



'Prisma, Vol 3'

Alabaca Ascension^a **Brickman** Restoration^b
Faingold The Defiant Poet: Elegy in Memory
 of Yevgeny Yevtushenko^b **Huff** The Dark
 Glass Sinfonia^b **Morris** Songs of the Seasons^b
Orshansky Spring Fantasy^b **Vassdal** Prelude
 and Fugue^c

^aKarel Dohnal *c/* Janáček Philharmonic
 Orchestra / ^bRobert Kružík, ^bJiří Petrdlík
 Navona © NV6271 (67 • DDD)



Whereas previous instalments of Navona's mixed-composer 'Prisma' series have featured multiple performers, Vol 3 features just one orchestra, the Janáček Philharmonic in Ostrava, albeit with two conductors, Robert Kružík directing the items by Ahmed Alabaca and Audun Vassdal, Jiří Petrdlík conducting the remainder.

Taken together, the seven works form a rather fine and entertaining album. None of the composers is front-line, perhaps, but some of the works definitely deserve wide currency. Ahmed Alabaca's clarinet-and-orchestral *Ascension*, for instance, I could quite see enjoying popularity with its elegiac character (mourning the passing of a clarinettist friend of the composer's) and style close to Copland in the opening movement of his Clarinet Concerto. Sarah Wallin Huff's *The Dark Glass Sinfonia* (2017), on the other hand, is less heart-on-sleeve but no less involving a listen. There is much to enjoy, too, in Raisa Orshansky's *Spring Fantasy* and Craig Morris's engaging suite *Songs of the Seasons*, the four meteorologically themed movements of which describe, respectively, a 'Winter Snowfall', 'Spring Raindrops', 'Summer Waves' and 'Fall Colors'.

The most gripping work here is Noam Faingold's *The Defiant Poet*:

Elegy in Memory of Yevgeny Yevtushenko, commenced shortly after the poet's death in Tulsa (where Faingold also lives) in 2017 and completed that summer. The work is a tone poem inspired by some of the poet's most famous works and catches their air of protest ('Babi Yar', not least) compellingly. By contrast, Scott Brickman's *Restoration* is more rhetorical in form, without the same burning inner compulsion of Faingold's tribute, impressive though it sounds. Norwegian-born Audun Vassdal's *Prelude and Fugue* is more curious, a rather elusive, Blomdahlesque creation.

The performances are well rehearsed and well recorded for the most part, though Brickman's *Restoration* does sound a little tubthumping in places. Definitely worth exploring.

Guy Rickards

Heinz Hall, Pittsburgh

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 1971

Architect Rapp & Rapp

Capacity 2675

Resident ensemble Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Moving to Heinz Hall in 1971 was a big step forwards for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. It had previously performed at two venues, Carnegie Music Hall and the Syria Mosque, in the city's Oakland neighbourhood, which is home to two major universities and the Carnegie Museums. Heinz Hall, the orchestra's first real home, is in downtown Pittsburgh among corporate headquarters. The move also turned out to be the first step in the development of a downtown Cultural District.

The hall was a gift to the orchestra by the Howard Heinz Endowments. It was originally constructed in 1927 by the architectural firm of Rapp & Rapp as an opulent movie house called the Loew's Penn Theater, in French Court style with crystal chandeliers and marble staircase. The conversion of the old building to a concert hall was a three-year, \$10 million project led by Stotz, Hess, MacLachlan and Foster architects, with acoustical consultant Heinrich Keilholz. Music director William Steinberg conducted Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony at the first concert on September 10, 1971.

Heinz Hall was designed to be a big multi-purpose hall, suitable for staged shows as well as concerts. It hosted Pittsburgh Opera and Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre until 1987, when the Benedum Center opened one block away. It continues to present touring musicals and other shows.

Heinz Hall underwent a major renovation in the summer of 1995. The \$6.5 million project included a new orchestra shell, removable risers for the orchestra, a new butterfly ceiling



reflector and extensive refurbishment under the direction of architect Albert Filoni of the firm MacLachlan, Cornelius and Filoni, and acoustician Lawrence Kierkegaard. The risers were used only for the 1995-96 season, Lorin Maazel's last as music director.

Kierkegaard said the Symphony's decision to keep Heinz Hall as a multi-purpose venue limited acoustical improvement to 75 per cent of what he could have achieved for a dedicated concert hall. In some ways the most appealing seats are the least expensive, near the top of the balcony. There the sound is well blended, with glamorous string sonorities. Those placing a premium on presence, transparency and impact will prefer seats downstairs, towards the centre of the front third of the hall.

Heinz Hall will be renovated again in the summer of 2021, a \$3 million project for 50th anniversary of the hall's opening. It will include new entrances for greater accessibility, the addition of a fifth box office window, painting, gold-leafing and glazing, as well as backstage improvements to dressing rooms and conductors' suites. **Mark Kanny**