

# Orchestral

## ORCHESTRAL CHOICE



### **Sturm und Drang, Vol. 4**

**Works by Kraus, Traetta, Mozart et al**  
Alexandra Lowe (vocalist);  
The Mozartists/Ian Page  
Signum SIGCD1012 73 mins

Signum's *Sturm und Drang* project, curated by Ian Page, gains in stature and substance with every new release. This engrossing offering is again thrillingly realised by The Mozartists, who play with a vitality and precision seldom eclipsed by other periodist ensembles.

Ian Page's scholarly notes remind us that the *Sturm und Drang* movement rapidly outgrew its literary origins, supplanting the Rococo semantics of formal Classicism by the time these two symphonies (which frame a triptych of vocal works featuring the soprano Alexandra Lowe) were written.

The C minor Symphony by Joseph Martin Kraus (1756-92) dates from around 1783, and was dedicated to Haydn, who declared that it would

## A dramatic series hits another high

Michael Jameson hails the latest in Ian Page's *Sturm und Drang* project

'be regarded as a masterpiece for centuries to come; believe me, there are few people who can compose something like that'.

It receives a gritty performance here; every dramatic gesture and unexpected dynamic contrast registers forcefully, with acrid gut strings and the impetuous rasp of natural horns conveying a visceral agitation that's often papered over when modern instruments

are employed.

The apocryphal story of Haydn's 'Farewell' Symphony No. 45, needs

**Every dramatic gesture registers forcefully**

no explanation here, but Ian Page's affectionate and eloquent account merits more comment than space permits. The unbridled vehemence of the opening *Allegro* is vividly captured, yet affectingly counterbalanced by nostalgic playing in the *Adagio*, and as the ensemble shrinks during the *Finale*, eventually to just two violins, it is hard to imagine Prince Esterházy failing to grant his musicians' plaintive yet respectful holiday request. Unmissable! ★★★★★



**Stature and substance:**  
Ian Page conducts the fourth volume of *Sturm und Drang*

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### **Mahler**

**Symphony No. 2 'Resurrection'**  
Hanna-Elisabeth Müller (soprano),  
Karen Cargill (mezzo-soprano);  
Chœur de Radio France,  
Orchestre National de France/  
Cristian Măcelaru  
Naïve V9093 85 mins



Every new recording of a Mahler symphony, especially of the two most famous ones, begs the question, why yet another? The Mahler Academy revelation in the Fifth last month justified itself in every way. This recording of the Second doesn't. It's decent, rarely eccentric and sounds well enough, if on the dry side. The opening flames

from the Orchestre National de France under Cristian Măcelaru are light, crisp, fastish but never feral, the first glimpse of heaven not too mannered, the second in the extensive first phase of the development too drawn out and without the atmosphere it needs. These opening 'funeral rites' need a keen sense of shape and movement if they're to hold focus, which doesn't quite happen.

Interest comes and goes throughout the rest. The *menuetto* is finely observed, the *scherzo* rather faceless, especially in that woozy trio with the two trumpets. Personality enters with Karen Cargill in 'Urlicht' and especially the echoing oboist, while later the Choir of Radio France sounds

excellent both soft and loud, and you can even hear Măcelaru getting excited in the urging to believe ('O glaube' in both its instrumental form as the Judgment Day canvas begins to take shape and when the mezzo finally gives the theme words). The 'Resurrection' payoff works, with the right drive towards the big climax, but is that enough? Probably in the concert hall, but amongst the wealth of great recorded performances, this hardly makes an impression. David Nice ★★★

### **Shostakovich**

**Symphony No. 7**  
San Diego Symphony Orchestra/  
Rafael Payare  
Delos DE3634 75:25 mins



After its first British performance in 1942, the critic Ernest Newman quipped that to find the 'Leningrad' Symphony's place on the musical map, you would have 'to look along the 70th degree of longitude and the last degree of platitude'. Although such a view of the work seems wide of the mark nowadays, there's no escaping the fact that the symphony is extremely long and requires an expert conductor to sustain its tension.

Following his impressive recording of the expansive 11th Symphony with the San Diego Symphony, Rafael Payare delivers an equally perceptive

# Orchestral Reviews



and powerfully controlled performance of the Seventh, supported by committed orchestral playing. One of the most insightful moments comes at the opening where Payare's dogged and deliberately heavy-handed accentuation gives the music a numbness that accords with the composer's description of the work as not depicting Leningrad under siege, but rather representing the city that Stalin had already destroyed and that Hitler merely finished off.

Payare's tempi are well-judged throughout and work effectively in the 'invasion' middle section of the first movement, where the conductor resists the temptation to increase the speed ever so slightly as more instruments join the fray. In this respect, the entry of the extra brass at the movement's climax is thrilling.

At the opposite end of the dynamic spectrum, there are some beautiful lyrical moments, and the spooky articulation of flutes, bass clarinet and harp at the end of the second movement is especially vivid. My only slight disappointment comes at the opening of the third movement where the Stravinsky-inspired wind writing sounds too urbane for my taste. **Erik Levi ★★★★★**

## Woyrsch

### Symphonies 1 & 6

Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen/Howard Griffiths  
CPO 555628-2 55:52 mins



Consonants might pile up in a heap at the end of Felix Woyrsch's surname, but the music of this

North German composer (1860-1944) remains easy enough to digest. It's comfortably tonal, ringing with 19th century echoes as well as German music's polyphonic past, and with only small glimpses of its future. The present album completes CPO's survey of his six symphonies, spiritedly performed in this case by the Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen conducted by Howard Griffiths.

The First was completed in 1907, the Sixth in the late 1930s. Stylistically, little changed in-between. Both display Woyrsch's fondness for assertive staccato utterances, sometimes suggesting a Bruckner symphony in a hurry. Wrapped around are gentler folk-like melodies, or in the Sixth's finale, a calming theme redolent of a Protestant chorale. But differences exist in the symphonies' perspective. The First is a grander construct, weighted towards its lengthy finale, announced with glorious trumpets. The 'sacred sinfonia' of the Sixth features movements labelled 'Sanctus', 'Via crucis' and 'Gloria', but keeps things brief, almost apologetic, as though Woyrsch realised that music in praise of God might not be what his Nazi overlords wanted when the symphony premiered in 1940.

The Sixth's finale could certainly benefit from being longer, if only to better balance the slightly disconcerting 'Via crucis': 14 variations marking the Stations of the Cross, chromatic in harmony, often subterranean in texture and tone. Whatever Woyrsch writes, however, you still keep listening. **Geoff Brown ★★**

## Tableaux

### Works by Ravel, Schumann & Mussorgsky

Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine/Joseph Swensen  
Alpha ALPHA1261 70:17 mins



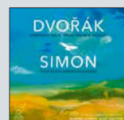
Joseph Swensen's programme showcases Ravel's consummate skill as an orchestrator, both of his own music and that of other composers. His orchestral version of *Pictures at an Exhibition* is such an imaginative and convincing feat of instrumentation that for many years it all but eclipsed Mussorgsky's piano original. Swensen and his Bordeaux players make the most of it, offering a performance that vividly captures the atmosphere of each piece. Less successful, and a comparative rarity, is Ravel's orchestration of a few numbers from Schumann's *Carnaval*. Ravel took on the commission for the dancer

Nijinsky, but the First World War intervened and the ballet was abandoned when Ravel had scored no more than four out of Schumann's 20 pieces. Perhaps he found the project uncongenial: at any rate, with the exception of the 'Paganini' portrait it sounds rather stiff, and lacks the brilliance of the keyboard original, with the 'Préambule' sounding very staid.

Like Mussorgsky's *Pictures*, Ravel's own *Mother Goose* is better known in orchestral garb than in its original form. Swensen opts not for the familiar suite, but for the expanded ballet Ravel subsequently made out of it. For this, he provided an exquisitely scored *Prélude* replete with fanfares and exotic bird-calls, a new spinning-wheel dance, and interludes linking the suite's reordered numbers. This new performance is warm and affectionate, though some may feel Swensen lingers too much in the 'Sleeping Beauty' pavane and the concluding 'Apothéose'. **Misha Donat ★★★★★**

## BRIEF NOTES

**Dvořák • Carlos Simon** Dvořák: Symphony No. 9; Carlos Simon: Four Black American Dances Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra/Manfred Honeck Reference Recordings FR-769SACD 58 mins



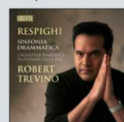
Recorded live in February 2025, this is a luxurious account of Dvořák's 'New World' Symphony, featuring beautiful solos and a sense of propulsion that never threatens to break away from Manfred Honeck's control. Most impressive is the ability of these large forces to move easily from bombast to tenderness to elegant sprightliness. Carlos Simon's *American Dances* make a compelling pairing, teeming with rhythmic attitude. **Charlotte Smith ★★★★★**

**Holst • Raitio** Works by Holst & Raitio Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra/Nicholas Collon Ondine ODE14912 62 mins



Nicholas Collon cleverly pairs Holst's *The Planets* with Väinö Raitio's lesser known *Moonlight on Jupiter* (1922-23) in this captivating record. Holst is full of contrasts – the shimmering serenity of 'Venus' particularly palpable. But it's Raitio's tone poem that transfixes – eerie, impressionistic and delivered with unwavering intensity. **Miranda Bardsley ★★★★★**

**Respighi** *Sinfonia drammatica* Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI/Robert Trevino Ondine ODE14772 63 mins



Large-scale and flamboyant, Respighi's *Sinfonia drammatica* has never grabbed much attention since its premiere in 1915. There's plenty to enjoy, however, with sumptuous orchestration and a rousing march towards the end of the *Allegro energico* first movement that pre-empt its equivalent in the *Pines of Rome*. Among the few recordings available, this sparkling rendition from the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI can hold its head high. **Jeremy Pound ★★★★★**