

# Orchestral & Choral

poised gravity. Typical was the opening Capriccio, in F sharp minor, which is turbulent, never merely restless, reminding us of the desolate atmosphere of the wind-swept graveyard of the composer's *Auf dem Kirchhofe*. It employs two very different ends almost the four-note motif that Mozart used in the finale of his *Jupiter* Symphony, with procedures of augmentation and inversion echoing Brahms's variation-writing days.

With memories of Stanev's performance of the *Etudes d'exécution transcendente* last year still vivid, expectations were naturally high when he turned to Liszt's *Sonata*. Obviously a great diversity of pianistic skills are required and there were magnificent and exquisite events in this reading. Yet the pianist's sheer virtuosity got the better of him in the final climax, which was too fast and too loud. Yet immediately after the furious *martellato* of those pages Stanev returned with a view of *Consolation* No.3 of the utmost refinement.

Max Harrison

## Medtner

### St Martin-in-the-Fields

A necessarily brief lunch-time programme at St Martin-in-the-Fields on June 3 was unusual in that it wholly comprised music by Nikolai Medtner, organised by the pianist on that occasion, Alexander Karpeyev. The programme began with three Novellas for solo piano Opus 17, which were – at around five minutes' each – remarkably attractive and exceptionally well-written pieces; each self-contained, as one had hoped, and yet quite different in their emotional expression, quite beautifully played. These were followed by Karpeyev being joined by the Idomeneo Quartet for an equally rare performance of Medtner's final masterpiece, the Piano Quintet, a work which received its first performance in London in 1950, when the pianist was not the composer but Colin Horsley; it was published after Medtner's death in 1951. The Quintet is a masterpiece, a fine and substantial work of around half-an-hour's duration, and received a performance full of insight and genuine interpretative affection. A remarkable and very well worthwhile programme all round.

Robert Matthew-Walker

## Three Choirs Festival: *Caractacus* Worcester Cathedral

It's a pity *Caractacus* isn't heard more often these days. Despite H A Acworth's clunky text – 'My comrades of the Roman thrall' is a typically risible phrase – Elgar's music is sensitively crafted and full of felicitous touches, especially in the choral writing. *Caractacus*'s Lament, for example, foreshadows elements of *Gerontius*, as does the women's chorus in Scene 5 (an interlude of heavenly poignancy), while the 'woodland bow'rs' chorus of Scene 3 conjures up an almost *Wand of Youth* innocence. In other places, though, Elgar's inspiration deserts him, resorting to operetta ditty in 'Leap to the light' and a final chorus that indulges too much in tub-thumping rhetoric and formulaic bombast.

But the various shortcomings hardly mattered in this remarkably competent performance on August 8. Sir Andrew Davis's fingertip direction (conducting such large forces without a baton certainly concentrated the eyes and ears of all participants) resulted in an impressively structured account, big enough when required, but never too noisy (the Philharmonia Orchestra showed commendable restraint) and, in the quiet pastoral sections, enhanced by focused, elegant singing from a Festival Chorus seemingly fired with enthusiasm. The five soloists ranged from good to outstanding, with Peter Savidge's *Caractacus* (warrior-king authority combined with tenderness) and Judith Howarth's nuanced, lustrously sung Eigen demonstrably taking the honours.

Given its potential for drama and character, one can't help wondering what might have become of *Caractacus* as an opera. Perhaps not a lot. After all, Stanford wrote six operas on equally worthy subjects – and they are all forgotten.

David Hart

## Corinthian Chamber Orchestra/ Adrian Brown

The word 'Chamber' in the Corinthian Chamber Orchestra's title is clearly a

somewhat elastic one in terms of number of players, to judge by the concert they gave at Queen Elizabeth Hall on June 28 under Adrian Brown. The programme comprised Dvorák's Cello Concerto with Richard Jenkinson and Rachmaninoff's Third Symphony – hardly 'chamber orchestra' fare. With such works for full symphony orchestra, cannot they remove 'Chamber' from their title? Otherwise, it implies giving concerts of music with under-strength personnel.

Having got that off my chest, I have to say that the performances were truly excellent; Jenkinson delivered a splendid account of the Concerto, which was all the more admirable as he clearly loves this work (which music-lover doesn't?) and loved playing it. No histrionics here – just honest music-making of quality. Adrian Brown conducted a superb reading of Rachmaninoff's Third Symphony – what a great work this is! – which was excellently played to a very high technical standard. There is always something special about such music when it has obviously been so thoroughly rehearsed, so that no allowances need be made for this performance – if only the 'name' London orchestras had this much rehearsal and preparation!

A really fine concert, and my only quibble is that I would have welcomed a short orchestral 'opener' before the Concerto: or am I being old-fashioned?

Alexander Leonard

## Howells: *English Mass* and Durufle: *Requiem*

### City of London Choir London Mozart Players/Hilary Davan Wetton

The programme by the City of London Choir, at St John's Smith Square on June 23 began with Herbert Howells's *English Mass*; the quietly questioning opening phrases of the *Kyrie* to cautious optimism as the chorus rose above shimmering strings promised a work of emotional intensity. In this first London performance using the new Novello score, The City of London Choir sang with a sensitivity which fully realised the complexity of