



Edition Hans Knappertsbusch & Berliner Philharmoniker – The complete RIAS recordings

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Hans Knappertsbusch – the complete RIAS recordings

Despite the avalanche of Hans Knappertsbusch reissues that has occurred during the last 15 or so years, collectors of that most individual conductor's work will want to acquire this magnificent new set of radio recordings with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, for three principal reasons.

Firstly the majority of the recordings were made between 28 January and 1 February 1950, with the Bruckner Eighth from a year later, and the Beethoven Eighth and Strauss 1,001 Nights Intermezzo from the year after that. The 1950 recordings most interestingly include both studio and public performance accounts of Schubert's Eighth and Bruckner's Ninth Symphonies, thus enabling the listener to compare directly two performances in the hands of an at times controversial conductor. There is little difference to be detected, apart from a slightly greater sense of urgency in the public performances. But in general Knappertsbusch in the studio is as effective as in the concert hall, judging by these particular sound documents.

A second reason for acquiring this set is its range of programming. The typical heavyweight works for which Knappertsbusch was famous as an interpreter are on this occasion admirably balanced by two CDs of lighter fare. Admittedly Karel Komzak's irresistible Bad'ner Mad'In sounds more like a Liszt tone poem than a piece of spa music, but in a way that's part of the attraction. That Knappertsbusch could be just as swift as the next conductor is well evidenced by his mercurial account of the Die Fledermaus Overture, so it's the sheer variety of musical voice and inflection of tone that fascinate here.

The third reason for acquiring this set is the very fine engineering. Although several of the recordings have seen the light of day on both LP and CD, there can be no question that in these newest incarnations – which make use of the original radio broadcast recording tapes – they sound better than ever. The quality never drops below solidly respectable early 1950s mono, and throughout there is a reasonable amount of acoustic space around the orchestra, though even a bit more would have been desirable for the Bruckner Eighth. Add to these favourable factors Audite's excellent presentation, complete with a very informative and extensive note by Habakuk Traber, and the set becomes self-selecting. No matter how many Knappertsbusch recordings you may have already, I recommend this new set most warmly.