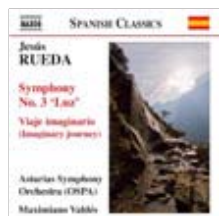


AUDIOPHILE AUDITION

JESUS RUEDA: Symphony No. 3 'Luz'; Viaje imaginario (Imaginary Journey) – Asturias Symphony Orchestra (OSPA)/ Maximiano Valdes - Naxos

The four elements work in overdrive in this symphony!



JESUS RUEDA: Symphony No. 3 'Luz'; Viaje imaginario (Imaginary Journey) – Asturias Symphony Orchestra (OSPA)/ Maximiano Valdes - Naxos 8.572417, 51:26 *:**

Born in Madrid in 1961, Jesús Rueda's output includes three symphonies, three string quartets, three chamber concertos, an opera, *Fragmento de Orpheus*, and a large and amount of piano music. Rueda's music is regularly played all over the world by prestigious orchestras, ensembles and musicians, including James MacMillan, the Arditti String Quartet, the Drumming percussion group and many others. He has served as Composer-in-Residence with the National Youth Orchestra of Spain and now holds a similar position with the Orquesta de Cadaqués, whose honorary president, Sir Neville Marriner, has commissioned *Elephant Skin* for orchestra. Together with Ananda Sukarlan he is a founding member of Musica Presente. Jesús Rueda is a professor of composition at the Conservatorio Superior de Música, Zaragoza, and also the artistic director of the prestigious Queen Sofia International Composition Contest (biographical information from Naxos)

Rueda is part of what has been a resurgence in classical composition in Spain and, like many of compatriots, his style is reflective of many other trends and sounds that have popped up over the last thirty years. The net effect is quite modernistic and this disc makes for an intriguing introduction to Rueda's music. I was not familiar with him until hearing this "Symphony #3", whose movements are titled *Fire, Water, Earth, Air* and *Toward the Light*. Certainly an eerie, metaphysical mood is established from the start with some high strings and whispering amidst the orchestra that gives way to a bristling ostinato figure in the strings and some wild chattering in the woodwinds. The movement is very propulsive and dependent on some repeated figures which flicker (like flames..) but is not quite minimalist in its construct. The *Fire* is short and gives way smoothly into the second movement, *Water*, which – for me – is a highlight of the piece. The sound is very diatonic and the composer indicates a melody treated in its own inversion, retrograde as well as retrograde inversion. The movement is punctuated by piano and wood percussion that does sound in spots like rain and thunder. This subsides but leads directly into *Earth*.

The *Earth* section opens with strings only and the tempo remains fast and frantic, ebbing temporarily into a somewhat jazzy wind interlude. Rueda indicates, in the package notes, that this movement can serve as an "Earth" movement right alongside – or into – Holst's *The Planets*. That might be a big stretch, stylistically. The *Air* is a calm after the nervous energy of the first three movements. There is a somewhat ordered chaos that disintegrates into a tranquil solo cello line with some slow, continuously shifting chord progressions until a solid bitonal coda is reached (briefly; almost reminiscent of Scriabin). A big brass and bells section acts as a bridge to *Toward the Light*, opening with a kind of "abyss" motive in the low strings and clarinets. Both the growing volume and expanding harmonies suggest an expanding light, first small, then all encompassing. The work ends in an almost mystical fashion.

The much shorter, "Imaginary Journey" in memory of Francisco Guerrero, Rueda's teacher, is very atmospheric and built on a sense of space. There is a consistent feel of "openness" in the orchestration and harmony which is punctuated by bursts of high winds, trumpet calls and unsettled strings. The "journey" seems to be created by textures and harmonies that get more and more complex, then regress into a near "nothingness." This is a creative, emotional work.

Rueda's music seems generally very complex. It is orchestrated quite thickly throughout; maybe even a bit gimmicky in spots (including a crank siren). However, the overall effect is good and the performances and recording are up to the usual high standards coming from Naxos. While probably not for everyone, I do recommend this to fans of big, modern orchestral music as well as anyone seeking to keep up with what is happening in parts of the globe that do not get a lot of attention here.

-- Daniel Coombs

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