

## **The Rite of Spring & Mavra**

**Tristan Jakob-Hoff | Friday, July 14, 2006**

### **Stravinsky**

The Rite of Spring  
Mavra

Parasha – Maria Fontosh  
Mother – Ludmila Schemtschuk  
The Neighbour – Lilli Paasikivi  
Hussar – Valerij Serkin

Junge Deutsche Philharmonie [The Rite of Spring]  
Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra  
Peter Eötvös

The Rite of Spring recorded on 11 & 12 September 2004; Mavra recorded on 15-17 October 2003

BUDAPEST MUSIC CENTER  
BMC CD 118 61 minutes

Youth orchestras – like young conductors and young listeners – have always had a special affinity for The Rite of Spring. Growing up, I always perceived Stravinsky as the classical equivalent of a Johnny Rotten or Sid Vicious, with The Rite as a sort of pre-World War I “Never Mind the Bollocks”. That Stravinsky was a man of infinite refinement and good taste, who later turned away from the acrid harmonies and thumping rhythms of his most infamous masterpiece, is incidental to the point: The Rite of Spring was, and is, pure Rock ‘n’ Roll.

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So here, a little disappointingly, is a recording of Junge Deutsche Philharmonie giving The Rite a performance of infinite refinement and good taste, with nary a safety-pin or bovver-boot in sight. Peter Eötvös has clearly spent a great deal of effort ironing out the rougher edges, instead teaching his young charges every last nook and cranny of this score, so that what it lacks in anti-establishment rabble-rousing, it makes up for with meticulous attention to detail. There is some disturbingly accurate playing throughout from these precocious teens and twenty-somethings, and under Eötvös they uncover some previously unsuspected intricacies of articulation and phrasing, most clearly evident in the florid ‘Introduction’ to Part One. Eötvös’s approach is perfectly valid, of course – one imagines that Stravinsky himself would have approved – but one cannot help miss the excitement and sense of discovery present in performances by other, less consummate youth orchestras.

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Eötvös’s affinity for folk music is strongly evident in his account of The Rite, and he is even more in his element in the rarely heard “Mavra” (1921-22). Drawing liberally on the style – if not the substance – of traditional Russian folk-music, Stravinsky’s mini-opera is one of the great curiosities of his catalogue, somewhat reminiscent of “Les noces” in its melding of traditional and neo-classical elements. According to Zoltán Farkas’s informative booklet note, Stravinsky considered “Mavra” to be his most accomplished work, and it is certainly possessed of an impressive confidence and lightness of touch, not to mention sparkling wit.

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It positively bubbles over with exuberant good spirits, and Eötvös’s account (this time with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra) is sheer delight, with supremely Russian-sounding contributions from Maria Fontosh as Parasha and Valerij Serkin as The Hussar.

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- Budapest Music Center

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