



Edition Fischer-Dieskau (IV) – Lieder by Beethoven and Brahms

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Don't be shocked if what you thought was an innocent Scottish ditty by Rabbie Burns about cradling ~~and caressing~~ a bonny wee bairn turns out to be a lusty drinking song, Kameradschaft and all. This third volume of treasurable early German radio recordings of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau focuses on Beethoven's arrangements of British folksongs, as commissioned by the doughty and enlightened Edinburgh-born George Thomson in the late 18th century. Fischer-Dieskau is joined by a small studio choir, a quartet of vocal soloists, and a piano trio which includes the remarkable pianist Michael Raucheisen, and Fischer-Dieskau's first wife, and mother of his sons, the cellist Irmgard Poppen, who tragically died young.

The settings are perverse, audacious and irresistible by turn, and Fischer-Dieskau enlivens every verbal rhythm, as the German translations are tongue-twisted round Scottish snaps and Irish jigs. The song 'O Zaub'rin, leb wohl' is surely a close relation of the Northumbrian 'Blow the wind southerly': it's fascinating to listen to this and other sea-changes in Beethoven's responses to the Celtic muse.

It's moving, too, to realise that this German celebration of British song was happening little more than five years after the end of the Second World War. And Volume Four – Lieder by Beethoven and by Brahms – reveals Fischer-Dieskau as fervent rehabilitator of German song precisely when the German nation itself was being reconstructed and reinvented. The incomparable accompanist Hertha Klust (featured on an earlier volume in this series) brings the ardent, instinctive best out of the 26-year-old Fischer-Dieskau: it's difficult to believe these are not live performances, so warm, intimate and immediate is their communication.

Fischer-Dieskau's youthful, not yet perfectly honed performances of Beethoven's Goethe settings, such as 'Mailed' and 'Neue Liebe, neues Leben', are infinitely touching. And his technical and emotional command of the little cantata, 'An die Hoffnung' particularly compelling. Eleven songs by Brahms show Fischer-Dieskau's robust advocacy of the composer: these performances, particularly an outstanding 'Heimkehr' and 'Es träumte mir', have red blood coursing through them, and make many present-day offerings seem timid and over-reverent.