

## Phil's Classical Reviews

Audio Video Club of Atlanta

November, 2013

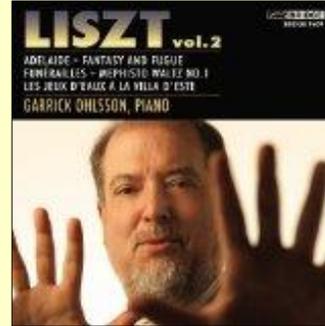


Brahms: Viola Sonatas (2), Op. 120; Trio, Op. 114  
Geraldine Walther, David Korevaar, András Fejér  
MSR Classics

In these keenly insightful performances by violist Geraldine Walther; cellist András Fejér, and pianist David Korevaar, three of Brahms' best-loved chamber works come up fresh as the day they first appeared. Not that there are no thorns among the roses, and it is to these artists' credit that they integrate the great variety of moods and textures as smoothly and cohesively as if there were no problems at all. The key lies in the continuous engagement of all three performers with the music and with one another. The last-named is vital, as Brahms integrated the clarinet with other instruments as it had never before been done in chamber music. When he came to re-write the clarinet part for viola, he took the greatest pains to ensure the result would be more than simply serviceable transcriptions, but works that would command respect on their own. To date, the two sonatas are performed and recorded almost as often in the viola version as in the original, and the trio continues to gain in popularity.

David Korevaar, well-known for his Bach, Beethoven and Ravel, is one of those rare solo pianists who shine as bright in chamber music. Fejér was a founding member of the Takács String Quartet in Hungary in 1977 (and since 1983 re-located to Boulder, CO where they are quartet-in-residence at the University of Colorado), and Walther became its first American member in 2005, surprising the older hands with how quickly and smoothly she fit into the ensemble.

All these qualities are requisite in performing these late chamber works of Brahms, as all three as rhythmically incisive and depend of a very close rapport to get the timing and the textures just right. Any failing in mutual sympathy would be immediately noticeable and would not be rewarded. We hear this cohesiveness in the earliest work on the program, the Trio in A minor, Op. 114, in which the dark sound of the viola's lower register in the very opening requires the cello to play in its higher



Liszt, Vol. 2: Mephisto Waltz, Jeux d'eaux,  
Funerailles, Fantasy & Fugue  
Garrick Ohlsson, piano  
Bridge

The CD repertoire is enriched by more fallout from Garrick Ohlsson's 2011-2011 piano recitals honoring the bicentenary of Franz Liszt. The White Plains, N.Y. native is a big man with an exceptional stretch on the keyboard, said to be a 12th in the left hand and an 11th in the right. More than that, he cultivates a big, full sound throughout the breadth of every chord he essays. All of which, and more, would seem to qualify him as an ideal interpreter of a composer who was continually pushing the envelope as to what it was possible to do with the piano.

Of course, playing Liszt optimally is a matter of more than just technical skill. There is the matter of interpretive insight, too. Curiously, though, the two features end up being almost identical when you're talking about Liszt, a composer whose reach exactly met his grasp, at least in his best works for keyboard. You must, in fact, approach interpreting Liszt through the technique required for the task. It is here that Ohlsson excels.

The program covers the range of Liszt's musical preoccupations during his career. "Adelaide" is a fairly early transcription of expansion of Beethoven's love song, the rise and fall of its emotion taking full advantage of the natural rise and fall of the beloved's name, which is given in its French version of five syllables: *Adélaïde*. Fantasy and Fugue reveals the colossal power and vital energy of its original in G minor by J. S. Bach. Liszt, who was conversant enough on the organ to have rendered a convincing account of the original, used the resources of the piano, including elaborate, powerful chords, to create an organ-like grandeur on the piano. Ohlsson obviously enjoys this work's rhetorical immensity.

*Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude* (Blessing in Solitude) and *Funerailles* (Funeral Ode), from Liszt's Poetic and Religious Harmonies of 1853, reveal two sides of the composer. The former, with its gently flowing

range to complement it. The rather spare, desolate sound that predominates in this movement is followed by the gracious warmth of the beautiful viola melody in the Adagio. The third movement, *Andantino grazioso*, is gently nostalgic, evoking “more a remembrance of a *Ländler* than an actual dance,” as Korevaar has it in his booklet notes. The finale is more passionately involved, even angry at times, perhaps reflecting Brahms’ own mood as he approached the end of his career.

Generally speaking, the Sonatas in F minor and E-flat major, Op. 120 are autumnal in mood, though Brahms being what he was, they too have their moments. Sonata No. 1 ranges from passionate declamation based on wide leaps in the viola part to quiet resignation at the end of the opening movement, abundant lyricism in the Andante, ebullience plus tricky syncopations between the two instruments in the scherzo, and lively virtuosity in the vivacious finale.

Sonata No. 2, despite its major key signature, is on the whole more restrained and introverted, in spite of the octaves in the piano part that occur in all its movements. Nobility, gentle affection and graciousness are its hallmarks. The finale begins with variations on a lovely, lilting theme in 6/8. The last ends on a suspension, which is very effectively managed here, before we plunge into a stormy and virtuosic finale for both players in which Brahms (albeit with his usual discretion) seems to “rage against the dying of the light.” Highly recommended.



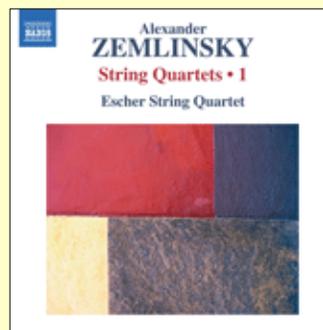
Shostakovich: Symphonies 1 & 6  
Andrey Boreyko, RSO Stuttgart  
Hänssler Classic

St. Petersburg, Russia native Andrey Boreyko proves, once again, to be a deeply insightful interpreter of the music of Dmitry Shostakovich. For the third time, he leads the Radio Symphony Orchestra – Stuttgart in a program of Shostakovich symphonies in which the orchestra comes across as more substantial than we have any right to expect of an RSO. His point making is superb, and he shapes the contours of the composer’s music in ways that bring out its expressive (if not always euphonious) qualities.

This is a curious pairing of symphonies that have similarities as well as differences. Both works display the range of moods in Shostakovich, from aloofness and

measures evoking peace and certitude, does not come across in Ohlsson’s hands as overlong, as it often does with lesser interpreters. The latter, written on the death of Chopin and to commemorate the martyrs of the suppressed Hungarian revolt of 1849, is also long. But, with its evocations of tolling bells and slow funeral processions and its moods of desolation, towering anger, and grief, it is not likely to bore any listener.

We have religious exaltation plus the play of light, movement, and color in *Les Jeux d’eaux de la Ville d’Este* (1877), an impressionistic piece that would have us believe Liszt was pre-cognizant of Debussy. Two other late works, *Klavierstück* in A-flat major and *Nuages gris* (grey clouds) require the utmost in Ohlsson’s interpretive insight to put them across. That is particularly so of the latter, in which a mood of foreboding and astonishing tonal barrenness (for Liszt, especially) is suddenly interrupted by two rolled chords in the upper register that seem to materialize out of the void. Finally, *Mephisto Waltz* No. 1, with its sonorous clashes, wild leaps, and the mood of voluptuous tenderness in one of its episodes, makes for a sensational way to end a program. Especially if your name is Garrick Ohlsson.



Zemlinsky: String Quartets, Vol. 1  
Escher String Quartet  
Naxos

The music of Alexander von Zemlinsky (1871-1942), an Austrian composer who was once highly regarded and influential but died, neglected and forgotten, in exile in Larchmont, NY, is beginning to receive due recognition in our own time. We have already gotten re-acquainted with his great Lyric Symphony (1923) and his symphonic poem after Hans Christian Andersen, *The Mermaid* (1905). Now the Escher String Quartet, one of today’s highly regarded young ensembles, has begun a series that promises to put the composer’s quartets on the map.

Significantly, the Escher Quartet, now comprised of Adam Barnett-Hart, Violin I; Wu Jie, Violin II; Pierre Lapointe, Viola; and Dane Johansen, Cello, chose to name themselves after the famous Dutch graphic artist in whose work natural and geometrical forms tend to morph into one another in ways that are both lyrical and mathematically precise. The Eschers see this as a metaphor for what they aim to achieve in the way of strongly individual components working together to

melancholy to pure lyricism and an elation that is not always heartfelt, but rather a reflection of the composer's cynicism and distrust of worldly pomp and party rhetoric. Symphony No. 1 in F minor, Op. 10 has always been popular with audiences second only to the Fifth in the number of times it has been recorded. Symphony No. 6 in B minor, Op 54, though it has a lot going for it in terms of purely musical qualities, has never been as favored.

The First Symphony begins with an Allegretto featuring a duet between solo trumpet and bassoon that has features of both a march and a waltz. It gradually picks up momentum and involves the orchestra in a vaudeville-type frenzy of activity. The following Allegro begins with a false start in the cellos and basses, giving way to a frantic scherzo in the clarinet. This is followed by music in a somber mood, and then a triple-time section in which a playfully mocking melody is passed among the various woodwinds, and finally a coda with widely spaced chords in the piano and violin harmonics creating an eerie, unsettling mood. That prepares us for the Lento movement in which a darkly foreboding oboe solo, transferred at length to the cello, reaches a crescendo. There is a drum roll, and then the finale, Allegro molto, commences at once. The music is a sarcastic toccata with elements of the grotesque. The ending, in which Shostakovich calls on the brass for fanfare-like figures, is so rousing that it usually generates spontaneous applause from audiences, as it does here in a live performance at the Beethovensaal, Stuttgart.

Symphony no 6, by contrast, has lagged in popularity, due in some extent to its unusual structure in which something seems to be missing. That "something" is an opening movement. The work opens instead with a Largo that, at 19 minutes, is much longer than the other two movements combined and is clearly intended as a slow movement and not an introductory section. Shostakovich further confused matters by stating in a radio broadcast that, "In my latest symphony, music of a contemplative and lyrical order predominates. I wanted to convey the moods of spring, joy, youth."- That is *not* the impression the user gets, but instead that of a deeply introspective, Mahlerian landscape for which the German adjective *beklemmt* (oppressed) seems appropriate. If this is spring, it is a silent spring. The mood is similar, in fact, to that of the more famous Largo in the Fifth Symphony, but its purpose is not as clear, and, with its excessive length, it overstays its welcome. It is followed by two bracing fast movements, a scherzo and a lusty music-hall gallop in a style reminiscent of Rossini's "William Tell" Overture. Listeners who have not been put off by the excessive length of the Largo will be well entertained.

achieve a satisfying, if sometimes surprising, whole.

The Eschers' performance style has been variously described. The Orange County (CA) *Register* praised their "generous, brilliant sound" and abundance of energy," while the San Francisco *Classical Voice* focused on their "cool, emotionally restrained sound that impresses through its sheer precision and clarity." One might suspect these disparate comments to reflect more of a difference between LA and San Fran, but actually, both are equally perceptive. In performing the quartets of Zemlinsky (or Brahms, another Escher specialty) you need to have both qualities working for you.

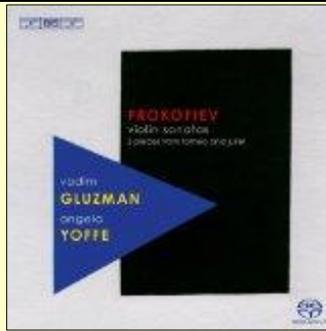
Broadly speaking, Quartet No.3 (1924) has a prevailing mood of cool austerity, while Quartet No.4 (1936) has more variety of emotion. The generalization will not take us far. Quartet No.3 does indeed begin in an overcast mood, slowly and cautiously, with the composer making much out of seemingly little in the Theme and Variations that follow. But the mood changes in the otherworldly slow movement, *Romanze*, and becomes playful, even optimistic, in the energetic *Burleske* that serves as finale.

The contrasts are even more pronounced in Quartet No. 4, in the form of a suite in six movements, perhaps a reflection of the different sides of Zemlinsky's recently deceased colleague Alban Berg, for whom he wrote this work as a tribute. The first movement, a Praeludium with solemnly expressive chords, is followed by a hyperactive, frenetic *Burleske*, and then an Adagietto that is more intense than we might have a right to expect from the title, and a jaunty *Intermezzo*. Only in the fifth movement, an Adagio in the form of a Barcarolle with variations, does Zemlinsky express his personal feelings for the deceased Berg. The finale, an energetic double fugue, reflects yet another aspect of the subject.

As a revealing insight into Zemlinsky's compositional processes, we have Two Pieces that he composed in 1927, perhaps with the idea of making them parts of a larger composition. Both have plenty of intriguing musical substance on their own, and challenge the performers' virtuosity as well, with explosive pizzicati, expressive glissandi, and *sul ponticello* bowing.



Vogel: Things Fall apart  
Odekhiren Amaize, voice and narration  
Albany Records



Prokofiev: Violin sonatas 1 & 2  
 Three pieces from Romeo and Juliet  
 Vadim Gluzman, violin; Angela Yoffe, piano  
 BIS Records (Hybrid SACD)

The duo of Vadim Gluzman and Angela Yoffe give distinguished performances of Prokofiev's two sonatas for violin and piano. Since much of the success of these nicely contrasted works is in the details, it's a good thing they recorded it for the Swedish label Bis, because the hybrid SACD in DSD sonics provides first-rate sound.

The two sonatas exhibit striking dissimilarities. To further complicate matters, Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 80 was actually premiered later than Sonata No. 2 in D major, Op. 94*bis*. The F-minor Sonata has a dark, unsettling opening, reflecting sorrow for those who suffered during WWII, and perhaps also the post-war angst of the late Stalinist era. Severity and desolation are the hallmarks of the opening movement. The second, unusually marked *Allegro brusco*, is brusque and aggressive, though the mood soon subsides and is replaced by one of those wonderful soaring melodies that we encounter unexpectedly in Prokofiev. The third movement, gentle, elegiac, and tender, is followed by a manic finale of intense energy, *Allegroissimo* (as lively as possible), ending in music that recalls the sonata's very opening.

As opposed to the varied, often disturbing, nature of the first sonata, Sonata No. 2 of 1944 seems to have been envisioned, at least in part, as a wartime morale raiser. Opus 94*bis* was a follow-up to the success of Prokofiev's Sonata for Flute and Piano, Op. 94 (that is one definition of *bis*, the other being "encore"). Its origin accounts for the refreshingly lyricism of the main melodies in the opening *Moderato* and the slow movement, marked *Andante* – melodies that are almost as effective in their setting for violin as they were in the flute original. Prokofiev being what he was, includes spiky, abrasive music in the scherzo movement. But the buoyant finale has all the ebullience of a band on parade.

For an encore, we have three delightful pieces arranged for violin and piano from Prokofiev's ballet masterpiece, Romeo and Juliet. They are: Montagues and Capulets (Dance of the Knights), Dance of the Girls with Lilies (the tenderly elegiac mood of which foretells Juliet's death), and Masks, a really rousing number.

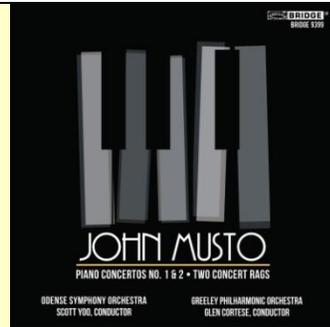
Things Fall apart is a new composition by American composer Roger C. Vogel, based on the novel by the late Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (1930-2013). That title, in turn, was taken from a line in the poem *The Second Coming* by Irish poet William Butler Yeats: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world." Never was a literary borrowing more apt. For Achebe's novel tells the story of what happens when a tribal culture, securely propped by the pillars of myth and tradition, is rudely supplanted by western concepts of government, religion, and order. Things, indeed, come apart.

Literature tells the history of the mass through the experience of the individual. In this case, the tragic hero of the story is a man named Okonkwo, respected highly among the people of a collection of villages in the lower Niger region named Umuofia. Alongside his admirable qualities, he contains the seed of his own destruction in his temper, displayed early in the story when he commits an unclean act by beating one of his wives during a season sacred to the harvest goddess.

The circle begins to close in on him when Ikemefuna, a young man who has been held as a hostage in Umuofia, is condemned to die by an oracle. Ignoring the advice of a village elder that he desist because Ikemefuna has regarded him as a father, he participates in the ritual killing rather than be thought weak by the others. Later, in a salute to the dead at a village funeral, Okonkwo's gun accidentally explodes, killing a bystander, and he is compelled to go into exile for five years. The circle of fate is complete when Okonkwo rashly strikes and kills a messenger of the white man's court, and then hangs himself to save his people from reprisals.

In bringing the text drawn from Achebe's novel to the concert hall, composer Roger Vogel enjoys the talents of his colleagues who premiered the work on September 6, 2012 at the Hodgson School of Music at the University of Georgia. They are Angela Jones-Reus, flute; Martha Thomas, piano; and Todd Mueller, percussion. This trio deftly sets a prevailing mood as they support and underscore the moods of the drama: lyrical, foreboding, and insistently moving toward the final tragedy.

The center of attention remains squarely on the baritone vocalist and narrator. He is the Nigerian-american singer Odekhiren Amaize, who coincidentally commissioned this work. I have been impressed with "Ode," as his friends call him, for some time, having heard with pleasure several of his recordings of Russian songs. He has as much presence in the role of prose narrator as he does as a singer, a factor that helps put across a drama that is all the more moving for its understated style.



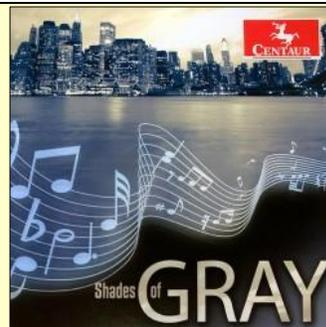
Musto: Piano Concertos 1 & 2; Concert Rages  
 John Musto, piano; orchestras conducted by Scott Yoo and Glen Cortese  
 Bridge Records

American composer John Musto (b. Brooklyn, NY 1954) impressed me when I reviewed a Bridge recording of his songs back in 2009. But it really didn't prepare me for the surprise I experienced when I auditioned this newest release of the composer's two Piano Concertos and two selections from his Concert Rages. His cool, characteristic lyricism was still there, in part a reflection of his ongoing love affair with the blues. But what we also get in the concertos are highly charged energy, a preoccupation with alert, exciting rhythms, a scintillating piano style, and a fearlessness in indulging himself in bravura that I find very welcome in these emotionally guarded times. It filled me with renewed optimism for the contemporary classical music scene.

Concerto No. 1 premiered in July, 2006, actually three months later than the premiere of No. 2, but it had a long gestation period going back to 1988. It begins darkly and slowly, with a meditative duet by two clarinets while the piano engages in quiet rumination in widely spaced chords and single notes, seemingly unaware of the insistent urging of the orchestra, which becomes progressively alarmed, and even angry. When the piano is finally moved to action, it immediately broadens the discourse with the orchestra. The movement, in Musto's typical A-B-C-B-A form, ends as quietly as it began.

In the second movement, marked *Andante grazioso*, Musto pays tribute to the spirit of ragtime, which has been a major influence in his music since the rags revival of the 1970's. It begins with a lazy melody which morphs into a quick double-time version in the middle section as Musto's piano interacts elegantly with the winds and brass. The finale, aptly marked *Scorrevole* (scurrying) is in perpetual motion as piano interacts with and against the orchestra (here the superb Odense Symphony Orchestra under Scott Yoo). Things build to a climax and then fall quiet until the piano builds up momentum again for a final dash up the keyboard and a bravura finish.

From its opening measures, Piano Concerto No. 2, which Musto premiered in April, 2006, is noticeably more extroverted than its predecessor. It has an improvisatory quality and a shameless proclivity towards the virtuosic,



"Shades of Gray," imaginative arrangements for clarinet with other instruments  
 Gary Gray, clarinet, with collaborative artists  
 Centaur Records

It's one of those happy occasions when musicians that are equally conversant in jazz and classical get together and discover that they are all neighbors on Serendipity Street. The immediate impulse was the desire of Gary Gray, who plays and teaches the most beautiful sounding clarinet anywhere, to explore the fresh possibilities of blending his reed one-on-one with other instruments. As the project evolved, Gray's friends caught the excitement. The result was seven works – plus two choice bonus tracks – created and recorded just for this project, to let us hear what sweet music the old licorice stick can make grooving with its pals.

The cornerstones of the main program were, naturally enough, by George Gershwin, the first composer to show us what the worlds of classical music and jazz have in common. Three Preludes, with pianist Bill Cunliffe sharing the honors with Gray and his clarinet, get things off in style, two numbers with catchy rhythms enclosing what Gershwin himself termed a "jazz lullaby." Track 7, Rhapsody in Blue, re-unites the two artists in a keenly honed arrangement of the Gershwin classic that includes the famous "clarinet glissando" we are used to hearing at the very opening (actually a trill, followed by a legato 17-note rising diatonic scale) and then gradually works the clarinet into an equal role as a melody partner with the piano. With delicious results, I might add, as the two instruments weave beguilingly through each other's lines.

Three Short Stories for clarinet and bassoon by Gernot Wolfgang has Gray collaborating with bassoonist Judith Farmer in a heady mix of jazz and Latin American rhythms, from the up-tempo "Uncle Be-Bop" to the coolly lyrical "Rays of Light" in which the instruments drift serenely in their separate grooves, and then the explosive "Latin Dance." "Twilight" from Hall of Mirrors by Mark Carlson reveals the composer's affection for the songs of the 1930's and 40's. Gray and pianist Joanne Pearce Martin do the poignant song full justice. Charles Harold Bernstein's Blending for clarinet and violin sets the most difficult task of all, as the composer finds ever more ingenious ways to find common blends for instruments of seemingly low compatibility. As performed by Gray and violinist Adam Korniszewski, it all works so

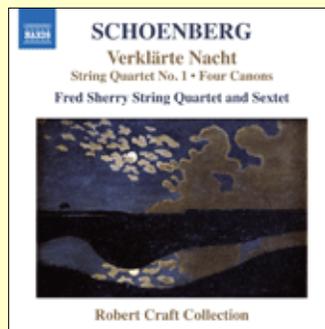
and not just in the piano part. As in the first concerto, Musto's A-B-C-B-A first movement form allows plenty of latitude for his piano to interact sensationally with the Greeley (CO) Philharmonic Orchestra under Glen Cortese. An interesting feature is Musto's use of crotales (a row of tuned bronze or brass discs each about 4" in diameter) to highlight the piano. The slow movement begins with an introspective blues based on half-steps of the accompanying figure from the previous movement. First trumpet, trombone, and then oboe enter the picture. Things build to a head, and then the music dies away, with fragments of the original blues littering the stage.

The finale, *Allegro energico* (and *how!*) begins with a terrific thwack on the bass drum. Then the fun begins. Hammered octaves, bariolage between the hands, driving rhythms, and brilliant passagework for the piano are mirrored by the virtuosic use of the orchestra, as in a jazz band (Musto's roots are nothing if not American). A slow burning ending is punctuated by another bass drum thwack, letting us know "that's all, folks" in no uncertain terms. As a respite in between the major works, we have contrasted pieces from Musto's Concert Rags, "Regrets" and "In Stride." The latter includes a tribute to Fats Waller, marked *Tempo di soft-Shoe*. Delicious!

well that the two sound as if they were made for each other.

Though not as well, I should say, as Gray's clarinet and Gary Foster's alto saxophone in Cunliffe's Yin and Yang, a neatly crafted conversation in canon form. As both "Gary's" are equally conversant on each other's reed, we might expect them to pull a switch the next time they appear together on the popular "Pacific Serenades." Blue Muse, by jazz great Kenny Burrell, pairs Gray and Burrell in a dialog that blends the two instruments so intimately, they might be reminiscing in a quiet café somewhere.

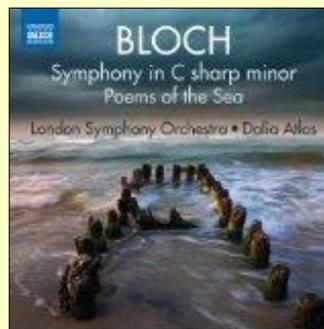
Cunliffe's arrangement of Billy Strayhorn's Lush Life has Juliette Gray speaking the lyrics while Cunliffe lays the foundation and Gary Gray adds color support on alto sax. The result brings out the bittersweet depths in the old song, originally written for Duke Ellington. Finally, Gray and pianist colleague Vince Maggio team up in Gray's arrangement of Carlos Antonio Jobim's ever-fresh standard, Wave. As with the other tracks on this CD, truly superior recorded sound brings out all the fine points in a way that befits intimate music making.



Schoenberg: Verklärte Nacht  
String Quartet No. 1, Four Canons  
Fred Sherry Quartet and Sextet  
Naxos

These are revealing performances of seminal works by Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951). As an added plus, they are all highly listenable, as well. They reveal the personality and artistic aims of the young composer better than any actual biography.

String Quartet No. 1 (1904/05), first on the program, shows Schoenberg already hard at work reconciling the structural logic of Brahms with the chromaticism of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. His future direction is revealed in the use of asymmetrical, rather than the balanced phrases so typical of quartet writing, plus themes



Bloch: Symphony in C sharp  
minor, Songs of the Sea  
Dalia Atlas, London Symphony  
Naxos

Ernest Bloch (1880-1959), Swiss-born American composer, reflected a lot of influences in his music (Mahler, Bruckner, Strauss) while maintaining a recognizable profile throughout his career. In an intriguing program, Israeli conductor Dalia Atlas presents two astonishingly neglected works by Bloch that give us added insight into his character and his artistic aims.

The larger and more important of the two is his Symphony in C-sharp minor, a major work that clocks in at 54:38 in the present performance, but does not seem long at all under Professor Atlas' baton. That's due in



Rachmaninov: Symphony No. 1  
The Isle of the Dead - Leonard  
Slatkin, Detroit Symphony  
Naxos

Leonard Slatkin and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra conclude their cycle of Rachmaninoff symphonies in impressive form with their best entry yet. It includes a symphony born under a cloud and a tone poem that debuted auspiciously and has been famous ever since. Both share the gloomy pessimism and obsession with death that has intrigued the composer's audiences down to the present day. The ill-starred item I mentioned above was Symphony No. 1 in D minor. It was a failure at its premiere in 1897, and its debacle left Rachmaninoff in a state of depression, unable to work on any

that appear again and again in many guises. The duration of 46:43 might seem excessive until you realize what the composer is up to. For sure, the writing can be very dense at the beginning, only gradually becoming clearer as we get deeper into the work (Gustav Mahler once remarked to the composer: "Here is a score of not more than four staves, and I am unable to read them").

It is also very emotionally intense music. The Fred Sherry Quartet, consisting of Leila Josefowicz and Jesse Mills, violins; Hsin-Yun Huang, viola; and Sherry himself on cello, do a commendable job staying on top of the many textural changes in a work that is unforgiving of any sloppiness, while still keeping their fingers on the pulse of its high intensity.

Verklärte Nacht (Transfigured Night), in which Josefowicz and Sherry are joined by David Chan, violin; Paul Neubauer and Yura Lee, violas; and Michael Nicolas, cello, was a work of which Schoenberg was particularly proud, being a successful synthesis of tone poem and chamber music. It has remained his most popular work. The programme tells of a man and a woman who meet by moonlight. She confesses to him that she is with child by a loveless liaison with another man she had met previously. Her lover forgives and comforts her, saying that her unborn child will be his, and their love will be made more perfect, even as the bright moonlight and starry sky transfigure the earth. The place in the score in which this actually *happens*, when the texture lightens and the harmony becomes more brilliant and translucent, is one of the great moments in music, and is captured here to perfection.

Four Canons for Quartet (1905-1949) is more listenable than we have a right to expect of the sort of music a composer usually writes for himself as an exercise. The fourth is charming, having been dedicated to the infant son of the conductor Artur Rodziński as a lullaby.

part to the fact that the composer organized his material so skillfully, with themes that we hear throughout the symphony in new, fresh guises. A rhythmic motif consisting of two short followed by two long beats underlies most of the music. By turns dark and sorrowful, then filled with sweeping dynamic force, humorous, marchlike, pastoral, heroic, and triumphant, the symphony contains a lot of variety in mood and texture.

Bloch was inclined to accept the forms of the past while filling them with material of compelling emotion and vivid color. The remarkable thing about the C-sharp minor Symphony is the incredible maturity shown by the then-20 year old composer. It was in fact his first work. Unlike so many young composers who overload their initial opus with a whole bathtub of musical ideas, Bloch shows maturity beyond his years in the economy (the word applies, even for a 50 minute work) with which he marshals the resources of the orchestra and the symphonic form itself.

Dalia Atlas, here at the podium of the London Symphony Orchestra, conducts a persuasive performance based on her long acquaintance with this composer. That this is only the third recording of the symphony currently available, the first in almost 20 years, reflects credit on Atlas for rescuing it from neglect. "I am of the opinion," she says in the booklet notes, "that this is Bloch's greatest and best work." As a major figure in the Ernest Bloch International Society, she speaks with authority.

The companion work, Three Poems of the Sea, is a real charmer that packs a great deal of luminous material in a small space (13:35 in the present performance). Like Debussy, Bloch realizes that the sea is intriguing because it represents incessant, restless movement *and* mystery. The three movements, "Waves," "Chanty," and "At Sea," take their cue from Walt Whitman's poems about the sea and seafaring.

new project for the next three years.

The D minor Symphony is now recognized as a major achievement, and a culmination of the Russian romantic tradition. With 37 currently listed recordings, it cannot be said to be ignored any longer. A major problem with its initial reception was the density of its themes. This is a completely cyclical symphony, in which themes emerge from cell groups and recur time and again in different forms in each movement and throughout the work. The stunning emotional intensity of this symphony may have been another reason for its poor reception. And remember, there were no recorded media in 1897 to help the composer, so a new work seldom got a second chance to make a first impression.

There's a lot happening in this symphony, and Slatkin is on top of it all: towering climaxes with expanded woodwind, brass and percussion, outcries and shudders against an expressive orchestral background, swelling appoggiaturas, even a few moments of relative calm such as the slow melody sung by the clarinet in the Larghetto. It is soon overcome by events, starting with menacing harmonies in the muted horns. There is also music inspired by Znamenny Chant with its characteristic melismas for unison voices. The finale is as grand and smashing as a train wreck, a fact which should endear this recording to audiophiles.

The Isle of the Dead, the companion piece, is a more satisfying work if for no other reason than the fact that its structure as a tone poem that unfolds in a crescendo-decrescendo involved fewer problems. A repetitive rhythm in 5/8, suggesting both the waves as Charon rows the souls of the dead to their destination and the feverish pulse of the dying, makes an unforgettable impression. So do the occasional sighs from the woodwinds and the quotation of the *Dies irae* that was to become Rachmaninoff's motto. Slatkin and the Detroit SO make it an overwhelming experience.