

ORCHESTRAL CONCERT CDs

David C F Wright DMus

In reviewing these 14 excellent CDs, I have included details about Geoffrey Terry who has produced them in the Czech Republic. He is rightly concerned about the quality of recorded sound, and puts forward a true and valid argument about recorded sound, and laments, as many do, that recording engineers take the responsibility of sound and dynamics away from the conductor, who should be in charge of tone and dynamics.

The length of the reviews vary. If it is a short review, it must not be taken that that CD is inferior. For example, I have said comparatively little about Wanda Wilkomirska's Britten. If I were to write more, it would be a catalogue of superlatives relating to her performance.

As already said, some reviews are longer and I have dealt on one occasion with the technicalities of the music, this being Dvořák's New World Symphony. This is done so that readers will readily see that I know what I am talking about and have musical and technical know-how although, like Mr. Terry, I have no desire to be pompous.

There are so many things to enjoy with this series of CDs. namely the excellent sound, the stunning performances by artists and conductors who may be otherwise completely forgotten.

Please view the website <http://www.orchestralconcertcds.com/welcome/welcome.html>

CD1-2008

BRNO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Conductor Jiří Waldhans

DVOŘÁK	Symphony no 9 in E minor (From the New World)
JAN NOVÁK	Philharmonic Dances
DELIUS	Prelude: Irmelin
DELIUS	La Calinda (Koanga)

Recorded live in the Royal Festival Hall, 22 October 1966

What a splendid CD with sound that is as good as you will ever hear. It is so alive that you feel you are there in the orchestra or in the front row.

Jiří Waldhans was the conductor of the Brno PO from 1962 and, with this orchestra, he toured extensively. Some will not know this conductor but, on this CD alone, he proves himself to be a very fine conductor indeed. He lived from 1923 to 1995.

His control in the Dvořák is exemplary and this performance is in the same league as that by Rudolph Kempe.

Waldhans makes the opening adagio introduction both spacious and clear and, from the word go, the sound is terrific. The timpanist makes an amazing sound and uses the right sticks.

The staccato woodwind is excellently caught and the music is often powerful when required. The clarity of the sound has to be heard to be believed. At the beginning of the allegro, the solo horn is memorable and the first oboe has an exquisite sound. There is a lot of detail such as the crisp playing of the lower strings. The first movement repeat is not observed but that seems to be common practice. In the B major passage, there is excellent ensemble work and the woodwind excel themselves. The modulations into C and A flat respectively work without a hitch and the lyrical passages are beautiful without being sentimental. The climaxes are shattering and not a problem for the recording engineer, and although it is rarely said, what a fine orchestrator Dvořák was.

The slow movement is a gorgeous adagio in D flat major with that beautiful cor anglais theme here played straight without the usual tear jerking slush. The conductor has picked an ideal tempo and his players achieve an excellent legato. The E major passage, poco piu mosso is ethereal and at 6. 23, the music positively glows with a violin theme of real beauty on the G string. The playful woodwind are infectious. After a terrific climax, we return to D flat and that cor anglais theme. Some might prefer this to be a little more spacious but the conductor has it right and prevents the music becoming mawkish.

The scherzo is, in my mind, Dvořák's weakest movement in this symphony, and is based on the Minuet and Trio of classical composers with varying tempi. Ideas from the first movement are recalled and the playing is as good as it gets.

The finale is marked allegro con fuoco and, in the main, it is. The orchestration is first class. There are hints of the Carnival Overture, Op 92, and earlier themes are recalled making this a unified symphony. The solo clarinet is at the top of his game and the brass are sensational. After a reprise of the slow movement theme, we have exciting swirling string playing of the highest order. The lyrical passages are sensual and the climaxes are wonderfully raw and phenomenal.

Like many, I often think that the symphony ending quietly is a mistake.

But this is a performance to treasure. It really is!

The Philharmonic Dances by Jan Novák (1921- 1984) were a revelation. Brilliantly orchestrated, hugely enjoyable at first hearing and remaining durable on repeated hearings.

Novák was Martinů's only main pupil and his influence is briefly detected in the last dance.

But this performance highlights the puzzle as why such fine music is not heard in the UK and, perhaps, elsewhere.

The Delius pieces are played beautifully.

CD2-2008

PRAGUE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

WALTON	Overture Scapino – conducted by Zdeněk Košler
PROKOFIEV	Piano Concerto no 3 in C Op 26 Peter Katin / Václav Smetáček Recorded live RFH 6 March 1968
KABELÁČ	Reflections op 49 / Košler
RAVEL	Rhapsodie Espagnole / Košler
DVOŘÁK	Slavonic Dance no 15 / Košler

The Walton and Prokofiev were recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London 6 March 1968 and the other items in Nottingham on 13 February 1967.

All performances are live.

I remind you of the website <http://www.orchestralconcertcds.com/welcome/welcome.html>

This CD has my highest recommendation. Its major work is Prokofiev's Piano Concerto no 3 in the best performance I have ever heard, and I have 40 recordings of this work.

Peter Katin told me that he only played the work a few times. He seldom played 'modern' works but, when he did, he proved that he was more than equal to them. He recorded William Mathias's Piano Concerto no 3 and captured its verve and vigour to perfection. I have admired his performance of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue and Bryan Kelly wrote a tango for him and Malcolm Lipkin wrote a piano sonata for him.

His Proms debut of 1953 was sensational with a performance of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto no 3 in D minor, an undisputed masterpiece of the piano repertoire. The ovation he received was one of the longest and most jubilant in Proms history.

In those days, he seemed to specialise in the Romantic war horses. He recorded Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto no 1 twice with Kundell and Pritchard. With Boult, he pioneered Tchaikovsky's Concert Fantasy and other pianists have since jumped on the band wagon to play this piece. Anthony Collins was his conductor in the Mendelssohn concertos, still underrated works. With Boult, he recorded Rachmaninov's First Concerto, another glorious work, and it is a superlative performance; and, with Colin Davis, the Second Concerto. His Grieg concerto is second to none and you can only marvel at it and the cadenza. His Schumann concerto with Eugen Goossens on World Records is very fine but the sound is echoey.

He has performed both the Brahms concertos, the second having a performance at a Prom in the 1970s.

I saw him perform the Liszt Concertos. His Totentanz was recorded and drew the highest praise. Was it Trevor Harvey who said, "Peter Katin performs fantastic feats of prestigious prestidigitation"? Other reviewers spoke of the variety of his glissandi.

I also saw him perform Rachmaninov's Concerto no 4 with George Hurst, a work that I rate in the highest category

Katin's performance of the Liszt Piano Sonata is a must. He brings to it not only the accuracy and essential skills, but an understanding and maturity lacking in many pianists.

He recorded Walton's Sinfonia Concertante with the composer conducting I prize a letter Walton wrote to me in which he says, "I could not have asked for a better pianist. Not only was he always accurate and technically brilliant but a delight to work with".

Sir Arthur Bliss told me that he would love Katin to record his Piano Concerto.

Katin regards Chopin and Schubert highly and has recorded much of their music. His performances of the B minor sonata of Chopin he has made his very own and he has written in defence of Chopin's Opus 61.

His recording of all the Mozart sonatas are a treasure and he has some interesting things to say about repeats in Mozart. He is very subtle and understanding in Mozart concertos. He has recorded Clementi and some Chopin on a square piano and, when he gave concerts for me, he delighted us with Bach the Partita no 1 in B flat, Scarlatti, Grieg, the formidable Dance of the Trolls, a fresh and profound Beethoven Moonlight Sonata and, of course, Chopin and Schubert.

This Prokofiev concerto is a beast to play. Only the greatest pianists can play it and only the super-great pianists can play it well.

I have always been in two minds about this concerto and have had a love-hate relationship with it. There seems to be some Prokofievian sarcasm in it... and castanets!! Yet no one can deny its staggering brilliance and physical difficulties. It must be one of the most difficult concertos to play, although John Lill told me that Prokofiev Piano Concerto no 2 was even more difficult.

Listening to Katin with the score before me, as all reviewers must do, I was overwhelmed. The accuracy, the attention to detail, every phrase and staccato, every dynamic... it is all there. The finger-work is so reliable and exciting as are the big chords. The allegros are allegros - very fast, merry and lively and so dependable in Katin's hands. One never feels that the performance is going to crash and it was a live performance. The lyricism is evident particularly in the second movement, which is a set of variations. The finale is so exciting, having tremendous build ups and more dazzling displays from this most excellent of pianists.

The orchestra is very good and they had to work hard to keep up with the brilliance and excitement. But they did.

After hearing this, I did not want to hear any more music for the rest of the day. I had had a marvellous meal and could not eat a pudding or anything else.

The Prague Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1934 by Rudolph Pekárek, and Václav Smetáček was its conductor for thirty years from 1942. Their conductors have included

Jiří Bělohlávek (1987-1990), Martin Turnovsky (1992-1995) marvellous at Martinů, and Serge Baudo (2001-2006).

Smetáček (1906-1979) was originally an oboist and the founder of the Prague Wind Quintet. As a conductor, he won many awards.

Zdeněk Košler (1928-1995) specialised in Czech music and was renowned for his Mozart and Prokofiev. He gave the Czech premiere of Prokofiev's Symphony no. 7.

But to return to the music. Miloslav Kabeláč (1908-1979) was a distinguished Czech composer who has eight symphonies to his name. His Reflections, Op 49, are nine miniatures for orchestra completed in 1964. They are fascinating pieces with interesting orchestral colours.

The Ravel Spanish Rhapsody is stop and start music having trouble getting off the ground.

However, the CD opens with a lively and detailed performance of Walton's Scapino overture, well very done. The encore of a Dvořák Slavonic Dance brings the house down! Phew!

The recorded sound is exemplary.

But this is Katin's disc! If you can't find it or buy it, steal it!

CD3-2009

Alfredo Campoli and Peter Katin

MOZART	Violin Sonata in A K 526
BEETHOVEN	Violin Sonata in C minor op 30 no.2
BRAHMS	Violin Sonata no 3 in D minor op 108

The first two items were recorded in the Fairfield Halls Croydon in 1972

The Brahms was recorded in Campoli's home in Southgate in 1973

This CD is a gem.

Campoli was born in Rome in 1906 and moved with his family to England in 1911. He was excellent in the classical repertoire and Sir Arthur Bliss wrote his Violin Concerto for him in 1956. Campoli loved smoking cigars and was a keen bridge player. He died suddenly in March 1991.

He was not given the acclaim he deserved. He had an excellent technique and a beautiful cantabile tone. But his career may have suffered because he played a lot of light music and salon music and was not taken seriously. And this still happens and it was frowned upon years ago. Today, we have concert artists singing musicals and pop songs and there are still those who raise their eyebrows at this.

The Mozart is a performance as perfect as it can be. The molto allegro is just that; the slow movement has a warm and endearing quality and the Presto finale glitters.

The Beethoven reveals the tension in a dramatic work. The work is faithful to the score, a feature of both performers, and the music flows effortlessly.

As to the Brahms, here is a performance which is not just playing the music but a soul-satisfying experience. One can feel the glowing but not oppressive summer, the freshness of a cool mountain

stream and that joy that goes deep and results in a silent non-demonstrative and durable pleasure. It is true that real joy is not superficial exuberance but something personal and internal.

The playing by both these magnificent artists is irrefutably unbeatable. They are not trying to outdo each other as some modern duos do. It is a duo in perfect harmony with each other, understanding each other and the music.

These two superstars once performed Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata op 47, and I heard it. Not only is it probably the greatest violin and piano sonata ever written, but the performance was incredible. In the last 25 years, I have longed to hear a performance that was the equal of this, but that has not happened.

I do possess Campoli playing the Brahms Concerto and someone has said he was one of the three greatest violinists of his generation, the others being Ricci, born 1918 and Milstein (1903-1992)

This review is short, but I need say no more.

CD4-2009

THE CZECH TRIO

Ivan Štraus (violin)

Josef Páleníček (piano)

Saša Večtomov (violoncello)

BEETHOVEN Piano Trio in D Op 70 no.1 (Ghost)

DVOŘÁK Piano Trio in E minor Op 90 (Dumky)

MARTINŮ Piano Trio in D minor (third movement)

Recorded live at the Queen Elisabeth Hall London 15th October 1972

I never understand why people do not respond to chamber music. It is the most personal and intimate music and it is my opinion that some composer's chamber music is their best work such as Tchaikovsky's String Quartet in E flat minor, Dvořák Quartets, Francaix's String Trio, Mendelssohn's Sextet and so on.

The Czech Trio are quite superb. It was founded by Josef Páleníček who was born in 1914 and died in 1991. Ivan Štraus was born in 1937 and is still living while the cellist Saša Večtomov (1930-1989) was also a brilliant performer and one of the most congenial human beings you could ever wish to met.

I am somewhat irritated by the nickname given to this Beethoven Trio. It was Czerny who called it The Ghost saying it reminded him of Hamlet's ghost. I can't see it and such a nickname devalues the work.

The performance is exemplary. The allegro vivace e con brio is. The sound is very good proving my claim that chamber music is the most intimate music. After the initial brief flourish we have that gorgeous tune and how well Beethoven developed his material... something Schubert could not do. Mozart was also fine at development. Consider the Jupiter Symphony and the five main themes working together in the extraordinary finale. Beethoven varies his material with an expert hand and his writing for the instruments is flawless. All the performances are excellent.

The slow movement is in F major and is a movement of great variety, perhaps a shade too long to support the material. There is one bass ostinato that becomes a trifle wearisome. Slow movements are easier to write than allegros that maintain the allegro tempo, and real allegros are very difficult and rare.

With that though in mind one has to say that this trio has a rare quality.

The finale, presto, looks easier on paper but it isn't. It is well written, beautifully played. It is a fine performance because it is so good. The balance between the instruments and sound could not be better.

Like many pianists I do not warm to Dvořák's Dumky Trio. Dvořák was a fine string player and wrote well for the strings. He was a first rate orchestrator but not really good at writing for the piano. But he is not alone in this ... Sibelius and Elgar especially, were not adept at writing for the piano.

This trio has six movements, and the music is light in character. There is nothing wrong with light music and I would opine that Eric Coates's music is better than some Edwardian serious music.

The trouble with some light music is that it is pleasant enough but not durable. And I have heard people who should know better than to say that Johann Strauss is as good if not better than J S Bach. A well-known musicologist has said John Lennon is the greatest British songwriter ever.

The Dumky Trio is played magnificently and that cannot be doubted. The players relish in this uncomplicated music and all have a gorgeous tone and perfect musicianship.

However, despite my reservations, the majority will love this work.

We are left with the best music on this CD... one movement of a superb Piano Trio by Martinů performed with great panache, often very exciting and certainly fulfilling, amazing music

I would have preferred the whole of this work to be on the CD.

Lovers of chamber music should invest in this disc.

Geoffrey Terry writes:

Whilst I was still very young my father deserted us, leaving my poor mother with the responsibility of caring for two small boys.

I was fascinated by the violin and finally, at about the age of thirteen, was driven to commit my first and only crime.

Whilst my mother worked to feed and clothe my brother and me I took her Singer sewing machine and exchanged it for a violin, at a second hand shop in Bromley, Kent.

When she returned home and discovered my misdemeanour she was, initially very angry but being a romantic by nature she couldn't help but feel some joy from my action.

There was no money for lessons and I taught myself to play by ear, mimicking the sound I heard on the radio.

After a few years I was able to play several violin concertos from memory, using my unconventional approach, and when I was 17 years old was accepted as a member of the London Schools Symphony Orchestra, for just one season; before being obliged to undertake National Service in the Royal Air Force.

Alfredo Campoli was my idol and I eventually met him, we became friends and I have many original recordings of him, from his home and in live concert.

When I left the RAF, I joined the Philips Recording Studios in the West End of London, following which I worked as an audio engineer in film and TV studios.

I left the recording industry and created a Hi. Fi business in South London and had a wide clientele, which included such illustrious names as Michael Jackson, George Harrison, Ringo Starr, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, Status Quo, Led Zeppelin, Frankie Howerd, Cilla Black, David Frost and the only two who held any interest for me, Sir Colin Davis and Alfredo Campol, I learned to fly and attend to customers needs throughout Europe.

We lived in Umbria, Italy, for ten years, five years in the USA, where I published a trilogy followed by 4 years in the Czech Republic.

Nostalgia compelled a return to the UK for 4 years, then 4 years in the South of France; my wife and I have finally settled in the Czech Republic once more.

I operated as a concert agent, and arranged tours of the UK for the Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Czech Trio, Ivan Moravec and several other artists from Eastern Europe. I also promoted the last Queen Elizabeth Hall concert for my dear friend Alfredo Campoli; he was accompanied by Daphne Ibbott.

At the beginning of the 1960s the formidable British pianist, Peter Katin, and I founded 'Audio Transcriptions'. We made recordings of young artists appearing at the Wigmore Hall then, with a very primitive acetate cutter, created LP records of the recital; the technical work being my responsibility.

The process was very wasteful, expensive and with no hope of making any sort of profit the venture was short lived

Previously, during my time working in recording studios and film sound studios, I had become disenchanted with the methods employed by the senior engineers and from the outset developed my own technique based on a scientific approach, (detailed information to follow), to the sound created by a live orchestra.

During the course of our relationship, Peter introduced me to the orchestral impresario Adolf Borsdorf, who arranged tours of the UK for orchestras from Eastern Europe

Adolf was anxious to have a recording made of the Northern Opera Group, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne), performing La Forza del Destino and The Merry Wives of Windsor.

I made the recordings for Adolf and, having become aware of my passion for music, he invited me to join him on a journey across Eastern Europe, where he would be negotiating tours of the UK for orchestras from those imprisoned countries, I accepted very happily.

It was 1965 when we set off to drive through East Germany, Poland Hungary and Czechoslovakia. I did most of the driving but, unfortunately, was not invited to participate in the meetings that took place.

In several locations we enjoyed concerts by the orchestras, we visited interesting locations and met many of the leading musicians of the day, Karel Ančerl, Václav Neumann, Kurt Masur etc. etc.

During the course of the trip we called on the Berliner Statskappeler, in E. Berlin, the Warsaw Philharmonic, Hungarian State Symphony, Brno Philharmonic and the Prague Symphony Orchestras. All the orchestras subsequently visited the UK for tours and once again I was invited to accompany them.

With my love of music, combined with an electronics background, particularly with regard to the recording process, I plucked up courage and asked if I might make recordings of the concerts, in the Royal Festival Hall in particular. I was both surprised and very pleased when the permission was granted.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s I accumulated a substantial library of recordings of live concerts and have enjoyed them privately ever since.

Many well known musicians have heard my recordings and complimented me on the sound quality.

The Symphony Orchestra is something very special to me. When I hear and see an orchestra performing I imagine the composer in the process of creating his work but I also consider the years of study and practice employed by each of the players to achieve the wonderful controlled sound.

CD5-2009

HUNGARIAN STATE ORCHESTRA

Conductor János Ferencsik

BEETHOVEN	Overture Egmont
KODÁLY	Dances from Galanta
BRAHMS	Symphony no 1 in C minor
BERLIOZ	Rakoczy March

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, 26 February 1966

János Ferencsik was another splendid conductor, probably now almost forgotten

His Egmont Overture has a mysterious start but when it gets going it becomes a conflagration of orchestral sound. It is the sort of sound and performance that causes you to throw your hat in the air, stand up and shout approval and applaud enthusiastically before the final chord has concluded.

The Kodaly is really a showpiece for the orchestra with serene instrumental solos, yet few speak of the composer's skilful orchestration, so good as to be an example worthy of imitation. I have never heard a performance that takes such notice of the musical punctuation.

Kodaly, like Mendelssohn, is not in fashion but slightly respected, albeit from afar. Kodaly was a health freak, taught in bare feet and was falsely accused of being a communist. He was hated without a cause in some quarters. Walton disliked him almost as much as Walton hated both Elgar and Britten.

I met Kodaly and his second wife, Elisabeth, and found them both very personable and congenial.

The greatest work for cello is Kodaly's Sonata for unaccompanied cello Op 8. Listen to Janos Starker play it, and then, you will have to lie down in a darkened room. It is phenomenal.

The Galanta Dances are given a fine performance with wonderful sound, sound far better than on many recordings and vastly better than the sound from the BBC. The fine pages of this remarkable score are beyond excitement.

I object to Brahms' Symphony no. 1 being called Beethoven's tenth. It is as mad as Rob Barnett saying that Dvořák was influenced by Britten or that Liszt's Piano Concerto no 1 is the Triangle Concerto!

People do talk nonsense and such inane remarks do not go away. It is like mud that sticks and will not wash away or a tenacious dog with a bone.

The Brahms is a genuine, sincere, honest, profound and impressive work. He is one of the only composers who could write a leisurely first movement and maintain interest. And it is a symphony in that this movement is in sonata form. It is only recently that I have realised how clever this symphony is in developing its material.

Ferencsik brings out detail, I have not heard before, and yet he plays what is written, and I have known and loved this symphony for fifty years.

The performance is so magnificent that it has the appeal of a highly expensive and beautiful jewel to be desired and owned.

The Andante sostenuto is another gem. It is romantic and has the feeling of a lost love...well, that is a view held by some, and it is a reasonable view. It is music from the heart to the heart. Listen to the oboe solo which as beautiful as it could be, and consider this composer's use of the oboe in his important works, e.g. the Violin Concerto. Brahms could write exquisite slow movements which hold the attention and are often beguiling.

The third movement un poco allegretto e grazioso is both charming and intimate sometimes sounding like chamber music which, of course, is the most intimate music.

The finale also begins in mystery as an adagio, and, at long last, we have a conductor who takes the main theme at the right tempo! The coda is very well judged.

And this is a conductor who avoids the bombast some lesser conductors give to parts of this magnificent and important symphony.

And it is not Beethoven's tenth!

A Berlioz encore ends the concert.

CD6-2009

BERLINER STAATSKAPELLE ORCHESTRA

Conductor Kurt Masur

BRUCKNER Symphony no 7 in E

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall 17 November 1967

Listening to this CD proved to me yet again that Bruckner is a far greater composer than Mahler.

There is a spirituality in Bruckner and, by that, I use the word spirituality in the correct sense... that is to say relating to God.

This most obvious spiritual music is Bruckner Eight which has the most sublime slow movement in all musical literature and the Symphony No 6 has those elements as well.

People can damage works by inane and other remarks that stick like super glue or act like a non-stop painful tooth. Calling Beethoven's Piano Sonata op 27 no 2 the Moonlight, has had no advantage in musical or aesthetic values. Some idiot referred to the Bruckner 7 as the Wagner symphony, but he should have been shot before making that stupid remark.

One of the many joys of Bruckner is that he can be stately and majestic without being pompous. Pompous means self-important and foolishly dignified. Foolish means very silly, unwise and absurd. That is certainly Elgar, but definitely not Bruckner who is majestic, which means beautiful, dignified and impressive.

Masur brings many qualities to this symphony and, again, the sound is first class. The audience response says more than I can. It is recording that all lovers of the symphony and Bruckner fans should have!

CD7-2009

BRNO PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Conductor Jiří Waldhans

SUK Symphony in C minor op 27 (Asrael)

Recorded live in the Royal Festival Hall, on 13 November 1968

I can tell you that I have never heard a better performance of this amazing work. Asrael is nothing to do with the lovely Jewish people, but is the Islamic name for the angel of death.

For some reason, Josef Suk was working on his funeral symphony from 1905 onwards. In the middle of composing this masterpiece, his wife, Otilie, a daughter of Dvořák, died and the work is dedicated to the exalted memory of Dvořák and Otilie.

What I fail to understand is why this symphony is not better known. In the UK, the BBC keep pouring out the symphonies of Mahler and Elgar and, to a lesser extent Dvořák, Sibelius, Beethoven and Mozart but, in the last fifty years of the BBC, the performances of the Suk can be counted on one hand. William Glock, who advocated unfamiliar music, put it on twice

The real highlight of this five movement symphony is the first movement lasting just under 15 minutes so magnificently played and recorded with only two microphones which were wisely and strategically positioned, yet another indication of Geoffrey Terry's reliable good judgment.

The second movement is an Andante with a well-judged tempo so it does not drag. The pathos is finely presented without being overdone.

The third movement is marked vivace but it is not that for long. The possible interpretation may be of initially laughing at death and not being afraid of it. Often the orchestra is restrained and there is some very effective music.

With the death of Otilie, the work, which was planned to contain optimism, becomes desolate and the final two movements are slow but that desolation is also in the third movement, which originally was to be a vivace.

It is a profound work and, perhaps, the music public does not want such intellectual music but rather want light-hearted music of no consequence and orchestral fireworks.

Perhaps it is not the fault of the music public at all but the odious dumbing down by the media who tell us what we must hear and what must have our approval and try to convince us that what is not played or seldom played is not worthy music.

The music of this movement from 6.00 onwards is profoundly beautiful. The opening vivace style returns for the last two minutes or so.

The fourth movement, Adagio, is full of pain so marvellously captured by the composer and this first rate conductor. It does not drag and is intense, but not in an overpowering and agonising way. One might detect tiny fragments of the New World Symphony. The flute and violin solos are quite lovely

The finale, *adagio e maestoso*, is very dramatic and angry music. It has power, elements of cynicism, agitation and things sinister. And it is not really an adagio but, forgive the pun, it is a movement with movement. Tragedy and horror are here. The tears come at about 4.13 but there is always the comforting arm and empathy. We do not have a sickly wallow as we find in one particular composer!

Geoffrey Terry, the recording engineer of these fourteen CDs, is concerned with the quality of performance and recording and believes that the BBC, along with most other analytical bodies, seem to classify that just about every new release as 5 star sound and 5 star musical quality. It is far from the truth.

Generally, the reproduction of sound recordings today is by way of such devices as MP3s and Walkmans and the quality has deteriorated.

The concert-going public is a minuscule proportion of the population. They, along with the rest of the population, who listen to recorded sound, have become accustomed to the poor quality of some sound recordings and the unreal performances, with which we are now confronted, and blindly accept the situation.

The problem lies with the manner in which recordings are approached.

If you love classical music, and if you listen to CDs, then you might have noticed that what you hear on the CD is quite different to that which you hear in the concert hall. It does not have to be that way and should not be that way!

The problem originates with sound engineers introducing too many microphones in and around the orchestra. One of the conductor's responsibilities is to observe the composer's dynamics (the volume of sound), and to encourage the orchestra with regard to tonal variety.

With what is known as multi-mic technique, all the conductor's efforts are overridden by an engineer sitting at a control panel and adjusting the sound level of each microphone. He also adds reverberation and various tonal effects. Following the recording, there are many technical adjustments made before the sound is actually transferred to the CD you buy. All these processes are unnecessary.

Not only that, but the musicians have less responsibility to perform to their best ability because it is a very simple process to replace 'fluffed' notes or speed up a passage or vary the sound quality of the instrument. With the introduction of a new technique, **CNSTR, or certified natural sound technique recording**, natural and accurate sound and tonal quality can be restored

With CNSTR, only two microphones are used. Of course, the placement of the microphones is highly critical, and that is where the expertise comes in. Secondly, because a test of sound level has been carried out before the actual recording is made, no adjustments of any sort are undertaken during the course of the recording. **The conductor has control** once again and that is both vital and essential.

Following completion of the recording any excessive background noises, coughing etc. can be removed and the natural sound that remains is then transferred to the CD you buy.

You might ask, if it is so simple to create CDs that sound very similar to the sound heard in the concert hall, then why do not all recording companies use the same process? The answer is that, with technological developments, recording companies have constantly striven to remain abreast of the latest developments and, in so doing, have moved farther and farther away from natural sound.

If the industry adopted this type of process advocated here, the cost of CDs could be reduced and a new interest could develop because CDs would sound so much better.

Orchestral Concert CDs is the first record manufacturer to produce CDs utilising CNSTR.

CD8-2009

LEIPZIG GEWANDHAUS BACH ORCHESTRA

Director Gerhard Bosse

BACH	Suite no 1 BWV 1066
BACH	Violin Concerto no 1 in E BWV 1042 (soloist Gerhard Bosse)
MOZART	Divertimento in D K205
HAYDN	Symphony no 6 in D Le Matin
BACH	Air from Suite no 3 BWV1068

Recorded live at St Pancras Town Hall, October 1966

Excellent sound again in an attractive programme by a fine ensemble. Bosse is the first rate soloist in the gorgeous Bach concerto and the Haydn symphony is a quasi concertante piece with exquisite solos.

There are so many recordings of this repertoire that one is at a loss to make a choice as to which recording to have. When it comes to the Bach Suites, Karl Munchinger and the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra is the front leader. But we must not underestimate this programme.

The Haydn symphony is difficult to bring off as it is not just a symphony, as we have already intimated. I must confess that I have not come across a really satisfying performance.

I responded mostly to the Mozart, which gave me great pleasure.

A wonderful sound is produced in the Bach concerto... simply sumptuous.

CD9-2009

SAŠA VEČTOMOV plays
DVOŘÁK Cello Concerto in B minor

Central Bohemia Symphony Orchestra
Conducted by Miloš Zelenka

DVOŘÁK In Nature's Realm op 91
SUK Radúz and Mahulena op 16

Recorded live at Podebrady Theatre, Czechoslovakia 1970

Saša Večtomov was probably the very finest Czech cellist. He was born into a musical family in 1930 and originally taught by his father who was a cellist in the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. He then studied with Ladislav Zelenka, became a member of the Czech Trio and the Prague String Quartet. He toured extensively and died suddenly at the age of 59.

He has an amazing tone of great beauty and I have heard him in Haydn, Roussel and others. He always gave reliable performances and ranks favourably with other great cellists such as Tortelier, Fournier, Piatogorsky, Feuermann, Rostropovich and the finest of them all, János Starker.

There are many fine recordings of this concerto and some disastrous ones. Much as I liked Jacqueline DuPre her recordings of this masterpiece fail on many counts.

The brilliant American cellist Lynn Harrell has said that there are only two great cello concertos those by Dvořák and Dutilleux and he is right

This performance is very fine. The soloist plays the work as if he loved it and I am sure he did. There is so much to admire that if I were to list all the qualities the reader might find this tedious. There are a few minor blemishes in the orchestra... the first horn solo sounds tubby

But live performances have no second chances.

The sound is, as usual, good and truly sparkles in the bright passages.

Dvořák's In Nature's Realm is well played. It is marked *allegro* which means quick, merry and lively and often it is not. It is more like a leisurely *Andante*. Material similar to the superior *Carnival* overture is hinted at and when the music leaves F major for A major then the music becomes more interesting. It is set in standard ABA format.

The revelation is Josef Suk's *Radúz and Mahulena*. *Radúz* is captured by King *Stolmirem* and *Runes* his queen. In prison he falls in love with *Mahulena* and when the Queen discovers this, conspiracy upon conspiracy ensue and the story is straight but has a happy ending.

It is a very fine score and the question is asked why is it not well known? The orchestration is superb and you will detect hints of Dvořák. The lively *Village Dance*, that is what it sounds like, is a gem and the final pages are quite remarkable. You really must hear it!

I have said in another review that Suk's *Asrael* Symphony is his masterpiece. This work is in the same vein.

Buy it!

We are glad that Geoffrey Terry has made this available to us.

CD10-2010

PRAGUE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Conductor Zdeněk Košler

DVOŘÁK Symphony no 8 in G, Op 88
STRAUSS Tod und Verklärung

Recorded live Nottingham Town Hall 13 February 1967

People do say and write some inane things about music.

Some misguided or dishonest person said that this symphony was Schubertian. Dvořák was completely different from Schubert. Schubert was too repetitive and, frankly, boring. One of his piano sonatas has 5 to 6 minutes of nothing but broken chords and scales. Dvořák knew how to develop his material, was a fine orchestrator and could vary the movements of a symphony. He also wrote some successful stage works whereas all of Schubert's stage works were and remain flops.

One of the most ridiculous remarks was made by the editor of Musicweb International who said that Dvořák was influenced by Britten. I have this in print from him framed in my bathroom.

I think Dvořák's symphonies vary in quality but there are some marvellous moments. The scherzo from Number 4 is invigorating; the final pages in number 7 are quite superb.

The New World Symphony is deservedly popular and number 8 may come a close second.

The first movement begins Allegro con brio, crotchet equals 138. But it isn't; it eventually becomes that but the openings drags and is ponderous. When the music does become alive the sound is amazing but then the music succumbs to a slow pace. The rustling of the strings suggest leaves buffeted by autumn winds and maybe that is why some have called this symphony a pastoral symphony.

I like the way that staccatos are observed. And although the main theme is plaintive and somewhat weak we have a melodic and warm movement. The music is well articulated, the tremolos are impressive and the divided violas give a real velvet tone.

The orchestration is fine and the final climax is thrilling. Schubert never wrote anything like this. Nor could he have. The brief cor anglais solo may suggest the slow movement of the New World.

I have trouble with the slow movement of this eighth symphony. In this performance, and others, it is too slow and makes the music feeble and the music outstays its welcome. It is also an episodic movement and the painful slow tempo adds to these problems. There is a sweet violin solo and some exquisite trumpet playing well punctuated staccato.

The sleeve notes call the third movement a scherzo. It is a village dance in 3/8 time, and this performance lacks bounce and the appropriate dance rhythm. The second section in G major is most effective. The coda is marked molto vivace.

The finale, Allegro ma non troppo is an introduction and set of variations on a theme given out by the cellos.

However, the openings bars have two trumpets in unison playing repeated notes, their notes are fluffed and yet it is hard to believe that professional trumpet players could go astray on the same repeated notes.

Throughout the score the performance often slows down when the score does not say so, including a grinding rallentando.

The horn trills are exciting and the final pages will lift your spirits.

Richard Strauss's *Death and transfiguration* begins Lento in E flat with unsettling sinister sounds. There are some ravishing flute and violin solos and the allegro begins with a shattering sound. The main theme, short as it is, is announced by the horn is impressive but the music returns to its strange plodding then become passionate and an allegro again and then the sinister opening is recalled. The problem with such music is the constant changes of tempo and to accommodate the conductor has to decide how to keep the music together and not present it as an untidy patchwork quilt.

The expert in conducting Richard Strauss is Fritz Reiner and his performance comes across as a complete whole and is remarkable.

CD11-2010

A CHOPIN RECITAL BY PETER KATIN

Four Songs from Op 74 transcribed by Liszt
Sonata no 3 in B minor op 58
Scherzo no 4 in E op 54
Mazurka in G minor op 24 no 1
Andante spianato et grand polonaise brillante op 22
Nocturne in F sharp op 15 no.2
Waltz in C sharp Minor op 64 no.2
Peter Katin (piano)

Recorded live in Fairfield Halls, Croydon 19 October 1966

There is no doubt that Peter Katin is the Chopin expert. There is a legion of good Chopin players and everyone seems to be playing Chopin today.

This recording came out in 2010, the 200th anniversary of Chopin's birth, and Katin's 80th birthday.

But Katin is superior to all these other pianists and for many reasons. Firstly, he plays Chopin straight not with effeminacy and the silly tinkling at the top of the piano. Secondly, he uses no affectation. He does not exaggerate any part of the music. He does not assert a personal stamp on it as if to say, "I have the only right interpretation", which some pianists do. But I will not mention them here.

I have seen Katin play many times and taken him to recitals he has given at my behest. I have talked with him. He is a slow learner of works, but when he knows the works, he plays them as written and with all the required detail.

I am not a lover of Chopin. I find that his work is often dreamy, but I have to review this CD on the basis of the performances, which are in no way lacking.

Taking the first movement as an example, every dynamic every crescendo, every ritenuto, every grace note is honoured. That cannot be said about most pianists. The left hand scales are exciting, every accent is observed, the wistful theme is played sostenuto, there are effortless mercurial arpeggios and when the music is described as *leggiero*, it is. While Katin's playing is never clinical, it is always controlled.

As with the usual custom, the first movement repeat is not observed and although the movement is marked allegro, it is not allegro for much of the time but that is what Chopin wrote. The movement ends in B major.

The scherzo is marked *molto vivace* and begins in E flat but the main part of the movement is a slow sort of trio in B major.

The Largo is in B major and Katin brings out the gorgeous cantabile theme. This movement is as long as the second movement and finale put together and some find it somewhat repetitive. It is certainly dreamy at times.

The finale begins in the minor key and ends in the major and is the most successful movement and calls for steel fingers and a cool head. Here we have splendid finger work and excellent articulation. The modulation into E flat is well judged and the gymnastics are exhilarating.

Katin has played this work very many times and relishes in it.

The Scherzo no 4 in E, op 54 is given a very fine performance. The piu lento section holds up the momentum but, again that is what Chopin wrote. Like a lot of his music, it is in 3/4 time, and therefore waltz time, which makes the music predictable. But, in this choice performance, Katin has a wide range of tonal colour and has the most effective nuances.

The Andante spianato and grand polonaise is far better in the solo piano version than the version with orchestra. Katin plays it lovingly and it is quite poignant. Perhaps Chopin uses too many embellishments as is his wont, but Katin disguises them so that they become part of the music and not appendages or miniature circus tricks as some pianists play it.

Katin's performance is felicitous and very beautiful.

The other Chopin pieces are given reliable and appealing performances. You will not hear a more charming performance of the 'darling' C sharp minor waltz anywhere

CD12-2010

WARSAW PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Conductor Witlod Rowicki

With Wanda Wilkomirska

BRITTEN Violin Concerto
TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony no 4 in F minor Op 36
MONIUSZKO Mazur from Straszny dwór

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, 7 April 1967

This CD is essential listening because it has a performance by the greatest Polish violinist, Wanda Wilkomirska, now 82 years old. While the Britten concerto is not a favourite of mine, the performance is flawless. There is an accuracy, perfect intonation, superb phrasing, marvellous range of dynamics, faithfulness to the score, superlative musicianship and, whatever one thinks of this score, it has no better advocate.

This is also a lesson in violin playing. There are no sickly portamenti, no exaggerations, no showmanship to impress the listener, no histrionics just honest playing and yet the lyricism and the con bravura are there.

This violinist is in the same league as Ginette Neveu and Edith Pienemann, a league of their own, and one could consequently be reluctant to hear any others.

Wilkomirska's performance is beyond praise.

The Tchaikovsky is a wonderful ramshackle and powerful performance. The horn playing is occasionally suspect but the sheer excitement that Rowicki generates is red hot. Geoffrey Terry's brilliant recording greatly aids this electrifying performance.

Rowicki (1914-1989) was a very fine conductor but, like many conductors in this series, liable to be forgotten which is another reason to buy these CDs.

What is incredible about his performance is that most conductors produce the first movement as a sort of patchwork quilt, a series of episodes, but here it emerges as a satisfying whole.

And for those of you would want maximum excitement and uplifting enjoyment, this performance is for us. For those who want a faithful reading of the score, this performance is for you as well.

The CD ends with a charming excerpt from Moniusko's The haunted manor.

CD13-2011

BERLINER STAATSKAPELLE
Conductor Kurt Masur

BEETHOVEN	Overture Leonora no 3
HAYDN	Symphony no 88 in G
DESSAU	In Memoriam Bertolt Brecht
MAHLER	Songs of a Wayfayer

Anneliese Burmeister (contralto)
Live recordings 1968

Kurt Masur is like Otto Klemperer, rather too Tuetonic for me. His tempi tends to be too slow, but one does not doubt his musicianship. His Beethoven Overture lacks drama and the Haydn symphony lacks the essential sparkle. Listen to Ronald Thomas and the Bournemouth Sinfonietta or the legendary Karl Munchinger.

The Dessau is fascinating and, as far as I can tell, very well played. The three movements are Lamento, Der Krieg soll verflucht sein, which basically means wars should be no more, and Epitaph. Dessau was a composer with several operas to his name but fled Nazi Germany for Hollywood where he wrote film scores. His output also includes orchestral music, chamber music and songs. He was a great admirer of Brecht and a friend of the composer Hans Eisler. He was a student of Klemperer and a Kappelmeister in Mainz and then went to the Berlin Opera. He returned to East Berlin in 1952 and many still speak affectionately of his master classes.

(See my article Music in Frankfurt and Mainz <http://www.wrightmusic.net/pdfs/music-in-mainz-and-frankfurt.pdf>)

The real joy of this CD is Mahler's Songs of a Wayfayer. Mahler is certainly not my favourite composer, but when it is sung like this one could be converted. The singer is the wonderful Anneliese Burmeister a splendid contralto. She was born in Mecklenberg 1930 and died in Berlin in 1998.

Her career began as an actress, but, between 1951 and 1956, she studied singing with Helene Jung at the Liszt Academy in Weimar. She made her debut in Offenbach's Tales of Hoffmann in 1956, was a triumph at Bayreuth in 1966, the year in which she took part in Dessau's opera Puntila. She toured Europe and was admired everywhere. Her singing of Bach was second to none.

Not only did she have a great contralto voice but great communication skills and a flawless technique.

This CD is worth buying for her performance.

We should be grateful to Geoffrey Terry for making available to us this performance and the welcome reminder of what a fine singer Burmeister was.... and the added bonus is the Dessau work.

Some many great performers of the past are forgotten or ignored. This must not happen.

CD14-2011

Prague SO, Václav Smetáček

SHOSTAKOVICH Symphony no 10 in E minor op 93

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, 3 March 1968

This is one of Shostakovich's most popular symphonies and deservedly so. As in the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth symphonies, it begins with an expansive opening moderato movement.

Life under communism must have been horrible and difficult. Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony was subtitled An Artist's Response to Just Criticism after Stalin and others had condemned his opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk and the Symphony no. 4.

I have heard some simply awful performances of the tenth symphony by Haitink, Rostropovich and Karajan. The Karajan LP on DG showed that he did not understand or like the piece.

This performance, however, has exceptional sound and the performance is very good, second only to Mravinsky, the Shostakovich specialist.

I do not comprehend how the writer of the sleeve notes refers to the second movement as fast and furious, angry and agitated, syncopated and SEXY! It is more like an angry military march of tyrants whether they are Communists or Nazis. Or is it a portrait of Stalin?

The third movement Allegretto is a sort of nocturne with different aspects of night. The sleeve notes say that Shostakovich admired Mahler and there may be Mahlerian influence in this work.

The finale is magnificently played... one cannot ask for better. It captures the spirit of the music and the genius of Shostakovich. Norman Del Mar called it therapeutic music that cancels depression, and this performance does that!

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