



hopak-style trumpet theme in the finale (at around 2:00). Certainly this is more characterful than the oft-recommended account by Dmitri Alexeev and Philip Jones with the English Chamber Orchestra (on Classics for Pleasure), which sounds matter-of-fact and rather too 'tasteful' in comparison. But better still is Marshev's performance, more alert than Uhlig's to the music's ironies and to its parodies as well as showing a keener sense of comic timing, aided and abetted by the suitably brash style of trumpeter Jan Karlsson and the alert playing of the Helsingborg SO.

Daniel Jaffé

Ruggles *Evocations: Four Chants for Piano. Visions. March. Parvum Organum. Valse Lente. Mood*. Organum**. Toys***. Ich fühle deinen Odem***. Windy Nights***. Prayer***. Exaltation. Angels.*
Donald Berman (pf); ***Daniel Stepner** (vn);
****Christopher Oldfather** (second pf);
*****Susan Narucki** (soprano).

New World Records 80629-2 **559** 53 minutes **DDD**

Carl Ruggles is a problem for us. An American experimental composer who created a tiny output of austere and maddeningly inscrutable pieces, his reputation rests largely on the advocacy of later colleagues like Henry Cowell and Lou Harrison. Ruggles was a New Englander to his core and a friend of Charles Ives who, apparently, admired his music enormously. But he was also a notoriously prickly sourpuss whose racist and anti-Semitic views frequently alienated those who wanted to champion his cause. And so the problems multiply – 'Creation is soul-searching. Nothing is ever finished,' he famously wrote, but part of Ruggles's problem in bringing pieces to successful conclusions lay in his unstable compositional technique. The likes of Cowell, Nicolas Slonimsky and pianist/musicologist John Kirkpatrick were all drafted in to whip Ruggles's scores into shape before performances. Compositional process equalled constant agony for Ruggles and he was deeply needy, his talent for misanthropy throwing his life into conflict and frustration.

Yet despite it all Ruggles remains mesmerising and impossible to dismiss. He could, in his inner ear, add up a mass of twisting dissonant counterpoint like no other composer. His lines had burnished clarity and he knew how to ape urgency via inner dialectic and



argument. Donald Berman, who previously 'uncovered' Charles Ives for New World, bases this recording on the pioneering editorial work on Ruggles's music undertaken by John Kirkpatrick. Ruggles often wrote one bar-to-a-page, with conventional notation petering out into diagrammatic representation. Berman's sleeve note wrestles with his conscience, wondering aloud whether 'finishing' Ruggles actually does his aesthetic a disservice. Well, I'm pleased he did – *Evocations* is probably the best known of Ruggles's piano works, but our knowledge is greatly enhanced by the bizarre twists of the *Valse Lente* and the steely construct of *Parvum Organum*. The more we know, the more pointed his riddles become.

A key paradox is between the music's tortured creation and its improvisational flow, and Berman exploits this tension between continuity and disjuncture ruthlessly. Even climatic sections, like those in *Visions*, stubbornly lead nowhere – these are climatic contours of material rather than of emotion. Berman's hard sonic and intellectual edge suits the challenges Ruggles meted out perfectly. Problems never solved, but investigated with forensic expertise.

Philip Clark

Fontaine *Seasons.*

Bruno Fontaine (pf).

Ambrosie AMB 9974 **559** 78 minutes **DDD**

Here is a truly unique disc – and one that in its intellectual and technical force stands comparison with Keith Jarrett's iconic 1975 Cologne concert, albeit without the latter's cumulative intensity.

Like Keith Jarrett, Frenchman Bruno Fontaine is equally at home in the jazz and classical repertoire, both solo and chamber (he has recorded the complete cello and piano works of Fauré for Ambrosie). He is also a conductor, arranger and composer, and his eclectic tastes are reflected in these twelve improvisations, recorded with 'no preparation, no planning, no editing, no correcting'.

All but two are based on original material – or perhaps no material. The exceptions are the first, which, as if in homage to Jacques Loussier, is a kind of meditation on the opening Prelude from Bach's '48', alternating snatches of that work with 'dreamy' flourishes



in the piano's upper and lower registers, and the sixth, which toys with Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* theme. Elsewhere there are echoes of Barber's Sonata (second movement) and Mussorgsky's *Pictures* (Bydlo) and sonorities reminiscent of Prokofiev, Ravel, Scriabin and Shostakovich (in his light vein). These are all wrapped in a variety of rhythms, textures and harmonies – from march to waltz, from smoky smooch to spiky scherzo, from the diatonic to the atonal. Fontaine has the control and virtuosity required to convey the varying moods he imagines, and the recordings are suitably atmospheric.

Neither the disc's title nor the names of the four 'trptychs' (each comprising three 'movements') – nor indeed the esoteric booklet note – is of any help in understanding the music, which defies description and creates a world of meaning entirely its own. (There are no seasonal connotations as in Vivaldi's and Tchaikovsky's eponymous works.)

Any recording of improvisation is necessarily a paradox, in that it can be heard only once as a spontaneous creation; thereafter its flights of fancy are trapped by predictability. It is a measure of Fontaine's achievement that his inspirations withstand repeated listening, constantly challenging our ideas about the nature of jazz and classical music.

Joe Laredo

Chopin Complete scherzos and ballades.

Earl Wild (pf).

Ivory Classics 75001 **559** 68 minutes **DDD**

Bach Partita no.1 BWV825 in B flat. **Scriabin** Piano Sonata no.4 op.30 in F sharp. **Franck** Prelude, Chorale and Fugue. **Schumann** Fantasiestücke op.12.

Earl Wild (pf).

Ivory Classics 75002 **559** 74 minutes **DDD**

This recording of the complete scherzos and ballades was made in May 1990 on Wild's preferred piano at the time, a Baldwin. The scherzos are bold and dramatic. In the B minor scherzo there is a well-defined contrast between the violent outer sections and calm central section, while the E major scherzo is delightfully playful with its sky-rocking arpeggios. In this, and elsewhere, Wild's clarity of articulation is remarkable. Other pianists may choose to find more menacing drama in the ballades, but Wild



strives to avoid histrionics whilst at the same time retaining passion when required and a clear sense of structure in each of the works.

It is a surprise to realise that Wild was 75 when he recorded these works by Chopin and amazing to find that he is 90 this year. To celebrate, Ivory Classics has issued a new disc of works recorded in May 2004. It is a wonderfully balanced programme and a chance to hear Wild in works not necessarily associated with him. Bach's Partita is given a communicative and intimate performance with delightful contrasts of light and shade. In the Andante of Sonata no.4 by Scriabin, Wild creates a wonderful sensation of languidness, and his control of tone is remarkable.

While in the past Wild may have taken the Prestissimo volando at a faster tempo, it is no less enjoyable for its clarity of textures and impressively powerful conclusion. The *Prelude, Chorale and Fugue* by César Franck is the meat of the programme, and here Wild employs all his years of experience at the keyboard. The layers of sound he achieves are remarkable, and while he suffuses the *Chorale* with melancholy, the glorious peroration of the *Fugue* is presented with great majesty.

In 'Des Abends' and 'Warum' from Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, the close recording captures Wild's subtle half-peddalling and exquisite variations of beautiful tone quality. The sense of wonder and intimacy Wild creates in the slow movements make one think of the exemplary recording by Harold Bauer from the mid 1930s, while in the faster movements there is certainly no lack of fantasy. This is a most enjoyable CD and a fitting tribute to one of the few remaining pianists from the golden age.

Jonathan Summers

Vintage/Reissues

Liszt Piano Concertos – no.1 S212 in E flat major; no.2 S125 in A major. **Liszt-Busoni** Rhapsodie espagnole S254. **Schubert-Liszt** Ständchen.

Paganini-Liszt La campanella S140 no.3. **Ginzburg** Fantasia on a theme of 'Largo al factotum' from 'The Barber of Seville'.

Grigory Ginzburg (pf).

Vox Aeterna VACD 00101 (Vol.1) £5 66minutes ADD

Bach-Busoni Prelude and Fugue BWV532 in D major. Toccata and Fugue BWV565 in D minor. Chorale Prelude BWV639 'Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu

Christ'. Chaconne from Partita no.2 BWV1004 for solo violin in D minor. **Bach-Galston** Siciliano from Sonata no.2 for flute and clavier BWV1031 in E flat major.

Grigory Ginzburg (pf).

Vox Aeterna VACD 00105 (Vol.3, CD1) £5 45 minutes ADD

Prokofiev Piano Sonata no.3 op.28 in A minor.

Scriabin Four etudes from op.8.

Gershwin Three preludes.

Liszt Réminiscences de 'Don Juan' S418.

Chopin Mazurka no.13 op.17 no.4 in A minor.

Grigory Ginzburg (pf).

Vox Aeterna VACD 00106 (Vol.3, CD2) £5 43 minutes ADD

Although practically unknown to Western audiences during his lifetime, the legendary Russian pianist Grigory Ginzburg (1904–1961) has attained posthumous recognition through archival releases. The Russian label Vox Aeterna has begun to issue some of Ginzburg's concert recordings in commemoration of his 100th anniversary. Two volumes have been released so far – numbers one and three, with more to come.

The first volume comprises orchestral works by Liszt and a selection of encores recorded on 24 February 1949 at a USSR State Symphony concert under Nikolai Anosov at the Grand Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire. Ginzburg's affinity to Liszt is well documented and his playing is refined with elegant phrasing and effortless virtuosity. The colourful orchestration of Busoni's *Rhapsodie espagnol* is played with expertise and flair, although the orchestra's rough playing and a poorly balanced recording are major drawbacks making this volume only for diehard Ginzburg fans – who are rewarded by his masterful playing. The encores capture Ginzburg at his best: the instinctively spontaneous and warm Schubert-Liszt *Ständchen*, Paganini-Liszt's *La Campanella*, played in one breath with true elegance and flair, and Ginzburg's own pyrotechnical paraphrase of the 'Largo al factotum' cavatina from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, played with great panache and humour, and published here for the first time.

Volume 3 features Ginzburg's solo recital of 25 December 1957 at the same hall in the Moscow Conservatoire. The first half is dedicated to Busoni's and Galston's transcriptions of Bach (CD1). Ginzburg's playing of Busoni's

organ transcriptions is majestic: the textures are rich and powerful without the slightest percussiveness. Rhythms are strict yet the timing is spacious with a feeling of grandeur and velvety legato. The Chaconne from Partita BWV1004 has continuous momentum, combining great architectonic sense of structure with depth of passion (Michelangelo's famed 1950 recording sounds like a perfectly chiseled sculpture by comparison). The Siciliano BWV1031 in Galston's arrangement, is mesmerising in its sense of timeless wonder, the tender melody well-cushioned in the layers of hushed 'lute' figurations and gently sustained basses. Compare this with Dinu Lipatti's recordings of the same Prelude BWV532 and the Siciliano (in Kempff's arrangement), which come across as cooler, more objective and straightforward.

Ginzburg finds his natural voice in Prokofiev's Third Sonata op.28, which opens CD 2 of Volume 3 (the second half of the recital): there is no forced tone to the music's excitement, which is filled with ingenuousness of expression and long, arching phrases. A similar affinity to the music's style is shown in the four Scriabin etudes from op.8. This is evident in the graceful sweeping lines of the C sharp major, the airy flight of the B flat minor (no.7), a dignified monologue of the other B flat minor etude (no.11), and the total abandonment and frenzy with which Ginzburg throws himself into the pathetic drama of the final D sharp minor etude. Ginzburg's treatment of the three Gershwin Preludes is unconventional: he was one of the first Russian artists to perform this music after a long ban and was thus unburdened by tradition, imbuing each of the preludes with his own warm interpretation. One of the highlights of this recital is Ginzburg's reading of Liszt's paraphrase of *The Réminiscences of Don Juan*. The cohesiveness and diversity of expression with which he paints different characters and the elemental power and refinement of his pianism are remarkable. His idiomatic performance of Chopin's Mazurka in A minor op.17 no.4 puts a fine finishing touch to this recital.

The booklet essay on Ginzburg, written by A. Kandinsky-Rybnikov, suffers from an awkward English translation by Miriam Fleishman. In spite of that, this is an