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NAXOS

Zdeněk FIBICH

Overtures

Comenius

A Night at Karlštejn Castle

The Jew of Prague

**Ballet Music
from Hedy**

Czech National Symphony Orchestra

Marek Štilec

Zdeněk Fibich (1850-1900) Orchestral Music • 4

Zdeněk Fibich was born in Všebořice on 21st December 1850. His father was a forestry official and the composer's early life was spent on various wooded estates of the nobility. Educated at home by his mother up to the age of nine, he was sent to a gymnasium in Vienna for two years before attending a Czech-speaking school in Prague where he stayed until he was fifteen. After this he was sent to Leipzig where he remained for three years studying the piano with Ignaz Moscheles and composition with Salomon Jadassohn and Ernst Richter. After a year in Paris, where he concluded his formal studies with Vinzenz Lachner in Mannheim, Fibich spent the next few years in Prague where he wrote his first opera *Bukovín*. At the age of 23 he married Růžena Hanušová and took up residence in Vilnius as a choirmaster. Having endured eleven unhappy months there, in August 1874 he returned to Prague where his wife died that October. In August 1875 he married his late wife's older sister, the contralto Betty Hanušová, but left her in 1897 for his former student Anežka Schulzová. Their relationship was to be an important one artistically, as she undertook the librettos for all of his later operas. Active as a writer and cultural commentator as well as composer, which former capacities caused much controversy concerning his post-humous reputation through to the First World War, Fibich remained in Prague until his death on 15 October 1900.

Among Fibich's catalogue of works are chamber music including two string quartets, piano trio, piano quartet and quintet for piano with strings and wind; three symphonies and several symphonic poems; seven operas including *Šárka* and *The Bride of Messina*, several melodramas including the large-scale trilogy *Hippodamia*, various liturgical pieces including a *Missa Brevis*, and as many as 600 piano pieces (composed during 1892–99) of which 376 were printed in four volumes and entitled *Moods, Impressions and Reminiscences* that served as a diary of his involvement with Schulzová, as well as providing a thematic resource the composer mined extensively in his operas as well as his *Second* and *Third Symphonies*.

The present recording features shorter orchestral works

and occasional pieces for theatre projects. Inspired by Jaroslav Vrchlický's play, the overture *A Night at Karlštejn Castle* was written in February 1886 and given its first performance in Prague by Adolf Čech on 25th March. Evocative horn calls set the ruminative mood at the opening of the piece, soon countered by decisive tutti chords launching the energetic first theme on strings and brass. After a wistful transition on woodwind, a second theme unfolds ex-pressively on upper strings before being taken over by woodwind and lower strings. The music reaches an excited climax, subsiding into a quirky passage for woodwind and horns that ushers in a brief development of the main themes, after which, they both return as part of a modified reprise, the second theme having even greater pathos as it heads to a coda that rounds off the piece in suitably festive fashion.

Designated as a 'Festival Overture', *Comenius* was completed in March 1892 and first heard at an event commemorating the seventeenth-century Czech teacher and writer, Jan Amos Comenius, on 27th March, again conducted by Čech. It opens with ominous chords shared between lower and upper strings (these latter underpinned by brass and timpani), the music taking on greater foreboding as it unfolds haltingly on lower brass and woodwind. At length the tempo picks up and a nervously agile theme ensues, soon finding contrast with the more easeful melody initiated by clarinet that presently builds to a brief climax. The earlier nervousness now resumes as elements of both themes are discussed while the music steadily intensifies towards a culmination that is summarily curtailed to make way for a modified reprise. Elements from the beginning are also reintroduced as a forthright apotheosis ensues, the piece heading directly into a coda which makes for a triumphal ending.

The overture to Josef Jiří Kolár's tragedy *The Jew of Prague* was written in 1871 and given its première in Prague on 27th March the following year, again directed by Čech. It begins with solemn woodwind writing which soon takes in strings and brass as the mood remains questioning

and ambivalent. A brief though menacing outburst duly propels the music into the headlong main theme which itself finds contrast with a more equable idea on horn and lower strings. A heated elaboration of both themes ensues, leading into the dramatic coda which draws on the sombre mood at the outset and ensures an appropriately fateful close.

Written during 1894-5 and based on the play *Don Juan* by Lord Byron, *Hedy* was Fibich's fourth opera and his first to a libretto by Anežka Schulzová. Uniquely for the composer, it features substantial ballet music in which Fibich draws on the precedents of Delibes and Tchaikovsky. Anticipatory brass chords then skirling strings and woodwind lead to the first dance, its strutting gait replete with picturesque touches on brass and percussion, before the tempo suddenly accelerates into a dashing coda. The second dance centres on a languorous melody that is initially allotted to solo cello, with woodwind and upper strings injecting a more whimsical note before both these elements are combined in some especially felicitous scoring. Over a steady rhythmic gait the third dance unfolds as humorous repartee between woodwind and strings, then the briefer fourth dance favours a more inward accommodation between these sections. The fifth dance focusses on plaintive woodwind exchanges against gracefully undulating strings, with a livelier central section, while the sixth dance rounds off the sequence with a spirited caper that finds the composer at his most uninhibitedly Czech.

The *Hippodamia* trilogy of melodramas took shape between 1888 and 1891. *Hippodamia's Death* is the final instalment, first heard in Prague on 8th November 1891 under Čech (the entire trilogy, all to texts by Jaroslav Vrchlický, was staged there from 16th to 18th February 1893). The piece unfolds at a steady pace that allows the vigorous main theme full rein. A more restrained theme is shared between woodwind and strings, then an evocative

third theme brings woodwind and harps to the fore – the main theme returning in a grandiloquent close.

The remaining four works on this disc were all written to accompany *tableaux vivants* – 'staged pictures' that were popular in Central Europe during the later nineteenth century. Occasional pieces which were not intended to outlive their immediate purpose, the scores as used for this recording have been prepared from the original sources by Marek Štílec.

Prologue to the Opening of the New Czech Theatre was written in 1876. Plaintive chords from strings and woodwind are enhanced by delicate harp writing, the music building to a brief though heartfelt climax before returning to the initial repose with which it concludes.

The Great Musical Monograph of the Building of the National Theatre had its première on 15th May 1881 at the Academy of Czech Journalists, once again conducted by Čech. Arresting fanfares are countered by quietly anticipatory writing from woodwind and strings, tension building on tremolo strings as the fanfares re-emerge and a decisive climax is reached. The music then takes on a ceremonial quality which is maintained to the majestic closing bars.

Music for the Reopening of the National Theatre was first given on 18th November 1883 for a *tableau vivant* by František Kolár. Woodwind and strings share a processional that becomes more imposing when it is taken up by the whole orchestra prior to an imperious culmination.

Music for the Celebration of the 300th Anniversary of the Birth of Jan Amos Comenius was written straight after the *Festival Overture* though given its première a day earlier on 26th March 1892. Strings have the same hymnal theme, taken up by full orchestra in a mood of regal splendour.

Richard Whitehouse

Performance Material

For the Naxos recordings of the complete orchestral works of Zdeněk Fibich Marek Štílec has kept strictly to authentic sources from around the time of the composer's life. First and foremost he studied surviving manuscripts of the scores and the first authorised copies and texts prepared for publication (see the catalogue of the composer's papers deposited at the Museum of Czech Music under *Zdeněk Fibich, Inventory of collection sign. 80, Prague 1999, fasc. 13-17* <http://nris.nkp.cz/Katalog.aspx?sigla=ABX001&katkey=KNMHKIFP>)

In some cases Marek Štílec made a thorough study of performance material (individual parts), as long as there was proof it had been used at a première. It has thus been possible to substantiate theories relating to the subjectively programmatic nature of some of the works, for instance the *Selanka "V podvečer"*. As the work progressed other findings, too, were used – including the composer's personal notes, inserts and performance suggestions in his manuscripts and the first printed editions that have not been incorporated in the Fibich Critical Edition so far but contribute to the highest level of authenticity. The performing material has in all cases been thoroughly edited, with a number of errors being corrected – errors that have plagued performances of Fibich's orchestral compositions up till now. Marek Štílec has been consulting other colleagues and musicologists in the Zdeněk Fibich Society (Czech Republic) of which he is a member himself, as to questions of the authenticity of sources and of interpretation.

All the orchestral works of Zdeněk Fibich are here recorded consistently without any "vide" cuts which, over the years, had crept into professional performances in spite of never having been authorised by the composer. All the repeats prescribed by Fibich (e.g. in the first movement exposition sections of the symphonies) have been consistently – and in keeping with the practice of the time – observed. The recordings have also tried to make use of contemporary reviews, as well as analyses of individual works that have been appearing each month since 2013 in the prestigious music magazine *Hudební rozhledy* and that are also available on the special web page www.fibich.cz, written by the conductor Marek Štílec.

Czech National Symphony Orchestra

Celebrating its twentieth birthday in 2013, the Czech National Symphony Orchestra has gained a leading position among the top Czech and other European orchestras. Renowned for its versatility, each year the orchestra presents a broad programme ranging from classical music concerts to contemporary genre, film scores, jazz, and musicals. The CNSO also organizes the summer Prague Proms Festival. The orchestra takes pride in the several Gold awards received for its recordings, and in the Gustav Mahler Prize, awarded for its performances of Mahler's works. Other achievements include the prestigious worldwide representation contract with IMG Artists London, and the long-standing recording project in association with Tokyo Victor Entertainment. The Czech National Symphony Orchestra was established in 1993 by the trumpet-player Jan Hasenöhrl. A spiritual father at the birth of the CNSO was the legendary conductor Zdeněk Košler. In 1996 the American Paul Freeman was named Chief Conductor, followed in 2007 by Libor Pešek.



Photo: Martin Malý

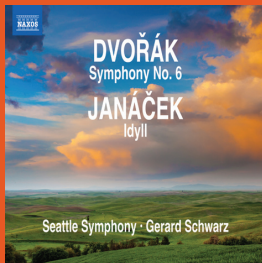


Marek Štílec

Marek Štílec was born in Prague in 1985 and began his studies at the Prague Conservatoire in the violin class of Dana Vlachová. He studied conducting with Leoš Svárovský, graduating from the Prague Academy of Performing Arts. He works regularly with a number of orchestras, including the Czech Radio Symphony Orchestra, Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Swan, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Prague Chamber Orchestra, Prague Philharmonia, Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice, Kammerphilharmonie Graz, the Berlin Camerata and the Ulster Orchestra. He founded the Chamber Orchestra Quattro with which he has given dozens of concerts and has made a number of internationally successful recordings. He works with Czech Television and Czech Radio and his recordings have also been broadcast by the BBC. In March 2010 he undertook a study visit at the San Francisco Symphony and in January 2014 he conducted the New World Symphony under the mentorship of Michael Tilson Thomas. He has attended the Leonid Grin master-class at the Neeme Järvi Academy for Conductors, and has also taken part in master-classes with Jorma Panula, Vladimir Kiradijev, Gerd Albrecht and Achim Holub.

Photo: Ondřej Klíma

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8.572985



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This fourth volume in the first complete recording of the orchestral works of Zdeněk Fibich features shorter orchestral works and occasional pieces for theatre projects. They include the evocative overture *A Night at Karlštejn Castle*, the Mendelssohnian overture to the incidental music for *The Jew of Prague*, as well as the witty and elegant ballet music from the opera *Hedy*. Specially prepared from original sources for this recording by Marek Štílec, the four *Tableaux vivants* ('staged pictures') reflect a 19th-century Central European fashion for staged pieces, including fanfares, majestic ceremony and regal splendour, not intended to outlive their immediate purpose.

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FIBICH
(1850–1900)

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Orchestral Works • 4

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|--|--------------|--|-------------|
| 1 <i>A Night at Karlštejn Castle – Overture</i> | 10:10 | 7 <i>The Great Musical Monograph of the Building of the National Theatre – Tableau vivant*</i> | 5:53 |
| 2 <i>Comenius – Festival Overture</i> | 12:09 | 8 <i>Music for the Reopening of the National Theatre – Tableau vivant*</i> | 3:12 |
| 3 <i>The Jew of Prague – Tragedy: Overture*</i> | 6:30 | 9 <i>Music for the Celebration of the 300th Anniversary of the Birth of Jan Amos Comenius – Tableau vivant*</i> | 2:33 |
| 4 <i>Hedy – Opera, Op. 43: Ballet Music (Concert version)*</i> | 17:42 | | |
| 5 <i>Hippodamia's Death – Melodrama, Op. 33: March</i> | 5:28 | | |
| 6 <i>Prologue to the opening of the New Czech Theatre – Tableau vivant*</i> | 2:06 | | |
- * WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS**



Czech National Symphony Orchestra
Marek Štílec

Recorded at CNSO Studios, Hostivař, Prague, Czech Republic, 9 (tracks 1, 3, 5–9) & 29 (2, 4) October 2013

Producer & Editor: Jiří Štílec • Engineer: Václav Roubal • Booklet notes: Richard Whitehouse

Editions: Czech Radio, Prague • Zdeněk Fibich website: www.fibich.cz

Cover photo: Sunrise in Czech Switzerland (Tomas1111 / Dreamstime.com)

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Playing Time
66:00



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Made in Germany

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Booklet notes in English