

counterpart's final symphonic musings. The idea of innocence brutally corrupted is common to both, though, even if Nielsen is more explicit about it in the hyperventilating climax of the first movement, which is unceremoniously hijacked by a brass section every bit as disruptive and pernicious as the renegade side drum in the Fifth Symphony. Then there is the 'throwing all the toys out of the pram' moment in the second movement, 'Humoreske', where the trombone's *glissandos* smell worse than you could possibly imagine. But the gravity of the slow movement is matched only by its desolation and I guess the real difference between Shostakovich and Nielsen would be the latter's anarchic sense of fun: the way he subverts the 'variation' option in the last movement and, of course, that two-finger salute to Death from two mightily rude bassoons in the pay-off.

Edward Seckerson

Prokofiev

Symphony No 3, Op 44.

Scythian Suite, Op 20. Autumn, Op 8

São Paulo Symphony Orchestra / Marin Alsop

Naxos © 8 573452 (61' • DDD)



Prokofiev, who never liked playing second fiddle to anyone, must have been piqued by Shostakovich's Soviet celebrity. But could the great Shostakovich boom be over? With three significant Prokofiev symphony cycles under way it looks as if some judicious rebalancing is taking place. That said, even die-hard fans will admit that Prokofiev's seven works in the form aren't always magnificent and Marin Alsop's elegant lucidity provides only a partial solution to the problem in this fourth release in her series. She gets unfailingly good string-playing, often more sensitively nuanced than that of her rivals, but her São Paulo team does tend to 'normalise' the invention, smoothing away rough edges in a manner not everyone will find idiomatic.

Typically generous in its provision of makeweights and warmly recorded (I've not heard the audiophile Blu-ray version), the new disc kicks off with a *Scythian Suite* offering keen rhythmic definition and considerable depth of feeling. For ultimate interpretative heft and passion I would turn to Claudio Abbado and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra; the conductor strains every last sinew and it helps that the band is so much larger. Still, Alsop's reading works on its own terms, and if she makes the

music sound as much like Roussel as Stravinsky one can perhaps discern why Serge Diaghilev chose to reject this would-be ballet score as insufficiently Russian.

The Third Symphony, stitched together patchwork-style from Prokofiev's then unstaged opera *The Fiery Angel*, can't perhaps be expected to convince as a conventional symphonic entity. Naxos has been here before with Theodore Kuchar's ill-kempt Ukrainian forces and anyone brought up on them will be used to a much edgier, sadomasochistic kind of effect. Also provides less revelatory detail than Kirill Karabits, working with what was once 'her' Bournemouth orchestra yet, in further downplaying the sense of hysterical possession associated with the opera, she makes the Third seem unusually coherent. It's good to have Prokofiev's autumnal add-on, here rendered raptly nostalgic (those mainly Russian-trained strings again). And the price is right. **David Gutman**

Sym No 3 – selected comparisons:

Ukraine Nat SO, Kuchar (10/95) (NAXO) 8 553054

Bournemouth SO, Karabits (6/14) (ONYX) ONYX4137

Scythian Ste – selected comparison:

Simón Bolívar SO, Abbado

(ACCE) DVD ACC20101; ACC10204

Prokofiev

Symphony No 5, Op 100. Scythian Suite, Op 20

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Litton

BIS © BIS2124 (67' • DDD/DSD)



Andrew Litton began his Prokofiev symphony cycle with a successful reading of the profound yet problematic Sixth (6/13). The Fifth presents fewer difficulties save perhaps in the second movement, when the main *scherzo* idea skulks in at a slower tempo before accelerating up to speed, and at the very end of the symphony where Prokofiev suddenly reduces the dynamic level as if to confront us with the compromised quality of the rejoicing. Some august ensembles have been found wanting in these awkward corners. Litton favours a relatively abrupt transition in the first instance and he keeps a tight grip on the fretful bustle at the close, helped by his incisive, un-gabbed treatment of the finale as a whole.

Litton is not usually a conductor prone to interpretative extremes and apart from some oddly articulated braking, momentarily intrusive in the opening movement, there is little to criticise and much to admire. Hereabouts we are conceptually closer to Karajan than speed

merchants such as Jansons or Gergiev, not that anyone else is quite so seamlessly monolithic. The Bergen orchestra's brittle winds and relatively gritless sonority may disappoint those who consider a darker, thicker kind of sound de rigueur in this music but you get to hear *piano* lines usually buried and well-defined percussion. With bright (over-bright?) state-of-the-art sound engineering the effect is almost disconcertingly crystalline. The *Adagio* slow movement is especially luminous, fading out with tender regret.

There have been earthier recordings of the *Scythian Suite* but none airier or more teeming with detail. Audiophiles will almost certainly find this more satisfying than Marin Alsop's new recording (reviewed above), but then it does come at premium price. The booklet-notes are sensibly balanced (Andrew Huth) and one of Kazimir Malevich's most memorable images informs the artwork. **David Gutman**

Sym No 5 – selected comparisons:

Leningrad PO, Jansons (5/88) (CHAN) CHAN8576

BPO, Karajan (1/93) (DG) 437 253-2GGA or

(12/00) 463 613-2GOR

LSO, Gergiev (6/06) (PHIL) 475 7655PM4

Raskatov · Stravinsky

Raskatov Piano Concerto, 'Night Butterflies'^a

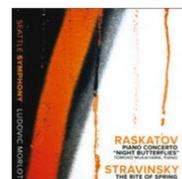
Stravinsky The Rite of Spring

^aTomoko Mukaiyama *pf*

Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Ludovic Morlot

Seattle Symphony Media © SSM1005 (63' • DDD)

Recorded live at Benaroya Hall, Seattle, June 2014



Alexander Raskatov is probably best known for his opera based on Bulgakov's Gogol-like

tale *The Heart of a Dog*, which reached the London Coliseum in 2010 and was praised for its staging while reservations remained about the enduring quality of the music. As the piano concerto *Night Butterflies* confirms, Raskatov is an inventive composer of the brief idea. In less than half an hour, he finds room for 12 movements, taking their inspiration from the denizens of a butterfly greenhouse. There are movements suggesting the swift flutter of wings, their lazier stirring, half-glimpsed colours, ghostly shades, elusive hoverings and, in the finale, a Russian song crooned by the soloist (the versatile and virtuoso Tomoko Mukaiyama) that tethers the whole nocturnal scene to a memory of Raskatov's lost Russian youth.

The orchestra respond nimbly to these fleeting inventions but are of course put to the test more by the demands of *The Rite of*



'A feisty, fully engaged player who generates real excitement': Leticia Moreno, whose new DG disc features Shostakovich recorded in St Petersburg

Spring. Ludovic Morlot directs a vividly coloured performance, so much so that the opening 'Adoration of the earth' sounds almost more like Ravel than Stravinsky, whose barbaric celebration is, for all the orchestral virtuosity, somewhat tamed in a tendency to beautify it all. Such crude effects as the muted trombones for the Ancestors sound almost polished, and some of the speeds suggest a quest after excitement for its own sake. But the playing is undeniably brilliant, and expertly controlled by Morlot in delivering what will always remain an orchestral *tour de force*. **John Warrack**

Shostakovich

Violin Concerto No 1, Op 77^a. Preludes, Op 34a^b
Leticia Moreno *vn*^b **Lauma Skride** *pf*^a **St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra / Yuri Temirkanov**
 DG © 481 1338 (65' • DDD)

^aRecorded live in the Grand Hall of the St Petersburg Philharmonic Academy



After the sensibly national programming of her first disc for Universal's Madrid-based arm, a collection entitled 'Spanish

Landscapes', Leticia Moreno may have been over-hasty in sanctioning the release of this live St Petersburg collaboration with Yuri Temirkanov and the local Philharmonic. Mstislav Rostropovich was apparently a teacher and mentor, so she certainly has the connections.

Partly because we've grown used to concert recordings which are extensively doctored in post-production, this one sounds all too real. The noises off are actually less distracting than the soloist's technical problems. She is a feisty, fully engaged player who generates real excitement as the performance proceeds but a palpably nervous start brings serious lapses in intonation, while the close miking necessary to bolster her rather fragile, quavery tone renders audible every intake of breath. The finale is nothing if not challengingly quick.

The studio-made coupling with pianist Lauma Skride is more polished (though still breathy) and the performers' essentially lyrical approach makes a plausible alternative to the larger-than-life projection of Benjamin Schmid with Lisa Smirnova (Ondine, 5/15). The present selection is also more generous, including all but one of the 19 arrangements by Dmitri Tsyganov plus a transcription by

Lera Auerbach. That said, the main work is wholly uncompetitive unless you happen to be following Miss Moreno's career. The booklet, in Spanish, Russian and (not always idiomatic) English, includes an informal interview with all three named artists. And there are plentiful images of a soloist credited by *Le Figaro* with 'the smouldering gaze of one of Almodóvar's heroines'. **David Gutman**

Sibelius • Wagner

Sibelius Symphony No 2, Op 43^a

Wagner Tannhäuser - Overture^b

Boston Symphony Orchestra / Andris Nelsons
 BSO Classics © BSO1401 (61' • DDD)

Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston,

^bSeptember 27, ^aNovember 6-11, 2014



To launch his inaugural concert as the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Music Director, Andris Nelsons chose the Overture to Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, an opera he first encountered as a five-year-old and an indelible experience which made him want to be a conductor. Nelsons directs with his customary zest and watchful