
NEWS & INFORMATION

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FULL-BORE VOŘÍŠEK
**CD RESURRECTS MASTERFUL MASS
BY COLLEAGUE OF SCHUBERT AND BEETHOVEN**

Jan Vaclav Hugo Vorisek (pronounced VOHR-zeh-shek), a once-celebrated composer known and admired by Beethoven and Schubert, is the focus of a new CD by conductor Paul Freeman and the Czech National Symphony Orchestra (Cedille Records CDR 90000 058).

The disc offers a pair of large-scale works by Vorisek (1791-1825), a Bohemian who made his name in late classical-period Vienna: the Symphony in D Major and Mass in B-flat Major. Performing in the Mass are the Prague Chamber Chorus and soloists associated with the Chicago concert scene: Patrice Michaels, soprano; Tami Jantzi, mezzo-soprano; William Watson, tenor; and Peter Van De Graaff, bass.

Born and raised in a small village in northeastern Bohemia, Vorisek moved to Prague to attend university and, at age 22, moved to Vienna, in the hope of meeting Beethoven. He worked as a conductor, pianist, and composer, earning Beethoven's compliments for his piano writing. He eventually won the position of Imperial Court Organist and wrote the Mass in B-flat while holding that post. He introduced Schubert, a close friend, to the nascent Romantic pianism he absorbed in his native land: Vorisek's Impromptus, Op.7, reflecting this style, were published well before Schubert's. When Vorisek died, at age 34, the court music director wrote: "Art thus loses a noteworthy, pre-eminent composer, and the court chapel perhaps the finest among living organists."

Lauded during his brief career, Vorisek is scarcely remembered today, although there have been a handful of recordings of the Symphony. *Gramophone* called it “a work of impressive confidence and command, firmly constructed and colourfully scored.”

In the Symphony, Vorisek demonstrates a Schubert-like gift of melody and a flair for the dramatic gesture worthy of Beethoven. It’s an inventive and charming work, blending the predominant style of the day with Vorisek’s own distinctive voice. The outer movements recall Beethoven’s early symphonies, as well as Schubert’s. The slow movement’s harmonic structure employs many thirds and sixths – intervals characteristic of Czech folk music. The energetic Scherzo and its pastoral-flavored Trio provide further evidence of Vorisek’s individuality.

Maestro Freeman, who had begun recording the symphony for a British label in 1995, introduced Cedille producer Jim Ginsburg to Vorisek’s music by inviting him to one of the recording sessions. The British recording was never completed, and Freeman, the Chicago-based conductor who is the Czech National Symphony’s music director, began the project anew with Ginsburg, who had become enamored of Vorisek.

Vorisek’s nimble and lovely Mass in B-flat Major is a classical masterpiece in the tradition of the great masses of Haydn and Mozart, but with a dignity and vitality all it’s own. Its style is reminiscent of late Mozart—*The Magic Flute* comes to mind (especially in the Benedictus). But as Andrea Lamoreaux writes in the program notes, “There is no question of imitation or derivation. It is an original, new-sounding work, conceived within the conservative traditions of liturgical music.”

Vorisek’s skillful and judicious use of dramatic counterpoint is especially effective in the fugues that conclude the Gloria and Credo sections of the Mass. He also contrasts, to great effect, choral singing with parts scored for solo voices. In the haunting *Angus Dei*, for example, he builds excitement by opening quietly with just the male soloists, followed by the complete vocal quartet; only at the movement’s climax does he, at last, unleash the full chorus.

Though Vorisek's Mass is not unknown in the Czech Republic—Ginsburg discovered it on a small Czech label while browsing a Prague record store a few years ago—the new Cedille CD appears to be the only currently available recording.

Cedille attributes the warm, inviting sound of the Mass to the acoustic charm of the Dvorak Hall of the Rudolfinum in Prague. Cedille recording engineer Bill Maylone says the hall has the reverberation of a small church, while its high ceiling, capped with a shallow dome, neither traps nor misdirects any of the sound. The hall also permitted a seating arrangement advantageous to a pleasing balance of voices, orchestra, and organ: the orchestra and soloists were positioned in front, with the chorus behind and slightly above them, flanking the main organ choirs, with ample space around the chorus.

Cedille Records (pronounced say-DEE) is dedicated to showcasing Chicago's most noteworthy classical artists and attractive yet unjustly neglected repertoire. The label is an arm of the nonprofit Chicago Classical Recording Foundation.

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JAN VÁCLAV HUGO VOŘÍŠEK
Symphony in D Major (28:00)
Mass in B-flat Major (32:24)
Czech National Symphony Orchestra
Prague Chamber Chorus
Paul Freeman, conductor
Patrice Michaels, soprano
Tami Jantzi, mezzo-soprano
William Watson, tenor
Peter Van De Graaff, bass
Cedille Records CDR 90000 058