

Mahler's Resurrection Symphony/Jonathan Nott

Reviewed by: Peter Reed

Mahler Symphony No.2 (Resurrection)

Anne Schwanewilms (soprano) & Lioba Braun (contralto)
Bamberg Symphony Choir
Bamberg Symphony Orchestra
Jonathan Nott

Recorded 14 & 15 March 2008 in Sinfonie an der Regnitz, Joseph-Keilberth-Saal, Bamberg
CD Number: TUDOR 7158 (2 SACDs)
Duration: 1 hour 24 minutes

Jonathan Nott's Mahler cycle with his Bamberg forces continues, and, in an already saturated Mahler 2 market, this recording is something to be reckoned with. This English conductor has built a distinguished career in Europe, but it's only within the past five years or so, via the Proms and the Edinburgh festival in particular, that the UK has woken up to the fact that here is a major-league figure.

From the very first bar of the ferocious and muscular opening, it is clear that Nott is a master-Mahlerian. His performance gives us high drama without histrionics, and his meticulous observance of detail could almost seem academic if it didn't bring this score to seething, coruscating life. Many listeners will not want to be prised away from the headlong urgency of Solti, the *uber*-emotionalism of Bernstein or the highly-wrought clarity of Rattle – all valid approaches that are nourished by Mahler's music. Nott, however, does not go in for hyper-active responsiveness; instead, his approach tempers the tragedy of the first movement with a sober and patient sense of growth and direction, thrillingly underpinned by the ubiquitous dotted rhythm that binds the music. The dream-like entry into the development combines Wunderhorn magic with fierce regret, and the spectral playing in the closing bars leaves the laying to rest of Mahler's hero intriguingly open-ended.

For all the close attention to detail, this performance doesn't sound remotely airless or micro-managed, and Nott gives 'Urlicht' and the finale a sense of inevitability that embraces the music's long vistas and pregnant silences, giving them room to breathe and time to make their impact. Nott also has a keen ear for keeping things in reserve, to considerable effect in the gradual unleashing of the third movement's grotesqueries.

I listened to this SACD recording on a Bose surround-sound system, and it has a presence and tolerance that embraces everything from the huge drum-rolls of the finale right down to that terrible silence just before the finale rushes in like a tidal wave. The percussion, from the lightest cymbal tap upwards is very well served, and the harp glissando that delivers the choir's "Was entstanden ist" to its shimmering strings accompaniment is sheer magic.

Contralto Lioba Braun doesn't quite hit the otherworldly bull's-eye in 'Urlicht', but she and Anne Schwanewilms are superbly consoling in the finale. Just occasionally, I reacted to the strings' brightness, but the woodwind-playing is full of character and, where required, considerable bite. For pace, strong narrative drive and sheer musicianship, this 'Resurrection' will take some beating. Highly recommended!