

Orchestral

deftness to these final pages, yet there is no doubting the agility with which he handles the closing bars – the composer's vision of Arcady vanishing in a trice.

Preceding the *Serenade* are pieces from either side of Stenhammar's output. The 'symphonic' overture *Excelsior!* (1896) endured a rough ride at its earliest performances on account of its overtly Teutonic demeanour, though its potent fusion of Wagnerian rhetoric with Brahmsian rigour should rightly have been commended, and the present account goes much of the way to ensuring that the formal and expressive inertness of its central development does not offset the coursing impetus with which it begins and ends. The 'Interlude' from *Sången* (1921) is a raptly expressive link between two halves of the cantata that was its composer's last major work (and, as Tomas Block points out in his perceptive booklet note, a 'Third Symphony' had Stenhammar the confidence to designate it thus), and which is rendered here with the requisite eloquence.

A pity, perhaps, that the complete cantata could not have been paired with the *Serenade*, but this disc remains an ideal entry point into Stenhammar – not least when the Royal Flemish Philharmonic seems so attuned to this music's taciturn yet tangible idiom. In the absence of Neeme Järvi's incisive remakes of the main pieces (DG – coupled with the two symphonies), the performances as variously coupled on Naxos are much more than adequate, though the excellence of the playing and recording on this new release ultimately weighs in its favour.

Richard Whitehouse

Stravinsky

Petrushka (1911 version)^a. *The Rite of Spring*^b.

Les Siècles/François-Xavier Roth.

Musicales Actes Sud ASM15 (full price, 1 hour 7 minutes). Website www.actes-sud.fr. Producer Jiří Heger. Engineers Bergame Periaux, Jean-Christophe Laurier. Dates Live performances in Frankfurt, Grenoble and Metz on ^aMay 14th-16th and ^bSeptember 28th, 2013.

Comparisons:

The Rite of Spring:

Bergen PO/Litton (BIS) BIS1474SACD (2008-09, rev. May 2011)

Paris Conservatoire Orch/Monteux (Decca) 475 7798 (1956, seven discs)

Columbia SO/Stravinsky (Sony Classical) SM3K46291 (1960, three discs)

The premiere of *Le Sacre du printemps* at the newly opened Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in 1913 is the stuff of legend, nearly igniting a riot. So much has been written about it, yet so little appears to be known as fact: was it the music or the choreography that the crowds objected to? Had Diaghilev actively sought a scandal? Were the demonstrations predetermined?

Lydia Sokolova, one of the dancers in that performance, recalled in a 1965 interview that 'they didn't even let the music be played for the overture. As soon as it was known that the conductor was there, the uproar began.' An eyewitness in the auditorium Carl van Vechten related 'a certain part of the audience was thrilled by what it considered to be a blasphemous attempt to destroy music as an art ... the orchestra played unheard, except occasionally when a slight lull occurred'. Stravinsky himself felt the objections were directed more towards Nijinsky's choreography, saying that the storm of protests only gathered 'when the curtain opened on the group of knock-kneed and long-braided Lolitas jumping up and down'.

If we're aiming for historical accuracy, a live recording on period instruments promising the score 'as heard at its 1913 première' might involve any amount of rowdy audience participation, but happily Les Siècles and François-Xavier Roth perform to little more audible than a muffled cough or two. Touring *Le Sacre* as part of the work's centenary celebrations (it played a great performance at the BBC Proms), the orchestra was recorded in Metz, Grenoble and Frankfurt to produce this disc.

In a booklet interview, the admirable Roth charts some of the changes Stravinsky made to the score leading to the 1967 Boosey & Hawkes edition (still the authorized edition – special dispensation was granted for the changes on this recording). In the 'Danse sacrée', at figure 186 in the score (3'26" in this recording) the orchestra suddenly plays piano with pizzicato strings. This is what Pierre Monteux (conductor at the premiere) plays in his 1956 recording with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra, but by the time Stravinsky made his Columbia Symphony Orchestra recording in 1960, the orchestra was louder, with strings played *marcato*. The change was then made in the 1967 edition of the score, which is what is heard on the Bergen Philharmonic's outstanding BIS recording under Andrew Litton.

Roth also describes many of the differences in the instruments when their 'Ballets Russes' orchestra was reconstructed: smaller tubas and trombones; French horns with piston valves rather than horns with German rotary valves; an Erard piano (for *Petrushka*) and gut strings. Michael Rolland plays a French bassoon (a 1900 Buffet Crampon) not equipped with an octave key, making that opening solo even more perilous. Despite these difficulties, the playing of *Les Siècles* emerges as splendidly confident on this disc. In Monteux's recording especially, you can still sense an orchestra grappling with a monster and not always coming out on top. With brass less strident than in a modern orchestra, woodwind detail emerges delightfully.

'The Augurs of Spring' is tauter under Roth than Monteux, while the 'Dance of the Earth' is less tentative than Stravinsky's

Columbia orchestra and more united in the 'Glorification of the Chosen' (not all about speed – Roth is more relaxed in the introduction to *Pa* the playing generates tremendous probably aided by the live recording; the acoustic is a little on the reverberant which means that – sonically – the Philharmonic BIS disc still reigns supreme on the foundation-shaking stakes in the recording under Litton. But once the tempo adjusts, there is plenty to admire in the playing from *Les Siècles*.

Like Litton's disc – indeed as in the three comparative versions listed – this is here paired with the 1911 version of *Petrushka* in an ear-tickling performance which delights. Percussion is well in the 'Shrovetide Fair' and Roth shines the score light on its toes. The trumpet representing the puppet's fist-wag are incisive but never at the expense of other orchestral textures; the solo is well blended with flute and bass and the waltz as the Ballerina dances in the Moor. The spatial width of Monteux's Decca recording means that even detail can be discerned there, but the conductor conducts with just as much charm.

For anyone who enjoyed Music & Arts' earlier release of *Les Siècles: The Firebird* (reviewed by Peter Raeburn in May 2011) or listeners curious to explore period-instrument explorations in the groundbreaking early twentieth-century repertoire, this disc is mandatory!

Weinberg

Symphony No. 21, Op. 152, 'Kiev'; Polish Tunes, Op. 47 No. 2.

^aVeronika Bartenyeva (soprano); ^bSymphony Orchestra/Dmitry Vassiliev. **Toccata Classics TOCC0193** (full price, 7 minutes). Website www.toccataclassics.com. Producer/Engineer Sergei Zhigunov. Dates 2nd and 3rd, 2013.

Having initiated a series devoted to chamber works for violin and piano, Toccata Classics ventures into Weinberg's output with this first recording of his First Symphony. Previously the symphony was shared between Chandos and Decca, but there was no reason why Toccata should get in on the act and its choice is one – filling out the picture of Weinberg's final creative period, in which symphony alternated with chamber symphony. The ailing composer withdrew into ever inward realms.

First, though, something rather different: *Polish Tunes* (1950) belongs to the assortment published as Op. 47, in which the relatively well-known *Moldavia* (in versions with and without solo voice) joined by a *Serenade* and the pre-