

heavier mob on the other side of the stage, is a highly effective resource; his deployment of percussion (quietly menacing timpani, skeletal tambourine) adds to the points being made, and the strings sing and cushion with gorgeous depths of tone.

Certainly the timbres are opulent, looking back to the First Symphony instead of forward to the spare grittiness of the Third, but they and the textures are genuinely, uncannily Elgarian.

The ESO certainly played with an enthusiastic awareness that they were making history, and the devoted, unassuming Kenneth Woods conducted with an easy flexibility that recalled the work's chamber-music origins. This "War Symphony" deserves to be acknowledged immediately as a worthy addition to the Elgar canon.  
Christopher Morley

#### Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra of London

This recently-formed medium-sized (about 50-



Eleanor Alberga

strong) orchestra of mainly young professionals began its second season of concerts under its gifted conductor Christopher Petrie at Cadogan Hall on October 11 with an unusually-shaped programme based around its new recording for the American Centaur label, in which the soloist was the American flautist Margaret Cornils Luke.

The unusual shape of the programme was that the first half comprised no fewer than four short works for flute and orchestra; the second half was Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony. Odd though this programme may have appeared at first, in practice it worked very well, for the choice of those four works was cleverly done and the performances were uniformly excellent.

The concert began with Cécile Chaminade's delightful *Concertino* for flute and orchestra, a work beloved of flute-players and of lovers of fin-de-siècle French music, for it is a truly winning score that well deserves its place in the repertoire of the instrument, and on this occasion it was revealed – for those who do not know it – as a particularly endearing composition.

Ms Cornils Luke's playing was at all times intensely musical and self-effacing – not for her an attempt at a personality cult – with the admirable result that we could concentrate entirely upon the quality of the music. A nod to Ms Cornils Luke's homeland followed in Charles Griffes's *Poem* for flute and orchestra – a work recorded in the very early days of long-playing records, an aeon ago, by Arthur Foote, which revealed Griffes to be an exceptionally gifted composer whose tragically early death (in his mid-thirties from the global 1919 influenza epidemic) robbed American music of one of its most individual voices.

This proved a most suitable foil to the Chaminade – albeit not so very far removed in character – and

an admirable prelude to Carl Reinecke's *D minor Ballade* for flute and orchestra, bearing the composer's impressive final opus number 288. This, too, proved to be a suitably contemporary work from the early 20th-century flute repertoire (there

are two earlier works by Reinecke – a *Concerto* and a *Sonata* – as Peter Reynolds' informative programme note told us) in which, once again, we could relish the beautiful tone and profound musicianship of our distinguished soloist.

The first half ended with a British work – Hamilton Harty's 'In Ireland', an orchestration by the composer from the 1930s of an earlier piece originally for flute and piano. It was an absolute charmer – pity, one felt, that Harty did not vouchsafe to us a full-scale flute concerto in this manner – and rounded off this intriguing first half of the programme in excellent style.

This concert marked Ms Cornils Luke's debut in this country and could not have been accomplished with greater success or more compelling musicianship. It was a pleasure to have heard this collection of pieces, so warmly and effortlessly played by the very fine soloist and effortlessly and stylishly partnered by this excellent orchestra.

The second half found us not so far away, in 1893 in Russia, in Tchaikovsky's greatest symphonic masterpiece. The sound of the PCOL in Cadogan Hall is rich and full – we have had occasion to remark on its suitability in this venue on earlier occasions – and the orchestral balance was almost ideal in this work. Petrie's account was entirely placed at the service of the music: like his distinguished American soloist in the first half, it was a reading that never exaggerated the emotions yet never abjured them, either – a performance that revealed the inherent, genuinely original, symphonic thinking of the greatest Russian composer of them all. All in all, a remarkable success.

Robert Matthew-Walker

#### Eleanor Alberga's *Langvad* UK premiere at Arcadia Festival 2015

Launched in 2010 and based in the beautiful setting of the Welsh marches, the annual Arcadia Festival is devised and directed by its co-founders, composer/pianist Eleanor Alberga and violinist ▶

Thomas Bowes. Each year they draw upon a group of high-calibre instrumentalists to perform well-loved chamber and instrumental repertoire as well as new music, some of which is provided by Alberga herself.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Eleanor Alberga has built a distinctive output that reflects not only several years as a concert pianist, but also her experience singing Jamaican folksongs and as a member of an authentic African dance company. Among her most important pieces are an opera, *Letters of a Love Betrayed*, commissioned by the Royal Opera House and Music Theatre Wales and premiered in October 2009 at the Royal Opera House's Linbury Theatre; a dramatic adaptation of Roald Dahl's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, for large orchestra and narrators; a critically acclaimed Violin Concerto (2001); three string quartets; a dynamic quartet for flute, oboe, cello and piano *Tiger Dream in Forest Green* (2004); *Succubus Moon*, for oboe and string quartet (2007), and *Shining Gate of Morpheus*, for horn and string quartet (2012) a shadowy and inventive single-movement utterance of great warmth and eloquence. Her curtain-raiser *Arise, Athena*, scored for large symphony orchestra and chorus, opened the 2015 Last Night of the Proms and it is to be hoped that this recent high-profile commission will serve to raise further the profile of a composer with an individual and engaging voice.

Written in 2006, Alberga's *Langvad* is

scored for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, string quartet and double bass. It was inspired by the Kirsten Kjaers

Museum in Northwest Denmark and its developers John Anderson and Harald Fuglsang who also initiated the Langvad Chamber Music Jamboree summer festival. The museum is located in the village of Langvad which consists of a very long road. This suggested to the composer the idea of a long parade, perhaps by circus folk, or a chronicle of events. Something of the myriad episodes encountered in a life is evoked by the serenade-like score's alternately vibrant and reflective passages.

*Langvad* is cast in one movement divided into contrasting sections. Clarinet and violin have key roles to play in the piece with extended solos marking significant transitional points in the material. Oboe and horn also come to the fore at other junctures, though Alberga ensures that each instrument in the ensemble has a

crucial role to play in the infolding drama. A short but ear-catching episode for string quintet reminds us that the composer has written several effective chamber works for strings, each benefiting in very different ways from her fusion of flowing lyricism and rhythmic energy. Journeying seamlessly from the substantial clarinet solo which launches the piece to angular and pungent dance-like *tutti* convulsions to an eloquent

central soliloquy for solo violin followed by a gentle melodic threnody for strings in canon to the final frenetic collective out-

burst, *Langvad* is a joyous celebration of diverse elements welded together convincingly into a single arc.

Presenting the work's UK premiere on 1 October 2015 in the Grade 1 listed medieval church of St. Mary Madgalene, Leintwardine, a stellar line-up of instrumentalists, consisting of flautist Sarah Newbold, oboist Jane Marshall, clarinetist Sacha Rattle, bassoonist Bartosz Kwasecki and hornist Victoria Swensen, violinists Thomas Bowes and Patrick Kiernan, violist Louise Williams, cellist Robert Irvine and double-bassist Chi-chi Nwanoku, was conducted with spirit and flexibility by Eleanor Alberga. This was an exuberant and expressive account of a directly communicative and life-affirming piece which makes a very welcome addition to the scant repertoire for a dectet combining string quintet and wind quintet.

Eleanor Alberga's uplifting *Langvad* formed the centrepiece of a compelling programme consisting of Dvorák's Quintet in G major for double bass and string quartet, Op.77, and, after the interval, Beethoven's String Quartet in C sharp minor, Op.131. Dvorák's evergreen chamber work received a reading of tremendous panache, its haunting melodies presented with the utmost freshness and spontaneity. Some extra drama was occasioned by the breaking of one of Thomas Bowes' strings in the finale, but after an unavoidable but commendably brief hiatus, the players continued to the end, resuming the effervescent mood of the

### Kensington Symphony Orchestra

The 60th anniversary season of the Kensington Symphony Orchestra – astonishingly, with only two permanent conductors in its history – got off to an excellent start at St John's, Smith Square on October 12th under its admirable conductor Russell Keable with a brilliant account of Strauss's 'Don Juan' – a difficult opener to any programme, and an account that revealed the individual and corporate qualities of this orchestra in no small measure. Not that the performance entirely inhabited the finest qualities which this orchestra can reach, but it was a life-enhancing reading that one was more than pleased to hear.

But the main attraction was the courageous programming of the second item – John McCabe's Concerto for Orchestra, written for Sir Georg Solti and the London Philharmonic over 30 years ago, but sounding on this occasion as if it were composed last year. The composer sadly died in February but as Keable's brief introductory comments to the work explained, this was more than a homage to a greatly-gifted musician, for the Concerto is one of the most impressive of such works by a British composer to have appeared since the war.

McCabe's Concerto for Orchestra certainly stretches the players – as much in their individual and corporate musicianship as in their technical abilities – and

is, in character, a deeply serious work of art that does not rely on gimmicky effects. If the score stretched the players of the KSO, they responded with a performance that would surely have thrilled the composer: unfailingly musical, the playing always put at the service of the work and one that dug deep into the emotional expression of this masterly composition.

Ravel's brilliant orchestration of Mussorgsky's 'Pictures at an Exhibition' concluded the programme – a performance your correspondent was obliged to miss, but which, by all accounts, was fully up to the standards of the first half.

Robert Matthew-Walker

movement with admirable ease. The crowning glory of the evening's music-making was an intense and deeply-felt performance of Beethoven's Op.131, in which Thomas Bowes and Robert Irvine made a particularly strong impression with the passion and commitment of their playing. The exacting seven unbroken movements were cogently and persuasively traversed, capturing the immensity, outlandishness and humanity of Beethoven's vision.

This was a concert of tremendous sweep and variety. Such was its distinction that I feel it cannot be long before the Arcadia Festival joins the long-established staples of the British music festival calendar. I await next year's programme with great interest.

Paul Conway

**Ashkenazy/Philharmonia Orchestra in Edinburgh Sunday 8 November 2015**

Few works can emphasize the quality of the orchestra's strings than the slow waltz which opens Sibelius incidental music to Järnevelt's play *Kuolema* (Death). The orchestra brought out all the tenderness and poignancy of this music while the flute of Samuel Coles introduced temporary lightness with delicate harmonies on the first violins, yet then the mood turned rapidly to darkness on a deathly winter's night, namely November 8 at Edinburgh's Usher Hall.

For the concerto, the enlarged orchestra was joined by the 21 year-old American-Korean virtuoso Esther Yoo. She is the youngest prize-winner of the 2010 International Sibelius Violin Competition, and prize-winner of the 2012 Queen Elizabeth Competition. She plays on the 1704 'Prince Obolensky' Stradivarius violin and at once as the opening chords rang out there was apparent a wonderful affinity between Ashkenazy and Yoo. The soloist was dressed in

a full length pink dress and an important feature in her playing is that she listens attentively to the orchestra, there was some fine articulation from the clarinet of Mark van de Weil and the admirable basses prompted a threatening darkness, against the spring-like dancing tones of the violins. Ashkenazy understands the symphonic line of this concerto with his long history of conducting the symphonies. Yoo possesses a big, almost masculine sound with her Stradivarius and she invokes an almost heroic theme in her playing, she is technically brilliant and shows all the prospect of becoming a truly great artist. The Philharmonia has a tremendous brass section, and superb bass players, Ashkenazy allowed Yoo to be heard against such opulent playing and the bouncing rhythms matched with violin and the timpani in the finale all succinctly heard and in perfect harmony. Ashkenazy is a superb accompanist in the tradition of his great compatriot and friend Kirill Kondrashin.

Vladimir Ashkenazy was perhaps the greatest interpreter of Rachmaninoff's piano repertoire through several decades and this intimate knowledge into the composer's psyche has allowed him a firm grasp on the symphonies. In the popular Rachmaninoff Second Symphony

Ashkenazy did not take the repeat in the great opening movement because 'it is inappropriate in such a long movement, the symphony is too long in general, and we Russian conductors prefer to play it this way' as he told me at the interval. Certainly when a Russian is at the helm of this work, he can make a British orchestra sound like a Russian orchestra, and I think even the St Petersburg Philharmonic would find it hard to match

this superlative performance. At the opening of the symphony, the dark theme which emerged from the six double basses produced an almost seductive idea, and there was a glorious wealth of tone in the violin playing and the leader Zsolt-Tihamér Visontay in his solo passage invoked such gorgeous sensitivity. Ashkenazy brought superb control to the opening Largo-Allegro with the inner dynamics in the slow build up induced through his coaxing of the strings crouching low down to bring all the emotion out of the music. In the Allegro molto, the orchestra were justly brash and with dramatically sharp rhythms, notable again was the clarinet of de Weil, sounding beautifully romantic with glittering playing from the strings. In the Adagio, the clarinet again was typically exemplary in the eloquence of the heart-stopping theme, and also there was extraordinary virtuoso playing from the cor anglais of Jill Crowther. The warmth in the golden tone of the Philharmonia strings was striking and there was some gorgeous brass playing exemplifying how strong these units are in the present-day Philharmonia Orchestra. The strength of the brass was revealed in the dramatic exultation in the richly burnished colour of the horn playing in the Allegro-vivace. Ashkenazy is not a dramatically exciting conductor at the podium, more a servant of the composer. Finally, he produced from his musicians a shattering build-up of tension and ultimately an exultant finish. The standard of this tremendous concert sets an impeccably high standard which will be difficult to match in any other Edinburgh concerts this season.

Gregor Tassie

**Hallé Orchestra/Cristian Măcelaru**

In an increasingly wet November in Manchester, conductor Cristian Măcelaru, with the Hallé Orchestra lifted the spirits by presenting three works that all look ahead of their time, at The Bridgewater Hall on November 26th.

Michael Gandolfi's enigmatically titled 'The Garden of Cosmic Speculation,' is named after the unique (and very ▶



Esther Yoo

Photo: Marco Borggreve