

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 Antonín Dvořák, Leoš 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. 3 "Rhenish"

Rafael Kubelik conducts the  
Berlin Philharmonic

It has often been charged that Robert Schumann's orchestral works are little more than thinly-veiled transcriptions of musical thoughts that fall more naturally on the keyboard, and that he lacked the necessary skill to realize his purely orchestral ideas effectively. Largely due to musicians' popular acceptance of these criticisms, Schumann's four mature symphonies have suffered long periods of neglect. We can freely admit Schumann's inexperience as an orchestrator, and some pianistic traits and mannerisms are bound to sneak across in the works of such an accomplished composer for the keyboard (very few composers are immune to such "seeping" effects); however, this in no way diminishes the powerful impact that his wonderfully evocative, prototypically "Romantic" (in the original, mid-nineteenth century sense of the word) symphonic compositions can have in skilled hands. A highly individual sense of formal design, strikingly beautiful thematic and harmonic substance, and a powerful 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 "Rhenish" Symphony, the Symphony No. 3 in E flat major, Op. 97, is so called because it was written in the fall of 1850 during the composer's tenure as conductor at Düsseldorf on the famous Rhine river. In a letter to the publisher N. Simrock in 1851 Schumann claimed that the history and spirit of that noble river and its people were running through his mind as he composed the work. The Symphony was less successful at its premiere in February 1851 (under the composer's direction) than had his two previous symphonic premieres had been. Although third in number, the

"Rhenish" is actually Schumann's final entry in the genre, the forthcoming Symphony No. 4 in D minor, Op. 120, having been originally composed in 1841.

The heroic main theme of the opening *Lebhaft* is laced with hemiolas that transform its basic 3/4 time into larger bars of 3/2. A second theme in G minor is offered by the oboe and clarinet before being taken over by the violins. The astute listener will have noticed a keen similarity between the rhythmic outline of Schumann's main theme and that of the main theme to the opening movement of Johannes Brahms' Symphony No. 3 in F major. This similarity is enhanced even further during the transition to the second theme in the recapitulation, when the figure is played out with precisely the same intervallic content as the later Brahms melody -- just one example of the deep and abiding influence Schumann's music had on his younger associate. Schumann incorporates the jovial *Rheinweinlied* (Rhine-wine Song) into the Scherzo, which, as in the Second Symphony, appears as the second rather than the more traditional third movement. The solid C major foundation is shaken up briefly by the A minor Trio (although, rather stubbornly, the bass continues to putter around on low C). Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the "Rhenish" Symphony is the interpolation of an extra movement. Marked *Feierlich* (Solemn), the movement originally carried the inscription, "in the manner of an accompaniment to a solemn ceremony." The Finale is a robust outburst (marked, like the first movement, *Lebhaft*) which recalls some of the main theme from the fourth movement before plunging into a final burst of joyful E flat.

# Schumann

## Symphony No. 3 "Rhenish"

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1. Lebhaft 9:44
  2. Scherzo (Sehr mäßig) 6:05
  3. Nicht schnell 5:07
  4. Feierlich 6:00
  5. Lebhaft 6:01
- Total Time: 32:57

Recorded by Deutsche Grammophon 1964



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[admin@highdeftapetransfers.com](mailto:admin@highdeftapetransfers.com)  
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