

JoAnn Falletta

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## CD of masterworks reflects Polish Spirit

By Tom Steels

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Music is not only an entertainment medium but also an educational one, something which JoAnn Falletta fully understands and promotes with inventive, adventurous and exploratory programming. This is clearly evidenced on a **new compact disc from the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra's own label, "Beau Fleuve Records" which finds the Maestro and orchestra in excellent form with perfect ensemble and bearing witness to the height of orchestral virtuosity which Ms. Falletta has achieved during her tenure with the BPO. If one is mindful of taking interest in classical music to a new level, this disc will do just that with a series of works under the banner "Polish Masterworks", a genre in which the BPO is perfectly at home.**

The names of the composers may not be acknowledgeable but the music is certainly very accessible. Poland has had a very long history politically, religiously, militarily and musically with the people suffering drastically even within recent memory but the flame of culture and nationalism could not be eradicated. The works on this disc are musical reflections of extremes of the Polish spirit with music that can pluck on the heartstrings, excite and astound all at the same time.

Szymanowski's "Concert Overture" could be subtitled "Szymanowski meets Richard Strauss" or vice-versa. Indeed other works in his output show the influence of Strauss and as the liner notes point out "Szymanowski felt deeply obliged to find a truly unique national voice." Nevertheless he does not seem to quite achieve this as did Dvorak and Smetana or even his compatriot Chopin. Even so this is exuberant, soaring music that lifts the spirit, played with great passion by the BPO musicians from pianissimo to "mega" forte resulting in most enjoyable music.

Of Wieniawski's two violin concertos, Michael Ludwig, BPO concertmaster plays the most popular of the two, the D Minor. Though not so well known as the concertos of Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and company - this

is music of a lyrical and melodious nature and is played in like manner by Mr. Ludwig with the Maestro and her colleagues accompanying in such a way as to highlight the warmth of both the solo and tutti strings. This is brought out marvelously in the second movement called "Romance," beautiful music which is Romantic by name and Romantic by nature, performed by Mr. Ludwig with truly heartfelt emotion. The final movement is not only "con fuoco" but also "a la Zingara" indicating "Gypsy Fire" - a "ravishing frolic" as the liner notes put it. Swirling passion is the order of the day with soloist and orchestra in a headlong dash to the finishing line. This is a live concert performance of the concerto with a well gauged balance between soloist and orchestra.

Witold Lutoslawski was the "grand old man" of Polish music and like Shostakovich often ran afoul of the communist authorities because of his music. At age five Lutoslawski's father was executed by the Bolsheviks because of his political activities but the Polish spirit of survival and ascendancy could not be defeated. His "Concerto for Orchestra" is fashioned in form like Bartok's which provided inspiration for the Polish composer. There is so much varied music in this work it is difficult to know where to begin. Ms. Falletta and the BPO open up what may be to many a new sound world with the first movement beginning rather ominously. Remembering that this is a concerto, that means it is a work written to showcase virtuosity and that is made patently obvious by a group of musicians clearly bound together with a love of the music they are performing - and it is an exemplary performance.

The second movement abounds with flighty, scintillating upper strings and playful woodwinds reminding at least this reviewer of "Mercury" from Holst's "Planets" with a very atmospheric percussion section drawing things to a close. Pizzicato Bass opens the last movement introducing a real tour de force with the BPO displaying its orchestral credentials in a most spectacular way, again as the liner notes say, "with lava melt sonorities." Even so the music presented here challenges the attention of the listener but with patience and openness **this is music that will transport the perseverer to new heights in music appreciation.** That applies to all the contents on this



marvelous disc including Karłowicz's "A Sad Tale" the closing item.

While the previous composers may be moderately or otherwise recognizable, Karłowicz may seem like the proverbial composer who "came in from the cold." Yet he also like Szymanowski was influenced by R. Strauss. The work was completed just a few weeks before his untimely death at age thirty three in a mountain climbing accident – itself a sad tale. Accordingly, the lower strings introduce a dirge like lament with the orchestra gaining the uplands of rejuvenation

(something like a mini "Tod und Verklärung") and then merging back in to darkened meditation. As played by the BPO and Ms. Falsetta it would be interesting to hear the other five tone poems in this series. **"Polish Masterworks" is recorded in sumptuous sound and from beginning to end the BPO is in top form, which along with the works recorded will not only entertain but also educate.**