



Pancho VLADIGEROV

Bulgarian Suite

Seven Symphonic
Bulgarian Dances

Vardar Rhapsody

Rousse Philharmonic Orchestra

Nayden Todorov

Pancho Vladigerov (1899–1978)

Bulgarian Suite, Op. 21 • Seven Symphonic Bulgarian Dances, Op. 23 • Vardar Rhapsody, Op. 16

Pancho Vladigerov is arguably the most influential composer that Bulgaria has yet produced. He was born in Zurich on 13 March 1899, but lived latterly in Bulgaria. His mother Eliza Pasternak was a relative of the Nobel Prize-winning writer Boris Pasternak, while his father Haralan Vladigerov was a Bulgarian lawyer and politician. His grandfather Leon Pasternak, who left Odessa and later settled in Zurich, was an influential figure in Vladigerov's musical development, playing violin with him and his twin brother Luben. Vladigerov himself also played the piano and began composing at an early age. In 1910, two years after his father's early death, the family moved to Sofia where he studied composition with Dobri Hristov.

In 1912 Vladigerov's mother managed to obtain a government scholarship for her children to study in Berlin, where they were enrolled at the Staatliche Akademische Hochschule für Musik, under the auspices of the Academy of Arts. Vladigerov initially studied music theory and composition with Paul Juon and piano with Karl Heinrich Barth. In 1920 he graduated from the Academy after further studies in piano with Leonid Kreutzer, as well as composition with Friedrich Gernsheim and Georg Schumann. He won the Academy's Mendelssohn Prize in 1918 and again in 1920. After graduation, Vladigerov became music director at the Deutsches Theater Berlin where he collaborated with the director Max Reinhardt. In 1932 he returned to Sofia, where he was appointed professor in piano, chamber music and composition at the State Academy of Music. The following year he was among those founding members of the Bulgarian Contemporary Music Society (later renamed the Union of Bulgarian Composers).

Vladigerov wrote in a range of genres including an opera (*Tsar Kaloyan*) and several ballets. His orchestral output features two symphonies, five piano concertos and two violin concertos, while his chamber music includes a string quartet, a piano trio and several works for violin and piano, as well as numerous pieces for solo piano. There are also a substantial number of folk song transcriptions

for a variety of instrumental and vocal media and some two dozen songs for voice and piano, along with incidental music for numerous productions at the Deutsches Theater Berlin, the Theater in der Josefstadt in Vienna and the National Theatre in Sofia.

Vladigerov gained considerable fame between the two World Wars. Many of his pieces were published by Universal Edition in Vienna, and performed throughout Europe and the US. As a pianist and conductor he toured many European countries, performing mainly his own works. In 1952 his *Jewish Poem* was awarded the Dimitrov Prize and earned the admiration of fellow composers such as Shostakovich. On his 70th birthday he was awarded the Herder Prize by the University of Vienna, while the Bulgarian record company Balkanton released an anniversary edition of his stage and symphonic music. His music was played by artists such as Alexis Weissenberg, David Oistrakh and Emil Gilels, and more recently by the Bulgarian-born pianist Valentina Seferinova. Pancho Vladigerov died in Sofia on 8 September 1978.

The three works recorded here are testament to Vladigerov's determination in bringing the music of his adopted homeland to international attention. Among the most notable is the set of *Seven Symphonic Bulgarian Dances* that he composed in 1931 and which function as an integral cycle, from which smaller groups or even individual pieces can also be extracted.

The opening dance is centred upon a lively theme for the whole orchestra, to which a more expressively ambivalent melody shared between woodwind and strings offers contrast, until the initial theme returns to steer this piece through to its rumbustious conclusion. The second dance begins with a winsome melody in which upper woodwind are to the fore, succeeded by a more sophisticated idea made more enticing by discreet touches from tuned percussion. The third dance starts in much the same vein, though here the main theme has a distinct Middle Eastern feel which is emphasised by

rumbustious scoring for brass and percussion. The fourth dance forms the stately centrepiece of this sequence, its languorous theme notable for some subtle interplay between woodwind and strings, as well as a livelier central section which brings a heightened return of the main theme prior to the rapt ending. The fifth dance returns to more animated affairs, its syncopated theme bringing further piquant interplay between strings and woodwind along with a cumulative overall motion that results in a vigorous close. The sixth dance is the most understated while also the most affecting, its wistful main theme unfolding with evident poise towards a livelier central section again denoted by its percussive touches, though the earlier theme eventually has the eloquent last word. The final dance begins almost mysteriously, its main theme gradually coming into focus before being shared out across the orchestral sections through to a forceful culmination, after which, activity continues unabated as the theme draws the whole orchestra towards a conclusion of irresistible energy and verve.

Vladigerov was one of the first composers successfully to combine elements from Bulgarian folk music with those of the European classical tradition. His most familiar work remains the *Vardar Rhapsody* (also known as the *Bulgarian Rhapsody*), which epitomises this approach. Originally written for violin and piano, the piece was orchestrated in 1928 and soon became, in the words of one commentator, 'the Bulgarian equivalent of Chopin's *Polonaise in A*'.

This commences with a stern call to attention, closely followed by a stately melody on strings which soon takes on a ceremonial majesty. This theme is made the basis of all that follows, its rhythmic profile audible even when it dies down into the lower reaches of the orchestra – at which point, the music takes on a much greater animation as melodic ideas emerge then disappear with some rapidity. Eventually this builds towards a climactic restatement of the opening theme, now heard at length prior to a sudden acceleration into the lively final bars.

Composed in 1927, the *Bulgarian Suite* is a further instance of Vladigerov's fusion between regional folk melodies familiar to non-specialist audiences with the sophisticated orchestral means available to European composers over the decade following the First World War. The outcome is somewhere between the systematic thinking of Bartok and Kodály, and the more generalised approach favoured by generations of Russian composers – not least those ballet scores from such as Glière and Vladigerov's slighter younger contemporary Khachaturian.

The opening *Quasi marcia* is based on an impulsive theme whose martial associations are by no means pronounced, especially as the main theme is given a variety of instrumental settings before returning to its original guise then proceeding to an emphatic close. The *Chant* which follows is notable for some resourceful scoring (not least for solo violin at the outset), as well as a harmonic richness which is redolent of such composers as Respighi or Canteloube, until the music reaches a rapturous culmination before subsiding back into its earlier languor. Next comes a *Chorovodna* whose energetic character is maintained throughout what follows, even if much of the orchestral writing is graceful in its restraint – notably during a central episode which again features some dexterous writing for percussion, though the closing pages have an undeniable panache. The final *Ratchenitza* continues in much the same vein, its main theme moving purposefully through the various orchestral sections and also taking in a contrasting secondary idea, before the initial theme returns to see the suite through to its decisive close.

Richard Whitehouse

Rousse Philharmonic Orchestra



Photo: Gergana Georgieva

orchestra has undertaken several international tours, and its discography includes recordings in the Golden Fund of the Bulgarian National Radio, and Television and Radio Berlin.

www.ruseopera.com

The Rousse Philharmonic Orchestra was established in 1919 as a successor to the traditions of symphonic activity in Rousse after the Liberation. The premiere concert of The Rousse City Philharmonic took place on 2 March 1919. In the first 30 years of its existence, the orchestra took various guises as and when it could fund and participate in different projects, such as the 'Lyra' Company and the 'Opera Union'. In 1947 the orchestra became a state company, and on 4 January 1948 gave its first concert as the State Philharmonic – Rousse under the baton of Konstantin Iliev. A highlight in the orchestra's history is its collaboration with Shostakovich, and the composer's premiere of his *Piano Concerto No. 2* in 1958. The orchestra is the initiator and host of the March Music Days and Winter Musical Evenings festivals. The

Nayden Todorov



Photo: Rudy Bezhev

Nayden Todorov is among the most talented Bulgarian musicians of his generation, with a vast repertoire that spans both symphonic and operatic works. A native of Bulgaria, the multi-talented European conductor has worked with orchestras in Vienna, Israel, and Bulgaria, where he currently serves as general director of the Sofia Philharmonic. Todorov studied with Karl Österreich and Uroš Lajovic in Vienna, and has gone on to conduct major orchestras across the European and American continents. In Israel, he was the resident conductor of the Haifa Symphony Orchestra, selected from more than 150 candidates. Todorov has recorded over one hundred albums for Naxos, RENT Music, Balkanton, MMO, Danacord Records, IMI Records and Hungaroton, and has also created several music productions for various radio and TV stations. In 2012 Todorov was named Bulgarian Musician of the Year.

www.naydentodorov.com

Pancho Vladigerov is considered by many to be the most influential composer that Bulgaria has yet produced, gaining fame between the World Wars and earning the admiration of Shostakovich. The three works recorded here are a testament to Vladigerov's mission to bring Bulgarian music to international attention, successfully combining elements of folk music with European classical tradition. The *Vardar Rhapsody* has been called 'the Bulgarian equivalent of Chopin's *Polonaise in A*', and the lively and exotic *Seven Symphonic Bulgarian Dances* is among the most notable of a series of works that fuse joyous regional melodies with sophisticated Western orchestration.

Pancho
VLADIGEROV
(1899–1978)

	Seven Symphonic Bulgarian Dances, Op. 23 (1931)	38:08
❶	Allegro moderato	5:42
❷	Allegro moderato grazioso	3:51
❸	Presto	3:13
❹	Andante con moto	7:42
❺	Vivamente	4:33
❻	Allegro comodo	7:21
❼	Animato con vivezza – Vivacissimo	5:33
❽	Vardar Rhapsody, Op. 16 (1922, orchestrated 1928)	9:28
	Bulgarian Suite, Op. 21 (1927)	26:38
❾	Quasi marcia	5:35
❿	Chant	7:37
⓫	Chorovodna	5:41
⓬	Ratchenitza	7:40

Rousse Philharmonic Orchestra
Nayden Todorov

Recorded: 30 January 2016 ❶–❷ and 7–8 November 2016 ❸–⓫ at the Rousse Philharmonic Hall, Bulgaria

Producer: Nayden Todorov • Engineer: Ivailo Janev • Editor: Roumiana Stoyanova

Booklet notes: Richard Whitehouse • Publisher: Édition d'état 'Science et Arts', Sofia

Cover photograph: Tsarevets Fortress, Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria by taseffski (iStockphoto.com)

© & © 2019 Naxos Rights US, Inc. • www.naxos.com