



Richard Strauss: Macbeth, Don Juan, Tod und Verklärung & Festmarsch in C

aud 97.755

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[Fanfare](#) (Steven Kruger - 2018.08.01)

I want to be less disappointed than I am. Kirill Karabits recently hit paydirt for Onyx in Bournemouth with powerful readings of the Walton symphonies. Meanwhile, the Staatskapelle Weimar, one of the world's oldest orchestras (it dates from 1482) not so long ago made incandescent, sonically rich Strauss CDs for Naxos with Antoni Wit. Kirill Karabits is the orchestra's new music director. What could go wrong? Well, for one, the recording sounds very 1960s. Compared to Naxos's deep Weimar soundstage, Audite has delivered a thin, bass-shy sonority. The Weimar Opera House is made to sound like London's Royal Festival Hall. That's not a good thing. Although one manages to make out the bass drum in Strauss's Festmarsch, it would be hard to avoid. The piece is a Strauss rarity of pre-Elgarian institutional tub-thumping, nicely delivered otherwise. But it would be hard to find supportive low tones and textures elsewhere in this release.

Strauss's music becomes dramatically less interesting when it doesn't have a sensual dimension. I was reminded of this almost immediately, as I listened to Macbeth blast away harshly. Karabits actually delivers a fairly sensitive performance, notable for a certain amount of rubato, but the central march doesn't rise up on grand and noble sonic waves the way it usually does, and one comes away disappointed at the grimness. When we turn to Don Juan and Death and Transfiguration, Karabits brings us standard performances, good ones, not a foot wrong anywhere, but is simply outclassed in every bar by Manfred Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony for Reference Recordings, just to name one contemporary.

I originally reheard Honeck's CDs to verify the missing depth of basses and percussion in this Audite release. And indeed, what a contrast! Heinz Hall makes for massively satisfying, deep and creamy Strauss sonorities. But I was ironically reminded, too, what a difference imagination makes and that mysterious quality Charles Munch used to call "fire." I came away from the comparison scarcely recalling how Karabits conducted the music. His Don Juan didn't leap from the balconies, and his old man suffered a rather gray tourist-class ascent to heaven. I suppose that means this time around someone gives out the old fashioned gentleman's "C"...