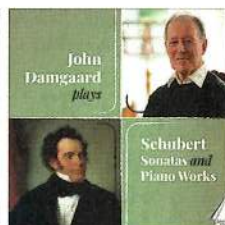


BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan opens boxes dedicated to a cellist, two pianists and a chamber music festival

There can't be a single recording from the stereo era that competes for wide appeal with **Jacqueline du Pré's** 1965 account of the Elgar Cello Concerto under John Barbirolli, though the coupling, Janet Baker's priceless rendition of *Sea Pictures*, is surely as much of a draw. As to the concerto, which has been reissued numerous times, it now sits *in situ* as part of a box of four well-transferred hybrid SACDs along with the Delius Concerto (under Malcolm Sargent), the Schumann and Dvořák Concertos (where the conductor is du Pré's husband, Daniel Barenboim), the Haydn concertos (with Barenboim conducting No 1 and Barbirolli No 2), Boccherini's Concerto No 9 in B flat (arranged and with cadenzas by Grützmacher, which won't please everyone – again under Barenboim), Monn (Barbirolli), Lalo and Saint-Saëns (No 1, both under Barenboim). Anyone who had the good fortune to see du Pré in concert will take her emotive interpretations and selfless dedication to everything she played as a given. These classic recordings offer further proof.

A quite different brand of musical excitement is offered by **20 Years Hohenstaufen Festival**, a series of concerts (2008-24) located in a charming village among the foothills of the Swabian Jura at the behest of violinist Rahel Rilling, a daughter of the noted and highly prolific Bach performer Helmuth Rilling. Spread across five generously filled CDs are vital performances by young musicians eager to share repertoire both known and little known. A Mozart 'Opera Suite' is arranged for two violins by Daniel Röhn, who performs alongside Gabriel Adorján for an enjoyable diversion. Bach is represented by the Third and Fifth *Brandenburg Concertos* played with great vitality, as is the Concerto for two violins (Adorján and Rahel Rilling). Ravel's mature A minor Piano Trio (Rilling, Zvi Plesser, cello, Yejin Gil, piano), Schumann's moody Second Piano Trio in F major (Nora Christian, David Adorján, cello, Gil) both come off well, as does Debussy's early Piano Trio in G major (Lena Neudauer, violin, Adorján, cello, Paul Rivinius, piano). Clarinetist Jörg Widmann features in Brahms's Quintet, beautifully performed; there are works by



Osvaldo Golijov (including the powerhouse *Mariel* arranged for violin and cello) and by Oscar Peterson, *Hymn to Freedom* with pianist David Gazarov (plus bass and drums), a real thriller of a piece, quasi-jazz that recalls the song 'Bridge over troubled water'. Schnittke's multifaceted Piano Quintet (with pianist Jacques Ammon) ends with a soul-searching *Moderato pastorale*. There's plenty more to enjoy and I can't recommend the set strongly enough: the music is consistently absorbing, the performances likewise, and the sound quality is excellent. A real musical adventure, that's for sure.

Turn to **Martha Argerich's** Lugano Festival recordings (only those that feature Argerich herself playing included in this recent set, by the way), featured now as part of 'Martha Argerich: The Warner Classics Edition', and you have a combination of superhuman pianism, acute and often persuasive musicianship and a sense of joy that this great player extends to all her collaborators. She's become a veritable cult, but to make such a glib claim is to minimise the extent of her genius and influence. The fact is that to encounter Argerich at her best is to be 'switched on' in the way her various collaborators are, and to attempt an analysis of what we hear – often for the umpteenth time (repertoire tends to crop up time and again) – seems like an insult. Argerich is perennially alive to spirit and detail, whether with the Capuçons, Gabriela Montero, Alexandre Rabinovitch, Gidon Kremer, Stephen Kovacevich, Lilya Zilberstein, Mischa Maisky or countless others. And, of course, there are her many solo performances, which are mostly stunning. The repertoire covered ranges from Bach to Weinberg via Liszt and Schumann (including the two wonderful violin sonatas). But there's a question that's posed and answered at the close of Marc Trautmann's excellent booklet note. 'What is your motto?' Argerich was asked.

The answer: 'Keep going.' Surely more than that? But there's a simple solution for us listeners. The temptation with a 46-CD set centring on a single towering artist is to over-indulge, like a kid in a sweetshop. If I say that you'll risk a sort of listener's queasiness, that's more to do with perceived appetite than with the enormous range of goodies that Argerich has on offer. You won't regret the investment, I promise, but I'd advise listening to only one disc at a time.

No chance of ratcheting the tension too high with the Danish pianist **John Damgaard** on Danacord, a Kempff pupil whose attentive performances of Schubert (sonatas, finished and unfinished, Impromptus and *Klavierstücke*) are full of subtle interest (but not the *Six Moments musicaux* and two Scherzos that Damgaard also recorded for the label), whether in terms of rubato or Damgaard's interestingly varied tempos. A good place to sample is the second of the late *Klavierstücke*, D946 (disc 5, track 9), which demonstrates Damgaard's approach to phrasing and his expressive management of tempo. I also like the way he plays the sublime A major Sonata, D664 (disc 3, tracks 5-7, recorded in 1998); but turn to Sergio Fiorentino recorded in Berlin in 1996 (now in Brilliant Classics' big Fiorentino box – see page 97) and 'pleasing' is transformed to 'sublime'. Even Sviatoslav Richter (Warner Classics) doesn't quite compare. But Damgaard's playing is full of interesting ideas and is well worth investigating. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

- The Great Cello Concertos du Pré**
Warner Classics ④ . 2173 25202-9
- 20 Years Hohenstaufen Festival**
Hänssler Classic ⑤ HC24060
- The Warner Classics Edition Argerich**
Warner Classics (46 CDs) 2173 24088-8
- Schubert Pf Wks Damgaard**
Danacord ⑥ DACOCD575/80