

Karel Husa

Symphony No. 1, *Serenade, Landscapes, Mosaïques*

Symphony No. 1 (1953) (26:33)

1. I. Adagio misterioso—Allegro assai (11:39)

2. II. Grave. attacca:

III. Poco piu vivo. Con moto.

Maestoso (14:49)

Prague Symphony Orchestra, Karel Husa, conductor

Serenade (1963) for Woodwind Quintet with

Strings, Harp and Xylophone (14:27)

3. I. The Mountain (5:04)

4. II. The Night (4:33)

5. III. The Dance (4:39)

Foerster Woodwind Quintet; Prague

Symphony Orchestra; Karel Husa, conductor

Landscapes (1977) for Brass Quintet (18:33)

6. I. Northern Woods (3:16)

7. II. Northern Lakes (8:06)

8. III. Voyageurs (6:57)

Western Brass Quintet; (Donald Bullock,

Stephen Jones, trumpets; Connie Klausmeier,

horn; Russell Brown, trombone; Robert

Whaley, tuba)

9. *Mosaïques* (1961) for Orchestra (16:01)

Stockholm Radio Symphony Orchestra; Karel

Husa, conductor

Total playing time: 77:44

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Notes

Karel Husa's triumphant return to his native Czechoslovakia in February 1990 to conduct the orchestra version of his *Music for Prague*, was the culmination of a distinguished career as an American-based composer of international reputation. Though it had been forty-four years since he left his homeland, Husa's prodigious musical output since then has been infused by his ties, both spiritual and political, to Czechoslovakia. No work shows greater evidence of this than *Music for Prague* (1968) a distressing but ultimately hopeful memorial to the city's Russian invasion. It was originally scored for wind band and is perhaps Husa's most popular work. Humanitarian themes play an important role in other major Husa works including *Apotheosis of This Earth* (1970), *An American Te Deum* (1976) both for chorus and wind ensemble, and the ballet *The Trojan Women* (1980).

Born in Prague, in 1921, Husa studied music at the Prague Conservatory and Academy where his first composition teacher was Jaroslav Ridky. He left Czechoslovakia in 1946 on a scholarship from the French government to study in Paris where he remained until 1954. While in Paris, Husa studied composition with Boulanger and Honegger, and conducting with Eugène Bigot, Jean Fournet, and André Cluytens. Among the notable works of this period were his first two string quartets dating from 1948 and 1953 respectively. (His String Quartet No. 3 earned him the Pulitzer Prize in 1969.)

Though the Academy of Musical Arts in Prague awarded Husa his doctorate in 1947 while he was in Paris, the demands of his burgeoning career and the continual political upheavals in Czechoslovakia resulted in his prolonged state as an expatriate. Husa left Paris in 1954 to accept a faculty position at Cornell University which has remained his home base ever since, as he continues to pursue an active career as both conductor and composer.

Upon his arrival back in Prague in 1990 in an interview for the newsletter *Music News from Prague*, Husa commented on being an American citizen with Czech roots: "I belong to Czechoslovakia and to America. This double allegiance is in me and it will always be that way." As the compositions on this disc display, Husa's unique double allegiance is surely in his music as well.

Dating from the time of Husa's Paris residency is his Symphony No. 1 (1953). Although the work resembles a Classical symphony in its three-movement design, its construction is based more on contrasts and large designs than on traditional sonata form. Music writer Elliott W. Galkin points out the stylistic influences of Bartók in harmony and Honegger in rhythm and orchestration. "One of the most dramatic of Husa's effects," Galkin writes of the Symphony No. 1, "is his ability to pile one motive upon another almost incessantly, and to create hypnotically a long and sustained crescendo which builds to a climax of

overwhelming intensity.” The work was premiered in 1954 by the Belgian Radio and Television Orchestra conducted by Daniel Sternfeld.

Mosaïques for orchestra (1961) was commissioned by the Hamburg Radio Orchestra which gave its first performance in 1961 conducted by the composer. The work is structured in five sections, or mosaïques, each scored for different instrumental groupings of the orchestra and each exploring new and shared motivic ideas. Husa writes: “The work, in some parts, is written in a strict serial system and, in other parts, it is constructed more freely. Groupings of two, three, or four notes are used in a similar way as materials of different colors are used in constructing a mosaic. The rhythms as well as the dynamics are used freely at times, and at other times they are subordinated to the same serial system as are the pitches.”

Serenade for Woodwind Quintet with Stings, Harp and Xylophone (1963) was composed for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra which premiered the work in 1963 under conductor Peter Herman Adler. It is scored in three movements entitled “The Mountain,” “The Night,” and “The Dance,” though the composer points out that the titles are intended to be suggestive rather than programmatic. The melodic, conversational approach of the writing for the

winds has led critics to compare the work to character pieces of Mozart and other composers of previous eras.

The latest work on this disc, *Landscapes*, dates from 1977 when it was premiered by the Western Brass Quintet. Husa has said of the piece: “The work reflects our time and our view of majestic, mysterious nature embellished by travelers such as northern geese and spaceships exploring the universe.” The movements’ titles, though again not intended to be strictly programmatic, are nonetheless evocative in a rather Romantic sense. In his notes to the original album release, Donald Bullock said the first movement, a fanfare entitled “Northern Woods,” reflects the grandeur and majesty of North American forests. The second movement, “Northern Lakes,” uses an A-B-A song form wherein serenity is interrupted by violence and followed by an altered, tempered serenity. Of the third movement, Bullock writes: “‘Voyageurs’ is a perpetuum mobile. The composer indicated his interest in creating a single, continuously sustained crescendo on the order of Ravel’s *Bolero* or Honegger’s *Pacific 231*. By his ingenious use of mutes and special effects the composer is successful in creating the long voyage which anticipates with each passing measure the arrival at the final destination.”

—Joseph R. Dalton

Production Notes

Symphony No. 1 Produced by Carter Harman.
Recorded in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1970.
Published by Schott Music Corp. (BMI).

Serenade Produced by Carter Harman.
Recorded in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1970.
Published by A. Leduc, Paris (BMI).

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Landscapes Produced by Carter Harman.
Recorded by William Allgood at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1977.
Published by associated Music Publishers Inc. (BMI).
The original recording was made possible, in part, by Western Michigan University.

Mosaïques Executive Producers: David Hall and Carter Harman. Produced by C.G. Brodin, Sveriges Radio (Sweden).
Recorded by Karl-Otto Valentin, engineer at the Swedish Broadcasting Corp., in the concert hall of the old Academy of Music in Stockholm, Sweden on January 25, 1967.
Printed by Schott Music Corp. (BMI).

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