

François-Joseph GOSSEC (1773-1829)

Symphonie à grand orchestra "La Chasse" in D major (1774-1786) [14:30]

Sinfonia à piú stromenti in C minor (ca 1762) [13:30]

Symphonie concertante du ballet de "Mirza" in D major (1784) [12:08]

Symphonie à 17 parties in F major (1809) [24:05]

Andrea Keller (violin); Martin Sandhoff (flute)

Concerto Köln/Werner Ehrhardt

rec. 13-16 January 2003, Deutschland, Sendesaal des Funkhauses Köln

CAPRICCIO ENCORE C8019 [64:13]

As a search of this site under the composer's name will reveal Gossec has not been ignored. This reissued disc further establishes and enhances his standing.

It would be easy to spoil Gossec with a heavy flat-footed approach. That is not what he is treated to across these four symphonies. Take the *Symphonie à grand orchestra "La Chasse"*. It's full of rhythmic surprises along the way as in the lively first movement which sounds Beethovenian. The skilled Concerto Köln under Werner Ehrhardt search out its serene dignity. The progress of this music reminded me of another neglected French contemporary figure: [Etienne Méhul](#). Pre-echoes of Beethoven - this time *The Pastoral* - return in the delightful countryside finale of *La Chasse*. The *Allegro* of the "Mirza" *Symphonie concertante* - a work with solos for violin and flute - is Mozartean. Its invention is gracious and even doffs its hat in the direction of Mozart's K364.

None of these symphonies is long-winded. The two central works, each in three movements, are exceptionally compact while remaining gently amiable. This affable geniality is even sufficient to lift the spirits in the fugal finale of the *Sinfonia à piú stromenti*.

The disc ends with the most grand and Beethovenian of these works and also the latest: the *Symphonie à 17 parties*. It returns to the four-movement *schema*. Not quite as fresh as its companions it still sports a witty and youthful third movement harking back to Gossec's earlier years. Gossec rounds things out with a regal finale.

While the note in English only by Michael Stegemann is pretty brief it serves its scene-establishing purpose rather well.

This lively music heard in lively music-making. It draws on an amiable personality who mines both serene dignity and regal grace.

Rob Barnett

Alma MAHLER (1879-1964)

Lieder und Gesänge

Fünf Lieder:

1. *Die stille Stadt* (Richard Dehmel) [2:40]
2. *In meines Vaters Garten* (Otto Erich Hartleben) [5:26]
3. *Laue Sommernacht* (Otto Julius Bierbaum) [1:52]
4. *Bei dir ist es traut* (Rainer Maria Rilke) [1:52]
5. *Ich wandle unter Blumen* (Heinrich Heine) [0:52]

Vier Lieder:

6. *Licht in der Nacht* (Bierbaum) [3:28]
7. *Waldseligkeit* (Dehmel) [2:31]
8. *Ansturm* (Dehmel) [1:39]
9. *Emtelied* (Gustav Falke) [4:10]

Fünf Gesänge:

10. *Hymne* (Novalis) [4:58]
11. *Ekstase* (Bierbaum) [2:35]
12. *Der Erkennende* (Franz Werfel) [2:48]
13. *Lobgesang* (Dehmel) [3:05]
14. *Hymne an die Nacht* (Novalis) [3:20]

Patrizia MONTANARO (b. 1956)

15. *Canto di Penelope* (Rosaria Lo Russo) (Melologue for soprano/actress and piano) [21:37]

Catharina Kroeger (soprano), Monica Lonero (piano)

Rec. October 2014, Digital Records, Rome, Italy

Sung texts available online

BRILLIANT CLASSICS 95469 [63:45]

Alma Schindler studied composition from the age of sixteen and later met Alexander von Zemlinsky, with whom she also studied. When she met Gustav Mahler in 1901, she was forced to give up her studies and her composer career. At the end of his life, however, Gustav had second thoughts, and in 1910 he helped her publish *Fünf Lieder*. These songs were probably composed a decade earlier. After Gustav's demise she published two more groups of songs: *Vier Lieder* (1915) and *Fünf Gesänge* (1924). Another two songs were published posthumously in 2000.

From time to time some of her songs appear in recitals and there have been a number of recordings. I have reviewed a couple of discs with the early *Fünf Lieder* ([review](#)) ([review](#)) and have a BIS disc from 1995 with songs by Clara Schumann and Fanny Mendelssohn besides eight of Alma Mahler's songs: the *Vier Lieder* plus two songs from each of the other groups. The singer is Christina Högman. There are also at least three issues with all her songs. On Ondine, Finnish mezzo-soprano Lilli Paasikivi sings all sixteen with orchestral accompaniment by Jorma Panula; on cpo, Ruth Ziesak, Iris Vermillion and Christian Elsner perform the 14 originally published songs with piano accompaniments by Cord Garben and with Alma's teacher Zemlinsky's songs Op. 7 as fillers; on Globe, Charlotte Margiono sings all sixteen with orchestra and with Zemlinsky's *Waldesgespräch* as filler. I haven't heard any of these.

The present disc includes only the fourteen songs published during Alma's lifetime. It's a pity the two posthumous songs were omitted; there is space left. We don't know much about the chronology of the songs, since few of them are dated or mentioned in her writings. However, the *Vier Lieder* published in 1915 are more modern, harmonically, than the other two groups. Generally, all the songs are well crafted and appealing though rather anonymous. Her ability to marry text with music is anyway conspicuous and it is valuable to have the songs collected in good readings. Catharina Kroeger has an agreeable, rather bright soprano and she sings sensitively and with fine nuances.

The "filler", Patrizia Montanaro's *Canto di Penelope*, has, as far as I understand, no connection with Alma Mahler – unless we regard both as strong-willed women. But while Penelope has been known

for her fidelity to Odysseus, in spite of having many suitors, Alma Mahler seems to have been fairly promiscuous. *Canto di Penelope* was composed in 2003 for Catharina Kroeger, and it is subtitled *Melologue for soprano-actress and piano*. It is a fascinating work that takes some time to come to terms with. The vocal part ranges from spoken lines via *Sprechgesang* to pure singing. It is intense, dramatic and in long stretches also beautiful, although there are no melodies in the conventional sense. The piano part is very expressive. The texts are available at the label's website brilliantclassics, but I would have preferred to have the translations side by side, not on separate pages.

Though not a genius – as her husband certainly was – it is still good to have Alma Mahler's songs available at an affordable price – and in the bargain one gets the fascinating challenge of *Canto di Penelope*.

Göran Forsling

Sergei RACHMANINOFF (1873-1973)

Piano Concerto No.2 in C minor Op.18 (1900) [31:29]

Piano Concerto No.3 in D minor Op.30 (1909) [38:50]

Khatia Buniatishvili (piano)

Czech Philharmonic Orchestra/Paavo Järvi

Rec. Dvořák Hall, Rudolfinum, Prague, Czech Republic 11-12 November 2016

SONY 88985402412 [70:19]

The first time I encountered the name of Khatia Buniatishvili was almost exactly four years ago in a concerto performance accompanied by Paavo Järvi. On that occasion she played Beethoven and I was hugely impressed although I see looking back that my feeling was that Jarvi was an attentive rather than inspired collaborator. In the intervening years, Buniatishvili's discography has grown fairly slowly but with the exception of Chopin's 2nd Concerto - again with Järvi - she has stuck with chamber and solo keyboard repertoire. So this is a valuable chance to hear her playing two of the most famous Romantic concerti with one of the world's great orchestras.

Buniatishvili is a phenomenal technician - passagework of terrifying complexity is heard with extraordinary clarity. But she is much more than just a technician - for all the brilliance of her playing the passages from this disc that linger longest are the gently poised musings of each concerto's central movements. She has a beautifully artless simplicity when required which strips the music of any sense of sentimentality or archness. In this she is helped by Järvi's rather plain approach. I have to say too plain for my taste - my only other encounter with Järvi in Rachmaninoff was a good but not outstanding 2nd Symphony in Cincinnati. The best thing about this current disc is undoubtedly Buniatishvili's playing but the overall impact of the disc is severely hampered by a very average recording. It sounds as if some rather odd post-production choices have been made at the mixing desk. Primarily amongst these is the absolute primacy of the piano. The actual keyboard sound is good but mixed so front and prominent that even when playing passagework or 'accompanying' an orchestral tutti the piano writing is dominant. This is not the fault of Buniatishvili playing too loud simply a question of balance. The tonal quality given the Czech Philharmonic is something of a disappointment too. The recording has been made in the Dvořák hall of the Rudolfinum in Prague. Other engineers there too have struggled to control the resonance of a space which can often add blurring ambience without additional warmth. The Sony engineers have failed in this struggle leaving the Czech orchestra sounding unbalanced and not the world-class ensemble I have so often heard in the past. Balances between strings and wind are unconvincing with too distant horns and wiry thin-toned celli.

Given that in the past Buniatishvili's performances in concert and on disc have prompted either adulation or derision in their individual musical choices this is a remarkably unfussy pair of performances. There are occasions when she can leap forward with impulsive and occasionally dizzying speed - the fugal passage in the 3rd movement of the 2nd concerto or the opening of No.3's finale are a case in point but generally she chooses remarkably centrist and uncontroversial speeds. Aside from the sudden bursts of speed the main defining characteristic is her refusal to over-egg the 'big tunes' with which these works overflow. Another way in which the engineering works against Buniatishvili is in the microscopic clarity her playing is given. Not that it cannot bear such close scrutiny rather that it can give an occasionally mechanistic quality to sections which need more of a sense of fantasy. As it happened I picked up recently the famous first recording by Ashkenazy on Decca legends of these two scores [conducted by Kondrashin and Fistoulari respectively]. I would not say these are my favourite versions but direct comparison is telling. Decca's ace production team of Erik Smith and Kenneth Wilkinson show their Sony counterparts how to balance this music even allowing for the fact that the Decca recording is over 50 years old. The older recording allows the listener to remember that Rachmaninoff was a master orchestrator - something the new disc rarely admits. More to the point Ashkenazy gives little if anything to Buniatishvili in purely technical terms but crucially he finds a sense of quicksilver fantasy in passages which verge on the mechanistic here as recorded. Both Kondrashin and Fistoulari are far superior to Järvi in allowing the great arching phrases of Rachmaninoff to breathe and expand. This does not mean indulgence but it does mean an elasticity

that seems to be contrary to Järvi's aesthetic. One last comparison, the new recording is very roughly a minute faster in each of the six movements than the older one - and a full two minutes quicker in the *Intermezzo* movement of No.3. Not that in all fairness Buniatishvili ever feels at all rushed but again this is indicative of a refusal to indulge. One last point of interest to collectors; Buniatishvili plays the even more challenging "ossia" cadenza in the 1st movement of No.3 and it receives a mighty performance.

I did wonder if Sony are trying to reposition Buniatishvili in the marketplace with this disc. The rather plain booklet features just a pair of rather demur pictures of the pianist with no artist biographies and none of the liner notes in the style of "artistic creeds" that have typified previous releases. For those who miss such things they can still be found on her website; "*Khatia Buniatishvili, shining pianist at the height of her abilities, came into this world in a shower of light during the summer solstice. On a human level, she is attracted more to equinoxes, being smitten by justice and seeking day and night in equal share. By lifting one's eyes skywards one might notice her playing hide-and-peek with either Venus or Mercury. The cosmos is her garden and it is in its movement that she feels alive, astride a comet*" says the homepage. The liner is written/translated in a slightly florid way - it neither adds or detracts greatly from one's appreciation of the disc.

My admiration for Khatia Buniatishvili as a pianist and musician is undimmed but I must admit that this disc was less challenging or remarkable than I had been expecting. This is a generous but not uniquely generous coupling and it is entering an absurdly competitive field. For those needing to hear pianism of remarkable clarity in forensic sound this might well be a preferred option. I see that there is a videoed performance of No.3 available with Järvi père conducting which I have not heard but a comparison would be interesting. Clearly the two main performers have an enduring performing relationship built over several years so I am sorry that it seems not to have born compelling fruit here.

Nick Barnard

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

'Loves me... Loves me not...'

Christoph Willibald GLUCK (1714–1787)

Arias from *Armide, Iphigénie en Tauride & Orfeo ed Euridice*

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)

Arias from Mozart: *Idomeneo, Così fan tutte & Le Nozze di Figaro*

Camilla Tilling (soprano)

Musica Saeculorum/Philipp von Steinaecker

rec. October 2015 Grand Hotel, Toblach, Italy

Full sung texts with English translations

BIS SACD BIS-2234 [65.51]

This release titled *'Loves me... Loves me not...'* a collection of eighteenth century arias by German opera masters Gluck and Mozart, from Swedish soprano Camilla Tilling is concerned with different aspects of love that are encountered in opera. For an operatic heroine love is rarely portrayed simply it's all too often unrequited or it may be obsessive or forbidden and entangled with loyalty, obstruction, jealousy, treachery or dishonour.

Following study at the University of Gothenburg, Tilling graduated from the Royal College of Music, London and began her international opera career in 1999. Tellingly her operatic repertory has developed progressively to include an increasing range of Mozart roles comprising all the arias contained here, notably a lighter lyric (Susanna), full lyric (Countess), lyric coloratura (Ilia) and dramatic coloratura (Fiordiligi). Demonstrating such steadfast interpretative expertise Tilling seems very much at home with this classical aria collection conveying her fresh and precise soprano voice of real purity that feels in prime condition. Beyond all doubt is Tilling's utmost sincerity for the texts.

There are three Mozart operas represented here *Idomeneo, Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Così fan tutte* with arias sung by four characters. My highlights include from *Idomeneo* Ilia's act I aria *Padre, germani, addio*. Here Tilling displays her lovely fluid tone with an attractive coloratura as Ilia chides herself for loving Idamante one of the Greek enemy and for betraying her family. From *Così fan tutte* comes Fiordiligi's celebrated act I aria *Come scoglio* performed with an abundance of drama and no lack of control as she proclaims loyalty to her absent lover the soldier Guglielmo. Tilling excels in her renowned act III aria *Dove sono* as the Countess Rosina from *Le Nozze di Figaro* who is wretched on account of neglect by her husband. Unwavering here is the soprano's glorious tone so smooth and eminently expressive.

Gluck, Mozart's older contemporary is represented by three operas *Orfeo ed Euridice, Armide* and *Iphigénie en Tauride* with a character from each having an aria. In 2014 Tilling sang the role of Euridice at Salzburg and she certainly shines brightly in this Gluck repertoire. My favourite of these is Iphigénie's act II aria *O malheureuse Iphigenia* from *Iphigénie en Tauride*. This is ravishingly tender singing by Tilling, with lovely oboe accompaniment, as the High Priestess Iphigénie in the Temple of Tauris delivers a lament for her vanished family and homeland. The enchantment continues in the final section of the aria with the choir of Priestesses provided by sopranos Adèle Charvet and Victoria Jung.

Musica Saeculorum under the assured direction of Philipp von Steinaecker is on fine form being especially alert, cleanly articulated with no shortage of commitment. Steinaecker's awareness with his Italian-Tyrolese period instrument ensemble ensures that Tilling is never fighting against excessive weight or volume. On the opening track Musica Saeculorum delivers the overture from *Idomeneo* with exhilarating playing infused with a palpable air of mystery.

Thankfully I can report that full sung texts with English translations are provided in the accompanying booklet together with a helpful new essay by Julian Rushton. All the recitatives and arias are

allocated an individual track which makes separation easy if required. Recorded at Grand Hotel Toblach in Italy the engineering team for BIS provide good clarity, presence and satisfying balance between voice and orchestra.

The last three decades have produced a number of excellent albums of Mozart opera soprano arias, notably from: Kathleen Battle/EMI, Renée Fleming/Decca, Véronique Gens/Virgin Veritas, Anja Harteros/RCA Red Seal, Sandrine Piau/Naïve, Patricia Petibon/Deutsche Grammophon, Marina Rebeka/Warner, Diana Damrau/Virgin Classics, Sabine Devieilhe/Erato and Regula Mühlemann/Sony. It's hard to ignore three Mozart collections of older recordings namely from Elizabeth Schwarzkopf and Lucia Popp both on EMI 'Great Recordings of the Century' and also Elisabeth Grümmer on BR Klassik.

In this superior collection on BIS of Gluck and Mozart arias Camilla Tilling is in quite exceptional voice. This is certainly one of the finest albums of its kind and has my highest possible endorsement.

Michael Cookson

Track listing:

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)

from Idomeneo, re di Creta (1780/81)

1. Overture [4.37]

Ilia's recitative and aria, act I

2. Quando avran fine omai [3.52]

3. Padre, germani, addio [3.51]

Ilia's recitative and aria, act III

4. Solitudini amiche [0.57]

5. Zefiretti lusinghieri [5.21]

Christoph Willibald GLUCK (1714-1787)

from Orfeo ed Eurydice (1762)

Euridice's recitative and aria, act III

6. Qual vita [2.05]

7. Che fiero momento [3.12]

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART

from Le Nozze di Figaro (1786)

Susanna's recitative and aria, act IV

8. Giunse alfin [1.11]

9. Deh vieni, non tardar [3.13]

from Così fan tutte

Fiordiligi's recitative and aria, act I

10. Temerari, sortite [1.14]

11. Come scoglio [4.34]

Christoph Willibald GLUCK

from Armide (1777)

Armide's recitative and aria, act II

12. Enfin, il est en ma puissance [2.50]

13. Quel trouble me saisit? ... Ah quelle cruauté [4.07]

Armide's aria, act III

14. Ah! Si la liberté [3.46]

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART

from Così fan tutte (1790)

Fiordiligi's recitative and aria, act II

15. Ei parte [1.27]

16. Per pietà ben mio perdona [7.37]

from Le Nozze di Figaro

The Countess's recitative and aria, act III

17. E Susanna non vien! [1.29]

18. Dove sono [4.32]

Christoph Willibald GLUCK

from Iphigénie en Tauride (1779)

Iphigénie's aria, act II

19. O malheureuse Iphigenia [4.15]

with Adèle Charvet and Victoria Jung, sopranos (Priestesses)

Heinrich Ignaz Franz BIBER (1644-1704)

Rosary Sonatas (c. 1676)

Alice Piérot (violin)

Les Veilleurs de Nuit

rec. June 2002, Chapelle de l'Hôpital Notre-Dame de Bon Secours, Paris, France

ALPHA 038 [51:36 + 68:08]

Biber's cycle of Rosary Sonatas consists of fifteen violin sonatas named after the fifteen prayers of the Rosary in Roman Catholicism. The set opens with the Annunciation, follows the life and death of Christ and ends with the heavenly coronation of the Virgin Mary. A final passacaglia for unaccompanied violin brings the set to sixteen. Biber composed this unusual program using a truly baroque system of numerology.

More startling is the music itself, which is at various times bold, slashing, contemplative, sorrowful, and jubilant. These many moods are achieved through imposing technical demands, including *scordatura*, a retuning of the violin to create lighter or darker sounds, and to facilitate novel multiple stops. "Normal" tuning holds only for the opening sonata and the concluding passacaglia. This is extravagantly baroque music, not for the diffident performer.

A generation ago, recordings of Biber's cycle were special events. It is remarkable that we now live in a time when some twenty-six recordings of these remarkable works are on offer. This growth partly reflects increased interest in Biber the composer, for whom we now have nearly two hundred recordings. It also reflects changing musical performance practice, with historically-informed fiddlers presenting their performances of these dazzling pieces as calling cards.

There is a lot of variation among performances, beginning with the accompaniment. Some choose a minimal keyboard and cello or even keyboard alone. Others vary the palette, with up to eight different continuo instruments in varying combinations, sometimes including such unexpected voices as a trombone.

Accompanying Piérot are viola da gamba, theorbo, and claviorganum. This seems a relatively modest array, but can make quite a racket when appropriate. Piérot herself is forceful enough, falling mid-way among interpretations which range from rather polite (Andrew Manze) to fanciful and aggressive (Gunar Letzbor and Riccardo Minasi). Listeners who enjoy a more fevered approach should look elsewhere, but many will find satisfaction in her even-tempered take on this music. The scourging of Christ lacks the fierce blows heard in some other versions, and in general, her strength may be in the quieter moments of the cycle. Yet her treatment of the Ascension sonata is quite exciting.

Piérot takes two hours to play the cycle, which is a typical length. The recorded sound is fine, and the notes by Pierre Pascal are exceptionally informative. They cast doubt on whether this music is so programmatic as we presume, suggesting that it is more about technique and less about Jesus.

Richard Kraus

Decades - A Century of Song. Volume 2: 1820-1830

Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Auf der Brücke, D853 [3:34]

Im Frühling, D882 [4:14]

Aus 'Heliopolis' I, D753 [3:45]

Gondelfahrer, D808 [1:59]

Auflösung, D807 [2:30]

Mikhail Ivanovich GLINKA (1804-1857)

Skazhi, zachem [2:01]

Ne iskushay menya bez nuzhdi [2:57]

Moya harfa [1:17]

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Sehnsucht, WoO121 [2:22]

Felix MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Minnelied im Mai, Op8/1 [1:36]

Louis NIEDERMEYER (1802-1861)

Le lac [7:35]

Carl LOEWE (1796-1869)

Erlkönig, Op 1/3 [3:32]

Herr Oluf, Op 2/2 [5:57]

Vincenzo BELLINI (1801-1835)

Malinconia, Ninfa gentile [1:44]

Ma rendi pur content [2:36]

Vanne, o rosa fortunate [2:39]

Franz SCHUBERT

Ellens Gesang I (Raste Krieger, Krieg ist aus), D837 [6:10]

Ellens Gesang II (Jäger, ruhe von der Jagd), D838 [3:37]

Ellens Gesang III (Ave Maria), D839 [6:22]

Der Winterabend, D938 [6:59]

Die Taubenpost, D957/14 [3:54]

John Mark Ainsley, Luis Gomes, Robin Tritschler (tenor); Anush Hovhanissyan (soprano);

Sarah Connolly (mezzo-soprano); Christopher Maltman (baritone); Malcolm Martineau (piano)

rec. All Saints' Church, East Finchley, London, June 2015- June 2016

Original texts and English translations included

VIVAT 114 [79:36]

In 2016 I welcomed the first release in a projected 10-volume series of discs, each of which will cover a decade of songs composed in the century between 1810 and 1910 ([review](#)). The intention is to create a comprehensive survey of song right through the nineteenth century and it will feature a variety of singers and composers. Some of the composers will be very familiar and their songs will be placed alongside composers whose songs are much less well known. The series is to be curated by Malcolm Martineau and having enjoyed the first instalment I was delighted to receive its successor for review.

This new disc gives opportunities to some singers whose work may not be familiar to some collectors. I've encountered the British tenor Robin Tritschler both live and on disc. However, the Armenian soprano, Anush Hovhanissyan was a new voice to me – she's to represent her country in the 2017 Cardiff Singer of the World competition, I understand. Similarly, I had not previously heard the Portuguese tenor, Luis Gomes. Both he and Miss Hovhanissyan have been members of the Jette Parker Young Artist Programme at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden while Tritschler is a former BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artist; so all of them have good pedigrees.

These three singers offer us some of the less familiar music in this programme. Anush Hovhanissyan has the three Glinka items. These are salon romances, dating from 1824-28. As Susan Youens tells us in her notes, the salon romance was "a type of often sentimental art song unique to Russia and

developed in the early nineteenth century." I'd not heard these pieces before. I don't think I'd describe them as distinguished examples of art song but they're worth hearing. Miss Hovhanissyan does them well, making very good use of the words and her expressive voice is well suited to them. Luis Gomes is allocated the trio of items by Bellini. I must say I'd never thought of him as an art song composer. Prof. Youens says of them that "if they are trifles, they are exceedingly elegant ones." I'm afraid I've never found Bellini's operas remotely to my taste and despite the ringing advocacy of Gomes it seems to me that "trifles" is the *mot juste*. Still, that's a highly subjective response and I'm sure that other listeners will respond more positively.

The other unfamiliar piece is *Le lac* by the Swiss, Louis Niedermeyer. I knew of him in connection with the École Niedermeyer in Paris where Fauré studied but I confess that I was ignorant of his music. I was also unaware of the important place that Susan Youens ascribes to him as a man who "revitalised French song; breaking the mould of the old-fashioned strophic romance he composed songs to words by the foremost poets of the time". *Le lac* is ambitious in scale and it impressed me. In the early stanzas of the poem Niedermeyer writes in a big, almost rhetorical style but later on the music becomes more relaxed and lyrical. Robin Tritschler makes a very good job of it and his vocal timbre is well suited to singing in French.

The ballads of Carl Loewe received the advocacy of no less a singer than Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Comparisons are inevitable between his setting of *Erkönig* and the version by Schubert. Loewe's piece lacks the demonic rhythmic urgency of Schubert's composition - what a masterstroke that was by Schubert! - but Loewe still commands attention and he relates the story well. Christopher Maltman is a gripping narrator. He's also vivid in the way that he unfolds the narrative of *Herr Oluf*, another ballad that ends with a corpse.

The programme includes a pleasing folk-like setting by Mendelssohn and *Sehnsucht*, which is Schumann's first extant song. Here Schumann chose to set a somewhat hothouse text he'd written himself; the music is rather Schubertian

And it's Schubert whose songs bookend this programme and which, frankly, put the other songs in the shade. When *Im Frühling* begins the piano part and light, easy vocal line might suggest we're in for a song that is simply charming. However, Schubert's effortless major/minor shifts give the song a lovely air of tender melancholy. John Mark Ainsley sings it beautifully while Martineau imparts a winning delicacy to the piano part. The next two songs show Christopher Maltman at his best. *Auf Heliopolis I* is a Mayrhofer setting and in the notes Susan Youens speaks of the poet's "dunkle Lebensangst" (dark anxiety about life). Schubert's music brings that characteristic out so well and the dark eloquence of the song is superbly conveyed by Maltman. Furthermore, the compass of the song allows us to savour both his lovely high notes and also the firm, dark brown sound of his lower register. He's no less successful in *Gondelfahrer*. Here the nocturnal aspect of the music is expertly realised through Maltman's highly expressive singing and the way in which Malcolm Martineau suggests in his playing the dark waters through which the gondola glides.

At the other end of the programme Sarah Connolly is on peak form in the three Walter Scott settings. She's poised and expressive in her delivery of *Raste Krieger, Krieg ist aus*. I loved her gorgeous tone and legato in this marvellous performance. She lavishes effortless vocal quality on the celebrated *Ave Maria*, which is serene and expressive. *Der Winterabend*, sung by Ainsley, is *echt*-Schubert. It's a simply exquisite song and Ainsley's lovely performance is very touching. To play us out, as it were, we hear *Die Taubenpost*. There's absolutely no reason why this sg shouldn't be detached from *Schwanengesang* and it makes a very satisfying conclusion to this programme. The music seems effortless and Maltman and Martineau are perfectly poised in performing it.

I enjoyed this disc very much. The singing is consistently good, no matter who is in front of the microphone, while Malcolm Martineau's playing is as pleasing and insightful as you'd expect. Though the recordings were made over several sessions the same venue has been used and the sound is

consistent – and good. The booklet is comprehensive with Susan Youens' interesting and enthusiastic notes a particular pleasure.

This is shaping up to be a perceptively assembled and uncommonly interesting survey of art songs. I hope we shan't have too long to wait for the next instalment.

John Quinn

Carl Philipp Emanuel BACH (1714-1788)

Sonata in A minor, Wq 65 No.32 [13:34]

Sonata in G minor, Wq 70 No.6 [13:38]

Sonata in D major, Wq 70 No.5 [14:25]

Sonata in F major, Wq 70 No.3 [12:40]

Sonata in A minor, Wq 70 No.4 [13:44]

Sonata in B flat major, Wq 70 No.2 [9:29]

Iain Quinn (organ)

rec. 28-30 July 2014, Miller Chapel, Princeton Theological Seminary, New Jersey, USA

NAXOS 8.573424 [77:29]

The accepted wisdom is that Johann Sebastian Bach's second surviving son, Carl Philipp Emanuel (whose Christian names, interestingly, never appear anywhere in the booklet or on the disc's cover), excelled as a composer in those areas in which his father did not. Some suggest that his unwillingness to write organ music was the consequence of a deliberate decision not to find his work compared with that of his father. That may well be the case, but just as likely is the fact that the glory days of the North German organ school were long gone by the time he came on-stream as a composer, and the market no longer had the appetite for big complex contrapuntal organ works. Much more suited to the age in which the younger Bach lived was the light and airy style which we have since come to label as the "classical".

This disc contains the five Organ Sonatas C P E Bach composed in 1755 and which were included in Wotquenne's catalogue of 1905 as Wq 70 nos.2-6, along with an arrangement for organ of the A major keyboard Sonata originally written in 1758, no.32 in the Wq 65 group. There remain just three more Sonatas for organ along with a few shorter pieces of doubtful authenticity, and that is the sum total of C P E Bach's organ music.

Anyone who knows the organ writing of Mozart's "Epistle" Sonatas or the organ concertos of Haydn and Stanley will immediately identify a clear stylistic link with these works of Bach. Contrapuntal gestures are few and far between, and even the superficially grandiose start of the G minor Sonata with its occasional forays into mild chromaticism could never in a million years be mistaken for that of J S Bach or his contemporaries.

The writing is for manuals only. Not because the music was intended to be adaptable on different keyboard instruments or because the organ at Bach's disposal was, like those of Stanley's London, devoid of a full pedal division, but because the person for whom Bach wrote this music was, it is reported, unable to play the pedals. That person was Princess Anna Amalia, sister to C P E Bach's then employer, King Frederick the Great of Prussia. An endearingly relaxed booklet note by Caroline Waight suggests that Amalia was not without a certain pride in her own playing prowess, claiming that when she played the organ, "under my windows, on the staircase, in the corridor, every place is full of a rabble that gather round – this amuses me, for I am giving them a spectacle gratis".

If the music was designed to impress, then Iain Quinn's effervescent performances do just that. He indulges in much hopping between the instrument's two manuals, exploiting the delights of this 2000 Paul Fritts organ, and chooses registrations from the 28 manual stops which sparkle, captivate and generally are a sheer delight on the ear, and all are captured in a bright, clean, unpretentious recording. Crisply articulated fingerwork and a welcome lack of nuance - even down to a habit of abruptly ending movements without so much as an implied *rallentando* – create a pleasingly buoyant sound. This would certainly have had any passing rabble keen to listen outside the windows; where, if the playing is in any way reflective of the outside environment, they were enjoying a bright spring day (in late July?).

Marc Rochester

François COUPERIN (1668-1733)

L'Apothéose de Lully [31:53]

Leçons de Ténèbres

Première Leçon [15:47]

Deuxième Leçon [11:26]

Troisième Leçon [11:26]

Katherine Watson (soprano), Anna Dennis (soprano), Arcangelo, Jonathan Cohen (harpsichord, direction)

rec. St. Jude-on-the-Hill, Hampstead Garden Suburb, London, 16th and 17th March 2013 (*Leçons*), 23rd January 2014 (*Apothéose*)

HYPERION CDA68093 [70:35]

The *L'Apothéose de Lully* was, as the name suggests, Couperin's piece composed in memory of Lully. This is the third recording I have of it. The instrumentation of the work is purely up to the performers. As the composer himself suggests, "can be played on two harpsichords as well as any other instruments". The three discs I have display this perfectly. The first is a performance by William Christie and Christophe Rousset, Harmonia Mundi (HMC 901269)—as originally intended, on two harpsichords. On the second, on Sony (SBK 62941), the Kuijkens perform a chamber version, including violins, bass viol, cello, flute, recorder, oboe, bassoon and harpsichord. The present recording offers an in-between approach: just violins, viola da gamba, lute and harpsichord. All versions have their validity, although up to now I have found myself drawn more to the Christie and Rousset's recording. This new version has a greater sense of clarity than the Kuijkens which comes from the use of strings alone. The lutenist, Thomas Dunford, deserves special mention; his phrasing adds colour to the performance. I also prefer Stéphane Degout as narrator. As a singer, he has a greater sense of musicality than Robert Kohnen for the Kuijkens. His voice also has a deeper timbre, giving his performance greater depth of feeling.

As with *L'Apothéose de Lully*, I now also have three versions of the *Leçons de Ténèbres*. My favourite is that by Sophie Daneman and Patricia Petibon, again led by William Christie, on Erato (0630-17067-2). Originally Couperin intended this to be a series of nine *Leçons*, three for each day of the Sacrum Triduum. Sadly he only managed to complete those for Le Mercredi Saint, or Maundy Thursday. These devotional works, an important part of the evening liturgy, were composed at the request of the Lady Nuns of Lxx (the abbey of Longchamp) sometime between 1713 and 1717. It has been suggested that Couperin had composed remaining six *Leçons* but failed to get them engraved, and they were subsequently lost.

The performance is good, and it makes an ideal companion to the *L'Apothéose de Lully*. For me, it does not eclipse the Christie performance. Sophie Daneman and Patricia Petibon have a greater purity than Katherine Watson and Anna Dennis, making theirs the recording I will return to most. I do prefer it, however, to my other version, also on Hyperion, by James Bowman and Michael Chance (CDH55455). That is a performance I never got on with. The countertenor voices do not suit the music, which was composed for women to sing, after all.

This recording, then, offers an elegant and well performed chamber version of the *L'Apothéose de Lully*, one up there with the best, and a recording of the *Leçons de Ténèbres*, that whilst very good and well performed, would not be my first choice. However, if you are coming to the [Leçons](#) anew and want a recording of the *Apothéose*, this could well be the recording for you. Performances throughout are very good. It is just my preference for the greater purity of the sung text that sways me towards the Christie. The booklet notes for this new Hyperion recording, which are also in French and German, are excellent, with full Latin texts given, but with only English translations.

Stuart Sillitoe

Nikolaus Harnoncourt Opera Collection

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Fidelio

Carl Maria von WEBER (1786-1826)

Der Freischütz

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Genoveva

Orchestra and Chorus of the Zurich Opera House / Nikolaus Harnoncourt (conductor)

rec. live 1999-2008, Zurich Opera House

Blu-ray Picture Format 16:9; PCM Stereo; Region Code 0

ARTHAUS MUSIK 108129 [439 mins]

This BD compilation was planned *before* Nikolaus Harnoncourt's death, so it isn't a conscious tribute. However, it adds extra poignancy to view it in the light of his passing. It brings together three previously released filmed stagings which celebrate his long-running relationship with the Zurich Opera, and they show him doing what he does best, whether you enjoy that or not.

Harnoncourt was most famous for his archaeological approach to historical performance, even if he wasn't always loved for it, and you get that most obviously in the performance of *Freischütz*, which uses period brass and timps. The horns, such an important part of this opera's world, sound particularly fine, both in the hunting calls of the stage action (they add a whole new layer of colour to the Huntsman's Chorus) and, especially, during that magical section at the beginning of the overture where they play in four-part harmony. The natural instruments also add a whole new level of darkness to the music associated with Kaspar and Samiel, and the strings seem to thin out their texture in sympathy.

The cast of singers is excellent here, too. Peter Seiffert is at his most exciting and heroic as Max, never tiring and sounding human right to the end. Matti Salminen booms his way convincingly through Kaspar's music, and László Polgár has brilliant presence as the *deus-ex-machina* Hermit of the final scene. Malin Hartelius is a lovely Ännchen, and it's only a shame that the (perfectly capable) Agathe of Inga Nielsen wasn't caught a little earlier. The chorus are rather sloppy, though, which is a serious black mark in this opera.

It's pretty much impossible to stage *Freischütz* these days: the original looks kitsch, and you lose the layer of mythology when you update it. Ruth Berghaus' production goes for the abstract, with big empty sets, monochrome costumes and stylised gestures that seem to distance the cast from one another. It's not a great approach, but I can't see any other approach working better, and I have to admit that, I found the Wolf's Glen scene rather creepy, much to my surprise.

I reviewed this performance of *Fidelio* [elsewhere](#), so I will only direct you to those words. I have nothing to add except to say that I haven't changed my mind, and there is, unfortunately, no improvement in the picture quality in this compilation.

Harnoncourt has done more than any other recent conductor to rehabilitate *Genoveva*, Schumann's only opera. [He recorded it for Teldec in 1996](#) with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, and in the booklet notes for this BD he describes it as "a work of art for which one should be prepared to go to the barricades." I'm with him there. Once you get past the first scene – which is decidedly symphonic and really not at all theatrical – the work is a fantastically deep exploration of psychology. The notes argue, perhaps in a bit of a cop-out, that Schumann isn't trying to be theatrical, but that instead he is presenting and tracing different states of mind. Whether you buy that or not, I find this opera enormously compelling, with its brilliant sorceress role (Margaretha) and its majestic lead soprano role for Genoveva herself. The two men are also brilliant for different reasons, and all four leads sound fantastic here. Juliane Banse invests the title role with heroic grandeur, and she sings as though her life depended on it. Martin Gantner is a majestic but also very humane Siegfried, and Shawn Mathey's

Golo captures the conflicted nastiness of the character very well. The show is all but stolen by the marvellously hysterical Margaretha of Cornelia Kallisch and, best among the minor roles, Ruben Drole declaims his way through the (brilliantly named) role of Hidulfus.

The production is totally crazy, though. With Martin Kušej, you know you're going to get something self-consciously *enfant-terrible-ish*, and it's now at the stage where it has become tiresome. He eschews the medieval and sets it as a psychodrama in a sealed room, which is more about Schumann's relationship with Clara and her father than it is about the original characters. It's interesting, I suppose, and I have to admit that the violent scenes are rather disturbing. Kušej gets trapped in his own layers of cleverness, however, and, more importantly, the production is downright ugly throughout; self-consciously so, in fact, with characters smearing grime and blood over the sterile white walls of the sealed room. Really!

All told this makes for an economical way of collecting these three productions, and you could have far worse unifying figures than Harnoncourt. His musical scalpel yields results everywhere, even if you don't always agree with them, and the vocal performances are mostly very good. Squeezing all three operas onto one BD meant that something had to give, and in these cases it's the surround sound. Were you to buy them separately you'd have a surround option, but here they're only in 2.0 stereo. However, I commented when I reviewed *Fidelio* that the sound was actually rather limited and a bit disappointing, so I'm guessing it's not much of a loss. On a technical level, the picture quality is actually fairly poor for *Freischütz* and *Fidelio*, but a lot better for *Genoveva*, which also appears to have slightly clearer sound. There are no extras, but the booklet notes (in English only) are fairly full, and they include a full track list with timings.

Simon Thompson

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Fidelio

Leonore – Camilla Nylund

Florestan – Jonas Kaufmann

Don Fernando – Gunther Groissböck

Don Pizarro – Alfred Muff

Rocco – László Polgár

Marzelline – Elizabeth Rae Magnusson

Jürgen Flimm (stage director)

Recorded 2004 [134 mins]

Carl Maria von WEBER (1786-1826)

Der Freischütz

Agathe – Inge Nielsen

Max – Peter Seiffert

Ännchen – Malin Hartelius

Kaspar – Matti Salminen

Hermit – László Polgár

Ruth Berghaus (stage director)

Recorded 1999 [159 mins]

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Genoveva

Genoveva – Juliane Banse

Siegfried – Martin Gantner

Golo – Shawn Mathey

Margaretha – Cornelia Kallisch

Hidulfus – Ruben Drole

Martin Kušej (stage director)

Recorded 2008 [146 mins]

Orlandus LASSUS (1530/1532-1594)

Magnificat

Cipriano DE RORE (1515/1516-1565)

De la belle contrade à 5 [3:23]

Orlandus LASSUS

Magnificat De la belle contrade 6. toni a 5 [7:39]

Giachet DE BERCHEM (c1505-1567) or Jacques ARCADELT (c1505-1568)

O s'io potessi donna à 4 [2:26]

Orlandus LASSUS

Magnificat O s'io potessi donna 2. toni a 5 [5:27]

JOSQUIN DESPREZ (1450/1455-1521)

Praeter rerum seriem a 6 [6:56]

Orlandus LASSUS

Magnificat Praeter rerum seriem 2. toni a 6 [11:20]

Claudin DE SERMISY (c1490-1562)

Il est jour à 4 [1:06]

Orlandus LASSUS

Magnificat Il est jour 2. toni a 4 [6:17]

Anselmo DE REULX (fl c1524-fl c1557)

S'io credessi per morte essere scarco à 4 [2:23]

Orlandus LASSUS

Magnificat S'io credessi per morte essere scarco 3. toni a 4 [6:25]

Philippe VERDELOT (c1480/1485-1530/1532)

Ultimi miei sospiri à 6 [2:49]

Orlandus LASSUS

Magnificat Ultimi miei sospiri 2. toni a 6 [7:34]

Die Singphoniker (Johannes Euler (alto), Daniel Schreiber, Henning Jensen (tenor), Michael Mantaj, Christian Schmidt (bass)) with Gerhard Hölzle (tenor)

rec. 3-5 November 2014, Himmelfahrtskirche, Munich-Sendling, Germany DDD

Texts and translations included

CPO 777 957-2 [64:16]

The *Magnificat* is one of the most frequently set texts in the history of music, alongside *Mass*. That is because it has become a part of Vespers, performed every day of the week. As it also found its entrance in the liturgy of the Lutheran and the Anglican churches, it was probably more frequently set and performed than the Marian antiphons. However, it seems unlikely that any composer has written more *Magnificats* than Orlandus Lassus. The number of settings attributed to him is 110; 101 of these are considered authentic. The most remarkable aspect of Lassus's output in this department is that forty of these settings are based on pre-existing material, either sacred (motets) or secular (madrigals, chansons). Here a procedure which was very widespread in Masses and is known as *parody* is applied to the *Magnificat*.

The *Magnificat* was usually part of the *alternatim* practice. In Lassus's settings only the even verses are set polyphonically; the odd verses have to be performed in plainchant. In this recording the plainchant differs from one setting to the other; the sources of the plainchant are not given. This creates some variety in itself, but the main reason why these settings are so different is the variety between the pieces from which Lassus took melodic material. There is a strong contrast between Josquin's motet *Praeter rerum seriem* and, for instance, the chanson *Il est jour* by Claudin de Sermisy. This results in *Magnificat* settings which are very different in character and in length.

One may wonder why Lassus used secular pieces as the foundation of so many *Magnificat* settings. In the liner notes we read: "The question becomes even more urgent when we bear in mind that the listeners surely would have recognized this or that source. As David Crook has demonstrated, the decisive motivation may be seen in the intention to elevate secular music of the highest quality to a

higher level of content by reshaping it as liturgical music. On the musical side the new design of the preexistent material, often elaborated in the most sophisticated way, suits the new text." The modern listener should not expect to recognize the original melodies easily. The *Magnificat* which is based on Josquin's *Praeter rerum seriem* is one of Lassus's most famous pieces and the motet is also pretty well-known, unlike the madrigals and chansons. Moreover, Lassus treats the material very differently. He may quote the opening phrase— always most easily recognizable—but also often takes a phrase from elsewhere, sometimes from the upper voice but also from the inner parts or the lowest voice. The quotations are also embedded in the musical fabric, which makes them even less easily recognizable.

Another interesting question is why Lassus composed so many settings of this text. David Crook, who was already mentioned in the quotation above, devoted a book to this part of Lassus's output. He states that the chronology of the *Magnificat* settings suggests that most of them were written after the Council of Trent which initiated the Counter-Reformation. Its reforms also affected the liturgy. The title of Crook's book says it all: *Orlando di Lasso's Imitation Magnificats for Counter-Reformation Munich*. The Counter Reformation went hand in hand with a growing veneration of Mary at the Munich court. The fact that very few of Lassus's *Magnificat* settings were published during his lifetime indicates that most of them were specifically intended for use at the Munich court.

The *Magnificat super Praeter rerum seriem* is pretty much Lassus's only setting which is really well known and is regularly performed and recorded. It was, therefore, a splendid idea to bring together a number of settings of this kind. It is also nice that every *Magnificat* is preceded by the piece on which it is based. The Singphoniker have a relaxed way of singing, very pleasant to the ear without being superficial. They are well aware of the differences between the various pieces and especially between the sacred and the secular. The acoustic is rather intimate, which seems perfectly suited to this repertoire. Obviously the madrigals and chansons were intended for domestic performance, but the *Magnificats* were performed at the court in Munich, so this also suggests acoustics that is not too reverberant.

This is the second Lassus disc by this ensemble. Mark Sealy welcomed the first disc - also with uncommon repertoire ([review](#)) - and this new release deserves an equally positive reception.

Johan van Veen

<http://www.musica-dei-donum.org>

<https://twitter.com/johanvanveen>