

Zdeněk FIBICH Symphony No. 2 in E flat major At Twilight Clarinet Idyli

Irvin Venyš, Clarinet Czech National Symphony Orchestra Marek Štilec

Zdeněk Fibich (1850-1900) Symphony No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 38 · At Twilight – Idyll for Orchestra, Op. 39 Selanka – Idyll in B flat major for Clarinet and Orchestra, Op. 16

Zdeněk Fibich was born in Všebořice on 21st December 1850. His father was a forestry official and the composer's early life was spent on various wooded estates of the nobility. Educated at home by his mother up to the age of nine, he was sent to a gymnasium in Vienna for two years before attending a Czech-speaking school in Prague where he stayed until he was fifteen. After this he was sent to Leipzig where he remained for three years studying the piano with Ignaz Moscheles and composition with Salomon Jadassohn and Ernst Richter. After a year in Paris, where he concluded his formal studies with Vinzenz Lachner in Mannheim, Fibich spent the next few years in Prague where he wrote his first opera Bukovín. At the age of 23 he married Růžena Hanušová and took up residence in Vilnius as a choirmaster. Having endured eleven unhappy months there, in August 1874 he returned to Prague where his wife died that October. In August 1875 he married his late wife's older sister, the contralto Betty Hanušová, but left her in 1897 for his former student Anežka Schulzová. Their relationship was to be an important one artistically, as she undertook the librettos for all of his later operas. Active as a writer and cultural commentator as well as composer. which former capacities caused much controversy concerning his posthumous reputation through to the First World War, Fibich remained in Prague until his death on 15 October 1900.

Among Fibich's catalogue of works are chamber music including two string quartets, piano trio, piano quartet and quintet for piano with strings and wind; three symphonies and several symphonic poems; seven operas including *Šárka* and *The Bride of Messina*, several melodramas including the large-scale trilogy *Hippodamia*, various liturgical pieces including a *Missa Brevis*, and as many as 600 piano pieces (composed during 1892–99) of which 376 were printed in four volumes and entitled *Moods, Impressions and Reminiscences* that served as a diary of his involvement with Schulzová, as well as providing a thematic resource the composer mined extensively in his

operas as well as his Second and Third Symphonies.

Composed in 1892 and 1893, the Second Symphony marks an appreciable advance on its predecessor [Naxos 8.572985] in that it brings the formal and expressive tenets of Fibich's musical thinking into persuasive accord. Most of its main themes are derived directly from the piano pieces which articulate his relationship with Schulzová, yet these are evolved with particular regard to the cyclical unity of the work as a whole, which evinces a high degree of thematic integration. The presence of Dvořák is undeniable, as is the Austro-German symphonism as exemplified by Schumann and Brahms.

The first movement opens with a lilting theme shared between strings and woodwind, soon building to a rousing climax before subsiding into a songful theme introduced by solo clarinet. Elements from the first theme duly return to round off the exposition in a vigorous manner, whence the development begins with a varied interplay of motifs from both themes as it moves effectively between them. A brief hush enables the woodwind to recall the first theme at the start of a reprise which unfolds much as expected, though with the second theme now largely entrusted to strings, before this heads into the coda that itself seeks to unify elements from both main themes as it heads towards a bracingly resolute conclusion.

The slow movement, among Fibich's most affecting statements, begins with an easeful polyphony between woodwind and strings that is barely ruffled by the distant sound of timpani – though greater contrast is secured by the arrival of a rhythmically trenchant idea on woodwind that brings a consequent rise in activity as it draws in the rest of the orchestra. At length a solo violin ushers in a return to the opening music, now even more warmly and expressively scored, which builds to an eloquent though short-lived climax. Although the rhythmic idea briefly reemerges and pulsating timpani momentarily darken the mood, an underlying sense of contentment holds good as the music reaches its serene ending. The Scherzo is launched with a call to attention on trumpet and capering interplay between upper woodwind and strings such as constitutes a theme of sorts; one whose animated progress is informed by some of the composer's most felicitous scoring. At length a pause is reached, the trio now commencing with a more measured dance whose ländler-like profile and piquant harmonies might plausibly bring Mahler to mind. A sudden increase in tempo, along with the return of the trumpet call, marks the return of the scherzo music which duly unfolds much as before (though its rhythmic and textural subtlety offset any risk of predictability) as it moves with increasing verve into an energetic and good-humoured close.

The Finale picks up where its predecessor left off, with the impulsive main theme expounded on full orchestra before it makes way for a more introspective idea that is itself rounded off by a forceful codetta. Unlike in the first movement, there is a full exposition repeat – after which the main constituents of both themes are treated to intensive development that again demonstrates the composer's orchestral resourcefulness. This culminates in the return of the main theme, but now the inward secondary theme emerges almost immediately to provide a measure of breathing space before the music heads into an extensive coda which recasts the main theme as a hymnlike peroration prior to the thunderous conclusion.

Composed in 1893, At Twilight is an idyll for orchestra that finds Fibich at his most Wagnerian in matters of harmony and orchestration. According to a letter written in February 1951 by Anežka Schulzová's brother, Bohuslav Schulz, the work is said to depict walks taken by Fibich and Anežka's family on Žofin Island in Prague, while each of its themes describes members of the Schulz family and Fibich's closest friends. It begins in the depths of the

strings, over which a theme of solemn eloquence unfolds on lower woodwind and strings. Gradually the music takes on greater opulence and amplitude, though all this is to change with the sudden emergence of a much livelier idea with upper woodwind and pizzicato strings much in evidence. An arresting passage initiated by flute over tremolo strings leads to a return of the opening theme. which now continues in even more heartfelt terms (the harp being especially evident) and with a correspondingly more luxuriant orchestration. At length the solo cello finds itself partnered by chirruping flute, which continues as the music heads into a final section that acts as a loose reprise of the main ideas previously heard. This culminates in a brief though lusciously scored climax, before a muted response on the lower strings (accompanied by evocative cymbal strokes) brings about the rapt and maybe even indolent conclusion

Although he was to write no actual concertos, Fibich left several pieces which feature a solo instrument. One such is the *Idyll in B flat major for Clarinet and Orchestra* (or violin and piano). Composed in 1879, this short work finds its composer in lighter mood, while still being permeated with the reflective inwardness that is a hallmark of almost all the music of his maturity. Over gently undulating strings, the soloist has a lyrical melody that is fairly pervaded by a wistfulness which borders on melancholy. This proves capable of effective transformation over the course of the piece as a whole, with just enough harmonic variety to hold the listener's attention as a brief climax is reached; after which the music returns to its initial rumination then onward to a limpid conclusion that is rounded off by ascending flutes and a final pizzicato chord.

Richard Whitehouse

Performance Material

For the Naxos recordings of the complete orchestral works of Zdeněk Fibich Marek Štilec has kept strictly to authentic sources from around the time of the composer's life. First and foremost he studied surviving manuscripts of the scores and the first authorised copies and texts prepared for publication (see the catalogue of the composer's papers deposited at the Museum of Czech Music under Zdeněk Fibich, Inventory of collection sign. 80, Prague 1999, fasc. 13-17 http://nris.nkp.cz/Katalog.aspx?sigla=ABX001&katkey=KNMHKIFP

In some cases Marek Štilec made a thorough study of performance material (individual parts), as long as there was proof it had been used at a première. It has thus been possible to substantiate theories relating to the subjectively programmatic nature of some of the works, for instance the *Selanka "V podvečer"*. As the work progressed other findings, too, were used – including the composer's personal notes, inserts and performance suggestions in his manuscripts and the first printed editions that have not been incorporated in the Fibich Critical Edition so far but contribute to the highest level of authenticity. The performing material has in all cases been thoroughly edited, with a number of errors being corrected – errors that have plagued performances of Fibich's orchestral compositions up till now. Marek Štilec has been consulting other colleagues and musicologists in the Zdeněk Fibich Society (Czech Republic) of which he is a member himself, as to questions of the authenticity of sources and of interpretation.

All the orchestral works of Zdeněk Fibich are here recorded consistently without any "vide" cuts which, over the years, had crept into professional performances in spite of never having been authorised by the composer. All the repeats prescribed by Fibich (e.g. in the first movement exposition sections of the symphonies) have been consistently – and in keeping with the practice of the time – observed. The recordings have also tried to make use of contemporary reviews, as well as analyses of individual works that have been appearing each month in 2013 in the prestigious music magazine *Hudebni rozhledy* and that are also available on the special web page **www.fibich.cz**, written by the conductor Marek Stilec.

Czech National Symphony Orchestra

Celebrating its twentieth birthday in 2013, the Czech National Symphony Orchestra has gained a leading position among the top Czech and other European orchestras. Renowned for its versatility, each year the orchestra presents a broad programme ranging from classical music concerts to contemporary genre, film scores, jazz, and musicals. The CNSO also organizes the summer Prague Proms Festival. The orchestra takes pride in the several Gold awards received for its recordings, and in the Gustav Mahler Prize, awarded for its performances of Mahler's works. Other achievements include the prestigious worldwide representation contract with IMG Artists London, and the long-standing recording project in association with Tokyo Victor Entertainment. The Czech National Symphony Orchestra was established in 1993 by the trumpet-player Jan Hasenöhrl. A spiritual father at the birth of the CNSO was the legendary conductor Zdeněk Košler. In 1996 the American Paul Freeman was named Chief Conductor, followed in 2007 by Libor Pešek.





Marek Štilec

Marek Štilec was born in Prague in 1985 and began his studies at the Prague Conservatoire in the violin class of Dana Vlachová. He studied conducting with Leoš Svárovský, graduating from the Prague Academy of Performing Arts. He works regularly with a number of orchestras, including the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra, Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Swan, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Prague Philharmonia, Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice, Kammerphilharmonie Graz and the Berlin Camerata, He founded the Chamber Orchestra Quattro with which he has given dozens of concerts and has made a number of internationally successful recordings. He works with Czech Television and Czech Badio and his recordings have also been broadcast by the BBC. He has attended the Leonid Grin master-class at the Neeme Järvi Academy for Conductors, and has also taken part in master-classes with Jorma Panula, Vladimir Kiradijev, Gerd Albrecht and Achim Holub. In March 2010 and again by invitation in February 2013 he undertook a study visit with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra and its chief conductor Michael Tilson Thomas. Photo: Ondřej Klíma

Irvin Venyš

The Czech clarinettist Irvin Venyš is among the outstanding artists of the younger Czech generation. He has been successful in major international competitions, including the Prague Spring, the Bayreuth Pacem in Terris and the EBU New Talent, as well as others held in Paris, Zurich and Madeira, and has appeared in leading festivals in Europe, including the Pablo Casals Festival in Prades, Festival Mittel Europa, and in concert halls throughout the world. He studied at the Brno Conservatory with Bretislav Winkler and at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague with Vlastimil Mareš and Jiří Hlaváč. He also spent a year at the Paris Conservatorier National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse in the class of Michel Arrignon. Venyš has recorded for Czech Radio and Television, Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk (MDR), ORF, and Arco Diva. *Photo: Josep Molina*



Zdeněk Fibich was one of the most important Czech composers of the second half of the nineteenth century, after his Czech predecessor, Smetana, and near-contemporary, Dvořák. His Symphony No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 38 is one of his greatest orchestral works, holding in perfect balance the dual influences of the Czech Nationalist School (and particularly Dvořák) as well as Austro-German models such as Schumann, Weber and Wagner. Most of the main themes derive from some of his own piano pieces but they are integrated and developed in masterly fashion. At Twilight is a lusciously scored orchestral piece, whilst the *Idyll* is gently melancholic.

Fibich ^a	Zdeněk FIBICH (1850–1900) Orchestral Works • 2	ubStar o ⁰ dropick
1 I. Allo 2 II. Ad 3 III. S 4 IV. Fi	phony No. 2 in E flat major, Op. 38 egro moderato lagio cherzo: Presto inale – Allegro energico wilight – Idyll for Orchestra, Op. 39	40:16 9:48 8:11 9:53 12:21 16:24
6 Selanka – Idyll in B flat major for Clarinet and Orchestra, Op. 16* 6:47 Irvin Venyš, Clarinet*		
Czech National Symphony Orchestra Marek Štilec		
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