



Irish charm: Barry Douglas plays the music of his homeland



Barry Douglas is a doughty champion of his native Ireland; no other musician has equalled

his contribution to culture on the Emerald Isle. More than just a pianist – in 1986 he won the Tchaikovsky Competition – he's also both a conductor and impresario. In 1999 he founded (and still co-runs) the Camerata Ireland Orchestra as a response to the Good Friday Agreement, bringing together the best musicians from North and South.

He records prolifically, and it was only a matter of time before he desisted from making CDs of Brahms, Schubert and Tchaikovsky, and turned his attention to the music of his homeland. On this album he figures as composer, arranger and exponent of the nocturnes of the Irish composer John Field.

Douglas's own compositions are slight, but the traditional Irish songs he's arranged have great charm. Everyone knows *Cockles and Mussels*, but nothing else in this collection will ring a bell with anyone not deeply versed in Celtic song. Most go back to the 18th century and have named composers, but the most decorous one – *Madam Cole* – is simply attributed to 'an old Irish harper' – while the most beautiful song of all is a lullaby dating back to the 17th century.

Meanwhile, Douglas brings transparency of sound to six of Field's *Nocturnes*; with Alice Sara Ott blazing a trail two years ago, it's nice to see these unassuming but delightful works getting their due. And Douglas finds more poetry in them than Ott does, each in its own delicate sound world. **Michael Church** ★★★★★

Shapes of Water

Piano Music by Debussy and Beyond

Carmen Stefanescu (piano)
Prospero PROSP012779 mins



So many piano pieces about water exist that you could probably fill a whole shelf with

recordings of them. All credit, then, to Carmen Stefanescu – described not inappropriately as 'pianist and musical storyteller' – for selecting such a varied programme, venturing off the beaten track of repertoire and demonstrating flair and empathy in works ranging from the late romantics up to the present day.

Some of Debussy's plentiful water and snow-themed pieces punctuate this recital, including a sumptuous account of 'La cathédrale engloutie', in which the pianist makes the most of the music's luxuriant resonances. Perhaps wisely, she avoids overloading the playlist with Debussy's compatriots, but a strong Fauré *Barcarolle* No. 1 is a welcome exception, along with Mel Bonis's *Il pleut!*. Even if the latter bears some resemblance to Debussy's 'Jardins sous la pluie', which opens the disc, it's full of delicious humour and sparkling fingerwork.

Further highlights include the poetic soulfulness of Mompou ('El lago' from *Paisajes*), some superb musical storytelling from Zemlinsky ('Der Wassermann', the third of his *4 Ballades*), a dramatically daring piece by Bloch, *At Sea*, and Amy Beach's serene *By the Still Waters* – though Nobuo Uematsu's portentous 'The Boundless Ocean', from a video game, slightly overstays its welcome.

Overall, this is a gorgeous recital that makes excellent listening. Stefanescu's rich-toned playing rises with aplomb to all its challenges and she crowns the disc with an irresistibly exultant performance of Debussy's *L'isle Joyeuse*. **Jessica Duchon** ★★★★★

Sonority

Works by Hollins, Dupré, Bach, Eben & Duruflé

Jan Liebermann (organ)
Regent REGCD601 69:34 mins



This impressive debut album by the young German organist Jan Liebermann

was recorded last year when he was still only 19. His remarkable sense of authority is clear from the way he lays out the musical argument in Alfred Hollins's Concert Overture No. 3. The music may sit somewhere in the wide space between Mendelssohn and Vierne, but the now largely forgotten composer was an interesting figure, who in his day rivalled Dupré for popularity as a concert organist.

The work of Marcel Dupré himself occupies the heart of this recording, with his magnificent set of Three Preludes and Fugues, Op. 36. Liebermann gives a dazzling account of the middle work, in A flat major, and conjures up the hazy impressionism of the other two, building the final C major piece – a scherzo in fugal form – towards a tumultuous climax. The organist is outstanding, too, in the suite by Maurice Duruflé, delivering the *Toccata* with invigorating bite, his registrations giving the Salisbury Cathedral organ snarling power.

Interrupting the trajectory of the programme, Sigfrid Karg-Elert's arrangement of what is usually known as Bach's 'Air on the G String' sounds a little out of place, especially when there could have been more, say, Petr Eben. The Czech composer's 'Moto Ostinato' (from his organ symphony *Sunday Music*) has clarity and bite, with Liebermann – and the recording engineers – making its spiky sonorities speak distinctly. **John Allison** ★★★★★

BRIEF NOTES

After Dark: A Midnight Fantasia

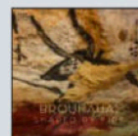
Works by Philips, Holborne, Byrd et al Pierre Gallon (harpsichord)
Harmonia Mundi HMM902765 69 mins



From the doleful musings of late evening to the optimism of a new day, Pierre Gallon leads us through the dark hours, largely in the company of English Renaissance composers but also one new work by Bernard Foccroulle. The general tone is meditative, but by using a range of keyboards and including some unexpected sounds along the way, Gallon ensures we are never tempted to nod off. **Jeremy Pound** ★★★★★

Brouhaha: Shaped by Fire

Works by Ian Gottlieb, Zachary Good, Fjóla Evans et al
Maiani da Silva (violin & voice) Sono Luminus SLE-70044 51:53



For this intriguing project, Maiani da Silva has commissioned six composers to write a work for solo violin inspired by 'human nature and our place in the ecosystem'. With titles like 'Shaped by a sunbeam' this might have been too earnest for its own good, but the result is highly atmospheric, featuring palpable effects and eccentric encounters between man and machine. **Charlotte Smith** ★★★★★

Throwback to Dance Works by Grieg, Chaminade, Ravel et al

Ivana Gavrić (piano) Signum Classics SIGCD947 72 mins



This carefully curated disc traces connections between composers through dance – Grieg's imprint on Ravel and Pejačević's on Chaminade. It flows from court and folk dances to the waltz, with Gavrić's playing poised throughout. Ravel's *Tombeau de Couperin* is a gem, the *Fugue* opening in a stunning, rhythmic suspense. **Miranda Bardsley** ★★★★★