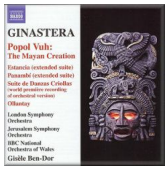
Ginastera - Popol Vuh, Estancia, Panambi, Ollantay (2010)



Estancia, Op. 8 *1. Scene 2: Los Trabajadores Agricolas 2:52 2. Scene 2: Danza del Trigo 3:07 3. Scene 3: La Doma 2:01 4. Scene 3: Idilio Crepuscular 2:49 5. Scene 5: Danza Final: Malambo 3:27* Suite de danzas criollas, Op. 15 (arr. S. Cohen for orchestra) *6. I. Adagietto pianissimo 1:55 7. II. Allegro rustico 0:38 8. III. Allegretto cantabile 1:54 9. IV. Calmo e poetico 1:43 10. V. Scherzando - Coda: Presto ed energico 2:59*
Panambi, Op. 1
11. Danza de los Guerreros 1:56 12. Juego de las Deidades del Agua 2:09 13. Invocacion a los Espiritus Poderosos 1:16 14. Danza del Hechicero 2:10 15. El Amanecer 4:57
Ollantay, Op. 17
16. I. Paisaje de Ollantaytambo 4:10 17.. Los Guerreros 3:05 18. III. La Muerte de Ollantay 5:11
Popol vuh, Op. 44
19. I. La Noche de los Tiempos 5:33 20. II. El Nacimiento de la Tierra 4:32 21. III. El Despertar de la Naturaleza 5:01 22. IV. El Grito de la Creacion 0:25 23. V. La Gran Lluvia 3:10 24. VI. La Ceremonia Magica del Maiz 2:28 25. VII. El Sol, la Luna y las Estrellas 1:35 26. VIII. El Amanecer De La Humanidad 1:15
London Symphony Orchestra (Estancia, Panambí) Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra (Suite de Danzas Criollas) BBC National Orchestra of Wales (Ollantay, Popol Vuh) Gisèle Ben-Dor – conductor

To the best of my knowledge, this is the second recording of Ginastera's final and unfinished orchestral essay, Popol Vuh: The Mayan Creation, op. 44, originally commissioned by Eugene Ormandy for his Philadelphia Orchestra. The composer worked on it piecemeal over the last eight years of his life, leaving eight of its proposed nine sections complete and fully orchestrated when he died. Unfortunately, the unwritten ninth section was to represent the end of the process of the world's creation, as outlined in ancient Mayan mythology. (The mythological tale was recorded by an unknown Dominican missionary in the 1550s. That text, the Popol Vuh or Council Book, is now the most detailed source material we have concerning the Mayan civilization.) Nevertheless, the eight extant sections form a satisfying work in their own right, as Leonard Slatkin realized when he received the score and premiered it in 1989, six years after

the composer's death. Slatkin went on to record the work with the St. Louis Symphony.

I do not have Slatkin's disc at hand for comparison, but Gisèle Ben-Dor and the well-regarded BBC Orchestra of Wales give a tremendous performance in this new recording. As you might imagine, there is a certain amount of subterranean brooding in the early sections (such as the first movement, "The Everlasting Night"), broken by shattering fortissimo explosions of sound and energy. The second and third movements, titled "The Birth of the Earth" and "Nature Awakes" respectively, recall earlier musical depictions of prehistoric activity, most notably Stravinsky's Rite of Spring and Max Steiner's score for the 1933 movie King Kong . When human beings appear in the form of native Indians, from the sixth movement on ("The Magic Ceremony of Indian Corn"), the composer revisits his early ballet music, employing accented dance rhythms. The final movement, "The Dawn of Humankind," is a brass chorale surrounded by swirling woodwind figuration. While not very long, it is decisive enough to act as an appropriate conclusion, so the work does not feel incomplete. Ginastera's orchestral imagination and expertise are evident throughout, and the textures are superbly captured in the vivid Naxos recording.

The symphonic triptych Ollantay (1946) is a precursor to the later work, inspired by Inca mythology. Opening with diatonic fanfares, the music builds to a vigorous war dance before reaching a peaceful conclusion. Like the other works on this disc, it is written in the composer's nationalistic style: strongly rhythmic in the fast moments, coolly impressionistic elsewhere.

The two ballet scores that made Ginastera's reputation were Panambí and Estancia , both set around the plains of Argentina. The orchestral suites Ginastera subtracted from these scores are well known and, in the case of Estancia , oft-recorded. However, that is not what we have here. Ben-Dor and the London Symphony Orchestra made a recording of the complete ballets, originally released on the Conifer label in 1998 and subsequently reissued by Naxos. (See James Miller's review in Fanfare 30:5.) Here she gives us what are termed extended suites from the two works. They might more accurately be called selections, as they seem to be extracts from the complete ballet recordings. (The session dates are the same.)

New to me—and I think to disc—is the orchestral version of a piano work, the Suite de Danzas Criollas , op. 15. The arrangement by Shimon Cohen, commissioned by Ben-Dor to perform with the Jerusalem orchestra, is sometimes splashy in a way that the composer's own orchestrations are not. Note, for instance, the doubling of xylophone and violins in the final presto . Nonetheless, it is exciting and vibrant on its own terms.

Recording quality is full and clear, despite the fact that this program was recorded in different venues and at different times. The London performances, as I said, have been issued before, but I can find no evidence of a previous incarnation of the Danzas Criollas, Ollantay, or Popol Vuh , which were recorded in 2006 and 2001 respectively. Once again, we owe Naxos a debt for making these colorful performances available. ---FANFARE: Phillip Scott, arkivmusic.com

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