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CLASSICAL

Classical Hugh Canning, David Cairns, Paul Driver and Stephen Pettitt

John Blow An Ode on the Death of Mr Henry Purcell et al Samuel Boden, Thomas Walker (tenors), Arcangelo, cond Jonathan Cohen Hyperion CDA68149 The baroque composer (1649-1708) is remembered mainly for his opera, Venus and Adonis, a clear forerunner of Purcell's Dido and Aeneas. The younger man was Blow's pupil, and Purcell's premature death in 1695 inspired this masterpiece, sung exquisitely by Boden and Walker. Hardly less poignant is the birthday song for the eight-year-old William, son of Princess (later Queen) Anne, who died three years later. HC Mahler Symphony No 5 Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne, cond François-Xavier Roth Harmonia Mundi HMM905285 This same Cologne orchestra, in 1904, gave the premiere of Mahler No 5. Whether or not it was that fact

that inspired these fine players and their brilliant conductor to surpass themselves, their account of the symphony is exceptional: intensely vivid, abrasive, violent in its contrasting dynamics, sounding at times like a modern work. Only the adagietto, at nearly 11 minutes (Bruno Walter took seven), seems to me misjudged. The rest is breathtaking. DC Brice Pauset Canons Nicolas Hodges (piano) Wergo WER7365-2 These two discs represent the cycles of canons for piano - and, on disc two, piano and electronics - produced by the Frenchman (b1965) between 1989 and 2010. Trois Canons, Cinq Canons, Sept Canons and, particularly striking, the Neuf Canons of 2010, along with the electroacoustic Perspectivæ Sintagma I, make an ambitious cycle of cycles. Hodges brings to it a brilliant expertise. The canonic effect

is more abstract than in, say, Nancarrow's player-piano studies, but is captivating nonetheless. PD Fayrfax, Lambe, Browne et al The Gate of Glory: Music from the Eton Choirbook, Vol 5 Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, dir Stephen Darlington Avie AV2376 Five more masterpieces from this rich source of pre-Reformation sacred music, beautifully sung. There's Robert Hacomplaynt's rhythmically complex Salve Regina, a fascinating Gaude flore virginali by Hugo Kellyk and a Robert Fayrfax Magnificat. But it's the rich male-voice compositions - Walter Lambe's Gaude flore virginali and John Browne's O regina mundi clara - that hit the sweetest spots. SP

Wörter: 359