one approaches it as an orchestral étude rather than a symphonic poem. Wit's performance is quite long at just over 28 minutes (a good 8 minutes longer than Fitelberg's recording) as he takes his time over the long slow central episode. Indeed it is hard not to blame him for lingering so beautifully on its eroticism, as it contains the best music of the whole piece. Would that Fitelberg had ended it there! The literal repetition of the opening is an unwelcome intrusion and demonstrates that Fitelberg's completion of the sketch was workmanlike rather than inspired. You will be forgiven for thinking that your CD has skipped, such are the jolts and jumps from one rendition of the opening theme to another. While the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra under Wit is at its best, we miss a sense of panache and easy virtuosity. It is high time to start showing off.

Michael Murphy
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

Martucci

Complete Orchestral Music – 1
Symphony No. 1 in D minor Op. 75
Notturno Op. 70 No. 1
Andante Op. 69 No. 2
Canzonetta Op. 65 No. 2
Giga Op. 61 No. 3

Andrea Noferini *vc*
Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma
Francesco la Vecchia *cond*

Naxos 8.570929 (69:38 minutes: DDD)
Notes in English and Italian

Complete Orchestral Music – 2
Symphony No. 2 in F major Op. 81
Theme and Variations Op. 58
Tarantella Op. 44 No. 6
Gavotta Op. 55 No. 2

Lya De Barberlis *pf*
Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma
Francesco la Vecchia *cond*

Naxos 8.570930 (69:44 minutes: DDD)
Notes in English and Italian

Complete Orchestral Music – 3
Piano Concerto No.1 in D minor Op. 40
La Canzone dei Ricordi

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Gesualdo Coggi *pnfte*
Silvia Pasini mezzo
Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma
Francesco la Vecchia *cond*

Naxos 8.570931 (67:53 minutes: DDD)
Notes in English and Italian

Complete Orchestral Music – 4
Piano Concerto No. 2 in B♭ minor Op. 66
Momento Musicale e Minuetto
Novelletta Op. 82 No. 2
Serenata Op. 57 No. 2
Colore Orientale Op. 44 No. 3

Gesualdo Coggi *pnfte*
Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma
Francesco la Vecchia *cond*

Naxos 8.570932 (68:54 minutes: DDD)
Notes in English and Italian

Writing in 1887, the 21-year-old Busoni reviewed the state of music in his native country from Leipzig where he had settled:

> Without question Italian music is beginning to pick itself up slowly from a period of deep decadence caused not so much by a lessening of spiritual energies than by a perversion of taste. … In Italy, each outpouring of the spirit has a certain relationship with the people, it exists for the people's pleasure and benefit, for the common good. When Verdi celebrated his first success with *Nabucco*, the people thought they had found again a figure who would make the theatre accessible to them, and, trusting in Verdi's talent, they were furnished for many years with beautiful tunes and popular subjects. This idea, and no other, explains the often excessive enthusiasm that the Italian people reserve for a great composer.[1]

Alongside the great rivers of Italian grand opera that swept public opinion along, through and beyond the upheavals of the Risorgimento ran a modest rivulet of indigenous instrumental music that, at certain times, seemed in danger of drying up entirely. Certainly the popular appeal of operas by Verdi, as well as those by Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and, later, Puccini dominated Italy in the long nineteenth century, and today these works still fill up the *cartelloni* of the world's opera companies. Only comparatively recently have scholars and recording companies turned their attention to the instrumental works of Sgambati (1841–1914), M.E. Bossi (1861–1925), Sinigaglia (1868–1944) and Martucci (1856–1909). Although major Italian critics – de Paoli, Gatti, d'Amico and Mila – together

[1] Ferrucio Busoni, 'Giovanni Sgambati. Eine Studie zur Beleuchtung der heutigen Musikzustände in Italien', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 58/25 (23 Jun 1887), reprinted in Busoni, *Lo Sguardo Lieto: tutti gli scritti sulla musica e le arti*, ed. Fedele D'Amico (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1977), www.rodoni.ch/martucci/busonisusgambati.html (accessed 7 January 2010).

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with the late John C.G. Waterhouse in the UK signalled the importance of this mid-century generation, they tended to concentrate their attention on the so-called Generazione dell'Ottanta, the group of composers[2] born in or around the 1880s who were keen to revitalize their country's music by reference to Baroque and pre-Baroque traditions of Italian instrumentalism. In the last quarter of the twentieth and onwards into the twenty-first century, scholarship has caught up with the earlier composers, in general studies – *La Musica Italiana nell'Ottocento* by Vincenzo Terenzio[3] and *La Musica Italiana per Orchestra nell'Ottocento* by Antonio Rostagno[4] – and in examinations of individual figures: Cominetti's monograph on Bossi[5] and, most significantly, the ongoing four-volume biography of Martucci by Folco Perrino.[6] Martucci certainly deserves such a major treatment, as his achievements as pianist, teacher, conductor and composer place him on a markedly higher plane than his contemporaries. It is gratifying to find recordings of his chamber[7] and orchestral works emerging on major labels. The current Naxos CDs of Martucci's complete orchestral music are by no means the first in the field. In 1990, ASV released four disks featuring the Philharmonia conducted by Francesco d'Avalos.[8] In 2003, Kees Bakels directed performances of the two symphonies with the Malaysian Philharmonic[9] for BIS, and, over the last 20 years, various companies have been re-releasing Toscanini's historic recordings made with the NBC Symphony Orchestra in the late 1930s and 1940s.[10]

Giuseppe Martucci was born on 6 January 1856 at Capua, just north of Naples. His father was a trumpeter and the bandmaster of a Bourbon regiment; it was he who gave young Giuseppe his first groundings in the rudiments of music. At the age of 12, Martucci entered the Naples Conservatory where his piano teacher was Beniamino Cesi, a pupil of Thalberg. Thalberg was living nearby at the time, having recently retired to a villa near Naples; his former rival Liszt held court at Rome, where his pupils included Sgambati. Thalberg's influence was much less evident in Neapolitan life, but his presence brought the aura of German music very close. Martucci's composition professor was the respectable but pedestrian Paolo Serrao, who imparted the fundamentals of counterpoint as well as a fleeting taste for grand opera.[11] Martucci was removed from the conservatory by his ambitious father in order to embark on a concert career, which took him round Italy and to France, England and Germany. He won warm praise from Liszt and Rubinstein, both of whom heard him play in 1874.

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2 For example, Respighi, Malipiero, Casella, Alfano, Pizzetti.

3 Vincenzo Terenzio, *La Musica Italiana nell'Ottocento* (Milan: Bramante, 1976).

4 Antonio Rostagno, *La Musica Italiana per Orchestra nell'Ottocento* (Florence: Olschki, 2003).

5 Ennio Cominetti, *Marco Enrico Bossi* (Mantua: Gioiosa, 1999).

6 Folco Perrino, *Giuseppe Martucci* (Novara: Centro Studi Martucciani 1992–).

7 For example, *The Complete Piano Trios: Piano Trio no.1 in C major, Op.59, Piano Trio no. 2 Op.62*. Trio Mezzena-Bonucci, Dynamic CDS132; *Complete Works for 'Cello and Piano: Cello Sonata in F Sharp Minor. Op.69, Tre Pezzi, Op.69, Due Romanze, Op.72*. Duo Pepicelli, Dynamic CDS182; *Martucci: Piano Quintet, Op.45*, Respighi*: Wind Quintet in G minor, P.21, Piano Quintet in F minor, P.35*. Ex Novo Ensemble di Venezia, Aldo Orvieto, Dynamic CDS099.

8 *Martucci: The Complete Orchestral Works*. Philharmonia, Francesco d'Avalos *cond*, ASV CD DCS 408.

9 *Giuseppe Martucci: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 2*. Malaysian Philharmonic, Kees Bakels *cond*, BIS-CD-1255.

10 For example, Naxos.

11 Early piano pieces include some paraphrases on themes from Italian Opera.

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On being appointed Professor of Piano at the Naples Conservatory in 1880, he gave up the peripatetic life of a virtuoso and took up conducting. A newly formed *orchestra stabile* gave its first concert under Martucci's direction on 23 January 1881. The repertoire he chose reflected his admiration of, and desire to disseminate, German music: Mozart, Schumann and, above all Wagner were programmed, next to works by Cherubini, Rossini, Berlioz and others. In 1883, he commemorated Wagner's death with a special concert in Naples, and five years later – he had by this time moved to be director of the Liceo Musicale in Bologna – he gave the Italian *prima* of *Tristan und Isolde*. His Bolognese period (1886–1902) was his most productive, both as a creative artist and from the quality of musical experience he was able to give his students and others. His love of Wagner's music grew, as did his attachment to the symphonies of Brahms, whom he met in Bologna in 1888. A series of concerts (1898) each promoting the music of a specific country demonstrated his unusually wide knowledge of European repertoire: for his British concert, for instance, he featured works by Parry, Mackenzie, Cowen, Sullivan and Stanford – his 'Irish' Symphony (Stanford would repay the complement by conducting Martucci's First Symphony twice at the RCM). He returned to Naples, this time as director of the conservatory in 1902. He set about reorganizing the institution and reinvigorating the concert life of the city; at the Teatro San Carlo he conducted *Tristan* and *Götterdämmerung* in 1907 and 1908 respectively. He died on 1 June 1909.

Martucci's early works are overwhelmingly for piano solo, often in the virtuosic manner of Thalberg. When he abandoned the life of a concert pianist, more enduring and personal compositions came from his pen – the Quintet, Cello Sonata, the two Piano Trios, the oratorio *Samuel* and the two Piano Concertos (1878 and 1885). Although the influence of Schumann, Mendelssohn and Brahms is apparent, Martucci's individual voice was beginning to come through, blending these German instrumental traits with the lyricism of opera – both Italian and Wagnerian – and the brightly lit buoyancy of meridional life. He attains full maturity during his time in Bologna; alongside important piano works (such as the Nocturnes op. 70) and chamber music (the pieces for violin and piano op. 67, and for cello and piano op. 69) sit two of his most significant compositions – *La Canzone dei Ricordi* (seven songs for mezzo-soprano and piano), and the First Symphony op. 75 completed in 1895 after seven years of work. The *Canzone* and several of the piano pieces were later orchestrated, and it is in this form that they are best known today. It is perhaps in these mature miniatures that we find the best of our composer. From his final period back in Naples come the Second Symphony op. 81 (1904) and several sets of piano pieces.

The four CDs from Naxos feature the Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma, established as recently as 2002 by the Rome Foundation and completely funded by private monies. Its main activities are focused on a season of concerts given at the Auditorium in the Via Della Conciliazione in Rome. (Rome's other orchestra, the Accademia di S. Cecilia, has moved its concert series to the new Parco di Musica.) Attending one of its concerts in October 2007, I was struck by how young the players were; most were in their twenties and early thirties. The music-making was marked by a corresponding freshness and vitality in which one missed only those moments of blazing interpretative insight that come from the lengthy gestation of a characteristic orchestral sound. The same positive qualities are apparent in these recordings, particularly in the shorter works; these versions stand up very well when compared with those of the Philharmonia under d'Avalos. The Theme and Variations op. 58 for piano and orchestra is the

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only disappointment here (it did not feature in the d'Avalos collection). This piece exists in three forms, for solo piano, two pianos, and piano and orchestra. In the present recording it receives a rather unsympathetic performance from the veteran pianist Lya De Barberiis, who, in tandem with some pedestrian orchestral playing, makes a less than compelling case for its musical merits. Moving to the symphonies and piano concertos, these performances may be recommended (particularly as a bargain price introduction to Martucci's music), but with certain reservations. The symphonies in particular are scored very heavily, with much harmonic patterning in inner parts; this is especially true of the First Symphony's first movement, where one feels a certain sympathy for the endlessly busy middle strings. Conductor Francesco La Vecchia, who often seems to identify profoundly with Martucci's small-scale music, has problems in balancing the principal and subsidiary lines both here and in the outer movements of the Second Symphony; the aural effect is cluttered and heavy, particularly as the brass are given their head at climaxes. This lack of balance has an inevitable adverse effect on the architectonic shaping of the whole movement. The First Symphony follows a Brahmsian pattern in its middle movements with an Andante followed by an Intermezzo-like movement, both on a considerably smaller scale than those that surround them. Unsurprisingly, these are the most successful sections in this performance. One special case concerns the speed of the Second Symphony's first movement: La Vecchia's performance clocks in at 15 minutes 48 seconds, d'Avalos's at 14 minutes 27 seconds and Bakels's more than three minutes faster at 12 minutes 34 seconds. La Vecchia is laboured and tediously pedantic, but extraordinarily enough it is he who follows Martucci's perilously slow metronome marking. Bakels has taken the initiative here and it pays off. His vision of the macrostructure, combined with a sense of what is *not* necessary to hear in the texture, make his reading by far the most satisfying for the listener. Indeed his disk of the two symphonies with another recently formed orchestra, the Malaysian Philharmonic, mentioned earlier, can be recommended ahead of other interpretations. With the Piano Concertos, La Vecchia is fortunate in his soloist Gesualdo Coggi, spry and agile in the management of virtuosic passages and suitably expressive when necessary, notably in the Chopinesque slow movement of the First Concerto. Although Martucci designed his concertos to display his own pianism, the resulting compositions are very far from being vehicles of empty display; the Second Concerto was championed by conductors such as Toscanini, Weingartner and Mahler, and it became the best known of Martucci's later works. Its massive first movement lasts longer than the other two movements put together and explores the whole spectrum of emotions from imposing dramatic gestures to gentle reflective reveries. Coggi here, as elsewhere, inspires both conductor and orchestra to playing of the highest order and, as an example of collaborative music-making, I would place it on a higher level than D'Avalos's set with Francesco Caramiello as soloist. The final large work is *La Canzone dei Ricordi*, which sets seven nostalgic poems by Rocco Emanuele Pagliara, all rather similar in tone, but cumulatively effective. The opulence both of the soloist's voice (Sylvia Pasini) and the orchestral playing brings out the languorous, almost Straussian sensuality of the music, the result being comparable to lying in a bath for too long – pleasurable but soporific. Some listeners may prefer the straighter, more forward sound of Rachel Yakar on the d'Avalos CD, but in this case Pasini's vocal quality seems to me to be entirely appropriate.

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These four disks mark the start of a larger project by the Naxos company involving the same core performers in recordings of late nineteenth- and 20th-century Italian music. According to the orchestra's website[1] there will be 27 CDs appearing over the next five years, recorded both in the studio and from live concerts. The favoured composers will be Casella, Malipiero, Busoni and Petrassi. If the standard of musicianship on the recordings is on the same high level as these Martucci disks, we will be in for a treat.

Alasdair Jamieson
Durham University

Richard Strauss

An Alpine Symphony (*Eine Alpensinfonie*) Op. 64

Staatskapelle Weimar

Antoni Wit *cond*

Naxos 8.557811 (54 minutes: DDD)
Notes in English and German.

For musicologists, analysts and performers alike, Strauss's final tone poem *Eine Alpensinfonie* (1915) is a problematic work. Musicologists have to contend with the fact that over its 13-year gestation period the project reinvented itself several times, and ghosts of its earlier incarnations – as an expression of Nietzschean anti-religiosity or a memorial to the tragic suicide of the playwright Karl Stauffer – emerge to complicate the ostensible subject matter, the description of a mountain ascent and descent. Analysts are confronted with a work which openly makes symphonic claims in its title, but whose single-movement structure fractures into unsymphonic miniature segments in response to the moment-to-moment programmaticism. This same issue vexes interpreters too, who face the challenge of creating a sense of coherence across the sprawling vastness of Strauss's canvas in spite of the variegated surface events. The score itself poses formidable technical difficulties to players, and the enormous forces (around 125 players) and non-standard instruments required (including thunder and wind machines, organ, cow bells and an aerophone) render performances less frequent than its vivid pictorialness might otherwise warrant. This new recording by the Staatskapelle Weimar directed by Antoni Wit triumphantly surmounts these challenges and presents us with a compelling account of a work often dismissed by cognoscenti as little more than a pot-pourri of special effects.

The Staatskapelle Weimar is the successor to the orchestra that Strauss led as Kapellmeister between 1889 and 1894, and appropriately Strauss's music is well represented in its discography (most recently by a 2008 release of *Sinfonia Domestica*, also directed by Wit). This line of historical continuity between the current players and the group of musicians that first performed *Macbeth*, *Don*

[1] See www.orchestrasinfonicadiroma.it (accessed 14 December 2009).

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