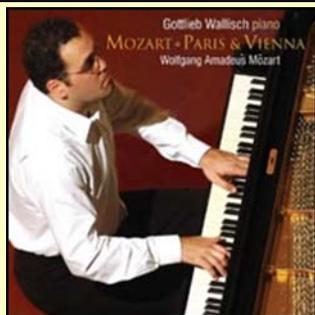


Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

August, 2012

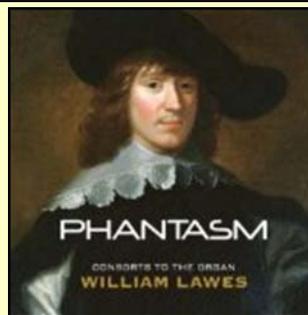


Mozart: "Paris & Vienna"
Gottlieb Wallisch, piano
Linn Records (Hybrid SACD)

Once again, it's a pleasure to listen to Gottlieb Wallisch playing Mozart. I previously reviewed his debut album for Linn Records, "Mozart in Vienna" in August, 2010, praising the transparency of his playing and the insight he brought into his interpretations. The superb clarity of purpose, sensitive touch on the keys, and feeling for the complexities of structure the Vienna native showed in his earlier album are present again in this latest release, "Paris & Vienna: a Tale of Two Cities." Though Mozart did, in fact write many of these piano works, including Sonatas 10 and 12, at home in Salzburg, they were clearly intended for the International stage. On the continent in those days, that meant the two cities of the title. Both sonatas lifted the sonata to new heights of virtuosity, transcending its origin as an instructional tool.

Sonatas Nos. 10 in C major, K330 and 12 in F major, K332 were both written within a short time of each other in 1778 (In between: K331, the sonata with the famous *Rondo alla turca*, but that's for another day and another album). Both bear similarities in their general outline and are generally optimistic and life-affirming, though the middle section of the Andante cantabile in K330 does seem surprisingly melancholy, an example of the sort of profundity that can steal upon the listener unawares when the subject is Mozart. The most remarkable movement of K332 is the finale, a rapid allegretto in 6/8 time that begins with a forte chord, soon giving way to rapid passagework, and concludes with a pianissimo cadence, one of Mozart's little surprises.

This pianist's marvelous feeling for lithe rhythms and seemingly effortless spontaneity is evident once again in the Allegro in B-flat major, K400, sole surviving movement of an unfinished sonata. Wallisch talks of its "frivolous virtuosity," and indeed that is the case, including a requirement for a dazzling display of finger dexterity that can leave the listener feeling agreeably dotty. The Fantasy in c minor, K396, begun by Mozart and finished by the Abbé Maximilian Stadler with a serious development and recapitulation that seem quite



William Lawes: Consorts for Organ, Viols
Phantasm
Linn Records (Hybrid SACD)

Poor William Lawes. In a profession that is frequently exposed to attacks by critics but seldom any actual violence, most composers manage to die in their beds. Lawes (1602-1645) was the exception. At a time of civil war, Cavaliers versus Roundheads, he was "Musician in Ordinary for Lutes and Voices" to Charles I. He was given a post in the King's Life Guards to keep him out of danger. But during the route at Rowton Heath, Lawes, ever a curious fellow, stuck his head up once too often and was "casually shot" by a marksman on the other side. If they'd had Prime Minister's Questions in those days, they could have expended their passions in hot air instead of gun powder, and the composer might have lived on to old age.

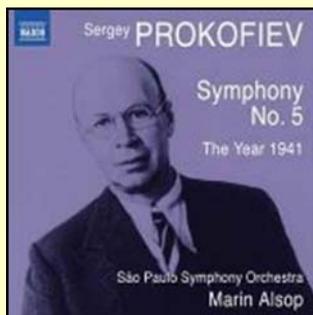
Lawes continues to inspire controversy to this day. Even the generally conservative article in Wikipedia refers to his "tendency to juxtapose bizarre, spine-tingling themes next to pastoral ones." But Laurence Dreyfus, treble viol and director of the early music consort Phantasm, goes to greater extreme in his assessment of the composer, citing Lawes' "daemoniac driving rhythms," his "offensive counterpoint," his suspensions in midair and the rawness of his harmonies. Concerning the Fantasy à 6 (Track 20), Dreyfus' remark is typical: "The competition among the six viols feels pointless until Lawes abruptly calls a halt to the chaos and administers a fatal harmonic shock (at 2:34) which writhes with pain."

Give us a break, Larry Dreyfus. Your Lawes often sounds like a 17th century conflation of Scriabin, Stravinsky and Prokofiev, all on steroids. I will grant you that William Lawes was then in the vanguard of English composers in his forward-looking use of counterpoint and fugue in more than just simple imitation of voices. But his dissonant harmonies may be nothing more than a reflection of the way the way the venerable consorts of viols were tuned in those days, or else the distinctly different way English composers from Byrd to Purcell heard harmonic intervals. (When the music of those times was being re-discovered in the 20th century, modern editors frequently assumed they were witnessing copyists' mistakes.)

in character with its beginning, provides yet another opportunity for keyboard wizardry with such unusually small note values as the preponderance of triplet hemidemisemi-quavers in its opening. (For years, I've longed to use that word in a review, and now I've finally had the chance. Thanks, Mozart!)

Sadness, sighing, profound mystery, and dissonance make up the world of the Adagio in B minor, K540. Wallisch does a wonderful job of pacing this remarkable outpouring of emotion that goes through a succession of moods, promising an enlightenment that is ultimately quashed, though the general mood is not as spectral or the chord progressions as wraithlike as I've heard in other interpretations.

The delightful Andante in F, K616, was originally written for mechanical organ, but, as Wallisch shows us here and in his account of the Paisiello Variations, K398, it is never safe to mistake Mozart's light tone and popular intent with mere superficiality.

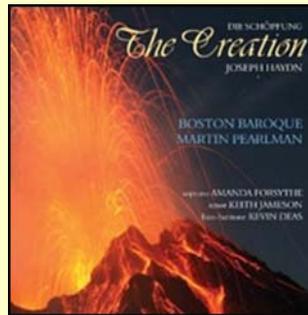


Prokofiev: Symphony No. 5, Op. 100
Marin Alsop, São Paulo Symphony Orchestra
Naxos

Under the inspired leadership of the American Marin Alsop, its recently appointed Principal Conductor, the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra of Brazil gives further evidence of why it is considered one of the world's fastest rising orchestras. The program is all-Prokofiev, and the OSESP, to give its Brazilian initials, does full justice to all the elements in the music of a composer of impressively wide range.

Prokofiev's symphonic suite *The Year 1941* was tepidly received when it premiered in Moscow, and it has languished in obscurity ever since. Shostakovich took the composer to task for failure to develop his themes, though it should be noted that the bar is considerably lower in that regard for a suite than it is for a symphony. More to the point, this work, ostensibly composed as a response to the Nazi invasion of Russia earlier in that year, was panned by the official critics as insufficient in that regard. Certainly, the opening movement, "In the Struggle," is bombastic and violent enough to please any Commissar. But the slow movement, "In the Night," is surprisingly quiet and lyrical, while the finale, glorious, optimistic and upwardly rising, was titled "For the Brotherhood of Man," a fine sentiment but hardly the

What this does in the case of Lawes is to make his music distinctive and flavorful. As played to perfection by Dreyfus, Wendy Gillespie, Jonathan Manson, Emilia Benjamin, Mikko Perkola, and Markku Luolajan-Mikkola in a consort of pairs of treble, tenor and bass viols, with Daniel Hyde on a euphoniously sympathetic portative organ, the sonic texture exudes a period charm that is never cloying but always a pleasure to hear. In seven "sets" incorporating a variety of fantasias and settings based on venerable plainsong, stately pavans, and lively country dances, and concluding with an "In Nomine," which Lawes quaintly spells "Inominy" (which my churlish spell-checker would have as "Ignominy"), the harmonies are just dissonant enough to be flavorful to a modern ear. I find this music very restful and soothing – spite of Dreyfus' assertions.



Haydn: *The Creation*, complete oratorio
Martin Pearlman, Boston Baroque
Linn Records (2-Hybrid SACD)

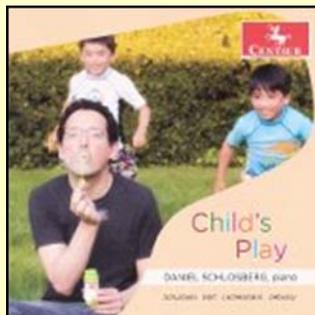
Martin Pearlman and the members of Boston Baroque make a nice splash in this, their debut album for Linn Records after several decades of recording for Telarc. They couldn't have presented a better calling card. This is one of the finer Haydn Creations on record, being distinguished for the excellence of solo vocalists Amanda Forsythe (S), Keith Jameson (T), and Kevin Deas (B), and for Pearlman's direction, which keeps things moving along at an optimal pace and maintains a natural flow of recitative, aria or duet, and chorus without any awkward places, so that the total playing time (97 min.) seems perfect for this work. As an additional plus, the 96kHz / 24 bit recorded sound compliments the artistic purpose of the performance to perfection.

As is usually done, Pearlman has opted for the German libretto (1798), rather than use the English version that the librettist, Baron Gottfried van Swieten, prepared for publication at the same time as the original. *Poor baron!* Actually, his much-maligned grasp of the language was good enough to serve him well during a very long career as a diplomat. The real problem in setting an English text to the music lies in the differing syntax of the two languages. Consider, for instance, Eve's aria in Part III, "*Teurer Gatte, dir zur Seite schwimmt in Freuden mir das Herz.*" That would be quite literally, and awkwardly in English, "Dearest spouse, at thy side swims in joy my heart." Scores of other examples could be cited. It's enough to defeat any translator. (I've often thought that German was the ideal

official Soviet explanation for why we should all support the Great Patriotic War.

The major work here is, of course, Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony in B-flat, Op. 100, that wonderful summing-up of the composer's life and career. From the opening Melody, given to the flutes and bassoons with a well-supported foundation in the strings, the composer's paean to "free and happy Man, to his mighty powers, his pure and noble spirit" unfolds surely and confidently, passing from one family of instruments to another. The scherzo movement, *Allegro marcato*, plays like a take-out from Romeo and Juliet (most likely the crucial street duel in Act II) with its brilliant writing for the clarinet and its headlong helter-skelter rapidity.

The *Adagio* is dreamy and full of nostalgia, again evoking Romeo and Juliet, with a more perturbed and dramatic middle section before returning to its original mood. The finale, *Allegro giocoso*, is far-ranging, ebullient, and ultimately triumphant. It seems to touch all the bases, engaging every family and every chair in a very diverse, imaginatively scored work for a large orchestra with a particularly sensational array of percussion instruments that includes the piano. All of which gives the members of the Saõ Paolo SO plenty of opportunity to show their stuff!



"Child's Play," Debussy, Schumann: Kinderszenen
Daniel Schlosberg, piano
Centaur Records

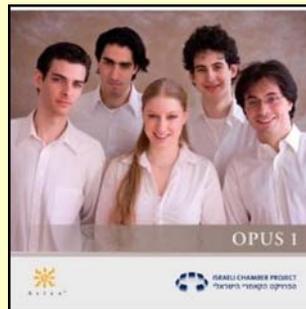
The bookends of "Child's Play," a recital by American pianist Daniel Schlosberg, have many moments of incredible beauty and enchantment. I'm less sanguine about the 8 tracks of music in between. More about that at "the end of the story"....

Schlosberg, an L.A. native who studied at Peabody, shows style and feeling, and a fine command of rhythms and textures in the two piano works that have the most to say about the secret life of children. Robert Schumann's Kinderszenen (Scenes from Childhood) follows a child through all the passionate activities of his day: listening to tales of foreign lands and peoples, playing *Hasche-Mann* (Blind Man's Bluff), witnessing an important event (soldiers on parade, to judge from the up-tempo march music at this point), dreaming during a mid-day nap, imagining himself a brave knight riding a hobby horse, listening to a grim and possibly nightmare-

language for conspiracy, from the way they withhold the full meaning of an utterance until the very last!)

In the present performance, all the music comes to life in vibrant color, not just the remarkably modern orchestration of the opening section with its depiction of primal chaos in the fleeting woodwind passages, some brilliant and others grey and quietly menacing, or the overwhelming sensation of the *fortissimo* in chorus and orchestra on the words "*Und es war Licht*" (And there was light!) which certainly achieves its wonted affect here. Not every critic in the past 200 years has been enchanted with Haydn's musical humor in his depiction of the animals – the lion's roar in *forte* double-bassoons and trombones, for example, or the slow, creeping progress of the worm.

On the other hand, the delicate touch of the composer is felt in passages such as those in Deas' bass-baritone aria "*rauschend gleitet fort im stillen Tal der helle Bach*" (Softly purling, glides through silent vales, the limpid brook) and the contrast between the depictions of the sunrise in Jameson's "*In vollen Glanze steigt jetzt die Sonne strahlend auf*" (In splendor bright the sun now rises) and the softer progress of the moon in the same aria: "*Mit leisem Gang und sanftem Schimmer schleicht der Mond die stille Nacht hindurch*" (With softer beams and milder light, the silver moon steps through the silent night). Sheer, matchless poetry, beautifully rendered and captured here.



Opus 1: Chamber music of Saint-Saens,
Martinu, Porat, Debussy, and Bartok
Israeli chamber Project
Azica Records

Sometimes you really *can* tell a book by its cover. In this instance, the fresh, eager faces of the young musicians on the booklet front give an earnest of engaging performances with which they make good on the enclosed CD. It is an intriguing program, as it encompasses five works for often un-traditional instrumental combinations in a variety of tone colors, timbres and styles. The performers are the members of the Israeli Chamber Project: Tibi Cziger, clarinet; Sivan Magen, harp; Itamar Zorman, violin; Shmuel Katz, viola; Michal Korman, cello; and Assaff Weisman, piano. All are native Israelis who began their studies in their native land and concluded them in New York, at either Juilliard or the Manhattan School of Music. The mutual sympathy of these talented young artists is apparent throughout the program.

inducing tale (*Fürchtenmachen*), and finally drifting off into peaceful slumber. Schlosberg derives beguiling poetry from each section of Schumann's masterwork.

Claude Debussy wrote his suite *The Children's Corner* for the pleasure of his beloved daughter Claude-Emma, known as "Chou-Chou," who was then three years old. In terms of texture, nuance, and dynamics, the six pieces that make up the suite can be as challenging to perform with the conviction Schlosberg shows here as they are disarmingly charming. The darker, more stirring middle section of "Jumbo's Lullaby," otherwise slow and languid as befits a slumber-song for a stuffed toy elephant, calls for special commendation, as do the delicate rhythms representing the swirling snowflakes in "The Snow is Dancing." "The Little Shepherd," poignantly piping his heart out on a solitary hill, cuts his wonted figure here, as does the hyperkinetic song and dance man in "Golliwogg's Cakewalk," which follows in striking contrast. Both the Schumann and the Debussy works seem to me a healthy corrective to the "politically correct" *zeitgeist* of our times, as they reveal the well-kept secret that little girls and boys have different emotional needs and requirements for nurture. Just as the hero of *Kinderszenen* could only be a boy, so is the heroine of *The Children's Corner* clearly a girl.

The intervening pieces, Arvo Pärt's *Für Alina* and Helmut Lachenmann's *Ein Kinderspiel*, are a waste of time. Pärt's brief piece was allegedly written as *bon voyage* for an 18-year old girl going abroad to study. Judging by its dismal tone, it sounds as if the young lady had died. The seven pieces in Lachenmann's suite, an example of *musique concrète*, make much use of spare, obsessively repetitive tones, sounding at times like metallic tapping or rats gnawing through plaster. It seems cruel of the composer to have titled his work "Child's Play," as much of it sounds like a child's worst dream. In the long run of music history, people like Pärt and Lachenmann will be forgotten. In the meantime, I recommend judicious use of the buttons on the listener's remote to skip tracks 14-21.



Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 2, "Little Russian"
Mikhail Pletnev, Russian National Orchestra
PentaTone (Hybrid SACD)

I have known and loved Tchaikovsky's Second Symphony in c minor, Op. 17 for years. It is so familiar, in fact, that it is easy to conflate the various competing

The works are by Saint-Saëns, Martinů, Debussy, Bartok, and present-day Israeli composer Matan Porat. The same instrumental combination never occurs twice, adding variety to the program. First out of the gate is Saint-Saëns' *Fantaisie for Violin and Harp* (1907). With its unique instrumental combination, romantic style, and free-flowing movement, it charms and exhilarates. Its rapid pedal changes and delicate glissandi create particular challenges for the harpist, as does the close interplay with the violin.

Martinů's curiously titled *Chamber Music No. 1* (1959) was actually a product of the last year of his life, after he had added some 90 works to the chamber repertoire. Perhaps he intended to emphasize the fact that it was for a mixed ensemble, consisting of clarinet, harp, string trio, and piano. It is the only work on the program featuring all the members of ICP. All are heard to good effect, thanks to a generous sharing among all hands of the composer's abundant melodies. With its kaleidoscope of colors, including octaves in the harp and tone clusters in the piano, it is a example of Martinů's "night music" in its richest vein.

Matan Porat's *Night Horses* (2007), commissioned by ICP, is the only work on the program by a living composer, Porat being a contemporary of the artists heard on this CD. It is written, perhaps consciously, for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, the same quartet Olivier Messiaen used in his famous *Quatuor pour le fin du temps*. It says well of the quality of Porat's tightly integrated work that it need make no apologies for its inclusion here. From its initial gossamer arabesques to the galloping sounds made by piano and strings later on, this evocation of a dream veering into nightmare is as moving to hear as it is challenging to play.

Debussy's *Sonata for Cello and Piano* (1915), arranged for cello and harp by Sivan Magen, makes use of modes and whole-tone and pentatonic scales, and calls for extended cello technique, including spiccato bowing and left-handed pizzicati. For the harpist, the fast pedal work is no less formidable. Magen does a fine job altering the harp's registration to account for its difference in character from the piano. The work strikes us as both engaging and exotic, with special mention for the impassioned role of the harp in the middle movement, *Sérénade*.

Bartók's *Contrasts for Clarinet, Violin and Piano* (1938) is a great choice to conclude the program. Its zestful virtuosity, recalling the fact that it was commissioned by the American clarinetist Benny Goodman and introduced by himself and the famous violinist Joseph Szigeti, has insured its popularity to this day. It is in three movements, *Verbunkos* (Recruiting Dance), *Pihenő* (Relaxation) in Bartók's best night music mood, and a lively *Sebes* (Fast Dance) in perpetual motion that allows the clarinet many chances to discretely misbehave itself.

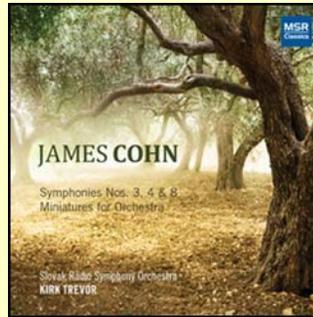
performances and come to the lazy conclusion that there is little difference between them, so long as they are well-played and sound grand and imposing.

The difference becomes apparent only when you have a conductor and an ensemble as well-versed on their Tchaikovsky symphonies as are Mikhail Pletnev and the Russian National Orchestra. It is not fair to say that the Second Symphony just sits down and plays itself, despite the deceptive way in which its themes and the gorgeous variations on the same succeed one another with perfect naturalness. Much still depends on the conductor's touch in the matter of pacing, rhythmic emphasis, and the dynamic shadings that add so much to the expressive quality of this work. From the point of view of the orchestra, firmly focused tone and the willingness to play with abandon when the score requires it are essential requisites. From the evidence of this recording, Pletnev and the RNO really have it.

As is well known, Tchaikovsky composed this symphony in the summer of 1872 while on vacation at his sister's estate in the Ukraine. He absorbed the native folk culture to such a degree that he used the melodies as many as five authentic Ukrainian folksongs in his new work, the most memorable of which are "Down by Mother Volga" in the opening movement and "The Cranes" in the rousing finale. That accounts for its popular nickname of the "Little Russian" Symphony. Tchaikovsky makes use of the "Mother Volga" melody first as a quiet elegiac melody in the horn at the very opening, and then in a number of attractive settings throughout the development. The finale builds in intensity throughout the variations on the "Cranes" theme until it ends in a whirlwind which Pletnev whips up with passion and abandon.

In between, we have a wedding march-like *Andantino Marziale* and a helter skelter scherzo with a more relaxed trio in unusual 2/8 meter which Pletnev takes very nicely. It will be noted that there is no real slow movement here, a fact which throws major emphasis on the exuberant finale.

As an extra, the program includes the seldom-heard original opening movement which Tchaikovsky revised in 1879-80 until it assumed the form we almost always hear (as on the present CD). Some of Tchaikovsky's contemporaries thought the original version was better, though when one finally has the chance to hear it, the rationale for the revision becomes clear. The original is over-developed and gets to the recap too belatedly. Despite the contention we often hear that the composer "substituted a new set of themes" in the revision, he actually did nothing of the sort but merely tightened up the structure, cutting about five minutes' playing time. Though I miss a charming variant of the theme at about 9:00, I have to admit that the revised version is superior. If you wish to hear the "Little Russian" as it sounded in its 1872 premiere, just use your CD remote.



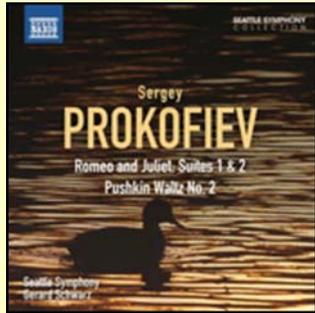
Cohn: Symphonies 3, 4 and 8
Kirk Trevor, Slovak Radio Symphony
MSR Classics

James Cohn (b. Newark, 1928) is a refreshing discovery. Not only is it a pleasure to discover a contemporary American composer who extolls the role of lyricism in music ("I've always tended to write in a melodic, rather than in a percussive way"), but it's a plus to find someone who does it in so natural, straightforward, unpretentious a way. Still among the living at age 84 and working on new commissions even as I write, Cohn (he pronounces his name co-en) believes in writing to his listeners' emotional, and not just intellectual needs, and he brings all the sonic resources of his orchestra to that end.

"His" orchestra, if I may use the term, has been standard with him for more than fifty years, ever since his Third Symphony (1955) heard on this program. It consists of five woodwinds, three brass, two percussionists, and a minimum of fifteen strings, with the understanding that more string players, if available, could be added to each part. Within these limitations, in part a reflection of the realities of musical life for the modern composer and the corresponding need to write with something other than a full 100-piece symphony orchestra in mind if one expects to be performed, Cohn has done very well for himself, as the present program bears witness. His music is immediately identifiable and accessible to listeners who have been put on a starvation diet by all the various "isms" that have come and gone in contemporary music – serialism and minimalism being the most odious.

In part, Cohn's accessibility is a product of his ear for timbres and his unerring instinct for choosing the right instruments for what he wants to say. Orchestral musicians must simply love this guy for the way he writes to their instruments' strengths, rather than torturing them to do the unnatural just to achieve a striking effect. Listen to the glorious clarinet melody over a kettledrum roll in the opening to Symphony No. 3, the fetchingly idiomatic use of the trumpet in the "Boogie" and "Drag" movements of his wonderful Miniatures for Orchestra, the hauntingly beautiful horn passages in the "Sunrise" and "Sunset" movements from the same work, or the fascinating dialogues in the strings in the *Andante tranquillo* of Symphony No. 4 (1956), and you will hear what I mean. Symphony No. 8 (1978) reveals a more concise, dramatic and turbulent element in Cohn's music without betraying the salient qualities that I described earlier.

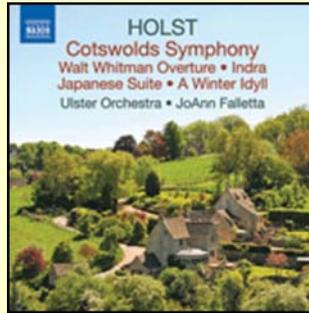
By the way, may I recommend an insightful 1987 interview by the indefatigable music commentator Bruce Duffie? It's available on Duffie's website, or you can access it easily from "External Links" in the Wikipedia article on the composer. In it, Cohn reveals himself to be a man who enjoys talking and has a lot to say about the role of the modern composer and the difficulties he faces in reaching his audience. It is well worth the time looking it up.



Prokofiev: Romeo and Juliet Suites
Gerard Schwarz, Seattle Symphony
Naxos

Readers may have noticed my predilection for Naxos Records' release of the various titles from the Seattle Symphony Collection. It's no mystery: many of these SSO performances with Gerard Schwarz as music director are, simply, among the very best symphonic recordings ever made in this country. Most of them were original Delos releases from the 1980's and 90's that benefited from the presence in the control booth of engineer John Eargle, to be forever identified with the symphonic sound stage concept for optimally capturing the sound of the orchestra.

In these 1986 recordings of Sergey Prokofiev's Suites 1 and 2 from his ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, all the omens were right: first, an orchestra in fine mettle with solid performances from every section, then a conductor whose instincts for bringing out all the fine points in a score in a totally un-fussy way that did not ignore the bold sweep of the whole picture, and finally, a recoding team to help realize the totality through sound that is beautifully focused and detailed without being obtrusive. Eargle is joined in the booth by another famous name in the industry, producer Joanna Nickrenz, and the results bear out the expectations.

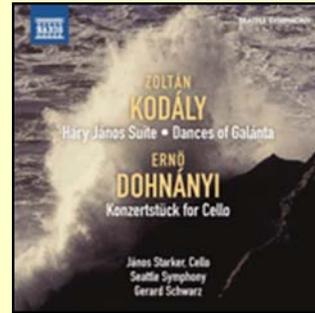


Holst: Cotswolds Symphony, etc.
JoAnn Falletta, Ulster Orchestra
Naxos

Gustav Holst (1874-1934) reminds me of the child's school essay about the cowboy who leaped on his horse and galloped off in all directions. The England of his day was rife with various artistic and philosophical movements. Sooner or later, Holst bought into most of them, including utopian socialism, Hindu mysticism, astrology, and theosophy. Musical influences included Wagner, Strauss, Ravel, and fellow English composer Ralph Vaughn Williams.

The upshot of all these influences is that Holst was slow to develop his own distinctive style. The present CD offers evidence of Holst's struggles in this regard, as well as plenty of examples of his brilliant sure-handed orchestrations, in performances by the finely mettled Ulster Orchestra under its American principal conductor, JoAnn Falletta.

We begin with the Walt Whitman Overture (1899), robustly Wagnerian tribute to a poet Holst admired for the broad scope of his humanity. It is followed by his Cotswolds Symphony (1900), suffused with the folksong influence and the genty rolling region of the name where villages seem to pop out of the landscape and enchantment beckons at every lane and hedgerow. The most profound



Kodaly: Hary Janos Suite + Dohanyi
Gerard Schwarz, Seattle Symphony
Naxos

The Seattle Symphony Collection continues with Gerard Schwarz leading the orchestra in 1988-1990 recordings of showpieces by 20th century Hungarian composers Zoltan Kodály (1882-1967) and Ernő Dohnányi (1877-960). Their luminous sonic qualities are captured optimally by producer Adam stern and engineer John Eargle.

Kodály begins his *Háry János* Suite with a bit of musical whimsy: a stunningly orchestrated symphonic "sneeze." The composer was at pains to assure his international audience that this related to an old Hungarian superstition that, if a listener sneezes at the beginning of a story, the teller of tales must be telling the truth. (A Hungarian lady of my acquaintance once informed me that it meant the very opposite, so maybe Kodály was pulling our leg, after all?)

In any event, the hero of Kodály's opera is a liar on a grand scale, claiming to have defeated Napoleon's *Grande Armée* single-handed, been received at court by the Austrian Emperor, and forsaken all honors and glory to return home and marry his village sweetheart. But Háry János is more than a simple braggart: says the composer, "He essentially is a natural visionary and poet. That his stories

<p>Sergey Prokofiev knew he really had something when he finished his <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> ballet. Within a year of its premiere, he fashioned two suites for orchestra (heard on the present CD) and one for solo piano, to give it further exposure. In every form, this masterpiece is firmly entrenched in the repertoire. And for good reason. Its themes, as danceable as they are lyrical, resonated through Prokofiev's career right to the end of his life.</p> <p>From the resounding opening foot-falls of "Folk Dance" in Suite 1, we know we are in the heady world of the modern ballet. "The Death of Tybalt" builds in excitement as Romeo furiously pursues the killer of his friend Mercutio through the streets of Verona, and when he gives Tybalt the fatal thrust, the agony of violent death is conveyed through viscerally jagged chords. The chords are doom-laden in "Montagues and Capulets," expressing the over-weening pride of the rival families and its potential for tragedy.</p> <p>But Prokofiev can also be gentle, as in his deft portrait of "Juliet the Young Girl," in the Balcony Scene, echoes of which resonate through Suite 2, and in the tender if heart-rending farewell scene, "Romeo with Juliet before Parting." Tenderness and tragedy come together in the final scene, "Romeo at the Tomb of Juliet," in a soft reprise of the music of "The Girl Juliet" before the final awareness of tragic death sets in. It is followed by a slow diminuendo, concluding on C major, the most consonant of chords, symbolizing the final peace of the grave.</p>	<p>movement is the slow one, an Elegy for artist and essayist William Morris, one of many well loved figures associated with the Cotswolds.</p> <p>A Winter Idyll (1897) is marked by the deep orchestral colors characteristic of that season of the year, while Japanese Suite (1915), written at the behest of a Japanese dance and choreographer, shows a tepid orientalism but otherwise an assured command of the orchestra. One of the finest pieces here is "Interlude: Song of the Fisherman," with its gloriously hued opening that seems to evoke a sunrise. Finally, Indra (1903), inspired by the Hindu legend of the rain god who subdued a vengeful demon, features a big, magnificently structured climax from which one gathers that the poor demon never stood a chance!</p> <p>That brings us to the fact that the overwhelming popularity of <i>The Planets</i> tends to obscure everything else the composer ever wrote. While it isn't quite fair to dismiss Holst as a one-trick pony, it's also true that one can be thrilled by his orchestrations to the detriment of what he has to say, so a given work may seem hazy by the following day. The sunny side to this conundrum is that, thanks to the compact disc, you can return weeks or months later to a delightful Holst program such as Falletta and the Ulster present here and be refreshed by it as if you were hearing the music for the first time!</p>	<p>are not true is irrelevant, for they are the fruit of a lively imagination seeking to create, for himself and others, a beautiful dream world."</p> <p>To that end, Kodály wrote music of such symphonic sweep that he could scarcely have expected it would be contained within the opera house, and he made it more flavorful with the native paprika of his own folk ethos. In the present recording, Schwarz takes a perfectly equipped Seattle Symphony through its paces, with smart, characteristically luminous and insightful performances from every section. Not only do the big "production numbers" (Viennese Musical Clock, Battle and Defeat of Napoleon, Entrance of the emperor and His Court) come across splendidly. So does the enchantingly beautiful Song, an evocation of the night in the form of a serenade, or perhaps a twilight reverie.</p> <p>Of special interest is the Intermezzo in the form of a <i>Verbunkos</i>, a swirling, exciting, uniquely Hungarian musical genre. Translated "recruiting dance," it was an entertainment put on by the army in order to lure the village lads in to hear the recruiter's spiel. We hear another example in Dances of Galánta, concluding the program with a very attractive 17-minute "encore."</p> <p>A treat here is the inclusion of Dohnányi's Konzertstück for Cello and Orchestra. Despite its name, it is a full-blown concerto with the usual three movements incorporated as one in easily-recognizable sections plus a reprise and cadenza. The great János Starker is the soloist here, essaying the many beauties of a score that includes a nocturnal Adagio section where the cello's melody is enhanced by distant bird-calls in the flutes.</p>
--	---	---