

CLASSICAL ★ CDs

ORCHESTRA

Weinberg – Symphony No. 19 'Bright May'

Initially considered a marginal cultural figure in 20th century Russia, scholars now believe Mieczyslaw Weinberg was one of the great Soviet-era composers. Born in Warsaw, Poland in 1919, Weinberg lost most of his family in the Holocaust as a young man. After fleeing the Nazis himself and receiving musical instruction in Minsk, he settled in Moscow at the behest of iconic Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich, and the two men began a lifelong friendship. Creatively, Weinberg was influenced by more abstract symphonic ideas coming from Western Europe, and consequently his music lacked the support from Soviet officialdom proffered to other composers. Yet his work had proponents, and because of their advocacy, Weinberg amassed a large oeuvre that is only now coming to greater public attention. Two of these works appear on a recently released Naxos recording, both sprawling expositions that demonstrate Weinberg's prodigious capacity as a composer. Symphony No. 19, subtitled "Bright May" is triumphant and rousing, but also subtle and reflective, like a bittersweet celebration at the end of a war. Deepening the contrast, The Banners of Peace – A Symphonic Poem sets a positive, outgoing tone, opening with robust strings and concluding affirmatively, a mood some scholars suggest was at odds with the more introspective quality of the composer's later work



~ Chris Morgan

> Vladimir Lande (conductor), St. Petersburg State Symphony Orchestra

> Naxos, 2012

ORCHESTRA

The Greatest Video Game Music 2

Looking for evidence that video games in the 21st century qualify as 'high art'? You might start with the fact that composer Austin Wintery's music for the video game Journey was recently nominated for a Grammy Award in the Best Score Soundtrack for Visual Media category, alongside work by Hollywood luminaries like John Williams and Howard Shore. Or you might just pick up a copy of The Greatest Video Game Music 2, the sequel to a similarly-titled recording released last year, which featured the London Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of acclaimed conductor Andrew Skeet. As the name implies, the CD track listing is a gamer's wish list, offering a unique selection of musical themes from some of the most recognizable titles ever. Super Metroid: A Symphonic Poem impresses with its ambitious arrangement and the intensity of the orchestra's performance while 'Dragon Roost Island' from The Legend of Zelda – The Windwaker combines delicate Japanese folk music and the pastoral splendour of European romanticism in a tidy package. Themes from popular games like Halo, Final Fantasy VII, Diablo III, Batman Arkham City and Sonic the Hedgehog are also featured, each of them uniquely reimagined for the recording. Appropriate for ardent gamers, as well as students of modern orchestra.



~ Chris Morgan

> Andrew Skeet (conductor) The London Philharmonic Orchestra

> X5 Music, 2012

ORCHESTRA

Ravel – Orchestral Works 1

The colourful, expressive works of French composer Maurice Ravel are the subject of this new compilation from Naxos. Although trained as a pianist, Ravel was a gifted orchestrator and his ensemble arrangements shimmer with genius. The performances here are dazzling and impassioned, imbuing the ambitious, Spanish-inspired 'Rapsodie espagnole' with new life, even a century after its composition. In refinement and technique, the musicians of the Orchestre National de Lyon are second to none. But with conductor Leonard Slatkin directing the performance, the ensemble becomes something else – a whirlwind of Iberian rhythms, pulling listeners along in its wake. The opening track, 'Alborada del gracioso', testifies to the effect, setting the tone for the rest of the recording with lively use of percussive instruments and darker suggestions in the central bassoon recitative. On the other end of the recording, Boléro - Ravel's seminal composition for ballet - closes out the CD with a 15-minute orchestrated crescendo that has become one of the most popular musical works of the early 20th century. Epic is as epic does.



~ Chris Morgan

> Leonard Slatkin (conductor), Orchestre National de Lyon

> Naxos, 2012