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CRITIC'S CHOICE



Prokofiev: Romeo and Juliet

Oslo Philharmonic/Vasily Petrenko
LAWO Classics LWC1105

When Vasily Petrenko took on the Oslo Philharmonic, I was surprised for two reasons. Firstly, wasn't it a bit too much the same as his Royal Liverpool Philharmonic – a good Northern European orchestra? And, would he find it difficult to reproduce the form that had allowed Mariss Jansons 30 years ago to turn the Oslo Philharmonic into one of Europe's most highly regarded bands. What was in it for Petrenko? Anyway, he is there, and on the evidence of this own label, complete *Romeo and Juliet*, recorded last November, doing well. He has a light touch with both the orchestra and the piece, and makes it sound really balletic throughout, without confining himself to tempi that dancers would find comfortable, and which makes ballet performances such drudgery for good conductors. It's interesting to compare his efforts with the two *Suites* recorded in Oslo by Mariss Jansons in January 1988 for EMI, with, fascinatingly, the same producer, John Fraser. Well done him, to have stayed the course for so long. It shows, that the orchestra is not that much different in quality now, than it was then. Despite Jansons being a top class orchestral trainer, much remains the same. Jansons is more obviously symphonic in his approach, but there are moments when I rather prefer Petrenko's more theatrical feel. Whilst this one will not displace either the Previn/LSO or Maazel/Cleveland versions, it is well worth considering.

David Mellor

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