

Schnittke – Symphony No. 5 ‘Concerto Grosso No.4’ (Jarvi)

Written by bluesever

Thursday, 27 September 2012 16:45 -

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Symphony No. 5 ‘Concerto Grosso No.4’ 1. *I. Allegro* 2. *II. Allegretto* 3. *III. Lento – Allegro* 4. *IV. Lento* 5. *Pianissimo fur grosses Orchester*
Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra Neeme Järvi – conductor

Often named as Schnittke's symphonic masterpiece, 'Concerto Grosso no. 4- Symphony no. 5' (1988) is indeed a formidable work, tackling head-on the challenges faced by composers in the late twentieth century attempting the Symphonic form.

The first half of the work is the Concerto Grosso and moves from a cacophonous parody of the Baroque (like the 2nd movement of the 1st symphony) to a 'completion' of the 16-year old Gustav Mahler's unfinished scherzo for a Piano Quartet. The movement ends remarkably, with the exact Mahler quote emerging from the destructive crash of a Tam-tam. However, it is the 3rd and 4th movements (the 'Symphony' part) that carry most of the emotional weight. The 3rd again carries on the Mahlerian spirit, taking the cataclysms that end Mahler's 6th and stretching their effect to the extreme. It is very violent, dissonant and everything we've come to expect from 80's Schnittke. The polystylisms of the 1st two movements are largely absent, Schnittke concentrating on writing a truly symphonic Allegro. After this comes a heavy, tortured funeral march, shot through with reminiscences of all the other movements until collapsing on itself in an enormous climax. This is truly one of the greatest late twentieth-century orchestral works.

"...Pianissimo..." (1968) is an interesting experiment in pitch but does not develop its material sufficiently to make it a truly great work.

The performances by Jarvi and the Gothenborg Symphony are just stunning, special mention

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must go to the brass section who just keep getting louder and louder in the 3rd movement, with no loss of sound quality. I would however love to hear Chailly's interpretaion (he was the dedicatee of the Symphony) Very highly recommended to all Schnittke fans and lovers of twentieth century music. ---C. Symonds

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