



Edition Ferenc Fricsay (V) – J. Strauss: Die Fledermaus

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Gramophone (Andrew Lamb - 01.12.2008)

GRAMOPHONE

Superb soloists and sense of ensemble – Fricsay's Fledermaus truly takes flight

The history of complete Fledermaus recordings post-WW2 is generally considered to begin with the 1950 Decca recording with Clemens Krauss conducting the VPO. This Fricsay version, though, predates it, having been recorded for West Berlin Radio at the Titania Palast in November 1949. It emerged from radio vaults onto CD in 1995 under the DG imprint. It has latterly appeared also in Membran's operetta series, and it now appears in this new transfer in Audite's Ferenc Fricsay Edition.

Its currency is fully deserved. Fricsay was a fine (and prolific) conductor of Johann Strauss, and his roots were, after all, as much on the Danube as Krauss's. If his Fledermaus Overture opens more soberly than some other versions, that serves merely to emphasise the excitement of the final accelerando. Throughout, the inflections that are so essential to a truly idiomatic Fledermaus come utterly naturally.

Though it will rule out the recording as a first choice for today, the sound quality is a good deal fuller than that of the Krauss version. There's the advantage of dialogue and sound effects too. Certainly the recording is a must for admirers not only of Fricsay but also of great vocalists of the past. It comes, moreover, from an era when singers knew their place. By contrast with today's recordings featuring international singers jetting in from around the world, this is essentially an ensemble production, showcasing leading Berlin singers of the time as much as the Krauss recording does Vienna singers. Peter Anders was a lyric tenor of immense grace, his career tragically cut short by a car accident in 1954. His Rosalinde is the young Anny Schlemm – only 22 years old, still a soprano, and wonderfully fresh-voiced. There's the elegant Helmut Krebs, too, as Alfred. Best of all, perhaps, is Rita Streich, as sprightly an Adele as one could expect to find.

Even for those already blessed with a collection of Fledermäuse, this is not a version to be ignored. The expert remastering is by Ludger Böckenhoff, who also offers online at www.audite.de a fascinating commentary on the recording.