

April 2013

GRAMOPHONE *Choice*

Delius



Koanga - excs^a. Appalachia^b. Sea Drift^c

^aHenriette Bonde-Hansen sop^{abc} Johan Reuter,

^aSimon Duus bars^{bc} Aarhus Cathedral Choir;

Aarhus Symphony^{bc} Choir and Orchestra / Bo Holten

Danacord © DACOCD732 (78' • DDD • T)



Holten concludes his tour of Delius's international works

This is the fifth and last of Danacord's fine series of 'Delius Masterworks'. After discs of Danish, Norwegian, English and French works comes this one inspired by American sources, music prompted by the composer's early experiences as a citrus planter in Florida. When all three works stand high in the list of Delius masterpieces, together offering a disc of almost 80 minutes, this is in many ways the most attractive of the whole series.

Bo Holten conducts performances of both *Appalachia* and *Sea Drift* that compare favourably with existing versions but the excerpt from *Koanga* is the most welcome item, a slightly cut version of the second half of Act 2, with four passages presented in sequence. These include monologues for Koanga's intended bride, Palmyra, the slave-owner Martinez and finally the fleeing Koanga, as well as the haunting dance 'La Calinda' complete with voices, as in the complete opera. That

alone makes a delectable item, and hardly less attractive are the three vocal solos. Though Koanga's final voodoo invocation is supposed to be heard in the distance, here the voice remains close, no doubt with the thought that it makes a more emphatic conclusion.

Unlike some rival versions, this disc offers separate tracks for different sections of both *Appalachia* and *Sea Drift*. Johan Reuter is the excellent baritone soloist in *Sea Drift*, sustaining the narration well, telling of the solitary sea bird that has lost its mate. Though many would count it Delius's finest work, the most memorable performance here is of *Appalachia*, with its 14 variations on a slave song leading up to the glowing conclusion with chorus and the highly evocative baritone solo, 'O honey, I am going down the river in the morning'. It is a passage which I find sticks in the mind for days after you have heard it, a tribute to this dedicated performance. First-rate sound, as in the previous issues. **Edward Greenfield**