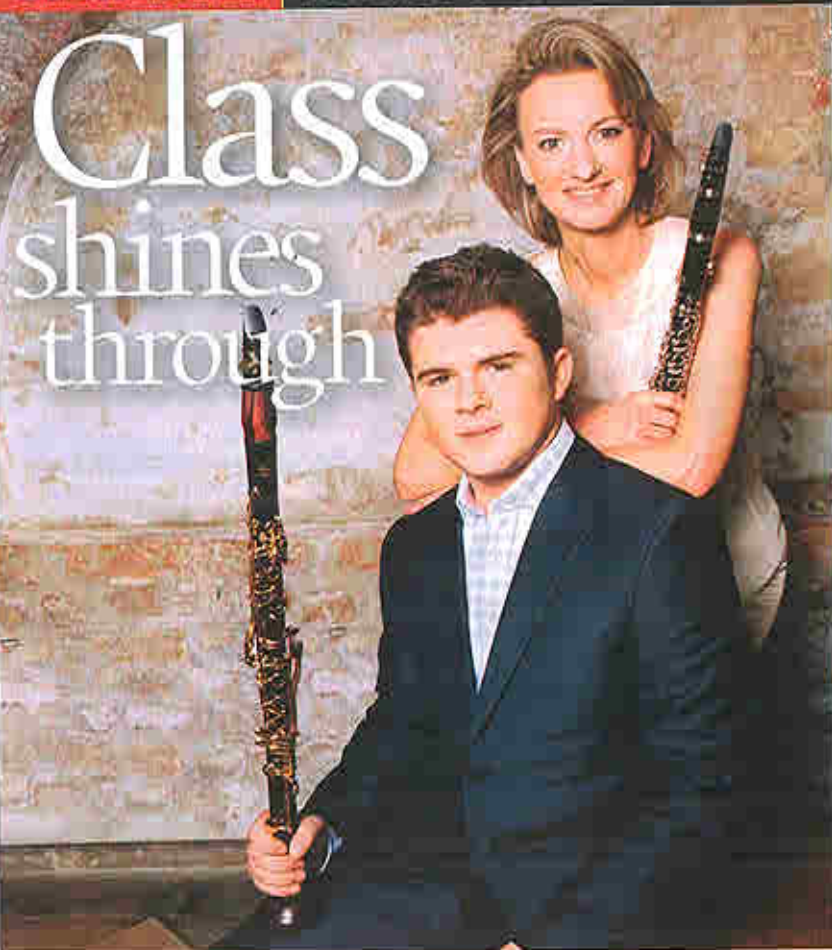


# Class shines through



Sabine Meyer and Julian Bliss play the first-class music of 'second-class' composers

WORDS JEREMY NICHOLAS

Here is a fine (but all too rare) example of a major label presenting star soloists in appealing works by second-division composers. There is a huge treasure trove of similar concerto and instrumental pieces from the 19th century still waiting to be revived, and it takes the persuasive advocacy of great musicians to show them in their best light.

The Concerto for Two Clarinets (1802), for example, by the Moravian composer Franz Krommer (1759-1831), is no masterpiece, but the first

movement might lead you to think it is (the second and third are weak by comparison). Who could fail to warm to the buoyant 'oom-cha-oom-cha' rhythm

playing is immaculate and perfectly blended. Meyer is the soloist in Louis Spohr's sparkling Clarinet Concerto No.2 (1810), while Bliss takes on the

Meyer and Bliss blend perfectly and play immaculately

that underpins some passages, its unique blend of vivacious (and sometimes audacious) demands on the two soloists, or its frequent passages of inspired lyrical beauty?

The great Sabine Meyer is a perfect foil for the gifted teenage virtuoso Julian Bliss; their ensemble

composer's Clarinet Concerto No.4 (1828). Conductor Kenneth Sillito and the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields are very much the support act here, but execute their light-footed role with a charm to match that of the ideally cast soloists. Altogether, it's a disc that's guaranteed to put a spring in your step. ■

★★★★★

**Krommer Concerto for Two Clarinets**  
**Spohr Clarinet Concertos Nos 2 & 4**  
 Sabine Meyer (cl), Julian Bliss (cl), Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields/Kenneth Sillito. EMI 379 7862



★★★★★

**Brahms Violin Concerto**  
**Schumann Symphony No.4**  
 Northern Sinfonia/  
 Thomas Zehetmair (violin)

Once upon a time, performances of Brahms's Violin Concerto usually tended to sound as if the music was reclining in a comfortable leather armchair. Thomas Zehetmair's approach, on the contrary, couldn't be more bolt-upright, and his tight-reined, forward-pushing, lean-toned interpretation is very much in the spirit of today's age. If this kind of thing is your cup of tea, then the self-evident class of Zehetmair's and the Northern Sinfonia's playing will deliver rich rewards. And in the same way, their refusal to allow the music to sprawl brings out much of the likeable best in Schumann's Fourth Symphony.

Avie AV2125  
**Malcolm Hayes**



★★★★★

**Elgar Symphony No.1;**  
**Organ Sonata (arr.Jacob)**  
 BBC National Symphony  
 Orchestra of Wales/Hickox

I doubt whether Elgar's magisterial First Symphony has ever sounded as ripely opulent and sonically beguiling as it does here, especially with first and second violins divided left and right of the conductor, thereby making the most of the composer's felicitous counterpoint. Hickox is uncommonly faithful to Elgar's meticulous instructions, while sweeping the music along in bracing fashion. Some may prefer a more overtly affectionate approach, à la Barbirolli, although Hickox also includes a major rarity in the form of Gordon Jacobs's imposing orchestration of the Organ Sonata, magnificently played by the BBC NOW.

Chandos CHSA 5049  
**Julian Haylock**



★★★★★

**Elgar 'Enigma' Variations;**  
**Introduction and Allegro**  
 London Symphony  
 Orchestra/Colin Davis

This is another welcome release on the LSO Live label, with a live recording made at the Barbican, in January of this year, of two of Elgar's best-known works. People are still puzzling over the 'enigma' in the variations but it doesn't detract from the beauty of the music, with each movement portraying his friends, his friends' dog, his wife and, in the last movement, himself. It's particularly apt for the London Symphony Orchestra to perform the *Introduction and Allegro for Strings*, as the orchestra gave the first performance, with Elgar conducting, just over 100 years ago. In Elgar's 150th anniversary year this album, with Colin Davis at the helm, does the composer proud.

LSO Live LSO 0109  
**Nick Bailey**



★★★★★

**Korngold The Sea Hawk; Deception**  
 Moscow Chorus & Symphony  
 Orchestra/Stromberg

A feast for Korngold junkies: the first complete recording of Korngold's entire film scores for the swashbuckler *The Sea Hawk* (1940) and *Deception* (1946), a thriller starring Bette Davis for which Korngold wrote the original version of his Cello Concerto. The Moscow Symphony Orchestra and Stromberg lavish love, attention and high energy on these rich scores; the composer rightly regarded them as 'operas without singing'. The plummy Russian-style, dark-'I'd mezzo-soprano Irina Romishevskaya is rather a hoot in 'Maria's Song' from *The Sea Hawk*, but Alexander Zagorinsky in the Cello Concerto is incandescent, and the vibrant strings and strident brass enter superbly into the spirit.

Naxos 8.570110-11  
**Jessica Duchon**