It's a little-known fact that Brahms enjoyed playing whack-a-mole, but instead of whacking down toy moles, he preferred to beat down young talents, one of whom was Hans Rott (1858-84). It's impossible to read Rott's story without getting utterly heartsick. He was a terrifically talented fellow student of Mahler in Vienna, and his childhood was lumbered with guilt liberally slathered on by mom (paging Dr Freud). As he got older, gratuitously cruel rebuffs upset his already fragile mental balance. Brahms's gruff rejection unhinged him. While riding on a train, he became convinced Brahms had filled the train with dynamite. (He got the details wrong, but the essential plot right. As Delmore Schwartz said "Paranoids have real enemies, too.") The worthless program notes blather on about mental illness without saying how he died. Confined to an asylum, he died of TB aged 26. For years he resembled the one from Brahms's Symphony 1. People who pick at that deserve Brahms's rebuff: "Das sieht jeder Narr!" (any fool can see that). The movement opens with pizzicato strings picking out a theme, then a majestic horn fanfares return with majestic splendor of the climactic music will be familiar to lovers of Mahler's Third. Mahler, to his credit, always approved. I'd call it intelligently anachronistic, sounding like Rott's music might have sounded had he lived a normal life span. With normal health, Rott could have lived well into the 1930s, when Schneider's techniques would have been right at home. Michael Volle sometimes has a pesky vibrato, but in the main his interpretations are sympathetic, sung with good diction and tone.

There are now seven recordings of Rott's symphony, running the gamut from about 50 minutes to Segerstam's ultra-luxurious traversal (Nov/Dec 1992) stretching to nearly 68. My favorite has been Weigle, at 54 minutes (Sept/Oct 2004). At 52 minutes, Albrecht is on the shorter end. In September/October I excoriated Jarvi's insensitive gallop through Raff's Lenore symphony. In this recording, the briefer overall timing is a major asset. Albrecht is one of those valued conductors with a point of view about this major work. His interpretation is more linear, with rhythmic energy and a crisper edge to its sonorities. The scherzo really has drive. Moreover, these virtues aren't bought at the cost of beauty or eloquence. There are enough wallowers out there, so this incisive performance is a welcome and legitimate alternative. If you love this symphony—if you love youthful inspiration at the very brink of genius—this is one of the best recordings.

O'CONNOR

RUDERS: Nightshade Trilogy
Capricorn/ Oliver Knussen; Odense Symphony/ Scott Yoo—Bridge 9433—51 minutes

Poul Ruders's Nightshade Trilogy (1987, 1992, 2004) is three pieces written over the course of a dozen years for forces ranging from a 10-piece chamber ensemble to a large orchestra (commissioned by the New York Philharmonic). As their title suggests, the works deal with the topic of forbidding darkness; they are appropriately spooky and nightmarish. Nightshade, the initial piece, opens with dark rumblings clearing to a fanfare, introducing a fuzzy rising scale. This material reappears and develops with scary clusters, unfriendly growlings, rapid squiggles, and shaky trills leading to exhaustion in the "pale moonlight, tombstones, crypts, and shadows".

The Second Nightshade is subtitled 'A Sym-
phonic Nocturne for Chamber Orchestra' and is filled with the same material as the previous entry. New is a march-like motive and a concluding lengthy melody drifting aimlessly through the fog. It ends with a chorale with bats flying in the air.

*Final Nightshade* is a 25-minute Adagio of the night. It takes greatness to pull off an unbroken slow movement of this length. Mahler and Bruckner were both pretty good at it, but Mr Ruders is not in that class (who is?) The rapt atmosphere seems to point distantly to those models, but the clotted harmony and melodic meandering frustrates any hope of paying attention or even staying awake for that chunk of time. The three-note motive that recurs now and then takes a stab at majesty, but crumbles pathetically without appropriate support. The piece just doesn't make it, but if you're into sullen tedium you might like it.

The Odense Symphony is not a great group, so that doesn't help much. Notes by the composer.

**GIMBEL**

**RUDOLPH: Clarinet Pieces**

 Luigi Magistrelli; Claudia Bracco, Carlo Bernava, p—Brilliant 94952—61 minutes

We tend to forget what a high percentage of our cherished "older" music (roughly before the 19th Century) came about from patronage, either by the church or the court. One of the most significant of such patrons was Archduke Rudolph of Austria (Johann Joseph Rainer, 1788-1831). He arrived in Vienna in 1790 when his father became Emperor Leopold II, and in 1803 Rudolph became Beethoven's sporadic pupil in composition, piano, and theory for about 20 years. He also, with Princes Kinsky and Lobkowitz, set up a lifetime annuity for parts do not advance beyond moderate difficulty.

Have a kind thought, then for the Archduke. He made Beethoven's life more tolerable, and without him we probably wouldn't have the *Missa Solemnis*. If you're curious about Rudolph, though, probably the best introduction would be Magistrelli's earlier recording of the Serenade, Trio, and Clarinet Sonata (Bayer 100307, M/A 2001).

**RUTTER: Choral Pieces; see Collections**

**RZEWSKI: The People United Will Never Be Defeated**

Omri Shimron, p—New Focus 134—62 minutes

I reviewed Rzewski's own rugged, harrowing performance of this mind-bending piece long ago, as well as Ralph Van Raat's warmer reading on Naxos, so I looked forward to hearing this new one. This is an epic, complex work and amenable to any number of interpretations.

As close to Ives as to any American composer, Rzewski creates near-unplayable virtuoso piano works that fuse vernacular American with high modernism. Played by the composer, *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, an epic set of 36 variations, has a special excitement. Here, performed by Omri Shimron, a pianist based in Greensboro, North Carolina, it has a great deal of shading and nuance, especially in the lyrical slow variations. Shimron also handles the more violent sections well, though this recording doesn't have Naxos's resonance. (He quotes Van Raat on the work's political symbolism.) He executes the near-orchestral rumblings and glissandos cleanly. The composer's version still packs a wallop, but it's valuable to have some-