

as Lied composers – it manages to avoid discussion (almost entirely) of less well-rehearsed areas such as the sociological context of the Lied, including the music of Schumann's long-forgotten contemporaries that he evidently considered in detail (since he reviewed them penetratingly in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*), or the music of women composers that was rarely even published (how many of Fanny Henschel's songs did Schumann know, one wonders?); or indeed the whole area of Schumann reception (notably how his music has been played and sung) over more than a century and a half.

The performances from the singers are warm and virtuosic, not only in their consummate technique, but especially in their subtlety, where all temptation towards either the over-sentimental or the over-theatrical – in short, the lures of the salon – are avoided. There is not only an inherent match of the different voices, but also a perfection of balance and interpretative interaction, which is complemented by the sound engineer's creation of a perfect vocal acoustic. As to vocal ensemble, the disc hits the ground running, with a sensuous rendering of the 'Liebesgarten' duet. There are perhaps moments in *Myrten* where each singer sounds a little less authoritative, in, for example, Bostridge's 'Du bist wie eine Blume' (no. 24 of *Myrten*) – one of the greatest of Schumann's solo songs – or Röschmann's 'Weit, weit' (no. 20), but there is so much singing of truly superb quality to be enjoyed here that momentary imperfections are barely noticeable.

The very heights of artistry on the singers' part, and fine technical production of these recordings, make the dull piano playing all the harder to enjoy, especially when time and again Schumann's piano becomes its own 'voice' and offers – if played with thought and intensity – the uniquely poetic meanings that other great players (such as Brendel or Eschenbach with Fischer-Dieskau) have been able to bring to life from the printed page. For some listeners this lack of a singing piano will spoil an otherwise notable addition to the catalogue.

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## Tchaikovsky

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**Tchaikovsky for four hands** Symphony no. 4 in F minor op. 36  
(transcription by Sergei Taneyev); *Romeo and Juliet* (transcribed by Nadezhda Purgold/Mme Rimsky-Korsakov); Sixteen from Fifty Russian Folk-Songs  
(10, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 23, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 42, 47, 48, 49)

Anthony Goldstone and Caroline Clemmow *pf*  
The Divine Art 25020 (69 minutes: DDD), £12.99  
Notes included.

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The three components of this CD of music for four hands at one piano are distinct. The only fully Tchaikovskian element is his 1868–69 arrangement of Russian folk songs. There is some merit in offering a selection grouped into two CD tracks – especially as the choice emphasizes well-known songs. Besides these arrangements, we have transcriptions of compositions by Tchaikovsky

made by other hands – his pupil, adviser and champion Sergei Taneyev (in the case of the Fourth Symphony) and Nadezhda Rimsky-Korsakov (the fantasy overture *Romeo and Juliet*).

Reducing a composition invested with the full range of orchestral sonority to the monochrome of a piano yields a substantial loss. Contrasts reinforced by changes of orchestral timbre are sacrificed; examples include the juxtaposition of pizzicato strings with wind chorus in the Symphony's Scherzo and Trio, and the passages of dialogue between orchestral groups in the finale (bars 223 ff.). Another loss is the harmonic tension provided by the suspensions in the woodwind (Overture, bars 21 ff. – even more so when the strings play the figure at bars 60 ff.); the residue is a far less interesting rising scale. The expressiveness of an orchestral instrument (or family) making a crescendo or diminuendo on a single note or chord is not possible on the piano without features which draw undue attention (for example, a tremolando). In the opening of the Symphony's first movement, the fanfares' varied intensity is much reduced, since the piano cannot adequately represent the contrast between (on the one hand) four horns (plus bassoons), *fortissimo*, and (on the other) two trumpets plus upper woodwind, also *fortissimo*. A general blandness is exemplified later when the piano cannot compete in raw power with two trumpets, *fff*, *con tutta forza*, plus timpani *fortissimo* (bars 193–6).

These versions were (I presume) prepared to make the music known when no orchestra was to hand, and to give pleasure in ensemble playing. What, then, is the value of recording such substitutes when the orchestral ideal is nowadays accessible at the touch of a button?

One justification is to draw attention to the transcribers' skill, and another to underline the importance in their time of such transcriptions. It is remarkable how good an impression of the original these versions provide, whatever losses there might be. Tchaikovsky was very keen that the task be entrusted to Taneyev in the case of the Symphony; Taneyev performed the same service for the Fifth Symphony, while the composer himself transcribed the Sixth. And Nadezhda Rimsky-Korsakov (née Purgold) was justifiably known as 'our orchestra' in the circle of eminent St Petersburg musicians to which she belonged.

Thirdly, transcription can bring to light aspects of pieces overlooked in familiar versions. At the most basic level, we think we are listening to pieces at an earlier stage of creative evolution – as harmony and counterpoint laid bare in the sonority of a single instrument. This homogeneous timbre brings out joins disguised by orchestral wizardry (for instance, the lead from the Andante sostenuto to the Moderato con anima in the first movement, bars 26–7). Little details which disappear in the fullness of a large tutti – perhaps because assigned to an instrument and a register where they were not meant to have a separate impact – now become clear; while that is also interesting, it can be more loss than gain: the five-note hemidemisemiquaver scales in solo woodwind instruments in the reprise of the slow movement (bars 200 ff.) emerge with a trace of unintended humour when they stand out so distinctly (as they are almost bound to) against the principal melody cantabile.

These performances capture the essence of Tchaikovsky's compositions, with some subtle pointing of phrasing and articulation. The finale of the Symphony would gain from a faster speed: here it sets a premium on safety over excitement. The slow opening music of *Romeo and Juliet* feels much slower than one is used to, and the music seems to drag, especially when moving in minims and crotchets, or in the deliberate harp chords (bars 28 ff.). The composer's

marking is *Andante non tanto quasi Moderato* there; when the lyrical theme returns for the last time at the end of the work (now *Moderato assai*, bars 509 ff.) it sounds more moribund than elegiac.

The folk songs suffer at times from an excess of civilization and similarity. Several go at speeds faster than is indicated or seems suitable (e.g. nos 47, 23, 32, 18). The finale (no. 49) is a very salonized account, beginning too quietly, of the Volga barge-haulers' heavy labour.

This is altogether an intriguing item, and leaves the listener favourably impressed, through music heard from a new angle, by Tchaikovsky's craft.

Stuart Campbell  
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### Vaughan Williams

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#### The Early Chamber Music Piano Quintet in C minor

Nocturne and Scherzo

*Suite de Ballet*

Romance and Pastorale

Romance

String Quartet in C minor

Quintet in D major

Scherzo

*Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes*

The Nash Ensemble

Hyperion CDA67381/2 (2 CDs) (134 minutes: DDD), £28.99

Notes included.

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Until 1999, the bulk of the music in this collection had not been heard since the first decade of the twentieth century; some had apparently never been performed at all. Its release constitutes both an extraordinary landmark in our understanding of the origins and development of a great composer, and a fascinating window onto British views of modern music c.1900, through the eyes (or ears) of one of its most open-minded and eclectic young composers. We do not tend to think of Vaughan Williams in terms of eclecticism, because he eventually developed one of the most instantly recognizable individual voices of twentieth-century music. Yet this recording reminds us that this particular voice did not emerge with full force until 1909–10, by which time the composer was close to 40, had been a prolific professional composer for over a decade, had studied on the continent with Bruch and Ravel, and had learned indirectly from virtually every major strand of contemporary music; even after that voice emerged, the composer's pre-war development culminated in 1914 with *A London Symphony*, a work as cosmopolitan as the city which it portrays, in which Debussy's *La Mer*, Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, and shades of Mahler and Elgar rub shoulders with English folk song, the whole made to cohere by the sheer force of the composer's by now distinctive style.

Our perspective on *A London Symphony*, including its frame of reference in