

## Ben-Haim • Bloch • Korngold

**Ben-Haim:** Cello Concerto; **Bloch:** Symphony for Cello & Orchestra; **Baal Shem-Suite** - Vidui & Nigun; **Korngold:** Concerto in D in one movement; *Die tote Stadt* - Tanzlied des Pierrot  
Raphael Wallfisch (cello); BBC National Orchestra of Wales/ Lukas Borowicz  
CPO 555 273-2 67.34 mins



Raphael Wallfisch's valuable series of cello concertos by exiled Jewish composers has

uncovered a number of works that have not to my knowledge been recorded before. This current release is no exception, featuring world premiere recordings of German-born Israeli composer Paul Ben-Haim's Cello Concerto of 1962 and Ernest Bloch's Symphony for cello and orchestra composed in 1954, the solo part having originally been conceived for trombone. Unfortunately, neither work strikes me as a major discovery. The Ben-Haim is undoubtedly expertly scored and couched in an accessible style that hovers between harmonically acerbic neo-classical energy, stomping Bartókian dance rhythms and a more luxuriously orchestrated quasi-Oriental expressiveness. Wallfisch plays the solo part with total commitment, and the warmly recorded BBC National Orchestra of Wales under Lukas Borowicz offers sterling support. Yet for all its technical fluency, Ben-Haim's work requires more striking motifs to really engage the listener.

In stark contrast, the second half of the disc includes repertory that combines emotional immediacy with structural lucidity. Bloch's 'Vidui' and 'Nigun' from the *Baal-Shem Suite* may be better known as violin pieces, but they work fabulously well on the cello. Even better, however, is Korngold's one-movement Cello Concerto drawn from the score he wrote for the film *Deception*. It's a gripping musical experience, benefiting from top-drawer thematic ideas and a real sense of direction. *Erik Levi*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## Brahms

**Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15; Four Ballades, Op. 10**

Royal Northern Sinfonia/  
Lars Vogt (piano)  
Ondine ODE 1330-2 71.59 mins



For good reason, performances of Brahms's concertos usually employ someone on a podium,

but not this account of the Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor. That's because of the collaborative sense of trust so well established between the Royal Northern Sinfonia and Lars Vogt, the pianist soon to complete his five-year tenure as the orchestra's music director. He may well have conducted the orchestral *tuttis*, but everything sounds like large-scale chamber music – albeit with an orchestra smaller than usually heard in this repertoire. In addition to being perhaps a little more authentic, the size of the band allows for some very fleet-footed playing in the



All that glitters: violinist Janet Sung sparkles

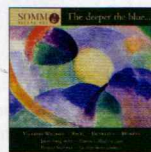
counterpoint of the finale. But the piano sound, which has Brahmsian weight but is never too weighty, is better captured by the engineers than that of the orchestra.

Dating from the same year (1854) in which Brahms started work on what became this concerto, the somewhat austere *Four Ballades Op. 10* make a very attractive counterweight. Vogt plays the second of these pieces with introspective warmth and captures all the strangeness of the fourth. The pianist's thinking behind this programme is evidently the way in which this music emerges from out of Beethoven's shadow, and his superb traversal of the *Ballades* supports such a view.

*John Allison*  
**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★

## The deeper the blue...

**Vaughan Williams:** Concerto for Violin and String Orchestra; **Dutilleux (Arr. Hesketh):** *Au gré des ondes*; **Ravel:** *Tzigane*; Sonata for Violin and Piano\*; **Kenneth Hesketh:** *Inscription-Transformation* Janet Sung (violin); Simon Callaghan (piano)\*; Britten Sinfonia/Jac van Steen  
SOMM Recordings SOMMCD 275  
72.21 mins



Janet Sung shines in the lyrical episodes of Vaughan Williams's Violin Concerto, most

especially in the beautiful *Adagio* – *Tranquillo* central movement.

In the jaunty *Allegro pesante* first movement her occasionally slightly off tuning suggests, appropriately, a bluegrass fiddler.

Kenneth Hesketh's richly colourful and evocative orchestral soundscapes in *Inscription-Transformation*, composed specifically for Sung, recall Oliver Knussen (who championed Hesketh's music): the emphasis is very much on woodwind and bell-like percussive sounds to complement Sung's by turns gleaming harmonics, bird-like song and yearning lyricism.

Hesketh's orchestration of Dutilleux's piano suite, *Au gré des ondes*, appears as a palette-cleansing interlude. His reworking and filling out of the piano textures soften the music's wayward character – 'Prélude en berceuse' sounds rather like late Vaughan Williams.

Sung and the Britten Sinfonia play Ravel's lush orchestral version of *Tzigane* with relish – though the piece, as so often, seems to 'sit down' rather abruptly at the end. Ravel's Sonata is played in its original form, Sung superbly partnered by Simon Callaghan who by artful pedalling makes the piano appear to 'bend' its notes in the 'Blues' movement. In that same movement, though, Sung draws back from the mic just as she launches into her pizzicato strum. Her tuning is also slightly less than precise in the final 'Perpetuum mobile'. All said, though, a most fascinating and enjoyable programme. *Daniel Jaffé*

**PERFORMANCE** ★★★★★  
**RECORDING** ★★★★★

## BACKGROUND TO...

### Kenneth Hesketh (b.1968)

Born in Liverpool, Kenneth Hesketh took an interest in composing while serving as a chorister at the city's Anglican cathedral. Formal studies followed at the Royal College of Music and the University of Michigan, plus a period at Tanglewood with Henri Dutilleux. His first commission came aged 19, and preceded many others, from Europe, Canada and the

US. Hesketh's music is inspired by a wide range of influences (medieval symbolism, machines, mutation) and takes in many genres. He is a professor of composition and orchestration at the Royal College of Music.

