NAXOS

DDD

8.557008

Alexander von ZEMLINSKY

Symphonies Nos. 1 and 2

Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra • Ludovít Rajter

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Edgar Seipenbusch

Alexander von Zemlinsky (1871-1942)

Symphony No. 1 in D minor • Symphony No. 2 in B flat major

The Austrian composer and conductor Alexander von Zemlinsky was born in Vienna in 1871. His reputation has to some extent been overshadowed by the controversial and influential achievements of his brother-in-law Arnold Schoenberg, with Alban Berg and Anton Webern, on the one hand, and by those of his older contemporary Gustav Mahler. Zemlinsky continues the tradition of Viennese classicism, the influence of Wagner never leading him to abandon tonality. In some measure he represents a generation of Viennese composers who were able to combine the apparently divergent tendencies of Brahms and Wagner.

Zemlinsky was trained at the Vienna Conservatory, where he was a composition pupil of Johann Nepomuk Fuchs, himself a pupil of Sechter, who had taught Schubert briefly, and of Bruckner, in the intervals of writing his daily fugue. Always a fine craftsman, Zemlinsky was able to instruct Schoenberg, whom he met in the amateur orchestra Polyhymnia in 1895, in counterpoint, and gave him advice on his earlier work. He was to remain for some time a strong influence both on Schoenberg and on younger composers in Vienna. He also taught Alma Schindler, later the wife of Mahler, who in 1897 became conductor at the Court Opera in Vienna. The daughter of a distinguished painter and step-daughter of Karl Moll, founder of the Sezession, she had had an earlier infatuation with Gustav Klimt, followed, when she turned her attention from painting to music, by a curious attraction to her teacher Zemlinsky, a man whom she described as of astonishing ugliness, chinless, toothless and very dirty. Zemlinsky, in his turn, seems to have been fascinated by his pupil. It was at a dinner party that Alma had her first contact with Mahler, when the discussion turned to male beauty. Mahler cited the example of Socrates, the relative ugliness of whose appearance was evidently transformed by the beauty of his mind. In reply Alma suggested Zemlinsky as a man whose intellect gave him beauty in spite of his physical ugliness. An argument arose about a new ballet by Zemlinsky, *Der Triumph der Zeit*, the production of which at the Court Opera Mahler had up to then opposed. The dispute, heated enough, elicited a promise from Mahler to speak to Zemlinsky on the matter and led, before long, to Mahler's own marriage.

Mahler once advised Berg not to go into the theatre if he wanted to be a composer, a counsel prompted by his own experience. Zemlinsky's career was essentially in opera. In 1899 he became Kapellmeister at the Carltheater in Vienna, and later conducted also at the Volksoper, where he was Kapellmeister from 1906 until 1911, with a break during Mahler's last season, 1907-08, when he conducted at the Court Opera. From 1911 until 1927 he was conductor at the Deutsche Landestheater in Prague, where he employed Schoenberg's pupils Webern, Jalowetz and Karl Horowitz. This period was followed by appointment as Kapellmeister at the Kroll Theatre in Berlin, under Klemperer, and the continuation of his work as a teacher, which he had carried out in Prague, at the Berlin Musikhochschule. At the accession to power of Hitler in 1933, Zemlinsky made his escape to Vienna, and at the Anschluss in 1938 moved first to Prague and then to the United States, where he died in 1942.

Zemlinsky's close association with Schoenberg, a relationship strengthened when the latter married Zemlinsky's sister Mathilde, brought early collaboration in the opera *Sarema*, for which Schoenberg assisted with the libretto. Both men were indebted to Mahler for practical encouragement. It was Mahler who presented Zemlinsky's second opera *Es war einmal* at the Court Opera in 1900, and accepted his next opera *Der Traumgörge* for performance. Later operas included two works based on Oscar Wilde, *Eine Florentinische Tragödie*, and *Der Zwerg*, a version of *The Birthday of the Infanta*.

In addition to these and other stage works,

Zemlinsky wrote songs, chamber music and four symphonies. The last of these, the *Lyrische Sinfonie* of 1923, using a text from Rabindranath Tagore, was quoted by Berg in his own *Lyric Suite*, as a sign of respect and affection.

Zemlinsky's *First Symphony*, written in 1892, came at the close of his period of study with Fuchs and is a thoroughly competent work, very much of its age. By 1892 the first of Mahler's symphonies had already been performed, as well as the tone poem *Tod und Verklärung* of Richard Strauss: Brahms had just written his *Clarinet Trio* and *Clarinet Quintet* for Mühlfeld, and Bruckner, with some assistance, was diffidently revising his *Eighth Symphony*. Zemlinsky's symphony is part of the rich classical symphonic tradition in Vienna. Lacking the blatant irony of Strauss or the diffuse originality of Mahler, it represents an excellent example of the late nineteenth century symphony. Its sometimes grandiose and sometimes ominous first movement is followed by a lively scherzo, with its vividly competent scoring and contrasted trio. The third and final movement, marked *Sehr innig und breit*, opens with an air of lyrical introspection and contains moments of considerable beauty, as it moves towards its pensive conclusion.

In 1897, the year in which his opera *Sarema* was first performed, Zemlinsky completed his *Second Symphony*, a work that was to attract a favourable reaction from the public. The symphony opens with a movement that has its own forthright grandeur, with a suggestion of Wagner. There follows a dramatic scherzo and a romantically contrasted trio. The slow movement, marked *Adagio*, has about it something of the poignancy of Mahler, happily resolved in conclusion. It is followed by a final movement that interrupts this mood of serenity with something more ominous, before the final resolution of conflict.

In 1896 Bruckner had died, and the death of Brahms came in the following year. Among the younger generation of composers, Richard Strauss, who was to outlive them all, had completed his series of symphonic poems, while Hugo Wolf, near to his final madness, had quarrelled with Mahler over the merits of Rubinstein's opera *The Demon*, and unilaterally declared himself director of the Vienna Opera. This was the Vienna of which Zemlinsky was a part, and in which the *Symphony in B flat major* was written.

Keith Anderson

Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra

The Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1929 as the first professional musical ensemble fulfilling the needs of radio broadcasting in Slovakia. The first conductors already placed particular emphasis on contemporary Slovak music in their programmes, resulting in a close connection with leading Slovak composers, including Alexander Moyzes, Eugen Suchoň, Ján Cikker and others. The original ensemble was gradually enlarged and from 1942, thanks to Alexander Moyzes, the then Director of Music in Slovak Radio, regular symphony concerts were given, broadcast live by Slovak Radio. From 1943 to 1946 the Yugoslavian Kresimir Baranovic was the chief conductor of the orchestra, to which he made a vital contribution. His successors were Ludovít Rajter, Ladislav Slovák, Václav Jiráček, Otakar Trhlík, Bystrík Režucha and Ondrej Lenárd, whose successful performances and recordings from 1977 to 1990 helped the orchestra to establish itself as an internationally known concert ensemble. His successor Róbert Stankovsky continued this work, until his unexpected death at age of 36. The orchestra has benefited from working with a number of distinguished conductors. With the current chief conductor Charles Olivieri-Munroe, who took the position in 2001, regular concert performances at the Slovak Radio concert hall in Bratislava have continued. Through its broadcasts and recordings the orchestra has also become a part of concert life abroad, with successful tours to Austria, Italy, Germany, The Netherlands, France, Bulgaria, Spain, Japan and Malta.

Ludovít Rajter

Ludovít Rajter was born in 1906 and studied at the Vienna Hoschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst under Clemens Krauss and Alexander Wunderer, and with Franz Schmidt and Joseph Marx as his composition teachers. A period as assistant to Clemens Krauss at the Salzburg Mozarteum International Summer School was followed by composition study in Budapest under Ernő Dohnányi in 1931. Two years later he was appointed conductor and subsequently first conductor, of the Hungarian Radio Orchestra. After the war he moved to Bratislava as principal conductor of the Slovak Philharmonic, of which he was the co-founder in 1949, and as professor at the Musikhochscule. During a career spanning over sixty years, Rajter has won a considerable international reputation, well known both in the concert hall and for his recordings, which include the four symphonies of Franz Schmidt.

Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra

The Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra was founded in 1949 as the first Slovak professional state symphony orchestra, based in the capital, Bratislava. Its chief conductors have included Vaclav Talich, Ludovít Rajter and Libor Pešek. The orchestra is a regular guest at major European music festivals. On tour it has performed in eighteen European countries, in Japan, Cyprus, Turkey and in the United States. It has recorded extensively for Naxos as well as for other labels, national and international, and for radio, television and film companies.

Edgar Seipenbusch

Edgar Seipenbusch was born at Velbert in Germany in 1936. He started playing the violin at the age of six and took up the piano four years later. He studied violin, piano, composition and chamber music at the Cologne High School for Music and became first violinist of the Cologne University String Sextet which made a number of concert tours in Europe. He became second concert master of the Rhenish Chamber Orchestra in 1958, becoming its leader two years later. Since 1962 Seipenbusch has worked with all the great Viennese orchestras in a wide range of activities. He was in charge of opera and operetta at St Poelten and has made a large number of recordings with the Vienna Chamber Orchestra. Between 1967 and 1972 he directed opera in Graz as well as guest conducting frequently in both Kiel and Frankfurt. Edgar Seipenbusch has also been guest conductor of the Vienna Chamber Orchestra on many occasions. In 1972 he became director of the opera at Innsbruck and has since worked on many TV productions with ORF and in Germany.

Alexander von Zemlinsky (1871-1942)

Symphonie n° 1 en ré mineur • Symphonie n° 2 en si bémol majeur

Le compositeur et chef d'orchestre autrichien Alexander von Zemlinsky naquit à Vienne en 1871. Ses œuvres ont été quelque peu éclipsées par les compositions controversées et influentes de son beau-frère Arnold Schoenberg, avec Alban Berg et Anton Webern d'une part, et par celles de son contemporain et aîné Gustav Mahler. Zemlinsky poursuit sur la voie du classicisme viennois, l'influence de Wagner ne le poussant jamais à abandonner la tonalité. Il représente, dans une certaine mesure, une génération de compositeurs viennois qui furent capables de réconcilier les tendances apparemment divergentes de Brahms et de Wagner.

Zemlinsky fut formé au Conservatoire de Vienne, où il fut élève de composition de Johann Nepomuk Fuchs, lui-même élève de Sechter, qui avait brièvement été le professeur de Schubert, ainsi que de Bruckner quand il n'était pas en train d'écrire sa fugue quotidienne. Ayant toujours été un artisan de premier ordre, Zemlinsky put donner à Schoenberg, qu'il rencontra dans l'orchestre amateur Polyhymnia en 1895, des cours de contrepoint et lui donner des conseils sur ses premières œuvres. Il devait longtemps exercer une forte influence à la fois sur Schoenberg et sur de plus jeunes compositeurs viennois. Il fut aussi le professeur d'Alma Schindler, qui devait épouser Mahler. En 1897, celui-ci devint chef d'orchestre de l'Opéra de la cour à Vienne. Alma était la fille d'un peintre éminent et la belle-fille de Karl Moll, le fondateur de la *Sezession* ; elle était éprise de Gustav Klimt mais lorsqu'elle se mit à préférer la musique à la peinture, elle se mit à ressentir une étrange attirance envers son professeur Zemlinsky, qu'elle décrivait pourtant comme un homme d'une laideur stupéfiante, dépourvu de menton, de dents et comme quelqu'un de très sale. Quant à Zemlinsky, il semble avoir été fasciné par son élève. C'est lors d'un dîner qu'Alma fit la connaissance de Mahler, lorsque les convives abordèrent le sujet de la beauté masculine. Mahler prit pour exemple Socrate, dont la relative laideur était manifestement transcendée par la beauté de son âme. Pour lui répondre, Alma cita Zemlinsky comme un homme dont l'intellect le rendait beau en dépit de sa laideur physique. On se mit à débattre d'un nouveau ballet de Zemlinsky, *Der Triumph der Zeit*, dont Mahler avait jusqu'alors refusé qu'il soit monté à l'Opéra de la cour. Quand ce débat fort houleux prit fin, Mahler promit d'en discuter avec Zemlinsky et il ne tarda pas à épouser Alma.

Mahler avait un jour conseillé à Berg de ne pas écrire pour le théâtre s'il voulait devenir compositeur, conseil que lui dictait sa propre expérience. La carrière de Zemlinsky se fit essentiellement dans l'opéra. En 1899, il devint *Kapellmeister* au Carltheater de Vienne, et plus tard il dirigea également des productions du Volksoper, où il fut *Kapellmeister* de 1906 à 1911, avec une interruption pendant la dernière saison de Mahler, en 1907-08, où il fut chef d'orchestre à l'Opéra de la cour. De 1911 à 1927, il fut chef d'orchestre au Deutsche Landestheater de Prague, où il employa les élèves de Schoenberg Webern, Jalowetz et Karl Horowitz. Cette période fut suivie par une nomination comme *Kapellmeister* au Théâtre Kroll de Berlin, sous la direction de Klemperer, et il poursuivit son parcours de professeur, qu'il avait mené à Prague, à la Musikhochschule de Berlin. Lorsque Hitler accéda au pouvoir en 1933, Zemlinsky se réfugia à Vienne, et quand vint l'Anschluss en 1938, il s'établit d'abord à Prague, puis aux USA, où il mourut en 1942.

L'étroite collaboration de Zemlinsky et de Schoenberg, relation renforcée lorsque ce dernier épousa Mathilde, la sœur de Zemlinsky, les mena à travailler ensemble sur l'opéra *Sarema* ; Schoenberg apporta son concours à l'élaboration du livret. Les deux hommes reçurent de grands encouragements pratiques de Mahler. C'est lui qui présenta le deuxième opéra de Zemlinsky *Es war einmal* à l'Opéra de la cour en 1900 et qui accepta son opéra suivant, *Der Traumgörge*, pour

qu'il soit monté. Parmi ses opéras ultérieurs figurent deux ouvrages inspirés d'Oscar Wilde, *Eine Florentinische Tragödie*, et *Der Zwerg*, adaptation de *L'anniversaire de l'infante*.

En plus de ces ouvrages et d'autres pièces pour la scène, Zemlinsky écrivit des mélodies, de la musique de chambre et quatre symphonies. La dernière d'entre elles, la *Lyrische Sinfonie* de 1923, utilisant un texte de Rabindranath Tagore, fut citée par Berg dans sa *Suite lyrique* pour manifester à Zemlinsky son respect et son affection.

La *Symphonie n° 1* de Zemlinsky, écrite en 1892, date de la fin de sa période d'études avec Fuchs ; il s'agit d'un ouvrage tout à fait compétent, correspondant tout à fait à son époque. En 1892, la première des symphonies de Mahler avait déjà été créée, ainsi que le poème symphonique *Tod und Verklärung* de Richard Strauss : Brahms venait d'écrire son *Trio pour clarinette* et son *Quintette pour clarinette* à l'intention de Mühlfeld, et Bruckner se faisait aider pour une timide révision de sa *Symphonie n° 8*. La symphonie de Zemlinsky appartient à la riche tradition symphonique de Vienne. Dépourvue de l'ironie flagrante de Strauss ou de l'originalité diffuse de Mahler, elle constitue un excellent exemple de symphonie de la fin du XIXème siècle. Son premier mouvement, parfois grandiose et parfois menaçant, est suivi d'un vif scherzo contrastant avec un trio habilement orchestré. Le troisième et dernier mouvement, marqué *Sehr innig und breit*, débute avec des airs d'introspection lyrique et présente des passages d'une beauté remarquable avant d'atteindre sa songeuse conclusion.

En 1897, année où fut créé son opéra *Sarema*, Zemlinsky acheva sa *Symphonie n° 2*, œuvre qui fut très bien accueillie par le public. Elle débute par un mouvement plein d'une grandeur affirmée évoquant Wagner. Viennent ensuite un scherzo dramatique et un trio aux contrastes romantiques. Le mouvement lent, marqué *Adagio*, rappelle un peu certaines pages poignantes de Mahler, mais sa conclusion est heureuse. Il est suivi d'un dernier mouvement plus menaçant qui rompt avec l'atmosphère de sérénité avant la résolution finale des conflits.

En 1896, Bruckner était décédé et la mort de Brahms survint l'année suivante. Au sein de la jeune génération de compositeurs d'alors, Richard Strauss, qui devait leur survivre à tous, avait achevé sa série de poèmes symphoniques tandis que Hugo Wolf, alors presque devenu fou, s'était querellé avec Mahler au sujet des mérites de l'opéra de Rubinstein *Le Démon*, et s'autoproclamait directeur de l'Opéra de Vienne. Telle était la Vienne à laquelle appartenait Zemlinsky et où fut écrite sa *Symphonie en si bémol majeur*.

Keith Anderson

Version française : David Ylla-Somers

8.557008

ZEMLINSKY: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 2

NAXOS

First released on Marco Polo 8.220391 and 8.223166

Zemlinsky was born in Vienna and taught Alma Mahler, whose husband gave him practical encouragement, and Schoenberg, who became his brother-in-law. Zemlinsky's *First Symphony*, with its grandiose first movement, lively scherzo and lyrical final movement, is rooted firmly in the rich Viennese classical tradition and represents an excellent example of the late nineteenth century symphony. The *Second Symphony* was immediately well received by the public and is characterised by a strong sense of romantic grandeur, in which traces of Wagner and Mahler are combined with Zemlinsky's own more elusive musical character to potent effect.

Alexander von ZEMLINSKY

(1871-1942)

	Symphony No. 1 in D minor †	**26:52**
1	**Allegro ma non troppo**	**12:57**
2	**Scherzo: Allegro scherzando**	**5:36**
3	**Sehr innig und breit**	**8:14**
	Symphony No. 2 in B flat major ‡	**41:49**
4	**Sostenuto**	**14:18**
5	**Scherzo**	**9:02**
6	**Adagio**	**8:24**
7	**Moderato**	**9:58**

Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra (Bratislava) • Ludovít Rajter †
Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra • Edgar Seipenbusch ‡

Symphony No. 1 recorded at the Concert Hall of the Slovak Radio, Bratislava, from 12th to 15th December, 1989 • Producer and Engineer: Martin Sauer
Symphony No. 2 recorded at the Concert Hall of the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra in November, 1985.
Producer: Martin Burlas • Engineers: Gustav Soral and Michal Ivanicky
Booklet Notes: Keith Anderson
Cover Image: *The Opernring, Ringstrasse, Vienna* (1890) by Franz Alt (1821-1914)
(Historisches Museum [Museen der Stadt Wien], Vienna / Harper Collins / The Art Archive)

NAXOS

DDD

8.557008

Playing Time
68:41

℗ 1986 & 1991 © 2003 HNH International Ltd.
Booklet notes in English • Notice en français
Made in Canada

www.naxos.com

NAXOS
ZEMLINSKY: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 2
8.557008