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Major Discoveries: Lajtha's Magical Music for String Orchestra

Review by: David Hurwitz



Artistic Quality: 9

Sound Quality: 9

Hungarian composer Laszlo Lajtha's symphony "Les Soli" for string orchestra, harp and percussion is a masterpiece. Comparisons with Bartók's earlier Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta are logical and obvious, but the two works couldn't sound more different. Whereas the Bartók is scary and grim, at least until its finale, the Lajtha is joyous, elegant, and fantastical, with the slow movement striking a graver tone. Each movement spotlights a member of the string family (bass, viola, cello, and violin, in that order). The percussion section includes timpani, and the harp participates fully throughout in equally solo fashion (sound clip). The music is simply delightful from start to finish, and its neglect in chamber orchestra concerts is simply unaccountable.

The same observation applies to the two Sinfoniettas, this time for strings only. Both have only three movements, but the Second Sinfonietta is the bigger of the two, with a central slow movement

("Lent et calme") that's beautifully sustained and just mesmerizing. I suppose the reason that this music so seldom gets played has something to do with its ferocious technical difficulty at all levels. That makes these fine performances, under three sympathetic conductors, all the more welcome. The Budapest Chamber Symphony does an excellent job giving music of real distinction the care and attention that it so richly deserves. The sonics are also consistently fine, the live audiences dead quiet.

We will need comparative versions to get the true measure of these works, but this release makes an excellent place to get started and more than holds its own. If you collect first-class 20th century music that's both characterful and approachable, yet still modern in tone and technique, you'll want to hear this disc.

Symphonie "Les Soli" (i)

Recording Details:

Reference Recording: None

LAJTHA, LÁSZLÓ:

Complete Works for String Orchestra (Symphonie "Les Soli"; Sinfoniettas Nos. 1 and 2)

Budapest Chamber Symphony, Simone Fontanelli, Imre Rohmann, Péter Csaba (conds.)

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CD