

Concerto Reviews

deal of panache. But the overall orchestral sound is thin and wiry, and the poor tuning of the piccolo in the finale to the Second Concerto are likely to become annoying with repeated listening. Erik Levi ★★

Mischa Zupko

Harpischord Concerto

Jory Vinikour (harpischord), Desirée Ruhstrat & Charlene Kluegel (violins), Margaret O'Malley (viola), David Cunliffe (cello)
Cedille CDR 3030 15:02 mins



Composer and pianist Mischa Zupko (b1971) hails from Chicago where, amongst other things, he teaches at DuPaul University – and is championed by Cedille Records, formed in 1989 as a non-profit to showcase performers and composers in and from the area. This short release offers a glimpse of why Zupko, the label and each of the five performers are multi award-winning in their own right.

Performed by Jory Vinikour and a string quartet comprising equally brilliant soloists, Zupko's Harpischord Concerto was written in 2003 and gets a belated but beautifully balanced premiere recording. Each of the three movements is attacked with freshness and vigour, the whole seeming to flash past in an instant, yet suggestively so and befitting its material.

Both compact and impactful, the concerto seeks 'to take the height of idiomatic writing for harpischord into a modern-day expression through the transformation of antiquated stylistic mannerisms.' This translates to much polyphonic fun and no small musing on the interwoven nature of old and new in contemporary culture, inspired by JS Bach, Couperin, D Scarlatti and more, seen through a distinctly postmodern, post-Stravinskian lens.

I 'Preamble' is a motoric experiment in phasing based on Bach's Prelude BWV 847, while II 'Whispers' expands into more lyrical terrain, making Couperin-inspired ornamentation the structural centre rather than decorative adornment. Finally III 'The Dance' is a playful take on ritornello forms and spiky, Scarlatti-esque harmonic and rhythmic swerves, steering

just the right side of parody. Steph Power ★★★★★

Portrait

Works by Le Chevalier de Saint-George

Lauranne Oliva, Victor Sicard, Bastien Rimondi, Théotime Langlois de Swarte (violin) et al;
Orchestre de l'Opéra Royal
Château de Versailles CVS130 97 mins



This is overdue. Of all those featured on the Château de Versailles Spectacles label, none is more apposite than Joseph Bologne, the Chevalier de Saint-George (1745–99), the quintessential Style Galant composer who also happened to be black. Aside from writing wonderful music, being a dashing virtuoso violinist and peerless conductor, his musical activities included acting as tutor to Marie-Antoinette. Unlike his fellow musicians, though, Saint-George (as he preferred to be known) was also a member of the King's guard and renowned as the best fencer in Europe, as well as an exceptional marksman, hunter, dancer and swimmer.

Much of this *Portrait*, which spills onto two discs, is devoted to extracts from *L'Amant anonyme*, his only surviving opera, but there is also a violin concerto, the G minor Sonata for keyboard and violin, a string quartet and assorted individual movements. Théotime Langlois de Swarte appropriately combines duties as spritely violin soloist with conducting the Orchestre de l'Opéra Royal. He brings plenty of vim and vigour to the concertos, playful invention in the sonata and ensures a delightful lightness of touch in the opera's ballet music. Soprano Lauranne Oliva is a sweet-voiced Leontine, yet is suitably imperious in the swirling opening to the remarkable *Scena* from *Ernestine*. She is joined by baritone Victor Sicard and tenor Bastien Rimondi, the latter utterly charming in *Rose d'Amour*. Sadly this is one of a handful of pieces on the set that, though attractive, are of uncertain provenance, while there is a lack of transparency about the arrangements and the booklet contains some biographical howlers. Such faux pas are frustrating as the performances

are thoroughly engaging. Christopher Dingle ★★★★★

Reality Eaters

Works by Robert Laidlow

Joseph Havlat (piano), Piatti Quartet; BBC Philharmonic/Vimbayi Kaziboni
NMC NMC D292 76:34 mins



There is a marvellous sense of mind-expanding wonderment that characterises the experience of listening to Robert Laidlow's music. Yet while his compositions are often sparked by such knottily complex source material as, for instance, the science of gravitational waves, this is music that agitates the heart just as much as the intellect.

This debut portrait album from NMC is a tour de force. It opens with the monumental *Warp* for piano and orchestra. Performed with total assurance by the BBC Philharmonic and pianist Joseph Havlat, this single-movement work moves between thrilling tumult and luminous clarity. The string quartet *Gravity* follows, which explores not so much the force itself but 'humanity's evolving understanding' of it. Across its five movements (performed with great verve by the Piatti Quartet), we travel through time from the primeval grit and vigour of 'Earth & Sky' to a musical expression of 'Graviton': a tiny particle 'theorised but not yet found' and characterised here by glistening harmonies, from which emerges a melody of daring sweetness.

The disc closes with *Silicon* for large symphony orchestra and electronics, which explores the technical processes and philosophical challenges of AI with rare originality (thank goodness). All three movements are compelling, but the final movement 'Soul' is perhaps the most arresting of all; here the orchestra plays live alongside its own warped (sonic) mirror image: an algorithm trained exclusively on the ensemble's own broadcasts (including snippets of spoken radio introductions and audience applause). The result is uncanny, provocative and beautiful – and makes for a fitting close to this outstanding album.

Kate Waking ★★★★★

Vivaldi in Prague

Works by Vivaldi, Reichenauer, Míča & Jiránek

Hana Blažiková; The Harmonious Society of Tickle-Fiddle Gentlemen/Robert Rawson
Accent ACC24420 75 mins



Vivaldi in Prague, a most welcome release from Accent, features The Harmonious Society of Tickle-

Fiddle Gentlemen (featuring both men and women!) directed by Robert Rawson. The album presents a judicious selection of instrumental and vocal music by Bohemian composers František Jiránek, František Antonín Míča and Antonín Reichenauer alongside their more well known Italian contemporary Vivaldi.

The disc opens with soprano Hana Blažiková in Vivaldi's aria 'La cervetta', one of Rawson's two reconstructions receiving its premiere recording. Both Blažiková's and The TFG's reputation as celebrated exponents of historical performance are in evidence here. In Vivaldi's aria 'Gelido in ogni verna' Blažiková is magisterial, with The TFG enhancing the frosty sound.

Blažiková's third appearance, in Míča's aria 'Jakó plamen vzhůru cíl', is captivating. Rawson's second completion is Vivaldi's 'Jsmě veselí a zpíváme', the first known aria sung in Czech. This is well-characterised by contralto Ciara Hendrick. Violinist Tassilo Erhardt is a compelling advocate in concertos by Reichenauer and Jiránek. With Vivaldi's G minor Bassoon Concerto (RV 496) underrepresented on record, Sally Holman's interpretation is a timely addition to the catalogue. Holman, oboist Mark Baigent and The TFG delight with their premiere recording of Reichenauer's Concerto for Oboe, Bassoon, Strings and Continuo. The album's final track brings instrumental soloists together with bass Tim Dickinson in Reichenauer's cantata for bass, oboe, violin, bassoon and continuo in another commanding offering.

Plaudits to all six soloists, The TFG and Rawson for such stylish interpretations which must surely draw attention to this unjustly neglected repertoire.

Ingrid Pearson ★★★★★