second movement that allows the trumpets to ring out to overwhelming effect in the C major blaze of sound immediately preceding the first reprise of the initial funeral march theme. The remainder of the Symphony is no less impressive, with accomplished playing from the Helsinki Symphony Orchestra. This is an Enrica to set alongside recent recommendations from P. S. Järvi and the Bremen Kammerphilharmonie (RCA), and Osmo Vänskä and the Minnesota Orchestra. Of the three, it’s Vänskä who best captures the dark atmosphere of the slow movement’s sotto voce beginning, but Manze’s disc shouldn’t be missed. Misja Donat

**PERFORMANCE**

**SOUND**

**BENCHMARK RECORDING**

Symphony: Vänskä

BIS SACD 1536 £12.99

**BEETHOVEN**

Symphony No. 3 (Eroica); Die Geschöpfte des Prometheus – finale; 12 Contredanses

Helsingborg SO/Andrew Manze

Harmonia Mundi HMU 807470 70.07 mins

**BBC Music Direct**

£13.99

In his lively and engaging booklet note, Andrew Manze describes the pieces recorded here as charting the progress of a musical idea from acorn to oak, and of its composer from obscurity to fame. No matter that some of the 12 Contredanses WoO 14 are actually quite late in origin, and that like many commentators Manze gets his chronology wrong (Beethoven’s sketches show that he first used the famous ‘Prometheus’ theme in the finale of his ballet The Creatures of Prometheus, and subsequently assimilated it into the dances, rather than the other way round) – this is a fascinating programme, and superbly realised. Inevitably, there’s one piece of the jigsaw missing: the finale of the Eroica Symphony was preceded by a set of variations for piano Op. 35, which recycles the same theme; and both feature an initial chain of variations based on the theme’s bass-line, before the melody itself appears.

Manze takes a surprisingly Romantic view of the Eroica, with a lingering account of its funeral march.

Weber had at best mixed feelings about his great contemporary. Some three years earlier, Beethoven’s recent works had prompted him to describe them as ‘bewildering chaos, an incomprehensible struggle for novelty from which some odd strokes of genius shine forth’. As for the now obscure German-born Danish composer and flautist Johann Wilhelm Wilms, Weber once heard one of his flute concertos, which he called ‘dull and routine’. He might have thought more highly of Wilms’s C minor Symphony, whose finale is included on this CD. It’s a piece that foreshadows the Classicism of early Mendelssohn, and attractive enough to make one curious to hear the remaining movements.

With nearly 20 minutes’ spare capacity on the disc, it’s puzzling to find the Wilms Sinfonia and Weber’s fine Clarinet Concerto in F minor each represented by not more than a single movement. Ákos Acsi, principal clarinettist of the Budapest Festival Orchestra, plays Weber’s slow movement beautifully, but it’s not a stand-alone piece. Fischer also offers a sparkling performance of the popular overture to Rossini’s The Italian Girl in Algiers, and his account of Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony is impressive, with the major-mode episodes of the famous second movement warm and glowing, and the Dionysiac finale tremendously exciting. The recording is first-class, too, though the balance could have placed greater emphasis on the ripitani and horns, which contribute so strongly to the work’s distinctive sonority. Misja Donat

**PERFORMANCE**

**SOUND**

**BENCHMARK RECORDING**

Symphony: Vänskä

BIS SACD 1536 £12.99

**BEETHOVEN**

Symphony No. 7; plus works by Weber, Rossini and Wilms

Ákos Acsi (clarinet); Budapest Festival Orchestra/Iván Fischer

Channel CCS SA 25207 (Hybrid CD/SACD) 60.50 mins

**BBC Music Direct**

£13.99

Iván Fischer presents Beethoven’s Seventh in the context of other works composed or performed around the time of its premiere on 8 December 1813. The report of Weber’s reaction to Beethoven’s piece – that its composer was ‘ripe for the madhouse’ – is almost certainly apocryphal, but