



Robert Schumann: Complete Symphonic Works, Vol. II

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Gramophone (Richard Whitehouse - 2019.08.01)

GRAMOPHONE THE ULTIMATE CHOICE

Nine decades of recordings reflect changing attitudes to Schumann's Second

This leaves Heinz Holliger with the WDR Symphony of Cologne as prime recommendation. Long crucial to his work as composer and conductor, Holliger's Schumann has all one might wish for – the leanness of a chamber orchestra, impact of larger forces, clarity of an authentic approach and creative acumen of one conscious of his role as being more than merely putting musicians through their paces. Some examples from each movement illustrate this: in the first, his emphasis on the *Un poco più vivace* transition (1'54") as it prepares for then motivates the ensuing *Allegro*; in the *Scherzo*, his consistency of pulse which integrates the *Trios* (1'39" and 4'15") and underlies the (relative) acceleration into the *coda* (6'24"); in the *Adagio*, his handling of the spectral interlude (3'57") that links each half while emotionally heightening the latter; and, at 4'00" in the finale, after the movement has reached near-stasis, his winsome underlining of the quotation from Beethoven's song 'Nimm sie hin denn, diese Lieder' (the last of the cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*) which then makes possible the ultimate affirmation.

Almost 175 years since its completion, Schumann's Second Symphony can, more than ever, be heard as the true embodiment of musical mid-Romanticism, as well as being the salient symphonic achievement from that interregnum stretching between Schubert and Bruckner.

Schumann has long been central to Heinz Holliger's creative thinking. His Cologne account – part of the most inclusive overview of Schumann's orchestral works to date – fuses chamberlike clarity, authentic style astringency and full-orchestral immediacy for astounding results.



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