Gustav Mahler: Symphony No. 3

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Fanfare (Christopher Abbot - 2003.01.01)

Like Audite\'s disc of Kubelik\'s Mahler Sixth (reviewed in 25:5), this recording was made at a concert that preceded the studio recording of Mahler\'s Third issued by DG as part of Kubelik\'s complete cycle. And like the performance of Mahler\'s Sixth, this one illuminates many facets of its conductor\'s art.

Kubelik\'s performances of the “massive” Mahler – the Second, Third, and Eighth – were less

purely monumental than either Solti or Bernstein, his contemporaries in the early Mahler-cycle stakes. Kubelik often celebrates the smaller, finer gestures, so the sense of struggle between elemental forces in the first movement of the Third isn\'t as pronounced as it is with the other two, especially Bernstein. Unfortunately, the sound on this new disc makes less of an impact than that on DG: The orchestra is recessed, so that the imperious horn calls and march are less so. Orchestral detailing is notable, but there are several rough patches where intonation is less than secure. There are occasions in the development where the tempo seems rushed – the sense of momentum isn\'t organic. This is less of a problem on the DG recording. Not surprisingly, the minuet is exquisite on the DG. It is no less so on the Audite, where the stereo image is just as sharp (though tape hiss is a distraction). The sound on Audite is somewhat thin, adding a metallic sheen to the winds. The playful Scherzo is also delightful, full of the small gestures I alluded to, such as the perfectly judged post horn solos. Marjorie Thomas contributes an “O Mensch!” that is fully characterized, though her voice seems to emerge from an echo chamber; the balance between choruses on “Es sungen drei Engel” is also problematic, with the women dominating the boys. Kubelik\'s employment of divided violins makes the all-important string writing extra clear in the final Adagio. His is an interpretation not without emotion, but with an overall sense of balance that works extremely well.

As with the previous Audite Mahler/Kubelik, this disc is primarily of historic value, vital for those who don\'t already own the DG set. It is an interpretation worth hearing, with the caveats concerning the sound as noted above.

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