

## **Gustav MAHLER (1860-1911)**

Symphony No. 2 in C minor "*Resurrection*" [80:56]

Anne Schwanewilms (soprano), Olga Borodina (mezzo-soprano), Philharmonischer Chor München (chorus master: Andreas Herrmann), Münchner Philharmoniker / Valery Gergiev

rec. live 15/20 September 2015, Philharmonie, Munich, Germany

Full German texts provided. No English translations.

**MÜNCHNER PHILHARMONIKER RECORDINGS MPH0001** [80:56]

Marking Valery Gergiev's first season as music director of the Münchner Philharmoniker, this performance of Mahler's *Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection"* is the first of a number of live recordings appearing on the orchestra's own label. Last month I attended a performance of Mahler *Symphony No. 4* by the Münchner Philharmoniker under Gergiev at the Philharmonie, Munich. I was delighted to hear this orchestra upholding its long Mahler tradition with such a magnificent performance.

Mahler laboured long and hard between 1888 and 1894 on his *Symphony No. 2*, undertaking later revisions. Widely known as the "*Resurrection*" *Symphony*, this five-movement work is scored for soprano and contralto soloists, mixed chorus and orchestra. At that time Mahler was still carving out a name for himself as a conductor, normally composing the score in his spare time, mainly during his summer vacations. Some of the work was composed in a hut Mahler had built on a lakeside meadow in Steinbach overlooking Attersee (lake) in the spectacular Alpine and lakes region of Salzkammergut.

In this substantial score, one of the greatest and most compelling creations of the Late-Romantic period, Mahler attempts to explore the existence of humanity in its entirety, using sung text in the final two movements. In the fourth movement the text is from the collection of German folk poetry known as *Des Knaben Wunderhorn (The Youth's Magic Horn)*. The fifth movement uses text from Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's ode *Die Auferstehung (The Resurrection)* and then Mahler uses his own words beginning with *O glaube, mein Herz* (O believe, my heart). Owing to the progressive nature of the writing, its unconventional design, the extended length and the massive forces, Mahler must have hardly dared to imagine that he would ever hear the symphony performed during his lifetime.

This Munich performance was recorded at a run of live performances at the Philharmonie. I have seen a live stream of one of those concerts, on 17th September 2015, broadcast on the 3sat television network. It is a quite stunning performance. It brings a lump to the throat and I do not think I have ever seen Gergiev as totally involved in a concert of any work. With the performance on this release, there is a palpable essential trust and empathy between Gergiev and his highly cultivated Münchner Philharmoniker.

Right from the opening movement *Allegro maestoso*, the potency and bite of the Munich orchestra is striking. Maestro Gergiev adopts impressive pacing throughout, with beautiful playing especially in the more lyrical passages. All sections of the orchestra impress, but I find the stunning playing of the brass and woodwind especially committed, expressive and perfectly in unison.

In Gergiev's hands, the exquisitely scored second movement marked *Andante moderato* with its gentle *Ländler* feels so light on its feet and elegant, evoking a mid-nineteenth century dance hall in Vienna. As the music develops in weight and intensity, the sound produced is remarkable especially from the golden sheen of the Munich strings. Towards the conclusion of the movement, the whirling sound on the strings has a dizzying effect.

Sounding like gunshots, the timpani strokes announce the opening of the third movement *Scherzo*. The swirling writing draws on the captivating melody from Mahler's *Wunderhorn* song *Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt (St. Anthony's Sermon to the Fishes)*. Gergiev draws out the acerbic and bitter sarcasm in Mahler's writing quite splendidly. In the section reminiscent of a *klezmer* band, the schmoozing clarinet solo always feels like a characteristic Mahler reference to Jewish folk music. The angry brass outburst at 8:01 is especially striking, as is the force of the pent-up energy released in

Mahler's terrible scream of anguish at 8:23, putting an immediate if temporary halt to the bucolic frolicking.

*Urlicht (Primeval Light)* from one of Mahler's own *Wunderhorn* songs is the title of the fourth movement. A genuine highlight is the performance of Olga Borodina, a rich and mellow-toned Russian mezzo-soprano, commencing with the words *O Röschen Rot! (O red rose!)*; a yearning declaration for respite from world weariness. Every word feels completely sincere, combined with her stunning expressive qualities and clear diction. Sounding totally controlled, Borodina displays her attractive timbre and flexible projection. Following on closely is the spiritually affecting *chorale* intoned commendably on the brass with woodwind playing of an elevated quality.

The final movement *Im Tempo des Scherzos* opening with Mahler's dreadful scream of anguish is given such remarkable weight. It maintains a harrowing quality before decaying into mere dust. In the "wilderness" section, the off-stage brass make a sure impression with the *chorale* tune of the *Dies irae* followed by blazing brass fanfares. Impressive are the great drum rolls at 9:10-9:27, shaking me right down to my boots. A distinct martial quality to the brass fanfares is interrupted only by tetchy woodwind and angry percussion. Off-stage brass lingers in a lament interspersed with a flurry of birdsong on the flute and piccolo. At 19:46 the Munich chorus enter with the words *Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n wirst du (Rise again, yes rise again you will)* that feels so mellow and tender, conveying a captivating impact. The text *O glaube, mein Herz (O believe, my heart)* is sung at 24:25 to magical effect by Borodina with her secure technique and appealing tone. German soprano Anne Schwanewilms is in fine expressive form too, excelling with the text *O glaube. Du wardst nicht umsonst geboren! (O believe, You were not born for nothing!)*. Schwanewilms and Borodina combine with the heavenly Munich chorus with the words *O Schmerz! Du Alldurchdringer! (O suffering! All pervading or O all-piercing pain!)*. With singing of such striking quality from the impeccably matched soloists and exceptional chorus, one could be excused for thinking they had been transported to paradise. After the final chorus the closing section soon develops in sheer weight and tension with the massed forces, organ and percussion battery including bells, combining in a thunderous climax, the most awe-inspiring and overwhelming that I have heard on disc. Special praise is due the magnificent Philharmonischer Chor München, impeccably rehearsed by chorus master Andreas Herrmann.

Recorded at live performances at Philharmonie, Munich, the sound quality is first-class, especially clear and detailed, with an exceptional balance between soloists, choral and orchestral forces. There is little extraneous noise and the applause has been taken out. Titled "*I shall die in order to live*", the booklet essay written by Klaus Döge is both helpful and informative. Full German texts are provided but regrettably and surprisingly there are no English translations.

Mahler's "*Resurrection*" *Symphony* has been recorded substantially over the years, with a number of fine recommendable accounts a list that now includes this Gergiev release with the Münchner Philharmoniker. First for its remarkable intensity and dramatic impact is the live 1995 Semperoper, Dresden performance with Bernard Haitink conducting Chor der Sächsischen Staatsoper Dresden, Sinfoniechor Dresden and Staatskapelle Dresden with soloists Charlotte Margiono (soprano) and Jard van Nes (mezzo-soprano) on Profil. For its great drama, there is the live 1989 Royal Festival Hall, London recording from London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir under Klaus Tennstedt with soloists Yvonne Kenny (soprano) and Jard van Nes (mezzo-soprano) on the LPO own label. Making a considerable impression too is the live 1982 Herkulessaal, Munich recording from Symphonieorchester und Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks with soloists Edith Mathis (soprano) and Brigitte Fassbaender (mezzo-soprano) conducted by Rafael Kublik on Audite. There is the inspiring 1986 studio account from City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Chorus under Simon Rattle with soloists Arleen Auger (soprano) and Janet Baker (mezzo-soprano) on EMI. Significant praise is also due to Rattle's insightful live 2006 recording with Rundfunkchor Berlin and Berliner Philharmoniker with soloists Kate Royal (soprano) and Magdalena Kožená (mezzo-soprano) on EMI. Leonard Bernstein was a great Mahlerian and I relish his intensely powerful 1963 Manhattan Center,

New York account that he recorded with Collegiate Chorale and New York Philharmonic with soloists Lee Venora (soprano) and Jennie Tourel (mezzo-soprano) on Columbia (reissued by Sony).

Valery Gergiev with the Münchner Philharmoniker underlines his credentials as a Mahlerian of some stature with this entirely compelling live account of the "*Resurrection*" *Symphony*.

***Michael Cookson***

### **Ildebrando PIZZETTI (1880-1968)**

Symphony in A (1940) [43:21]

Harp Concerto (1958, 1960) [21:33]

Margherita Bassani (harp)

Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale/Damian Iorio

rec. Auditorium RAI Arturo Toscanini, Turin Italy, 23-26 Sept 2015

**NAXOS 8.573613** [65:14]

Pizzetti's only symphony shares a point of origin with Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem*. It was commissioned by the Japanese Imperial government to play its part in marking the 2600th anniversary of the accession of the island chain's first Emperor. Another work with the same provenance is Richard Strauss's *Japanese Festival Music*. The Pizzetti and Strauss appear to have been acceptable to the commissioning government while the Britten - with its Requiem movement titles - was not.

The Pizzetti Symphony is in four movements. There are two large outward-facing statements riven with discontent and conflict. These are in keeping with the spirit of the times. They buttress two substantial but shorter inner movements. The music is tense and charged with foreboding but there's little to be heard in the way of victory: no braggadocio and no victors' swagger.

The first movement breathes turbulence and tension. It has a touch of Vaughan Williams' Fourth Symphony about it. The word *Concitato* (agitated) appears in two of the movement titles and is a true indicator. The music is certainly not dissonant. It is athletic, full-sounding and not at all neo-classical. An occasional fleck of hope relieves the storm-clouds. Muted fanfares are part of the scenery but a darker message is barked out at 8:50. An anomalously tender serenade can be heard at 10:00 but tumbling fury meets valour in trumpet fanfares at 12:10. After this an exhaustion-induced gentle answer turns away anger. The music takes on an ecclesiastical note before a stuttered protest.

The second movement is an *Andante tranquillo* which picks up on the singing 'churchy' aspect of the previous movement. There are some trudging interventions but these are mixed with whispered violins giving the impression of high alpine pastures.

Next follows a playful, light-textured *Rapido* which is the shortest of the four movements. The lighter message remains stippled with anxiety in keeping with the work's overall mood. This continues in dominance. Even so we get moments of true exultation for first time at 2:48.

The last movement runs to 13:50. It starts as another *Andante*, as did the first. The mood is heavily suppressed but soon an understated march enters with angular glassy writing for romantic strings which seem to aspire to the light. More turbulence is on the menu at 9:00 and violence confronts the high mountain pastures. Something approaching a confident strut surfaces but gradually atomises. The Symphony ends with that same reverent ecclesiastical glow. It's almost Mahlerian - but Pizzetti is not about to give us an ending in bombast. Instead serenity hangs over the Symphony's last moments.

The Symphony was premiered in Tokyo in December 1940 with conductor Gaetano Comelli. It seems that a recording was made by Japanese Columbia. On 78s it must have been a weighty tome of an album given the score's duration.

Written twenty years later, Pizzetti's Harp Concerto is in three movements. Written for one of Italy's leading harpists, Clelia Gatti Aldrovani (1901-1989), it is launched by a smilingly warm, even sybaritic, *Andante*. The aural palette is cleanly weighted with the redolence of Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro* sweeping in. A calming blessing of a work, this extends into the placid blossom-hung second movement although there are some shivers, tremors and grey clouds. The finale is a lively *Allegro moderato* but this too draws breath to absorb the views (2:20). It reminded me a little of Alwyn's *Lyra Angelica* but the Pizzetti is lower key although summery enough. The finale carries a few wintry flurries.

The Naxos Italian orchestral series continues to push out the boundaries of appreciation of Italian music. The whole thing is a joint venture with RAI.

Across seven pages the liner-essay is one of the label's best and its range of reference is widely cast by David Gallagher. It is in English only. Gallagher explores the symphony's Japanese connection and other commissions of the time.

The recording quality, without being overly glamorous, splendidly serves the music and these fine committed performances. This is unusual, provocative and satisfying music owing a debt to Naxos for allowing it to step out into the open air.

***Rob Barnett***

### **Mieczyslaw WEINBERG (1919-1996)**

Chamber Symphony No. 3 op. 151 (1990) [33:43]

Chamber Symphony No. 2 op. 147 (1987) [22:41]

Chamber Symphony No. 1 op. 145 (1986) [23:19]

Piano Quintet op. 18 (1944, arr. for piano, string orchestra and percussion by Andrei Pushkarev and Gidon Kremer) [43:27]

Chamber Symphony No. 4 op. 153 (1990) [36:11]

Yulianna Adeeva (piano)

Andrei Pushkarev (percussion)

Mate Bekavac (clarinet: 4)

Kremerata Baltica/Gidon Kremer, Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla (4)

rec. Live, Musikverein Vienna, 13 June 2015 (1-3) and Latvian Radio Studio, Riga, 9-10 June 2015 (Quintet, 4)

**ECM NEW SERIES 2538/39** [79:43 + 79:38]

This release has proven to be one that has divided opinions, Stephen Greenbank making it a Recording of the Month ([review](#)), and Steve Arloff somewhat lukewarm about the works while praising the performances ([review](#)). With each already work extensively described I'll confine myself to a few comparisons and a personal response.

As with the chamber orchestra versions of some of Shostakovich's string quartets I'm in agreement with the general view that, while such transcriptions rob the originals of some of their steely intensity and emotional depth, there is also something new created. Smoothing off some of the sharp corners and gritty edges can have its own appeal, and I am more of a mind to take such versions at face value, bringing them out when I seek to visit that certain world with a somewhat plusher upholstery. The first three of Weinberg's *Chamber Symphonies* are almost entirely such reworkings, the first taken from the *String Quartet No. 2* with an extra fourth movement added, the *String Quartet No. 3* became *Chamber Symphony No. 2*, *String Quartet No. 5* becoming *Chamber Symphony No. 3*.

Comparing these recordings of the *3rd and 4th Chamber Symphonies* with the generally admired but not universally acclaimed Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra recording on the Chandos label ([review](#)) you can hear where the live performance has the advantage of intensity in the Third Chamber Symphony. Clarinettist Mate Bekavac adds a nice touch of vibrato to his tone at crucial moments, giving added character to a recording that already has more to offer than the virtuoso but more polite and less clearly balanced Johnny Jansson despite its studio origins. Those Kremerata Baltica strings really play with gusto in the *Allegro molto*, and the thin chill of the *Adagio* really creates that sense of melancholy you might expect from a composer's last completed opus. The Umeå Symphony Orchestra has *Chamber Symphonies 1, 4 & 2* on the Alto label ([review](#)) re-released from Olympia, and these are also very convincing performances in quite opulent recorded sound.

My reference for the Piano Quintet has been that on the RCA 'On the Threshold of Hope' album ([review](#)), but this arrangement by Gidon Kremer and Andrei Pushkarev is an entirely different animal. This was already a work with symphonic proportions, and the string orchestra sonorities plus subtly added percussion really make this into a remarkably powerful score. Despite the significance of the piano part this is never really in danger of turning into a piano concerto, and the chamber-music nature of the piece's origins is retained with sections for solo strings, though more as a reminder of what was than an attempt at a concerto grosso style.

With precious few versions of these works in the mainstream catalogue this ECM package has to be seen as a significant and valuable contribution. If you are a fan of Shostakovich and 20th century Russian culture then you owe it to yourself to acquire these excellent recordings of some very fine music. If you are interested in exploring the string quartets then Quatour Danel has a complete edition on the CPO label. This ECM release has usefully informative booklet notes by David Fanning

and a personal recollection of the composer by Alexander Raskatov, who quotes his words, "One should never divide music into avant-garde and arrière-garde, into contemporary and non-contemporary." Amen to that. There is good music in every era and genre, and Mieczysław Weinberg's is both very good indeed, and fully deserving of such a fine set of performances.

***Dominy Clements***

### ***Limelight and Limestone***

Margareta Dellefors (soprano)

Texts with English translations enclosed for the Rangström, Wagner and Hallström excerpts

**STERLING CDA 1693-2 [79:15]**

International readers will possibly recall the name of Margareta Dellefors (b. 1926) as the instigator of the huge outdoor arena Dalhalla in the province of Dalarna in central Sweden. In the deep forests north of Lake Siljan she found a closed down limestone quarry with marvellous acoustics and managed to raise funds to make this one of the world's foremost opera and concert arenas, on a par with the Arena di Verona. Unfortunately she was later manoeuvred out from the enterprise but her name is still held in high esteem by opera lovers around the world.

But this was in the 1990s, when she was already retired. Before that she had a career as a primary school teacher, but parallel with that she studied singing and got opportunities to sing in operas and operettas in Sweden, Finland and Norway and soon sang leading roles during the late 1950s and 60s. Her signature role was Tosca, and on this disc we can hear *Vissi d'arte* in a live recording from 1967. From the early 1970s she worked as presenter at the music channel of Swedish Radio, including being producer for three concerts with Joan Sutherland and Richard Bonyngé made for the radio.

The present disc contains live recordings made between 1963 and 1972 and finds her in glorious voice. The Rangström songs are from a lyrical scene for soprano solo and orchestra, composed in the late 1930s to poems by Hjalmar Gullberg, *Den utvalda* (The Chosen One). It consists of nine songs, but only five are included here. It has been recorded complete by Camilla Nylund for CPO ([review](#)), but I haven't heard it. They are highly attractive songs and I believe readers who hear Margareta Dellefors' recording will want the complete set as well. Better known are Wagner's *Wesendonck-Lieder*. There are many ways of approaching them and I have recordings with singers as far apart as Régine Crespin and Kirsten Flagstad. Ms Dellefors sings *Im Treibhaus* inwardly with lyrical beauty and delivers a glorious *Schmerzen* while in *Träume* she radiates almost Flagstadian majesty.

Three Italian opera arias are highly successful. *La mamma morta* from *Andrea Chenier* is touching and at the same time monumental. *Pace, pace* from *La forza del destino* is impressive in every way and even if I didn't know that Tosca was her favourite role, I would be convinced when hearing her *Vissi d'arte*. Ivar Hallström is hardly known outside Sweden, but he was by some distance the best Nordic opera composer during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His music is truly dramatic, he was an expert orchestrator and the vocal parts are grateful for the singers. The two excerpts from *Den Bergtagna*, based on a medieval ballad, are from a complete radio performance, and besides Margareta Dellefors's dramatic Mountain Queen we also hear Jan-Erik Olsson as a good Kark. Ariadne's big scene from *Ariadne auf Naxos* was Margareta Dellefors's last official concert in June 1972 and it clearly demonstrates that she discontinued her career while still at the top. The ovations were well-deserved.

Torsten Sörenson's *Canticum Annae* for soprano and large organ was recorded at the premiere in January 1969 at Gustavi Dome in Gothenburg with the composer at the organ. The tonal language is decidedly modernist but the vocal part is very *cantabile* and grateful for a big dramatic voice. Part of the work is melodrama with spoken lines over the organ. This is an impressive finale to a very enjoyable retrospect disc. The recorded sound varies a bit from source to source but is generally very good.

A very attractive disc.

**Göran Forsling**



## Track listing

### **Ture RANGSTRÖM (1884 – 1947)**

Five songs from *The chosen one* (Hjalmar Gullberg, 1938) [10:35]

I. Festive preparation [1:25]

II. The sleep of five senses [2:55]

III. About gifts of sacrifice [1:55]

IV. Rower's song [2:25]

V. Sunrise [1:50]

Göteborg Symphony Orchestra/Sixten Eckerberg rec 1967

### **Richard WAGNER (1813 – 1883)**

Wesendoncklieder (Mathilde Wesendonck) [20:15]

I. *Der Engel* [3:10]

II. *Stehe still* [3:45]

III. *Im Treibhaus* [6:05]

IV. *Schmerzen* [2:30]

V. *Träume* [4:35]

Göteborg Symphony Orchestra/Styrbjörn Lindedal rec. 1965

### **Umberto GIORDANO (1867 – 1948)**

*Andrea Chenier: La Mamma morta* [5:35]

### **Giuseppe VERDI (1813 – 1901)**

*La forza del destino: Pace, pace, mio Dio!* [5:45]

Dutch Radio Symphony Orchestra/Fulvio Vernizzi

Live rec 10 January 1963

### **Giacomo PUCCINI (1858 – 1924)**

*Tosca: Vissi d'arte* [3:15]

Stora Teatern's Orchestra, Göteborg/Gunnar Staern rec 1967

### **Ivar HALLSTRÖM (1826 – 1901)**

*The Bride of the Mountain King:*

I. The choir of the dwarves and the Mountain Queen's aria, act III, sc 1 [6:55]

II. Duetta between the Mountain Queen and Kark, act III, sc 2 [4:00]

Margareta Dellefors (soprano) – The Mountain Queen; Jan-Erik Olsson (baritone) – Kark; Göteborg Symphony Orchestra and Göteborg Radio Choir/Lennart Hedwall rec 1968

### **Richard STRAUSS (1864 – 1949)**

*Ariadne auf Naxos: Ein schönes war hiess Theseus Ariadne* [12:40]

Stora Teatern's Orchestra, Göteborg/Gunnar Staern rec 1972

### **Torsten SÖRENSON (1908 – 1992)**

*Canticum Annae* for soprano and large organ (First book of Samuel, 2:1-10) (1968) [10:15]

Torsten Sörenson (organ)

Rec live at Gustavi Cathedral, Göteborg on 26 January 1969

**Sir Nicholas JACKSON (b. 1934)**

***The Rose and the Ring* (2016) [68.51]**

William Morgan, tenor – Prince Giglio

Edward Grint, baritone – Prince Bulbo, Count Hogginarmo

Robyn Parton, soprano – Princess Rosalba, Fairy Blackstick

Katherine Crompton, mezzo-soprano – Princess Angelica

Katie Coventry, mezzo-soprano – Countess Gruffanuf

Peter Aisher, tenor – Captain Hedzoff

Michael Mofidian, bass – King Valoroso

Sarah Shilson, soprano – Queen

Concertante of London/Sir Nicholas Jackson

rec. Drapers' Hall, London, 4 and 7 May 2016

**NIMBUS ALLIANCE NI6339 [68.51]**

This piece is described by its composer as 'an opera in two acts', but in purely musical terms it may be regarded as a sort of apotheosis of the neo-classical style with music that derives in its entirety from arrangements for chamber orchestra of movements from the keyboard sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757). For some obscure reason these charming vignettes are allied to a text drawn from *The Rose and the Ring* by William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-63), originally published nearly a century after Scarlatti's death as part of a collection of occasional Christmas pieces and described by the author as a 'Fireside Pantomime' although it is written in narrative style and not as a drama. The plot, absurd even by the hardly exacting standards of the genre of pantomime, revolves around a farrago of mistaken identities and disguises which would be regarded as excessive even in a baroque opera, spiced with some sadistic scenes of threatened torture and execution of the kind that Carroll and Gilbert were subsequently to mock with gruesome effect in *Alice* and *The Mikado* respectively. In point of fact Thackeray (unlike his later parodists) actually consummates his bloodthirsty tendencies, with some sycophantic courtiers being eaten by lions; and it is only the sense of absurdity that prevents the plot from being really sinister in its undertones. There are no engaging Becky Sharps or Barry Lyndons to be found in *The Rose and the Ring*, with its thoroughly unsympathetic collection of characters who thankfully fail to elicit the slightest degree of sympathy from the audience.

The alliance of pre-existing music to words by major English authors might suggest some parallels between Jackson's 'opera' and Holst's *At the Boar's Head* with the latter's Shakespearean text overlaid across melodic material largely deriving from English folksong. But these parallels are hard to discern. For much of the time Thackeray's words are simply set to baroque-sounding vocal lines, rife with pseudo-period ornamentation and riddled with false accents. To take just one of many examples, the totally incidental word "to" in the phrase "from one kingdom to another" is extended in a totally unnatural manner near the beginning of the 'aria' in track 6. The CD cover observes that the full text of the English libretto is contained in the booklet, and that is true; but the booklet itself clearly stands in some need of careful proof-reading, being riddled with misprints, differences between what is sung and what is printed, ascriptions of phrases to singers other than those actually singing them, and failing even to indicate who is actually singing some fairly major roles in the action. Nor are the singers free from fault here, with some consonants simply swallowed, omitted or otherwise inaudible. William Morgan, Robyn Parton and Katherine Crompton have the greater share of vocal proceedings, although the singer who takes the part of the villainous King Padella really should have been individually credited in the booklet. In his final scenes Peter Aisher, singing a tenor role, seems in places to be transformed into a bass.

The booklet contains some period illustrations in the shape of caricatures which featured in the original publication (although these are not attributed, they are the work of Thackeray himself – and they look good enough to be by Tenniel). We are also given a complete list of the individual sonatas from which the music is drawn in each track. As I have observed, the selected link between the words and the music of Scarlatti is oddly unexplained and apparently unmotivated; and although the results have a considerable degree of charm, the sharp edge of Thackeray's satire is blunted. The singers, their

occasional lapses in diction excepted, have generally fine voices and combine well in chorus; and the playing of the instrumentalists – single woodwind, string quintet and harpsichord – is sprightly and pointed under the direction of the composer, one-time organist at St David's Cathedral. *The Rose and the Ring* is hardly to be considered as a contribution to the realm of modern British opera, or to the dramatic sphere of musical theatre; but as an entertainment pure and simple it might well appeal to groups with the technical skill to sing and play it. The recorded sound is excellently balanced and clear. The opera was apparently first performed on a concert on 4 May 2016, one of the dates given for this recording; if it was a public performance, the audience were as quiet as mice.

***Paul Corfield Godfrey***

**Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)**

String Quartet in F major, M.35 (1904) [28:49]

**Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)**

String Quartet in G minor, L.85 (1893) [26:04]

**Darius MILHAUD (1892-1974)**

String Quartet No. 12, Op. 252 (1945) [13:17]

**Gustave SAMAZEUILH (1877-1967)**

Cantabile et Capriccio for String Quartet (1947) [9:37]

Joseph Calvet recalls his encounter with Ravel (in French) [1:52]

Calvet Quartet (Joseph Calvet, Jean André Champeil (violins), Maurice Husson (viola), Manuel Amédée Recassens (cello))

rec. August 1946, Stuttgart Staatstheater, South German Radio (Ravel and Debussy), November 1948 Paris, Studio RDF, Radiodiffusion Française (Milhaud and Samazeuilh). September 1972 (Calvet radio talk)

**MELOCLASSIC MC4005** [79:43]

The Calvet String Quartet was formed in Paris in 1919, and over the next twenty years developed a reputation for its technical polish, refinement and informed musicianship. In fact, it came to be regarded as the finest European quartet together with the ProArte Quartet. In 1928, the ensemble scheduled their first Beethoven cycles at the instigation of Nadia Boulanger. They had missed out on the 1927 Beethoven Centenary, intimidated by the established reputation in Beethoven performance of their rivals, the Capet Quartet. In 1940 the Calvets disbanded, with two of their personnel going their separate ways. In 1944 the new Calvet Quartet re-formed, but only remained in existence for another six years. In 1950, due to Calvet's health problems, the quartet disbanded. He was to live another thirty-four years until 1984, and in that time he was to pass on his expertise and knowledge to countless musicians.

I am not at all familiar with the Calvet Quartet, and this is my first encounter with their playing. My research tells me that they recorded both the Debussy and Ravel String Quartets commercially in the 1930s. These performances have been issued both on LP and CD (Lys). On this live radio broadcast, the perennial pairing derives from August 1946, in the ensemble's final incarnation. What strikes me in these performances is the idiomatic sense of style they bring to the music. Tempi are comfortable, and phrasing is natural and instinctive. Debussy's Quartet is more passionately intense, with an underlying dramatic intent. In the Ravel, the impressionistic elements are emphasized. The players are highly sensitive to the infinite subtleties, nuances and inflections within the both scores. Each work employs pizzicato passages in its second movement. These are especially successful, with the plucked strings resounding warmly and distinctly.

The other two pieces, by Milhaud and Samazeuilh, were taped two years later, in November 1948. The String Quartet No. 12 by Milhaud was written to commemorate the hundredth anniversary the birth of Gabriel Fauré. It has a gorgeous lyrical slow movement, the emotional heart of the work, which the Calvets savour to perfection. The opening movement is sunny and joyous. The finale, lively and genial, is played here with scintillating virtuosity and aplomb. Ensemble is stunning.

Gustave Samazeuilh may not be known to many. Born in Bordeaux, he studied initially with Chausson, who died prematurely in 1899. He then transferred to d'Indy and Dukas. The impressionistic complexion of his music clearly shows Debussy's influence. The *Cantabile and Capriccio for String Quartet* dates from 1947, a year prior to this recording. The *Cantabile*, as its name suggests, is steeped in beguiling lyricism. The *Capriccio*, in contrast, is spirited and vivacious. Impressive is the pristine articulation of the pizzicatos in the latter. One can appreciate, listening to this, why the ensemble was lauded for its technical prowess.

For those who understand French, there is Joseph Calvet's short interview, recalling his meeting with Ravel.

The sound is a little recessed and dim in the Ravel and Debussy, but less so in the later airing. I found the notes by Michael Waiblinger particularly enlightening. I may be a first-timer to the Calvet Quartet's playing, but I now count myself a convert.

***Stephen Greenbank***

Previous review: [Jonathan Woolf](#)

## **Walter BRAUNFELS (1882-1954)**

### *Ulenspiegel*

Marc Horus (Till Ulenspiegel)

Christa Ratzenböck (Nele)

Joachim Goltz (Profoss)

Hans Peter Scheidegger (Klas)

Andreas Jankowitsch (Jost/Schuster)

Tomas Kovacic (Bürgermeister/Ablaspriester)

Martin Summer (Schreiner/Arkebusier)

EntArteOpera Choir, Israel Chamber Orchestra, Martin Sieghart

Roland Schwab (stage director)

rec. Tabakfabrik, Linz, Austria, September 2014

**CAPRICCIO C9006 DVD** [129 mins]

Along with [Prinzessin Brambilla](#), [Die Vögel](#) and *Verkündigung*, this is the fourth opera by the German composer Walter Braunfels that I have. At first viewing, I must say, I was not that impressed but I think that it was more a reflection on the production rather than the music. The second time I just listened to the music with the pictures switched off, so the staging did not detract from the late romantic mastery of the composer. Having purely listened to the opera I then watched it again. I was able to appreciate more the vision of the director, Roland Schwab, even if I still found it somewhat distracting.

Walter Braunfels, born in Frankfurt am Main, was originally taught music by his mother who was related to Louis Spohr, before studying at the Hoch Conservatory with the well respected pianist James Kwast (his other pupils included Percy Grainger, Hans Pfitzner and Otto Klemperer). Braunfels went on to study law in Munich before deciding that his future lay in music. He achieved such success with his third opera, [Die Vögel](#), that Adolf Hitler, not realising that he was of Jewish lineage, asked him to compose an anthem for the National Socialists, a commission that Braunfels declined. This was to affect his career during the period Hitler when was in power. He lost his position of founder director of the Hochschule für Musik Köln, while his music was deemed Entartete, or degenerate, due to his Jewish ancestry. During this period of internal exile Braunfels continued to compose, completing his *Verkündigung*. Although included in his list of operas, Braunfels actually described it as "A Mystery in Four Acts and a Prologue". After the war he returned to his teaching position and his place in German society. It was only after the release by Decca in their Entartete Musik series of [Die Vögel](#) that his music began to be recognised. Since then a number of very fine recordings have appeared.

*Ulenspiegel* was Walter Braunfels's second opera, composed in 1913. It is based upon the 1868 novel "La Légende et les Aventures héroïques et glorieuses d'Ulenspiegel et de Lamme Goedzak au pays de Flanders et ailleurs" by the Belgian author Charles de Coster. It deals with the adventures of Thyl or Till Ulenspiegel, although there are not many "merry pranks" here. In this depiction Till is more of a freedom fighter battling against the forces of the oppression of the Spanish Inquisition in the Spanish Netherlands during the Reformation wars or the Dutch War of Independence. Rather than setting the action in the historical context, Roland Schwab has opted for a more kakotopian setting, in which leather-clad groups do battle, a bit like "Mad Max" the opera. This is what I have problems with, the staging. For me it does not seem to add to the drama—in fact, it detracts. I find it a bit bloody for my liking, but I suppose setting it in context might detract from some of the drama of this production.

The opera *Ulenspiegel* is a relatively early work, firmly based in the great Austro-German Romantic tradition. It is only after Braunfels's conversion to Catholicism, which was partly due to his experiences in the First World War, that his music becomes more religious in nature. This can be seen in [Die Vögel](#) where the music of the final act has a more devotional tone, even ending with a hymn. The music might not be as opulent and striking as his later works, but neither the less it is still interesting and shows a style in development. It is certainly a step up from [Prinzessin Brambilla](#), composed some four years previous. It is a dramatic work. Braunfels uses the music well to set the mood, employing

different devices to ramp up the tension in the work, owing much to Wagner, Mahler and Richard Strauss.

The performance is very good, with the Israel Chamber Orchestra more than up to the challenges provided by the score. The singing of the main characters is excellent. Marc Horus as Till and Christa Ratzenböck as Nele are well matched and full of character. It is Joachim Goltz as the arch villain, the Provost, who steals the show; at times, he brings a true sense of menace to the role. All three here also prove to be fine actors, something that their roles in this opera require. The rest of the cast members and the EntArteOpera Choir also prove to be in good voice. There is an occasional bit of roughness in the singing, but this only adds to the drama of the production and seems to fit well with the action.

I still have my doubts regarding the staging, but this production is growing on me with every watch. Musically it is very enjoyable, even if the subject matter does not really lend itself to enjoyment. This is a DVD which must be given time, as it is only with repeated viewings that you come to appreciate the director's vision.

***Stuart Sillitoe***

## **Heimat**

Benjamin Appl (baritone)

James Baillieu (piano)

rec October 2016 & Jan 2017, Studio 1, Bayerische Rundfunk, Germany

**SONY CLASSICAL 88985393032** [66:54]

*Heimat* is one of those German words for which there is no simple translation. It means “homeland” but, unlike *Vaterland*, it suggests a place you long for rather than somewhere that inspires nationalistic pride, and it can take in people and states of mind as well as geographical places. It is a sufficiently knotty concept to sustain a classical concept album like this one. I’m not altogether sure that Benjamin Appl has managed to pull it off, however.

Appl has all the indications of a star-in-waiting, and I enjoyed his Wigmore Hall CD of last year ([review](#)). This is his first disc for his new label, and Sony have allowed him to curate a programme that is both an exploration of a concept in song and something uniquely personal to him. His idea of *Heimat* ranges from Heaven (Schubert’s *Seligkeit*) to the joyful nature-painting of Wolf’s Spring song *Er ist’s*, through to that deeply German identification with the land and, eventually, to Appl’s newly adopted home of the UK, for which we have a range of songs by British composers. There are *three* booklet essays (in English and German) to explain the concept, one of which is penned by no less a man than Neil MacGregor, the former director of the British Museum, who mentions that Appl was important in promoting the museum’s 2014 exhibition that was aimed at presenting Germany to the British public.

It’s very well put together, with a lot of intelligence, and I respect the bespoke element to it. Furthermore, there is definitely a lot to like about his interpretations. However, I have to admit that the voice is not quite as beguiling as I remember it. It has developed a slightly darker centre, giving it almost a somewhat nasal quality in places, something which undermines the peace of, say, Brahms’ *Cradle Song*. There’s nothing wrong with his technique, and the clarity of his German is excellent, but I didn’t detect as much depth or insight as I had hoped for (something which, looking back, I had also commented on in his Wigmore Hall disc). His reading of Schubert’s *Hermit (Der Einsame)*, for example, is rather superficial, without tapping into the irony that is lurking there, and his perusal of the nocturnal landscape in Brahms’ *Mondnacht* feels like a Cook’s tour rather than a penetration into the soul. The same composer’s ‘Mein Mädel hat einen Rosenmund’ actually sounds rather rough to my ears, almost like a drinking song (which it definitely isn’t!), and the disc’s main problem, for me, is that his approach to the songs is too simple, seeking one meaning where great interpreters open a window into many. For example, he captures nicely all the bluff straightforwardness of Schubert’s *Wanderer to the Moon*, but not the longing.

At the risk of damning with faint praise, he does well in songs where the variety is already laid out for him, such as Schreker’s *Waldeinsamkeit*, which sparkles as it runs through its different moods. He also captures the Cabaret tone of Adolf Strauss’s ‘Ich weiß bestimmt, ich werd’ dich wiedersehen’ and sings it very beguilingly (and you can forgive him for glossing over its horrible irony: the title translates ‘I am certain I will see you again’, but Strauss was murdered by the Nazis at the age of 42). Similarly, he is better at plumbing the depths of Schubert’s dark *Wanderer*, including the wistful longing of the second half. James Baillieu also makes a splendid accompanist. I loved the gentle twinkling of the keyboard that depicted the angels’ journey in Reger’s *Child’s Prayer*, and the Romanticism of the harmonies in Strauss’s *Allerseelen* sounds sensational under his fingers. In fact, there is often more suggestion and ambiguity in his accompaniment than there is in Appl’s singing, Schubert’s *Nachtstück* being a prime example.

In fact, and perhaps surprisingly, it was the section of British songs that I enjoyed the most. There is wit and sparkle in Poulenc’s *Hyde Park*, and he is very good in *Silent Noon*, even finding some folksiness in *Home, Sweet Home*. Even though you wouldn’t mistake him for a native speaker, his English diction is strong, and his young man’s take on the Warlock songs is very fitting, as is his meditative rendition of John Ireland’s very British take on the concept of home.



I guess there's a legitimate argument that I'm being too harsh about a young artist who is at the start of his career, but the things I miss are the things that mark out the great singers as truly great. Appl isn't there yet, though, of course, that doesn't preclude the possibility that he might get there. I worry a little, however, that he might not have been ready for a project like this yet, and that should send up warning signals. His poster-boy good looks would make him a prime candidate for too-much-too-soon, and I very much hope that Sony are going to manage (and mentor) him well.

***Simon Thompson***

**Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828)**

Seligkeit D 433 [1:52]

**Max REGER (1873-1916)**

Des Kindes Gebet op. 76/22 [1:38]

**Hugo WOLF (1860-1903)**

Er ist's [1:23]

**Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)**

Wiegenlied op. 49/4 [1:55]

**Franz SCHUBERT**

Der Einsame D 800 [4:19]

**Johannes BRAHMS**

Mondnacht WoO 21 [2:51]

**Franz SCHEKER (1878-1934)**

Waldeinsamkeit [3:06]

**Johannes BRAHMS**

Mein Mädel hat einen Rosenmund [1:57]

**Hugo WOLF**

Verschwiegene Liebe [2:23]

**Richard STRAUSS (1864-1949)**

Allerseelen op. 10/8 [3:08]

**Franz SCHUBERT**

Nachtstück D 672 [6:02]

Drang in die Ferne D 770 [3:34]

Der Wanderer an den Mond D 870 [2:17]

**Adolf STRAUSS (1902-1944)**

Ich weiß bestimmt, ich werd' dich wiedersehen [3:51]

**Franz SCHUBERT**

Das Heimweh D 456 [1:22]

Der Wanderer D 489 [5:16]

**Francis POULENC (1899-1963)**

Hyde Park FP 127/2 [0:48]

**Benjamin BRITTEN (1913-1976)**

Greensleeves [2:05]

**Ralph VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872-1958)**

Silent Noon [4:00]

**Henry Rowley BISHOP (1786-1855)**

Home, Sweet Home [3:11]

**Peter WARLOCK (1894-1930)**

My Own Country [2:17]

The Bachelor [0:50]

**John IRELAND (1879-1962)**

If There Were Dreams to Sell [2:24]

**Edvard GRIEG (1843-1907)**

An das Vaterland op. 58/2 [1:55]

Ein Traum op. 48/6 [2:30]

## **Władysław ŻELEŃSKI (1837-1921)**

### **Secular Choral Works**

Anna Fabrello (soprano), Beata Koska (alto), Jacek Szymański (tenor), Robert Kaczorowski (bass), Marcin Rembowski and Bartłomiej Skrobot (horns), Aneta Czach (piano), Ewa Rytel (piano)

Zespół Wokalny Simultaneo/Karol Kisiel (tracks 1-5)

Art'n'Voices (tracks 6-10)

Podkarpacki Chór Męsk/Grzegorz Oliwa (tracks 11-15)

rec. February 2016, Akademia Muzyczna w Gdańsku, Sala S2; May and August 2016, Centrum

Edukacyjne w Rzeszowie

Polish texts: no translations

**ACTE PRÉALABLE AP0363** [68:32]

Acte Préalable has been strongly active in the music of Władysław Żeleński. He was born near Cracow and studied there and in Prague and Paris. Back in Cracow he began a distinguished pedagogic career - succeeding Moniuszko as composition teacher - before moving to an even more distinguished position in Warsaw. He was soon back in Cracow however and was eventually to become Director of the Music Conservatoire. So, a strong academic pedigree and clearly an important teacher – his most famous pupil was Zygmunt Stojowski.

He has been best known for his choral music, though some labels of late – Hyperion included – have explored chamber music with success. This disc however returns us to Żeleński the writer for the voice and does so with a sequence of fifteen secular pieces, mostly compact, and written at different stages in his compositional life. They are largely unknown examples of his music and are heard in premiere recordings.

*Pieśń myśliwska* sports two hunting horns in this version for mixed choir. Originally it was written for men's voices and four horns but the adaptation by Feliks Nowowiejski preserves its vibrant Germanic woodsman ethos well. Incidentally, his arrangement is actually for four horns in F, so this performance has halved the hunting quotient, but no harm is done. *Oboja wiosna* is a calm, verdant setting in which the lines expand and contract with burgeoning warmth, deeply rooted in nineteenth-century romantic procedure. A joyful, affirmative but taut Spring setting follows in the form of *Preludium* whereas the piano-accompanied *Dobra noc* is an appropriately domestic and prayerful piece, pliantly sung and enshrining a rather beautiful, meditative quality.

*Humoreska* is an example of a feast song, a highly jolly piece, lasting no more than 70 seconds and there's a touch of jocular folklore about *Nasza Hanka* which also reveals the composer's control of text, metre and amplitude. There's another piano-accompanied piece in the form of *Noc majowa*, a reverent piece that, frustratingly (as elsewhere) remains undated in the booklet but which sounds as if it belongs stylistically to the 1870s. By contrast, *Kantata na cześć Kościuszki* can be specifically dated to 1910 as it was written to commemorate the dedication of monuments in Washington DC. Robert Kaczorowski deploys a big, beefy bass solo and the piano postlude is very much reminiscent of the composer's best solo piano pieces. The deep basses of Podkarpacki Chór Męsk make their mark in *Pieśń żeglarszy* – a nautical celebration full of ebullient confidence. *Do pracy* dates from 1894 and was another commission, this time for an exhibition. At eight minutes, it hardly outstays its welcome, though that makes it the second longest piece of the fifteen. It's a shame Żeleński here reaches for that tired trope, the academic fugato.

There are texts but no translations so your Polish had better be good to appreciate the verbal felicities of the word settings: mine isn't and therefore this is a loss. The choral forces are on fine form and are excellently drilled and directed in a pleasing acoustic.

**Jonathan Woolf**

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### **Carl NIELSEN (1865-1931)**

Flute Concerto, FS 119 (1926) [18:34]

Clarinet Concerto, FS 129 (1928) [24:10]

Aladdin Suite, FS 89 (1918-19) [26:35]

Samuel Coles (flute); Mark van de Wiel (clarinet)

Philharmonia Orchestra/Paavo Järvi

rec. live Royal Festival Hall, London, 19 November 2015 (Flute), 19 May 2016 (Clarinet); Henry Wood Hall, London, 20 May 2016 (Aladdin)

**SIGNUM CLASSICS SIGCD477** [69:22]

In 2015 I enthusiastically recommended a new recording of Nielsen's concertos, including the Violin Concerto, with soloists and the New York Philharmonic under Alan Gilbert, as part of their Nielsen series of live performances for Dacapo, and designated it a "Recording of the Month" ([review](#)). Thus, I approached this new disc with some trepidation and wondered how it could possibly equal that one. I need not have worried. The two performances here are every bit as superb as the earlier ones and the recorded sound, if anything, is even better.

Samuel Coles, a pupil of James Galway, has been principal flute in the Philharmonia Orchestra since 2011 and is a professor at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He is a true virtuoso with a vibrant tone that never becomes shrill unless the music calls for that piercing quality. What makes this recording outstanding, however, is his obvious rapport with the rest of the orchestra and conductor Paavo Järvi and the clarity of the sound, where the delightful interaction of the flute with the other winds, the timpani, and the bass trombone is present for all to hear. There is almost a chamber-music feel to the recording, rather than just a soloist with the orchestra accompanying. All kinds of detail are heard as never before. For example, in the first movement at 2:35 and again at 2:41 there is a quiet upward string phrase that is noticeable here, whereas in other accounts, including Robert Langevin's with the New York Philharmonic, you have to strain to hear it. I wasn't aware of it until I listened to this new recording. There are many such touches throughout that come up fresh here. It is true that the sound of the solo horn may not be as big as Philip Myers' in the New York performance, or George Curran's of the important solo bass trombone there, but hornist Nigel Black and bass trombonist David Stewart here are effective in their own right. Black's trombone smears are as fine as any I have heard.

Mark van de Wiel is equally impressive in the Clarinet Concerto. He is principal clarinet of both the Philharmonia and the London Sinfonietta. He captures the varied spirit of this music at least as well as Anthony McGill in the New York account. McGill produces a slightly warmer, even woodier sound, but when the music calls for some stridency Van de Wiel can scream with the best of them. Again the recorded sound is terrific, with a perfect balance between soloist and the rest of the orchestra, including the all-important snare drum. Both Paavo Järvi and Alan Gilbert seem like natural interpreters of Nielsen and compare well with such native-born Nielsen specialists as Michael Schønwandt and Thomas Dausgaard in this respect. Overall, there is little to choose between these new accounts and the earlier ones on Dacapo.

What most separates this new disc from the Dacapo recording, though, is the coupling. Here I'm afraid Järvi loses out. It is more logical to have all three Nielsen concertos together, even if there are plenty of viable alternatives for the Violin Concerto. Nikolaj Znaider is wonderful exponent of that concerto on the Dacapo disc, as fine as any of the competition and better than most. There are also many recordings of the *Aladdin Suite* from which to choose, if that is your cup of tea, that are at least as good as Järvi's.

Nielsen composed over 80 minutes of incidental music for Copenhagen's 1919 Royal Theatre production of *Aladdin*, adapted from a story in *The Arabian Nights*. The composer had misgivings about completing the score in time for the production. He was given rather short notice, yet he did complete it with the help of a former pupil. The whole score has rarely been recorded, but the suite he adapted from it turned out to be one of his most popular, if unrepresentative, compositions. It is

available on disc in a number of compilations of his much better tone poems and orchestral excerpts from his two operas. The *Aladdin Suite* is probably my least favourite Nielsen work with its exoticism seemingly foreign to the composer's nature. It begins promisingly with a powerful Oriental Festival March, but by the end of the seven movements I have had more than enough of the suite's exoticism. Järvi's account is certainly good, but the sound he is given here seems diffuse compared to that for the concertos. The production team is the same, but the venue is different and that may explain the inferior recording. If you want a more forceful and colourful interpretation in superb sound, I would go with Herbert Blomstedt and the San Francisco Symphony's recording on Decca that includes the optional wordless chorus in the 'Marketplace in Ispahan'—the most complex part of the work—and the final 'Negro Dance'.

I will definitely keep this CD for the two concertos, but would recommend the New York Philharmonic/Gilbert recording as a first choice for all three Nielsen concertos. Signum has done its part in providing a first-class product in its presentation. In addition to a very attractive cover, the booklet contains detailed and insightful notes by Nordic music specialist, Andrew Mellor, several colour photos, and a listing of the orchestra members.

***Leslie Wright***