

REISSUES

Reviewed by Michael Tanner

SCHUBERT

Symphony No. 8; Rosamunde – incidental music
Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra;
Vienna Philharmonic/Pierre Monteux
Eloquence 480 8905 (1965) 48:07 mins



This is a fiery, intense and dark *Unfinished*, followed by an ideal performance of three pieces from *Rosamunde*, some of it so tender you can hardly breathe.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

SCHUBERT

Schubert: Symphony No. 9; plus Beethoven: Symphony No. 9 – finale
Elisabeth Schwarzkopf (soprano), Elsa Cavelti (mezzo-soprano), Ernst Haefliger (tenor), Otto Edelmann (baritone), Lucerne Festival Choir; Philharmonia/Wilhelm Fürtwangler
Praga Digitalis 350085 (hybrid CD/SACD) (1954) 79:27 mins



An odd disc, though the contents are marvellous. The studio Schubert No. 9 is acknowledged as a classic, but the last movement of his last performance of Beethoven's Ninth makes a strange and unsatisfactory filler.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

BEETHOVEN

Symphonies Nos 2 & 7
Vienna Philharmonic/Karl Böhm
Orfeo C910 151 B (1980) 79:58 mins



These are almost ideal performances, for those who aren't addicted to authenticity. Warm and detailed playing from the Vienna Philharmonic in Böhm's penultimate concert – and very lively too.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

STRAUSS

Don Quixote; Also sprach Zarathustra
Rudolf Streng (viola), Pierre Fournier (cello); Vienna Philharmonic/Karajan
Orfeo C 909 151 B (1964) 79:58 mins



This is Karajan in his element and in his stride, and Richard Strauss too, for those who enjoy the bombast of *Zarathustra* and the brilliant onomatopoeic strivings and death of *Don Quixote*.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

True, you may feel you need to keep increasing the volume, but the warm, intimate, slender sound is an appropriate reflection of the score Mahler left incompletely fleshed out, the bare bones of which Cooke mostly respects. Only occasionally do the big dissonances and lunges really jump out at you, but they're part of something bigger and stranger. The central miniature with a big heart, the 'Purgatorio' movement, is pointillistically done; the second *scherzo's* fade-out is on the threshold of audibility, all the more to make you jump out of your skin when the military drum attacks. Marie-Andrée Benny's flute solo seeks not sheen or glory, but the essence of simple vulnerability, with strings making chamber music around and beyond her. While one might question the onward movement of Mahler's sketches early on, the great finale affirms itself as a masterly conclusion to a symphonic life – and heartbreaking, as it must be.

Warm sound in Montreal's Maison symphonique helps preserve a very special world – one certainly more remarkable than Simon Rattle's in Berlin or Daniel Harding's in Vienna. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



PROKOFIEV

Symphonies Nos 4 (revised version) & 6; Symphonic Fragment
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/
Kirill Karabits
Onyx ONYX 4153 77:49 mins

The final volume in Kirill Karabits's fine Prokofiev series opens with a compelling account of the Sixth Symphony. One of the major virtues of this performance lies in Karabits's ability to draw a cogent symphonic thread throughout each movement. Thus the sudden increase in tempo that builds up to the terrifying central climax in the opening *Allegro moderato* seems more powerful because Karabits presents the earlier part of the movement in comparatively introspective terms. Likewise in the Finale, the conductor gradually ratchets up the tension, the martial rhythms that follow the deceptively jovial first idea in the strings becoming ever more sinister in character as the movement moves towards its brutal coda, presented here, as in Mravinsky's classic performance, with a devastatingly

effective slowing down of tempo before the final chord.

The Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra plays with conviction and virtuosity throughout the Sixth. And it's equally adept in the expanded version of the Fourth, which here seems far less structurally discursive than in many other performances. A largely positive recommendation for this release is slightly marred by some occasionally odd sounding bits of orchestral balance: for example, the trumpets' obliteration of the high screeching note in upper woodwind at the beginning of the second bar in the *Largo* of the Sixth. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



PROKOFIEV

Symphonies Nos 3 & 4 (1930 version)
Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra/James Gaffigan
Challenge CC 72584 (hybrid CD/SACD) 57:36 mins

This first release in yet another projected Prokofiev symphonic cycle has outstandingly vivid recorded sound, particularly resonant in the bass end of the orchestra. This serves to intensify the menacing quality of the lower brass and percussion in the outer movements of the Third Symphony, here performed with dramatic flair and a real sense of foreboding. Somewhat less convincing is the third movement. Although the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic plays the music with consummate virtuosity, the eerie string passagework seems mechanical and strangely bereft of the necessary feeling of anxiety.

I have some reservations, too, about James Gaffigan's approach to the first version of the Fourth. The tempo for the first movement's slow introduction is surely too slow to sustain the necessary flow; this problem also affects continuity in the ensuing *Andante tranquillo*, despite some wonderfully sensitive solo woodwind playing. Indeed, a direct comparison with the Kirill Karabits recording of the same work (reviewed in November) demonstrates that despite the disadvantage of noticeably inferior recorded sound, the Ukrainian presents a far more strongly characterised view of the music and a greater transparency in projecting Prokofiev's occasionally dense orchestration. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



SCRIABIN

Symphonies Nos 3 & 4

Oslo Philharmonic/Vasily Petrenko
Lawo Classics LWC 1088 (hybrid CD/SACD) 68:24 mins

Symphonies Nos 3 & 4

LSO/Valery Gergiev
LSO Live LSO 0771 (hybrid CD/SACD) 64:58 mins

Though Scriabin has a reputation as a key innovator in the early 20th century, musicians rarely bother with the dizzy mix of theosophy and messianic egotism which inspired him. Vasily Petrenko, who usually digs deep into the subtexts of scores he conducts, shows an excellent grasp of each symphony's dramatic trajectory, and a broader than usual awareness of the creative legacy within which Scriabin worked – the vigour of the Third's opening motif recalls, appropriately, Beethoven's *Eroica*. Yet it is precisely the *Divine Poem's* symphonic qualities, rather than its self-aggrandising drama, which Petrenko appears to foreground. Even in *Poem of Ecstasy* (essentially Scriabin's hymn to sex), though each climax is effectively built, there is a dispassionate coolness in much of the playing. The rather distant recording – albeit the SACD layer reveals more grain and detail – does not help: harp and celesta glisten attractively in *Poem of Ecstasy*, but Scriabin's would-be epic canvas of the Third is reduced to the glamorous but emotionally muted level of a photorealist painting.

Valery Gergiev and the LSO's performances reveal rather more detail despite rather less clean recorded sound. Gergiev has clearly taken a fresh look at the Third Symphony's score, driving to the first movement's first climax without the usual (unmarked) dramatic pause; the pay-off comes with an all the more shocking and powerful second climax (marked 'écroulement formidable' by Scriabin). Yet curiously Gergiev's accounts of both the Third's second movement and of the *Poem of Ecstasy*, rich in detail though they are, are less sensuous than even Petrenko's. Gergiev, rather than caring for the intrinsic themes of Scriabin's works, seems more interested in underlining the Russian colours and their influence on Stravinsky. *Daniel Jaffe*

PETRENKO: PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★
GERGIEV: PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★