

Adagio looks forwards a quarter-century to the sensuality of *Samson et Dalila* – the foreshadowing enhanced here by Fischer’s daringly slow tempo. Throughout the symphony, too, Saint-Saëns demonstrates his extraordinary gifts as a tunesmith – the melody of the *Marche-Scherzo*, with its subtle shifts of harmonic colour, has been stuck in my head for weeks now. Fischer doesn’t wring quite as much drama from the score as Martinon (EMI, 1/74), but he does convey real affection for this neglected gem, and Hyperion’s engineers reveal a wealth of exquisite orchestral detail.

I wish I could be as enthusiastic about Fischer’s interpretation of *Le carnaval des animaux*. A few movements are well-characterised – I like the way the strings drag dreamily behind the beat in ‘Tortoises’, say – but most are too punctilious for my taste. The kangaroos need to be bouncier, the swirl of ‘Aquarium’ is spoiled by an insistent emphasis on the crotchets, and ‘Fossils’ is oddly foursquare. A pity, as it’s the only misfire in Hyperion’s otherwise marvellous survey of the Saint-Saëns symphonies and assorted orchestral works (of which, I assume, this is the third and final instalment). If Fischer’s cycle doesn’t quite supplant Martinon’s now nearly 50-year-old set, it’s certainly worthy to stand alongside it. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Schubert

Symphony No 9, ‘Great’, D944

Scottish Chamber Orchestra /

Maxim Emelyanychev

Linn ④ CKD619 (55’ • DDD)



David Zinman led the way; now here is Maxim Emelyanychev

waltzing through the ‘Great’ C major with all the repeats in less time than maestros of yore took to conduct roughly three-quarters of the same notes.

Not even Zinman in Zurich (Sony/BMG, 6/14) or Norrington in Stuttgart (Hänssler) set out on the second movement with Emelyanychev’s brisk clip, which resembles an *Allegretto* more than *Andante con moto*, no less in the airily floated second theme than the *alla marcia* first. In any case both older conductors point the phrasing, nudge and coax it into shape, with an affection to which the new account never once aspires.

In the mould of his *Eroica* from Nizhny-Novgorod (Aparté, 2/19), the orchestra is balanced upwards, cast loose from a

compact bass line that is too discreet for its own good at those many points in the symphony when we should feel the ground beneath our feet. The Scherzo’s Trio is especially disappointing in this regard: where are the smiles, the memories, the new wine and the tears that belong to every bar of this music?

The SCO’s violin section attacks the finale’s endless semiquavers with unflagging energy, and it’s an achievement of sorts for the all-important trio of trombones to play with the agility and delicacy of a flute section. Some measure of exhilaration enters the reading with the ‘Ode to Joy’ quotation and builds towards a conclusion of genuine elation, which old hands may think too little, too late. But if the symphony’s ‘heavenly lengths’ have left you cold in the past, Emelyanychev could be the man to banish your Schubertian blues. To the perennial debate over the accent or diminuendo on the last note he brings an ingenious solution, contriving both at once. His recordings with Il Pomo d’Oro demonstrate a musician of considerable flair and independent mind; as yet those qualities produce fitfully illuminating results in symphonic repertoire. **Peter Quantrill**

R Strauss

Don Juan, Op 20. Don Quixote, Op 35^a.

Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op 28

^aLouisa Tuck VC

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko

LAWO ④ LWCI184 (76’ • DDD)

R Strauss • Ravel

Ravel Boléro^a R Strauss Don Quixote^b

^bKian Soltani VC

West-Eastern Divan Orchestra / Daniel Barenboim

Peral ④ 483 7502 (56’ • DDD)

Recorded live at the Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires,

^aAugust 3, 2014; ^bAugust 7, 2017



I gave a warm welcome to the first instalment of Vasily Petrenko’s Strauss series with the Oslo Philharmonic (8/19), and the second album is, if anything, even finer. It showcases three of the composer’s most vividly pictorial works in performances shot through with the same sense of discovery and flexibility, and of conductor and orchestra thoroughly enjoying themselves.

For *Don Quixote* Petrenko follows the score’s lead in casting his orchestra’s

superb principal cello, Louisa Tuck, as the Knight. Her playing is beautifully integrated and superbly eloquent – the hush and tenderness of the final minutes is especially moving. Tuck’s interplay, too, with Catherine Bullock’s bumptious Sancho Panza is a delight; few recent recordings have been so satisfactory and eloquent in the dialogue of Variation 3.

But it’s largely Petrenko’s conviction that makes the performance so special, with no bar allowed simply to play itself, the music’s descriptiveness vividly but never doggedly conveyed; we feel Don Quixote’s misguided determination to throw himself into each delusional adventure, and we really sense the swirling power of his imagination – you’ll struggle not to get swept up in Var 7’s flight of fancy. There’s grandeur and sorrow, too, which intensifies the ultimate feeling of pathos in a rousing account of Var 10.

The couplings are outstanding, too. *Don Juan* bristles with energy and anticipation but Petrenko also brings subtlety and, as the piece progresses, a growing sense of our protagonist’s conscience catching up with him. *Till Eulenspiegel*, meanwhile, is remarkable not just for its sharply etched characterisation but also for the flexibility of the approach, Petrenko often allowing himself space and taking his time. With superb playing and excellent engineering, this is another highly recommended album in what’s turning into a very fine series.

By contrast, Daniel Barenboim’s new release on his Peral label is a disappointment. Brought out to celebrate 20 years of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, it hardly shows them at their best. The live recording of *Don Quixote* is marred by engineering that places Kian Soltani’s cello far too far forward – he dominates even in the grandest orchestral passages – and gives little sense of perspective and breadth.

Soltani’s playing is undoubtedly eloquent, and there are lovely contributions from violist Miriam Manasherov, but the persistence of the cello in the balance quickly becomes tiring. And while Barenboim’s conducting, as with his earlier Chicago recording (Elatus, 12/91), doesn’t do anything terribly wrong, it is strangely short on imagination and affection. It rarely feels, either, as though the orchestral playing adds up to more than the sum of its talented parts.

The *Boléro* coupling is rousing (complete with enthusiastic applause) and features some fine solo contributions but with undistinguished engineering, again,