a *Messa di Requiem in morte di Vincenzo Bellini* survive as substantive examples of that ambition. Working on the basis that the C minor work was “based on individual movements which Donizetti composed around 1820”, and that the work actually exists in two versions, Hauk decided to draw other isolated pieces into a stand-alone Mass. Noting that “Donizetti acted as Mayr’s musical assistant”, and that the latter “repeatedly incorporated” music by the former in his own compositions, Hauk decided to re-imagine what the combined work might have sounded like. He began with a *Credo* in E flat major, composed by Donizetti around 1820 which, four years later appeared transposed into D major for a service in honour of St Cecilia held in his native Bergamo. Donizetti’s *Credo* has been lost, and the music survives only in a full score written out by Mayr. Of this score, Mayr’s son-in-law wrote “this score is not by Donizetti, but transcribed by the famous G S Mayr”. As for the remainder of the movements, they all seem to be the work of Mayr (drawn, it would seem, from the 277 individual Mass movements *Grove* lists in its entry on Mayr). The one exception is a setting of *Ave Maria, gratia plena* which Donizetti composed in the early 1840s.

The lack of historic credibility may well put some off from dipping their toes into this apparently uncharted water, but it should be pointed out that Franz Hauk has been a tireless advocate of Simon Mayr’s music, and what this disc lacks in historical legitimacy, it more than makes up for in performance conviction.

Franz Hauk is an organist who has made several particularly fine recordings on the organ of Ingolstadt Minster, where he has been organist since 1992. He has brought into the catalogues a whole wealth of forgotten and intriguing works, as well as some very impressive Bach discs, all on the Guild label. His involvement on disc with Mayr, who was born in Ingolstadt in 1763, dates back to 1999 and so far has run to 4 discs for the Guild label and eleven for Naxos. On this latest release he conducts the Simon Mayr Choir which he himself formed in 2003, along with members of the chorus of Bavarian Opera and an ensemble going under the name of Concerto de Bassus about which the booklet tells us nothing but which the Naxos website describes as “outstanding students or graduates of the University of Music and Performing Arts, Munich”.

The orchestra certainly gives a strongly melodramatic edge to the openings bars of the *Kyrie*, which is even more powerfully conveyed by the chorus. Possibly bass Martin Berner does not have quite the gravitas this music needs, although tenor Mark Adler has a splendidly agile quality, and mezzo-soprano Marie-Sande Papenmeyer and soprano Siri Karoline Thornhill are particularly impressive in the ensemble passages. Hauk’s direction is tight, crisp and precise, with strongly marked accents and vivid dynamic contrasts. His brisk, no-nonsense sense of purpose, drives the music through all kinds of basic

weaknesses and inconsistencies on which, with a less committed hand at the tiller, it might be inclined to founder. I particularly admire the way he maintains an almost Mozartian elegance in music which, rather too often, has the orchestral allure of a fairground organ; Mayr seemed partial to jaunty clarinets in thirds.

A delightful *Laudamus te*, has a strong Mozart-feel, and while Norwegian soprano Siri Karoline Thornhill gives an utterly charming, richly florid account, perhaps the most delightful thing here is the bubbling orchestral accompaniment which has a lovely transparency. A long and deliciously chromatic clarinet solo leads into the *Domine Deus*, which is a fine vehicle for Berner's light but nimble bass. The booklet notes tell us that the extensive violin solo which introduces the *Qui sedes* was written for Pietro Rovelli; that it was written for some virtuoso is clear from the astonishing insertion of a virtuoso cadenza which exists purely to display a violinist of note. Here it's played by Theona Gubba-Chkheidze with a gentle, unassuming charm which seems to match the contemporary descriptions of Rovelli's playing as "simple, expressive, graceful, noble". Matching this is Mark Adler's delightfully clear and unpretentious tenor line.

There is a youthful fragility about the soprano of Marie-Sophie Pollak, which I find quite endearing in the *Et incarnatus est* of the *Credo*, but is particularly suited to Donizetti's lovely setting of the *Ave Maria*. Largely built around her and the three lower voices of the solo quartet, this performance has an endearing naivety which seems a world away from the opera stage. Unfortunately the heavy orchestration of the *Sanctus*, *Benedictus* (with its half-hearted Rossini-like *crescendo*) and *Agnus Dei* (with its thinly-disguised references to Beethoven's Seventh Symphony) often proves too weighty for the same light and pure solo quartet to make much headway, but the unequivocally operatic *Hosannas*, with trumpet and drum fanfares, show off the chorus to a particularly impressive effect.

Marc Rochester

L'arte del madrigale

Ensemble Voces Suaves (Lia Andres, Christina Boner-Sutter (soprano), Gabriel Jublin, Jan Thomer (alto), Dan Dunkelblum, Raphael Höhn, Paolo Borgonovo (tenor), Tobias Wicky (baritone), Davide Benetti (bass), Ori Harmelin (theorbo))

rec. April 2016, Espace culturel C.J. Bonnet, Jujurieux, France DDD

Texts and translations included

AMBRONAY AMY306 [62:24]

In the second half of the 16th century the madrigal was the main form of secular vocal music in Italy. It had its origin in the *frottola*, which was by far the most popular genre in Italy from roughly 1450 to 1530. It is a collective term for texts of various forms and character. Its origin was the practice of reciting poems to a musical accompaniment which was widespread in the mid-15th century. Poet, singer and performer were usually the same, and the accompaniment was mostly improvised. The practice of improvising *ad lyram*, as it was called, was even part of the pastime of the aristocracy.

The madrigal was different in several respects. Madrigals were mostly sung without instrumental accompaniment. They were written by the main composers of the time, such as Giaches de Wert, Luca Marenzio, Jacques Arcadelt and Cipriano de Rore. These were mostly in the service of an aristocrat, and it is at the aristocratic courts - or in the homes of citizens from the upper echelons of society - that madrigals were sung. The composers often made use of texts from the pen of some of the most renowned poets of their time - Torquato Tasso, Giovanni Battista Guarini and Ottavio Rinuccini - or of the past, such as Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375). Whereas in *frottolas* there was little connection between text and music, composers of the madrigals from the late 16th century paid much attention to the text and aimed at illustrating them with various means, such as musical figures and harmony.

Many madrigals are of a pastoral nature. Characters, which often turned up in pastoral poetry, such as Thyrus and Clori, and Cupid, the god of love, often make their appearances in madrigals. Love is a central subject, including the many trials and tribulations of it. The latter explains why some texts have a rather gloomy content. One of the most telling examples is *Sento che nel partire* by Carlo Gesualdo: "On leaving you I feel my heart is close to death. Thus I, a miserable wretch, cry constantly: This feels like death". It comes as no surprise that Gesualdo uses chromaticism here to illustrate the text.

Many madrigals include examples of text illustration. Giaches de Wert opens his madrigal *Sorgi e rischiara al tuo apparir il cielo* with a marked rising figure: "Arise, light up the sky with thy approach", whereas the second part begins with a descending figure on the text "Descends, Hymen!" This madrigal was written for a special occasion: the marriage of Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga of Mantua and Margherita Farnese. The same is the case with *In quel parte si ratto* which ends with the lines: "O Gonzagas! O Farnesi, O Margherita! How high our expectations of your brood!" As Wert was in the service of the Gonzagas, he also composed a number of madrigals, which celebrate the virtues of this duchy, its landscapes and its rulers. Vincenzo's father was a great lover of music and also composed a considerable number of sacred and secular pieces. One of them is the madrigal *Padre, che'l ciel, la terra e'l tutto reggi*.

Nearly all the madrigals recorded here are written in the *stile antico* which is dominated by counterpoint. Much changed around 1600: the music became more dramatic, the performance more declamatory and music was considered the servant of the text. However, the differences with the madrigals by composers of previous generations were not as large as Giulio Caccini, the main advocate of the *seconda prattica*, suggested. Several madrigals in the programme include dramatic elements, for instance by juxtaposing two groups in the form of a dialogue. The two opposing groups are represented by different voices, for instance high versus low. *Tirsi morir volea* by Giaches de Wert is one example. That said, Monteverdi's strongly declamatory *T'amo mia vita* from his fifth book of 1605 is a telling example of the stylistic change, which took place around 1600. The *stile nuovo* found

its precursor in the madrigals Luzzasco Luzzaschi composed for the Concerto delle dame, an ensemble of three ladies who sung at the court of Ferrara and whose reputation spread across Italy. One of these ladies was Anna Guarini, daughter of the famous poet. Luzzasco is represented here with *I' mi son giovinetta*, a madrigal for two sopranos and basso continuo, on a text by Boccaccio.

Whereas madrigals were mostly of a serious nature, composers also wrote more lighthearted pieces. Some concentrated on genres known as *canzonas* or *balletti*. Giovanni Giacomo Gastoldi was particularly famous for his *balletti*, such as *Cantiam lieti, cantiamo*. This piece was included in an edition of madrigals for eight voices by various authors of 1597. That shows that there was no watershed between the various genres. The three pieces from the pen of Lodovico Agostini are all taken from the collection of *Canzoni alla napolitana* of 1574. These pieces stand out for their lively rhythms, closely related to dance, and onomatopoeia. *All'arm'all'arme* by Agostino is a good example, with its fanfare figures on the opening phrase: "To arms, to arms, my trusty thoughts". In the oeuvre of Agostini we find some satirical parodies. Maybe *Vita della mia vita* is one of them. This could explain why the lively rhythm is used for a text like this: "Alas, your departure will make me take my own life".

The French label Ambronay regularly releases discs with recordings by young ensembles. This is the result of an European cooperation project under the name **eemerging** which - according to the booklet - "is the natural continuation of the Young Ensemble Residences developed since 2009 at the Centre culturel de rencontre d'Ambronay". Each year the most promising ensembles are selected and are offered professional training and assistance in building an international career through concerts and promotion. After three years of support the best ensembles have the opportunity to make their first professional recording. The present disc is the result of Voces Suaves being selected for the years 2014 to 2016. The selection is well deserved. Voces Suaves was founded in 2012 in Basel and comprises mostly singers who have been educated at the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. They focus on vocal music of the renaissance and baroque eras, and madrigals are one of their specialities.

They deserve much praise for their first recording. First of all, the programme has been put together intelligently. It shows the various manifestations of a genre which was hugely popular during the 16th century. Moreover, with the selection of pieces the ensemble has largely avoided the best-known pieces. Agostini is especially badly represented on disc, but even a composer like Wert could do with more attention. Only a small part of his huge output in the realm of secular music is available on disc. The voices blend perfectly and they pay much attention to the text. In Luzzaschi's madrigal the two sopranos deliver fine performances of the demanding parts. There is one aspect where I would like to see some improvement. Dynamically I find these performances a bit too undifferentiated. Especially the more expressive pieces could do with some stronger dynamic shading. That is also a way to single out some key words or phrases.

In short, this is a very fine release which make me want to hear more from this ensemble.

Johan van Veen

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Bozena Harasimowicz (soprano)

Krystyna Pyszkowska (piano)

rec. Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Krakowa, sala Fontany, 19 June 2014

ACTE PREALABLE AP0357 [41:42]

This nicely presented CD contains the lighter, non-orchestral works of the Polish composer Juliusz Luciuk, who is 90 this year. It would seem that the total number of pieces available can only fill the disc to a short 42 minutes.

The notes in the glossy booklet go to some length to explain or justify the composer's decision to produce works in a lighter vein, suggesting in a rather convoluted manner that his exposure to jazz and the use of one of his pieces in a film, led to his decision.

Whatever his reasons, he was clearly able to compose easy-on-the-ear pieces for differing purposes. The first item is a vocalise – a wordless cantilena for soprano and piano, lasting some 4 minutes, sung nicely here by Bozena Harasimowicz. It sounds slightly French to me, perhaps because he studied with Boulanger and Messiaen, but that is only a fleeting impression, and it is pleasant but not particularly memorable. The second item is, I think, the best piece on the disc, being a lament, sung in English (albeit with one or two slight mispronunciations) of a poem by Sinai Lechter which is in remembrance of the children of The Holocaust. Appropriately mournful, it is a fine song lasting just over 3 minutes.

The third piece is entitled "The Song of the Westerplatte Soldiers" and became one of its composer's best known pieces because it was used as the theme to the film "The Ferry". Its success led Luciuk to make further forays into the realm of popular song. No translation of the Polish is provided.

The Three Rhythmic Impressions follow and are the only solo piano works. Lasting a total of just under 9 minutes, they are a rumba, a lullaby and 'medium bounce tempo'. They are thought to date from his early years as a composer, and the third one has hints of the blues in it.

The disc winds up with seven short songs, most of 2 to 3 minutes or so duration, written for children, with titles such as "The Little Rise Bush" or "A Bit of Porridge". Only one of them has a translation into English included in the booklet. As might be expected, they are immediately attractive on the ear, with musical styles occasionally showing hints of Jazz.

It is not really possible to express an opinion of Luciuk's musical style, given the limited range of expression of the works presented on this CD. Some of his larger orchestral works, mentioned in the booklet notes, have been recorded by Acte Prealable. It would be interesting to hear their recording of his ballet.

The recording is a good one, well balanced between voice and piano in a natural acoustic.

Jim Westhead

