



(LYRCD 6011)

ANTONIN DVOŘÁK Love Songs & Folk Duets

Katherine Ciesinski, mezzo-soprano
John Ostendorf, bass-baritone
Grayson Hirst, tenor
Rudolph Palmer, piano

PROGRAM NOTES

Antonin Dvořák is best known for his large scale symphonies and concerti. His songs with piano are less popular and yet he composed them throughout his life. The Bible Songs and Moravian Duets are often heard. The present collection focuses on least familiar vocal repertoire and are here sung in their original languages. Dvořák's German publisher Simrock asked the composer to provide him with German translations of all the songs for publication. Indeed, some were actually composed in German, but the majority began life as Czech folk lyrics. Rather than turn to the verses of Goethe and Heine, Dvořák preferred rustic Slavic poetry. In the case of the youthful Opus 6, Four Serbian Songs (1872), TRACKS 1-4, the composer himself used a Czech translation for his brief cycle. Simrock published them some years later in German. The Czech versions for the first and fourth songs do not survive.

For Opus 73 (TRACKS 5-8) the publisher wanted to follow up on the great success of Dvořák's recent Slavonic Dances (Op. 72) and requested a set of four folk tunes (V Národním Tónu) which echo some of the melodies and sentiments of the dances. The

best of these, “Ach, není tu” (TRACK 7) is an extended lament which won immediate public favor. In 1888, Simrock commissioned a set of springtime Lieder for female voice, to be dedicated to Sophie Hanslick, wife of the celebrated Viennese critic. Dvorák obliged by setting German texts in an homage to Schubert: Vier Lieder, Opus 82 (TRACKS 9-12).

The eight-song Czech cycle Opus 83 (TRACKS 13-20), Písne Milostné has a more complicated history. Though published just after the German songs, these first were composed twenty years earlier as Cypresses, set to the Moravian poetry of Gustav Pfleger- Moravský. Dvorák had dedicated them to a pupil he fancied (when she became engaged to someone else, the young composer married her sister, Anna). Much of this material surfaced years later as a popular string quartet of the same name. The songs are distinctive for their elaborate piano accompaniments and display echoes of Tchaikovsky and Brahms. Though little known today, they demonstrate the composer’s finest writing for the solo voice.

The Child’s Song is a short, impromptu a capella duet the composer penned in 1881 for the children of his Czech publisher, Emanuel Stary. Detská Písen (TRACK 21), was only discovered and published in the 1950s. Likewise, a collection of sixteen Russian Folk Melodies (composed in that language for voices and piano accompaniment) was not published in the composer’s lifetime. The three heard here (TRACKS 22-24) display the composer’s love for his Slavic heritage.

SERBIAN SONGS

Opus 6

THE MAIDEN (in German).....TRACK 1

Once upon a time a maiden fell asleep on the grass.
The Grass drained the red from her cheeks,
So she stole his green color.
The girl awoke, argued bitterly with the Grass.
She went before a Judge: “Give me back my rosy cheeks!”
The Grass said: “Give me back the green color
You snatched from me and I’ll return your red cheeks.”
They quarrelled, each accusing the other.
The judge’s verdict reconciled them, and they parted.

THE WARNING (in Czech).....TRACK 2

Don’t forget, little bride’s maid, how cried on my lap.
Tears flowing, you’d complain, “Let God in Heaven
Punish any maiden who trusts a man’s promises!”
Look at that sky, now clear, now cloudy,
Just like a young man’s sincerity.

When he kisses you he says "I'll marry you."
After the kiss: "But let's wait until fall."
Fall comes: "Let's wait 'til winter."
Winter gone, spring blossoms emerge.
Again he sings, but to a different girl!

THE GARDEN (in Czech).....TRACK 3
You must plant your wishes, sweetheart.
Every day faithfully go out to the garden.
If the moon rises yellow, you must forget me.
If the evening star shines white, come to me at night.
But if a blue violet sprouts, we'll pass our days kissing!

The Warning (in German)
A young girl wades, alone in the cool water.
Her eyes sparkle, cheeks red, feet white.
From afar a horseman calls her, laughing:
"You wade alone, my lovely, yet soon you'll be mine.
If only you were betrothed to me, sweet one,
I'd bathe myself in milk to get spanking clean.
I'd inhale roses to get a rosy glow
And tie a sash around me to cut a dashing figure."

V Národním Tónu
Slovak Folk Songs, Opus 73 (in Czech)

THE LULLABY.....TRACK 5
Goodnight, my darling; may God protect you.
Goodnight, sleep well; have sweet dreams.

THE MOWER.....TRACK 6
Near Temesvar, a country lass was cutting hay.
Her chore done, she called to her sweetheart
"Hey, help me carry this pile of straw."
"Let your parents help since they won't let you be mine.
Even as a baby, they promised you to me.
When you tended geese, you conquered my heart."

THE LAMENT.....TRACK 7
Nothing here pleases me, nothing makes me happy.
What used to delight me has drifted away.
I am only offered what I don't want.
They offer me a widow, but she has only half a heart.
Nothing here pleases me...

THE HORSEMAN.....TRACK 8
I've a horse who carries me over mountains and valleys.

I had a little bird with a broken leg.
Dear, bring me fresh water to drink.
Once I had a sparkling love, but she betrayed me.

VIER LIEDER
Four Songs, Opus 82 (in German)

LEAVE ME ALONE.....TRACK 9
Leave me along with my dreams
Where my heart can no longer trouble me.
Leave me the delights, the pains I feel since I first saw him.
Leave me in peace: do not drive joy from my heart
With the harsh words I hear around me.
Leave me the glowing image of his face.
Don't think I am bewitched.
You cannot know the thrill of his priceless love.

THE EMBROIDERESS.....TRACK 10
How comforting are my chosen tasks.
They stand along life's troubled path like guardian angels,
And dry my tears.
I often feel crushed by bitter pain,
But so long as I can see my knitting and cozy home
My heart can grow calm again.
Only simple chores comfort the hour of pain.
They heal my wounded spirit.
Through them I have found earthly salvation.

SPRINGTIME.....TRACK 11
The earth is kissed by sunshine, feels its warmth,
Many-colored flowers sprout from her breast.
Songs burst from my own heart when you are near.
I feel your warm glance, long for your very essence.
But the sun can forsake the earth, no green leaf grow.
So my heart, without you, feels no springtime or song.

AT THE BROOK.....TRACK 12
The brook flows gently, happily babbling
Because it touches the lovely flowers along the banks.
Their beauty is reflected deep in the brook's heart,
Yet still it must flow along, cannot stop for a moment.
Little stream, carry off my sorrows,
You who flow cool and quiet,
Far from that lovely blossom I'll not see again.

Pisne Milostne

Love-Songs, Opus 83 (in Czech)

ABOUT OUR LOVE.....TRACK 13

From our love no happiness can flourish.
If it did, it couldn't bloom for long.
Why do tears creep into our kisses,
Why is our love so threatened?
Parting is bitter when love lingers,
For the heart knows it will soon perish in misery.

FROM THE HEART.....TRACK 14

Death dwells in many a heart, as in a desolate place.
Because of this misery there is only emptiness.
But visions of sweet love can suddenly enter it.
Then the enflamed hearts fills with passion,
And in sweet illusion is swept to Paradise.
There it sings the old love refrains.

THE HOUSE.....TRACK 15

I wander about your old house,
Still wounded by your faithlessness.
With nostalgic eyes, I see you approach,
My arms are open, my eyes are full.
Where are you, love? If only you'd come back.
But I have no hope of seeing you again.

HOPE.....TRACK 16

I know I still want you
And that you too want our love to remain alive.
Yet when I look into your eyes on this lovely night,
When the Heavens bless me with love's power,
Yet then my eyes fill, for a cruel fate threatens our joy.

THE MAY NIGHT.....TRACK 17

Over the land a languor spreads, this pure May night.
A light breeze rustles the leaves;
A blanket of calm floats down.
Drowsy flowers whisper secret songs.
Contented Nature dreams, all turmoil ceased.
Stars proclaim hope for the world.
Earth and sky blend into one.
But in this once-happy heart
I feel only intense suffering.

BY THE STREAM.....TRACK 18

I stand alone by a forest stream.
Its ripples penetrate my thoughts.
I see an old stone beneath the water,
Rocked back and forth by ceaseless currents.
They tug at the stone; it turns over.
When will life's stresses set me free?
Ah, when?

THE ENCHANTMENT.....TRACK 19
Enchanted by your sweet powers, I'd gladly perish,
If only your laughing, lovely lips did not call me.
Yes, I'd die with great love in my heart,
If only those lips
Did not call me back to life.

THE SINGING SWAN.....TRACK 20
Beloved, unique soul, you reign in this heart.
My thoughts surround you, though fate separates us.
If I were a singing swan, I would fly to you.
And in my final hour I'd serenade you
With my very last sigh.

Detská Pisen
CHILDREN'S SONG (in Czech).....TRACK 21
I have nothing precious I can give you.
I can only wish for you what you want.
My heart is full of love for you,
It reminds me how much I adore you.
This heart is yours, a gift forever.

Russian Folk Duets
(in Russian)
THE BIRCH TREE.....TRACK 22
In the meadow stood a white birch.
Noone would chop it down.
I feel like walking out to the woods.
I'll go there and cut down that little tree.
I'll lop off three branches and whittle whistles.
From a fourth I'll make a balalaika.

THE COUNTRY-DUCKLING.....TRACK 23
Ah, little duck, where did you sleep last night?
I slept in the meadow under a bush.
Stop tooting on those whistles,
Stop or else you'll wake papa.
Drink up, my good son.

CHERRY TREES.....TRACK 24

Sour cherries ripen in the field.
Lovers kiss, court, but do not get married. Tra-la-la...
Near the field white flowers grow.
A girl with black eyelashes cuts wheat there.
One mountain is steep, another low.
One sweetheart is far away, one nearby.
The near one has furs, the far one has black lashes.
I'll quit the near one and rush off to the other.

PROJECT HISTORY

This album was conceived and recorded in 1985 for Daniel Nimetz' Spectrum Records and was released as an analog LP. Some of New York's finest musical people were enthusiastic and lent their support: George Jellinek, long-time musicdirector of WQXR and the host of "The Vocal Scene," wrote notes and gave advice. Musicologist Barbara Hampton Renton helped assemble the repertoire. The glorious Yveta Graff served as fairy godmother to the project, patiently coaching us singers in the Czech, keeping us motivated and even supplying the cover art from a 19th century Czech painting (Jméno Uprka, Od Keréj, "The Choice"), hanging in the living room of her glamorous Park Avenue apartment, where she put us through our paces before we went off to Merkin Hall to record. I sang often with colleagues KathyCiesinski and Grayson Hirst and over the years have collaborated happily and often with the wonderfully talented Rudy Palmer. We're all grateful to Nick Fritsch for lovingly re-mastering the material and bringing it to life again on Lyrichord.

-- John Ostendorf

TRACKS AND TIMING

SERBIAN SONGS, Op. 6

Katherine Ciesinski, John Ostendorf

- 1 Das Mädchen/The Maiden (2:36)
- 2 Pripamatováni/The Warning (3:26)
- 3 Výklad Znamení/The Garden (1:07)
- 4 Kein Entrinnen/No Escape (1:45)

V NÁRODNIM TÓNU/ Folk Tunes, Op. 73

Grayson Hirst

- 5 Dobrú noc /The Lullaby (2:43)
- 6 Zalo Dievca/ The Mower (2:01)
- 7 Ach, Není tu/The Lament (4:39)
- 8 Ej, Mám Já /The Horseman (1:45)

VIER LIEDER/ Four Songs, Op. 82

Katherine Ciesinski

9 Lasst Mich Allein/Leave Me Alone (2:57)

10 Die Stickerin/The Embroideress (2:25)

11 Frühling /Springtime (1:28)

12 Am Bache/At the Stream (1:08)

PISNE MILOSTNE/ Love Songs, Op. 83

John Ostendorf

13 O Nasí Lásce/About Our Love (1:51)

14 V Tak Mnohém/From the Heart (2:30)

15 Kol Domu/The House (1:19)

16 Já Vím/Hope (2:44)

17 Nad Krajem Vévodí/The May Night (1:48)

18 Zde V Lese U Potoka/By the Stream (2:13)

19 V Té Sladké Moci/The Enchantment (2:05)

20 O Duse Drahá/The Singing Swan (2:12)

21 DETSKÁ PISEN/Children's Song (1:24)

Katherine Ciesinski, Grayson Hirst

RUSSIAN DUETS

Ciesinski, Hirst, Ostendorf

22 The Birch Tree (1:33)

23 The Country Duckling (2:55)

24 Cherry Trees (2:06)

TOTAL TIME: 52:55

CREDITS

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