

An inordinately gifted conductor, István Kertész died at age 43 in a tragic drowning off the Israeli coast. He had already reached full maturity as a musician, proving his worth in opera, oratorio, and the symphonic repertory. His interests were wide-ranging, including works from the Classical and Romantic periods and large portions of twentieth century music.

Beginning with private lessons in childhood, Kertész studied piano and violin. He continued with violin training at the Ferenc Liszt Academy in Budapest, adding composition under the supervision of such teachers as Weiner and Kodály. He pursued his conducting studies with László Somogyi, at the same time benefiting from studying the performances of Otto Klemperer, who was then working at the Hungarian State Opera. In 1953, Kertész was appointed resident conductor at Győr, two years later transferring his activities to Budapest, where he was hired as coach and conductor. Following the political uprising and Soviet response in 1956, Kertész moved with his family to Germany, subsequently acquiring German citizenship.

From 1958 to 1963, Kertész was general music director at Augsburg. His British debut took place with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in 1960, followed by appearances with the London Symphony Orchestra in 1961. His American debut came with a tour with the NDR Symphony Orchestra in 1961, during which he made a positive impression on American audiences and critics alike. An appointment as general music director in Cologne came in 1964 and 1966 brought both a Covent Garden debut, directing *Un ballo in maschera*. A global tour with the London Symphony Orchestra led to his succeeding Pierre Monteux as LSO principal conductor in 1966. In 1971, he became music director of Cologne's Gürzenich-Orchester, a position he held until his death two years later.

Kertész was decidedly non-interventionist as a conductor. With scrupulous attention to the composer's directions, his interpretations were more remarkable for sound musicianship than for striking individualism. Still, his performances often held high drama, and he was intentional about advocacy of works he believed in, which, in light of his broad interests, were numerous. At Cologne, he presented the German premiere of Verdi's *Stiffelio* as well as Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* (a work he recorded in its first complete edition on disc).

For Decca, Kertész recorded a superb *Bluebeard's Castle* with Christa Ludwig and Walter Berry, still unsurpassed after several decades. His complete recordings of the Dvorák, Brahms, and Schubert symphonies still enjoy honorable places among the best versions committed to disc. The first Western recording of Kodály's *Háry János* (the complete opera) was made with the London Symphony under Kertész's direction. The Decca label coupling of Dvorák's *Requiem* and Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus* is another fitting tribute to a superb artist too soon departed.

In addition to Bartók, Kertész was an indefatigable champion of works by Stravinsky, Henze, and Britten. Britten's *Billy Budd* was first presented to German audiences under Kertész's baton and he directed the first performance of the *War Requiem* heard in Vienna. For Ravinia Festival audiences, Kertész directed the *War Requiem* with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra & Chorus shortly before his death. With soloists Phyllis Curtin, Robert Tear, and John Shirley-Quirk, the conductor's shattering interpretation left audience members limp.

DVORAK

Symphony No.7 in D Minor

István Kertész / London Symphony Orchestra



Many consider Antonín Dvorák's Symphony No. 7 in D minor, Op. 70, the pinnacle of his achievement as a composer. Indeed, never before had he risen to such a height, and one can make a formidable case that he never again did, the immense and just popularity of the "New World" Symphony notwithstanding. Dvorák had spent a full five years away from the symphonic domain when, in December 1884, he began plotting his course through the Symphony No. 7. The interval had been an important if not especially prolific one; the works of this period had been significant (for example the Piano Trio in F minor, Op. 65, the String Quartet No. 11 in C, Op. 61), and when the time came to compose the Symphony No. 7 Dvorák was prepared. The commission came from the London Philharmonic Society, to whose membership Dvorák had been elected in 1884.

The four-movement Classical plan was Dvorák's bread and butter as a composer. Here the movements are: Allegro maestoso, Poco Adagio, Vivace (the Scherzo), and Allegro.

A less likely main theme for a symphony than the wistful, lyric pianissimo idea offered by the violas and cellos at the opening of the first movement would be hard to come by. But it is not long before the

drooping pendant at the end of the melody is converted, by means of some characteristic Dvorák hemiolas, into something far more electrifying, and from that point the movement is off and running. The second theme, in B flat major and introduced by a rich rising chromatic passage in the violins and woodwinds, has the aspect of a carefree summer day to it. The slow movement begins simply, contentedly -- the clarinet providing an airy tune that hovers between the keys of B flat and F major. There is, as the movement gradually reveals itself, passion enough. The hemiola-ridden main tune of the Scherzo, which is probably the most famous movement in the symphony, draws us into an extraordinary and compelling realm in which vivacious rhythm and undeniable melancholy are made to walk hand-in-hand.

Prominent augmented seconds and an abundant use of the raised fourth scale degree provide the finale's principal theme and the music around it with a peculiar and subtly exotic pungency. A major becomes the launching pad for a fluffy second theme in the cellos. The assertive quarter note thrusts of the symphony's final bars manage to break through the wall of D minor into the adjacent field of D major, and the matter ends in a blaze of glory.

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Symphony No.7 in D Minor

István Kertész / London Symphony Orchestra

- 1 Allegro Maestoso 10:19
- 2 Poco Adagio 10:12
- 3 Scherzo Vivace - Poco Meno Mosso 7:20
- 4 Allegro 9:16

Recorded by Decca 5-6 Mar 1964 Kingsway Hall

Producer - Ray Minshull

Engineers Kenneth Wilkinson & James Lock



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