Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No. 2 & No. 6 ('Pastorale')

aud 95.531

EAN: 4022143955319

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www.listencarefully.co.uk (Christopher Breunig - 2007.02.05)

The German label Audite began as a transfer series from Bavarian Radio archives of live performances conducted by Rafael Kubelik (with the Munich orchestra from 1967–85). There are Mozart and Beethoven concertos with Clifford Curzon and a near-complete Mahler symphony cycle, to which the Eighth has been recently added, albeit in disappointing sound – it is a hybrid disc [92.551] which has on the SACD layer both the original tape as broadcast and the tidied edition. 'Listen and compare' is a unique Audite feature (see www.audite.de for full catalogue, including audiophile vinyl alas not distributed in the UK). As a conventional CD [95.531, midprice] we now have Beethoven's Symphony 2, taped in Paris in 1971, with solid sound and plenty of stamping on the podium, and a lovely Pastoral from Munich, 1963, with a wider stereo spread but less bass.

The selling point of Kubelik's DG cycle was that each symphony was with a different orchestra, the Sixth with the Orchestre de Paris rather disappointing. This one also starts unpromisingly slowly but Kubelik's basic tempo is reached via rubato – indeed what makes both performances so engaging is the proportioning of tempi, although the very slow trio in 2(iii) might concern some listeners. This symphony is fiery, like the later RPO Beecham Second.

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