

Mieczyslaw Karłowicz – Violin Concerto, Symphony ‘Rebirth’ (2009)

Written by bluesever

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Part I

01 - *Biała Gołąbka (Bianca da Molena) overture*

Violin Concerto in A major, op. 8

02 - *I. Allegro moderato*

03 - *II. Romanza. Andante*

04 - *III. Finale. Vivo*

encore

J.S. Bach

05 - *Gavotte en Rondeau from Partita in E major, BWV 1006*

Part II

Symphony in e minor, op. 7 "Rebirth"

01 - *I. Andante. Allegro*

02 - *II. Andante non troppo*

03 - *III. Vivace*

04 - *IV. Allegro maestoso*

The National Philharmonic Orchestra

Antoni Wit - conductor

Ilya Kaler - violin

Live broadcast, Polish Radio Program 2, National Philharmonic Hall in Warsaw,
Poland, 6 February 2009

Chandos Records Ltd. continues its survey of Mieczyslaw Karłowicz in Volume II of his works. As I mentioned in my review of the first volume, interests in his art came into a more fuller fruition only recently. Even due this month is an Hyperion disc featuring his violin concerto, very

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much adored in Poland yet virtually unknown elsewhere. That Hyperion CD (which also includes Moszkowski's Concerto) should help change that as the Chandos series is already doing so. Hopefully other orchestras would pick up the re-discovery phase of Karłowicz' highly individualistic art.

Although the Symphony is placed third on this disc, it is something I would love to tackle on first. It's quite a wonderful piece, with echoes of Tchaikovsky, Grieg, and some Wagner yes, but then again, quite idiosyncratic in its melodic invention. Written in 1903, its source of inspiration was, at least according to some sources though not mentioned in Wightman's booklet essay, Nietzsche. It's called "Rebirth" Symphony (otherwise known as "Revival" or "Renaissance" Symphony), and the 'darkness to light' scheme shows some kinship to Tchaikovsky's Fifth. But, as I've stated, despite the aforementioned echoes, it is quite a wonderful piece. It's dramatic underpinning in the first movement is countered by a very graceful secondary subject that recurs throughout. This subject evokes Grieg with a sense of longing and sentimentality. The movement is conflicting in a compelling way. But the ternary second movement to me shows Karłowicz as among the best he could do. It is a beautiful movement, yet at 4'55", majestic and dignified too. But who would've thought how illuminating that Wagnerian climax towards the end would wind up being? Quite riveting! And the scherzo is lively enough, with some Tchaikovskian lyricism in the middle, but the finale is quite something else. It is vivid and the Hymn is triumphant and perhaps a tad pompous. It's an excellent idea to include excerpts from Karłowicz programme notes regarding his Symphony in the booklet.

The other works here are quite likable in their own terms. The Serenade for Strings (1897) is a delightful piece, quite easygoing in its expressionism. The March is finely written while the Romance is attractively subtle and poetic, even though the slow movement of the Symphony is much more compelling and memorable. But I warm to the Waltz, which elegant and not at all flabby, and the Finale, which somehow puts to mind Lehar (more specifically his Merry Widow) with the writing not as exotic, but with the playful rusticity that in part made Lehar well loved and admired. The Bianca da Molena (prologue from the incidental music from Nowinski's "Music for the White Dove") is resplendent, with a glaring opening and heroic passages throughout. The prologue reminds me a good deal of Novak's overture to Jaroslav Vrchlicky's play "Lady Godiva", though with Novak's greater imagination, a more evocative orchestration and tone painting.

In any event, an important disc, especially since no other versions of the works are widely available. The BBC Philharmonic continues to be an excellent ensemble and it is quite amazing how well versed this orchestra is, with such an assurance in their playing of even the rarest of repertoires (as with a number of British orchestras nowadays, like the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra or the Royal Liverpool). However, one, at times, may wish for a slightly greater sonority and affection in some of their playing, which brings to mind the Symphony. My

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acquaintance with the work was first made thanks to a Polskie Nagrania LP recording of Wodiczko and the Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra. That recording, despite its limitations, continues to hold a special place in my collective memory. There were small cuts made in that performance, unfortunately. But the abundance of warmth is evident in the Polish orchestra, with Wodiczko showing every bit of flair and admiration of the piece. And his phrasings and structural hold are immaculate (listen, if you can, how he springs up the finale with such sparkle and exuberance while adding greater weight and majesty on the Hymn). If only Wodiczko would've kept himself from tampering with the score, while affording himself a far better, first class recording, would this recording be the benchmark. But, as is, it is not, which brings us to Nosedá's delivery. His a very poetic affair, with some very dramatic undercurrents in indeed bring to mind Tchiakovsky. And I admire the warmth and elegance he brings forth in the Andante non troppo movement. The finale is more dignified and noble in Nosedá, and yet it's Wodiczko who's more outgoing and lively. But to Nosedá's huge advantage, the score is presented in full, which greatly enhances its appreciation and gives us a more multi-dimensional look into Poland's emerging and promising talent by the turn of the 20th Century. --- David Anthony Hollingsworth, amazon.com

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