Edition Fischer-Dieskau (I) – H. Wolf: Mörike-Lieder

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BBC Music Magazine (Hilary Finch - 2008.09.01)

More invaluable releases from the Berlin radio archive: this time performances from 1948-55 of the songs of Hugo Wolf. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau once wrote of Wolf's 'intensity, intellectual penetration, variety and fullness of mood, style and expression'; exactly the same could be said of the singer's interpretation of this composer. In these two revelatory discs, one is impressed with the sheer sense of time and infinite care taken in the preparation of music that Fischer-Dieskau was to champion throughout his life.

Wolf's songs require the finest judgement of shifting tones of voice, the closest of close focus. That's just what the 18 selected settings (out of 53) of the poetry of Eduard Mörike receive here. All but one is accompanied by the minutely sensitive Hertha Klust, Fischer-Dieskau's coach and chosen accompanist at the time. It's wonderful to hear voice and piano slowly and sensuously feeling their way through the chromatic Wagner-tinted harmonic language of love songs like 'Im Frühling' and 'An die Geliebte' – though most of these are Mörike's darkest songs of sleepless nights and tear-stained love.

The second disc presents five settings of Goethe. Here are the Harper Songs performed movingly and magisterially when Fischer-Dieskau was just 24. And here, too, is a selection from the Spanisches Liederbuch, microscopically prepared (some might prefer a slightly more relaxed approach in this repertoire) and keenly attentive, again with Hertha Klust, to every shifting nuance of mood and voice. The recorded sound throughout is slightly constrained accoustically, though it does not affect these superb performances.

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