



Herbert von Karajan - The Early Lucerne Years

aud 21.464

EAN: 4022143214645



Gramophone (01.12.2023)

GRAMOPHONE Box-Set Round-up

Rob Cowan revisits great recordings of the past from four conductors and a pianist

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Having already released its complete **Otto Klemperer** recordings (excepting his Beethoven Ninth and some Mahler with voices – 10/23), Warner Classics has followed up with a second volume centring on opera and sacred works. There's also a typically rigorous Jon Tolansky documentary, *Otto Klemperer: An Opera Staircase*, involving commentaries from Nicolaï Gold, John Dolson, Siva Ole and the like, as well as copious musical extracts. The opera inclusions are headed by what must surely be one of the most splendidly beautiful recordings of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* ever made, a Savi Raj Guld production taped at London's Kingsway Hall in 1966 with a cast including Gold, Gundula Janowitz, Walter Berry, Lucia Popp, Gottlob Frick, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Christa Ludwig. To hear the glorious Janowitz sing Pamina's aria 'Ach, ich fühl's' in such serene orchestral surroundings is a blissful experience. The remaining Mozart operas include a *Das Götterweib* from 1966 with Nicolaï Ghiturov and Christa Ludwig. Tim Ashley and Neil Fisher revisited this recording for 'Classics Reconsidered' (4/21), NF rounding up with the words 'It's hard to think of any conductor today who could impress his own vision across an opera with as much conviction as Klemperer does. He casts a long shadow, and the recording should absolutely be considered a classic for that achievement.' The other Mozart operas (*Così fan tutte* and *Le nozze di Figaro*) were recorded somewhat later, and although well cast, tend towards slow tempos.

A 1968 Wagner *Flying Dutchman*, although memorable, is less fiery than a live Royal Festival Hall performance given at around the same time and released on CD by Testament (10/08). Ditto Beethoven's *Fidelio*, where Klemperer preferred his Covent Garden cast to the one settled on for this generally marvellous (and far

better-engineered) Walter Legge stereo production. Jon Vickers's Florstan being a highlight. Don't miss in both, I'd say! I was especially taken with a 1969 account of *Die Walküre's* Act 1 and Wotan's Farewell with Helga Dernesch (Siegfried), William Cocheran (Siegfried) and Hans Sotin (Hunding).

As to the sacred items, it's worth noting that the Christian convert Klemperer remained a practising Roman Catholic until 1967, when he left the faith and returned to Judaism. His towering renditions of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, Handel's *Messiah*, Beethoven's *Missa solenne*, Brahms's *German Requiem* and a superb disc of choruses from the B minor Mass (including an inaudible rendition of the *Sanctus*) all predate his conversion, whereas an elevated account of the complete B minor Mass (music that Klemperer considered the greatest ever written) dates from the year of his re-conversion. Put briefly, Klemperer's way with those mighty spiritual narratives, as part of between austerity and spiritual empathy, summons the aura of Old Testament prophets, specific damnation being, in context, a largely irrelevant issue. If you seek evidence of just how good they are, try 'Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras' from the *German Requiem*, with its loudly ringing horns – magnificent. The refurbishments, by the way, are superb.

A softer option for the Bach works can be found in Erato's *Bach: The Great Sacred Works*, featuring some distinguished soloists (Felicity Palmer, Kurt Equiluz, Werner Krenn, Anthony Rolfe Johnson, Barbara Schickl and others), Ensemble Vocal et Instrumental de Lausanne and the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra under **Michel Corbois**, a 10-disc extraction from 'The Complete Erato Recordings: Baroque and Renaissance Eras' (74 CDs on Erato, 12/22). By way of example, not up 6'5" compared with Klemperer's 11'48", but

the tone is still affectingly reverential. These are considered performances, nearly always transparent, with varied tempos (sometimes sprightly, sometimes not) and devotional in spirit. We've offered the two great Passions, the B minor Mass, *Christmas Oratorio*, *Magnificat* (in D) and *Cantata No 187*.

Like Klemperer, the American conductor **Levin Maazel** looked no compromise when it came to his career. In 1989, expecting to become successor to Herbert von Karajan as chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, he suddenly and publicly severed all connections with the orchestra when it was announced that Claudio Abbado was to take over. Luckily for us, Maazel had already made a number of remarkable recordings with the BPO for DG, including Rachmaninov's three symphonies, *Symphonic Dances* and other orchestral works (1981-84), readings distinguished by seamless lines and some glorious playing. All are gathered together as part of a handsome 39-disc set of Maazel's complete recordings for DG.

Brahms's *Concerto for Orchestra* and *Fare Pizzaro* (1979) are similarly stupendous and charged with atmosphere, as is Zemlinsky's *Lyrical Symphony* (with Julia Varady and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau), but for me the high points in Maazel's BPO legacy are the early recordings, starting with the 1957 mono tapes of *Romeo and Juliet* music by Berlioz, Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev, the *Berlioz* (taken from his *symphonie dramatique*) electrifying in the extreme. And what playing! My only quibble is, why omit so sleepily with *Romeo* at the *Temps of the Capulets*? Surely Maazel of all people (who went on to prepare a *King without Words* sequence with the BPO for Telarc) could have adapted the majestic closing 'Oath of Reconciliation' for orchestra without voices. Still, what we do have is dazzling. Schubert symphonies, too (stretching from No 2



Otto Klemperer projects a singular vision in his recordings of operatic and sacred works

to the *Urfürst*), the Fourth a particular highlight, its opening *Adagio molto* like a Gainsborough scenic masterpiece reflected in sound. There are five 'New Year's Day' Concerts with the Vienna Philharmonic, all of them stylishly turned. Maazel was a master of the Viennese 'lilt' and, also with the VPO, Dvořák's *Symphonies Nos 7-9* (good rather than exceptional). Maazel's French legacy includes Mozart's first and last symphonies and unforgettably poignant (and at times humorous) accounts of Ravel's mini-opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges* and *L'heure espagnole* with the French National Radio Orchestra (recorded in 1960 and 1965 respectively). A large-scale operatic masterpiece is Verdi's *Luis Miller* (Covent Garden with Plácido Domingo), an excellent performance from 1979, and there are also works by Beethoven, Brahms, Falla, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Massenet, Respighi, Rimsky-Korsakov, Richard Strauss and Stravinsky.

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Ward Marston's catalogue of freshly discovered or rediscovered musicians from the past is impressive by any standards, but with a three-disc set devoted to (mostly) live recitals featuring the Austrian-American pianist **Robert Goldsand** (1911-91), a Moriz Rosenthal pupil who summed his performing career at the age of 10, he scores even higher than usual. The recording dates are in the main between 1956 and 1978, with one or two memorable commercially taped items thrown in for good measure (in Górkowsky's *Symphonic Metamorphosis* on 'Die Fledermaus', taken from a 1964 Decca LP, and an abridged version of Rachmaninov's *Variations on a Theme of Chopin* as recorded by the Concert Hall Society in 1952). But it's the live items that make the biggest impression, Liszt's *Grande Valse de Paganini* a highlight, recorded in New York in 1956, 'Capriccio' all dynamism and filigree, 'La chaise' with its pristine turns of phrase and immaculate trills, and a dazzlingly variegated 'Theme and Variations' warranting particular praise. Goldsand was a formidable virtuoso, yet his playing is often made up of the subtlest components, even in Rosenthal's spectacular reworking of Chopin's 'Minute' Waltz or Górkowsky's ingenious 'Ballade' (the Studies Op 10 No 5 and Op 25 No 9 combined), both of which emerge more as music than as show-off stunts. By contrast, Clement's *Sonata in F sharp minor*, Op 25 No 5, is a model of finely sculpted classicism whereas Camargo Guarnieri's *Sonata No 1* in the G Clef (published in 1948) kicks its heels in the manner of Villa-Lobos. As to the rest, we've offered Albinetti, Handel, more Chopin (principally in the originals), Prokofiev, Rachmaninov, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann and, to close, a warmly uplifting account of 'Jesus, son of man's' deicting' in Myra Hess's arrangement. It's an enticing introduction to a musician's music, and the transfers (by Seth Winson) are, for the most part, first-rate. So are Donald Manfell's notes. ●

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