

Zdeněk FIBICH

Symphonic Poems

Othello

Záboj, Slavoj and Luděk

Toman and the Wood Nymph

The Tempest

Spring

Czech National Symphony Orchestra

Marek Štilec

Zdeněk Fibich (1850-1900)

**Othello, Op. 6 • Záboj, Slavoj and Luděk, Op. 37 • Toman and the Wood Nymph, Op. 49
The Tempest, Op. 46 • Spring, Op. 13**

Zdeněk Fibich was born in Všebořice on 21st December 1850. His father was a forestry official and the composer's early life was spent on various wooded estates of the nobility. Educated at home by his mother up to the age of nine, he was sent to a gymnasium in Vienna for two years before attending a Czech-speaking school in Prague where he stayed until he was fifteen. After this he was sent to Leipzig where he remained for three years studying the piano with Ignaz Moscheles and composition with Salomon Jadassohn and Ernst Richter. After a year in Paris, where he concluded his formal studies with Vinzenz Lachner in Mannheim, Fibich spent the next few years in Prague where he wrote his first opera *Bukovín*. At the age of 23 he married Růžena Hanušová and took up residence in Vilnius as a choirmaster. Having endured eleven unhappy months there, in August 1874 he returned to Prague where his wife died that October. In August 1875 he married his late wife's older sister, the contralto Betty Hanušová, but left her in 1897 for his former student Anežka Schulzová. Their relationship was to be an important one artistically, as she undertook the librettos for all of his later operas. Active as a writer and cultural commentator as well as composer, which former capacities caused much controversy concerning his posthumous reputation through to the First World War, Fibich remained in Prague until his death on 15 October 1900.

Among Fibich's catalogue of works are chamber music including two string quartets, piano trio, piano quartet and quintet for piano with strings and wind; three symphonies and several symphonic poems; seven operas including *Šárka* and *The Bride of Messina*, several melodramas including the large-scale trilogy *Hippodamia*, various liturgical pieces including a *Missa Brevis*, and as many as 600 piano pieces (composed during 1892–99) of which 376 were printed in four volumes and entitled *Moods, Impressions and Reminiscences* that served as a diary of his involvement with Schulzová, as well as providing a thematic resource the composer mined extensively in his operas as well as his *Second* and *Third Symphonies*.

The present recording focusses on the symphonic poems spanning the greater part of Fibich's composing career. Earliest here is *Othello*, inspired by Shakespeare's tragedy and emphasizing the intertwined fates of its three main characters – Othello, Desdemona and Iago. The piece was first performed in Prague on 7th December 1873, conducted by Bedřich Smetana. Incisive trumpet fanfares launch a ceremonial introductory section, which draws in the whole orchestra before subsiding on timpani. A brief yet incisive passage follows, then the fanfares and ceremonial music return – though now leading into a mellifluous section where first woodwind then strings outline an expressive theme that grows in fervour as it unfolds. This soon reaches a heady climax, dying away to leave the flute and harp before lower strings suggest an abrupt change of mood. At first this is outweighed by recollections of the earlier themes, but the intensity quickly mounts as the music becomes more agitated – the expressive theme ultimately failing to re-establish itself in the face of a further onslaught which briefly abates only to return for a brutal climax that is curtailed to leave woodwind musingly pensively on what has been. This unfolds into a bittersweet evocation of the ill-fated lovers and builds to a fervent culmination that cannot prevent a final return of the preceding violence before the work comes to rest on gently lapping phrases from the harp.

Adolf Čech gave the first performance, in Prague on 25th May 1875, of the symphonic poem *Záboj, Slavoj and Luděk*. Described as being 'based on motifs from the Dvůr Králové manuscript' (a frequent inspiration for burgeoning Czech nationalism), it audibly impressed Smetana around the time that he embarked on his cycle of symphonic poems *Má vlast*. The piece gets underway with a vigorous motif on strings, then by an evocative passage with tremolo strings to the fore – elements of both combining in the agitated theme which now holds forth across the orchestra. This duly takes on a more resolute demeanour, though it proves short-lived as initially distant brass fanfares gather in impetus towards a powerful climax drawing on most of the

ideas so far heard in an increasingly strenuous development that reaches a suitably martial culmination. The agitated theme now assumes the foreground and a modified reprise ensues – the more resolute element re-emerging as the music drives onwards, though what follows brings a change of perspective with its expressive theme for woodwind and brass over limpid strings. Gradually the emotion intensifies before it reaches an apotheosis pervaded by knightly grandeur, but the final word is given to full orchestra whose brusque chords provide a decisive conclusion.

Although finished early in 1875, the symphonic poem *Toman and the Wood Nymph* was not performed in its orchestral guise until Adolf Čech presented it in Prague on 24th March 1878. The subject-matter is a Czech variant of the familiar tale of the youth fleeing from the faithlessness of his beloved to an oblivion offered by the embrace of the wood nymph. The initial theme has more than a touch of languor, but this finds contrast in the martial element on brass with which it is soon combined. This leads into a more incisive section in which the martial element is given freer reign, along with a more agitated expression that brings about a climax with its ominous recasting of the initial theme. This is followed by a more lightly scored and balletic section with overtones of the nocturnal, but this gradually assumes a more yearning expression as the music gains in emotional immediacy. The ending nonetheless feels deliberately understated, as the initial languor is suffused with a resignation reflecting that of the tale which inspired this piece and which soon reaches its subdued close.

The Tempest was composed in 1880 and is not to be confused with the eponymous opera that Fibich wrote on this subject during 1893-4. Both works were inspired by Shakespeare – the symphonic poem providing an encapsulation of the story that begins with its evocation of storm and shipwreck, and ends with the reconciliation of those

whom fate had set apart. The opening is suitably fraught and frantic, with the whole orchestra engaged in a vivid depiction of the resulting chaos that presently subsides into a blissful evocation of the island with woodwind and upper strings to the fore. This gains in ardency before an agitated outburst brings a dance-like element which, in turn, passes into ominous exchanges between bass clarinet and brass over lower strings. The blissful music briefly reasserts itself, only for the tempestuous opening to return with a vengeance in what might appear to be the closing section. In fact this proves to be much more affirmative, as elements from across the piece are brought together for an ending that foresees the eventual resolution of the drama.

Described as a 'symphonic picture', *Spring* was first performed in Prague on 25th March 1881 again under the baton of Adolf Čech. The piece offers a depiction of the season in all its manifest variety – whether in terms of a renewal of life, with its celebration in dance and song, or as a period of transition that feels all the more affecting for its impermanence. A plaintive idea for clarinet is joined by horn then other woodwind and strings as the music grows in expressive breadth, a second and more restive theme soon emerging on lower strings and reaching a brief climax. What follows is essentially an informal development of those ideas heard so far, rounded off by hymnal chords on the strings which presage a more animated section that focusses on a dance-like idea for woodwind and harp, soon to be joined by strings then brass and percussion as it gains in boisterous energy. An accelerated version of the opening theme is combined with the prevailing animation as the initial music is briefly recalled, solo flute then oboe and strings wending their way towards another and even livelier section that sees the work through to a tranquil reminiscence of the opening music which serves as a coda.

Richard Whitehouse

Performance Material

For the Naxos recordings of the complete orchestral works of Zdeněk Fibich Marek Štilec has kept strictly to authentic sources from around the time of the composer's life. First and foremost he studied surviving manuscripts of the scores and the first authorised copies and texts prepared for publication (see the catalogue of the composer's papers deposited at the Museum of Czech Music under *Zdeněk Fibich, Inventory of collection sign. 80, Prague 1999, fasc. 13-17* <http://nr.is.nkp.cz/Katalog.aspx?sigla=ABX001&katkey=KNMHKIFP>

In some cases Marek Štilec made a thorough study of performance material (individual parts), as long as there was proof it had been used at a première. It has thus been possible to substantiate theories relating to the subjectively programmatic nature of some of the works, for instance the *Selanka "V podvečer"*. As the work progressed other findings, too, were used – including the composer's personal notes, inserts and performance suggestions in his manuscripts and the first printed editions that have not been incorporated in the Fibich Critical Edition so far but contribute to the highest level of authenticity. The performing material has in all cases been thoroughly edited, with a number of errors being corrected – errors that have plagued performances of Fibich's orchestral compositions up till now. Marek Štilec has been consulting other colleagues and musicologists in the Zdeněk Fibich Society (Czech Republic) of which he is a member himself, as to questions of the authenticity of sources and of interpretation.

All the orchestral works of Zdeněk Fibich are here recorded consistently without any "*vide*" cuts which, over the years, had crept into professional performances in spite of never having been authorised by the composer. All the repeats prescribed by Fibich (e.g. in the first movement exposition sections of the symphonies) have been consistently – and in keeping with the practice of the time – observed. The recordings have also tried to make use of contemporary reviews, as well as analyses of individual works that have been appearing each month in 2013 in the prestigious music magazine *Hudební rozhledy* and that are also available on the special web page www.fibich.cz, written by the conductor Marek Štilec.

Czech National Symphony Orchestra

Celebrating its twentieth birthday in 2013, the Czech National Symphony Orchestra has gained a leading position among the top Czech and other European orchestras. Renowned for its versatility, each year the orchestra presents a broad programme ranging from classical music concerts to contemporary genre, film scores, jazz, and musicals. The CNSO also organizes the summer Prague Proms Festival. The orchestra takes pride in the several Gold awards received for its recordings, and in the Gustav Mahler Prize, awarded for its performances of Mahler's works. Other achievements include the prestigious worldwide representation contract with IMG Artists London, and the long-standing recording project in association with Tokyo Victor Entertainment. The Czech National Symphony Orchestra was established in 1993 by the trumpet-player Jan Hasenöhrl. A spiritual father at the birth of the CNSO was the legendary conductor Zdeněk Košler. In 1996 the American Paul Freeman was named Chief Conductor, followed in 2007 by Libor Pešek.



Photo: Martin Malý



Marek Štilec

Marek Štilec was born in Prague in 1985 and began his studies at the Prague Conservatoire in the violin class of Dana Vlachová. He studied conducting with Leoš Svárovský, graduating from the Prague Academy of Performing Arts. He works regularly with a number of orchestras, including the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra, Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Swan, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Prague Philharmonia, Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice, Kammerphilharmonie Graz and the Berlin Camerata. He founded the Chamber Orchestra Quattro with which he has given dozens of concerts and has made a number of internationally successful recordings. He works with Czech Television and Czech Radio and his recordings have also been broadcast by the BBC. He has attended the Leonid Grin master-class at the Neeme Järvi Academy for Conductors, and has also taken part in master-classes with Jorma Panula, Vladimir Kiradijev, Gerd Albrecht and Achim Holub. In March 2010 and again by invitation in January 2013 he undertook a study visit with the New World Symphony and its chief conductor Michael Tilson Thomas.

Photo: Ondřej Klíma

Less well known than his compatriots Dvořák and Smetana, Zdeněk Fibich was however one of the greatest Czech composers of his day. These symphonic poems span the best part of his career, starting with *Othello*, which emphasizes the intertwined fates of Shakespeare's main characters. More nationalist in character, *Záboj*, *Slavoj and Luděk* impressed Smetana when he was working on *Má vlast*, while *Toman and the Wood Nymph* is an evocative and tragic tale of supernatural romantic yearnings. *The Tempest* encapsulates Shakespeare's story of storm, shipwreck and reconciliation, and the 'symphonic picture' *Spring* depicts the season in all its variety.



**Zdeněk
FIBICH**
(1850–1900)



Orchestral Works • 3

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| 1 | Othello, Op. 6 | 16:59 |
| 2 | Záboj, Slavoj and Luděk, Op. 37 | 17:52 |
| 3 | Toman a lesní panna (Toman and the Wood Nymph, Op. 49 | 12:32 |
| 4 | Bouře (The Tempest), Op. 46 | 11:39 |
| 5 | Vesna (Spring), Op. 13 | 13:03 |



Czech National Symphony Orchestra
Marek Štilec

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