

performance captures the work's power and its intimacy.

We're also treated to a clutch of superb but little-known pieces by Biber's contemporaries. In two motets by Christoph Bernhard (works which fuse the intricate sobriety of Renaissance polyphony with Italian Baroque lyricism), the performers balance clean and lucid timbres with pliant expressivity. While in Johann Joseph Fux's *Omnis terra adoret*, the mixed ensemble is beautifully balanced – not least by Alpha's recording engineers. The singers are very much part of the instrumental consort so the threads of Fux's musical texture all weave together in a diaphanous fabric. Finally, sonatas by Fux and Johann Michael Nicolai showcase the supple finesse of the Freiburg players. *Kate Bolton-Porciatti*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Gesualdo

Madrigali, Books 3 & 4

Les Arts Florissants/Paul Agnew
Harmonia Mundi HAF8905309-10
90:05 mins (2 discs)



It's often speculated that Gesualdo's extreme musical language is the mirror of a

tortured soul who murdered his wife and her lover whom he found *in flagrante delicto*. Here, though, Les Arts Florissants's director, tenor Paul Agnew, suggests that his scorching dissonances and chromaticisms were the natural continuation of a highly expressive musical language which had emerged in Ferrara in the later 16th century.

This series of discs to record the complete madrigals here reaches Books Three and Four. The texts – mostly by Ferrarese poets – revel in morbid themes of love unrequited and an obsessive longing for death. The singers pay studious attention to the poetry and its nuances, painting the words with a rich palette and contrasting light and shade to reflect Gesualdo's chiaroscuro. 'Dolce spirto d'amore', for example, is seductively whispered in breathy tones suggesting 'The sweet spirit of love, greeted with a sigh'; in 'Sospirava il mio core' the singers plumb resonant depths to carve out the words 'You may die, but your martyrdom will continue'; 'Se vi miro pietosa' oscillates between pulsating life and hushed silence, pointing up the textual antitheses; in 'Io tacerò, ma nel silenzio mio', steel-edged sopranos suggest the 'heartless lady' of the poet's fixation. There's an almost unbearable bitterness to 'Dolcissimo sospiro', while in 'Moro, e mentre sospiro' the singers' ghostly wailings create an anguished interior monologue.

Harmonia Mundi's recording is clean and immediate: individual parts are easily discernible within the finely balanced ensemble and the words cut through with feverish intensity. *Kate Bolton-Porciatti*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Monteverdi

Il delirio della passione – Songs and Arias

Anna Lucia Richter (soprano), Dmitri Sinkovsky (countertenor), Teo Aroni, Ciro Aroni (tenor), Alessandro Ravasio (bass); Ensemble Claudiana
Pentatone PTC 5186 845 62:25 mins



Fire and finesse: the Freiburger Barockconsort and Vox Luminis perform Biber



For the most part we associate Anna Lucia Richter with German repertoire –

Schumann, Schubert, Bach even – but this is a bold new step. Here she presents some of the finest pieces for solo voice by Monteverdi stretching across his career.

She begins strongly with the Prologue to *Orfeo* where she makes the most of the entreaties in each verse without drenching the melodic line in ornamentation – a danger not entirely avoided in the orchestral ritornellos which also seem oddly fast compared with the pace of the vocal narrative. Richter's declamatory storytelling reaches an impressive peak in the *Lamento d'Arianna* where every device of characterisation and emotional evocation is brilliantly deployed, including a collapse into speech towards the end. Quieter pieces, such as 'Pur ti miro' from *Poppea* (sung with the countertenor Dmitri Sinkovsky), perhaps lack a little tenderness. In the free-standing songs the performers have fun with some stylistic parodies and arrangements: 'La mia turca' uses the Turkish reference to introduce drumming and 'exotic' scales worthy of the film music for *Lawrence of Arabia*, and the jazzy cornetto playing of Andrea Inghisciano (matched by Richter's artful distortions of rhythm in favour of the clarity of the text) adds much to the languid tale of a forlorn lover in 'Ohimè, ch'io cado'. Some pieces do

not quite work – in the duet 'Zefiro torna', for example, the second voice part is sometimes confusingly performed on the violin – but this selection provides a fresh and unusual look at many Monteverdi favourites. *Anthony Pryer*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Schubert

Schubert's Women – Lieder and Scenas

Klaudia Tandler (mezzo-soprano), Gabriele Jacoby (narrator), Niall Kinsella (piano)
Gramola 99223 62:26 mins



This recital offers an appealing selection of largely well-known Schubert settings, with

added interest given by interleaving the groups of songs with poems Schubert set – heard in thrilling, animated readings by Austrian actor Gabriele Jacoby. This attractive idea both recalls the musical-declamatory evenings of Schubert's day, as well as more recent series' such as Graham Johnson's *Songmaker's Almanac*.

The recital was born at the Franz Schubert Institute where pianist Niall Kinsella devised a programme that would show different sides of the female character as depicted in the poetry of Schubert's day, organised in small groups. Familiar musical ground is trod with the inclusion of the famous settings of Goethe's Mignon and Gretchen poems.



BACKGROUND TO... Heinrich Biber's Requiem

Though officially undated, Biber's Requiem in F minor is believed to have been written in the early 1690s. That places it just a few years after the composition of the more grandiose and slightly longer Requiem in A major that he wrote in 1687. No record exists for whom this piece was written, though its intimate scale might suggest it was for a more low-key persona. Even

though this setting of the Latin mass was written for smaller forces – it features just five soloists and a five-part choir – Biber succeeds in creating an intense and atmospheric soundworld.

Does it work as a programme? There are some inexplicable shifts of mood, and more could have been done to connect textures, keys and ideas, but that does not detract from the basic quality of the chosen songs and poems; Goethe's 'Kennst du das Land' is spellbinding as poem or song. 'Der Jüngling an der Quelle' opens magically, with perfectly judged colour, but 'Der Fischer' feels heavy. The recorded sound could be more even and blooming, and balance between voice and piano is not always sympathetic. Mezzo Klaudia Tandl has a beautiful, rich sound and an elegant, untroubled delivery; Kinsella is a meticulous collaborator; and both could push for greater elasticity and variety. If not revelatory, altogether this is polished music-making of fine repertoire. *Natasha Loges*

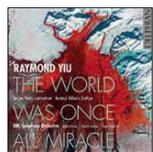
PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Raymond Yiu

The London Citizen Exceedingly Injured*; **The World Was Once All Miracle****; **Symphony†**

†Andrew Watts (countertenor),
**Roderick Williams (baritone);
BBC Symphony Orchestra/
*David Robertson, **Andrew Davis,
†Edward Gardner

Delphian DCD 34225 67:44 mins



This terrifically engaging disc of music by Raymond Yiu opens with a bang. Subtitled 'symphonic game for orchestra', *The London Citizen Exceedingly Injured* (2012) nigh-on shimmers with invention. The piece was sparked by an unlikely array of stimuli including 18th-century bookseller Alexander Cruden, the 'silenced church bells' of George Orwell's *1984*, London's Chinatown and Elgar's *Cockaigne Overture* which Yiu magics into a concerto for orchestra that by turns flutters, pulses and stabs with a vivid sense of wit and colour.

Drawing on another master of dystopian fiction, *The World Was Once All Miracle* (2017) sets six poems by Anthony Burgess. Conceived as a portrait of the writer, Yiu's score references various episodes from Burgess's life including his time in Malaysia (conveyed by striking use of bamboo resonators known as *bungkakas*) and a delightful homage to Cole Porter,



A proud songster:
Lawrence Zazzo is
expressive in Dove

whose music Burgess delighted in. While the work lacks some of the imaginative zing of the disc's opening track, this is nonetheless a fascinating piece and Roderick Williams's dextrous and intelligent performance meets every challenge of the score with aplomb.

Yiu's First Symphony is as much a song cycle as a symphony, with a glorious performance here from countertenor Andrew Watts. Setting texts by Whitman, Cavafy, Gunn and Donne, the work references everything from '70s disco to Domenico Scarlatti and is at once subversive, playful, emotive and radiant. With its every track captured live in concert, the recording finds the BBCSO on brilliantly agile form and in every way a match for Yiu's electric musical imagination. *Kate Wakeling*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Les Six

Songs by Auric, Durey, Honegger, Milhaud, Poulenc and Tailleferre

Franziska Heinzen (soprano),
Benjamin Mead (piano)

Solo Musica SM357 49:44 mins



On the face of it, a recording of the piano pieces making up the 1920 *Album des Six*, together with songs from these composers' later years, seems a good idea. Including

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Proud Songsters

– *English Solo Song*

Songs by Bell, Bridge, Britten, Browne, Rebecca Clarke, Dove, Finzi, Celia Harper, Quilter, Thiman and Vaughan Williams

Michael Chance, Lawrence Zazzo, Tim Mead (countertenor), Ruairi Bowen, James Gilchrist, Andrew Staples (tenor), Ashley Riches, Mark Stone (bass), Simon Lepper (piano)
King's College KGS0052 65:59 mins



This is an unusual album from King's, Cambridge. Clearly conceived during the present

COVID pandemic, it showcases several, often highly distinguished former choral scholars singing English solo songs, all with excellent piano accompaniment by Simon Lepper – apart from Celia Harper's unaccompanied folksong-style 'My love gave me an apple' (sung by countertenor Michael Chance).

Presumably the singers chose the songs themselves from their own repertoire. The resulting programme is perhaps not ideally varied: richly harmonised Edwardian salon settings of distinguished poetry mingle with mildly poignant, almost Ravelian (though avoiding that French master's occasional acerbic tartness) post-World War I songs.

There are exceptions. Rebecca Clarke's 'The Seal Man' invigorates the post-Ravel style into something distinctive and truly atmospheric, well matched here by James Gilchrist's engaged and dramatically expressive account (excelling his already fine performance on the first volume of Somm's *100 Years of British Song*). Gilchrist brings the same welcome qualities to his performance of Roger Quilter's 'Fear no more the heat of the sun'.

Countertenor Lawrence Zazzo alone offers songs outside that cosy English style: he well conveys the irony of 'God's Love' in Jonathan Dove's setting of Vikram Seth; and the tart and expressive angularity of Iain Bell's 'Come away, Death' is a relief after so much salted caramel sweetness. Of the other singers, Gerald Finley (singing Finzi and Vaughan Williams) and Mark Stone (singing Bridge, Warlock and Quilter) also stand out for their engagement with text. *Daniel Jaffé*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★