

ORCHESTRAL REVIEWS

it is effortlessly realised by the OBC Barcelona Symphony Orchestra under Ludovic Morlot.

Best is the opener, *Las constelaciones que más brillan* (2023), inspired by an imaginary night sky by the Spanish illustrator Pere Ginard. Stretched between a substratum of lower strings and the whistle of high harmonics, García Tomás's orchestra seems to dilate with ever-increasing depth and detail, like the experience of staring at the stars. Composed to accompany Verdi's Requiem, on words by the 17th-century Catalan poet Francesc Fontanella, the short orchestral song *Ara sí que ets divina* (2023) is luminously sung by baritone Josep Ramon Olivé; one wishes only that there was more of it. And even on *Blind Contours II* (2021-22) – a work in which a certain amount of open score writing is applied (analogous, the composer says, to retracing an outline on paper without looking) – every step in the musical arc feels fully scored, such is the seamlessness of the playing.

If these first three works occupy a similar, warmly billowing sound world, 2020's *Sonic Canvas* stands slightly apart. Writing for Spain's national youth orchestra, JONDE, García Tomás argued – reasonably if paradoxically – that a youth orchestra would have more time to rehearse and so be able to handle a greater degree of contrapuntal complexity. *Sonic Canvas* has that extra density, certainly, but it misses some of the easy-going fluidity that García Tomás would find just a few years later. **Tim Rutherford-Johnson**

Tubin

'The Early Years of Eduard Tubin'

Suite on Estonian Motifs^a.

Symphony No 2^a. Two Preludes^b

^aEstonian National Symphony Orchestra /

Mihhail Gerts ^bof

Orchid (ORC100455 • 62')



My late *Gramophone* colleague, the much-missed Robert Layton, would have been

immensely heartened by this release. Long an admirer of Tubin's later symphonies, his reviews (as RL) in these pages of his music during the late 1980s and '90s were genuinely ear-opening and charted his deepening appreciation of Tubin's music and stature as a major symphonist of the middle to late 20th century.

Neeme Järvi's recording of the Second Symphony (1937) with the Swedish Radio

Symphony Orchestra surprised him, however, as he had not expected it 'to be anywhere near so imaginative or powerful a composition'. It is a thoroughly compelling structure, wholly satisfying on its own unconventional terms, remarkable for being the product of a 32-year-old not long out of Heino Eller's composition class, and its three linked movements foreshadowed the symphonic freedom and mastery of Nos 5-10. This is the third recording I have encountered of it and the second by the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, which Arvo Volmer conducted in the previous recording. This newcomer need fear no comparison with either predecessor and, indeed, is more impactful than Volmer's. It is in many ways very close to both in terms of pacing, with precious little to choose between it and Järvi's still-splendid account. Orchid's sound, however, is beautifully clear and crisp, with strong depth of tone, and arguably the finest it has received.

The strong playing of the Estonian orchestra is a plus point in the *Suite on Estonian Motifs* (1929-31). Not to be confused with the more popular *Suite on Estonian Dance Tunes* for violin and orchestra or the 1940 *Sinfonietta on Estonian Motifs*, this suite is a student work, composed before the First Symphony. For all its bombast and want of nuance, it makes for an enjoyable listen and is an impressive work. For conductor Mihhail Gerts this was avowedly a labour of love, and he turns pianist for the encore of two early Preludes from the 1920s, comparing well with Vardo Rumessen's near-40-year-old accounts. 'Recommended with all possible enthusiasm', wrote RL of Järvi's recording, and so say I of this brightly recorded successor. **Guy Rickards**

Preludes – comparative version:

Rumessen BIS BIS-CD14/16 (3/89)

Symphony No 2 – comparative versions:

Swedish RSO, N Järvi BIS BIS-CD304 (4/86)

Estonian Nat SO, Volmer Alba ABCD141 (6/00)

Van Parys

Eco ... del vuoto^a. EUTOPIA^b.

Fantasie^c. Piano Concerto^d

^dJan Michiels ^{pf} 'Ensemble Revue Blanche;

'Estonian Philharmonic Choir; ^dAntwerp

Symphony Orchestra; ^bBrussels Philharmonic

Orchestra; ^fFlanders Symphony Orchestra; ^eRoyal

Concertgebouw Orchestra / ^dMartyn Brabbins,

^bKazushi Ono, ^{ac}Kristiina Poska

Antarctica (AR083 ■ • 60' • T)

^{bcd}Recorded live at the ^dQueen Elisabeth Hall,

Antwerp, May 28, 2022; ^cConcertgebouw, Bruges,

April 3, 2025; ^bFlagey, Brussels, September 26, 2025



For two decades, the distinct and complex harmonic spectra of bells have provided

Annelies Van Parys with a fruitful terrain for exploration. Bells are also powerfully evocative sonic signs, the heralds of both celebration and mourning. On this, the Belgian composer's intriguing debut portrait, neither – ahem – resonance is overlooked.

Eco ... del vuoto (2019), a commission from the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (here conducted by Kristiina Poska) and a homage to her teacher Luc Brewaeys, picks up the baton from a Concertgebouw commission he left incomplete at the time of his premature death in 2015. *Eco ...* begins with the sound of a (tubular) bell, whose resonances are gradually reinscribed and decelerated by the orchestra until, as if by magic, Brewaeys's sketch material – a close cousin of Gérard Grisey's spectralist emblem, *Partiels* – is found concealed within, as a kind of inverted climax.

Written for an energetically fizzing Jan Michiels and recorded live with the Antwerp Symphony under Martyn Brabbins, the Concerto for piano and orchestra (2021-22) is less obviously tintinnabular, although its central preoccupation – how to integrate the clangorous timbres and fixed pitches of the piano with a more fluid orchestral environment – is similarly concerned with questions of timbre and resonance. Van Parys's solution, in a slow second movement that separates two sparkling toccatas, is to gradually detune her orchestra such that the piano itself sounds out of tune, thus giving it a 'spectral' vibe without having to break out the tuning key.

In both works, sonority provides the means through which to articulate technical challenges. On the rest of the album it supports more political musings and a more pessimistic tone. *EUTOPIA* (2024) and *Fantasie* (2025) offer complementary considerations of the European project: one despairing, the other cautiously more optimistic. In *EUTOPIA*, also recorded live by the Brussels Philharmonic under Kazushi Ono, the collapse of post-war European ideals is narrated by a slow dissolution of technocratic serialism, before a distended version of Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' is heard on – yes – bells, in all their ambiguous symbolism. Less successful



Mihhail Gerts and the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra explore the early works of compatriot Eduard Tubin, including his remarkably assured Symphony No 2

is *Fantasia*, a sort of cantata-cum-concerto grosso for the soprano, flute, viola and harp soloists of Revue Blanche, the Estonian Philharmonic Choir and the Symfonieorkest van Vlaanderen, again conducted by Poska and a third live recording. In the face of Gaea Schoeters's forthright text, the sonic intricacies of Van Parys's music are somewhat reduced to local colour. Mindful of offering too-easy solutions, her soprano switches into a nonsense fantasy language at the end, but this feels like a cop-out rather than a sensible evasion and the music quickly peters out. Whether the exploration of an afterlife, the attempt to create dialogue, even the collapse of an ideal, Van Parys's arguments are strongest when they are made by sound alone.

Tim Rutherford-Johnson

Vivaldi

'Vivaldi Edition, Vol 75 -

Concerti per vari strumenti II'

Concertos - in B flat, RV553; in C, RV555; in C, RV557; in D minor, RV535; in F, RV543; in F, 'La tempesta di mare', RV570

Les Musiciens du Prince - Monaco /

Gianluca Capuano

Naïve (OP9025 ■ • 46')



Antonio Vivaldi rattled off concertos for many solo instruments -

violin, cello, bassoon, oboe, mandolin - but there are a good handful for *vari strumenti*, concertos for multiple instruments in unusual combinations, anything from two oboes or four violins to the astonishing configuration assembled for the C major, RV555: three violins, two *viole all'inglese* (violas da gamba), two cellos, two recorders, an oboe, a chalumeau and two harpsichords plus, in the finale, two *violini in tromba marina* - essentially 'pimped up' violins to imitate the buzzy *tromba marina*, a single-string medieval instrument.

When the first album devoted to *concerti per vari strumenti* in Naïve's Vivaldi Edition appeared in 2005, performed by Zefiro, it was demarcated Vol 25. Two decades on and we're up to Vol 75 for its successor, with the ever-stylish Les Musiciens du Prince - Monaco making their series debut, directed by Gianluca Capuano. There are no premiere recordings here but most of the works have very little competition, so

only the most devoted of Vivaldians will risk duplication. A few crop up on excellent albums from Europa Galante (RV570, 553, 555), La Serenissima (RV557, 543, 535) and Zefiro (RV557, 535), the latter on a peach of an album on Astrée (9/00).

La tempesta di mare, RV570, featuring recorder, oboe and bassoon, is more familiar in its RV433 flute concerto guise. Underpinned by Benny Aghassi's bustling bassoon, the results are suitably stormy in character - although not as boisterous as Italian period bands Zefiro and Europa Galante. RV557 features pairs of violins and oboes in the outer movements, with two recorders and bassoon given the central *Largo*, which features some delicate lute accompaniment sounding like fluttering butterfly wings.

The four-movement RV543 features solo violin and oboe in two movements, always in unison, but is most interesting in the courtly *Allegro alla francese*, dominated by oboe and bassoon, which goes with a real swing. With the B flat major RV553 for four violins, we're in *L'estro armonico* territory, featuring dazzling interplay between the four soloists, led by Enrico Casazza, and some rollicking Baroque guitar in the finale. Oboists Pier Luigi