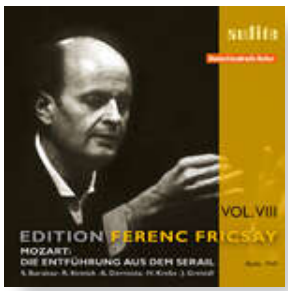

Edition Ferenc Fricsay (VIII) – W.A. Mozart: Die Entführung aus dem Serail

aud 23.413

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Gramophone (Richard Wigmore - 01.05.2009)

GRAMOPHONE

An Abduction worth hearing, but Fricsay's studio version is still superior

The famously baton-less Ferenc Fricsay was always an invigorating Mozart conductor, favouring slimmed-down forces, urgent (yet never hectic) tempi and lithe textures decades before these became the norm. This 1949 Berlin radio recording of Mozart's harem Singspiel has many of the same virtues – including Streich and Greindl as Blonde and Osmin – as his 1954 studio version (DG, 7/55R). From the crackling overture, Fricsay's control of pace and dramatic tension is unerring, not least in the Act 2 finale as the reunited lovers move from celebration, through suspicion to reconciliation.

Drawbacks include matt mono sound that sets the orchestra too far back in relation to the voices and makes the violins sound thin and papery. The Turkish department jangles vaguely in the background. Rehearsal time was evidently at a premium; and while the RIAS orchestra plays with spirit, ensemble – especially wind chording – can be ragged. Fricsay, like all other conductors of his era, has no truck with ornamentation, or even basic appoggiaturas. As in all recordings before the 1960s, Belmonte's dramatically redundant aria "Ich baue ganz" is jettisoned; less forgivable is the whopping cut in Konstanze's "Traurigkeit".

Sari Barabas is not the only Konstanze on disc to sound like a Blonde raised above her social station. She sings what remains of "Traurigkeit" with feeling and shows a defiant spirit in "Martern aller Arten". But her ultra-bright, slightly fluttery tone, prone to squeakiness above the stave, is far from ideal in a role that needs the dramatic intensity of a Donna Anna, the tenderness of Pamina and the spitfire brilliance of the Queen of the Night. Barabas also lacks a trill, that must-have of any soprano in the 18th century. The rest of the cast, though, is excellent. Anton Dermota, always a graceful Mozart stylist, sings with plangent, liquid tone, and avoids making Belmonte sound passively wimpish. Streich's bubbly, sharp-witted English maid and Greindl's fat-toned Osmin, gleefully relishing his imagined triumph in his final aria, are just as vivid as in 1954. Their mutual taunting near the start of Act 2 is one of the performance's highlights. The Pedrillo, Helmut Krebs, brings an unexaggerated comic touch to the flustered mock-heroics of "Frisch zum Kampfe". As in many other Entführung recordings actors are bussed in for the dialogue, making for some jarring mismatches between speech and song. Only Streich and Greindl – happily – are allowed to speak their own lines. While Fricsay's studio recording has far superior

sound, tighter orchestral playing and a better Konstanze in Maria Stader, I'm glad to have heard this, above all for Dermota's lyrical, impassioned Belmonte.

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