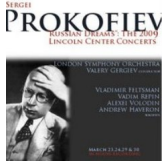


Sergei Prokofiev – Symphony No.1 in D Major op. 25 (Gergiev) [2006]

Written by bluesever

Sunday, 25 October 2009 14:02 - Last Updated Saturday, 22 March 2014 21:18

Sergei Prokofiev – Symphony No.1 in D Major op. 25 (Gergiev) [2006]



1. *Allegro* 2. *Larghetto* 3. *Gavotta: Non troppo allegro* 4. *Finale: Molto vivace*
London Symphony Orchestra Vladimir Gergiev - conductor

In Shostakovich's anniversary year it is as well to be reminded of the symphonic legacy of Sergey Sergeyevich Prokofiev, his senior colleague and sometime rival. David Nice's heavyweight booklet-notes seem aimed at making of Prokofiev a Shostakovich manqué. But the composer's less caring personality, lack of social and political engagement and frequent failure to consider what a symphony might be (beyond a mould to be filled with wonderful tunes and short-term effects) need not alter the fact that there is some tremendous music here which deserves to be on every collector's shelf. For all its protean variety it's an idiom that responds well, perhaps better than Shostakovich's, to Valery Gergiev's extrovert, sometimes brusque approach. If that sounds like criticism, I should say at once that the new performances of the Second, Sixth and Seventh are probably the finest on CD. While the Third packs a supercharged punch, it may be found too raw and driven for its subtleties to register. The familiar Classical No 1 gets the most destabilising treatment with a stodgy opening movement and a whirlwind finale. The cycle was taped live during Gergiev's Barbican series in May 2004 and emerges now not on the orchestra's own label but in Philips livery. Given the venue's acoustic problems, sound-quality is better than one dared hope – bold, immediate and lacking only the last ounce of depth and allure. As those who attended will recall, the maestro directed with a toothpick and a gestural armoury all his own. Whatever the difficulties, the players deliver the goods with a hefty, if not overly refined, sonority we shall doubtless be hearing more of in the future. A pity that there was no space for the optimistic final flourish Prokofiev tacked onto his Seventh Symphony in pursuit of Stalin Prize winnings. Both alternatives were given in concert. That said, there's enough toughness and disquiet in what has gone before to make its omission feel right. We do get both editions of the Fourth, not always the case in previous recorded intégrales. Any sense of disappointment there may be associated with the music's relative poverty of invention, though there is more charm in the material than the conducting allows. Swallowed whole as it must be, the set nonetheless confirms Gergiev as Prokofiev's most ardent contemporary advocate. The visceral thrust and passion of the LSO's playing knocks the likes of Ozawa's Berlin Philharmonic into a cocked hat. Strongly recommended. --

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David Gutman, GRAMOPHONE

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