



Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau sings Gustav Mahler | Daniel Barenboim, piano

aud 95.634

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RECORD REVIEW Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau at 85 on Audite and EMI by Nigel Simeone

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau is 85 this year, and to celebrate his birthday Audite has issued four discs of the great German baritone in previously unreleased broadcast performances of Lieder. These constitute a significant addition to the singer's vast discography, with two live concerts – both with outstanding pianists – and two discs of radio recordings that include some unusual repertoire. No Fischer-Dieskau collector will want to be without them. A Brahms recital given at the Berlin Philharmonie in 1972 has Tamás Vásáry at the piano. Fischer-Dieskau has always believed in the value of single-composer recitals; as he once put it: 'If you only do little dusters – three or four songs by one, and another, and then yet another – you lose the opportunity to think your way into the composer's mind.' This kind of focus wasn't only for the benefit of the performers but also 'so that the audience could be gradually drawn into a particular creative genius's way of thinking, and could follow him'. The Brahms programme ranges from relatively early songs like 'Wie bist du, meine Königin' and 'wie rafft' ich mich auf' (both from Op. 32, published in 1865), to later songs such as 'Wir wandelten' (from Op. 96) and 'Ständchen' (from Op. 106). The order of the recital is not chronological, but instead plots an emotional trajectory that reveals the expressive breadth of Brahms's Lieder. With unfailingly sensitive and intelligent accompaniment from Vásáry the result is just what Fischer-Dieskau set out to achieve – total immersion in the world of Brahms's Lieder, and not only to the music but also to the poetry: the diction throughout is not only extremely clear but also conveys profound understanding (Audite 95.635, 1 hour 6 minutes).

Another single-composer recital is devoted to Mahler. This was given in the Philharmonie, a year before the Brahms concert, with Daniel Barenboim at the piano. It includes songs from the Lieder und Gesänge aus der Jugendzeit, Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen, Des Knaben Wunderhorn and two Rückert-Lieder. At his best, Fischer-Dieskau is magnificent here, although there are moments in louder songs when he's inclined to hector. There are many highlights, among them a marvelous performance of 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen', where Barenboim's playing comes close to matching the restrained passion of Leonard Bernstein on his Mahler recital with Fischer-Dieskau (Sony, deleted, but available as a download). Despite the occasional vocal mannerism, this is a concert marked by the kind of concentrated intensity that compels attention (Audite 95.634, 1 hour 1 minute).

A collection of broadcasts of Schumann, Beethoven and Mahler begins with Schumann duets sung by Fischer-Dieskau and Julia Varady, with Cord Garben at the piano. The Opp. 34 and 78 sets are here, along with four others, and they are affectionately done (with some downward transposition to suit the singers). Beethoven's Sechs Lieder von Gellert were made with Hertha Klust in 1951. The broadcast sound is remarkable for its age, and Fischer-Dieskau's voice is at its freshest, as it is for three songs from Mahler's Des Knaben Wunderhorn recorded two years later with the same pianist (Audite 95.636, 57 minutes).

The last Audite disc has some particularly interesting repertoire. Eight religious songs by Reger with organ accompaniment (played by Ulrich Bremsteller) show the composer at his most approachable, and effortlessly ingenious too in the Passionlied, Op. 19, a kind of chorale prelude for voice and organ, along with songs like the lovely Geistliche Lieder, Op. 105. The most recent recording on these CDs dates from 1989 and it's again for voice and organ music: Heinrich Sutermeister's 1947 setting of words from two Psalms (70 and 86) for low voice and organ. The disc ends with a group of ten songs by Hindemith recorded in 1979 with Aribert Reimann – pretty much an ideal partnership in this music. They perform a mixed group of Brentano, Rückert and Novalis settings, ending with the early Drei Hymnen, settings of Walt Whitman in German translations. This is a most rewarding disc, in fine sound. For all four of these discs, there are notes in English, but the sung texts are printed only in German, so it's appropriate to mention again the excellent Website www.recmusic.org/lieder where most if not all of them can be found with a little searching (Audite 95.637, 1 hour 4 minutes).