

Choral & Song

CHORAL & SONG CHOICE



An exquisite collection of remarkable song treasures

Kate Wakeling is enraptured by Katharine Dain and Sam Armstrong's album of French and Polish works



Light and shade: Dain and Armstrong are an appealing duo

Forget This Night

Works by Bacewicz, L Boulanger, Szymanowski
Katharine Dain (soprano), Sam Armstrong (piano)
7 Mountain 7MNTN-046 70 mins

This excellent duo's last album was rightly praised for its thoughtful programming and elegant performances. *Forget This Night* is every bit as appealing in its repertoire and execution, with Dain and Armstrong bringing a terrific sense of light and shade to an expertly curated collection of French and Polish songs.

At the heart of the album is *Clairières dans le ciel* (Clearings in the Sky), the only song cycle by Lili Boulanger. Her music shimmers with luscious harmonies, delicate textures and an intense sense of atmosphere, and this cycle, a study of romantic obsession from the ecstatic to the desolate, is among her finest work. The piece receives an exquisite reading from Dain and Armstrong, who offer everything from the ethereal to the earthy in this assured performance.

The solo vocal music by Lili Boulanger is a rare and special thing to experience

There is also an unexpected highlight: a previously unrecorded fragment of music for solo voice from Boulanger's very last notebook. Dain renders this magical snippet of music with extraordinary tenderness and intimacy. It is a rare and special thing to experience. The Polish elements of the album are no

less captivating. Among many treasures are Szymanowski's 'Pochyl się cicho nad kołyską' (Lean silently over the cradle), a chilling lullaby that invites us to find peace at the bottom of 'the black, black pond', and a setting of Tagore by Bacewicz in 'Rozstanie' (Parting), which brims with fiery passion.

This is altogether a remarkable release: beautiful, intelligent and utterly heartfelt.

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★★★
★★★★★

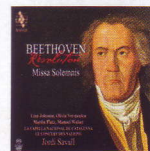
You can access thousands of reviews from our extensive archive on the BBC Music Magazine website at www.classical-music.com

Beethoven

Missa Solemnis

Lina Johnson (soprano), Olivia Vermeulen (mezzo-soprano), Martin Platz (tenor), Manuel Waiser (bass); La Capella Nacional de Catalunya; Le Concert des Nations/Jordi Savall

Alia Vox AVSA9956 75:15 mins



Is the *Missa Solemnis* the greatest opera Beethoven never wrote? Theatrical through and

through, there's something positively Promethean about its quest to reconcile the divine and the human. And like JS Bach's equally all-encompassing B minor Mass, it's more a personal statement writ large than a practical contribution to the liturgical repertoire – even though Op. 123 started life as a work to mark the consecration of Beethoven's patron and pupil Archduke Rudolf as Archbishop of Olomouc. Considering it his greatest work to date, Beethoven famously inscribed 'from the heart – may it return – to the heart' ahead of the Kyrie, an injunction Jordi Savall has clearly heeded.

Nonetheless, the recording is a bit of a mixed bag. Both disturbed and disturbing, the *Agnus Dei* is beautifully paced as glowering disquiet is ambushed by terrifying military interjections; and the poised opening of the *Sanctus* is haunting, its 'pleni sunt caeli' bright and explosive, the *Benedictus* – with its sublime violin solo – ethereal. But, besieged by a reverberant acoustic and somewhat congested recording (the opening of the *Gloria* particularly so), it's not always easy to follow Savall's vision of the piece. The *Kyrie* is short on 'presence', the choral attack at the outset a little limp, and the responding soloists are unfavourably recessed in the sound picture. For all Savall's manifold insights – foreshadowings of Brahms and Bruckner intrigue the ear – there are more consistently compelling period-instrument versions available – the last recording by Nikolaus Harnoncourt with Concentus Musicus Wien, and John Eliot Gardiner's live second recording among them.

Paul Riley

PERFORMANCE
RECORDING

★★★
★★★