

Hans Werner Henze - Symphony No. 7; Barcarola per Grande Orchestra (2001)

Written by bluesever

Wednesday, 26 January 2011 10:03 - Last Updated Tuesday, 07 January 2014 20:36

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1. *Barcarola Per Grande Orchestra (In Memoriam Paul Dessau)* 2. I: *Tanz - Lebhaft Und Beseelt* 3. II: *Ruhig Bewegt* 4. III: *Unablassig In Bewegung* 5. IV: *Ruhig, Verhalten*
Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Sir Simon Rattle - conductor

This is a most important—and overdue—issue. It has taken nine years for Henze's Seventh Symphony to appear on disc, an extraordinarily long time given the work's stature. Composed to a Berlin Philharmonic commission, No. 7 is the most conventional in format of any of his symphonies (Nos. 1 to 6 are available on a mid-price DG set, 12/90) and the only one in four movements (the Scherzo being placed third). Gone are the episodic and partita-like designs of earlier works, the Seventh adopting a recognizably Beethovenian model, although the music's point of departure seems to me to lie more immediately in the symphonies of Karl Amadeus Hartmann. Henze states in the notes that the Seventh is "a German symphony, and it deals with matters German". One of these is the poet Friedrich Holderlin, whose sufferings in an asylum and late poem *Halfte des Lebens* ("Half of Life") inspired respectively the Scherzo and finale; what lies behind the intense and complex threnody of the towering second—and longest—movement is not divulged.

This repertoire is not normally associated with Simon Rattle or the Birmingham band but there is no lack of knowledge or commitment evident in the playing (they gave the first UK performances in 1986). Indeed, I rather think that their familiarity with the music of Nielsen and Sibelius has stood them in good stead, enabling them to tackle Henze's architectonic constructions with complete assurance. Particularly impressive are the climaxes to the first and last movements, both superbly prepared and flawless in execution. The many delicate passages in which both the symphony and the earlier *Barcarola* (1979) abound are rendered equally impressively; listen to the closing minutes of *Barcarola* for some wonderfully quiet playing (and in a live recording, too!). Mike Hatch's excellent recording does full justice to these eruptive scores. All in all, a tremendous achievement. -- Gramophone [11/1993]

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