was not until 1897 that Taneyev put the other two in order, scored them, and issued them as Tchaikovsky's Andante and Finale op.79.

And Taneyev was surely right about the first movement. The piano writing is curiously starved, even at times skeletal, the passage work often prosaic (the huge repetitious cadenza has none of the textural richness that makes the corresponding sections in Tchaikovsky's first two concertos so impressive), and the ideas, though some have charm, are less than first-rate Tchaikovsky. True, the slow movement is a very substantial flow of quietly reflective melody that is well worth having, but the finale is, frankly, at times banal (one tune is positively awful by Tchaikovskyan standards). It is unlikely that the full three-movement version will ever find a place in our concert halls, but it is good to have it available on CD in such admirable performances as here.

The First Piano Concerto is, of course, a very different matter, and it begins with one of Tchaikovsky's greatest opening movements. First there is the splendid tune that never returns, but which contains a whole fund of melodic particles that become building blocks within some of the movement's later melodies, contributing unobtrusively to the structural integrity of this spacious and very coherent conception. Such a piece requires of its performers a scrupulous and clear-headed approach that allows the music to speak for itself without bursts of gratuitous rhetoric and/or self-advertising virtuosity. With Konstantin Scherbakov's clear-fingered account of the solo part and Dmitry Yablonsky's well-paced control of orchestral matters, there is no danger here of the movement's sweep becoming masked by italicized detail. These same virtues are quietly present in what follows. Some may find the relatively uninflected presentation of the slow movement denies it some of its more familiar expressiveness in other performances, but the consistent textural clarity (and especially Scherbakov's razor-sharp articulation in the central *prestissimo*) means no detail is lost. Much the same may be said concerning the boisterous, so-Russian finale: again, a 'straightforward' (no pejorative nuance intended) delivery that never suggests that the performers think they know more about the music than the composer. This is outstanding value at the price.

David Brown

The English Hymn – 5

'Lead, Kindly Light' – Hymns of Faith and Assurance

The Choir of Wells Cathedral
Malcolm Archer *director*
Rupert Gough *org*

Hyperion CDP12105 (69 minutes: DDD)
Notes in English.

The 23 hymns included in this collection represent a wide range of hymn-singing traditions and are drawn from a broad time span, reflecting the long

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and varied history of the English hymn. Hymns from the nineteenth century dominate, though other periods and traditions are also represented. Three of Charles Wesley's most famous hymns are included, 'O for a thousand tongues to sing', 'Love divine, all loves excelling' and 'O thou who camest from above', reflecting his important place in the history of the English hymn, and the role of the Methodist movement in affirming the place of congregational song in worship. The significant role of John Henry Newman in the religious development of nineteenth-century Britain is acknowledged through the inclusion of two of his texts, one of which provides the title for this disc. English translations of Latin, French and Welsh texts indicate the debt owed by English hymnody to other traditions from the British Isles and beyond, as well as to authors of earlier centuries. The craft of hymn-writing continued to prevail in Britain throughout the twentieth century, and is reflected here with hymns by three contemporary writers: Edward J. Burns, Timothy Dudley-Smith and Bernadette Farrell. The latter's hymn 'O God, you search me and you know me', an adaptation of Psalm 139, seems slightly incongruous here. Whereas the other contemporary words and tunes fit easily into the genre of the older hymns, this feels less comfortable; the language is in an unmistakably modern idiom, its directness and simplicity being somewhat removed from the rich poetry of the other hymns, and the tune being something of a hybrid form, combining elements of the traditional hymn-tune, the modern Catholic responsorial psalm-chant, and the worship-song into a whole that compares less than favourably with other offerings on this disc.

Musically, too, the collection is varied. Two of the most famous tunes from the Welsh revival, 'Cwm Rhondda' and 'Blaenwern' are included, and along with the traditional Irish melody 'Slane', Ralph Vaughan Williams' harmonization of the Warwickshire ballad 'Shipston' and the renowned 'Brother James' Air', set to the 23rd Psalm, ensure that the varying singing traditions of the British Isles are represented. As well as Bernadette Farrell's hymn, the work of two other contemporary composers, Malcolm Archer and Maurice Bevan, is represented alongside more familiar tunes, such Charles Lockhart's 'Carlisle', set to 'Breathe on me, breath of God', and 'Hereford' by Samuel Sebastian Wesley, set to 'O thou who camest from above'.

The standard of performance is consistently excellent, the choir of Wells Cathedral producing a warm and rich tone, and Rupert Gough providing sensitive and colourful organ accompaniments. A collection of hymns does not naturally afford a choir, particularly one of such high quality as this, the opportunity to demonstrate its full capability. However, brief glimpses of this can be heard in the two hymn-anthems, conductor Malcolm Archer's arrangement of 'Brother James' Air' for trebles, and Maurice Bevan's setting of 'There's a wideness in God's mercy'. The latter, in particular, is a fine setting of the composer's tune 'Corvedale', which deserves wider recognition. Additionally, there are several descants, verses sung by solo voices and different sections of the choir, which provide welcome contrast in the longer hymns. The organist is also allowed to demonstrate his skills in several high-quality re-harmonizations of final verses, most effectively in the tune 'Fulda', set to 'We have a gospel to proclaim'.

While the standard of performance on this recording is high, it does raise several issues about performance practice in the realization of hymnody. Aside from the richness of tone, other aspects of the recording also indicate that such a performance could only be achieved by a highly trained choir of Wells'

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calibre, and while this makes for a high level of aural satisfaction, it should be borne in mind that, with the exception of the two hymn-anthems, all of the hymns on this recording were written for congregational singing. While some characteristics that distance this recording from typical congregational singing are rewarding for the listener, such as the consistent approach to breathing according to punctuation rather than the end of metrical lines, especially notable in 'O for a thousand tongues to sing', set to 'Lydia', with its long notes at the end of lines, others, such as the considerable *rallentandi* found at the end of nearly every hymn, become wearing. Generally, Archer's tempi are rather stately, and while these are well suited to grand hymns such as 'Christ is made the sure foundation' and 'Ye holy angels bright', other tunes, especially those from non-conformist traditions, such as 'Cwm Rhondda' and 'Blaenwern', would benefit from livelier tempi, in a manner more akin to the Welsh Chapel than the English Cathedral. Similarly, the *rallentandi* would have a greater dramatic effect if used more sparingly. Their consistent application, however, is trying on the ear, and in several instances they are rather excessive, such as in 'O Jesus, I have promised' and 'We have a gospel to proclaim', where the delay in reaching the final chord removes virtually all sense of pulse.

Hymnologist Alan Luff's liner notes are excellent, showing an acute awareness of the scriptural and historical origins of the various hymns, and guiding the reader through the various stages of the English hymn tradition represented on the disc. Biographical information is provided for both authors and composers, who are often less well known, and is a welcome feature. The inclusion of the full hymn texts is also commendable and the cover photograph of Ospringe Church, Kent, set in rolling countryside, aptly captures the ambience of the disc.

Overall, this is a well-constructed recording, representing many areas of the English hymn-singing tradition, both past and present. The programming is effective, combining hymns that are well known, less familiar, bold, reflective, old and new. The singing and organ playing are of a particularly high standard, though a greater variety of tempi and a more judicious use of *rallentandi* would have brought some welcome variety in a genre that is, by nature, repetitive.

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