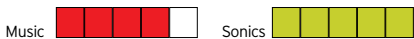
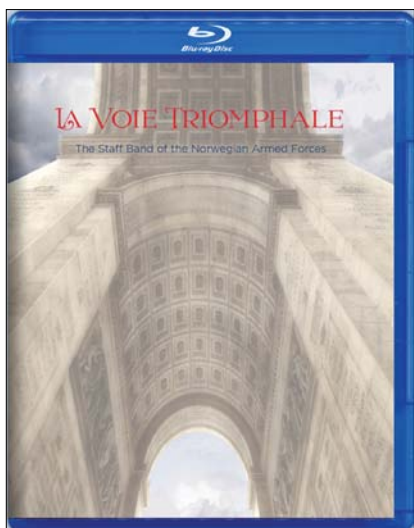


Classical Music Reviews



La Voie Triomphale. Norwegian Armed Forces Band. 2L (SACD, Blu-ray, downloads)

Most recordings from the Norwegian 2L label are “sonic spectacles,” and *La Voie Triomphale* is the most spectacular yet. The repertoire may have something to do with it. Since audio’s Golden Age of the 1950s and 60s, music for concert band has been well served by recordings. Frederick Fennell, of course, made close to two dozen records for Mercury with his Eastman Wind Ensemble and later worked with Telarc and Reference Recordings. RR continues the tradition to this day, with its impressive recordings of the Dallas Wind Symphony. It’s no surprise that the concert band and its subgroup, the brass ensemble, appeals to the best audio engineers and producers: the dynamics and instrumental sonorities push the limits of the recording art.

This new 2L presents the Staff Band of the Norwegian Armed Forces led by Ole Kristian Ruud in an all-French program. The main event is the *Grande Symphonie Funèbre et Triomphale* of Hector Berlioz. The opening F minor “Funeral March” is powerfully evocative—at the first performance, it accompanied a procession of coffins to a new “garden of remembrance”—with solemn field drums setting the tone. A “Funeral Oration” follows, featuring a gorgeously intoned trombone solo, and the half-hour piece concludes with an ecstatic “Apothéose.”

The remainder of the program proceeds chronologically. Camille Saint-Saëns’ *Orient et Occident* sports “exotic” percussion accents—triangle, bass drum, a softly struck gong—and lavishly scored, melodically pleasing themes that contrast East and West. The brief *Fanfare to La Peri* by Paul Dukas is thrillingly played by the Norwegians, with precisely matched triple tonguing. Next up is Darius Milhaud’s *Suite Française* of 1945, a jaunty, celebratory work written to honor the French Resistance during Second World War, then comes Henri Tomasi’s over-the-top *Fanfares Liturgiques*, for brass and percussion. Its Gothic sensibility evokes vintage black-and-white movies with grey, cold cathedrals, muttering hunchbacks, and light shining from above onto upturned faces. The program finishes with Eugène Bozza’s exuberant *Children’s Overture*.

You won’t go wrong with any of the formats in which the program is available. The “physical media” option provides both a hybrid multichannel SACD and a music-only Blu-ray disc; there are also a number of download alternatives, including 192/24 stereo and 96/24 multichannel. With all, the sound of the field drums in the Berlioz is scary-realistic, every stroke of every roll intelligible. When a tam-tam is hit at the outset of *Fanfares Liturgiques*’s finale, the sense of a large, heavy piece of metal set vibrating from its center and radiating outwards is uncanny. Dynamic range is stunning; woodwind and brass sonorities are rendered with their rich complexity intact. 2L’s multichannel sound is characteristically immersive. Detailed seating arrangements are provided for all six works: for some, there are a significant number of players positioned behind the conductor (and thus behind the listener.) The multichannel download is “only” 96/24, while the program on the BD is 192/24 in all channels. The latter is significantly better, and the best way to experience this program, with a reach-out-and-touch-it dimensionality rarely achieved on recordings. **Andrew Quint**

Further Listening: Grainger: *Lincolnshire Posy* (Fennell); *Chicago Symphony Brass Live* (SACD)