A MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF WAR

Kolman: Monument For Six Million Jews
Zelienka: Auschwitz
Hrusovosky: Hiroshima
Simai: The Victory

The Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus conducted by Ludovit Rajter
The Bratislava Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Bystrik Rezucha
American Premiere Recording
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The most important works of Slovak new music are the subject of a regular edition of Supraphon records which, this time, focuses its attention on choral music. The three choral compositions on this disc reveal the wide-ranging palette of the creative conquests in this field. Besides these three pieces of vocal music there is also the orchestral Monument per 6,000,000 by Peter Kolman (b. 1937 in Bratislava). The composition dates from 1964 and was first performed by the Bratislava Radio Symphony Orchestra in 1965 under the baton of Andras Markowski. The composer has revised the work in 1966 and the recording of this new version is included on this disc.

In 1964 when this work was written, Kolman was working on two other compositions. They are the Panegyrics for 16 Instruments and Hommage à Kentinski for String Quartet. In all three of these compositions the author was trying to elucidate the problem which had then held his attention, namely: in which way is it possible to apply in the same work various contemporary means of composition invented by present-day composers. Kolman was convinced that it is possible to combine these means on the basis of their common traits even though they sometimes seemingly exclude each other. However, it is necessary to find out those common characteristics in the means of a given period. As a composer he was looking for an answer in a practical application of his thesis. The three above-mentioned works are the fruit of this effort. The Monument is dedicated to the memory of the victims of the concentration camps. The contrasting pages of this composition are condensed into three sections flowing into a dramatic finale. This is linked up with an epilogue played by a solo violin whose intervals suggest Jewish religious chants.

JUJA ZELJENKA (b. 1932) is undoubtedly the leading figure of his generation of composers. He caught attention even during his studies in the master class of Professor Jan Čikker by his First Symphony, Dramatic Overture, Suite for Small Orchestra, First Piano Quintet and a number of piano compositions (Capriccio, Scherzo, Intermesso, Pastorale and Bagatelles). After graduation from the Bratislava Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts he devoted himself to film and incidental music. Film music afforded him the opportunity to experiment with all forms of contemporary compositional technique and in this way exercised a positive influence upon the forming of his expression even in works destined for the concert hall such as the Ballad for Chorus and Orchestra (1957) based on folk poetry: Sonata for Piano (1958); Second Piano Quintet (1959); Seven Compositional Studies and the Revolutionary Overture (1962); Second Symphony in C for Strings (1960); Fragments from the ballet Cosmos on a libretto by M. Herčík (1963-3); Three Pieces for Piano and a String Quartet (1963); Structures for Symphony Orchestra (1964); Metamorphoses on words by Ovidius (a composition commissioned by the Zagreb Biennale) and Music for Chorus and Orchestra (1966). However OSWIECIM became the best known of his compositions not so much as a work in itself but because of the horrific way which led to its performance. Based on a text by Nicholas Koval, it originated in 1960 as Zelenka's contribution to the celebration of the 15th anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia. A radio performance took place only at the beginning of 1964 and a concert version as late as April 29, 1965 on the occasion of the First Annual Series of Bratislava Music Festivities. The Chorus and Orchestra of the Slovak Philharmonic was conducted by Ladislav Rajter, Július Pántik, a member of the Slovak National Theatre, and Peter Žemný and J. M. Dobročínsky was responsible for the choral part.

HIROSHIMA, a cantata for recitator, coloratura soprano, mixed choir and orchestra on words of R. Skukáš, is the work of the composer and musical theoretician IVAN HRUŠOVSKÝ (b. 1927), who is still better known as a writer on music. He has published a university text book called Introduction into the Study of the Theory of Harmony (1960) and another work, Slovak Music (1964); his last great theoretical work is a monograph on Jan Čikker, the composer. He has also published a number of essays and critical notices. He studied composition with Alexander Mozer. Among his works the following are to be especially mentioned: Suite Pastoral, Piano Concerto (1958); Tatran Impressions for Orchestra; The White Birch Tree, My Sister for contralto and female chorus (1960); Sinfonietta for Two String Orchestras (1959) and Combinazioni sonore (1964).

The form of Hiroshima is determined, above all, by the necessity proportionately to follow the text. Clearly apparent is the composer's aim to write a tripartite work, both in details and as a whole. The dynamic form is built upon known means — from the fugato to the harsh homophony of a large orchestra. The composer's whole thinking is linear. His melodic line, with the exception of choral parts, is not cantabile but based on intervals. The whole work is constructed by means of a single descending diminished third combined with an ascending fifth. These intervals predetermine the pattern of Hrusovský's linearity and its resultant which we may, at the same time, call harmony because of the consistent centralization of the process.

PAVOL SIMAI (b. 1930) is a pupil of Jan Čikker and Paul Dessau. Let us mention the following of his numerous compositions: Love Verses for Tenor and Piano; Sonatina for Flute and Piano; the ballet Three Spinners, all written in the second half of the 1950's. In 1961 came into being his Suite for Piano From Slovakia and his Piano Sonata; in 1962 his Ballads, A cycle for Soprano, Bass, Flute and Piano based on folk poetry; in 1963 his Dance Fantasy for Orchestra, A Dirge for Solo, Chorus and Orchestra based on poems by Jan Smrek and in the following year, November. A Cycle of songs for Baritone and Piano on words by Marcel Herz and finally, Victory. Vittoria compositions per grande orchestra (as the original title of Victory runs) is dedicated to the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra.

Simai uses none of the established techniques of composition but follows his own independent method when using the serial principle. His series, however (which only rarely appears in its complete form) forms only the basic material and one cannot even speak of thematic work in the traditional sense of the word. The composer decomposes it into lesser patterns or, better still, introduces it in a hidden form on various instruments. The harmony of the Victory is remarkable for its superfuse of diminished and augmented intervals and also for the density of tonal patterns.