

Orchestral Reviews

First and last things:
Vasily Petrenko
conducts Scriabin



in the middle, and then spend the finale patrolling the extremes. So Scriabin's indulgently Wagnerian, six-movement Symphony No. 1 of 1900 rubs cheeks with the single expanse of *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* (1910) – music sailing so far from old moorings that some reputable critics of the time pronounced the composer insane. In these vivid interpretations, drawn from live concert performances, Petrenko and his superb Oslo orchestra clearly sympathise with both ends of the spectrum, though it's the wild and woolly *Prometheus*, much enlivened by Kirill Gerstein's almost jazzy solo piano, that really gets the blood racing.

The First Symphony contains its own extravaganza in the vocal finale, an exuberant setting of a bathos-ringed text by the composer himself in praise of Art ('Glory to Art, Glory forever!'). Here, the soloists and Oslo Philharmonic Choir sing as if holding the music, and certainly the words, at arm's length. You can't really blame them. At any event, the work's true distinctions lie elsewhere, in the pendulum swings between sunshine and shade, or the opening *lento*, where Wagner and Tchaikovsky seem to shake hands and the orchestra's suave woodwinds languidly sing like dawn chorus birds who don't want to get out of bed. Petrenko shapes such details with great finesse and equally digs out instrumental niceties from the heady perfumed tumult of *Prometheus*. Precision, transparency, and, when it's warranted, sweltering heat. *Geoff Brown*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Shostakovich Symphony No. 5

NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra/
Krzysztof Urbanski
Alpha Classics ALPHA 427 46:16 mins



'Shostakovich's Fifth is without doubt one of the greatest symphonies ever written.' Krzysztof

Urbanski evidently speaks for many of his peers: the catalogue is stuffed with outstanding recordings. Still, his unfolding of the long first movement, with its many tempo changes, as a single unified sweep is most impressive, as is the hushed desolation he achieves in the third movement. Maybe his account of the post-Mahlerian Scherzo lacks quite the savage bite of certain other versions, but his interpretation of the opening stretch of the finale not as a resurgent gathering of the masses, but as an increasingly frantic flight, suddenly confronted by the brutality of power, is terrifying. The NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra responds with all due intensity.

Alas, the recorded sound is both slightly recessed and reverberant, so that searing tutti tend to get fuzzed by extraneous resonance while some of the quieter string textures lack presence – the first violins' high tremolo F sharp in the final bars of the slow movement is inaudible. Whether this is the result of too-distant miking or of still-problematic acoustics in the new Elbphilharmonie hall is hard to tell.

Bayan Northcott
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★



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Phantasm

Matthew Locke

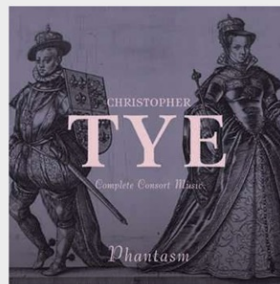
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