

talent whose varied tonal palette especially suits Szymanowski's music, though in that respect she faces formidable competition, CD-wise, from the likes of Skride, Zehetmair, Danczowska, Zimmermann, Steinbacher and Tetzlaff. The formula needed for this particular concerto includes tonal translucency and technical agility, that and an ability to dart in and around the work's multi-layered orchestral textures. Philippens connects well with Szymanowski's sensual muse, though the National Youth Orchestra of the Netherlands under Xian Zhang, while impressively proficient, don't achieve the level of pointillist precision that, say, Rattle in Birmingham does for Zehetmair, Wit in Warsaw for Zimmermann or Janowski in Berlin for Steinbacher. All score higher in the glitter department, which in this of all works matters. Philippens likes her expressive *portamentos* and has plenty of wrist power in reserve for the more demanding passages. Couplings will as ever be of the essence.

Skride, Zehetmair, Danczowska and Zimmermann all usefully add the Second Concerto (Zimmermann providing a further bonus in Britten's marvellous Violin Concerto), whereas Philippens offers various Szymanowski pieces for violin and piano with Julien Quentin, plus a brief Stravinsky sequence, the winsome 'Chanson russe' (ie Pasha's aria from *Mavra*) being especially attractive. The Szymanowski works face a significant digital rival in the more comprehensive Hyperion collection of the 'complete music for violin and piano' featuring Alina Ibragimova with pianist Cédric Tiberghien (though Ibragimova passes on the transcription of 'Roxana's Song' from *King Roger*, which Philippens includes). Comparing the two at the start of 'La fontaine d'Aréthuse', the most famous of the three *Myths*, is enough to establish Ibragimova's sense of atmosphere, the way she connects with Tiberghien, and their shared sense of tonal colour. The entrancing *Nocturne and Tarantella* proves likewise, Ibragimova's fine-tipped Nocturne quite in a class of its own. Summing up, I'd opt for Ibragimova and Tiberghien in the duo pieces and either Zimmermann or Zehetmair in the Concerto. However, Philippens is certainly good enough to please those who fancy this particular programme. **Rob Cowan**

Vn Conc – selected comparisons:

Zehetmair, CBSO, Rattle (8/96*) (EMI) 514576-2

FP Zimmermann, Warsaw PO, Wit

(A/09) (SONY) 88697 43999-2

Szymanowski Wks for Vn & Pf – selected comparison:

Ibragimova, Tiberghien (7/09) (HYPE) CDA67703

'The Tchaikovsky Album'

Capriccio italien, Op 45. Fantasy-Overtures – 'Francesca da Rimini', Op 32; 'Romeo and Juliet', Overture, '1812', Op 49

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra /

Vasily Petrenko

Decca/Classic FM © CFMD38 (72' • DDD)



Something of a Tchaikovsky hit-parade here (hence the title and Classic FM

connection) but nothing run-of-the-mill about the performers. The strident trumpet fanfares announcing *Capriccio italien* are an auspicious start and Petrenko's darkly saturated Royal Liverpool Philharmonic strings pull us in, the final bars of the soulful first theme driven home with real trenchancy. You can hear straight away what fine sound the engineers have achieved in Liverpool's Philharmonic Hall. For the rest of this opening showpiece, Petrenko – the tourist from St Petersburg – clearly knows a good Italian street party when he comes across one. Bags of colour, sparkling work from the RLPO trumpets and a heady sprint through the final pages, which certainly does the business.

Romeo and Juliet is more subdued, very much in the 'classical' vein, with subtle instrumental blends and wonderful attention to dynamics. Petrenko achieves a truly breathtaking hush of disquiet at the lead in to the first agitated *allegro* and the love theme arrives on gossamer strings swelling to its final blossoming without overworking the *rubato*. I've heard more exciting accounts but few as sensitive.

Much the same might be said of *Francesca da Rimini* where the winds of Dante's inferno hardly blast as intensely as they do in the famous Stokowski recording – or indeed the highly emotive account (still my favourite) from Bernstein and the Israel Philharmonic. Tchaikovsky's innate classicism again takes precedence over a more explicit 'pictorial' romanticism, with the balletic allusions beautifully pointed in the central love scene with its delectable woodwind colorations. The climax wrought from that limp limpid clarinet theme is a splendid thing.

And so to the year 1812, which delivers the martial goods with vigour. Urgency is the key here, with Petrenko adopting a super-propulsive tempo for the main *allegro* section – very exciting – and no sense of lost momentum in the lyric interludes. The final assault brings a telling assortment of bells and a suitably ground-shaking cannonade. Definitely an IMAX experience. **Edward Seckerson**

Telemann

'Totally Telemann – Music for Orchestra'

Concertos – TWV51/B1; TWV51/c1; TWV52/e1; TWV52/e3. Suite, 'La bourse', TWV55/B11

Barokkanerne

LAWO Classics © LWV1074 (67' • DDD)

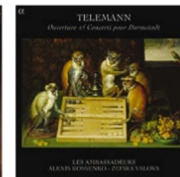
Telemann

'Overture & Concerti pour Darmstadt'

Concertos – TWV51/a1; TWV51/D1; TWV51/D2; TWV52/e3. Overture, TWV55/F3

Les Ambassadeurs / Alexis Kossenko fl

Alpha © ALPHA200 (70' • DDD)



Two discs of Telemann concertos and overture-suites, both by ensembles of similar size, even with a work in common (an achievement when you consider just how much Telemann there is to choose from). How to distinguish between them?

Well, actually it's not so difficult. Barokkanerne, a Norwegian group with a strong line in guest directors, offer four concertos and the overture-suite celebrating the Frankfurt stock exchange in whose swanky building Telemann had his apartment. The suite's enigmatic movement headings ('Le repos interrompu', 'La solitude associée', etc) have had programme-note-writers groping for unconvincing explanations for years (reader, I was one), only to be exposed by the discovery that the overall title of 'La bourse' came from a 20th-century publisher. Ah well, whatever it is about, Barokkanerne do not characterise it that much here, and it is instead in the four concertos that they are at their best. Alfredo Bernardini breezes by to lead a lusty oboe concerto with customarily fluid ease (the piece starts on an alarming dissonance, by the way); Kati Debretzeni reveals a natural security and musicality in a violin concerto with a lovely slow movement; and she and Torun Kirby Torbo show plenty of suave expressive detail in a concerto for flute and violin with another terrifically touching *Adagio*. Kirby Torbo later teams up with Ingeborg Christophersen in the evergreen Concerto for flute and recorder, liquidly played and as exhilarating in its 'Polish' finale as ever.

French group Les Ambassadeurs are more outgoing, with a bigger sound right from when two horns blast their way into the hunt-obsessed Overture in F and pretty much refuse to go away, even when the rest of the orchestra is dancing a sarabande. Happily their boisterous



Yuja Wang, who joins the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and Michael Tilson Thomas in Littloff's *Scherzo* on their new disc of miniatures

company is respectful (if a tad tipsy), until they bring things to end with a clamorous 'Fanfare' based on the horn-call signifying the kill. Jean-François and Pierre-Yves Madeuf, playing fully natural horns, bring a joyously loose-lipped and fruitily tuned flavour to it all. Elsewhere there is another violin concerto, this time with an opening *Adagio* that seems borrowed from some tragic opera scene. Zefira Valova is a spindly soloist compared to Debretzeni, and is recorded a touch too closely for my liking, but her flat-coloured sound does contribute something to the lachrymose quality of this unusual movement. She is nimble, however, in the flute and violin concerto, in which that extraordinary *Adagio* has a stiller quality than that of the Norwegians, though maybe that is another way of saying they do less with it. Director Alexis Kossenko is the soloist in two D major flute concertos, wanting more grace in the oom-cha first movement of D1, but in D2 establishing a proud polonaise rhythm in the first movement, tumbling and trickling deliciously through the *Largo* and leading a rustic reel in the finale. This is great stuff; but when all is said and done it is that horn-fuelled Overture, guaranteed to raise a smile, that remains the star of this release. **Lindsay Kemp**

PHOTOGRAPHY: GAN YUAN

'Masterpieces in Miniature'

Debussy *La plus que lente* **Delibes** *Sylvia* – *Cortège de Bacchus* **Delius** *On hearing the first cuckoo in spring* **Dvořák** *Legend*, Op 59 No 6 **Fauré** *Pavane*, Op 50 **Grieg** *The Last Spring*, Op 34 No 2 **Ives** *A Concord* **Symphony** (orch Brant) – **The Alcotts** **Litolff** *Concerto symphonique No 4*, Op 102 – *Scherzo* **Mahler** *Blumine* **Rachmaninov** *Vocalise*, Op 34 No 14 **Schubert** *Rosamunde*, D797 – *Entr'acte No 3* **Sibelius** *Valse triste*, Op 44 No 1

^a**Yuja Wang** *pf*

San Francisco Symphony Orchestra / Michael Tilson Thomas

SFS Media © SFS0060 (78' • DDDDSD)



'This recording pays homage to the tradition of these pieces,' says Michael Tilson Thomas in an introduction to this 12-item miscellany. 'Playing them is now nearly a lost art.' I wonder whether that is entirely true, when the programme includes such core numbers as Fauré's *Pavane*, Rachmaninov's *Vocalise*, Sibelius's *Valse triste* and Delius's *On hearing the first cuckoo in spring*. Nor are

Mahler's *Blumine* or the entr'acte from Schubert's *Rosamunde* exactly uncommon, though the languorous, mannered way in which Tilson Thomas conducts the latter certainly lends it a novel profile. A tiny motivic similarity between the *Rosamunde* music and the start of 'The Alcotts' from Charles Ives's *A Concord Symphony* neatly establishes a link to one of the less familiar choices here, and it is fun to have Delibes's 'Cortège de Bacchus' from his ballet *Sylvia* as a final item, a deliciously Frenchified foretaste of Elgar in pomp-and-circumstance mode.

Back in 2000 Mariss Jansons and the Oslo Philharmonic released an EMI disc of 'World Encores' (alas nla) that also included *Valse triste* but was in general upbeat. Tilson Thomas has homed in more on the reflective repertoire, though he does begin with the *Scherzo* from Litolff's *Concerto symphonique* No 4, glitteringly played by Yuja Wang. Here, however, Tilson Thomas is perhaps closer to the mark about the lost art of performing such pieces, for you only have to recall Cherkassky, Curzon, Katin or Moura Lympany to remember the artless wit and sparkle that such music can radiate. **Geoffrey Norris**