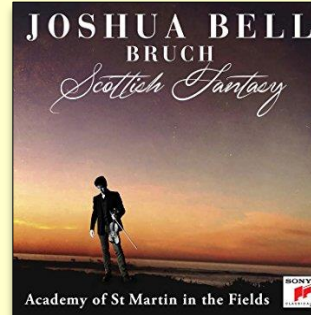


Brahms + Tchaikovsky: Violin Concertos  
Artur Kaganovsky, violin; Philip Greenberg, NSO Ukraine  
(Centaur)

Artur Kaganovsky (b. Moscow, 1986) is described in the booklet notes as “one of the great violinists of his generation.” Normally, I’m inclined to be blasé about praise for an artist I’d never heard of (though the fact that the quote was attributed to no less an observer than James DePreist should have tipped me off.) I guess I just hadn’t been paying attention. Well, no more of that: from the evidence of the two great violin concertos he performs on this album, the praise is no mere hyperbole. This young man is a flaming star who bears watching for the future.

Brahms and Tchaikovsky have been characterized by many critics, perhaps unfairly, as opposites in personality and style: Brahms introverted, inside-out in his approach to music, with tightly controlled harmonic development; Tchaikovsky extroverted, boldly expressive, flamboyant and uninhibited harmonically. Comparisons that broad usually break down. In fact, both the Brahms and the Tchaikovsky concertos, while undoubtedly infused with the personality of their creators, have a lot of stirring music that will keep you on the edge of your seat, especially in their finales. And their slow movements are infused with a lyricism that never fails to move us.

The Brahms concerto opens quietly, like the pale yellow light of dawn on an autumn morning, with the mist rising on a lake. Brahms pays tribute to tradition in the way he develops his themes. There is nothing superficially beautiful about his melodies: on the contrary, all are carefully formed and beautifully supported. The Adagio movement is simply breathtaking in its deeply personal lyrical beauty, supported at a key moment by a singing melody in the oboe. The finale, *Allegro giocoso*, is both intriguing and exciting, with high-energy rhythms and a restless momentum reminiscent of both folk and gypsy music. With its wide melodic leaps and its bold double-stopping, it was initially described by Brahms’ critics as “a concerto against the violin.” Time, and greater



Bruch: Scottish Fantasy, Violin Concerto No. 1  
Joshua Bell, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields  
(Sony Classical)

Joshua Bell is phenomenal, and this release of all-time favorites by Max Bruch shows us just why. The American violinist makes a big splash in his dual role as soloist and music director of the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, succeeding the departed Neville Marriner. His string sound is “fat” or “lean” as the musical line requires, soaring to great heights without the least diffraction in tone. And his multiple stops are immaculately clean, with well-characterized individual voices. As conductor, he and the Academy bring out the strengths in Bruch’s orchestrations in both the *Scottish Fantasy* and *Violin Concerto No. 1*. People usually don’t gush about how great these orchestrations are, but they serve the purpose of what Bruch has to say perfectly, reinforcing the solo violin in a way that is just enough without being intrusive. In everyday life, people can be too smart for their own good. The fact that Bruch was just smart enough in his orchestrations helps make these works so very satisfying.

*Scottish Fantasy* reflects Bruch’s passion for exploring musical traditions other than his own and incorporating them into the classical mainstream. He does this in the *Fantasy* by using actual folk tunes to bring out its rich Scottish character: The *cantabile* section of the opening *Andante* invokes “Auld Robin Morris” in a noble harp tune that recalls bardic times as it reinforces the voice of the violin. The following *Scherzo*, marked *Allegro*, quotes the lively tune “Dusty Miller,” with drone basses imitating the sound of bagpipes while the violinist engages in extremely bold double- and even triple-stopping. This is done so sensationally and resolutely that it might encourage premature applause from an audience unaware that the work, with so many choice utterances to its credit, is only half over.

A fadeout in the violin provides a bridge to the slow movement which is deeply moving in the present recording. This *Andante* makes effective use of a very

familiarty with this work among succeeding generations of young artists, of which Kaganovsky represents the most recent, have relegated that rusty old harpoon to music's dustbin.

The Tchaikovsky? Well it is obviously as Russian and nationalistic as the Brahms is steeped in German lore and tradition. The opening movement, characterized by several sidelong glances at a polonaise, has such a resolute ending that unwary audiences have been tempted to premature applause, assuming that the last word has been uttered and the work is finished. The slow movement, a Canzonetta tinged with the color and spirit of a folk song, features a melody in the bassoon providing heart-easing balm. Tchaikovsky gives us equal measures of poetry, passion, and sheer flair in his final movement. The verve with which Kaganovsky and the orchestra swing without a break into this finale from the quiet, subdued ending of the Canzonetta is one of music's greatest thrills. This finale, marked *vivacissimo* (as lively as possible) is an out-and-out Cossack Dance, the Trepak. Should that surprise all of us *Nutcracker* fans?

soulful tune "I'm down for lack o' Johnnie." The greatest surprise of all occurs in the finale, marked Allegro *guerriero* (i.e., "warlike") and based on the rousing patriotic tune that has resounded through Scottish history, "Scots wha hae" (Scots who have with Wallace bled). Bell does a masterful job with a violin part that calls for incredible dexterity, playing on three and even four strings simultaneously, and alternating between bowing and strumming.

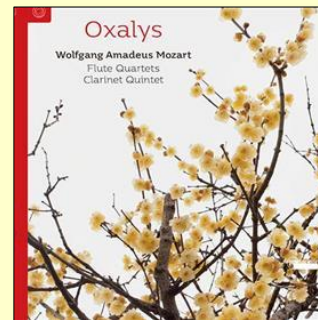
Violin Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 26 is an unforgettably beautiful work that exerts a spell over the listener right from its mysterious opening with a soft drum roll. It shows a strong affinity with Mendelssohn's ever-popular Concerto in E Minor in its architecture, even to the extent of joining the first and second movements with a linking passage in the violin. The glorious outpouring of melody in this concerto and Bruch's unusual glowing harmony speak for themselves. There is so much double-stopping in the violin part in all three movements that it becomes second nature to an executant like Joshua Bell. In the finale, he ratchets up his virtuosity in a plethora of stops in dance tempo that get ever faster and more energetic as we approach the finish line.



Chopin, Schumann, Grieg: Music for Cello & Piano  
Inbal Segev, cello; Juho Pohjonen, piano (Avie)

Israeli cellist Inbal Segev and her partner, Finnish pianist Juho Pohjonen, give outstanding accounts of works by Chopin, Schumann, and Grieg that deserve such spirited and incisive championing. All three composers were master lyricists, and it shows in these performances.

Segev strives for a beautiful tone as something of primary importance in all three works. In that regard she is fortunate to possess a 1673 Ruggiero cello with a malleable tone that falls somewhere between the tenor and baritone registers, helping her to better visualize the music she plays here. Chopin's Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 65 is infused with the spirit of the bel canto that he admired so much in the opera of his day, and thus the cello becomes an extension of the human voice. That this work caused Chopin more difficulty than any other, we may gather from his voluminous sketches over a period of two years. That it meant a lot to him personally, we can infer from the fact that he asked his friends to play the slow movement, a Largo with a warm melody



Mozart: Flute Quartets + Clarinet Quintet, performed by  
Oxalys (Passacaille)

In the first place, just what is "Oxalys"? Well, it's the botanical name for a common plant, also known as "Wood Sorrel," that is noted for the delicate hues of its flowers, rose, purple, or white, depending on the variety. In former times before the advent of synthetic dyes, it was used to add color to fabrics.

That name, which this musical ensemble who all met in the Brussels Conservatory in 1993 have chosen for themselves, seems particularly apt in the present all-Mozart program because of the hues in these five musical works. Sometimes soft and at other times brilliant, they add warmth, graciousness, and vibrancy to the music. Our musicians – flutist Toon Fret, clarinetist Nathalie Lefèvre, violinists Shirley Laub and Frédéric d'Urse; violist Elisabeth Smalt, and cellist Martijn Vink – give gracious expression to the hues, rhythms, phrasings, and much else besides, that make the four Flute Quartets, Köchel numbers 285, 285a, 285b, and 298, and the Clarinet Quintet, K581, the great beauties

and an intimate confessional mood, when he was on his deathbed, and that this was the last music of his that he ever heard. In this work Chopin made much of a lovely rising and falling half-step, heard in the first entry of the cello, which serves as a motif unifying all four movements. There is a sense of joyous release in the finale, a scampering Allegro in which the cello shows remarkable nimbleness in matching the piano step for step.

Schumann's 3 Fantasiestücke, Op. 73 were originally written for clarinet and piano, a fact that Inbal considers "clearly discernible" in the composer's own occasionally un-idiomatic transcriptions for cello. She and Pohjonen do a good job handling the frequent abrupt changes of mood, reflected in such expressive markings as *Zart und mit Ausdruck* ("Tender and with Expression") and *Rasch und mit Feuer* ("Sudden and with Fire" – and how!)

Edvard Grieg wrote his Cello Sonata in A minor, Op. 36 following a frustrating period in which he had been obliged by his publisher to write additional pieces for *Peer Gynt*, a project for which he felt little enthusiasm. He spoke often of "finding himself again" as a composer, and one senses that he did just that in this sonata for cello and piano. It is one thing to say that Grieg drew on his Norwegian folk heritage in writing it, but there is also a bold, free spirit at work in so much of this music, particularly in the opening *Allegro agitato*, where the sound is extremely rich without sacrificing any of the composer's famous warmth and the music is distributed evenly between the performers. We hear it also in the finale in a dark-sounding folk dance, marked *Allegro molto e marcato*. This is no mere accompanied sonata, but a work requiring the full participation of both partners.

Of particular interest for audiophiles are Segev's comments on the difference in the way the human ear perceives the voice of the cello in the concert hall as opposed to recordings, and the consequent need she and Pohjonen had to adjust their playing accordingly: "For example, when recording, playing with force or 'growling' does not translate as well as it does on stage, so one must bear this in mind when playing *fortissimo*. On the other hand, I could never play the *pianissimo* that we captured on this recording in a live concert, as no one in the audience would be able to hear me!"

The recording venue, the Academy of Arts and Letters in New York, proved acoustically ideal, and the results, in recordings produced by Da-Hong Seetoo, are present here in optimal warmth and balance. For his part, Pohjonen cared so much about the piano tone that he had his own Steinway shipped across the country from the West Coast!

that they are.

To begin with, there's a lot of variety in these Flute Quartets. K285a and K285b are not simple variants of K285, but charming and original works in their own right. K285 in D Major leads off with a sparkling Allegro and finishes with a scampering Rondeau finale. In between, we have an Adagio in the form of an aria of poignant longing by the solo flute over a plucked string accompaniment that would surely have invited comparisons among Mozart's listeners with Gluck's "Dance of the Blessed Spirits."

K285a in G major is in two contrasted movements, a quick Andante *con moto*, and a Minuet (*Tempo di Menuetto*) characterized by sudden rests, sharp dynamic contrasts and breathtaking runs. K285b in C major is memorable for its second movement, a Theme and Variations ranging from minor-key poignancy (Var. IV) to gentle lyricism (Var. V) and a lively waltz (Var. VI).

K298 in A major comes next. It begins with a stately Andantino in four variations. The flute takes the theme and embroiders it in the first, the violin the second, and the viola the third. Then the flute takes up the theme again in the fourth over a backdrop of running chords in the cello. A sprightly Minuet and Trio and a playful Allegretto grazioso unusually marked *con molto garbo ed espressione* (with much glamour and expression) conclude the work.

If you get the idea Mozart was using these four highly attractive works to explore matters of tone color, part leading, harmony and counterpoint that he would use in his great symphonies and string quartets yet to come, you are absolutely right! That is particularly the case in Clarinet Quintet in A major, K581, a work marked by its sunny disposition in the outer movements and in the Minuet and Trio. In the long-breathed melodies and virtuoso runs of the opening Allegro, the clarinet often usurps the role of the first violin. The slow movement, a nocturne in all but name, will haunt your dreams with the great beauty and serenity of its melody. The Minuet has two trios, the first for strings alone, the second a charming duet for clarinet and violin. The ebullient finale is in the form of a set of variations that sound deceptively facile but were the product of the sort of creative imagination of which Mozart alone was capable.



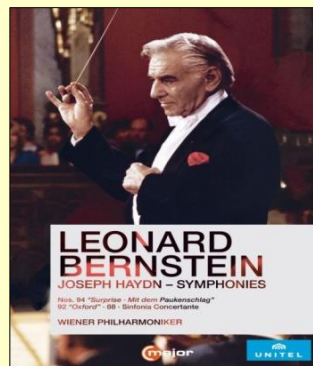
“French Moments,” Piano Trios by Fauré, Debussy, & Roussel - The Neave Trio (Chandos)

A phenomenon of our time, the meeting in schools and conservatories of students from all over the planet and their subsequent uniting into musical ensembles, is well represented by the Neave Trio. This trio of sensational young Russo-Japanese-American artists, consisting (in order) of Mikhail Vesolov, cello; Eri Nakamura, piano; and Anna Williams, violin, have been taking the concert halls of the world by storm in comparatively few years with their sensitivity of touch and expression, unanimity as an ensemble, and rare ability to communicate to audiences the emotion and poetry in the music they play. If I were to list the venues where they've performed, it would fill up this column. A better way is to visit their website [www.NeaveTrio.com](http://www.NeaveTrio.com)

“French Moments” celebrates three great composers: Albert Roussel, Claude Debussy, and Gabriel Fauré, each of whom enriched the genre in different ways. Roussel was a late bloomer as a composer, having commenced his formal studies at the Schola Cantorum in Paris after a career in the French Navy. His naval years were not a waste of time, for he had the opportunity to visit exotic lands with their steaming tropical forests, dark-eyed natives, and the proverbial dawn that comes up like the thunder – the influence of which you find scattered throughout his mature music. Another influence is his lifelong love of the French countryside, which is evident in the dancing measures in 9/8 time, marked *Vif et gaiment*, that follow a brief, slow introduction in the finale of his Trio in E-flat Major, Opus 2 (1902, revised 1937).

At least two other features of this trio deserve our attention. First, the way Roussel unifies the work, in the manner of the school of César Franck, with groups of three rising notes, first heard in the opening movement and recurring in the other two. Second, the wonderful warmth of the theme in the finale, recalling a happy time when he was on leave with his wife from his duties as a lorry driver in the First World War.

Debussy wrote his Trio in G Major in Russia in the summer of 1880. At the time, the ardent 24-year old music student was under the patronage of Mme. Nadezhda von Meck, the grande dame who had been Tchaikovsky's patroness. Critics have tended to belittle



Haydn: Symphonies Nos. 88, 92, 94, “Surprise” + Sinfonia Concertante - Leonard Bernstein, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (C Major DVD)

Leonard Bernstein is seen at the top of his art as a conductor in these video recordings of 1984-1985 performances of Haydn symphonies with the Vienna Philharmonic, which were made live in the venerable Grossermusikvereinsaal, Vienna. Despite the grand-sounding name of the venue, the stage is actually of modest dimensions compared with those in most of today's concert halls. The side galleries of the audience are in surprisingly close proximity to the players, and there is no real apron to the stage, so that any false step backwards by the conductor would land him, literally, in the lap of some shocked spectator! The resulting performing space is quite intimate, facilitating sightlines and enabling the conductor to make use of small, discrete gestures, particularly facial, that make all the greater impression.

All of that actually makes the job of the conductor – especially *this* kind of conductor – easier than you might well imagine. The public is not aware of the fact, but a symphonic conductor actually has his hardest work cut out for him in rehearsal, *not* in the actual performance. It is there that he works patiently with the orchestra on the myriad details of the score of which he already has a definite idea that he has formed in his mind from hours of intense study. By the time he is ready to communicate his vision to the musicians in rehearsal, he has committed to memory literally thousands of details. Someone once said that a conductor must “keep the score in his head, and not his head in the score.”

In performance, the hard work equation is reversed, and the conductor becomes (or *should* become) a helpful friend and guide to the orchestra. He sets the tempo, beats the time with his baton, gives cues, and reminds the players of the things they'd all worked on in rehearsal, encouraging them in a lot of ways, some of which have to do with facial expression, posture and movement within the discrete limits of the podium. The one thing he cannot do in performance is actually talk to the orchestra, as that would be a distraction for the audience. With all the other means of communication he has at his disposal, it would be superfluous in any event.

this Trio as a youthful effort, but the truth is, it foreshadowed the later Debussy in various ways, including his penchant for four-bar phrases that (to cite Roger Nichols' booklet annotation) "sit down at the end of the last bar and wait for someone to do something." His use of pedal notes to highlight decorative elements and his tendency to wander into modal patterns are already much in evidence. There's a lot of choice material in the four well-characterized movements, including a deliciously playful, danceable trio that, for Nichols, calls up visions of footlights and tutus.

Fauré, on the other hand, wrote his Trio in D Minor, Op. 120 in his last years, after he had retired from the Conservatoire in 1920 at the age of seventy-five. We might expect to find the weariness of age in this late work (and in fact, he frequently complained of it) or a retreading of earlier composition styles, but such is not the case. On the contrary, there's a lot of joy and excitement running through this work, plus considerable harmonic and rhythmic freedom. The main concession to age is the composer's tendency to dwell in the middle range of the sound spectrum owing to his increasing deafness that affected high and low pitches. Fauré makes a virtue of this apparent liability by entrusting the broadly stated melody, first heard at the outset of the work, to the soothing voice of the cello.

As elsewhere in this album, the slow movement, Andantino, gives the Neave Trio ample scope to display their mutual rapport and deep sensitivity to feeling. The urgent outcries at the opening of the finale, *Allegro vivo*, are worked-through beautifully in the course of the movement.

When all these things are working well for the conductor, he can be the happiest, most relaxed figure on the stage. Leonard Bernstein certainly shows this confidence on the podium right from the beginning of the first work on the program, Symphony No. 94 in G Major. With his light footwork and swaying body movement combined with an erect posture, he communicates the gently rocking feeling of the opening measures. This work has its most sensational moment in the slow movement, Andante cantabile, in the sudden, totally unexpected, orchestral *forte* that occurs at the end of the measure, giving this work its nickname of "Surprise" Symphony (in German-speaking countries, *Mit dem Paukenschlag*, "with the drum wallop"). That is by no means the end of Haydn's pleasant joking in this movement alone, which contains a series of variations on a very innocent main theme -- one stormy and dramatic, another sweetly decorated by the woodwinds, yet another propelled forward by trumpets and timpani. The movement's quiet, poignant conclusion may be considered a kind of surprise in itself.

No. 92 in G Major, the "Oxford" Symphony, continues the surprise element in this program. After a tranquil opening movement in which a lovely theme is decorated by the woodwinds (golden flute tones complimented by charming solo passages in the oboe), it is, again, the slow movement that contains the biggest surprise -- this time with a purposefully striding central section that temporarily interrupts the flow of the peaceful opening melody.

**To be continued, below ==>**

No. 88 in G Major has a wealth of folksy cantabile melodies. The opening melody is particularly sublime. And (yes!) once again, we have a surprise in the slow movement, a sublimely beautiful Largo in which the melody, initially heard in the oboe and cello, is dramatically punctuated at one point by the full orchestra, including the first appearance of trumpets and timpani in what has been a bucolic setting up to this point. After a Minuet in which the middle section is heard over a bagpipes-like drone in the bass, we are treated to a rollicking finale where the camera focuses at one point on a bassoonist playing a spirited and very difficult passage in which he is obliged to take a daunting number of breaths per minute (I don't know how many, but don't try this at home, lest you find yourself hyper-ventilating!) Bernstein saves the last surprise for himself when, after the finale has finished and he has shaken hands with the section leaders of a very professional Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, he appears again onstage and, in a display of real bravura, conducts the orchestra standing perfectly still, his arms folded, the baton totally inactive. It is as if he were saying to us: "Look, folks, I didn't make all this gorgeous music happen just by waving a stick: these are the fellows who did it, and they deserve your applause!" Only a smile curling on his lips and an occasional sidelong glance to the orchestra as if to say "Remember what we did in rehearsal," betrays the fact that he is still involved as a conductor, albeit in an unusual way.

The program concludes with the Sinfonia Concertante in B-flat for Violin, Oboe, Bassoon, and Cello, a work in which richly tuneful melodies are in such abundance, you have to be careful not to step on them. Bernstein carries off the daunting task of cueing four different soloists with class and dignity.



Brahms: Complete Symphonies 1-4  
Jukka-Pekka Saraste, WDR Sinfonieorchester  
(Profil Records, 3-CD)

Finnish conductor Jukka-Pekka Saraste gives us accounts of Brahms' Four Symphonies that seem to be infused and illuminated with the experience of a lifetime in these 2013-2017 recordings made with a fine WDR Sinfonieorchester in the Köln (Cologne) Philharmonie. That accumulated wisdom is vitally important because these venerable works pose more problems of interpretation than you might at first imagine. And Brahms is not always the genial old guy with the whiskers that tradition has created for us. You cannot take this composer for granted.

Quite often, in fact, different listeners may get very different impressions of the same passage, or even the same work. A good example is Symphony No. 2 in D, Opus 73, perhaps Brahms' most popular of all. We are

certainly taken in by Brahms' abundant flow of easy lyricism in this work, reflected in the relaxed, pastoral mood in the opening and slow movements, their natural flow, and melodies suggestive of Brahms' songs. But there are altogether restless tensions in that same slow movement marked *Adagio non troppo* that may take us unawares if we haven't been prepared for them – tensions that might seem to have more in common with his later Tragic Overture. The scherzo, marked *Allegretto grazioso*, has a dash of Hungarian paprika in the coda section, while the finale, *Allegro con spirito*, ends in a glorious blaze of brass. Saraste characteristically does a good job of not telegraphing the surprises in this movement, so that they always sound fresh and spontaneous.

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68 made early audiences sense the omnipresence of Beethoven behind the music, a facile judgment that ignores the fact that Brahms took the forms of received tradition and broke them down within his own semantic context. Saraste is in sympathy with Brahms' richly varied lyricism and dark coloration in this work. At its very opening bars, the kettledrum pounds out the pedal point C, so that we have no doubt of the key resolution on which the symphony will close, while the strings struggle valiantly with the upward-moving syncopated line. Saraste never rushes the tempi in this work, allowing the various incidents to accumulate and build toward climaxes. The slow movement, *Andante sostenuto*, is made memorable by the songs of the solo violin and oboe, while the finale seems to embody a conspicuous ascent from darkness into light. In the finale, evening seems to descend slowly on us in the layered sound of the strings, giving way at last to the wonderful chorale with its confident upward and onward progress in the horns that we will remember in our dreams (and have heard at many high school graduations).

No. 3 in F, Op. 90 strikes many listeners as the least problematical and easiest to fall in love with at first hearing of all the four symphonies. Its ardent nature, gently rocking rhythms, and abundant lyricism remind us of the joy of first love and the happiness we look to find in nature. The keys to success here are judicious pacing and choices of tempi, the avoidance of micro-managing when you conduct this score, and the wisdom not to make more of the music than is there, so that you can make your points as naturally as fresh leaves come to a tree. Saraste does all of that, and the gracious results are there for us to hear.

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98 may be the most problematical of the four, as well as the most tightly concentrated and compelling. At the outset, we hear an astonishingly simple-minded motif "duh-DUM, da-DEE, duh-DUM, da-DEE." Equally astonishing is the fact that it serves as a unifying feature throughout the whole highly organic work. In this symphony many listeners sense an elegiac quality and an acerbity that it shares with the Song of Destiny, Song of the Fates, and certain sections of the Deutsches Requiem, an inexorable quality in Brahms that is not always popular with audiences. The tumbling syncopations and globose mood of the scherzo come over well under Saraste's baton. The finale is in an old baroque variation from known as a Chaconne. It requires, and receives from Saraste, the extremely careful pacing and awareness of its harmonic goal that is needed to build the tension and drama in this finale to almost unparalleled heights. Saraste's interpretation makes us aware of two things that are seemingly contradictory: the fact that this work pays homage to ancient tradition and the harmonic venturesomeness that led Schoenberg to refer to the composer in a famous essay as "Brahms, our contemporary."

Saraste also does a great job with the "fillers" (if you want to call them that) in this 3-CD set. Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56a, by turns urgent, grandiose, stirring, relaxed, and pastoral, was among Brahms' favorites of all his works. Again paying his respects to tradition, he builds up the variations carefully with increasingly dense motifs and gradually accelerating tempi, right up to the stunning presto in the eighth variation. Academic Festival Overture, Op. 80, is likewise more sophisticated than just a simple potpourri of old German university songs. Brahms follows a logic that makes it come across as a unified work with a purpose, culminating in the glorious outburst in the coda of the

best-loved student song of all, "*Gaudeamus igitur*" (Let us therefore all rejoice).

I've never warmed much to the Tragic Overture, Op. 81. Perhaps the fault is mine. A dark, driven work, it contains a lot of surging thematic material, much of it melancholy, grim, and stoical in character. The fact that Brahms reworked it from music he had originally composed for a projected Vienna staging of Goethe's *Faust* may help to account for its striking character and relentless forward movement. A notable feature is the slowing-down of tempo in the central section, a mixture of development and variation form that Saraste puts across very well. If I ever learn to really *like* this work, it will surely have to be in Saraste's interpretation and no one else's.