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CD REVIEWS

LEIGHTON: Symphony for Strings, op 3; Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani, op. 58[1]; Concerto for Strings, op. 39. [1]John Scott (organ), BBC National Orchestra of Wales c. Richard Hickox. Chandos CHAN 10461.

LEIGHTON: Symphony No. 2 *'Sinfonia Mistica'*, op. 69; *Te Deum Laudamus* (1964). Sarah Fox (sop), BBC National Orchestra of Wales and Chorus c. Richard Hickox. Chandos CHAN 10495.

LEIGHTON: *Sequence for All Saints*; Prelude on *'Rockingham'*; *O God, Enfold Me in the Sun*; Morning Canticles; *The World's Desire*. Wells Cathedral Choir and School Chapel Choir, David Bednall (org), c. Matthew Owens. Hyperion CDA 67641.

Kenneth Leighton (1929–88) has endured considerable neglect since his death 20 years ago. His legacy of orchestral, instrumental and cathedral music is substantial and still remains largely unexplored on CD. These three CDs, with a wealth of first recordings, will hopefully mark a reversal of fortune: but the news of Richard Hickox's death in December 2008 only serves to highlight the fragility of all artistic endeavour. We can be grateful to these two gifted individuals, composer and conductor, for enriching our lives.

Leighton's music has a dark thread, which can be disconcerting, and it demands a high level of emotional and intellectual involvement. The Symphony No. 2, *Sinfonia Mistica*, of 1974 is a requiem for the composer's mother setting texts from the English metaphysical poets including Donne, Traherne and Herbert. A prolonged meditation on the nature and inevitability of death does little to appeal to concert audiences, and thus it has enjoyed few performances. But it is one of Leighton's most profound, mature works; and the visionary and sometimes sombre music highlights his own struggle with his religious beliefs. The questing nature of this music finds its counterpoint in the vivid and gothic imagery of Donne's Holy Sonnet XIII, 'To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd'and in the19th-century American hymn tune 'The Shining River'. This visionary quality, which informs much of his choral work, stems from a lifelong interest in religious philosophy which had already surfaced in an earlier oratorio, *The Light Invisible* (1958).

A new release of Leighton's cathedral music includes a number of first recordings, and features two 'Sequence' cantatas he wrote to celebrate major festivals of the Christian year, somewhat in the manner of Britten's *Parables* and *St. Nicholas*. Dance rhythms and hymn tunes are prominent features in both *A Sequence for All Saints* (1978) and *The World's Desire: A Sequence for Epiphany* (1984, one of Leighton's last pieces). Also remarkable is the very theatrical and often astringent use of the organ, both to give added weight to the choir but also as a powerful voice of its own. Unlike the ghostly *Sinfonia Mistica*, the music in these two works is often joyous and celebratory. Leighton wrote gloriously for treble and soprano: his experience as a boy chorister at Wakefield Cathedral imbued him with a deep understanding and love of a tradition which, like his heroes Howells and Britten, he greatly enriched. The set of canticles he wrote for Monkton Combe School in 1967 (which can be sung in unison – but you would never think so, such is the richness of invention) includes a *Te Deum* entirely different to the well-known one he wrote in 1964, which is heard on the Chandos recording for the first time in its orchestral version.

Leighton's early music is in a class of its own. The little carol *Lully, Lulla*, written in 1948 when he was only 18 has become a firm favourite for its haunting soprano solo. The Symphony for Strings, op. 3, from the same year is a work of amazing proficiency. No young man's dutiful obeisance to the English pastoral scene here … you could be hearing Holmboe, Wiren, Eller or some other Scandinavian neo-classicist peppered with the cutting-edge British modernists of the day: Seiber, Rawsthorne and Searle. And Leighton hadn't even started his studies with Goffredo Petrassi yet! His writing for string orchestra perfectly illustrates his clean and natural lines: the Concerto for Strings from 1960 is a worthy successor to Britten's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*. Even more masterly is the Organ Concerto of 1970 which not only evokes the spaciousness of the great building for which it was written (the Chapel of King's College Cambridge), but is scored for the same forces as the 1938 Poulenc Concerto. Maybe not quite as sultry as that predecessor, this piece is nonetheless imbued with the francophone spirit, particularly that of Messiaen, and is a unique

contribution to British music, which is not richly endowed with organ concertos.

These are three very high-quality recordings of the music of a man of exceptional talent and ability. I can think of no more fitting tribute to Richard Hickox than the continuation of this survey of Leighton's work in his 80th anniversary year. Well done Chandos, come on Naxos: why not slate the three Leighton concertos for the next instalment of your British piano concertos series?

Bret Johnson

PRIAULX RAINIER: Cello Concerto.[1,2] ELGAR: Cello Concerto in E minor, op. 85.[1,3] RUBBRA: Cello Sonata in G minor, op. 60.[4] Jacqueline du Pré (cello); [1]BBC Symphony Orchestra c. [2]Sir Malcolm Sargent, [3]Norman del Mar; [4]Iris du Pré (piano). BBC Legends BBCL4244 - 2.

Listeners will purchase this CD, I suspect, for one of two main reasons: 1) to hear Jacqueline du Pré's already *very* personal account of the Elgar concerto, and/or 2) to hear two rarities – Priaulx Rainier's Cello Concerto, a Prom commission for the 1964 season (here receiving to first recording) and Edmund Rubbra's Cello Sonata of 1946, written the year after du Pré was born.

Although they were contemporaries and died in the same year (1986), Rainier and Rubbra were, musically speaking, poles apart. Indeed, they might be said to have inhabited quite different planets. Whilst Rubbra's natural mode of discourse was a lean, tonal and lyrically-infused counterpoint, Rainier's involved much more abrupt, abstract gestures which related back to Stravinsky and Varèse, as much as the indigenous music of her native South Africa.

This CD is worth buying for the Rainier concerto alone. Commissioned by her stalwart supporter, Sir William Glock, this fascinating but barely-known work is typical of its composer: fastidious in its writing for both soloist and orchestra, the music is both pithy, yet fearless in its statements (Rainier herself was an intrepid swimmer and yachtswoman). Over a 20-minute duration, the work is divided into three continuous movements: Dialogue – Canto – Cadence and Epilogue. The resultant music is bracing and individual – rather like hearing the aural equivalent of a Barbara Hepworth sculpture (Rainier and Hepworth were friends), with colliding surfaces and ideas rotated through space. A muscular plangency is always uppermost, but there are, too, moments of repose. These are characterized by a typically Rainierian fingerprint: the use of *pianissimo* major 10ths, a feature of many of her later works (cf. *Plöermel* for winds and percussion).

The soloist and orchestra react and respond to one another but rarely, if ever, meet in gestures of accord. Skilful orchestration ensures that *tutti* forces never obscure the solo line, whilst solo woodwinds and percussion (particularly gongs, marimba and xylophone) enhance the sense of dramatic continuity. For much of its duration, this concerto is introspective, making it a fascinating partner (yet sufficient foil) to the Elgar concerto: both performances were recorded on the same evening. In common with many of Rainier's pieces, this craggy, obdurate work grows stronger and more imposing with repeated hearings.

Rubbra's undervalued Sonata receives a probing and eloquent performance, whilst the Elgar, under Sargent, was recorded the year before du Pré's legendary interpretation with Barbirolli (1965). This earlier performance shows a growing command of nuance and freedom of expression allied to the fast, intense vibrato that was her hallmark. A fascinating and poignant release.

Perhaps a sterling label such as NMC could be persuaded to resuscitate other orchestral works by Rainier – *Due Canti e Finale*, *Plöermel* and the *Duo Concertante*, for example? The integrity and individuality of these works is undiminished, and ripe for rediscovery.

Richard Leigh Harris

RICHARD ARNELL: *Sinfonia quasi Variazioni*, op. 13; Symphony No. 1, op. 31; Symphony No. 6 *'The Anvil'*, op. 171. Royal Scottish National Orchestra c. Martin Yates. Dutton Epoch CDLX 7217.

This Dutton Epoch release brings together Richard Arnell's earliest symphonic writing with his latest symphony. The *Sinfonia quasi Variazioni*, op. 13 (1941) is a crucial work in the composer's output: as well as establishing his individual style that evolved in Symphonies 1–5, it was the first piece of his to be broadcast in Britain (by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Sir Thomas Beecham, who also premièred it with the New York Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall on 15 March 1942). The work is cast in five movements and consists of a series of free variations on a theme played by the clarinets in the opening bars. In his programme note, Lewis Foreman describes the central *Andante* as the 'emotional heart' of the piece, and it makes a satisfying contrast with the two energetic scherzos flanking it. The *Andante con moto* finale, launched by expressive fugal string writing, provides a true culmination through a

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steady accumulation of tension. In a gesture of great expressive economy, all the more remarkable from a composer in his mid-twenties, the work ends with just four bars of *fortissimo*.

The restraint in evidence in the *Sinfonia* is carried still further in the Symphony No. 1, op. 31 (1943), which is scored for a classical orchestra of single woodwind, two horns and strings. There, also, is a 'classical' feel to the work, whose emotional weight resides in the first half with a substantial opening *Allegro* followed by an even more expansive *Andante*. A pithy *Vivace* scherzo paves the way for the ebullient *Presto* finale, with its slower, memorably questioning second subject. In keeping with the symphony's compact and controlled character, the ending is abrupt and unselfconscious. Another key early work in the composer's development, it was premièred by the Canadian Broadcasting System Symphony Orchestra under Bernard Hermann in a CBS broadcast in January 1944 and the first concert performance took place the following May under Beecham at Town Hall, New York.

The opening bars of Symphony No. 6 (a simple chord on the piano followed by a clash on the anvil) instantly transport the listener to a radically different soundscape. This is the composer's op. 171, composed between 1992 and 1994: five decades'-worth of creativity separate this from the other items featured on the disc. The opening *Lento* is preparatory, establishing the symphony's unique atmosphere and some of the main material, including a quote from Beethoven's last string quartet. The following *Allegro*, entitled 'Structure and Tune', has a quote from Shelley, 'Ye are many', underlined by a rhythm that fits the words. The third section, 'Keyboard Event' (*Moderato*), uses the piano in concertante style, representing the composer as pianist. The Conclusion (*Lento*) is (though still very concentrated at just over seven minutes) the most substantial section, and consists of a passacaglia-type progression laced with increasingly richer instrumentation. The piano/composer reappears, only to be drowned out by the gong. This is the most personal and elusive of the Arnell symphonies: enigmatic, quirky and pared down to essentials, it has more in common with the similarly sphinx-like, wiry-textured symphonic swansongs of William Wordsworth and Malcolm Arnold than Arnell's own earlier symphonies. There is perhaps even a touch of Havergal Brian in its curiously plaintive use of piano sonorities and dislocating, abrupt shifts of mood and timbre.

The RSNO under Martin Yates play with great warmth and subtlety in these recordings, bringing out the considerable personality in all three rewarding scores. In the *Sinfonia*, Yates rightly waits until the finale's climactic restatement of the main theme before unleashing the full weight of his orchestral forces and he displays much delicacy and savouring of the pure, uncluttered instrumentation of the coolly elegant Symphony No.1. Despite the warning on the back of the CD concerning the piercing sound of an anvil being struck in Symphony No.6, the results are never blatant as Yates superbly catches the work's mercurial tone. He makes even more of this piece than Adrian Leaper did in the first performance (with the B.B.C. Philharmonic, broadcast from Manchester on 9 April 1995), finding greater emotional depth in the last movement, for example, by taking it at a steadier tempo and thus giving it room to evolve inexorably. The recording is exemplary throughout: clear without being distractingly clinical.

This is a disc I will be returning to again and often. Its importance is secured as part of the first recorded symphony cycle of a composer who, I feel sure, will come to be regarded as one of the leading symphonists in 20th-century British music. Dutton has given us an opportunity to take stock of Arnell's considerable achievement: Symphony No.3 emerges as the peak of the series, especially in its majestic uncut version, but inspiration is consistently (and exceptionally) high throughout the cycle. Together with this latest addition, the Dutton Arnell orchestral series is a genuinely exciting recording project that should prove both durable and significant.

Paul Conway

ALAN RAWSTHORNE, BERNARD STEVENS: Piano Music. James Gibb (pno). Lyrita 1107 (mono)

This new CD of piano music consists of works by two leading British composers from the mid-20th century: Rawsthorne (1905–71) and Bernard Stevens (1916–1983), with six of the seven works featured written between 1949 and 1954. Both composers studied piano with Frank Merrick; Rawsthorne continued his studies with Egon Petri, whilst Stevens subsequently studied with Arthur Benjamin.

The performances are transfers from mono recordings made in 1958/59. As one would expect, the sound has a somewhat 'thin' and 'dry' flavour, (suffering occasionally from 'print-through') but is nevertheless very clear. The pianist James Gibb was the dedicatee or first performer of several of the featured works, and enjoyed long and close friendships with both composers.

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The Rawsthorne works are *Bagatelles* (1938), *4 Romantic Pieces* (1953) and the *Sonatina* which was premièred by Gibb at the Wigmore Hall in 1949, the manuscript of the work having been stolen from the dressing room during the concert! The first movement of this work might be described as archetypal: mysterious, fleeting, with the entire argument fastidiously shaped from an unassuming 4-note cell; proceeding with power and logic, but with a number of vehement (yet always tasteful) outbursts from this supposedly restrained composer. As in a number of other works from around this time (cf. the Second Piano Concerto) the finale unexpectedly bursts in with a rollicking theme to round off the work on an exuberant note.

The remaining two-thirds of the disc are given over to Bernard Stevens and include *5 Inventions* (1950) and *Ballad No.1* (1951). In *Fantasia on Giles Farnaby's Dreame* (1953) a short introduction precedes the statement of Farnaby's theme, which then immediately changes into free variations/recollections/reinterpretations of selected facets of the theme. Especial mention should be made of the fine sense of growth and progression throughout this piece, but particularly in its final third, the power of which is palpably conveyed by this performer. The resultant work is, however, always in keeping with the grace and elegance of Farnaby's original theme. By contrast the *Sonata* (1954) is a much more demonstrative and forceful work. Although 'in one movement', there are three clear sections. The most striking music is sonorous and noble, at times displaying a real Romantic sweep and power, though this is always harnessed through the disciplined gaze of a social realist.

The performances of both composers are by turns deft, powerful, and always persuasive. One is constantly reminded of the assurance of piano writing that is eminently practical and always rewarding both to play and listen to.

Tim Mottershead

WIDMANN: String Quartets: No. 1; No. 2, *'Choral'*; No. 3, *'Hunting'*; No. 4; No. 5, *'Versuch über die Fuge'*[1]. [1]Juliane Banse (sop); Leipzig String Quartet. Dabringhaus und Grimm Gold MDG 307 1531-2.

The German clarinettist/composer Jörg Widmann was born in Munich in 1973. As a performer, he has premièred Rihm's *Music for Clarinet and Orchestra* (1999) and Reimann's *Cantus* (2006). As a composer, Widmann studied with Henze, Wil-

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fried Hiller and Rihm. He has received a plethora of prizes, and his opera *Das Gesicht im Spiegel* was named the most important première of 2003/4 by *Opernwelt*.[1]

Widmann's five string quartets (so far) are cyclically oriented, and can be performed as one piece. In doing so, they exhibit a metastructure of Introduction-Largo-Scherzo-Passacaglia-'Fugue (with soprano)'. The cycle begins (First Quartet, 1997) almost inaudibly (bows are held down on the strings with the greatest pressure, but with no real sound – hence the silence of the opening of this recording). The viola plays a crucial role in this initial quartet. Gesture, until the last formal section, is all – a short but intense 'quasi una ciacona' completes the work.

Although there are no direct quotations, the Second Quartet (2003, rev. 2006, '*Choralquartett*') is inspired by Haydn's *Seven Last Words*. Widmann seeks to negate inherited concepts of time and tonality, so that by beginning 'at the end of the path' (his words), he seeks to deny the desolate, but at the same time take away hope from tonal references. This is bleak music, an extended (13'36") sequence of last breaths.

The high-spirited Third Quartet of 2003 is subtitled '*Hunting Quartet*' and acts as high contrast. It begins with a short, sharp, bracing shout of 'hi!' from the players before the hunting rhythms kick in (the shouts return, changed in affect, later in the movement). This quartet corresponds to the scherzo of Widmann's metastructure. The theme is borrowed from Schumann's *Papillons*, then transmogrified, then deconstructed ('skeletonized', as the composer puts it). In an attempt at mirroring social situations, Widmann then has the hunters become the hunted, with the three upper instruments setting on the cello. Virtuoso *sul ponticello* passages create a disturbing sound-world towards the quartet's end, in direct contravention of the confidence of the beginning, while swirling glissandi point to overbearing disorientation. The quartet/movement simply disintegrates.

Despite its notational complexity (including separate 'breathing scores' for each player) and its passacaglia basis, the Fourth Quartet (2005) sounds very airy. A wide spectrum of pizzicati inform this piece, as does the impression of a disembodied processional. Hauntingly fragmented, it moves naturally to the solo voice that opens the Fifth Quartet (2005). Perhaps '*Versuch über die Fuge*' might be translated as 'genesis of a fugue'. Here Widmann inserts Biblical texts from Ecclesiastes and the Vanitas vanitatum (in Latin, except for a key phrase in German), in order to underline the composer's never-ending search for answers. Julianne Banse is stunning in her response to the vocal lines, whether they be long and disembodied or pointillist. Her blanched purity of tone is most memorable. Throughout, the Leipzig String Quartet (Dabringhaus und Grimm's house quartet) delivers the utmost concentration and identification with Widmann's idiom. The recording is exemplary in terms of clarity and perspective.

Colin Clarke

[1] For more on Widmann, see Graham Lack, 'At Fever Pitch: The Music of Jörg Widmann', in *Tempo* Vol. 59 No. 231 (January 2005), pp. 29-35 (Ed.).

'Scawfell': music for bass clarinet by BOZZA, DIETHE, ARVO PÄRT (arr. Watts), WOLFGANG GABRIEL, PAUL TERMOS, JOE CUTLER, ANTONY CLARE. Sarah Watts (bass cl), Antony Clare (pno). Clarinet Classics CC0056 (CD/CD-ROM).

British musician Sarah Watts went on from the Royal Academy of Music to study bass clarinet at the Rotterdam Conservatoire. That experience is reflected in *Nieuw Werk*, a short one-movement piece in the minimalist style of the 1970s by the late Paul Termos. Here, the piece is complemented by Watts's transcription of Arvo Pärt's *Spiegel im Spiegel*, made with the composer's blessing on the basis of his clarinet arrangement – although the original version for violin and piano remains probably the most effective.

The Austrian composer Wolfgang Gabriel (b. 1930) adheres to more conservative paths in his four-movement *Sonata on Welsh Folk Songs*, op. 30a. Two harmonically piquant slowish movements, inspired by 'Malltraeth Dyke' and 'The Bardsey Boat Lament' respectively, are separated by a *scherzando* treatment of 'The Ox-Driver's Song'. An extended final movement combines elements of three songs ('The Cap of Broad Lace', 'The Black Mare' and 'See-Saw, Swaddled One').

That Watts is equally adept in traditional forms and new sonorities is confirmed by her performances of two recent works. Described as a set of miniature fairy-tales, Joe Cutler's *Urban Myths* are beautifully tailored to the bass clarinet and keyboard (piano or harpsichord). Both players find poetry in the central 'Secret Garden'; 'Chasin' the Skunk' and 'Hokus Pokus' are exhilarating demonstrations of agility. In evoking England's highest mountain peaks, pianist Antony Clare's atmospheric *Scawfell* – the initial heading is 'mesmeric' – turns the solo wind instrument into a coltish cousin of the alphorn. Hitherto unpublished, the two instrumental parts can be downloaded from the CD.

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The disc opens, innocuously, with a well-made *Ballade* (1939) by Eugène Bozza. More gripping is Watts's lyrical rendering of a 19th-century *Romanze* by Friedrich Diethe. Clare accompanies perceptively throughout, and this recording gives added lustre to the Clarinet Classics 'Young Artist' series.

Peter Palmer

KAY: Suite from *The Quiet One*; *Three Pieces after* Blake for soprano and orchestra[1]; *Scherzi Musicali*; *Aulos* for flute and chamber orchestra[2]. [1]Janet Hopkins (sop), [2]Melanie Valencia (fl), Metropolitan Philharmonic Orchestra c. Kevin Scott. Albany TROY 961.

HARRIS: Symphony No. 11. GOULD: *Cowboy Rhapsody*. MOORE: Symphony No. 2. EFFINGER: Little Symphony No. 1, op 31. Sinfonia Varsova c. Ian Hobson. Albany TROY 1042.

CORIGLIANO: *Dylan Thomas Trilogy*. Thomas Allen (bar), Nashville Symphony Chorus, Orchestra and soloists c. Leonard Slatkin. Naxos American Classics 8.559394.

CORIGLIANO: *Mr Tambourine Man* (Seven Poems of Bob Dylan); *Three Hallucinations from 'Altered States'*. Buffalo Philharmonic c. Jo Ann Falletta. Naxos American Classics 8.559331.

LOCKLAIR: *Symphony of Seasons*; *Lairs of Soundings*[1]; *'Phoenix and Again'* Overture; *In Memory – H.H.L*; Harp Concerto[2]. [1]Janeanne Houston (sop), [2]Jacqueline Bartlett (hp), Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra c. Kirk Trevor. Naxos American Classics 8.559337.

MCKAY: *Epoch*, An American Dance Symphony. University of Kentucky Symphony and Women's Choir c. John Nardolillo. Naxos American Classics 8.559330.

HEADLEY: *California Suite*; Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2; Symphony No. 1. Anna Bogolyubova (pno), Russian Philharmonic Orchestra c. Dmitry Yablonsky. Naxos American Classics 8.559300.

PERRY: *Jamestown Concerto*. SCHUMAN: *A Song of Orpheus*. THOMSON: Cello Concerto. Yehuda Hanani (vlc), RTE National Symphony Orchestra c. William Eddins. Naxos American Classics 8:559334.

The black American composer Ulysses Kay (1917–95) left a substantial body of graceful and elegant music including a finely crafted Concerto for Orchestra (1948), which will hopefully soon be re-recorded, since this Albany release purports to be the first of a series. The music Kay wrote for the film *The Quiet One* in 1948 is charming and atmospheric. In fact the earlier music is fresher and more appealing, including the flute suite *Aulos*: I found *Scherzi Musicali* from the 1960s rather dry.

Roy Harris's Third Symphony is still considered his finest work even after considerable exploration of the other symphonies and concertos in recent years. The Symphony No. 11 (1967), whilst not quite his last (he wrote two more), reverts to the single-movement model of the Third, but less successfully. After a promising start the music seems to lose focus, with over-dominant percussion a poor substitute for effective symphonic narrative. Naxos have recorded Nos 5. and 6 (*Gettysburg*) for release in 2009 as part of their ongoing series with Marin Alsop. The real find however on this Albany CD for me was the Little Symphony No. 1 by the almost forgotten mid-Westerner Cecil Effinger (1914–90), a coolly elegant suite of movements in an ingratiating neo-classical style. Effinger was very prolific but clearly capable of considerable invention and a further look at his music on CD would be very welcome. He is remembered with great affection in his native Colorado. His manuscripts are lodged at the University of Boulder.

Naxos have recently taken to exploring evermore obscure composers and repertoire. Hubert Klyne Headley was a native Californian. Listening to his music I didn't feel I had made a sensational discovery: it is pleasant enough but bland. I had been more excited about the George Frederick McKay *Dance Symphony*, as we have already had some releases of real quality by him. Indeed there are some really beautiful and sometimes even ethereal episodes (especially the female choir vocalises), but the piece is unsustainable for a whole hour. It isn't really a symphony but a series of independent tone pictures. Dan Locklair is well known as an organist, and his orchestral music is strikingly rhythmical and with occasional minimalist tendencies. The Harp Concerto is fresh, approachable and upbeat, as is the *Symphony of Seasons*.

The best known name from this collection is that of John Corigliano (b 1938). His *Dylan Thomas Trilogy* has never before been recorded complete and the composer has added some interludes. Corigliano's music often alternates between explosive dramatic force and atmospheric sensuality. Anyone who knows his Symphony No. 1, a scream of outrage at the curse of AIDS, will have an idea what to expect in *Mr Tambourine Man*, an intriguing setting of several well-known Bob Dylan songs for soprano and orchestra.

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Don't expect a Dylan pastiche: this is Corigliano through and through, and note the extraordinary effects he achieves in 'Chimes of Freedom'. We can also look forward to his large Symphony No. 3 for winds, *Circus Maximus*, in early 2009. Finally a very warm welcome goes to a new recording of William Schuman's *Song of Orpheus* for cello and orchestra (1962). The highlight of a CD of American cello concertos, this is a thoughtful and introspective work in a very different style to Schuman's powerful Symphony No. 8 from the same year. The Virgil Thomson Concerto sounds naïve at first, but this is deceptive and what you get is considerably more than what you hear. The Naxos releases, then, prove to be a mixed selection with Corigliano, Locklair and the cello concertos taking the honours.

Bret Johnson

SMALLEY: Piano Quintet[1]; Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano[2]; String Quartet No. 2[3]. [1,2]Roger Smalley (pno), [2]Darryl Poulsen (hn), [2]Paul Wright (vln), [3]Australian Quartet. MELBA MR301112

Roger Smalley studied composition with Peter Racine Fricker and John White at the RCM, subsequently taking private lessons with Alexander Goehr before frequenting Cologne and Darmstadt (he also studied with Stockhausen in Cologne). In the mid-1970s, Smalley emigrated to Australia, where his works are regularly performed. Melba Recordings Pty Ltd is based in Victoria.

The title of this disc is 'Through a glass darkly', a quote from Corinthians that zooms in on humankind's clouded perspective. Recontextualisation and deconstruction of pre-extant material is a central idea of Smalley's thought, and the Piano Quintet (2003) incorporates one of Smalley's favoured compositional techniques, that of requisitioning a musical fragment (from another composer or one of his own works) and weaving it into his own musical argument. If the fragment comes from a work that was originally tonal, as in the Chopin references we experience on this disc, Smalley has to battle, compositionally, with the integration of these tonal references into his own language – a problem that invites in questions of harmonic functionality and directionality, and their loss. Here in the Quintet, the first eight bars of Chopin's Mazurka in F minor, op. 68 no. 4 crops up in the third movement (scherzo); its chromatic harmonies also form the basis of the final chaconne. The first three movements (Overture, Intermezzo and Scherzo) are all relatively brief; the final chaconne equals their combined duration. The angular, energetically leaping Overture seems restless, while the Intermezzo continues the feeling of unrest via its fragmentary gestures. The finale is essentially a suite of character pieces utilizing types used by Chopin. References to Chopin himself vary from the overt to the semi-concealed. Beauty of sound and of harmony seems to be a determining factor here, something which heightens the feeling of reflective *Rückblick*.

The Horn Trio of 2000–2002, commissioned by the solo horn player on this recording, again reuses older material, but this time the theme comes from another work by Smalley. He takes the harp part from the very end of his Contrabassoon Concerto (1998), heard here in its barest form on the solo horn at the opening of the second movement (a set of 17 'Mirror Variations'). The first movement is built on a 12-note row derived from this theme, the musical material being stacked on the skeleton of a sonata form; the finale attempts to reinterpret the row in tonal terms by re-reading it as a set of 'tonalities'. Darryl Poulsen is a real virtuoso. He is just as agile in the tricky lower register as he is in the stratosphere, and his slow, legato lines in the labyrinthine 'Mirror Variations' show none of the lumpiness easily associated with this instrument. The dramatic gestures of the finale are rendered with gusto.

Poulsen seems only available on disc elsewhere as listed soloist in the Shostakovich Cello Concerto No. 1 on Channel Classics 15398 (with the Australian CO and Pieter Wispelwey as cellist). Based on present evidence, it would be good to hear more from him, especially since his biography refers to his commissioning of new works for the horn.

The single-movement String Quartet No. 2 (1999) was commissioned by the Australian String Quartet. Again, the ghost of Chopin is present (here, the Mazurka op. 56 no. 3, bars 181–189) and, although Smalley does not acknowledge this in his notes, Schubert and (in the work's final minutes) late Shostakovich. There is no coat-hanging of material, Schoenberg-like, onto older forms here – instead, there is an intuitively led feel to the ongoing argument. The performance is exemplary in its concentration and in its build-up of angst. Moments of repose are sweetly delivered, while gestures that overtly refer back to earlier musics attain the utmost poignancy.

The recordings of all three pieces (the Quintet and the Trio hail from Perth, the Quartet from Adelaide) are exemplary in terms of clarity and distancing.

Colin Clarke

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BATE: Viola Concerto. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (Orch. Chase): *Romance* for Viola and Orchestra. W.H. BELL: *Rosa Mystica*. Roger Chase (vla), BBC Concert Orchestra c. Stephen Bell. Dutton Epoch CDLX 7216.

A wondrous CD. The music of Stanley Bate (1911-59) has languished for half a century, yet in the 1950s he was quite a well-known figure. His early death at 47 and somewhat unhappy personal life did not preclude the production of quite a substantial body of music, including four completed piano concertos, four symphonies (we should hopefully hear two of these, which Dutton plan to record in 2009), two operas and a number of ballets: around 70 works in all. The 40-minute Viola Concerto was written in America and first performed there in 1947 by Emanuel Vardi and the NBC Symphony. It hasn't been heard since.

Lewis Foreman in the sleeve notes considers Bate's style to be 'occasionally derivative'. It is true that Bate felt a strong affinity with his teacher Vaughan Williams, whose influence is strongly felt at various points in the Viola Concerto. But how Bate picks up VW's emotional language and makes it his own! This is emphatically not a work of discipleship but a powerful essay of lyrical grandeur. The heavily atmospheric slow movement and the ensuing feather-light scherzo are masterly, in my view. So much so, that I have returned to this piece time and again and keenly await Dutton's next Bate offerings.

Scarcely less impressive is the Concerto *Rosa Mystica* by William Henry Bell, dating from 30 years earlier and only being heard for the second time in 90 years! Bell is another fascinating figure, born in 1873 and reared in the English cathedral tradition as chorister and organist, who became a pupil of Stanford, prior to emigrating to South Africa. He forged quite an advanced style for his time and the *Rosa Mystica* of 1916 is another piece with its own very distinctive personality. The occasional modal inflections and quotation from Palestrina lend that slightly archaic atmosphere associated perhaps with early Respighi (the *Sinfonia Drammatica* had just been written a couple of years before, and would almost certainly have been unknown to Bell).

The abundance of melodic invention and sumptuous orchestration in these concertos bring us two fantastic discoveries on one disc. The brief, meditative and affecting *Romance* by Vaughan Williams serves as an entr'acte. The value of such enterprises that preserve and enrich our musical culture is almost immeasurable. Congratulations all round: an exceptional bargain – at mid price too!

Bret Johnson

COLIN MATTHEWS: *Alphabicycle Order*[1]; Horn Concerto[2]. [1]Henry Goodman (narr), [2]Richard Watkins (hn), Hallé Orchestra c. [1]Edward Gardner, [2]Mark Elder. Hallé CD HLL 7515.

DEBUSSY: *La mer*. DEBUSSY, arr COLIN MATTHEWS: *12 Préludes (first set)*. Hallé Orchestra c. Mark Elder. Hallé CD HLL 7513.

DEBUSSY: *Jeux*. DEBUSSY, arr COLIN MATTHEWS: 12 *Préludes (second set)*. C. MATTHEWS: *Postlude: Monsieur Croche*. Hallé Orchestra c. Mark Elder. Hallé CD HLL 7518.

EGGERT: *Number 9 VI: a bigger splash*. COLIN MATTHEWS: *Turning Point*. VERBEIJ: *LIED*. GLANERT: *Theatrium Bestiarum*. Jörgen van Rijen (tbn); Concertgebouw Orchestra c. Markus Stenz. RCO LIVE RCO 08003.

Colin Matthews is Associate Composer with the Hallé Orchestra. That the Hallé is issuing such important scores as these on its own label is a sign of the greatest initiative. The first disc presents two works by Matthews of the utmost contrast. While the Horn Concerto ponders on deep, even primal, matters, *Alphabicycle Order* (2007) is in a very much lighter vein. This is, in fact, the recording of the work's première in Manchester's Bridgewater Hall. The texts are by Christopher Reid and the piece is of course set in 26 movements. The writing for the children's choir is always simple and effective. The children are asked to shout, to speak in notated rhythms as well as to play bells and burst balloons. The 'Alphabike' has 26 wheels, just as Matthews's piece has 26 movements, alphabetically arranged.

The fine actor Henry Goodman is the sterling narrator, blessed with superb diction and a splendid line in near-farce (try 'Diffodils', a sort of nightmarish take on these normally placid flowers in which they end up chasing poets o'er vales and hills). Matthews's scoring is a delight. Does the icy onomatapeoia of 'Fountain-climbing' make covert reference to Strauss' *Alpensinfonie*?. Even the more angular movements (like 'Gruntparents', which opens the second of the work's five parts) are imbued with a sense of fun, while suavité is all in the 'Iciclist' waltz and the 'Sleepdogs' tango.

The lightness of touch that the Hallé accorded the performance is a continual delight. It seems the live ambience helped no end. As to the text, if you think some of the titles are cringeworthy (in the very best sense of the English nonsense poem), wait till you hear the texts themselves. Word-play perhaps reaches its height in the description of the 'Oy-oy' (a close relation of the yo-yo), a concept echoed and negated in the 'Zagzig' (*not* an inverse zigzag). Edward Gardner has been garnering fine

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reviews for his work at ENO, and for his accompaniment to Kate Royal's EMI debut recital disc (with the ASMF). He conducts with confidence.

Matthews completed his horn concerto in March 2001. Richard Watkins, featured here, was the original soloist (on that occasion the orchestra was the Philharmonia, under Salonen). Matthews is not the first composer to bring forward the orchestral horns into co-operation with the soloist (think of the final perorations of the Richard Strauss Second Horn Concerto, for example) but he actually opens his work with this idea. We hear initially four off-stage horns hearkening back to their hunting origins. Space is important – the soloist begins grouped with them, but enters from the left to assert his own independence. Once onstage, the horn is conjoined timbrally with new bedfellows, the flügelhorn and the trombone.

The lyric impulse is strong here. The solo horn lines sing almost continually (Watkins manages the legato most beautifully, his slurs a model of their kind). Like Britten in the Prologue to his *Serenade*, Matthews makes use of the horn's natural harmonics, an expressive device that takes in notes conventionally thought of as 'out of tune'. Here the effect emerges as more of a pitch-shading than anything else. Again, as in the case of the Britten, the soloist departs the stage in the final stages, leaving the strings to continue the adagio. Unlike Britten, the horn is able to join his colleagues offstage – but even they cannot keep him company for long. That the Hallé under Elder negotiates such complex scores with such ease is a cause for much celebration.

An inspired coupling of Debussy's *La mer* and a selection of twelve Debussy Préludes orchestrated by Colin Matthews, also on the Hallé's own label, provides plenty of food for thought. *La mer* is given a performance of great élan in its more outgoing moments, and great sensitivity elsewhere. Elder's elucidation of lines and textures is exemplary (his approach is more Boulez than Karajan), something that is underlined by his handling of the Debussy/Matthews *Préludes*. Here, Matthews adds a post-Debussian sheen to Debussy's miniatures, so that they seem to glisten in a light that shines, identifiably, from after their original time of composition. Occasionally he extends a phrase ('Brouillards') or adds implied harmonies ('Ce qu'a vu le vent d'Ouest'), while 'Le vent dans le plaine' is almost half as long again as the original. The sleaziness and grotesqueries of 'Minstrels' is wittily conveyed; I wonder, though, about the handling of the nostalgia of 'Les sons et les parfums', which sounds just a tad false. 'Général Lavine' could usefully have had more playfulness. Puck's twilit flitting is rather blunted, heard as if through a veil. The flaxen-haired girl is to be played at half-speed, and appears as a gossamer strings and harp coda.

Elder's *Jeux* matches and mirrors the strengths of his *La mer* – an approach that does not diminish the sensuous sexuality of the score. The arrangements of the *Préludes* on this disc remain closer to Debussy's original than do the companion arrangements on the first volume. Reordering means that we hear new combinations and parallels, as when the mysterious string veil of 'Danseuses de Delphes' meets the playful bassoons of 'La sérenade interrompue'. Distanced mystery informs the frozen 'Des pas sur la neige' (melodic lines are carried by the woodwind), while it is tongue-in-cheek teasing that shines forth most in 'Pickwick'. Matthews' orchestrations can be reminiscent of Ravel or Respighi (as Gerald Larner points out in his notes) but he retains his own individuality – as in the brass fanfares in 'Anacapri'. The set ends not with the glittering orchestration of 'Feux d'artifice', but with the misty grandeur of the 'Cathédrale engloutie'. The Postlude takes its name from Debussy's critical *nom de plume* and represents 'part portrait of Debussy and part expression of exuberance and reflection on having completed the project' (Matthews). In keeping with the general ethos, it is an arrangement of a piano piece – this time one of Matthews's own. The time Matthews spent with Debussy is readily apparent (*La mer* seems to hover in the climaxes, rather than the *Préludes*).

There is only one Matthews work on the Concertgebouw disc, set against Eggert's David Hockney-inspired jazz excursions, Theo Verbeij's *LIED* (featuring the superbly expressive trombone of Jörgen van Rijen) and Glanert's *Theatrium Bestiarum*, and that is *Turning Point* (2006). Lasting almost exactly 20 minutes, *Turning Point* is essentially bipartite – a complex first part leads to a scherzo, which together form the faster first part, before the turning point of the title ushers in the slow, intense third part (amounting to about half the work's duration). The shadow of Mahler seems to hover in the later stages, both in the expansive lines and in the overwhelming sense of the massive, in contrast to the more glistening, intricate workings of earlier.

That the performance is live (January 2007) and so very assured is a tribute to all concerned. My colleague Guy Rickards considered the Glanert piece in his review of the Avie performance in *Tempo* Vol. 62 No. 244. The account here is raw and energetic.

Colin Clarke

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