

Jensen: Orchestral Works

This is Steven Haller territory, but Steven has not been well lately, so I will review it and dedicate the review to him.

This is Adolf Jensen, a German composer, not to be confused with a Danish composer with the same last name, whose music we have reviewed before. (“Jensen” could be German, Dutch, or Scandinavian.) Adolf was born in 1837 in what is now Kaliningrad (then Königsberg). Tausig appointed him to teach in his music school in Berlin, but in 1868 he moved to Dresden and spent his time composing. The last five years of his life were spent in Baden-Baden (I wouldn’t mind spending five years there myself), and he died there in 1879.

So he was very much a romantic German composer, a follower of Schumann (he planned to study with him, but Schumann died) and later Wagner and Liszt.

All of this music is pleasant and well crafted, but mostly not very memorable. The Wedding Music is attractive; it was written in Graz for two pianos, for a Berlin banker’s wedding. The excellent orchestration is by Reinhold Becker (1842–1924). Becker’s instrumentation is so good that you cannot imagine it was not by Jensen himself (especially after hearing the other pieces here).

On the Road to Emmaus is a scene every Christian knows from the gospel of Luke. It has great possibilities: a conversation with an unknown stranger who gradually reveals himself to be Jesus. The music is somewhat descriptive—at least of emotional states—and brilliantly instrumented. He dedicated it to Berlioz, who wrote him in response that “it is full of vitality and captivating fervor. Your instrumentations and modulation are masterly.” Gregorian elements and chorales are blended into it.

The opera excerpts are instrumental: the overture, the introduction to Act II, and an entertaining ballet. In fact, it is the ballet that I think Steven Haller would like best. It is bright and lively but not frivolous. It also has melodies that may very well stick in your mind. © 2015 American Record Guide

Donald R Vroon

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