Josef Suk – Fairy Tale; Serenade for Strings (Belohlavek) [1992]



Pohádka (Fairy Tale) Op.16: *1. About The Constant Love Of Raduz And Mahulena And Their Trials 2. Intermezzo. Playing At Swans And Peacocks 3. Intermezzo. Funeral Music 4. Runa's Curse And How It Was Broken By True Love* Serenade for strings in E flat major, op.6:
5. I. Andante Con Moto 6. II. Allegro, Ma Non Troppo E Grazioso 7. III. Adagio - Piu Andante - Tempo I 8. IV. Allegro Giocoso, Ma Non Troppo Presto
Czech Philharmonic Orchestra Jiří Bělohlávek – conductor

Josef Suk, son-in-law of Dvořák and grandfather of the famous Czech violinist of the same name, had a moody artistic disposition. Dvořák was just the opposite--a generally cheerful and pleasant man, and one day he told his prize pupil to lighten up a bit a write something cheerful. The Serenade was the result, an obvious tribute to Dvořák, whose own Serenade for Strings remains one of his most popular and charming creations. The lineage is clear: if you like the Dvořák Serenade, than you simply must have this equally attractive sequel. The Fairy Tail is a vivacious and melodic suite that fully lives up to its name. Here's a record for fans of Czech music looking for something pleasantly different. ---David Hurwitz, amazon.com

This disc, well recorded in 1992, features two early works by Josef Suk. The Serenade is the better known but the Fairy Tale suite is a most attractive piece, somewhat more embedded into the romantic styles current at that time - Richard Strauss for example. The music is not so involved dramatically or orchestrally and has a generally lighter touch. Dvorak was Suk's father-in law at the time of the Fairy Tale and Suk was his favourite pupil at the time of the Serenade. Dvorak was enthusiastic about both works and with good reason.

The Fairy Tale suite is in four movements and was originally written as incidental music for a stage play. However, as Suk became more and more involved with the plot, the music eventually outgrew the play and was later re-arranged to form this separate suite where each movement is like a mini tone poem. This is a very persuasive performance by an orchestra and conductor deeply sympathetic to the Czech idiom and the performance carries considerable conviction.

Much the same can be said of the playing in the Serenade. This is a lighter work and is often paired with the Dvorak string Serenade which may well have been Suk's model. It follows Dvorak's advice to apply himself more to major keys rather than the minor keys which Suk had previously favoured. This resulted in a predominately happy work which has been Suk's most popular work ever since.

Suk's finest work, the Asrael symphony, is a much more serious work and was written following the death of both Dvorak and then Suk's wife, Dvorak's daughter, both at an early age and within a year of each other. None of that experience touches either of the works on this disc which provide an altogether happier listening experience.

In conclusion I would suggest that if this program appeals, then this disc deserves to be seriously considered for purchase as it is a very fine effort indeed by all concerned.--- I. Giles, amazon.com

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