
Arthur Lintgen

The Erich Leinsdorf/Carol Neblett 1976 RCA recording of Korngold's *Die Tote Stadt* is legendary among Korngold fans. Neblett sounds so gorgeous that her version of Marietta's Lied is even better than Renée Fleming's recording. This is some of the most beautiful singing ever recorded, despite René Kollo's tendency to shout at times. The original sound was excellent, but it is now available for the first time on SACD. This should be a treasure for Korngold fans and all Romantic opera lovers.

The Yannick Nézet-Séguin Mahler Eighth Symphony is all about the Philadelphia Orchestra. The soloists are adequate, but the orchestra is even better than the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Solti's widely acclaimed Decca version. Just listen to the amazing sonority of the augmented brass in the finale to hear what I mean. The Philadelphia Orchestra is ideal for Rachmaninoff's sound, but not in the way you might expect. There is no excessive Romanticism here. In fact, the words that best describe the Trifonov/Nézet-Séguin performance are elegant perfection. That may not be everyone's idea of Rachmaninoff's music, but it works. The CD also contains Trifonov's piano transcriptions of Rachmaninoff's *Vocalise* and "The Silver Sleigh Bells" from *The Bells*.

Legends of the Fall is one of James Horner's largest and most popular scores. This is a complete expanded version containing a substantial amount of new music. It all sounds the same, but a megadose of Horner in ultra-Romantic mode should be irresistible for his fans. *Across the Stars* is a collection of many of John Williams's most famous themes arranged for Anne-Sophie Mutter as violin soloist with full orchestra. The arrangements are invariably brilliantly done, and completely change the sound of the music. This is a showpiece for Williams as composer and Mutter as soloist. The Deluxe Edition also contains a DVD with Williams and Mutter in conversation.

KORNGOLD *Die Tote Stadt* • Leinsdorf/Neblett, Kollo, Luxon, Prey/Munich RO • DUTTON 7376 (2 SACDs)

MAHLER *Symphony No. 8* • Nézet-Séguin/Meade, Oropesa, Wall, Bishop, Fujimira, Griffey, Weba, Relyea/Westminster Symphonic Ch, Choral Arts Society of Washington, Philadelphia O • DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4837871

RACHMANINOFF *Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 3* • Trifonov/Nézet-Séguin/Philadelphia O • DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4836617

HORNER *Legends of the Fall* • Horner/London SO • INTRADA 443 (2 CDs)

ACROSS THE STARS • Mutter/Williams/Recording Arts O of Los Angeles • DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4837459 (CD/DVD)

James V. Maiello

BIS continues to be a top tier label, and I'm not surprised that two of the selections on this year's want list come from them. I'm always on the lookout for interesting recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, all the better if I can find them on period instruments. Masaaki Suzuki and the Bach Collegium Japan have offered one here that rivals my treasured reading of the piece by John Eliot Gardiner and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique. Suzuki's tempos are similarly brisk, and he maintains a keen sense of large-scale form in his interpretation of each movement. The players are precise, and years of playing together have made them remarkably cohesive as an ensemble. The overall approach is flexible, energetic, and sophisticated, and the timbral heterogeneity of the period instruments is not lost in the refined texture. Moreover, the disc is recorded beautifully. The sound is lively and clear, but not sterile.

Similarly, lutenist Jacob Lindberg has turned out one of the finest lute recordings I've heard in years for BIS. His selection of works by the Bohemian aristocrat and amateur lutenist Jan Antonín Losy brings Losy's music to a wider audience, but its real value lies in the quality of the performances and the recording. Lindberg's passagework and articulation are controlled exquisitely, and he brings out the nuances of each suite, treating each movement as if it were the most important item on the album. The recorded sound is warm and natural, just right for the intimate nature of the lute.

It is also unsurprising that the Boston Camerata has produced another gem under the direction of Anne Azéma. *Free America! Early Songs of Resistance and Rebellion* is a timely masterpiece that delivers consistently fine performances. Azéma leads by example. For example, her voice is in fine form and the diction is exceptionally clear. This isn't just about vowels and consonants, it's about being prepared so thoroughly that she can really communicate with listeners rather than simply singing words. In a program marked by straightforward, somewhat austere music, this is incredibly important, and such an ethos pervades the album. The program hangs loosely around several thematic sections, and the title is certainly meant to be provocative. And why shouldn't it be? If music were simply for light entertainment, then Plato and Aristotle wouldn't have given it so much attention.

Finally, Christoph Wolff's latest study of Bach's music should not be missed. There are few, if any, scholars more authoritative on J. S. Bach and his music than he, and the book provides a perceptive look at Bach's music and offering readers a deep understanding of both the music and its various contexts. It is much more than just another study of Bach's music. Wolff is brilliantly insightful, and his research is among the most intellectually rigorous in the field. Although the book stands solidly on its own, I recommend treating it as a companion to Wolff's 2000 monograph *J.S. Bach: The Learned Musician*, also published by Norton.

BEETHOVEN Symphony No. 9 • Suzuki/Moen,Kielland,Clayton,Davies/Bach Collegium Japan • BIS (SACD)

JAN ANTONÍN LOSY: note d'oro • Lindberg • BIS (SACD)

FREE AMERICA! Early Songs of Resistance and Rebellion • Azéma/Boston Camerata • HARMONIA MUNDI

BACH'S MUSICAL UNIVERSE: The Composer and His Work • Wolff • W.W. Norton & Co 2020, New York

Robert Markow

It is hardly accidental that two of my three choices this year are of music by Richard Danielpour, as he is to my mind one of the finest composers alive today. Not only does he have a voice all his own (you can invariably tell a Danielpour composition without knowing the identity of the composer beforehand), but his music speaks immediately and directly to the listener without the aid of program notes or philosophical explanations. To a large extent, he is a throwback to an earlier age when composers were not averse to infusing their scores with sensuous orchestration, rhythmic vitality, and passionate lyricism. Virtually everything I have heard by Danielpour is at least good, and most of it is excellent. Naxos, which has issued nine releases of his music over the years, always puts forth its best effort for a Danielpour release with good notes, outstanding sound, and texts with translations where relevant.

The Passion of Yeshua is almost certain to go down in history as Danielpour's magnum opus, not only in length (at 100 minutes his longest score) but in scope, breadth, and quality. As the title implies, *The Passion of Yeshua* depicts Christ's last days on earth, told in terms that clearly point to Bach's Passions as its model, and to the *St. Matthew* in particular. Like Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Danielpour's work opens with a monumental chorus and closes with words of peace and acceptance. Between these pillars, passages of haunting lyricism and contemplative beauty alternate with those of dramatic narrative and powerful thrust. JoAnn Falletta, who led the world premiere in 2018 at the Oregon Bach Festival, leads a first-rate cast, chorus, and orchestra.

Also on the subject of death we have three more Danielpour works on another disc, led by *Talking to Aphrodite*, a song cycle for soprano, horn, and strings. As such, it inevitably brings to mind Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings*, an analogy that goes further than mere cursory comparison. It is every bit the equal of Britten's work, perhaps even finer. In six contrasting songs lasting nearly half an hour, Danielpour translates the anxieties, concerns, fears, and heartache of an unnamed woman into music of burnished beauty and radiant hues. Then there is Danielpour's 2014 transcription of his Sixth String Quartet ("Addio") from 2009. The subtitle of the resulting