

Jóhannsson is very much Hollywood's go-to composer at the moment. His score for the sci-fi drama *Arrival* will already have hit the cinema screens by the time you read this, and will be followed later in 2017 by music for the long-awaited sequel to the 1982 sci-fi classic *Blade Runner: Blade Runner 2049*.

All of which makes one wonder where Jóhannsson found time to compose music for 'Orphée', his first disc with Deutsche Grammophon since signing an exclusive contract in 2016. In fact, 'Orphée' is based on a series of musical ideas dating back to 2009 – 'simple contrapuntal themes with an ascending harmonic thrust', as the composer describes them. The Orpheus myth became a catalyst for further elaboration and development of these ideas, with Orpheus's gaze upon Eurydice functioning as a 'metaphor for artistic imagination'.

Other than *Orphic Hymn* (Jóhannsson's evocative setting of a short text from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, sung with sublime power and restraint by Paul Hillier's Theatre of Voices), the Orpheus story is only applied in a loose sense. It enables the composer to present the main theme – a rising stepwise melody that resolves upwards over a series of suspended chords – in a number of different guises, however, from a version for string orchestra in 'A Song for Europa', above which are laid shortwave broadcasts of coded messages from so-called Numbers Stations, to more straightforward presentations on pipe organ and string quartet, and the aforementioned *a cappella* setting. Jóhannsson's imaginative synthesis of spiritual minimalism and electronica will satisfy fans familiar with his soundtracks, but the overall impression one gets here is of a series of short cues for a film that has yet to be written. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

## Ligeti

Six Bagatelles. Chamber Concerto.

Ten Pieces for Wind Quintet

Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Les Siècles Live/Musicales Actes Sud © ASM26 (44 • DDD)

Recorded live at the Chapelle du Méjan, Arles, and the Cité de la Musique, Soissons, France, April 12-14, 2016



At first glance, this 44-minute disc bookending György Ligeti's 1970 Chamber

Concerto – a major work – with two occasional wind quintet pieces might feel a rather paltry offering compared with

Ligeti's Chamber Concerto paired with the Piano Concerto and *Melodien* as part of Teldec's complete Ligeti Project, or DG's classic Boulez recording placed alongside *Ramifications* and the Second String Quartet. But, word to the wise, if you consider yourself a Ligeti aficionado, you need to hear these tour de force, cream-of-the-crop performances by François-Xavier Roth and Les Siècles.

The booklet-notes don't specify how the ensemble's usual *modus operandi* of matching repertoire with historically appropriate instruments worked out here, but the group's keenly sensitive ears for timbre – honed in recent recordings of Stravinsky, Chabrier and Debussy – create performances of rare textural pliancy. Ligeti's 1953 student *Six Bagatelles* connects back to that early-20th-century French neoclassicism with which, as it leans towards Dadaism, the ensemble are so familiar. The opening *Allegro con spirito* might be the best Milhaud piece Milhaud never wrote, and Marion Ralincourt's laser-cutter flute and Hélène Mourot's guttural oboe push for a more unruly spectrum of sounds than is customary in wind quintet playing.

The *Ten Pieces*, from 1968, is a fully mature score that trailed many of the textures and techniques Ligeti would apply to the larger Chamber Concerto. But these 10 brief movements are, for now, suggestive vignettes, and *Les Siècles* dispatch them with deadpan throwaway curtness. The opening piece is classic micropolyphony – a polyphony of polyphonies, one of Ligeti's trademark techniques – and the thick carpet of lines weaved by a mere five musicians is a thing to behold.

Arguably, Reinbert de Leeuw and the Schönberg Ensemble treat you to a more explicitly dramatic Chamber Concerto, but the mood music of *Les Siècles* – an often serene surface with the vaguest hint of furious pedalling underneath – is very attractive and, again, their opulently buttery woodwind tone impresses (especially compared to Boulez's synthetic margarine). The penultimate movement of the *Ten Pieces* has the instruments trigger interference tones by bending the temperament; comparable moments in the Chamber Concerto are again exquisitely heard. And the manic slapstick deconstructing mechanisms of the third movement are all the more manic and slapstick for not being overdone.

**Phillip Clark**

*Chamber Concerto – selected comparisons:*

*Ens Intercontemporain, Boulez (1/84<sup>®</sup>) (DG) 423 244-2GC*  
*Schönberg Ens, de Leeuw (5/01<sup>®</sup>) (WARN) 2564 60285-8*

## Rachmaninov · Tchaikovsky · Goldenweiser

'A la mémoire d'un grand artiste'

Goldenweiser Piano Trio, Op 31

Rachmaninov Trio élégiaque, Op 9<sup>a</sup>

Tchaikovsky Piano Trio, Op 50

Piano Trio Schäfer Then-Bergh Yang with

°Kang-Un Kim *harmonium*

Genuin © 2 GENI6437 (133' • DDD)



Tchaikovsky started things off by writing his A minor Piano Trio as a musical

memorial to Nikolay Rubinstein. Rachmaninov then wrote his second *Trio élégiaque* in memory of Tchaikovsky, and Alexander Goldenweiser wrote his E minor Trio in memory of Rachmaninov. Alongside this sequence there can be added Arensky's D minor Trio, composed as a tribute to the departed cellist Karl Davydov, and Shostakovich's Second Trio, prompted by the death of his friend Ivan Sollertinsky. But it is particularly enterprising of the Piano Trio Schäfer Then-Bergh Yang to link together the Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Goldenweiser: even though the first two are already healthily represented in the catalogue, the Goldenweiser, composed in 1950, seems otherwise to be available only on an old recording (from Revelation) featuring Goldenweiser himself on the piano with Leonid Kogan and Mstislav Rostropovich.

In terms of structure, Goldenweiser follows Tchaikovsky's pattern of an elegiac first movement followed by a theme and variations. The music lacks anything like the strength of profile that Tchaikovsky or Rachmaninov proffer in their own trios, though the performance itself is thoroughly sympathetic and well balanced instrumentally. The players are on much stronger ground with the Tchaikovsky and the Rachmaninov, in the latter deploying the optional harmonium to announce the theme of the central movement's variations. The playing blends poignancy with passion and some impressive projection and sensitive turns of phrase. The Tchaikovsky/Rachmaninov coupling alone would make the recording recommendable, and it is at least useful to have the Goldenweiser to complete the chain. **Geoffrey Norris**

## Reinecke

'Chamber Music for Clarinet, Horn and Piano'

Fantasy Pieces, Op 22. Introduction and

*Allegro appassionato*, Op 256. Nocturne,

Op 112. Trio, Op 274