

than extraordinary, and his musical message is always at the forefront of his interpretations. This is gold-standard piano playing which should not be missed. **Scott Noriega**

GOLDMARK Symphony No. 1, "Rustic Wedding." Symphony No. 2 in Eb, op. 35 • Lan Shui, cond; Singapore SO • BIS 1842 (SACD: 76:22)

Some stars end their lives in spectacular explosions seen clear across galaxies; others just kind of fade away. Karl Goldmark (1830–1915) was probably never more than an M-class star to begin with, and his light continues to dim as time passes. Of Hungarian birth, Goldmark trained as a violinist, first at the academy in Sopron (Ödenburg in German), and later at the conservatory in Vienna, but as a composer he was largely self-taught. To make ends meet, he accepted work as a music journalist, a vocation for which he seemed eminently well-suited, for he managed successfully to navigate the musical politics of the day by treating the feuding factions—namely the Wagner and Brahms camps—evenhandedly and by refusing to take sides. But in the end, Goldmark's diplomacy didn't win him any lasting friends, for as the wise man says, "he who sits on fence gets only splinters up his butt." Wagner, after all, couldn't very well be caught consorting with a Jewish composer, and Brahms, for other reasons, parted ways with Goldmark as well, after the two had hit it off and Brahms had been complimentary towards Goldmark's music.

Only two of Goldmark's works out of a catalog of about 70 seem to have kept his name from sinking into oblivion altogether. One of them, his Violin Concerto in A Minor, was championed by Nathan Milstein and subsequently taken up by a handful of other "name" violinists, including, but not limited to, Itzhak Perlman, Sarah Chang, and Joshua Bell. The other work that still clings to life is the "Rustic Wedding" Symphony, given a new lease on life by the current disc, and proving once again my contention that works with nicknames or subtitles have a leg up in the survival game.

Prior to the appearance of this new BIS SACD, the recorded field for the Symphony was pretty much dominated by Yondani Butt and the Royal Philharmonic on a 1992 ASV CD, a disc I have in front of me for comparison. To be sure, there have been other noteworthy recordings—by Jesús López-Cobos with the Los Angeles Philharmonic on Decca, Stephen Gunzenhauser with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland on Naxos, André Previn with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra on EMI, a 1968 performance by Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic on Sony, and a 1950 recording by Beecham and the Royal Philharmonic, digitized for CD by Sony—so it can't be said that the work has been neglected, but Butt's recording has long been a favorite, making George Chien's 1992 Want List.

This is the first recording of the "Rustic Wedding" I'm aware of in SACD, and for some, that, in itself, may be what tips the balance in favor of this release. Beyond that, though, I can say that the performance is a very fine one. Will it spark a sudden Goldmark revival? Probably not, for, as far as I know, the work is not on anyone's list of all-time "Great Romantic Symphonies." There are even some critics who choose not to acknowledge the piece as an actual symphony, claiming that its unusual form—its first movement is cast as a set of variations—makes it more of a suite or a work along the lines of Dvořák's *Symphonic Variations*. And though its five-movement layout, each movement with a descriptive title, has precedents in Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, the music's lightweight, folksy, dance-like character suggests a score that would not be out of place as a ballet or pantomime.

Shui's reading is faster than Butt's in every one of the movements, most tellingly in the fourth (*Andante*), titled "Im Garten":

	<u>Shui</u>	<u>Butt</u>
I	17:00	17:39
II	3:51	4:22
III	4:42	4:58
IV	9:39	11:33
V	<u>8:10</u>	<u>8:52</u>
	43:22	47:24

Rather than sounding rushed, however, Shui's performance paints Goldmark's peasants having

the time of their lives, imbibing a bit too much of the bubbly as they slur their way through another round of toasts and stumble all over each other. Shui does a particularly good job of portraying the tipsy, ruddy-cheeked wedding guests in the way he articulates Goldmark's syncopated and off-beat rhythms. Listen, for example, to the giddy third movement (Serenade), marked *Moderato scherzando*, and to the finale (Tanz), marked *Allegro molto*, by which time everyone is three sheets to the wind. Shui has much more fun with the score than Butt does, and it translates into a thoroughly delightful performance, enhanced by BIS's superior recording.

Also favoring this new release is a much more substantial second work, Goldmark's Symphony No. 2, as opposed to the *Sakuntala Overture* offered by Butt. With this work there is no argument that it's not a symphony, as it conforms to conventional formal standards and layout. There is, however, once again, another of those pesky discrepancies that crop up in some allegedly reliable sources and then get promulgated in cyberspace without anyone bothering to check its validity. Such is the case here regarding the Second Symphony's key, and, unfortunately, it's an error that has even crept into prior *Fanfare* reviews.

Yondani Butt recorded a companion disc to the "Rustic Wedding," containing Goldmark's Symphony No. 2 (ASV 934). The headnotes to two reviews of that CD in 19:3, one by Peter Rabinowitz, the other by Martin Anderson, both give the key of the Symphony as E, while right next to it in the Archive, the headnote to a review by David Johnson of Michael Halász's Marco Polo recording, gives the key as Eb. I'm looking at the score, and the key signature contains three flats, so the key has to be Eb, not E. How does this sort of error occur? Well, in this case, we can attribute it to ASV, which misidentified the key on its own recording of the piece. But that raises the question of whether we should take at face value any CD labeling or trust the album notes contained therein. The Internet, great boon to information sharing that it is, has also, unfortunately, led to cavalier attitudes and practices when it comes to basic fact checking. I'm not criticizing Rabinowitz or Anderson for the mistaken key; their reviews date back to a time before scores were accessible online, but one thing it does prove is that neither of them has perfect pitch, and neither do I.

Goldmark composed his Second Symphony in 1885, 12 years after the "Rustic Wedding." It, too, is somewhat folksy in character, but it goes through the well-behaved motions of sonata-allegro form and development of its thematic material. There are also some flashes of real drama and attempts on Goldmark's part to craft something more serious. The music is quite attractive and, in my opinion, better-fashioned as a symphonic experience than is the "Rustic Wedding." Alas, if only it had a nickname. Perhaps "Chazzan" would be fitting, as the Jewish-tinged second movement, according to the album note, seems to be a remembrance of Goldmark's father, who was a synagogue cantor.

This is now my top choice for the "Rustic Wedding" Symphony, but even if it weren't, I'd still give this release a strong recommendation for the very beautiful Second Symphony, which has very few currently listed alternatives to choose from. The Singapore Symphony Orchestra sounds just like, and the equal of, any top-rated Western ensemble, which is to say excellent, and BIS's SACD recording, once again, provides state-of-the-art sound. **Jerry Dubins**

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In reviewing Goldmark's "Rustic Wedding" Symphony as led by Gerd Schaller in *Fanfare* 34:6, I noted that while this work is rarely heard in concert these days, it does not lack for recordings. I knew of eight at the time, and ranked Schaller's up there at the top. Now we have a ninth, and this one goes to the top of the pile as well. What I particularly liked about Schaller's performance was the "rustic"-ness of the wedding he depicts —"as it might have been celebrated in some Bohemian or Styrian village a century or more ago." Those words apply as well to Lan Shui's performance with the Singapore Symphony, of which he has been music director since 1997 and which he has brought to international renown.

Fluidity of line and balance of forces are Shui's strongest suits here. This is orchestral playing at the peak of refinement and beauty. There is never a harsh edge, a forced sound, or a ragged entrance. Phrases are shaped with loving care. Magical moments abound. In the first movement of the "Rustic Wedding," at 7:21, the intricately interwoven, dovetailed writing is so perfectly rendered

that one could imagine it to be the aural equivalent of the scattering of fairy dust. The woodwind playing in II is lovely beyond words, and the clarinet solos in IV (“Im Garten”) conjure up the world of Mendelssohn’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Conductor Mehli Mehta (Zubin’s father) used to say that the two qualities he looked for in a great orchestra were how it sounded when playing softly and how the back stands of the string sections were managing. On both counts the SSO passes with flying colors. Listen to the elegance with which the cellos and basses present the *pianissimo* opening of the “Rustic Wedding” Symphony, followed by a quiet trio of horns perfectly matched in sound and articulation. As for those back-stand string players, every single one is pulling his or her weight in the virtuosic writing in the Finale of the Second Symphony, writing that outdoes even what Schumann demands in the Scherzo of his Second Symphony or Bartók in the Finale of his Concerto for Orchestra. It takes just one or two misfits to muddy the waters, but not here. The result is incredible clarity and coruscating brilliance.

If the “Rustic Wedding” Symphony is seldom played these days, the Second is virtually unknown. It is an uneven work, with a dull first movement, a second movement (in *A♭* Minor!—seven flats) of no particular melodic interest but distinguished by sensuous beauty and some piquant chromaticism *à la* Liszt or Wagner, a third of scintillating delicacy (one is reminded of Berlioz’s observation about his Overture to *Béatrice et Bénédict*: “a caprice written with the point of a needle”), and an energetic, dancelike Finale that gives the strings a real workout.

The ever-growing discography of the SSO now includes some 40 releases, mostly on BIS, spanning the last couple of decades. It appears to be one of the few orchestras anywhere with something resembling a recording contract these days. Coming in the near future is a miscellaneous Rachmaninoff program. The orchestra’s discography features recording premieres, well-designed programs, and rarely recorded but worthy material. This seems to be the first and only recording to pair both of Goldmark’s symphonies.

BIS’s engineering is a bit disappointing. The clarity is there, but missing is the warmth and richness of sound I usually hear from this orchestra in live performances. The soundstage lacks depth, being more two- than three-dimensional. Compare the results on another SSO recent release on BIS, Rachmaninoff’s First Symphony and First Piano Concerto, made with a different engineer, and you’ll hear the difference. There are good program notes by Jean-Pascal Vachon. **Robert Markow**

GOLINELLI Piano Sonatas: in D♭, op. 30; in e, op. 53. Two Concert Studies, op. 47 • Francesco Giammarco (pn) • NEWTON 8802181 (54:54)

Stefano Golinelli (1818–1891) is hardly a household name today, but during the 19th century he travelled widely, was highly regarded by numerous musical luminaries, and composed prolifically. He studied piano and counterpoint in Bologna with Benedetto Donelli, later taking lessons in composition briefly with Nicola Vaccai. In 1840, at the age of only 22, he was recommended by Rossini for the position of professor of piano at the Liceo Musicale in Bologna, which he held until his retirement in 1870. In 1842, Ferdinand Hiller, when passing through Bologna, advised Golinelli to take up a concert career; he considered him the best Italian pianist of the age, admiring also some of his compositions. And he was not alone. Schumann, too, praised some of his works, recommending especially the composer’s 12 *Studi* in an 1844 article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Later even Busoni included some of composer’s works in his repertoire. Golinelli toured all of Europe, reaching his apex in the years 1845–1855, performing all over Italy (Naples, Florence, Milan, Genoa, and Palermo), Germany, England, and France. In his later years he devoted himself fully to composition: in his lifetime he wrote over 200 works for the piano.

Though he composed in most of the prevalent genres of the day—variations, preludes, fantasias, toccatas, nocturnes, and others—the current recital shows only two different ones: the sonata and the etude, and two of each. In general Golinelli’s music is melodically attractive—he was an Italian, after all—and filled with the typical Romantic gestures of the day in its use of accompanying arpeggios, rapid scale passages, and some surprising, though perhaps not totally unexpected, modulations. The Sonata, op. 30, the first of five which he would compose throughout his career, was written in 1845, and so is a relatively early work, one which Golinelli may have performed on