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Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava Marek Štilec

Zdeněk Fibich (1850–1900) Orchestral Music • 5

Zdeněk Fibich was born in Všebořice on 21 December 1850. His father worked as a forestry official and the composer's early years were spent on various wooded estates of the nobility. Educated at home by his mother until the age of nine, he was sent to a gymnasium in Vienna for two years before he attended a Czech-speaking school in Prague where he stayed until he was 15. After this he went to Leipzig where he remained for three years, studving piano with Ignaz Moscheles and composition with Salomon Jadassohn and Ernst Richter. After a vear in Paris, having already ended formal studies with Vinzenz Lachner in Mannheim. Fibich duly spent several years in Prague and there completed his first opera Bukovina. At the age of 23 he married Růžena Hanušová before taking 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 was to marry his late wife's older sister the contralto Betty Hanušová, but left her in 1897 for his former student Anežka Schulzová. Their relationship proved to be an important one artistically, as she undertook the libretti for all his subsequent operas. Prominent as a writer and cultural commentator as well as a composer (these former roles were to cause no mean controversy in terms of his posthumous reputation, right through to the First World War). Fibich resided in Prague until his death there on 15 October 1900.

Fibich's sizable catalogue of works encompasses chamber music, including two string quartets, a piano trio, piano quartet and quintet for piano with strings and wind; three symphonies and various symphonic poems; seven operas, including *Šárka* and *The Bride of Messina*; several melodramas including the large-scale trilogy *Hippodamia*; some 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 entitled *Moods*, *Impressions and Reminiscences*. These served as a diary of his involvement with Schulzová, as well as providing a thematic resource that the composer mined extensively in

his operas along with his Second and Third Symphonies.

By contrast with the solid formal integration of his *First Symphony* [Naxos 8.572985], or the hard-won cyclical unity found in his *Second* [8.573157], Fibich's *Third* pursues the 'darkness to light' trajectory synonymous with the symphony during the 19th century. Completed in 1898, it was among the composer's final works prior to his untimely death and a highpoint of his maturity. It is therefore a pity the piece has found even less success than its predecessor when establishing a place in the orchestral repertoire other than in Czech-speaking territories.

The first movement launches straightaway into an impulsive theme which is shared between woodwind and strings, quickly building towards a brief climax before heading into the suave second theme with some highly piquant woodwind writing. After a resolute codetta, the more ambivalent mood re-emerges for an eventful development, where elements from both themes are resourcefully juxtaposed on the way to a chorale-like climax. A stealthy transition builds towards a heightened return of the first theme, then a modified reprise that recasts the second theme in altogether more sombre hues. From here an extensive coda brings about a triumphal culmination which duly subsides before being concluded by two decisive, *Vltava*-like chords.

What follows is no conventional slow movement, its forceful opening idea heard in rhythmic unison across the orchestra then contrasted with plaintive responses from woodwind. These continue into a more sustained melody, richly harmonised on strings while redolent of those often found in Fibich's operas. An inward episode featuring clarinet builds towards the main climax, before revisiting the sustained melody then winding down to a serene ending. Poised between *scherzo* and *intermezzo*, what follows is centred upon an infectious idea for upper woodwind and strings that typifies the carefree nonchalance of this movement overall. Further elaborated in some of the composer's most beguiling orchestration, it

duly makes way for a ruminative *trio* with some especially atmospheric writing for solo woodwind and (briefly) violin before bassoon jocularly brings a return of the *scherzo* theme. This resumes its lively course essentially as before, though now with a sudden *diminuendo* prior to the teasing final gesture.

Pointedly matching the first movement in weight, the finale opens with furtive gestures from woodwind and horns over lower strings and timpani, building to a short-lived climax before a heady *crescendo* into the lively main theme. Brass are audibly to the fore here, whereas the second theme is slighter if hardly less purposeful as it unfolds toward a forceful development into which the ominous shades of the introduction are integrated. Once again this makes way for the lively theme, setting up a curtailed reprise with more space given to the second theme. This, in its turn, leads to an apotheosis with elements of both themes triumphally to the fore.

The remaining items on this album are drawn from three of those operas that rank as Fibich's most substantial achievement. They extend the dramatic lineage of Smetana to a degree which was seized on by certain pupils and acolvtes as representative of the 'authentic' Czech music as opposed to that of Dvořák and his successors (a polemical debate that had far-reaching consequences over the next half-century and even beyond). Written during 1896–97, and first staged at Prague's National Theatre on 28 December 1897, *Šárka* draws on the same 14th-century Bohemian legend that had inspired the third of Smetana's cycle of symphonic poems Má vlast as well as Janáček's first opera (not produced until 1925). Todav it stands as Fibich's most frequently revived opera, even though non-Czech performances remain rare. The Overture begins with ominous exchanges for woodwind above tensely rustling strings, setting forth the tragic mood unerringly and building to a climax of baleful portent. Dving down into the depths, it is succeeded by evocative horn-calls which lead to a more dynamic theme underpinned by percussion. though the ominous music soon returns in more restrained scoring but with no less pathos. Presently regaining its

initial power, this subsides to a close where the ultimate outcome of the entire opera is intimated to stark and unequivocal effect.

Written during 1893–94, *The Tempest* was one of several 19th-century operas based upon the play by Shakespeare (following on from now forgotten efforts by Bishop and Halévy), and is not to be confused with the eponymous symphonic poem Fibich had composed more than a decade earlier. Its distinctive approach is evident with the *Overture* (or *Prelude*) to Act III. Here the equable and often idyllic mood of the drama's latter stages is encapsulated in music of no mean delicacy and poise. A more expressive theme is duly heard on lower woodwind and strings, though the initial music returns soon takes on greater impetus and ironic humour – doubtless evoking those strange creatures encountered on the island. A further return of the opening music persists through to a close in which charm and pathos are tellingly combined.

The second of Fibich's seven completed operas. The Bride of Messina is based on the play by Schiller (which had similarly inspired Schumann to a concert overture three decades before). Written during 1882-83, it won a competition organised by the National Theatre in Prague and its first staging there on 28 March 1884 helped to establish Fibich's national career, but the sombre nature of the drama and the music's unashamedly Wagnerian cast hindered its further progress (the German premiere only took place in 2015 and it remains unstaged in the UK). The Funeral March comes from the final act of the opera and besides fulfilling an ostensibly scenic function, it also foreshadows the inescapably fateful outcome. Building in emotional power, the march-like initial section makes way (in time-honoured fashion) for calmer and consolatory music shot through with a restrained nobility. Its anguished climax, though, only makes the return of the opening section more inevitable, and it is these baleful strains that bring about the culmination before it subsides gently and regretfully into the depths.

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://nris.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 since 2013 in the prestigious music magazine *Hudebni rozhledy* and that are also available on the special web page **www.fibich.cz**, written by the conductor Marek Štilec.

Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava

A renowned symphony orchestra, the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava boasts a long tradition, typical Czech sound, and progressive repertoire that has been acclaimed by audiences and critics worldwide. The orchestra gives first-class performances not only in its interpretations of the works of its namesake Leoš Janáček, but also of other composers from the late Romantic period to the present. The orchestra was founded in the first half of the 20th century when eminent musicians such as Paul Hindemith, Sergey Prokofiev and Igor Stravinsky arrived in Ostrava. Since then, many international personalities have influenced the artistic development of the orchestra, such as Mariss Jansons, Charles Mackerras, Karel Ančerl, Sviatoslav Richter, Rudolf Firkušný and Plácido Domingo, among many other conductors and soloists. More recently, artists such as Anna Netrebko, Jonas Kaufmann, Patricia Petibon, Lisa Batiashvili, Lukáš Vondracek, Vadim Gluzman, Gábor Boldoczki and Johannes Moser have appeared with the orchestra, whether in Ostrava or on tour. The orchestra has been conducted by Michail Jurowski, Vassily Sinaisky, Antoni Wit, Krzysztof Penderecki, Christian Arming, and Łukasz Borowicz. **www.jfo.cz/en**



Photo © Dita Pepe

Marek Štilec

Marek Štilec began his musical studies on the violin at the Prague Conservatory and studied conducting with Leoš Svárovský at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. Štilec is an alumnus of the International Järvi Academy and Jac van Steen's Emerging Conductors Series, and has participated in the masterclasses of Michael Tilson Thomas and Jorma Panula, among others. He conducts a wide range of leading orchestras, including the New World Symphony, the Ulster Orchestra, Das Kurpfälzische Kammerorchester Mannheim, the Wiener Concertverein Orchester, the Orchestra of the Swan, the London Classical Soloists, the Berlin Camerata, the Kammerphilharmonie Graz and Sinfonietta Bratislava, as well as the top orchestras in the Czech Republic.

www.arcodiva.cz/en/agency/instrumental-soloists/marek-stilec/



Photo © Daria Kalinovska

Zdeněk Fibich's three symphonies project very different qualities: *No. 1* (available on 8.572985) prizes structural integration, and *No. 2* (8.573157) cyclical unity. *Symphony No. 3*, written only two years before his untimely death, but at the zenith of his powers as one of the Czech Lands' leading composers, reveals Fibich's sustained melodic and atmospheric powers as the music pursues the 'darkness to light' trajectory synonymous with the symphony during the 19th century. The remaining pieces, drawn from his best stage works, showcase operatic qualities that extend the dramatic lineage of Smetana. This is the final volume in this series.

Zdeněk FIBICH (1850–1900)	€Fly United
Orchestral Works • 5	
Symphony No. 3 in E minor, Op. 53 (1898)	37:23
1 I. Allegro inquieto	11:21
2 II. Allegro con fuoco	8:03
3 III. Scherzo and Trio: Vivo e grazioso	7:22
4 IV. Allegro maestoso	10:38
5 Šárka, Op. 51 – Overture (1896–97)	8:54
6 Bouře ('The Tempest'), Op. 40 – Act III: Ove (1893–94)	erture 8:10
7 Nevěsta messinská ('The Bride of Messina'), Act III: Funeral March (1882–83)	Op. 18 – 8:30
Innáčok Philharmonic Ostrov	79



Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava Marek Štilec

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