

RECORD REVIEW

FRANZ LACHNER. Symphony No.1 in E flat major, Op.32
LOUIS SPOHR. Symphony No.2 in D minor, Op.49

Singapore Symphony Orchestra conducted by Choo Hoey
Records International 7004-1 (digital stereo)

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Louis Spohr wrote his second symphony in March of 1820 when he was almost thirty six years old. Composed for the London Philharmonic Society, the work was premiered on April 10, after only a single hurried (parts rushed to the players with the ink still wet?) rehearsal earlier the same day.

Nevertheless, Spohr seems to have been quite satisfied with his new symphony, not only with the performance, but with the quality of his own craftsmanship in the work itself. This must have been quite a relief to him as he had been expressing doubts that "the creative power of his youth" was "on the decline". He need not have been concerned - the symphony was a fine one and was particularly well received by the audience which enthusiastically encored the scherzo.

Although it is a work from the first full flush of Spohr's maturity as a composer, there are still several streaks of impetuous vim and vigour in it. To be successful, a performance of this work must at times be willing to relinquish its sense of mature dignity and command in favour of more youthful exuberance. The recorded performance under review here strikes a marvellously convincing balance between these two opposite expressive poles. Conductor Choo Hoey galvanizes his Singapore Symphony Orchestra into an emotionally committed response to this symphony the equal or better of any commercially recorded performance of a Spohr symphony to date.

Maestro Choo's fledgeling orchestra (a mere six years old when the recording sessions took place last year) acquits itself admirably on a technical level as well. It is good that it does as this recording is really quite awesome in its transparency and clarity of detail. The music is played with style and élan, all the repeats are taken, in fact, one could hardly ask for anything better save that the SSO were a true world-class ensemble. It is not, but this in no way detracts from the impact upon the listener that the SSO's performance of this Spohr symphony is sure to have. If the next six years see as much development as the first six, the SSO will be well on its way to becoming a serious contender on an international level.

Franz Lachner's first symphony on the other side is a really delightful "find" and receives a performance virtually the equal of the Spohr. The infectious spirit of Schubert and Rossini pervades this charming work which, nevertheless, contains enough of Lachner's individuality to keep the listener guessing just who on earth could have composed the piece in question. A perfect companion to the Spohr: let us hope we hear more of both composers from Records International soon.

Pressings, from direct metal masters, are by Sonopress of West Germany (not Teldec, as mentioned in the preview article in Newsletter No.51) and have satin smooth surfaces. This, coupled with the spaciousness and clarity of the recorded sound, makes for superlative listening. The record is due out on compact disc soon, but could only result in the nth degree of improvement over this wonderful disc.

The record is available on the Marco Polo label in Europe and Asia. In case of difficulty obtaining it, please write to Mr. David Nelson, Records International, PO Box 1140, Goleta, CA 93116-1140, U.S.A.. He will be able to quote price + postage rates to anywhere in the world.

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