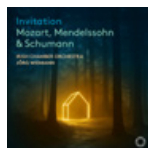


taking: unsentimental, unforced, and all the more affecting for the patience with which he lets Mahler's long farewell unfold.

The set was recorded over seven years in Prague's Rudolfinum, the orchestra's historic home, and Pentatone's engineering captures the hall beautifully—warm, spacious, and alive enough to convey both the faintest whisper and the most overwhelming climax. The label has presented the cycle with packaging and documentation that underscore its sense of completion without distracting from the music itself.

Mahler cycles inevitably invite comparison, but this one stands comfortably on its own terms. What distinguishes it is not interpretive eccentricity but attentiveness, the sense that every line in the score has been carefully heard. Over 11 discs, the cumulative result is quietly compelling, a set that rewards repeated listening and reveals new details each time.

Some undertakings justify their scale. This Mahler cycle is one of them.



INVITATION: MOZART, MENDELSSOHN, AND SCHUMANN

Irish Chamber Orchestra, Jörg Widmann, cond.
(Pentatone)

This new release from the Irish Chamber Orchestra under conductor Jörg Widmann gathers together slightly less-known compositions by blockbuster composers. First, clarinetist Widmann joins the wind section of the orchestra for a spirited performance of Mozart's Serenade for Winds in C minor. Next up is Mendelssohn's String Symphony No. 8 in D major, which for me was the highlight of the album. Although Mendelssohn's string symphonies are very early works, they're stunning pieces that deserve more frequent performances. The Irish Chamber Orchestra's rendition is rhythmically vigorous and full of fire.

Last on the program is Robert Schumann's *Overture, Scherzo, and Finale*. Schumann himself was so pleased with this symphonic work that he almost considered naming it his Second Symphony but appears to have changed his mind due to its lack of a traditional slow movement. Its lighter, more cheerful mood creates a satisfying close to

the album. This collection of recordings, made over several years, serves as a documented retrospective of Widmann's ten-year tenure with the orchestra.

—Miranda Wilson



ISLAND PRAYERS

Turtle Island Quartet
(Azica)

The San Francisco-based Turtle Island Quartet, formed in 1985, has undergone numerous personnel changes in its four-decade career and is just now coming out of a recording hiatus (its last official album, the Charlie Parker-inspired *Bird's Eye View*, was released in 2018). So, *Island Prayers* is the Turtles' first album with the current lineup. It features three original works by violinist, founding member, and music director David Balakrishnan. (Gabriel Terracciano, violin; Benjamin von Gutzeit, viola; and Naseem Alatrash, cello, round out the roster.) Balakrishnan's turbulent, Bartókian, three-movement title track is dramatic and dissonant while feeling comfortable, like a well-told tale. Dialogue, the first movement, isn't as melodic, or plush, as Balakrishnan's earlier compositions—2005's *Mara's Garden of False Delights* suite—comes to mind—but the second movement, Atonement, is richly rendered and reflective (its spaciousness is reminiscent of Balakrishnan's splendid 2014 composition *Confetti Man*). The third and final movement, Redemption, has a lively, revivalist feel with soulful pizzicato cello passages by Alatrash.

Beneath the layers of modernity, the two-time Grammy Award-winning quartet reveals a hint of American vernacular music, including fiddle tunes and jazz. That's to be expected: This is, after all, the groundbreaking quartet that recorded chamber treatments of Hendrix and Coltrane and shook the chamber-music world in the '80s and '90s with a genre-jumping blend of rock, pop, jazz, and classical music. Balakrishnan's "Darkness Dreaming" is a sheer delight, a blend of Hungarian fiddle tunes and fanciful swing-jazz dance styles. Jazz also informs Terence Blanchard's "Turtle Trajectory," a nod to the Turtles' 2021 Grammy-nominated

collaboration, *Absence* (Blue Note), with the jazz trumpeter. Meanwhile, the ensemble's American folk roots manifest in a lovely version of Carolina Chocolate Drops founding member and Silkroad Ensemble director Rhiannon Giddens' "Pompey Ran Away." In the liner notes, Balakrishnan writes: "It was intentional that we found one voice each to represent 'jazz,' 'folkloric,' and 'new music,' but that each voice had broad stylistic influences beyond the preconceived limits of their genre." *Island Prayers* succeeds in presenting a musical pastiche as satisfyingly diverse as the vast American cultural landscape.

—Greg Cahill



HIDDEN LEGACIES—WEINBERG & KORNGOLD

Kristina Reiko Cooper, cello;
Kaunas City Symphony
Orchestra, Constantine
Orbelian, cond.
(Delos)

Hidden Legacies juxtaposes the relatively well-known Korngold Cello Concerto with the two lesser-known concertos of Mieczysław Weinberg. The Weinberg works, in my opinion, are not performed or recorded as much as they deserve, so it's gratifying to hear them on this album. Tying these two composers together is their shared history of fleeing Nazi persecution—Korngold to Hollywood, Weinberg to the Soviet Union—and never being able to return home. Knowing this history makes listening to their concertos an even more emotional experience for the listener.

The soloist, Kristina Reiko Cooper, uses a gorgeously flexible rubato throughout, which seems fitting for the character of the pieces. While her vibrato might seem unusually slow and wide at this time, it fits well with the passionate mid-century style of all three concertos. The Kaunas City Symphony, under the direction of Constantine Orbelian, provides a colorful "foil" for Cooper's dramatic playing. Their interpretation of Korngold is one of the best on record, and their persuasive performance of the two Weinberg works is most welcome for fans of the composer.

—MW