

Nicolás Pasquet



Nicolás Pasquet was born in 1958 in Montevideo, Uruguay, where he studied violin and conducting at the State Music Academy, before continuing his studies in Germany in Nuremberg and Stuttgart. In 1984 and 1986 he won the National Competition for Young Conductors of the German Council of Music, and in 1987 he won first prize at the 37th International Conducting Competition in Besançon. He has guest-conducted numerous renowned orchestras, including the Stuttgart Philharmonic, NDR Hannover, Hamburg Philharmonic, Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse, Queensland Philharmonic Orchestra, Munich Radio Orchestra, the Basel Symphony Orchestra and many others. He has served as Chief Conductor of the Pécs Symphony Orchestra (Hungary), the Neubrandenburger Philharmonie and the Coburg

Theatre Orchestra. Presently he is Chief Conductor of the Youth Symphony Orchestra of the State of Hessen, Germany. He is Professor of Conducting at the Franz Liszt University of Music in Weimar, where he leads an international conducting course and is Chief Conductor of the Symphony Orchestra.

Pécs Symphony Orchestra

The city of Pécs, in the South-East of Hungary, is an important cultural centre, with a symphony orchestra that continues a tradition of some two and a half centuries. After its reorganisation in 1984, the Pécs Symphony Orchestra undertook a series of important concert tours abroad with performances throughout Europe and worked with a number of distinguished conductors. Orchestral repertoire was broadened particularly under the English conductor Howard Williams from 1989, with an increased attention to contemporary music. In 1993 Nicolás Pasquet, winner of the 1987 Besançon competition, was appointed Chief Conductor. The orchestra now performs as the Pannon Philharmonic Orchestra.

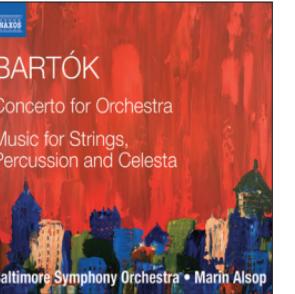
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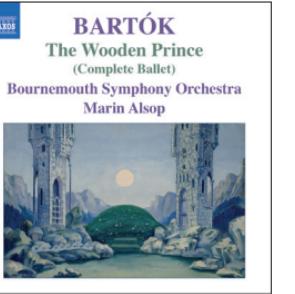
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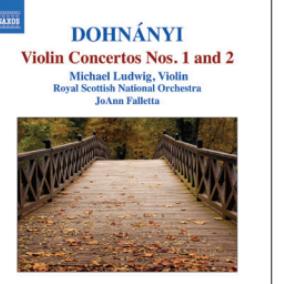
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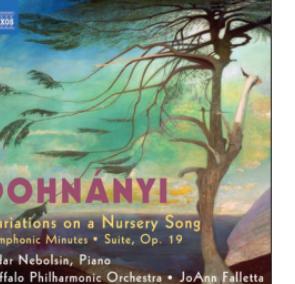
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László LAJTHA Orchestral Works • 1 Symphony No. 1 • Suite pour orchestre Nicolás Pasquet • Pécs Symphony Orchestra



László Lajtha (1892–1963)

Symphony No. 1, Op. 24

In memoriam, Op. 35 • Suite pour orchestre, Op. 19

László Lajtha, one of the greatest Hungarian composers of the first half of the twentieth century, was born in Budapest on 30 June 1892. He took his composer's diploma as a pupil of Viktor Herzfeld at the Budapest Academy of Music and continued his studies in Leipzig and in Geneva, until 1914 spending six months of each year in Paris. Lajtha was a pupil of Vincent d'Indy, who introduced him to the musical world of Paris, and the periods he spent there brought friendship with a number of people who exercised a decisive influence on his musical language. He began to collect folk music in the second decade of the century, then spending the four years of the war at the front as an artillery officer. In 1919 he was appointed to the teaching staff of the Budapest National Conservatory. From 1928 Lajtha was a member of the International Commission of Popular Arts and Traditions of the League of Nations and later a member of the Commission of Arts and Letters until the outbreak of the Second World War. He was also a member of the committee of the International Folk Music Council, based in London. It was in 1930 that he signed his first contract with the Paris publisher Leduc, his exclusive publisher from 1948. His international career as a composer began in 1929 with the award of the Coolidge Prize for his *Third String Quartet*. After the Second World War László Lajtha became director of music for Hungarian Radio, and also Director of the Museum of Ethnography and of the National Conservatory. In 1947, commissioned to provide film

music, he spent a year in London, but on his return lost all his official positions for political reasons. In 1951, he received the Kossuth Prize for his activities in the field of folk music. He was the only composer since Liszt to be elected a corresponding member of the French Académie des Beaux-Arts. Lajtha died in Budapest on 16 February, 1963.

Although it is not so indicated by the title, the composer compiled his *Suite pour Orchestre, Op. 19*, from the ballet *Lysistrata*. Lajtha wrote four works for the stage: three sparkling ballets and a brilliant comic opera. The first of these was the one-act ballet *Lysistrata*, composed in 1933, the only such work of Lajtha's to be staged in his life-time. The ballets *Le bosquet des quatre Dieux* (The Grove of Four Gods) of 1943 and *Capriccio* of 1944 are only known from the suites derived from their music, while the opera *Le chapeau bleu* (The Blue Hat), with a libretto by Salvador de Madariaga, had its first performance on Hungarian Radio as late as 1990.

The story of *Lysistrata* was written by Lajtha and the Hungarian poet Lajos Áprily and based on a play by Aristophanes. The women on both sides are tired of the war between Athens and Sparta. They want peace, but the Elders who control matters keep the hostilities going. At the instigation of the single girl Lysistrata, the women offer a sacrifice to Aphrodite and seek her help. Lysistrata also persuades the women to refuse their husbands their conjugal rights for as long as the combatants refuse to make peace. The women defend

their citadel against the elders, who want to set it on fire. The warriors of Athens and Sparta, united at last by a common cause, join forces with the women and defeat the Elders. All celebrate happily together and Lysistrata, still single, thanks Aphrodite.

Shortly after the first performance an interview with Lajtha was carried by the periodical *Délíbab*, in which he said: "Reading *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes in János Arany's translation, I was captured by the theme being so danceable: everything can be expressed by movement, every confession of love or feeling. In *Lysistrata* the protagonist is the crowd, with the soloists merely episodic. The main events are the conspiracy of the women, the fratricidal strife, with individuals only providing additional colouring."

The ballet was produced at the Hungarian Opera House on 25 February 1937, when the conductor was János Ferencsik, the stage director Gusztav Olah, the choreographer Rezső Brada and the stage designer Zoltán Fülop. The famous mezzo-soprano Piroska Tutsek was cast in the title role, because Lysistrata does not have to dance. The piece had a run of four nights, but since 1937 it has never been staged again.

The ballet score consists of a series of closed numbers, which later facilitated the composition of a suite. The latter has four movements: *Prélude et Hymne*, *Marche burlesque*, *Valse lente* and *Can-Can* and was first performed in November 1936 in the Vigadó (Redout), six months before the staging of the ballet. As Lajtha's most detailed biographer, János Breuer, notes, the *Suite* was the only orchestral composition by Lajtha to be played in concert in Budapest until 1945. This fact shows the neglect that Lajtha suffered all through his life, while his music was better known abroad, in Western Europe. To Breuer's knowledge the suite was

performed in Rome and in Brussels in the 1936–37 season, and also, in the composer's lifetime, in Paris, London and Melbourne.

Lajtha wrote *In memoriam* in 1941, describing it in a subtitle as *Pièce Symphonique pour Orchestre*. His intention was to give a measure of eternity to the victims of the Second World War and the incompleteness of the title may suggest the anonymity of the dead as well as the incomplete nature of the list of the fallen, with millions still to be killed in this most terrible of wars. As a young man, the composer had served as an artillery officer and had first-hand experience of these horrors. The shocking single-movement dramatic composition lasts about twenty minutes and is an eloquent protest against war and against the helplessness and senselessness of human suffering. The basic dynamics of the work range from *piano* and *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, as the cries of pain burst forth, always followed by the silence of shock. Having already written music for the cinema, Lajtha almost projects before the listener's inner eye the procession of victims and the agony of those left mourning.

In memoriam was dedicated to the BBC and was conducted in London by Sir Adrian Boult. In May 1945, when concerts could be held once more, this work was the first première to be given in Budapest, and was played there again six weeks after Lajtha's death on 2 April 1963, together with the ballet suite *Capriccio*, conducted by one of the composer's most talented pupils, János Ferencsik.

With nine symphonies and several other symphonic works, Lajtha is one of the major Hungarian Symphonists. While his contemporaries Bartók and Kodály made little use of the genre, Lajtha found it the most meaningful, together with the string quartet. Written when Lajtha was

44, the *First Symphony*, unnumbered at this time, has three movements, like several of his later symphonies. These are fast (*Allegro*) – slow (*Andante*) – fast (*Allegro molto*), and follow the traditional three-movement form of the Italian opera overture or *sinfonia*, a forerunner of the classical symphony itself.

Lajtha's symphonies can be divided into two groups. Chronologically close but sharply different in contents are the vigorous and optimistic *First Symphony* of 1936 and the dramatic and ominous *Second Symphony* of 1938, the latter suggesting the dread that came over the composer at the signs of coming war. After a break of ten years, he continued the series, with a new symphony every two or three years, until 1961.

Symphony No. 1 has been particularly neglected and the composer's affinity with the Latin or French spirit, mastery of Western musical idiom and reliance

on Hungarian folk music is apparent here. Lajtha had had experience of writing for a large orchestra, with film music, ballet and orchestral suites before 1936. In the symphony his exceptional gift for instrumentation, the richness of his melodic invention and his humour are all present. The *First Symphony* is dedicated to the famous Austrian film director Georg Höllerer, in memory of their collaboration in *Hortobágy*, a film celebrating the Hungarian pusztá. The first performance of the symphony was in the Netherlands and in Hungary it was performed by the Radio Orchestra under the direction of János Ferencsik. This studio concert was also broadcast in London, Paris and Prague.

Emőke Solymosi Tari
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