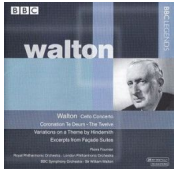


William Walton - Cello Concerto Choral and Orchestral Music (2002)

Written by bluesever

Wednesday, 16 November 2011 19:34 - Last Updated Tuesday, 01 July 2014 20:24

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Walton - Cello Concerto 01 - 1. *Moderato* [06:42] 02 - 2. *Allegro appassionato* [06:04] 03 - 3. *Lento; con moto; Risoluto tempo giusto (Brioso; Allegro molto); Rapsodicamente* [11:25] 04 - Walton - *The Twelve, anthem for chorus & organ* [12:21] 05 - Walton - *Coronation Te Deum, for soloists, chorus, organ & orchestra* [10:32] Walton - Variations on A Theme by Hindemith, for orchestra

06 - *Tema. Andante con moto* [02:07] 07 - *Variation 1. Vivace* [01:57] 08 - *Variation 2. Allegramente* [01:51] 09 - *Variation 3. Larghetto* [02:02] 10 - *Variation 4. Moto perpetuo (Con slancio)* [00:49] 11 - *Variation 5. Andante con moto* [02:32] 12 - *Variation 6. Scherzando* [01:15] 13 - *Variation 7. Lento molto* [03:20] 14 - *Variation 8. Vivacissimo* [00:45] 15 - *Variation 9. Maestoso* [00:45] 16 - *Finale (Allegro molto); Coda (A tempo primo (il tema) ma meno mosso)* [05:46]

Walton - *Facade, Suite No.1, for orchestra*

17 - *Tango; Pasodoble (Lento)* [01:48] 18 - *Popular Song (Grazioso)* [02:16] 19 - *Old Sir Faulk (Tempo di Fox-trot)* [02:03] 20 - *Tarantella; Sevillana* [02:34]

Pierre Fournier: Violoncello Robert Tear: Tenor Shirley Minty: Contralto Ann Dowdall: Soprano Michael Wakeham: Baritone London Philharmonic Orchestra Royal Philharmonic Orchestra BBC Symphony Orchestra London Philharmonic Chorus: William Walton: Conductor

This is one of a pair of CDs issued by BBC Legends to mark the Walton centenary and it is invaluable on several counts.

Walton made many recordings of his music, including most of his major works. However, with the exception of the four numbers from *Facade*, none of the works on this disc were otherwise recorded by him. Furthermore, we have here a recording of the world premiere of the Hindemith Variations, a performance of the Cello Concerto by Pierre Fournier who, so far as I am aware, never made a commercial recording of the work and, finally, a rarity in the form of the orchestral version of *The Twelve* which, I believe, is not otherwise available in this form. So, this is a

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mouth-watering prospect for Walton aficionados.

I don't know why the Hindemith Variations aren't heard more often for they are masterly. The variations are concise, resourceful and witty. They contain many of the characteristics of Walton's style and some traces of Hindemith's style too (I'm thinking especially of Variation 5 (Track 11)). The piece could be said to repay a thirty four year-old debt for Walton never forgot the fact that Hindemith rescued the première of his Viola Concerto in 1929 by taking on the solo role at short notice and the two men were friends thereafter. Walton based his variations on a theme from the second movement of Hindemith's Cello Concerto (1940). Furthermore he weaves a direct quotation of four bars from Hindemith's opera, *Mathis der Maler* into the seventh variation (Track 13, 2'36"). Readers will have gathered that, sensibly, each variation is tracked separately.

I deliberately decided not to compare this performance with the great recording of the piece made in 1964 by George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra. It seemed to me that it would be unfair to compare an account by a virtuoso orchestra which had played the piece several times with a recording of the very first performance of the work. In fact, Walton and his players need not fear comparisons for theirs is a fluent, confident and assured performance of the work. The players sound completely inside the piece and Walton's direction is as authoritative as one might expect. Whilst Szell's account retains its supremacy, I think, this is a notable addition not just to Walton's discography but also to that of the work itself.

The same is true of the performance of the Cello Concerto. This work was written in 1956 for Gregor Piatigorsky and he gave the first performance in Boston in January 1957 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Charles Munch. Just a few weeks later these same artists made the first recording which remains a benchmark account. The present performance was given just two years later, presumably at the Edinburgh Festival.

Fascinatingly, this is a much fleeter account than Piatigorsky's. Indeed, Fournier and Walton take over five minutes less (interestingly, the score quotes a duration of approximately 27 minutes.). The differences come in the outer, predominantly slower, movements where Piatigorsky is passionately romantic while Fournier tends to be more patrician and restrained, though he certainly does not play down the mood of gentle nostalgia which prevails in much of the work. Where the music is more reflective Fournier's cello sings out eloquently and throughout he is poised and refined. I think Piatigorsky perhaps has a slight edge in the quicker moments and to my ears he displays a degree of greater urgency in the two cadenza passages of the finale, particularly the first of these.

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It is worth pointing out that Fournier is balanced quite closely and this does mean that some details of the accompaniment are lost, especially where the orchestra is playing quietly. The Boston players can be heard to much better advantage (under studio conditions, of course) and they do play the score magnificently. However, the RPO are also diligent accompanists. There are no blemishes of the sort that occurred in the performance of Walton's First Symphony from the same concert, which has been issued on a companion CD (BBC Legends BBCL 4097-2). Perhaps more rehearsal time had been devoted to the concerto?

This Fournier/Walton performance is an excellent one. As I've indicated, there are many points of contrast between this and the Piatigorsky/Munch account. Both strike me as very convincing traversals of the score and we're lucky that we now have both to savour.

The two choral works on the disc both come from the same concert which was given to mark the 900th anniversary of the foundation of Westminster Abbey. For this occasion Walton orchestrated his anthem, The Twelve, which had been written the year before for his old Oxford college, Christ Church, and first performed there with the original organ accompaniment only a few months before this Westminster concert. I must confess I had no idea an orchestral version existed. It is mighty effective and should be better known. Here the piece receives a good, committed performance. The only snag is that (as usual) BBC Legends stubbornly refuse to provide the text. This is a definite drawback since Auden's words are far from straightforward and though the singers' diction is pretty good one really needs to be able to follow the text to appreciate the work fully.

The other work from the Abbey concert is the Coronation Te Deum. This is a really splendid piece, I think, one of Walton's best choral pieces. It is performed magnificently here with a full-throated contribution from the excellent choir who are balanced very well with the orchestra. With the full panoply of the brass conferring a ceremonial grandeur appropriate to the setting and the occasion, this is a thrilling performance. How splendid it is to have such a fine recording of Walton directing the work in the very building where it was first heard thirteen years earlier.

To complete the disc there are four excerpts from Façade, obviously taken from a Promenade concert. Three of them ('Popular Song'; 'Old Sir Faulk'; and 'Tarantella-Sevillana') come from Suite No 2 while 'Tango-Pasodoble' is from the first suite. They receive sprightly and enthusiastic performances from the BBC Symphony Orchestra who sound to be enjoying themselves. From the reaction at the end, it's obvious that the Promenaders did.

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This is an invaluable disc. It is just the sort of issue that make the BBC Legends series so important. All the performances are very good and the sound quality is perfectly satisfactory (though that of the Cello Concerto does show its age a bit). The notes are by Lyndon Jenkins. They are good but it is slightly cheeseparing, I think, to have used the same essay for both of these Walton issues with just a very brief paragraph about each work. However, that small quibble doesn't detract in the least from the significance of this issue. It is of the utmost importance as an addition to the Walton discography and I recommend it urgently to all admirers of this fine composer. --- John Quinn, musicweb-international.com

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