

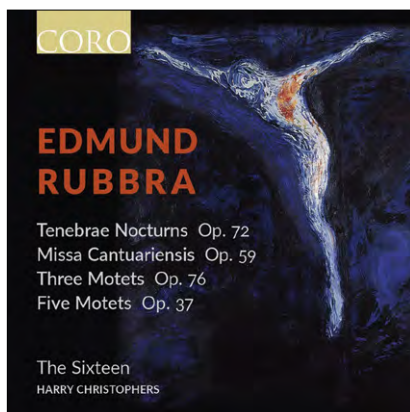


MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Rakowski: *Stolen Moments*.
Amy Briggs, Gil Rose. BMOP.

Jazz is one of the most significant modern-era influences on many other sorts of music, most definitely including “classical” music. Few living composers have exploited its catchy rhythms and bluesy inflections more thoroughly than David Rakowski, whose symphonies, concertos, and multitudinous piano preludes and etudes, despite dazzling intricacies and free-wheeling dissonance, are charged with jazz-inspired verve, excitement, and fantasy. His big new piano concerto, with soloist Amy Briggs (who plays with spectacular virtuosity on this vividly recorded SACD), puts two allegros around a long-lined, eloquently pensive elegy in memory of Rakowski’s teacher Milton Babbitt, and stuffs the music with springy roudades, elaborate filigree, delicate interlacings of piano and celesta, rambunctious percolations of piano over percussion, momentum-accumulating *moto perpetuo* ostinatos, post-tonal boogie-woogies, and much, much more. Some sections evoke a lysergically-primed Alban Berg imitating Gershwin, or perhaps vice-versa, while others sound like a big-band face-off of Schoenberg versus Messiaen. And everywhere the hyper-active piano riffs, jiggles, skitters, pummels, dodges, darts, and splashes. **Mark Lehman**

Further Listening: Babbitt: *All Set* (Nonesuch)

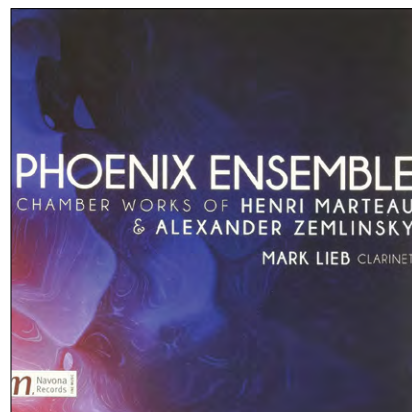


MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Rubbra: *Tenebrae Nocturns*. The Sixteen, Harry Christophers. Coro.

Edmund Rubbra (1901–86) was born into modest circumstances to parents who were amateur musicians. While doing clerical work as a teenager, he studied music on his own. At 17, he put together a concert of Cyril Scott’s music, and the composer took Rubbra on as a student; he later studied with Holst and Vaughan Williams. The avant-garde meant little to him; his music is tonal with occasional spicy chords, and it grows and flowers organically out of its own material. The impression I get is of deceptive simplicity: he’s always emotionally open, but his writing testifies to a remarkably deep and learned inner life. The three *Tenebrae Nocturns* set texts from the Maundy Thursday service that comes before Easter—one of the darkest, weightiest nights of the Church year; the writing is austere but not cold. There are two groups of motets whose words come from the Bible and from British poets; they’re contemplative even when not specifically devotional. The *Missa Cantuariensis* (sung in English) is solemn but a bit brighter in tone, and Rubbra sews in a few threads of sensuality. The Sixteen sing richly and impeccably, and the cathedral’s atmosphere is perfect. **SE**

Further Listening: Rubbra: Symphonies 6 & 8 (Del Mar, Handley/Lyrita)



MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Marteau & Zemlinsky: *Chamber Works*. Phoenix Ensemble. Navona.

Henri Marteau was born in 1874 to a French father and a German mother who had studied piano with Clara Schumann. At age five, a student of Paganini gave him a toy violin. Marteau graduated to the real instrument, becoming an accomplished performer and teacher. Brahms introduced him to clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, for whom Marteau wrote his lyrical Quintet for Clarinet and String Quartet (1908); it balances French lightness, Brahmsian harmonies, and rhapsodic freedom. Marteau also explored emotional depths more than his better-known French contemporaries; to broad-brush it, Debussy could be sensual and Ravel vibrant, but neither delved far into humans’ inner workings. Marteau’s charming Serenade for Nine Wind Instruments shuns any turmoil; it’s more akin to Poulenc and Milhaud. Alexander Zemlinsky’s youthful Trio for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano has plenty of Teutonic drama and passion along with memorable themes and a Romantic craftsman’s ability to handle chromaticism and extended developments. The Phoenix Ensemble is lively and engaging if not completely polished. The sound for the Marteau is decent if a little dry; in the Zemlinsky, it’s congested and not always flattering, though still listenable. **SE**

Further Listening: Caplet: *Oeuvres pour Vents* (Ensemble Initium/Timpani)