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Review by Henry Fogel

TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No. 5 • Yuri Botnari, cond; Moscow PO • ROYAL MUSIC SOCIETY 10055 (46:55)

ArkivMusic lists nearly 140 recordings in print of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, and they cover a wide range of interpretive approaches. In my collection timings range from 41 to 52 minutes (and that doesn't count the outlier, Sergiu Celibidache at 57 minutes). A collector might wonder about the value of a new recording, other than documenting the work of a particular conductor and orchestra. However, it turns out that Yuri Botnari has unique ideas about this work and communicates those ideas very effectively.

Botnari studied with Gennady Rozhdestvensky and Yuri Simonov at the Moscow Conservatory, along with famed Russian pedagogue Ilya Mussin at the Leningrad Conservatory. His view of Tchaikovsky's music, as reported in other *Fanfare* reviews by Colin Clarke and Jerry Dubins, is predominantly lyrical and warm. The strings play with a rich tone and a long singing line. The brass is firm but rarely dominant or incisive. Accents tend to be rounded rather than crisp. One result of this approach is that when Botnari wants to put a dramatic exclamation point on a passage, it is doubly effective. In many ways this approach is the opposite of Yevgeny Mravinsky's Tchaikovsky, which is inflected with a razor-sharp bite. I am an enthusiastic fan of Mravinsky's Tchaikovsky, finding it brilliant and exciting, but I also love the beauty of what I hear from Botnari.

There is a grandeur to Botnari's long, arching phrases, particularly because he seems to inspire the orchestra to play the music as if the players are just discovering it. No phrase feels like a throwaway, even though these musicians must have played the Tchaikovsky Fifth many times over the years. At the end of the introduction to the first movement they achieve a *pianissimo* that never loses tonal body. That is followed by an utterly natural easing into the *Allegro con anima* that follows. All tempo adjustments are carefully judged and natural, without any sense of gear-shifting.

The second movement *Andante cantabile* receives as lyrically beautiful a performance as I've ever heard. Botnari's subtle application of rubato is quite affecting, the horn solo is very well played, and the strings sing out everything with tenderness and warmth. The third movement waltz is lilting and graceful without ever turning precious, and with particular attention to balances. Some conductors play the finale for maximum power and excitement. Botnari instead connects it to his overall concept. Often the brilliance of the Finale wipes away much of the melancholy that is an inherent part of this symphony's DNA. The result here is a more unified performance than we often get. The recorded sound is rich, warm, and well balanced. The program notes are not extensive, but for this music they don't need to be. This release was a real discovery for me. **Henry Fogel**



Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 5
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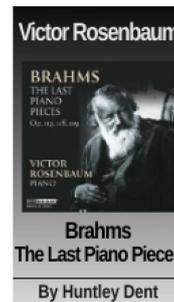
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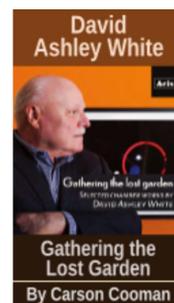
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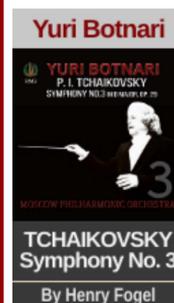
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