

the opening flourish finds tone and engineering in vivid harmony. Normally in the young Strauss's rather simple orchestration, you don't notice the discreet woodwind frills, but they all register here, especially the most delicate ones from the two flutes in the finale. Ticciati's elegant touch stops the ensembles from ever sounding too square.

Subtle beauties abound in the Duet-Concertino – once a hearthside Cinderella, now admitted to the ball in an abundance of fine recordings. None is better than this one; clarinettist Maximiliano Martin plays the fairy-tale princess with due limpidity and spirit, but it's Peter Whelan's bassoon beast/bear who steals the show in his charismatic cantilenas without unbalancing the ethereal whole, reminding us that so many of Strauss's non-vocal works are operas for orchestra.

The rest of the wind get their characterful chance, too, in the sweet and simple Serenade. Only quibble would be over the portrait of Strauss, not at the age that could be applied to any of these works at either end of a distinguished lifetime. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

20th Century Harpsichord Concertos

Kalabis: Concerto for Harpsichord and Strings; **W Leigh:** Concertino for Harpsichord and Strings; **Michael Nyman:** Concerto for Amplified Harpsichord and Strings; **Ned Rorem:** Concertino da Camera
Jory Vinikour (harpsichord); Chicago Philharmonic/Scott Speck
Cedille CDR 90000188 75:42 mins

The harpsichord enjoyed a mini revival during the early 20th century, when major composers of the time – including Poulenc – wrote concertante works for the instrument. The English composer Walter Leigh's Concertino, first recorded (on piano) in 1946 and unheard by its creator who was killed during the Second World War, evokes Baroque structures with a neo-classical approach to melody; it's not until the compact third movement that there's a nod towards modernity. Ned Rorem's *Concertino da Camera*, composed in



Phenomenal Paganini:
Ning Feng triumphs in
Violin Concerto No. 1

1946, is in a similar vein, with gentle dissonance and the composer's trademark splashes of woodwind colour. Soloist Jory Vinikour brings out the youthful energy of the work, which was produced when Rorem was just 23; this is the premiere recording of it.

Things become more experimental during the second half of the disc, with concertos by Viktor Kalabis, to whom the disc is dedicated, and Michael Nyman. As in the Leigh piece, the Chicago Philharmonic strings perfectly partner Vinikour's virtuosity, and the first and third movements of the Kalabis prove themselves to be worthy of wider recognition. Nyman's Concerto for Amplified Harpsichord and Strings, written on the brink of the next century, takes us into a new soundworld. Vinikour is dynamite in the repeated percussive melodies that permeate the minimalistic cadenza (and post-cadenza). *Claire Jackson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Belle époque

Brahms: Clarinet Sonata No. 1 (arr. Berio); **Debussy:** Première rapsodie; **Pierné:** Canzonetta; **Trojan:** Rhapsody for Clarinet and Orchestra; **Widor:** Introduction et Rondo
Annelien Van Wauwe (clarinet); Lille National Orchestra/
Alexandre Bloch
Pentatone PTC 5186 808 59:50 mins



Now in her early thirties, Annelien Van Wauwe is already a consummate artist and this

well-planned disc gives us an excellent view of her technical skill, her musicianship and her lovely tone, even in the *altissimo* register. The only curious thing about the disc is that the notes say nothing whatever about her, so I had to learn from elsewhere that she has played at the Proms and is in continual contact with the queen of clarinettists Sabine Meyer. But as the Bard says, 'A good wine needs no bush' and her playing on its own is eloquent testimony to her talents.

The Debussy Rhapsody, described to me by one professional clarinettist as a death trap since the composer makes players do all the things they particularly dread, is despatched with grace and a wonderful feeling for the interplay between dreaminess and jokes. Berio's orchestration of the first Brahms Sonata, despite a few inserted bars that I really don't see the need for, is respectful and works well, while Manfred Trojan's Rhapsody is great fun in a highly modern idiom with some imaginative orchestration. I'm now playing the disc for the third time, and most certainly not the last.

Roger Nichols

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Virtuosismo

Paganini: Violin Concerto No. 1
Vieuxtemps: Violin Concerto No. 1
Ning Feng (violin) Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias/
Rossen Milanov
Channel Classics CCS 40719 68:20 mins



Even in a market flooded with Paganini One, Ning Feng's seemingly effortless,

unflashy virtuosity really takes some believing. Whatever Paganini throws into the technical melting pot – high-speed chains of multi-stoppings (always especially challenging moving upwards), forced harmonics, high-wire acrobatics on all four strings, fingered octaves, left-hand pizzicato and every conceivable style of ricochet, staccato and spiccato bowing – Feng emerges completely unscathed. Indeed, so complete is his command of every parameter that after a while one almost forgets the strenuous difficulty involved. But he's not a big-personality player like, say, Michael Rabin. Itzhak Perlman or Yehudi Menuhin (whose stereo account with Alberto Erede, despite the occasional rough edge and traditional cuts, uniquely makes Op. 6 sound like a *bona fide* masterpiece). His silvery tonal purity, immaculate intonation and gently beguiling musicality have a way of making most other players sound decidedly effortful by comparison, however.

Usefully, Feng opts to couple it with Vieuxtemps's Fourth Concerto, possibly the composer's finest work. Here, in the haunting, extended orchestral introduction (which occupies virtually half the opening movement), Rossen Milanov and his Spanish orchestra of which he is music director, create a glorious brooding atmosphere, so much so that one almost forgets that it's a concerto rather than a symphony. Mind you, Feng's playing is so commanding throughout – the tricky first movement cadenza and third movement *scherzo* are almost impossibly silky-smooth – that it is left in absolutely no doubt who the real star of the show is. It sets the tone on arguably Feng's finest release to date, captured in alluringly natural sound. *Julian Haylock*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★