



Press review



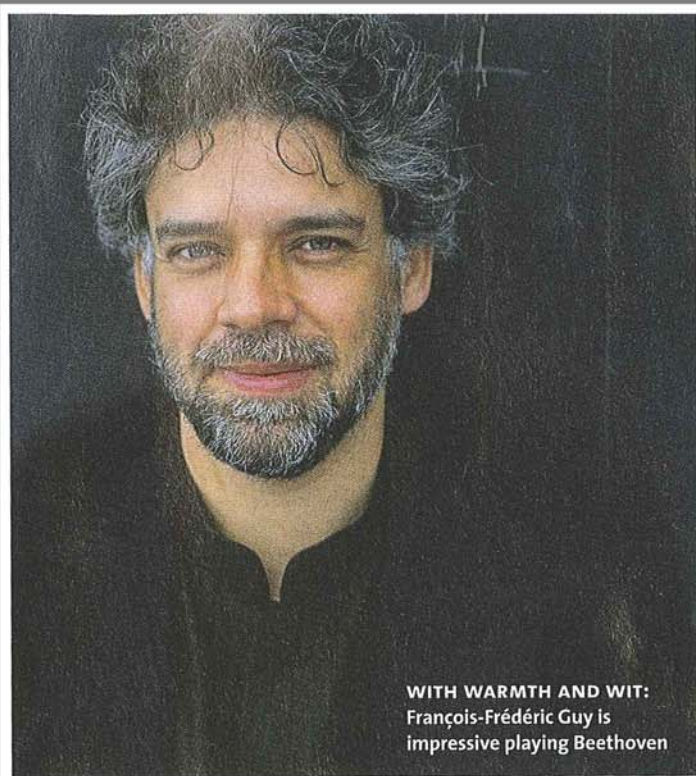
different characterisation, and in truth the flute version – quintessential B minor Bach as exemplified by the keyboard *Overture in the French Style*, BWV831 – need not fear this usurping alternative.

By the same token, why, beyond natural curiosity, choose a version of Suite No. 4 without trumpets and drums, the very elements that Bach added for extra jubilation when he adapted the music to cantata purposes? One reason to hear this version might be the wonderful buoyancy, lift and insights of Monica Huggett's treasurable *Sonnerie*. These performances are alive with fine moments, yet even the 'young Prince' might have enjoyed Bach's last thoughts (tellingly realised by Koopman and Pinnock, for example) even more. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

giving an imposing rendition of the grandiose cadenza that Beethoven supplied for No. 2 a full decade after he'd completed the work, and responding well to the wit of the final rondo. Warmly recommended, even to those who already own several versions of these much-recorded works. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



WITH WARMTH AND WIT: François-Frédéric Guy is impressive playing Beethoven



BEETHOVEN

Piano Concertos: No. 2 in B flat, Op. 19; No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37
François-Frédéric Guy (piano);
Radio France PO/Philippe Jordan
Naïve V 5179 65:00 mins

BBC Music Direct £13.70

These warm and meticulously detailed performances find François-Frédéric Guy and Philippe Jordan taking the opening movement of the C minor Third Concerto at a steady four-to-the-bar tempo that allows them to give full weight to the march-like main theme, and especially its repeated-rhythm tail-end (memorably transferred to the timpani in the closing moments).

The slow movement is deeply expressive, and the finale, sensibly following on as an *attacca*, receives an appropriately unhurried reading, too. Only a couple of tiny details mar the very high standard of the performance as a whole. The first is of little account, but it's a pity that a poor edit momentary disturbs the flow of the left-hand part in a solo passage near the start of the first movement's recapitulation; and Jordan's treatment of the Concerto's ending, where Beethoven wraps up proceedings with a series of full-blooded cadences, is curious. The cadences ought to be rock-steady, but Jordan – presumably in a misfired attempt to lend it greater emphasis – delays the final hammer-blow, and the effect ends up sounding faintly comic.

These are, however, altogether impressive accounts, with Guy

BEETHOVEN

Ideals of the French Revolution: The General; Symphony No. 5; Egmont – extracts; Opferlied, Op. 121B

Montreal SO/Kent Nagano
RCA Red Seal 88697400842
106:53 mins (2 discs)

BRUCKNER

Symphony No. 4 (original version)
Bavarian State Orchestra/Kent Nagano
Sony 88697368812 (hybrid CD/SACD)
74:53 mins

MAHLER
Das Lied von der Erde
Klaus Florian Vogt (tenor),
Christian Gerhaher (baritone);
Montreal SO/Kent Nagano
Sony 88697508212 61:23 mins
BBC Music Direct (Beethoven) £15.65
BBC Music Direct (Bruckner) £13.70
BBC Music Direct (Mahler) £13.70

Kent Nagano is a conductor with a wide variety of sympathies, in both the operatic and the orchestral repertoires. These three discs show how versatile and flexible he is, at the same time that they reveal a personality which, if not instantly recognisable, is still powerful, warming always to exciting drama.

The Beethoven pair is in the first place an oddity. We have the Fifth Symphony, very much performed as a revolutionary act: Beethoven as Haydn's successor, a figure we hear a lot about at present, is swept aside by Beethoven the ferociously intent freedom fighter. It is a brisk, almost violent performance, exciting but probably not enduringly so. On the same disc there are excerpts from *Egmont*, of which the one that matters is the magnificent Overture, in an account that would have one storming the local Bastille if there were one. The other disc in this pair is a concoction by the music critic

Paul Griffiths, which has the purpose of producing a harrowing account of what happened in Rwanda and how this was studiously ignored by the Western powers, animated by the same music from *Egmont* and the fragments that Beethoven used for the melodrama (in the literal sense). The actor Maximilian plays the part of The General, telling us of the horrors and of how his task of helping was bureaucratically undermined. Half of the other disc is repeated here; the rest is trivial musical punctuation. Yet it is effective enough to get you steamed up at the crass ineptitude of our rulers.

Bruckner's Fourth Symphony is here performed in its first version, unheard until 1975: it is much more expansive than the usual version, and the orchestral score is more than 100 pages longer. I have previously not liked the early version, which is also quite different – the *scherzo*, quirky even by Bruckner's standards, is quite unlike the familiar one; and there is much material throughout which Bruckner changed or dropped. Nagano has persuaded me that the original, for all its oddities and shapelessness, is an inchoate masterpiece, far more interesting and original than the work we are familiar with, which is Bruckner's least adventurous work. This is a major act of reclamation, something to be deeply grateful for.

Mahler's great *Das Lied von der Erde* is given in the alternative version with tenor and baritone, instead of tenor and contralto. I can't see, have never seen, why anyone would

perform this alternative, except to demonstrate how much finer the contralto version is. Nor is Nagano's account especially insightful, though the tenor Klaus Florian Vogt has his appeal – the booklet admits that his voice was overdubbed, presumably because it is too small for him actually to perform the cycle. Christian Gerhaher treats his text as if he were singing Wolf, with whisperings and stresses quite out of place in this large-scale work. No texts are provided – a major dereliction. *Michael Tanner*

PERFORMANCE (BEETHOVEN) ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★
PERFORMANCE (BRUCKNER) ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★
PERFORMANCE (MAHLER) ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE:

Mahler: Ludwig, Wunderlich/
Klemperer EMI 566 8922 £9.78



ELGAR

Enigma Variations; In the South (Alassio); Serenade for Strings
Philharmonia Orchestra/Andrew Davis
Signum SIGCD 168 66:38 mins

BBC Music Direct £13.70

These three live performances from 2007 further burnish Andrew Davis's credentials as an Elgar conductor. One feature of the recording is the

GUY VIVIEN



The world's authority on classical music since 1923

Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 2

Additional Recommendation

Piano Concertos – Nos 2 & 3

François-Frédéric Guy (pf) **Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Philippe Jordan**

Naïve V5179 (60' · DDD) [Buy from Amazon](#)

What a joy François-Frédéric Guy's performances are. Brilliant and direct in the finest French tradition, they are also alive with passing felicities, whether illuminating an early pioneering spirit or a change into what EM Forster once called 'Beethoven's C minor of life'. In the Second Concerto Guy's exuberance and poetry go hand in hand. The first movement's startlingly original cadenza is played with unfaltering assurance and the hushed magic with which Guy handles the main theme of the central *Adagio* sounds a special note. A dazzling finale, too, finds ample time for individual nuance and pointed characterisation, making his sense of contrast in the Third Concerto all the more remarkable. Here both he and Jordan take a qualified view of Beethoven's *con brio*, conveying an atmosphere of foreboding, of minor-key unease resolved in an inward-looking *Largo* where everything is experienced afresh. The finale is unusually restrained but, again, there is nothing of the studio and everything of a life experience. Guy's reading ranks high in a crowded catalogue.

(2009)