



SHOSTAKOVICH

Symphonies Nos 1-3

Netherlands Radio Choir; Netherlands Philharmonic/Mark Wigglesworth

BIS SACD-1603 81 mins

BBC Music Direct £13.99

Shostakovich's quirky First Symphony was written as his graduation piece and remains a remarkable achievement for someone who completed its orchestration only two months short of his 19th birthday. Even so, I don't recall being gripped quite as much by this work as in this present recording by Mark Wigglesworth and his Netherlands forces. Their relish in the Symphony's vibrant kaleidoscope of characters and colours, all caught in a fine recording, hold your attention – even throughout passages that sound less than inspired in other hands. Wigglesworth and his musicians are alive to every inflection: for a good idea of the performance's qualities try the first movement, from the comically sinister *Wozzeck*-like theme which first sidles onto the stage, to the suave secondary flute theme. Throughout, we can hear not only the obvious influence of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, but also the urbane harmonies that recall both *Les six* (Honegger in particular)

BBC okt '12

and Martin. In other words, this Symphony is a very cosmopolitan work, predating both Socialist Realism and Shostakovich's discovery of Musorgsky and his own 'Russianness'. I have returned to this performance several times with great pleasure.

The following two Symphonies which generously fill this disc, composed in the approved revolutionary and 'democratic' (uplifting choral finale) Soviet style of the 1920s, are less inspired though at times wildly experimental. Be warned that the dynamic contrasts are fairly extreme, so if you turn up the volume to hear the Second Symphony's almost inaudible opening you will be fairly blasted by its final peroration. *Daniel Jaffe*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★

RECORDING ★★★★★

BACKGROUND TO...



George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Gershwin's career began as a teenager, working as a pianist for a

music publisher in New York's Tin Pan Alley. Taking up composing, he began to write songs and musicals, and his first Broadway show, *La, La Lucille*, opened before he was 21. After a failed attempt to study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger and Ravel, with the latter urging him to be a 'first-rate Gershwin' rather than a 'second-rate Ravel', he returned to America. Alongside his jazz-inspired concert-hall works, Gershwin was a prolific song composer, often collaborating with his lyricist brother Ira.