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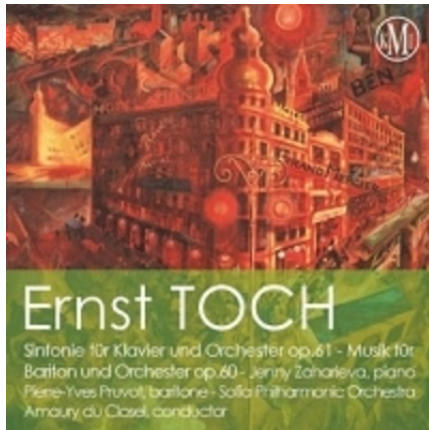
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Toch: Sinfonie Fur Klavier Und Orchester, Musik Fur Orchester Eine Baritonstimme / Du Closel, Sofia Philharmonic

Release Date: 09/10/2013

Label: Karusel Music Catalog #: 120110 Spars Code: DDD

Composer: Ernst Toch

Performer: Pierre-Yves Pruvot

Conductor: Amaury Du Closel

Orchestra/Ensemble: Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra

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Recorded in: Stereo

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Notes and Editorial Reviews

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TOCH Symphony for Piano and Orchestra , op. 61. Music for Orchestra and Baritone , op. 60 • Amaury du Closel, cond; Jenny Zaharieva (pn); Pierre-Yves Pruvot (bar); Sofia PO • SACEM 120110 (53:20 Text and Translation).

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This is the second recording of Ernst Toch's four-movement, 34-minute Symphony for Piano and Orchestra. A Talent SACD, with pianist Diane Andersen and Staatskapelle Halle led by Hans Rotman, was reviewed in *Fanfare* 30:1. The Symphony weaves back and forth between drama and lyricism; it is basically tonal, spattered with mild dissonances that occasionally strike hard. The opening *Allegro* is busy yet playful, with much of both Hindemith and Shostakovich (the First Piano Concerto) in evidence, but Toch ends the movement with an easy-going, relaxed warmth. A scherzo-like *Lebhaft* continues the mood but hints at darker things; surprises abound. Thus far piano and orchestra have been going full tilt together, but a deep, questing *Adagio* begins with three minutes of orchestra alone, followed by an equally long solo; the two never do join forces. The Finale, *Cyclus variabilis-Allegro molto*, goes off in all directions, variable indeed, for over 13 minutes. It is a fascinating and enjoyable piece.

Each recording brings this complex work to life. Both pianists are comfortable with Toch's sometimes virtuoso demands (Andersen is known for her Bartók; Zaharieva has recorded the Brahms B? Concerto); both orchestras are satisfactory if not much more—one would love to hear this piece played by one of the great ensembles. This Sacem recording suffers a bit from a reverberant yet clotted acoustic; Talent's SACD has by far the better sound. For three movements, it makes for easier listening, but conductor Hans Rotman and his German orchestra just don't get the giant Finale; in their performance, it drifts along with no seeming purpose, mindless if happy. Just the opposite is true under du Closel; *Cyclus variabilis* becomes a riveting, pulsing engine, probing uncharted musical waters. The difference is immense, and I much prefer the new recording for that reason.

Music for Orchestra and Baritone, an even more unusual work than the Symphony, is new to me and, I believe, to discs. It begins with a long, slow, quiet orchestral movement that is achingly beautiful, conjuring up

distant horns wafting across the Alps—or the Pyrenees, as in the opening measures of d'Albert's *Tiefland*. One's immediate reaction is: Why did such stunning music not become standard repertoire? The answer lies not only in Toch's unfortunate personal history but in the unexpected forms he chose. Next comes a mostly unaccompanied song to an early Rilke poem, "You, God, my neighbor," a (one-sided) discussion between a man and God. A woodwind quartet breaks in for a short interlude, and then all Hell breaks loose: a loud, bombastic orchestral passage which could be ripped from a Soviet film. The baritone continues, to a gentle accompaniment which brings back the opening beauties, and the music closes with more bombast. It's a strange brew, but Toch makes it all work. Baritone Pruvot is excellent, stentorian when called for and dramatic at all times, with superb diction. The orchestra steps up a notch from its performance of the Symphony, and the recorded sound is also an improvement,

Both works were written in 1932, just before Toch, who was Jewish, fled Nazi Germany. He was at the time, with Hindemith, one of the two leading German composers. His career never fully blossomed in America, despite seven symphonies written here. The course of music in the 20th century—not only German music—might have been totally different but for that disruption. These two works represent Toch at his peak, a true master, and this disc goes straight to Want List 2014.

FANFARE: James H. North

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Works on This Recording

- Symphony for piano & orchestra, Op. 61** by *Ernst Toch*
 Conductor: Amaury Du Closel
 Orchestra/Ensemble: Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra
 Period: 20th Century
 Written: 1932
- Music for Orchestra and a Baritone Voice, Op. 60** by *Ernst Toch*
 Performer: Pierre-Yves Pruvot (Baritone)
 Conductor: Amaury Du Closel
 Orchestra/Ensemble: Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra
 Period: 20th Century
 Written: 1932

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