

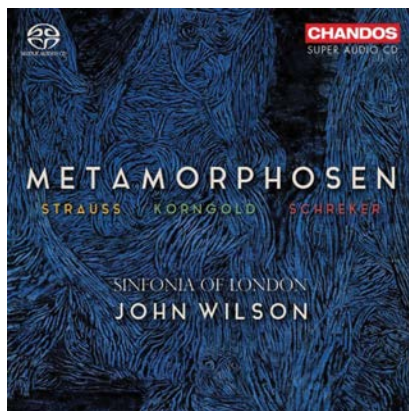


MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Massenet: *Songs with Orchestra*. Devos, Dubois, et al.; Paris Chamber Orchestra, Niquet. Bru Zane.

Since 2009, the Palazetto Bru Zane organization has punched above its weight in dusting off neglected romantic French music, presenting concerts and making recordings for its own label and others. Their own productions are always high quality with classy artwork and hefty booklets. This release collects 25 short songs by Jules Massenet, one of several composers who wrote similar settings in the vein of Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été*. The string orchestra is complemented by harp or piano, maybe a wind instrument or three, and sometimes percussion. With a limited palette, Massenet still wrote cleverly, and the smaller forces let the singers do their thing without pushing. It's an aural treat to hear this talented, varied cast of young vocalists just *sing*, without the distractions of acting, without fussing over virtuosity. The mood of the whole album is utterly relaxing. The lyrics are fragrant with love, nature, religious devotion, and sentiment. I particularly like the melancholy opening of "Autumn Thoughts," the pizzicato accompaniment of "To Columbine," the cheerful faux-Baroque counterpoint in "Marquise," and the effervescent bounce of "Musette's Song." A few well-chosen instrumental numbers provide a diversion now and then. Nice clear sound, too. French and English texts. **SE**

Further Listening: *Nuits* (Véronique Gens, I Giardini/Alpha)

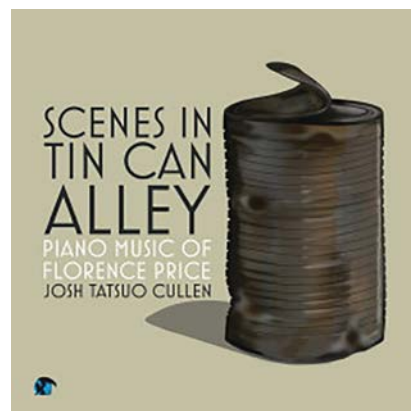


MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Strauss: *Metamorphosen*. Korngold: *Symphonic Serenade*. Schreker: *Intermezzo*. Sinfonia of London, Wilson. Chandos (SACD).

John Wilson seems to be the latest conducting sensation. His recordings almost invariably get rave reviews whether they deserve it or not, especially in the British press. For example, his interpretation of the Korngold Symphony has received almost universal praise despite the fact that his extremely fast tempos in all four movements fundamentally change the nature of the music. Marc Albrecht's Pentatone recording is preferable for its performance and sound. Wilson does typically record interesting programs, and this Chandos CD is a good example. *Metamorphosen* is a masterpiece. Wilson plays it with considerable intensity at a conventional tempo, but does not quite achieve the tragic power of Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic. Korngold's *Symphonic Serenade* for String Orchestra is a major work probably influenced by the Tchaikovsky and Dvořák *Serenades*. The melodies and orchestration for a large string ensemble are excellent, and should solidify its place in the mainstream repertoire. Wilson plays the music well at a fairly fast tempo that sounds reasonable here. Schreker's *Intermezzo* is a pleasant and accessible but minor work. The Chandos string sound is consistently outstanding, ensuring that this is a highly desirable collection. **Art Lintgen**

Further Listening: Korngold: *Symphony* (Marc Albrecht/Pentatone)



MUSIC ●●●●○ SONICS ●●●●○

Florence Price: *Scenes in Tin Can Alley*. Josh Tatsuo Cullen, piano. Blue Griffin.

Florence Price is having a moment. Call it round two; this native of Arkansas moved to Chicago in 1927, at the age of 30, to escape the endemic racism of the American south. There she became the first African-American woman to have a work premiered by a major American orchestra when her *Symphony No. 1* was played in 1933 by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The current renaissance of her music centers around her superbly constructed symphonic output, which has been favorably compared to the style of Dvořák. But she wrote in many formats, including solo piano. This collection consists of miniatures, penned between 1928 and 1941. They draw from a variety of influences, including rag, musical theater, spirituals, and generous dashes of Chopin and Debussy. All but a set of five Preludes are descriptive works, presented in a concisely theatrical manner as scenes, sketches, and portraits. Price was not an innovator in any technical way, and her emotional range is somewhat limited, but her elegantly formed music radiates an easy sense of joy and human dignity. That's a winning formula in my book. American pianist John Tatsuo Cullen presents this material with panache and palpable affection. **Peter Burwasser**

Further Listening: Price: *Symphonies 1 & 3* (Nézet-Séguin, Phila. Orch.)