

## RARE AND WELL DONE

Janet Banks reviews three discs featuring both neglected and recent cello concertos

Think 18th-century cello concertos and one name springs to mind. Haydn, however, wasn't the only composer to try out the capabilities of the instrument, as a delightful new disc by **Klaus-Dieter Brandt** with L'Arpa Festante proves (Ars Produktion ARS 38 068). The C major Concerto by Carl Friedrich Abel, J.C. Bach's London sidekick, is the epitome of the *stile galant* in its lightness and delicacy, and frequently recalls Haydn's work of the same key. Brandt plays a southern German Wolfram cello of 1776 whose extra 2.5cm of body length provides a correspondingly deeper reverberating sound. This is particularly noticeable in the solo cadenzas in each movement of the quirky Concerto no.2 by Christian Ernst Graf, two of whose sinfonias are also featured, along with a more pedestrian First Concerto. Munich-based period ensemble L'Arpa Festante

plays with sparkling precision and Brandt's performance is flawlessly purist, though just a touch of vibrato on the long, expressive notes would have been a welcome addition.

Moving on a few decades, **Raphael Wallfisch** has chosen works from the Classical–Romantic transition for his latest disc with the Northern Sinfonia (Nimbus NI 5868). Spohr's Eighth Violin Concerto, in Grützmacher's arrangement, rarely leaves the opera house in spirit, and Wallfisch and his 1760 Gagliano instrument are every bit the match for a coloratura tenor, playing the work's flights up the fingerboard, charmingly ornamented melodies and high octave passages with an almost vocal ease. The same technical mastery also makes light of the flamboyant demands of the A major Concerto by Reicha and Variations on 'Là ci darem' by Danzi, both prominent cellists



Klaus-Dieter Brandt:  
a flawlessly purist  
performance of Graf

of the period, and Weber's virtuosic Concerto 'Grand pot-pourri'. Combined with stylistic good taste, and a full and rich orchestral sound, this is a pleasing collection.

London-based Russian cellist and conductor **Alexander Ivashkin** has taken on Rostropovich's mantle in continuing to promote new Russian cello concertos (Alma Classics 5029). In recent live recordings from Switzerland, Russia and Canada, he plays concertos from the last half century, ranging from Shchedrin's austere *Parabola concertante* and Denisov's

Variations on Haydn's canon *Tod ist ein langer Schlaf* (the latter sadly marred by poor quality recording) to Alexander Vustin's fragmentary *Disappearance* (1992) for solo cello, bayan (Russian accordion) and strings, in which the instruments gradually reduce to percussive taps and then silence. The movingly played central memorial movement is a total contrast, with full, passionate strings and bayan, while Schnittke's serial 1967 *Dialogo* is played with the mastery of one who has devoted years to the composer's works.