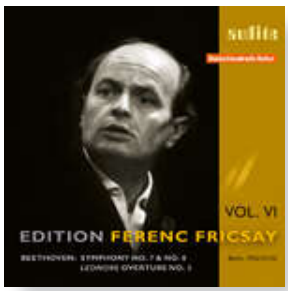

Edition Ferenc Fricsay (VI) – L. v. Beethoven: Symphonies No. 7 & No. 8, Leonore Ouverture No. 3

aud 95.593

EAN: 4022143955937

Fanfare (Christopher Abbot - 01.05.2009)

These recordings were made between 1952 (Lenore) and 1954 (No. 8) with the RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) orchestra under studio conditions in the Jesus-Christus-Kirche, home to Karajan's first stereo Beethoven cycle for DG a decade later. A recording of the Overture appeared on disc as part of an EMI Fricsay collection reviewed by James Miller in 26:2, but I believe it was a live transcription rather than the studio version heard here. The Audite engineers have done a very creditable job, providing a clean-sounding remaster with plenty of instrumental detailing—the winds in the Presto from No. 7, for example; the sound is on the bright side, but there is quite adequate bass as well.

The performance of the Seventh is impressive, with little of the "measured, weighty approach" that Miller detected in Fricsay's performance of the "Eroica." Tempos aren't quite up to those supported by the latest research, but the only other remnants of old-school Beethoven interpretation that some (like me) will find objectionable are the omission of repeats in the first movement Vivace and in the fourth movement Allegro con brio. Those cuts aside, this is an enjoyable, spirited performance, with a convincingly fluid Allegretto and a rollicking, boisterous Presto.

As annotator Friedrich Sprondel writes, "Fricsay moves his performance of the Eighth towards the Seventh," mostly by investing the first and last movements with a four-square deliberateness, and presenting the Eighth as the logical if slightly anachronistic bridge between the Seventh and the majestic Ninth. Absent the kind of light-textured, energetic reading more regularly heard now, this Eighth becomes monotonous, a kind of lumbering pixie trying to impress with its nimble footwork. The orchestra is impressive, however, and can't be faulted for whatever disappointment the performance produces.

The recording of the Lenore Overture shows its age more than the symphonies, with copious tape hiss and exceedingly thin-sounding brass. This is a dramatically convincing (if occasionally slow-paced) performance, however, evidence of Fricsay's years in the opera house (where he programmed the overture at the end of the opera as a kind of "dramatic résumé").

Aficionados of Ferenc Fricsay will want this disc; I can happily recommend it to those listeners interested in postwar Beethoven and high-quality mono-era recordings.

»audite« Ludger Böckenhoff • Tel.: +49 (0)5231-870320 • Fax: +49 (0)5231-870321 • info@audite.de • www.audite.de