



An absolute delight: the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Martin Yates bring previously unheard Vaughan Williams to life

the oboe nearly all the primary melodic material. Even the recorded sound (so naturally balanced in the Strauss and other works) is off, with the orchestra pushed to the background. I can't fault Mayer's playing, and it's a lovely touch that the Fugue from the original piano suite makes an appearance, but I find Schmeisser's arrangement relatively monochromatic.

There are brighter spots, thankfully. Elgar's late *Soliloquy* (1933), salvaged by Gordon Jacobs from an unfinished suite for oboe and orchestra, is given an intensely songful reading by Mayer. And although his interpretation of Eugène Goossens's concise yet formidable Oboe Concerto (1927) has less Stravinskian bite than the 1948 premiere recording, with Léon Goossens and the Philharmonia under Walter Susskind (also reissued on Oboe Classics), he manages to find a seamless link between the work's odd mixture of English pastoral lyricism and Russian exoticism.

The Bamberg Symphony offer supple, affectionate support under Jakub Hrůša (Mayer was the orchestra's principal oboe in the early '90s). They play the Strauss as if it's chamber music. It's a pity one can't hear more of them in the Ravel.

Andrew Farach-Colton

'Russian Masquerade'

Arensky Variations on a Theme by Tchaikovsky,

Op 35a **Prokofiev** Visions fugitives (arr Barshai)

Scriabin Preludes, Op 11 (arr Kaipainen)

Tchaikovsky Elegy

Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra /

Sakari Oramo

BIS (P) BIS2365 (59' • DDD/DSD)



but the case of Prokofiev's *Visions fugitives* in this 1962 arrangement for strings by Rudolf Barshai is a little more fundamental. However many corners in Barshai's upholstered version show that the music can suggest many things, the entire set (which omits No 7) is lifted on to entirely different foundations. It is no longer one person's thoughts but something fundamentally grander. I smiled at Barshai's handling of the microscopic coda at the end of No 9 and his complex layering in No 16 but am still left with the feeling that massed strings force flesh on to a purposefully skeletal design.

Which they don't in the selection of Scriabin's 24 Preludes made and

orchestrated by the late Jouni Kaipainen in 1999. These pieces find Scriabin in hearty, romantic voice before that voice transmuted (string clothing can admittedly underline the fact that this is no *Souvenir de Florence* but occasionally, as in No 8, wants to be). As the notes point out, certain numbers flourish with the added bass of low strings (Nos 14 and 18) and others from the sense of flight in upper ones (No 23), while the ensemble work in No 6 gives the engaging impression of multiple human beings pushing and pulling at the argument. The crack chamber orchestra from Finland's west coast is well drilled, with a grainy sound closely captured.

Oramo brings his architectural nous to Arensky's Variations, originally a movement from his String Quartet No 2 (that score for two cellos). Its theme is a simple strophic song, ultra-clear on each phase of the journey even when it is played upside down at the end. The composer's own arrangement recalls Grieg's *Holberg Suite* at times in its plain-speaking jollity and tenderness. Tchaikovsky's Elegy is a pleasing finisher but a slightly underwhelming one. For all its qualities, you might well have the same reaction to the disc as a whole.

Andrew Mellor