

The Cardinal's Musick presents a contrasting account of the same pieces on *Cardemus* for the 1589 works, and *Hyperion* for the 1591. Besides using different pitching and singing me to a part, the Cardinal's Musick emphasises how Byrd differentiated between voices, making robust and even swaggering statements that are less nuanced but potentially more surprising. Those who like experimentation may prefer the Cardinal's Musick, but those who delight in English choral traditions will embrace Trinity's performance *Berta Joncus*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★★★



**CRUMB**

**The River of Life; Unto the Hills**  
Ann Crumb (soprano); Orchestra 2001/James Freeman  
*Bridge 9278A/B* 83:22 mins (2 discs)  
**BBC Music Direct** £13.99  
This, volume 10 in Bridge's complete Crumb edition, presents premiere recordings of *River of Life* and of the revised *Unto the Hills* (its original version was included by the same artists on volume 7). Crumb, tongue-in-cheek, I'd guess, has described *River* as his 'Ivesian thing'. Like Ives he delves into the treasury of American hymns and spirituals, but treats them very differently. Although 'Old Time Religion', the least successful movement, is set as a rather tatty small-town parade, on the whole any comparisons would be with the mysterious, impressionistic Ives of *The Housatonic* or *Central Park*.

**BACKGROUND TO...**



**George Crumb (b1929)**  
The maverick American composer is most famous for works he composed in the 1970s, most notably *Black Angels* for string quartet, the work that inspired the founding of the Kronos Quartet, and a series of pieces for amplified piano he published in two volumes, *Makrokosmos* (named after Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*).  
After a less productive period during the 1980s and '90s, Crumb has composed increasingly for voice and also works involving the guitarist David Starobin.

*Unto the Hills*, now re-catalogued as *American Songbook III* with *River* renumbered as *I*, was the first to be composed (in 2001), triggering the series. It's very much of a piece with *River*, but uses Appalachian folk songs as its source-material. As in *River*, the central movement (of nine) is an instrumental interlude relating to a particular time of day.

Both cycles use songs that are very familiar in other realisations, from elaborate choral arrangements to remarkable accounts by the likes of Paul Robeson or Aretha Franklin, from '60s folk-revival versions to alt.country interpretations. This raises the bar considerably for Ann Crumb, the composer's daughter, but she clears it with ease and elegance. Against backdrops that are spare yet full of subtleties and interest, she interprets the songs with clarity and feeling. *Barry Witherden*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★★★



**ELGAR**

**Songs and piano solos**  
Amanda Pitt (soprano), Mark Wilde (tenor), Peter Savidge (baritone), David Owen Norris (piano)  
*Avie AV 2129* 139:39 mins (2 discs)  
**BBC Music Direct** £22.99  
Though Elgar's songs are hardly the most inspired area of his output, the best offer glimpses of his larger, greater works. In this birthday tribute, pianist David Owen Norris makes an idiosyncratic selection, chiefly tracing what he claims was the abiding influence of Elgar's early love for Helen Weaver. The trail leads inconveniently to two orchestral cycles, the *Sea Pictures* – given here in Elgar's draft at soprano pitch – and the hearty wartime Kipling set, *The Fringes of the Fleet*.

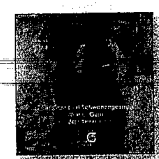
Norris plays Elgar's own domestic piano, an 1844 Broadwood Square now in the Cobbe Collection at Hatchlands. While he's a persuasive exponent of it, and it's fascinating to hear the *Sea Pictures* and the Prelude and Angel's Farewell from *Dream of Gerontius* on the instrument at which they were written, I suspect Elgar would have been horrified by the idea of performances on this private period piece. And the singers seem to find it difficult to match its domestic quality and its unresonant setting. Mark Wilde opts for conversational intimacy, but loses that at climaxes, while Peter Savidge is mostly bluff and blustery and sounds uncomfortable when holding back; Amanda Pitt

finds an acceptable middle way, but with an occasional distracting flutter.

For general listeners, Elgar's songs are better represented by Somm's discerning and well-performed single-disc selection. But for devoted Elgarians there are certainly some intriguing discoveries here, including the piano sketch that became the opening of the Cello Concerto, and a reconstruction of Elgar's touching final song, coyly named *XTC*.

*Anthony Burton*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★

**BENCHMARK RECORDING**  
Songs: Soloists, Martineau  
*Somm SOMMCD 220*



**SCHUBERT**

**Schwanengesang; Ausgewählte Lieder nach Gedichten von Goethe**  
Werner Gura (tenor), Christoph Berner (piano)  
*Harmonia Mundi HMC 901931* 69:37 mins  
**BBC Music Direct** £13.99

Bavarian tenor Werner Gura is one of today's most accomplished Schubertians, so his *Schwanengesang* has been eagerly awaited. He's joined by Viennese accompanist Christoph Berner, who evokes every movement of wind and water with sentient, fleet-fingered playing on a Viennese Ehrbar piano of 1877 – albeit recorded with too much resonance.

Both musicians are highly sensitive to the ever-shifting qualities of movement in Schubert's music: the rushing pulse of eager life, and the sighing awareness of mortality in these great late songs. The opening group of Rellstab settings are characterised by half-lights and delicately-turned vocal ornaments; the Heine songs by that spooky sense of movement within stasis, as Gura's legato recreates the wide horizons of sky and sea.

What I miss is a searing sense of life-hunger, and the knife-edge of anguish which defines this collection. Gura's tenor tends to shy away from the risk of finding that pain at the top of the register – something which Peter Schreier (WH Live 0006) has never shirked. My benchmark remains Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's 1972 recording with Gerald Moore: touchingly ardent, and with an intensity of anger, pain and fear which looks into the abyss. *Hilary Finch*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★

**BENCHMARK RECORDING**  
Fischer-Dieskau, Moore *DG 463 5032*



**SCHÜTZ**

**Opus ultimum Schwanengesang; Psalm 100; Psalm 119; Deutsches Magnificat**  
Collegium Vocale Gent; Concerto Palatino/Philippe Herreweghe  
*Harmonia Mundi HMC 901895-96*  
88:49 mins (2 discs)  
**BBC Music Direct** £19.99

It's a miracle that we have the music of Schütz's final work, a setting of Psalm 119. Six of eight handwritten part-books were discovered in 1900, then disappeared again until the 1970s. Herreweghe performs them with 24 voices, eight providing a contrasting sonority of soloists, and with cornet, trombones, strings and continuo.

Psalm 119 with its 176 verses is the longest in the Bible. Initial letters of each eight-verse section create an alphabetical acrostic forming the framework for an extended prayer; setting it was an apt undertaking for Schütz's 'Swan Song' a year before his death in 1672. He divided the text into 11 sections, each beginning with a plainchant intonation and ending with the Gloria. As testament to a life of devotion, the complete collection is magnificent, more than worthy of an archival recording. But with so much text, the setting is a continuous stream of new music, all in common time, all at one tempo, all in eight parts. A little goes a long way – it is music to savour as if liturgically, one motet at a time – and the jubilant triple-time of the Magnificat provides a welcome contrast.

The performance is most sensitively managed, voices coloured by discreet instruments, though the sound-stage is perhaps rather narrow for Schütz's intended division of the choirs into two lofts either side of the altar. *George Pratt*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**SOUND** ★★★★★



**SIBELIUS**

**The Origin of Fire (original and revised versions); Sandels, Op. 28; The Captive Queen; The Rapids-Rider's Brides etc**  
Tom Nyman (tenor), Tommi Hakala (baritone); YL Male Voice Choir; Lahti SO/Osmo Vänskä  
*BIS CD-1525* 71:51 mins  
**BBC Music Direct** £12.99

When an admirer demanded 'to kiss the hand that wrote *Ulysses*', James