

Horenstein

Janáček: From The House of the Dead, Sinfonietta



"A rustic character, very warm, open, pleasant and easy going", was how Jascha Horenstein described Janáček after they met at the ISCM Festival in Frankfurt in the summer of 1927. He took an immediate liking to the Czech composer and was fortunate to spend some time with him discussing his music, particularly the "Sinfonietta" and his last opera "From the House of the Dead", at that time still a work in progress. Shortly after that meeting Horenstein conducted the Viennese premiere of the "Sinfonietta" (12 February 1928, with the same orchestra as featured on this recording), and during the 1931/32 season directed at least eight fully-staged performances in Düsseldorf of "Aus einem Totenhaus" to critical and public acclaim that resonated throughout Germany. For that production he was assisted, and his appreciation of the composer further stimulated, by Max Brod, a close friend and colleague of Janáček's (and of Kafka's) and a tireless promoter of his music. The production in Düsseldorf was the last time the opera was staged in Germany until the mid-1950s, burdened not only by Nazi disapproval but also by its uncompromisingly bleak prison camp setting, a sensitive subject in post-war Germany.

After the war Horenstein continued to perform Janáček's music on radio, on recordings and in concerts, including the Argentine premiere of the "Sinfonietta" in Buenos Aires in 1951 and the American premiere of "The Makropulos Case" in San Francisco in 1966. The present recording of "House of the Dead", the opera's French premiere, was given in concert form in one of Radio France's Paris studios on 14 May 1953. Sung in French before an invited audience, the opera was broadcast live on national radio but the date clashed with a performance by the visiting Vienna State Opera, and Horenstein's prediction that "not a single member of the press will be at my concert!" was not much of an exaggeration. This was unfortunate because the occasion found him, the orchestra and the vocalists in top dramatic form - concentrated, involved and intensely engaged. To listen to the opera in French may disappoint those familiar with the original Czech, but there is compensation in some fine characterization and vocal acting from the principal members of the cast. The version recorded here uses Universal Edition's posthumously published score from 1930 that included various modifications by editors as well as the inclusion of a more optimistic ending, none of which were sanctioned by the composer and which have been discarded in the recently published critical edition.

Horenstein admired Janáček for his independence and for the utter originality of his language, untouched by the compositional trends of his time. In the case of the "Sinfonietta", the work entered his repertoire after his meeting with the composer when he was still a young and inexperienced conductor, and resurfaced when he included it in several post-war performances before recording it for Vox Records in 1955, the source for the present recording. The sessions took place during a two week period in Vienna that also included recordings of "Taras Bulba", Bruckner's 8th Symphony (PASC 429) and violin concertos by Bruch and Sibelius (PASC 516) played by Ivry Gitlis. An early recording of the "Sinfonietta" often criticized for its lack of propulsive energy, Horenstein's reading is contemplative and inward-looking, perhaps influenced by Janáček's withdrawal of its "Military" appellation, employing slow, deliberate tempi and textures that introduce an element of wistful nostalgia into the music and underline the sombre nobility of its Slavic roots.

Misha Horenstein

horenstein

conducts janáček

from the house of the dead
sinfonietta

PACO 173



solistes, chœur d'hommes et orchestre national de la rtf
vienna symphony orchestra

live & studio recordings · 1953 & 1955



horenstein

conducts janáček



disc one

JANÁČEK From The House Of The Dead (De la maison des morts - Z mrtvého domu)

1. Overture (6:00)
2. Act I - Aujourd'hui ils apporteront (4:35)
3. Quel est ton nom (3:44)
4. Allons, plus de colère (2:31)
5. Il ne verrais pas jamais (1:26)
6. Quand j'étais un bon jeune homme (3:56)
7. Aljeja, t'as pas un bout d'fil (7:32)
8. Act II - Introduction (2:42)
9. Ah mon Aljejo (2:38)
10. Alexandr Petrovic, on prépare la fête (3:55)
11. Je dirais tout (5:54)
12. Après quoi le temps passe (2:48)
13. La la la la la (6:21)
14. La pantomime de la belle meunière (2:07)
15. Et là bas, que je vous demande (1:48)

CAST

Lucien Lovano (Bar.), Chichkov
Roger Barnier (Ten.), Skuratoff
Jean Giraudeau (Ten.), Luka Kouzmitch/Filka Morosov
Doda Conrad (Bar.), Prison Commander
Bernard Demigny (Bar.), Alexandr Petrowitch/Gorjantchikov
Gerard Friedmann (Ten.), Aljeja
Xavier Depraz (Bass), Don Juan/Tchekunoff
Michel Hamel (Ten.), Garde/Chapkine/Tcherevin/Sganarelle
Andre Vessieres (Bar.), Le Petit Forcat/Le Forgeron
Joseph Peyron (Ten.), Grand Forcat

Choeur d'Hommes de la RTF, cond. Rene Alix
Orchestre National de la RTF
Live broadcast, Paris, 14 May 1953

disc two

1. Act III - Jésus, fils de Dieu (3:55)
2. Ah frères, va mourir, c'est pas rien (5:27)
3. Mes pauvres petits frères (3:15)
4. 'Vous', disait-il au vieux père (3:22)
5. Filka m'à tourni (2:04)
6. La vodka (4:30)
7. Le lendemain (10:10)
8. Hou ... Hou ... Hou (6:29)
9. RADIO Closing announcement (1:23)

JANÁČEK Sinfonietta

10. 1st mvt. - Allegretto - Allegro maestoso (Fanfare) (3:30)
11. 2nd mvt. - Andante - Allegretto (The Castle, Brno) (6:57)
12. 3rd mvt. - Moderato (The Queen's Monastery, Brno) (6:23)
13. 4th mvt. - Allegretto (The Street Leading to the Castle) (3:04)
14. 5th mvt. - Andante con moto (The Town Hall, Brno) (8:37)

Vienna Symphony Orchestra

Studio Recording, Vienna, 2-16 September 1955
Originally released on Vox PL9710

conducted by Jascha Horenstein

XR Remastered by Andrew Rose

Source recordings and photo from the archives of Misha Horenstein
Cover artwork based on a 1928 photograph of Jascha Horenstein
rehearsing the Vienna Symphony Orchestra for the Viennese premiere of
the Sinfonietta

Total duration: 2hr 7:00
CD1: 57:53 CD2: 69:06

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