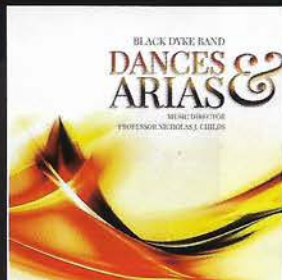


# Reviews

**CD  
OF THE  
MONTH**



## Dances & Arias

Black Dyke

Conductor: Professor Nicholas Childs

Doyen: DO CD369

This new disc of Edward Gregson's music is a milestone for several reasons. Firstly, it forms a fascinating retrospective of music spanning the composer's creative life, from the early, concise and tautly constructed *Patterns* of 1974, to music that although not entirely new in conception, is certainly new to its brass band audience. Secondly, it includes a magnificent account of *The Trumpets of the Angels* and

finally, it introduces us to two newly minted works - the *Cornet Concerto* of 2016 and the striking *Four Etudes*, the first three of which were written for piano in 1982, but are here reimagined in a fascinating version for brass band.

Opening, *Dances and Arias* is given a performance of potent drive and urgency, matched by playing of haunting and atmospheric lyricism in the arias. Richard Marshall is a sparkling soloist in the *Cornet Concerto*, incisive and rhythmically articulate in the outer movements and beautifully sentimental, but never cloying in the 'more distant memories' of the central *Intermezzo*.

*Patterns* receives a welcome airing, whilst what the composer describes as the Stravinsky-derived 'quirkiness' of the *Four Etudes* makes compelling listening, sounding quite unlike anything else in Gregson's brass band canon, and laced with the composer's fascination with texture and timbre. Pride of place, however, has to go to the monumental *The Trumpets of the*

*Angels*, given an inspirational reading of breathtaking power. Drawing its inspiration from the *Book of Revelation* and Olivier Messiaen's music, this version was prepared for Black Dyke's 2016 'European' contention. Hallé principal trumpet, Gareth Small, delivers the taxing solo trumpet part with majestic virtuosity, and the work makes a huge impact with its moving warmth, sheer excitement and the triumph of its overwhelming conclusion.

In his introduction to the recording, the composer intimates that this latest CD of his brass band music is not necessarily going to be the last. One would hope not, but if that were to be the case there could be no more engaging a retrospective of Gregson's band music than this.

**CHRISTOPHER THOMAS –  
CHIEF CONTRIBUTOR**

◀◀◀◀◀ Programme  
◀◀◀◀◀ Performance  
◀◀◀◀◀ Recording  
◀◀◀◀◀ Presentation

## Q&A

### CHRISTOPHER THOMAS ENJOYS A Q&A WITH EDWARD GREGSON

#### How did you choose the repertoire for the disc?

Well, most of it is new music written during my year with Black Dyke, but to make up the disc we decided it would be good to have a new recording of *Dances and Arias*, as the previous one was on the first volume of the Doyen series from some 25 years ago!

#### Do you still look back on your older works represented such as *Dances and Arias* and *Patterns* with affection?

Yes I do! The two particular works you mention are significant as they were 'groundbreaking' in their own way. *Patterns* was written for youth bands, so I wanted to write something that was 'fresh' - musically challenging, whilst still rewarding to play, hence the constantly changing metric structure, harmonic twists, but still maintaining a strong melodic content.

#### *Trumpets of the Angels* is a hugely taxing work of stamina-sapping 20-minute duration. Should there be more works for band that take us outside the time constraints of the contest stage?

A resounding 'yes!' Many bands (Black Dyke is an honourable exception) have become too obsessed with contesting to the detriment of concert-giving. The new version of *The Trumpets* was written for BD and, although it was specially 'revised' for the band's own-choice at the Lille 'European' competition, I still regard it essentially as a concert work. It's not in the normal 'comfort zone'!

#### You originally wrote the *Four Etudes* for piano. Did the sound of the brass band scoring develop naturally in your mind from the original?

The first three were originally written for piano, whilst the fourth (*Aleppo*) was written recently; in any case, I wanted to write something different as a summation of my year with BD and these pieces, sparse and compact in texture and form, fit the sonorities of the brass band well. They are a bit different from my other works for brass band.

#### In a recording situation such as this and the presence of a large-scale works, how do you try to capture the excitement and spontaneity of a live concert performance?

Black Dyke and Nick Childs are very adept and professional when it comes to recording sessions. They seem to have the capacity to 'switch on' when the red light goes on. The performances of my music on this disc are stunning - a composer could not wish for any more! ■



Edward Gregson