

(‘A Swan’) – are well known but it is good to hear the lesser-known in their rightful place, such as ‘Den Saerde’ (‘The Wounded Heart’) and ‘Spillemænd’ (‘Fiddlers’), both plumbing depths in Kielland’s verbally pointed performances.

Monica Groop’s complete Grieg song-cycle for BIS has deeper, darker mezzo colours. Anne Sofie von Otter’s Grieg recital, a *Gramophone* Award-winner in 1993, offers a mixed programme headed by an intense, Lieder-like account of *Haugtussa* – not the traditional way, perhaps, but marvellously involving.

**Richard Fairman**

*Songs – selected comparison:*

*Groop, Vignoles, Derzvinger*

(5/94<sup>o</sup>, 2/03<sup>o</sup>) (BIS) BISCD1607/9 (aas)

*Haugtussa – selected comparison:*

*Von Otter, Forsberg (6/93<sup>o</sup>) (DG) 477 6326GGP*

## Haydn



Die Jahreszeiten

**Dorothea Röschmann** *sop* **Michael Schade** *ten*

**Florian Boesch** *bass* **Vienna State Opera Chorus;**

**Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra /**

**Nikolaus Harnoncourt**

*Video director (performance)* **Michael Beyer**

*Video director (documentary)* **Eric Schulz**

EuroArts (DVD) 207 2678; (Blu-ray) 207 2674

(150' + 25' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live at the Salzburg Festival, July 2013

Includes documentary ‘Nikolaus Harnoncourt rehearsing Joseph Haydn’s *The Seasons*’



It may be perverse to give pride of place to the ‘bonus’ feature. But anyone acquiring this DVD of

Haydn’s pastoral idyll should begin with Eric Schulz’s riveting 25-minute documentary interleaving rehearsal footage (and the occasional shot of Salzburg) with Harnoncourt’s thoughts on *The Seasons* and on conducting Haydn. An astonishingly vital 83-year-old, Harnoncourt stresses the need to understand Haydn’s detailed rhetoric in order to avoid the unthinking routine that was all too common in Austria until recently. George Szell, with whom he played Haydn symphonies as a young cellist, comes under the cosh for his ‘machine-like’ performances. As Harnoncourt eloquently demonstrates in rehearsal, ‘the written notes are only the beginning’. Inter alia, we see him encouraging the naturally refined VPO horns to blare (‘schmettern’) raucously in the spectacular hunting chorus, and, in the ploughman’s song, getting the piccolo to play an octave higher than written to evoke

the ‘whistling peasant’. As a sworn enemy of undifferentiated *sostenuto*, Harnoncourt is constantly urging chorus and orchestra to shade away, gradually or abruptly, on longer notes. In the process, the opening ‘passage of winter to spring’ becomes excitingly explosive, even at Harnoncourt’s characteristically broad tempo. The majestic fugal finale of ‘Spring’ becomes airier, more nuanced, while the chorus in praise of wine acquires an added lurching exuberance.

In rehearsal and interview Harnoncourt makes a (usually) convincing case for his trademark flexibility of tempo in Classical repertoire. Even so, in one or two movements – the love duet in ‘Autumn’ or Hanne’s *faux naïf* tale of country lass outsmarting randy lord – the fluctuations sound contrived rather than growing naturally from melodic and harmonic flux. In the main, though, this is a splendid, inspiring performance of a life-giving work. It’s superbly executed by a 60-strong VPO, given a quasi-period makeover by Harnoncourt, and the elite of the Vienna State Opera Chorus, whose firm-toned sopranos are a world away from the fruity wobblers of old.

The soloists, though not quite the equal of those on Harnoncourt’s recent CD version, are all vivid performers. Florian Boesch is a robust, genial Simon in the earlier parts of the oratorio, then makes something dramatic of his sombre memento mori in ‘Winter’. Neither he nor tenor Michael Schade – hushed and fearful in his aria evoking the midday torpor – is ideally elegant in Haydn’s brief bouts of coloratura. Dorothea Röschmann sounds a shade too mature and sophisticated for Hanne, though her poised, shapely singing is always a pleasure per se.

Camerawork is intelligent and unfussy, always focusing on what you want to see; and while the balance isn’t always consistent, and the soloists are slightly too closely miked for my taste, hardly a note of Haydn’s teeming woodwind detail, not least his delicious bassoon-writing, escapes the ears of the engineers. Buy this, then, not only for a performance that does rich justice to Haydn’s bucolic masterpiece but also for Harnoncourt’s ever-stimulating thoughts, and some notably revealing and entertaining rehearsal footage.

**Richard Wigmore**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Harnoncourt (DHM) 88697 64267-2*

## Heggie

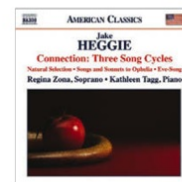
‘Connection: Three Song Cycles’

*Natural Selection. Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia. Eve-Song*

**Regina Zona** *sop* **Kathleen Tagg** *pf*

Naxos American Classics © 8 559764

(59' • DDD • T)



Best known for his operas, Jake Heggie is also a prolific

writer of songs (over 250 to date), many of which form part of larger cycles such as those that feature on this disc.

These cycles give a good account of their composer’s relative strengths and failings. *Natural Selection* (1997) sets five poems by Gini Savage that chart a young woman’s search for her sense of self before finally attaining it within: a present-day take on Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und -leben*, perhaps? *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia* (1999) investigates the nature of one who is all too easily written off as a victim of circumstance – Heggie’s own poem preceding three by Edna St Vincent Millay in which Ophelia ultimately comes to terms with her misfortune and, by doing so, transcends it. Much the longest of these three song-cycles, *Eve-Song* (1996) sets eight poems by Philip Littell in which the biblical Eve’s eloquent recollections of her life become fused with equally prescient comments on the fall from grace of humanity at large.

Throughout these cycles, Heggie reveals an adept handling of the voice-and-piano medium – for all that the vocal line could have benefited from more expressive variety and the piano-writing from greater tonal nuance. Nor are excursions into jazz and popular idioms free from inhibition or contrivance. Yet it would be wrong to deny the ready appeal of these songs, not least with Regina Zona and Kathleen Tagg as such sympathetic exponents. Certainly those who feel the American art-song to have ended with Ned Rorem will find much to enjoy here. **Richard Whitehouse**

## Schubert



‘Nachtviolen’

Abendlied für die Entfernte, D856. Abendstern, D806. Abschied D475. An den Mond in einer Herbstnacht, D614. An die Nachtigall, D196. Frühlingsglaube, D686. Herbst, D945. Der Hirt, D490. Hoffnung, D295. Im Jänner 1817 (‘Tiefes Leid’), D876. Im Walde, D834. Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren, D360. Nach einem Gewitter, D561. Nachtgesang, D314. Nachtviolen, D752. Der Sänger am Felsen, D482. Der Schiffer, D694. Der Strom, D565. Totengräber-weise, D869. Über Wildemann, D884. Der Wanderer, D649. Der Wanderer an den Mond, D870. Wehmut, D772. Der Zwerg, D771