

lyricism and humour, and the performance is extremely compelling.

Levanon's *Land of Four Languages* comprises four brief pieces based on traditional songs in Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish and Ladino. Scored for strings and four players on two pianos, the results are lyrical and elegant but are not especially memorable. More rewarding is the vibrant and poetic performance of Poulenc's Concerto for two pianos also included on the programme. Recorded in the Church of St Jude on the Hill in London by Mike Clements, all four works enjoy sound of commendable clarity and balance.

Christian Hoskins

Palumbo

'Woven Lights'

Violin Concerto^a. Chaconne^b

Francesco D'Orazio^a *vm^aelec vn*

^bFrancesco Abbrescia *live elects*

^aLondon Symphony Orchestra / Lee Reynolds

BIS (BIS2625 • 58')



If Italian new music seems a rather less adventurous place now than in previous

decades, the emergence of composers such as Vito Palumbo (b1972) at the very least suggests a willingness to deploy the advances of earlier generations towards more euphonious if often equivocal ends.

Cast in a single movement of around 30 minutes, the Violin Concerto (2015) starts out with sepulchral stirrings that gradually open out texturally and dynamically on to an evocative backdrop for the soloist to pursue a mainly lyrical and often imaginative discourse. While the violin is very much first among equals across what unfolds, its contribution stands out owing to the fastidiousness of Palumbo's orchestration; notably during those later stages (of a piece in several arc-like sections) when other instruments come briefly if tellingly to the fore to extend the music's expressive remit. A final and evidently defining climax precedes its dying down towards the musing and even mystical serenity with which this work closes.

Francesco D'Orazio is the assured soloist both here and in *Chaconne* (2019-20), its scoring with electronics testament to the scrupulousness by which Palumbo approaches the medium. In the initial 'Woven Lights', a five-string electric violin is heard in the context of sampled sounds whose gestural immediacy decreases as these are drawn into a sonic continuum as unpredictable as it is imaginative. A long

and often plangent cadenza makes way for 'The Glows in the Dark', the violin now surrounded by 30 pre-recorded variants of itself as this music assumes a rarefied while also capricious quality typified by tangible weightlessness.

Francesco Abbrescia has realised the electronics with audible sensitivity, and the London Symphony Orchestra respond with equal finesse to the astute conducting of Lee Reynolds. Warmly recommended, not merely to anyone who feels nostalgia for those distant 'future utopias'.

Richard Whitehouse

Prokofiev

Symphony No 1, 'Classical', Op 25

London Symphony Orchestra /

Gianandrea Noseda

LSO Live (LSO0363D) • 14'

Recorded live at the Barbican, London, January 30 and February 9, 2020



Over a concentrated few days in May 2004, Valery Gergiev conducted the London

Symphony Orchestra in an incendiary Prokofiev symphony cycle, later released on Philips. Since then Gergiev has come and gone as principal conductor and now Gianandrea Noseda, principal guest, is surveying a new cycle. Unlike Gergiev's high-impact hit, it's spread out over a number of seasons. And unlike Gergiev, the symphonies are being released one at a time by LSO Live, initially to stream or download, eventually to appear in a physical box-set once the cycle is complete.

Noseda makes an emphatic, rather heavy start with the Haydnesque *Classical* Symphony, recorded in early 2020 before the world shut down. The sound is bigger and meatier than in 2004, with solo instruments spotlighted; the trumpets, especially, are more present, a hectoring quality that should be great in the other symphonies but is less so here, where a twinkle in the eye is required rather than a sharp poke. Noseda's first movement is sluggish, but the *Larghetto* flows. The Gavotte is nicely clipped, light on its toes. His finale isn't as helter-skelter as Gergiev's but still comes in at a lively canter, cleanly articulated. **Mark Pullinger**

Selected comparison:

LSO, Gergiev

Philips 475 7655PM4 (6/06)

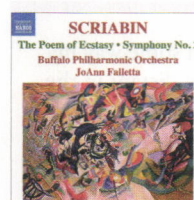
Scriabin

Le poème de l'extase, Op 54.

Symphony No 2, Op 29

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra / JoAnn Falletta

Naxos (8 574139 • 60')



It doesn't at all surprise me that Scriabin once thought of calling his *Poem of*

Ecstasy 'Poème orgiaque' or 'Orgiastic Poem' – either way, there's something of the forbidden fruit about it, something illicit. A thrilling immodesty. And it plays with that immodesty, that innate vulgarity, like no other piece I know, almost inviting disapproval.

Its concision (especially if you think of it as his Fourth Symphony) is a further enticement. There's something wildly decadent about that wilful contradiction between scale and duration. I think of Percy Grainger's *The Warriors* ballet (of comparable duration), whose prowess lies with its insane excess. We rejoice in the extravagance for its own sake.

But, dare I say it, I don't think *Poem of Ecstasy* can ever fully deliver through a recording. It's a live experience first and last with *tuttis* (among the loudest in symphonic music) so overloaded with information that even the best engineering in the world cannot fully convey the sensory overload of the live event. This sounds like a decent enough rendition from JoAnn Falletta and the Buffalo Philharmonic – and in deference to the engineering heft is not sacrificed to detail in the biggest of the sound waves – but is 'the swoon factor' all it should be? Does the culmination (I hesitate to use the word 'climax') feel all-engulfing? Yes and no. You can never get enough of the eight unison horns when they finally carry the infernal trumpet tune aloft. But I will say that the optimal high note in the coda really pops here and with it there's a feeling of having truly 'arrived'.

Symphony No 2 never seems to arrive. It's a classic case of better-to-journey-than-to-arrive. Percy Grainger might have described it as a 'ramble'. He would not be wrong. For all the promise (and in some cases memorability) of its ideas and notwithstanding the cyclic nature of the adopted style there are great swathes of music here that feel (and are) narcissistic rather than developmental. It's pleasant to meander through the chirruping 'forest murmurs' of the third-movement *Andante* (lovely playing here) but Wagner understood context in the ways that Scriabin never would. We have our ears on where all this might lead and in that context the hectoring 'chivalry' of the finale is such an anticlimax. Falletta cannot persuade me otherwise.

Overcooked, overheated, over here? The discussion will rumble on. **Edward Seckerson**