

Sergey Rachmaninoff. *The Miserly Knight*. DVD. London Philharmonic Orchestra / Vladimir Jurowski. With Sergei Leiferkus, Richard Berkeley-Steele, Maxim Mikhailov, Viacheslav Voynarovskiy, Albert Schagidullin. Waldron, Heathfield, East Sussex: Opus Arte, 2005. OA 0919 D. \$26.99.

Like his widely-hailed *Aleko*, Sergey Rachmaninoff's *The Miserly Knight* was based on a prose work by Alexander Pushkin and created as a vehicle for the great Russian bass Fyodor Chaliapin. Unlike his earlier work, however, Chaliapin rejected the role of the Baron—the avaricious knight of the title—and the work slipped away into obscurity soon after its premiere in 1904. In the summer of 2004, the Glyndebourne Opera Festival paired the dark and brooding work with Giacomo Puccini's comedy *Gianni Schicchi* in a performance that was celebrated by opera aficionados and newcomers to the work alike. For those of us who couldn't make it to the live performances, Opus Arte was on hand to record the striking new production, directed by Annabel Arden.

This is a stunning production in nearly every way. As a way of introducing the story's greatest but unseen character, Arden employs aerialist Mathilda Leyser as Greed, outfitted in a grotesque costume that conjures up images of medieval armor crossed with modern restraining devices. Her presence, at key moments in the opera, is an eerie and ghoulish one, and makes for a perfect addition to this otherwise male-dominated work. As the Baron of the title, bent on keeping his hoards of gold from his son, Sergei Leiferkus offers an authoritative performance. His twenty-five minute monologue at the heart of the opera is outstanding in technical detail, his delivery is precise and heartless, and he is able to descend into an animal-like rage without sacrificing power or clarity: exactly what the role calls for. Although tenor Richard Berkeley-Steele occasionally falls short in his performance of the Knight's

son Albert, Maxim Mikhailov (as the Servant), Vyacheslav Voynarovskiy (as the Moneylender), and Albert Schagidulin (as the Duke, in a great basso presentation) all contribute solidly. The London Philharmonic Orchestra also does an excellent job with *The Miserly Knight*. Led by conductor Vladimir Jurowski, it provides the sinister and rich tone needed for this work. Jurowski obviously relishes commanding the orchestra in this opera, where it is given such an important role by the composer as the omnipresent dark heart of the Knight.

The production values on the DVD are mostly good. Setting the opera in a dark, damp pit that is the Baron's money-hole does not always make for the clearest image, but overall the hugely evocative staging and effects were clearly shown, a boon to viewers who are just as interested in the stage design and direction as the music and execution. Supplementary material on the DVD includes a cast gallery and interviews with the performers and directors as well as an illustrated synopsis of the plot. While the cast gallery has become common feature on opera DVDs, the interviews with Arden, Jurowski, and Leiferkus are of real value for viewers intrigued by the work, the Glyndebourne staging, and other aspects of the performance. The illustrated synopsis—which uses stills from the production at various stages of development and includes a voice-over explaining the action and some of the musical language used—is a great addition to the disc for newcomers to the work.

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Benjamin Britten. *The Turn of the Screw*. DVD. City of London Sinfonia / Richard Hickox. With Lisa Milne, Diane Montague, Catrin Wyn Davies, Mark Padmore, Nicholas Kirby Johnson, and Caroline Wise. Waldron, Heathfield, East Sussex: Opus Arte, 2005. OA 0907 D. \$29.99

Since its premiere in 1954, Benjamin Britten's opera *The Turn of the Screw*, has proved to be one of the composer's more enduring stage works. The opera's orchestra of only thirteen players and cast of six make it relatively easy to present, assuming of course that one has access to a boy soprano capable of learning and acting the pivotal role of Miles. Based on the notoriously ambiguous ghost tale by Henry James, the story afforded Britten the opportunity to explore once again one of his favorite themes: the corruption of innocence.

This film adaptation of the opera by director Katie Mitchell for BBC Wales television frees itself from the confines of a stage production. Mitchell makes use of the orchestral interludes between each scene to establish the presence of the two ghosts as very real threats to the children, as they lurk in shadowy hallways or stalk the grounds of the country house, spying on the new governess. Her cast is uniformly excellent, and musically this performance can hold its own against any of the competition, including the composer's own audio recording. Dramatically too there are no weak links, and the singers give performances which are compelling and natural. Lisa Milne gives a star-making performance as the Governess, and is given strong support by Diana Montague as Mrs. Grose. Mark Padmore's Quint proves that the

canon of Britten's tenor roles is in secure hands for another generation, and Catrin Wyn Davies provides plenty of gothic thrills as Miss Jessel. Perhaps it is the two children who impress the most—Nicholas Kirby Johnson as Miles and Caroline Wise as Flora. These are performances with a maturity well beyond their years, and it is a pleasure to see at last Flora played by a child, rather than the short adult soprano usually cast. Opus Arte's all region NTSC DVD includes a plot synopsis, a scene selection menu, a cast photo gallery, and subtitles in five languages, including English if so desired.

The Turn of the Screw has fared well on video. In addition to this new release, there is a very fine production filmed at the Schwetzingen Festival in Germany, for those who may prefer a more traditional stage presentation (DVD; Arthaus-Musik 100199). An earlier film adaptation from 1982 by Petr Weigl employs a cast of mainly Czech actors lip-synching to a recording by Colin Davis (VHS; Philips 070 500-3). While not bad, this production can be a bit heavy handed in its Freudian symbolism and the children are rather grotesque. Since it has not been reissued on DVD it is no longer competitive.

John Holl and
Chicago Public Library

Keeping Score: MTT on Music; The Making of a Performance: Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. DVD. Produced and directed by David Kennard and Joan Saffa. Executive producer, Janette Gitler. Live concert performance directed by Gary Halvorson, and produced by Michael Bronson. [N.p.]: Harmonia Mundi, 2005. 821936-0005-95. \$24.99.

This DVD is part of an ambitious effort by the San Francisco Symphony to foster a larger and more diverse audience for classical music, not simply by presenting live performances of well known works, but by examining the internal elements of a composition through dissecting Michael Tilson Thomas's interpretation of the score ("decoding the composer's message," as he puts it), speculating on Tchaikovsky's intent in his Fourth Symphony, and hearing the performer's own thoughts on exactly what it is they do to bring orchestral works to life. Tilson Thomas talks about "primal

moods" as musical expressions of humanity, and "emotional weight" in describing Tchaikovsky's own feelings as he worked on this composition.

One unique aspect of this DVD is the inclusion of individuals who are not considered part of the orchestra's artistic staff. Particularly interesting is an illustration of how the orchestral librarian edits parts for each musician with Tilson Thomas's annotations—one of the many behind the scenes practices that contribute to the final production of a symphony orchestra concert. While there are similarities to Leonard

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