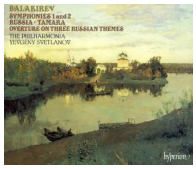
Balakirev - Symphonies 1 And 2 • Russia • Tamara • Overture On Three Russian Themes (1992)



Symphony No 1 In C Major (44:11) *1-1 Largo - Allegro Vivo 13:31 1-2 Scherzo: Vivo - Poco Meno Mosso 8:11 1-3 Andante - 13:30 1-4 Finale: Allegro Moderato - Tempo Di Polacca 8:58 1-5 Russia Symphonic Poem 15:20 2-1 Overture On Three Russian Themes 9:01 2-2 Tamara Symphonic Poem 21:45*
Symphony No 2 In D Minor (36:31)
2-3 Allegro Ma Non Troppo 10:00 2-4 Scherzo Alla Cosacca: Allegro Non Troppo, Ma Con Fuoco Ed Energico 8:32 2-5 Romanza: Andante 9:04 2-6 Finale: Tempo Di Polacca 8:40
The Philharmonia Yevgeny Svetlanov - conductor

‘Unjustly neglected’ says one note; ‘waiting to be discovered’ claims the other. Yet the First Symphony, which anti-establishment figure Balakirev took over 30 years to complete, has been championed with spirit by Beecham, Järvi, Svetlanov (twice) and now Sinaisky. To anyone who treasures this 19th-century leader and teacher for infusing Western music with the shot-silk cadences of Russia’s oriental neighbours, the first movement is something of a hurdle, even though its sober symphonic argument does flip into rhapsody-mode halfway through. Sinaisky judges it beautifully, with sprightly definition of phrase and rhythm that serves the exotic remainder of the symphony equally well. Svetlanov’s pulse is certainly slower than it was in his old Melodiya days, but his stately progress, abetted by plush if sometimes remote recording, revels in the Philharmonia’s velvety sheen – like a wealthy Russian merchant parading in his fine new fur coat. Certainly his other readings reflect at leisure all the colours in the suite-like Second Symphony, with the splendid cossack scherzo originally discarded from its predecessor, and the three fantasies on Russian and oriental themes. The Overture is especially fascinating for its use of melodies better known from Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony and Stravinsky’s Petrushka: and all three are finer than Chandos’s companion-pieces – though the King Lear Overture has a fine main theme beautifully reprised by the BBC Philharmonic oboist. Chandos should certainly be looking to Sinaisky in Manchester, rather than its job-lot Polyansky recordings from Moscow, for its Russian repertoire. ---David Nice, classical-music.com

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