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Classical CDs Weekly: Prokofiev, Philip Sawyers, Andrew Matthews-Owen

Russian violin concertos, plus two discs of contemporary music

by [Graham Rickson](#) | Saturday, 17 March 2018

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Interesting but challenging: pianist Andrew Matthews-Owen

Nick Rutter

Halo: Music for Piano by Phibbs, Tabakova and Kendall Andrew Matthews-Owen (RTF Classical)

This latest disc released by the Richard Thomas Foundation (“aiming to bring interesting and occasionally challenging pieces of contemporary music to new audiences”) is as good as the others I’ve heard. The nervous should begin with the seven *Modétudes* by the Bulgarian composer Dobrinka Tabakova, each one allotted a different musical mode. It’s remarkable how each tiny piece has such a distinct character, my favourites being the doleful *Locrian*, immediately followed by a very Bartókian study in the *Phrygian* mode. Tabakova’s three-part *Halo* gives the collection its title, an otherworldly exploration of piano harmonics inspired by a glimpse of a halo around a full moon. The final section is a treat, its ostinato riff overlaid with glints and flashes of light.



Hannah Kendall’s *On the Chequer’d Field Array’d* is an entertaining attempt to describe the three stages of a chess game in musical form. Kendall’s slow, probing opening leads to a dense middle section and exhausted coda which suggests that the defeated party has taken it pretty badly. And there’s a set of *Six Preludes* by Joseph Phibbs, improvisatory, unfussy marvels of economy. No. 4, a gentle processional of bell sounds and elegant melody, is irresistible. Especially as played here by dedicatee Andrew Matthews-Owen, another persuasive advocate for new keyboard music. Appealingly resonant recording, and, as with the Sawyers release, the sleeve art is great. Another reason why CDs will always win over downloads.