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AUDIOPHILE AUDITION

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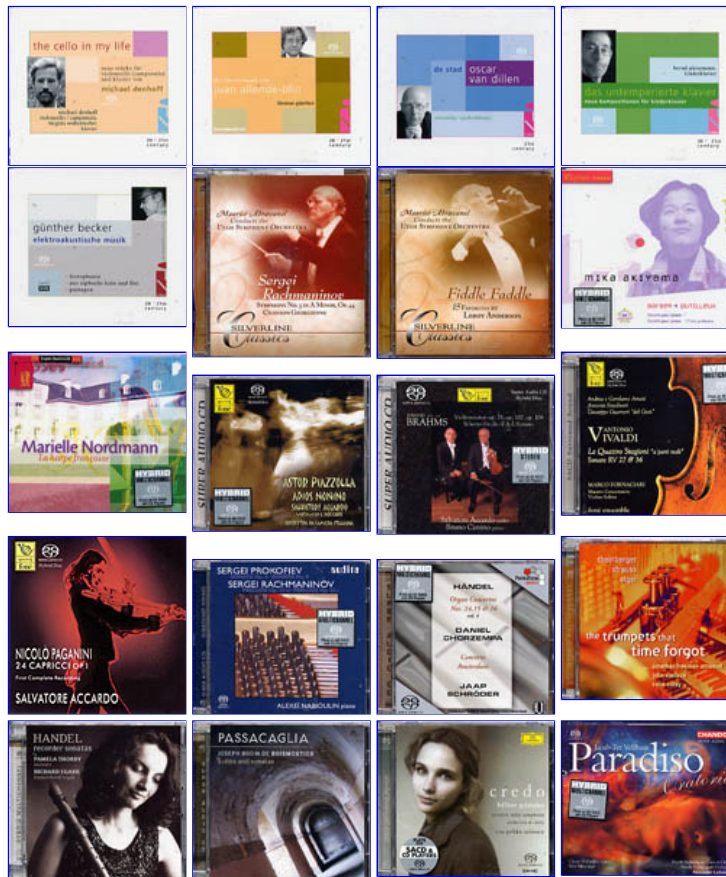
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47 SACD & DVD-A Reviews This Month

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MULTICHANNEL DISC OF THE MONTH



GUSTAV MAHLER: Symphony No. 2 in C Minor "Resurrection" - Latonia Moore, sop./Nadja Michael, mezzo-sop./Vienna Singverein/Vienna Philharmonic/Gilbert Kaplan - DGG SACD (2 discs) 474 594-2:

Kaplan is a real musical phenomenon. He was originally a stockbroker who developed an obsessive interest in Mahler's Second Symphony. Now he is on

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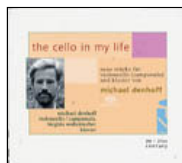
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the faculty of Juilliard, the author of an illustrated biography of Mahler, hosts radio series on Mahler and music in general, and is on the board of many musical institutions. He has specialized in conducting Mahler's Second and has done so with over 50 orchestras now, as well as recording it with the London Symphony in 1988 in a best-selling disc set. Kaplan is the joint editor of a completely new critical edition of the symphony's score, which incorporates hundreds of corrections to errors which remained in the 1970 previously-published corrected score. Most of these changes are very subtle in nature, often coming from the composer's final stages of editing the work.

Kaplan's 1988 disc was a gem but this new version is nothing short of breathtaking. The music seems to flow more smoothly and builds to its various ecstatic climaxes with greater inevitability than before - perhaps due to the many performances he has conducted of the work in the ensuing 16 years. And now we have the higher resolution and enveloping surround field of multichannel SACD reproduction. (MTT and the SF Symphony are going to have a tough time beating this entry when they get around to the Second in their Mahler SACD cycle.) The dynamic range on these discs seems wider than any other classical recording I have heard. One could never listen to this on a car CD deck without compression - which none of the auto players have anymore. Haven't heard of the two soloists, but they are superb, and the almost holographic sound image of the massed chorus across the soundstage is something to behold - especially in the super-pianissimo passage leading up to the mass reiteration of the Resurrection theme in the finale. This is considered the softest entrance in choral music literature. Simply glorious music given a glorious performance and, finally, appropriate recording presentation. Why any two-channel diehard would still insist that multichannel is a gimmick after comparing the stereo and multichannel options on these discs is a complete mystery to me. Mahler's Fourth has often been thought the best introduction to the master's music for Mahler neophytes, but this is such an achievement that I say lay the Second on them!

- John Sunier



MICHAEL DENHOFF: The Cello in My Life – Compositions for Cello and Piano – Michael Denhoff, Cello; Birgitta Wollenweber, Piano – Cybele SACD 361.401 – Multichannel Hybrid SACD:

The accompanying booklet with this disc warns against expecting a virtuosic display by a composer at his chosen instrument – nothing could be farther from that than what you get here, but the results are nonetheless very satisfying. As with most 20th and 21st century chamber compositions, there's a great deal of silence interspersed with the music, but this only heightens the dramatic effect. The writing done for the piano accompaniment here is truly excellent – one almost gets the impression that composer and cellist Michael Denhoff intentionally minimized the role of the cello to emphasize the broad palette of tonal colors the two instruments are capable of during interplay.

The pieces here haven't totally abandoned conventional form, and the playing is quite melodic throughout; especially noteworthy is the contribution from pianist Birgitta Wollenweber – her playing is nothing short of phenomenal, and the recorded sound of the piano just sparkles. There's a low-frequency rumble that's barely perceptible on all of the tracks, but it in no way intruded on my enjoyment of the program. The surround content is pretty much limited to the front channels with some ambience presented by the rears. Switching to the stereo-only tracks did indeed collapse the soundstage slightly.

Any collection of late-20th century chamber music would be incomplete without this disc – very highly recommended.

- Tom Gibbs



JUAN ALLENDE-BLIN: The Piano Music – Thomas Gunther, Piano – Cybele SACD 160.401 – Multichannel Hybrid SACD

This collection of piano music served as my introduction to Chilean expatriate Juan Allende-Blin, with whom I was previously unfamiliar. Early on he was taught composition by an uncle (an associate of Debussy), then later by a student of Anton Webern. He relocated to Germany in 1951, where he studied for a while with Olivier Messiaen. The piano works heard here very strongly reflect the influences of Webern and Messiaen, and though it shares much of the dissonance from that period, the music for the most part is melodic throughout. Pianist Thomas Gunther has a long association with Juan Allende-Blin, and he plays this music with mastery and a deep understanding.

Only one piece, the Dialogue for 2 Players (track 6), departs significantly from traditional form, where approximately six minutes into the piece the second player (composer Juan Allende-Blin) appears and begins plucking the strings inside the piano and playing against them with tennis balls. It sounds kind of strange, but it has a really interesting effect on the music, which remains very cerebral throughout.

The recording is excellent, with the piano front and center in the soundstage. The surrounds add needed ambience to give a more 3-dimensional aspect to the performance. At times gripping, at other times downright harrowing, I still found this music to be very listenable and enjoyable for extended sessions – highly recommended.

- Tom Gibbs



OSCAR VAN DILLEN: De Stad (The City) – Ensemble Gelber Klang – Cybele SACD 361.301 – Multichannel Hybrid SACD:

After the conclusion of World War II, the port city of Rotterdam, Netherlands, began rebuilding from the near-total destruction of the war and within two decades had become and has since remained the world's busiest seaport. In 2003, Dutch composer Oscar Van Dillen was commissioned by the Historic Museum of the City of Rotterdam to create a piece commemorating the opening of a new exhibition on The History of New Rotterdam. His response was De Stad, (The City), which is actually two compositions; the first is a series of six vignettes which serve to describe various moods and actions that contribute to the overall experience that is modern-day Rotterdam. The second is a compression of the six vignettes into a single continuous electroacoustic movement with a significant amount of electronic embellishment.

The straight reading is played by Ensemble Gelber Klang, with a few electronic touches added here and there by the composer. Although basically a traditional chamber ensemble, the occasional use of instruments such as the accordion and marimba help to give this group a sound unlike any other, and that helps to serve the music here well. The sounds we're hearing are an amalgam of industrial activities, musical traditions, and the vast cultural influences that make up daily life in Rotterdam. I particularly like movement 3, where a quiet underpinning from contrabass and strings begins to give way to staccato bursts of piano, while tympani rumble distantly and ominously. The overall effect is quite chilling and exuberant.

The compressed version, which was specifically composed with surround sound in mind, takes the foundation provided by Ensemble Gelber Klang and adds every conceivable electronic effect – voices, sounds of waves crashing, machinery, clocks ticking – coming at you from every channel of your system, and the effect is quite startling, but nonetheless enjoyable. At times, it's almost reminiscent of Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon!

Technically, the disc is superb. All my listening was done in surround sound, and this disc, played back in a well set-up multichannel system, is a surround tour-de-force. Very highly recommended.

- Tom Gibbs



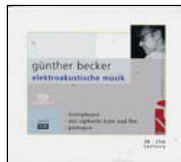
The Not So Well-Tempered Klavier – New Compositions for Toy Piano – Bernd Wiesemann, Toy Piano – Cybele SACD 160.501 – Multichannel Hybrid SACD:

This disc's title, *The Not So Well-Tempered Klavier*, is a pretty amusing twist on the venerable Bach collection – hey, at least some Germans have a refined sense of humor, anyway. The premise of this disc – new compositions for toy piano – might strike one as quite odd, but some of the compositions are really pretty enjoyable. Eleven different composers offer works here; I especially enjoyed Oscar Van Dillen's piece (track 3), which uses three toy pianos (front, center, left) to really amazing effect. Karl-Heinz Zarius' piece (track 7), a Nocturne, also worked very well for me, and really emphasized the bell-like sound of the toy piano, with an almost Bartokian feel to the music. Track 26, by Christian Banasik, takes the live instrument, and recombines it with numerous taped samples of toy pianos to create a totally different chromatic experience.

The bottom line for me here, though, is – just how much toy piano can anyone endure during one sitting? Taken as individual pieces, and listened to judiciously, the various pieces can be quite striking and some very enjoyable – but they make for a really tough listening session when heard back-to-back-to-back. My wife and dog both were about to pull their respective hairs out when I finally pulled the plug on this unusual disc!

Sonically, the disc is surprisingly good, with a lot more body to the sound than one would have expected from a toy piano. Regardless of how good the sound, this is definitely an acquired taste musically – some of the tracks would make for a great throw-in on a mix tape for parties or whatever – but I'd really recommend trying it before buying it. [And if you just can't get enough of the tinkly sounds, there are several standard CDs of works for toy piano by John Cage and others on the Wergo and New Albion labels...Ed.]

Tom Gibbs



GUNTHER BECKER: Collected Works – Electroacoustic Music – Cybele SACD 960.401 – Stereo Hybrid SACD:

Gunther Becker's music harkens back to the early days of German electronic music in the mid-seventies, when Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream were first gaining followings. The recordings here date from the seventies; *Ferrophonie*, a work from 1973 that explores and electronically modulates steel products and sounds, represents the only recording ever made of this composition. The overall feel of the music has much more in common with the free-form works of Tangerine Dream than anything by Kraftwerk – there's not a hint of melody or an underlying beat to be found. And while some of the sounds here possess an arresting quality – much of it is way too overwhelming for even casual listening.

Sound-wise, these seventies-vintage stereo recordings really sound pretty good, but this disc may have been better served by remixing the original stereo tapes into surround. This is another of those acquired taste discs – you either love it, or hate it – so try it before you buy it, if possible.

Tom Gibbs



RACHMANINOFF: Symphony No. 3 in A Minor; Chanson Georgienne - Utah Symphony Orchestra/Maurice Abravanel

- Vanguard/Silverline Classics DVD-A288242-9:

Continuing the superb reissue program of the phenomenal Abravanel quadraphonic recordings for Vanguard on DVD-A, this one brings us a lovely performance of a popular Rachmaninoff symphony. All the four-track original tapes have been lovingly restored and played on specially-tweaked four-channel analog decks in order to re-mix for 5.1 surround. One of the three special features included with each disc in this series goes into that effort on transferring and restoring the legacy. The other two features here also continue what is found on the other discs: an Abravanel Memorial Tribute, and Remembering Abravanel's Utah Symphony Orchestra. It's quite exceptional what perfection Abravanel achieved with his orchestra, which was not considered among the top U.S. orchestras. And Vanguard's skill in engineering the original recordings, plus the acoustics of the Mormon Tabernacle venue all added up to a musical achievement that has withstood the test of time, and now can be heard with the clarity and fidelity that was impossible at the time of the recordings' first releases. This series is exactly the sort that the DVD-Audio camp sorely needs to bolster up the classical side of its catalog vs. the majority of SACD classical releases. Bravo to all concerned! The short Chanson features vocalist Natania Davrath, who is also the unique vocalist in the Songs of the Auvergne reissues, also reviewed here this month.

- John Sunier



Fiddle Fiddle - 15 Favorites by LEROY ANDERSON - Utah Symphony Orchestra/Maurice Abravanel - Vanguard/Silverline Classics DVD-A 288241-9:

I was not rushing to audition this one, regarding Anderson as a sort of musical Edgar Guest. I was reminded of my high school orchestra, which was the first thing of any import I recorded with my new portable Ampex 601 (still have the Scotch 111 reel too). But when I finally sat down and slipped it into my Rotel DVD-A player I found the music not at all the chore that I had envisioned. It's an indication of Abravanel's personality that he approached these light pieces just as he would a more serious symphony or concerto, and we get captivating performances that are free of the "just-play-the-notes" style that so much MOR music sounds like. Not a great deal to analysis or discuss about this music - just listen and enjoy. The surround makes it definitely a more "interactive" experience. Anderson's Sandpaper Ballet and The Typewriter were my faves back in high school and still are. The latter wasn't the first to use the sounds of actual typing in music, but it's more rhythmic and lots catchier than Erik Satie's usage of the writing instrument in Parade. The same three video featurettes are included in this DVD-A as in the rest of the Utah Sym. series. Tracks: Sleigh Ride, Blue Tango, Trumpeter's Lullaby, Belle of the Ball, Bugler's Holiday, Forgotten Dreams, Syncopated Clock, Plink Plank Plunk, Fiddle Fiddle, Sandpaper Ballet, The Typewriter, Sarabande, Song of the Bells, Jazz Pizzicato, Serenata.

- John Sunier



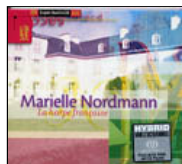
HENRI DUTILLEUX: Piano Sonata; 3 Preludes for Piano; BARBER: Sonata Op. 26 - Mika Akiyama, piano - Lyrinx/Talents SACD Lyr 2220:

Interesting partnering of works here. The connections are that both composers were about the same age and both won a Prix de Rome which allowed them to study in Rome just prior to the outbreak of WW II. Their respective sonatas both appeared after the war and both play around with tonality, though more so in the Barber, which has some discreet dodecaphonic elements - though rescued by a long-lined melody. The Barber's final movement has an imposing four-part fugue which gets rather jazzy in parts. The entire work is extremely virtuosic and has become an important work of 20th century American compositions for piano. Dutilleux began his catalog of works with his 1947 sonata. It shows his attraction for modal writing, echoes, and fashioning usual sound structures. The three

Dutilleux preludes are dedicated respectively to Arthur Rubinstein, Claude Heiffger and pianist Eugène Istomin. Akiyama is fortunate to get an entire disc as her initial recording, and in multichannel SACD on top of it! Her fine performances fully deserve it.

I recall how after the introduction of the stereodisc in 1958 most recordings of solo piano continued to be in mono on the thought that a single instrument didn't benefit that much from stereophonic reproduction. (Also, recording piano was enough of a challenge without adding the many artifacts peculiar to cutting stereo grooves into vinyl at that time.) But that sort of thinking doesn't seem to be happening with hi-res multichannel - there have been many solo piano releases in multichannel, and it does improve the realism of the recording. In fact, I have found that my "broken-record" complaints about 40-foot-wide piano sound seem to be less of a problem with multichannel reproduction.

- John Sunier



**La harpe française - Marielle Nordmann, harp =
PIERNE; Impromptu-Caprice; DEBUSSY: Reverie, La fille aux cheveux
de lin, Arabesque 1 & 2, Clair de lune, ENESCO: Allegro de concert,
FAURE: Une chatelaine en sa tour, Impromptu, ST.-SAENS: The
Swan, ROUSSEL: Impromptu, DUPARC: Chanson triste,
HASSELMANS: Les follets - Lyrinx SACD LXR 2211:**

Nordmann is considered the spiritual heir to the great French harpist Lily Laskine. She is described in the notes as a beautiful woman but there is no picture of her provided - rather a different approach from that of most jazz and classical recordings lately, which have adopted the rock merchandising slogan: Sex Sells. There's a photo of her harp, however, in the drawing room belonging to some prince where the recording was made. I believe the concert harp is an even more difficult-to-record instrument than the grand piano, and Lyrinx has been successful in this effort. The wide dynamic and frequency range of the instrument has been perfectly captured. With the natural-sounding surround envelopment one really feels right at home in Prince whatsis' drawing room.

- John Sunier

The first SACDs imported from the Italian Fone label...



**ASTOR PIAZZOLLA: Adios Nonino - Italiana
Chamber Orchestra/Salvatore Accardo, violin & director - Fone SACD
020 SACD:**

This is one of two Piazzolla SACD in the initial release of nine discs from Fone. While there have been a number of Piazzolla SACDs already released, these have a very special connection: Conductor and violinist Accardo was a close friend of the composer, and Piazzolla even dedicated his composition Milonga in D to him. In the interview with Accardo in the note booklet there is discussion of the Italian connection - Piazzolla's parents were Italian and there is much of Italian music in the mixture that is known as Tango. Piazzolla had a difficult time getting his music accepted by some critics and tango fans because he didn't design it for dancing but for listening. The disc's title tune is probably the most gorgeous piece the Argentine composer ever wrote - a remembrance of his father. It receives a very lovely ten-minute treatment here with a fine solo by pianist Laura Manzivi. Other Piazzolla classics given the chamber orchestra treatment are Milonga del Angel and Verano Porteno. I don't recall having heard the disc's closing Three Pieces for Chamber Orchestra on previous Piazzolla collections. It's a rich three-movement work: Prelude, Fugue and Divertimento. The transcriptions of the other works are primarily by Francesco Fiore. The page of tech information shows that Fone puts a strong emphasis on audiophile quality. The recordings were made direct to five-channel (no LFE) DSD, using Van den Hul cables and dCS converters.

- John Sunier



**BRAHMS: Violin-Piano Sonatas Op. 78, 100 & 108;
Scherzo in C Major - Salvatore Accardo, violin/Bruno Canino, piano -
Foné Stereo SACD 008 SACD:**

Violinist Accardo shines in this album of the three Brahms masterpieces for violin and piano. They are all highly lyrical and carry the vocal qualities of the lied throughout. The duo has chosen to emphasize that aspect of the music, bringing out a beautiful singing tone on both instruments that is concisely captured by the stereo DSD recording. The second sonata has a number of references to the composer's own lieder, and is dominated by a feeling of serene relaxation. The third sonata differs from the others in going to four movements instead of the normal three, and it becomes more exuberant and lively. The violin tone is especially rich and natural - something that can be so painful in many standard CDs.

- John Sunier



**VIVALDI: The Four Seasons; Sonata in G Minor RV
27; Sonata in A Minor RV 36 - Marco Fornaciari, v./Foné Ensemble -
Foné SACD 005 SACD:**

Ah yes, yet another Four Seasons. The interpretive bag here is about halfway between the boring carefulness of decades ago and the wild enthusiasm of ensembles such as Il Giardino Armonico. Recording-wise, very rich and enveloping sonics. If you don't already have a Four Seasons in your SACD collection, you couldn't go wrong with this one.

- John Sunier



**PAGANINI: 24 Capricci Op. 1 - Salvatore Accardo,
solo violin - Foné SACD 032 (2 SACDs):**

This new release is called the first complete recording, though I know I have somewhere in my collection another set of the 24 works on two CDs. It appears Fone bases that statement on the fact that the Capriccios are normally performed without their "retornelli" and for this recording Accardo has performed all of them. Paganini's name is synonymous with the violin and he is regarded as the inventor of the modern violin. He was such an astounding virtuoso of the instrument that tales abounded of the violinist selling his soul to the devil for his legendary skills. He had a fragile nature, but also was hypersensitive, impetuous and not in the best of health. Paganini created a whole new catalog of stylistic effects never before heard on the violin.

Some of the Capriccios are real finger-busters for performers, while others have showy passages that were obviously designed to wow his audiences but really weren't that difficult to play. Again, multichannel playback presents the violin in a normal size and in a natural acoustical space, plus without a hint of the digitus frequently ailing standard CD recordings featuring solo violin. However, although I wasn't able on short notice to put my finger on another version in my collection, I do recall a more silky and pleasant tone than I hear on these SACDs. Their generally rough timbre seems to point up the difficulties of some of Paganini's tricks, when I would think the idea was to make them seem effortless. I don't believe I would have retained that other set if the violin tone was as harsh as I hear on these discs. The particular timbre was the same on the 44.1 CD layer, just less detailed. My system is not slanted toward high end hardness, but perhaps on a vacuum tube setup the violin tone would be more acceptable. As it is I found it just short of annoying.

- John Sunier



**PROKOFIEV: Sonata No. 4; Sonata No. 8;
RACHMANINOV: Prelude in G Flat Major, Prelude in E Major - Alexei Nabioulin, piano - Audite SACD 92.513:**

This German label only has a couple of SACDs out so far and is difficult to find. Prokofiev's piano sonatas seem to be coming to the fore in both recitals and recordings in recent years. Perhaps it is due to their often nervous and high-strung quality which seems to reflect much of modern-day life. Nabioulin is a Russian pianist coming from the legendary Russian school of piano virtuosos. The recording, however, was made in Germany with the best equipment rather than depending on the often iffy sonic quality of Russian recordings. An interesting angle here is that the piano is not the usual Steinway or Bosendorfer but a Japanese Kawai. I did notice that the extreme high register percussive passages in the two Prokofiev sonatas were not nearly as filling-loosening as I recall on other recordings of the works employing Steinways. Again, multichannel playback provides a very natural piano sound and feeling of the performance space that draws the listener in more than with stereo.

- John Sunier



**HANDEL: Organ Concertos Vol. 4 - Nos. 14, 15 & 16
- Daniel Chorzempa, organ/Concerto Amsterdam/Jaap Schröder - Pentatone 4.0 RQR SACD PTC 5186 110:**

This volume completes the series of the complete organ concertos; we have reviewed the first three volumes here previously. As before, these were originally recorded by Philips around 1975 in four channels for release on SQ LPs but then the format died out. Pentatone decided not to re-mix for 5.1 or 5.0 but to let the original four-channel setup come thru via SACD the same way it did in the original control room (before the matrix encoding to LP which messed it up thoroughly). Handel's concertos were merely improvised encores to his oratorios which were so well-received that they became a regular feature. Opus 4 and 7 constitute 12 of the concertos and the three on this disc were published without opus numbers. In the final concerto, No. 16, three of the movements are lifted from his concerto for two horns and finale came from his oratorio Judas Maccabaeus. These are really chamber works rather than bigtime symphonic organ concertos, but nevertheless the multichannel option sorts out the subtle interplay of organ lines from the chamber orchestra with a clarity no two-channel version can equal, even in SACD.

- John Sunier



**The Trumpets That Time Forgot = RHEINBERGER:
Suite for two trumpets & organ; RICHARD STRAUSS: 3 Movements
from "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" Suite; ELGAR: Sonata No. 2 Op.
87a - Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, trumpets; John Wallace,
trumpets; Colm Carey, pipe organ - Linn SACD CKD 242:**

Recording in the voluminous acoustics of Hereford Cathedral, these three skilled musicians perform three spectacular works featuring trumpets and organ. John Wallace fronts The Wallace Collection brass ensemble, and Freeman-Attwood and Carey co-founded Renaissance 2000 to explore ensemble music with pipe organ. It may be a surprise to learn that none of them were originally composed for that combination of instruments - all have been transcribed. The Rheinberger was originally for violin, cello and organ and the Strauss is arranged down to the three instruments from its original chamber orchestra version. The Elgar work was composed for brass band and later reworked into a solo organ sonata, so this arrangement simply puts back a couple of the trumpets from the brass band. All three works are full of strong melody, lyricism and a very wide dynamic range.

This is an audiophile gem if I ever heard one!

- John Sunier



HANDEL: Recorder Sonatas = D Minor HWV 367a, B Flat Major HWV 377, C Major HWV 365, F Major HWV 369, A Minor HWV 362, G Minor HWV 360, Harpsichord Suite in E Major - Pamela Thorby, recorder/Richard Egarr, harpsichord and organ - Linn SACD CKD 223:

From a large sound to small one with this disc. These are the six complete recorder sonatas composed by Handel during his tenure in London. He frequently used the instrument in both his operatic and orchestral works. The oboists in the orchestra were usually called on to play the recorder parts, and it is felt he wrote these sonatas for one of these players - to serve as entertainments during breaks in concerts. Some of the organ concertos reviewed above might also have been heard at the same concerts. The sonatas are full of wonderful melodies and exuberance, and Thorby is one of the leading recorder players today. It is greatly satisfying for anyone who has played the recorder themselves or accompanied recorder players to listen to Thorby's performances and know that we are never going to be subjected one of those awful sounds that recorders in lesser hands are bound to make! Egarr's harpsichord solo on the Handel suite is a welcome "entertainment" in the middle of this recital. He went to school with Thorby and they have concertised together, but this is their first recording together.

- John Sunier



BOISMORTIER: Suites & Sonatas = Trio Sonata in G Major, Sonata in D Major, Cinquième Suite in D Minor, Trio Sonata in E Minor, Suite in A Major, Sonata in E Minor, Diverse Pieces for Viols in C, Gentelesse in G Major - Passacaglia - Linn Stereo SACD CKD 204:

Passacaglia is a quartet of performers whose previous Linn SACD was the music of Telemann. Boismortier is known as the composer of many duets for recorders but he wrote in many different forms, including opera-ballets, motets, cantatas and chamber works. Boismortier himself was a transverse flute player and used that instrument in his ensemble works more than the recorder, although most of his chamber music was designed to be easily adapted to playing on the recorder. Although French titles are given to the various movements, most of these pieces adhere more closely to the Italian style. This was a period of conflict between the two styles of music, which eventually resulted in Boismortier giving up composing altogether. The Suite in A Major is strongly influenced by Rameau's harpsichord music but also shows the Italian style. Two of Passacaglia's members play a variety of flutes and recorders between them, the third member is heard on viola da gamba, and the male musician plays both a French double-manual harpsichord and on the first Trio Sonata and one in E minor plays an early 18th century chamber organ.

- John Sunier



Credo = BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonata No. 17 "The Tempest," Fantasia for Piano, Chorus and Orchestra in C Minor "Choral Fantasy;" JOHN CORIGLIANO: Fantasia on an Ostinato for Solo Piano; ARVO PÄRT: "Credo" for Piano, Mixed Choir and Orchestra - Hélène Grimaud, piano/Swedish Radio Choir/Swedish Radio Symphony Orch./Esa-Pekka Salonen - DGG SACD 474 869-2:

A highly unusual program selected by pianist Grimaud, with the "center of gravity" (as she calls it) being Beethoven's problematic Choral Fantasy, which seems to be a sort of loose rehearsal for the Ode to Joy of the Ninth

Symphony. She discussed with Arvo Part looking for a second work for piano and orchestra to pair with the Choral Fantasy and he gave her his Credo. It opposes two dissimilar musical worlds, one an arrangement of a Bach prelude and the other serialized and extremely dissonant. In fact I've never heard such a loud and noisy work from Part - hard to believe it is by him. The other works on the program are the very tempestuous Beethoven piano sonata and John Corigliano's Fantasia using a famous theme from the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. Grimaud has synaesthesia - the ability to "see" colors in sound- and she describes the various colors for each of the works on this program. A fascinating, very intellectual program which requires your close attention. Superb performances by all concerned, and although the hi-res surround presentation didn't help me to get into the Part work, it could be fulfilling for someone else.

- John Sunier



JACOB TER VELDHUIS: Paradiso Oratorio - Claron McFadden, soprano; Tom Allen, tenor/North Netherlands Concerto Choir/North Netherlands Orchestra/Alexander Liebreich - Chandos SACD CHSA 5012: [See also DVD-V section this month]

This premiere recording comes in a double-disc box but contains only a single 73-minute disc. It has been simultaneously released as a 5.1 DVD of the same original music video oratorio for soprano, tenor, sampler, female choir and orchestra. The text comes from Dante as well as composer Veldhuis. Although the note booklet has the contents in brief of all the 16 parts of the oratorio plus a few stills from the video, you will probably be pretty lost without the video presentation. So I will cover this more in detail in that section this month. This work is an example of the musical ferment and creativity going on in Amsterdam; it's unlike anything that would come out of the U.S. Veldhuis says he is moved by human suffering but instead of commenting on it with the "doom and damnation" he sees in so much contemporary art, he prefers "to strive for crystal-clear, unearthly and perfect musical beauty that can arouse passion and ecstasy." The image and much of the music are literally heavenly. The score is very complex and dense and demands the clarity afforded by the multichannel hi-res playback. As good as it is, there is some loss encountered with the Dolby Digital 5.1 track of the video DVD, so I suggest getting both, starting both the SACD and DVD in sync with one another, and using the soundtrack from the SACD with the DVD images. There are some small visuals of the singers but the sync doesn't have to be that accurate to appreciate the work.

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