The Sea, H100. Summer, H116.
Two Poems, H118. Enter Spring, H174
New Zealand Symphony Orchestra / James Judd
Naxos Ⓢ 8 557167 (63 minutes: DDD)

Enter Spring – selected comparison:
BBC NOW, Hickox (2/02) (CHAN) CHAN9950
The Sea – selected comparisons:
Ulster Orch, Handley (3/87) (CHAN) CHAN8473
RLPO, Groves (11/98) (EMI) 556 855-2
BBC NOW, Hickox (1/03) (CHAN) CHAN10011
Enter Spring, The Sea – selected comparison:
NPO, Britten (8/99) (BBC) BBCB8007-2
Summer – selected comparison:
BBC NOW, Hickox (3/04) (CHAN) CHAN10112

Bracing bargain Bridge from the Southern hemisphere

James Judd directs a hearty, sensibly paced account of *Enter Spring*, Bridge's most uninhibited achievement and one of the pinnacles of 20th-century British orchestral music. Like Britten on his superbly invigorating and judiciously proportioned interpretation from the 1967 Aldeburgh Festival, Judd sees to it that the central section's climactic processional at fig 30 (12'40") doesn't undermine the full cumulative impact of the same material's triumphant return in the coda. On the whole, Judd extracts more sinew, purpose and detail from Bridge's exhilarating canvas than does Hickox (the antiphonally divided first and second fiddles help), though (perhaps inevitably) the last ounce of tangy familiarity is missing. A pity, too, that no one picked up on the flute's C natural instead of C sharp in the very opening bar; otherwise, all goes pretty much swimmingly. (➢ page 44)

In the gorgeous *Summer* Judd paints a landscape bathed in clearer air than the sultry heathaze evoked in Hickox's recent account; both approaches are valid and work beautifully. I'd have welcomed more in the way of fragrant poetry and wistful poignancy in the elusive first of the *Two Poems* (Nicholas Braithwaite's pioneering Lyrita account – 1/80, nla – got it about right), but its *Allegro con brio* companion has a delightful skip and point. As for *The Sea*, I wouldn't place this Naxos newcomer ahead of any of the four comparative rivals listed above. To my ears, Judd whips up the finale to rather superficial, inorganic effect, while the first and third movements bring a hint of sluggishness which the similarly measured Hickox avoids. Best is the 'Sea-foam' *scherzo*, but even here there's a playfulness which rather eludes these spirited artists.

The sound is eminently vivid and well-defined, though the chosen acoustic is not the most alluring. Despite any minor reservations, an enjoyable concert and very decent value.

Andrew Achenbach