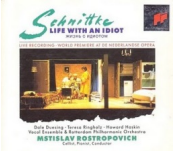
Alfred Schnittke - Life with an Idiot (1992)



Disc: 1 *1. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act One: Prologue, 'Life with an idiot is full of surprises' 2. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 1, 'My friends congratulated me on my idiot' 3. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 1, 'I had been full of doubts and anxieties that winter' 4. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 1, 'Everybody laughed' 5. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 1, 'I pictured to myself a crafty and staid wise old man' 6. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 1, 'Well look what's happened - I've belched' 7. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 1, 'Sometimes I mix up my dead wives' 8. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 1, 'I've swapped a birdie for a pizza!' 9. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 1, Tango (Intermezzo) 10. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 2, 'I said later that if I had gone' 11. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 2, 'Look: my former fellow students' 12. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 2, 'I got down to searching for the holy simpleton' 13. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 2, 'Ekh!' 14. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 1: Scene 2, Intermezzo*

Disc: 2

1. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 1, 'In the beginning Vova was very reserved' 2. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 1, 'In the evenings, to prevent Vova suffering from insomnia' 3. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 1, 'Once, on returning home, I chanced upon the following scene' 4. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 1, 'A few days later Vova started tearing up the books' 5. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 1, 'Suddenly, one fine day, he dumped a whole pile in the middle of the room' 6. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 1, 'Ekh!' 7. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 1, Intermezzo 8. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'Vova has cleaned up his act a lot' 9. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'Don't offend him. Don't traumatise Vova' 10. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'Life with an idiot is full of surprises!' 11. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'I was intrigued as to which proclivities of Vova my wife bent over backwards to 12. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'Ekh!' 13. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'Well, and now, cock-sucking reader, whoever you are' 14. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'They made their home in the second room' 15. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'We beat her up, beat her up!' 16. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'Suddenly, the wife declares: 'Vova! Either him..." 17. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'I love you. Love!' 18. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'I am Renoir' 19. Life With an Idiot, opera in 2 acts: Act 2: Scene 2, 'The guard treated me like I was one of the family'

I - Romain Bischoff
Wife - Teresa Ringholz
Vova - Howard Haskin
Guard - Leonid Zimnenko
Marcel Proust - Robin Leggate

Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra
Mstislav Rostropovich – conductor

What a wonderful title. The absurdist libretto of Schnittke's opera by the former 'dissident' writer Victor Erofeyev is based on his own short story and is partly a satire on Soviet life under Communism ('Vova' was Lenin's nickname, and Howard Haskin — the creator of the role — was made up to look like the former leader). Clearly, for Schnittke and other post-Soviet artists, there are still scores to setde with the past. Whether that will tell against the opera's long-term success remains to be seen.

At its worst it recalls a superior cabaret act, Schnittke's frequent recourse to parody as part of his 'polystylistic' approach sounding a touch glib. But other moments suggest wider resonances. The opera was premiered in Amsterdam last April, when this recording was made. Rostropovich, who was instrumental in the project from an early stage, conducts a brash but vital performance (he also plays the cello and piano) and the cast enters fully into the spirit of the piece. The sound has a curiously hollow quality. -- George Hall, BBC Music Magazine

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