

CD REVIEW



KALINNIKOV
Symphony no 1 in G minor

RIMSKY KORSAKOV
Overture The Noblewoman Vera Sheloga;
Sinfonietta on Russian themes Op 31
Overture on Russian themes Op 28

USSR Symphony Orchestra / Svetlanov REGIS RRC 1351 (79.03)

A splendid bargain CD mastered by Paul Arden-Taylor and licensed by CDK Music.

The playing is exemplary as you would expect from Svetlanov, who was second only to Mravinsky, and the playing by the Russian orchestra is very fine, as is the sound.

The gem is the Symphony no. 1 in G minor by Vasily Kalinnikov. He was born on 13 January 1866, the son of a policeman. Vasily studied at the seminary at Oryol becoming the director of their choir at the age of fourteen. Later, he joined the Moscow Conservatoire but could not afford their fees. He was accepted into the School of the Moscow Philharmonic Society on a scholarship and studied the violin and bassoon and had composition lessons from Ilyinsky. He was a music copyist... the only way he could make a living.

In 1892 Tchaikovsky recommended him to the director of the Maly Theatre and, later that year, to the Moscow Italian Theatre but tuberculosis had plagued Kalinnikov all his life and so he settled in the warmer climes of the Crimea living at Yalta for the rest of his life. Here he composed most of his work which include two symphonies, a Serenade for strings, a Suite for orchestra, some small piano pieces, songs and choral works, of which his religious music is very telling.

He died on 11 January 1901 just before his 35th birthday.

His Symphony no. 1 uses cyclic principles. It is characteristic of Russian nationalistic music.

It has four movements, the opening Allegro moderato is very attractive, melodic and beautifully scored with hints of melancholy. Although it is exquisitely scored it may lose its way in the middle by being somewhat repetitive and the fugate section, as with all fugues, is predictable. But it is glowing music. The second movement is marked Andante commodamente which, again, is beautiful and nostalgic. The scherzo is joyful and rustic while the finale is very Russian and exciting... often exhilarating, wonderfully scored and with a terrific ending.

One cannot fault the performance or the sound.

The rest of the CD is devoted to Rimsky Korsakov. His opera The Noblewoman Vera Sheloga dates from 1898 and tells of a woman who becomes pregnant while her husband is away. When he returns he demands an explanation and Vera's sister says that the child is hers thus saving Vera from disgrace. The overture has its moments although many may claim it is a trifle. The Sinfonietta on Russian themes is acceptable and, at times, quite gorgeous and the Overture on Russian themes fares even better.

Rimsky was a fine orchestrator but, beware, if you buy his book on orchestration since it is a book about his orchestration.

A delightful disc.

David Wright

