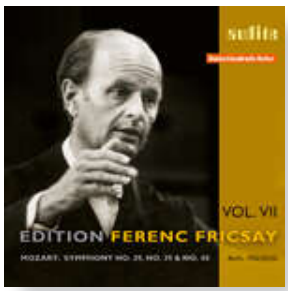

Edition Ferenc Fricsay (VII) – W.A. Mozart: Symphony No. 29, No. 39 & No. 40

aud 95.596

EAN: 4022143955968

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Fanfare (Mortimer H. Frank - 2009.07.01)

Many musicians, whether conductors, soloists, or chamber groups, often feel more comfortable—and do their best work—in front of an audience rather than in the recording studio. But you would never know it from this release. The two live performances featured here (Nos. 29 and 40) can best be described, respectively, as deadly and deadlier. This is as strange an account of 40 as I have ever heard. Most striking is the first movement, an Allegro molto in “two.” Fricsay leads it as Allegretto moderato in “four.” It’s almost as if he were reacting against Furtwängler’s 1948 recording, which, indeed offered a refreshingly fleet two-to-the bar tempo. Only in the last two movements do things come (comparatively) to life. If No. 29 is not quite so extreme in its heavy-handedness, it nonetheless lacks the buoyancy that the music demands.

But in No. 39, the one work here recorded in the studio (in 1950), Fricsay gave a performance as fine as any I know, one in which the music’s contrasts of lyric gentleness and affirmative thrust are conveyed superbly. And the instrumental balance is first-rate, winds cutting through the texture to clarify significant detail often lost in recordings of the period. According to the insert notes, it was made for Deutsche Grammophon. Oddly, however, I could find no reference to it either in old Schwann catalogs or in WERM, which suggests that it may never have been released in English-speaking countries. It is certainly the kind of Mozart one would expect from Fricsay, who left justly admired recordings of the composer’s C-Minor Mass and Abduction from the Seraglio.

In all three recordings here, the sound is slightly metallic in string tone, but otherwise fine for its time. In No. 29, Fricsay observes exposition repeats in outer movements; in Nos. 39 and 40, only in the first movement. Whatever its shortcomings, for those interested in the conductor or in a splendid No. 39, this release is worth having.

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