

CD REVIEW 89

SHOSTAKOVICH

Cello Concerto no 1 Op 107

Rostropovich, Philadelphia Orchestra, Eugene Ormandy, recording dates from 1960.

Violin Concerto no 1 Op 99,

David Oistrakh, Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra, Mravinsky, recording dates from 1959.

Regis RRC1385

This is a highly commended CD

The Cello Concerto is an important work and is arguably one of the best Russian cello concertos. The first movement is perfect in its design and content and we must not forget the significant part for solo horn, the only brass instrument in this work. When I think of other cello concertos, some of which are venerated, I cannot comprehend why this should be and why this masterpiece is not so well known

Rostropovich has a ravishingly beautiful tone and one senses that he feels every note. He was the Russian cellist par excellence and I was bowled over by his performance of the Prokofiev Sinfonia Concertante. It was a work that Shostakovich admired deeply and understandably so.

This Shostakovich concerto was not commissioned by Rostropovich but it is known that he desired a concerto from a great composer.

The work opens with the familiar monogram on Shostakovich's name DSCH which in musical notes is D, E flat, C and B. If you know the end of his Symphony no 10, the timpani sound this monogram to great effect.

The second movement may be elegiac in character and the third movement is a cadenza brilliantly written but, perhaps a little too long. This leads without a break into the finale, an allegro con moto. The solo horn and timpani play important roles as they do in the opening movement. There is a quote from a Russian song Suliko which was a favourite song of Lenin.

This performance is legendary. The cello part is technically demanding and Rostropovich is equal to it.

The Violin Concerto no 1 is said to reflect Shostakovich's sufferings under the Stalin regime. In 1948 many Soviet composers were denounced as formalists which led to the banning of performances of Shostakovich's music. It was written and then shelved until 1955 when Stalin was dead.

I saw the masterful Gidon Kremer play this and I could not believe any mortal could achieve such perfection.

You have to be a phenomenal violinist to play this work which opens with a nocturne which may suggest the relief that Stalin was dead. The second movement is a scherzo in which the famous monogram appears. The third movement quotes from his Symphony no 7 and there is a formidable cadenza which leads into a bustling finale. The excitement is almost too much. It is electrifying. You want to leap from your seat with a bravo or two.



Oistrakh is sensational. His lyrical tone is unbelievably beautiful and his virtuosity is never in doubt. Mravinsky proves himself, as always, to be a very fine conductor.

Highly, very highly, commended.

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