

largesse of the most magnanimous measure. Listen to the Adagio of No. 2, surely one of the most feverishly Romantic movements in the literature, where Welser-Möst is content to frame Schumann's delicately fashioned long-lined melodies in the aural equivalent of a malevolent chastity belt.

I have heard things by this conductor that please me greatly as of late, but these early days, with the rare exception, were totally unexceptional, not aided one whit by EMI's stuffy and fog-laden sound, a curious sort of weather report from the usually reliable Abbey Road studios. With Bernstein's Schumann 2 (Sony) and Giuliani's 3 (DG), not to mention more modern versions by Barenboim and Zinman, this issue just won't do. **Steven E. Ritter**

SCRIABIN Piano Concerto. See PABST.

SCRIABIN Solo Piano Works & • Maria Lettberg (pn) • CAPRICCIO 49586 (8 CDs: 506:08)

& Bonus DVD (55:00)

Latvian-born pianist Maria Lettberg has, so far, maintained a fairly low profile. Her credentials are solid: early training at the St. Petersburg Conservatory was followed by study with Pöntinen in Stockholm and Raekallio in Helsinki. But she has conscientiously avoided the competition route, and her name hasn't figured in the headlines. As far as I can tell, this set—which includes all of Scriabin's solo piano works with opus numbers—is her first recording.

Of course, offering up such a survey is a gutsy way to elbow your way into the catalog. Then again, on the evidence here, Lettberg is a gutsy pianist. These are, for the most part, big, assertive performances, featuring a dark bass-centered tone, a confident technique, a huge dynamic range (superbly captured by the engineers), and a highly dramatic interpretive outlook anchored in a keen sense of the turbulence of Scriabin's textural conflicts. Thus, for instance, her highly wrought reading of the Second Sonata makes the most of the malevolence shadowing the second movement—just as her version of the Third brings out the painful weight of the opening movement, and her performance of the Third Etude from op. 65 nearly sears us with its heightened fury. This is Scriabin without apology.

At the same time, it's sometimes arguably Scriabin without nuance—or, at least, the kind of timbral nuance we hear in Hamelin's Sonatas or the kind of rhythmic nuance we find in Le Van's Mazurkas (27:6). Not that Lettberg is a pounder in the manner of Michael Ponti (whose Scriabin complete is entirely eclipsed by this new recording). There's a delightfully sunny lift, for instance, to the Prelude, op. 2/2, and the Ninth Sonata arises out of spellbinding mystery. Still, it's fair to say that she's more partial to Scriabin's tumultuous *Sturm und Drang* than to his nostalgic melancholy, more attuned to his volcanic outbursts than to his airier reflections, more sympathetic to his poison than to his nectar, more sensitive to his pokes and jabs (try her angular reading of the Etude, op. 8/10) than to his lyricism, more comfortable with his tough-mindedness (say, in her admirably hard performance of the Prelude, op. 33/3) than to his more cryptic scurrying or his mystical meditations (say, the Prelude, op. 74/4). There are therefore moments when the more redolent music seems a touch prosaic and where the more yearning music turns inert. Then, too, for all her technical command, there are passages where she attains an impressive churning energy at the cost of gestural specificity.

Still, when she is good, she is very, very good: in the stalking funereal weight of the last movement of the First Sonata, in the kick that launches the op. 25 Mazurkas, in the fire of the op. 36 Waltz, in the ecstatic momentum of the Fifth Sonata, in the seething passion of the rarely heard Allegro appassionato and the even rarer Allegro de concert, in the staggering implacability of the Prelude, op. 59/2. And even when she is less successful (say, in the wanderings of the Sonata No. 8), she never betrays the spirit of the music. The outlines may be smudged, but the composer's image is always recognizable.

The bonus DVD includes an attractive interview, where Lettberg's enthusiasm for the project is palpable, as well as a half-hour collaboration with artist Andrea Schmidt called *Mysterium*, which offers compressed versions of five of the sonatas (plus *Vers la flamme*) with visual images of the pianist (playing a white Bösendorfer, bathed in a variety of lights) superimposed with abstract paintings, flames, and some cellular-level biological photos (including, perhaps inevitably, the strivings of sperm). It's more tasteful than many such efforts—but I suspect that most listeners will prefer the music alone. The notes, by the pianist, offer scattered observations, with lots of quotations from

Scriabin's letters, always interesting, but not especially coherent.

Recommendations? The Scriabin benchmarks (Hamelin, Horowitz, Le Van, Neuhaus, Paik, Richter, Sofronitsky) may not be challenged here; but anyone wanting to gather up this material in a convenient package will find this irresistible—and even those with substantial Scriabin collections already will find much to enjoy. I look forward to hearing more from this formidable artist. **Peter J. Rabinowitz**

SHEPPARD Gaudete caelicole omnes. Beati omnes. Laudate pueri Dominum. Aeterne rex altissime. TALLIS In jejuniu et fletu. Te lucis ante terminum. Audivi vocem. Salvator mundi. TYE Omnes gentes. Missa sine nomine. In pace In Idipsum • Hilliard Ens • ECM 001127402 (72:08 □)

This overview of Tudor church music is limited to the last decade of Henry VIII's reign. The separation from Rome had been achieved but not from Roman liturgy; nevertheless, the church music composed in Henry's last years foreshadowed the stylistic reforms that followed. All of this music belongs to that narrow period. The Tallis selections are familiar, and not just because we now have his complete works on record. *Te lucis ante terminum* is the festal setting and *Salvator mundi* is the more familiar of two settings. Tye's works range from the familiar *Omnes gentes* to an unfamiliar anthem and the Peterhouse Mass, first recorded only recently (23:2). Here the movements of the Mass are interspersed among the works of the other composers. The Mass has suffered neglect because of its missing tenor partbook. The reconstruction for the first recording was not credited, but this one apparently was made by David Skinner, who prepared all the music for the program. Sheppard's four works are the least familiar, the only previous recordings being *Aeterne rex altissime* by Harry Christophers (16:5) and *Gaudete caelicole omnes* on a Meridian CD that never arrived here.

The Hilliards have ranged across the centuries from medieval music to contemporary composers, but it would be easy to think that this repertoire is close to their heart. The three Byrd Masses, but it would be easy to think that this repertoire is close to their heart. The three Byrd Masses on EMI, unaccountably missing from the EMI catalog for many years, have never been equaled. This program moves from one strong interpretation to the next. I would have preferred to hear the Mass uninterrupted, as in the earlier version, but apart from that there is little to choose between the two. The Ely Cathedral choir is just a bit slower, hardly noticeable, but the choir of boys and men in the Lady Chapel of the gothic Ely cathedral produces an entirely different sound than this vocal ensemble in the intimate space of St. Gerold. Either version will suffice, but both are worth hearing.

The mixture of a few well-known anthems with two that have never been recorded makes an interesting program, with the superb performances insuring lasting satisfaction. The focus on three composers working in a short period of a few years sheds light on all of them. Recommended. **J. F. Weber**

SHOSTAKOVICH Fugues, op. 87/1, 3–6, 12, 15, 17, 22, 24. See BACH.

SHOSTAKOVICH Symphonies: No. 3, "May Day"; No. 15 • Roman Kofman, cond; Czech P Ch Brno; Beethoven O Bonn • MDG 937 1210 (Hybrid multichannel SACD: 75:21)

"Well," I thought uncharitably when this next-to-last installment in Roman Kofman's underwhelming Shostakovich cycle arrived, "at least this means the series is almost over." Up to this point, Kofman's performances have been done in by flatness of affect and lack of propulsion. This conductor seems unable to bring commitment and involvement to overtly dramatic passages. As it turns out, Shostakovich shaped these two symphonies, especially the 15th, as if to downplay Kofman's weaknesses as an interpreter, so the disc at hand rises above the rest of the series.

In the early 1970s, Shostakovich claimed that with the 15th he intended to write a "happy little symphony," something of a musical toyshop. What he actually produced was far more complex than that. There are severally typically mordant episodes, and snippets of Rossini's *William Tell* Overture in the first movement allude to Shostakovich's early work cobbling together live musical accompaniment for silent movies. But the second movement is serious indeed, and perhaps the symphony's most memorable material is its use of a brass chorale lifted from Wagner's *Ring*. It is not a symphony full of driving scherzos and crushing climaxes, so there are few opportunities for Kofman to go wrong. True, in the first movement, a few outbursts, especially at phrase ends, could use a little more snap, but otherwise the music is played with the needed sass. In the slow movement, a few moments plod, but it's otherwise effective, even if it fails to reach the intensity achieved in several