



Rafael Kubelík conducts Bartók: Bluebeard's Castle

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American Record Guide (Ralph V Lucano - 2014.09.01)

Fischer-Dieskau seemed to like the role of Bluebeard. He made two studio recordings of it for DG, one in German (with Hertha Töpper) conducted by Fricsay in 1958 and a second in Hungarian (with Julia Varady) conducted by Sawallisch in 1979. The performance we have here dates from 1962 and is also in German. The best thing about it is the Judith of the vivacious, personable Irmgard Seefried. She was just past her prime in 1962, and she has to reach for some top notes (she releases the high C almost as soon as it is emitted); but her voice is still round and steady, and she utters each word with personal commitment. Her intensity as she asks Bluebeard to open door after door is almost frightening, and she's particularly eloquent describing the flowers she sees through the fourth of them. Her final phrases, after the opening of the last door, are heartbreaking.

She can, perhaps, seem too outgoing a singer, but next to Fischer-Dieskau she's a model of restraint. His role does not lie in a comfortable part of his voice. In particular, it needs a depth and resonance he doesn't have—his first few lines already take him below the point where he can produce singing tone. After the fifth door opens, you want his voice to expand confidently, but instead he tends to bark and shout rather than muster the needed fullness. He's interesting to listen to, and when he doesn't have to strain for volume, he can be direct and communicative, but he's still wrong.

Kubelík draws spirited playing out of the Swiss Festival Orchestra, and the monaural sound is good—deep and undistorted; all the drama and color in the score come across.

No texts are supplied. As usual nowadays, Audite directs you to their website; but the German libretto given does not match the words we actually hear, though it's close enough to follow. Worth having for Seefried's sake. If you insist on a Fischer-Dieskau Bluebeard, go with the Hungarian one.