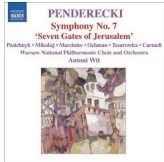


Krzysztof Penderecki – Symphony No.7 ‘Seven Gates of Jerusalem’ (Antoni Wit) [2006]

Written by bluesever

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1. Part I: *Magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis* 2. Part II: *Si oblitus fuero tui, Jerusalem* 3. Part III: *De profundis* 4. Part IV: *Si oblitus fuero tui, Jerusalem* 5. Part V: *Lauda Jerusalem* 6. Part VI: *Facta es super me manus Domini* 7. Part VII: *Haec dicit Dominus* Aga Mikolaj – soprano Olga Pasicznik - soprano Ewa Marciniak – alto Wieslaw Ochman – tenor Romuald Tesarowicz – bass Boris Carmeli – narrator Warsaw National Philharmonic Choir Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra Antoni Wit – conductor

The most notable feature of Penderecki's Symphony No. 7, "Seven Gates of Jerusalem," is that it sounds more like an oratorio than a symphony; in fact, one movement is set for a cappella chorus. It is not surprising, then, to discover that Penderecki wrote the piece in 1996 as an oratorio in celebration of Jerusalem's third millennium and didn't decide to designate it as his Seventh Symphony until after it had been performed in Jerusalem and Warsaw the following year. The composer hadn't yet written a sixth symphony, but felt that the symbolic significance of the number seven, which permeates the work on many levels, mandated this numbering. (Richard Whitehouse, in Naxos' program booklet, noted that "though a 'No. 6' had been fully worked out in concept, it had not yet been written." Penderecki completed his Eighth Symphony in 2005, but at that time, the Sixth had still not appeared.)

Six movements are settings of Latin texts from the Psalms and the Prophets. (It is a curious aesthetic and political decision that the composer would have chosen to write a work for Jerusalem's millennial celebration using the Christian Vulgate translation, rather than the original Hebrew of these texts.) One movement, set for speaker and orchestra, is in Hebrew.

Idiomatically, the work is solidly post-Romantic, with just enough nods to postmodern polystylism and to modernist harmonies and gestures to situate the work as a product of the late twentieth century. Penderecki's inventive orchestration helps enliven musical material that

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frequently sounds second hand. The most effective choral writing is often derived from chant and Renaissance polyphony, but in its grander moments it is shamelessly derivative of Mussorgsky, and occasionally summons the ghost of Orff's Carmina Burana. The sixth movement, a Hebrew setting of Ezekiel's vision of the valley of the dry bones, set as "Sprechstimme for male voice," is easily the most compelling movement, a genuinely chilling account of the vision, stylistically closer to the composer's 1966 St. Luke Passion than to the rest of the symphony. It reveals the composer's mastery at creating and maintaining visceral dramatic tension. Boris Carmeli's stunning performance as the speaker perfectly captures the spirit of Ezekiel's astonishing vision and is the highlight of the CD.

Antoni Wit leads the Warsaw National Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra, ensembles that are expert and experienced performers of Penderecki's music. The playing and singing are fervent and impassioned, as committed and compelling a reading of the symphony as could be hoped for. ---Stephen Eddins, Rovi

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