


Janáček Provides the Highlight in Tomáš Netopil's LPO Programme

April 27, 2015

 United Kingdom **Wagner, Beethoven, Janáček** Andrea Danková (sop); Karen Cargill (mezzo); Aleš Briscein (tenor); Jochen Schmeckenbecher (bass); Orfeo Català i Cor de Cambra del Palau de la Música Catalana; London Philharmonic Choir & Orchestra/Tomáš Netopil. Royal Festival Hall, London, 25.4.2015 (CC)

Wagner – Overture: The Flying Dutchman

Beethoven – Symphony No 4

Janáček – Glagolitic Mass

Tomáš Netopil is a most interesting conductor. His discography already includes a version of Mozart's *Lucia Silla* (from *La Fenice*), and a Busoni *Doktor Faust* (Oehms Classics). He has made two significant recordings of the music of Janáček for the Czech label Supraphon, both with the Prague RSO – one of orchestral works including the *Sinfonietta* ([review](#)); the other coupling the *Glagolitic Mass* with *Eternal Gospel* ([review](#)). Just a few days after the present concert under consideration, Netopil will conduct Halévy's rarely-heard opera *La Juive* at Vlaamse Opera.

The first half held standard repertoire. It was a shame perhaps that Wagner's *Holländer* Overture came so close in time to Andris Nelson's Covent Garden performances. The London Philharmonic responded well to Netopil's well-drilled gestures, but throughout there was the feeling that they were not totally behind him. The level of audible detail was impressive, but no compensation from the loss of the elemental feeling so vital to this piece. There were a suspicious number of split notes from the trumpets; a response to the conductor or just an off night?

There were, again, a number of identifiable positives to the Beethoven Fourth which followed, including a wide dynamic range (proper *pianissimi* when required), hard-sticked timpani and speeds that spoke of historical awareness within a performance that clearly was not enslaved by it. There was drama and tension to the finale; yet again this was a performance neither revelatory nor particularly energising.

Hopes were high for the performance of the Glagolitic Mass, and here there is much more positive news. A huge chorus (actually three: the LPC, Orfeo Català and Cor de Cambra del Palau de la Música Catalana) added impressive heft. In a *Gramophone* interview, Tomáš Netopil is passionate about his "chosen" version of the score, which appears to be something of a composite (see his interview with Hannah Nepil in *Gramophone*). Gavin Plumley's notes for the concert avoid the issue "in whatever version the work is performed" he says, after discussing the merits of the September 1927 version, that was used in its Brno premiere, edited by Jiří Zahrádka. (A little research revealed it was indeed this September 1927 edition that was used).

If the LPO lacked the immediacy of Netopil's recording on Supraphon, the choirs and soloists were consistently superb. The only shared soloist between this performance and Netopil's Supraphon recording is the Slovakian soprano Andrea Danková, a singer with a radiant voice of real substance and body, all of which was used in service to her impassioned singing throughout. Danková's upper register is particularly impressive as it is so free: she can negotiate these higher reaches with seeming ease, and her sense of dramatic declamation brings visceral, passionate results. Aleš Briscein was a strong, lyric tenor voice (particularly in the Gloria, or "Slava" as it appears here, but also in the Credo – "Věruju"), while both Cargill and Schmeckenbecher acquitted themselves well.

Perhaps the orchestra was at its finest in the Interlude, with its long lower string lines; throughout, it was in the finer, more delicate moments that Netopil impressed most. And of course there are those organ solos, delivered with fine aplomb by Catherine Edwards, perfectly capturing these passages' sense of not only abandon but of stretching boundaries to breaking point.

A pity the first half of the concert held few clues as to what was to come.

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