



Sergei Prokofiev: Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution

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New discs coming out in...January and February 2018

The Russian Revolution, whose centenary was marked in various ways throughout 2017, has always been regarded with abhorrence, ambivalence, or jubilation. According to his autobiography, the composer Prokofiev initially 'welcomed (the February revolution) joyfully'; by the time he wrote Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution [audite 97754] his feelings may have been somewhat more conflicted, as Stalin's 'Great Terror' raged. However, after more than a decade living abroad, he had resettled in Moscow, and with artists in the country treading a tightrope at that time, any qualms he might have had about the regime were quashed, at least in public. Nevertheless, and despite setting texts by Marx, Lenin and Stalin, the monumental Cantata fell foul of the Committee for Artistic Affairs and was banned from being performed for not meeting the criteria of 'socialist realism', only eventually being premiered 1966.



ON RELEASE

NEW DISCS COMING OUT IN... JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2018



Edward Wickham and the Choir of St Catharine's College present the psalm settings of Claude Le Jeune

Troubled times form the backcloth of three releases early in 2018. A new CD by the Choir of St Catharine's College, Cambridge – **Mon Dieu me peit: Psalms of Claude Le Jeune**, being released on the Resonus label [RES 10206] – would never have come about had it not been for a heroic intervention 500 years ago. The Protestant Reformation in the 16th century unleashed civil unrest and wars, and Protestants living in Catholic countries were at best vulnerable, at worst deported or killed in massacres such as that in France on St Bartholomew's Day in 1572. So the Huguenot composer Claude Le Jeune (late 1520s-1600) might have thought twice

before writing a tract that was critical of the reactionary Catholic League governing Paris (where he was based for most of his working life), which then compelled him to flee the city when it was under siege in 1590. Stopped as he tried to leave by the St Denis gate, Le Jeune had with him manuscripts of various of his compositions, including the *Davidicorum*, 12 settings of psalm texts in ornate polyphony. According to the account by Marin Mersenne some years later, these were seized by guards and were about to be thrown onto a fire, when Le Jeune's travelling companion and fellow composer Jacques Maudt stepped in and persuaded the retainers of the music, allowing them to be repaid eight years later.

This account alone would be enough to whet the appetite of any musician, but their real interest lies in the substance of the music itself. St Catharine's director of music, Edward Wickham, explains: 'I came across these settings of the Genevian Psalter many years ago when I was the director of The Renaissance Singers. The large-scale setting of Psalm 46 was particularly striking and I have ever since had an ambition to record it and others from the collection.' In the CD booklet, Wickham describes the collection as descriptive and dramatic ... set not in the sober, unadorned fashion we expect of Calvinist worship, but in highly virtuosic polyphony ... The style is [akin to] that of the Italian madrigal and the French chanson of the late 16th century'. And how did the students of the Cambridge college respond to it? Wickham replies, 'The music is challenging for any group of singers, but I was gratified to watch the St Catharine's Choir members grow to love this music – so much so, that they created for themselves a consensuative Le Jeune T-shirt'. The Russian Revolution, whose centenary was marked in various ways throughout 2017, has always been regarded with abhorrence, ambivalence, or

jubilation. According to his autobiography, the composer Prokofiev initially 'welcomed [the February revolution] joyfully'; by the time he wrote **Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution** [Audite 97754] his feelings may have been somewhat more conflicted, as Stalin's 'Great Terror' raged. However, after more than a decade living abroad, he had resented it in Moscow, and with artists in the country treating a tightrope at that time, any qualms he might have had about the regime were quashed, at least in public. Nevertheless, and despite setting texts by Marx, Lenin and Stalin, the monumental Cantata fell foul of the Committee for Artistic Affairs and was banned from being performed for not meeting the criteria of 'socialist realism', only eventually being premiered in 1946. Sir Arthur Bliss was in the US when the second world war broke out, and remained there until 1941, when he returned to the UK to take up a post at the BBC. His **Beauties** [Chandos CHSA 5191] was a commission to mark the opening of the new Coventry Cathedral in 1962 after the original was destroyed during the second world war, though its first performance in the cathedral only came 30 years later. Though it depicts something of the violence of the cataclysmic event, it ultimately looks towards healing and reconciliation.

In organ releases, Stefan Engels rounds off his **Karg-Elert Complete Works** survey with vol. 15 on the Steinmayer organ in St Nidaros, Trondheim [Priority PRCD 1185]; two American organs are featured, played by **Renée Anne Louprette** [Actis APL 01609], and by Andrew Peters on **American Variations** [Regent REGCD 508]; and Andrizej Stodolko presents Baltic organ works [MDG 906 2048-6].

Renée Anne Louprette shows off a Mander organ at the Church of St Ignace Loyola, New York



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