

This is a wholly exceptional release, artistically out of all proportion as to what might first appear to be its importance. The significance of the music of Edmund Rubbra, in so far as it is known at all today, is predicated upon his eleven symphonies, which – thanks to the enterprise of Chandos – are all available in fine recordings under the late Richard Hickox. For many music-lovers and musical commentators, that is about it, but Rubbra's four string quartets are artistically the equal of his symphonic output, and the concertos for piano and for violin are equally distinguished compositions.

Nonetheless, Rubbra's songs are completely unknown, even to singers, which makes the appearance of this magnificent issue of over thirty of them so significant.

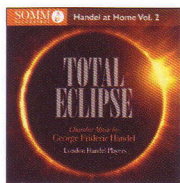
Rubbra (born in Northampton in 1901) wrote songs throughout his life, yet they never 'broke through', so to speak, into the mainstream English repertoire. Quite why this was so is puzzling, but Rubbra never wrote what might be termed a 'hit': in his extensive song output, there is no equivalent of Vaughan Williams's *Linden Lea*, or Ireland's *Sea Fever*, although melodically and communicatively Rubbra's songs inhabit the same tonal areas, arch-like phraseology and sympathetically apt use of the human voice.

This collection, aesthetically, could well prove a turning-point for lovers of English song: here is a selection of over thirty fine examples of word-setting by a great English composer – examples which, it is true to say, have been unwarrantedly ignored for far too long.

The performances throughout, from this very gifted group of artists, are both fine and aesthetically compelling, and the recording quality is a *sine qua non* from this wholly admirable company.

An outstanding record in every regard – it is very strongly recommended.

Robert Matthew-Walker



Handel at Home Vol 2

Rinaldo HWV 7: Overture; Sinfonia and Cara sposa; Il Vostro maggio;

Lascia ch'io pianga/Sonata a 5 HWV 288/Samson HWV 57: Overture; Total eclipse; Thus when the sun/Radamisto HWV 12: Ombra cara/Giulio Cesare in Egitto HWV 17:

Overture; Se pieta; Da tempest/ The Choice of Hercules: Yet can I that dulcet lay

London Handel Players

★★★★★ SOMM CD 0676 [75'48"]

A visit to Handel's home in London is a must for any genuine music-lover who can undertake the trip: actually being in the very room in which Handel composed *Messiah* over three weeks, to be in his bedroom and elsewhere in the residence brings a sense of feeling and, for this visitor, a patina of understanding which are unforgettable.

In such circumstances, one can readily imagine the music on this outstanding release being performed; a cloud of tobacco smoke here and there, a waft of wine and perhaps some London gin, one's attention gripped by the atmosphere and concentration upon the music being played just a few feet from one's chair – this is how, surely, Handel imagined and his distinguished audience experienced his music for the home.

Had the master heard performances of the consistent quality one experiences on this finely-recorded CD, he would surely have been more than satisfied – as would his fellow-listeners – for this new release is artistically superb, a rare and original concept brought to an admirable conclusion.

Robert Matthew-Walker



Berio: Complete Piano Works Petite Suite/Six Encores/Sequenza IV/Canzonetta for piano four hands*/

Touch for piano four hands*/Cinque Variazioni/Rounds/Piano Sonata
Matteo Bevilacqua, piano;

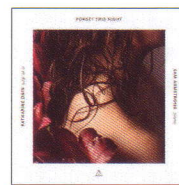
*Luca Trabucco, piano

★★★★★ Grand Piano GP 903 [74'25"]

Here is a fascinating collection, eminently worthwhile, of Berio's complete music for piano; of these works, the Petite Suite is on balance the least radical, but despite Berio's reputation in some quarters, all of these pieces are approachable, even to non-specialists. Berio was above all a communicative composer, never one to inhabit an ivory-tower (no matter with what aesthetic baggage his work is usually accompanied critically) and at all

time immediate and spontaneous. Matteo Bevilacqua (with partner Luca Trabucco in the two works for four hands) plays all of this music with complete conviction and understanding, the genuine emotional range of which may well surprise those who have been uncertain, given some of the critical mauling to which Berio's music has been subjected, as to whether such works are for them. The recording is clear and more than acceptable, and the accompanying booklet notes tell the enquiring listener all they need to know.

John Alexander



Forget this night – songs and piano music by Lili Boulanger, Karol Szymanowski and Grażyna Bacewicz

Katharine Dain, soprano/
Sam Armstrong, piano

★★★★★ 7 Mountain Records
7MNTN-046 [c. 68"]

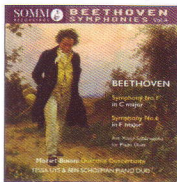
I must confess that all of this music was new to me, although the work of all three composers isn't. The most significant composition here is Lili Boulanger's sole song-cycle, *Clarières dans le ciel* (*Glades in the sky*), written in 1914 to thirteen poems by Francis Jammes, and expressing an intensity of love that perhaps only French literature at the time could embrace.

This work is indeed the main reason for acquiring this beautifully planned and recorded disc, which is, moreover, so well performed throughout. Although the three composers are very varied creative figures, it is fascinating, on playing the disc complete straight through (as though one were at a recital), to realise how well all of this music goes together. Not of course that one composer echoes or inhabits a similarity of musical language of the others – it is a question of suitability, or basic inner emotional feeling, that inspired all three composers in their musical realisations of affection, at times bordering on physical love, and how such immortal feelings inspire in creative humanity a universal style of communication that transcends spoken or written language.

There may indeed be a metaphysical connection which binds this music together – in any event, this recital makes complete artistic, indeed aesthetic, sense in such compelling

performances as these. The presentation and the recording quality are first-class, and all-in-all this record demonstrates the essential qualities of European musical art of the twentieth-century at its most intimate yet most humanly communicative. A distinguished release, which I was most pleased to hear.

Geoffrey Leigh



**Beethoven
Transcribed
Scharwenka:
Symphony no 1 Op
21/Symphony no 6
Op 68 'Pastoral'**

**Busoni: Duetтино Concertante BV88
after Mozart (K 459)**

Tessa Uys, Ben Schoeman, piano duo
★★★★ SOMM CD 0677 [74'06"]

The on-going SOMM series of Beethoven Symphonies in the piano duet transcriptions by Franz Xaver Scharwenka has been a revelation for all, not least in the quality of interpretations of this supremely gifted piano duo, and this latest issue of the First and Sixth Symphonies is fully up to the standard of earlier issues. Those collecting the series will need no encouragement to obtain the new disc, which apart from having two of the symphonies in world premiere recordings of these transcriptions, also had Busoni's delightful Duetтино Concertante, a splendid work based upon the finale of Mozart's Concerto K459.

The performances throughout are so musical, so fully Beethovenian in the symphonies and so fully acknowledging the subtleties of Busoni's homage, as to defy criticism. As the recording quality is also excellent, this disc can be wholeheartedly recommended.

John Alexander



**Mahler: Symphony
No 2 in C minor
'Resurrection'**
**Marie Eriksmoen,
soprano/Jennifer
Johnston, mezzo-**

**soprano/Philharmonia Chorus and
Orchestra/Santtu-Matias Rouvali**
★★★[★★] Philharmonia Records
SIGCD 760 [2xCDs, 81'10"]

Recorded live during a public performance at London's Royal Festival Hall on June 8, 2022, as can be seen this is an 'orchestra's own label'

release, not one issued by an established commercial record company. One makes this point as there are various aspects of the release which a truly professional approach would have made it a more attractive proposition. Elsewhere in this issue's varied CD reviews one can readily find discs with a playing-time of over eighty minutes, so why, in this technologically-advanced age, does the Philharmonia issue the symphony, at just over eighty-one minutes total playing-time, on two CDs, with no additional music?

Had this been a Mahler 'Resurrection' on one CD, it would probably have swept the board in terms of genuine value-for-money: one has to mention such factors as the competition is so tough. One assumes the Philharmonia would like to sell as many copies as possible.

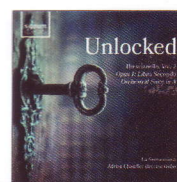
The presentation also gives far too much leeway to the designers, without much thought to purchasers: on the booklet's title/contents page, the soloists are not mentioned – one has to leaf through the pages until one comes across the now-customary artists biographies in order to find out who they are. The type size on the overall packaging is also absurdly small – and the very title of the work is not shown on the front cover!

Thankfully, such an 'amateur-night' approach (which includes biographies of the booklet-note writers), in the teeth of considerable commercial opposition, does not of course extend to the performance itself.

This is very good, at times profoundly so, and – given the nature of the recording – captures admirably the 'feel' of a live performance, although the notorious Festival Hall acoustics still occasionally pose unnecessary challenges to the engineers; one must question if this Hall is truly the best possible venue for a work of this nature.

Admirers of this conductor will disabuse themselves of my restraining comments, but this very good performance could have been presented with far greater professional style and commercial grasp. The soloists are both excellent. For admirers of this conductor only.

Robert Matthew-Walker



**Unlocked:
Brescianello Vol 2**
**Giuseppe Antonio
Brescianello: Op 1 –
Concerti &
Sinphonie Libro**

**Secondo; Overture – Suite in A
La Serenissima/Adrian Chandler**
★★★★ Signum SIGCD 767 [72'15"]

The resurrection of the music of so many eighteenth-century composers has, at times it seems, become something like a flood for performing groups and commercial record companies during the past sixty years or so, with the result that the wonderfully rich vein of worthwhile repertoire is now available for music-overs world-wide in a manner that would have been considered unthinkable in the decade following World War II.

Here is another of those admirable composers, whose music, contemporaneous with Vivaldi (as a quick point of reference), is more than well-worth our attention. As Adrian Chandler writes in his excellently informative booklet notes, little is known of Brescianello's early life, who, it seems, was very likely born in Bologna round about 1690, and made his first artistic mark in Venice, before travelling in acceptance of various courtly appointments. Such facts are as may be, and serve to place him historically and geographically in his time, but it is his music with which we are (and his contemporaries were) concerned.

Thanks to Adrian Chandler's assiduous investigations, we can hear Brescianello's music today world-wide, and this admirably-produced (in every sense) CD stands as an excellent example for the justification of the contemporary classical record business: performances and recordings of such quality would have been almost impossible seventy-odd years ago, justifications a-plenty for the support (in every sense, aesthetic as well as financial) of this music, which, because of its qualities, appeals as much to us today as it surely did to its initial hearers three hundred years ago.

Little need be said of the individual works here, but I felt the C minor Concerto V for violin, strings and continuo was arguably the finest and most originally expressive composition in this collection, although the A major Concerto runs it close. Nor should one overlook Brescianello's early symphonies