

composed in the first decade of the 19th century) come as a dramatic revelation. Not only has the scale vastly expanded – both are 4-movement works each running to nearly 40 minutes – but one senses a hitherto unsuspected ability to think over long spans, along with a new-found confidence in the use of counterpoint, effective modulation and touches of chromaticism. What suddenly inspired these two quartets poses an intriguing question; the notes' suggestion that they were 'due to the influence of Mozart and Beethoven' may have an element of truth about it, but surely cannot be the whole story. The period instrument performances are sympathetic and committed, although it is hard to overlook some poor intonation and occasional sour tone, especially in the many exposed and often high-lying solos for the first violin, while the presentation is all that an important document such as this should be, including as it does a detailed work list of Zmeskall's extant compositions. String quartets are hardly in need of new repertoire from the Viennese Classical period, but more adventurous ensembles might find it rewarding to look at the last two quartets, especially if they have a cellist eager to make a bigger contribution. Brian Robins

20th CENTURY

Anthony Burgess *the Man and his Music*
John Turner rec, Harvey Davies pf 123' 28"
métier **msv 77202** (2 CDs)

I asked for this as a favour from Divine Art because I was at one stage interested in Anthony Burgess as author and (more trivially) a copy of his provocative but lively reviews happened to be by the fax, so I regularly dipped into it until it was certain that the message had gone. I was, however, disappointed that I hadn't realised that there wasn't very much Burgess there: indeed, there were two discs with 23' 10" out of 123' 28" devoted to him. The other 15 composers featured Gordon Crosse, Wilfred Josephs, Herbert Murrill, Alan Rawsthorne, Matyas Seiber and some names I don't recognise. Burgess begins and ends disc 1, and ends disc 2. There is a lot in common between the composers, perhaps because there are problems in keeping the balance between recorder and piano, and to 20th-century listeners who are remote from the recorder world, the recorder (of whatever pitch) seems an outsider to many. I was a bit disappointed in Burgess's skill, but that may have been because his son (for whom the pieces were mostly written) may not have been a skilful player. Alas, he was not writing for John Turner. No doubt the Recorder Magazine will

give this a thorough review. I was intrigued by the idea of *Blooms of Dublin*, a television opera based on Ulysses: Burgess was an expert on James Joyce. The main BBC copyist worked very hard on it, and I occasionally gave it a glance and was very disappointed to miss the result. CB

ANTHOLOGIES

Anniversaries & Messages Yale Schola Cantorum, Simon Carrington 51' 53"

Delos **DE 3436**

J. S. Bach *Der Geist hilft*; David Lang again; Liszt *Ave Maria* Christopher Theofanidis *Messages to Myself* Victoria Missa *Alma Redemptoris mater*

I thoroughly enjoyed listening to this disc. The Victoria mass is paced to perfection; I find that conductors often opt for slower, "more profound" tempi with Victoria since he imbues his music with more emotional intensity than Palestrina and it therefore needs more space to breathe. It strikes me that Carrington takes the music at face value and, while making space to savour the key moments in the texts, does not allow it ever to become indulgent. The three later works (Liszt included) are very beautifully sung with a lively, focussed choral sound, very well captured by the recording, and the only slight (qualified) disappointment was the Bach – interesting as it is to hear a cappella, it simply sounds rather bare, given (a) Bach's given scoring and (b) the fact that the regular conductor of Yale Schola Cantorum these days is none other than Masaaki Suzuki. That slight caveat notwithstanding, this is an extremely enjoyable CD. BC

Die helle Sonn leuchtet: Deutsche Kirchenlieder Stimmwerck and guests 66' 11"
cpo **777 792-2**

This disc combines Kirchenlieder in the sense of what Anglo-Saxon will recognise as hymns with more intricate settings (of text and/or melody). The four voices mix and sometimes combine with instruments (the booklet lists cornetto, two gambas, lute and organ), or sing in consort alone. Some arrangements (since I don't think these are all 100% kosher) are more successful than others; I am not convinced that a ritornello of sorts played on gamba with organ continuo works. CB's covering note with the disc wondered if German churches used countertenors. While that debate can rage on without any help from me, it is a matter of record that courts did employ male Diskantists as well as choir-boys (Zerbst for one). The beauty of Stimmwerck is that the four voices blend beautifully anyway, and the countertenor (Franz

Vitzthum) is exemplary at not being permanently in the limelight. BC

The Merton Collection: Merton College at 750 Choir of Merton College, Oxford, Benjamin Nicholas, Peter Phillips, Anna Stepler org 74' 04"
Delphian **DCD34134**

Byrd *Praise our Lord*, Dunstaple *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, Gibbons *This is the record of John*, Greene *Lord let me know mine end*, Mundy *Magnificat & Nunc dimittis* (2nd service), Purcell *Hear my prayer*, *Remember not*, Sheppard *Libera nos* etc

This release is part of the celebrations marking the 750th anniversary of the college founded by Walter de Merton in 1264. Until 1980 the college was an all male establishment. The subsequent decades have seen the steady development of a mixed choir, initially under the direction of undergraduate organ scholars but since the mid-noughties a modern choral foundation under professional direction. The singers are a mixture of choral scholars and volunteers: the organ scholars remain undergraduates. Nourished by the famous acoustic of the college chapel the choir (which is quite large at 12. 6. 7. 10 on this recording) has developed a sumptuous sound and has attracted considerable praise for its previous recordings. And here comes some more. The basic disciplines of ensemble, tuning and blend are rock solid and they tackle a wide range of music – Dunstaple to now – with confidence. About half the programme might be considered 'early' and, given the academic context and the focus of this magazine, a few remarks on performance practice seem appropriate. Leaving aside the 'inauthentic' mixed choir dimension, the approach to this is subjective and pragmatic. Dunstaple's *Veni sancte spiritus* is transposed down a third from its written pitch and later 16th century music up a third. Purcell's *Hear my prayer* is unaccompanied but the succeeding *Remember not*, *Lord, our offences* has organ support. Also with organ is *This is the record of John* (Gibbons) with the solo line given to a valiant falsettist who sounds much happier in the contemporary *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* that begins the programme.* This is one of a number of fine pieces in what one might describe as a post-post-modern idiom. They are part of the ongoing Merton Choirbook project, the contents of which are likely to become favourite and valued repertoire for those choirs able to tackle it.

David Hansell

I was convinced long before I'd ever thought seriously about English renaissance pitch that This is the record of John sounded much better in F with a tenor. CB