

to the fore, packs a terrific punch. When the recapitulation erupts in G minor rather than major, the effect is almost apocalyptic. The finale is just as exciting, the repeated-note bass-lines charged with quivering nervous energy, the dissonant, disruptive potential of the raucous *zingarese* outbursts exploited to the full. But Fey can be subtly expressive, too: the variation slow movement is poised and delicate, the rarefied figuration for silvery muted strings shaped with uncommon eloquence.

Occasional tempo manipulations in No 47 (not for nothing is Fey a former Harnoncourt pupil) always seem expressively justified. In the other two symphonies, though, the stunning playing and fierce dramatic intensity (quite ferocious in No 44) co-exist with moments of perversity. I don't mind the added brass fanfares in the ceremonial opening *Allegro* of No 41, or the unscripted *pizzicati* in the charming rococo slow movement. But why, I wonder, does Fey see the need to grind to a virtual halt in the development? Haydn's teasing false moves are far wittier without this kind of heavy underlining.

There are further grotesque distensions of the pulse in the first and last movements of the *Trauer*, plus an implausibly breathless tempo for the canonic Minuet. To compound my frustration, the seraphic *Adagio* is played with hushed, ethereal beauty. I shall certainly want to return to this disc when I'm feeling particularly strong. But if you want comparable dramatic excitement without the irritating eccentricities, go for Pinnock, on a six-disc Archiv set of 19 symphonies from the so-called *Sturm und Drang* years. **Richard Wigmore**

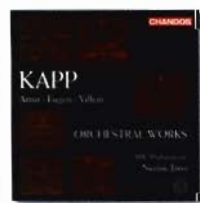
Kapp Family

A Kapp Don Carlos
E Kapp Ballet Suite, 'Kalevipoeg'
V Kapp Symphony No 2 in C minor
BBC Philharmonic / Neeme Järvi
Chandos © CHAN10441 (64' • DDD)

Three orchestral pieces from one of Estonia's great musical dynasties

In 1998 Olympia issued a fascinating CD of works by three generations of the Tcherepnin family: grandfather (Nikolai), father (Alexander) and son (Ivan). Now Chandos has issued a similar disc devoted to the Kapps, featuring an overture by Artur (1878-1952), a ballet suite by his son Eugen (1908-96) and a symphony by Artur's nephew Villem (1913-64) who, like Eugen, was a pupil of Artur.

Composed shortly before his graduation from the St Petersburg Conservatory, Artur's *Don Carlos* (1899) is a concert overture after the manner of Tchaikovsky and a remarkable achievement for a first orchestral essay, full of poetry and concise in structure. Like Verdi's opera, it is based on Schiller. The subject of



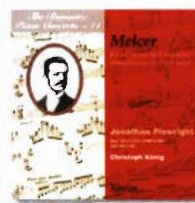
Eugen's ballet *Kalevipoeg* (1947) is no less than Estonia's national epic, the story of a giant whose exploits encompass the heroic and violent. The six-movement suite given here is a popular concert item and encapsulates the essence of the larger work, though its slightly folksy, chocolate-box idiom masks the epic's nastier elements, much as Grieg's music did with *Peer Gynt*.

Villem's Second (1954-55) is an almost textbook Russian symphony, four movements in a bright, nationalist style perfect as a product of the 1890s but deeply anachronistic 60 years later. An attractive, well argued work, nonetheless. Splendid sound and performances throughout. **Guy Rickards**

Melcer

Piano Concertos – Nos 1 and 2
Jonathan Plowright *pf* **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / Christoph König**
Hyperion © CDA67630 (67' • DDD)

A musical alchemist again works his magic on some obscure repertoire



Henryk Melcer (-Szcwinski) does not merit a mention in every musical reference work. He was born near Warsaw in 1869 and died from a heart attack mid-lecture at that city's conservatory in 1928. His career, defined by a succession of pedagogic appointments and artistic directorships throughout Europe, is well charted in Joseph A Herter's valuable booklet.

Not a prolific composer, Melcer, a pupil of Leschetizky, wrote his Piano Concerto No 1 in 1892-94. It gained a measure of popularity at the time and was first recorded in 1980 by Michael Ponti. Sir Henry Wood, who conducted the work in 1911, thought "it was quite worth hearing once". I think it is better than that. True, there are passages of glittering superficiality and predictable gestures but these are more than compensated for by its many arresting features like the dramatic fermata in the first movement at 9'26" followed by (most unusually) a full-blown fugue.

The Second Concerto from 1898, also in three movements, is crowned by a hair-raising final *Allegro con fuoco*, a remarkable *tour de force* which, were it ever to be heard in a concert hall,

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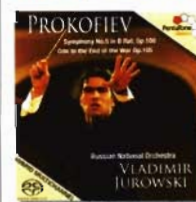
would have you on your feet at the end cheering. As with his compelling performances of the two Stojowski concertos (6/02 – not to mention his

subsequent Hyperion discs of Paderewski and Bach-Rummel), Plowright enhances his glowing reputation as a musical alchemist of rare distinction with a transcendent technique. The piano/orchestra balance is well focused, captured in a slightly less resonant acoustic than usual in this venue (City Halls, Glasgow) which, in some ways, I prefer. I need hardly add that collectors of this historic Romantic Piano Concerto series need not hesitate. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Prokofiev

Symphony No 5, Op 100
Ode to the End of the War, Op 105
Russian National Orchestra / Vladimir Jurowski
PentaTone © PTC5186 083 (58' • DDD)

An edgy Fifth and even a host of harps can't save the odd Ode



Having given us superb accounts of Tchaikovsky's Third Suite and two Shostakovich symphonies (5/06 and 7/06), these artists seem less convinced by the pomp and

circumstance of Prokofiev in socialist realist mode. Not that their disc will be viewed as anything other than essential by die-hard admirers of a composer at once familiar yet strangely elusive.

This is by my reckoning only the third recording of the *Ode to the End of the War* and technically the best, always assuming you care about one of Prokofiev's most threadbare pieces of *Gebrauchsmusik*. One possible selling-point is the supreme eccentricity of its scoring: relatively conventional wind, brass and percussion sections are joined by eight harps, four pianos and eight double basses. Tempting to conclude that Prokofiev was poking fun at the hubris of his political masters – he even lifts one of the main ideas from his then suppressed *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution* – but real evidence is lacking.

In the main work Jurowski is only marginally faster than such familiar Western exponents as Herbert von Karajan (DG, 12/00), apparently unpersuaded by Soviet-era speed merchants like the young Mariss Jansons (Chandos, 5/88). More striking is his tendency to vary the pulse in the first two movements. Though the change of metre en route from *Scherzo* to Trio at 2'08" (fig 33) is marked *Pochissimo più animato*, Jurowski is at pains to avoid any taint of slickness.

Rather than the Berliners' famously saturated sound, the Russian band offer transparent and occasionally edgy sonorities. There's lots of tuba and Prokofiev's significant piano part is encouraged to dominate textures in which it is more often submerged. Antiphonally placed violins contribute a number of beautiful effects but I won't pretend this would be my own first choice. The finale at least is exceptional – fleet, lithe and rhythmically alert in all the awkward