

IN THE
STUDIO

EDITOR'S CHOICE

conditioned by the Great War of 1914. Remarkable, too, that Housman should so unerringly have anticipated it.

Both programmes include first recordings: eight among the songs by John Jeffreys, three in the mixed anthology. Gurney's *On Wenlock Edge* is a strong setting, thought up in the trenches, written out in hospital. Ian Venables's settings of Dowson and Roethke are sensitive to mood and attractive in manner, as is his song-cycle *Love's Voice*. Of the two tenors, James Gilchrist has the warmer voice, Nathan Vale's thinner tone giving most pleasure at moderated volume. Each has the support of a fine pianist. **John Steane**

Marsh

Albert Giraud's *Pierrot lunaire*
Linda Hirst *mez*; Joe Marsh *narr*; Red Byrd;
Juice Trio; Ebor Singers; Hilliard Ensemble /
Paul GAMESON

NMC © 2 NMCD127 (101' • DDD • T/t)

Going further than Schoenberg
ever did – and generally succeeding



In 1992 Alexander Goehr completed his cantata *The Death of Moses*, inspired by Schoenberg's great opera *Moses und Aron*. Now here is another work which one can't imagine existing had it not been for a work of Schoenberg's: *Pierrot lunaire*. No less than Goehr's cantata, it is both homage and critique – a consequence rather than an imitation.

Roger Marsh sets all Giraud's 50 poems: Schoenberg 21. Marsh combines the original French with English translations: Schoenberg used German translations only. Schoenberg used a single vocalist and five instrumentalists: Marsh has four vocal ensembles as well as a solo mezzo and a narrator, with occasional though telling use of instruments. Schoenberg echoes the 19th-century song-cycle: Marsh creates associations with different choral forms – motet, madrigal, chorale, chant. Once the ear adjusts to the layering of speech and song, the work is supremely approachable, with expressive, often simple harmonies offset by catchy rhythms, touching on popular styles in ways which echo Messiaen and Berio. Indeed, the theatrical extravagance of the two movements featuring Linda Hirst seems designed as homage to the great Cathy Berberian.

There is a powerful climax near the end of Part 1, where the spirit of "cruel Eucharist" is at its clearest, aided by organ and bells. Listening without a break, you might feel that the music retreats once too often to a default style of sustained, close-position harmony. But so skilful is the performance, and so atmospheric the recording, that any reservations soon dissolve. Even discrepancies between the spoken text and the printed translation, the result of the composer's changes, cease to distract after the first hearing. **Arnold Whittall**

Choral Parsons

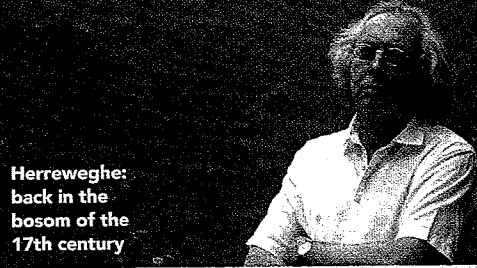
Chamber choir Voces Cantabiles under their director Barnaby Smith recorded the choral music of Robert Parsons in February at London's All Hallows Church for Naxos. The disc opens with Parsons's longest work, the *Magnificat*, setting the Latin text, and closes with his *Ave Maria*. The First "Great" Service, based on the 1549 Prayer Book text, forms the bulk of the recording, interspersed with three anthems set to texts from the Funeral Service. Voces Cantabiles was formed in 2003 and released "Forever Child", a CD of vocal music by Ronald Corp, for Dutton last year (11/06).

Elgar on song

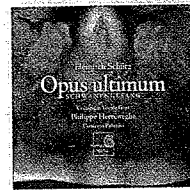
To celebrate Elgar's 150th anniversary pianist David Owen Norris and The Works – soprano Amanda Pitt, tenor Mark Wilde and baritone Peter Savidge – have recorded songs and piano works on Elgar's own 1844 Broadwood piano. The two-disc set, released by Avie on June 2, features 32 Elgar songs for voice and piano (including the world premiere of Elgar's unpublished final song set to his own words) in addition to first recordings of Elgar's piano arrangements of the theme of the Cello Concerto, and the Prelude and Angel's Farewell from *The Dream of Gerontius*. The release includes a booklet of complete song texts annotated by David Owen Norris.

Stradella's St John

In March the Academia Montis Regalis went to the Italian town of Cuneo to record Stradella's oratorio *San Giovanni Battista* for Hyperion. Formed in 1994, the Academia Montis Regalis has made a number of discs, including a collection of Vivaldi violin concertos with soloist Enrico Onofri last year for the Naive label (10/06).



Herreweghe:
back in the
bosom of the
17th century



Can this be the
greatest work by
an octogenarian
before Strauss?



Schütz

Opus ultimum (Schwanengesang), SWV482-94

Ghent Collegium Vocale; Concerto Palatino / Philippe Herreweghe
Harmonia Mundi © 2 HMC90 1895/6 (89' • DDD • T/t)

Philippe Herreweghe's return to the bosom of the 17th century is as welcome as his recent claims for an "authentic" approach to Bruckner symphonies have, generally speaking, not been. Indeed, the beauty of this remarkable performance of Schütz's last work resides principally in Collegium Vocale's blooming cradle of sound and how it unassumingly stakes its claim – with no subtext – on the unique ambitions of Schütz's "Swanson". These are founded on the composer's distilled and often austere contemplation of Psalm 119 in 11 double-choir motets, joined by Psalm 150 and the impressive *Deutsches Magnificat*.

If not texturally pared down, this is a journey where the 86-year-old Schütz withdraws from the world in a lexicon of finely drawn plainchants, antique modes, taut contrapuntal and antiphonal exchanges, melodic swathes and quicksilver declamations. Herreweghe illuminates each verse with a considered and gentle ear for the progression from the "statutes" of faith towards a sense of hope and salvation as we move towards a new Covenant, revealed in the final motet with its assuaging supplications and rock-like assurance. Here we sense, above all, Schütz's mix of defiance and resignation for the gradual passing of a self-contained sacred tradition threatened by radical worldly things (like operas).

Collegium Vocale relish Schütz's introspection and easy exchange between solo and *tutti* sections, which allow the inspired rhetorical mood-changes to reveal each marked-out image ("when thou shalt enlarge my heart" at the end in the second motet is dealt a moment of special attention as it moves towards a conclusion in rapt homage to Monteverdi). Herreweghe's performances are generally outstanding in their attention to detail: some might quibble that the inner *tutti* voices occasionally lack focus and energy, but this is a performance where Schütz's seasoned harmonic shifts are treated as pure music and not over-accentuated by rhetorical zeal: the music doesn't need it.

In any case, the doubling of the two four-part choirs with brass gives Herreweghe scope for a variety and scale which ensures that graphic representation emerges from a palette of irradiating luxuriance. The sixth motet is a masterpiece of interchanging images and yet a chance for Herreweghe to judge, exquisitely, Schütz's own contemplative paraphrases (here, from a madrigalian "quicken me after thy loving kindness" towards a growth of soaring affirmation for "thy word is settled in heaven").

That we have these works at all is a minor miracle. Schütz's *Opus ultimum* was discovered in 1900 and then assumed destroyed in the Second World War, before reappearing in the mid-1970s. Can a greater work have been completed by an octogenarian? This recording urges us, very persuasively, to think perhaps not. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

ERIC LARRAVADIEU