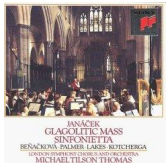
Leos Janacek - Glagolitic Mass – Sinfonietta (1992)



Glagolitic Mass: *1. I. Uvod (Introduction) 2. II. Gospodi pomiluj (Kyrie) 3. III. Slava (Gloria) 4. IV. Veruju (Credo) 5. V. Svet (Sanctus) 6. VI. Agnece Bozij (Agnus Dei) 7. VII. Varhany solo (Organ) 8. VIII. Intrada* Sinfonietta: *9. I. Allegretto 10. II. Andante - Allegretto 11. III. Moderato 12. IV. Allegretto 13. V. Andante con moto*
Gabriela Benackova (soprano) Felicity Palmer (mezzo soprano) Gary Lakes (tenor) Anatoly Kotcherga (bass) John Scott (organ) London Symphony Chorus & Orchestra Tilson Thomas – conductor

It is a tribute to Janácek's genius that we always think of him as a 20th century composer. In fact he was aged 46 when the new century began, but of course he continued to develop and the majority of his compositions of lasting value were written in the final phase of his life.

The Indian Summer that is Janácek's final decade contains his greatest music, indeed some of the finest operas and instrumental works ever written, This is not to deny, however, that prior to that period a few of his compositions, including the orchestral rhapsody Taras Bulba and the opera Jenufa, attain the same high standards.

Composed in 1926, the Sinfonietta uses a large orchestra, the outer movements requiring a complement of extra brass, including fourteen trumpets. Tilson Thomas conducts a performance which enjoys very high standards of playing, as well as a clear and well focused recording. If the results are not quite in the front rank of recorded performances, that is because the rhythmic attack lacks the cutting edge which this music seems to gain in the hands of native Czech performers. (Rafael Kubelik (Deutsche Grammophon) is particularly effective.) But Tilson Thomas does offer compensations, since the more lyrical moments of the work have a poetic beauty which seems hard to match. Any doubts about the more dramatic agenda do not present major problems, though for sheer drama other performances can add an extra dimension.

Performance standards are high also in the Glagolitic Mass, with marvellous playing from the LSO, while the LSO Chorus matches their standard. Make no mistake, this music is fearsome in its technical demands and these things should not be taken for granted, even if the fact of recorded performances can encourage us to expect excellence at the push of a button.

As in the Sinfonietta, the quieter, more reflective aspects of the Mass are beautifully done, and beautifully captured by the recording, too. There is careful attention to dynamic shadings and characterful phrasing.

In this remastered issue the sound is probably better than ever, and there is no lack of impact in the more powerful sections of the score, of which there are many. For example, John Scott's big organ solo expands magnificently, and will be heard to best advantage by those who dwell in detached properties.

The soloists make an effective team, and it is interesting to hear Felicity Palmer take the mezzo soprano part, where previously she was the soprano soloist on Sir Simon Rattle's performance on EMI. Gary Lakes, that fine Wagnerian tenor, is caught in good voice, though he does struggle occasionally with his Czech diction.

Tilson Thomas conducts with a sense of real dedication and commitment, and the dramatic aspects of the work come across with biting clarity and directness. For this is a splendid performance of a choral work which gets becomes more powerful and compelling with each performance one hears. ---Terry Barfoot , www.musicweb-international.com

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