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Album Reviews

Jesús RUEDA
Symphony No. 3 'Luz'
Viaje imaginario (Imaginary Journey)
Asturias Symphony Orchestra (OSPA)
Maximiano Valdés

[RUEDA, J.: Sinfonia No. 3, "Luz" / Imaginary Journey \(Asturias Symphony, Valdes\)](#)

Naxos 8.572417

- [MusicWeb International, November 2010](#)
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Mark Sebastian Jordan

[MusicWeb International](#), November 2010

Recording of the Month

One quote from Spanish composer Jesús Rueda says more about his Symphony No. 3 than the rest of my review can: "I must admit, I like large orchestral forces, a sort of orgy of sound with multiple lines at play together; I'm attracted by dense and dazzling textures filled with colour and dynamism, rhythmic proliferations, and sound limits that lead to the edge of the abyss."

One can get a good idea about whether or not Rueda is likely to appeal from that statement. Perhaps I can elaborate a little more by saying that Rueda is something like a European cousin to American composer John Adams: a post-minimalist composer of tonal music, though extended tonalities and free use of dissonance for expressive purposes are strongly present. Or one could say that Rueda stands in relation to Philip Glass-style minimalism as Richard Strauss stood to Mendelssohn's romanticism. In both cases the latter composer took the basic style and exponentially increased all its elements, in every direction.

Rueda's Symphony No. 3 is subtitled "Luz" ("Light"), not so much as a focus but rather as a catalyst. The first four movements freely depict the traditional four elements, but Rueda evokes how light interacts with them. The first movement, "El fuego" ("Fire"), starts with massive mounds of brass chords, with strings and glockenspiel furiously flickering in sparks. Lest that sound like a description of Wagner's "Magic Fire Music" from *The Ring*, rest assured that Rueda's canvas is so visceral that Wagner's depiction seems quaint, almost dainty in comparison. And even John Adams rarely approaches the layered density Rueda explores.

In the second movement, "El agua" ("Water"), the tempo slightly relaxes, though remaining quick, and diatonic melodic strands show up, though in a very pointillistic, glistening orchestral garb. The sense of light playing on constantly changing watery surfaces is ever-present, like a modern day descendant of Dukas' *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*, yet the composer's layering means that there are also ominous happenings down in the depths, giving this music more than just dazzling surface allure. The movement is a set of variations ending with an astonishing passage for a brace of wood blocks and timpani glissandos, sounding for all the world like a shower of water droplets in a cave.

"La tierra" ("Earth") takes off with fast, motoric patterns in the strings. The precision demanded here by the composer is extreme, and the strings of the Asturias Symphony may have a few ragged edges, but what is far more important is that conductor Maximiano Valdés declines to slow down and play it safe. This performance takes risks, thus capturing the edgy feel Rueda requires. After reaching a glittering peak, the movement avalanches with long, slow trombone glissandos and even a siren (shades of Varèse!) into the calm of the fourth movement, "El aire" ("Air"). This is the first slow movement thus far in the work, mercifully offering some respite from the frenetic activity of the first three movements before building to its own exultant peak.

The play of light on the elements help point where this symphony is going, namely, "Hacia la luz" ("Toward the light"). Played continuous like the other movements, this finale opens with a sudden dizzying sense of space, with woodwinds offering keening, birdlike cries over an abyss. Slowly but surely, we begin to fall through layers of atmosphere with strange, colorful densities, until the exhilarating music pushes back up to a vertiginous climax, dissolving into a quiet resolution of string harmonics at the end. Truly a pulse-pounding voyage from Rueda, and one that deserves to be heard worldwide.

The makeweight for this still rather short disc is Rueda's earlier *Viaje imaginario* ("Imaginary Voyage"), subtitled 'Francisco Guerrero in memoriam,' in honor of Rueda's teacher. Rueda wrote the somber piece in 1998, almost ten years before finishing the symphony. For all its evident craft and sincerity, this Rueda voyage comes across as generic modernism when compared with the startling originality of the symphony. Perhaps a better filler would have been for someone to orchestrate Scriabin's obsessive piano tone poem *Vers la flamme* ("Toward the Flame"), which would fit nicely on a program with this symphony.

The Asturias Symphony's brass can have a few intonational strains, and the strings can get a shade wiry in places, but in music of such rude vitality, silky refinement would sound ludicrous. This impression of rough edges also comes in part from the detail disclosed by the aggressive, close-up recording. But the extra color is worth it. The all-consuming vision of Rueda's symphony is cathartic, and Valdés and his orchestra exult in it, making this another important release in the Spanish Classics series from Naxos.

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Allen Gimbel

[American Record Guide](#), November 2010

I reviewed a Col Legno disc of chamber music by Spaniard Jesus Rueda (b. 1961) in September/ October 2006; Naxos doesn't supply much background information on the composer in their booklet, and there isn't much on the net. We are told he studied with Francisco Guerrero, to whom the final piece on this program is dedicated. The Col Legno release (20208) tells us he studied with Luigi Nono in the 80s, but has since rejected old-fashioned Euro-avant-gardism and has been moving to an extremely dense postmodernist harmonic language that includes a dose of tonal and classical remembrance, but in a relentless, breathless expressive style.

His Third Symphony (2004–07), subtitled *Luz* (Light), is a big 43-minute tone poem on the Elements (Fire, Water, Earth, and Air, in that order), with a final movement called 'Towards the Light'. Holst seems to be hovering discreetly in the background, with his notions of orchestral spectacle put forth here with an expanded postmodern orchestral palette (in fact, III was actually intended as a supplement to *The Planets*). Rueda's language is a colorful, cinematic post-tonality, mostly blaringly loud, almost entirely harmonically conceived, and full of splashy orchestral color. The piece is essentially classical in its movement structure. Opening with what amounts to a brief introduction ('Fire'), II ('Water') breaks into a jagged dance-like motive that is developed intricately. It cooks, ending with a seething mass of wood percussion. III ('Earth') is a sizzling scherzo, with wildly angular developments. The movement ends with a sirenfilled climax and an organ-style chorale, attached with groggy descending slides. IV ('Air') is an Impressionist-like slow movement, with bells and chimes ringing out the morass. V ('Towards the Light') is an appropriately overbearing finale, with a dose of piano, bells, and harp, massively overlaid chaos, an exhausted leaden dance, and an organ-like denouement.

The program closes with *Imaginary Journey* (1998), a brief 8-minute tombeau for Rueda's teacher Guerrero in the manner of a funeral procession complete with church bells and low trombone weeping—and lots of inconsolable wailing. It makes for a fairly dispiriting conclusion.

Nevertheless, about the symphony, if you enjoy having your walls and skull vibrate, you won't want to miss this. It is an interesting entry into the contemporary symphonic arena and, though not for the timid, is worth investigating especially at the low price. The Asturias make a joyful noise.

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[Gapplegate Music Review](#), August 2010

I am always glad to get a chance to hear music that I might have missed had I not been doing this blog, especially when, like today, the music really catches my ear. Jesus Rueda (b. 1961) is a not-yet-old Spanish exponent of modern music. His Third Symphony *Luz* (Light) (2004–7) forms the centerpiece of a magnetizing new release (Naxos 8.572417) with the Asturias Symphony Orchestra conducted by Maximiano Valdes.

Rueda's symphony is an orgy of sound in five movements. The movements are titled "Fire," "Water," "Earth," "Air," and "Towards the Light." Rueda gets a big, dramatic, very colorful sound from the orchestra, and it is clear he has mastered the capabilities and sound colors to be had. It's exciting music, so much so that my wife paused in her daily course of chores to ask me "who is that?" as she listened. My wife is usually a good test of my review fare, since she can get a bit blasé with the constant bombardment of sound coming out of my music system.

And I must say my reaction was the same. This is a truly original symphonic voice. The fine performance ensures that we do not mistake that for something more eclectic. It brings out all the nuances of detail in a work that has plenty of that. It makes me want to hear more of his work. Highly recommended.

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Stephen Eddins

[Allmusic.com](#), August 2010

Jesús Rueda is one of the most energetic and productive Spanish composers to emerge in the late 20th century. This Naxos CD brings together two of his works, his 2007 Symphony No. 3 "Luz," and a 1998 tone poem, *Viaje imaginario* (Imaginary journey). The symphony, a ferociously energetic work, lasts over 40 minutes and is in five movements with the titles "Fire," "Water," "Earth," "Air," and "Towards the Light." Its first three movements have such a turbulent, relentless drive that the repose of the fourth comes as a huge relief. The fifth movement begins with quiet and builds in volume and intensity without ever quite producing the catharsis that the previous movements have set the listener up to expect. Rueda is clearly an exceptionally inventive composer; at every moment his fertile imagination is evident in the creative musical development and the orchestration...It's easy to get caught up in the visceral charge that he generates, and repeated listening reveals ever new fascinating details...*Imaginary Journey*, written in memory of the composer's teacher, Francisco Guerrero, is more persuasive because it is more focused in tone and direction. It is a dark work, a heartfelt lament, and Rueda conveys the desolation of loss with clarity and power. Maximiano Valdés and Asturias Symphony Orchestra are up to the challenge of Rueda's demanding scores, delivering committed and fully invested performances.

[BACK TO TOP](#) **David Denton**[David's Review Corner](#), July 2010

Born in 1961 Jesus Rueda is included in the list of leading Spanish composers of our time, his work in the field of piano music giving him international acclaim. The Third Symphony has had a large gestation period starting life in 2004, and though the sleeve proclaims this recording as the 'definitive version', it really should have been translated from the Spanish as the 'completed version', its previous concert performance being given with an incomplete third movement. It is in five movements - Fire, Water, Earth, Air and Towards the Light - the music leaning heavily towards atonality, though it is built from a world of tonal colours. At times brutal, but often expressed in subtle shades, there are few moments between. For those who inhabit the contemporary music scene, it is certainly not difficult to enjoy, the third section, Earth, being an entity that can be performed in concert to complement Holst's *The Planets*. It views a highly energised world where the mass of life strives to exist. The final movement is the most extended, the idea of peaks and voids providing a whole spectrum of inovative sounds. *Viaje imaginario* was composed in 1998 in memory of his mentor, Francisco Guerrero, who had died three months earlier. It is a score where you sense timelessness, the work drifting into nothingness. My admiration once again goes to the Asturias Symphony Orchestra with their Chilean conductor, Maximiano Valdes, their playing of very challenging music brimming with commitment, confidence and impact. The recording is equally outstanding.

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