



Edith Mathis sings Mozart, Bartók, Brahms, Schumann and Strauss: Selected Lieder

aud 95.647

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Swiss lyric soprano Edith Mathis was for several decades one of the foremost in her Fach and was granted so long a career thanks to her intelligent husbanding of her voice. She didn't retire from the stage until 2001 when she was 63 and even returned to the stage in Lucerne, her birthplace, in 2018, shortly after her eightieth birthday for a recital with her student Rafael Fingerlos, where she recited Heine's verses between the songs. The secret with her longevity was that she, as Jürgen Kesting points out in his liner notes, followed Léopold Simoneau's advice: "Always sing with the voice you have, and not with the voice that you would like to have". In other words, she never strayed beyond the roles that were natural for her. Bach and Mozart became her bread and butter in the opera houses and the concert platforms and in the recital rooms the central German Lied repertoire – Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Richard Strauss and Hugo Wolf – was honed to perfection. The present disc, recorded live in 1975 at the first in her long series of recitals at the Lucerne Festival, can stand as a splendid example of a typical Edith Mathis performance. Readers who want to delve deeper in her recording career will find their fill in a 7 CD DG box issued in connection with her eightieth birthday.

Recorded live implies that there are occasional distractions in the shape of audience noises, but those are limited to some murmuring between the songs and enthusiastic applause between the sections. Yes, one exception from the general rule of audience behaviour occurs after the first of the five Richard Strauss songs, Schlechtes Wetter, where there is an extra brief round of applause, at a guess to apostrophize Karl Engel's elegant final flourish of the postlude. Otherwise the recording is well-balanced and clean and no-one should avoid this issue for the sake of the sound – it is fully comparable to studio efforts of the same period.

Well versed in the Mozart repertoire she has the ideal voice also for his songs, and even before she has started singing we are lured into the Mozartean world through Karl Engel's delicate piano introduction to Das Veilchen. All Ms Mathis's hallmarks are here: the beautiful youthful tone, fresh as dew, the lightness of touch, the self-evident building of the phrases and the unfussy interpretations – there is no exaggerated word-painting or over-emphasis. Her legato is seamless and there is no lack of temperament – just listen to Dans un bois solitaire and Der Zauberer. A handful of Mozart songs is a perfect concert opener which immediately sets an agreeable atmosphere.

Bartok's Dorfszenen, built on Slovak folksongs, is certainly not the avant-garde composer, but rather the musicologist, who spent so much time in his youth to collect



and record the music of the people in his native Hungary as well as the surrounding regions. There are some harmonic twists and rhythmically there are challenges, not least in the concluding Burschentanz, wild and burlesque. On the other hand Wiegenlied is so sensitive and delicious, and the whole suite is a gem that should be heard more frequently. Bartok may not be home-ground for Edith Mathis but she certainly has the measure for his music.

Brahms's charming 42 Deutsche Volkslieder are natural companions to Bartok and the songs are just as light and fresh as the singing. She had recorded all 42 with Peter Schreier and, as here, Karl Engel at the piano, so was well inside these pearls.

After the interval she returned with no less than nine Schumann songs. Schumann seems to have been a great favourite for her, and the DG-box mentioned above contains a lot of his songs. The well-known Widmung and Der Nussbaum are deliciously nuanced, but the whole section is wonderfully interpreted, up to the concluding Hauptmanns Weib, not one of the most performed of Schumann's songs but the racy text, built on a poem by Robert Burns, is sung here with great intensity. The quintet of Strauss songs is also memorably interpreted and is rounded off with a delicious Hat gesagt – bleibt's nicht dabei.

The well-deserved applause is rewarded with Hugo Wolf's endearing Auch kleine Dinge können uns entzücken from Italienisches Liederbuch, a perfect encore which presents Edith Mathis at her very best.

From the above, readers must in all likelihood draw the conclusion that I liked the disc. That's correct. And I don't begrudge anyone to get the same experience.

**Edith Mathis (soprano)**  
**Lieder Recital - Lucerne Festival**  
 Karl Engel (piano)  
 rec. live, 3 September 1975, Kunsthaus, Lucerne  
**AUDITE 95.647 [78:31]**

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