

sensitive, finely shaped, searching performance that follows on makes a good case for playing things down at the start. The trouble is, the opening now sounds perfunctory – as though Jurovski just can't wait to get to the 'real' business. Surely the Nietzsche-Strauss dawn of higher consciousness merits more reverence than this? Here Zarathustra emerges from his cave, gives the rising sun a quick thumbs-up, then heads off on his travels. The 'Dance Song' climax is similarly underwhelming. It's good to be reminded that there's more to this piece than awe-inspiring tone painting, but not if that tips the balance too far the other way.

Jurovski is far more in control of the overall conception in Mahler's *Totenfeier* ('Death Rites'), the original version of the Second Symphony's funeral march first movement. It works very well as a self-standing tone poem, and the performance has such compelling conviction that occasional differences from the familiar version (orchestration, texture, a small amount of extra material) hardly matter.

What then of the Symphonic Prelude? This has been variously attributed to Bruckner, the teenage Mahler and Bruckner's pupil Rudolf Krzyzanowski. My feeling is that it probably contains Bruckner, but that a fair bit of it definitely isn't Bruckner. Could it be one of Mahler's student essays? It's possible to imagine *Totenfeier* emerging from this. Whoever wrote it, I doubt it's been better performed.

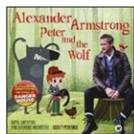
Stephen Johnson

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Prokofiev • Saint-Saëns

Prokofiev: Peter and the Wolf;
Rawsthorne: Practical Cats;
Saint-Saëns: Carnival of the Animals
Alexander Armstrong (narrator);
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic
Orchestra/Vasily Petrenko

Warner Classics 9029575952 77:28 mins



It's a measure of Peter and the Wolf's brilliance that no amount of theatrical histrionics or 'fashion' can spoil a score of such spare, enchanted perfection. Its economy of means – both in words and music – give it a mirror-like quality, reflecting the changing ethos of the times. Rummaging through

the catalogue you'll find great patricians like Sir John Gielgud; the comics (Dame Edna Everage, Lenny Henry), pop stars (David Bowie better than Sting), and the honeyed, comforting pros (Richard Baker) among which Alexander Armstrong belongs. There's a palpable smile in his sonorous baritone – and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's invigorating account makes up for any lack of excitement in the reading.

It's the same story for Saint-Saëns's ever-fresh *Carnival of the Animals*. Armstrong seems all-too aware that Ogdan Nash's mordant verses (1949) now sound groan-worthy, but the irrepressibly witty score (aided by a dynamic uncredited piano duo) triumphs.

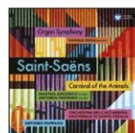
The rarity on this disc is Rawsthorne's setting of TS Eliot's *Practical Cats*. A bristling overture, colourfully scored, promises much. And Armstrong's skills as singer-actor come into their own in this *sprechgesang* recitation. Then it goes on. And on. Serving only to remind us that not all the poems were as good as *Macavity*. I think Andrew Lloyd Webber probably had the better idea here... Helen Wallace

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Saint-Saëns

Symphony No. 3*;
Carnival of the Animals†

*Daniele Rossi (organ); Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia/Antonio Pappano †(piano); Martha Argericho (piano)
Warner Classics 9029575555 61:26 mins



There's a wealth of expression to be drawn out of every note in the slow opening of Saint-Saëns's

Organ Symphony – at least as shaped by Sir Antonio Pappano, live in concert with his non-operatic orchestra in Rome.

Non-operatic? This most popular and dramatic of the French composer's symphonies here receives an intensity of treatment that would not disgrace a Leoncavallo denouement. There's something driven, almost demonic about the first movement, progressing in great dark surges, and the *Poco Adagio* unfurls as a tragic aria in all but name. Pappano brings us a drama in music that undoubtedly compels and raises the

hairs at every turn. The only trouble is that it leaves one wondering whether Saint-Saëns really is being ideally served. Rather like Balzac, Saint-Saëns is a detailed observer and conveyor of drama, yet one often suspects that the heart he appears to wear on his sleeve is not actually his own. Here, the music's poise and lightness of touch, the vivacious imagination and rigorous construction, don't always come through the extremity of expression; and crucially, when the finale gets underway, it can risk becoming excessive – maybe depending on your mood while listening. Do hear it – I may be being churlish.

No such problem tethers down the *Carnival of the Animals*, in which Pappano takes to the piano alongside Martha Argerich, together with soloists from the orchestra. It's pure fun, and even if it is delivered with unusual heat, the high energy and glittering pianism prove irresistible. Jessica Duchon

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Scriabin

Symphony No. 2;
Piano Concerto
Kirill Gerstein (piano); Oslo
Philharmonic Orch/Vasily Petrenko
Lawo LWC1139 76:35 mins



In many respects, Vasily Petrenko is the ideal interpreter for this ripe overheated music with its strong echoes of Liszt, Wagner and Tchaikovsky. He knows instinctively how to sustain momentum, particularly in the Second Symphony's more repetitive sequential passages. He also ensures that Scriabin's propensity for unleashing constant surges in sound in the faster-paced movements does not become self-defeating, and that the biggest climaxes of all really have the greatest impact.

The Oslo Philharmonic responds with brilliantly incisive ensemble in the tricky part-writing of the second movement and negotiates all the awkward fluctuations in tempo

Reissues Reviewed by Bayan Northcott



Beethoven Symphony No. 9
Sony 88985453852 (2008) 63:55 mins
Wonderfully clear textures from the compact choral and orchestral forces of the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen in a compelling reading under **Paavo Järvi** combining best of 'traditional' and 'period' practices. ★★★



Haydn Symphonies Nos 100, 102 & 103
Mozart Symphonies Nos 25 & 38;
Eine kleine Nachtmusik
Eloquence 480 6592 (1949-58) 128:52 mins
In these 1950s releases, **Georg Solti** seems two-minded about Haydn, indulging the slower music while fiercely overdriving the London Philharmonic in the fast. His Mozart with the LSO is more stylish and integrated. ★★★



Mozart Symphonies Nos 39, 40 & 41
Alto ALC 1339 (1963/66) 78:35 mins
Where is the nervous intensity of the G minor Symphony in this literalistic 1960s account by the Berlin Philharmonic under **Karl Böhm**? No. 39 and the *Jupiter* are a bit livelier but without much individuality or charm. ★★



Mozart Symphonies Nos 39 & 40
Berlin Classics 0300881BC (1974-75) 49:48 mins
Same old-style big-orchestra Mozart and similar tempos to the Böhm: yet how much more flowing, incisive and nuanced these 1970s readings under **Otmar Suitner** sound – with delectable woodwind detail from the Staatskapelle Dresden. ★★★★★