

Shostakovich: Hamlet and King Lear

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

signum Records are delighted to present the second recording on SignumClassics of the CBSO, under the direction of Mark Elder.

In his youth Shostakovich devoted much time and energy to composing for the theatre and the cinema, writing for an astonishing variety of movies, satires, the music-hall and the ballet.

he music for Nikolai Akimov's outrageous and scandalous production of Hamlet was composed in the winter of 1931 – 1932. Akimov had decided that tragedy was irrelevant to the modern Soviet audience, and therefore presented the play as a satirical farce in which the play was turned up-side-down, by reversing all the usual assumptions about the plot and how it should be acted. The alterations to Shakespeare's work are reflected in the titles of several of Shostakovich's numbers. He was asked to provide music for scenes that Shakespeare only refers to but which Akimov insisted on representing on stage, for example the feast where "funeral baked meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables". The overall character of Shostakovich's music is often abrasive and satirical, and flippant just where we would expect the music to be more serious. There are also some funny moments, with particular sharp parodies of various well-known musico-theatrical clichés.

n 1954 Kozintsev had also attempted to direct a staged version of Hamlet. For this occasion he decided to reuse music that Shostakovich had already written for him to use in a staged production of King Lear in 1941. All that Kozintsev asked Shostakovich to add for the 1954 Hamlet were a Gigue and a Finale, both of which are included on this recording as an appendix to the music for Akimov's 1932 production.

he music that Shostakovich wrote for Kozintsev's 1941 King Lear production inhabits a strange and transitional world, halfway between the bright and brilliant sarcasm of the music for Akimov's Hamlet of ten years earlier and the more soberly functional manner of his post-war theatrical music. Gone is most of the cheekiness, the fondness for the experimental and the grotesque. There is much in this often oppressively dark music that is characteristic of what was by now Shostakovich's public symphonic manner.

erhaps the most powerful and unusual part of the score is the bizarre cycle of Fool's songs, with which the Fool mocks the mistakes of his master, the King, in the course of the first three Acts. The music of these songs is as strange and quirky as the words they set. Taken as a whole, these ten songs make up a miniature cycle of sourly absurd, almost expressionistic outbursts for voice and orchestra. They seem to form a whole in themselves, standing apart from the rest of the incidental music to the play.



1 - 4. 5 - 9. 10 - 18. 19 - 26. 27 - 30.	Act IV	ction [9.27] [5.13] [10.03] [10.43] [9.30]
31. 32.	<u>Hamlet: 1954 Production</u> Gigue Finale	[1.37] [1.29]
33. 34.	King Lear Op. 58a: 1941 Production Prelude and Cordelia's ballad The return from the hunt	[4.44] [0.49]
35.	The Fool's ten songs i) 1. He Who Decides ii) 2. Fools had ne'er less grace in a year	[0.25] [0.56]
36.	iii)3. He that keeps nor crust nor crumb i) 4. The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long	
37.	ii) 5. Father's that wear rags i) 6. When priests are more in word than matter ii) 7. A fox when one has caught her	[0.57]
38.	iii) 8. The cod piece that will house i) 9. He that has and a tiny little wit	[0.49]
39. 40. 41. 42. 43.	ii) 10. That stir which serves and seeks for gain Finale of Act I The approach of the storm The scene on the heath The blinding of Gloucester i). The military encampment	[2.03] [1.25] [1.29] [2.03] [0.59] [1.37]
44.	ii) Fanfares March	[1.08] [2.09]

Total running time: [73.03]

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