

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Mark Pullinger is thrilled by the conclusion of an exhilarating cycle of Beethoven symphonies on period instruments from Jordi Savall – a triumph over challenging circumstances



Beethoven

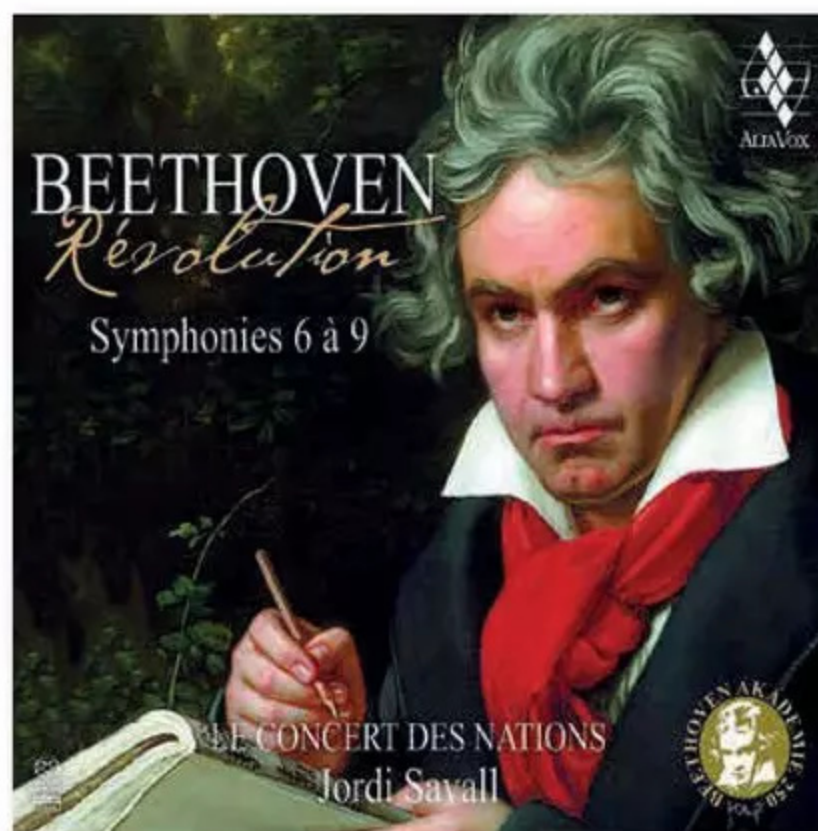
'Révolution, Vol 2'

Symphonies - No 6, 'Pastoral', Op 68; No 7, Op 92; No 8, Op 93; No 9, 'Choral', Op 125^a

^aSara Gouzy sop ^aSalome Fischer contr ^aMingjie Lei ten ^aManuel Walsler bar ^aLa Capella Nacional de Catalunya; Le Concert des Nations / Jordi Savall
Alia Vox (M) (3) AVSA9946 (170' • DDD/DSD)

Chapeau to Jordi Savall and Le Concert des Nations. The pandemic delayed the completion of their Beethoven symphony cycle but they came out fighting. As soon as conditions in Spain permitted, the orchestra – 35 players from Le Concert des Nations, including some long-serving members, plus around 20 young players from across Europe – reconvened their 'Akademien', intense six-day periods of rehearsals, concerts and recording sessions, nailing the Sixth and Seventh in July 2020. The Eighth was taped in Wrocław in October 2020 but the Ninth there was scuppered when four members of the choir tested positive for Covid on the very day they were due to record the final movement. Several other performers, including Savall himself, then caught it, which forced the cancellation of the rest of their scheduled European tour ('an artistic and financial catastrophe', the conductor writes). Undeterred, they reattempted the Ninth again in autumn 2021, enabling the cycle's completion. As Savall argues in his eight-page booklet note – with, one senses, a wry smile – as Beethoven was born in December 1770, his 250th anniversary must logically run from December 2020 until December 2021 ... so they did complete their project in time.

It was titled 'Beethoven Révolution', but how revolutionary do these recordings actually sound, given the period-instrument charge into performing Beethoven was led by the likes of Roger Norrington,



'You can almost feel the rosin flying in the fiercer attacks, the double basses scrabbling desperately to escape the storm's downpour'

Christopher Hogwood and Frans Brüggen four decades ago? Indeed, it's been a while since I acquired a new cycle on period instruments – Jos van Immerseel (2005-07), Emmanuel Krivine (2009-10) and Brüggen (2011) were all recorded over 10 years ago now. But in his essay 'Beethoven versus



Jordi Savall brings energy and freshness to Beethoven

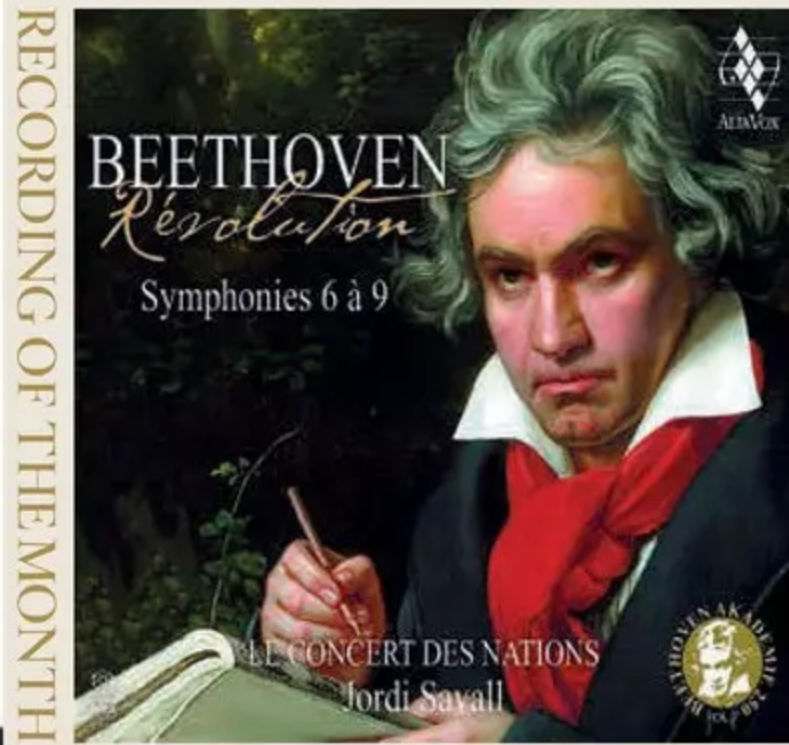
Beethoven', charting the revolution in performing the cycle, Luca Chiantore makes an excellent point that, for Savall, Beethoven is a 'frontier'; all his work and recordings (except his 1994 *Eroica* – 7/97) are of music prior to the early 19th century.

This certainly gives a freshness and energy that are thoroughly invigorating, although that wasn't evident from the very start of my listening. Beginning with the *Pastoral* was a bit of a red herring, though, as it's the most relaxed symphony of the nine and Savall's tempos in the first two movements are decidedly unhurried. The 'Scene by the Brook' flows amiably with winsome bird calls, particularly flautist Marc Hantai's teasing nightingale. But then we arrive at the peasant dance and the tempest, and the floodgates open. What is immediately noticeable is that the strings have a really sinewy, almost abrasive quality; there are 33 of them in the Sixth and Seventh (39 in the Eighth and Ninth) but they are recorded very closely, meaning you can almost feel the rosin flying off their bows in the fiercer attacks, the double basses scrabbling desperately to escape the storm's downpour.

There's a gritty *Sturm und Drang* quality to the opening of the Seventh and I like the way Savall keeps the *Allegretto* moving yet still retains its nobility. The punchy *Allegro con brio* finale is hardly Wagner's 'apotheosis of the dance' but is instead full of vigour and it really stings, taken at the same tempo as Norrington and John Eliot Gardiner, but the playing feels more alive, more vital. (Krivine is a whole minute faster, surely too hectic – a rare miscalculation.) Watch their recent Seventh performed at the Laeiszhalle in October 2021 on YouTube and you can see the joy on the players' faces. You can also appreciate Savall's understated, unfussy baton technique.

GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



BEETHOVEN
 'Révolution, Vol 2'
 Symphonies Nos 6-9
 Le Concert des Nations / Jordi Savall
 Alia Vox
 ▶ **MARK PULLINGER'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 30**

This is a thrilling, physical, probingly musical and invigoratingly alive-feeling period performance set of Beethoven symphonies, and a triumphant second half of conductor Jordi Savall's full cycle.



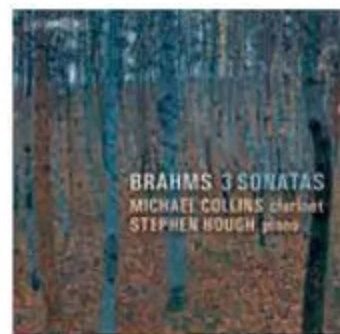
RESPIGHI. SCHOENBERG. STRAUSS
 'Métamorphoses nocturnes'
 Appassionato /

Mathieu Herzog

Naïve

Extraordinary string sound here from the former Ébène Quartet member's ensemble.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 39**



BRAHMS
 Clarinet Sonatas
 Michael Collins *cl*
 Stephen Hough *pf*
 BIS

The third recording of the Brahms's Clarinet sonatas from Michael Collins – see the last issue for his reasons for returning to the works – and a very beautifully performed one too.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 45**



WEINBERG
 'Light in Darkness'
 Linus Roth *vn* et al
 Evil Penguin
 Linus Roth's invaluable

contribution to the Weinberg discography is here added to with another fine album, encompassing most of the works involving violin he'd not previously recorded.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



CPE BACH
 Sonatas & Rondos
 Marc-André Hamelin *pf*
 Hyperion
 Music of the 'maverick of the Bach

dynasty', as reviewer Michelle Assay puts it, brought splendidly to life by a master pianist in both the reflective and the rhythmically joyous pieces alike.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 54**



LISZT
 'Vol 1: Death and Transfiguration'
 Kenneth Hamilton *pf*
 Prima Facie
 Kenneth Hamilton

offers a richly rewarding and brilliantly played Liszt survey, clearly deeply thought-through, and furthermore recorded on a fabulous sounding piano.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 57**



'MARIA & MADDALENA'
 Francesca Aspromonte
sop | Barocchisti /
 Diego Fasolis
 Pentatone

Music exploring the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, communicated with compelling engagement, in a superb Baroque recital.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



'SONG'
 The Hermes Experiment
 Delphian
 An entrancing album of songs, at times disarmingly moving,

the group's unique line-up (harp, clarinet, soprano, double bass) lending them all, despite their diversity, an intimate shared sound world.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



RAMEAU
 Acante et Céphise
 Les Ambassadeurs -
 La Grande Écurie /
 Alexis Kossenko
 Erato

An 'enthraling triumph' writes reviewer David Vickers, owing as much to perfect principal casting as to the impeccable instrumental playing throughout.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**



'MIRRORS'
 Jeanine De Bique *sop*
 Concerto Köln /
 Luca Quintavalle
 Berlin Classics
 A glorious showcase

for Jeanine De Bique, whose rich and characterful voice displays jaw-dropping precision in passages of thrilling virtuosity, and poignant grace in the slower numbers.

▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**



DVD/BLU-RAY
MOZART Die Zauberflöte
 Sols; Royal Opera / Julia Jones
 Opus Arte
 A chance to see David McVicar's 2003 Royal Opera House production – previously released under Colin Davis – with different forces, led by Julia Jones.
 ▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
'THE MANY LOVES OF ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK'
 Various artists
 Supraphon
 Well-known classics and little-known Dvořák gems, expertly drawn from Supraphon's superb catalogue of the composer's music. As Rob Cowan puts it: 'a terrific set'.
 ▶ **REVIEW ON PAGE 91**