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EXCLUSIVE 80TH BIRTHDAY INTERVIEW

HARNONCOURT RECORDS... GERSHWIN!

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"Gershwin is much more subtle than Wagner."

Nikolaus Harnoncourt

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Orchestra

Weingartner, Muck, Richard Strauss and Hans Richter. Andrew Manze, in the informative booklet, points up the work's indebtedness to Brahms (structure, key sequence, keyboard style) with the elfin touch of Saint-Saëns in the *Scherzo*. Stenhammar, though, is very much his own man, not least in the folk-style finale in which, halfway through, he changes direction and quotes his own song "Lutad mot gärdet" before bravely ending his 46-minute work on a *pianissimo* chord.

The Second Concerto (1904-07) also has four movements with the *Scherzo* placed second, though these are played without pause, resulting in a "novel, some have said 'improvised', structure" (Manze). Few will be able to resist the tumultuous finale. Manze was a shrewd choice of conductor, as was Seta Tanyel as soloist, a pianist whose lyrical grace is matched by a no-holds-barred bravura and an innate sparkle that makes her the preferred choice over the excellent Mats Widlund in the First Concerto (Chandos, 10/92). The recorded sound (John H West and Sean Lewis) is of Hyperion's usual high standard. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Stojowski

Violin Concerto, Op 22^a. Romance, Op 20^a.

Violin Sonata No 2, Op 37^b

Agnieszka Marucha *vn* bJean-Jacques Schmid *pf*

*Elsner Secondary Music School Orchestra,
Warsaw / Piotr Warjak

Acte Préalable © AP0221 (64' • DDD)

The Sonata's a winner as the Stojowski revival uncovers more of his music



The rehabilitation of Zygmunt Stojowski (1870-1946) continues apace with these three world-premiere recordings, following Jonathan

Plowright's recordings of the two splendid piano concertos and an album of solos (Hyperion, 6/02, 10/04), Dux's fine recordings of the Suite for Orchestra and *Prayer for Poland* (2/09) and the present label's disc of chamber works for cello. While Stojowski may not be a Great Composer, he is certainly a notable member of the second division.

Having said that, his Violin Concerto (three movements, 30'05", completed in 1900) is not a complete success despite the assured playing of Agnieszka Marucha (a young Polish player clearly destined for an important career) and the highly accomplished student orchestra. The solo part has everything you would expect in a Romantic concerto of the era – double-stops, octaves, taxing, rapid passagework – everything except strong thematic material. The gorgeous second movement is best; the finale weakest. The Romance (6'10"), written for Jacques Thibaud in 1919, is a winning addition to the repertoire (think Chausson/Bruch), poignant and lyrical, rising to a powerful climax. By far

the strongest work is the Second Sonata (28'09") from 1911, written for Polish violinist Arthur Argiewicz (1881-1966) and championed by Enescu and Kochoński among others. The dialogue between the two instruments, the attractive themes and the graceful (and frequently demanding) writing for both instruments common to all four movements must surely find favour with many players. The Sonata may sound more French than Polish (the first movement is clearly inspired by Franck's) but when played as sensitively and persuasively as this it makes you wonder why it has been gathering dust these many years. **Jeremy Nicholas**

R Strauss

Metamorphosen, AV142.

Symphonia domestica, Op 53

Staatskapelle Weimar / Antoni Wit

Naxos © 8 570895 (75' • DDD)

There's detail in the Domestica as Antoni Wit continues his Strauss survey



Antoni Wit and his Weimar orchestra have already established their Strauss credentials with an outstanding disc of the *Alpine Symphony* (9/06).

This new coupling also has the advantage of the attractively warm acoustic of the Weimarahalle and, as before, Wit's account of the *Symphonia domestica* is richly spacious to match the recording although in no way lacking in forward momentum. The vivid and often charming detail of the composer's autobiographical narrative is affectionately observed but the narrative flow through the five movements is also splendidly maintained. Keith Anderson's admirable descriptive notes provide an affectionate picture of the composer's wife and her relationships with her husband and child, while the performance ensures that the series of motifs associated with the family interplay are illuminated with Strauss's characteristically complex, richly coloured scoring. So the music can either be enjoyed as a descriptive symphonic poem or a five-movement symphony. In Wit's hands the tender writing for the child's "Wiegenlied" in the third section is especially touching, and the "Liebesszene" of the *Adagio* has all the Straussian erotic passion one could wish for. This is recalled in the finale when all the threads of the narrative are thrillingly joined together.

The *Metamorphosen* too is well played, with much refinement of texture and no lack of feeling, if yet without quite the richness of perspective of the very finest versions. Neeme Järvi with the RSNO is more ardent, Iona Brown with the Norwegian CO has a movingly memorable valedictory feeling (both Chandos), and Karajan (DG, A/82^b) is still unsurpassed. So this new Naxos coupling, while worth its modest cost, is not a first choice for the latter work.

Ivan March

Stravinsky

Apollon musagète. Pulcinella – Suite
Chamber Orchestra of Europe /
Alexander Janiczek

Linn © CKD330 (54' • DDD/DSD)

Stylish, lyrical readings of two of Stravinsky's ballets from the '20s



These two classic ballet scores, composed eight years apart, could hardly be more different. The *Pulcinella* Suite (1920) comes from the ballet suggested by Diaghilev

and is based on existing music by Pergolesi and some 18th-century Italian contemporaries. Stravinsky was sceptical about the idea to start with but soon went through everything of Pergolesi he could find and "fell in love". At the time this seemed a baffling departure for the composer who had shocked the world with *The Rite of Spring* but history and the whole of Stravinsky's neo-classical period have made sense of it. He regarded *Pulcinella* as "to some extent a satire" but found he had to change or add very little to make the music his own.

Apollo (1928) – Stravinsky preferred the shorter title – was written for Balanchine and represents pure ballet unencumbered by a narrative although the nine dances are related to episodes in the life of the Greek god. As in *Pulcinella* Stravinsky distorts Classical and Baroque idioms to his own idiosyncratic ends in a technique of masterly restraint. Less became more.

Stravinsky's own recordings from the mid-1960s are rhythmically taut, as one might expect, but what comes over in these new recordings by the justly lauded Chamber Orchestra of Europe is the lyricism of *Apollo*. Stravinsky as a melodist? It's a claim rarely made for him but this impeccable and stylish performance radiates melodic appeal devoid of sentimentality. Overall this is a most attractive release, an imaginative coupling and an excellent recording.

Peter Dickinson

Stravinsky

'Stravinsky in Moscow'

Petrushka – Suite (1947 version)^a. Song of the Volga Boatmen^a. Fireworks, Op 4^a. Ode (Elegiacal Chant in three parts)^b. Orpheus^b

^aMoscow State Philharmonic Orchestra; ^bUSSR State Symphony Orchestra / Igor Stravinsky
Melodiya © MELCD10 01604 (68' • ADD)

Recorded live at the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory in 1962

The composer introduces his music to the musicians of his homeland

When Schoenberg and Stravinsky were more generally accepted as the sole avatars of 20th-century music, it was unfashionable to delve too deeply into the national qualities of their modernism. With his endless capacity for reinvention, Stravinsky sought to liberate his art