

## GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

### REPERTOIRE RARITIES ON RECORD

**Jeremy Nicholas** makes some fresh discoveries worth seeking out among new piano releases



Alexandra Sostmann offers a beautifully recorded Baroque-inspired programme of original works and transcriptions

One of the joys of reviewing for *Gramophone* is the opportunity to discover repertoire one would not have otherwise encountered. While seminal works and masterpieces rarely emerge from the shadows, there seems to be a bottomless chest of valuable and unjustly forgotten works and composers. Here are four recent examples.

Alexandra Sostmann, beautifully recorded in Neumarkt's Reitstadel (Bavaria), presents a programme of pieces by Frescobaldi, his pupil Froberger and JS Bach transcribed by Respighi, Feinberg and Brahms (his arrangement for left hand alone of the great D minor violin Chaconne), together with original works by Pachelbel (his Chaconne in F minor), Ligeti and Pärt. From sonic grandeur to whispered intimacy, as suggested by the album's title *Grenzgänge* ('Border Crossings'), Sostmann's is an imaginative take on various Baroque voices that makes for a rewarding listen.

**Alec Rowley** (1892-1958) is a name familiar to anyone who has taken the piano exams of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music. But who has heard a note of Rowley's concert works? He was prolific – piano concertos, chamber music, choral works, organ solos

and a voluminous amount of piano music. The question is, does one want to spend any time in the company of Alec Rowley outside the sphere of education? The answer is a resounding yes, especially with such an accomplished and sympathetic guide as John Lenehan.

He begins with the Toccata *The Two Worlds* from 1934, which gives a good indication of the flavour and character of 'grown-up' Rowley: tonal, melodic, technically challenging, economical, immediately appealing and unmistakably English. Elsewhere, using a broad brushstroke, one might be reminded of York Bowen, Eric Coates, Percy Grainger, early Elgar or, in the case of the second track, *A Memory* (1914), Andrew Lloyd Webber: the opening bars offer a prescient glimpse of 'Music of the night' from *The Phantom of the Opera*. I also fell for the lovely Canzonetta – rendered with unaffected simplicity by Lenehan – but the real pianistic meat is provided by the programme's centrepiece, *Seven Preludes (On All the Intervals)* from 1930 and the two three-movement Sonatas (1939 and 1949). Robert Matthew-Walker astutely sees parallels with 'the Gallic bonhomie of Poulenc and Milhaud at their most gregarious, without pastiche ... whilst remaining creatively individual'. These

are all first recordings. I'd be surprised if not a few pianists follow Lenehan's lead and add Rowley to their repertoire.

More premieres from the Portuguese pianist Artur Pereira. Readers might remember his name as the author of *Beethoven's Dedications*, which I had the pleasure of reviewing in the February issue. Last year Pereira issued two albums on the Sonoris Causa label, the start of a complete Beethoven sonata cycle – it promises to be very fine indeed – which, wisely or not, included on the second disc four movements from **Luiz Costa's** *Poemas do monte* ('Poems from the Mountains'). Pereira has now devoted an entire album to the first recording of all 12 movements of the cycle, eight of which are premiere recordings. He studied with the composer's daughter and it was he who unearthed the unpublished movements to add to those already in print.

I doubt if many have ever heard of Costa (1879-1960) but he is revered in Portugal and, from this evidence, deserves a place in the sunshine. In its evocations of the rural Portugal of the 1920s, one hears echoes of the Impressionists, some Lisztian traits, certainly something of Albéniz and Granados and perhaps of *Cenas nas montanhas* ('Mountain Scenes') by Costa's teacher José Vianna da Motta. But Costa



is his own man. His grand-pupil does these bucolic tone poems proud. Pereira is a master colourist and temperamentally attuned to the genre, championing them with warmth and affection, greatly helped by Mark Jonathan Almond's sound engineering at the RNCM.

The name of **Elias Parish Alvars** (born Eli Parish) crops up infrequently in these pages (the last reference I can find was a decade ago). I have long admired his Harp Concerto and it was his virtuosity on the harp (Berlioz called him 'The Liszt of the harp') that is said to have been the inspiration for Sigismond Thalberg's development of his famous three-hand illusion for the keyboard. But how many know that not only did Parish Alvars write piano music but that he wrote piano music in conjunction with Carl Czerny? Well, here is the evidence on a highly entertaining disc bookended by a couple of their extended fantasies for two pianos on Donizetti operas, one on *Linda di Chamounix*, the other on themes from *Anna Bolena*, *La Sonnambula* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

There is much vapid, showy passagework that relies on light-fingered, insouciant virtuosity to bring it off, the keyboard equivalent of a coloratura soprano's runs and trills. Simon Callaghan and Clodna Shanahan have it in spades, adding works by Parish Alvars's teacher Nicolas-Charles Bochsa (1789-1856) and Dussek – his *Duo concertant* of c1812. Halfway through comes a further obscurity: an arrangement by Carl Lewy (1823-83) for piano four hands of Parish Alvars's Overture from his (unpublished) opera *The Legend of Teignmouth* (1843). It's an ear-tickler – no more, no less – with which the enterprising duo have enormous fun. Teignmouth? That was the birthplace of Elias Parish Alvars. Transcription junkies need not hesitate. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**Grenzgänge** Frescobaldi to Pärt  
Alexandra Sostmann  
Propsero PROSP0034



**Rowley** Piano Works  
John Lenehan  
Dutton @ CDLX7401



**Costa** Poemas do monte, Op 3  
Artur Pereira  
Sonoris Causa ▶ SC004



**Parish Alvars et al** Pf Duos & Duets  
Simon Callaghan, Clodna Shanahan  
Lyrita SRCD411

than others (Kurtág's gnomic and texturally varied *Signs, Games and Messages*, 1989-2004 – which appear at regular points throughout the programme – furthest of all). Yet all share one quality that also marks Bach's solo violin music as significant, namely an ability to stretch the instrument's expressive and colouristic potential way beyond imaginable limitations. Bach himself is represented by his most celebrated unaccompanied violin work, the D minor Partita, closing with the Chaconne, which Jonian Ilias Kadesha (a talented player who has Greek-Albanian roots) treats as a genuine processional, keeping more or less in time throughout – the tempo at the end of the piece is the same as it is at the beginning. In Kadesha's hands the Courante is lively and liting, the Gigue crisp and rhythmically focused. Added embellishments help flavour the mix.

Among the pieces that adopt Bachian forms is the *Ciaccona* (2002) by the Swiss composer and violinist Helena Winkelman, which opens like a sicilienne, then elaborates, turns harsh and antsy, before swinging into Ceilidh mode. It's a wild, unhinged piece, though tightly argued, and it closes mysteriously among quiet harmonics.

Schnittke's ingenious Fugue (premiered in 1999) is busy, very well built, played part pizzicato, part chords with running figurations and a brilliant close. The Russian-American composer Lera Auerbach is responsible for the *Lonely Suite* (2002, subtitled *Ballet for a Lonely Violinist*), which is much as it says it is: thoughts and ideas that might flit through your mind when alone, maybe a children's folk song ('Boredom'), or what sounds like a muted mirror-image of Bernstein (his *Serenade* in 'imaginary dialogue'), or knocking the bow on the body of the violin in a way that you might have expected from Shostakovich. Biber's hypnotic Passacaglia in G minor anticipates the Bach we've already heard, with its downwards-facing ground bass, ornate yet pure overall, gently handled by Kadesha though very deft.

To close we're offered the last of Kurtág's *Signs*, which arrives as if from the far distance, disembodied, vague, defying gravity almost. Ingenious, as I say – an album to treat like an evening recital. Whether you'll want to repeat the experience is down to personal taste. I've a suspicion that I will. **Rob Cowan**

## 'Légende'

**Bochsa** Rondeau sur le trio 'Zitti zitti' du Barbier de Séville de Rossini **Fauré** Une châtelaine en sa tour, Op 110 **Grandjany** The Colorado Trail,

Op 28 **Liszt** Le rossignol, S250 No 1 (arr Renié) **Mchedelov** Variations on a Theme by Paganini **Parish Alvars** La mandoline, Op 84 **Posse** Variations on 'The Carnival of Venice' **Renié** Danse des lutins. Légende d'après 'Les elfes' de Leconte de Lisle  
**Joel von Lerber** *hp*  
Claves (50-3048 • 67)



Like a mythical harp-playing bard, Joel von Lerber too is a teller of legends.

But such is the Berlin-based Swiss harpist's sweeping command of colour and line that he has no need for words. The music, almost all of which takes its inspiration from tales or poems, says it all.

Von Lerber's second album and first for Swiss label Claves is also a homage to that great harp virtuoso, composer and pedagogue Henriette Renié. Her darkly dramatic *Légende d'après 'Les elfes' de Leconte de Lisle*, with its echoes of Schubert's 'Erlkönig', and the sprightly *Danse des lutins* are two of the highlights of the programme, showing off von Lerber's supple technique and narrative skills to their best advantage.

There are also more straightforwardly tuneful if often equally virtuoso works such as Grandjany's *The Colorado Trail*, and theme and variations including the marvellous *Variations on a Theme by Paganini* (the theme being from Paganini's famous 24th Caprice) by Mikhail Mchedelov. These remind us that the majority of the works here are also essentially fantasies, and von Lerber is good at milking the extended introductions for all their worth to remind us in turn of the word's manifold senses.

But the most shamelessly expressive playing comes right at the beginning, with Fauré's exquisite *Une châtelaine en sa tour*, after a poem by Verlaine. Whether striking *près de la table* or aiming for a juicier sound, whether spinning a silken melody or exhaling glissandos and feathery figurations, von Lerber here presents us with an irresistibly gentle invitation to enter a magical world. **William Yeoman**

