



DVOŘÁK Cello Concerto No. 2 in b, op. 104.¹ *Silent Woods*, op. 68.¹ *Serenade for Strings*, op. 22
• Stanislav Vavřínek, cond; ¹Petr Nouzovský (vc) • BRILLIANT 95696 (74:34)

For sheer listening pleasure, the programming of this disc—three of Dvořák’s most beautiful orchestral works—is inspired. This is the sort of album I’d almost expect to find aimed at the new-to-classical-music or casual-classical-music listener. But of course, it’s not that. The works themselves may fall favorably on the ear, but they’re not elevator music. Dvořák was blessed with a natural talent that seemed to come unbidden for spinning out instantly recognizable melodies of great beauty, charm, and lasting memorability. And these he usually managed to work into well-made compositions of excellent craftsmanship and strong form, although shaping and organizing his material didn’t always come as instinctively to him as did his muse for melody. In the three works on the present disc—*Silent Woods*, the B-Minor Cello Concerto, and the E-Major Serenade for Strings—we have Dvořák at his best, works in which he achieved a synthesis between melodic inspiration and structural integrity.

With the dozens of recordings of the concerto that one can choose from among the many great cello virtuosos that have put their stamp on it—from Casals, Piatigorsky, Feuermann, Rostropovich, Fournier, Leonard Rose, and János Starker, to more recent familiars such as Yo-Yo Ma, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Zuill Bailey, Heinrich Schiff, Steven Isserlis, Mischa Maisky, Jan Vogler, Johannes Moser, Christian Poltéra, and the list goes on—one oughtn’t be accused of dismissiveness for asking the same question Raymond Tuttle did in his review of Poltéra’s recording of the piece in 40:1. To wit: “Why play it? Everyone else has, and possibly better. Is it because it is expected of them? Would we look askance at a cellist who didn’t play Dvořák’s Cello Concerto or at a clarinetist who didn’t play Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto?”

The answer to that question, of course, lies in the “possibly better,” and as incredible as it may sound, I can say that Petr Nouzovský’s playing of the piece is indeed better than just about every performance of it I’ve heard. The cellist is on fire. This is a fast-paced, blazing, virile reading of the score. Nouzovský’s technique is awesome. Without slowing down, he sails through the most difficult passages, including the double-stops and the frightful run in octaves at 11:33 (even more challenging on a cello than it would be on a violin due to the stretch of the hand and fingers) that are as perfectly in tune as I’ve ever heard them. But not to worry; Nouzovský draws great beauty of tone from his 1921 Georg Rauer cello, and as a native Czech he identifies with the throbbing, dumka-like emotional heartbreak of the concerto’s *Adagio* movement. This still relatively young Czech cellist—he was born in 1982—is phenomenal. I’m surprised we haven’t heard more from him than we already have. If you’re looking for a new recording of Dvořák’s Cello Concerto, this is it—no need to ask Tuttle’s question.

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