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# Nicholas Kok

## Selected Reviews

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### **Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* Arthaus Musik, January 2015 DVD**

'Nickolas [sic] Kok leads a springy performance from the pit.' - **Francis Muzzu, Opera Now \*\*\*\***

### **Elliot Carter The Nash Ensemble, Wigmore Hall (March 2014)**

"An invigorating performance conducted by Nicholas Kok." - **Richard Fairman, Financial Times \*\*\*\***

"Running through the concert was the sure direction of Nicholas Kok, whose clarity as a conductor was a model of its kind. A remarkable evening." - **Colin Clarke, Opera Today**

"The Nash Ensemble could not be faulted in the incisive commitment of their response under Nicholas Kok." - **Mark Berry, The Boulezian**

### **Moth Requiem Signum Classics, SIGCD368 (February 2014)**

"We expect virtuosity from the BBC Singers, but this performance leaves one gaping in admiration... It is impossible to imagine a more favourable way of experiencing this enthralling music than by listening to this superbly engineered and presented release." - **William Hedley, International Record Review**

"Terrific stuff, with already the feel of a classic, and admirably served by the BBC singers plus alto flute and three harps, and the conductor Nicholas Kok." - **Stephen Plaistow, Gramophone Magazine**

"Recorded after a memorable Proms premiere last year, *The Moth Requiem* is one of Birtwistle's most austere beautiful works. Scored for women's voices, three harps and alto flute, it movingly pairs Robin Blazer's poem triggered by a memory of the sounds made by a moth trapped under a piano lid with the hauntingly evocative Latin names of moths themselves. *The Ring Dance of the Nazarene*, featuring a standout contribution from Roderick Williams, is similarly striking, as are the performances and recording." - **Classical Music Magazine**

"Conductor Nicholas Kok keeps everything under able control with a clear sense of the structure and texture of Birtwistle's music." - **Robert Hugill**

"The performances themselves, by the BBC Singers and the Nash Ensemble, conducted by Nicholas Kok, are staggeringly good: secure, expressive and extraordinarily supple." - **Europadisc**

"Significantly, Kok has the singers work in close tandem with instrumentalists. At times the blend of sound, where the vocal overlaps precisely and intimately with the wind instruments in particular, is striking. At all times the two groups truly do the intricacies of all of Birtwistle's music here proud.

The performers, though, never defeat or confound our ability to connect cleanly with the music. It remains clear and transparent in every component. Crescendo, large variations in dynamic, frequent rallentando and accelerando passages are typical of Birtwistle's sense of drama and impact on the listener. Here Kok and his forces handle them with great style.

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The style of choral singing which Kok elicits from the BBC Singers in all the works on this CD is perhaps at its most expressive in this piece [On the Sheer Threshold of the Night]. It's a practised, unified, yet well-conceived style of singing which suggests vividly that there is a multiplicity of depths and breadths to Birtwistle's subject matter...It is quite an achievement. You cannot afford to miss this CD." - **Mark Sealey, *Musicweb International***

### **Harrison Birtwistle, *Moth Requiem* – UK Premiere Cadogan Hall, BBC Proms (August 2013)**

"The BBC Singers plus players from the Nash Ensemble gave a virtuoso performance." – **Michael Church, *The Independent***

"The Monday-lunchtime recital by the BBC Singers with members of the Nash Ensemble, under Nicholas Kok, showed that Cadogan Hall is tremendously hospitable, too, to a small chorus, albeit one of unsurpassed professional dexterity. Their stimulating programme united ancient, modern and brand-new English music." – **Paul Driver, *The Sunday Times***

### **Recording of Kenneth Hesketh's *Theatre of Attractions* Psappa (April 2013)**

"Psappa's playing under Nicholas Kok is emotionally compelling, driven and utterly tuned into Hesketh's creative aesthetic. The disc as a whole provides an illuminating cross-section of the composer's chamber output." – **Music Web International**

### **SAUL, Braunschweig**

"Musikalisch hat Nicholas Kok als Spezialist für Alte Musik das Mögliche erarbeitet und läßt durch das engagierte Staatsorchester einen "Philharmonischen Händel" mit Ansätzen an historische Aufführungspraxis erklingen, was zum groß und abwechslungsreich instrumentierten "Saul" auch hervorragend passt, sollte bei der Programmplanung der nächsten Zeit in Richtung dieses Repertoires weitergedacht werden, hätte man eine gute Plattform." – **Martin Freitag, *Opernfreund.de***

"Als auch das wie verwandelt spielende Staatsorchester, das unter Nicholas Kok keine Wünsche an federnder Rhythmik, klug eingesetzter dynamischer Akzentgebung und festlicher Kraftentfaltung offen ließ. Ergänzt um Theorbe und Cembalo entstand so ein festlich-barockes Klangbild voller Feinheiten, abrupter Charakterwechsel und delikater Begleitung. Auch die Chöre glänzten dabei mit prägnantem Ton." – **Andreas Berger, *Braunschweiger Zeitung***

"Das Staatsorchester Braunschweig bringt unter der Leitung von Nicholas Kok Händels Musik zum Glänzen, hält sich da, wo der Gesang im Mittelpunkt steht, dezent im Hintergrund und bietet so ein gutes Fundament für das intime Spiel der Protagonisten auf der Bühne. Nicht zu vergessen der Chor des Staatstheaters Braunschweig..... der ebenfalls Glanzpunkte zu setzen vermag." – **Sascha Ruczinski, *Opernnetz***

"Man war gespannt, wie weit sich das Staatsorchester auf historische Spielweise einließ – das Ergebnis konnte sich wirklich hören lassen. Nicholas Kok sorgte am Pult für zügige Tempi und animierte zu schlankem Musizieren, sodass trotz moderner Instrumente ein schlackenloser, transparenter Klang aus dem Graben kam." – **Der Opernfreund**

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### **Bach Brandenburg Concerto No. 1 & 5, Bach Double Concerto, Haydn Symphony No. 94 Staatsorchester Braunschweig**

"Dabei hatte Nicholas Kok am Pult die dynamischen Satzzeichen prägnant ausgereizt, mit sehr flotten Allegri und sehr getragendem Adagio, dessen vereinzelte Schlussnoten er veratmen ließ wie einen letzten Seufzer.

So kam Kok als Dirigent erst bei Haydns Sinfonie Nr. 94 wieder zur Geltung, die in klassischer Aufgeräumtheit strahlte. Wenn im Andante in Geigenmelodie und Streicherzupfen die Pauken- und Orchesterschläge reinfahren, macht das noch heute Effekt: „mit dem Paukenschlag“ heißt das Werk seither im Untertitel. Das Menuetto kam mit ländlerhafter Erdung, das Allegro in leichtfüßiger Eleganz. Nunmehr herzlicher Applaus im fast ausverkauften Saal."

"Das Staatsorchester Braunschweig, das gewiss nicht allzu oft mit der Partitur eines Barockwerks konfrontiert wird, konnte unter der einfühlsamen Leitung des britischen Dirigenten Nicholas Kok die in die Musiker gesetzten Erwartungen mehr als nur erfüllen." - **Udo Pacult, *Der Neue Merkur***

### **New Year Gala, Scottish Chamber Orchestra**

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"A well-chosen programme and a well-chosen conductor are the requisites of a Viennese New Year – along with a well-chosen orchestra – and if Vienna failed on one of these counts this year, Edinburgh got all of them right. Nicholas Kok was an inspired choice for the SCO's concert on Saturday (to be repeated this week in Dumfries and Ayr), alert to every nicety of the music, amusingly responsive to the audience and witty in the way he featured intrusions by unrelated composers upon what was otherwise almost entirely an evening of Johann Strauss the Younger.

Compared with earlier in the day in Vienna, where the chilly Franz Welser Most was in charge, this was an evening in which

bonhomie formed part of some beautifully textured performances in which warmth of detail, complete with two sorts of horn, shone through the familiar notes. The waltzes, including the structurally irregular Roses from the South, were sharply defined, and the polkas, including a sizzling Thunder and Lightning, were delivered with a sense of contrast.

Nothing surpassed the bizarre Egyptian March or the seamless flow of Perpetuum Mobile, in which the SCO displayed Strauss's flair for instrumental colour to the full and the conductor refrained from saying "And so on" at the end – his solution to how to finish this masterpiece seemed more Viennese.

But the non-Viennese elements also contributed to the success. Being a devotee of music more modern, Kok saw the point of planting the rhythmic tics of Stravinsky's Polka for Circus Elephants amid the strains of old Vienna. Getting soprano soloist Gillian Keith to exploit the coloratura virtuosity of the Titania polonaise – neither waltz nor polka – from Ambroise Thomas's Mignon also seemed in the context a stroke of genius." - **Conrad Wilson, *Glasgow Herald***

### **Orfeo ed Euridice, Opera North at Edinburgh International Festival**

"The musical direction by Nicholas Kok was lightsome and joyous." - **Roymond Monelle, *Independent***

"Under Nicholas Kok, the music flows cleanly and effortlessly" - **Kenneth Walton, *The Scotsman***

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"Nicholas Kok conducts a fleet, urgent reading of the score, the chorus and orchestra are on top form."

- **David Blewitt, *The Stage***

"Nicholas Kok works wonders with an orchestra using modern instruments to play in more or less authentic style...The playing is consistently crisp and agile." - **Martin Dreyer, *Yorkshire Evening Press***

"sous la direction de Nicholas Kok, la version en noir et blanc donnée, mercredi 1 September, d'Orfeo ed Euridice avance ses pions avec un assurance majestueuse qui remplit son contrat: faire voir la musique sans que l'on cesse pour autant de l'écouter."

- **Rosita Boisseau, *La Monde***

## Stravinsky with Birmingham Royal Ballet

"Stravinsky's score, played by the Royal Ballet Sinfonia conducted by Nicholas Kok, shimmered with beauty."

- **Debra Craine, *The Times***

"Nicholas Kok conducted with great distinction." - **Robert Beale, *Manchester Evening News***

"Nicholas Kok finding the magic of the Fairy's Kiss" - **Richard Edmonds, *The Stage***

## Gluck 'Orphee', Staatstheater Stuttgart

"Since the cutting edge of Spuck's treatment is primarily dance, for conductor Nicholas Kok this obviously was an interpretative constraint. Yet Kok's conducting was both wonderfully spirited in attack and studiously and appropriately stable. He reconciled the differing expressive requirements of singers and dancers with careful awareness of both, in a stylish, continuously engaging performance of Gluck's cool intense structural classicism." - **Opera Now**

"The State orchestra played in splendid, dynamically differentiated form. The allegro-parts were swiftly and precisely articulated by the string sections, the "Dance of the blessed Spirits", taken (performed) in a floating manner, had a warm sound, a plentiful expression despite a carefully restricted vibrato. The winds contributed with contrasting colour-dots: Trumpets and horns with metallic authenticity, flutes and clarinets demonstrated once more the radicalism of this score. The chorus was allowed to act on the scene -...-and sang light French vowels with a beautiful sound. Chorus and orchestra in world conquering mood: due to Nicholas Kok at the conductor's desk." - **Stuttgarter Zeitung**

"Nicholas Kok conducts the beautiful composition in a stylistically precise, transparent and chamber orchestral way. He holds the beautifully playing State orchestra and the stage together with a supremely good hand, delicately precise but getting excitingly dramatic where the action requires it. A tone longer or shorter held, a reinforcement of the tone, a slowing down of the tempo, a trill, one passage can destroy the effect of a scene completely" Gluck wrote. Nicholas Kok seemed to be aware of this as well as Christian Spuck" - **Loco**

"... the sensitive playing of the State orchestra impresses with precise and expressive string cascades, crystal clear wings and appealing cadenzas in the oboes and flutes and, under the leadership of the baroque expert Nicholas Kok, understands superbly the art of combining chamber musical baroque sound with symphonic brilliance." - **Suedkurier**

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"Included in the frenetic cheering was also the State orchestra which was driven to play in a rather swift but also in a lovingly articulated way by Nicholas Kok." - **Neuer Merker**

"And also the orchestra under the leadership of Nicholas Kok who does a good job with a clearly structured, transparent and yet juicy sound." - **Neue Musikzeitung**

"...the cheer was for... the agile playing orchestra under the direction of Nicholas Kok..." - **Neue Zuercher**

"The conductor Nicholas Kok... with the small and concentrated Staatsorchester produces a wonderfully varied sound. He sets off early classical "dynamic rockets". He approaches it with toughness but the musicians can also flatter." - **Suedwest Presse**

"...requirements which the English conductor Nicholas Kok and the State orchestra met since they obviously seem familiar with playing in an historically correct musical manner: A very vivid and determined (focused) playing, highly expressive and full of (friction) tension when concerned with the buzzing rejection which snarls (growls) at Orpheus as he faces the underworld." - **Badische Zeitung**

"Whilst the conductor Nicholas Kok leads the score in a swift and solemn (festive) way..." - **Canstatter Zeitung**

"The long lasting applause was also meant for Nicholas Kok who, as the conductor, brilliantly coordinated the orchestra and the soloists." - **Giessener Allgemeine**

"It was a great success under Nicholas Kok's musical direction because Gluck's music sounded almost modern in its many dimensions as well as being appealingly dramatic with ironic undertones in the part of Amor." - **Heilbronner Stimme**

## Dido and Aeneas/Les Noces, Opera North

"Hearing Dido and Aeneas is almost worth the price of a ticket – that, and Kok's immaculate stewardship of the Orchestra's stirring strings." - **Neil Fisher, The Times**

"[Les Noces:] the singers, four grand pianos and five percussionists produce a performance of startling precision under Nicholas Kok's disciplined beat. [Dido and Aeneas:] Kok's persuasive manipulation of the tactus and the string's strong phrasing." - **Anna Picard, Independent on Sunday**

"[Les Noces:] The performance, under the musical direction of Nicholas Kok, went by in a flash. [Dido and Aeneas:] Kok's conducting ensured an unobtrusive "period" lightness of touch and sureness of pace." - **Paul Driver, Sunday Times**

"what this daring double-bill lacks in visual appeal it more than makes up for in musical and dramatic power." - **Peter Latham, British Theatre Guide**

"Kok and the Opera North Orchestra as baroque band were magisterial." - **Manchester Evening News**

"Nicholas Kok was the impressive conductor of both works." - **Patric Standford, Yorkshire Post**

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### Stravinsky double bill, Edinburgh International Festival

"...underpinned by superb playing from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Nicholas Kok." - **The Herald**

"Nicholas Kok conducts a stirring performance from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra." - **Independent**

### BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra - Hear and Now

"Scintillating, but ending with the soft dry thwack of a bass drum, it was the event of the night, superbly conducted by Nicholas Kok." - **Conrad Wilson, The Herald**

"The piece comes across as more than just an exercise in structure, especially with Nicholas Kok bringing out the dancing rhythms" - **Rowena Smith, Guardian**