

processional's full tragic force is only intermittently conveyed.

By way of comparison, I dug out Barbirolli's classic 1957 recording (also with the Halle): here you'll encounter music-making of such infectious spontaneity, temperament, compassion and inimitably ruddy complexion that a life-enhancing experience is guaranteed. As for this latest contender, there's heaps to admire in terms of polish, coordination and meticulous observation but rather less that truly warms the cockles. Overall, Elder's is not a *London Symphony* to join my own shortlist of Barbirolli's PyelNixa recording mentioned above (Dutton), Boult's blisteringly cogent 1952 LPO account for Decca, the big-hearted 1972 LSO/Previn and Handley's cherishably idiomatic 1992 remake with the RLPO.

The Oboe Concerto (which brings a beneficial switch of venue to BBC Manchester's Studio 7) is more to my liking. Halle principal Stephane Rancourt makes an exquisitely poised and affectionate soloist, while Elder and his responsive Halle strings play their full part in a lovely performance of unstinting poetry and illumination that does justice to this still underrated piece.

Andrew Achenbach

*London Sym - selected comparisons:*

LPO, Boult (9/52R) (DECC) 473 241-2DC5

Halle, Barbirolli (2/59<sup>R</sup>) (DUIT) CDSJB1021

LSO, Previn (8/72R) (RCA) 82876 55708-2

RLPO, Handley (8/93) (CFP) 575309-2

## Vivaldi

Lequattro stagioni, Op 8 Nos 1-4. Violin Concerto, 'L'atempsta di mare', Op 8 No 5 RV253  
Altamira Chamber Orchestra / Robert Atchison *vn*  
with Sir Michael Gambon *narr*  
Guild® GMCD73755•DDD

## Vivaldi

Lequattro stagioni, Op 8 Nos 1-4. Violin Concertos - 'L'amoroso', RV271 *u* favorito', RV277 RV375  
Elizabeth Blumenstock *vn*  
Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra / Nicholas McGegan  
Philharmonia Baroque® PBP0376•DDD



The latest eight seasons made in San Francisco and London  
It's a tribute both to Vivaldi's music and to the present performers that two such different recordings of *The Four Seasons* can be so satisfying to the same listener. A former member of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and co-principal to Iona Brown, violinist Robert Atchison formed the modern-instrument Altamira Orchestra in 2009. This is their first recording, on which they are joined by legendary British actor Sir Michael

Gambon, who reads Vivaldi's sonnets in an English translation by Jordan Lancaster.

Far from being a distraction, Gambon's mellow intoning of Vivaldi's word-paintings (themselves based on lost paintings by Marco Ricci), like Patrick Stewart's for Arnie Roth and Musica Anima (American Gramophone *[sic]*), enhance the music's word-painting - a true feast for the senses. Atchison is all elegance and refinement; this is a very English Vivaldi, not without drama but closer in spirit to Alan Loveday's 1970 recording with the ASMF than to Iona Brown's more than a quarter of a century later. There is a pleasing dreamlike, almost yearning quality here: this is a wistful looking back on the past rather than an attempt to recreate it.

Period-instrument band Philharmonia Baroque's recording is the third to be released by their own label, which was launched in January 2011 to celebrate their 30th anniversary. Baroque violinist Elizabeth Blumenstock is a PBO regular, having performed with them as soloist, concertmaster and leader since 1981. She plays a 1660 Guarneri.

In contrast to Atchison's approach, this is very much in the HIP camp: the tempi are brisker (compare the former's 3'00" in the *Largo* of 'Spring' with McGegan's 2'18"), the string tone more transparent, the downbeats more pronounced and the attack and articulation far more varied. There is also liberal ornamentation and rhetorical flourish from Blumenstock, though she is less mannered and less driven than Italians such as Fabio Biondi. In contrast to Atchison's vocal, horizontal approach, Blumenstock is vertical, the pulse energised more though adumbration of the underlying harmonic structure. The effect is extraordinary.

Both recordings are equally satisfying but offer entirely different solutions to the same problem; they also offer different fillers. The choice is yours. William Yeoman

*Four Seasons - selected comparisons:*

Biondi, *Europa Galante* (3/04) (VIRG) 545547-2

Loveday, ASMF (DECC) 475 753IDOR

Brown, ASMF (HANS) CD98 107

## Widor

Piano Concertos - No 1, Op 39; No 2, Op 77.  
Fantaisie, Op 62  
Martin Roscoe *pf*  
BBC Concert Orchestra / Martin Yates  
Dutton Epoch® CDLX727674•DDD

## Widor

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 55'  
Piano Concertos - No 1, Op 39; No 2, Op 77.  
Fantaisie, Op 62  
Markus Becker *pf*  
BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Thierry Fischer  
Hyperion® CDA6781772•DDD