



Franz Schubert: Lieder Collection

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Fanfare (Burton Rothleder - 01.05.2008)

This is a recording made from a radio broadcast in Cologne in 1954. The then-new discovery, baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, at age 29 performs Schubert Lieder accompanied by pianists who are very competent but are undistinguished when compared with pianists with whom Fischer-Dieskau collaborated in later years. Fischer-Dieskau's voice is magnificent and youthful, and, surprisingly, interpretively mature. And, no surprise, he was yet to reach his prime.

The sound quality of this monaural recording does not do the piano justice, resulting in a muddy, slightly blurry sound. The vocal sound, however, has the clarity and presence of a modern recording without, of course, the stereo effect.

There are many paths that I, as a reviewer, can take, so let me choose to compare the 29-year-old Fischer-Dieskau and his very competent accompanists with the 57-year-old Fischer-Dieskau—most mature but a bit past his vocal prime—and his musical partner, Alfred Brendel, who serves not as a mere accompanist but as a supreme Schubert keyboard interpreter of unsurpassed pianistic talent. This is a comparison most conveniently made for the six Schwanengesang songs. In general, the more mature Fischer-Dieskau is less impetuous and less willing to sacrifice vocal quality slightly for musical and poetic expressiveness than his younger self. For example, in Der Atlas on this CD there are sacrifices of pitch for drama in a few spots that you don't find in Fischer-Dieskau's later collaboration with Alfred Brendel.

The listener has a unique opportunity here to examine the difference between a pianist of Weissenborn's very significant abilities and Brendel's astonishing abilities. It's unique because pianists like Weissenborn don't usually record sonatas and concertos to enable such a comparison. I cite three examples. The forte-fortissimos and sforzandos, and their contrasting adjacent measures, in Der Atlas are played exactly so by Weissenborn, but are slightly exaggerated by Brendel—just enough to make them much more effective without ever sacrificing musicality. The diminished sevenths that pervade Die Stadt sound commonplace at Weissenborn's fingers but are positively eerie at Brendel's. I can't explain how Brendel accomplishes this, because at my fingers they would sound like exercises, or worse. Weissenborn's piano in Die Taubenpost (not numbered "14" in this CD for reasons rooted in editorial history) merely accompanies Fischer-Dieskau, whereas Brendel's piano sings along with the singer. In sum, Brendel takes many chances and almost always wins, and that condition applies to all of the greatest performers.

The additional eight Lieder cover a variety of styles that represent Schubert's Lied composition style. Among these styles are the lyric found in An die Musik, the declamatory (which I personally do not like) found in An Schwager Kronos, and the expressive and dramatic found in the great Erlkönig. In the latter, Fischer-Dieskau

very effectively and smoothly assumes the role of der Vater and that of der Sohn where they alternately sing their parts.

This is a highly recommended disc for Schubertians and for German Lied fanciers. Where in a Venn diagram these two categories intersect for you, if you don't own this disc you are missing a chance of a lifetime.

