The notes for this recording are attributed to Roman Hinke and Remy Stricker. At two and a half pages for both symphonies together, they are pretty minimal. The music and the performance deserved something more substantial.

This is a welcome recording, with much to recommend it, and the dissatisfactions that one can find with it do not in the slightest stand in the way of an enlightening and pleasurable hearing. I look forward to listening to it many times, and to sharing it with the students in my lectures.

Douglass Seaton
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Tchaikovsky

Piano Concerto No. 1 in B♭ minor op. 23
Piano Concerto No. 3 in E♭ major op. 75
Andante and Finale op. 79 (orch. Sergey Taneyev)

Konstantin Scherbakov *pf*
Russian Philharmonic Orchestra
Dmitry Yablonsky *cond*

Naxos 8.557257 (69 minutes: DDD)
Notes in English and German.

This is a CD of much interest. Curiously, while the musical richness of the three (or should we say two?) pieces, as designated on this CD, diminishes as work succeeds work (indeed, almost as each track succeeds track), the scholarly interest for those not already familiar with the last two works (or should we say one?) on the last three tracks may still rise if they have little or no prior acquaintance with them. And surely the last three tracks are really only three-quarters of another work? And whose work are the last two tracks anyway?

Explanations needed? Let us start at the end. In April 1891 Tchaikovsky embarked on a four-week tour of the USA, and it was evidently on the return voyage to Europe that he began to sketch a sixth symphony in E♭. This draft was completed in November, and two-thirds of the first movement were scored. But reviewing it a month later, Tchaikovsky experienced disenchantment, and abandoned the piece. However, in 1893 he reincarnated it as a piano concerto, completing and scoring the intended first movement in July, but deciding, because of its length (despite the fact that it is considerably shorter than the First Piano Concerto's first movement), to leave it as a one-movement concert piece. Then three months on, and only weeks before his sudden death, he showed it to the composer and pianist, Sergei Taneyev, his former pupil and now a close friend, and the one man to whom Tchaikovsky would turn for criticism of his own compositions. Taneyev was blunt, especially finding the concerto's element of virtuosity underplayed. Nevertheless, Tchaikovsky still retained faith in what he was doing, and set about converting the slow movement and finale of the abortive E♭ symphony into the remaining two concerto movements. The completed first movement would be published in 1894, but it

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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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