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Bates: Works for Orchestra. San Francisco Symphony, Tilson Thomas. (192/24)

Bates: Anthology of Fantastic Zoology. Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Muti. (96/24)
Both: Classicsonline.com

An analysis of the music programmed by the top 22 American orchestras for 2014–2015's concert season revealed that Mason Bates, now 39, was the second most performed living composer. (John Adams was #1.) Bates has unassailable academic *bona fides*—Juilliard, study with David Del Tredici and John Corigliano, a Ph.D. from UC Berkeley—but has also had extensive experience as a DJ and techno artist in the San Francisco area. He's known for his "electro-acoustic" compositions, and Bates himself is sometimes seen at the back of an orchestra with his laptop.

Bates' style is quite accessible but there's always an edge—and sometimes a sociopolitical point of view. On the MTT/SFS program, *Liquid Interface* begins with "Glacial Calving," a reference to the consequences of global warming, and "Crescent City" culminates in an electronically-enhanced Katrina. *Alternative Energy* time travels to 1896 (Henry Ford's workshop), 2012 (a particle collider, with sound samples of the beast), 2112 (a decommissioned nuclear plant), and 2222 (a postcard from Iceland in a dystopic "post-energy" age). *The B-Sides* channels the techno/warehouse music Bates is intimately familiar with. The 192/24 files sound superb—spacious and dynamic, with both instrumental and electronic sounds lustrously reproduced. *Anthology of Fantastic Zoology*, premiered by Riccardo Muti and the CSO last year, takes its inspiration from a 1957 Jorge Luis Borges work of "magical realism." A half-dozen mythical creatures and their environment are vividly portrayed in a virtuosic showpiece that eschews electronica. The recording, produced by David Frost, has natural depth and detail.

Rêves d'Espagne. Henk Neven, baritone; Hans Eijsackers, piano. (96/24)

Godard: Mélodies. Tassis Christoyannis, baritone; Jeff Cohen, piano. (96/24)
Both: eClassical.com

Iberian culture and music has long fascinated non-Spanish composers, and *Rêves d'Espagne*, released on the Onyx label, presents songs by two Frenchmen, a Russian, and a Norwegian. Jacques Ibert was hired by director G.W. Pabst to write music (*Quatre Chansons de Don Quichotte*) for an early 1930s film. Two pensive settings bookend a pair of more animated songs expressing the knight's devotion to Dulcinea. Dmitri Shostakovich is in an uncharacteristically upbeat mood with his *Six Spanish Songs*; Arne Dørumgaard (1921–2006) produced 22 volumes of *Canzone scordate*—"Forgotten Songs"—that include his takes on 15th and 16th Spanish music. Finally, Maurice Ravel's last completed work was *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*, which, while Spanish-inflected, still reflects the composer's modernist outlook. The Dutch baritone Henk Neven has an appealingly textured voice and can sing softly without crooning. His accompanist fully deserves the opportunity he's given to play two solo pieces by Albéniz and Granados. Neven's voice is richly reproduced and the piano sound is excellent.

Benjamin Godard (1849–1895) is now largely forgotten, but was a big deal in Third Republic France. He produced plenty of large-scale works and was also a prolific song composer. His many *mélodies* are sometimes dismissed as "salon music" but actually range widely in subject matter and emotional intensity, from archly entertaining (*Fables de la Fontaine*) to heartfelt expression of romantic longing (*Le Banc de pierre*). Tassis Christoyannis' light, lyrical baritone is just what's needed and his pianist is fully engaged. *Aparté* provides immediate sound that puts the performers in your room.

Shostakovich: Piano Trios Nos. 1 & 2. Viola Sonata. Ashkenazy, Visontay, Lidström, Meinich. (96/24)

Dvořák: Piano Trio No. 4 ("Dumky"). Mendelssohn: Piano Trio No. 1. Rozanova, Roussev, Salque. (96/24)
Both: HDtracks.com

These two Decca releases are anchored by their respective keyboard players. The Shostakovich program features Vladimir Ashkenazy, 78 years old at the time of the recording, and if his playing is less crisp than it once was, it's as interpretively astute as ever. Ashkenazy is joined by violinist Zsolt-Tihamér Visontay, concertmaster of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and cellist Mats Lidström, and they cruise smoothly through the 13-minute Trio No. 1, an early work that alternates a Romantic sensibility with Shostakovich's more recognizable frisky style. The group then tackles Trio No. 2, a World War II-era piece that's regarded as one of the composer's finest chamber works. Ashkenazy begins the ineffably sad largo with eight weighty chords that communicate a bone-weary spiritual depletion, and the Klezmer-inflected finale builds to a grinning dance of death. Ada Meinich is the string soloist for Shostakovich's Viola Sonata, his last completed work, and the two musicians capture perfectly its valedictory spirit. The studio recording is close-up with warm, resinous string tone.

The Ukrainian-born pianist Elena Rozanova teams up with violinist Svetlin Roussev and cellist François Salque for Dvořák's "Dumky" Trio—a reading that's fully alert to the work's sudden shifts from moody introspection to exuberance—plus an electrifying account of Mendelssohn's D Minor Trio that showcases Rozanova's astounding technique in the two outer allegros and effervescent scherzo. Here, the recorded sound may lack the last word in clarity and impact, but that shouldn't dissuade anyone from obtaining this accomplished program.

