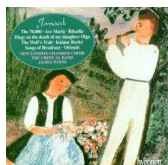


Leos Janacek - Choral Music (1997)

Written by bluesever

Tuesday, 29 March 2011 08:42 - Last Updated Wednesday, 15 January 2014 11:17

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Ríkadla (Nursery Rhymes) (18) for 9 voices & 10 instruments, JW 5/17 1 *Introduction* [0'30] 2 *The beetroot got married* [1'19] 3 *There's nothing better than Springtime* [1'04] 4 *The mole creeps* [0'59] 5 *Karel rode off to hell* [0'31] 6 *Ripped trousers* [0'29] 7 *Franta the knacker's son played the bass-fiddle* [0'59] 8 *Our dog, our dog ...* [0'34] 9 *I'm giving a little talk ...* [0'54] 10 *The old woman was making magic* [0'34] 11 *Ho, ho, off go the cows ...* [1'08] 12 *My tiny little wife...* [0'37] 13 *Granny's crawling into the elder bush ...* [0'21] 14 *A white goat's picking pears* [0'37] 15 *German-beetle broke some pans* [0'35] 16 *A goat is lying in the hay* [0'36] 17 *Vašek, pašek, the drummer* [0'38] 18 *Frantík, Frantík* [0'22] 19 *The bear sat on a tree trunk* [1'33] 20 *Kaspar Rucky* [5'51] 21 *The 70,000* [5'18] 22 *The wolf's trail* [6'31] 23 *Elegy on the death of my daughter Olga* [6'42]

Songs (3) of Hradcany (Hradcanské písničky), for female voices & instruments, JW 4/40

24 *Golden Street* [3'28] 25 *The weeping fountain* [4'07] 26 *Belveder* [7'42] 27 *Ave Maria* [4'48] 28 *Our Father* [14'33]

New London Chamber Choir, Critical Band, James Wood (conductor)

Janáček's Nursery Rhymes (Rikadla) sound particularly youthful, but they were written in the composer's final years of glory. The eighteen songs are accompanied by a tiny wind band, including an ocarina, with occasional contributions from double bass, piano, harp, organ, and some delicate percussion. The music is close in spirit to that of *The Cunning Little Vixen*, and has, if anything, even more charm than that miraculous opera. This presentation is captivating—even more so than that on a Chandos disc reviewed in *Fanfare* 19:4. There the playing is more virtuosic and the recorded sound fuller, but the net effect is less intimate.

The remaining pieces are more serious, ranging from a humorous tracing of the life and death of the philandering rogue Kašpar Rucký to the patriotic tragedy of *The 70,000* and the personal one of *Elegy*. Clive Williamson is the sensitive pianist in the latter. This is all gorgeous music, none more so than the haunting *Hradcany Songs* for female voices with minimal accompaniments.

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These performances strike me as nearly ideal, although a solo soprano and tenor strain a bit in one number each. Production values are equally high, from recorded sound to the inclusion of complete texts in Czech and English. Although the booklet lists more than forty members of the New London Chamber Choir, most songs are sung by smaller groups; besides the listed soloists, choir members are also given small solo parts. Although I find the singing graceful and convincingly idiomatic, it does not sound especially Czech; I suspect that native speakers will hear a foreign accent, so they might prefer the Chandos disc, on which Rikadla is sung by nine students from a Prague music academy. That is the only possible quibble I can imagine about this enchanting Hyperion disc. ---Fanfare: James H. North, arkivmusic.com

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