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# Nicholas McGegan

## Selected Reviews

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### ***L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* Curtis Opera Theatre (November 2023)**

"With the 1740 Milton-inspired 'pastoral ode' *L'Allegro il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, Curtis Opera Theatre continued its fine track record with Handel stage works to the benefit of its students as well as the Philadelphia audience. ... The student singers and instrumentalists clear benefited from Nicholas McGegan's experienced and generally crisp leadership in the pit."

– David Shengold, *Opera Magazine*

### ***Bach St John Passion* Cantata Collective (CD – AVIE Records, June 2023)**

"The recording, made in concert at the First Congregational Church of Berkeley in March 2022, captures an intimate, detailed, and warm acoustic. It's billed as a "live" recording yet the audience is silent throughout. In all, this is a beautifully performed and recorded St. John Passion that gives full measure to the work's remarkable synthesis of devotional and theatrical elements." – Ken Melzer, *Early Music America*

"...the overall experience of this exceptionally well-recorded live performance is one of attending a highly meaningful church service even if one does not happen to be a member of the particular denomination for which the music was created."

– InfoDad.com

"The live sound engineering is marvelous, making the choir sound like a much larger group (there is no applause) and defining big spaces where the singers have room to define the text closely." – James Manheim, *ALLMusic Review*

### ***Mozart Violin Concertos* Gil Shaham and SWR Symphony Orchestra (CD – SWR Music, May 2022)**

Pair Gil Shaham with a versatile orchestra directed by such an enlightened musician as Nicholas McGegan and the outcome is a pragmatic hybrid of historical and traditional performance styles. – Robin Stowell, *The Strad*

### ***Early Horn Concertos* Swedish Chamber Orchestra and Alec Frank-Gemmill (CD - BIS)**

"Nicholas McGegan is equally at home in this repertory, meanwhile. The Swedish Chamber Orchestra play with wonderful freshness and finesse, and there's a flawless sense of ensemble between Frank-Gemmill and the solo strings in the Sinfonia da camera. An exceptional disc" – Tim Ashley, *Gramophone*

"This is an outstanding collection, in which Frank-Gemmill's stratospheric virtuosity, on three different instruments, is elegantly counterpointed by Nicholas McGegan's buoyantly sympathetic direction." – Julian Haylock, *BBC Music Magazine*

### ***La Gloria di primavera* Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra (CD)**

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Nicholas McGegan leads his chorus and period orchestra in nicely polished, stylistically assured performances

**George Loomis, *Opera Magazine***

### ***The Seven Ages of Shakespeare with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Chorus*** **Birmingham Symphony Hall, June 2016**

If any conductor can make a programme like this fly, it's Nicholas McGegan. [...] He opened Nicolai's Merry Wives of Windsor overture with a radiant sweep of sound, drawing the string tone up from the basses with a batonless wave of the hand, then bouncing up and down like he was mounted on springs as the Allegro hurtled away. [...] Sullivan's bubbly Merchant of Venice suite was cut down to a mere three movements, and McGegan positively supercharged them. [...] McGegan [...] can hold an audience breathless. [...] McGegan, beaming with enjoyment and looking at times as if he was about to start bodypopping, draped violin lines artlessly over Purcell's [excerpts from The Fairy Queen] melancholy plaints, detonated volleys of trumpets and timpani, and shaped big, dramatic dynamic contrasts.

- **Richard Bratby, *theartsdesk.com***

### ***Haydn, Mozart and Leclair with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra*** **City Halls Glasgow, January 2016**

I have never known conductor Nicholas McGegan turn out a dull, lifeless or routine performance with an orchestra. It's simply not in his nature. He's a dynamo, a true animator, an energiser and an ignition point from which music can take off and take wing. McGegan and his orchestra, absolutely flying and in terrific form, roared through Leclair's Scylla et Glaucus and a fabulous account of Haydn's Military Symphony, with nice musical control of the seismic percussiveness that can be too-easily overwhelming.

- ***The Herald***

It required a change in game plan for an orchestra more used to the opulence of later music, evident in a scaled-down string section that embraced the required style – clean, gutsy playing from front desk to back that gave buoyancy and precision, in particular to Haydn's Symphony No 100 (the Military), which oozed wit, theatre and charisma. Thrusting exuberance ignited the percussive eccentricities of the Haydn symphony, and brought thrills and spills to Jean-Marie Leclair's music from Scylla et Glaucus, tightly packaged in McGegan's own concert arrangement.

- ***The Scotsman***

### ***Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the Royal Northern Sinfonia and Chorus*** **The Sage Gateshead, April 2015**

Conductor Nicholas McGegan's gestures were economic, but each counted as he kept an eye on the bigger picture [...] It was a breathtaking performance that fulfilled every expectation.

- **Gavin Engelbrecht, *The Northern Echo***

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### **Teseo**

#### **Philharmonia Baroque (PBP07)**

"Nicholas McGegan leads the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra to give light and sprightly playing. The sound produced is extremely pleasing." – **John T. Hughes, *International Record Review***

### **Mozart at the Hollywood Bowl Los Angeles Philharmonic in August 2014**

"McGegan kept the all-Mozart concept fresh by dipping into some relatively underexposed territory in Mozart's vast catalog, investing everything with the zesty tempos and life-affirming spirits for which he is known." – **Richard S. Ginell, *The Los Angeles Times***

### **Vivaldi, Piazzola and Handel at the Hollywood Bowl Los Angeles Philharmonic in August 2014**

"McGegan, who makes everything he conducts look as if it's more fun than anything, simply jumped in, and Chalifour and the small string orchestra had no choice but to follow." – **Mark Swed, *The Los Angeles Times***

### **Handel *Acis and Galatea* (arr. by Mozart) Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra in April 2014**

"Mr. McGegan and the Philharmonia forces were a constant source of life and sensuous colour."  
– **Alastair Macaulay, *The New York Times***

"Under the rousing direction of Nicholas McGegan, [Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra's] glorious rendering of the music, with a terrific assist from the Philharmonia Chorale, had us transfixed throughout." – **Carla Escoda, *The Huffington Post***

"The enormous pleasure of this production is in the effusively engaging conducting of McGegan and his fine period instrument orchestra and chorus." – **Mark Swed, *The Los Angeles Times***

### **Hommage a Trois; Arias and Duets by Haydn, Mozart and Cimarosa Scottish Chamber Orchestra (Linn CKD428)**

"Nicholas McGegan leads with total understanding and support and the modern-instrument Scottish Chamber Orchestra plays with perfect eighteenth-century style." – **Robert Levine, *International Record Review***

"Whichever composer they're engaged with, Nicholas McGegan and his Scottish players offer spry and alert musicianship throughout, making a particular highlight of the sinfonia from Cimarosa's miniature monodrama."

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- George Hall, *Opera Magazine*

"The Scottish Chamber Orchestra's characterful accompaniments under Nicholas McGegan's expert baton prove advantageous at every turn." – **Max Loppert, *BBC Music Magazine***

### **Beethoven Symphonies No. 4, Op. 60 & No. 7 Op. 92 (PBP06) Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra**

"Those similarities are brilliantly brought out by Nicholas McGegan and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra of San Francisco, in performances that nicely take note of period practice using original instruments without labouring the point... McGegan, British-born and –trained, who has made his mark in the US and elsewhere, seems intent on presenting each work without too much interference or idiosyncratic underlining." – **Edward Greenfield, *Gramophone Magazine***

"...these freshly minted and energetic readings of two Beethoven symphonies fare altogether better. McGegan understands that for all outwardly jubilant character, this music has a tensile strength and rigour about it. That essential seriousness of intent registers powerfully in his watchful textural layering during the introduction, where dynamic shading is also excellently managed. It is McGegan's rhythmic exactitude and alertness that often brings that description fully to life in this engaging and athletic performance. Advocates of authentic performance practice should find much to admire in McGegan's fresh-faced, vital readings." – **Michael Jameson, *International Record Review***

### **Orchestra of St. Luke's Carnegie Hall**

"The stage door opened, and Mr. McGegan bounded out to the podium, beaming and exuding enthusiasm. This, not the opening bars of Mozart's Symphony No. 29 in A (K. 201), was the real start of the concert, which turned out to be one of the most appealing, satisfying performances I have heard this season... There is something about his abundant zeal and affection that seems to enhance his work in the Baroque and Classical repertory he favours." – **Steve Smith, *New York Times***

### **Teseo, Philharmonia Baroque**

"On Thursday evening the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, led by Nicholas McGegan, gave a performance of Handel's *Teseo* at the Herbst Theater here that confirmed its leading position in the field. For the most part it was the irrepressible positive energy of the orchestra that breathed life into this three-and-a-half-hour performance." - **Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, *The New York Times* (April 2013)**

### **Messiah, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra**

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Rayfield Allied  
Southbank House,  
Black Prince Road,  
London SE1 7SJ, UK  
[www.rayfieldallied.com](http://www.rayfieldallied.com)  
E-mail [info@rayfieldallied.com](mailto:info@rayfieldallied.com)  
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"Handel would utilize whatever forces were available when performing his Messiah and likely to have an orchestra of the size so expertly directed by Nicholas McGegan here. McGegan's balancing act was so astutely deployed that the BSO were never compromised, all solo accompaniments beautifully poised." - **Bournemouth Echo**

### Handel: *Atalanta* with Philharmonia Baroque (CD)

"The Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra excel at detailed sensitive accompaniment of singers, whether playful or sentimental, and Nicholas McGegan's gently charismatic conducting lavishes obvious TLC upon one of Handel's most light-hearted lesser-known gems." – **Paul Riley, Gramophone**

"McGegan directs with incisive intelligence, drawing wonderfully spirited playing from the Philharmonia Baroque" – **Paul Riley, BBC Music Magazine**

### Haydn: *Symphonies Nos. 88, 101 and 104* with Philharmonia Baroque (CD)

"McGegan's period band follows the release of a stunning disc of Berlioz and Handel (sung by the late mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt Lieberson) with this highly enjoyable album of late Haydn symphonies, recorded in concerts at Berkeley's First Congregational Church from 2007 to 2009.

Even in a field crowded with period-instrument Haydn symphony recordings, McGegan's vigorous, charismatic readings compel your attention. Tempos are well chosen, never hectic or driven, as some "authentic" versions tend to be. The 50-odd players take to their conductor's crisp articulations and buoyant phrasings so well that the music speaks with an appealing naturalness.

When McGegan does intervene — note the explosive bursts of timpani in the slow movement of No. 88, and the lusty whoops of the valveless horns in the opening Presto of the "Clock" — it's always to bring out Papa Haydn's charm and good humor.

The fact that the performances were caught on the wing, in clear, truthful sound, seals the deal. Highly recommended."

- **John von Rhein, Chicago Tribune [Album of the week]**

### Berlioz: *Les Nuits d'Ete*; Handel: *Arias* - Lorraine Hunt Lieberson (CD)

"under McGegan's discerning discretion the transparent period sonorities make you marvel more than ever at the atmospheric delicacy of Berlioz's orchestration" – **Gramophone Magazine**

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### Messiah, BBC Proms

"I have never heard a more uplifting Messiah, or a choral event which more perfectly answered the requirements of the auditorium's vast space. McGegan may be a period-performance man, but what he brought out was the sheer drama of the work, in which almost every chorus and aria is an emotional roller-coaster." - **Michael Church, *Independent***

"In terms of expression, too, the singing was sensitively conceived and brilliantly executed. Much of the credit should go to Nicholas McGegan, who led with even judgment mixed with infectious enthusiasm." - **Guy Dammann, *Guardian***

"Something amazing happened at the Proms last night – a performance of Handel's Messiah that was fresh, edgy and exciting." **Petroc Trelawny, *Daily Telegraph***

### Orlando, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra

"McGegan led a brisk, vigorous performance, and the orchestra sounded fine..." - **Allan Koznin, *New York Times***

"McGegan conducted with animation and ease, a strong rapport between the entire orchestra. Clearly McGegan's twenty-five years conducting Philharmonia Baroque have created an enviable connection among musicians, allowing them to achieve such coherent and masterful performances. Everyone on stage seemed engaged, excited, and delighted to be present and performing. [...] This exciting and lively production is a testament to the calibre of artistry of Nicholas McGegan and his Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra." - **Cashman Kerr Prince, *The Boston Musical Intelligencer***

"The magician-in-chief was Nicholas McGegan, who conducted his Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra Sunday afternoon with unflagging energy and led five exemplary singers through their gruelling paces in the solo roles." - **Mike Silverman, *Huffington Post***

"The performance, with Nicholas McGegan conducting his philharmonia Baroque, offered rich rewards in the score's sheer quality" - **Opera Magazine**

"From the opening notes, McGegan gave off a smile that remained in place for the entire performance and, through the final chorus some three-and-one-quarter hours later, the fusion of 18<sup>th</sup>-century music and drama was a sheer delight at every turn." - **Dennis Polkow, *Chicago Classical Review***

"McGegan presided with genial vigor, encouraging and enjoying the extravagance." - **Matthew Guerrieri, *Boston Globe***

"The hero was Nicholas McGegan, who guided his Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra of San Francisco through the operatic cabals, curlicues and convolutions, anno 1733, with gusto and savoir-faire, also infectious affection." - **Matrin Bernheimer, *Financial Times***

### Teseo, Göttingen Handel Festival

"...in his final season as artistic director of Göttingen's International Handel Festspiele, Nicholas McGegan and stage director Catherine Turocy have provided a stylish and entertaining production which brought the normally reticent first night audience to its feet." - **Catriona Graham, *The Opera Critic***

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"it was McGegan's Göttingen Festival Orchestra which surely brought the initially reserved, ultimately genial audience to its feet" - **David Nice, *The Arts Desk***

"After a tenure of 20 years, this was McGegan's final season as musical director of the festival. His expertly paced and beautifully played (by the festival orchestra) *Teseo* was one of the finest operas I've heard from him there, appropriately tender in Agilea's music and thrillingly dramatic in Medea's outbursts." - **Brian Robins, *Opera Magazine***

## Scottish Chamber Orchestra

"The performance was outstanding, with the SCO alert and responsive to McGegan throughout... [he] went deliberately over the top with it, making it riotously entertaining. An outstanding achievement that will linger in the memory of those who heard it long after its final chords die away." - **Tim Ashley, *The Guardian***

"Charismatic conductor Nicholas McGegan can always be relied upon to awaken fresh thoughts in music from the Baroque or classical periods. In Haydn's unashamedly programmatic score, he took every opportunity to colour its nuances, to exaggerate its imagery tastefully, but above all, to flavour its mood swings with a sense of drama that always remained well within stylistic bounds." - **Kenneth Walton, *The Scotsman***

## Messiah, RSNO

"It's a fact of musical life that conductor Nicholas McGegan is a wizard. He can make music soar in apparent defiance of gravity [...] The faster the music became, the lighter was McGegan's touch, with lots of detached notes, scrupulously-placed accents to

articulate pulse and rhythm, and a delivery at high speed that was pristine in its clarity. Nothing was exaggerated; everything was intimate and understated. It winged by and, quite exceptionally, was a genuinely enthralling Messiah." - **Michael Tumelty, *Glasgow Herald***

## Mendelssohn, Beamish and Beethoven, BBC SSO

"Has conductor Nicholas McGegan ever given, or drawn from an orchestra, a routine or pedestrian performance? If so, I've never heard it, and it's not on the record. He is by no means underrated – he's a world figure – but one wonders sometimes if his stature is fully appreciated.

Last night's varied concert demonstrated the range of this magic man. His technique, as was evident throughout his culminating and scorching performance of Mendelssohn's Scottish Symphony, was on full display. It is unorthodox, to say the least. He uses no baton and has an extraordinary armoury of gestures: the McGegan hap-sway, the body bounce, the over-arm delivery; the left-foot stomp (very Steve Martland), the double-shoulder shrug and the excavation technique, involving both arms and extending from the shoulders to the knees.

However it all translates and transmits to the orchestra, it ignited a performance of electric concentration and momentum from the SSO in a compelling Mendelssohn Three whose focus never wavered.

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Momentum, in fact, is one of McGegan's gifts and weapons; and by momentum I do not mean speed. It characterised his lucid account of Sally Beamish's distinguished concerto for orchestra, entitled *Sangsters*, whose triple-time first movement had a wondrous sense of flow that was entirely down to McGegan.

And it informed every nuance of his cracking accompaniment to Robert Levin's daredevil, scintillatingly provocative performance of Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto with its infectious embellishments, hair-raisingly improvised cadenza, and buccaneering delivery. A splendid night." – **Michael Tumely, *The Herald***

## Orlando, Göttingen Handel Festival

"Nicholas McGegan's FestspielOrchester Göttingen played with their customary élan, the conductor being ever alert to the needs of the singers." – **Sandra Bowdler, *Opera Magazine***

## Mendelssohn and Rameau, BBCSSO

"Anything Nicholas McGegan conducts, he does so like a boy with a new toy. His bouncy, bubbling style is infectious; his genuine charisma lights up most performances. Last night was no exception [...] Nothing was held back in a performance that fired brilliantly on all cylinders." – **Kenneth Walton, *The Scotsman***

"McGegan was at his dancing exuberant best in the finale of Felix Mendelssohn's Italian Symphony, a fiery sparkling reading of what is actually the best bit of a work much better known for its opening" – **Keith Bruce, *Glasgow Herald***

## Edinburgh International Festival

"conducted with implacable intensity by McGegan" – **Tim Ashley, *The Guardian***

"McGegan revealed far more syncopation than I ever knew existed in this score: very engaging, especially in the guitar-accompanied choruses." – **Andrew Clark, *Financial Times***

"characterful and zesty performance from conductor Nicholas McGegan and the SCO" – **Michael Tumelty, *Glasgow Herald***

"the unstoppable McGegan at his blindingly energetic best" – **Michael Tumelty, *Glasgow Herald***

"the fizzing enthusiasm of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Nicholas McGegan" – **Hilary Finch, *The Times***

"Nicholas McGegan's sprightly conducting of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra" – **Hugh Canning, *Sunday Times***

"Nicholas McGegan's well-paced performance" – **Sandy Scott, *The Scotsman***

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## La Gloria di primavera (CD)

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