

BBC

IS SATIE MISUNDERSTOOD?

Why his notorious eccentricity has eclipsed his genius

WHEN COMPOSERS POKE FUN

The famous pieces that had a laugh at the world around them

music

The world's best-selling classical music magazine

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW!

Joyce DiDonato

The daring mezzo brings
a 19th-century poetic
great to musical life

BBC RADIO 3
Full March
listings inside
See p100

AWARDS 2026

**VOTE
NOW!**

For the best
recordings of
the year!
see p24

100 reviews
by the world's
finest critics

Recordings & books
- see p72

Also in this issue...

Eco-music: saving the
planet one note at a time

Explore Italy in the
company of Hector Berlioz

Max Richter at 60: his
eight-hour *Sleep* revisited



Chamber Reviews

with a seemingly boundless harmonic imagination.

Each player in the Neave Trio has an individual sound and, intriguingly, they are not always an obvious blend: there's luminous and full-blooded tone from cellist Mikhail Veselov, violinist Anna Williams offering a sound profile slenderer in outline and with more portamento, and the pianist Eri Nakamura providing an all-embracing, magnificently cushioned foundation. Yet it's still six hands and one mind, with taut ensemble and unified vision. The recorded sound sometimes could have done more to enhance the dynamic contrasts – the Schumann comes over as slightly one-note – but the environment is pleasingly warm. *Jessica Duchon* ★★★★★

Invitation

Works by Mozart, Mendelssohn & Schumann
Irish Chamber Orchestra/
Jörg Widmann
Pentatone PTC5187511 69:04 mins



This issue celebrates Jörg Widmann's decade-long artistic collaboration

with the Irish Chamber Orchestra. The crisply enunciated and attentive accounts are serviceable if never quite top-drawer, but the recordings, made between 2015 and 2024 in two very different acoustic settings, don't always display the ICO's playing to fullest advantage.

That's most apparent in the opening work here, Mozart's C minor Wind Serenade, K388, during which Jörg Widmann, who is also an accomplished clarinettist, joins the ICO wind players. The work's *Sturm und Drang* severity is convincingly realised, but the recording is close-focused and dry, lending an acidic taint to the sound.

Mendelssohn's prodigally brilliant string symphonies were written as compositional exercises for his teacher,

Zelter, and revealed a mastery and maturity which continue to astound, even today. The strings of the ICO are heard in Symphony No. 8 in D, rising impressively to meet the searching demands of its mercurial outer movements, where any momentary reservations over intonation or ensemble are forgivable and won't detract from an otherwise entrancing reading of this pleasing apprentice work.

The most satisfying playing comes when the entire ensemble unites for an effective and joyous reading of Schumann's proto-symphonic *Overture*, *Scherzo*, and *Finale*, Op. 52. Jörg Widmann addresses his musicians with a will, and clearly believes in the merits of this rarely heard work, delivering a performance that's as vitally alert and assured as many catalogue alternatives, something commendable in itself given the ICO's greatly reduced instrumental forces. *Michael Jameson* ★★★★★

Origins

Works by Dvořák & Dabić
Akhtamar Quartet
Cypres CYP1691 54:33 mins



From the joyous evocation of birdsong of the opening to the eruption of happiness at the end of the *Finale*, Dvořák's delight at being, in his own words, 'home for good' after nearly four years in America is clear everywhere in his last but one quartet. Nevertheless, this is a complex work and radiant celebration can turn rapidly to introspection. The challenge for performers is to create a sustained picture rather than a collage of uncoordinated fragments. The Akhtamar Quartet's solution in the first movement is to take a fast basic tempo while relaxing only slightly in the lyrical passages, and the result is impressive. Unfortunately, their approach in the more discursive *Finale* results in a loss of impetus, and the sublime slow movement, while expressive, lacks weight and breadth. Nevertheless, this is an estimable performance if not in the same league as the Haas Quartet's recording from 2010.

Commissioned by the Akhtamar Quartet in 2024, Jelena Dabić's four-movement

quartet, *Anzhamanak*, attempts to create a dialogue between Armenian and Balkan folk music. The performers' lean, well-focused tone is ideally suited to the plangent sonorities of the opening movement, 'Root'. In 'Signal', the brisk, at times nervy second movement, the players produce a Bartók-like bounce and the contrasts that characterise the remaining movements, 'Thread' and 'Glint', are delivered in a way that produces not so much a dialogue as a synthesis of ideas. This attractive, cleverly written music finds near-ideal advocates in the Akhtamar Quartet and is certainly worth investigating. *Jan Smaczny* ★★★★★

Tranquilles Cœurs

Le Goût Français dans les Cours Allemandes
Ensemble Théodora
Alpha ALPHA1197 60:49 mins



This album is a testament to the strength of France's power to culturally conquer

foreign lands during the reign of Louis XIV. The influence of French musical styles and of composers such as Lully and Campra was particularly strong in neighbouring German territories, where rulers of even the smallest states strove to imitate the grand sophistication of the Sun King's court.

The all-female Ensemble Théodora – soprano Mariamielle Lamagat, violinist Louise Ayrton, viola da gamba player Alice Trocellier and harpsichordist and organist Lucie Chabard – have scoured music libraries in Germany and Sweden to put together a programme of transcriptions, arrangements and original works by lesser known and anonymous composers. Music by Lully features large, with instrumental versions of extracts from his operas and ballets, including the air 'Tranquilles cœurs' from *Le Triomphe de l'Amour*, from which the album gets its title. There is an exquisitely restrained performance of one of Campra's single-voice motets, which finds its echo in Johann Philipp Krieger's *Surgite cum gaudio*. Johann Fischer's Trio Suite from his *Tafelmusik* collection recalls music written to accompany Louis XIV's suppers,

BRIEF NOTES

Bartók • Szymanowski Bartók: *Sonatas Nos 1 & 2 For Violin & Piano*; Karol Szymanowski: *Mythes* Frank Peter Zimmermann (violin), Dmytro Choni (piano) *BIS BIS-2787 72 mins*



This programme showcases all the technical and musical brilliance we have come to expect from violinist Frank Peter Zimmermann. Admirably matched by Ukrainian pianist Dmytro Choni, he is particularly effective in Szymanowski's Greek-inspired *Mythes*, with beautifully sustained playing in the upper register. In the Bartók, the pair are spirited, though Zimmermann's violin feels a little remote in the balance, robbing the works of some intensity. *Charlotte Smith* ★★★★★

Inscape Works by Haas, Shostakovich, Vasks and J Novák

Alinde Quintet *Supraphon SU43732 58 mins*



Czechia's Alinde Quintet hit the ground running with this first-rate debut recording. With a masterful wind arrangement of Shostakovich's Eighth String Quartet at the album's heart, there is angst aplenty here, though Jan Novák's frisky Concertino provides some levity. The Quintet's interplay is exemplary throughout. *Jeremy Pound* ★★★★★

Perseverantia A Suite for Piano and String Trio

Vadim Neselovskyi (piano), Ysaÿe String Trio *Tzadik CDTZA4060 35 mins*



Perseverantia, a searing 11-movement suite, is Vadim Neselovskyi's way of processing everything that has happened in his homeland of Ukraine since 2022. The opening 'Before 24' softens its listener – intimate, aching, the cello almost resembling a hushed voice – before 'Tanks Near Kyiv' erupts into panicked strings. Elsewhere, the violin soars and the keys drive us forward. This exquisitely played record is urgent, devastating and compassionate. *Miranda Bardsley* ★★★★★