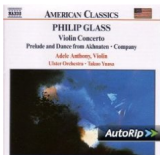


Philip Glass - Violin Concerto; Prelude and Dance from Akhnaten; Company (2000)

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 02 January 2010 18:21 - Last Updated Sunday, 24 November 2013 17:16

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COMPANY 1. I 2:33 2. II 1:56 3. III 1:50 4. IV 2:41 VIOLIN CONCERTO 5. I
6:51 6. II 8:32 7. III 9:28

AKHNATEN

8. Prelude 12:16 9. Dance (Act II Scene III) 5:34

Ulster Orchestra Adele Anthony, violin Takuo Yuasa, conductor

The musical style of Philip Glass (b. 1937) became widely recognizable by the 1990s, if not earlier. Many lesser composers imitated him (and still imitate him) and he has obviously become one of the more important figures in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century music. He has more than a few detractors, though, who hear his music as unbearably repetitive and without sufficient development. The three works on this CD, all from the 1980s, reflect Glass' mature minimalist style, and, like much of his work, will fare better with certain listeners on first hearing than on subsequent ones.

The Violin Concerto was premiered by Paul Zukofsky in April, 1987, at a time when the composer was enjoying acclaim from the success of *Satyagraha* and *Akhnaten*, which both appeared earlier in the decade. The Concerto is a dramatic, intense work whose ever-active rhythms impart much tension and passion. That's hardly news in describing so many Glass works, but here it seems especially so. The slow second movement (which isn't so slow, actually, thanks to the busy rhythms) is haunting and atmospheric, and the finale contains probably the most compelling music in the work. At nine minutes and twenty seconds, it is the longest movement and sounds the most challenging to the soloist. The driving yet gossamer motif that dominates the finale is unforgettable, and its repetition does not become too much of a good thing, the composer investing the music with tension and varying the material and orchestration quite effectively.

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The performance by the young Australian violinist Adele Anthony is splendid, totally convincing. Her tone and technique are fully up to the task, and her interpretive skills are impressive. Yukuo Yuasa and his Ulster players abet her with a fine sense for Glass' idiom. I'm sure the composer will like this recording.

As for the other items here, the Prelude and Dance from Akhnaten are the more substantial. Maestro Yuasa seems to have a fine grasp on Glass' style, as textures blend nicely and rhythms sound with elasticity and springiness, and the whole of the music takes on an atmosphere perfectly appropriate to the ancient imagery associated with the opera from which it was taken.

Company, from 1982, written to accompany an adaptation of Samuel Beckett's work of the same name, is a piece consisting of four short sections. Each features music with much rhythmic and atmospheric interest. As in the Akhnaten excerpts, the Ulster players acquit themselves admirably here, and Yuasa seems again to have a firm grasp of Glass' style.
---Robert Cummings, Rovi

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