



**Elgar *Falstaff*. Songs. *Grania and Diarmid*: Incidental Music & Funeral March. Roderick Williams (bar); BBC Philharmonic/Sir Andrew Davis**

CHANDOS SACD CHSA 5188 74 mins



Although this disc has the 'symphonic study' *Falstaff* as its principal offering, the couplings offer great interest. The performance of *Falstaff* itself is very idiomatic indeed. Davis finds huge detail: he seems to prove you can have the Edwardian swagger and fullness without being overburdened sonically. There is tenderness, too, in the 'Dream Interlude'. The SACD recording itself is simply beautiful, the BBC Philharmonic sounding burnished and lush. The clean-cut baseline is supplemented with a real Elgarian depth – Davis has a fervour that confirms *Falstaff* as first-rank Elgar.

Baritone Roderick Williams has just the right voice for the three restrained Op 59 songs, while the two of Op 60, orchestrated by the composer, burst with power and nobility. All of the vocal contributions are sterling, and one wonders if this repertoire might lead some listeners towards the beauty of Elgar's part songs?

To end the disc with the 49-second *Smoking Cantata* is pure genius.

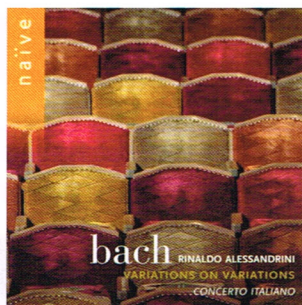
COLIN CLARKE

**Bach *Variations on Variations Concerto Italiano*. Rinaldo Alessandrini (harpsichord)**

NAÏVE OP 30575 68 mins



This is a fascinating mix of arrangements for instrumental ensemble of works originally for various keyboards, described by Alessandrini himself as 'a divertissement, a subtle intellectual pleasure.' Thus, the



Passacaglia, BWV5892, originally (probably) for pedal harpsichord, is here weighted, lachrymose and heard in an impassioned yet stylish account (contrast, for example, with Respighi's weighty orchestration of this work). Concentrating the scoring down, the *Aria variata alla maniera italiana*, BW989 is presented for violin and basso continuo instead of on harpsichord in a fabulously lilting performance; a pity the church acoustic occasionally muddies the texture.

Of course, the *Goldbergs* have famously been arranged for string trio by Sitkovetsky, an arrangement that works superbly. So does Alessandrini's version, which starts on harpsichord for the first statement of the theme before the balance of (stringed) instruments is introduced. Listen to the astonishing scoring of Variation 28 to hear just what a mind is at work here. Stimulating fare.

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**Prokofiev Symphonies Nos 2 & 3 The State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia/Vladimir Jurowski**

PENTATONE PTC 5186 624 73 mins



Vladimir Jurowski has left Londoners in no doubt of his affinity for the music of his homeland in his performances with the LPO. Here, he heads the State Academic SO of Russia in powerful performances of two of Prokofiev's lesser-performed symphonies.

Both symphonies date from before the second world war. Jurowski himself describes the second symphony as 'strange, futuristic'. The dissonant, forward-moving first movement is viscerally presented; the set of variations that comprises the works' second part houses real beauty. The recording is



impeccable, picking up every nuance. A terrific account, sparkling and intense.

The third symphony uses musical material from the composer's opera *The Fiery Angel*. Jurowski strikes at the very heart of the work: the first movement is gloriously pounding but there is flexibility and lyricism, too, while the enigmatic, shadowy slow movement is beautifully done.

Virtuoso performances of huge power; although not for the faint-hearted.

CC

**Walton Viola Concerto. Sinding (arr Røsth) *Suite im alten Stil*, Op 10 Eivind Holtmark Ringstad (via); Oslo PO/Joshua Weilerstein (Walton), Arvis Engegård (Sinding)**

LAWO LWC 1133 42 mins



This is short measure in terms of duration, but there is easily enough interest to make it viable. Written at the suggestion of Beecham, the Walton viola concerto remains underplayed to this day, and Holtmark Ringstad makes a powerful, confident case for it, nimble in the central *Vivo, e molto preciso, gentle* in the first movement (superbly ruminative at times) and locating the open-air aspect to the finale. Walton himself recorded this piece several times, of course, but this serves as an expressive modern recording.

The coupling is Sinding's *Suite in the Old Style*, heard here in a nicely expressive performance. True, the first movement pales in comparison with Heifetz' violin version, but this is a fascinating piece, the 'old style' particularly noticeable in the composer's way with cadences. Those who know Sinding as a one-work composer (*Frühlingsrauschen*) should hear this.

CC

