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disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PASC 270

DELIUS

A MASS OF LIFE - HASSAN

PRISTINE
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XR

Whether Nietzsche's poetry has any value or not I neither know nor care (the English translation in the vocal score makes no sense at all) but I am only grateful that it provided Delius with the images of the will of man and eternity, night and day, dance and song, and so forth, that caused him to compose this great and glorious work, which is all that matters.

The Mass of Life has always been dear to Sir Thomas Beecham and I remember well the first time I heard him conduct it, at the close of the Delius Festival in 1929, and the tremendous impression it at once made on me. Now he gives a truly inspired performance which probably surpasses that one, and will, I am certain, remain one of the finest things in the repertoire of the gramophone record. The hazards are as great in this work (perhaps even greater) as in the choral finale of the Ninth Symphony, and even under Sir Thomas a choir unable to meet all the demands, or an unintelligent baritone soloist, could wreck it. I hope Bruce Boyce will not misunderstand me if I say that, fine artist though I knew him to be, I did not know he could rise to the heights he does in this performance. It is not only that he sings the difficult and trying part with complete ease and any lack of strain, but that he sings it with such a depth of conviction and intensity of emotion. As for the London Philharmonic Choir, I feel that if Delius were alive he would write a letter to them and to Frederick Jackson similar to the ones he wrote to the Philharmonic Choir in 1929 and to its trainer, Kennedy Scott, in which he praised Kennedy Scott's great achievement and their "really magnificent singing." "I have never heard my works sung so subtly and with such fine nuance." These tributes from one slow to praise are also deserved, it seems to me, by Mr. Jackson and his choir.

Excerpt from LP review in "The Gramophone", November 1953

James Elroy Flecker's play Hassan was first performed at His Majesty's Theatre (as it then was) in September 1923. I was present on that occasion and can recall Henry Ainley's fine performance in the name part, Fay Compton, equally good, as Pervaneh and the striking effect of Delius's incidental music: Not all of it has worn well and today the pseudo-Oriental idiom of the choruses of the beggars, the "fair and dusky beauties", and the soldiers, is all too reminiscent of Chu Chin Chow. What is left, most of it, is pure Delius, in spite of "oriental" chromaticism.

Sir Thomas Beecham gives us the Introduction to Act 1, the Serenade—this is played twice, the first time as a violin solo, the second time (just before the Closing Scene) as a viola solo, a very brief Interlude before an unaccompanied chorus behind the scenes, another chorus for women only, the Prelude to Act 3, The Procession of Protracted Death (in the horrible torture scene of the play), and The Closing Scene with the haunting chorus "We take the Golden Road to Samarkand", which fades away into the distance as the caravan sets out. What is played on the disc differs in many respects from the piano score prepared by Philip Heseltine, as for example in the Introduction to Act 1, and I would be interested to know why this is so. It is a pity that the sleeve note writer, after giving an adequate summary of the story, has not done more to identify the pieces played with the stage action. He gives no hint that it is Hassan who serenades Yasmin, a character not mentioned in the summary, on his lute. At this point I seem to remember that, as the melody was played, Ainley declaimed a poem to his lady-love, though my score says "Voice, behind the scenes". Yasmin, it may be said, is a worthless little creature who deserts her lover for the head executioner, but she did at least inspire a lovely tune.

Excerpt from LP review in "The Gramophone", January 1959

Recording and restoration notes

Both of these recordings were taken from Philips/Fontana white label test pressings in near-mint condition. My main aim in the remastering of them was to bring to the recordings the extra warmth and life which XR remastering and Ambient Stereo processing offers. Although both were highly competent recordings of their era, both sound a little dull and flat to the modern ear in their original incarnations, something which these new transfers and remasterings endeavour to remedy. **AR**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM

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COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
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BEECHAM

PRISTINE
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XR

THE ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA



DELIUS

A MASS OF LIFE

ROSINA RAISBECK, MONICA SINCLAIR, CHARLES CRAIG, BRUCE BOYCE
LONDON PHILHARMONIC CHOIR

HASSAN SUITE

LESLIE FRY, ARTHUR LEAVINS, FREDERICK RIDDLE, BBC CHORUS

DELIOUS A Mass of Life**CD One**

- 1 Part 1 - 1. Invocation - Chorus (5:27)
- 2 2. The Song of Laughter (1:58)
- 3 3. The Song of Life (13:13)
- 4 4. The Riddle (3:19)
- 5 5. The Night Song (9:51)
- 6 Part 2 - 1. In the Mountains (9:21)
- 7 2. The Song of the Lyre (6:18)
- 8 3. The Dance-Song (18:47)

CD Two

- 1 4. At Noon in the Meadows (13:38)
- 2 5. The Song of Rapture (4:55)
- 3 6. The Paen to Joy (16:02)

Rosina Raisbeck, soprano Monica Sinclair, alto
Charles Craig, tenor Bruce Boyce, bass
London Philharmonic Choir (chorus-master: Frederick Jackson)

DELIOUS Hassan Suite

- 1 1. Introduction (1:51)
- 2 2. Serenade (violin solo) (2:25)
- 3 3. Short interlude (0:28)
- 4 4. Unaccompanied chorus behind scene (1:58)
- 5 5. The Beggars of Bagdad (1:16)
- 6 6. Chorus of women (2:17)
- 7 7. Prelude to Act III (2:31)
- 8 8. Chorus of soldiers (2:23)
- 9 9. The Procession of Protracted Death (2:17)
- 10 10. Serenade repeated (viola solo) (2:13)
- 11 11. Closing scene: The Golden Road to Samarkand (8:52)

Leslie Fry, baritone
Arthur Leavins, violin Frederick Riddle, viola
BBC Chorus (chorus-master: Leslie Woodgate)

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by **Sir Thomas Beecham**



PASC 270

XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**Transfers from Philips and Fontana
white label test pressingsCover artwork based on a
photograph of **Sir Thomas Beecham****A Mass of Life**

Recorded at Abbey Road Studio 1,
London, 8 & 11 November, 8, 10, 12
& 13 December 1952, 1 & 20 January,
10 April, 14 May 1953

Hassan Suite

Recorded at Walthamstow Assembly
Halls, London, 29 May 1956

Total duration: **2hr 11:20**

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