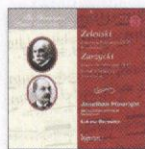


for what now sounds like his ponderous, big-orchestra approach to Schubert's C minor Symphony. This performance happened years before the early music movement got its decisive grip on the period; and if the quick movements here sound heavy-footed, there's no mistaking the impressive call to attention conjured in the first movement's slow introduction. We don't think of Barbirolli as specially associated with Britten's music (although he conducted the first performances of the Violin Concerto and *Sinfonia da Requiem*). His response to the *Serenade for tenor, horn and strings*'s range of sounds and moods is memorable nonetheless, with superb singing from Gerald English and a marvellous sense of time-suspended rapture in the closing 'Sonnet': the vibrato of Hermann Baumann's bombproof horn-playing sounds strange, however, to Anglo-Saxon ears (mine, anyway). Sibelius's Second Symphony is here an exemplary display of how to generate an enthralling voltage-level from the podium without pulling the music about. Unfortunately, some of the orchestral playing – sour principal oboe, rough brass – isn't up to today's standards. *Malcolm Hayes*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★



ŻELEŃSKI

Piano Concerto in E flat, Op. 60

ZARZYCKI

Piano Concerto in A flat, Op. 17; Grande Polonaise in E flat, Op. 7

Jonathan Plowright (piano); BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Łukasz Borowicz
Hyperion CDA 67958 61:26 mins

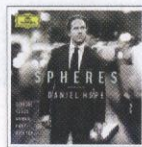
BBC Music Direct £12.99

Even in the crowded field of rare Romantic piano concertos, the Polish composers Władysław Żeleński (1837-1921) and Aleksander Zarzycki have something particularly satisfying to bring to Hyperion's invaluable series. Not many works by Żeleński survive, but those that have been recorded bear consistent witness to a warm and attractive style. The Concerto in E flat, premiered by its dedicatee, Ignacy Friedman, in 1904 and recorded here for the first time, is an imposing piece: its technical challenges are exhilaratingly dispatched by Jonathan Plowright, while no detail of its dark Slavonic colouring escapes the attention of

the conductor Łukasz Borowicz, who draws finely responsive accompaniments from the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

Belonging to an earlier generation, the virtually forgotten Zarzycki (1843-95) stands up well here, too, in his lyrical and brilliant two-movement Piano Concerto in A flat, dedicated to Nikolai Rubinstein. Composing in Chopin's wake, Zarzycki incorporated dance forms into his music, and the Grande Polonaise recalls the great Polish master in its sparkling elegance. It's performed with the right degree of stately swagger. *John Allison*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★



SPHERES

Works by Glass, Einaudi, Westhoff, Pärt, Fauré, Auerbach, Kats-Chernin, Jenkins, Bach etc

Daniel Hope (violin); Jacques Ammon (piano); Deutsches Kammerorchester Berlin; Berlin Radio Choir/Simon Halsey
DG 479 0571 74:46 mins

BBC Music Direct £13.99

I've always admired Daniel Hope for his determination to follow an unfashionable path. This album of 18 bite-sized pieces, in which Hope is joined by the Deutsches Kammerorchester Berlin and the Berlin Radio Choir, makes me think again. Hope writes in the liner notes, 'My aim was to bring together composers... united by the age-old question: is there anything out there?' But the question for any listener must be: is there anything in here?

Barely, is the answer. Two or three pieces deserve to be heard. Pärt's *Fratres* emerges as the craggy masterwork it truly is, and the works by German Baroque composer Johann von Westhoff and Philip Glass are engaging. Everything else is feeble beyond belief. My star ratings salute Hope's determination to wring every drop of expressivity from the music, however vacuous, and the glowing recorded sound. The music itself barely deserves one star. Hope tries to dignify it by invoking a connection with mankind's dreams about the heavenly spheres in the CD notes. But it's embarrassingly obvious that there's no real connection. It's depressing to see a once-proud label like DG releasing something so meretricious. *Ivan Hewett*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★