

Stanislaw Moniuszko – Halka (Satanowski) [1987]



CD1 1. *Ouverture* 2. *Act I: No.1 Polonaise* 3. *Act I: No.2 Trio* 4. *Act I: No.3 Recitatif And Romance* 5. *Act I: No.4 Air And Duett* 6. *Act I: No.5 Chor And Air Of Stolnik* 7. *Act I: No.6 Mazurka* 8. *Act II: Prelude* 9. *Act II: No.7 Recitatif And Air Of Halka* 10. *Act II: No.8 Halka/Jontek* 11. *Act II: No.10 Finale, Duo, Finale* CD: 2 1. *Act III: Prelude* 2. *Act III: No.11 Chor* 3. *Act III: No.12* 4. *Act III: No.13 Chor* 5. *Act III: No.14 Finale* 6. *Act IV: Prelude* 7. *Act IV: No.16 Sextet With Chor* 8. *Act IV: No.17 Duet Kalka/Jontek* 9. *Act IV: No.18 Prayer In The Chruch* 10. *Act IV: No.19 Recitatif, Cavatina And Cantilena Halka* 11. *Act IV: No.20 Finale*
Halka - Barbara Zagórzanka (soprano) Jontek - Wiesław Ochman (tenor) Stolnik - Jerzy Ostapiuk (bass) Zofia - Ryszarda Racewicz (mezzosoprano) Janusz - Andrzej Hiolski (baritone) Polish National Opera Orchestra & Chorus Robert Satanowski – conductor

I think this a great showcase for the so often neglected slavonic opera, strangely so, since Dvorak, Tchaikovsky, Bartok, Chopin, Smetana and so many other of the most celebrated composers of non-vocal classical music comes from these parts of Europe. Probably, this comes from the fact that slavonic languages are in no way related with the languages of 'the west world'. This neglecting view is shown, as commented by a reviewer below, also by the record company when not giving us the polish text alongside the other, more common, languages. This does not, however, disturb me too much since it's rather easy, even without any knowledge of the polish language, to follow the text in a language you know, helped by the index numbers of each track (there are several).

And, and this is a strong point indeed, Stanislaw Moniuszko has in this opera also managed what few other opera composers of the romantic era (it's in the transition of romantic / Verdi era) actually did - to make a psychologically believable unity of text and singing - the music perfectly sounds as the text implies (even Verdi would be proud of the pscyological structure of the caracters). Just listen to either of Jontek's great arias in act 2 and 4 respectively - love, pain and bitterness. This also goes for Janusz, who is not onesidedly cold & mean, but also shows guilt

at times. As a luxury we in 'Halka' also have a few instrumental pieces that are highly memorable, maybe most widely known the 'mazurka'. This almost totally makes you forget that the music sometimes, falls down to conventional standards - the reasons to love this opera are simply too many to dismiss it by such a simple fact - to be honest, have you ever heard an opera performance that doesn't at times sound conventional?!

The performance heard here is very good - showing every aspect of the score (love, despair, bitterness, oppression, pain, etc). None of the main roles really sounding as young (vibrato sometimes is wide in higher registers) as they are in the plot - but that's a minor problem since they all know how to present this opera (they've done it before!), and boy, do they deliver here - this is a great showcase for good live recordings without too many disturbing noises.

I'm sure - if 'Halka' had been written by an Italian or in Italian - it would be appreciated as one of the strongest operas of the 19th century. Don't hesitate - this is really, really good. --- Mr JB, amazon.com

I wasn't very taken with Satanowski's recording of Moniuszko overtures for cpo, but this recording of Moniuszko's (probably) most famous opera is much more satisfactory. Yes, it is correct that the Polish libretto isn't there, but translations are, so I frankly don't care one wit about and seriously doubt that many non-Polish listeners would in general. It is still very much possible to hear how well Moniuszko wrote for voices and to follow his depiction of the emotions and build-up of drama in this rather effective, charmingly attractive and tuneful work.

It is also correct that Moniuszko reverts to some very conventional note-spinning - in that sense he isn't quite the equal of a stylistically comparable composer such as Smetana, but there is so much to enjoy in here that even the less effective passages pass by quickly; the instrumental set-pieces are strong, and several of the arias are genuinely memorable. It is also given an energetic, spirited - ebullient, even - performance (maybe a little too light for a tragedy like this). None of the singers are really outstanding, but their voices are in general warm and with impressive enough technique (and sheer stamina) to provide almost unalloyed pleasure

throughout. Well, as other reviewers point out, they are really too old for the roles, and it is admittedly audible - solid technique will have to make up for youthful spirit, and it generally does, even though there are also some instances of wobble in higher registers for several of the singers.

The orchestral playing is vibrant and colorful, and Satanowski keeps a spirited, flowing pace to the whole thing. The sound quality is also rather good - especially given that this is a live performance, even if it is a little cavernous and off-balance at times. In sum, then, I think this set warrants a firm recommendation; a very attractive work in very compelling performances.

---G.D., amazon.com

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