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WEINBERG

Clarinet Music

Clarinet Concerto

Clarinet Sonata

Chamber Symphony No. 4

Robert Oberaigner, Clarinet

Michael Schöch, Piano

Dresden Chamber Soloists

Michail Jurowski

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919–1996)

Clarinet Music

Mieczysław Weinberg was born in Warsaw on 8 December 1919, where he emerged as a highly regarded pianist who might well have continued his studies in the US until the Nazi invasion forced him to flee to Minsk (in the course of which his travel documents were inscribed as Moisey Vainberg, by which name he was 'officially' known until 1982). During 1939–41 he studied composition with Vasily Zolotaryov then, after the Nazi invasion, headed further east to Tashkent where he duly became immersed in numerous theatrical and operatic projects. There he also wrote his *First Symphony*, which favourably impressed Shostakovich and resulted in his settling in Moscow in 1943 where he was to remain for the rest of his life. Despite various personal setbacks (his father-in-law, the renowned actor Solomon Mikhoels, was murdered in 1948, and Weinberg himself was imprisoned for alleged 'Jewish subversion' then freed only after the death of Stalin in 1953), he gradually gained a reputation as a figure who was championed by many of the leading Soviet singers, instrumentalists and conductors.

Despite receiving various official honours, Weinberg's fortunes declined noticeably over his final two decades – not least owing to the emergence of a younger generation of composers whose perceived antagonism to the Soviet establishment secured them greater coverage in the West (where Weinberg was never to enjoy more than a modest presence even during his heyday) and his death in Moscow on 26 February 1996 went largely unnoticed. Since then, however, his output – which comprises 26 symphonies and 17 string quartets, together with seven operas, some two-dozen song cycles and a wealth of chamber and instrumental music – has secured an increasing number of performances and recordings, and is now held in great regard as a significant as well as personal continuation of the Russian symphonic tradition.

The present album collates those three works featuring clarinet, an instrument Weinberg would have known from his earliest years given its presence in klezmer bands or theatre ensembles. Composed in 1970

(details of its first performance remain unclear, though it was published in 1977), the *Clarinet Concerto* is perhaps the most immediately arresting of Weinberg's works in this genre. As with the *Violin Concertino* and *First Flute Concerto* [Naxos 8.573931], the accompaniment is limited to strings, but Weinberg secures a notably wide range of textures from these forces articulating the melodic ideas over each of its three movements. The customary fast–slow–fast format is observed, the latter two movements playing without pause.

The first movement opens with a purposeful idea on clarinet over pizzicato strings, its tensile momentum enhanced by restive interjections from strings. There follows a more inward and eloquent theme with repeated note gestures on strings, before the initial impetus re-emerges for a sequence of sardonic exchanges with motifs from both themes pressed into service. The initial idea presently continues as part of a modified reprise with the second theme accorded greater space, latterly interrupted by elements from the earlier theme for an angular coda that drives towards a hectic conclusion. The second movement starts with a nobly wrought string threnody, joined by clarinet for what soon evolves into a heartfelt and melancholic discourse. This dies down in lower strings, before building to an impassioned climax suddenly curtailed to leave the clarinet musing uncertainly in the company of lower strings then solo viola. The closing pages anticipate the emotional fatalism to come. Here, however, the final movement is launched by a perky theme shared between clarinet and upper strings over a deft pizzicato accompaniment. This soon provokes a more confrontational response from strings, though a graceful idea steers the music toward more pensive waters. Lively gestures from strings lead into a brief if eventful clarinet cadenza, duly capped by the strings' resolute cadential chords.

Earliest of these works is the *Clarinet Sonata*, written in 1945 and given its premiere on 20 April the following year at the Small Hall of Moscow Conservatoire with clarinetist Vasily Getman and the composer as pianist.

Before the current wave of interest in Weinberg, this piece had already found favour – hardly surprising given its formal and expressive poise.

The first movement opens with a ruminative theme on clarinet, latterly joined by piano in an understated dialogue that evinces greater animation when a second theme emerges. A central climax has this theme elaborated in more forceful terms, before the second theme resumes its lively course prior to a return of the initial theme then a pensive close. The second movement begins with a capering theme, underpinned by fanfare-like repeated notes on piano and taking on more angular expression as it unfolds. A central section features an elegant, folk-inflected melody that builds to an unexpectedly fraught climax before a transition on piano back to the initial theme, betraying greater pathos as it draws to a regretful conclusion. This is pursued in the final movement, its lengthy piano prelude touching on greater emotional depth before the clarinet emerges with an improvisatory passage which draws both instruments into an intense discourse. Over rolling piano chords the clarinet unfolds a bittersweet melodic line, which almost inevitably subsides into musing retrospection and so brings this work to its resigned ending.

Written between 30 April and 12 May 1992, the *Fourth Chamber Symphony* also proved to be Weinberg's last completed work. Here the strings are bolstered by obbligato clarinet (in A) and triangle (heard just four times during the finale). Unlike its predecessors, the piece has no recourse to any of the composer's string quartets and its movements unfold as an unbroken continuity. It does, even so, allude to various earlier pieces – most notably through a chorale melody that Weinberg had referred to as a constant presence over the extent of his creativity. Dedicated to the composer Boris Tchaikovsky, his younger contemporary and a confidante of longstanding, the piece

went unheard in Weinberg's lifetime: its first hearing was most likely at recording sessions by Thord Svedlund with the Umeå Symphony Orchestra in May 1998.

The opening movement indeed commences with that chorale, its nostalgia shot through with muted anguish. This is presently elaborated across the strings, without increase in tension or dynamics, until the clarinet makes a discreet entrance, its lilting theme heard against pizzicato accompaniment and with a haunting countermelody. The latter duly makes a transition back into the chorale, gradually regaining its initial somnolence and then on to a motionless close. The second movement affords total contrast, its hectic main theme shared between clarinet and strings over pulsating accompaniment. A second idea is no less conflicted in its starkly rhythmic exchanges between upper and lower strings, before intensive development of both themes with clarinet to the fore. There follow impassioned solos for violin then double bass; after which, the third movement begins with pensive exchanges between clarinet and lower strings. This evolves haltingly into an eloquent discourse for strings, also heard soloistically, which alludes back to the chorale melody as it builds towards a plangent culmination joined by clarinet. A resonant pause ushers in the final and longest movement, initially evoking the desolate mood at the start until clarinet makes its reticent entry. A triangle stroke launches a plaintive melody for clarinet with klezmer overtones, bringing a more animated though still restrained expression, with winsome writing from upper strings. Intensifying, this reaches a sustained climax with a sudden descent on clarinet then an abrupt exchange with double bass, heading to a resigned close on lower strings with pizzicato chords and one last triangle chime.

Richard Whitehouse

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Robert Oberaigner

Photo: Andrej Kasik



Robert Oberaigner, principal clarinetist of the Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden, has established a reputation as one of the most distinguished performers of his generation. Since his solo debut at the Wiener Konzerthaus at the age of 17 he has regularly been invited to appear at prestigious international venues and festivals such as the BBC Proms, the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Kölner Philharmonie and the Mozarteum, Salzburg. He has performed chamber music with outstanding musicians such as Myung-Whun Chung and Sol Gabetta, and has appeared as a soloist with numerous orchestras including the Staatskapelle Dresden. In 2019 he premiered Simone Fontanellis' *Clarinet Concerto*, a work dedicated to him, and in 2018 gave his debut as a composer, performing his work *Tränen der Colombina*, Op. 1 in Tokyo. Oberaigner's discography includes recordings for the German label MDG with pianist Michael Schöch. Together, they have released Max Reger's complete works for clarinet and piano and Brahms' *Clarinet Sonatas*. Born in Hall in Tirol, Oberaigner studied at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna and in The Hague, where he focused on historically informed performance. He completed his studies at the University of Music, Lübeck with Sabine Meyer. Before moving to Dresden he served as principal clarinet of the Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne and appeared as a guest performer with the Berlin Philharmonic and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras. www.robertoberaigner.com

Michael Schöch

Photo: Andrej Grlic



Michael Schöch is equally proficient in both the piano and organ. Since being awarded First Prize at the ARD International Music Competition in the organ category, he has performed at prestigious venues such as the Wiener Konzerthaus and Berliner Philharmonie, and the cathedrals of Riga, Passau, Merseburg, Mainz and Speyer. He has performed with numerous renowned orchestras including the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestre de l'Opéra de Rouen, and has been featured on numerous broadcast recordings. His vast discography includes the piano concertos of Tyrolean composers such as Johann Ruffinatscha and Emil Berlanda, the complete piano and organ works of Julius Reubke (Oehms Classics), and numerous other releases on the Musikproduktion Dabringhaus und Grimm label. Schöch studied piano in Innsbruck with Božidar Novec, Munich with Gerhard Oppitz and Salzburg with Pavel Gililov, as well as organ in Munich with Edgar Krapp. Among numerous other accolades he has been awarded First Prize at the Franz Schubert International Competition in Rousse, Bulgaria (piano), and the International August Everding Competition in Munich (organ). Since 2015 he has served as professor of organ at the Tyrolean State Conservatory in Innsbruck. www.michael-schoech.com

Dresden Chamber Soloists

Photo: Robert Kusnyer



Each year in early summer, musicians of the Dresden Staatskapelle and its associates meet for the Shostakovich Festival Gohrsch. This focus on Russian music of the 20th century has resulted in the establishment of a small orchestra, and on this recording the ensemble appears together for the first time as the Dresden Chamber Soloists. Concertmaster Federico Kasik studied in Lviv (Lemberg) and Dresden before embarking on a career in the Dresden Saxon Staatskapelle. As a soloist he has appeared with orchestras in Germany, Poland, Austria, Ukraine and Switzerland, and is active in chamber music, among others with the Fritz Busch Quartet. Since 1989 Friedwart Dittmann has been principal cellist in the Dresden Staatskapelle where he is also chairman of the Artists' Union for chamber music concerts and conductors' debuts. He studied in Weimar and is personally engaged in the development of musical training.

Michail Jurowski



Born in Moscow in 1945, Michail Jurowski grew up in a circle of internationally acclaimed artists of the former Soviet Union. Shostakovich was a close family friend, and Jurowski is today one of the leading interpreters of his music. Jurowski studied at the Moscow Conservatory, and during his last years in the Soviet Union frequently conducted performances at the Bolshoi Theatre. From 1978 Jurowski was regular guest conductor at the Komische Oper Berlin and in 1989 he left the USSR after accepting a permanent post with the Semperoper Dresden. He has held titled positions with orchestras across Germany and Austria, and as a guest conductor has led the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra among many others. His discography includes the world premiere of Rubinstein's opera *Moses* with Sinfonia Iuventus, a project which was awarded prestigious UNESCO patronage on Warner Classics, and alongside televised concerts and radio recordings across Europe, he has recorded with orchestras including the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. Jurowski was awarded the German Record Critics' Award in 1992, 1996 and 2017, and in 2001 received a GRAMMY nomination for his recording of orchestral music by Rimsky-Korsakov with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra.

Mieczysław Weinberg was familiar with the clarinet from his youth, given its prominent place in klezmer bands and theatre ensembles, and he wrote three works specifically for the instrument. In the *Clarinet Concerto* he draws a wide range of textures from the accompanying strings, over which the soloist explores the clarinet's extremes of register in virtuosic fashion. Despite having been written when Weinberg was still in his mid-twenties, the *Clarinet Sonata* is a mature work with Romantic and folkloric elements. His last completed work was the *Chamber Symphony No. 4*, an impassioned piece with a wrenching chorale theme and role for obbligato clarinet.



Mieczysław
WEINBERG
(1919–1996)

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**Clarinet Concerto,
Op. 104 (1970)**

- 1 I. Allegro
- 2 II. Andante –
- 3 III. Allegretto

**Clarinet Sonata,
Op. 28 (1945)**

- 4 I. Allegro
- 5 II. Allegretto
- 6 III. Adagio

Chamber Symphony No. 4, Op. 153
29:26 for clarinet, triangle and
11:06 string orchestra (1992) 33:07

- 7 I. Lento – 8:08
- 8 II. Allegro molto – Moderato – 7:03
- 9 III. Adagio – Meno mosso – 9:48
- 10 IV. Andantino – Adagissimo 7:59

- 20:11
- 6:06
- 7:02
- 6:55

Robert Oberaigner, Clarinet

Michael Schöch, Piano 4–6

Dresden Chamber Soloists 1–3 7–10

Federico Kasik, Violin 7–10 • **Friedwart Dittmann, Cello** 7–10

Michail Jurowski 1–3 7–10

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