

Harmony restored:  
Francis Monkman  
resumes his long-  
term love affair  
with the organ

## REVIEW

### INSTRUMENTAL

TLZ/PETER BEUTLER

#### Artist Interview

# Francis Monkman

The prog-rock musician returns to his roots to perform Bach on a newly restored organ

#### INTERVIEW JOHN EVANS

**So, a classical organist who once played in John Williams's crossover band, Sky. Explain...**

I studied organ at the Royal Academy with Geraint Jones. Later, inspired by Jimi Hendrix, I took up the guitar and formed a band and in time met John Williams and formed Sky. Our version of Bach's D minor Toccata went to number five in the charts. **But you're still in love with the organ?**

I was playing the harpsichord by the age of eight and from there went on to learn the organ, so it's been a long love affair. My father helped restore Shandy Hall, where Laurence Sterne wrote *Tristram Shandy*, and through him I developed a

love for period instruments and how they help reveal composers' intentions.

**Which is where your new CD comes in...**

Albert Schweitzer once asked, 'Why do old instruments sound so much better?' Old harpsichords certainly sound different from their modern counterparts, as if each note is trying to say something. It's a quality I discovered in the old Gerhard organ at Schlöben that I play on the CD. Though it was restored in 2003 it shares a quality with original instruments of the time – an 'internal growth' to the sound.

**Which are your favourite pieces in the collection?**

Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor is obviously very close to my heart, but as an

example of the organ's very special quality I'd have to choose his E flat Fugue which closes the second CD. Listen carefully and you'll hear that, as with a bowed instrument, when each note of the organ dies there's a feeling of it anticipating the next. This effect is enhanced when you play the instrument as Bach would have, that is by drawing your finger along the key, rather than simply striking it. Look at old keyboards and you'll see grooves in the keys caused by this style of playing.

**What's next?**

I plan to record Bach's *Goldberg Variations* on the harpsichord but I so enjoyed performing the Bach works on my new disc that I might be available for recitals if required!



#### Lang Lang Memory

Music by Mozart, Chopin, Schumann and Liszt

He exploded onto the scene with thrilling live performances that left us gasping, but here it's a quieter, more reflective Lang Lang that explores these familiar but evocative works that represent his earliest introduction to music. Whilst there are none of the fireworks associated with his live CDs, this recital is every bit as sensitive and intense, best demonstrated for me by Schumann's *Kinderszenen* where Lang Lang's delightful delicacy transforms the composer's descriptive titles into evocative miniature soundscapes. This is an accomplished and intelligent performance – and one that secures this young pianist's place at the top of the international league.

DG 477 5976

Jane Jones



#### Shostakovich 8 Pieces, Cello Sonata in D minor Schnittke Cello Sonata No.1, Madrigal, Klingende Buchstaben

Alban Gerhardt (cello), Steven Osborne (piano)

Beautifully recorded (another Andrew Keener/Simon Eadon special) and played, this is a disc that enchants simply through the sound it makes. Both Gerhardt and Osborne are noted especially for their poetic insights and whenever the music turns introspective here they cast a magic spell so as to have one hanging on to their every note. The haunting opening of Schnittke's 1978 Sonata is so delicately voiced that it sounds as though both players are merely breathing on their instruments.

Gerhardt's magical control in the solo cello *Madrigal in Memoriam Oleg Kagan* is no less remarkable. Only a certain reluctance to indulge the music's more gritty, cynical side brings any hint of reservation.

Hyperion CDA67534

Julian Haylock



#### Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition Chopin

Three Nocturnes, Op.9 Ravel

Gaspard de la nuit Sergio Tiempo (piano)

There's much to enjoy in this fiery disc from the young Argentinian pianist Sergio Tiempo. The high colours and dark tales of the Mussorgsky and the Ravel come across vividly and he is capable of producing a marvellously singing sound, the voicing carefully balanced. But sometimes his approach strikes me as representative of a current pianistic trend: that beautiful tone in soft passages often vanishes in louder ones in favour of excessive, stabbing force, while apparent interpretative originality is not always as convincing as one would like. Tiempo's immediacy, flair and many moments of true poetry nevertheless make this recital well worth hearing.

EMI 558 0182

Jessica Duchon



#### Scriabin Piano Sonatas Nos. 2, 3&9, etc.

Alexandre Melnikov (piano)

Scriabin's piano music is among the most notoriously demanding in the repertoire. His compositions encompass a colossal range of emotions, from half-whispered, Chopinesque miniatures to the full-on explosions of his later works. On this disc, Alexandre Melnikov's playing seemingly has it all. You'll be hard pressed to find a more meltingly lovely tone than that employed by Melnikov in the Prelude No.4, Op.11, yet somehow he sustains this seductive autumnal glow in even the most note-saturated climaxes of the 'Black Mass' Sonata, without even a hint of hardness. Melnikov's control of texture, colour and mood rivals even the grand master, Horowitz. Outstanding.

Harmonia Mundi

HMN 911914

Julian Haylock

★★★★★

#### Bach Miscellaneous organ works

Francis Monkman (organ)

The former keyboard player of Sky returns to his classical roots in this recital played on the newly restored organ of Schlöben (near Jena). The programme is an odd-ball mix of choral preludes, extracts from the *Clavierübung* Bk.3 (few of them well known) and the famous Toccata and

Fugue in D minor. Monkman's tempi are cautious (for example the Fugue in G, BWV541) and I would have preferred more contrast among the bright tonal colours that dominate his registrations. But the two generously filled discs are well-played and recorded and offer an unusually wide ranging view of Bach's genius. Crocodile Records CR 0007 **Jeremy Nicholas**