

Choral

Elgar

The Dream of Gerontius, Op 38^a.

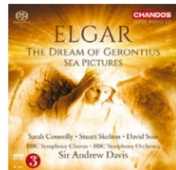
Sea Pictures, Op 37

Sarah Connolly *mez*^a Stuart Skelton *ten*

^aDavid Soar *bass* BBC Symphony ^aChorus

and Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos ② LPH013 (125' • DDD/DSD • T)



This is unquestionably the strongest *Gerontius* to have come my way since Sir Mark Elder's

Gramophone Award-winning Hallé account (1/09). A superbly paced and lovingly shaped Prelude immediately proclaims Sir Andrew Davis's formidable credentials in this repertoire; indeed, his patient and scrupulously observant conception of the whole work evinces a selfless authority, wisdom and instinctive ebb and flow, and he certainly secures a splendidly disciplined and consistently fervent response from his massed BBC Symphony forces. Just occasionally I find myself craving a touch greater thrust – I personally prefer 'Sanctus fortis' to move on a fraction more than it does here, and perhaps the last ounce of exhilaration and edge-of-seat danger is missing from the *Presto* marking at fig 43 onwards (disc 2, tr 7) in the Demons' chorus – but these tiny quibbles pale into insignificance when set beside the ineluctable sweep and glowing dedication of Davis's reading in its entirety.

As for the vocal team, Stuart Skelton's stamina, dramatic range and ringing, Vickers-like tone are a tremendous asset. He may not yet be a match for Heddle Nash on Sir Malcolm Sargent's pioneering 1945 set (still the touchstone all these decades later), but he brings exactly the right awe-struck hush to 'Novissima hora est' and really shines in the oratorio's later stages. David Soar, too, sings with lofty projection and unstinting eloquence (his Angel of the Agony is an especially pleasing achievement). Arguably best of all, though, is Sarah Connolly, who brings a deeply affecting radiance, sense of wonder and intelligence to everything she does.

Disc 2 also contains a majestic performance of the *Gerontius* Prelude with its concert ending, while the main offering is preceded by a wholly sympathetic

rendering of *Sea Pictures*, which (once again) finds Connolly in glorious voice. Davis and the BBC SO play their full part in a performance to rival such distinguished forebears as the Baker/Barbirolli (EMI), Greevy/Handley (CfP) and, yes, Connolly's own conspicuously fresh and rewarding interpretation with Simon Wright and the Bournemouth SO (Naxos, 12/06).

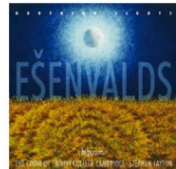
Chandos's thrillingly tangible SACD sound packs an almighty punch in terms of lustre, amplitude and range (Croydon's Fairfield Hall was the helpful venue).

Andrew Achenbach (November 2014)

Ešēnvalds

Amazing Grace. The Earthly Rose^a. The Heavens' Flock. Merton College Service. The New Moon. Northern Lights. O Emmanuel. Only in sleep. O salutaris hostia. Psalm 67. Rivers of Light. Stars. Trinity Te Deum^b. Ubi caritas. Who can sail without the wind^a

The Choir of Trinity College Cambridge / Stephen Layton with ^aSally Pryce *hp*^b Trinity Brass
Hyperion ② CDA68083 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Born in 1977, Latvian Ēriks Ešēnvalds is principally known as a composer of choral

music. This album commemorates a two-year stint as Fellow Commoner at Trinity College, Cambridge, whose choir is here joined by Trinity Brass and harpist Sally Pryce. Ešēnvalds's style is resolutely tonal, at times harking to the Anglican tradition (in the *Trinity Te Deum* and the *Merton College Service*), and at others to a more ethereal form of post-minimalism, though without the processual apparatus that sometimes pertains in the latter style. It is, in other words, particularly well suited for mixed modern choirs, whether or not accompanied by brass, organ or (in Ešēnvalds's more playful mood) Jew's harp or tuned glasses.

Trinity College's choir sounds as though its members relish the experience of recording his music. The sonority is secure from top to bottom (one is used to fine female trebles, but basses of this depth and solidity are rarer in such choirs), and the recording has clarity, detail and presence. For myself, I find Ešēnvalds at his most

convincing when dwelling on natural phenomena of his homeland; too often, the sacred music flirts with bombast (*Te Deum*), predictable harmonic progressions (*Magnificat*) or clichéd spirituality (*O salutaris hostia*). Nevertheless, lovers of this corner of the choral repertoire will find here much to enjoy. Fabrice Fitch (March 2015)

Haydn

Die Jahreszeiten, HobXXI/3

Christina Landshamer *sop* Maximilian Schmitt *ten*

Florian Boesch *bass* Collegium Vocale Gent;

Champs-Élysées Orchestra / Philippe Herreweghe

PHI ② LPH013 (129' • DDD • T/t)



Haydn's glorious celebration of the rural world in which he, a wheelwright's son,

grew up has done notably well on disc, with bracing period-instrument recordings from Gardiner (Archiv), Harnoncourt and Jacobs (both Harmonia Mundi), and Colin Davis's lovingly observed, large-scale performance on the LSO Live label. On his own label, Philippe Herreweghe here directs a performance of comparable vividness, one to reinforce my long-held feeling that *The Seasons* is every bit a match for *The Creation* in inventive power. While less bucolically uninhibited than Jacobs, especially, Herreweghe has a sharp ear for the score's manifold colours, and never misses a trick with Haydn's delectable tone-painting: say, in the flitting, gambolling woodwind in Spring's 'Freudenlied', the charming wind sallies in the Autumn trio and chorus 'So lohnet die Natur den Fleiss', or the hushed, bleak introduction to Winter. Each of the woodwind principals emerges as a poet in their own right.

Christina Landshamer, pure and luminous of tone, sings this with an ideal mix of grace and wondering innocence. She is delightful, too, in the song where artful country girl outwits aristocratic lecher, and in her Autumn love duet with the dulcet-voiced young tenor Maximilian Schmitt. His sensitive singing of the cavatina depicting the summer heat (the hushed, muted strings marvellously evocative here) is one of the performance's highlights. Florian Boesch makes a genially relaxed