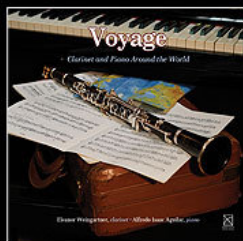




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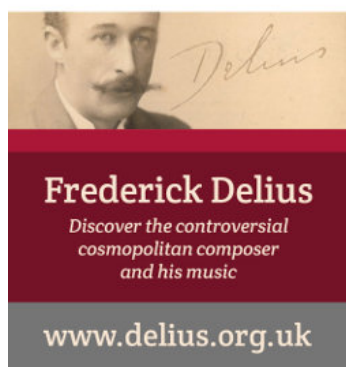
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Review by Henry Fogel

TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No. 3 • Yuri Botnari, cond; Moscow PO • ROYAL MUSIC SOCIETY 10052 (51:53)

If you are familiar with Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 3, the first aspect of Yuri Botnari's performance that might grab your attention is its duration of 51:53. The recordings in my collection range from 37 to 44 minutes. Botnari's approach may be guided by the tempo marking for the introduction to the first movement, *Tempo di marcia funebre*, along with the third movement's *Andante elegiaco*. Whatever is at the root of his choices, Botnari's interpretation is very different from all other recordings I am familiar with, which emphasize the dance elements in the work.

I was skeptical at first, but the longer I listened, the more I became convinced of the validity of Botnari's view. He finds solemnity and grandeur in the "Polish" Symphony, elements that are usually downplayed. I make no claim that his view is more valid than others, but it works well on its own terms. As with other conductors who take unusual views of standard repertoire (Celibidache's Bruckner, late Bernstein in almost everything), the trick is to bring the music off convincingly.

This performance succeeds in part because of the deeply committed playing of the Moscow Philharmonic. It is not easy to keep track of all the different Russian orchestras, but this one has a distinguished history. It was founded in 1951 by Samuel Samosud and led from 1960 to 1975 by Kirill Kondrashin. Since 1998 Yuri Simonov has been music director. These musicians could play Tchaikovsky in their sleep, and a principal task facing the conductor is to assure that they don't sound as if they are. Botnari has a strong relationship with them and is the orchestra's conductor laureate.

In the Scherzo, the fourth of the symphony's five movements, the slow tempo works because of the high level of interplay between first-desk players and even whole sections. The musical communication is very strong, most apparently in inflection, dynamic shading, and tiny matters of emphasis within phrases. Another strength of this performance is the beauty of the string playing. The string tone is lush without becoming soupy, phrases are firmly shaped, and even at the softest dynamics the strings retain the core of their sound without thinning out.

One could characterize Botnari's Tchaikovsky as the anti-Mravinsky approach (although online discographies list no Mravinsky recording of this symphony). Rounded attacks and accents, a dark rather than bright orchestral color, liberal application of rubato, and a willingness to linger over some moments add up to something I found an engaging listening experience. The recorded sound is rich and clear; the program notes are minimal, telling us much more about the conductor than the music. **Henry Fogel**



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