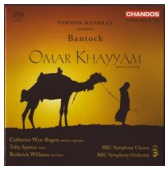
Bantock - Omar Khayyam (2007)



1. Part I Beginning 58:13 2. Part I Conclusion & Part II 1:13:07 3. Part III 40:08
Catherine Wyn-Rogers - mezzo-soprano (The Beloved) Toby Spence - tenor (The Poet) Roderick Williams - baritone (The Philosopher) Olivia Robinson - soprano (First Pot) Siân Menna - mezzo-soprano (Second Pot) Edward Price - bass (Sixth Pot) BBC Symphony Chorus BBC Symphony Orchestra Vernon Handley - conductor

The recording of Bantock's choral masterpiece has long been at the top of Ralph Couzens's wish list and it has now finally come to fruition with the BBC Symphony Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Vernon Handley. This is a premiere recording and offers three CDs for the price of two. Bantock had a passion for all things Eastern and this interest in the exotic certainly finds an outlet in Omar Khayyám. The overriding philosophy of the rubáiyat of Omar Khayyám, a twelfth-century Persian astronomer, mathematician and poet, was the transience of existence and the insignificance of the individual, whether high-born or lowly. The poetical work of Omar Khayyám was translated into English by Edward Fitzgerald. Bantock uses a large orchestra with two full string complements, arranged to the left and right of the conductor, and in the atmospheric caravan scene he also makes a feature of authentic camel bells. This is our Disc of the Month. ---chandos.net

Granville Bantock (1868-1946) was never one for doing things on a small scale, and his complete setting of Edward Fitzgerald's translation of The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyám attests to the scope of his vision. The oratorio, which lasts over three hours and requires a huge orchestra and chorus, is unlikely to find a place on many concert programs, but a recording offers the listener the ideal opportunity to savor it in manageable chunks. It's a very attractive piece that suffered from the bad timing of its premiere, which was very close to that of The

Kingdom by the much more famous Edward Elgar. Bantock's style is similar to Elgar's, and any Elgar fan should find much here to appreciate. His music reflects the sound of late nineteenth century Germans, particularly Brahms, but there is a Wagnerian influence as well. Debussy's aesthetic is also in evidence in the harmonic movement of the more "exotic" sections, and there are moments of languid lushness that are similar to the soundworld of Gurrelieder, whose premiere it predates. While Bantock didn't have a particularly original vision, his canny combination of a variety of influences, his skillful orchestration and vocal and choral writing, and the epic sweep of his lyricism make Omar Khayyám a very appealing piece. It doesn't have enough variety to fully sustain interest for three hours, but taken in smaller doses, it has much to commend it. It receives a stellar performance by the BBC Symphony and Chorus, led by Vernon Handley, who lovingly shapes the colorful score. Mezzo-soprano Catherine Wyn-Rogers, tenor Toby Spence, and Roderick Williams sing with warmth, robust tone, and passionate intensity. The sound of Chandos' SACD is full, clean, and spacious. ---Stephen Eddins, AllMusic Review

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