

ORCHESTRAL

Listen out this month for masterful Mahler from **MARISS JANSONS**; controversial Brahms from **CHRISTIAN THIELEMANN**; plus **SARAH-JANE BRADLEY**'s stunning disc of British viola music

Revealing Tchaikovsky

ERIK LEVI admires *Yevgeny Sudbin's enterprising programme*



MEDTNER

Piano Concerto No. 1; *Liebliches Kindl*

TCHAIKOVSKY

Piano Concerto No. 1

Yevgeny Sudbin (John Neschling);
São Paulo SO/John Neschling

BIS SACD-1588

(hybrid CD/SACD) 71:16 mins

BBC Music Direct £12.99

In deciding to pair the most famous warhorse in the piano concerto repertoire with a major work that is almost never heard in the concert hall, Yevgeny Sudbin may have taken something of a calculated risk. If this was indeed his intention, the gamble has certainly paid off. The irresistible melodic invention of the Tchaikovsky in

this warmly engineered recording provides a marvellous foil for the more searching structural subtleties of Medtner's Concerto.

In his highly informative booklet notes Sudbin affirms the strength and originality of Medtner's music, but it's his stunning virtuosity, marvellous variety of touch, and sensitive interaction with the conductor and orchestra that really does the talking. The First Concerto, composed during the First World War, emerges here as an incredibly powerful and moving work. Sudbin's highly charged approach, romantically intense in the dynamic opening and increasingly capricious in the central sequence of variations, is marginally more extrovert in character than the probing account from Dmitri Alexeev on Hyperion, though both artists play with a similar level of conviction.

While Alexeev's disc features the enterprising coupling of Medtner's Piano Quintet, it would be a great



EXTRORT: Sudbin sheds new light on familiar Tchaikovsky

pity to overlook the enormous virtues of Sudbin's Tchaikovsky. Admittedly the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra strings don't have quite the bloom of some of their European counterparts, but Sudbin's performance is so fresh and imaginative that one can't help

but hear each over-familiar phrase in a completely new light.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
SOUND ★★★★★

BENCHMARK RECORDING
Sudbin BIS SACD-1588



BEETHOVEN

Complete Orchestral Works, Vol. 9:
Symphony No. 8; König Stephan;
Ruins of Athens; Fidelio Overture,
Op. 72b; Tarpeja; Namensfeier
Overture; Wellington's Victory
Swedish Chamber Orchestra
Örebro/Thomas Dausgaard
Simax PSC 1282 71:44 mins

BBC Music Direct £13.99

It's unusual enough to find the *King Stephen* or *Namensfeier* overtures on concert billings or CD new release sheets, still more unusual to hear them done with such brio and delight. Beethoven's many ingenious (and sometime downright quirky) surprises leap off the page as new, and there's even a touch of mischievous humour from time to time. When you hear Thomas Dausgaard get to

work on the 'Turkish March' from *Ruins of Athens* it's hard to resist the impression that Beethoven meant it as pure comedy – the Sultan's army as the Keystone Cops. Not very PC, perhaps, but still very enjoyable.

The Swedish Chamber Orchestra is as taut, muscular and alert as elsewhere in this impressive and very useful cycle, but with what sounds very much like the exhilaration of discovery in the less familiar works. After all it must be a treat for orchestra musicians to play (mostly) good Beethoven that they don't know backwards. Even the far from sublime *Wellington's Victory* has fresh enthusiasm as well as tight discipline – for once parts of it actually sound like Beethoven. Admittedly there have been equally crisp performances of the Eighth Symphony that have caught more of its underlying tigerish intensity – Mackerras on CFP for one – and the *Fidelio* Overture doesn't quite convey the sense of a great drama to come. But as a whole this is

invigorating stuff, and surprisingly easy to gulp down in one sitting. Very good recordings, though the edit at the beginning of track 16 sounded a tiny bit clipped to me. *Stephen Johnson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
(SYMPHONY & FIDELIO) ★★★★★
(THE REST) ★★★★★
SOUND ★★★★★



BRAHMS

Symphony No. 1

BEETHOVEN

Egmont Overture
Munich Philharmonik/
Christian Thielemann
DG 477 6404 60:44 mins
BBC Music Direct £12.99

Christian Thielemann is one of those conductors who divides opinion. For

some he remains the major inheritor of the great German tradition that extends back to the 19th century, whilst others find his interpretations rather wilful and over-indulgent. Not surprisingly this latest release of live recordings made with the Munich Philharmonic in June 2005 will delight his many admirers as much as it is likely to infuriate others.

These are opulently recorded, involving performances. In such familiar repertoire it's enormously gratifying to find a conductor who refuses to take the music for granted. Every bar is carefully nuanced, the orchestra responding quite splendidly in a powerfully driven account of Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture. The Brahms is unashamedly Romantic with a highly menacing introduction in which the strings are perhaps too forwardly placed in relation to the wind. It's entirely typical of Thielemann that there is a considerable degree of tempo fluctuation between the first and