

# Brief notes

Our monthly selection of shorter reviews includes a dusting of Christmas discs

## Joachim Badenhorst Adventa

Mogil *Winter & Winter* 910 260-2



Your bleak Christmas starts here. Based on Icelandic folklore, this musical poem is dark, brooding and often eerily atmospheric. Beautiful, yes, but 'Jingle Bells' it most certainly isn't. (JP) ★★★★★

## Balakirev Piano Works

Nicholas Walker (piano)

*Grand Piano* GP811

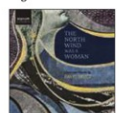


Balakirev's Chopin-esque piano music, arrangements of Beethoven and Glinka and various tinkering are hardly known, which makes this fascinating series well worth seeking out. (OC) ★★★★★

## David Bruce The North Wind Was A Woman etc

Avi Avital (mandolin) et al

*Signum Classics* SIGCD599



David Bruce writes in a vivid and appealing style, yet his music never quite does what you expect. From golden sun to gentle autumn rain, nature inspires the works on this excellently performed disc. (RF) ★★★★★

## Patrick Cassidy The Mass

London Voices; LSO et al

*Supertrain Records* SR015



No denying the talent of the forces performing this rather ponderous work from the Irish composer, but there is beauty to be found, especially in the Osanna and Agnus Dei. (MB) ★★

## Dalberg String Quartets

Nordic String Quartet

*Dacapo* 6.220655



I'd not come across the music of Nancy Dalberg, one of Nielsen's pupils, so this was fascinating to dive into these three quartets. The first two are particularly engaging works. (RF) ★★★★★

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## Eller Symphonic Poems

Estonian Symphony Orchestra

*Ondine* ODE1335-2



Eller is one of Estonia's composing heroes, his brilliantly orchestrated music a gorgeous blend of impressionism and post-Romanticism. This is a wonderful introduction to the man dubbed the 'Estonian Sibelius'. (OC) ★★★★★

## Roderick Elms

A Windy Christmas

Joyful Company of Singers et al

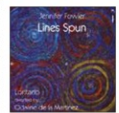
*Herald* HAVPCD 410



The 'windy' in the title refers to brass, woodwind, organ and, of course, the human voice. It's an eclectic mix of the well-known and less familiar, but all really rather jolly. (JP) ★★

## Jennifer Fowler Lines Spun etc

Lontano *Metier* msv 28588



Lontano showcases assorted chamber music by the London-based Australian, Jennifer Fowler. Others may find a more distinctive voice than I did, but either way the performances are good. (RF) ★★

## Glière • Hahn • Shostakovich Chamber Works

Artur Pizarro, Alban Gerhardt et al

*Cavi-music* 8553102



Recorded live at the Spannungen Festival in Germany, these performances simply fizz with energy. An excellent introduction to three less familiar corners of the chamber music repertoire. (JP) ★★★★★

## Jóhannsson 12 Conversations with Thilo Heinzmann

Echo Collective *DG* 483 7218

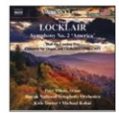


The result of a long collaboration between the late composer and the German painter, this album for string ensemble has an eerie, claustrophobic soundworld. (FP) ★★

## Dan Locklair Symphony No. 2 etc

Slovak National Symphony Orchestra

*Naxos* 8.559860

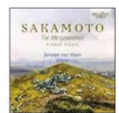


Full-hearted music from the American composer in a disc of premiere recordings. *Hail the Coming Day* is a particular pleasure; the concerto comparatively benign. (MB) ★★

## Ryuichi Sakamoto Piano Works

Jeroen van Veen (piano)

*Brilliant Classics* 95389



Sakamoto's world embraces everything from Chopin-esque lyricism to orientalism and Einaudi-style noodling. Five discs of solo piano arrangements, though, is more than enough. (JP) ★★

## Schütz The Christmas Story

Yale Schola Cantorum

*Hyperion* CDA68315



Schütz's Italianate oratorio is one of the masterpieces of the early Baroque and is performed beautifully here. Voices and instruments are superbly balanced within the rich recorded texture. (OC) ★★★★★

## Tchaikovsky The Nutcracker

State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia

*Pentatone* PTC 5186 761



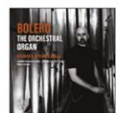
Very neat, very precise, very Russian – everything you'd want from this festive classic. The orchestra bring out rhythmic passages with clarity and revel in the glorious moments. (FP) ★★★★★

## Bolero – The Orchestral Organ

Works by Ravel, Holst et al

Daniel Oyarzabal (organ) et al

*Odradek* ODRCD0392



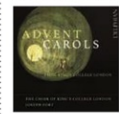
Aided by a pair of percussionists, Daniel Oyarzabal's arrangements of orchestral favourites by the likes of Holst and Ravel make imaginative use of the many colours of León Cathedral's Klais organ. Enjoyable stuff. (JP) ★★★★★

## Advent Carols

Works by Palestrina, Byrd et al

The Choir of King's College, London

*Delphian* DCD34226



A beautifully atmospheric recording of the Advent service from King's College, London. Don't miss the new pieces, especially George Benjamin's and Kerensa Briggs's. (RF) ★★★★★

## Christmas Works by Tallis et al

The Gesualdo Six *Hyperion* CDA68299



A delightful album by an all-male *a cappella* group is hard to come by – all too often they're po-faced or schmaltzy; but this is neither. An elegant blend of old and new. (FP) ★★★★★

## In dulci jubilo Works arranged by Pettman, Whitehead et al

Harmonia Sacra *Nimbus* NI6391



All the words from your favourite carols, but unexpected music galore – thanks to interesting new settings by a varied quartet of composers. Well sung, though the sound is quite close. (RF) ★★

## Make We Merry Works by David Bednall, Bob Chilcott et al

Benenden Chapel Choir et al

*Regent* REGCD547



The merriment here is rather sober, but not without its charms. There's some welcome sparkle in Bednall's brass writing and Chilcott's entry has a wistfully sweet innocence. (MB) ★★

## Mer(s) Works by Elgar, Chausson and Joncières

Marie-Nicole Lemieux (contralto) et al

*Erato* 9029542433



I'd skip Joncières' 'ode symphonique' and the Elgar (there are better versions), and head straight for Chausson's beautifully orchestrated, winsome *Poème de l'amour et de la mer*. (OC) ★★