

appearance. Subsidiary roles are ably filled and provide a few moments close to what Berlioz had in mind, for example Stephen Milling's noble Narbal, Oksana Shilova's affecting Ascagne, Eric Cutler's fruity but vocally accomplished Iopas, Dmitri Voropaev floating above the earth in Hylas's homesick ditty. In the promotional bonus feature Gergiev mentions his gratification at working with "creative people," though he seems a bit defensive. Visually, the gist of this production, its perceptible "theme," is the appropriation of *Les Troyens* for would-be-clever notions whose upshot is deconstructive vandalism, thoroughgoing uglification, an act—many acts—of cultural terrorism, garlanded with the usual specious, self-serving Eurochatter. It is the equivalent of the producer scrawling graffiti and relieving himself in St. Peter's or the Coliseum.

What if one turns the screen off? After his divinatory *Fantastique* (discussed in tandem with Simon Rattle's tilt in *Fanfare* 32:5), Gergiev's way with the old-masterly Berlioz takes one aback. The practiced hand keeps things moving and brings the climactic moments to a sure head, but without nuance. Where everyone from Beecham and Scherchen at the midcentury, to Colin Davis young and old, Prêtre, Gardiner, Levine, have found abundant poetry, Gergiev gives us prose, and too often a glib hustle. The fifth-act opening is typical. Conductors with Berlioz in their blood make the Trojans' disquiet crackle: Gergiev plays the scene as a dull exercise. Énée's crowning moment, "Inutile regrets," goes flat, missing the anguishing splendor Heppner or Domingo bring to it; Gergiev abets, rather than spurs, Ryan's weepy account. The spectral apparitions come and go with no especial flair—visually, vocally, or from the pit—while Didon facing down Énée has all the *éclat* of a tawdry domestic spat. Barcellona carries the show quite well, if you don't look at her. Clueless time-beating and deadpan dullness are Gergiev's especial contribution. Sound is generally up-front, balanced, and punchy. Subtitles are available in French, English, Spanish, German, Japanese, and Chinese. Loomis does *Star Wars* a disservice. Perhaps this *mise en scène* can be recycled for *Aniara*.
Adrian Corleonis

BIELAWA *Elegy-Portrait*. See SCHUMANN.

BISCARDI *In Time's Unfolding*¹. *Tartini*^{2,3}. *Piano Quintet*^{3,4}. *Mestiere*³. *Di Vivere*⁵. *The Viola Had Suddenly Become a Voice*^{6,7}. *Companion Piece (for Morton Feldman)*^{1,8} • Marc Peoloquin (pn); ²Curtis Macomber (vn); ³Blair McMillen (pn); ⁴Yonah Zur (vn); ⁴Daniel Panner, (va); ⁴Greg Hesselink (vc); ⁵Da Capo C Players; ⁶Paul Neubauer (vla); ⁷James Goldsworthy (pn); ⁸Mark Helias (db) • NAXOS 8.559639 (65:47)

I've admired for many years the music of Chester Biscardi (b.1948). On the one hand, he's a scrupulous composer who writes richly detailed music that reflects modernist ideas about form and development. But he's also a romantic, writing music that has inherent sweep and lyricism, and always rooted in traditional tonal practice, no matter how far from that source he gets.

This release covers the entire span of the composer's mature career, from *Tartini* (1972) to *The Viola Had Suddenly Become a Voice* (2005). Like many composers of his generation, Biscardi's music starts off spikier than it has become, and *Tartini* (for violin and piano) is no exception, though there's an exciting theatricality about its rhetoric. *Di Vivere* (1981) is written for the now-traditional *Pierrot* quintet, and has the strongest Uptown sound of any work on this program. In its athletic tussle and pitch centers' arrivals announced in ringing unisons, it reminds one of Wuorinen. But in contrast, the 1979 *Mestiere* for solo piano is much more rhapsodic, with highly idiomatic piano figuration throughout, which creates Impressionistic sonic screams that project lovely layers of harmony. The 1989 *Companion Piece (for Morton Feldman)* feels like a transitional work. Biscardi was close to Feldman (something you might not immediately infer from the music), and this work, while it has the sustained quiet of its dedicatee, is more openly expressive. Its harmonies are less juxtapositions of beautiful chords but actual progressions, no matter how laid-back. Mark Helias's playing is also exceptional; listening at first without reading any notes, I just assumed a cello instead of bass, as the sound is so light and "flutey."

These are the earlier works of the set, and from here we move to a more open, resonant, and emotionally forward world in the later music. One gathers from both his program notes and the music itself, that Biscardi deeply loves the repertoire, finds inspiration from it, and often builds his

pieces as responses to particular works. This is particularly true of *The Viola Had Suddenly Become a Voice*, which quotes a phrase of Schumann, and integrates it into its own fabric with the seamlessness of a dream. *In Time's Unfolding* (2000) (for piano) opens and closes the program, and again refers to Schumann, but also has a distinctly American flavor. Biscardi mentions Gershwin and Copland as harmonic referents, and I hear Bernstein as well. And the 2004 Piano Quintet, while a more abstract work, never stints on its lyrical impulse, and has a *morendo* ending that seems natural, rather a precious gesture.

I find this quite beautiful music. Biscardi strikes me as a deeply honest composer; he says what he feels necessary, he's curious and exploratory. It also has great range, moving from referents as diverse as Wuorinen, Feldman, and Schumann. In short, the art has integrity. I also remember him as a graduate composer at Yale, buzzing with a sweet energy, and from his picture he looks exactly the same decades later (except for having lost the ponytail, though maybe my memory tricks me there). He also obviously inspires wonderful performers, giving them music that challenges and satisfies. The quality of playing here is testimony to that bond. Highly recommended. **Robert Carl**

BOCCHERINI-GRÜTZMACHER Cello Concerto in B \flat . See C. P. E. BACH.

BORODIN String Quartet No. 2. Cello Sonata in b. Piano Quintet in c • Jaromír Klepáč (pn); Michal Kaňka (vc); Pražák Qrt • PRAGA PRD DSD 250282 (SACD: 77:02)

The Quartet No. 2 may be Borodin's best-known chamber work, as well as his best, but it is known mainly for the Nocturne third movement, which is often performed separately in various arrangements. In my view, the first movement, with its lilting main theme, is at least as beautiful, and the other movements are most appealing as well. Although convincingly structured, expertly written for the instruments, and richly detailed, this work is not always taken seriously as a contribution to the string quartet literature. After all, 19th-century Russians didn't really know how to write string quartets, did they? That was German-Austrian territory. Performances like this fine one by the Pražák Quartet, notable for warmth and beauty of tone and a texture that is at once rich and transparent, can help put such prejudices to rest. The four instruments are in an equal partnership here, and the contributions of viola and cello register more prominently than usual. The first movement is relaxed and expansive, with tasteful rubato and an effortless flow befitting its mellifluous and lyrical character. The Scherzo too is appropriately graceful, but with much energy and forceful accents in the middle section. The Nocturne receives an unsentimental treatment, with a tempo that is the quick side, and an exuberant Finale rounds out this excellent performance.

The quartet is coupled with two much earlier works, both dating from the early 1860s, which nonetheless are far from negligible. The Cello Sonata is built largely on a motif from J. S. Bach's Sonata No. 1 for Unaccompanied Violin, which appears in all three movements, but it also contains a theme Borodin later used in his Symphony No. 2. The quintet is more what one would expect from a work by a member of the Mighty Handful, with themes of more overtly Russian character. It's an appealing work, delightfully melodious, although rather odd in form—the third and final movement is longer than the first two put together. Both works are beautifully played by the Pražák musicians and pianist Jaromír Klepáč.

The stereo SACD sound is bright, forward, vivid, and very lifelike, with extended response at both ends of the frequency range. I do not have the equipment to evaluate surround sound. The CD layer is smooth and pleasant but not as open and spacious as the SACD. Bass response is also less prominent.

For Borodin quartets, it would be logical to turn to the Borodin Quartet. On Chandos, the original membership of that ensemble couples a fine performance of Quartet No. 2 with the Quartet No. 1, a work of greater maturity and stature than the two other works offered by Praga. Chandos gives no dates for these recordings, but they were obviously made prior to the emigration of two members of the quartet from the Soviet Union in the 1970s. Other sources indicate that this group recorded Quartet No. 2 in 1962, and that presumably is the recording on this disc. In any case, sound quality is very good, although predictably lacking the spaciousness and bass presence of the Praga SACD. The Borodin players are noticeably quicker and more urgent than the Pražák in all movements except the Nocturne, where they take a more deliberate approach. They also employ more rubato and