

lacking in these readings. For example, comparing Falletta's reading of the second symphony with Zubin Mehta's 1986 performance, one hears that he has paid more attention than Falletta to the many *rallentandos*, *accelerandos* and *ritardandos* that Paine indicated. While their tempo choice for the opening *Adagio sostenuto* (56 bars) is basically the same ($\downarrow = 96$), Mehta's heavily inflected performance is 32 seconds longer. In the *Adagio* third movement, 'A Romance of Springtime', Mehta's performance is 2' 04" longer than Falletta's. While his choice of tempo is marginally slower ($\downarrow = 56$ to Falletta's $\downarrow = 60$), it is his flexible approach to the underlying Romantic basis of the music that offers the listener an opportunity to enter into Paine's musical artistry. Basic tempi for the faster movements are similar in both performances; Mehta's fluid *rubato* approach surges and flows, however, while Falletta's is generally somewhat more metronomic.

These quibbles aside, over the past decade Naxos has provided Americanists with recordings of works by many otherwise ignored nineteenth-century American composers; these include William Henry Fry, George Templeton Strong, George Whitefield Chadwick, Amy Beach, Charles Martin Loeffler, Arthur Foote and others. These recordings of the published orchestral pieces by Paine continue in that tradition; although most of the pieces were available on earlier recordings, we can all be grateful to Naxos's enlightened management for providing us with new recordings of these works.

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Overtures from the British Isles

Frederic Austin	<i>The Sea Venturers</i>
Charles Villiers Stanford	Prelude to <i>Oedipus tyrannus</i> op. 29
Samuel Coleridge-Taylor	Overture to <i>The Song of the Hiawatha</i> op. 30, no. 3
Frederic Hymen Cowen	<i>The Butterfly's Ball</i>
Granville Bantock	<i>The Frogs</i>
Alexander Campbell Mackenzie	Overture to <i>The Little Minister</i>
Arthur Sullivan	Overture to <i>Macbeth</i>
Henry Balfour Gardiner	Overture to a Comedy

BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Rumon Gamba *cond*
Chandos 10797, 2014 (1 CD, 78 minutes), \$13

A recording project such as this, notes conductor Rumon Gamba, often begins with a 'long list' of potential repertoire. He describes in liner notes how the record company,

conductor, producer, orchestra members and 'academic specialists' – that is, musicologists – all submit suggestions, making the list very long indeed. In this case the goal was a cross-section of British concert overtures written between 1880 and 1940. The chronological delimitation ensured overall continuity of style while also allowing the project to mine a vast number of independent orchestral works, many of which have never been recorded before. While striking a balance between recognized and lesser-known composers, Gamba specifically avoided the most well-known figures, such as Edward Elgar and William Walton. Because Chandos appended two 'magic words' to the record ('Volume 1'), Gamba wryly noted that there would be opportunities for including them in future iterations of the project. This has already proven to be the case, as Chandos released a second disc of *Overtures from the British Isles* earlier in 2016 (Chandos 10898) that opens with Walton's *Portsmouth Point* overture.

The final tally of composers for vol. 1 comes to nine: Frederic Austin (1872–1952), Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924), Samuel Coledrige-Taylor (1875–1912), Sir Frederic Hymen Cowen (1852–1935), Sir Granville Bantock (1868–1946), Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie (1847–1935), Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900) and Henry Balfour Gardiner (1877–1950). Even among the familiar names, however, the selected repertoire is largely unfamiliar. Such is the case with Sir Arthur Sullivan. Rather than a Savoy Opera overture, Gamba leads a performance of the Overture to *Macbeth*. Sullivan composed this late in his career for an 1888 production of Shakespeare's play by Sir Henry Irving. Rather than making much of the Scottish element in 'the Scottish play', Sullivan concentrated instead on its inherent drama. Thus, the overture is a restless piece with frequent changes of mood, including suitably 'spooky', though brief, music representing the appearance of Banquo's ghost.

In contrast, Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie's Overture to *The Little Minister* positively revels in references to Scottish national musical characteristics. Imitations of bagpipes introduce the work, and a fleet reel closes it. In between is a lyrical, even sentimental melody for strings and the quotation of the folk song 'Duncan Gray'. These traits all fit the commission: incidental music for an 1897 play by J.M. Barrie, some seven years before he would rise to fame with *Peter Pan*. The 'little minister' of the title inhabits a rural Scottish village, and his trials and triumphs are the subject of the work. Mackenzie himself is best known as the long-time Principal of the Royal Academy of Music from 1888 to 1924, but his music is rarely performed today. On the basis of this overture, this obscurity is undeserved.

Another composer more famous in name than in deed is Sir Charles Villiers Stanford. Stanford taught perhaps the most famous generation of English composers, including Ralph Vaughan William and Gustav Holst, at the Royal College of Music. For this he has been inscribed as one of the instigators of the English Musical Renaissance at the turn of the twentieth century – even if largely by inspiring his students to rebel against his own narrow musical judgments. Like his compatriot Hubert Parry, Stanford's recognition as a teacher has overshadowed his compositions. Stanford's music has nevertheless achieved something of a renaissance on record in recent years, and the present disc further contributes to this rediscovery. His Overture to *Oedipus tyrannus* comes from incidental music written in 1887. An opening solo for English horn captures the bleak tone of Sophocles's tragedy, and Stanford adds a layer of then-fashionable exoticism by writing in the Lydian mode. Afterwards, chromatic harmonies provide a lengthy lyrical melody in the strings with its *molto espressivo* marking, and a diatonic brass figure represents Oedipus himself as king of Thebes. This is a

work with a powerful beginning and end; the heroic music for Oedipus is the most conventional, but a dramatic interruption by timpani clears the stage for the English horn to conclude the overture.

The final piece of incidental music on this disc is rather less successful: Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Overture to *The Song of Hiawatha*. Coleridge-Taylor was an English composer of part Sierra Leone Creole descent whose trilogy of cantatas *Scenes from 'The Song of Hiawatha'* were enormously popular with London audiences from the turn of the century until World War Two. The overture was composed in 1899 as an addition to the complete work. Although Coleridge-Taylor based the *Song of Hiawatha* on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's epic poem about Native Americans, his overture develops the spiritual 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I See, Lord'. Coleridge-Taylor appears to have been inspired in his choice of material by a performance of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, whom he heard in London in the late 1890s. The spiritual is combined with a waltz of Straussian character in an uneasy mix of serious-mindedness and sentimentality. Even more surprising, no references are made to thematic material from *The Song of Hiawatha* itself, save for fanfares in the overture's coda. The final result is an unsuccessful hybrid of two strange musical bedfellows.

The remaining selections are more light-hearted independent concert works. Sir Granville Bantock's Overture to *The Frogs*, for example, incorporates an off-the-beat 'hopping' motif as well as rhythmically repeated dissonances echoing the cry of Aristophanes's onomatopoeic chorus of frogs: 'Brekekekèx-koàx-koàx' (Βρεκεκεκεξ κοάξ κοάξ). This 1935 'comedy overture' is one of a number of pieces Bantock composed in the 1930s inspired by Greek theatre; another is the *Overture to a Greek Tragedy*, based on Sophocles's tragedy of Oedipus (like Stanford's overture).

Similarly inspired by the animal kingdom, but of even lighter weight, is Sir Frederic Hymen Cowen's concert overture *The Butterfly's Ball*. Written in 1901, it was once exceptionally popular, receiving 23 Proms performances alone by 1930. After Cowen's death five years later it disappeared from the repertoire. Its gossamer light dance is in the manner of Mendelssohn's elfin music, though it contains some full-throated passages for the brass as well. The title comes from a children's poem written in 1802 by William Roscoe, describing a gathering attended by members of the insect kingdom lit by a friendly glow-worm.

The closing work on the disk is the least programmatic. Conceived simply as a brilliant orchestral showpiece, Henry Balfour Gardiner's *Overture to a Comedy* is high-spirited, with sudden intrusions of dissonance to steer the playful themes in new directions. Its slow middle section features a knowingly sentimental violin solo. The overture dates from 1906; a revision, recorded here, came in 1911. Balfour Gardiner was an intensely self-critical composer who destroyed many of his works after their first performances. He later gave up composition altogether to devote his considerable fortune to the promotion of British music. His activities in this area included sponsoring a concert series in 1912–13 that included works by Gustav Holst, Percy Grainger and Arnold Bax.

Though Bax himself is not represented on this disk, a personal friend of his is: Frederick Austin. Better known as the outstanding baritone singer of his generation, Austin also wrote concert music, including *The Sea Venturers* presented here, dating from 1934. It owes much to Bax's example, from its modified tripartite form – climaxing with a restatement of the secondary theme, a hallmark of Bax's larger works – to its kaleidoscopic orchestration. Austin wrote that he wanted to evoke 'something of the lives of English seamen ... who took peril and pleasure as

it came' (liner notes, p. 8). *The Sea Venturers* provides a dramatic opening to the disk; it is a striking and effective work with memorable (and frequently pentatonic) thematic material.

The programme as a whole is strong, with a welcome selection of unfamiliar repertoire by composers both known and unknown today. The BBC National Orchestra of Wales plays very well for Gamba; both orchestra and conductor are veterans of many recording projects devoted to unfamiliar or forgotten British repertoire, including much film music. In addition to contributing the aforementioned 'long list' of potential repertoire, the indefatigable British music scholar Lewis Foreman provides detailed liner notes.

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Liszt Inspections

Marino Formenti *pf*
Kairos 13292, 2015 (2 CDs: 130 minutes), \$25

Writing in the 1970s, Jean-François Lyotard distilled the sensibilities of post-modernism down to an 'incredulity towards meta-narratives'.¹ With Marino Formenti's *Liszt Inspections*, we are given a performative realization of this 'incredulity', as the pianist seeks to cast suspicion upon standard historiography. The CD explores the correspondences between Liszt's body of work and diverse repertoires of the twentieth century, suggesting a far more fluid view of history. The experimentation Liszt undertook in the twilight of the nineteenth century holds a significant place in this theme Formenti plays upon. The CD's programme suggests the circularity of history, with twentieth-century modernisms echoing alongside their nineteenth-century forbearers.

Formenti includes works not strictly limited to Liszt's late period. For example, Liszt's *Il Penseroso* from the *Années de pèlerinage II: Italie* (1838–49) precedes Galina Ustvolskaya's Sonata No. 6 (1988); the pairing is at first stark and jarring, but the underlying parallels between the two works gradually reveal themselves. Ustvolskaya's relentlessly pounding homophonic texture and her interest in exploring timbre are remarkably similar to Liszt's approach when musically representing Michelangelo's sculpture of the thinker above the tomb of Lorenzo de Medici. The same use of stark registral contrasts to generate forward momentum is also found in Liszt's *Funérailles* from *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses III* (1848–53),

¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984): xxiv.