

## Delibes – Sylvia (Fistulari) [1959]

Written by bluesever

Sunday, 30 August 2015 16:11 -

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SIDE 1: SYLVIA: ACT I *Prélude* 4:53 *Nº1 Scherzo* 6:42 *Nº2 Le Berger (Pastorale)* 6:21  
*Nº3a Les Chasseresses* SIDE 2: SYLVIA: ACT I (Continued) *Nº3b*  
*Intermezzo* 1:18 *Nº4 Valse Lente* 4:18 *Nº5 Scène* 7:31 *Nº6 Cortège Rustique* *Nº7 Scène*  
*4:23* *Nº8 Entrée du Sorcier (Finale)* 4:47  
SIDE 3: SYLVIA: ACT II  
*Entr'acte* 2:42 *Nº9 Orion Scène* 7:35 *Nº10 Pas des Ethiopiens* *Nº11 Chant Bachique* 2:55  
*Nº12 Scène et Danse de la Bacchante* 8:03 *Nº13 Scène (Finale)*  
SIDE 4: SYLVIA: ACT III  
*Nº14a Marche et Cortège de Bacchus* 6:25 *Nº14b Scène* 4:20 *Nº15 Barcarolle* *Nº16*  
*Divertissement Pizzicati* 2:00 *Andante* 4:10 *Strette-Galop* 2:55 *Nº17 Le Temple de Diane*  
*(Finale)* 5:45 *Nº18 Apparition d'Endymion (Apothéosis)*  
London Symphony Orchestra Anatole Fistoulari – conductor Recorded in Watford Town Hall,  
near London, June 28-29, 1958

French composer Léo Delibes' three-act mythological ballet Sylvia is something of the poor unknown cousin of his far more famous Coppélia of six years earlier, and yet it too is music of great grace, charm, and beauty. As a musical genre, ballet spent most of the nineteenth century in a pitiable condition, and conventional musicology tells us that it was only the great works of Tchaikovsky that raised the genre to the style and symphonic quality that today we take for granted; in all fairness, however, Delibes, whose ballets just barely predate those of the great Russian, came very close to achieving the same kind of pinnacle, and it is worth noting that Tchaikovsky himself remarked that he felt his Swan Lake to be "poor stuff compared to Sylvia." Sylvia's rise to repertoire position really began not at its 1876 Paris Opera premiere, but rather with a 1900 revival in St. Petersburg. In the century or so since, Sylvia has popped up in major ballet theaters on a semi-regular basis; it is far better known, however, outside the theater, via one or another of the orchestral suites that various people have drawn from the full score.

Torquato Tasso's Aminta was the source from which Delibes' librettists, Jules Barbier and the

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Baron de Reinach, drew the story of Sylvia, the Nymphe de Diane (the Nymph of Diana).

Delibes' masterful score betrays a heavy debt to the heavy Wagnerian dramatic style then all the rage throughout Europe--particularly in the Prelude, with its bombastic and richly-scored opening and then its shimmering, luxurious pianissimo gestures -- but at the same time manages to retain something of the textural clarity and sectionalization more typical of French music. There is gorgeous melody throughout the three acts, aptly reflecting Sylvia's sensual plot while only rarely dipping too far into the sentimental bucket.

"Faunes et Dryades," a scherzo from the beginning of Act I, mixes a lovely cello tune together with more witty woodwind gestures and some pert pizzicati. In the "Valse lente" from the same act, Delibes manages to impart that most aristocratic of dance-forms with a high-minded humor, while in the "Cortège rustique," a happy flute melody plays around with the mock-exotic tones of open fifths, tambourine and triangle.

Highlights of Act II include the "Pas des Éthiopiens," with its striking tritones between the strings and horns and drum-accompanied piccolo flute solo, and the eminently graceful "Chant bacchique."

The "Pizzicato Polka" of Act III has achieved some fame outside the ballet, and for good reason. The use of an alto saxophone in the "Barcarolle" from that same act was certainly unusual for the day, but the instrument is fittingly smooth against the rolling waves of the string and harp background. The first of the final two numbers, "Le Temple de Diane," is dramatic tension all the way through, from the tremolo build-up and blatantly Wagnerian descending string scales right up to the seamless transition to the beginning "Apparition d'Endymion," an epilogue that brings the ballet to a triumphant E major close. --- Blair Johnston, Rovi

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