Valentin Silvestrov – Requiem For Larissa (2004)

1. Requiem for Larissa - I. Largo 6:32 play 2. Requiem for Larissa - II. Adagio - Moderato - Allegro 9:10 3. Requiem for Larissa - III. Largo - Allegro moderato 9:52 4. Requiem for Larissa - IV. Largo 5:36 5. Requiem for Larissa - V. Andante - Moderato 9:20 6. Requiem for Larissa - VI. Largo 5:54 7. Requiem for Larissa - VII. Allegro moderato 6:05
National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine Vladimir Sirenko - conductor

Valentin Silvestrov composed Requiem for Larissa between 1997 and 1999 as a memorial to his wife, musicologist Larissa Bondarenko, who died in 1996. It is a big and unceasingly somber work, scored for chorus and orchestra. Understandably, this Requiem is to a degree reflective, incorporating musical themes drawn from older works that had special meaning to the couple. While Silvestrov's typically glacial tempos are in evidence here, some of the opening half of the piece has an angular spikiness that recalls serial techniques without actively engaging in them. Instrumentally, Requiem for Larissa is dark, atmospheric, and even a little cinematic; the choral parts are sparse and minimally applied. In the fourth-movement Largo, the voices take over and settle down into an ethereal texture that leavens the gloom somewhat, but by this time 25-and-a-half minutes have gone by and some listeners will have already tuned out owing to the toughness of the opening section.

Requiem for Larissa is an intensely personal piece performed with respect and care by the Ukrainian National Chorus and Symphony Orchestra under conductor Vladimir Sirenko. As with many ECM releases, the cover image is striking, being an image derived from a Jean-Luc Godard film. As nice as the package and performance are, it's hard to ignore the seeming impression that there is something distant and detached about the music. Compared to 2002's ECM release Leggerio, pesante, Requiem for Larissa seems a bit of a letdown, though not every listener will agree with this view. Requiem for Larissa should definitely be heard by those already in touch with Silvestrov's music; for others who are coming to Silvestrov for the first time, Leggerio, pesante might be a better choice. --- Uncle Dave Lewis

"While Silvestrov's inspiration is the Latin mass for the dead so widely set in the classical tradition, this is no typical requiem. There's a 'Requiem eternam' and a 'Lacrimosa', but only a few isolated words are selected from the traditional text. There is no 'Dies irae', and no wonder, as who wants to think about one's departed loved one being judged? The work is generally symmetrical. The opening and closing portions of the work are typical of Silvestrov's late orchestral music, with that special lush yet grim lake of sound. At one moment in each of these two framing portions, however, we are treated to a beautiful bit where strings playing harmonics dialogue with flutes.

The middle section, however, will be for many listeners the emotional heart of the world. Here Silvestrov leaves behind the Latin mass and includes a setting of Taras Shevchenko's poem saying goodbye to the world." - Christopher Culver

"Silvestrov's Requiem for Larissa is a poignant tribute to the memory of his late wife, a bitterly-wrought mourning piece that transcends his individual grief to strike a universal chord. Its seven movements are played without pause, utilizing a large chorus and orchestra, piano, and a synthesizer. Its text is the traditional, though fragmented, Latin Requiem, along with an excerpt from a grim poem, 'The Dream,' by the Ukranian poet Taras Shevchenko. This last constitutes the haunting fourth movement, the sung words, a 'farewell to earth,' set to a slow pianissimo folklike melody that stays in the memory. The next movement, the Agnus Dei, includes extended Mozartian solos for violin, its postlude a moving depiction of unearthly peace. The final two movements are a reprised variation of what has come before, from the hieratic opening drenched in sorrow to a Tuba mirum that rages against the dying of the light. The last sounds we hear are the gentle rustlings of the wind, as Nature washes away grief. Silvestrov's sound world is unique, as is this modern masterpiece".

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