

# Orchestral



## Edward Seckerson enjoys Marin Alsop's Bernstein:

*'The Age of Anxiety is a cracker of a piece and this excellent performance amplifies that view in every way'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 30**



## Andrew Achenbach is swept away by the NYO's Holst Planets:

*'I love the string timbre in "Venus", and how giddily delirious are the xylophone's madcap antics during "Uranus"'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 36**

## Alnæs

Piano Concerto, Op 27<sup>a</sup>. Symphony No 1, Op 7

<sup>a</sup>Håvard Gimse *pf*

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Eivind Aadland

LAWO Classics © LWC1112 (70' • DDD)



Eyvind Alnæs's Piano Concerto (1915) has charm aplenty. The Norwegian composer's

score is tuneful and opulently orchestrated, and the virtuoso piano-writing is often dazzling. It's impressive for its craftsmanship, too, the myriad ideas developed and interwoven with a sure hand. What's disconcerting is an occasionally jarring juxtaposition of mood and emotion. Listen to the end of the first movement's central development section (beginning around 8'15"), for example, and how Alnæs screws the tension tighter and tighter, building a climax of Tchaikovskian intensity that leads to nothing more than a flippant recapitulation of the opening theme. Or take the end of the darkly lyrical slow movement, where an even more gripping climax this time subsides into eerie stillness – a spell that's rudely broken by the ditzzy waltz theme of the finale. The result of these ill-fitting joins is a patchwork effect that undermines the work's structural integrity and narrative coherence.

This is the second recording of Alnæs's concerto, and while excellent, it's perhaps a touch sober in comparison with the joyous exuberance of Piers Lane and Andrew Litton (Hyperion). Håvard Gimse conveys a delightful sense of improvisatory freedom in some passages but Lane makes the complex piano part flow more easily, giving the music a much-needed feeling of inevitability.

Alnæs's First Symphony (1897), composed following his studies with Reinecke in Leipzig, is less characterful but more cohesive than the concerto. The two inner movements are very fine, particularly the solemnly expressive *Adagio* with its

aching harmonies and inventive orchestration (try at 6'15", where the upper strings are divided into delicate strands). Certainly Eivind Aadland and the Oslo Philharmonic make a more compelling case for this work than Terje Mikkelsen and the Latvian National Symphony (Sterling), and LAWO's close-up recording adds to the musical impact. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

*Piano Concerto – comparative version:*

*Lane, Bergen PO, Litton (6/07) (HYPE) CDA67555*

*Symphony No 1 – comparative version:*

*Latvian Nat SO, Mikkelsen (6/10) (STER) CDS1084-2*

## Alwyn

'The Film Music of William Alwyn, Vol 4'

**MUSIC FROM THE BLACK TENT<sup>a</sup>, A CITY SPEAKS, FORTUNE IS A WOMAN<sup>a</sup>, THE MASTER OF BALLANTRAE<sup>a</sup>, MIRANDA<sup>a</sup>, ON APPROVAL<sup>a</sup>, SATURDAY ISLAND<sup>a</sup>, SHAKE HANDS WITH THE DEVIL<sup>a</sup>, THE SHIP THAT DIED OF SHAME AND THEY FLEW ALONE<sup>a</sup> (ed Philip Lane)**

<sup>b</sup>Charlotte Trepass *sop*

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Rumon Gamba

Chandos © CHANI0930 (78' • DDD)



William Alwyn composed these film scores between 1941 and 1959, when a visit to the cinema was a twice-weekly event for many UK citizens, with attendance levels that have never been surpassed.

In *The Black Tent* (1956), filmed in Technicolor and VistaVision, the audience could be whisked from suburbia to a foreign location like Libya, where shooting took place. Alwyn's score was typical of his cinematic craft. Eschewing the flamboyant approach of a Tiomkin, Alwyn devised music that portrayed events on screen in a pithy, no-nonsense fashion without resorting to cliché. In this Suite his cues, often carrying a dense narrative, proceed in a cogent fashion, as with the Nocturne and Finale, where the drama and romance of the desert are inspired by Arabic music.

Adventure films dominate this fourth CD of Alwyn's music. *The Master of Ballantrae* (1953), from the novel by Robert Louis

Stevenson, is in a Scottish idiom, while *Shake Hands With the Devil*, a dramatic tale of the Black and Tans and the IRA, contains a little idyll for strings alone, 'People of Erin'. A sombre, fully scored funeral march ('Trouble') rounds off this Suite. 'The Mermaid's Song' from *Miranda*, a vocalise sung by the soprano Charlotte Trepass with full-bodied tone, provides an apt contrast, along with a Chopin-style Nocturne, played by pianist Paul James, in Alwyn's *They Flew Alone*, a biopic of Amy Johnson. The sweeping Prelude from *Saturday Island* (1952) demonstrates again how the change from major to minor is such an effective musical device, while *Fortune is a Woman* is dominated by a three-bar motif at the start.

Philip Lane has once again reconstructed and arranged much of this music, with the notable exception of the 'Manchester Suite' from *A City Speaks*. In this instance Alwyn presented his five-movement score to the film-makers in advance of the production, directed by Philip Rotha and commissioned by Manchester City Council. It was conducted on the original soundtrack by Barbirolli with the Hallé Orchestra. Alwyn's score illustrates Manchester's citizens at work and at play. There's an aspirational vision of a better life to come in the *Alla marcia* and a gritty determination to put it into practice in the Interlude. A fleeting Scherzo depicts their leisure activities.

The BBC Philharmonic under Rumon Gamba have a ball playing this music, no more so than in the dance cues from *On Approval* (1944), the film version of Frederick Lonsdale's stage comedy, where the action was moved back from the 1920s to the 1890s. The film was described by director Lindsay Anderson as 'the funniest light British comedy ever made'. A Waltz, Polka and a Lancers' medley testify to Alwyn's versatility on any cinematic subject. Artwork, picture stills, comprehensive music notes and a fine recording add their own allure to this significant addition to Alwyn's cinematic output. **Adrian Edwards**