



Elisabetta

**BRUSA**

**Symphony No. 1**

**Merlin –  
Symphonic Poem**

**Royal Scottish  
National Orchestra  
Daniele Rustioni**

**Elisabetta Brusa (b. 1954):  
Symphony No. 1 • Merlin – Symphonic Poem**

Elisabetta Brusa has always been strongly interested in and influenced by all the arts, in particular by the constraints of differing forms and genres imposed upon composers wishing to express original ideas in their music. After writing a handful of brief works during her early years, she turned to Classical sonata form for her *First Symphony* (1988-1990). This was her first work for large orchestra, following her graduation from the Milan Conservatory in 1980 with a Diploma in Composition.

*Symphony No. 1* shares many similarities of language and expression with her *Nittimero Symphony* (1986-1988) [Naxos 8.555266], as well as the fundamental framework of sonata form. On first hearing, *Symphony No. 1* leaves an overwhelming impression of sheer volume of sound, and of immense orchestration alternating monumental instrumental blocks with contrasting moments of pure lyricism. The opening bars of the first movement, with their dotted rhythms and 'chiaroscuro' (light and dark contrasts), recall the opening bars of Shostakovich's *Fourth Symphony*. The orchestration of the work, with its ample percussion, harp and keyboards, has the unusual effect of fluctuating between intensifying the tumultuous soundscape and soothing the emotional tension. The work's harmonic language is based around the note C sharp (which acts as the pivotal point for chordal mutations) and there are numerous thematic and rhythmic leitmotifs woven throughout the course of all four movements. The initial *Allegro ma non troppo* is characterised by a certain aggression, while the lyrical *Adagio*, of almost Brucknerian length, is a showcase for the composer's ecstatic and ethereal moods. Occasionally there are references to Holst, Vaughan Williams and Walton, all of them composers dear to Brusa and with whom she shares compositional colouring. The third movement, a 3/4 *Allegro* in the form of a typical Scherzo,

whirls the listener around as if in the throes of a gothic "Valse" of death which alternates two themes, one in smooth and undulating compound time, the other in concisely rhythmic duple time. The *Allegro moderato* finale resumes Brusa's typical orchestration of alternate and overlapping instrumental blocks with the original dotted rhythm re-presented and interwoven with lyrical motifs from the *Adagio*. The shattering conclusion to the symphony is reached with a sudden and almighty C sharp. *Symphony No. 1* is dedicated to the composer's teacher and mentor Hans Keller.

Mythology, literature, art and travel have always played a strong role in Elisabetta Brusa's life. Her symphonic poem *Merlin*, written in 2004, tells the story (or rather emotionally describes) of Merlin, one of history's best-loved legendary figures and one for whom she has long had a fascination. In contrast to her *Symphony No. 1*, *Merlin* is a work free from the constraints of a traditional musical form, (as are the works recorded on her two previous Naxos albums) rather being a musically programmatic reflection of the character. As creator of the Round Table, Merlin's magic enabled Uther Pendragon and Ygraine to conceive King Arthur, who was then raised by Merlin until his accession to the throne of Camelot. In Brusa's symphonic poem an incessant rhythm, passed around the various instrumental sections and percussion (note the unusual yet pertinent presence of the anvil), provides the backdrop to a large-intervalled melody. This melody makes use of ethereal harmonies and magical instrumental effects which enchant the imagination of the listener, creating a solemn and spellbinding atmosphere. Merlin's disappearance into a puff of smoke is brilliantly and wittily described in the work's finale.

**Gilberto Serebbe**



**Elisabetta Brusa**

Born in 1954, Elisabetta Brusa studied composition at the Conservatorio of Milan, Italy, with Bruno Bettinelli and Azio Corghi, graduating in 1980. She continued studying with Hans Keller until 1985. She won first prize at the International Competition for

Composition for String Quartet in Washington DC in 1982, the Fromm & Fulbright Foundation Fellowships for the Composition Course at the Tanglewood Music Center in the United States in 1983 and from 1988 to 1990 artistic residencies at the MacDowell Colony in the United States. She writes nearly exclusively for orchestra and has had numerous commissions, performances and broadcasts in Europe, the United States, Russia, Canada, Australia, Ukraine, Hong Kong and Korea with orchestras such as the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, State Hermitage Symphony Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra, CBC Vancouver Orchestra, Gera-Altenburg Philharmonisches, Aachener Kammer Orchester, New England Philharmonic of Boston, Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, I Pomeriggi Musicali Orchestra of Milan, I Solisti Veneti, as well as with many other ensembles and soloists. Naxos has released two other recordings of her works for orchestra [Volume 1 / 8.555266 and Volume 2 / 8.555267]. She has taught composition since 1980 and has been Professor of Composition and Orchestration at the Conservatorio di Milan since 1985. She is married to the conductor Gilberto Serebbe.

[www.elisabettabrusa.it](http://www.elisabettabrusa.it)



**Daniele Rustioni**

At the age of 32 Daniele Rustioni is one of the most exciting conductors of his generation. For two seasons he has been Music Director of the Teatro Petruzzelli, Bari and is presently the Principal Conductor of the Orchestra della Toscana. In 2013 he received the

"Best Newcomer of the Year" award from International Opera Awards in London. Daniele Rustioni regularly conducts in leading opera houses in Italy and abroad, including the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Teatro Regio, Turin, La Fenice, Venice, the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Opera North and the Welsh National Opera. During the 2013/14 season he made débuts at the Opéra National de Lyon in France and at the Bayerisches Staatsoper in Germany. Daniele Rustioni is active also in the concert-hall. Beside his collaboration with the Orchestra della Toscana, he has conducted the Santa Cecilia Orchestra, the Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, the BBC Philharmonic, the Helsinki Philharmonic, the London Philharmonic and the Monte Carlo Philharmonic.

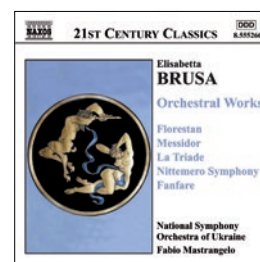




## Royal Scottish National Orchestra

The Royal Scottish National Orchestra was formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra and became the Scottish National Orchestra in 1950. It was awarded Royal Patronage in 1991. Throughout its history the orchestra has played an integral part in Scotland's musical life, including performing at the opening ceremony of the Scottish Parliament building in 2004. Many renowned conductors have contributed to its success, including George Szell, Sir John Barbirolli, Walter Susskind, Sir Alexander Gibson, Neeme Järvi, Walter Weller, Alexander Lazarev and Stéphane Denève. In 2012 the RSNO welcomed British-Canadian musician and conductor Peter Oundjian as its latest Music Director and Danish conductor Thomas Sondergård as Principal Guest Conductor. 2012 also saw the appointments of two new Leaders, James Clark and Maya Iwabuchi. The RSNO has a worldwide reputation for the quality of its recordings, receiving two Diapason d'Or de l'année awards for Symphonic Music (Denève/Roussel 2007; Denève/Debussy 2012) and eight GRAMMY® Awards nominations over the last decade. Over 200 releases are available, including the complete symphonies of Sibelius (Gibson), Prokofiev (Järvi), Glazunov (Serebrier), Nielsen and Martinů (Thomson), Roussel (Denève) and the major orchestral works of Debussy (Denève). The RSNO is one of Scotland's National Performing Companies, supported by the Scottish Government. For more information, please see [www.rsno.org.uk](http://www.rsno.org.uk).

## Also available



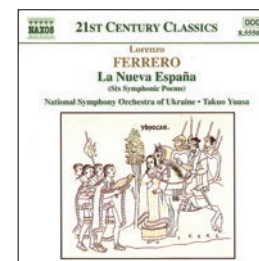
8.555266



8.555267



8.572039



8.555044

This is the third volume in the series of orchestral music by Milanese-born Elisabetta Brusa. Sharing its neo-tonal language with her *Nittemero Symphony* [Volume 1 / 8.555266], the imposing, vividly immediate and approachable *Symphony No. 1* is her first work for large orchestra. The symphonic poem *Merlin* evokes the great magician of legend through rich orchestral colours and powerful rhythms. Volume 2, described by *Gramophone* magazine as ‘a collection not to be missed’, can be heard on Naxos 8.555267.

Playing Time  
**59:54**

**Elisabetta  
BRUSA**  
(b. 1954)

**Symphony No. 1, Op. 10 (1988-90)**

**49:01**

❶ **Allegro ma non troppo**

**11:46**

❷ **Adagio**

**17:09**

❸ **Allegro moderato**

**7:38**

❹ **Adagio**

**12:28**

**Merlin – Symphonic Poem, Op. 20 (2004)**

**10:53**

❺ **Adagio**

**10:53**

**WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS**

**Royal Scottish National Orchestra • Daniele Rustioni**

Recorded in Henry Wood Hall, Glasgow, Scotland, 12th-13th August 2014

Producer: Andrew Walton (K&A Productions Ltd.) • Engineer: Mike Clements • Booklet notes: Gilberto Serembe

Cover: *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1872-77) by Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898),

Courtesy National Museums Liverpool (Lady Lever Art Gallery)