

Antonio Janigro

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Johann Sebastian Bach

Suites for Cello

Antonio Janigro

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It is very fascinating to listen to Bach's Cello Suites interpreted by Antonio Janigro, at the present time, when everyone is increasingly leaning on what the English nicely called 'period informed performances'. When I was a "budding" cello student back in 1960s, overwhelmed by Janigro's Bach, I was not a least bit "period informed". At school nobody actually insisted on the purity of style - the sensibility of Romanticism was dominating the performance of works from all styles, often to the extent that it reminded me of a prank with Mona Lisa's moustache. Although, we were expected to show a higher degree of seriousness and depth when interpreting Bach, even his music was not spared from "romantic touch".

At that time, to grow-up on Janigro's Bach was the best thing that could happen to a young cellist striving to develop a good taste. Performances by the great master will not, however, reveal the characteristic, somewhat lighter and more dance-like articulation. This was the time when legato strokes were excessively used and tempi were generally slower, particularly affecting the sarabands, turning them sometimes into elegies. Also, neither Janigro nor the majority of his contemporaries used *scordatura* in the *Suite No. 5*, so that the characteristic timbre of the flattened A string was missing, and the chords often had to be adjusted to the capability of the standard tuned instrument. Despite of all that, his performance emanates artistic honesty and nobility - Janigro's omnipresent trademark, so familiar in his other interpretations. Plasticity of the linear polyphony is commendable, leading of voices is perfectly clear, the architecture of the work perfectly laid out, and most of all, the flawless intonation and beautiful cultivated tone. His ease and virtuosity are particularly pronounced in the *Suite No. 6*, where the cellists, playing on contemporary instruments, face a difficult challenge because of the missing high E string. (The suite was composed for five-stringed cello).

Nowadays listener cannot but admire and esteem Janigro's playing, and push aside any thoughts of orthodoxy of style, all the more given the fact that the recordings were made in mid 1950s. Every age brings its own way of interpretation, but what matters is that Janigro most certainly belonged to a small number of those exceptional and great artists who, at their time, knew the better way of introducing Bach to the general audience, long before the awareness of performance practices of Baroque music became a matter of major concern for all the interpreters.

Valter Dešpalj

JOSEPH HAYDN

Die Sieben Letzten Worte

Zagreb Soloists, Antonio Janigro

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The most sacred, and to some as well as to me, the most beloved symphony of Joseph Haydn, whose spiritual dimension was recognised just in 20th century, both by exquisite interpretations and courageous attempts of various composers, such as the one of Sofia Gubaidulina. This recording is exactly one of such significant revivals of *The Seven Last Words*, dating back to 1964, the age of dominance of various soloists and virtuosos, so the same formula was reasonably chosen for I Solisti di Zagreb as well to follow the trend. Antonio Janigro was leading the Zagreb Soloists during that time, time that we perceive today as the golden age of this ensemble. This is what this fascinating recording reveals at first listening. Although somewhat dry, it should not be looked at as a sequence of dramas of each of the seven individual, elegant movements because here Janigro, with the soloists, attempted the impossible: to obtain a Beethoven-like orchestra, which he most successfully achieved in the last movements *Lento alla breve*, and particularly in *Largo* in E-flat major. Mediterranean gesture of Renato Fasano or the warmth of the painful cantilena in Barenboim's interpretation of Bach are present here as well, but above all, the Mozartean uniformity of style supported by utmost fidelity to the score, resulting, thus, in an exciting insight into the tone colour, true, of a chamber orchestra, but with the power and density to be heard much later in Ludwig van Beethoven's "Seventh" or Franz Schubert's "Eight". How come that Haydn, instead of building the seven Golgothic musical images upon sacral, chamber-like musical performance, relied on the orchestral, symphonic sound. He was famous for his effort to expand and elaborate all the possibilities related to orchestral music and performance, yet, he had not achieve such a level of seriousness and polyphonic stability in any of his other one hundred symphonies. Written in 1801, eight years before his death, this mature piece is, if not *summa operi* of the inventor of the classical symphony, definitely a palette of extremely demanding musical studies for the cathedral service in Cadiz on the occasion of Good Friday. This may be the reason why Haydn did not care much about getting into the meaning of each individual sentence but was rather eager to spiritually articulate the words uttered by God himself in such a fateful moment for the entire mankind, to which end he employed everything he could, that is, the entire palette of the orchestra available to him at that time and in the immediate future according to his vision. As a counterpart to the "Creation", Janigro has surrendered the entire spiritual pilgrimage of the New Testament to his Soloists, which was not a mistake at all. Indeed, the Soloists sound here just like members of a symphonic orchestra, of the best one - the Vienna Symphony Orchestra.

Đurđa Otržan

