



S. Rachmaninov: Symphony No. 2 & Caprice bohémien

aud 92.558

EAN: 4022143925589



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[Fanfare](#) (Peter J. Rabinowitz - 2007.03.01)

Arnold Kats, now in his early eighties, has been the conductor of the Novosibirsk Academic Symphony Orchestra since it was founded half a century ago—and, on the evidence here, he has built an assured ensemble palpably comfortable with the music at hand. Comfort, however, can easily skid into routine—and for all its merits, this performance of the Rachmaninoff Second sounds very much like business as usual. On the positive side, the rich sound of the strings is appropriate for the repertoire—and where they're given the main material, the performance can glow (try, as but one example, the cellos at rehearsal 10 in the first movement's transition into the development). Solo winds are often laudable, too—expressive, but judiciously avoiding schmaltz.

But these virtues are undermined by a blowzy and reticent brass contingent (there's no solidity to the climaxes) and, even more serious, by a lack of rhythmic point (the orchestra, for instance, doesn't generate much energy from the syncopations and rhythmic clashes in the second movement). In the end, more often than not it seems as if we're skimming over the music. With competition from conductors ranging, in interpretive viewpoint, from Golovanov through Stokowski on to Ashkenazy, Previn, and Slatkin, this performance simply doesn't make it.

Kats, by the way, drops the first movement repeat—which is nothing compared to the editorial hanky-panky in the rarely heard Capriccio, which is not only cut but also re-ordered. If only there were a little interpretive hanky-panky as well. But no, this is well-mannered to a fault. For those to whom such details matter, the recording was made in PCM 44.1 kHz/24 bit, and later converted to DSD; in 5.0 surround, there's a good sense of space, but there's not much detail to the timbres. A disappointment.