

strict literal sense. Bound by the notes to a constant pitch, Horne exercises great freedom in matters of volume, weight, and timbre to unrestrainedly eloquent effect.

The whirling *canzonetta* "Se il vuol la mulinara" (reportedly Rossini's first composition) and *canzonetta spagnuola* "En medio a mis dolores," melodious to begin with, are heard with a profusion of embellishments that technically are nothing short of fabulous, and are made even more so by their air of sparkling spontaneity. The repeating turns in the Spanish selection are a special joy.

In two songs of leave-taking, "L'ultimo ricordo" (another item from the *Péchés*) and "Addio di Rossini," Horne distinguishes tellingly between the gloomy deathbed sentimentality of the first and the formulaic, if sincere, sentimentality of the second, as her searching imagination also finds gradations of sympathy and humor in the two pastoral songs, "La Passeggiata" and "La Pastorella," that round out the album.

Martin Katz, at the piano, is at all times a sensitive and resourceful accompanist, grand or intimate, commanding or discreet, as occasion requires. At times in the cantata, Horne's magnificence seems to cry out for the support of an orchestra, and Katz's part comes across as if it were a reduction from full score. Because it is not, these scattered moments do neither artist dishonor. After all, Rossini's first Joan, Mlle. Péliissier, had to settle for a piano in this case, too.

Matthew Gurewitsch

The Cunning Little Vixen. Leoš Janáček

<i>The forester:</i> Richard Novák	<i>Lapák:</i> Ivana Mířová
<i>His wife/The owl:</i> Helena Buldřová	<i>The rooster/The jay:</i> Libuše Domanínská
<i>The schoolmaster/The gnat:</i> Miroslav Frydlewicz	<i>Chochoška:</i> Božena Effenberková
<i>The parson/The badger:</i> Karel Průša	<i>The young vixen/The frog:</i> Marie Koucká
<i>Harášta:</i> Jaroslav Souček	<i>The cricket:</i> Irena Fillicňová
<i>Pásek:</i> Karel Hanuš	<i>The grasshopper:</i> Gabriela Krčková
<i>Bystrouška:</i> Magdaléna Hajóssyová	Czech Philharmonic Orchestra
<i>Pásková:</i> Drahomíra Tikalová	Czech Philharmonic Chorus
<i>The woodpecker:</i> Marie Mrázová	Kůlm Children's Chorus
<i>Goldskin:</i> Gabriela Beňačková-Čáponá	Václav Neumann, conductor
<i>Frantík:</i> Jiřina Marková	Pro Arte 2PAL-2012 (2 discs)
<i>Peptk:</i> Jarmila Sovobodová-Žilková	

Just after World War I and their country's newly gained independence, a number of Czechoslovakian artists became fascinated with the animal world as a model for studying the human struggle for survival and as a pretext for playing with new ideas, whether political, social, or strictly aesthetic. Under the inspiration of J. H. Faber's *La Vie des Insectes* and *Souvenirs Entomologiques*, pub-

lished in 1919, playwrights Josef and Karel Čapek used butterflies, beetles, and ants in their *Insect Play* to create an analogy to human life. The success of this play's first production in April 1922 undoubtedly encouraged the composer Leoš Janáček to take the same analogy as the subject of his next opera, *The Cunning Little Vixen* (*Přítahy Lišky Bystroušky*). Since moving to the Slovakian mountains in December 1921, Janáček had spoken of wanting "to sing the majesty of these mountains, . . . the love call of the songbirds and the shrieks of the birds of prey, . . . and the humming tremolo of a thousand insects" (Jaroslav Vogel, *Leoš Janáček* [London: Orbis Publishing, 1981], p. 268). When he found an interesting story by Těsnohládek, commissioned to accompany a set of animal illustrations in a newspaper to which he subscribed, Janáček set out constructing a libretto. By fall 1922 he was composing the music.

As in the Čapek play, the notion of eternal cyclicity or the constant regeneration of life lies at the basis of the parallelism between the two worlds, animal and human. But while the libretto traces the life of a vixen from its youth when it was caught by a forester, through its eventual escape, return to the forest and espousal of a fox, to its accidental death by gunshot, man is not merely a spectator in this world, as he is in the Čapek play. Scenes in the forest alternate with those at the lodge or the inn. The forester's intimate relationship with the animals leads him from desiring to conquer them to abandoning his gun and toward understanding them. With the appearance of the vixen's offspring in the last moments of the opera, the seemingly amoral animal world provides the hope that humans need in old age.

Musically this libretto gave Janáček the occasion not only to incorporate his notations of animal sounds but also to link the two worlds through artistic means. Repeated rhythmic and melodic patterns inspired by creatures such as the cricket and the frog allowed the composer to create a kind of dynamic stasis not unlike that of nature. By indicating that four singers should each perform two roles, one animal and one human, and by giving the pairs similar music, Janáček was able to build direct analogies between animals and humans.

The need for a delicately balanced orchestra and for clearly differentiated characterizations presents special problems for any performance, especially one destined for audio recording. In the recent second recording of *The Cunning Little Vixen* conducted by Václav Neumann, the performance of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra is significantly clearer, more precise, and more luxurious than that of the Prague National Theater Orchestra which first recorded the opera under Neumann's baton in the early 1960s. The strings handle the extreme registers with much more facility and present finer distinctions between light, crisp sections and more lyrical ones. Orchestra and singers often work in subtle duet, as during the vixen's description of her life to the fox, or in careful mutual reinforcement, as with the light, inquisitive tone given to the accompaniment of the fox when he appears on the scene. Although Neumann does not always perform the tempi exactly as marked in the score, he follows the frequent changes in tempo with great care.

The musical characterizations given by the singers on the second Neumann recording, however, sometimes lack the precision of those on his first recording. In most cases, the problem is rooted in the casting, rather than in the inherent quality of the voices. Whereas the children playing the animal roles have distinctly different voices on the older recording, the children on the newer one have rather homogeneous voices which blur the distinctions between the characters. Furthermore, in the dialogue between the dog Lapák and the vixen Bystrouška, the contrast between the mezzo voice of Ivana Mixová as the dog and the soprano voice of Magdaléna Hajóssyová as the vixen is much less striking than between the voices of Ludmila Hanzalíková and Hana Bohmová on the older recording, and so fails to underline the contrast between the domesticated animal and the more wild one. The use of Marie Koucká in two roles, the frog and the young vixen, exemplifies this problem of casting in its most acute state. When the frog and the young vixen engage in dialogue in the opening scene (an impossibility with only one singer in a staged performance), the lack of any differentiation in the voices undermines the calculated variety in the score. But, to be fair to Neumann, one must notice two possible reasons for this casting. First, the ambiguous dual characterization given by Koucká works very well in act 3 when, a few years later, the forester catches the frog's grandchild as he goes to grab an offspring of the vixen. The return of Koucká as the frog also musically reinforces the notion of regeneration at the end of the opera. Second, there are other dual roles in the opera, apparently intended by Janáček. Reinforcing musical parallels between certain animals and humans in the score, Neumann effectively casts the soprano Libuše Domanínská (who sang the fox in his first recording) as both the rooster and the jay, the contralto Helena Buldrová as the wife and the owl, the tenor Miroslav Frydlewicz as the schoolmaster and the gnat, and the bass Karel Průša as the parson and the badger.

But for the scholar and serious listener, the liability of this recording is its libretto insert. Unlike the previous Neumann recording, no explanatory text or synopsis accompanies this two-record set. Pro Arte only provides the listener with a cast of characters and an English translation of the libretto. With the record side changes not indicated in the text, and a homogeneous format which makes the changes of scene seem structurally part of the dialogue, the libretto is difficult to use. One wonders particularly why Pro Arte chose not to place the Czechoslovakian original beside the English, as it is in the insert of Neumann's first recording. With a line-by-line translation and the original side by side, the opera is much easier to follow and one has the opportunity to compare a literal English translation with the German one that accompanies the piano-vocal score. Because the German version by Max Brod is an interpretation rather than an exact translation and because it diverges in significant ways from the original in both style and meaning, the scholar will want to have access to the libretto that accompanies Neumann's first recording

even while listening to the second one. In some instances, the libretto accompanying the newer recording represents a more literally correct translation; however, the translation that comes with the older recording is usually more idiomatic. Moreover, only the older version occasionally mirrors the rhyme scheme contained in sections of the original Czechoslovakian.

Those with pronounced interest in Janáček recordings will also want to listen to another Supraphon recording of *The Cunning Little Vixen* made in 1972 under the direction of Bohumil Gregor, reportedly a disappointment in many respects, and a new London recording of the opera conducted by Charles Mackerras and featuring Lucia Popp as the vixen.

Jann Pasler

Boyarina Vera Sheloga. Rimsky-Korsakov

Vera Sheloga: Stefka Evstatieva

Nadczhda: Alexandrina Milcheva

Vlascerna: Stefka Mineva

Le Boyard Sheloga: Peter Bakardzhiev

Knjaz Tokmakov: Dimiter Stanchev

Orchestre National de la Radio Bulgare

Stoyan Angelov, conductor

Harmonia Mundi HM B 152 (1 disc)

Boyarina Vera Sheloga, completed in 1898, is not so much an independent work as it is the final page of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's thirty-year intermittent revision of his first opera, *The Maid of Pskov*. Although the composer sanctioned independent performances of *Vera Sheloga* in a note in the published score, even he seems to recognize its dependence on the earlier work by describing it not as an opera, but as a "musico-dramatic prologue." To gain a perspective on the piece, then, we must glance first at the history of Rimsky-Korsakov's work with Lev Mey's historical drama *The Maid of Pskov*.

The composer first turned to this play in March of 1866, when he set for voice and piano the lullaby that Vera Sheloga sings to her baby daughter Olga in the first act. Then in the winter of 1867–68, Balakirev and Mussorgsky suggested that he turn Mey's drama into an opera, and Rimsky-Korsakov quickly began work. He chose, however, not to set the first act of the play, adding instead an account of what we learn from it—that Olga, the heroine, is not the daughter of Sheloga's husband—to the opera's opening scene. This earliest version of *The Maid of Pskov* was completed in January of 1872 and was performed successfully at St. Petersburg's Maryinsky Theater exactly one year later.

Although *The Maid of Pskov* was successful in the theater, the composer grew dissatisfied with it as a result of the self-imposed musical studies that he had undertaken to correct his own technical ineptness. In 1877–78 he prepared a second version of *The Maid of Pskov*. Details concerning the changes intro-