

KAZUO YAMADA

Grand Treasure

A Song of Young People • Kiso • Spellbinding

Russian Philharmonic Orchestra

Dmitry Yablonsky



Kazuo Yamada (1912-1991):

A Song of Young People • Kiso • Symphonic Suite 'India' (Spellbinding) • Grand Treasure

The Japanese composer and conductor Kazuo Yamada is remembered primarily as a writer of songs in the style of 20th-century French composers, and as the successor to Qunihico Hashimoto (1904-1949) [see Naxos 8.555881 and 8.572869]. In the pre-war period he was also known as one of the few Japanese composers able to write full-scale orchestral music but, after the war, he refused to publish his earlier orchestral works. Of *Kiso*, for example, he claimed that he had lost the score and was no longer willing to have it performed. As a result, in the post-war period it was purely as a conductor that he was recognized, his songs alone narrowly escaping oblivion, whilst his career as an orchestral composer was completely forgotten.

In 1931 Yamada had joined the piano department of the Tokyo Music School, studying with Leo Sirota. He studied composition under Mahler's pupil, Klaus Pringsheim, who became Yamada's mentor, and conducting under Joseph Rosenstock, and made his debut as a composer in 1937, when his work *Prelude on a Japanese Folk Song* took first prize in an orchestral music competition held by JOAK (the present-day NHK). He made his conducting debut in 1942 when he was appointed full-time conductor of the Japan Symphony Orchestra, from which he created the present-day NHK Symphony Orchestra in collaboration with Hisatada Otaka.

In 1953 Yamada started to teach conducting at the Tokyo University of the Arts, fostering a younger generation of conductors that included Ken'chiro Kobayashi, Kazuhiro Koizumi, Hiroshi Ishimaru and Yoshikazu Tanaka. As a conductor Yamada introduced major works from abroad and also conducted world premières of Japanese works, including Saburo Moroi's *Symphony No. 3* [Naxos 8.557162], Tomojiro Ikenouchi's *Two Symphonic Movements*, and Akira Ifukube's *Lauda Concertata*.

Yamada's compositional style reflects diverse influences from Richard Strauss, Béla Bartók, Paul Hindemith, and 20th-century French music. He always expressed interest in avant-garde methods of the day such as Expressionism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (The New

Objectivity). Importantly, however, his most significant influence was Mahler's music, which can probably be ascribed to his study with Klaus Pringsheim, one of Mahler's pupils. Yamada once confessed that Mahler was "the man for whom I feel the strongest affinity and sympathy".

Originally conceived as a chamber piece for cello and piano in 1935, his little symphonic poem *A Song of Young People* was written in 1937 using some of the original motifs. It was accepted as an entrant in the Second Competition of Japanese Composers held by the New Symphony Orchestra in 1938. Not all Japanese composers of this period turned to Japan for inspiration. In 1937 Saburo Moroi, Shiro Fukai, Kazuo Yamada, Komei Abe, Ro Ogura, Muneyoshi Ozaki and the music critic, Ginji Yamane, formed the Prometheus Group, in opposition to the Japanese nationalism advocated by Alexander Tcherepnin who had arrived in Japan in 1934 and founded the Tcherepnin Award Competition for the purpose of promoting Japanese orchestral works abroad, especially those which emphasized Japanese and Asian elements. Yamada had already begun to question the facile exoticism of some of his contemporaries in his mid-twenties, describing *A Song of Young People* as a protest against this trend. The work had its première at the Japan Seinen-kan on 25th February 1938, with the New Symphony Orchestra under Rosenstock's direction.

Kiso, originally entitled *Symphonic Kiso for Large Orchestra*, is an orchestral paraphrase of two Japanese folk-songs. The first is of the pastoral *Obako*, into which a folk-song from the Shonai plains of the Tohoku district is introduced ('*obako*' means 'maiden' or 'young woman' in the Tohoku dialect), and the second, *Kiso-bushi*, is an orchestration of a folk-song from the Kiso region in Nagano prefecture. Commissioned by NHK, this work appears to have been written between August and November 1939, judging from the notes in the sketches and other sources. The entire piece lasts only about fifteen minutes, and each of its two parts can be played independently, as the composer indicates in the manuscript, where he labels the first part *Prelude*. There is at least one draft of this work in

the form of a piano score, in addition to the finished score, which allows Yamada's process of creation to be traced. For example, the draft contains another melody written before the start of the *Kiso-bushi* piece, but this was left out of the finished score.

The *Symphonic Suite 'India'* is a reworking of the *Music for Ballet in Three Scenes 'Spellbinding'*, Op. 13 (1940), into a concert suite for orchestra which omits the vocal parts (chorus and solos) in the original score. Its première in May 1942, by the Japan Symphony Orchestra under the composer's own baton, was broadcast overseas by NHK's Tokyo broadcasting station.

The original work for ballet was written at the request of Yaoko Kaitani (1921-1991), the renowned Japanese dancer and choreographer, a pupil of Pavlova who played a crucial rôle in establishing post-World War II Japanese classical ballet. She founded the Yaoko Kaitani Ballet Institute with the aim of popularising ballet in Japan. Yamada began to work with Kaitani's ballet troupe around the time he graduated from the Tokyo Music School, writing and conducting music for them. The plot of the ballet, based on an old Indian legend, is in three scenes, the first entitled *The Temple in Twilight*, the second *Nightmare*, and the third *Morning in the Temple*. A precious jewel, which is an avatar of a beautiful woman, has been inlaid into the left eye of the statue of Buddha in a temple near the desert. One night a young priest serving in the temple who is tormented by a nightmare, plucks the jewel from the statue's eye while struggling against his conscience, and commits murder. Captivated by the invisible woman's strange aura, he is held spellbound by Buddha and falls into the abyss of the nightmare. Ultimately, awakened from what was an ephemeral dream, the young priest bows deeply before the statue of Buddha seeking atonement, and his invisible spell is broken.

The symphonic suite is made up of four movements. The first movement roughly follows the original music for the ballet. In the introduction, the clarinet and the violin play the theme from the opening of the first scene, *Caravan in Twilight*, followed by *Dance of the Street Women*, leading to a dynamic climax and a moment of final tranquillity. The second movement uses the music from the ballet's second

scene, *Nightmare* and the third movement amounts to a kind of *intermezzo*, where the interplay between the oboe and the flute carries the main theme. The fourth movement begins with an intensely irregular metre, generated by the strings, piano, horn and bassoon. This music depicts the scene in which the young priest plucks the jewel from the eye of Buddha and commits murder.

Grand Treasure, Op. 20, was written at the request of the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper and given its première on 1st January 1945 in a radio performance by the Japan Symphony Orchestra under Yamada's direction, in celebration of the New Year. The title *Grand Treasure* means '*the Emperor's people*'. Yamada commented on this title in the programme notes for the concert première, explaining that he quoted it from *Kojiki* (Legendary Stories of Ancient Japan). When this work was composed and published, the war was going badly for Japan, with members of the orchestra called up one after another to serve. In this work Yamada seems to imply the senselessness of losing the beautiful land and the nation, namely the Emperor's people, to war. The motif of the funeral march from the first movement of Mahler's *Symphony No. 5* can be heard, a nuance that may be interpreted as a funeral march for the Emperor's people, killed during the last stages of the war.

In this music, Yamada uses *shomyo* (chanting of Buddhist hymns) of the Tendai sect. The composer wrote: '*The Buddhist shomyo, involving complex rhythms within its apparent simplicity, can in a sense be thought of as the origin of Japanese music. Unique to Japan and underpinned by a magnificent tradition, shomyo is imbued with a mysteriously impulsive, moving rhythm. By using shomyo in this way, I set out to sing the praises of the universal love of humanity.*' Yamada added to his orchestration instruments related to *shomyo*, such as the *horagai* (conch horn), *mokugyo* (a kind of slit-drum), and *dora* (tam-tam), in order to recreate the sounds heard in temples. The Mahlerian influences can be discerned not only in the sonorities and motifs, but also in the very structure of the work.

Abridged from the notes written by Mari Saegusa (Tokyo University of the Arts), translated and edited by Akihiko Ushio and Jeffrey L. Hart

Russian Philharmonic Orchestra

The Russian Philharmonic Orchestra is firmly rooted in Russia's rich musical traditions, and has achieved an impressive and outstanding musical quality by drawing its musicians from the highest ranks of Russia's most famous orchestras such as the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Russian National Orchestra and the State Symphony Orchestra. The Russian Philharmonic Orchestra was originally formed as a recording ensemble and has gone on to receive high acclaim. In addition to regular recordings for leading international companies, the orchestra has undertaken tours to Turkey, Austria, Germany, China, Taiwan, Finland and elsewhere. Dmitry Yablonsky was appointed Music Advisor to the orchestra in 2003. In 2006 the orchestra won a *Gramophone* Prize for their recording of Shostakovich on Deutsche Grammophon.

Dmitry Yablonsky



Dmitry Yablonsky was born in Moscow into a musical family. His mother is the distinguished pianist Oxana Yablonskaya, and his father Albert Zaionz has for thirty years been principal oboist in the Moscow Radio Orchestra. Dmitry began playing the cello when he was five and was immediately accepted by the Central Music School for gifted children. When he was nine he made his orchestral debut as cellist and conductor with Haydn's *Cello Concerto in C major*. In Russia he studied with Stefan Kalianov, Rostropovich's assistant, and Isaak Buravsky, for many years solo cello of the Bolshoy Theatre Orchestra. Before immigrating to the United States he performed on many occasions in Moscow and many cities of the former Soviet Union. He was finally able, in 1977, to obtain a visa that allowed him and his mother to move to New York, where he became a pupil of Lorne Munroe at The Juilliard School of Music. In 1979, at the age of sixteen, he participated in the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont, the youngest to do so that summer. In 1980 he met Aldo Parisot, distinguished cellist and professor at Yale University, where he spent four years, at the same time furthering his interest in conducting. After graduating from Yale, he spent two years in the artist diploma programme at The Juilliard School with Zara Nelsova. Dmitry Yablonsky made his debut as a conductor in Italy at the age of 26, when he stepped in to replace another conductor at the last minute. As a cellist he has played in major concert halls throughout the world, and in chamber music has collaborated with distinguished colleagues. For four years he has been Principal

Guest Conductor of the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra and has conducted many other orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, collaborating with leading soloists. Dmitry Yablonsky has made more than seventy recordings, many of them prize-winning, as conductor and cellist for Naxos, Erato-Warner, Chandos, Belair Music, Sonora, and Connoisseur Society. He has organized international festivals, including the Wandering Stars Festival, which takes place in different countries each year. He is Co-Artistic Director of Qabala Music Festival in Azerbaijan. In 2009 he became an academician of the Independent Academy of Aesthetics and Liberal Arts in Moscow, and also professor of cello at the Baku Academy of Music.

Kazuo Yamada was one of Japan's most influential composers and conductors who, in his own works, rejected the 'facile exoticism' of Japanese nationalism that became the vogue at the onset of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937. The little symphonic poem *A Song of Young People* is one such 'protest' work. *Kiso (Old Japanese Melody)* is an orchestral paraphrase of two folk songs, while the symphonic suite *India* is a reworking of the ballet score *Spellbinding*, which is based on Indian legend. The Mahlerian *Grand Treasure* is a threnody for the dead that movingly incorporates Japanese instruments related to *shomyo* (the chanting of Buddhist hymns) which, in Yamada's own words, 'can in a sense be thought of as the origin of Japanese music'.

Kazuo
YAMADA
(1912-1991)

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| ❶ | A Song of Young People
– Little Symphonic Poem (1937) | 11:17 |
| ❷ | Kiso (Old Japanese Melody), Op. 12 (1939) | 15:20 |
| | Symphonic Suite 'India'
(Spellbinding) (1940) | 13:19 |
| ❸ | I. Moderato | 5:54 |
| ❹ | II. Animato | 3:20 |
| ❺ | III. Larghetto con moto | 1:16 |
| ❻ | IV. Rubato tempo marcato | 2:49 |
| ❼ | Grand Treasure, Op. 20 (1944) | 15:09 |

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