audite

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

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EAN: 4022143955999

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American Record Guide (R. Moore - 2008.11.01)

Audite has been releasing recordings made for German radio in the early-to-mid 1950s by Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. With so many recordings by this artist available, you may wonder what could make it worth your while to consider any of these. Here are two good reasons: (1) the artist's voice is in its fullest bloom, with a youthful passion tempered by an intellectual acuity that few singers possess and (2) Audite has used the latest audio engineering to produce a really fine sound.

When he recorded these songs at age 36 F-D's young voice fully embodied the qualities for which he is so glowingly remembered – the careful caressing of words, the exquisite phrasing, and the sublime head voice. In the intense moments of vocal drama, he does not show the tendency of his later years to bark out notes.

The program includes 18 of Wolf's Mörike Lieder from 1888. As the liner notes comment, the songs selected are "contemplative and internalized, with undertones of existential despair and farewell, dominated by a quest for (religious) solace" Most of the songs are slow and quiet and offer one of the best opportunities available to hear the remarkable textual exegesis F-D brought to lieder singing.

Except in one song, he is accompanied by Hertha Klust, his preferred pianist in the early 1950s. P-D is in complete control of his vocal technique and is in his most luscious voice. Indeed it is beyond my capacity to imagine these songs sung more beautifully. His reading of 'In der Frühe' is almost unbearably lovely. All of this will melt your heart.

The sound is bass-heavy in the piano, but for mid-1950 sound it is warm and wonderful. Orfeo released a disc of Mörike Lieder as part of an 11-CD set of 1956-1965 Salzburg recitals by F-D and Gerald Moore (S/0 2005) that offers a more spacious sound and captures accurately what it was like to hear him in recital. This studio recording is more like being in a small padded room with the singer; it's extraordinarily intimate. If you're a F-D devotee, this is indispensable. If you have not been won over to Wolf's songs, this will do it.

Texts but no translations.

»audite« Ludger Böckenhoff • Tel.: +49 (0)5231-870320 • Fax: +49 (0)5231-870321 • info@audite.de • www.audite.de