

CHANDOS COLLECT

# Folk Inspirations

Bartók • Enescu • Weiner

Philharmonia Orchestra  
Scottish National Orchestra  
Neeme Järvi

CHAN 6625

## Folk Inspirations

**Béla Bartók** (1881–1945)

**Hungarian Sketches, BB 103 (Sz 97)\*** 11:38

- |   |                             |      |
|---|-----------------------------|------|
| 1 | 1 An Evening in the Village | 3:05 |
| 2 | 2 Bear Dance                | 1:35 |
| 3 | 3 Melody                    | 2:24 |
| 4 | 4 Slightly Topsy            | 2:31 |
| 5 | 5 Swineherd's Dance         | 1:58 |

**Leó Weiner** (1885–1960)

**Hungarian Folk Dances, Op. 18†** 27:30

Suite

**Hugh Bean** violin solo

- |   |   |      |
|---|---|------|
| 6 | I Allegro risoluto e ben marcato                    | 6:50 |
| 7 | II Andante poco sostenuto – Allegro con fuoco       | 5:45 |
| 8 | III Andante poco sostenuto – Pesante, poco maestoso | 8:35 |
| 9 | IV Presto   | 6:16 |

**George Enescu** (1881–1955)

10 **Romanian Rhapsody, Op. 11 No. 1‡** 13:25

in A major

Modéré – Très vif

11 **Romanian Rhapsody, Op. 11 No. 2‡** 11:46

in D major

Lent – Vite

TT 64:36

**Philharmonia Orchestra\*†**

**Bradley Creswick\* · Hugh Bean†** leaders

**Scottish National Orchestra‡**

**Edwin Paling** leader

**Neeme Järvi**

## Folk Inspirations

### Bartók: Hungarian Sketches

The *Hungarian Sketches*, completed in August 1931, are, like the *Transylvanian Dances* written in the same year, derived from earlier piano pieces, in this case from three different sources. 'An Evening in the Village' and 'Bear Dance' come from *Ten Easy Pieces* of 1908, 'Melody' is the second of *Four Dirges* (1909–10), 'Slightly Tippy' is the second of *Three Burlesques* of 1908–11, while the 'Swineherd's Dance' comes from *For Children* (1908–10). All these pieces are either based on actual folksongs and -dances or simply draw on the peasant idiom, in which Bartók was so thoroughly steeped that it is often hard to tell which is which unless he tells us. The orchestral setting adds generous quantities of salt and pepper (black, coarse-ground) to a previously well-cooked meal.

### Weiner: Hungarian Folk Dances

In 1921, in an essay on contemporary Hungarian composers, Bartók wrote of Leó Weiner:

Although his musical studies are based on the German school, he orientated himself from the very beginning towards French music just before Debussy, particularly

Bizet. At the same time he displayed certain tendencies toward a classical purism which made him an adversary of all modern achievements,

including, by implication, those of Bartók himself. Note also the absence of any reference to Hungarian folk music. This, in fact, was a later (i.e. post-1921) enthusiasm of Weiner's and inevitably owed something to the activities of Bartók and Kodály in the field of folksong collecting and disseminating. As for treating this material symphonically, however, Weiner remained a resolute conservative, and the *Suite Hungarian Folk Dances*, Op. 18 – the first fruit of the 'nationalist' phase of his composing career, completed in 1931 – has more in common with Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* or Brahms's *Hungarian Dances* than with anything by Bartók or Kodály. Liszt, of course, drew on gypsy music, whereas Weiner's source was the Hungarian peasantry. Nevertheless, in general terms of style and technique Weiner belongs to the late nineteenth rather than the twentieth century. Which is not to gainsay his accomplishments: fine craftsmanship, a sense of drama and colour, and stylish orchestration

(some beautiful solos for violin and woodwinds in the third movement). Rather like the *English Dances* of Sir Malcolm Arnold, each movement is as much a miniature tone poem or mood-picture as an actual 'dance', in other words a kind of free fantasy on Hungarian peasant themes, their rawness tempered, for better or for worse, by the hand of a highly cultivated and skilled musician.

### Enescu: Romanian Rhapsodies

Like Liszt but unlike Bartók, George Enescu (1881–1955), Romania's only composer of international stature, lived mostly outside his native land. As well as composing he also played the violin and the piano, and conducted and taught, all with the utmost distinction. The composer Marcel Mihalovici described him as 'un immense musicien, un musicien *total*', and to Yehudi Menuhin he was 'a man formed by great and vital natural elements, whose every thought and gesture had sweep and breadth'. Such was the scope of his talents and energies that he was unable to devote himself exclusively to composition, nor to promote his works after they were composed. He was too humble, too concerned to do his unselfish best for other men's music, even if this meant neglecting his own.

The two *Romanian Rhapsodies* date from 1901 and are (particularly in the case of the

First) the works by which Enescu is best known today. Ironically, they are less authentically Romanian than, say, the well-known suites *Romanian Christmas Songs* and *Romanian Folk Dances* for piano by Bartók, which were the product of the intensive research into Romanian folk music that Bartók undertook in the years after 1909. This is because Enescu's rhapsodies clearly are modelled on Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* and, like them, are of frankly popular, as opposed to folk, derivation. Enescu himself later deprecated their popularity, and what we know of his later music – notably the opera *Oedipe* (1923–31), the cantata *Vox Maris* (1929–51), the Third Orchestral Suite (1937–38), the Concert Overture 'on themes in the Romanian popular style' (1948) – suggests that as he developed and matured he quickly left his earlier self behind him. No one, however, need be self-conscious about enjoying the Rhapsodies: Percy Grainger adored them for their wealth of colour and incident and it is easy to spot their influence in the scoring of some of Grainger's own folk music settings and original compositions.

The First Rhapsody, in the bright-red key of A major (brilliantly suited to the violins because of its prominent open A and E strings), employs a large number of tunes, all stitched or strung together in a way that recalls the origin of the term 'rhapsody': in

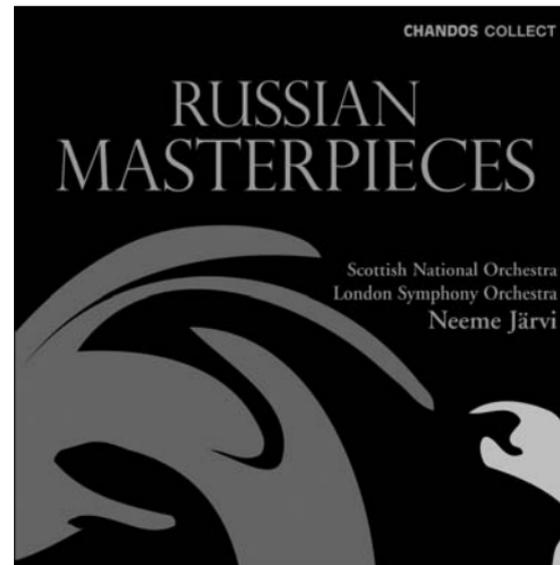
ancient Greece the 'rhapsodists' were 'song-stitchers' who roamed about the country reciting fragments of the Homeric epics. (Liszt seems to have been one of the first to apply 'rhapsody' to a form a musical composition.) Enescu contrives many delightful touches: the informal quasi-improvisatory opening, with solo clarinet and oboe sharing and trying out different segments of their tune, as members of a village band might; the harp which masquerades first as a *tremolando* cimbalom, later with a second harp as guitars strumming rhythmic chords; the gypsy-style fiddling which brings to mind Heifetz's famous party piece *Hora staccato* by Grigoraș Dinicu (a Romanian violinist and composer who specialised in light music); the mini-concerto for woodwinds (it starts with two alternating flutes) which allows the much-put-upon violins to mark time for a bit. Repeated hearings or study bring to light certain technical unorthodoxies cunningly built into what appears to be a normal symphonic sound-picture: a piccolo which comes in half a beat late but manages to correct itself within a couple of bars, and an amazing passage of organised argumentative chaos in which the woodwind and brass cannot agree either on which version of the tune they are supposed to be playing or on when and how to play it (the piccolo intervenes and makes matters worse). The listener will probably remain as sublimely

unaware of these internecine irregularities as he does when they occur in real life and are not premeditated by the composer. Nonetheless, it is worth remarking that the date of the First Romanian Rhapsody is 1901, that of Debussy's *Ibéria* – generally thought of as one of the first orchestral works in which elements of improvisatory 'realism' are programmed into the score – is 1908.

The Second Rhapsody is predominantly slow and concentrated (whereas the First is fast and loose). It is also based on fewer themes, but these are milked to the full for their expressive lyrical qualities and rich textural and contrapuntal possibilities (the climax combines elements of three). It is not hard to hear in certain of the tunes the 'parlando rubato' of Romanian folk laments, with their intricate ornamentation and exotic melodic inflections (both Bartók and Enescu recognised the complex compound of Arab, Slavonic and Hungarian influences that made Romanian music what it was). The final section – led off by an energetic solo violinist – somewhat unexpectedly reverts to the spirit of the *hora lunga* or 'round dance' with which the First Rhapsody has already rendered us familiar. However, the dynamic rises only momentarily above *piano*, and a leisurely, languid flute arabesque has the last word.

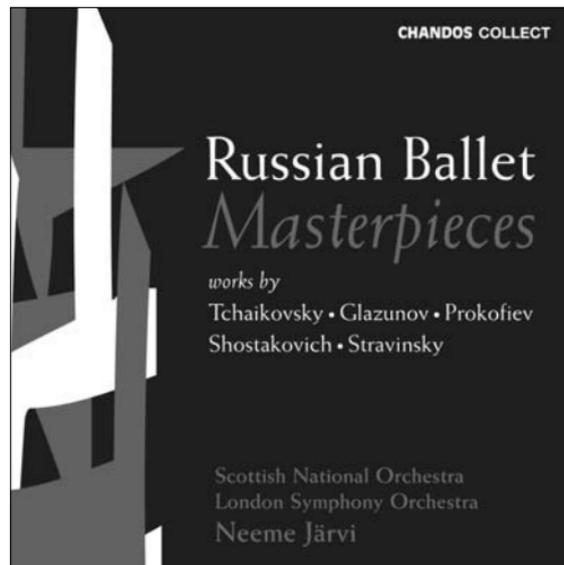
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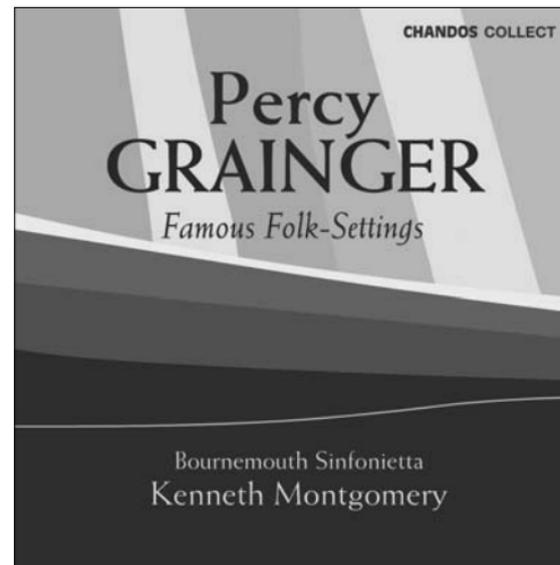
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