



Imaginative and fabulously executed - Yannick Nézet-Séguin's live Mendelssohn symphonies are among the finest available

happens. Spurred on by athletically sparring *divisi* violins, the first movement drives to a fine, searing climax, while the finale darts and leaps jubilantly, with no whiff of pomposity in the marching second theme that irresistibly evokes 'O my darling Clementine'. Delightful, too, are the airy, chamber-musical textures of the Scherzo and pastoral Trio, and the unsentimental eloquence of the *Andante*, enhanced by tastefully judged sliding portamentos – another hallmark of these performances – and meticulous observation of Mendelssohn's detailed dynamic markings. Like Antonello Manacorda in his recent recording (Sony Classical, 6/17), Nézet-Séguin uses the recently published edition of the symphony by Christopher Hogwood, which, inter alia, restores the woodwind fantasy-cadenza at the start of the finale that Mendelssohn deleted from his autograph. This is one of the most compelling *Reformations* on disc.

The early C minor – here more suave than fiery – and the two favourite named symphonies are almost as good. Brio and Mendelssohnian grace go hand in hand in the outer movements of the *Italian*, buoyed by an agile, lissom bass line and, where apt, violin-playing of thistledown delicacy. The development's gradual surge from tense *pianissimo* lull to the jubilant return of the main theme is one of many moments in these symphonies that proclaims Nézet-Séguin's mastery of transition. For my taste

the processional second movement, shaped *con amore*, is too measured for an *Andante con moto*: Roger Norrington and the London Classical Players (Erato, 11/90) are spot-on here. But for a combination of poise, élan and light, pointed rhythmic articulation (so crucial in Mendelssohn), the final saltarello has rarely been bettered. True to form, Nézet-Séguin emphasises elegiac lyricism in the flexibly paced opening movement of the *Scottish* (the *Allegro*'s main theme is hardly *un poco agitato*), though he gives full value to the contrapuntal tensions of the development, underpinned by exemplary timpani clarity. The superb (unnamed) COE clarinet – a star player in this symphony – launches one of the most ebullient and brilliantly played Scherzos on disc. While the *Adagio* is rather broader than Mendelssohn's swift metronome marking, the main theme combines luminous purity with expressive, natural-sounding rubato, while Nézet-Séguin's perfectly graded crescendos enhance the hieratic starkness of the minor-key episodes. The finale is marvellously atmospheric, from the trenchancy of the opening (mindful of Mendelssohn's original *guerriero* marking), through the mysterious sense of distancing in the hushed clarinet-bassoon duo before the coda, to a bounding, exultant peroration. It's dangerous, of course, to nominate an outright winner, especially given the

competition in the *Scottish* and *Italian* symphonies. A pity, too, about the slightly fuzzy recording of the chorus in the *Lobgesang*. But for anyone wanting a complete set of the symphonies in the lean, lithe modern mould – my kind of Mendelssohn – Nézet-Séguin's imaginative, fabulously executed performances guarantee abiding pleasure.

Richard Wigmore (9/17)

## Ravel

Daphnis et Chloé

Ensemble Aedes; Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth  
Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 5280 (55' • DDD)



Diaghilev's initial reaction to *Daphnis et Chloé*, documented in Jean-François

Monnard's excellent booklet-note, was 'Ravel, it is a masterpiece, but it is not a ballet. It is a painting of a ballet.' It certainly is a masterpiece and Ravel's *symphonie chorégraphique* continues Les Siècles' period-instrument explorations of the Ballets Russes repertoire following its excellent recordings of the three Stravinsky ballets (*Actes Sud*, 12/11, 9/14). Recorded in concert from as many as seven different venues – including Paris's Philharmonie, Hamburg's Laeiszhalle and Snape Maltings – it