

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 Jenůfa 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.



Robert Schumann

Symphony No. 2 in C, Op. 61

Mantfred Overture, Op. 115

Rafael Kubelik

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra

In the autumn of 1844 Clara moved the Schumann household to Dresden, where Robert recovered enough from a terrifying attack of nerves to complete the A minor Piano Concerto for her in July 1845. Soon thereafter he began thinking about a new symphony, which eventually became the third of his four, although published as No. 2. To fight the symptoms of syphilis, he steeped himself in Bach, out of which came several contrapuntal works for organ, pedal-piano, and conventional clavier. At last, on December 12, a sudden wave of inspiration lifted him so high that he sketched the first movement of a new C major Symphony in three days, had proceeded to the finale by Christmas Day, and on December 28 completed preliminary sketches. His tinnitus worsened, however, interfering with long-term concentration until February 12, 1846, when he began to orchestrate the blueprint. Schumann completed the scoring of Symphony No. 2 only 17 days before its Leipzig premiere in November, conducted by Felix Mendelssohn, and immediately after that added three trombones to existing parts for double winds, horns, and trumpets, string choir, and timpani.

As in the "Spring" First and D minor symphonies of 1841, he created a unifying motif, and gave this new motto theme to the brass in a deeply sonorous introduction (*Sostenuto assai*) to the sonata-structured opening movement. A masterful segue ushers in the craggy, edgy, *Allegro ma non troppo* -- "moody, capricious, refractory" music in Schumann's own words -- this, too, derived from the motto. The motto also underlies all three song sections of the ensuing Scherzo: *Allegro vivace*, which has two trio sections (as the "Spring" Symphony did): the first one charmingly bucolic, in G major; the other one lyrical, with an embedded theme based on Bach's name (B flat, A, C and B natural, which the Germans call H). This is followed by a tragically expressive *Adagio* in C minor, whose principal subject resembles the first trio sonata of Bach's Musical Offering. This is the only *Adagio* movement in Schumann's symphonic canon, verily a *cri de coeur*; he began a fugue midway but did not complete, much less develop it. The floodtide of melody swept everything before it.

Unable to work for several weeks after completing the *Adagio*, a "cured" Schumann took up the finale. The principal subject of his aptly marked *Allegro molto vivace* quits the sickroom in order to exercise out of doors. While he borrowed its second theme from the heartsick *Adagio*, he expurgated all traces of melancholy. The subsequent development of both themes ends quietly in C minor, whereupon the solo oboe quotes a melodic phrase from the last song of Beethoven's *To a Distant Beloved* cycle (whose text begins, "Then accept these songs"). This and the original motto combine in the celebratory coda of what is surely Schumann's symphonic Mount Rainier.

The Manfred Overture is one of Schumann's finest orchestral creations; it conveys very effectively the urgent despair of Byron's work. Three remarkable chords precede the pained, chromatic tune in the oboe and second violins. A somber texture is provided by the orchestra, here Schumann's frequently ineffective and superfluous doublings seem most appropriate, until the passion can be restrained no longer and a wild rout ensues. A few brief fragments of lyric thought in the major mode occasionally poke through -- how effective are such outbursts of hope against so grim and indefatigable a background! The energy is momentarily spent as we near the midpoint of the piece; chorale-like fragments in the brass and isolated woodwind chords receive a terse commentary from the lower strings. As the anguished pursuit continues, it is easy to see the marked influence that Schumann's imitative orchestral procedures had on Tchaikovsky. The underlying E flat tonality is firmly re-established by a long succession of E flat minor chords in the winds, against which an agitated violin figure (with that piquant raised fourth, a prominent feature throughout the work) finally runs out of energy as the initial oboe melody returns.

Schumann

Symphony No. 2 In C, Op.61

Manfred Overture, Op.115
Rafael Kubelik - Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra

Symphony No.2 In C, Op.61

1. Sostenuto Assai - Un Poco Più Vivace
Allegro Ma Non Troppo- Con Fuoco 11:43
 2. Scherzo (Allegro Vivace) 6:54
 3. Adagio Espressivo 9:21
 4. Allegro Molto Vivace 9:18
 5. Manfred Overture, Op.115 12:06
- Total Time: 49:22

Transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape
Recorded by Deutsche Grammophon 1964



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