
CD REVIEWS

MURAIL: Complete Piano Works. Marilyn Nonken (pno). Metier MSV CD92097 (2-CD set).

For a composer so often inspired by painting, and so concerned with wide-ranging gradations of colour, Tristan Murail (b.1947) might be expected to approach writing for solo piano with little enthusiasm. After all, you only have to listen to a relatively recent work like *Winter Fragments* for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano with MIDI keyboard and computer (2000) to encounter an unusually subtle yet strongly-articulated soundscape, and a memorably evocative one, even if it's not literally inspired by Bruegel, as one annotator has suggested. If you think of Murail primarily in terms of such spectral blockbusters as the orchestral *Gondwana* (1980) and *Time and Again* (1986) you might therefore hesitate before investing in his complete piano music. But sampling this recording from Metier by Marilyn Nonken should soon make you change your mind.

The six works included span some 36 years, starting in 1967 with a piece which Murail wrote as his 'audition' for Messiaen's composition class at the Paris Conservatoire. *Comme un oeil suspendu et poli par le songe* has an exotic, surreal title, deriving from a poem by Murail's father Gérard (also a painter), and gives early evidence of a preference for pictorial allusiveness at odds with what, by 1967, was left of post-war avant-garde abstraction, and affirming associations with a pianistic, poetic tradition stretching back from Messiaen through Ravel, Debussy and Scriabin to Liszt. At a little over five minutes, the piece can be categorized rather bluntly as an exuberant, confident mélange of the expressionist and the impressionist, and it shows, if only in sketch form, that basic confrontation between the primitive and the complex which Murail's mainstream modernism has sustained over the years.

Even in 1967 Murail was doubtless as aware of Boulezian pyrotechnics (the second sonata, *Structures*) as of the more reticent qualities of earlier French piano music, and five years later, in the two movements of *Estuaire* (1972), the strenuous has the upper hand, with often stormy textures in which a clear sense of what would become the essence of spectralism – the form-generating distinction between fundamentals and decorative elaborations – can already be heard. In

his notes, Murail describes *Estuaire* as 'an attempt at appropriating the serial aesthetic for my own benefit, ... trying to make it say something it couldn't say. ... The enterprise was paradoxical, and the result ambiguous, a transitional work'. It was in the composition which followed four years later that, Murail claims, 'I managed to completely liberate myself from the stylistic fashions of the day': and *Territoires de l'Oubli* (1977) seems especially audacious when heard immediately after *Estuaire*, since it seizes on a possible weakness in the earlier work – a reliance on the static at the expense of the steadily evolving – and transcends that 'weakness', not by avoiding but by exaggerating it.

Lasting more than 28 minutes, *Territoires de l'Oubli* begins with repeated tremolandos and arpeggiations that give the clearest possible indication of Murail's intention to build new structures on the foundations of the grandly expansive rhetoric of the Liszt-to-Messiaen tradition. Yet the title, which Marilyn Nonken translates as 'Landscapes of the Unknown' but is more literally understood as landscapes or regions of forgetfulness – oblivion – suggests a palpable, even desperate anxiety lest the power of memory be eroded. Laboured pun though it may be, the connexion between spectral music and ghostly, often menacing evocations of tradition is too explicit here to be denied: and the principal ghost is not any earlier composer's style, but the whole 'classical' notion of music needing continuity rather than fragmentation, proceeding on the basis of memory (similarity) rather than of forgetting (contrast). In *Territoires de l'Oubli*, Murail's music pronounces a fierce anathema on disintegration, a denunciation almost hysterical in its vehemence (according to Nonken, 'it is not unusual for strings to break during performance') and implacable in its protracted relishing of the multiple resonances obtainable when dense sonorities are sustained (the pedal depressed throughout) and prolonged by elaborations that miss the mechanical and the monotonous by a hair's-breadth. Nevertheless, the perils of an excessively static effect are triumphantly avoided. By 1977, of course, Murail was already aware of the then-current possibilities of electronics, and it is the probing aural sensibility of the composer of an Itinéraire work like *Mémoire/Erosion* (1976) which fuels the sonic phantasmagoria of *Territoires de l'Oubli*.

Between 1977 and 2003, Murail wrote little for the piano, returning to it only in 1992, when the death of Messiaen prompted *Cloches d'adieu, et un sourire*. As Murail says, 'the bells heard in the piece belong to the universe of spectral music and to that of Messiaen', and anyone expecting a quiet, wistful, reticent homage may be surprised by the echos of Murail's earlier rhetorical aggressiveness which survive. Nevertheless, the piece ends on a convergence with the early Messiaen of the prelude *Cloches d'angoisse et larmes d'adieu*, and this constructive piety towards a specific musical past takes a further turn in *La Mandragore* (1993), whose portrayal of the magical mandrake plant said to grow in the shadow of the gallows positively requires the kind of allusion to Ravel's *Le gibet* which Murail manages to sustain without for a moment compromising his own much more intense, less understated idiom.

Ten years on from *La Mandragore* comes Murail's second major piano work, the nine-movement *Les Travaux et les Jours* (2003). At well-nigh 40 minutes, this outdoes even *Territoires de l'Oubli* in length. Nevertheless, as Nonken points out, it shares basic material with the earlier work, and the terrifying nightmare of *Territoires* has not been entirely exorcised. The first movement's eloquently serene reflections on ascending arpeggio-like formations may seem a world away from the earlier turbulence, and to demonstrate the kind of Apollonian pattern-making that might be one consequence of Murail's development of the Patchwork compositional software. Even so, a contrasting descent to a menacingly reverberating cluster sets the tone for the kind of contrasts that recur as later movements unfold, and there is a clear echo of earlier priorities in Murail's comment that the music is supported on the resonance of a low F which is only unveiled right at the end. Murail's creative energy still burns strongly, and the twin universes of spectral music and Messiaen, to which he referred in his note on *Cloches d'adieu*, are invoked with further refinement and resourcefulness here: for example, the calm chorale with which the fourth piece begins sounds very like a sequence (and consequence) of Messiaen's chords of resonance.

Marilyn Nonken plays throughout with peerless authority and resplendent technique, her exceptional range of touch and dynamics marvellously caught in this fine recording. Even though we might regret that there is not another half hour or so of piano music by Murail to fill out the second disc the outstanding quality of what there is offers first-rate value for money.

Arnold Whittall

BENNETT: *The Mines of Sulphur*. Kristopher Irmiter, Beth Clayton, Brandon Jovanovich, James Maddalena, Caroline Worra; Glimmerglass Opera Orchestra; c. Stewart Robinson. Chandos CHSA 5036(2)

Richard Rodney Bennett's first full-length opera has waited 40 years for a commercial recording, but this superbly executed production has been well worth the wait. The quality of orchestra, singers and sound reproduction, despite the difficulties of live recording, make this disc a valuable addition to Bennett's discography, and to the still small number of recordings of recent British operas. This highly dramatic opera demands as much from the performers as actors as it does from them as singers, yet the Glimmerglass Opera artists are particularly successful in providing convincing characterisations. Caroline Worra's impassioned portrayal of the initially sympathetic but increasingly disturbing Jenny is especially memorable.

The Mines of Sulphur (1963, première 1965) belongs to Bennett's concentrated period of operatic production in the 1960s, which followed two significant developments in his career. First, Bennett had gained considerable experience and success as a film composer. Second, he had abandoned the strict serialism learned from Boulez in favour of a freer 12-note idiom owing something to Henze and Britten. The influence of the former experience is strongly felt in the opera. Inevitably, with a recording of a seldom-performed opera, the listener feels deprived of the stage-action. This feeling is acute when hearing *The Mines of Sulphur* due to the extent to which the music, after the manner of film, evokes every nuance of a scene. The 'moment of magic' in which Rosalind appears in an ornate dress is perfectly captured in Bennett's exotic instrumental effects and the momentary shift away from serialism in the lyrical violin melody. The composer's experience of film is also evident in his ability to evoke the consistently oppressive, fearful atmosphere demanded by Beverley Cross's libretto about the trio who murder the owner of an isolated mansion and who go to ever greater lengths to avoid their ultimately inescapable punishment.

This unrelieved feeling of agitation lays open the danger of failing to maintain the suspense of the opera over two hours. Thus the composer's ability to modify and abandon it in places is crucial. One important device to this end is the use of folk song. The opera was dedicated to Benjamin Britten and there are parallels here with *The Turn of the Screw*. Not only do Bennett's songs

momentarily relieve the atmosphere of the opera, but as in Britten's work they contribute to the portrayal of the central idea, the gradual corruption of innocence and blurring of good and evil. The tonal purity and simplicity of the initial stanza of the song in Jenny and Rosalind's duet is gradually destroyed as the ominous serial instrumental lines become more prominent. When she reprises the song as 'Haidee' in the play-within-the-opera a similar process occurs. It is also this melody that leads Haidee to the act of infidelity with Hugo prior to the murder of the Count; and which marks the revelation of Jenny's true character, and the fact that the protagonists are doomed, in the opera's musically climactic final moments.

Despite the effectiveness of this device in illuminating the meaning of the drama, the music overall does not quite achieve the relentless increase in tension, the sense of moving towards an inescapable conclusion, that the drama seems to demand. Yet Bennett's genius in the evocation of short scenes, characters' feelings, and the overall atmosphere of suspense is abundantly clear in this valuable – and, with Bennett's seventieth birthday approaching, timely – recording.

Joanna Dunn

GIYA KANCHELI: *Time...and again*; *V & V*; Piano Quartet. Gidon Kremer (vln), Oleg Maisenberg (pno), Kremerata Baltica, The Bridge Ensemble. ECM New Series 461 8182.

ALEXANDER KNAIFEL: *Psalm 51 (50)*; *Amicta Sole*. Mstislav Rostropovich (vlc), Tatiana Melentieva (sop), Glinka Choral College, State Hermitage Orchestra c. Arkady Shteinlukht. ECM New Series 472 0832.

ECM's latest album of music by Giya Kancheli marks the composer's 70th birthday in exceptionally fine style. It features a trio of works from the 1990s: the duet *Time...and again* performed by its dedicatees and erstwhile musical colleagues, violinist Gidon Kremer and pianist Oleg Maisenberg; *V & V* for violin, taped voice and string orchestra, with Kremer leading his Kremerata Baltica; and the Piano Quartet, subtitled *In l'istesso tempo*, performed by the Bridge Ensemble for whom it was composed.

Commissioned by the Barbican Centre, London, and premièred there on 7 April 1997, *Time ...and again* proceeds through the juxtaposition of a recurring incantatory motif in the piano, slivers of melody and circling

arpeggiated chords in the violin, often stated in the ghostly harmonics so favoured by the composer. Kremer and Maisenberg give a cogent, super-refined performance of this introspective fresco, in perfect unison at the final shattering climax.

V & V is book-ended by a disembodied voice on tape singing a wordless melodic line, joined at the end of each phrase by Kremer's single sustained note. After the third such phrase, the string orchestra bleeds into the texture almost imperceptibly. The ensuing dialogue between solo violin and string orchestra consists of nothing more than slowly changing, endlessly sustained string chords over which Kremer spins a fragile web of violin filigree. The Bridge Ensemble, for its part, inhabits the tenebrous world of the Piano Quartet with complete empathy, wisps of counterpoint coalescing into melodies of disarming loveliness. If, as the quartet intimates, not even the redemptive power of music can heal our broken humanity, we can at least be thankful for the fractured beauty of Kancheli's art.

The recording is of the crystalline quality one has come to expect from ECM. All three works were recorded in a church acoustic, entirely right for the pregnant caesuras which characterize the episodic nature of Kancheli's music of consolation. Having now reached a total of eight releases devoted entirely to his work, the cumulative power of Kancheli's ECM discography marks it out as one of the most significant recording projects in contemporary music.

On paper, a 20-minute 'setting' of *Psalm 51 (50)* for solo cello may sound decidedly unpromising as the basis for a piece. But when one learns that the composer is Alexander Knaifel and the solo cellist is Mstislav Rostropovich, the result – written in 1995 – suddenly takes on a quite different aspect. The performance note with which the composer prefaces the score provides the key to its aesthetic effect: the text is intoned as if it sounds. Unfolding with a plainchant-like simplicity and intensity, Rostropovich 'sings' the Russian translation of the text, articulating it syllable by syllable through the cello. Like most ancient poetry, the psalms were originally performed to musical accompaniment – the word psalm derives from the Greek *psallein*, meaning 'to play a stringed instrument' – so Knaifel neatly conflates the two roles through the person of Rostropovich. The setting offers a further example, if one were needed, of the remarkable power of unadorned monophony. In the comprehensive, fastidiously-produced CD booklet, which includes manuscript facsimiles, texts and photos, the composer remarks that *Psalm*

51 (50) is regarded by some as being 'the most comprehensive expression of the feelings of the entire *Book of Psalms*'. Hieratic and possessing an intrinsic inner strength, the work sees Knaifel at his most trenchantly individual.

Also dating from 1995, the psalm's companion piece *Amicta Sole* (Clothed with the Sun) is another religiously inspired work. Its tripartite text opens with the Russian Orthodox prayer to the Holy Trinity, followed by two genealogies of Christ from St Matthew and St Luke. Featuring the impossibly beautiful voice of Tatiana Melentieva, who at various times is enveloped by the Boy Choir of Glinka Choral College to produce a whispering gallery of vocal timbres – a textural feast after the famine of the psalm – the work's gentle, unhurried progress appears to exist outside time. Providing a clear stylistic link to the earlier work, the State Hermitage Orchestra conducted by Arhady Shteinlukht (a long-standing interpreter of Knaifel's music) is similarly instructed to intone the Russian texts as if they are being sounded aloud. This second ECM New Series recording confirms Knaifel's singular ability to fascinate and surprise.

Peter Quinn

ROCHBERG: Symphony No. 2; *Imago Mundi*. Naxos 8.559182.

ROCHBERG: Symphony No. 5; *Black Sounds; Transcendental Variations*. Naxos 8.559115.

ROCHBERG: Violin Concerto (revised and extended version). Peter Sheppard Skaerved (vln). Naxos 8.559129. All three discs Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra c. Christopher Lyndon-Gee.

The death of George Rochberg on 30 May 2005 at the age of 86 sadly deprived him of the opportunity to witness the completion of this very impressive Naxos series of CDs of his orchestral music (there is a further release to come of his vast Symphony No. 1 from the late 1940s, while the Third, Fourth and Sixth Symphonies still remain unrecorded). By any measure Rochberg was one of America's most powerful and persuasive symphonists of the period after 1945, and indeed he almost single-handedly re-invented the medium in 1976 with his gloriously post-romantic Symphony No. 4, which foreshadowed the great swing away from experimentalism which followed in the USA.

Rochberg's early music, including the Symphony No. 2 (1956), was avowedly serial but his own description of it as 'hard romanticism' is

closer to the mark. I was astonished by the claim made in the sleeve notes that it is 'the first twelve-tone work composed by an American', but as I could only think of foreign-born competition (Webern, Schoenberg, Dallapiccola etc) I felt obliged to accept this claim.¹ The work itself was first performed by the Cleveland Orchestra in 1959 under George Szell – an outstanding judge of musical quality, who championed important young American composers like Benjamin Lees and Peter Mennin – and soon after recorded by the New York Philharmonic under Werner Torkanowsky in the very dry Columbia sound of that time. This new digital recording paints in details hitherto unespied. The work emerges as a series of intricately wrought tableaux of shimmering intensity. One remarkable facet is the aspirational nature of this music.

Although dark in mood, with war-like undercurrents, the symphony speaks determinedly in its own language and on its own terms, and thereby bears witness to a strength of character which is the hallmark of all of Rochberg's music, and to a confident individuality which was sustained throughout successive stylistic evolutions. The later *Imago Mundi* (1973), written after a visit to Japan, is a fascinating exploration of oriental gesture and bird music, especially that of the Japanese *gagaku* orchestra, which had also recently been explored by Hovhaness and Harrison. By this time Rochberg was working on a major commission from the Pittsburgh Symphony (and its then music director Andre Previn) and Isaac Stern, a 50-minute Violin Concerto in the grand romantic style.² This concerto, recorded by the artists who premiered it, has become probably his best known work. However, that first recording shortened the piece through nearly 15 minutes of cuts that were insisted on by Stern. On this new Naxos disc, however, Christopher Lyndon-Gee, with the composer's enthusiastic support, has restored the longer original version. And with what a

¹ Which is certainly in error. Roger Sessions embraced the 12-tone method fully in his Solo Violin Sonata of 1953; Wallingford Riegger was employing a form of it as early as *Dichotomy* (1932); plenty of other examples could be cited – Ed.

² The epic scale of the Concerto had already been anticipated in Rochberg's extraordinary *Caprice Variations* for unaccompanied violin (1970), a series of 51 variations on 'the' Paganini *Caprice* encompassing a kaleidoscope of idioms from Beethoven to the present day. Selections from the work have been recorded before; more recently Peter Sheppard Skaerved, the soloist in the Violin Concerto recording, has issued the entire unbroken 90-minute work on two CDs (Metier MSV CD92065a & b). It is an index, perhaps, of the strong feelings that Rochberg's music still arouses that *Tempo* was unable to find a reviewer for this disc despite offering it to four different writers, one of whom confessed he hated it and another (generally enthusiastic about Rochberg's works) that he simply couldn't understand it. – Ed.

magnificent result, brilliantly played here by Peter Sheppard Skaerved. American music is not over-endowed with violin concertos but this one proudly takes its place alongside those of Bloch, Schuman, Barber, Paulus and Bergsma. Rochberg utilizes his supremely confident mastery of contemporary language to re-capture the past: epic it certainly is, aspic it most certainly is not: listen to the nocturnal slow movement with its apparent hint of Messiaen.

By the time Rochberg wrote his Fifth Symphony in the mid 1980s his language had evolved yet further into a complex blend of tightly-wrought variation form (he was always fond of the one-movement structure) and neo-romantic expressionism. There is the same authority and certainty of purpose found in works from 30 years earlier; maybe a greater transparency and luminosity; but no repetition of what had gone before. The evolution carried on into his final major works, the Sixth Symphony (1988) and the Clarinet Concerto (1995) but the Fifth Symphony is a sort of apotheosis. *Transcendental Variations* (1975) for strings, adapted from the slow movement of the Third String Quartet (1971–2), is one of Rochberg's most mystical creations: a vision of time expressed in a set of variations. It could hardly be in greater contrast to the austere *Black Sounds* from a decade earlier, the product partly of Rochberg's brief but significant friendship with the elderly (and dying) Edgard Varèse.

This is an unmissable series devoted to the music of one of the pivotal figures in contemporary American music, performed and recorded to very high standards and, at budget price, an absolute giveaway.

Bret Johnson

HENZE *Ein Landarzt*^{1–6,10,12}; *Das Ende einer Welt*^{2,4–9,11–12}.

¹Roland Hermann (bar), ²Roderic M Keating (ten), ³Jonas Dickopf (boy sop), ⁴Matteo de Monti (bass), ⁵Isolde Siebert (sop), ⁶Daphne Evangelatos (alto), ⁷Hans Werner Henze (narr), ⁸Frieder Lang (ten), ⁹Robert Bork (bar), ¹⁰Köln Cathedral Choir, ¹¹West German Radio Choir, Köln, ¹²West German Radio SO c. Markus Stenz. Wergo WER 6666-2.

It is often forgotten that Hans Werner Henze, whose reputation as an operatic composer in the latter half of the 20th century ranks only behind that of Britten, made his first essays in the genre with several modest pieces in a single act or designed for radio. His first, tentative step in this

direction was with *Das Wundertheater* ('The Magic Theatre'), after an intermezzo by Cervantes, in 1948. His work in the theatre at this time – primarily for dance companies – drew him more towards ballet, but it was opera that would prove to exercise the more fundamental and long-lasting hold. Late in 1950 North West German Radio commissioned him to compose an opera especially for radio, reviving a pre-war experiment that had given birth to Werner Egk's early *Columbus* (1931–2) amongst other works. Having spent some time with the kings of *musique concrète*, the Pierres Henry and Schaeffer, Henze felt able to tackle the project in the following spring. He had already selected Kafka's nightmarish allegory *Ein Landarzt* ('A Country Doctor') as his subject and rapidly composed the score, factoring in 'special effects' such as tapes played backwards and the use of reverberation or echo. These were not restricted to background noises or as audio scenery, however, but were used to add to the tonal palette of the singers. This can be heard especially in the case of the doctor himself who sings normally (mostly in recitative or speech-song) when narrating but has echo added when taking part in the story itself.

Kafka's uneasy story of the doctor making a house-call to a dying patient was a subject ripe for setting in a dodecaphonic score. Henze, newly acquainted with Schoenberg's method, provided a dramatic accompaniment, closely argued with contrapuntal structures including canon and fugue. The style itself as much as anything catches the bleak unreality of the doctor's predicament and emphasizes the dream-like detachment with which he interacts with the world around him. So, there is no musical upheaval to accompany the terrified flight of the servant girl Rosa into the house to evade the amorous advances of the stable boy – who essentially barter the use of two horses, so the doctor can make his house call, for his possession of her body – nor his kicking down of the bolted door so that he can reach her. The musical as well as psychological climax comes only after the doctor has finished the visit and tries to return to 'pull her from beneath the ugly stable boy'. The borrowed horses, which had delivered him the ten miles to his patient in a radiophonic flash, now move in agonized slow motion, marooning him in a limbo from which he can never return to save Rosa from the stable boy's persistent attentions, or even prevent himself being displaced by a new country doctor.

Ein Landarzt was premièred (from a tape) in November 1951 and went on to win the Prix Italia two years later. In the 1960s Henze revisited the score twice: firstly to produce a stageable version,

shorn of the special effects, to join *Das Wundertheater* and *Das Ende einer Welt* in a triple-bill of one-acters (following in the footsteps of Hindemith and Krenek before WWII); and secondly recasting the work as a monodrama for Fischer-Dieskau and orchestra. This last was issued on disc but has never been widely available. In 1994 Henze revised his 1951 original and it is this version that has now been issued by Wergo. Roland Hermann gives a nicely drawn vocal performance as the doctor, catching his detachment and frustration at his own impotence equally well. The other parts – all very minor vocally – are delivered well but it is the West German Radio Symphony Orchestra who flesh out Henze's musical vision, expertly directed by Markus Stenz.

Pairing *Ein Landarzt* and *Das Ende einer Welt* (1953 – also given here in its 1994 revision) is natural given their common origins in commissions for radio. For what was his third operatic work – although he was beginning to think seriously about *König Hirsch* by this time – Henze selected a satirical tale by Hildesheimer which allowed for a greater expressive variety in the music. On a superficial level this shows itself in the pastiche baroque of the rediscovered works played, as part of the plot, to the ill-assorted clutch of cognoscenti gathered on the Marchesa's artificial island; but more fundamentally to allow Henze to give a little more depth to his cast of characters. (Although these are identical in number to *Ein Landarzt* no one dominates *Das Ende einer Welt* in the way the doctor does in the earlier work.) This is ironic given the stock nature of his cast: a countess with enough money to build an artificial island in the Venetian Lagoon – but not enough to have it built solidly: this is the 'world' that ends by sinking at the close – surrounded by an astrologer, a professor-cum-politician, an artist (possessed of two talents, no less), a dealer in artefacts and a mysterious 'cultural dignity', Golch, for whom Henze reserved his deepest contempt. Yet the music is rather lighter in spirit, as befits a satire, with a studied inconsequentiality – expressed nowhere better than at the close, as the dealer Fallersleben, the only person to escape the island's wrack, mourns not the Marchesa or her guests but rather Marat's bathtub, which he had just delivered to her. Again this is a nicely-sung account and Stenz directs with pace and a light touch. Having Henze himself take the part of the narrator is an added bonus. Wergo's sound is excellent, although this is in no small part due to the original productions by West German Radio from 1996.

Guy Rickards

WILLIAM BOLCOM: *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Christine Brewer, Measha Brueggergosman, Hana Davidson, Linda Hohenfeld, Carmen Pelton (sops), Joan Morris (mezzo-sop), Marietta Simpson (con), Thomas Young (ten), Nmon Ford (bar), Nathan Lee Graham (speaker/vocals), Tommy Morgan (harmonica), Peter 'Madcat' Ruth (harmonica and vocals), Jeremy Kittel (fiddle), The University of Michigan Musical Society Choral Union, Chamber Choir, University Choir, Orpheus Singers, Michigan State University Children's Choir, Contemporary Directions Ensemble, University Symphony Orchestra c. Leonard Slatkin. Naxos 8.559216-18.

AARON COPLAND: *Inscape*. ROGER SESSIONS: Symphony No. 8. GEORGE PERLE: *Transcendental Modulations*. BERNARD RANDS: *...where the murmurs die...*. The American Symphony Orchestra c. Leon Botstein. New World 80631-2.

KYLE GANN: *Nude Rolling Down an Escalator*: Studies for Disklavier. New World 80633-2.

When he was 17 William Bolcom began to think about setting all of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. He wrote music for some of the poems in 1956, and he continued working on the project for over 25 years. Such an undertaking presented manifold difficulties. Not only are there 46 poems, but they all are more or less the same length, and most of them have about the same structure. Bolcom struggled over many years with the problem of shaping the work and determining what character it would have. When he found, in an appendix of Williams Muir's 1888 edition of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake's final ordering, which differed from the one usually seen, he was able to see how to organize the whole mass of poems into nine movements. The work was finally finished in 1982, and received its first performance in 1984.

Bolcom is particularly drawn to what he calls 'the Blakean principle of contraries'. (He quotes: 'Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence', from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*). The character of his musical interests and, in fact, of his career as a composer have had a similarly eclectic quality, and that eclecticism is perhaps the most noticeable feature of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. The work stylistically runs the gamut from Victorian parlor songs and folkly Scots-Irish ballads and dance tunes through vaudeville and pop-rock songs to music in a modernist tonal style – sounding a little like Britten – and further, towards what one might describe as good-old-fashioned modern music.

Certain of the songs display an apparently incongruous combination of text and music: 'The Shepherd' set as a country-western cowboy song, and 'The Little Black Boy' as a soul song, are perhaps the chief examples. This can produce what may seem at first a pleasing but slight frisson; but on further acquaintance they reveal great depths to both music and poem. The initial process of moving rather quickly from a song set in one style to another set in a contrasting one is gradually modified to an approach which creates ever longer, more continuous, and more dramatically urgent and satisfying continuities, all eventually subsumed into one large dramatic arc from beginning to end. Perhaps it is the wild array of different styles that causes *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* to seem so particularly American. In any case, the work is both profound and profoundly beautiful.

The splendid performances preserved on this disc were associated with a performance in April, 2004, at the University of Michigan, involving eleven vocal soloists, as well as harmonica and fiddle soloists, along with four different University of Michigan choruses along with a children's chorus from Michigan State University, the University of Michigan Contemporary Directions Ensemble, and The University Symphony Orchestra, all under the direction of Leonard Slatkin. All of the singing, both by soloists and choruses, and all the playing is wonderful; perhaps the most striking performance is that of Joan Morris, Bolcom's wife and long-time performing partner, who sings with particular intensity and musical character, especially in the deeply moving 'The Divine Image', where she negotiates the technical shoals of the song with an especially thoughtful and masterly technique.

Aaron Copland's last two orchestra pieces,³ like Stravinsky's *Threni* and Virgil Thomson's *Lord Byron*, languish undeservedly under a cloud, as a result of either bad or badly-placed first performances. In Copland's case, the fact that his later music was 12-tone (whatever that means, or might have meant to him) also contributed to the disrepute which still clings to *Connotations* (1962) and *Inscape* (1967). In fact, Copland's music from the late 1950s onward is really more of a return from his populist manner to something like the tonal language and 'abstract' quality of his earliest 'ultra-modernist' music than a striking-out into any brave new stylistic world. *Inscape*, the

last of his major works, is striking for its beautifully resonant chords, its austere textures, and its colorfully sonorous and brilliant orchestration, with a continuity compressed but not unlike *Appalachian Spring* or the *Short Symphony*.

Just about all of the music of Roger Sessions, Copland's one-time friend and early associate in the promotion of American music, likewise labors under the received wisdom that it is inordinately thick, a little clunky, and generally grey in orchestration and sound quality. In fact, his Eighth Symphony, after its extraordinarily original opening – which launches an impassioned singing melody in the highest register of the violins, suspended high above a mysterious rolling accompaniment of maracas – unfolds a closely-argued continuity featuring a grand and highly detailed polyphonic texture, clarified by luminous orchestration, and propelled by a surely controlled harmonic progress. The contemplative first movement, the slower of the two, is followed by a brawling and exuberant fast movement which starts with a bang, moves in a chugging but inexorable manner to a violently explosive climax, and leaves in its wake receding waves, ultimately dissolving back into the music of the beginning.

These new brilliant, vibrant, and compelling performances of the Copland and Sessions works by Leon Botstein and the American Symphony Orchestra which are on this New World disc reveal the works' true natures. Also included are equally fine performances of George Perle's *Transcendental Modulations*, a prolix and discursive set of variations in a Bergianly lyrical style with glamorously lustrous orchestration, and Bernard Rands's *...where the murmurs die...*, a work which builds, through the repetition and juxtaposition of three modules of material, an elaborate textural climax. This is a disc well worth obtaining. It would be good if Botstein and the ASO could follow it with recordings of more of the Sessions Symphonies.

Kyle Gann is a composer who may be best known for his writings as a critic at the *Village Voice* in New York and a proud chronicler of 'downtown' music in the later part of the 20th century. He also, quite literally, wrote the book on the music of Conlon Nancarrow.⁴ New World Records has released a recording of ten of his studies for disklavier written between 1997 and 2004: Gann works with a newer, higher-tech

³ Three, if we count *Music for a Great City* (1964), which he derived from his 1961 music to the film *Something Wild*. The relationship of this fairly austere score to the supposedly rebarbative *Connotations* would be worth consideration (Ed.).

⁴ *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

version of Nancarrow's player piano, the disklavier being a piano 'played' by a computer via MIDI data. Each of the pieces on the disc has a strong and clear profile, presenting a distinctive – sometimes, perhaps, overly jokey – idea. 'Texarkana', named after the town in Texas which is the birthplace both of Nancarrow and of Scott Joplin, is a complex, wacky, somewhat wobbly, and very up-tempo rag. 'Petty Larceny' is a collage based entirely on fragments of Beethoven piano sonatas (and probably quoting every one of them). 'Cosmic Boogie-Woogie' is a tribute to Terry Riley. 'Folk Dance' for Henry Cowell continually embellishes, in an increasingly elaborate way, a plaintive folk-like tune. Sometimes one may feel that Gann is following a little too closely in Nancarrow's footsteps for comfort, but each of the pieces is clearly the work of a lively and inventive musical personality, and each is executed with precise intention and complete mastery. The last, 'Unquiet Night', is a longer, elegaic work of considerable depth, and a beauty of instrumental sound unmatched by the others.

Rodney Lister

URS JOSEPH FLURY: *Vineta*¹; Concerto for Cello and Orchestra²; Sinfonietta for Strings³. ¹Biel Symphony Orchestra; ²Pierre Fournier (vlc), Vienna Volksoper Orchestra; ³Vienna Chamber Orchestra c. ^{1–3}Urs Joseph Flury. Musikszene Schweiz MGB CD 6184.

SCHOECK: Concerto for Cello and String Orchestra, op. 61; Suite in A flat for Strings, op. 59. Julius Berger (vlc), South West German Chamber Orchestra of Pforzheim c. Vladislav Czarnecki. ebs 6145 (www.EBSMusikproduktion.de).

Urs Joseph Flury has been mentioned in this journal (*Tempo* 204) as the conductor of music by his father Richard Flury. Born in 1941, Flury junior was educated at institutions in Biel, Berne and Basle. He played for a time as a violinist in the Basle Chamber Orchestra and teaches his instrument in his native Solothurn. As a composer he represents the ultra-conservative end of the very wide spectrum of music featured on the Musikszene Schweiz label. A Gallo disc of his chamber pieces and songs, some of which consciously look back to the 18th century, has been pilloried in the German and Swiss musical press. Flury also had unhappy experiences during a spell as a conservatoire teacher. Much of the experimentation of the late 20th century – which in Switzerland took forms as aggressive as they were belated – has passed him by. Since Flury has

shown little interest in modernism, it would be disingenuous to call him a post-modernist. What matters is that his music seldom sounds hackneyed. Like his father's secular works, Urs Joseph Flury's border on light music, in a way that reflects the Viennese blood in their veins. In the religious field his *Solothurn Christmas Oratorio*, a setting of dialect texts, is a masterpiece of its type.

Flury's Cello Concerto, dating from 1977/78, offers a valuable contribution to the cello repertoire. It comprises the conventional three movements, of which the second is influenced by traditional jazz and headed 'Tempo di Blues'. Pierre Fournier, the work's dedicatee, advised the composer during its gestation, and it is good to hear his artistry undiminished by age on a 1981 recording under Flury's baton. The cello opens the concerto with an unaccompanied recitative followed by a classical sonata-allegro. The tripartite central movement leads to a rondo finale with a waltz episode. A touchingly elegiac ending to the concerto harks back to its introduction.

The delightful Sinfonietta from the same period is in four movements. The opening *Sonatina, quasi una Fantasia*, doesn't outstay its welcome; neither does the final march. An *Intermezzo nostalgico* incorporates a serenade for solo violin. The third movement is a combination of waltz and tango, and everywhere Flury's feeling for string sonorities pays dividends.

Flury's orchestral tone-poem *Vineta* dates from 2000/01. The piece was inspired by a legendary island city known as the Venice of the Baltic. The corrupt lives of its inhabitants brought upon them three heavenly warnings, followed by a catastrophic tidal surge. The bells of the sunken city can still be heard pealing on Easter morning. At the outset of the composition *Vineta's* riches are depicted by four horns, and impressionistic effects abound. The immorality is suggested, none too violently, by a mounting complexity in the harmonic and rhythmic treatment of three dances. Some tentative moments don't detract too seriously from this live recording of the première performance.

Flury's Cello Concerto has several features in common with Othmar Schoeck's opus 61 of 1947. Both works are in A minor and last a little over half an hour; both are dedicated to Pierre Fournier. And Schoeck, too, met with his share of criticism for being wedded to the musical past. Where the Schoeck Cello Concerto differs from Flury's is in the scoring for strings alone and the suite-like division into four movements. The soloist enters almost at once, with an energetic motif from the purely instrumental *Andante*

appassionato in Schoeck's *Notturmo* for baritone and string quartet. The first movement, Schumannesque in its lyricism, is nearly as long as the other three movements put together. The following *Andante tranquillo* leads to one of Schoeck's few really quick movements, a Presto introduced by a 36-bar solo passage in D minor. The final rondo is prefaced by a chromatically hazy Lento, its muted effects recalling Reger as strongly as the contrapuntal arts displayed elsewhere in the work.

In the main Schoeck put his talent into his instrumental music, his genius into his songs. Nonetheless, his Cello Concerto is graced by individual touches throughout. On its first CD recording Julius Berger applies a fitting virtuosity to the solo part. The strings of the Pforzheim Chamber Orchestra make a refined impression both here and in the five-movement Suite that Schoeck wrote shortly before the Cello Concerto.

Peter Palmer

ADOLF BUSCH String Sextet in G, op. 40. BRAHMS String Sextet No. 1 in B flat major, op. 18. Kölner Streichsextett. Raumklang/Marc Aurel Edition CMN 006.

ADOLF BUSCH: Quartet in One Movement in B minor, op. 29. KAMINSKI: String Quartet in F major. SCHULHOFF: String Quartet No. 1. ULLMANN: String Quartet No. 3. Casal Quartet. Telos Music Records/TLS 111.

ADOLF BUSCH: Organ Works. Ludger Lohmann (organ). Motette CD 13101.

The compositions of Adolf Busch (1891–1952) are among the best-kept secrets of classical music: his stellar reputation as a violinist and chamber-musician seems to have allowed no room in the public consciousness for further excellence. Yet his worklist is enormous, including three symphonies (1916, 1927, 1936), the last of them choral, concertos for violin (1921) and piano (1924), the latter dedicated to his son-in-law Rudolf Serkin, and a *Fantasy* for cello and orchestra (1913; lost), an orchestral *Introduction and Chaconne* (1932), several extensive variation-sets, including the *Variations on the Radetzky March of Johann Strauss I* for large orchestra (1914), a *Symphonic Fantasy in Two Movements* for large orchestra, organ and mixed choir (1917; also lost), a massive setting of the Sixth Psalm (1952), a *Concerto for Large Orchestra* (1930 – probably only the fourth Concerto for Orchestra ever written (after Hindemith, Roussel and Holmboe), a

generous quantity of choral music and songs and a prodigious amount of chamber music: much of it, as you would expect, for various combinations of strings. If Busch were merely an accomplished composer, his music might deserve occasional inspection; in the event, he proved the natural successor of Max Reger, whose friendship he enjoyed at the outset of his career. The relationship was founded on 26 January 1909, when the sceptical Reger could write to his wife: 'Early today a 16-year-old brat played me my concerto here *by heart*, perfectly beautiful in tone, technique etc. Isn't that marvellous?' That the brat was in fact 17 hardly detracts from Busch's achievement – but it is time that this achievement as a practising musician stopped obscuring the qualities of his uniquely invigorating music.

The Kölner Streichsextett have now recorded both Brahms sextets, each imaginatively coupled.⁵ The Regerian heritage is audible from the first bars of Busch's G major String Sextet, op. 40 (1928, rev. 1933), his only contribution to the genre: it sets out in a mood of apparently levity but is very soon involved in a polyphonic discussion of moving spiritual content and astonishing contrapuntal fluency. The second movement is an achingly lovely *Adagio molto e cantabile*, whose soulful yearning disguises the complexity of its constituent texture. Busch revelled in fugal technique, as witness his orchestral *Improvisation (in the Form of a Fugue) on a Waltz Theme by Johann Strauss I* (1922); the first of the *Three Studies* for orchestra (1940) contains a fugue with the longest subject I have ever encountered. The pert, flightily witty *Presto* of his Sextet is accordingly a fleet and nimble fugue – and, as if we hadn't noticed, the spirited finale pitches straight into another fugue, using elements of the preceding one, and barrelling forward in a welter of contrapuntal lines, marrying ear-boggling rhythmic complexity with complete technical assurance.

The performance of the Brahms B major Sextet which precedes the Busch alerts the listener to the possibility that the reading of the later work might be rather cautious: the Kölner Streichsextett approach the Brahms almost as if it were a viol fantasy, as if they were determined that the parts should be heard individually. And indeed they do tread cautiously in the Busch: there's the odd biffed note and more than one

⁵ No. 2 appeared in 2001 alongside Kurt Hopstein's *Vergessene Gärten* ('Forgotten Gardens') of 1993 (Marc Aurel Edition CMN 004), its passionate, elegiac lyricism indicating that Hopstein, born in Cologne in 1934, is a composer whose music deserves further exploration.

occasion when you can hear them wishing they had safety wheels; there are a number of passages which would benefit from less respect and more impetuosity. That's not to minimize the importance of this pioneering recording, which immediately invites Busch to take his seat as one of music's finest contrapuntists. I know of no composer who can indulge in such intricate instrumental polyphony without sacrificing at least a degree of symphonic momentum – but Busch manages to have his cake and eat it.

If confirmation of that ability were required, it arrives in the form of Busch's *Quartettsatz* (the title customarily translated in the little Busch literature there is as *Quartet in One Movement*), op. 29 (1924), an 11-minute essay in an organic *Lento* – *Vivace* – *Prestissimo* progression, built of smaller episodes that vary the pulse. The introduction, swelling from delicate, confessional intimacy into sonorous polyphonic discourse, gives way to a surprisingly folksy dance, trilled into activity and occasionally calmed by the return of the opening material. The trills then launch another of Busch's extended and inspiring fugal passages, inhabiting counterpoint that lives and breathes – there's no hint of academic spadework here – before the trills return to launch the brief *Prestissimo* coda. Quartet musicians frequently

complain that, since virtually all the music available to them is full-scale, building varied programmes can be difficult. Here's a work that would allow such a change of pace – and which is also a deeply satisfying musical experience in its own right.

Busch and his conductor-brother Fritz, though gentiles, refused to perform in Nazi Germany. The other three composers on this Telos disc weren't allowed the Busches' dignified protest: Erwin Schulhoff and Viktor Ullmann were both murdered by the Nazis; Heinrich Kaminski, only part-Jewish, was banned from public activity and sheltered from the fascist blast in Ried, in Bavaria. The grotesqueries of Schulhoff's First Quartet and the post-*Verklärte Nacht* idiom of Ullmann's Third Quartet being relatively familiar these days, the chief interest of this CD, besides the Busch, will be what may be the first recording of Heinrich Kaminski's 1913 String Quartet in F (his only full-scale contribution to the genre: otherwise there's only a *Prelude and Fugue on 'Abegg'* for string quartet, from 1927). Kaminski, born in Tiengen in 1886 and a student of Paul Juon and Hugo Kaun in Berlin, saw composition as a confessional activity, an expression of his love for his fellow human being, the 'Liebe zum Du' which he felt was a spiritual imperative.

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At this stage of his development, Kaminski's counterpoint hadn't evolved into the free-wheeling polyphony it was to become in works like the orchestral *Concerto Grosso* of 1922 or the *Dorische Musik* of eleven years later. A quotation in the booklet from Carl Orff, a Kaminski student, recounts that: "Kaminski, coming from late Romanticism, was a hymnist: all his music was preaching. Polyphony was his philosophy. He was also given to a curious religious fervour which complicated his unconditional nature'. That intensity is audible from the first quiet bars of his Quartet: a rapt, hymnic *Lento espressivo* leading to a movement marked *Energisch* which, though intense, is not especially energetic; a surprisingly playful *Adagio espressivo* and a closing *Allegro*. The faster movements are characterized by melodic material that is brief in cut but immediately memorable; the slower sections gain their expressiveness from the urgent, almost prayerful quality of Kaminski's fervent counterpoint. Kaminski died in 1946, giving himself ample time to be forgotten before the modernist hegemony pushed his music aside entirely. As with Busch's, his music is slowly being rediscovered, and appreciated for its sober passion. Even if the playing of the Casal Quartet on this new CD isn't always as tidy as it might be, they are to be congratulated for such an intelligent and enlightening choice of repertoire.

Busch introduced the organ into several of his large-scale works, to tremendous effect: I would love to hear a live performance (and a modern recording) of his ferocious *Psalm 6*. And with the example of Reger before him, it would be odd if he hadn't written something for solo organ himself. In the event there are only three large-scale works: a *Fantasie über Johann Sebastian Bachs Rezitativ aus der Matthäus-Passion 'Mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen' und den Choral 'Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir'*, op. 19 (1919), a Passacaglia and Fugue, op. 27 (1923) and a Toccata and Fugue, op. 67 (1948). Ludger Lohmann's recordings (their first), on the Rieger organ of the concert hall of the Stuttgart Conservatory – rather a smaller and more circumscribed sound than I would have expected – are, like the Cologne string players' of the Sextet, on the cautious side. Everyone familiar with Reger's larger organ works will recognise the territory here: the *Fantasie* – a whopping 20 minutes in length, plus an eight-minute fugue – is a massive contrapuntal edifice, unflagging in its severity, even if it loses direction here and there (or perhaps Lohmann lets the tempo flag). Where it differs from Reger is that Busch's counterpoint, though chromatic, doesn't have that cloying quality that can make

Reger difficult for some listeners; nor does Busch explode in those terrifying outbursts that point to some deep trauma in Reger's psychological make-up. Busch does flirt with 12-tone procedures – the Passacaglia theme contains all 12 notes of the scale, and his idiom is naturally, though mildly, dissonant – but though he can weaken tonal pull, he never abandons tonality other than momentarily.

Busch's other organ works, far smaller in scale, are basically learned Bachian-Regerian noodlings: two brief *Choralfantasien über 'Wer den lieben Gott lässt walten'* from 1910, a *Choralbearbeitung über 'Alle Menschen müssen sterben'* from 1911 and *Acht Choralsvorspiele*, op. 60a, written in exile in New York in 1942 (the Busch brothers refused to play in Nazi Germany), when this brief but hands-on engagement with German culture may have held especial poignancy for him. Lohmann writes that there are 'three inaccessible early chorale arrangements' missing from this otherwise complete first recording of Busch's organ music. Dominick Sackmann's *Adolf Busch: Werkverzeichnis* (Schweizerisches Musik-Archiv, Zurich, 1994) omits juvenilia which is, I guess, where those pieces are hiding. Why, though, did Lohmann omit the brief chorale prelude on 'Freu dich sehr, o meine Seele', published by Günther Ramin in *Das Organistenamt*, Part II, Vol. 1, in 1925, which would just have fitted on this 76-minute CD? One can hear in the climaxes of the *Fantasie* and the more vigorous parts of the other two big works that there's more to this music than Lohmann makes of it but, as with the Cologne account of the String Sextet, there is already a lot here to be grateful for.

Martin Anderson

HENRI DUTILLEUX: *L'Arbre des Songes*; *La Geôle*; *Deux Sonnets de Jean Cassou*; *Mystère de l'Instant*. Olivier Charlier (vln), François Le Roux (bar), Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine c. Hans Graf. Arte Nova Classics 82876638252.

The result of a commission from Radio France for Isaac Stern, to whom it is dedicated, Dutilleux's Violin Concerto *L'Arbre des Songes* (The Tree of Dreams) is one of the composer's most exquisite creations. As is typical of the composer, the concerto is cast in an unbroken arc, its four sectional subdivisions separated by three distinctive orchestral interludes, the first pointillistic, the second monodic, the third a vigorous yet essentially static tuning-up exercise. A tintinnabulating concertante group consisting of chimes, vibraphone, piano, celesta, harp and

crotales assumes an important structural role, enunciating a unifying melodic idea that runs throughout the entire score. Olivier Charlier proves a sweet-toned and insightful soloist.

Dedicated to Dutilleux's brother Paul, who was imprisoned in Stalag VIIIIC between 1940–1945, *La Geôle* for baritone and orchestra sets a text by Jean Cassou from his collection *Trente-trois sonnets composés en secret* (1941). This world première recording (the composer had previously been steadfast in his refusal to authorise a recording of the work), brilliantly sung by François Le Roux, reveals a composition of great lyricism – one of only a handful of explicit musical responses by a French composer to the events of the Second World War.

*Deux Sonnets de Jean Cassou*⁶ sets poems from the same collection, the dynamic, ardent 'Il n'y avait que des troncs déchirés' in marked contrast to the undemonstrative solemnity of 'J'ai rêvé que je vous portais dans mes bras'. Dutilleux's treatment of the vocal line of the latter is of particular interest, setting each of the 12 syllables of the verse line to different notes of the chromatic scale.

Commissioned by, and dedicated to, Paul Sacher, *Mystère de l'Instant* for string orchestra, cimbalom and percussion consists of ten brief movements which, unusually for Dutilleux, are unrelated musically – indeed the original title of the work was *Instantanés* (Snapshots). It is work of great imagination, characterized by extremes of mood and kaleidoscopic string timbres. The specific colour of the cimbalom adds a delightfully incisive piquancy to the work as a whole and Ildikó Vékony throws himself into this meaty role with evident relish. From the ghostly whisperings of 'Appel' to the impassioned unison string melody of 'Litanies', and from the statuesque 'Choral' to the final climactic ascent of 'Embrassement', *Mystère de l'Instant* is meticulously wrought and receives a vibrantly translucent performance from the Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine under Hans Graf.

Peter Quinn

TOCH: Complete Symphonies. Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin c. Alun Francis. Three CDs, available separately: Nos. 1 and 4: cpo 999 774-2; Nos. 2 and 3: cpo 999 705-2; Nos. 5, 6 and 7: cpo 999 389-2.

⁶ In Dutilleux worklists this is more commonly referred to as *Trois sonnets de Jean Cassou*; the two Cassou sonnets recorded here are in fact the second and third of a set of three (the first being 'Eloignez-vous').

TOCH: Piano Concerto No. 1, op. 38; *Peter Pan*, op. 76; *Pinnocchio* Overture; 'Big Ben' Variations, op. 62. Todd Crow (pno), NDR Hamburg Symphony Orchestra c. Leon Botstein. New World Records 80609-2.

Another very enterprising symphonic cycle completed by cpo (even though the 3 year intervals between each CD have been frustrating) to add to those they have undertaken of Milhaud, Frankel, Villa-Lobos, Wellesz and Sallinen. Ernst Toch (1887–1964), born in Vienna, thoroughly embracing the advanced techniques favoured by Krenek and Berg and was a leading figure in modern music in the inter-war period. The arrival of the Nazis in 1933 rapidly ended this first part of his career and, after a spell writing film music in Hollywood, he composed little more until after 1945. By that time he was a fully-fledged American citizen, nearing 60 and still reeling from the emotional shock of the war and the loss of so many relatives in the Holocaust. Despite a serious heart-attack he found redemption in feverish composition, producing nearly 30 major works in his last 15 years, including all seven of his symphonies. These works make an excellent showcase and display remarkable stylistic consistency, although Nos. 6 and 7 are less structured and more fragmented than the others, rushed out in a frantic race against time in the final months of the composer's life.

The first two symphonies (1950 and 1951) were actually premiered in Vienna, but they both show Toch's love of unusual instruments and instrumentations. No. 2 often uses two harps, and there is an intriguing section in the second movement for strings and orchestral piano. Much of Toch's music is loosely neo-classical in concept, but much given to impressionistic adornments, Scriabinesque gestures and dissonant, tritone-based harmonies. The very opening pages of Symphony No. 1 (at nearly 40 minutes the longest of the seven) bear all of these thumbprints: high whispering string tessituras punctuated by fragmented motifs from solo instruments (often in terse unisons), chiming glockenspiel and harp. What makes Toch's style so distinctive too is the absolute clarity of his contrapuntal lines: the sheer delicacy and brilliance of his orchestral palette illuminates every thread, no matter how sinuous or truncated. The Second Symphony is dedicated to Albert Schweitzer, whom Toch had never met, but for whom he was full of admiration and fulsome praise. Another rather obsequious dedication prefaces the Symphony No. 4 (1957). Toch had visited the famous MacDowell Colony for artists in New Hampshire, where he met its founder, Marian MacDowell, the

very elderly widow of the American composer Edward MacDowell. He inscribed some words of homage to her, intended to be read out as part of the performance. Antal Doráti, who conducted the première, refused to allow them to be recited: they are included on cpo's recording, though no reciter is credited, so presumably the speaker is Alun Francis himself. In fact the symphony is absolute music, although again no conventional formal scheme is followed. We experience again the same camerata ethic of piquant transparency and economic use of tutti, whilst at the same time Toch maintains a full symphonic 'feel'.

One of his most celebrated works of the 1950s was Symphony No. 3 (1955), which won him the Pulitzer Prize and was recorded by Steinberg and the Pittsburgh Symphony (who also gave the première). It employs a large orchestra with Hammond organ and, in its original version, featured several non-essential mechanistic instruments such as the hisser, the rotarion and the pressure horn, which Toch later eliminated from the score. It is tempting to regard this indulgence as mere pandering to an American psychology *à la* Antheil and Gershwin, but Toch retains his stylistic independence and identity in music that is poetic and articulate: the score is inscribed with a quotation from Goethe's *Werther*. The brilliant mock-heroic marches, cascading scherzi, leaping strings and apparently endless kaleidoscope of colour seem more likely to have won over the Pulitzer judges than the novelty value. The other well-known Toch Symphony is No. 5 (1963), a symphonic poem in two movements inspired by the Old Testament Biblical story of Jephtha. Toch's last pieces are informed by a sort of stream of consciousness technique. The Seventh Symphony (1964) ends on a percussive note almost by way of a full stop: 'that's it'.

This is a most rewarding set of symphonies, and cpo have at the same time been issuing Toch's even larger output of string quartets (he wrote 13 in all, though the first five, all very early works, are lost). Toch's discography has been further enhanced by the recording of the First Piano Concerto from the 1920s (stylistically very similar to the later symphonies) and several minor post-war works, all of which can be very highly recommended. Toch's contribution to 20th century music was both unique and distinctive and we should be thankful his legacy has been rescued by these accomplished performances and recordings.

Bret Johnson

KENNETH LEIGHTON: Sonatinas Nos. 1 and 2, op.1; Sonata No.1 op.2; Sonata No.2 op.17; Five Studies op.22; *Fantasia Contrappuntistica (Homage to Bach)* op.24; Variations op.30; Nine Variations op.36; *Pieces for Angela* op.47; *Conflicts (Fantasy on Two Themes)* op.51; Six Studies (Study-Variations) op.56; Sonata (1972) op.64; *Household Pets* op.86; Four Romantic Pieces op.95; *Jack-in-the-Box; Study; Lazy-bones*. Angela Brownridge (pno). Delphian DCD 34301-3 (3-CD set).

PATRICK PIGGOTT: *Fantasia quasi una Sonata*; 8 Preludes and a Postlude (Third Set). Second Piano Sonata. Malcolm Binns (pno). British Music Society BMS 430CD.

SORABJI: *Fantasia ispanica*. Jonathan Powell (pno). Altarus AIR-CD-9084.

ROWLEY: Concerto for piano, strings and percussion, op.49. DARNTON: Concertino for piano and string orchestra. GERHARD: Concerto for piano and strings. FERGUSON: Concerto for piano and string orchestra, op.12. Peter Donohoe (pno and c.), Northern Sinfonia. Naxos 8.557290.

Sevenside Composers' Alliance Inaugural Piano Recital. GEOFFREY SELF: Sonatina 1. IVOR GURNEY: Preludes, Sets 1, 2 and 3. JOLYON LAYCOCK: *L'Abri Pataud*. RICHARD BERNARD: *On Erin Shore*. STEVEN KINGS: *Fingers Pointing to the Moon*. SUSAN COPPARD: *Round and Around*. JOHN PITTS: *Aire 1; Fantasies 1, 5*. JAMES PATTEN: *Nocturnes 3, 4*. SULYEN CARADON: *Dorian Dirge*. RAYMOND WARREN: *Monody; Chaconne*. Peter Jacobs (pno). Live recording, 23 February 2005. DunelmDRD0238.

Sevenside Composers' Alliance – A Recital by two pianists. MARTINŮ: *Three Czech Dances*. BEDFORD: *Hoquetus David*. JOHN PITTS: *Changes*. HOLLOWAY: *Gilded Goldbergs Suite*. JOLYON LAYCOCK: *Die! A1 Sparrow*. POULENC: *Élégie*. LUTOSLAWSKI: *Paganini Variations*. Steven Kings, Christopher Northam (pnos). Live recording, 14 May 2005. DunelmDRD0243.

'Transcendent Journey'. FOULDS: *Gandharva-Music*, op.49; *April-England*, op.48 no.1. CORIGLIANO: *Fantasia on an Ostinato*. PROKOFIEV: Toccata, op.11. With works by BACH-CHUQUISENGO, HANDEL, BEETHOVEN-LISZT, BACH-BUSONI, SCHUMANN. Juan José Chuquisengo (pno). Sony SK93829.

Much respected as a craftsman and a teacher, the late Kenneth Leighton was really a more significant creative personality than he was often given credit for. Though perhaps best known now for his church music, the piano was very much at the centre of his creative world; piano music encompassed his entire career, from the two Sonatinas of opus 1 (1946) to the set of Preludes

he was writing at his death 42 years later. There have been some notable recordings before – Stephen Hough's of the op.56 *Study-Variations* (Hyperion), Peter Wallfisch of the op.30 *Variations* and the op.64 *Sonata* (Chandos) – but this new 3-disc set of Leighton's 'complete' solo piano works in excellent accounts by Angela Brownridge is immensely valuable. (If I tweezer the epithet it's because the liner notes indicate the existence of further, unpublished works.)

His musical language was an eclectic mix, nourished by such influences as Bartók, Hindemith, Bach, Busoni, a temperate use of 12-tone procedures – and also the impressionism of Debussy, patent in the early works and transfigured in the maturity of the late ones. In a sense the piano output makes Leighton seem more of a miniaturist than in fact he was, prone to variation-sets and suites of short pieces (there are 78 separate tracks to consider). But the disparate movements often build to an impressive architectural unity, and the lyricism and passion are never in doubt. Among the most impressive pieces here are the 1956 'Homage to Bach' that he entitled *Fantasia Contrappuntistica* – though it's on nothing like the scale of Busoni's work of that name – and the Piano Sonata of 1972: Leighton's third, but his reluctance to number it suggests he rather disowned Sonatas 1 and 2 from 1948 and 1953, which would be a pity if so, for they're attractive works. The late studies and preludes suggest a composer still fascinated by the tactile experience of working with the most basic stuff of music, with tones and intervals and textures; and altogether the set provides plenty of food for thought and pieces to return to repeatedly.

Patrick Piggott (1915–1990) was born 14 years earlier than Leighton, and outlived him; but though he was known and respected as a teacher and pianist, as Head of Music for the BBC's Midland Region, and as the author of standard books on John Field and Rachmaninov, his music – despite the advocacy of several fine artists – never attained wide circulation and almost nothing of it is currently in print. Malcolm Binns's CD of piano music, issued by the British Music Society, is a valuable reminder of an individual creative personality. Piggott studied piano with Harold Craxton and Julius Isserlis, among others, and his composition teachers included Benjamin Dale (when is a CD company going to discover and issue his *The Flowing Tide*?) and Nadia Boulanger. He had some interest in 12-note working within a predominantly tonal context. The two piano sonatas are substantial and thoughtful works, displaying great resource in

motivic variation. The first (written about 1961 and later revised; Piggott preserved very few pieces from any earlier period than this) is entitled *Fantasia quasi una Sonata*, an appellation which Colin Scott-Sutherland's helpful booklet note is at a loss to explain 'apart from a possible reference to "moonlight" in the musical imagery'. But the Beethoven reference, if there is one, is surely to the other 'Sonata quasi una Fantasia', op.27 no.1: Piggott's sonata has the same shape, a moderately-paced first movement and tumultuous central scherzo giving way to a slow finale which bears the expressive weight of the work. This is a *Lento* headed 'De Profundis (In Memoriam)', an impressive, deeply-felt elegy for the composer's mother, based on a 12-note theme and developing into a tragically-accented funeral march. The Second Sonata, composed nearly 20 years later, is also structurally quite original, the second movement combining elements of an improvisatory intermezzo with a variation-finale on a sarabande-like theme.

The music often sounds more French than English: Ravel seems a major influence, though Piggott's harmony, apart from a partiality to whole-tone effects, is tarter and steelier. Obsessive major-minor ambiguities, chordal alternations and very full figurations abound: austere though it sometimes sounds in its chordal complexes, there is nothing 'minimal' about these sonatas, and the larger movements do sometimes seem to lose themselves in complex tracery. The sharper, conciser forms and effective variety of the *Eight Preludes and a Postlude* make a stronger impression of a composer with important things to say and the means to say it. Binns's performances seem exemplary (he comments that since he first broadcast these works in the 1970s and 80s he finds he takes them 'somewhat longer in performance nowadays'), but there is no sense of indulgence anywhere on the disc: these are cogent and passionate readings, beautifully recorded.

The 'Spanish style' came naturally to Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji; he was after all, as he liked to proclaim, part Spanish-Sicilian, and as well as making a very effective solo piano transcription of Ravel's *Rhapsodie Espagnole* (1945) he wrote, among his early works, a *Fantaisie Espagnole* (1919) which is probably one of the few Sorabji pieces that has achieved something approaching popularity, given the number of performances and recordings it has had since the beginning of the 'Sorabji revival' in the 1970s. Altarus, who some years ago issued a performance of the *Fantaisie* in a performance by Donna Amato on a 'CD single', have now

brought out a similarly-titled work from much later in Sorabji's career – the *Fantasia ispanica* of 1933 – as part of their series of recordings of Sorabji piano music by Jonathan Powell.

The *Fantaisie espagnole* lasts in performance, typically, between 11 minutes (Amato) and 15 (Michael Habermann) and is in a single movement with clearly-defined sections. The *Fantasia ispanica* lasts over an hour and has five discrete (though continuous) movements. Jonathan Powell, in a typically informative booklet note, delineates these as a prelude and four movements exploring triple-time dance measures – pasodoble; an alternation of malaguena and zortziko; a habanera (the only movement so designated by Sorabji); and a finale that suggests a jota – the whole 'punctuated by rhetorical recitatives'. Enthusiasts for Sorabji's music, among whom I generally count myself, if on the temperate end of enthusiasm, will of course wish to acquire this superbly recorded CD, and it represents another milestone in this extraordinarily gifted pianist's discography. Yet I found myself, after three or four hearings, wondering if this massive work represented, apart from its polyphonic complexities, any significant advance on the concise and brilliantly effective *Fantaisie*. (In terms of humour – for the *Fantaisie* is very witty – it is plainly inferior.) Sorabji would doubtless have excoriated the idea of significance altogether: this is plainly the work that he wanted to write and doubtless one that he much enjoyed writing (in the midst, we learn, of an otherwise depressing extended sojourn in Bombay). Yet its characteristically extreme inflations of *cante jondo*, guitar-chords, florid Andalusian cadences and all the other devices of the post-Debussy, post-Falla Franco-Spanish-national style do tend to suffer, at such length, from the principle of diminishing returns. (It would be depressing if one began thinking of Sorabji as just a rather more farouche kind of Turina, a composer in whose hands the exotic becomes the mundane.)

Sorabji dedicated the *Fantasia ispanica* to Alec Rowley, a composer to whom the CD companies have hardly paid any attention so far – though his neglect may be coming to an end, since his Concerto for piano, strings and percussion is found played by Peter Donohoe on a disc of Naxos's British Piano Concertos series. British only by adoption in the case of Roberto Gerhard, whose dark and haunted Concerto for piano and strings (1951 – the dating on the back of Naxos's box is ten years out) also makes continual reference to Spanish music, but of a considerably more austere kind than Sorabji does. This is its

third recording in recent years,⁷ and by some measure probably the best, a fact which alone should recommend this excellent bargain-price anthology to prospective buyers. Gerhard is generally reckoned (he reckoned himself) a Catalan composer. Sorabji, had anyone asked him, could well have claimed to be, by birth, more of a Spaniard than Gerhard, whose ancestry was German-Swiss and Alsatian. But Gerhard – born and resident in Catalonia for 40 years, a pupil of Granados and Pedrell – probably did know the idioms in a different way and certainly stylized them differently (and was still doing so in his most radical post-serial compositions). The Concerto's references to Spanish Renaissance music within a near-totally chromatic context remain part of its fascination. Beside this lithe and febrile utterance Howard Ferguson's Concerto (also for piano and strings, and an exact contemporary of Gerhard's work) appears almost bluff and hearty, whereas in its own terms it is a powerful and distinguished piece, wearing its neo-classicism more lightly than Rowley's trim and enjoyable Concerto.

Considerable interest attaches to the recording of Christian Darnton's Concertino for piano and strings: I believe this is the first occasion on which a work of this composer has appeared on disc. Darnton (1905–81) had the odd distinction of being the only British pupil of the Berlin-based composer Max Butting,⁸ a progressive contemporary of Hindemith, Weill and Eisler whose own extensive output (including nine symphonies) has yet to be discovered by the CD companies. Darnton himself was rated on the avant-garde wing of British music in the inter-war years, with several performances in ISCM Festivals; later he lapsed into silence for nearly a quarter of a century.⁹ The two major works with which he made a belated return to composition, and which gained BBC broadcasts – a Concerto for Orchestra (premiered by Colin Davis, no less) and the Fourth Symphony (premiered by Edward Downes and entitled *Diabolus in Musica*) – certainly merit recording. The Concertino,

⁷ The rivals are Geoffrey Tozer and the BBC Philharmonic under Matthias Bamert on Chandos CHAN 9556 (1997) and Albert Attenelle with the Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona I Nacional de Catalunya conducted by Lawrence Foster (Montaigne 782107, no longer available) (1999).

⁸ Shortly before his death, Christian Darnton reviewed a German biography of Butting for *Tempo*. It was a labour of love: he even copied out pages of his erstwhile teacher's scores in his own hand, though we were unable to make use of these as illustrations.

⁹ He also wrote a highly idiosyncratic short history of music (*You and Music*, Pelican Books, 1940) which still occasionally turns up in second-hand shops: the only such book known to me which proceeds chronologically in reverse, beginning with 'The Contemporary Scene' and moving back in time to 'The Paris School' of the 14th to 12th centuries.

written in 1948 and the product of a deliberate attempt to cultivate a simpler style than Darnton's pre-war works, is extremely Stravinskian – in fact in the first two movements one has the odd impression of listening to a version of *Apollon musagete* to which someone has thought to add an agile and inventive piano continuo. The spirited, toccata-like finale is, perhaps, more neo-Handelian, though the final bars sound cribbed from Stravinsky's Concerto in D. Yet I don't mean to dismiss the piece as mere epigonism: Darnton certainly meant it seriously and it doesn't, in fact, sound quite like anything else in the British repertoire.

The Severnside Composers' Alliance, like other such groups up and down the country, is a loose association of West Country composers set up in 2003 to help promote their music. (See its website, www.Severnsidecomposers.all.at). Its membership includes such well-known and comparatively senior figures as David Bedford, Adrian Beaumont, Raymond Warren and Graham Whettam as well as several talented younger composers, encompassing a wide range of styles. These two discs, recorded live earlier this year at their inaugural piano recital and at a follow-up 2-piano recital, clearly serve a promotional purpose, but – mingling the work of Alliance members with other repertoire, they are also interesting and thought-provoking programmes in themselves.

Peter Jacobs has long been a doughty champion of British music from the 19th century to the present day, with a fine technique and an innate sense of what his varied repertoire demands in the way of interpretation and emotional commitment. In his inaugural piano recital (recorded live at Bath Spa College, Newton Park, in a pleasing ambience) he chose to interleave the contemporary works with one of the Severn Valley's most famous voices, both as poet and composer – Ivor Gurney. In the course of the disc Jacobs gives us Gurney's complete Preludes of 1919–20, in a sequence that exhibits some divergences from their recent recording by Mark Bebbington, reviewed by Gerard McBurney in *Tempo* Vol.59 No.232. While Bebbington plays them in a sequence numbered 1–9, with a premier recording of the second version of Prelude No.9 in D making a tenth item, Jacobs disperses them through the programme in the three 'sets' that Gurney seems to have had in mind. He too plays all nine completed Preludes, omitting the second version of No.9. His 'No.4 in D sharp minor', strangely, corresponds to Bebbington's 'No.8 in F sharp', and he has two bonuses: premiere recordings of a turbulent

Fragment in F minor and Gurney's unfinished F sharp Prelude (the third in that key, written in mental asylum in 1924), in a completion by Severnside Alliance member (and liner-note author) Richard Carder, thus making this issue a required purchase for dedicated Gurney enthusiasts. Bebbington, more flexible in rhythm and nuance, profits from Somm's exceptionally fine recording, but Jacobs, if more straightforward in his projection of line, is no less sensitive to the varied atmospheres of these largely introspective pieces. The Dunelm recording has a narrower dynamic range, but a pleasant ambience.

To the contemporary works. Geoffrey Self, whom I knew previously only as the author of an excellent book on E. J. Moeran, contributes a trim, rather neoclassical Sonata, which contrasts nicely with the Messiaen-ish tintinnabulations of Jolyon Laycock (b.1946)'s prelude *L'Abri Pataud*, inspired by a paleolithic site in the Dordogne, and *On Erin's Shore*, a sort of constructivist chorale prelude on an Irish folksong by Richard Barnard (the youngest composer here, born 1977). These comparatively modest pieces are offset by the longest work on the disc, *Fingers Pointing to the Moon* by Steven Kings (b.1962), an enigmatic, questing sequence of six short movements which briefly spans a stylistic gamut from somewhere in the orbit of Webern to that of Nancarrow, pedal resonance evoking the night sky.

Bach stands behind two of the composers here – Susan Coppard's short *Round and Around*, based on 'the most outlandish scale she could devise', she calls 'part hora, part fugue', and it has been described as 'Bach in an Israeli Madhouse'. Three pieces – an *Aire* and two *Fantasies* by John Pitts (b.1976) are intensely pleasant music with a serene rhythmic sense and a sure harmonic ear, *Fantasy 5* being based on a Bach Prelude, but 'rewritten with different chordal implications'.

James Patten (b.1936) seems to be reinventing the night-music genre in his stark, rather bump-in-the-night Third and much gentler, chorale-like Fourth Nocturnes (composed as a pair in 1999), though I was reminded at times of Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies*. Richard Carder (b.1942), mentioned above, composes as Sulyen Caradon. His *Dorian Dirge*, in memory of the bass player Paul Servis, who was killed in a car crash, 'can be played by any combination of instruments, or on the piano': it's a plangent kind of slow cakewalk on a jazzily syncopated, more or less Dorian bass line.

Finally Raymond Warren's *Monody* and *Chaconne* are the first and last movements of a piano sonata which it would be worth hearing

complete: they are related, the first consisting of a passionate, much-decorated single line, the Chaconne taking up some of its ideas in stricter dance form. There are perhaps echoes of Britten and Tippett (the latter was one of Warren's teachers), even of Alan Bush. At seven minutes plus, the Chaconne is the longest single movement on the disc, and though it's invidious to make comparisons in such a programme, solely on the evidence of the pieces presented here Warren emerges as the figure most capable of sustained organic invention. They are all fortunate to have been able to put their works into the hands of a pianist as capable as Jacobs, who faithfully reflects the many moods and idioms, and is equally responsive to the most static and spare textures and the most note-filled writing.

Alliance member Stephen Kings is one of the pianists on the 2-piano recital, but here the Severnside composers account for less than a third of the playing-time. The 2-piano medium lends itself to process-music, to hocketing and minimalist bell-sonorities, and these features can all be sensed in David Bedford's *Hoquetus David* and two works by composers who figure on the other disc – John Pitts's minimalistic *Changes* and the intriguingly-titled *Die! A1 Sparrow* by Jolyon Laycock. The title, though, is an anagram of something else, and thus 'entirely meaningless', according to the composer. This quite ambitious piece was originally composed for the Icebreaker band and only later adapted for pianos, and it has something of that famous ensemble's aggressive hocketing style and relentless antiphony. The rest of the programme is made up by a number of modern classics in the medium, not least Martinů's substantial *Czech Dances* of 1949, written for Ethel Bartlett and Rae Robertson, which I'm always surprised he didn't orchestrate; and a selection from Robin Holloway's *Gilded Goldbergs*, that remarkable re-imagining of the Bach *Goldberg Variations* whose first complete recording (Hyperion CDA 67360) was reviewed by Mike Smith in *Tempo* Vol.57 No.225. Kings and Northam sometimes seem to probe deeper into Holloway's music than the Micaleff-Inanga Duo, and apart from some initial uncertainties of co-ordination in the Martinů, with its tricky sprung rhythms, they despatch this varied programme with panache and enthusiasm (the concluding Lutoslawski *Paganini Variations*, of course, is always guaranteed to bring the house down). The disc, unfortunately, has a very shallow, dry, constricted sound, almost devoid of resonance, and this does not do the music any favours.

The fey title apart, 'Transcendent Journey' is a gem of a disc: unusual and enterprising repertoire, the individual items intelligently programmed to cast multiple reflections on each other, superbly recorded and alluringly performed, even beautifully presented in terms of sleeve and booklet. Peruvian-born but based in Munich, a protégé of Sergiu Celibadache, Juan José Chuquisengo invests all the works here with a necessary quality of belief, backed up by absolutely peerless playing, incisive in rhythm, warm, colourful and with a seemingly infinite range of touch and dynamics.

Two Bach chorales, in the pianist's own transcription, lead into a meditation on ground-bass variations, where Handel's G major Chaconne is enclosed by two works by the unfamiliar but astonishing John Foulds (1880–1939): the visionary and prophetic *Gandharva-Music* (1915) whose flood of filigree over an ostinato bass presages the Minimalism of 60 years later, and the irrepressible *April-England* (1926), whose central section is kind of riotous passacaglia. The fascination with ostinato is maintained in Liszt's transcription of the Allegretto from Beethoven 7, and John Corigliano's *Fantasia on an Ostinato*, which is a modern re-casting and dis-arrangement of that same movement. And finally a triptych of mighty Toccatas – Bach BWV 911, Schumann and Prokofiev – balance out the chorales: motion and attack rather than reflection and *legato*. So the disc is a journey indeed, from contemplation to action.


The items of most interest to *Tempo* readers are presumably the Foulds and the Corigliano. The superbly original Foulds pieces have never been better played; Chuquisengo's seamless shaping of *Gandharva-Music* makes one feel one is, finally, hearing the piece as it is meant to be heard. As for *April-England*, he adopts a more measured tempo for the staggering exfoliation of the central section than do either Peter Jacobs (Altarus) or Kathryn Stott (BIS), but is able thereby to summon greater power at the climax of all the activity, and to subside more naturally into its echoes. If one counts the recordings of the orchestral version of this piece (two so far, with a Warner Classics release expected in 2006) as well as the piano original, *April-England* is now by far Foulds's most-recorded work. The Corigliano is the only piece perhaps not totally out of the top drawer, but Chuquisengo makes you admire its obsessive quality.

Calum MacDonald

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