demonstration, and Variation 5 does not even vaguely anticipate Chopin's style. Nevertheless, with its informative notes and accomplished performances, this disc is strongly recommended as an important addition to the growing selection of recordings of the works of this centrally important figure.

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LOUIS SPOHR (1784–1859)
SYMPHONIES VOL. 3: SYMPHONIES 1 & 6, OVERTURE OP. 12
NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover / Howard Griffiths
cpo 777 179-2, 2011; one disc, 62 minutes

The symphonic output of Louis Spohr seems to be experiencing something of a renaissance lately, at least in the field of recordings. Howard Shelley's cycle of Spohr symphonies with the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana was recently completed on the Hyperion label, and Howard Griffiths, with the NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover, is not far behind with this third volume of symphonies on cpo. Both Shelley and Griffiths work with orchestras performing on instruments with modern set-ups, and both fill out their discs with recordings of Spohr's incidental music.

Thus, alongside renditions of the first and sixth symphonies, Volume 3 of the cpo cycle includes Spohr's earliest essay in purely orchestral music, his Concert Overture in C minor, Op. 12, composed in 1806 when the composer was around twenty-two and published in 1808. A review in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* commented on Spohr's agreeable mix of gloomy (*düster*) and gentle (*sanft*) melancholy and concluded that 'if one calls this ROMANTIC, this reviewer would not object' (my translation; *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 11 (1808/1809), 182). Certainly this was music that appears to have touched a chord with many born in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Music theorist Moritz Hauptmann reminisced about how as a seventeen-year-old, after hearing Spohr's Overture, 'I cried, cried again the whole way home, cried at home by the pailful, and cried for several days afterwards. I see myself even now, sitting alone in my room, kneeling on the ground with my head on a chair, weeping like mad in a delirium of joy and despair.' Like the reviewer in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, Hauptmann was touched by persistent cultural trends, by the curious mixture of despair and joy: 'I was at an age', he explained, 'when one of La Fontaine's novels could make me infinitely happy or miserable' (Moritz Hauptmann, *The Letters of a Leipzig Cantor*, trans. and ed. A. D. Coleridge (London: Novello, 1892), volume 1, 13). The Concert Overture begins with a slow introduction which opens into a fresh and energetic Allegro, with a contrasting secondary theme occasionally coloured by the chromaticism that Spohr was to make his trademark over the course of his illustrious career. It was presumably this rapid and heady mix between apparently contrasting affects and moods – each containing, as it were, a shadow of the other – that caused the teenage Hauptmann to weep like mad.

Spohr attempted his first symphony in 1811 at the suggestion of Georg Friedrich Bischoff (Symphony No. 1 in E flat major, Op. 20), and as Clive Brown and others have noted (including the present liner-note writer, Bert Hagels) the composer used Mozart's Symphony No. 39 in E flat major, K543, as something of a model. The general outlines of Spohr's movements, such as their time signatures and sentiments, can be traced to Mozart's 1788 work. Yet far from being a slavish imitator, Spohr in fact infuses Mozartean forms and themes with his own formidable contrapuntal and thematic designs, a procedure characterized by the late Charles Rosen as 'classicizing'; such works were 'based on the exterior models, the results of the classical impulse, and not upon the impulse itself' (Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style* (London: Faber,

1972), 381). Even though Rosen goes on to say that classicizing works are not without their charm, his viewpoint unfortunately essentializes and marginalizes composers like Spohr as being stuck in some kind of transitional limbo. Similarly, in textbooks and in classrooms composers such as Spohr are conceptualized as between 'classical' and 'romantic', whereas it is clear from contemporaries that he – like Mozart – was decidedly viewed as a romantic. And although the indebtedness to Mozart might today leap off the score to our eyes, to an astute intellectual such as Friedrich Rochlitz, who reviewed the work not long after the premiere, it was outstandingly original; 'we have not heard for some years a new work in this genre that offered so much novelty and individuality without eccentricity and affectation' (my translation; *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 13 (1811), 379).

Spohr's trademark chromaticism (of the kind that appears to have annoyed Beethoven in his famous observation on the composer's oeuvre) appears not long after the opening of the adagio introduction to this first symphony; the allegro movement is in the same triple metre as Mozart's and the themes of both symphonies share the same well-crafted tautness. The moods of the slow movements are also remarkably similar, even down to the dotted rhythms and expansive and daring harmonic inflexions. With the scherzo and finale, Spohr and his model part company; in both of these movements Spohr effects daring modulations that flirt with far more extreme key relationships than those essayed by most of his contemporaries.

The last work on this recording is Spohr's most curious. It dates from 1839, when the composer was on the cusp of his great successes in England: his Symphony No. 6 in G major, Op. 116 ('Historical Symphony in the Style and Taste of Four Different Periods'). Here is music very much of its time; Spohr's attempt at stylistic pastiche invariably means that a work such as this dates very quickly, something picked up by one of Spohr's biggest fans, Hauptmann, who hated the artificiality of the conceit: 'don't let us have any more *Historical Symphonies*', he pleaded (Hauptmann, *Letters of a Leipzig Cantor*, volume 2, 71). Spohr even went as far as to append dates and composers to each movement: 'Bach-Handel period 1720', 'Haydn-Mozart period 1780', 'Beethoven period 1810' and the 'most modern period' (*Allerneueste Periode*) of 1840 (one year in the future, at the time of composition).

The self-consciousness of the imitations is apparent from the outset: Bach is represented with a severe fugue, Handel with a pastorale lifted straight from those in *Messiah*, Mozart with phrasing and gestures from his symphonies (including a quotation from the slow movement of K543, which Spohr evidently admired – probably because of the famous and pivotal C♭); the Beethovenian scherzo even has an opening solo not for two timpani, but three. The final movement appears to have puzzled and mystified audiences and critics alike, who couldn't work out what the tone of the music was supposed to be. Was Spohr satirizing current trends, or making a claim to be the 'most modern' composer of his day? When Spohr asked Mendelssohn for his opinion of the work, he diplomatically and cautiously stated that he wished the last movement had been more clearly 'like your magnificent, spirited overtures' (quoted in Clive Brown, *Louis Spohr: A Critical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 24). The movement is filled with the latest percussion, and there is a profusion of diminished-seventh chords. It is clear that Spohr is parodying works of composers – French composers, in particular – whom he disliked; there may also have been some professional jealousy on the composer's part, since the Parisians had never much liked his music.

The NDR Radiophilharmonie performs splendidly under Howard Griffiths's direction; they are stylish, technically assured and well balanced. Griffiths pays careful attention to the manifold hairpins, expressive indications and dynamic inflections that Spohr was careful to mark. Even more importantly, one gets the impression that orchestra and conductor alike treat Spohr's work with seriousness, enthusiasm and passion. Even if this reviewer prefers period instruments, the NDR Radiophilharmonie demonstrates the extent to which prevailing historically informed performance practices can infuse the culture of modern symphony orchestras, at least in Europe. The slow movement of the first symphony has some appropriate *portamenti* in the opening cello line, and vibrato in the string section is varied and expressive. The woodwinds are also particularly beautiful in this recording. Most appealing is the transparency of the orchestral

families, which makes Spohr's innovations in orchestration and tone colour clear to the ear. Contemporaries such as Samuel Wesley noted that Spohr surpassed even Mendelssohn in orchestral colour (quoted in Brown, *Louis Spohr*, 70); the clear mix and mastering of this cpo recording put listeners in an excellent position from which to assess Wesley's claim and appreciate this quality for themselves.

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LEONARDO VINCI (1690–1730)
LA PARTENOPE
Sonia Prina, Maria Grazia Schiavo, Maria Ercolano, Eufemia Tufano, Stefano Ferrari, Charles Do Santos / I Turchini di Antonio Florio / Antonio Florio
Dynamic CDS 686/1-2, 2012; two discs, 126 minutes

Although Leonardo Vinci's life was brief, he still managed by the age of forty to have completed more than thirty-five operas, at a rate of three to four per year. A specialist opera composer, Vinci was very much steeped in the Neapolitan tradition, having lived and composed almost exclusively in that city (excepting a few Venetian and Roman outings such as the famous *Didone abbandonata* of 1726).

Partenope was premiered in 1699 at the Teatro San Bartolomeo in Naples. The original libretto is by the prolific Arcadian librettist Silvio Stampiglia, and is credited as the first libretto to deal with the myth of the foundation of Naples. Unlike similar myths relating to Venice and Rome, the Neapolitan myth is the only one based on a musical subject: the voyage of the Sirens after their encounter with Ulysses. The long line of allusions in the text would have been readily understood by the local public, who, under Spanish dominion, saw themselves as Partenopei, the descendants of Partenope, and therefore 'real' Neapolitans.

The myth deals with the aftermath of Ulysses' collusion with the Sirens, when a group of them led by Partenope broke away and found themselves on the Neapolitan shore (the name itself stems from 'nea-poli' – that is, new city). Despite being a musical myth, and therefore suitable for an opera libretto, the story in fact exhausts itself with the arrival of the group on the shore and the foundation of the city. There are no subsequent (pseudo-)historical events to sustain and feed the plot, as in the case of other librettos on Greco-Roman subjects. This deficiency makes itself felt in the plot, which largely limits itself to a series of love intrigues together with the two stock couples (a royal and a noble one) that traditionally provide the *lieto fine* in most baroque operas. The only real action is a battle scene between the Partenopei and the invading Prince Emilio; the remainder relies on stock situations of love intrigue, cross-dressing, misunderstandings and so on.

Partenope as a musical entity has had a convoluted history, as was often the case with eighteenth-century operas. After the 1699 premiere there followed a number of different musical settings until 1722, when the libretto was set anew by Domenico Sarro. That version was then taken to Rome, where, because of its lukewarm reception, Vinci was asked to update the opera (presumably resetting some of the arias and/or adding new ones). That was in 1724. The following year Vinci was asked to compose an opera for Venice. With little available time, he chose to offer a reworking of Partenope as *La Rosmira fedele*, presumably because the identification with the Partenope myth would not have transferred successfully to the Venetian stage.

The musicological underpinning for the present project has been provided by Dinko Fabris. Vinci's autograph of *La Rosmira fedele*, which survives at the British Library, contains a substantial amount of Sarro's music; essentially, all of the recitatives and some of the choruses and sinfonias are by Sarro. On