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Pristine Audio continue to offer an intriguing mixture of the familiar and the unusual. Vanguard's 1952 version of Bloch's *Israel* Symphony remained the only recording for some years: no doubt the need for five vocal soloists in

the last of the symphony's three movements has contributed to its neglect. But it is an impressive work, given a committed performance by the Vienna State Opera Orchestra under Franz Litschauer. The recording is adequate, but has some unevenness and occasional distortion. The disc is completed by a good quality 1951 Philips recording of Bloch's *Schelomo*, played with passion and beauty of tone by the cello soloist Tibor de Machula. The Hague Residentie Orchestra under Willem van Otterloo is backwardly balanced, but gives whole-hearted support (© PASC199, 52mins).

Who would have thought that any record of Sir Thomas Beecham's wartime association with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra might have survived? Well, after a perilous journey through various sound carriers some third or fourth-generation material provides better quality than one would ever expect in 1943 performances which include Elgar's *Enigma* Variations, Wagner's *Fliegende Hollander* Overture and the Preludes to Acts I and III of *Meistersinger*. Live Beecham is always very special, and it is fascinating to hear how Sir Thomas gets an electric response from what was clearly a less than first-rate ensemble (© PASC212, 67mins).

Pristine's third volume of recordings by Alfred Hertz and the San Francisco Symphony contains French music and covers the total timespan of this ensemble's work for Victor between 1925 and 1928. There are two versions of Massenet's *Phedre* Overture – one acoustic and one electric – with the same composer's ballet music for *Le Cid* and short pieces by Auber, Delibes and Gounod. The German-born conductor's lightness of touch in this repertoire is surprising and the quality of the playing is excellent: Hertz is shown again to have a most underrated reputation. Excellent Mark Obert-Thorn transfers (© PASC216, 57mins).

Felix Weingartner was Director of the Music School in Basel for eight years, and brought the Basel Symphony Orchestra to a high standard, as we can hear in a fine, flexible performance of Weber's *Freischütz* Overture. We also hear the conductor's own interesting orchestration

of Weber's *Invitation to the Dance*, his own less interesting (indeed rather trite) Scherzettino from music for *The Tempest*, and the Entr'acte No. 3 from Schubert's *Rosamunde*. All these pieces were recorded in a single May 1928 session, but the disc's major item is a March 1929 recording in London of Mendelssohn's *Scottish* Symphony with the orchestra of the Royal Philharmonic Society. The symphony is played in a charmingly graceful and bright-eyed fashion that one would not always associate with this usually serious-minded conductor. The Scherzo is a particular delight. Good basic recordings and again excellent Obert-Thorn transfers (© PASC210, 58mins).

Artur Schnabel's Beethoven is familiar, but he recorded only one version of the First Concerto, in 1932, with the London Symphony Orchestra under Malcolm Sargent. As transfer engineer Andrew Rose reveals in his notes, the original recording had basic faults, and his efforts to correct these have resulted in a quality of sound which is markedly superior to any other transfer I have heard. The performance itself has a winning combination of aristocratic authority and strong communication. The disc is completed by an equally desirable account of the Second Concerto from 1935, with Sargent this time conducting the London Philharmonic Orchestra (© PASC197, 66mins).

The Busch Quartet's Beethoven recordings are better-known than its Schubert. A coupling of the latter composer's String Quartets, D887 and D112, recorded in 1938, is therefore very welcome. The Busch doesn't provide the kind of virtuosity offered by more recent groups, and not does its Schubert have the quality of Viennese lilt and charm found in performances by groups emanating from the composer's home city, but its performances do possess an appealingly open, heartfelt quality of a kind only found in artists who came from older traditions. The last movement of D887 starts slightly unsteadily, and takes a while to recover (another 78rpm version of this side should perhaps have been made), but in every other respect these are immensely satisfying performances, very well transferred (© PACM066, 66mins).

Alan Sanders