

Jakub Jan Ryba *Czech Christmas Mass*

Sobehartova/ Mrazova/ Dolezal/ Novak/ Kühn Chamber Chorus/ Xaver Thuri (organ)/
Dvorak Cham Orch/ Libor Pesek

Jirí Ignác Linek *Concerto for Organ and Orchestra; Sinfonia Pastorale in D*

Václav Rabas (organ)/ Pardubice Cham Orch/ Libor Hlaváček

Recorded 1991; TT 63'58". SUPRAPHON 11 1007-2

This CD, which features two composers unknown outside the Czech republic (to me, anyway) contains a delightful discovery in Ryba's *Czech Christmas Mass*. Ryba (1755-1815) was a prolific composer among whose thousand-odd works there are sixteen masses. This exceptionally happy - almost naïvely joyful - work is a precursor of Dvorak's *Mass in D* in the directness of its musical language and its Czech pastoral idiom. For some tastes it might almost be described as twee, but I found it thoroughly engaging, well performed with flair and energy. The scoring is interesting too, with a part for the organ which alternates between continuo and solo. Unfortunately the organ on this recording is tuned to a sharper pitch than the rest of the orchestra; at first this almost fits with the bucolic charm of the music, but it rapidly becomes tiresome, particularly at moments when the (generally excellent) choir are torn between the pitch of the organ and the orchestra.

There are no such problems in the organ concerto by Linek (1725-1791), which is recorded in a different location with a different orchestra. If anything the organ is slightly flatter than the orchestra, but not enough to cause serious annoyance. A more serious flaw is the lack of bounce and rhythmic poise from both soloist and orchestra, particularly in the first two movements; this music is less individual than Ryba's and needs persuasive advocacy to make it enjoyable. The playing of the Pardubice Chamber orchestra seems heavy and too rich in vibrato for music of this period. This problem also affects the *Sinfonia pastorale* though here the tempi are more lively.