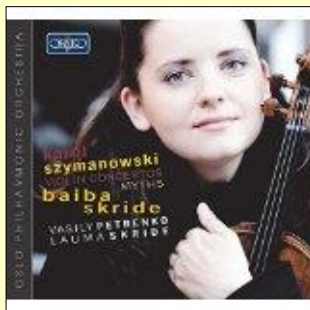


Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

February, 2015

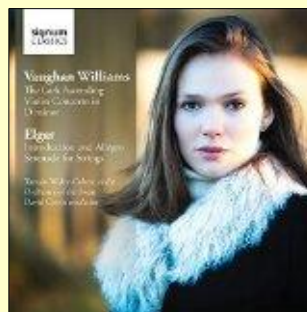


Szymanowski: Violin Concertos 1, 2; Mythes
Baiba Skride, violin
Vasily Petrenko, Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra
(Orfeo International Music)

Baiba Skride, the incredible young violinist from Riga, Latvia, celebrates her fourth release on the German label Orfeo with a sumptuous recording of music that is obviously close to her heart. This gorgeous program of music by Polish composer Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937) consists of works for violin from all three of his generally recognized periods: the late Romantic influenced by Wagner, Strauss, and Scriabin; the Debussy-influenced Impressionist period; and the last period, in which he incorporated the folk music of the Goral region of Poland into his own personal style.

Violin Concerto No. 1, Op. 35, was inspired by the poem "May Night" by Tadeusz Micinski, evoking the enchantment of the night, sounds of night creatures, and the exalted feeling a young man experiences on the eve of his wedding. Baiba Skride makes the composer's palette of sounds very much her own in a performance that stresses the role of the soloist as a presence hovering over the proceedings and leading the way to each new revelation, rather than that of the solo virtuoso in the spotlight, opposed to or supported by the orchestra. In other words, this work is more tone poem than concerto in the usual sense. It is structured in five sections, played continuously.

Not that there isn't virtuosity enough to make the violin role challenging, as witnessed by the double stopping passages in the opening *Vivace assai* section and the sheer dynamism imparted by rising and descending arabesques in the third, marked *Vivace scherzando*. It's just that the virtuosity is sublimated to the overall purpose of the tone poem / concerto. Skride's playing encompasses it all, from quiet contemplation to towering climaxes with the orchestra. At the very end, we have a moment of glistening brilliance as the violin penetrates through an aura created by brass, cymbals and triangle before dissolving in a pianissimo, as if merging with the voices of the night.



Elgar: Introduction & Allegro, Serenade + Vaughn Williams: Violin Concerto, The Lark Ascending
Tamsin Waley-Cohen, violin; David Curtis, Orchestra of the Swan (Signum Records)

The young English violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen (b. London, 1986) has a way of her own when it comes to the music she particularly loves and the way she wants to perform it. This artist, who studied at the Royal Academy of Music and has been described by one of her teachers, Ruggiero Ricci, as "the most exceptionally gifted young violinist I have ever encountered," puts together a moving pairing of Ralph Vaughn Williams' Concerto in D minor for Violin and String Orchestra and his fantasia *The Lark Ascending*. That's with the assistance of the Orchestra of the Swan under David Curtis, who take the microphone by themselves in Sir Edward Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro and Serenade for Strings*. It's all such enchanting listening that one is scarcely aware of the passage of time.

Vaughn Williams' Violin Concerto has never received the attention due a work of such obvious immediate appeal. Maybe its relative neglect was due to the fact that VW originally named it "Concerto accademico," which would seem to have been the kiss of death as far as great popularity is concerned. The composer was originally inspired by the Double Concerto of J.S. Bach, but he soon left the well laid-out path of Neo-classicism for the more rustic one of the English folklore that he loved, though not without inserting a healthy dose of counterpoint in the playful wildness of the outer movements. The central Adagio, marked *Tranquillo*, is relaxed and dreamy, with simple harmonies that lend it a nostalgic feeling in the present performance.

That mood is also found, and gloriously too, in the more famous work for violin and orchestra, *The Lark Ascending*. A rhapsodic work, as much tone poem as it is anything else, it relies on simple, straightforward means and easily comprehended harmonies to evoke an indelible impression of its subject, a bird that is almost unique in its habit of singing in flight as it soars upward in ever-widening circles, a sight and sound just

Violin Concerto No. 2, Op. 61 finds Szymanowski combining folk-like themes with his own distinctive harmonic idiom to create a rhapsodic feeling. In the opening movement (and these are true movements, rather than sections as in the first concerto, even though they are played without a break) the music moves suddenly from an elegiac mood to a stamping *marcato*, which leads to an orchestral climax. Skride as soloist has much to do in this work, with its extensive opening- and final-movement cadenzas, shifting moods, and interplay with various instrumental groups.

We conclude with *Mythes*, Op. 30, in which Baiba Skride is joined by sister Lauma on piano. The work is in three sections, inspired by Greek mythology: The Fountain of Arethusa, Narcissus, and Dryads and Pan. As befits the impressionistic style, the effects are more subtle here, including irregular broken chords evoking the soft babbling of the spring in the opening section.

The recordings of the two concertos, produced by Sean Lewis for Deutschlandradio Kultur in the Oslo Concert Hall, have a wonderful warmth and presence in the ambience, capturing violinist, orchestra, and the various groupings in an attractive, natural-sounding perspective. This is truly audiophile-class sound.



“The Bach Project,” Vol. 1
 Todd Fickley, Schnitger organ of St. Michaëlskerk
 Zwolle, The Netherlands
 MSR Classics

Todd Fickley, an American organist who is quite active in the Washington, D.C. area as well as internationally, realizes a long-cherished dream with the release of the first volume in what promises to be a complete survey of J. S. Bach’s organ music, entitled “The Bach Project.” On first hearing, his style seems exceptionally smooth, though with reservations I will discuss later.

The wide-ranging 75-minute program for Volume 1 encompasses the entire scope of Bach’s genius, from the delightfully extroverted *Tocatta, Adagio, and Fugue*, BWV 564, to the profound and powerfully wrought *Passacaglia in C minor*, BWV 582. In between, we have accounts of the chorale prelude *An Wasserflüssen Babylon* (By the Waters of Babylon), BWV 653; *Trio Sonata No. 1 in E-flat major*, BWV 525; *Prelude and Fugue in A minor*, BWV 543; and a real masterwork, the *Partita diverse* on the chorale “*Sei*

made to stimulate the poetic imagination. We are so rapt by the violin’s trills and arabesques, and the way Waley-Cohen plays them with such obvious feeling and personal involvement, that we are almost oblivious to VW’s superbly economic orchestration, using flutes, oboe, bassoon, and horns *just enough* to reinforce the harmonic richness. At the end, the violin melody soars to its highest point in “skylark mode,” disappearing into airy nothingness at the very end.

Elgar was another composer who took the very attractive folk vein his fellow composers were beginning to mine in his day, an “Englishness” composed of seemingly commonplace, everyday elements, yet lyric, melancholic, nostalgic and utterly timeless in its appeal, up to the level of art. Introduction and Allegro reflects these qualities in the context of a work in which a string quartet interacts with large body of strings to produce rich, expressive harmonies and “a devil of a fugue” (Elgar). Handelian string writing, combined with a Welsh hymn tune that is heard first in fragmentary form and then triumphantly in its entirety near the end, provides David Curtis and the Orchestra of the Swan with choice food to feast upon. They also give a charming account of the less-imposing *Serenade for Strings*, a little gem that has a surprisingly poignant *Larghetto* for its middle movement, not the sort of thing one expects from “entertainment” music!



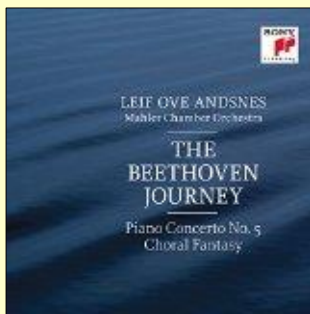
Fauré / Saint-Saëns / d’Indy: Piano Trios
 The Horszowski Trio
 Bridge Records

In what appears to be their debut recording, the Horszowski Trio give a splendid account of themselves in an outstanding program of works by French romantic composers. Named in honor of the well-loved pianist and teacher Mieczyslaw Horszowski, the trio consists of violinist Jesse Mills, cellist Raman Ramakrishnan, and pianist Rieko Aizawa. These three young artists actually have a history of playing together that goes back farther than you might think. Mills and Ramakrishnan first met as music students when they were children, and they got acquainted with Aizawa, said to have been the very last piano student of the remarkably long-lived Horszowski (1892-1993), in New York, which they consider their home base. With backgrounds that include the Juilliard School and the Marlboro Festival, these artists are well-equipped to perform the music on this program. Their lightness of touch lends real

gegrüßst, Jesu gütig", BWV 768 (I greet Thee, merciful Jesus). All have an attractive alacrity in the outer movements and fugues and an appropriate gravity in the central adagios of BWV 564 and 525. This is an ideal program for listeners who are just getting acquainted with Bach's organ music and want to know what it optimally "sounds like."

Therein lies a problem, which may only be apparent to traditionalists such as myself. The present program was produced, as presumably all the other releases in The Bach Project will be, using a computer program known as Hauptwerk. Briefly, Hauptwerk produces an audio signal in response to input received via MIDI. This input may originate from an external MIDI keyboard or from an MIDI sequencing program. The audio output is based on recorded samples ("sample sets") which are then modified by several different technologies to eliminate undesirable effects such as excessive wind turbulence and noise. These sample sets can be enormous, often in excess of 20 Gb. The end result that one hears is an assembling in real time of elements that have been previously recorded. Fickley himself relishes the delicious irony that "the organ is recorded before the performance!"

There's a lot more to the process, and readers are invited to look up the ample documentation available on the internet for themselves. Tempering Fickley's enthusiasm for the use of Hauptwerk because of its potential to make historical instruments, such as the 1721 Schnitger organ of St. Michaëlskerk, Zwolle, Netherlands, instantly accessible by organists and students worldwide, is the nagging question of legitimacy. I can't resist suspecting a "composite" performance, something the classical recording industry has traditionally eschewed. If what we hear has been "assembled", how are we to distinguish critically between different artists' performances of the same work of music? (A sobering thought: widely applied, it might put critics like me out of business!)



Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 5, "Emperor" + Choral Fantasy, Op. 80
Leif Ove Andsnes, pianist & conductor
Mahler Chamber Orchestra (Sony Classics)

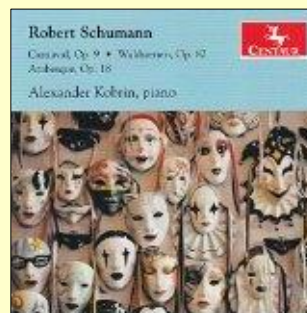
Norwegian pianist Leif Ove Andsnes has been a concert headliner for some 25 years now. That he is at the top of his form now is quite evident from this latest,

elegance and distinction to music that was originally premiered in the Paris salons. But don't be deceived: it is salon music raised to the level of high art.

A perfect example of this is Trio No. 1 in F major, Op. 18 by Camille Saint-Saëns. A composer who never allowed musical expression to trump musical form but was wise enough to realize that the one grows out of the other, Saint-Saëns left his fingerprints all over this lithesome work. It is in four movements, the first of which has our musicians playfully tossing the melodies between their instruments. The second movement, *Andante*, with its minor modes, drones, and dotted rhythms, recalls music of an earlier era (Bach and Mozart, we remember, were Saint-Saëns' heroes). It is served up with a more modern French lyricism. The Scherzo is quick, precise, and devilishly witty, as the instruments engage in a spirited argument (over the location of the downbeats, observes Ramakrishnan in his highly readable booklet notes). The finale combines whimsy and heat, ending, as our annotator observes, "with a wink and a smile."

Vincent d'Indy was the product of a proud aristocratic family, but as he aged he liked to return to his roots in the south of France. In his Trio No. 2 in G major, Op. 98 (1929), the 78-year old composer aimed to recapture the sprightly *élan* of the baroque dance suite, as we can tell from the titles of the movements: *Entrée en Sonate*, *Air*, *Courante*, and *Gigue en rondeau*. Graciousness and joyfulness are the keynotes of the final two movements of an elegant work in which not a note seems misplaced.

Much of the emotional weight of this program is carried by Gabriel Fauré's Trio in D minor, Op. 120, a darkly beautiful late work that was not well understood in its day but has been vindicated by posterity. Oscillating piano accompaniments, a haunting sound created by unison string writing, plus subtle difficulties in pacing resulting from patterns of freedom versus constraint, all pose no problem for the Horszowski Trio. May they enjoy a long career in our concert halls!



Schumann: Carnival, Waldszenen, Arabesque
Alexander Kobrin, piano
Centaur Records

Russian pianist Alexander Kobrin (b. Moscow, 1980), winner of numerous international piano competitions

and last, installment in his survey of the piano concertos entitled "The Beethoven Journey." I was high on his performance of the Fourth Concerto in my review last May, and am happy to report that his account of the Fifth is on the same high level. It is a magisterial rendering of the well-loved "Emperor" Concerto if ever there was.

Andsnes has lost none of the youthful fire he displayed earlier in his career, and his tone is even firmer and suppler. His passagework in the Allegro movement is marvelously fluid as he plays, and leads the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, in a performance that molds the shapely contours of a movement that, at 20 minutes, rivals that of the afore-mentioned Fourth Concerto as Beethoven's most "front-loaded" opening movement. There is an inherent sense of rightness and inevitability at work here that marks this concerto movement as Middle-Period Beethoven at its best.

That remark still goes in spite of the fact that the composer did some unconventional things here, such as commencing with a piano solo that soon develops into an extended cadenza which, punctuated by *tutti* chords from the orchestra, lays out the bold formal outline of the entire movement. Though Beethoven strays into remote keys from time to time, there is never any doubt any doubt that this work that started in E-flat major will end on the same key as surely as death and taxes, with no attempt to thwart the steady marchlike tread of the opening Allegro. The Adagio movement is calm and reflective, a mood to which Andsnes seems particularly well attuned. This artist obviously enjoys immensely the many opportunities for utter brilliance afforded him in the Rondo finale.

Andsnes and the Mahler CO continue the good work in the companion-piece, the Fantasia in C minor for Piano, Chorus, and Orchestra. Endowed in the final section with a melody that is clearly a forerunner of the "Ode to Joy" in the Ninth Symphony, the Choral Fantasy continues to be performed occasionally despite some uneven writing that can still cause problems for the unwary interpreter today. The piano part, which Andsnes handles masterfully in the present recording, ranges from quicksilver lightness to a very heavy eight-note passage with orchestral accompaniment. Further, the textures as written are uneven, and the harmonic progressions do not always flow naturally. (At its premiere in December, 1808 the work had to be restarted.) Still, it is a jolly work with occasional moments of the sublime, and Andsnes & company bring out all its good points.

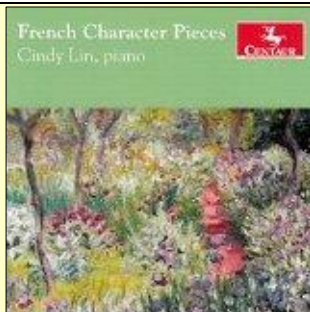
including the Van Cliburn and the Busoni, now teaches in the U.S. and has toured extensively. His beautiful tone and musicality speak for themselves in the present pairing of two major works by Robert Schumann on the Centaur label. Both are works that require the virtuosity and constant engagement with the music that Kobrin is well-equipped to provide.

Carnaval is perhaps the most popular of Schumann's creations among pianists, in spite (or maybe because of) its obvious difficulties. Written in 1834, it was in part a manifesto on behalf of the true musical art of his day as opposed to its vulgar, audience-pleasing imitations. In "Valse allemande," he even used an old-fashioned *grossvateranz* (grandfather dance) to satirize the tastes of hidebound conservatives. In "Sphinxes" he included three bars of four-letter configurations without any indication as to key, tempo, or dynamics which are not meant to be played – a strange procedure to say the least. This piece is usually excluded by pianists, though not by Kobrin, and the results are *rather* strange.

Needless to say, Schumann's criticism of contemporary taste, ending in a galumphing, triumphant March of the *Davidsbund* (the proponents of true art) against the Philistines, was more apparent to his audiences than it is today. Of more interest are the note configurations S-C-H-A, As-C-H and A-S-C-H, where S and As are German notation for E-flat and H for B natural. These form acrostics that are keys to the personal story that lies under the commedia masks worn by revelers at Carnival, equivalent to our own Mardi Gras. The most telling pieces relate to Schumann's tempestuous first love (*Estrella*), the woman he would eventually marry (*Chiarina* – Clara), and a nocturne of deep compass in tribute to one of his favorite composers (*Chopin*). Many of the other pieces sound a trifle banal this late in the day, though Kobrin invests them with the personal involvement and meticulous care he displays throughout the work, building up to the rondo finale, where the afore-mention March races ever faster toward the finish line.

Waldszenen (Forest Scenes) is another opus comprising some pieces of undeniably haunting beauty, along with more mundane ones, a characteristic of a composer with a trait of annoying unevenness, even to his admirers. The memorable pieces – *Einsame Blumen* (Lonely Flowers), *Verrufene Stelle* (Haunted Place), and *Vogel als Prophet* (The Prophet Bird) are all in minor keys. The more conventional genre pieces – depicting a lovely landscape, a friendly wayside inn, and the thrill of the hunt – are all in major ones, either B-flat or E-flat. Kobrin's exceptionally accomplished style smoothes over the unevenness, so that these Forest Scenes come across as a satisfying collection.

Arabesque is one of Schumann's most beloved works, encompassing no fewer than eight dramatically contrasted sections in a piece lasting just over seven minutes. The demands on the performer are interpretive rather than technical, as he must account for the



"French character Pieces"
Cindy Lin, piano
Centaur Records

Cindy Lin is a young woman with a passion for both music and travel. She has concertized all over the United States and Taiwan, holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Maryland School of Music, and currently teaches at several campuses of the Des Moines Area Community College in Iowa. On the present release of "French Character Pieces," she shares with us one of her two particular passions in music (the other being 20th Century American).

Each of the French composers on this program possessed a unique approach to the matters of sonority, tone color, and texture that marked his or her music in this genre as distinctive and immediately recognizable. Claude Debussy is represented by *Estampes* (Prints), three of his finest efforts in the area of evocative music. The play of light and air infuses the images of "Pagodes," "La Soirée dans Grenade," and "Jardins sous la pluie," in which Java, Spain, and France rub shoulders in music redolent of Javanese gamelan music, the light, pulse-quickening rhythms of the Habanera, and French children's songs. Lin does some of her best work in these three highly evocative pieces, culminating with as fine an account of "Gardens in the Rain" as I can remember, capturing the menace as well as the beauty of a sudden rain shower.

"Ménétriers et glaneuses" (fiddlers and gleaners) by Déodat de Séverac vividly describes the happy harvest celebrations of rustic fiddlers and dancing peasant girls. Emmanuel Chabrier, up next, is represented by two of his *Pièces pittoresques*, "Sous-bois" (under the shade of the trees, perhaps a lovers' rendezvous) and "Improvisation," both deftly rendered here in Lin's performances. Olivier Messiaen's selection of Preludes include the avian description "La Colombe" (the dove), a rather enigmatic "Le Nombre léger" (perhaps an example of the composer's well-known fascination with mysticism), and, best of all, "Un reflet dans le vent" (a reflection in the wind) which evokes the power of the wind to transform the appearance of things.

More evocation, which is always more subtle than mere picture-postcard painting, awaits us in two descriptive Etudes de Concert by the much neglected

changes of character of the floridly decorated theme, from light and caressing to pensive, then agitated, and finally passionately stirring. Kobrin handles all these changes with such deceptive ease that we might think Arabesque less of an achievement than it really is.



Poulenc: Organ Concerto + Saint-Saëns: Symphony No. 3, "Organ" – James O'Donnell, organist
Yannick Nézet-Séguin, London Philharmonic Orchestra
LPO Recordings

This live recording, made in Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London on 26 March 2014, is the record of an historical event. In the context of the aptly-named Pull Out All The Stops festival, it marked the premiere of the hall's newly refurbished organ ("reconstructed" would be a better word), a project that was the crowning jewel of the multi-year renovation of the hall itself. On this occasion Yannick Nézet-Séguin led the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and organist James O'Donnell was featured as soloist, in performances for which the enthusiastic audience applause at the end of the final track does not begin to tell the story.

Appropriately for the occasion, the main items on the program were the two most stunning achievements for organ and orchestra of modern times, Francis Poulenc's Organ Concerto in G minor and Camille Saint-Saëns' famed "Organ" Symphony in C minor. The Poulenc was the product of a crucial period in the composer's development in which his music took on a new seriousness, the product of his re-discovery of his Catholic faith following the tragic death of a friend in an auto accident and Poulenc's subsequent visit to the Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Rocamadour with its awe-inspiring setting which seems to grow out of the mountainside. Written for organ, strings and timpani alone, it belies its limited orchestral resources to reaffirm the truth that greatness in music is the product of great ideas, and not necessarily massive forces.

Poulenc intended his Organ Concerto to be performed as a single continuous movement, though, as on the present CD, it is often indexed as seven tracks as an aid to the listener. At a playing time of 22:38, this is a taught, economically structured work with not a single note that does serve a purpose. In a performance such as the one we have here, it exerts a powerful influence on the listener. The sections differ substantially in tone, style, and texture, as organist, string orchestra and

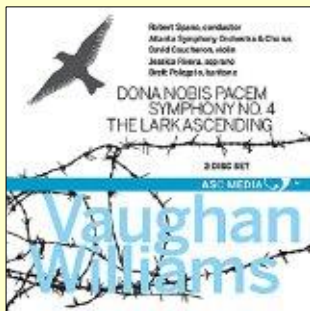
Cécile Chaminade. Her *Automne* is a vivid description of the season in which you can sense the blustery wind and the sadness of the fall colors. We also have her nostalgia-tinged *Souvenance* (remembrance). Maurice Ravel's "*une Barque sur l'océan*" (a sailing ship on the ocean) and "*La Vallée des cloches*" (valley of the bells) evoke the beauty and mystery of the watery element and the sounds of distant bells chiming in syncopation. Lin's account of the former, in which rattling repeated notes have a chilling effect, reminding us of the many lives that have perished in the sea, is one of the best I've ever heard.

Finally, the orientalist Charles Koechlin is represented by three selections from *Les Heures persanes* (Persian Hours): "*En vue de la ville*," "*Chant du soir*," and "*A l'Ombre près la fontaine de marbre*" (In the Shadow by the Marble Fountain), pieces that are perhaps more pictorial than evocative. Lin concludes the program with a fine flair in three pieces from Francis Poulenc's piano suite *Napoli*: a rather livelier than usual "*Barcarolle*," a charming and adventurous "*Nocturne*," and a spirited "*Caprice Italien*" that is virtuosic and exuberant in its appeal.

timpani interact to promote an overall feeling of formal restraint versus emotion that is simply overwhelming. The deep points are the softer moments in sections 3: *Andante moderato*, and 5: *Très calme – Lent*. Even here, the calm is likely to be disturbed by more agitated music before the work finally ends with a sense of deep peace and profound beauty.

Saint-Saëns' "Organ" Symphony, by contrast, is scored for a rather big orchestra with enlarged woodwind and percussion sections and piano (both two- and four-hands) in addition to the organ that assumes pride of pace by virtue of its commanding sound and the fact that it is used with surprising economy, calculated for the maximum impact. It may be considered the glorious culmination not only of the composer's career but of the spirit of French romanticism in general.

This symphony has it all. It is structured as two vast movements, 1) *Adagio – Allegro moderato – Poco Adagio* and 2) *Allegro moderato – Presto – Maestoso – Allegro*. However, both movements can be perceived as subdivided by the entrance of the organ, softly and almost inaudibly on the 32-foot pedal stops in the *Poco Adagio* and then with thunderous impact in the *Maestoso*. A truly beautiful dialog between organ and strings in the *Poco Adagio* is paralleled in the second movement by a pastoral interlude. Afterwards, we have increasing fugal structure, followed by rousing brass fanfares in the final section as Nézet-Seguin takes the LPO on a spirited sprint to the finish line.



Vaughn Williams: *Dona Nobis Pacem*, *Symphony No. 4*, *The Lark Ascending* (with David Coucheron, violin)
Robert Spano, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Chorus
ASO Media

In one of the most stunning recordings of music by Ralph Vaughn Williams that I've heard in recent years, Robert Spano leads the Atlanta Symphony and Chorus in three works that reveal the intriguing, multi-sided personality of the composer. They also celebrate his remarkable ability to capture beauty, in both inherently beautiful and "unbeautiful" subjects.

Dona Nobis Pacem (Grant Us Peace) uses the verses of the Latin hymn, sung movingly here by soprano Jessica Rivera, to intersperse the English language lyrics, mostly to texts by Vaughn Williams' favorite American poet, Walt Whitman, describing the mindless fury of war and pity and solace for its victims. Baritone soloist Brett Polegato and the ASO Chorus under Norman Mackenzie are in superb form in Whitman's "Reconciliation" and "Dirge for Two Veterans," the latter commemorating two Civil War soldiers, father and son, laid to rest in the same grave, while the furious measures of "Beat! Beat! Drums!" spreading through the chorus like a wildfire fanned by its own self-generated winds, capture the inhumanity and blind destruction of war itself. The final section, "O man greatly beloved," based on a number of poignant biblical verses dealing with loss and the need for consolation, ends the work on a note of dignified grief and restraint.

The decision to spread the 83 minute program over two discs (happily, priced as one) was clearly necessitated for practical reasons by the capacity of the CD medium. But breaking the program after *Dona Nobis Pacem* proves to be a wise move from an artistic viewpoint as well, as there is simply nothing in the Vaughn Williams canon that can compare with this immensely moving choral work, influenced by the composer's experiences as an ambulance driver in the Great War.

Symphony No. 4 in F minor, by contrast, reflects some of the same influences, but it is not easily identifiable as a

"war symphony." It was a very personal work for Vaughn Williams, revealing many aspects of his character. "I don't know whether I like it," he was wont to say in later years, "but it's what I meant." His wife, the poetess Ursula Wood, described it best, saying that it epitomized "The towering furies of which he was capable; his fire, pride, and strength are all revealed and so are his imagination and lyricism."

The exceptionally taut symphony uses expanded brass and percussion sparingly and to great effect. A marvel of dissonance and power that is superbly captured in the present performance, it relies for much of its effectiveness on its vivid contrasts. Anger and aggression in the opening movement, underscored by trenchant rhythms and pulsating energy, are succeeded in the slow movement by a forlorn, wandering melody over a pizzicato bass, its sadness resolving into a lonely flute solo, tinged with weariness. The scherzo is dance-like but mercurial and rhythmically unpredictable, ending in a pounding drum passage that leads without a break into the finale. This last movement has a manic mix by way of variety. Basically, the mood is one of excitement and agitation, with eruptions from the brass, and then a peaceful interlude for the strings and oboe. A fugal epilog, heard first in the trombones, prefaces a brass-drenched declamation at the very end of what is one of only two symphonies by the composer to end *forte*, rather than quietly.

The program concludes with Vaughn Williams' well-loved pastoral rhapsody for violin and orchestra The Lark Ascending. Inspired by the poem of the same title by George Meredith, the main contour of the work follows the slow ascent of the meadow lark itself, rising in ever-widening circles, while the sound of the violin, played here by David Coucheron in a way that stresses its warm lower range as well as its stratospheric highs, consciously imitates the bird's rhapsodic song "in chirrup, whistle, slur and shake." (Amazingly, this work, now performed as often as any other by the composer, was almost unknown to American listeners before Louis Lane, warmly remembered here in Atlanta, recorded it in 1963 with the Cleveland Sinfonietta.)

Further enhancing the appeal of the performances is the first-rate recorded sound, produced by Elaine Martone, with the assistance of Fyodor Cherniavsky, and recorded, mixed, and mastered by Michael Bishop. The total package sounds so great, in fact, that I would unhesitatingly recommend this CD for the highest honors in the recording industry, though I have no faith in the process by which the various awards committees derive their conclusions.