

Igor Stravinsky – Les Noces – Mass – Cantata (2006)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Les Noces. Première partie: Premier tableau : Chez la mariée*
 2. *Les Noces. Première partie: Deuxième tableau : Chez le marié*
 3. *Les Noces. Première partie: Troisième tableau : Le départ de la mariée*
 4. *Les Noces. Deuxième partie. Quatrième tableau : Le repas de noces*
 5. *Messe: Kyrie*
 6. *Messe: Gloria*
 7. *Messe: Credo*
 8. *Messe: Sanctus*
 9. *Messe: Agnus Dei*
 10. *Cantate: I. A lyke-wake dirge. Versus 1. Prelude - This ae nighte*
 11. *Cantate: II. Ricercar I. The maidens came*
 12. *Cantate: III. A lyke-wake dirge. Versus 2. First interlude - If ever you gav'st hos'n and shoon*
 13. *Cantate: IV. Ricercar II. Sacred History. To-morrow shall be my dancing day*
 14. *Cantate: V. A lyke-wake dirge. Versus 3. Second interlude - From Whinnymuir when thou may'st pass*
 15. *Cantate: VI. Westron Wind*
 16. *Cantate: VII. A lyke-wake dirge. Versus 4. Postlude - If ever thou gav'st meat or drink*
- Carolyn Sampson, soprano Jan Kobow, tenor Susan Parry, alto Vsevolod Grivnov, tenor Maxim Mikhailov, bass RIAS Kammerchor, musikFabrik
Daniel Reuss – conductor

This is an outstanding disc of Stravinsky's choral music, beginning with a visceral performance of *Les Noces* that captures the raw barbarism of the score. If you like Orff's *Carmina Burana*, this is where it comes from. A series of tableaux depicting a peasant wedding, *Les Noces* is a revolutionary work--and it sounds it in this blazing performance. The *Mass* is revolutionary in a different way, returning to earlier music traditions like Gregorian chant. It can sometimes sound too ascetic for its own good, but Reuss's superb chorus and wind band invest it with the warmth and color it needs to make its full effect. The *Cantata*, written four years later in 1952, is a prime

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example of Stravinsky's late neo-classicism. Based on medieval English texts, its small chorus and soloists, sparsely backed by a chamber band, rebuke the work's neglect through their incisive performance. -- Dan Davis, amazon.com

Frankly, my dear, it's too pretty -- and while Stravinsky's Les Noces is many things, it's not pretty. It's belligerently uncompromising in its abrasive choral writing, it's aggressively brilliant in its glittering score for four pianos and percussion, and it's powerfully propulsive in its driving polyrhythms. But it's not pretty -- and this performance by the RIAS-Kammerchor and MusikFabrik directed by Daniel Reuss is very, very pretty. There's a richness and a roundness to their choral singing, a polish and refinement to their piano and percussion playing, and a poise and stability to their rhythms that can best be described as pretty. Worst of all, there's none of the sheer ferociousness that is the hallmark of all great performances of Les Noces. This performance is surely well sung and well played, but its ultimate affect is too sweet to be truly creditable. The performances here of Stravinsky's later Mass and Cantata are equally well executed but lack the sense of austere reserve that characterize the great performances of those works. Although Harmonia Mundi's 2006 super audio sound is much cleaner and deeper, the recordings of Les Noces, the mass, and the cantatas to hear remain Stravinsky's own fierce and severe recordings from the '50s and '60s. ---Ja,es Leonard, Rovi

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