

Berlioz

Harold in Italy; Les Nuits d'été

Tabea Zimmermann (viola),
Stéphane Degout (baritone);
Les Siècles/François-Xavier Roth
Harmonia Mundi HMM 902634
68:35 mins



Berlioz was the archetypal Romantic creating effusive semi-autobiographical outpourings, so it is odd that *Les Nuits d'été* is rarely sung by a man. The poems are evidently from a man to his beloved, and the original cycle was for mezzo-soprano or tenor; but with its tangled history of orchestrations for different voice-types, *Les Nuits d'été* rapidly came to be seen as a vehicle for female voice. Stéphane Degout's superb account makes clear this need not be so. His fresh baritone effortlessly conveys the *joie de vivre* of the opening 'Villanelle', yet his stillness in 'Le Spectre de la Rose' and outstanding control at the end of 'Sur les lagunes' are heartachingly beautiful. François-Xavier Roth's period-instrument ensemble Les Siècles provides superb support for Degout, lifting rather than overpowering the voice, with grainy wind textures providing plenty of character in 'L'Île inconnue'.

The orchestra is even more vivid when let loose on the adventures of *Harold en Italie*, bringing incisive rhythms, translucent textures and a fizzing energy, while Tabea Zimmermann holds nothing back as viola soloist. The sunny lines of Harold's opening stroll in the mountains sing gloriously, the undulations accompanying the pilgrims' song are distinctly ethereal, and there's no lack of grit when the brigands arrive.

Christopher Dingle

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Henderickx

Nostalgia; Four Pieces; Makyo; 2 Nocturnes; In Deep Silence III

Boho Strings/David Ramael
Antarctica AR 011 56:07 mins



Nothing here is quite as it seems. An album putatively of music for string orchestra by

Belgian composer Wim Henderickx, the works here are not as originally

conceived, while the Boho Strings are joined by soloists in all but one piece. This is quintessential Henderickx heard through a different prism, with his usual enticing melange of ingredients and simplicity of gesture, but emphasising delicacy in itself rather than as a contrast. Even that is misleading, though, as the disc opens with the Stravinskian hammering strings that start the *Four Pieces*, the clarinet of Roeland Hendrixx teasingly dancing around them.

The ensuing *Misterioso* has greater kinship with what follows, notably *In Deep Silence III* where the strings hover on the edge of audibility, and *2 Nocturnes* in which Valerie Debaele entices with the elegiac flute writing. Lin Chin Cheng is the persuasive marimba soloist in the more episodic dreamscape of *Makyo*. The highlight, though, is the superb *Nostalgia*, in which the strings are joined by all three soloists in a re-imagining of a striking work originally written for Middle-Eastern instruments. The Boho Strings, directed by David Ramael, relish the unusual tunings here to cap an excellent debut recording.

Christopher Dingle

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Mahler

Symphony No. 2 'Resurrection'

Ruby Hughes (soprano), Sasha Cooke (mezzo-soprano); Minnesota Chorale & Orchestra/Osmo Vänskä
BIS BIS-2296 (hybrid CD/SACD)
84:38 mins



Osmo Vänskä has very clear ideas of his own about Mahler, as his account of the Fifth Symphony

which launched the Minnesota cycle splendidly demonstrated. The disadvantage of that in this *Resurrection* comes, for me, very early on: after a swift, rather lightweight signing-in for fire and fury, the first movement's initial glimpse of heaven almost grinds to a halt. Mahler rather puzzlingly writes 'im Tempo nachgeben' (relaxing into the tempo), but it doesn't seem to be a different one from the opening *Allegro maestoso*. On its return, this climbing theme is as beautifully *pianissimo* as you'll ever hear on a recording; but the slow speed kills it.

After one more extreme, a pressing-forward of the contrasting

Reis



passage in the second before it winds down *Andante moderato*, the more objectionable. clarity give the scher of the song 'St Antho to the fishes' (who al go on doing what the a perfect theatrical c 'cry of disgust' that t engulfs the slithery; hugely impressive a way forward to a fin as any, with BIS's so heightening the aby tumults (a phenome for tam-tam and bas always clear offstage a poised 'Urlicht' sol Sasha Cooke, a rathe soprano contributi Hughes, both placed natural sound pictu huge, as it should be

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

Mendelssohn

Violin Concerto in String Symphonies

Munich Radio Orche
Henry Raudales
BR Klassik 900324 74