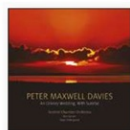


So concerned is Gamzou to heighten expression, that every other upbeat becomes a *ritardando*, repeatedly impeding forward momentum, while the contrasts between loud and soft – enhanced, presumably at the conductor’s behest, by the huge dynamic range of the recording – mean that in order to hear some of the more shadowy *pianissimos* at all, one boosts the volume, only to be blasted out of the room by an ensuing *fortissimo*. Worth hearing, but no real challenge to earlier recensions of Mahler’s sketches. *Bayan Northcott*

PERFORMANCE ★★★  
RECORDING ★★★



**MAXWELL DAVIES**

**An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise; Concert Overture: Ebb of Winter; Hill Runes; Last Door of Light; Farewell to Stromness**  
Sean Shibe (guitar); Scottish Chamber Orchestra/Ben Gernon  
Linn CKD534 59 mins

The orchestral works *Ebb of Winter* and *Last Door of Light* were both written in Maxwell Davies’s old age. While neither strays beyond his familiar territory of Orkney landscape, environmental concern, and tight-reined orchestral rhetoric, each is superbly imagined nonetheless, with the intersection of intricate construction and ultra-clear part-writing that was uniquely this composer’s. Aficionados will not mind hearing, yet again, those trademark Maxwell Davies devices of whooping horn *glissandos* and hyperactive chattering trumpets, especially when delivered with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra’s bombproof expertise; and Ben Gernon’s conducting of both works is forthright and immaculate.

The beautifully executed guitar interludes are supplied by Edinburgh’s Sean Shibe; *Hill Runes* is based on a cryptic five-stanza poem by Orkney poet George Mackay Brown, while *Farewell to Stromness* is an arrangement by Timothy Walker (the guitarist of Maxwell Davies’s Fires of London group) of the piano original. *An Orkney Wedding, With Sunrise* depends on the presence of a live audience for its riotous goings-on to come across best; not even orchestral playing as scintillating as this, with brilliant recorded sound to match, can quite compensate for an inevitable loss of atmosphere in



**FORTHRIGHT AND IMMACULATE:**  
Ben Gernon conducts a colourful range of late Maxwell Davies

Edinburgh’s otherwise empty Usher Hall. *Malcolm Hayes*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



**MOZART**

**Symphonies Nos 39-41**  
Australian Chamber Orchestra/  
Richard Tognetti  
ABC Classics 481 2880 93:57 mins (2 discs)

In a crowded market, this pair of discs of Mozart’s last three symphonies stands out, and will, I imagine, prove controversial. In his candid notes to the performances, which are live, though without any audience noise, Richard Tognetti recalls playing these works under Frans Brüggen, of whom he says ‘he wasn’t just “dabbing antiseptic Dettol” on the music as you sometimes get with English so-called specialists in early music’ (Who can Tognetti be thinking of?). And certainly these accounts are pretty merciless affairs, which I found bracing even if I sometimes recoiled from the ferocity of the attack. The opening bars of the *Jupiter* (No. 41) positively bark at you, and the harsh dissonances in the introduction to No. 39 have never before been as harsh as this. On the other hand, Tognetti slows down, regularly, before a lyrical subject, and in general lets tempos ebb and flow in an unfashionable way.

Oddly, when he repeats the minuetts of the symphonies, he takes their

own repeats as well, a superfluous procedure – but he doesn’t take the repeat of the development in the last movement of the *Jupiter*, which I regard as mandatory. So there is plenty to be surprised about in these performances, but I found them dramatic and enlivening more than any I have heard of these works for many years. Just prepare to be startled. *Michael Tanner*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



**PROKOFIEV**

**Romeo and Juliet**  
Oslo Philharmonic/Vasily Petrenko  
LAWO Classics LWC 1105  
144:48 mins (2 discs)

The first impression is very positive: the Introduction – warmly expressive, flexible and exuding interpretative confidence – promises an outstanding performance. Romeo’s opening dance is maybe a touch too jaunty – he is, after all, meant to be still recovering from his infatuation with Rosaline. Yet within a few numbers Vasily Petrenko suggests a greater than usual range to the ballet’s character, from the first street brawl (the dissonant horn harmonies suitably bruising) to the pompously brisk march which follows ‘The Duke’s Command’ (about twice the speed of any other performance). All the

main characters are vividly drawn – Juliet lively yet definitely a child at her first appearance, Romeo impetuous and ardent at the balcony scene (Prokofiev’s swirl of colours at the height of ‘Love Dance’ vividly realised); and all the supporting male characters – gentle Friar Laurence apart – swaggering and full of the brittle wit and aggression of youth.

The main caveat is that Petrenko here uses the corrupt Soviet Bolshoi Theatre edition of the score. This does not affect Act I, but from Act II there is some particularly heavy-handed reinforcement of the orchestral scoring, many of the dances weighted down by extra string doublings, percussion and brass to rather ‘shouty’ effect rather than Prokofiev’s more varied conception. The replacement of the oboe solo at the opening of ‘Dance of the Five Couples’ with blasting trumpets is particularly crass. A pity, because otherwise this is a very fresh and vibrant new account, the first and final acts as great as any available.

*Daniel Jaffé*  
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



**TCHAIKOVSKY**

**The Nutcracker; Symphony No. 4**  
Mariinsky Orchestra/Valery Gergiev  
Mariinsky MAR 0593 (hybrid CD/SACD)  
129:02 mins (2 discs)

Way back in 1998, Valery Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra released a compelling if occasionally hard-driven account of *The Nutcracker*. This new version is not quite as unyielding with more measured tempos adopted for certain dances. Yet the impeccable sense of structural continuity and pacing, which characterised the earlier recording, remains intact, and once again Gergiev paints Tchaikovsky’s dream-world in the boldest colours, from the dark subterranean sounds that announce the exciting battle scene in Act I to the magical and glistening bright lights in the Land of Sweets in Act II. The Mariinsky Orchestra plays the score with theatrical verve and virtuosity, and the crystal-clear recording really brings out all the subtle inner details of Tchaikovsky’s orchestration.

I wish I could be equally enthusiastic about the Fourth Symphony. Things don’t get off to the best start with the fuzzy articulation of the horn triplets in the fate motif,