Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau sings Beethoven and Mahler and Schumann duos with Julia Varady

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GRAMOPHONE

Fischer-Dieskau windfall

Previously unreleased, perhaps the finest Fischer-Dieskau Brahms recital on disc

Having already commented on one fine collection celebrating Dietrich Fischer-Dieskaus 85th birthday (EMI, 6/10), I'm delighted to report four separate CDs from Audite that are if anything even more valuable. Being "previously unreleased" helps, but so often the "unreleased" tag has a negative cause. Not so here, certainly not in the case of a 1974 Berlin Brahms recital with pianist Tamas Vasary (23 Lieder in total). I'm tempted to claim this as the finest Fischer-Dieskau Brahms recital on disc, the musical rapport with Vasary often electric, especially in such songs as "Abenddämmerung" and "Sonntag". The combination of unspoiled vocal velvet, interpretative intelligence and spontaneity is quite irresistible and the sound quality is excellent.

Next best is a 1977 programme of Schumann duets with Fischer-Dieskau, his wife Julia Varady and pianist Cord Garben, some of them famous from adorable old RCA recordings with Lotte Lehmann and Lauritz Melchior, though here the approach tends to be more relaxed. But what singing! Varady is on superb form. The remainder of the disc is devoted to Beethoven and Mahler songs recorded in die early Fifties.

Being a bit of a Reger nut, I was delighted to encounter a sequence of sacred songs for voice and organ, beautiful miniatures, richly harmonised and superbly performed. The same disc also includes a piece by the Swiss composer Heinrich Sutermeister based on Psalms 70 and 86 (also with organist Ulrich Bremsteller) and a gritty sequence of Hindemith songs with pianist Aribert Reimann. Lastly, an all-Mahler recital with Daniel Barenboim recorded in Berlin in 1971 includes two Rückert-Lieder, "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen" at a daringly slow8'43" chough somewhat hampered by a noisy audience. The highpoint of this memorable recital (17 songs in all) is Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen, especially "Ich. hab ein glühend' Messer", a passionate, even disturbing onslaught. Again, the sound is excellent, though as with these other discs you'll need to search out song texts and translations.

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