
Paul McCreesh

Selected Reviews

Elgar *The Dream of Gerontius* Recording, Gabrieli Consort, Signum Records (April 2024)

"This is not just another recording of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*. Following his gargantuan recreations of early performances of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Berlioz's *Grande Messe des morts*, conductor Paul McCreesh has again delivered a splendid recording of special interest."

"McCreesh lays out much of the choral music with amplitude and captures a very English feeling of sanctity in this wide-ranging score, which brings Anglican chant and anthem into a fruitful embrace with Wagnerian opera."

- **Richard Fairman, *Financial Times***

"McCreesh brings an impressive control of contrasting tempos to the polyphonic, multicolour orchestration that forms such an intrinsic part of the work.

". . . The principal reason why I was moved to return to this recording numerous times is McCreesh's differentiated response to the range of choral styles Elgar asks of in his score, and which allows the chorus to function, when required, as a truly involved 'collective' character

"Most of all, [the recording]'s expressive choral and orchestral merits, to quote the words of Newman's angel, as such that it 'will gladden thee, bit it will pierce thee too.'"

- **Jeremy Dibble, *Gramophone***

"This stunning recording burrows deep down into Elgar's magical score . . . McCreesh steers the ship with unerring focus."

- **Dan Cairns, *The Times***

"Throughout the oratorio, McCreesh's orchestra makes a wonderful sound."

"Paul McCreesh conducts the work very well indeed. It's evident that he has prepared both the orchestra and chorus thoroughly for this assignment."

- **John Quinn, *Music Web International***

"This is a surpassingly wonderful account...McCreesh unfolds the Prelude with a subtle control of shape and dynamics, and an awareness of wind colours throughout the whole performance...this wonderful, humane performance."

- **Christopher Morley, *Slipped Disc***

Haydn *The Creation*, Minnesota Orchestra, Orchestra Hall Minnesota (April 2023)

"Friday's was the most enjoyable Minnesota Orchestra concert this season. Led by English conductor Paul McCreesh (who also translated the oratorio's text), it was as big and bold an interpretation as one could wish for a work that's basically about the beginning of everything. ...Overseeing it all with insight, energy and charisma was McCreesh..."

- **Rob Hubbard, *StarTribune***

Filharmonia Poznanska, Haydn London Symphony & Beethoven C Major Mass (January 2020)

"The entire audience was concentrated on McCreesh. Not without reason, as with his entire being he expressed all the musical nuances intended by the composer"

- **Daria Zadrożniak, *Ruch Muzyczny***

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Recording CD: *An English Coronation*, Gabrieli Consort, Signum Classics SIGCD569 (May 2019)

"A project delivered with McCreesh's customary attention to detail...it's a labour of love and sounds it...Incisive in the orchestral works – what scintillating woodwind playing he secures in Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 1 – McCreesh is at his considerable best in the choral items."

- Paul Riley, *BBC Music Magazine******

"On his tireless voyage of ceremonial and liturgical reconstruction, Paul McCreesh's 20th-century coronation anthology is arguably his most ambitious and intricate to date... Well-articulated insights into the rich theatrical dimension of this quartet of coronations work best in the large works, all of which sound spectacular in the ringing acoustic... One can imagine the virtuosity required by every contributor, at every turn, to make this a reality, let alone a dazzling triumph."

- Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, *Gramophone*

"Elgar's sombre, introspective *Coronation March* is performed with real style, the articulation crisp, the transparent orchestral sound allowing every detail to register... Experience and innocence collide to staggering musical and sonic effect: listen to this lot in Parry's *I Was Glad* or Handel's *Zadok the Priest* and be amazed at the visceral punch of these forces at full pelt. Girding, anointing, oblation and 'orb delivery' are omitted, but otherwise we get a remarkable sense of what being sat in Westminster Abbey must have been like... Walton's *Coronation Te Deum* is sensational, as is *Crown Imperial*, these pieces surrounding David Matthews's exquisite, newly commissioned *Recessional*, which leads straight into his arrangement of the *National Anthem*. Its second verse features almost 1,000 performers, massed trumpets and bells suggesting Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*. A treat, even for those with republican leanings. Signum's production values are exemplary, the two CDs presented in a covetable hardback book. Really, really impressive, and fun to boot."

- Graham Rickson, *The Arts Desk*

Mozart & Tchaikovsky, Kammerorchester Basel (May 2019)

"The impulses he gives to the interpretation with his eloquent hands are perfectly enough."

- Gerhard Dietel, *Mittelbayerische*

Handel *Messiah*, Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal (December 2018)

"... the delivery of the singers and instrumentalists of the OSM led by Paul McCreesh was quite exceptional ... Like that of Nikolaus Harnoncourt, and others, the *Messiah* of McCreesh is not one to exhaust itself in the first part, that devoted to the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah and the Nativity. It reveals itself and is consumed in the second part, that of Passion and triumph, with a radiance that lasts in the third, that of life after death. ... With high demands, Paul McCreesh went almost as far as Trevor Pinnock with the *Violons du Roy* four years ago. And the OSM has been admirable of precision, proving that the eloquence in this repertoire is more a question of rhetoric than of instruments."

- Christophe Huss, *Le Devoir*

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Recording: Haydn *The Seasons*, Gabrieli Consort & Players, Wrocław Baroque Orchestra, National Forum of Music Choir (Spring 2017)

"McCreesh clearly relishes the sheer range of colours which the period instruments are able to bring to Haydn's music, this is a recording which is full of colour ... by rediscovering the work's essential qualities and not trying for portentousness, McCreesh has enabled me to enjoy the work far more for its own qualities ... some period instrument performances simply re-work a piece into a pre-conceived image, but here McCreesh has enabled us to listen to Haydn's *The Seasons* with new ears."

- Planet Hugill

"A musical hit from McCreesh"

- Trouw

"Substantial choral and orchestral forces captured in sound that is both expansive and immediate."

- Recording of the Month, ClassicalMusic.com

"For the first time this recording aims to present a period performance on an authentically grand scale... Paul McCreesh conducts his own English version, perfectly enunciated by the British/Polish choir, and the communal sense of joy is infectious. The three soloists are first-rate. So is the recording. An uplifting performance all-round." - *Financial Times*

"...this recording brings [The Seasons] thrillingly to life... Paul McCreesh assembles a massive throng of singers and players, the numbers that might have performed the piece in 1801. And what a noise they make! McCreesh's fresh new translation animates the top-class solo singing, while the massed choruses blow the roof off. Glorious."

- The Guardian

"This recording is well worth acquiring, to get to know one of Haydn's most treasurable works"

- Classic FM

Handel *Messiah*, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (December 2016)

"How do you keep Handel's great oratorio sounding fresh and relevant...? Hiring Paul McCreesh is one solution. The English conductor is a choral specialist, and he brought a rare clarity and dynamism to the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra's *Messiah*...McCreesh's take on Handel's masterpiece was bracingly direct and free of pomposity."

- Star Tribune

J.S. Bach *B Minor Mass*, Royal Northern Sinfonia (March 2016)

"McCreesh, a master in the art of conducting massed forces, led the line wonderfully... Everyone on stage showed total commitment to climbing this 'Everest', and the orchestral performances from all sections were of the highest quality... Full marks all round."

- Chronicle Live

Bach *St Matthew Passion*, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (October 2015)

"... it was the arresting vision of McCreesh and his confident way of bringing it into life that impressed the most... this was a performance so meticulously crafted that it was hard to find fault in anything... If you've longed for a concert that gives Bach the full measure of greatness that he deserves, you aren't going to find many that succeed as well as this."

- Twin Cities

"though his tempos were lively without feeling pushed — the crowd scenes, for instance, were delivered with special punch — the conductor managed to sustain the work's essential quality of introspection and repose."

- Star Tribune

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Recording: Britten War Requiem, Gabrieli Consort & Players (August 2015)

"McCreesh leads an electrifying and fastidiously detailed account of the Britten. Both choruses and orchestra are absolutely first-rate, and the recording, from performances in three different venues, is almost freakishly lifelike."

- *Dallas Morning News*

Wagner, Britten, Mozart, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (May 2015)

"McCreesh was a joy to watch, coaxing a dancing quality from the music at every opportunity, floating in place on the first movement and turning the minuet into a foot-stomping mazurka... this Mozart performance bore the earmarks of the kind of fresh, enthusiastic perspective that evangelists for the early often bring to their interpretations." - *Pioneer Press*

Mendelssohn *Elijah*, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Sydney Philharmonia Choir (May 2014)

"[The performance] brought the scale and force of Mendelssohn's gestures into spectacular focus. After a portentous opening, the angular orchestral fugue of the Overture led in a straight line to a startling, thrilling choral outburst Help Lord, which certainly gets straight to the point. In the hours that followed the musical precision and balance made absorbing listening... The Sydney Symphony Orchestra bristled and glowed with finesse."

- *Sydney Morning Herald*

Schubert, Prokofiev & Beethoven, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Ordway Center for the Performing Arts (February 2014)

"the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra - under the intensely taut direction of English conductor Paul McCreesh - gave an electrifying performance of Prokofiev's Second Violin Concerto, one that skillfully captured the contradictions roiling within the composer during the mid-1930s."

- *Pioneer Press*

Mendelssohn, Schumann, Schubert, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchester & Gabrieli Choir, Leipzig Gewandhaus (September 2013)

"After the interval the stage was set for a powerful, and powerfully eloquent, Walpurgis Night. The Gewandhausorchester's representation of blazing flames, the clamour of the poem's "torches and rattling sticks" and the fervent evocation of light made for a remarkable experience, filled with both spine-chilling savagery and quiet contemplation. The magnificent Gabrieli Consort provided the choruses, and every word of its heartfelt laments and furious howling came across clearly - listening to them is an experience you just never want to come to an end..."

And the tumultuous spirit of the music was matched by the enthusiastic applause in the packed hall. Schumann's *Nachtlied* (Night Song) for choir and orchestra provided a point of calm to counterbalance the turmoil that had gone before, bringing the concert to a dazzling close. But there had already been a moment of magic from the Gewandhausorchester and McCreesh in the first half of the concert, with Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*. The conductor reached deep into the jewellery box in the *Allegro moderato*, taking the movement at a sublime, unhurried pace to conjure forth delicate, flawless gems. In contrast, he focused more on individual sections in the *Andante con moto*, shaping them with energetic precision and drawing out beautiful solos from the clarinet, oboe and flute."

- *Leipziger Volkszeitung*

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Britten *War Requiem*, 1962, Gabrieli Consort & Players, Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra (Autumn 2013)

"McCreesh creates a vast crescendo and pauses for an awestruck moment before an incandescent Hosanna, with heart-stopping results. The Gabrielis and Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir are joined by a host of young voices, and it shows in a choral sound of airy, pure brilliance. His New College choristers have the ideal mix of celestial glow and nimble impatience; his orchestra is wonderfully articulate. And the sound picture has the greatest depth and range of all the recordings [of this work]... the profundity and coherence of McCreesh's recording sets a new standard for this work."

- **BBC Music Magazine*******

"The transparency of the textures and the crisp outlines are a delight. You hear more of the subcutaneous detail of Britten's scoring, I think, than on any previous recording. McCreesh opts for an all-British trio of soloists: Susan Gritton thrillingly hieratic, John Mark Ainsley a tenor very much in the Peter Pears mould, Christopher Maltman making every word matter."

- **The Guardian**

"Thrilling... sensationally good instrumental playing."

- **The Times**

"The McCreesh War Requiem...has the presence and intensity of a live cathedral performance: it sets new standards for this strangely moving choral work. The Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir projects the Latin liturgical texts with radiant luminosity, matched by the trebles of the Choir of New College, Oxford, while the three soloists – Susan Gritton, John Mark Ainsley and Christopher Maltman – combine poise and conviction. McCreesh brings astonishing clarity to the work's musical syntax: the performance culminates in a transformative 'Libera me.' Here is a recording worthy of the Britten centenary."

- **Financial Times*******

"Another triumphant realization of a complex, multi-layered work..."

- **Independent**

Schubert, Saint-Saëns, Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, with Sol Gabetta (cello) (March 2012)

"Paul McCreesh was down on the floor – right in front of the musicians, stirring each other almost in the style of chamber music. He leaned forward, jumped up on his toes and down to his knees. With energetic arms, he let the orchestra roar like a fire or fade to nothing in the melodic sequence. [...] Rarely has Schubert sounded so lively."

- **KPN**

Haydn *The Seasons*, The Barbican Centre, London (January 2012)

"McCreesh conducted it quite wonderfully, with an almost innate sense of its ebb and flow, summoning impeccable, incisive playing and some glorious choral singing from his Gabrieli Consort and Players."

- **The Guardian**

Mendelssohn *Elijah*, 1846, Gabrieli Consort & Players, Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra (Winged Lion) (2012)

"...The sound is massive when required, but the articulation is never unwieldy and there is delicacy too ... this is a triumph..."

- **Gramophone**

"...McCreesh has succeeded admirably in re-creating, as clearly as possible, the kind of impact this masterpiece must have made at its first performances ... here is singing of the highest international standard and musical intelligence..."

- **International Record Review**

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"...Paul McCreesh here totally re-imagines it: the big choruses are transparent as well as massively impressive – with young Gabrieli voices and a Polish choir in the lead – and there is no danger of religiosity in the fresh-voiced soloists ... In all, a spectacularly successful reinvention of the British choral tradition."
- Observer

"...The sound is tremendous ... but as in the recording of the *Grande Messe des Morts*, one of the striking aspects of the performance is the way that Paul McCreesh so naturally places the great set pieces within the context of a multifaceted expressive whole ... a definite first choice."
- The Daily Telegraph

"...A thrilling performance ... The sound is spectacular, just as it should be, right now there is no recording of *Elijah* to which I'd rather listen..."
- CD Review, BBC Radio Three

Recording: Berlioz *Grande Messe des Morts*, Gabrieli Consort & Players, Signum SIGCD280 (October 2011)

"The concept of Berlioz's Requiem Mass may embrace a certain element of grandiosity but, listening to this performance, it is impossible to forget that Berlioz was a supreme orchestrator and a composer with a broad dramatic talent."
- Gramophone

Mendelssohn *Elijah*, Gabrieli Consort and Players, Leipzig Gewandhaus (September 2011)

"The tremendous cry of 'Help, Lord!' bounced off the walls, and this first choral entry made it abundantly clear that this performance of *Elijah* was going to be something special; something significant. Two and a half hours later, it was even more than that: this was one of the most vivid performances of Mendelssohn, or indeed of any piece from the choral repertoire, that had been heard in Leipzig in recent times. Paul McCreesh and the Gabrieli Consort and Players, along with their choir of hundreds incorporating the Wrocław Philharmonic Choir, gave a full-on performance of Mendelssohn's biblical opera-oratorio, delivering the force of the Old Testament with unbridled power. And yet McCreesh balanced out the seething drama by lending his orchestra a classical spring to its step, and allowing it to breathe. And that is exactly what Mendelssohn's music is: the future, encased in the traditional."
- Leipziger Volkszeitung