

in conveying the anguish of what that means in the context of the symphony as a whole. The returning motto theme – one of Elgar’s noblest processionals – is heavily indecisive in the closing minutes of the movement. Doubt and a sense of unfinished business prevail.

In Barenboim’s fiercely dynamic approach to the scherzo – full of martial gung-ho – we know why. It is as if the music is scenting impending strife (premonitions of the Great War) and there is no small irony here in its Teutonic brashness. Again, the trio feels like a conscious distraction from the fearful and the gradual winding-down into the great slow movement is marvellously achieved.

If the symphony, as Elgar himself suggested, is essentially a formal expression of human experience with all its trials and tribulations but ultimately a need to ‘come home’ with hope, then the First Symphony’s slow movement is where everything is put into perspective and all of life’s disappointments and regrets are tempered with a deeper sense of resignation. Complex character that Elgar was, that found its way into the writing and Barenboim’s generously sounded account of this wonderful movement makes such capital of the depth achieved in the subdivisions of the string-writing. I know that the peculiarly English accent is very much written into this music but his Staatskapelle Berlin seem to feel it intuitively, not least with regard to its deep and abiding sense of consolation. That is universal, of course, and reminds me of a very well-known conductor who observed that if Elgar had been born in Austria he’d have been called Mahler.

The quiet hush of resignation at the close of the movement (achieved at a price, we are made to believe) is breathtaking without feeling affected – as in super-hushed for theatrical effect – still retaining its full tone, and the pale, wistful clarinet peeping through in the final bar again reminds us how subtle Elgar’s colorations are.

And so the finale is upon us, with the motto theme darkly disguised. Barenboim’s drive through the movement’s development feels like a kind of celebration of what the symphonic *allegro* can generate in terms of energy, and it is only when it finally does abate into a kind of repose that you instinctively know that something wondrous this way comes. The transformation of that darkly ominous march into something radiant

and transcendental is quite simply one of the great moments in English (or any) music, and Barenboim and his orchestra ease us so gently into this revelation that the climax when it comes sings all the more gloriously.

The ‘triumphant’ return of the motto is quite thrilling and again quite unlike anything else in Elgar: those euphoric *sforzandos* really make the heart leap in what has to be one of the most original depictions of hard-won jubilation in music. The dense swelling of the orchestration in these pages sounds marvellous here with again exemplary balances.

So there isn’t a tempo, a turn of phrase or a rubato anywhere that I would take issue with. More importantly, the whole feels thoroughly integrated and gloriously spontaneous. This is up there, you’ll have gathered, with the very finest that the gramophone has yet given us of this great – and finally, I hope, universally celebrated – symphony. **Edward Seckerson**

## Schubert

Symphony No 9, D944

Orchestra Mozart /

Claudio Abbado

DG 479 4652GH;

479 5087GH2 (63' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Auditorium Manzoni,

Bologna, September 19-23, 2011, and the Bolzano Auditorium, September 24-25, 2011



There was a time when Schubert’s Great C major Symphony seemed an

interpretatively elusive work, which explains why such store was set by memorable recorded accounts by Furtwängler, Krips, Boult and Böhm. And by Toscanini, when his 1941 Philadelphia performance resurfaced in the late 1950s. Since there are things in the symphony which can be traced directly back to Schubert’s Overture ‘In the Italian Style’, D590, an Italianate take on the work has never been without interest.

Abbado’s first recording, made with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe in Vienna in 1987, stood within that Italianate tradition, and very fine it is, though Abbado’s endorsement of some over-zealous research into the autograph manuscript led to a couple of curious interventions. I rather enjoyed the eupheptic belch, worthy of Sir Toby himself, which Schumann deleted from the *Scherzo* when he originally unearthed the symphony. But the altered version of the motif which

brings major-key pathos to the minor-key march at bar 25 of the slow movement was an intervention too far.

Neither occurs in this new recording, which derives from a series of performances Abbado gave with his Orchestra Mozart in different halls in Bolzano and Bologna in September 2011. Since the results, technically speaking, are perfectly plausible, it’s clear that this daring raid on Abbado’s posthumous archive is well within the competence of DG’s editors and engineers.

No one is likely to mistake the Orchestra Mozart for a slimmed-down Berlin Philharmonic, as was the case with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, but the Orchestra Mozart’s homelier, less virtuoso approach is apt to Abbado’s later way with the music. It’s a reading that is mellower, though with no loss of textural transparency, and more measured, though with no loss of cogency and drive. As before, Abbado takes all the repeats.

If the results are not as purely electrifying in the quicker movements as in the 1987 version, in the slow movement the newer performance has the edge. Not only is the text to be preferred but the performance itself is deeper and more serene. ‘Like a bell haunted by a human soul’ is how Tovey describes the horn’s ushering in the return of the minor key after the movement’s consolatory second subject. And so it is here. This, then, is a version which complements rather than yields to or replaces Abbado’s earlier recording. Admirers of the conductor – and the symphony – will want both.

**Richard Osborne**

*Selected comparison:*

COE, Abbado (2/89) (DG) 423 656-2GH

## Shostakovich

‘Under Stalin’s Shadow’

Symphony No 10, Op 93.

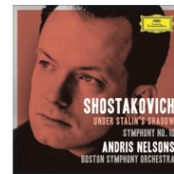
Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District - Act 2, Interlude (Passacaglia)

Boston Symphony Orchestra /

Andris Nelsons

DG 479 5059GH (65' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Symphony Hall, Boston, April 2015



Andris Nelsons’s first (live) recording as Music Director of the Boston Symphony is quite something. It carries the title ‘Under Stalin’s Shadow’ though, of course, the Tenth Symphony – premiered just months after Stalin’s death in 1953 – was the point at which Shostakovich emerged from that