

More concert music by a composer rather better known for his film scores



Miklós Rózsa, born in Budapest, was one of the most gifted of all the composers who moved from his homeland to Hollywood to write music for films (95 of them!). He was a natural melodist and scored for orchestra with great flair, and the Hungarian flavour of his music gave it a special edge and character.

Rózsa was especially impressive in variations, as the diverse and colourful *Variations on a Hungarian Peasant Song* demonstrates. It features a *concertante* solo violin – the seductive Jennifer Pike, who is equally impressive in both the virtuosity and sweet lyricism of her solo role. *The Vintner's Daughter* (12 variations on a French folksong) was originally written for solo piano and it was Eugene Ormandy who commissioned the orchestral version, with its imaginative and highly contrasted instrumental colouring and tempi. The *Notturmo ungherese* again features a gentle solo clarinet at its opening but, spiced with a pair of passionate climaxes, it is a truly volatile Hungarian rhapsody.

The disquieting Cello Concerto was inspired by the composer's meeting with his compatriot, János Starker, who aided its composition. The work is comparatively austere but emotionally gripping. The first movement demands (and receives) passionate virtuosity; the darkly coloured central *Lento* broods intensely and hauntingly; the dancing, *moto perpetuo* finale is dissonantly aggressive, with frenzied writing for soloist and orchestra alike, framing a hauntingly mysterious yet tranquil centrepiece. These are four first-rate works by a still neglected composer, marvellously played and recorded.

Ivan March

Saint-Saëns

Symphony No 3, 'Organ', Op 78^a.

Piano Concerto No 4, Op 44^b

^bJean-François Heisser pf ^aDaniel Roth org

Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Les Siècles Live © ASMO4 (61' • DDD)

Recorded live at ^bOpéra-Comique, Paris, June 16,

2009; ^aSaint-Sulpice, Paris, May 16, 2010

Org Sym – selected comparisons:

Litaize, Chicago SO, Barenboim (4/87^b) (DG) 474 612-2GOR

Marshall, Oslo PO, Jansons (4/95) (EMI) 555184-2

A rare in-situ recording of the Organ Symphony on period instruments



Saint-Saëns's *Organ Symphony* would be one of my desert island discs, and even here on the mainland it is a more or less permanent fixture on the car's CD system.

But it has to be either Mariss Jansons and the Oslo Philharmonic with Wayne Marshall on the organ of Rouen's Eglise de Saint-Ouen or Daniel Barenboim with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, teamed up with Gaston Litaize in Chartres Cathedral. These are my benchmarks in terms of interpretation, finesse and sheer excitement, against which this new one from the "period" orchestra Les Siècles, recorded with organist Daniel Roth in Paris's Saint-Sulpice, stands up pretty well.

The period instruments and sparse use of string vibrato do not diminish the ampleness of sonority, and in the slow movement there is beguiling warmth. The whopping growl of the organ on its C major chord at the start of the *maestoso* section certainly makes its impact but some instrumental detail gets lost in Saint-Sulpice's acoustic and the bass drum's *fortissimo* thwacks sound like a 20-ton cannon. But there is visceral pleasure to be had from the performance's rhythmic drive, counterbalanced by polished phrasing and an appealing glow to the orchestral colour.

The Fourth Piano Concerto, recorded in Paris's Opéra-Comique, features Jean-François Heisser on an 1874 Erard in an affectionate, spry performance, the piano placed slightly too close, perhaps, but still allowing the strands of orchestral texture to shine through. **Geoffrey Norris**

Schmitt

La tragédie de Salomé, Op 50.

Le palais hanté, Op 49. Psaume XLVII, Op 38^a

^aSusan Bullock sop São Paulo Symphony ^cChoir and Orchestra / Yan Pascal Tortelier

Chandos © CHSA5090 (68' • DDD/DSD • T/D)

La tragédie de Salomé – selected comparison:

Montreal Metropolitan Orch, Nézet-Séguin

(6/10) (ATMA) ACD2 2647

Nézet-Séguin has the edge in Salomé but this disc offers more music by Schmitt



Another month, another recording of Florent Schmitt's *La tragédie de Salomé*. Anybody who already has the recent ATMA release by Yannick Nézet-Séguin

and his Montreal-based Orchestre Métropolitain will have good reason to be satisfied with that and will probably not need to investigate further – unless the appetite for Schmitt is insatiable. Nézet-Séguin coupled *Salomé* with César Franck's D minor Symphony. Yan Pascal Tortelier and his Brazilian orchestra go all out for Schmitt, with the interesting inclusion in their programme of *Le palais hanté* and his setting of Psalm 47, giving the whole choir something to sing other than the female voices' wordless lines in *Salomé*.

The haunted castle that Schmitt had in mind was the one of Edgar Allan Poe's poem,