

big name is Claudio Abbado, whose later years are producing such a variety of outstanding music-making. Yet the vast majority of this has been in music from Mozart onwards: Abbado conducting Baroque repertoire is certainly unusual, although as the booklet notes remind us, he recorded the *Brandenburg Concertos* for LP with the orchestra of La Scala (issued by Dischi Ricordi) and he also performed them much more recently at the 2003 Lucerne Festival.

This new DVD is a treat. It presents a concert given in the Teatro Municipale at Reggio Emilia in April 2007. The instrumentalists – members of the Orchestra Mozart – are led by the outstanding Baroque violinist Giuliano Carmignola, and the other players here include Michala Petri on recorder. The whole ensemble (essentially a large chamber group, quite often playing one or two to a part) is of stunning quality and boasts some superb period stylists.

Abbado is happy to trust these players to deliver thrilling *Brandenburgs*, and so they do – he actually does very little beyond gently coaxing them to give of their considerable best: several movements, including the whole of No. 6, are not conducted at all. The joyous spirit of everything about this concert is really uplifting: the cameras show us the players at full stretch and they are clearly enjoying every second – the two viola players in No. 6, for example, seem to radiate delight as well as playing with immense verve. Speeds throughout the six concertos are lively and the style is always historically informed, even though some of the instruments are modern. Baroque bows ensure superbly animated and energetic articulation in a movement like the finale of No. 3, which incidentally has a nifty harpsichord cadenza before the two chords that are all Bach wrote down of the slow movement. The harpsichord is played magnificently throughout by Ottavio Dantone, who is also the soloist in No. 5. Reinhold Friedrich is the sparkling trumpet player in No. 2.

This immensely enjoyable one-off occasion, led by one of the most distinguished conductors currently active, but in the most unobtrusive way, has very much the feeling of an evening of spontaneous chamber music presided over by a benign and inspiring coach. The concertos are played in the order 1, 3, 5, 6, 4, 2 (the last movement of No. 2 is encored). There is at least one other very good set of the *Brandenburgs* on DVD (by the Freiburger Barockorchester), but don't miss this lovely disc: I don't know of another version of these concertos on film that provides quite such high levels of commitment, stylish virtuosity and pure pleasure. The sound is very clear (I used the default PCM stereo setting; the other options are Dolby Digital 5.1 and DTS 5.1) and the camerawork is sensitive. Recommended with great enthusiasm.

*Nigel Simeone*

**Divertimenti** New SACD/Blu-ray Audio

**Bartók** Divertimento for Strings, Sz113.

**Bacewicz** Concerto for String Orchestra.

**Björklund** Carmina.

**Britten** Simple Symphony, Op. 4.

**Trondheim Soloists/Øyvind Gimse** (violin).

**2L 2L50SABD** (full price, one SACD, one Blu-ray Audio, 1 hour 9 minutes). *Website* www.2l.no.

*Producer/Engineer* Morten Lindberg. *Engineer* Hans Peter L'Orange. *Date* November 2007.

At first glance this programme appears a curious assemblage. Although the title of the recording is 'Divertimenti' only one of the pieces is actually so titled, and the bringing together of Britten (1913-76), Bacewicz (1909-69), Björklund (b.1945) and Bartók (1881-1945) is obvious only in that they all begin with a 'B'. Be that as it may, once you begin to listen to the music all doubts evaporate. The Trondheim Soloists are a string orchestra who bring a very particular kind of sound to all they touch – cool crystalline transparency – and without sacrificing the individuality of the composers here they manage to make the transitions in style seem utterly natural, compelling even.

Part of the secret of the 'Trondheim sound' here is that the recording venue has been carefully chosen to suit the repertoire – the luminous acoustic of Selbu Church in Norway. The enthusiastic and experimental team which runs the young 2L label have brought an ideal balance, tonal colour and spatial sense to the music-making, which it has made available to us in an array of high-definition formats. As a keen audiophile myself I was thrilled to have the option of either spinning the hybrid SACD disc (for stereo on CD players or multi-channel sound on SACD players), or experimenting with the Blu-ray Audio disc, which offers three surround-sound formats and one stereo mix-down (the only video image is a menu selection screen).

This is not the place to start discussing the relative merits of CD and SACD versus Blu-ray sound, but I will just say that the sonic results from the Blu-ray disc were electrifying. The sheer punch, dynamic range and sense of atmosphere and acoustic space were hard to credit coming from a simple Sony Blu-ray player, which, just a few days ago, had cost me a modest £300 – small change in the serious hi-fi world. Blu-ray players are a much, much cheaper option than SACD players (and they have the advantage of playing video in both DVD and Blu-ray formats too). There could be exciting times ahead for affordable high-definition sound if more companies embrace the notion of Blu-ray Audio. Yet with the current credit crunch and a host of competing formats out there I'm not going to hold my breath. Intriguing though.

I hadn't come across Grazyna Bacewicz before, but she seems to have been one of the few female composers of her generation in Poland to have achieved recognition outside her country. Her *Concerto for String Orchestra* of 1948 may occasionally bring to mind Lutosławski and Szymanowski but there's a spare, haunting lyrical impulse (particularly in the clouded skies that hover over the slow movement) which marks out a distinctive if slender voice, beautifully drawn out by the players here. Terje Björklund's *Carmina*, originally written for the Chilingirian String Quartet, was specially transcribed for the larger forces of the Trondheim Soloists for this recording. It was apparently inspired 'by The Pindar Odes which were written for winners of the Olympiad in ancient Greece'. However, despite some climactic passages (one or two reminiscent of phrases in Britten's *Simple Symphony*) the music doesn't strike me as particularly heroic; rather, it conveys a moving sense of emptiness, enough to put one in mind of Anita Brookner's resonant phrase in *Hotel du Lac* ... 'vibrant with absence'.

Bartók's *Divertimento for Strings* of 1939 is given a satisfyingly muscular performance (bar a few rough edges from the violins in the outbursts of the first movement), with its centre of gravity firmly located in the darkly ruminating central *Adagio*. The Trondheim Soloists have more of interest to say about Britten's *Simple Symphony*, allowing melancholy overtones and a slight edge to creep into this normally sunny, untroubled work to gripping effect. The boisterous theme of the opening 'Bourrée' verges on the nervy, and the 'Frolicsome Finale' is delivered at a hectic pace, like film music accompanying a menacing chase scene. The 'Playful Pizzicato' is particularly well served by the recording, with more tonal substance behind the plucking than usual. I'm not taken in by its apparent innocence, though; there's something vaguely unsettling about the pizzicato ... ghostly whisperings as the screw turns.

*Simon Heighes*

**London Philharmonic Orchestra** New  
**Bax Tintagel.**

**Rachmaninov** Symphony No. 3 in A minor, Op. 44.

**London Philharmonic Orchestra/Osmo Vänskä.**

**LPO 0036** (medium price, 53 minutes). *Website* www.lpo.org.uk. *Producer* Andrew Walton. *Engineer* Phil Rowlands. *Date* Live performances at the Royal Festival Hall, London on December 8th, 2007.

**Comparisons:**

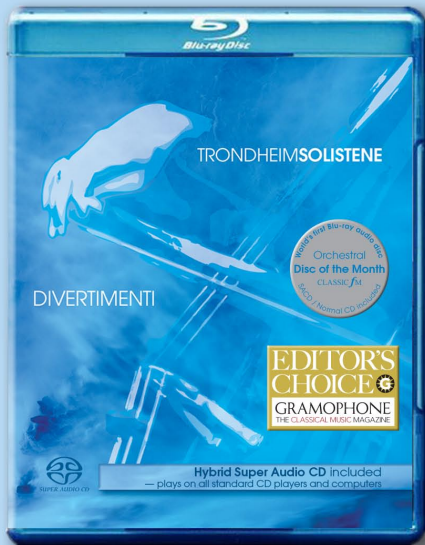
**Bax:**

BBC PO/Handley (Chandos)  
CHAN10122(5) (five discs)

**Rachmaninov:**

LSO/Previn (EMI Classics) 7 64530-2  
(1976, three discs)

National PO/Stokowski (EMI Classics) 5 66759-2 (1975)



**DIVERTIMENTI (2L50SABD) - SACD / Normal CD included**

**2L**

# The Trondheim Soloists DIVERTIMENTI

— nominated for three GRAMMY Awards:  
Surround Sound • Engineering • Best Ensemble

MARIANNE THORSEN

# MOZART

TRONDHEIMSOLISTENE

VIOLIN CONCERTOS

**MOZART (2L38SACD)**

Classic FM '*...mellifluous performances, topped off by perfect cadenzas*' 5 stars  
Stereophile '*...a record to die for*'

**2L distributed in the UK by Discovery Records**  
[www.discovery-records.com](http://www.discovery-records.com) or contact 01380 728000

**GRAMMY  
NOMINEE**



**51st  
GRAMMY  
Awards**

February 8, 2009  
8pm et/pt CBS

[www.2L.no](http://www.2L.no)