

**Mahler** (arr. Schoenberg) *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*; *Das Lied von der Erde*.  
b**Emma Curtis** (con); b**Brennen Guillory** (ten); a**David Stout** (bar); **Orchestra of The Swan** /  
**Kenneth Woods**.  
Somm F C SOMMCD0109 (79mins; DDD); rec. Townsend Hall, Shipton-on-Stour, UK, 19/11/10.

This new pairing of chamber reductions of two of Mahler's finest works for voices and orchestra follows hard on the heels of Somm's recent release of the Fourth Symphony, also reduced for chamber ensemble (reviewed on page 66). Whereas that disc was directed by David Curtis, this most recent release features the young conductor Kenneth Woods directing the Midlands's new ensemble, the Orchestra of the Swan, based at Stratford-upon-Avon, and appearing frequently in Birmingham. Woods has been making a considerable name for himself as a Mahler interpreter both in the UK and on the west coast of America, and listening to this new disc it is not hard to hear why. His handling of both works is extremely impressive, with a strong sense of atmosphere and control apparent in each, despite the limitations of the reduced scorings.

In this achievement he is clearly helped by the individual players of the orchestra of the Swan, who yield little to their colleagues in larger orchestras in terms of instrumental technique and musicianship. The *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* come off best, thanks to some impressive singing from the baritone David Stout, who is well inside the score, both vocally and interpretively. *Das Lied von der Erde* is a tougher nut to crack, and there is a slight sense of strain at times in the singing here, not that this is always inappropriate, given Mahler's often tough writing for the voice. On the credit side, contralto Emma Curtis gives a most poignant reading of the final *Abschied*. Somm's recorded sound, engineered by Gary Cole, is first-rate throughout, with excellent balance and plenty of aural space.

Perhaps the best way to approach this enterprising disc is not as a face-to-face encounter directly with Mahler himself, but as an insight into how musicians such as Schoenberg (the driving force in both arrangements), impoverished by the first world war, later sought to experience his music at first-hand. With this adjusted perspective in mind, the new disc is likely to create considerable interest and to give much pleasure.

**David Patmore**