

A top conductor of large orchestral works of the late nineteenth century, Rafael Kubelik was born near Prague in 1914. The son of violinist Jan Kubelik (1880–1940), he studied violin, piano, composition, and conducting at the Prague Conservatory. He made his debut before the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra at age 19, and in 1939 became the music director of the National Opera in Brno, Czechoslovakia. In 1941, he became the music director of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, a post he held until 1948. In 1948, with the establishment of a Communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia, Kubelik left his homeland and became an exile for the next 40 years.

Kubelik's three years with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, beginning in 1950, were frustrating. A persuasive rather than a dictatorial figure and a diplomat rather than a martinet, he lacked the ability to control the orchestra. Additionally, Kubelik's musical sensibilities had been shaped in the early twentieth century rather than the late nineteenth, as had been the case with his immediate predecessors, and he programmed far too much modern music for the taste of critics and subscribers. Kubelik was fortunate that his appointment coincided with the orchestra making its first move into long-playing records for the Mercury label. Among his two dozen recordings with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra was a riveting performance of Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition and one of Smetana's My Fatherland. Ultimately the fit just wasn't right between Kubelik and the orchestra, and he gave up the appointment.

Kubelik served for three years, from 1955 through 1958, as music director of the Covent Garden Opera in London, where he conducted the British premieres of Janáček's Jenufa and Berlioz's Les troyens. From 1961 until 1979, he was music director of the Bavarian Radio Symphony in Munich, with which he also recorded extensively (for Deutsche Grammophon), and was the principal conductor of the Metropolitan Opera in New York during the 1973–1974 season as well. He was a most-welcomed guest conductor in Chicago on many occasions throughout his later career, appeared with virtually all of the world's major orchestras, and recorded extensively in England, America, and Germany. In 1973, he became a Swiss citizen.

Rafael Kubelik embodied a tradition of robust post-Romantic music-making that was ideally suited to the recording medium as well as the concert hall. He was celebrated as a master of rich orchestral color, which was brought out most vividly in the late Romantic and post-Romantic scores for which he was most popular. This included much of the Russian repertory and virtually all of the nationalist music of the era, especially the work of his fellow countrymen Antonin Dvořák, Leos Janáček, and Bedřich Smetana. He recorded the latter's *Má Vlast* at least four times on as many different labels, the last at a live performance in Prague during 1990 at a concert commemorating the liberation of the country from Communist rule released on the Supraphon label. The sheer number of his recordings that remain in print, and their equal distribution between the "historical" and modern sections of classical music departments, speaks volumes about his enduring popularity and the validity of his performances and interpretations. His complete Beethoven and Mahler cycles remained in print for many years. Although relatively little of his operatic work was preserved on record, the small number of these are also well-regarded, especially his *Rigoletto*.

With the fall of the Communist dictatorship, Kubelik, who had been intermittently ill for several years, returned to Czechoslovakia for the first time in four decades with the intention of resuming composing full-time. As it was, he had authored five operas, several symphonies, and various works for soloist and orchestra, vocal works, and chamber pieces.



Schumann

Symphony No. 1

Symphony No. 4

Rafael Kubelik conducts the
Berlin Philharmonic

Robert Schumann's popular appeal as one of the masters of mid-nineteenth century piano music has been injurious to his reputation in other genres. His string quartets are frequently ignored by both public and performers due to the oft-stated but ill-informed charge that they are little better than inflated piano transcriptions, and his four mature symphonies have suffered even longer and more painful periods of neglect for similar reasons. It has become fashionable to claim that, even in those passages where Schumann's ideas are more purely orchestral in conception, he lacked enough skill at instrumentation to realize those ideas as well as a better orchestrator might have. Consequently, many conductors have taken it upon themselves to "improve" Schumann's scoring, with results that vary from the extremely effective to the indefensible, and there has hardly been a twentieth century performance or recording entirely free of such alterations.

We can freely admit Schumann's inexperience as an orchestrator, and not take offense at the subtle modifications made to his scores by such well-intentioned musicians as George Szell. On the other hand, the wholesale re-writes by Gustav Mahler have the ultimate and very unfortunate effect of removing Schumann from his element altogether (as does his similar re-write of Beethoven's Ninth).

The first of the two charges leveled above is a different matter altogether, for these four works are by no means mere piano transcriptions. Schumann was obviously a fluent composer for the piano, and some pianistic traits and mannerisms are bound to sneak across from the one medium to the other (very few composers are immune to such "seeping" effects). This in no way, however, diminishes the impact that his wonderfully evocative, prototypically "Romantic" (in the original, mid-nineteenth century sense of the word) symphonies can have in skilled hands. A highly individual sense of a formal design, strikingly beautiful thematic and harmonic substance, and a history of influence on such later symphonists as Brahms and Tchaikovsky all recommend these musical gems to both audiences and musicians alike, who would do well to re-evaluate them on

their own terms, and not compare them to the works of later composers who clearly had different means and different goals.

Schumann's Symphony No.4 in D minor, Op. 120, although last by number, is hardly his final effort in the genre. It was, in fact, originally composed immediately following the completion of the First Symphony in 1841, and thus predates either the Second or the Third symphonies. Schumann, however, refrained from publishing the work until 1853, during which interval he undertook some revisions (principally in the area of orchestration, though the work's complexity would lead us to suspect that he continued to tinker with details for some time). The work is far and away the most formally innovative of the composer's four symphonies: the four movements, each structurally incomplete, are to be played without any break. Collectively, they form a single large-scale formal design. Significantly, Schumann considered calling the piece "Symphonic Fantasia"--no doubt wondering if such a creation were still a genuine symphony.

Symphony No. 1 in B-flat Major, Op. 38, original German title and byname Frühlingssinfonie, English byname Spring Symphony, symphony by German composer Robert Schumann that premiered on March 31, 1841, in Leipzig and was conducted by Schumann's friend Felix Mendelssohn. It is an intensely optimistic work and is the most frequently performed of Schumann's four symphonies.

Schumann's inspiration for this buoyant symphony, at least in part, was the poetry of the German writer Adolf Böttger, whose verses were popular with composers from Edvard Grieg to Richard Strauss for their imagery of spring-time. The symphony's first movement opens with a glorious brass fanfare that broadens into a majestic orchestral theme. There are gentle evening moods in the second movement, sprightly dances in the third, and an imaginative development of varied melodies in the fourth movement, which follows a sonata form.

Schumann

Symphony No. 1

Symphony No. 4

Rafael Kubelik conducts the Berlin Philharmonic

Symphony No.4 In D Minor, Op.120

1. Ziemlich langsam - Lebhaft 11:19
2. Romanze (Ziemlich langsam) 4:50
3. Scherzo. Lebhaft 5:53
4. Langsam - Lebhaft - Schneller - Presto 7:28

Symphony No.1 In B Flat, Op.38 - "Spring"

5. Andante un poco maestoso - Allegro molto vivace 11:26
6. Larghetto 6:42
7. Scherzo (Molto vivace) 5:53
8. Allegro animato e grazioso 7:078

Transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape
Recorded by Deutsche Grammophon 1963



For more info e-mail us:
admin@highdeftapetransfers.com
or visit our website:
www.highdeftapetransfers.com