

Scriabin

Piano Concerto in F-sharp minor, Op.20

Symphony No.2 in C-minor, Op.29

Kirill Gerstein (piano)

Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra

Vasily Petrenko

Recorded May & June 2016 in Oslo Concert Hall, Norway

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Duration: 77 minutes

Reviewed: January 2018

Scriabin's Second Symphony & Piano Concerto – Oslo Philharmonic/Vasily Petrenko and Kirill Gerstein [Lawo Classics]

Reviewed by Colin Anderson



Alexander Scriabin's Piano Concerto, from 1896, written when he was in his early-twenties, is his first work for orchestra, adding one to the piano he'd so far composed for; he was a concert-virtuoso on the instrument. It's a rhapsodic work, opening gently on a horn, Scriabin writing not heroically but lyrically yet with no lack of ardour. Plenty of notes for the soloist to negotiate in the outer movements, mind, which Kirill Gerstein does with consummate ease as well as significant musicianship, the Oslo Philharmonic (sporting bewitching woodwind solos, clarinet especially) and Vasily Petrenko fully attuned to their guest's dedicated and perceptive playing, as delicate as it is full-on confident. At the music's heart is the wondrous slow movement, ineffably beautiful in itself, and here so tenderly realised by the strings, quite magical and poignant in effect, Gerstein

relishing the Chopinesque figurations with sensitivity.

In the first year of the twentieth-century (1901) Scriabin composed his ambitious, five-movement Second Symphony. He didn't have to wait long to hear it, the following year in St Petersburg, when Liadov conducted: he may have been a dilatory composer but he was keen to look at and lead others' music. Scriabin, steeped in Wagner's music and edging his way ever-nearer to being mystical and ecstatic, was searching for ultimate otherworldly experiences and also advancing his musical language.

Of the five (cyclical) movements, the first is dark and fragrant, impassioned in *fortissimos* and the *attacca* second strides powerfully, as if trying to overcome opposition, with syncopations, strong accents and lyrical asides – this is not specific programme music but it would be easy to invent one in response to its sense of drama and emotion. The central Andante is rarefied and impressionistic, transporting us to a heavenly realm bedecked with a multitude of flowers, if not without elated rises of intensity, and over eighteen minutes the performers' concentration and discernment is compelling. There follows the *Tempestoso* fourth movement, volatile wind-swept music that leads into the majestic Finale that is dominated by a brass chorale of stirring proportions that plays hell with the memory long afterwards, gratefully, and which unlocks the triumph and consolation that this Symphony has been searching for; the closing bars are thrillingly uplifting.

This is a great performance of it, captured in sonic splendour, engineered by Arne Akselberg.

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