

*Symphony No.4* (1910–16). Each subsequent hearing magnifies my appreciation of this masterpiece. Conductor Ludovic Morlot and the Seattle Symphony seem comfortable with the work's contradictions. Ethereal high strings evoke night uncannily in the short Prelude yet orchestral interruptions are harsh; meanwhile a hopeful chorus sings the hymn *Watchman*. Is it right to have all of this going on? Ives would say, "Sure – why not?" Then a complex movement, *Comedy*, goes much further. It opens with quarter-tone string glissandi, the quiet soon intruded on by other material including marches and full brass, sentimental tunes, a piano waltz and a violin solo, often with different simultaneous tempi. Conductor, orchestra and engineer still manage to keep everything in balance in this musical funhouse! The following strict hymn-tune-based Fugue could not contrast more vividly. In the visionary Finale, despite diverse interruptions, Morlot maintains the unifying sense of a parade bookended by percussion-alone passages that emerge from and return to silence.

The classics *The Unanswered Question* (1908) and *Central Park in the Dark* (1898–1907) receive scrupulous, loving treatment, with impeccable intonation. In *Symphony No. 3, "The Camp Meeting"* (1901–14) a different side of Ives appears, as turn-of-the-century classical music language combines seamlessly with nineteenth-century American hymnody; this recording presents a persuasive case for the result.

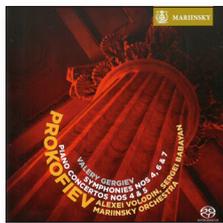
Roger Knox

**Prokofiev – Symphonies Nos. 4, 6, & 7; Piano Concertos Nos. 4 & 5  
Alexei Volodin; Sergei Babayan; Mariinsky Orchestra; Valery Gergiev  
Mariinsky MAR0577**

▶ The Swiss composer Arthur Honegger once claimed that Prokofiev would "remain the greatest figure of contemporary music."

These were strong words of praise indeed and whether or not one agrees, this splendid two-disc set on the Mariinsky label offers the listener ample opportunity to decide. The collection is the first in a series the label is issuing to honour the 125th anniversary of Prokofiev's birth and features the piano concertos *Four* and *Five* and symphonies *Four*, *Six* and *Seven*, appropriately performed by the Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre with soloists Alexei Volodin and Sergei Babayan all under the direction of Valery Gergiev.

The set opens with the *Piano Concerto No.4* for the left hand, music completed in 1931, and the second concerto written for the pianist Paul Wittgenstein who had lost his right arm in the Great War (Ravel had



provided the first). The opening movement – the first of four – is sprightly and virtuosic, with Alexei Volodin easily handling the technical demands for the left hand that would challenge all but the most competent of artists. An expansive and introspective second movement follows a quirky *Moderato* before a lickety-split finale where soloist and orchestra prove a formidable pairing.

The *Fifth Concerto* from 1932 also presents considerable technical challenges. Its five brief movements are true studies in contrasts, from the cheeky and extroverted opening to the calm *Larghetto*. Throughout, Sergei Babayan's dexterity and keyboard style are much in evidence; the virtuosic demands are conveyed with great finesse.

Judging from the relatively small number of recordings of the *Symphony No.4* – originally composed in 1930 but expanded 17 years later – it would seem to be the most under-appreciated of all seven symphonies. The light and playful mood attests to its origins in the ballet *The Prodigal Son* on which it was based. Gergiev and the Mariinsky Orchestra provide a spirited and thoroughly convincing performance, bringing together a wealth of timbres and colours. *Symphony No.6* was completed in 1947 and has long been regarded as the darker twin of the more optimistic *No.5*. Nevertheless, Gergiev draws a sensitive performance from the orchestra throughout the solemn march-like opening movement, the anguished and lengthy *Largo* and the optimistic and rambunctious *Vivace*, performed with panache. To a degree, the ballet spirit is also found in *Symphony No.7* from 1952. The gracious second movement waltz and elegiac andante are further enhanced by the warmly resonant strings, while the spirited finale seems meant to be danced to! A surprisingly placid ending brings the symphony – and the set – to a satisfying conclusion.

In all, these are exemplary performances and the collection is destined to be a staple in the catalogue.

Richard Haskell

**social sounds  
Catherine Lee  
Teal Creek Music TC-2035  
(catherinemlee.com)**

▶ The difficulty and excitement of a solo instrumental performance arises from the fact that the entire sound envelope is, from beginning to end, from top to bottom, exposed. A note's attack, its approach towards silence, the sound of keys, the performer's breath – all these come under the listener's scrutiny, amplified by the surrounding stillness. On *social sounds*, Portland oboist Catherine Lee, instead of merely navigating these choppy waters,



makes them her destination. Almost all of the pieces feature an improvisatory aspect, tools which Lee uses to prod the boundaries of her instrument's sound.

The first such piece presented here is Jérôme Blais' *Rafales*. Scored for solo oboe and piano with depressed sustain pedal, the work is this disc's standout. Inspired by the composer's encounters with Nova Scotian wind, Blais supplies the performer only with loosely defined long-tone gestures, leaving their lengths at the performer's discretion. These, combined with the timbral shifts caused by the choreographed movement of the oboe in relationship to the microphone, result in a gripping tension: Lee's tone, at first pushed and pulled along its edges, finally disintegrates into the murk of sympathetic vibrations with the piano.

A similar effect is achieved in Emily Doolittle's *Social sounds from whales at night*, only here it's improvised timbral fingerings and pitch bends which cause the tension, and pre-recorded whale sounds rising to the ocean's surface which give release. The sum of these is a CD as compelling as it is eminently listenable.

Elliot Wright

**Mangabeira  
Trio Virado  
Soundset Recordings SR1075  
(triovirado.com)**

▶ Trio Virado was created after member guitarist João Luiz heard the Leo Brouwer piece *Paisajes, Retratos y Mujeres* in a Brazilian concert at the Leo Brouwer Festival.

So enthralled was the musician with its successful instrumentation that he asked his manager to bring flutist Amy Porter and violist Juan-Miguel Hernandez together for a concert of this piece and Luiz's arrangement of three Astor Piazzolla tangos. The musical chemistry clicked with a permanent trio, more concerts, more pieces and this debut release.

The unusual instrumentation works as each instrument and each performer can convincingly take on lead or accompaniment roles in various styles. The above-mentioned Brouwer piece is given a clear, energetic performance in its subtle three note ideas, unison sections and stylistic shifts from Renaissance to minuet dance rhythms. Likewise the three Luiz-arranged Piazzolla tracks are spirited, tight, rhythmic, and true to the bandeonist/composer's musical vision. The other three works by Sergio Assad, Hermeto Pascoal and Luiz are well-played good pieces in a more popular music genre – for example Luiz' theme and variations work *Todas as Manhas de Carnaval*, and showcases the trio's ability

