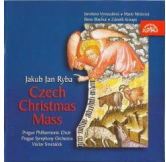


Jakub Jan Ryba - Czech Christmas Mass (Smetacek) [2002]

Written by bluesever

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Jakub Jan Ryba - Czech Christmas Mass (Smetacek) [2002]



1. *Czech Christmas Mass for soloists, choir, organ and orchestra* 00:38:42 1.1. *Kyrie* 00:05:27 1.2. *Gloria* 00:05:06 1.3. *Graduale* 00:03:14 1.4. *Credo* 00:05:54 1.5. *Offertorium* 00:07:00 1.6. *Sanctus* 00:02:09 1.7. *Benedictus* 00:03:23 1.8. *Agnus* 00:03:13 1.9. *Communio* 00:02:52 2. *My Lovely Nightingale. Pastorella for soprano, flute, organ and orchestra* Jaroslava Vymazalová – soprano (1) Marie Mrázová - contralto (1) Beno Blachut - tenor (1) Zdeněk Kroupa - bass (1) Helena Tattermuschová - soprano (2) Jaroslav Josífk - flute (2) Milan Šlechta - organ Jaroslav Vodrážka - organ (2) Czech Philharmonic Chorus (1) Prague Symphony Orchestra Václav Smetáček – conductor

It's hard to tell what's going on here. Although it's called a "mass", and the movements are indeed named after the sections of the Roman liturgical service, Jakub Jan Ryba's (1765-1815) *Czech Christmas Mass* abandons the traditional Latin texts for a format more akin to a pastoral play. Apparently what we're hearing is dialogue (in Czech) among shepherds preparing to visit Bethlehem. The problem is, no texts or translations are included, so all we can do is listen and wonder exactly what all those soloists are singing about. Not that the music is especially interesting--it's about as structurally formulaic as music from this period can get, and the scoring for four soloists, choir, organ, and orchestra offers not the slightest hint of originality.

But perhaps that's not the point. This kind of work was designed as a familiar, accessible invocation of the Nativity story, presented in church on Christmas eve, and both the music and the words would have been well-known to the congregation--as it apparently is today in certain parts of the Czech Republic. And it's that audience that likely will appreciate the simplicity and meaning inherent in this 39-minute scenario. The soloists are decidedly heavy of tone and/or wide of vibrato, especially the labored-sounding bass, but that seems to be a preference and a style. And no one can be accused of lacking enthusiasm or sincerity throughout the performances. The sound from this 1966 production is perfectly fine, and the "filler", a four-minute pastorella for soprano, flute, organ, and orchestra titled *My lovely Nightingale* is charming and as musically naive and unpretentious as the mass. --David Vernier,

ClassicsToday.com

When exactly the pastoral mass of Jakub Jan Ryba (1765-1815) became the symbol of Czech Christmas is possible to determine only approximately. We know exactly, however, why this work holds such a special place: it has a moving pastoral mood with a certain dose of tasteful naivete which comes into beautiful harmony with Czech folk nativity scenes. And Ryba's mass, known by the first words "Hey, master," resounds today from hundreds of church choirs and magically conjures up for the listeners the idyll of old-world Christmas with an illuminated country church with snow-drifts and a frozen starry horizon. There are many recordings which capture the idyllic atmosphere of central-European Christmas as presented by Ryba. However, only few of them can boast such tasteful professionalism and pastoral poetics as this one with the conductor Smetacek, whose sonically reconstructed version we are presenting in a new graphical design. This recording will certainly become an indispensable part of your family's Christmas ritual. ---supraphon.com

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