



Edition Ferenc Fricsay (XI) – G. Rossini: Stabat Mater

aud 95.587

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Gramophone (Richard Osborne - 2009.10.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Fricsay in concert, and a dramatic reading of Rossini's sacred masterpiece

This is not a reissue of Fricsay's memorable 1954 DG recording of Rossini's Stabat Mater but a live performance given with identical forces in Berlin's Hochschule für Musik three days later. The recording, transferred directly from Deutschlandradio studio tapes, is first-rate, dear and immediate, an occasional touch of sibilance notwithstanding.

Anyone familiar with Fricsay's celebrated 1953 DG Verdi Requiem will know how fiery and expressive his direction is. And how scrupulous. No Italian conductor on record has dared to take Rossini's tempo markings in the work's opening and closing movements as literally as Fricsay. The Introduzione in particular benefits enormously from his swift and involving reading. Text matters as much to Fricsay (a devout Roman Catholic) as it did to Rossini, whose reading of the Latin poem was more comprehending than the "What's he doing writing religious music?" brigade could begin to imagine.

Even the assiduous Fricsay has trouble keeping tabs on Kim Borg in the "Pro peccatis" (which lacks its opening drumroll) but elsewhere his deeply felt moulding of the text draws memorable responses from his singers, not least Maria Stader in a thrilling and mercifully unoperatic "Inflamatus". Ernst Haefliger's account of the "Cuius animam" is one of the finest on record, die final top D flat perfectly sounded.

Though this ensemble of Berlin choirs was probably as fine as any in Europe at the time, the perils of live performance take their toll in the unaccompanied "Eja mater" which ends up a semitone sharp (the choir is better in tune in "Quando corpus morietur"). This, however, is a small price to pay in an otherwise accomplished live performance that has about it the true blaze of faith.