

# The Best of Classical

COLIN ANDERSON TRAWLS THROUGH RECENT CLASSICAL RELEASES

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## JS BACH

### The Six Keyboard Partitas, BWV825-830

Vladimir Ashkenazy (piano)

Decca 478 2163



Vladimir Ashkenazy brings typical honesty to playing these joyous and sublime pieces.

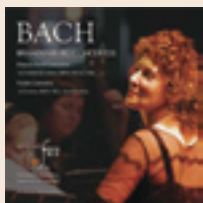
He has a fine sense of rhythm and brings

soulful intensity to the slower numbers: crisp, timeless, and with plenty of feeling, as well as being alive to the variety of moods these suites embrace. Occasional breath-like noises from the pianist may annoy some listeners, but it adds to the sense of Ashkenazy's commitment. These unmannered and truthful accounts are blessed with an immediate and lucid sound that allows full value to rhythmic clarity and harmonic diversion. The piano sounds lean yet with power and dynamism when required, if slightly more 'even' in those three Partitas that Tony Faulkner has engineered (Philip Siney is the other engineer). It's a sound that, intentionally or not, re-creates an intimate drawing-room, the single musician playing these rare and beautiful flowers, cultivated centuries ago by Johann Sebastian Bach, to a handful of *cognoscenti*.

## JS BACH

### The Brandenburg Concertos, et al Apollo's Fire (The Cleveland Baroque Orchestra)/Jeannette Sorrell

Avie 2207 (2 CDs)



These Brandenburgs (recorded in 1999 and 2000) have been available before on a different label, and are now supplemented by two harpsichord

concertos (played by Sorrell) and Elizabeth Wallfisch in a violin concerto. The Brandenburgs are given with energy and vibrancy, the period instruments adding agreeable edge and bite. Sorrell's tempos are quite measured, and convincingly so, aiding articulation and detail, and always with a buoyancy that gives the music a going-somewhere momentum.

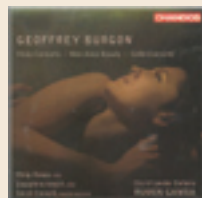
The church acoustic is excellent for projecting the music vividly but without

harshness, and the balance between soloists and tutti is very well managed. The music-making is lively and shapely, played with virtuosity, plenty of heart, and little dogma; nothing 'museum' here! The immediacy of the Brandenburgs is attractive, if not the last word in dynamic subtlety. The players seem a little further back for the concertos (same production team and venue), but the approach is just as gutsy, responding faithfully to Sorrell's muscularity. BWV1052 is heard as both a harpsichord and a violin concerto. Wallfisch is a little swamped but plays athletically and with beautiful expression. Overall, this is colourful Bach.

## GEOFFREY BURGO

### Viola Concerto 'Ghosts of the Dance'; Merciless Beauty; Cello Concerto Philip Dukes (viola); Sarah Connolly (mezzo-soprano); Josephine Knight (cello); City of London Sinfonia/Rumon Gamba

Chandos CHAN 10592



Geoffrey Burgo's Viola Concerto (2008) starts as if in mid-phrase; we are already in a dance competition in America during the Depression.

The music grabs the attention from the off, in both its skilled pastiche and its beguiling unpredictability: the rhythmic cunning of the orchestral sinew (including drum kit and saxophones); and the rich, almost vocal sound of the viola. It continues into a tango-like second movement, and the irrepressible finale has plenty of swing. This is a very enjoyable work from a composer (born 1941) who is well-known for his soundtrack scores (Brideshead Revisited; Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy, et al). The Cello Concerto (2007) is darker, has filmic connotations, and establishes a haunted discourse.

Merciless Beauty (1997) sets texts by Kit Wright, William Blake, Geoffrey Chaucer and Anon, for countertenor or mezzo-soprano. Melodic, atmospheric, and haunting, Sarah Connolly is a vivid narrator. The concertos are given their first recordings here, and in excellent performances too. The sound quality is vivid and spacious, with good balance. Plenty of incident and

## ALBUM CHOICE

### DAVID MATTHEWS

#### Terrible Beauty; Clarinet Quartet; Marina; String Trio; String Trio No.2; Winter Passions

Susan Bickley (mezzo-soprano); Stephan Loges (baritone); The Nash Ensemble/Lionel Friend

NMC D152



David Matthews (born 1943) is a distinctly English-sounding composer, building on his predecessors and

with European awareness. He writes music that engages the heart and the head: melodic, colourful, suggestive, and alive with feeling. This selection of scores embraces vocal and instrumental music, the former including settings of Homer and Shakespeare (Terrible Beauty) T S Eliot (Marina) and Pushkin (Winter Passions), honouring the words with lyrical intensity and the vivid use of instruments.

The chamber pieces are no less engaging: beautifully crafted and atmospheric, always rigorous yet with a living heart and a poetic imagination. These performances, no doubt recorded in the presence of the composer, are superb in understanding and execution, and have been beautifully recorded in their immediacy, good balance, and faithfulness to natural tones. The solo singers are well integrated with instruments, allowing Matthews' finely graded colours and effects to emerge unencumbered. With an excellent booklet note and full texts, this is another superb disc in the NMC catalogue and also in the recorded representation of David Matthews' music.