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CD Review by Raymond Tuttle

SCRIABIN *The Poem of Ecstasy*. Symphony No. 2 • JoAnn Falletta, cond; Buffalo PO • NAXOS 8.574139 (59:35)

I was a little disappointed with the recording of Glière’s Symphony No. 3 (“Il’ya Muromets”) released by this team in 2014, partly because it did not sound particularly Russian. Here, they return with two similarly over-the-top, and similarly Russian, works by Scriabin. I don’t know if I’d say that these performances are any more Russian, but someone must have lit a fire under Falletta and her orchestra at the start of these recording sessions, because these are supercharged readings that can compete with any already on the market.

There is no dawdling here, and no stopping to smell the incense. *The Poem of Ecstasy* reaches orgasm in 19:15. This is almost exactly the same length as Pierre Monteux’s much-admired recording from decades ago, but most modern recordings take a minute or two longer. (Kitaenko, on Oehms, takes 22:59.) Falletta is excellent at pacing the music. Wave follows wave, and tension mounts to a point where one can barely stand it any longer. I believe that Scriabin meant to make listeners uncomfortable in this work—at least that is the impression that I get from this recording. The solo trumpet player is not named (on Monteux’s recording, it was the great William Vacchiano). Whoever they are, they throw themselves into the music, driving the excitement along with plenty of gleaming tone to spare.

The Symphony No. 2 is even fleeter, especially in the last movement, which I think is the fastest I’ve ever heard. Scriabin’s tempo marking is *Maestoso*, which generally is taken as an invitation to play this movement as bombastically as possible. This is *no maestoso*. That said, the bombast is delicious. This movement, but really the symphony overall, was an act of self-indulgence for the composer, and for listeners to appreciate it they probably have to be willing to meet Scriabin halfway by wallowing in its excesses. For a long time, my favorite recording was Muti’s with the Philadelphia Orchestra. I wouldn’t say that the Buffalonians play better, but their brass section comes off very well here, and Falletta, as in the *Poem*, moves from one sweaty climax to the next with passion and confidence. The Buffalo Philharmonic is hardly new to CDs, of course, but this CD could be an eye-opener to those who are unfamiliar with this orchestra. To promote civic pride, I think Buffalo’s city government should give a copy of this CD to every household within its borders.

By the way, speaking of the Buffalo Philharmonic, Lukas Foss recorded Sibelius’s *Four Legends of the Kalevala* with that ensemble c. 1970, and it was released by Nonesuch. That recording never made it to CD. It probably is too late for that now, but Foss’s Sibelius is so good that someone should bring it back into circulation. **Raymond Tuttle**

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