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CD REVIEWS

LACHENMANN: *Salut für Caudwell*; *Les Consolations*; *Concertini*. Wilhelm Bruck, Theodor Ross (guitars), Schola Heidelberg, WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, Klangforum Wien c. Johannes Kalitzke. Kairos 0012652KAI (2-CD set).

LACHENMANN: *Gran Torso*; *Grido*; *Reigen seliger Geister*. Stadler Quartet. NEOS 10806.

> From the beginning I have been concerned not just with 'noisiness' and alienation but with transformation and revelation, and with real 'consonance' in the widest sense, so that rhythm, gesture, melody, intervals, harmony – every sound and everything sounding – is illuminated by its changed context.

Lachenmann's mission statement comes in notes on *Concertini*, a 37-minute score from 2004 which is as eloquently subversive as any of his earlier works, and whose complex cause is devotedly served in this recording by Klangforum Wien under Johannes Kalitzke. Within the vividly expressionistic world of his music, Lachenmann displays an expansive, almost Varèsian relish for the endlessly disconcerting potential of sound itself. *Concertini* belies the miniaturizing implications of its title, since even though it concerns the interactions and oppositions of small, distinct groups of instruments, its materials – and especially its brass writing – allow epic intensity to override any overt suggestions of delicacy or intimacy. Indeed, at mid-point there is an explosion that sounds for a time like a parody of a high-modernist battle symphony. The crux comes from around seven minutes from the end, when something more sustained, more conventionally stable comes to the fore. Yet the composer refuses to be reconciled, refuses to resolve, to succumb to the seductions of what at one point sounds close to traditional chordal consonance.

Almost 40 years before *Concertini*, in *Les Consolations*, Lachenmann had chosen the relatively easy target of Lisztian sentiment for subversion: but the result, in the work's original version (1967–8), might have conformed almost too comfortably to the radical choral orthodoxies of that heady decade. These settings of short passages from Ernst Toller and the Old High German *Wessobrunner Gebet*, imposingly stark and dramatic, were therefore re-contextualised ten years later by a Prelude, Interlude and Postlude in which Lachenmann engaged for the first time with a very different text: Hans Christian Andersen's *Little Match Girl – Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern*. Here, the 'noisiness' suggested by the scraping and striking of matches, which prepares the ground for the large-scale 'Musik mit Bildern' (otherwise opera) with this title which he undertook in the 1990s, promotes a chilly, freezing fervour. In the climactic Postlude (the high point of a remarkably accomplished account by the 16 singers of Schola Heidelberg, director Walter Nussbaum, with members of the WDRSO Köln) there is extraordinary intensity as the music responds to the image of the 'light of heaven', both joyful and menacing, and to the little match girl's possible transfiguration into one of those 'blessed spirits' whose version of modernist dance Lachenmann has imagined in his second string quartet (1989).

Salut für Caudwell (1977) comes from the same years as the expanded version of *Les Consolations*. This celebratory ritual for the English writer, Marxist and Spanish Civil War casualty Christopher Caudwell – as well as for 'all outsiders who, because they disturb thoughtlessness, are instantly lumped together with iconoclasts' – is a kind of Lachenmannian *War Requiem* for two guitarists. For the first half of its 25 minutes the piece features a simple, purposeful, march-like rhythmic motion that is counterpointed by a declaimed text deriving from Caudwell's writings. As Lachenmann says, 'Caudwell demanded an art which realistically confronts reality and its multi-layered contradictions'. Confronting contradictions is not to be confused with simply depicting them, however, and the second part of *Salut für Caudwell* advances into a more complex, diversified response to the music's earlier action. This recording from 2005 by the work's original performers is a technical *tour de force*, and an authentic demonstration of the composer's austerely sustained declamatory style – that '"consonance" in the widest sense' that he continues to explore so unquietly and uncomplacently.

The Stadler Quartet's recordings for NEOS were made in July 2007, barely eight months after the performances by the Arditti Quartet issued by Kairos that same year (see *Tempo* No. 245, July 2008, pp.68–9). Such duplication is rare at the 'sharp' end of the contemporary repertory, and among the factors it points to is the evidence that Helmut Lachenmann's challenges to string play-

ers – most obviously, his sidelining of traditional methods of sound production – do not result from ill-considered ignorance of what these instruments are capable of. Lachenmann persuades his interpreters that this is what contemporary music needs to be like – at least as he conceives it: and, given the right kind of performers, the outcome is to open new horizons of experience and understanding, which speak to today with special urgency and intensity.

The photograph in the NEOS booklet of the Stadler members standing – and smiling – on a pile of rubble could be a sign that subtlety is not the name of the game, and Lachenmann's three quartets can clearly be heard as sermons in sound on the need to build things anew, uncompromisingly, from the ground up, on the ruins of what belongs to the past. Nevertheless, the difficulty of avoiding inappropriate allusions seems to underpin some of the composer's wittier strategies: for example, the title 'Grido' will inevitably suggest an expressionistic tone-poem, perhaps in homage to Edvard Munch's famous painting *Der Schrei* ('The Scream'). Sure enough, the music has plenty of gestures which can be made to fit that association: yet it turns out that 'Grido' stands primarily for the members of the Arditti quartet at the time of the work's première: **G**raham Jennings, **R**ohan de Saram, **I**rvine Arditti, **Do**v Scheidlin. Perhaps – and even if an element of the composer's friends being pictured within survives – this is Lachenmann's somewhat sardonic way of indicating how limiting it is to links words and pictures directly to sounds.

Similarly, if *Gran Torso* (the first quartet, begun in 1971 and finally revised in 1988) alludes to another quartet composition with 'great' in the title it does so more to evoke the extraordinary, sublime aesthetic ambitions of Beethoven's op. 133 fugue than to parrot aspects of its form or texture. The extremes of the material involved – ranging, essentially, from silence to the densest sonic activity – are Lachenmann's own. Only through the embrace of such acoustic 'rubble' can a new authenticity emerge, and the obeisance to Gluck's Elysian fields in the second quartet, *Reigen seliger Geister* (1989), delivers on the promise of pure sublimity, with an often high-pitched spirit of austere yet fervent remoteness from the mundane which remains among Lachenmann's most absorbing achievements.

If the second quartet is, among other things, a study in distancing, the much more recent *Grido* (2001) brings music back down to earth. This time not even consonance and vibrato are wholly excluded from its highly diverse building blocks, but the inspiration provided by Irvine Arditti and his colleagues seems to invite an exercise in convergence, showing how Lachenmann can explore homogeneity while still remaining Lachenmann. He writes warmly in the NEOS booklet of the achievements of the Stadler players, and these are indeed performances and recordings to complement the Arditti's. Only in the nature of the booklet – Kairos includes notes with a few invaluable timed cues to events in the music – is the earlier issue straightforwardly superior. Blessed indeed are the hardy spirits which will seek out both, and begin a study through comparison.

Arnold Whittall

DAVID MATTHEWS: Symphonies Nos. 2 and 6. BBC National Orchestra of Wales c. Jac van Steen. Dutton Epoch CDLX 7234.

MATTHEWS: String Quartets Nos. 4, 6 and 10; *Adagio* for String Quartet, op.56a. Kreutzer Quartet. Toccata Classics TOCC 0058.

MATTHEWS: *Terrible Beauty*; Clarinet Quintet; *Marina*; String Trio; String Trio No.2; *Winter Passions*. Susan Bickley (mezzo), Stephen Loges (bar), The Nash Ensemble c. Lionel Friend. NMC D152.

Thanks to two enterprising recording projects from Dutton Epoch and Toccata Classics, David Matthews's significant achievements in the traditional forms of symphony and string quartet, which have held such an attraction for him and which he has done so much to re-invigorate, may now begin to receive their due. In addition, NMC continue to champion the composer's cause, most recently in a valuable disc of works for chamber forces.

As part of their on-going Matthews Symphony cycle, Dutton Epoch have released a coupling of the Second and Sixth featuring the BBC National Orchestra of Wales under Jac van Steen (CDLX 7234). Both works are significant additions not just to the Matthews discography, but to the British symphonic catalogue.[1]

Dating from 1979, the Second shares a single-movement form with the First and Third (already released on Dutton Epoch CDLX 7222). Between its thematically interrelated slow introduction and monumental coda, it embraces a powerful *Adagio* section (with doleful, multiply divided strings), a driving *Allegro* and a mercurial scherzo, all within an unbroken 35-minute span. Different orchestral

[1] A further Dutton release of Matthews's music, including the two Violin Concertos and the Oboe Concerto, is imminent (CDLX 7261) as this issue goes to press – Ed.

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sections take it in turns to assume a dominant role and the work is frequently driven by episodes of strenuous rhythmic vitality, not least in the substantial passage for percussion between the *Allegro* and scherzo. Its trajectory suggests an advance from innocence to experience, as the naïve bassoon melody in the slow introduction returns transfigured on the trumpet as a symbol of rebirth in the massive epilogue. The recurring three-note, bell-like motif which embellishes these closing pages has its origins in church bells Matthews used to hear on Sunday morning walks in Oxfordshire.

It is fascinating to pick out influences, some of which are still detectable in the composer's recent output. The opening keening bassoon theme and rhythmic pounding elsewhere suggest a composer under the spell of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, whilst Mahler and Berg are occasionally reflected in the harmonies and soaring melodic lines, and the final section has a Shostakovich-like irony. If these stimuli are less effectively absorbed than in Matthews's latest symphonic works, the consistently creative and vividly dramatic orchestral effects are a source of genuine pleasure.

Sir John Barbirolli once sagely observed (in the context of Jacqueline du Pré's youthful exuberance) that young people should be excessive or they will have nothing to pare down in later life. In Matthews's case, the refining element of creative maturity will be readily apparent as the listener turns from the extravagance and prodigality of his Second Symphony to the subtlety and sophistication of his Sixth (2007). This most English-sounding of his symphonies is rooted in Vaughan Williams's 'Down Ampney': all three of its movements are based on elements of the hymn tune, which is gloriously stated in full in the work's coda. It is a measure of Matthews's command of his material that, although the work consists of a tiny fizzing scherzo sandwiched between two substantial and expansive movements, the symphony's overall proportions seem perfect, similar in effect to the inner movements of Mahler's Tenth Symphony, a work Matthews assisted Deryck Cooke in orchestrating in the 1960s. Perhaps the Sixth's pleasing sense of symmetry can also be partly ascribed to the fact that the scherzo came first, originally forming part of a set of variations dating from 2004 by different composers on the 'Down Ampney' theme, and thus begat its two adjacent movements, directly influencing their character and material.

In contrast to the Second Symphony, the Sixth's influences are convincingly subsumed in

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Matthews's own distinctive style, as the spirits of Mahler's and Vaughan Williams's own Sixth Symphonies hover over various episodes in the piece with beneficent serenity (with the aid of Alpine cowbells in the case of Mahler). The climactic moment near the end of the work when the hymn tune is stated in full could, in lesser hands, have descended into cliché, but as Matthews handles it, the effect is cathartic and moving, entirely devoid of sentimentality; this is, one feels, the true destination and culmination of an intricately designed and meticulously integrated work.

Jac van Steen and the BBCNOW offer cogent readings of these two disparate but equally gripping symphonies and are alert and responsive to the composer's personal brand of vigorous late-Romanticism and spare, chamber-like Expressionism alike. They bring to life Matthews's pungent scoring, especially in the scherzo of the Sixth with its delightful cadenza for vibraphone and marimba: if the performers seem more at home in this work, this may be because they gave its first performance at the 2007 Proms and have therefore had more opportunity to fully assimilate it. David Matthews is arguably one of the finest symphonists of his generation. This release, beautifully recorded up to the very best Dutton standards, provides ample evidence to support such a claim.

In the first of their survey of the complete Matthews String Quartets, Toccata Classics present the Kreutzer Quartet in fresh and vibrant readings captured in excellent sound. The Fourth (1981), in four substantial movements, has a formal resemblance to Beethoven's A major Piano Sonata, op.101. Unusually, the work begins with an *Andante*, launched by a striking introduction on harmonics, and whose traditional sonata-form structure is offset by the use of a dramatic central episode in place of the expected development section. A skittish, capricious scherzo is followed by lyrical slow movement, incorporating a dream-like faster section where all the material presented thus far is speeded up. The weighty finale starts with cadenzas for each instrument, leading to an extended sonata *allegro* which culminates in the return of the dramatic episode from the first movement. A measured and muted coda moors the piece in D major.

Dating from ten years later, the String Quartet no.6 is a tersely argued and compact three-movement work. Its central *Adagio*, based on a shorter memorial piece (also included in the programme) is the wellspring of the quartet, from which the two sonata-form outer movements draw their thematic material. The outset of the *Allegro energico* finale calls to mind the concluding movement of Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto* No.6. Later, a theme from the *Adagio* returns, expressive and tender on the cello, before the movement (and quartet) ends in a welter of blazingly affirmative *sforzandi*.

Like his contemporary John McCabe, David Matthews has a great interest in birds and birdsong and his Tenth String Quartet (2001), cast in a pair of contrasting movements, reflects this passion. An atmospheric *Lontano* uncannily evokes Australian magpie and cuckoo songs. The score calls for metal practice mutes to create an impression of distance and requires the C string on the cello to be tuned down to B, lending the piece a distinctive, haunting character of its own; the following *Vivace* incorporates these birdsongs into a predominantly lively dance movement.

Attacking these works with fearless energy, the Kreutzer Quartet make a very strong case for regarding Matthews as one of the foremost contemporary writers for string quartet. This is an essential purchase and future instalments are keenly anticipated. One small point: the front and back of the disc describe the contents as 'First Recordings', yet the String Quartet No.6 has appeared before on CD in a Metronome release with the Brindisi Quartet in a more urgent and rough-hewn account.

Colin Matthews was the recording producer on that 1994 disc and he continues to support his brother's work as executive producer on a recent NMC release, entitled 'Winter Passions', that helpfully fills some gaps in the David Matthews discography. Of the purely instrumental items on the programme, the earliest is the Clarinet Quartet (1984) which, like the Tenth String Quartet, is in two strongly contrasted movements. The first, an elaborate theme and variations, contains a 'fast forward' episode recapitulating the material heard thus far, like a dream flashback, an effect used in the Fourth String Quartet three years previously. In the terse *molto vivace* finale, a driving scherzo is quelled by the subtle introduction of the previous movement's theme, leading to a sustained and quiet conclusion. The String Trio, op.48, was written in 1989 for the 25th anniversary of the Nash Ensemble. All four tightly-constructed and well-balanced movements share a motif which spells out the name NASH. Written 14 years later, the two-movement Second Piano Trio begins with a freely rhapsodic set of variations that revel in the potential sonorities of the work's stringed forces, leading into a faster, more rhythmic concluding section which turns out to be a varied restatement of the preceding movement. An outstanding piece in which every note tells, it receives very persuasive, passionate advocacy from the Nash players.

The three chamber pieces with voice on the

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programme range over three decades. *Marina*, from 1988, sets a T. S. Eliot poem, responding to its images of the sea. Richly scored for viola, clarinet, alto clarinet and basset horn – 'for added mellowness', as the composer puts it, especially during the instrumental interlude near the end of the piece – this is an elegant, urbane setting, particularly memorable for its eloquent viola writing. *Winter Passions* (1999) is a setting for baritone, clarinet, string trio and piano of D. M. Thomas's translations of three Pushkin poems, in which the first, 'Winter Road', quotes a Russian folksong and deftly evokes a 'troika' accompanied by pizzicato strings suggesting a balalaika. The second, entitled 'Invocation', hauntingly depicts the poet dreaming of his lost love and, after a short 'dream-interlude' for clarinet and piano, the concluding 'Winter Morning' is a giddily exultant treatment of a poem in which the poet awakes and implores the girl by his side to enjoy the beauty of a glorious winter morning. The most recent featured vocal work is *Terrible Beauty*, from 2007, scored for soprano and an ensemble of flute (and bass flute), clarinet (and bass clarinet), harp and string quartet. Prefaced with lines from the *Iliad* in the original Greek, it sets Enobarbus's eulogy of Cleopatra from Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra* in the form of a predominantly sensuous dramatic scena. With its mixture of recitative and arioso and acute sense of theatre, this might be regarded as a mini-opera akin to Britten's *Phaedra*, making the listener regret anew that Matthews has so far produced no large-scale operatic works.

Under Lionel Friend's assured direction, the Nash Ensemble players perform magnificently, sounding entirely at home in this repertoire. Soloists Susan Bickley and Stephen Loges make distinguished contributions to another excellent and strongly recommended addition to the NMC's impressive catalogue of contemporary British music.

Paul Conway

HARVEY *Scena*[1]; *Jubilus*[2]; *Speakings*. [1]Elizabeth Layton (vln), [2]Scott Dickinson (vla), BBC Scottish SO c. Ilan Volkov. Aeon ABCD1090

Although none of the pieces on this disc utilizes the voice per se, it is the voice that underlies each work at a very deep level: *Scena* via the operatic voice, *Jubilus* via chant and *Speakings* via speech itself.

It was Irvine Arditti who premièred *Scena*. Elizabeth Layton is the soloist here, and she plays with supreme confidence. She is accompanied by a small ensemble of some nine instruments. Harvey has structured the piece so that it is in five sections; the mode of expression is that of a narration, and has links to opera. The work begins with a darkly-scored 'Lament'; its converse side is found in the stratospherically-scored interlude between the second and third 'scenes', a passage judged with the utmost precision on the present recording and one which leads into the tender 'Romantic Event'. The work's finale is a theme and variations on a theme from *Lotuses*, an earlier work by Harvey for flute and string trio.

In 2002, Harvey wrote *Jubilus* for viola and eight instrumentalists in response to a commission from Radio France. The basis for *Jubilus* is the solo viola *Chant* of a decade earlier – again, the inspiration is vocal in nature, this time an imagined monk chanting on Mount Athos. Harvey uses the medieval technique of the melismatic extension (jubilus) of the final syllable of the Alleluia in plainchant. Later in *Jubilus*, he invokes a Buddhist monastery. He also utilizes melody from a Tibetan chant. This is a work of magnificent invention, both sonic and structural. *Jubilus* lasts just under 15 minutes. Unfortunately Aeon's sleeve promises *25'53"*, for some reason.

Speakings (2007–08) is the third in a line of pieces inspired by the idea of purification (it is preceded by *Body Mandala* and *… towards a Pure Land*). In the previous works, body and mind had been purified – here, it is speech (the Buddhist idea of 'Right Speech', I assume). Electronics are used in addition to 11 soloists and full orchestra (the electronics are synchronized via a MIDI keyboard, which launches the sound files). Harvey has the orchestra 'learn to speak' during the course of the piece, with speech defined as a highly expressive sound texture. Of course, while the orchestra learns to speak, the language itself must remain a mystery to the listener, or at the least a field of musico-semantic possibilities. The starting-point is incarnation itself. The central movement depicts the chatter of adult life and extends Harvey's earlier work *Sprechgesang*, which preceded *Speakings*. It ends with a poignant, exhausted statement of a mantram. The complexities of composition are multiple here, yet the immediacy of Harvey's expressive voice is what dominates the listening experience. The reverberant finale is again chant-like in basis, its long, slow lines implying an arrival at a new space beyond the foregoing (wisdom / enlightenment / afterlife?).

The combination of these three pieces in top-rank recordings and with the highest possible interpretative standards is a cause for celebration. Urgently recommended.

Colin Clarke

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HANS ABRAHAMSEN: *Schnee*. Ensemble Recherche. Winter & Winter 910 159-2.

Composers have been fascinated by canon for more than half a millennium, with Hans Abrahamsen the latest to succumb. His hour-long work *Schnee* (2006–8) is subtitled 'ten canons for nine instruments' and was inspired by his making instrumental transcriptions of Bach canons in the 1990s and becoming fascinated by Bach's 'animated world of time in circulation'.

In *Schnee* Abrahamsen creates an unsettling frozen universe of canonic forms, endlessly circling round the same cellular material in an edgy landscape of brittle, mechanical sounds. The canons are not audibly 'on the surface' in the way, for example, Steve Reich's are; instead they owe more to Tinctoris's definition of canon (in 1475) as 'a rule showing the purpose of the composer behind a certain obscurity'. This is indeed music of purposeful obscurity.

The ten canons come in pairs, offering a stereoscopic perspective on the same material, as in 'the old technique from the late 19th century, where two almost identical pictures, photographed with just a small spatial displacement between them, are placed next to one another.' The effect is that 'one sees a magical three-dimensional picture in the middle, as the sum of the other two'. Musically, the effect emerges gradually over time, persistently and mesmerically.

The opening pair uses fluting sounds, scratchy and elusive, occasionally erupting into fits of violent, mechanical action. The pianos are prominently mixed, so we can hear every detail of the stopped piano strings being plucked like a demented psaltery. The second pair are skittish, the regular pulse now broken up and disturbed, highly engaging in their unpredictable energy. Canon 2B introduces sudden moments of suspended animation, suspicious echoes and aftershocks floating in space.

The canonic movements get progressively shorter, through the very slow, self-contained 'Tai Chi' ceremonial of Canon 3A and B to the hectic piano rumblings of 4B, 'Hommage à WAM'. The last pair, inversions of each other lasting just a minute each, are delightfully delicate musical box confections, gauche and innocent. The weakest sections are the superfluous *intermezzi*, which work against the careful symmetry of the canons. In a piece notable for its restraint, they are the only composerly indulgence.

This fascinating piece, presented in Winter & Winter's usual stylish corrugated cardboard case, occupies a unique niche in contemporary music at the meeting of old and new, minimalism and the avant-garde, an astringent music of icy beauty.

Bernard Hughes

DIETER SCHNEBEL: String Quartets. Quatuor Diotima; Katarina Rasinski, Michael Hirsch (voices), NEOS 11048.

In 1954, at the age of 24, Dieter Schnebel was the very acme of the post-Webernian adept. His Five Pieces for String Quartet, ranging in length from 13 to 39 seconds, assemble tiny fragments into miniature versions of such hallowed genres as Waltz (no. 2) and March (no. 4). Satisfyingly on the edge, this is music with a memory, but concerned to suppress all but the most evanescent echoes of a recent past which, in 1954, was difficult to detach from cultural, political and military disaster: and so, for Schnebel, aphoristic reticence was the only possible mode of expression. Half a century later, the fruits of long meditation on the social and spiritual consequences of needing to learn from tradition while also needing, Beckett-like, to keep going forwards at all costs, has produced more than 50 minutes of string quartet music, all written since 2000, and issued on this exceptionally well played and recorded Neos disc to mark Schnebel's 80th year.

With its specified actions for the players, the 40-minute *Streichquartett "Im Raum"* (2005/6) needs to be seen as well as heard: but even as sound alone it offers a deeply satisfying demonstration of how far Schnebel has been able to travel, cheerfully trampling on the post-Webernian eggshells with which he began, and reinvigorating through disorientation and reconstructive strategies of many kinds a remarkably wide range of musical archetypes. His way of working with patterns to ensure a basic comprehensibility aligns him, up to a point, with Mauricio Kagel. But the highly energized spontaneity, coupled with a total lack of self-indulgent skittishness, suggest nothing less than a (late) Janáček for our times. Like both Janáček and Kagel, Schnebel can sometimes come dangerously close to faux-naïvety, as the final movement of *"Im Raum"* reveals. But in this instance the directness of the way extreme, unmediated contrasts are put across keeps the danger at bay, as a sense of the primitive, the elemental is deftly integrated into processes that in other respects work to keep integration at a healthy distance.

Schnebel uses very basic pitch and rhythmic material, but his methods are consistently personal, in keeping with an ethos that manages to

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be visionary without heavy, would-be 'Utopian' overtones. A spirituality at the opposite extreme from Messiaen's, and more readily to be aligned with psychoanalysis than with scripture, becomes obvious in the Second Quartet (2006–2007), whose three movements, called 'Remembering', 'Repeating', 'Working Through', acknowledge an essay by Freud which provided the title for the International Psychoanalytical Association Congress (Berlin, 2007) – the body enlightened enough to commission the work. The dramatic element in this quartet does not involve movement for the players, though they can provide the speaking, occasionally singing voices for the Schnebel-assembled scraps of text involved. This performance, which uses separate male and female voices, has an aura occasionally reminiscent of Ligeti's *Aventures*: and Schnebel is one of the few composers today who can be thought of as deepening further the humanistic aura of Ligeti as well as Kagel, the serious playfulness and the playful seriousness. The palpable presence of these qualities on this outstanding CD is Schnebel's invaluable gift to us on his eightieth birthday.

Arnold Whittall

BRYARS: *I Send You this Cadmium Red*[1]; *The Island Chapel*[2]. [1]John Christie, [1]John Berger (voices), [1]Roger Heaton (cl/bass cl), [1]James Woodrow (elec gtr), [1]Bill Hawkes (vla), Gavin Bryars ([1]dble bass/[2]electric keyboard), [2]Melanie Pappenheim (contralto); [2]Sophie Harris (vlc). GB Records BCGBCD06.

BRYARS: *three canadian songs*[1]; violin concerto, *'The Bulls of Bashan'*[2]; *The Porazzi Fragment*; *By the Vaar*[3]. [1]Holly Cole (voice), [2]Gwen Hoebig (vln), [3]Gavin Bryars (db), CBC Radio Orchestra c. Owen Underhill. GB Records BCGBCD12.

BRYARS: *Live at Punkt*; *Laude* Nos. 4, 13, 19, 28, 29, 35–37; *Lauda dolce* No. 1; *Lauda (con sordino)*. Anna Maria Friman (sop), John Potter (ten), Morgan Goff (vla), Nick Cooper (vlc), Gavin Bryars (db), James Woodrow (electric gtr), Arve Henriksen (tpt). GB Records BCGBCD15.

'I send you this cadmium red' refers to a collection of letters between John Christie and John Berger. Colour is the main theme, and acts as a springboard for the authors to reflect on their own experiences. The frame of reference is large, and the discussions themselves are fascinating. The distinction between Yves Klein blue and Matisse blue exemplifies the keen intelligences at work here. Ideas spark off each other and lead to new ideas; the result is a sequence of philosophic meanderings. The letters were used, in an audio version, for a programme on BBC Radio 3.

Of course, the equivalence of colour to music (synaesthesia, if viscerally experienced) is a well-known phenomenon, brought to prominence perhaps by Scriabin and Kandinsky. Given that his scoring is almost unremittingly dark, Gavin Bryars's responses move away from the synaesthetic to more subtle shifts with the possible exception of the glowing sonorities of movement seven, 'Patch of Light'. Bryars treats the colours thematically so that he can cross-reference the movements. There are allusions (to Schubert and to Charlie Parker) as well as one actual quote (from *A Patch of Light* by Arlid Anderson). Bryars's music suits the two movements that meditate on darkness and black (movements five and six) particularly well. The latter makes explicit use of minimalist gestures to accompany the fragments of melody.

The two pieces on this disc are neatly interlinked as, in track 9 ('A Quality of Light') Christie describes a visit to the St Nicholas Chapel, St. Ives. Bryars's 1997 piece *The Island Chapel* was recorded in precisely that space, and makes for the perfect postscriptum. Scored for contralto, cello and electric keyboard, the piece cogitates on the chapel and its relationship to the gallery across the bay. They were linked by the pictures of James Hugonin, and the piece was recorded in the chapel with the intention of playing the recording in the gallery itself. The poems set are by Etel Adnan. Malanie Pappenheim's blanched, closely recorded tones seem attuned to the crepuscular feel of the poems themselves; Sophie Harris's plaintive cello underlines and comments on the slow narrative.

A pity some of the booklet notes are all but illegible thanks to the overlay of colour on the text itself. Nevertheless, this remains a stimulating release.

Bryars has been closely linked to Canada since 1993, so it is apt that CBC Records should issue the splendid disc of orchestral music. The pieces complement each other in scoring, but are linked by an over-arching umbrella of introspection.

Holly Cole's voice occasionally seems reminiscent of the early Sarah Vaughan in its melancholy and its mellow lowness. Her reading of the *Three Canadian Songs* is remarkably committed. There is a richness to the string writing of the final song, 'The Apple' that melds well with the almost bluesy vocal line. Bryars, over the course of the songs, reduces the orchestration from full string orchestra to just six solo cellos and four double-basses in the last.

The Violin Concerto (2000) was written for the conductorless Primavera Chamber Orchestra

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and its leader Paul Manley. Bryars's writing emphasizes the interior, ruminative side of the solo instrument, and its capacity for melancholy soliloquy. Bryars also makes reference to the Vivaldi *Four Seasons*, perhaps inspired by the originating ensemble's name. The subtitle is a tongue-in-cheek allusion to a reference by Cecil Forsyth in his 1914 orchestration treatise in which he refers to the noise and kerfuffle string players make when attaching mutes. No such disturbances here (Bryars includes a method of staggering in which players remove or add mutes so that there is a type of timbral cross-fade). Gwen Hoebig is a superlative interpreter. Her clear gifts for the lyric enable her to shape each phrase to perfection and her ease in the violin's highest register makes Bryars's lines sing exquisitely.

A related piece is *The Porazzi Fragment* for 21 solo strings. The fragment in question is by Wagner, an unpublished 13-bar theme the first eight bars of which date from 1858–9 and which was completed on 2 March 1882. The mood is entirely different to that of the Violin Concerto: dark in a post-*Metamorphosen* way. Poignant in the extreme, the heart of this music is caught well by the CBC orchestra and its recording team (perhaps a slightly lusher sound, while maintaining the linear clarity, would have been a bonus).

By the Vaar (1987) was written for jazz double-bassist Charlie Haden, and about two thirds of the solo part is improvised (Haden himself has recorded the work with the ECO on Point Records, where the coupling is Bryars's Cello Concerto). On this recording it is the composer himself who is soloist. The 'Vaar' is an imaginary river in Flanders; the title comes from the opera *Doctor Ox's Experiment* and the music derives from a sketch for a scene between the two lovers Frantz and Suzel. An extended adagio for double-bass, strings, bass clarinet and percussion, this mesmeric 20-minute piece speaks of stillness and serenity. Bryars's artistry is never in doubt. The solo is pizzicato throughout.

The last disc is devoted to deeply ruminative music which has a marked timeless aspect. Gavin Bryars has succeeded, where many have failed, in identifying a kind of timeless music that sits comfortably between eras. The music is meditative but it is never vapid in the way of much New Age music, perhaps because the place it stems from (Bryars himself) is itself a place of much depth. The performances were given at Kristiansand, Norway on 5 September 2008 as part of the Punkt Festival. The choice of performers is entirely apt. Both John Potter and Anna Maria Friman possess voices of heartbreaking purity and an ability to pitch to perfection, and when they duet (as for example in *Lauda* 37, 'Clascun ke fede sente'), the result is pure magic.

The incredibly poignant solo cello in track 4 is the instrumental analogue to the purity of the voices used here. Moments of utmost stillness (towards the end of *Lauda* 13, for example) threaten to take the listener beyond the listening experience to meditative silence, but stop short at the last moment. Even the more active numbers (*Lauda* 19) do not break the mood. Neither, interestingly, does inter-movement applause – instead, it serves to underline the sense of a shared occasion.

Jazz elements crop up in, for example, the half-broken (in timbral terms) trumpet solo in *Lauda* 37 or the walking double bass in No. 19. Bryars's wedding of ancient and (jazz) modern is seamless.

The performers are all highly accomplished and experienced. The cello and double-bass duet of the *Lauda dolce* is expert, the intensity underlined by the close recording. One of the longer tracks (7'24"), its sense of stretching time makes it one of the most memorable. Scored without voices, the *Lauda (con sordino)* for solo viola, electric guitar and piano (Bryars himself plays the piano part) is perhaps the most delicate music on the disc.

Some of the vocal *laude* have previously appeared on the album *Oi me lasso*, while the *lauda* featuring Henriksen were written specifically for this concert. This is a valuable momento of what was clearly a very special occasion.

Colin Clarke

ALUN HODDINOTT: 'Landscapes – Song Cycles and Folksongs'. Claire Booth (sop), Nicky Spence (ten), Jeremy Huw Williams (bar), Andrew Matthews-Owen (pno). British Music Society BMS437CD.

'English Heartland Songs'. Songs by ROGER LORD, SULYEN CARADON, DENNIS WICKENS, IVOR GURNEY. Joanna Morton (sop), Colin Howard (ten), Jeremy Huw Williams (bar), Anna Roberts (pno), Nigel Foster (pno). Mynstrallsy REPS 101.

JOHN JEFFREYS: 'Idylls and Elegies'. Jonathan Veira (bar), Kenneth Smith (fl), Philharmonia Orchestra c. Paul Bateman; Orchestra da Camera c. Kenneth Page; Paul Bateman (pno). Divine Arts dda25082.

By the time he died in 2008, Alun Hoddinott had composed so much orchestral and chamber music that it is easy to dismiss his vocal works as secondary. Hoddinott withdrew most of his early songs and only returned to the genre in earnest

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with his *Landscapes (Ynys Môn)* of 1975. The cycle of five pieces for tenor and piano sets to music contemporary English-language texts by Emyr Humphreys. *Landscapes* was premièred by fellow Welshman Stuart Burrows, for whom Hoddinott subsequently wrote *Six Welsh Folksongs* and *Two Songs from Glamorgan*. In 1985 another Welsh tenor, Kenneth Bowen, commissioned *The Silver Hound*, a 'six ages of man' sequence to words by Ursula Vaughan Williams. This period was also that of Hoddinott's stage and television works, notably *The Beach of Falesá* and *The Trumpet Major*.

Inspired by the island of Anglesey, *Landscapes* combine striking ideas and vivid imagery, Hoddinott responding with precision and colour. Here the underlying formal pattern is mosaic-like; in *The Silver Hound*, the narrative engenders a simpler vocal style. Sympathetically partnered by Andrew Matthews-Owen at the piano, Nicky Spence brings out the beauties of each cycle. He also bestows charm on arrangements of traditional songs, performed in English versions by Rhiannon Hoddinott (the *Six Folksongs*) and Geraint Lewis.

In 1994, a couple of years after writing his Symphony No. 9 (*A Vision of Eternity*) for Gwyneth Jones, Hoddinott produced the short cycle *One Must Always Have Love* at the request of an American poet, Alice Bliss. Soprano Claire Booth captures the underlying rapture of the cycle's four pieces, which draw on Christina Rossetti, Emily Dickinson, Bliss herself and finally W.B. Yeats. Baritone Jeremy Huw Williams joins Booth in delivering an extended 'scena', *Towy Landscape*. Michael Pollock takes the second piano part in this richly evocative setting of the 18th-century poet John Dyer, completed in 2006 as Hoddinott's op.190.

'English Heartland' is a phrase that has been used in the title of a book about the Midlands, but here the term has emotive rather than regional connotations. The moving spirit behind the disc is executive producer Richard Carder, who contributes two sets of songs under the name of Sulyen Caradon. His long-standing admiration for Ivor Gurney is reflected in four Gurney pieces 'for children' – three Robert Graves songs and a setting of W.B. Yeats's *Cradle Song* – each of them deftly performed by Joanna Morton with Anna Roberts at the piano.

Morton also lends enchantment to Caradon's three *Lowland Airs*, two of them previously recorded live by other singers on the Dunelm label. Alice Meynell's *November Blue* is a quasi-Whistlerian evocation of London which the music matches superbly. Baritone Jeremy Huw Williams and pianist Nigel Foster, for their part, are fully alive to the expressive nuances of Caradon's *The Garden of Gaia* trilogy, based on subject-matter which has been the traditional preserve of folk singers. Here, poems by Wendy Cope, Gerda Mayer and Peter Jay ('The Third Planet') are couched in telling harmony and a flexible, at times ferocious lyricism.

A few years ago Jeremy Huw Williams recorded Dennis Wickens's darkly declamatory setting of Siegfried Sassoon's *Attack*. Now he has applied himself to Wickens's sombre song-cycle *The Heart Oppressed*. Animated by only the slightest of rhythmic stirrings, these songs of Thomas Wyatt's confinement in the Tower of London in 1536 never make for easy listening. The tonal language is, however, imaginative, its devices ranging from early baroque melismata to 20th-century grittiness.

The eminent oboist Roger Lord was born in 1924, two years before Wickens. He first turned his hand to song-writing in his seventies, and the clutch recorded by the tenor Colin Howard largely reflect Lord's allegiance to the musical values of a Finzi or Quilter. Amid settings of William Blake, Hilaire Belloc and Dylan Thomas, several W.H. Auden songs stand out by dint of their variety.

Prior to the present 'Idylls and Elegies', Divine Art released two anthologies of John Jeffreys's solo songs, the first featuring the tenor Ian Partridge and the second James Gilchrist. Like Wickens and Lord, Jeffreys was a hardy survivor from the 1920s, one whose lyrical style recalls John Ireland and Peter Warlock. Composed in 1966 and published in 2005, *Poem for End* sets Ivor Gurney's poem of that name for baritone, obbligato flute and string orchestra. The typically allusive text rounds off Gurney's 'Rewards of Wonder', the first of several volumes he produced in the City of London asylum. Every note counts in Jeffreys's 11-minute score, receiving its first performance on this recording. Ranging from stark recitative to fervent arioso, Jonathan Veira's rendition with the Philharmonia strings and flautist Kenneth Smith achieves sustained intensity.

As well as John Jeffreys pieces retrieved from Meridian and Somm recordings, the disc contains several bitter-sweet orchestral compositions which the Philharmonia execute with flair. In his other role of solo pianist, conductor Paul Bateman gives an elegant account of *Toby's Dreams and Elegy,* a neo-Elizabethan set of miniatures. This release is a worthy memorial to an outstandingly lyrical composer who died late last summer.

Peter Palmer

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GEOFFREY BURGON: Viola Concerto; *Merciless Beauty*; Cello Concerto. Philip Dukes (vla), Sarah Connolly (mezzo), Josephine Knight (vlc), City of London Sinfonia c. Rumon Gamba. Chandos CHAN 10592

Geoffrey Burgon's 2008 Viola Concerto is subtitled *'Ghosts of the Dance'*, which refers to the composer's self-confessed aim to match the 'suave, caramel sound' of the low-mid registers of the viola with smooth American dance music of the 1930s and 40s. This is immediately apparent in the nonchalantly 'cool' medium-paced opening, which deploys drum kit, various brass mutes, and 'walking' pizzicato bass lines. A specific guiding principle of the imagined scheme is that of a depression-era dancing competition that aims to leave the last couple standing. This idea goes some way towards explaining the frequent changes of mood and pace (sometimes frenetic) in the opening movement, and also the background beat, literally ever-present in some form or other. The composer defines the slow movement ('quasi tango') by several changes to the orchestral texture, the most obvious being the absence of the drum kit. A more subtle change is the way in which pizzicato and carefully controlled dynamics lend a sense of drama, even theatricality to the proceedings. Indeed there appears to be a Shostakovich-like sense of irony in evidence. The finale immediately recalls the 'cool' world of the opening, albeit in terms of a soft-shoe shuffle, with flowing solo passages frequently underpinned by subtle percussive effects. If on occasion the music sounds reminiscent of Gershwin or Stéphane Grappelli-style jazz, then I would like to think the composer would have accepted this as a compliment on a job so well done. The main climax, which cuts off to leave wood blocks to introduce a brief cadenza, leads to the most attractive section of the whole work: a long, coolly jazzy, passage with subtly sweeping harmonies over a walking bass line. The overall effect is worthy of Quincy Jones: it really is that good! A brief recall of the opening theme from the soloist then ends the work suddenly, which Burgon envisioned as the last couple making their way home 'as if in a painting by Edward Hopper'. Quite so.

If the Cello Concerto of the previous year appears to have greater 'weight' and 'depth', it arises from two related circumstances. Firstly, the composer again allows the solo instrument to dictate the overall sound world; this time by (mainly) utilizing the cello's dark-hued lower registers. Secondly, he recognized that this approach corresponded with his interest in *film noir*, extending the analogy to imagine the soloist as prey to the orchestra's dark rainy night. Although one might initially be skeptical about this claim, something along those lines is obviously afoot at the outset, where one hears swirling, slightly menacing 4-note figurations, and an urgent yet lyrical cello line. A long central episode, which manages to be 'static' yet full of a brooding tension, is also suggestive of the same agenda. Towards the end of the movement the cello theme returns largely in orchestral garb, then (following a final flourish for cello) the music chillingly dips off the radar to lead directly into the slow movement. Here the orchestral accompaniment provides a dimly lit, murky backdrop. The cello's utterances are at first more subdued, but soon become more engaging and lyrical; with short orchestral snatches (a succession of characters?) woven around. Following a lovely cadenza, a solo violin is featured in the brief coda. Movement III begins with a pacey new theme announced by the cello, immediately creating a more strident tone. Later, a brief orchestral rendering of this opening theme leads to a duet between cello and solo violin. Again there appears to be some extra-musical reason for the extended coupling, which according to the booklet represents 'hero and heroine'. Although at nearly nine minutes this movement is rather long, Burgon definitely saves the best till last. The lengthy coda for cello (covering the instrument's entire range from low to high) is supported by lush sustained sonorities of remarkable finesse, depicting the previously pursued soloist finally entering (in the composer's words) 'Hollywood heaven'.

Although the orchestral song cycle *Merciless Beauty* was written 1996–97 for the counter-tenor James Bowman, the composer asked mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly to record the songs to discover what effect a different voice type would yield. Four of the seven songs (the even numbers plus the last) are to words by contemporary poet Kit Wright (b. 1944), juxtaposed by classic poems (the odd numbers), all on the subject of love. The short first song, to an anonymous 16th-century verse, opens with suave, immediately accessible music, although the odd-sounding soprano saxophone melody (which provides the brief introduction, interlude, and postlude) adds a troubled note. Although the words border on the bawdy, the setting seems rather aloof and humourless. The voice appears too embedded in the middle of the texture and as a consequence the words are sometimes indistinct, but whether this is due to the composition or the alternative voice is uncertain.

Happily this is not the case in the second song. A muted trumpet introduction moodily adumbrates both the main theme and oboe interludes.

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The theme appears fully-fledged in the vocal line of verse 1, where one is immediately struck by the clarity of voice and beautiful simplicity of line. A repeated note idea is followed by a rising 4th/falling 5th sequential descent, returning to the original start note. The final verse counters the essential downward-tending nature of the music by emphasizing upward motion in the vocal line, but although appearing optimistic, the overall impression is the forlorn hope of love in absence. The much shorter third song, 'The Sick Rose' to words by Blake, utilizes throughout a rapid continuous accompaniment of descending broken 3rds in conjunction with an intermittently-tolling bell, suggestive of the passage of time. Simple word-painting (such as a higher level of dissonance or melisma or repetition on key words) proves effective. The fourth song, 'Tune for an Ice cream van', is thankfully an image the composer doesn't attempt to paint! The words describe a breathless search for a lover through contemporary London. Whilst the music appears to reflect this, beginning with a groovy 'open'-sounding rising figure, the word setting/rhythms fail to press home this advantage, sounding a little too formal, when a more casual, relaxed approach would perhaps have been preferable?

In fact there seems to be a broader problem here. The poem is written entirely in couplets, with the music falling into eight vocal sections separated by interludes of various lengths. The opening and closing settings are each three couplets long (the last a kind of recap. to match the poetic content). Musically pleasing as this scheme may be, it unfortunately separates a poetic thought which, cross-grained between the end of one couplet and the beginning of the next, would surely have been better served by continuity? The fifth song, 'Merciless Beauty', sets words previously attributed to Chaucer. The orchestral introduction (which returns as a coda) begins dramatically, almost like a French overture, continuing with a menacing emphasis on repeated F# octaves. The main idea of the accompaniment is based on this same note, together with a foreboding downward semitonal shift, complementing the deliberately restricted range of the vocal part in verses 1 and 2, the ideas from which are then developed in a third verse of greater dynamic, emotional, and melodic range. The cool detachment of the sixth song matches the narrative of lovers in enforced separation, and makes extended use of bassoon and tuned percussion. The final song transforms the theme of the third into a gently undulating ostinato accompaniment, of subtly shifting metrical emphasis under a beautiful vocal line, ending the work as inconclusively as the love affair described.

The three substantial recent works featured on this disc (including première recordings of the concerti) now form a poignant introduction to those who only know the polished film and TV work of this distinguished concert composer.

Tim Mottershead

YORK HÖLLER: *Topic*[1]; *Horizont*[2]; *Mythos*[3]; *Schwarze Halbinseln*[4]. [1]WDR Cologne Symphony Orchestra c. Michael Gielen, [2]quadraphonic electronic music realized by Peter Eötvös & Volker Müller at WDR Studio for Electronic Music, [3]*MusikFabrik* c. Zolt Nagy, [4]WDR Cologne Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, c. Diego Masson. NEOS 10829.

HÖLLER: *Sphären*; *Der ewige Tag*. WDR Cologne Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, c. Semyon Bychkov. NEOS 11039.

News that York Höller had won the prestigious Grawemeyer Award for 2010 doubtless encouraged the enterprising NEOS label to release this pair of CDs. The first disc reissues recordings of some of Höller's earlier pieces, composed between 1967 and 1982. The second offers two large-scale works from the years 1998–2006: this 2001 performance of *Der ewige Tag* was previously available on the Avie label, but the 2008 world-première recording of *Sphären*, the Grawemeyer winner, is released for the first time.

Born in 1944, Höller (like Helmut Lachenmann, b.1935) belongs to those in-between German generations, younger than Henze or Stockhausen, older than Rihm or Pintscher, which faced the difficult challenge of how to respond to technical benchmarks set and sustained by pioneering seniors. For Höller this meant youthful engagement with, first, Bernd Alois Zimmermann and, later, Karlheinz Stockhausen. NEOS 10829 is framed by works dedicated to each in turn, and it is fascinating to chart Höller's progress from the bold, even brash orchestral canvas of *Topic* (1967) to the ambitious multimedia enterprise – orchestra, chorus, speaker, electronics – that is *Schwarze Halbinseln* (1982). Perhaps because Höller has spent so much time with students, teaching composition, any early tendency to anarchic extravagance was soon tempered by the kind of focus on continuity, consistency and (especially where vocal writing is concerned) regularity and stability, which together embody his 'modern-classic' aesthetic. While the harmony is never traditionally tonal – dissonance retains its post-Schoenbergian emancipation – forms and textures shun the fragmentations and stratifications of modernism 'proper', and they

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do so even in *Topic*, whose dramatic power is the greater for the kind of hyper-expressionistic dynamism which the young Höller had learned from Zimmermann.

Four years after *Topic*, while still in his 20s, Höller was working alongside Stockhausen at the WDR Studio in Cologne. *Horizont* – heard here in a realization credited to Peter Eötvös and Volker Müller – is his sole surviving piece for tape alone, and 40 years on, despite a few inevitably dated sound-effects, it remains a mightily impressive demonstration of what the medium could achieve. More than that, a tolling rhythmic pedal, prominent from mid-point onwards, has become something of a Höller trademark, signalling contained expressive intensity and aesthetic accessibility.

With this distancing from pure modernist radicalism comes the kind of acknowledgement of long-standing romantic, Germanic perspectives that can be heard in *Mythos* (1979–80, rev. 1995) for 13 instruments, percussion and tape. Höller has had less opportunity, or less inclination, to compose for the stage than Henze or Stockhausen – *The Master and Margarita* (Paris, 1989) remains his only opera: but a degree of post-Wagnerian mythologizing, linked to perceptions about national psychology, could be one of the factors which helps to make *Mythos* so strong a demonstration of the virtues of searching for synthesis rather than imposing it as a given from bar 1. The expressionistic edge to the material, and the way tape and live sound vie for prominence, are qualities which the later Höller has apparently not sought to retain, still less to intensify. But even if *Mythos* is something of a 'one-off', it is a hugely impressive one, especially in this 1997 recording of the revised version by *musikFabrik*.

Written just three years after *Mythos*, *Schwarze Halbinseln* might have been conceived as a complement to such iconic Stockhausen scores as *Momente* and *Hymnen* (the version with orchestra); the 'black peninsulas' of the title suggest just the kind of fundamental intersections – land and water, live/electronic sound, choir and orchestra, speech and song – by means of which mid-20th-century composers sought to maintain a presence within the institutional framework of public concerts alongside standard repertory. This recording of the work's première, under Diego Masson, is strongly shaped, with excellent balances and perspectives, and the darkness of the prevailing atmosphere is compelling. Yet the rhetoric seems increasingly reliant on traditional gestures – suddenly highlighted harp glissandos, siren-like incantations from the chorus, aspiring assertions from brass and strings – that make immediate effects but lack much deeper resonance. And the opportunities these discs provide to juxtapose Höller in 1982 with Höller in the new century do little to challenge this perception.

Der ewige Tag (1998–2000) has one explicit connection with *Schwarze Halbinseln*: one of the three poems which provide its texts is by Georg Heym, and its title, 'Der Tag', complements that of 'Der Nacht', which is recited towards the end of the earlier work. As an expressionist with Francophile (Baudelairean) tendencies, Heym (1887–1912) is a fascinating figure, and it is tempting to infer that his ambivalence about more progressive, pessimistic modernity is mirrored in Höller's own attitudes. The vocal writing in *Der ewige Tag* (which also sets poems by Ibn Sharaf and Pablo Neruda (the latter regrettably excluded from the booklet for copyright reasons) is rhythmically staid, and although the surrounding instrumental and very discreet electronic tapestry offers more decorative flourishes here and there, Höller's modern-classic connectives and 'groundings' remain fundamental throughout. The more animated, even fractured textures of the extended orchestral interlude before the Neruda setting suggest the kind of alternative reality that is swept away in the upbeat, even Utopian ending, representing dawn, sunrise, new births. Given this emphasis, therefore, it is very notable that in *Sphären*, begun immediately after *Der ewige Tag*'s completion, Höller returns to his more characteristic, and more convincing, preoccupation with the darker side of things.

The six movements of *Sphären*, which play for almost 40 minutes, also continue Höller's project of constructive engagement with, and ambivalence about, various aspects of tradition. The work, though suite-like, is emphatically not a *'Planets* for our times': indeed, its associations appear to be directed less towards the wider universe and focused more on environmental aspects of our own planet. Having said that, I believe that it is not too fanciful to suggest that Höller shares something of Holst's mixed feelings about contemporary progressiveness. The first movement, 'Wolkengesang' ('Song of the Clouds') begins with what is surely a conscious allusion to Debussy's 'Nuages', and there are further hints of Debussy as well as Stravinsky in the fifth movement's 'Fireworks' (*Feuerwerk*) – an adaptation of a separate, free-standing piece from 2005.

In general the contained expressiveness and relative textural and gestural plainness of this music are far removed from the youthful flamboyance of the Zimmermann-dedicated *Topic*, and with such expansive forms there is a certain risk of plainness and sobriety turning to monotony. Is this the price to be paid for instant accessibility? What remains

undeniable is the deeply personal nature of the music's tone, and a sense of the eternal night of death pervades the final 'Sphärentrauer'. This 'mourning of the spheres', with its references to Schubert's 'Death and the Maiden', continues the line of tributes to the composer's late partner, as in the last of the *Tagträume* pieces for piano trio (1994), which alludes to the final song of *Die Winterreise*. Later Höller might have less obvious 'edge' or 'attitude' than later Lachenmann, or recent Rihm: but in seeking to hymn the virtues of restraint and moderation without recourse to parodistic blandness, he continues to offer a distinctive and thought-provoking commentary on the situation of and prospects for the serious composer within contemporary society.

Arnold Whittall

CONNESSON: *Cosmic Trilogy*; *The Shining One*. Eric le Sage (pno), Royal Scottish National Orchestra, c. Stéphane Denève. Chandos CHSA 5076.

I had not heard of the French composer Guillaume Connesson before being sent this CD, but I expect to hear much more. It is perhaps worth saying at first what Connesson's music is *not*: it is not 'cutting edge' in any sense, neither avant-garde in its outlook nor dissonant in its harmonic language. There are few passages which might not have been written a hundred years ago, and it may not please those who like their music spicy and challenging. And yet to call it conservative would be to sell short the exhilarating energy and brilliant orchestration which make this music so vital and engaging.

The *Cosmic Trilogy* of symphonic poems which make up the bulk of the disc were inspired by Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*. They are presented in the reverse order of their composition, beginning with *Aleph,* in which the creation of the universe is characterized as a glorious added-sixth 'big bang'. *Aleph* owes a debt to John Adams, but surpasses him in subtlety of orchestration and rhythmic variety, deserving (and, judging by the composer's website, seems to be getting) wide exposure as a concert overture. A skittering, whirling symphonic dance, its wild climaxes and moments of whimsy recall *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. It may one day achieve similar classic status.

By contrast the second piece dreamily evokes the vast span of space in the millions of years after its creation. The harmonic world here is redolent of Dutilleux but there are also epic passages which could pass as a superior quality film-score – and that is not to damn with faint praise, but a genuine compliment. The long, melodic crescendos are mostly well controlled, although the music loses some focus in the central panel, and the piece as a whole feels a little bit overlong. The finale, *Supernova,* again uses a wild dance for its climax, this time representing the collapse of a star in on itself.

This CD shows Guillaume Connesson to be a composer of the utmost craftsmanship and fluency, utterly sure of the music he wants to write, untroubled by the pursuit of modernity. His music is readily appealing, perhaps sometimes slightly cheap in its effects, but brilliantly realized and, I imagine, thrilling in live performance. Although the composer and conductor are French, the heroes of the disc are Scottish: great credit should go to the Royal Scottish National Orchestra for its virtuosic playing, and for commissioning two of the four pieces on the recording.

Bernard Hughes

WIDMANN: *Freie Stücke*[1]; *Sieben Abgesänge auf eine tote Linde*[2]; Octet. [2]Olga Pasichnyk (sop), Collegium Novum Zürich c.[1]Jürg Widmann

In *Tempo* Vol. *63* No. 248, I reviewed Jürg Widmann's String Quartets on the Dabringhaus und Grimm label and found his gestural mode of utterance utterly compelling. The present disc offers a selection of ensemble works dating from 1997–2004.

The *Freie Stücke* of 2002 displays a Webernian sense of compression (most of the ten movements are around the 2–3 minute mark) with a feeling for timbre that is entirely Widmann's own. Recontextualisation of known sonorities is used to keen effect (a minor seventh chord played *sf* on high harmonic strings enables the listener to hear this simultaneity in a new way, far removed from any traditional context). The dissonant stasis of the sixth movement is particularly haunting. The performance seems impeccable. Widmann challenges his players, frequently using registral extremes and asking at times for wind multiphonics. The eighth movement is the most overtly dramatic and rhythmic. Given that the composer conducts, this recording should be regarded as of special authority.

The *Sieben Abgesänge auf eine tote Linde* (Seven Refrains on a Dead Linden Tree, 1997) sets poems by Diana Kempff and is scored for soprano, violin, clarinet and piano. The piece is an in memoriam

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for a linden tree that was destroyed by lightning during a concert. The event spurred Kempff (1945–2005) to write a series of poems. Widmann's piece is therefore a requiem. A relatively early work, texture and sound are even at this point primary compositional considerations. The purity of the Ukrainian soprano Olga Pasichnyk's voice is remarkable, and is heard to most telling effect in the sparse fifth movement, 'Und wenn der Tod so kommen mag …'. The individual instrumentalists are virtuosos, clearly acclimatized to Widmann's complex language. Tonal references, when they occur, sound an entirely natural part of the musical vocabulary, just as naturally as do the Schoenbergian overtones of the penultimate, 'Die Wurzel auf dem Kopf, die Krone erdgekrallt …'.

The Octet is scored – like the Schubert Octet – for clarinet, horn, bassoon, two violins, viola, cello and double bass. Widmann is clearly aware of his inherited heritage in writing a chamber octet, and many of the harmonic gestures point back to earlier languages before Widmann's own voice takes them on a journey. The 'Menuetto' links to his Third Quartet ('Hunting') in its use of fanfare figures. The 'Lied ohne Worte' is the most substantive statement (at 8"48). An elusive and shadowy affair, it surely negates any criticisms of Widmann being a mere musical magpie. The finale shows a preoccupation with the use of silence as part of discourse.

Widmann's music continues to fascinate. He is clearly a force to be reckoned with.

Colin Clarke

ROCHBERG: Piano Music: Vol. 1 Hirsch-Pinkas piano duo; Vol 2 Evan Hirsch (pno), Vols 3 and 4 Sally Pinkas (pno). Naxos American Classics, available separately: Vol 1 8.559631, Vol 2 8.559632, Vol 3 8.559633, Vol 4: 8.559634.

George Rochberg (1918–2005) left a substantial body of piano music and these four volumes are our first extended survey of it. Whilst Stravinsky, Bartók, Messiaen and Ravel stride palpably in the shadows, the diamantine brilliance of Rochberg's musical language as well as the mercurial fluidity of his technique place him in a class of his own. Once I started listening to *Circles of Fire* for piano duet (1996), I couldn't turn away from it for the whole of its 70 minutes, so commanding was it of my attention. The work is an extended series of musical studies on the deepest and most compelling psychological impulses of the human mind, the same impulses which Rochberg identifies as being the very drivers of creation of matter and the universe. As such this is a profoundly mystical cycle, on a par with *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* 50 years earlier.

The 15 pieces explore contrasts, and how the polarity of ideas arcs back towards itself: tonality and atonality, symmetry and asymmetry (as in galaxies and spirals of stars), light and dark (movements 2 and 14 entitled 'Chiarascuro' I and II) – and, by analogy and extension, matter and space, time and eternity, good and evil and also, ultimately, life and death. It is this duality in which beauty resides. Rochberg quotes W.B. Yeats who said that it is the fire in the mind which 'divides us from mortality by the immortality of beauty'. So this vast work explores at its profoundest level a synthesis of all opposites: both those we see and those which remain unknown to us. At all events the music is extraordinarily vivid and its movements are laid out in a symmetrical pattern of five Solemn Refrains, which establish anchors of simple order amidst the whirling clashes of adjacent movements. The heart of the work comprises the Messiaenic 'Nebulae' (movement 7) and 'Sognando', a floating, reflective, Brahmsian episode. 'Caprichos' (movement 12, after the gruesome set of drawings by Goya) confronts the primitivism and atavism of human nature but the musical contrast here, rather than between dark and enlightened humanity, is between the active and the passive: brutality versus anxiety. Rochberg's own music represented a process of synthesis: in the 1960s he abandoned serialism and re-kindled the spirits of Brahms, Mozart and Mahler, especially in his notable (and, so far, only once played) Symphony No. 4 (1975). Gradually singularity yielded to duality in the later pieces, such as Symphony No. 5 and of course *Circles of Fire*.

Much of the solo keyboard music was written early. The epigrammatic *Twelve Bagatelles* (1952) are Schoenbergian miniatures, whereas the *Three Elegiac Pieces* (1945 rev. 1998) carry weightier emotional baggage. The central movement is an elegy for a young person, prefaced by a short poem by the composer's son Paul, whose very premature death in the 1960s was at least partly responsible for Rochberg's wholesale re-evaluation of his creative direction, mentioned earlier. The third piece (actually written in 1998 when the composer was 80) lays bare the lean and desiccated outlook of old age. Also revised at this period was another major work from the 1940s, *Sonata Seria*, a piece of unrelenting austerity and formal rigour. 'Little scope for arbitration' here, as the very articulate notes say, but further evidence of the astonishing expressive range of this composer who delighted

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in contrasts and in their inherent circularity. The breadth of his reach is further evidenced in the *Partita Variations* (1976), which opens volume 3 of this Naxos survey. Felicitous exultation contrasts with brooding lamentation in an extraordinary flux of moods underpinned by an organic inevitability of growth. The *Sonata-Fantasia* (1956) is one of Rochberg's strictest 12-tone works, a precipitous wall of pianistic granite for the stoutest of brave hearts, performer or listener.

Volume 4 is the most varied of the set: *Carnival Music* (1971) is another exercise in contrasts and the synthesis of opposites. Extrovert ragtime and jazz yield to introspection and reflection but the swing and return of the pendulum underlines the unifying force of music. The strength of character of the *Four Short Sonatas* (1984) takes no prisoners. The final work on this set, a very early set of *Variations on an Original Theme* (1941) marks a sort of homecoming because of its roots in the great piano traditions of the 19th century.

This remarkable collection is a testament to a significant musical figure whose evaluation is still far from complete. We have had some excellent Naxos releases (Symphonies 1, 2 and 5 and the Violin Concerto) and Symphonies 3, 4 and 6 will hopefully follow. These four piano CDs are superbly executed by two dedicated advocates. More excellent budget-price value.

Bret Johnson

FERNEYHOUGH: *Terrain*[1]; *no time (at all)*[2,3]; *La Chute d'Icare*[4]; *Incipits*[5]; *Les Froissements d'Ailes de Gabriel*[2]. [1]Graeme Jennings (vln), [2]Geoffrey Morris (gtr), [3]Ken Murray (guitar), [4]Carl Rosman (cl), [5]Erkki Veltheim (vla); Elision Ensemble, c. Franck Ollu, Jean Deroyer. Kairos 0013072KAI.

With turbulence and volatility of the essence, it seems only right that images of flight and rapid motion should feature prominently in Brian Ferneyhough's music. Naïve programmaticism is nevertheless anathema to this most impetuously cerebral of composers. So, in the case of *La Chute d'Icare* (1988) it is as much the sense of crisis, the curious mixture of elation and despair affecting the precipitately falling Icarus, that can be read into the music's hectic engagement with vibrating air, which takes the form of a 9-minute clarinet concerto. As for the 'rustlings' (*Froissements*) of the Angel Gabriel's wings in the 18-minute guitar concerto that forms Scene 2 of the opera *Shadowtime* (1999–2004): these imply a kind of tensely constrained motion at the opposite extreme from headlong falling through space, and the emphasis is even more strongly on metaphorical projections of Walter Benjamin's anger, despair and possibly even self-pity as he failed to escape from Europe and committed himself to suicide in a world dominated by the showy, violent culture of the Nazis. If the keening, preternaturally agile clarinet solo embodies all things Icaran, the refined, non-assertive, self-communing guitar might be held to stand for those virtues which, like the helpless hero Benjamin, were destined to be destroyed by the realities of war and persecution in 1940.

Such readings might appear ineptly fanciful, not least to the composer, but they gain some credulity from performances of remarkably sustained vividness and panache, and from recordings which squeeze every last ounce of colour and dynamic shading from the intricately crafted scores. In every respect, Elision and Kairos are a formidably accomplished and persuasive combination in this music, and part of that persuasiveness lies in recognizing the basic contrasts which affect the essential character of these compositions. There might be a less obvious human presence in *Terrain* (1992) than in either of the works mentioned so far. Here the contest between a solo violin and an *Octandre* octet can be thought of as a confrontation between nature (place) and artifice (fantasy): and Ferneyhough's own mastery of design is particularly clear, as initial complexity and density are not allowed to stagnate. Turmoil is offset by relative stability, and the placement of silences indicates the composer's recognition of the need to give the listener (as well as the performers) room to breathe.

Rhetoric's capacity to represent the human rather than the mechanical seems to determine *Terrain*'s progress to a triumphantly cadential climax which then begins to fade as the soloist hints at a gentler dying fall, the music stopping before it can turn itself inside out. In *Incipits* (1996) for viola and ensemble, likewise, the strategic placement of breaks in the flow of sound and the thinning-down of denser textures fits with a form which, while notionally episodic, works as a cumulative traversal of a continuum between the extremes of fractured and more connected materials. However, the recording of *Incipits* is almost too closely focused for the dramatic patterns of the interplay between the viola and the important percussion part to make their full effect.

A particular feature of *Les Froissements d'Ailes de Gabriel* is the shadowing of the solo guitar by another guitar in the chamber orchestra, tuned a quarter-tone down. In the year of *Shadowtime*'s completion and première (2004) Ferneyhough returned to this pairing, and to the material of

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Scene 2, calling the result *no time (at all)*. Naturally enough, the ears are able to grasp much more of the quasi-distortive interaction between the two guitars than they can in the 'concerto' itself, and the result is a heightened sense of sharing and shadowing identities. There's also a relaxed exuberance to the duetting which suggests relief at the absence of the intimidating ensemble with its flamboyant, even militaristic material. Doubled up, and recorded with maximum definition, the guitar sound seems far less vulnerable to decay than it does in the opera itself.

Arnold Whittall

ARTHUR BUTTERWORTH: Symphony No.5, op. 115; *Three Nocturnes: 'Northern Summer Nights'*, op. 18; *The Quiet Tarn*, op. 21; *The Green Wind*, op. 22; *Coruscations*, op. 127; *Gigues*, op. 42. Royal Scottish National Orchestra, c. Arthur Butterworth. Dutton CDLX 7253.

'Ancient Sorceries'. RICHARD STEINITZ: *Hymn to Apollo at Delphi*. ARTHUR BUTTERWORTH: *Ancient Sorceries*. STEPHEN HOUGH: *Three Grave Songs*. NICHOLAS MARSHALL: *Cat and Mouse*. JOHN MCCABE: *Two Latin Elegies*. JOHN GARDNER: *Six by Four*. JOHN JOUBERT: *Crabbed Age and Youth*. Nicholas Clapton (countertenor), John Turner (recorder), Jonathan Price (vlc), Ian Thompson (hpschd). Guild GMCD 7348.

A recently-released Dutton CD presents the première recording of Arthur Butterworth's Fifth Symphony (2002) together with a selection of his short orchestral works. Inspired by the scenery of Rannoch Moor, the symphony is an essentially contemplative work, reflecting on the past and in particular the composer's previous four contributions to the medium. It has a particular emotional affinity with the more modestly scored Third Symphony ('*Sinfonia Borealis*') of 1979 and, in contrast with the more extrovert First (1957) and Fourth (1986), takes more account of line and shape rather than colour: except for harp and some modest percussion, the score has slender instrumental requirements.

The opening *Allegro moderato* is one of Butterworth's most rigorous sonata-form structures. Closely argued and ideally proportioned, the movement coolly works out the dramatic possibility of its two principal, clearly delineated main ideas: an urbane first subject presented at the outset (the woodwinds feature prominently here as they do throughout the whole work) contrasted with secondary material represented by a winding, angst-ridden figure first heard on violas.

The haunting central *Adagio*, as so often in Butterworth's orchestral music, is the dark heart of the piece. Muted strings pile up a dense chord over a *pianissimo* bass drum roll, which shifts massively like enveloping mists or heavy sleep disturbed by the start of a nightmare. Flecks of harp and the distant tolling of tubular bells add to the distant, dream-like quality of the music. A meditative, eloquent passage entitled *quasi recitativo*, beginning in the lower strings and answered by woodwind, leads into an archaic-sounding section like a funeral dirge, full of 'Scotch-snap' rhythms signposting the influence of Rannoch Moor. Here perhaps the composer is depicting the 'ancient burial mound under the shadow of a ruined kirkyard' mentioned in the score's preface. The movement ceases with a resonant *pianissimo* tam-tam stroke (perhaps a tribute to Anthony Payne's elaboration of Elgar's sketches for his Third Symphony, a work Butterworth admires and which ends with such an effect).

An energetically driven concluding *Allegro molto* readmits daylight into the score. Here is the 'March wind' which 'moans through a copse of gaunt and withered firs', as the score's preface puts it. There are clear echoes of the relentless *moto perpetuo* Finale of the composer's First Symphony, though the impact here is less devastating and more benign. After building to a dramatic, *fortissimo* tam-tam-crowned climax, the material disperses into mere wisps of sound: desolate drum rolls, remote pedal notes on lower strings, muted horn calls and solitary specks of harp – a parting reminder of how economical and ingenious this symphony's instrumentation has been, constructing impressive edifices of sound from seemingly commonplace raw materials.

Butterworth's Fifth Symphony is notable for its concentration on the linear aspects of composition, as opposed to harmonic weight. The light, airy atmosphere of the outer movements is a result of a well-chosen palette, yet despite the sophisticated poise of the gently flowing first movement and the Finale's unflagging energy, it is the dark-hued and trance-like central *Adagio* with its solemn, austere dignity that resonates longest in the memory. Under the composer's incisive, clear-eyed direction, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra's committed performance makes a very persuasive case for regarding this work as one of most impressive of recent British symphonies.

The shorter orchestral pieces span nearly 50 years but demonstrate a remarkable consistency of approach and breadth of imagination. Memories of a holiday visit to Cape Wrath, coupled with recollections of earlier visits to the Cairngorms gave the composer the idea for *Three*

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Nocturnes – Northern Summer Nights, op. 18 (1958). The central piece, 'Rain', was transcribed literally from an earlier piano score and the closing movement entitled 'The eerie, silent forest in the stealthy darkness' recalls Rothiemurchus Forest in Invernessshire. This highly atmospheric suite quickly became one of the composer's most successful works, achieving many performances, some of which the composer conducted himself: with the help of his responsive RNSO players, he brings out the score's considerable poetry in this new Dutton recording.

In the early 1960s, Butterworth was acting as 'composer-in-residence' of the then BBC Northern Orchestra at a period when that title hadn't been invented; two of the pieces he wrote for the orchestra at this time feature on the programme. *The Quiet Tarn* (op. 21) is a recollection of Malham Tarn in the Yorkshire Dales on a June evening in the hot summer of 1959. The main motif, shared between different instruments, represents species of wildlife calling to each other. Butterworth's next piece, *The Green Wind* (op. 22), which complements *The Quiet Tarn* most effectively, was inspired by some lines of poetry by Shelley: 'It was a bright and cheerful afternoon/Towards the end of the sunny month of June'. With effective use of flutter-tongued flutes and string, harp and timpani *glissandi*, Butterworth's ecstatic music mirrors the heady, intoxicating atmosphere suggested by Shelley's poem.

The remaining items are lighter and more relaxed in mood. *Coruscations* was written for the Lancaster-based Haffner Orchestra to celebrate its 25th anniversary season in 2007. Premiered at a midsummer concert, it draws upon the composer's varied experiences of this time of year from celebration and revelry to stillness and tranquillity. Gently layered with nostalgia and wistfulness, this very recent work confirms the composer has lost none of his skill in orchestration and formal expertise. Bringing the programme to a rousing conclusion, *Gigues* is a lively scherzo dating from 1969. Light years away from his predominantly dark, moorland-inspired symphonies, it finds the composer in refreshingly jocund and ebullient mood; liberal use of the tambourine adds to the festive atmosphere.

This thoughtfully-planned Dutton CD is warmly recommended. The performances get to the heart of each work and the participation of the composer, an experienced and authoritative conductor, brings an unmistakable stamp of authenticity. The natural recorded sound is ideal, opening out impressively in climaxes. It is to be hoped that more releases will follow from this source: the Second, Third and Sixth Symphonies are all well worth exploring and the concertos for organ, cello and guitar are also unconscionable gaps in the Arthur Butterworth discography.

A new Guild disc, which presents a selection of music featuring countertenor and recorder by living British composers, includes another essential Butterworth piece. Indeed, the disc takes its title from his *Ancient Sorceries*, exquisite settings of three Walter de la Mare poems for countertenor, recorder and harpsichord, op.49. In the first song, 'Voices', the singer is beguiled by strange, seductive sounds from the depth of woods. The recorder is the airy spirit, tempting mortals to the Underworld, whilst the harpsichord provides a rich backcloth to this dialogue and, as in the following two songs, is written not in a conventional Baroque style, but provides a nervously pulsating harmonic web of sound, underlining and covering the drama. Did I hear a brief echo of the eerie, restless muted violin figure from the Epilogue of Vaughan Williams's Sixth Symphony about a third of the way into this setting?

The recorder suggests the sounds of a fairy horn played in the far distance of a moonlit summer night's sky in the second song, entitled 'The Horn'. The human watcher is intrigued, and perhaps saddened at being so earthbound, unable to join in the revelry. Finally, 'Sorcery' returns to the stillness of a pool by a woodland glade and the mood of the first song, but a warning comes from the woodman not to wander into the thickest shades of the forest, nor to heed the beckoning evil voice of Pan. In these haunting settings, Butterworth is guided by the texts: witness the recorder's subtle chirruping and swooping at the mention of the 'curlew', or the hypnotic harpsichord *ostinati* vividly portraying Pan's malign influence. The unusual scoring ideally conjures up a supernatural, timeless, twilight world. This song cycle has remained one of his most successful pieces and, on the evidence of this recording, it is not difficult to understand why.

Also on the programme, Richard Steinitz's lyrical *Hymn to Apollo at Delphi* is based on ancient Greek melodies and written as a wedding present for the composer's bride to be. Scored for countertenor, various sizes of recorder and harpsichord, this is an appealing, direct and far-reaching piece consisting of variants of the Delphic hymn and the Song of Seikilos. Steinitz controls the pace superbly with striking use of dramatic pauses and exploits fully the recorders' contrasting registers to create shifting perspectives on an otherworldly aura, superbly captured in this recording.

John McCabe's *Two Latin Elegies* for countertenor, recorder, cello, harpsichord and bells (1991) is based on Latin texts: Catullus's elegy at his broth-

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er's grave and the well-known, anonymous Hymn for Compline, *Te lucis ante terminum*. The melodic material is derived from two phrases in the Fifth Pavan from William Byrd's collection *My Lady Nevell's Book*. This introspective and predominantly restrained piece is punctuated by the tolling of a set of medieval bells; linking the two songs is a short interlude for the three instrumentalists. The concluding bars of this hypnotic, chant-like work feature what sounds like a ghostly echo of the 'Dies Irae' theme.

Light relief is provided by John Gardner's *Six by Four*, a song-cycle for countertenor, recorder and harpsichord, which treats well-known lyrics from Shakespeare's plays. These are as melodious and directly appealing as Gardner's many other settings of the Bard and the jazzy inflections of the central episode of 'When Daisies Pied and Violets Blue' and the cod-Elizabethan swing of 'When that I was a little tiny Boy' are especially liberating in the context of the disc's generally sombre and reflective repertoire. More humour is to be found in the central Hardy setting of pianist Stephen Hough's miniature triptych *Three Grave Songs* for countertenor, recorder and cello, written especially for this release. Also included in the collection, Nicholas Marshall's *Cat and Mouse*, scored for countertenor, recorder and harpsichord, takes six poems by Ted Hughes on aspects of nature as its text. Among the effects employed by Marshall, the flutter-tongued writing for recorder in the final setting, 'Fern' is perhaps the most striking.

Satisfyingly rounding off the programme, John Joubert's *Crabbed Age and Youth* (1974) is a series of five expert settings of well known poems by Shakespeare and his near-contemporaries, which poignantly contrast the wisdom and infirmity of old age with the joys and blithe energy of youth. The piece is scored for countertenor, recorder, cello and harpsichord, but Joubert sagely varies the accompanying forces throughout. Placed at the very heart of the cycle is the most intimate treatment, for countertenor and harpsichord, of the Shakespeare sonnet that lends the piece its title. The composer has a predominantly lyrical output and is justifiably renowned for the skill and poetry of his word-setting, and this finely-wrought work is a particularly affecting example.

John Turner, Ian Thompson and Jonathan Price complement Nicholas Clapton's sensitive approach to all these diverse texts and their combined musicianship gives much pleasure. Though the various items on this disc encompass a surprisingly wide variety of approach and mood, it is unlikely that listeners will want to hear them all consecutively in one sitting. This is a valuable collection of unusual repertoire and one I shall be dipping into again.

Paul Conway

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