



**HIGH SPIRITS:** The Trondheim Soloists play spirited folk

# Norway's most musical folk

Christopher Dingle enjoys the latest two Blu-ray audio releases



## BULL

**Saeterjentens Søndag; Violin Concerto in A; Concerto Fantastico; I Ensomme Stunde; La Verbena de San Juan; Et Saeterbesøg**  
Annar Follesø (violin); Norwegian Radio Orchestra/Ole Kristian Ruud  
2L 2L-067-SABD (hybrid CD/SACD; plus Blu-ray: 7.1 dts) 69:16 mins (2 discs)

## IN FOLK STYLE

**Grieg: Holberg Suite; Two Nordic Melodies, Op. 63; Amper: Abrégé – folk suite for nyckelharpa and string orchestra; Larsen: Diplom – folk suite for fiddle and string orchestra**  
Geir Inge Lotsberg (violin); Trondheim Soloists/Oyvind Gimse  
2L 2L-068-SABD (hybrid CD/SACD; plus Blu-ray: 7.1 dts) 57:23 mins (2 discs)  
BBC Music Direct £24.99 (each)

Two more intriguing releases of Norwegian repertoire from the marvellously inventive 2L label. Both offer exceptional recorded sound, with the listener being truly

immersed in the music in surround sound. As with earlier 2L sets, there are two discs, one with blu-ray audio, the other a hybrid SACD.

The music of virtuoso violinist and composer Ole Bull will be new to many outside Norway, but he was a major figure in the 19th century. Born in 1810, he was lauded across Europe by figures such as Berlioz, Schumann and Liszt for his ability to combine exceptional technique with emotional insight. The major works here are Bull's two violin concertos,

## The Trondheim Soloists possess energy and a full-blooded sound

which have only recently been rediscovered. Like the works of some other virtuoso performer composers, they are rather episodic in nature, but it is clear that Bull had a keen melodic gift, as well as exceptional mastery of the violin, including four-part writing. Annar Follesø does a sterling job of bringing these works vibrantly to life, with barely a blemish in his beautiful *bel canto* tone despite the numerous leaps into the stratosphere. The Norwegian Radio Orchestra gives excellent

support under Ole Kristian Ruud, and the only caveat being that there could occasionally be a little more drive. Among the accompanying shorter works, the miniature that opens the set, *Saeterjentens Sondag*, are especially sublime.

The same could be said of the new disc from the Trondheim Soloists, *In Folk Style*, though it opens with more familiar fare, in the guise of Grieg's *Holberg Suite* and *Two Nordic Melodies*. As with their stunning Divertimento disc, the Trondheim Soloists possess great energy and a full-blooded sound, though there is no lack of poetry or beauty. The 'Air' of the *Holberg Suite* might have had a touch more fluidity, but its 'Rigaudon' is quite simply joyous, as are the new orchestral folk suites, *Diplom* and *Abrégé*. The former features Gjermund Larsen's fiddle playing, while *Abrégé* is an arrangement by Johannes Leonard Rusten of pieces by Emilia Amper featuring her on *nyckelharpa*, a type of fiddle with chromatic keyboard. Unless you have a pathological aversion to modern folk music, then this is infectious, even if it leaves the Grieg feeling like a distant dream.

PERFORMANCE (BOTH) ★★★★★  
RECORDING (BOTH) ★★★★★

dying composer in a Bollywood film that didn't happen, and surprisingly serious in tone until it goes over the top in a choral apotheosis.

It's all well played by the versatile Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra under the composer, with committed contributions from the veteran bassist Gary Karr and the outstanding violinist Philippe Quint, and clearly recorded. *Anthony Burton*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## R STRAUSS • WEBERN

**R Strauss: Ein Heldenleben; Webern: Im Sommerwind**  
Chicago SO/Bernard Haitink  
CSO Resound CSOR 9011004 (hybrid CD/SACD) 62:32 mins

BBC Music Direct £13.99

In these live performances from 2008, Bernard Haitink directs a *Heldenleben* full of excellent qualities, yet not quite so spellbinding or charismatic as Reiner's. The way he delineates Strauss's polyphony is very impressive, bringing out the counterpoints and subsidiary voices with nothing short of exemplary clarity. The orchestral sound is magnificent in SACD, quite stunning in the battle-sequence. Yet there is something rather ponderous about the enunciation of the vaunting, youthful opening theme; the gaggle of enemies sounds altogether too good-mannered; and for me, at least, the love-music and the glowing rhetoric of 'The Hero's Works of Peace' do not touch the heart. Considered overall it's a fine performance, but not one to set aside, say, Karajan's 1983 rendering with the Berlin Philharmonic (DG), or indeed Reiner's from half a century ago (RCA) – or, to cite a more recent version, Christian Thielemann's stunning rendition with the Vienna Philharmonic (DG).

An unexpected coupling, Webern's youthful, gorgeous *Im Sommerwind* is the reflective foil to Strauss's action man, and paradoxically it's this that makes the disc very well worth acquiring. Haitink renders a performance of great dignity and tenderness, a vision of the Romantic tone-poet Webern could have become had not fate (and Schoenberg) taken a hand. Haitink achieves the feat of investing it with the aura of at least a near-masterpiece. *Calum MacDonald*  
PERFORMANCE (STRAUSS) ★★★★★ (WEBERN) ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## TCHAIKOVSKY

**Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture; Serenade for Strings; Francesca da Rimini, Symphonic Fantasy**

**EWALD**  
**Brass Quintets Nos 1 & 3**  
Philadelphia Orchestra/  
Christoph Eschenbach  
Ondine ODE 1150-2D 113:46 mins (2 discs)

BBC Music Direct £15.99  
Never heard of Victor Ewald? Don't worry; neither had I. Nor, it seems, had Russophiles writing around the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries when Ewald balanced his talents as civil engineering professor, cellist in the Beliaeff Quartet and composer.

Brass players may be grateful for the two quintets here, which are an easy-going delight, bound to encourage spot-the-influence games. No. 1 in B flat minor of circa 1890 starts with Russian folksong treatment, goes on to sound like early Strauss and turns Borodin-esque in a 5/4 *scherzo* (another one to challenge those who say Tchaikovsky got there first in the *Pathétique*). No. 3 in D flat follows the ruling Russian symphonist in 1912, Glazunov, and boasts an exuberant finale. Trumpeter David Bilger sings gloriously in the First Quintet's slow movement.

The brass divertimentos provide light relief after the most serious-

minded *Francesca* I've ever heard, spaciouly avoiding whirlwind overkill and dynamically alert in a studied but affecting remembrance of happier times. On the first disc, Tchaikovsky's String Serenade, following *Romeo and Juliet*, plays a similar role to the quintets. Christoph Eschenbach's approach to the Serenade is big and sumptuous with symphonic strings, rather than light and fleet with a small ensemble. The breadth of his *Romeo* doesn't always work as well as his *Francesca*, but he does hit the heights of the love theme with aristocratic aplomb and he always reminds you what a fabulously organised symphonic movement this is. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE (QUINTETS, FRANCESCA) ★★★★★ (THE REST) ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## VIEXTEMPS

**Violin Concertos Nos 4 & 5; Fantasia appassionata, Op. 35**  
Viviane Hagner (violin); Royal Flemish Philharmonic/Martyn Brabbins  
Hyperion CDA 67798 66:40 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99

When Hyperion's *Romantic Violin Concerto* series was first planned, the name of Vieuxtemps must have been one of the first on the list. In the mid-19th century he took on Paganini's mantle of 'greatest living violinist', and trod the same path of virtuoso-composer. Since his focus was the violin (occasionally the viola), his works have struggled to retain the same prominence as those of composers who cast their nets more widely. This is a pity, as they are every bit as rewarding as the handful of old war-horses that dominate the repertoire of many of today's violinists.

Of the two concertos presented here, the Fourth shows the influence of Beethoven and is, as Berlioz observed, virtually a symphony with violin solo. It is also a work of some daring that may have given Bruch an idea or two, though arguably makes better use of them. The lyricism of Fifth Concerto is more pervasive, with the movements running together in the manner of Liszt's First Piano Concerto. Viviane Hagner is a marvellous exponent of both works, as she is in the more overt technical show piece of the *Fantasia appassionata*. The Royal Flemish

## BACKGROUND TO...

### Ole Bull (1810-80)

Bull was one of the greatest violinists of the 19th century and a central figure in Norway's musical life. He mastered the violin well before his tenth birthday to the extent that the statutes of the Bergen Harmonic Society were altered to allow so young a musician to join the orchestra. Widely travelled, he was especially popular in the US where, as Bull said, he was 'an adopted son'. Bull was responsible for recognising the young Grieg's talent and persuading the boy's parents to send him to the Leipzig Conservatory. Grieg, in gratitude, dedicated his first set of folksong arrangements to Bull.



Philharmonic are thoroughly committed. *Christopher Dingle*  
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★



## WEINBERG

**Symphonies Nos 1 & 7**  
Erik Risberg (harsichord); Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra/Thord Svedlund  
Chandos CHSA 5078 (hybrid CD/SACD) 69:23 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99

Mieczysław Weinberg's First Symphony was written in Tashkent in 1942, three years after the young composer had sought refuge in the Soviet Union escaping from Nazi persecution in his native Poland. It was dedicated to the Red Army as a defiant token of gratitude to the soldiers whose stalwart actions against the German aggressors had helped to save the composer's life. Yet although militaristic elements are certainly present in the central section of the first movement and in the rather stolid finale, this largely accomplished work encompasses a much wider emotional palette including a lyrically reflective *Lento* as well as propulsive and ironic *scherzo*. Stylistically the Symphony draws upon an intriguing blend of influences ranging from Prokofiev in the contours of the opening melodic idea to Mahler in the serenity and poise of the slow movement, while the *scherzo* breathes a similar air to the *scherzo* of Shostakovich's Sixth.

By the time Weinberg composed his Seventh Symphony for Rudolf Barshai's Moscow Chamber Orchestra in the mid-1960s he had developed a much stronger musical identity. Imaginatively scored for solo harpsichord and strings, this haunting work – conceived as an unbroken sequence of five movements – culminates in a compelling finale that is particularly notable for employing a wide array of eerie instrumental effects.

Following on from his successful disc of the composer's Concertos, Thord Svedlund and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra deliver exemplary performances of both works. Supported by outstanding sound, this release can be confidently recommended to those who enjoyed Chandos's other fine discs of Weinberg's Symphonies. *Erik Levi*  
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

## REISSUES

Reviewed by Jessica Duchon

### CHOPIN • SCHUMANN

**Chopin: Piano Concerto No. 2; Schumann: Piano Concerto**  
Louis Lortie (piano); Philharmonia Orchestra/Neeme Järvi  
Chandos CHAN 10603 X (1992) 62:27 mins  
BBC Music Direct £7.99



A very rewarding listen, with beautiful touch from Louis Lortie. Neeme Järvi controls a halo of whisper-soft strings in the Chopin. Slightly erratic rubato in Schumann, but the Chopin is a triumph.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

### DOHNÁNYI

**Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2**  
Howard Shelley (piano); BBC Philharmonic/Mathias Bamert  
Chandos CHAN 10599 X (2002/04) 72:25 mins  
BBC Music Direct £7.99

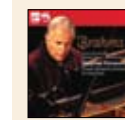


Too rarely heard concertos: way-out stuff at times, mixing grand virtuosity, as befitted Liszt's fellow countryman, with immense melodic generosity. And for Shelley, it's an utterly jaw-dropping *tour de force*.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

### BRAHMS

**Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2, Ballades, Op. 10, Klavierstücke, Op. 76**  
Stephen Kovacevich (piano); London Symphony Orchestra/Colin Davis  
Newton 8802010 (1979-85) 147:54 mins  
BBC Music Direct £12.99 (2 discs)



Kovacevich is on fire in these recordings. Visceral, inspired, spiritual and sensual, his Brahms balances on the edge, yet reaches profound repose for slow movements.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★

### CHOPIN

**Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2; 4 Ballades; Barcarolle in F sharp, Op. 60 etc**  
Jorge Bolet (piano); Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal/Dutoit  
Newton 8802008 (1989) 136:50 mins  
BBC Music Direct £12.99 (2 discs)



A mixed bag, or maybe an acquired taste: Bolet's Chopin playing has some stunning moments

of eloquence, but sometimes longs for a more fleet-fingered facility.  
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★  
RECORDING ★★★★★