

**REINECKE Concertos for Piano and Orchestra: No. 1 in F# Minor, op. 72; No. 2 in E Minor, op. 120; No. 3 in C, op. 144; No. 4 in B Minor, op. 254.** • Klaus Hellweg, piano; Alun Francis, conductor; Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonia. • CPO 999 239-2 [DDD]; two discs: 57:04, 55:50. Produced by Andreas Beutner. (Distributed by Koch International.)

Carl Heinrich Reinecke (1824-1910) was considered an important composer, pianist, and conductor in his time, but his reputation has faded greatly over the past century. This new set adds to his fairly substantial representation in the current catalogs, but of his works only the "Undine" Sonata for Flute and Piano has achieved much popularity. It's also the only Reinecke I can recall hearing in concert, and at the time I found it an odd mixture of invention and cliché.

There are already two recordings available of the first two piano concertos, but I hadn't heard them. Thus I was totally unprepared for the stupefying banality of the Concerto No. 1, as ridiculous a collection of glittering generalities on the subject "Piano Concerto" as you will ever run across. The piano writing, while in Romantic style, is as repetitious as the worst Vivaldi concerto. This piece is as unworthy a revival as I've ever run across. The Concerto No. 2 is a little shorter and much milder in its clichés, but it barely holds the attention due to a paucity of distinctive ideas.

The pieces on the second disc are a somewhat tastier kettle of fish. Pianist Klaus Hellweg writes in his program notes, "Reinecke's contemporaries regarded the Third Concerto . . . (1877) as the most important concerto of its time. Brahms's D minor concerto had not yet established itself." It *had* established itself well enough on Reinecke, though, as you will hear by comparing the piano figurations about three minutes into the second movement with the wonderful piano entrance in the first movement of the Brahms, then a couple of decades old. This large-scale piece, nearly thirty-five minutes long, is a somewhat intriguing combination of the styles of Chopin and Brahms with maybe a little original Reinecke finding its way in. It's hardly a masterpiece, but it's so much better than the first two concertos that it seems like one.

The Fourth Concerto is a more modest, and much shorter, piece. It's amazing to hear this music, which sounds almost like Schumann, coming from 1901, well into the era of Mahler. Again, Reinecke's lack of inspiration keeps the music from being truly memorable, but it's well written for the piano and has a few good tunes, most memorably the opening theme of the finale.

Klaus Hellweg seems thoroughly comfortable with all of this music. Heroic virtuosity is rarely called for in Reinecke's writing. Hellweg instead offers very

expressive playing with good, round tone, and he even manages to play some of Reinecke's most banal passages with a straight face. Francis and the orchestra aren't exactly underbalanced, but they are recorded so dully, with such a marked lack of presence, that they come across as very little of a factor in the performances. I can hardly believe that such an experienced conductor and a professional orchestra would play with so little clarity, so I'm inclined to blame the recording engineers.

Frankly, Reinecke's reputation had led me to expect more from this set than I got. I can recommend it only to repertoire freaks and piano concerto completists. Those in search of fresh musical nourishment are likely to come away very disappointed.

**Leslie Gerber**

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### **Reinecke symphonies on Chandos - Reviewer Unknown?**

**Review by: ClassicsToday** *Artistic Quality: 6 Sound Quality: 7*

Chandos' entry of Reinecke symphonies is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, we can finally assemble a complete set together with Naxos' recording of the first symphony. On the other hand, after listening to these rather drab, uninspiring pieces, you might not see the point after all. An estimable teacher of many famous composers, known for some decent works for flute, and a fine conductor and pianist in his own right, Reinecke (1824-1910) did occupy a position of status during his heyday and once was thought to be on par with the likes of Schumann and Liszt. But the more innovative creations by Strauss, Bruckner, Mahler, and others left Reinecke's highly conservative works in the dust, and the question is whether that fate was justified. On the evidence contained in this disc, fate probably had the right idea, and try as they might, Howard Shelley and his Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra do not always make a persuasive case to the contrary.

To be fair, the Symphony No. 2 (1875), loosely based on a (contextually unnecessary) Danish tragedy, benefits from some lovely tunes, notably in the expressive oboe solo in the second movement and in the opening theme of the first movement (a theme that will strike listeners as eerily reminiscent of the first-movement Allegro section of Mendelssohn's "Scotch" Symphony). The lengthy and repetitive final movement loses its appeal after the first five minutes as its ardent main theme, straight out of early Wagner, keeps appearing but without any sense of climax—and then just ends with a thud.

By contrast, Reinecke's ultra-pedestrian Symphony No. 3 has virtually no redeeming qualities other than its studious attention to sonata form. The resolute, clunky main theme yields nothing in the way of dramatic impact and simply gets passed around uneventfully before entropy has a chance to take over. The unremarkable inner movements possess none of the lyricism of its predecessor, and the last movement is simply an insipid parade of transitory figures that inexorably presuppose a major event but lead absolutely nowhere.

As this is the one of the very few available recordings of these uneven works (a performance of the third symphony on Signum Records was just released in June), Shelley and his Tasmanian forces should be commended for their archaeological expedition; but throughout the performances, you sense a certain tentativeness, making you wonder whether a more experienced and dynamic conductor might be able to coax more from these symphonies. The big themes, such as they are, never really bloom, the brass is nearly always held back, and there just doesn't seem to be a high level of exuberance in the playing. Chandos' engineering also is not up to its usual standard; the whole orchestra sounds a bit distant, and the brass, already reined in, penetrates only intermittently.

**REINECKE Symphonies: No. 2 in c, op. 134; No. 3 in g, op. 227 • Howard Shelley, cond; Tasmanian SO • CHANDOS CHAN 9893 (69:00)**

Carl Reinecke (1824-1910) was, by political accident and career choice, a German composer. He was born, however, in Altona, then a Danish town in what is now part of Germany. I bring this up because it says a lot about the two symphonies on this release. They are both informed by a strong Danish folk-music impulse—the same that permeates the music of Gade and, later, of Nielsen.

As the notes to this release state, in his own time Reinecke was highly regarded much in the way that Schumann and Liszt were. He was an esteemed teacher in Cologne and in Leipzig where, in 1860, he was appointed director of the Gewandhaus, a post he held for 35 years. As professor of piano and composition at the Leipzig Conservatory he taught, among others, Edvard Grieg, Christian Sinding, Arthur Sullivan, Johann Svendsen, Frederick Delius, and Felix Weingartner.

Now he is remembered, if at all, as the composer of a single, though splendid, flute piece—the Ondine Sonata, op. 167, composed in 1885. I have long admired that work. Despite its Germanic melodic material and overall construction, its harmonic procedures occasionally provide more than a glimpse into the music of Debussy and Ravel yet to come. The Ondine Sonata's futuristic hints aside, Reinecke was largely a conservative composer—one whose music, as conventional

wisdom would have it, apparently failed to stand the test of time.

The test of time has more to do with fortuitous accident (the plus side) and the capricious forces of mercantalism (the minus side) than with intrinsic musical worth. Mendelssohn unearthed and ceaselessly championed the music of the great Leipzig Cantor. Liszt effectively kept the music of Beethoven before the public a generation after it had become passé, and Leonard Bernstein did much to popularize the music of Mahler, Nielsen, Shostakovich, Ives, Harris, and Schuman at the time when I came of age. On the negative side, concert promoters and record A & R persons of that same generation and far, far later ones sought to capitalize on the familiar by offering only "the world's greatest classics performed by the world's greatest singers, conductors, and orchestras" (truly an exclusive and rarefied brotherhood). It made good business sense. Why sell one copy each of a million titles when one could do far better by selling a million copies of a single title? Fostering name-brand recognition was crucial, and, within narrowly defined parameters, healthy partisanship was encouraged: We're a General Motors, Beethoven, Toscanini family; the Hegemans down the street are a Chrysler, Mozart, Bruno Walter clan (and boy are they stupid! . . . they probably vote Democrat).

If there were only a couple of acts in town, simple mercantile wisdom could prevail. Good mercantile sense is not necessarily good musical sense, and so I once again applaud independent labels like Chandos, Hyperion, cpo, MDG, and Naxos (to cite just a few randomly selected ones, I hope not at the expense of so many others out there). They are all, given their particular niches, meritoriously dealing with a music continuum that is two millennia deep, whose breadth has yet to be fully explored, and that will yield countless unknown treasures in the years to come. The maximized bottom line is, apparently, not their inspiration.

These two Reinecke symphonies are fine pieces. Despite Reinecke's Gewandhaus connection, they are more Schumanesque than Mendelssohnian, and given their Scandinavian inflections, they are very much in the realm of Gade's and Svendsen's symphonic creations. Robust, forthright in expression, folkishly inspired, and handsomely orchestrated, they receive splendid, enthusiastic, and well-recorded advocacy here. **William Zagorski**

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**REINECKE Octet.**<sup>1</sup> *From the Cradle to the Grave:* Excerpts (arr. Köhler).<sup>2</sup>

**Sextet**<sup>3</sup> • Fenwick Smith (fl);<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Craig Nordstrom (cl);<sup>1, 3</sup> Thomas Martin (cl);<sup>1, 3</sup> Keisuke Wakao (ob);<sup>1, 3</sup> Daniel Katzen (hn);<sup>1, 3</sup> Jonathan Menkis (hn);<sup>1, 3</sup> Roland Small (bn);<sup>1</sup> Richard Ranti (bn);<sup>1</sup> Hugh Hinton (pn)<sup>2</sup> • NAXOS 8.570777 (67:52)

Carl Reinecke (1824–1910), virtuoso pianist and string-player, prolific composer, revered teacher, and for many years music director of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, is today remembered, if at all, as a composer of works for winds and of cadenzas for other composers' concertos. At one time the assumed inheritor of the mantles of Schumann and Mendelssohn, Reinecke instead fell under the shadow of the looming genius of Johannes Brahms. Fenwick Smith's notes suggest that he began writing chamber works for winds because it was a genre that Brahms had not dominated. Fair enough; it worked.

These wind ensembles date from the last two decades of Reinecke's long and productive life. They show the influence of the German Romantics and of Mozart's later wind serenades. Anyone who enjoys the Mozart works or Richard Strauss's wind compositions will take pleasure in these, though they lack the harmonic innovations of the later master and the sheer genius of the earlier. The Wind Sextet is undoubtedly the more accomplished of the two works, but both it and the earlier Wind Octet have enormous charm. In the Sextet, Reinecke darkens a standard woodwind quintet with the addition of a second horn, creating a colorful palette that he exploits skillfully. The Octet is even more concerned with sonority, the pairs of clarinets, horns, and bassoons often providing a richly variegated foundation to support flute and oboe filigree. There is nothing especially profound here, just warm summer evening, open pavilion kind of fare. Given the fairly sparse wind ensemble repertoire, it is hard to figure why they are not more often performed.

*Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe* was written as a suite for piano, in the manner of Schumann, tracing a life from birth to apotheosis. This is salon music for domestic consumption and Reinecke tailors his piece precisely to his market's fondness for sentimentality. Mercifully for modern sensibilities, only eight of the 16 pieces were arranged for flute and piano by flutist Ernesto Köhler. I was particularly relieved that the finale, "Upward to the Stars," was omitted. Smith and Hinton play the pieces with great flair and conviction, but this is altogether too maudlin.

For all that, I am pleased that Naxos has made this 1993 Et'cetera release (*Fanfare* 17:1) available again. Comprised of non-principal members of the Boston Symphony—the principals perform as the Boston Symphony Chamber Players—the ensemble's excellence speaks volumes about the talent depth in that orchestra. These wind ensembles were recorded again in 1994, by Ensemble Villa Musica for MDG 304478 (*Fanfare* 19:1), during what was, judging from the many reviews in *Fanfare*, a mid-1990s mini-surge of interest in the composer's works. David Johnson, who reviewed both of these, thought the intimacy of the MDG performances better caught the works' spirit. I prefer the marginally superior warmth and energy of the Naxos—and the price. **Ronald E. Grames**

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