

# Orchestral Reviews

with great fluidity. I was particularly enthralled by the degree of menace projected in the fourth movement *Tempetoso*; and if the triumphalism of Finale, with its pompous march-like transformation of the central melodic idea of the Symphony sounds empty, this is surely the composer's fault.

My only other slight caveat comes in the extended slow movement which takes some time to generate a suitably sensuous atmosphere. Perhaps the problem lies with the somewhat inexpressive flute playing at the opening which contrasts strikingly with the same instrument's magically poetic phrasing at the close.

The Piano Concerto, composed a few years earlier, is less characteristic, its harmonic language having stronger connections to Schumann and Chopin. Nevertheless, pianist Kirill Gerstein makes the most of Scriabin's poetic writing with some particularly limpid sounds in the central *Andante*. As always, Petrenko proves to be the ideal concerto partner, ensuring that the dialogue between soloist and orchestra remains razor-sharp throughout. *Erik Levi*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## Shostakovich Ovod (The Gadfly); The Counterplan – excerpts

Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz/Mark Fitz-Gerald  
Naxos 8.573747 61:46 mins



Having recorded vibrant accounts of meticulously restored film scores by Shostakovich,

such as *New Babylon* and *Alone*, Mark Fitz-Gerald now reaches one of the most familiar by that composer. Usually recorded in the form of Lev Atovmian's 12-movement suite, *The Gadfly* (1955), illustrating a romanticised story set during Italy's Risorgimento, is here restored to the more subtle and varied colours of Shostakovich's original orchestration. One can hear more clearly the contrasts between the music of the bourgeoisie (the 'Galop', stripped of Atovmian's gaudy xylophone, sounds most effective played by strings only), the church (including the 'Donna nobis pacem' from Bach's Mass in B minor – which replaced Shostakovich's original 'Ave



Shostakovich original:  
Mark Fitz-Gerald conducts  
the score of *The Gadfly*

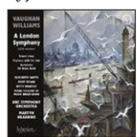
maria' cue also included in the CD), and of the people ('Bazar', named 'National Holiday' in Atovmian's suite). Several diegetic cues, such as the brief 'Folk Dance: Tarantella' for mandolin, flute and clapping, enhance the score's Italian flavour. Just as revealing, too, is having the cues in their intended sequence and in their original form: the lyrical 'Youth' and the melodramatic 'A Slap in the Face' are more effective heard as discrete pieces rather than awkwardly bolted together as in Atovmian's arrangement, 'Romance'.

The programme is rounded out with excerpts from *The Counterplan*, which includes one of Shostakovich's greatest Soviet hits. *Daniel Jaffé*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## Vaughan Williams

**A London Symphony; Sound sleep; Orpheus with his lute; Variations for Brass Band**  
Elizabeth Watts, Mary Bevan (soprano), Kitty Whately (mezzo-soprano); Royal College of Music Brass Band; BBC Symphony Orchestra/Martyn Brabbins  
Hyperion CDA 68190 72:25 mins



When the late Richard Hickox recorded (for Chandos) the original 1913 score of *A London Symphony*, reinstating the substantial cuts made by Vaughan Williams before the work's publication, a comprehensive picture of his

revision process now seemed to be in place. Not so simple. There were in fact two published scores – the now familiar 1933 version, and the earlier, 1920 one recorded here, marking an intermediate stage in the Symphony's evolution. While many of the changes made between this and the final score concern fairly minor details, there are also some larger, eyebrow-raising differences.

In the 1920 version the serene polyphonic writing for strings in the first movement's introduction is mirrored by a similar, balancing passage in the finale's epilogue. Fine as this is, its omission in the final 1933 version makes the epilogue's process of dissolution more concise, and therefore more striking. The post-1920 removal of two superb linking passages in the slow movement is much harder to understand – especially the second of these, with its solo horn, cor anglais, clarinet, and mysteriously dissonant accompanying tremolo strings. Martyn Brabbins conducts the work with a sense of purposeful directness, likeably enhanced by the expressive warmth of the BBC Symphony Orchestra's response.

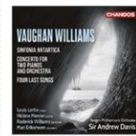
The supporting items in this all-Vaughan Williams programme offer interest too. There are two rarely heard early orchestral song-settings, including *Sound Sleep* with its three solo voices, and the Variations written as a test piece for the 1957 National Brass Band Championships – with rather more imaginative results, in musical

terms, than a technical brief of this kind might suggest. *Malcolm Hayes*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## Vaughan Williams

**Sinfonia Antartica; Four Last Songs; Concerto for Two Pianos**  
Mari Eriksmoen (soprano), Roderick Williams (baritone), Louis Lortie, Hélène Mercier (piano); Bergen Philharmonic/Andrew Davis  
Chandos CHSA 5186 (hybrid CD/SACD)  
77:47 mins



Vaughan Williams's Piano Concerto still has a daunting reputation – its percussive

chromatic runs completely overwhelmed its dedicatee Harriet Cohen. The late Joseph Cooper prepared this two-piano edition, for which the composer added extra bars and a serene closing cadenza, with a striking final fade well suited to Louis Lortie's expansive yet nuanced approach. Either he or Hélène Mercier could probably polish off the original by themselves, but their partnership develops its intensity without strain, particularly attractive in rich SACD sound.

Davis is at his most dynamic, and the Bergen Philharmonic playing is characteristically crisp. This would be my present first choice, though Ashley Wass's spirited account of the original on Naxos is equally fine, too.

I was never so convinced by Davis's earlier, somewhat colourless *Antartica* (Warner), but this, if not definitive, is a finer animal. It begins less epically than some, but gathers scale and momentum. The Bergen players are especially effective, the huge orchestration never cluttered or opaque in SACD spaciousness. The composer rightly saw Scott, despite some misjudgements, as authentically heroic, and Davis movingly paces the last movement's classical tragedy, finally swallowed up in the uncaring ice.

Though the title *Four Last Songs* invites unfortunate comparisons with Richard Strauss's cycle, these are the composer's final settings of his wife Ursula's verses on the subject of love. Orchestrated by Anthony Payne, they're attractive if unexceptional, but Roderick Williams does evoke their essential tenderness. *Michael Scott Rohan*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★