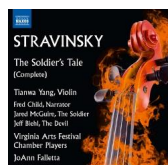


Igor Stravinsky - The Soldier's Tale (JoAnn Falletta) [2015]

Written by bluesever
Sunday, 07 May 2017 14:14 -

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The Soldier's Tale, Pt. 1 *Part I: Introduction: The Soldier's March (Narrator) Part I: This isn't a bad place to stop... (Soldier, Narrator) Part I Scene 1: Airs by a Stream Part I Scene 1: Give me your fiddle... (Devil, Soldier, Narrator) Part I Scene 1: The Soldier's March (reprise) (Narrator) Part I Scene 1: Hurray, here we are!... (Narrator, Soldier) Part I Scene 2: Pastorale Part I Scene 2: The Soldier looks up... (Narrator, Soldier, Devil) Part I Scene 2: Pastorale (reprise) Part I Scene 2: He took the book and began to read... (Narrator, Soldier) Part I Scene 3: Airs by a Stream: Just to stretch out on the grass... (Narrator, Soldier, Devil) Part I Scene 3: Airs by a Stream (reprise)*

The Soldier's Tale, Pt. 2 *Part II: The Soldier's March (reprise): Down a hot and dusty road... (Narrator) Part II: Now he comes to another land... (Narrator, Soldier) Part II: Royal March Part II: They gave the word for the band to play... (Soldier, Narrator, Devil) Part II: The Little Concert Part II: There on her bed the Princess lies... (Narrator) Part II: 3 Dances: No. 1. Tango Part II: 3 Dances: No. 2. Valse Part II: 3 Dances: No. 3. Ragtime Part II: The Soldier holds the Princess close... (Narrator) Part II: The Devil's Dance Part II: The Devil's exhausted... (Narrator) Part II: The Little Chorale Part II: The Devil's Song: All right! I shall have to wait... (Devil) Part II: Grand Chorale: You must not seek to add to what you have... (Narrator) Part II: I have everything... (Soldier, Narrator, Devil) Part II: Triumphal March of the Devil*

Fred Child - Narrator Jared McGuire - Soldier Jeff Biehl - The Devil Tianwa Yang, Violin
Virginia Arts Festival Chamber Players Ricardo Morales, Clarinet Laura Leisring, Bassoon
David Vonderheide, Trumpet R. Scott McElroy, Trombone Robert W. Cross, Percussion
Christopher White, Double bass Pamela Berlin, Director JoAnn Falletta, Conductor

This album, featuring violinist Tianwa Yang and the Virginia Arts Festival Chamber Players, contains one of Igor Stravinsky's small-scale theatrical works, *The Soldier's Tale*. Stravinsky wrote this work in collaboration with author Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, and artist Rene-Victor Auberjonois. The work is based in a Russian folk tale by Alexander Afanasyev, and is scored for two speakers, a narrator, and a septet, as well as a non-speaking dance role. Pamela Berlin directs this production, and Joann Falletta is the conductor of the instrumentalists.

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There never was much doubt about this one. Naxos lined up its "A-Team" in the persons of Tianwa Yang, violin, and conductor JoAnn Falletta, but trumpeter David Vonderheide (wonderful in the Royal March) and percussionist Robert W. Cross also deserve a hearty shout-out, and the fact that I'm not talking about everyone individually doesn't make them any less worthy. The Soldier's Tale is one of the fortunate pieces that (usually at least) either gets done very well, or not at all.

That said, complete performances on disc are rare. Picking a language in today's international marketplace is one reason, while the annoyance factor of having people talk over the music comprises another. I personally loathe spoken narration over music, and so I greatly prefer the suite, which leaves out all of that talking. Still, you can't dispute that the team assembled here of Fred Child (Narrator), Jared McGuire (The Soldier) and Jeff Biehl (The Devil) do an excellent job of story-telling; and at the end of the day if you haven't heard the complete work, then you don't know The Soldier's Tale.

It only remains to be said that the sonics are excellent, the dialogue crystal clear without obscuring instrumental detail, while the purely instrumental pieces (the various marches, the Pastorale, the Three Dances) leap from the speakers with all of the rhythmic ebullience that Stravinsky intended. Logical competition comes from Stravinsky's own Columbia recording with Jeremy Irons in the speaking role(s), but there's a lot to be said for breaking the text up into parts for the individual characters, especially if it's going to be adapted to a new language to begin with. So here it is: simply the best if you want the work complete, and in English. ---
ClassicsToday, arkivmusic.com

Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat*, here *The Soldier's Tale*, is a work for narrator and small instrumental ensemble, ideally with dancers. The work was translated into English by Michael Flanders and Kitty Black; the "revised by Pamela Berlin" label here refers to some Americanisms inserted by Virginia Arts Festival director Pamela Berlin, and this American *Soldier's Tale* may be unique. The story comes from a little Faustian folktale of a soldier-at-war's-end, who accepts a bargain with the Devil, and the direct, at times doggerel-like rhymes of the text do well when given the directness of a translation into vernacular English. You don't get a big-name narrator as you do with some British English-language recordings, but narrator Fred Child, Jared McGuire as the soldier, and Jeff Biehl as the Devil effectively realize Berlin's down-to-earth vision of the work. The biggest name involved in the production is the frequent Naxos-label violinist Tianwa Yang, and she proves an ideal Stravinsky instrumentalist, crisp and sharp. Put it together with the fine work of the little-known Virginia Arts Festival

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Chamber Players under JoAnn Falletta, and with a realization of the voice parts that achieves a kind of American simplicity, and you have a praiseworthy version of this Stravinsky classic at a budget price. ---James Manheim, AllMusic Review

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