



JEAN SIBELIUS, SNÖFRID; CORONATION CANTATA, RAKASTAVA, ANDANTE FESTIVO ETC

OSMO VÄNSKÄ, JUBILATE CHOIR, LAHTI SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

(BIS-1265)

If you enjoy the symphonies of Sibelius then venture boldly into his other works. There isn't much in his huge opus of works that will not appeal. In the area of vocal music his works are not often encountered, but BIS is doing a great job in making sure they get the audience.

The main work *Snöfrid* is a work for orchestra, chorus and narrator, a dramatic work steeped in mystery and Finnish lore in the best tradition of Sibelius. The other two choral pieces, *Oma Maa (My Country)* and *Coronation Cantata* offer a glimpse into Sibelius' beautiful choral writing style, and the latter is especially haunting in its nocturnal shades.

The disc comes with some excellent hors d'oeuvres, for example the subtle *Andante Festivo*, a stunning example of Sibelius' mastery in luminous string writing. Other rarities include miniatures like *Rakastava* and the early *Overture in A*.



SERGEI PROKOFIEV: ALEXANDER NEVSKY

YURI TEMIRKANOV, ST PETERSBURG PHILHARMONIC

(RCA RED SEAL 60867)

Of RCA's reissues of a bunch of titles from their mid-1990s catalogue, this is perhaps the most exciting. It represents a pioneering effort to present the score of this Eisenstein Stalin pleaser in modern sound – and if you have ever watched the black-and-white classic with its disgraceful soundtrack, you will know what a treasure this is. Prokofiev's magnificent score is restored to its original grandeur, from the stunning patriotic choruses that just make you want to be Russian to the classic *Battle on the Ice* complete with sound FX, this riveting performance by Temirkanov and the St Petersburg band will have you waving hammer and sickle.



EDWARD ELGAR: CELLO CONCERTO, SEA PICTURES

JACQUELINE DU PRE, CELLO

SIR JOHN BARBIROLI, LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

(EMI 562-8862)

Remember that awful film *Hillary and Jackie*? Well, neither do I (who names a biopic of one's sister by putting her own name first?) Tsk tsk, Hillary Dupre's scandalous kiss-and-tell biography had the music community in uproar for quite a while. But forget the scandal, and celebrate the artistry of this stunning cellist whose talent was nipped in the bud by a fatal onset of multiple sclerosis. Du Pre's cello literally mourns her fate even before she

knows it. To hear her is truly heartbreaking, and Elgar's nostalgic concerto is perhaps the perfect vehicle for such a tragic figure. Dame Janet Baker provides stunning vocals to another of Elgar's rarities, the beautiful song cycle, *Sea Pictures*. EMI has remastered this classic with their new technology that's been proven to deliver a far superior sound to the earlier CD releases, so if you haven't yet acquired this historic recording, there's no better time to do so.



RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: 9 SYMPHONIES, TUBA CONCERTO, THE WASPS, ELIZABETHAN PORTRAITS, VIOLIN CONCERTO

ANDRE PREVIN, LONDON SYMPHONY ORCH

(RCA RED SEAL 55708)

You can't help but be swept away by the exuberance of the *Sea Symphony*, dramatic and illuminated by crystal clarity – just sample the perfectly balanced colours of the opening of the slow movement, and the clearly audible scraped cymbals. Such are the strengths of Previn's cycle, one which is especially touching in the remarkable 3rd (*Pastoral*). Here Previn is perhaps the only one who truly illuminates the subtle colours painted by the composer in this Sibelian tribute – take the role of the tuba in the soft passages of the *Scherzo* and the closing pages of the *Finale*, rarely audible in other recordings.

Previn demands loving care from his players, and the orchestra responds enthusiastically – from the beautifully moulded string phrases (listen to the heartbreaking loneliness of the opening of the *Nr 7, Sinfonia Antartica*) to intensely expressive solos (the cor anglais that opens the slow movement of the 2nd (*London*) is simply stunning), there is always something special happening.

Of all the cycles past and present, this classic Previn cycle was at the top of the heap in its day, rivalling even the eminent Sir Adrian Boult's (whose EMI cycle was dogged by an uncharacteristic lack of a certain edge found in his earlier

recordings), particularly in the 3rd and 5th. It is still unbeatable today, both for its electrifying sound and inspired performances. Previn's return to the catalogue with a vengeance is long-awaited, especially in this complete edition which includes rare gems such as the delectable *Tuba Concerto* (a first on CD) and the even more obscure *Violin Concerto*.



SERGEI RACHMANINOV, PIANO CONCERTOS 1-4, PAGANINI RHAPSODY

STEPHEN HOUGH, PIANO

ANDREW LITTON, DALLAS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

(HYPERION 67501/2)

Stephen Hough takes the Hollywood out of Tinseltown's favourite romantic composer, and puts the Russian back into these classic concertos. Whether it stands up to its claim as the recording for the new millennium or not, you decide – each Rach fan will have his or her favourite. Yet, Hough does live up to his promise of providing a lean, electrifying Rachmaninov. This is technically brilliant, even if the brightness of the overall sound will find romantics reaching for the blanket. Leave the kleenex in the drawer, and be prepared for a fast ride. Even the schmaltzy (but oh so deliciously so) 22nd *Paganini Variation* cannot deter Hough, who does perform some real magic in this familiar Rediffusion closer.

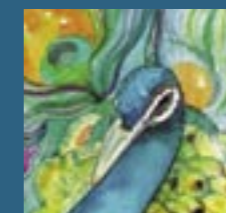
The Dallas Symphony is faithful to Hough's vision, serving up a lean and gritty Slavic backdrop that saves the rushed 2nd Concerto from escaping attention altogether. Litton moulds the orchestra lovingly, but not enough to counter some of Hough's excesses, for example, the absolutely fast-forwarded opening chords of the 2nd which kills the mystery to perhaps the most enigmatic opening ever written. Still, as a live recording it brims with concert hall excitement tempered by a remarkable fluency, and there is no shortage of high voltage, especially in the *Finale* of the 3rd, which can sound almost brutal.

CH Loh is a musician

CH'S HALF DOZEN

KEEPING TIME

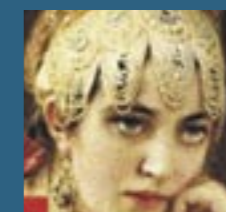
CLASSICAL TIME PIECES TO PASS THE HOURS WITH



ZOLTAN KODALY: VIENNESE MUSICAL CLOCK (HARY JANOS SUITE)

One of the most colourful musical timepieces in classical music, just wind it up and hear it go!

NEEME JARVI, CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCH (CHANDOS 8877)



SERGEI PROKOFIEV: CINDERELLA (COMPLETE BALLET)

It's that horrifying twelve-chimer that sent poor Cindy out of the dance floor, minus one glass slipper. It really strikes twelve, too.

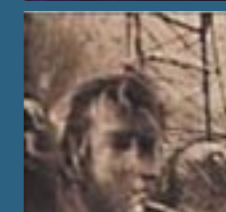
ANDRE PREVIN, LONDON SYMPHONY ORCH (EMI DOUBLE FORTE 68604)



RALPH VAUGHAN-WILLIAMS: A LONDON SYMPHONY

Big Ben's familiar chime is immortalised in the opening and closing of this colourful English symphony.

RICHARD HICKOX, LONDON SYMPHONY ORCH (CHANDOS 9902)



OLIVIER MESSIAEN: QUARTET FOR THE END OF TIME

Forget *Schindler's List* or *The Piano Player*. This is real-life concentration camp inspiration.

MYUNG WHUN CHUNG, GIL SHAHM ET AL (DG 469052)



AMILCARE PONCHIELLI: DANCE OF THE HOURS (LA GIOCONDA)

Popularised by the 1963 American comic parody by Allan Sherman entitled, *Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh*. Believe it or not, this standard is now a ringtone. Go ahead, download it to your cellphone and annoy the hell out of your friends

HERBERT VON KARAJAN, BERLIN PHILHARMONIC (DG 459445)



JOSEPH HAYDN: SYMPHONY 101 (CLOCK)

18th Century audiences were very easy to amuse. If you find the show of stocking shocking, then be prepared to be amazed by Haydn's amazing clock impersonations. Not.

SIR COLIN DAVIS, CONCERTGEBOUW (PHILIPS 42614)