



F. Schubert: Mass No. 6 in E-flat major, D 950

aud 92.541



American Record Guide March/April 2006 (Koob - 2006.03.01)



Schubert's sixth and final mass (seventh if you count his German Mass) is his masterpiece in the genre and part of the incredible gush of musical glories from his final months. It gets far fewer performances than it deserves. The work is built on the innovations first seen in his previous A-flat Mass, also from his final years (1826). Both works – especially this one – offer the kind of scope and dimensions characteristic of his great C-major Symphony.

Schubert was certainly familiar with his idol Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and paid tribute to it here. Running nearly an hour, its “heavenly lengths” indeed approach the dimensions of that choral behemoth. But, unlike Beethoven (who didn't care whom he offended), Schubert couldn't bring himself to entirely abandon the strict Viennese church music protocols of the day. So he avoided Beethoven's humanistic overtones, wrote distinctly non-operatic parts for his soloists, and stuck to subdued orchestration that eschewed “frivolous” instruments like flutes. Remember, Schubert was deeply steeped in the classical mass tradition, having sung the best ones by Haydn and Mozart as a Hapsburg Court choirboy under Salieri.

But why look for hints of Beethoven from Schubert's gentle soul? He has left us here what he's best at: broad rivers of long-breathed melody, ingenious modulations, gut-wrenching beauty – and his own sweet sincerity of spirit. No composer captured moods and emotions – including sacred ones – more honestly or effectively than Schubert. Just as he can sound happier, more playful, more lovesick, more agitated, or more depressed than any other, he can sound more pious and reverent as well. Even though Schubert was insecure about his abilities as a contrapuntalist, he achieved sacred drama and solemnity here (and further supported sacred traditions) by means of some very impressive polyphony, especially the massive fugues that end both the Gloria and the Credo.

This account – recorded in concert – is a dream come true. Rafael Kubelik is a Schubertian to the core and taps this ethereal score for every drop of its spiritual exaltation. Chorus, orchestra, and soloists are all caught up in his spiritual spell and perform splendidly. All of the rather subdued solo roles are beautifully handled, but I fell in love with Gundula Janowitz's radiant soprano all over again. Their ‘*Et incarnatus est*’ ensemble, not far into the Credo movement – ravishing, gently rocking interlude in 6/8 time – is unforgettable.

This is part of a new Super-Audio series from Audite, dubbed “Listen and Compare”. Each release contains two versions of the same recording. One is a sophisticated digital restoration of the original concert tapes, re-engineered for multi-channel SA; the other – also copied into the SA format – presents the otherwise unrestored historical archive. And therein lies the only fly in the ointment for me. My SA player duly delivered the very lush and detailed restoration in totally ear-pleasing fashion, but wouldn't read the tracks containing the undoctored copy of the source tapes. Having noticed no other defects in my equipment, I hesitate to lay the blame on it. Perhaps the producers of this recording should be aware that some SA players apparently can't handle their product.

But no matter: a sublime masterpiece, sympathetically performed by legendary artists and reproduced in

rich, clear sound is always welcome. I'll look forward to future releases from this series.

Audiophile Audition December 2005 (Gary Lemco - 2005.12.02)

Schubert drafted his E-flat Mass on a commission from Michael Leitermayer in June 1828. Schubert followed the Viennese tradition in liturgical music quite rigorously, restricting his use of wind writing without flutes, two horns, two trumpets, and three trombones to support the choir. The expansiveness of the textures, comparable to those of the "Great" C Major Symphony, includes rich harmonic modulations and repetitions as well as long-phrased melodies, several of which recall the Overture to Rosamunde. Schubert employs fugal counterpoint from the antique style for his Gloria, Credo, and Sanctus sections; although, with his typical modesty, Schubert expressed a desire to study further with Simon Sechter, the Viennese master of the contrapuntal exercises. The completed Mass was performed posthumously on 4 October 1829, eleven months after Schubert's death.

Recorded 22 March 1968, this elegant performance captures conductor Rafael Kubelik (1914-1996) in top form, demonstrating his capacity to balance weighty blocks of sound and shifting semi-operatic textures. The solo voices, embedded into the tissue of the choral concept, eschew the high coloratura virtuosity we find in Mozart's Great Mass in C Minor. We do have a magnificent trio in Et incarnatus est and lovely soli in the Agnus Dei. The Sanctus achieves a dramatic impact more akin to Weber's Wolf-Glen scene from Der Freischuetz. The blending of classical Viennese sacred music tradition in the manner of Haydn and Mozart and Schubert's own subjective style occurs with silken precision, a performance to rival Erich Leinsdorf's equally convincing 1960 version featuring tenor Fritz Wunderlich (Testament SBT 1111). Kubelik's vocal cast congeals seamlessly, wherein Gundula Janowitz sails in the Benedictus, and the Dona nobis pacem, with its dark agogics and the full vocal quintet and chorus, hurls itself forward in mighty declamation. In augmented surround sonic splendor, courtesy of Otto Petzak, the totality of the effect proves piously spellbinding.

CD Compact Año 20, N° 198 Mayo 2006 (Jesús Dini - 2006.05.01)

Schubert terminó su maravillosa misa en Mi bemol D950 entre junio y julio de 1828 y como en la misa en La bemol, utiliza una traducción alemana, aunque cantada en latín, que omite ciertas palabras litúrgicas del Gloria y del Credo sin que ello signifique ningún posicionamiento teológico o doctrinal por parte del autor. La tonalidad elegida-Mi bemol- es inédita en las grandes obras del maestro, no sólo para la iglesia sino en su producción sinfónica, instrumental o camerística. Hay un rigor tonal en toda la obra - el movimiento armónico se establece entre Mi bemol, Si bemol, Sol menor, la bemol, sus relativos menores así como tonos próximos y dominantes- y el efectivo orquestal comprende clarinetes, oboes, fagots, trompas, trompetas, trombones y timbales aparte de las cuerdas. No está previsto el órgano, aunque pueda emplearse en el refuerzo del bajo. El contrapunto y la fuga están en el epicentro de la obra, así como una voluntad cromática muy evidente que la configura como una obra severa, grave, desnuda y con un carácter más próximo a la simplificación y a la discreción global. Reparto de envergadura, con una Gundula Janowitz en su mejor momento, la presencia lírica de una gran tenor como Waldemar Kmennt y el gran bajo Franz Crass, y la espléndida, mesurada y refinada dirección de un Rafael Kubelik en uno de sus más brillantes momentos (la grabación procede de 1968) y puede considerarse como una de las mejores versiones de la obra antes de las grandes lecturas referenciales de Harnoncourt o Gardiner en nuestra década. Todo un homenaje al gran director checo con un elenco interpretativo de lujo para la época. La toma de sonido, remasterizada al sistema Super Audio CD es muy buena, con magnífica compensación de los volúmenes y planos sonoros.

Classica-Répertoire Octobre 2005 (Xavier de Gaulle - 2005.10.01)

Kubelik, dans ce concert munichois du 22 mars 1968, prend à bras le corps cette Messe, sans doute la plus accomplie de Schubert et composée durant la dernière année de sa courte vie. L'investissement émotionnel et dramatique est total, sans la moindre chute de tension : l'orchestre, à la fois beau (le legato des cordes!) et hargneux; le chœur, qui clame ou supplie, comme si sa vie en dépendait, avec un art consommé des contrastes, des infléchissements lyriques poignants et des explosions tragiques qui donnent le frisson sont les constantes de cette captation exceptionnelle. Tout ici baigne dans le climat de confiance, d'abord, puis celui véritablement apocalyptique dont Schubert a voulu s'approcher, et qui se creuse irrémédiablement au cours de l'œuvre, depuis le Kyrie tout en douceur contrite, jusqu'au terrifiant Agnus Dei qui est bien la traduction, comme récrivait Brigitte Massin de « tout le trajet de l'aventure intérieure vécue par Franz Schubert » depuis sa glorieuse première messe. Dans cette œuvre, les solistes n'ont qu'une part secondaire, mais l'affiche prestigieuse réunie par Kubelik ne fait pas mentir sa réputation.

Ni Abbado (DG, 1986), très sophistiqué, ni même Sawallisch (Philips 1972 et EMI), pourtant éminent spécialiste des œuvres religieuses de Schubert, ne sont parvenus à chauffer à blanc toute une formation orchestrale et chorale : on écouterait les terribles ostinatos des cordes basses dans le « Miserere » du Gloria, les clameurs des cuivres, la consternation épouvantée du chœur et qui retombe tour à tour dans la plus discrète déploration : le travail de Kubelik est proprement génial. Mais isoler un moment n'a pas de sens puisqu'il n'en est pas un dans cet enregistrement qui trahisse la moindre faiblesse. Kubelik manifeste un constant souci d'unité – ce qui est la caractéristique même de cette messe – tout en laissant déjà entrevoir les abîmes du Requiem de Verdi. Un disque stupéfiant, qui convaincra tous ceux qui placent les Messes de Schubert loin derrière tout le reste. Nota : le disque propose successivement la version CD et SACD, à titre de comparaison pour l'auditeur.

Classica-Répertoire Novembre 2005 (Philippe van den Bosch - 2005.11.01)

Un enregistrement de concert de 1968 en SACD, et sélectionné pour le discophage? Certes la captation paraît peu précise et plutôt globale, mais quelle agréable couleur! Le chœur paraît très ample, mais d'une douceur et d'un velouté exceptionnels, jamais criard ni strident. Malgré une stéréo légèrement « ping-pong », l'orchestre et les voix s'inscrivent dans un vaste espace bien étage. Les pianissimos sonnent de manière délicieusement aérienne, mais avec tellement de présence qu'il est inutile de « pousser » l'amplificateur, l'échelle dynamique s'avérant très mesurée. Il s'agit d'un SACD stéréo hybride, offrant une version CD + SACD stéréo remixée, et en supplément, sur la piste SACD, plus longue, la prise de son originale, pour permettre aux amateurs d'accéder au legs historique et d'apprécier la pertinence du travail de restauration, ce qui constitue une excellente initiative.

Der neue Merker Nr. 116 (Dorothea Zweipfennig - 2005.07.01)

Schuberts Es-Dur Messe entstand in seinem letzten Lebensjahr 1828. Auch wenn Schubert sich nach dem Auszug aus dem Elternhaus von der bigotten Frömmigkeit des Vaters distanzierte, blieb Religion für ihn dennoch eine existentielle Privatangelegenheit. Den eigenen Glauben dokumentierte er hin und wieder in seinen Werken: „Auch wunderte man sich sehr über meine Frömmigkeit, die ich in einer Hymne an die heil. Jungfrau ausgedrückt habe, und, wie es scheint alle Gemüter ergreift und zur Andacht stimmt.“

Mit ihrer Länge von ca. einer Stunde sprengt die Messe den zeitlichen Rahmen der katholischen Liturgie –eine souveräne Überschreitung des vorgegebenen formalen Spielraums. Das Kyrie, das die Messe mit einem schreitenden Rhythmus in den tiefen Streichern und weichen Posaunenakkorden eröffnet, entfaltet gleich den großen Atem, mit dem Schubert Form und Ausdehnung der Messe zur sinfonischen Dimension erweitert. Die solistischen Partien sind keineswegs reich auskomponiert, vielmehr wirken sie manches Mal wie eingebettet in das chorische Gesamtgeschehen; nicht die opernhafte Exponierung der Solisten und ihrer Virtuosität stand für Schubert im Vordergrund, sondern der klangliche Wechsel zwischen Solist und Gesangsensemble im Chor der Gläubigen. Schubert bemüht sich insgesamt um einen Ausgleich zwischen der klassischen Wiener Sakralmusik-Tradition, den Forderungen des Klerus und den eigenen musikalischen Zielen. Zu den Zugeständnissen an die Sakralmusik gehören zweifellos die beiden ausgedehnten Fugen am Ende des Gloria und des Credo. Anders als in seinen späten Sinfonien scheint Schubert in der Messe nach einer neuen Interpretation der alten Formen zu suchen.

Die Live-Aufnahme vom 22.März 1968 aus dem Herkules-Saal der Münchner Residenz mit Rafael Kubelik und dem Symphonie-Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks und den o. gen. wirklich prachtvollen Solistenensemble erscheint im SACD Format. Sie ist die Fortsetzung der Reihe „LISTEN & COMPARE“, die dem SACD-Hörer neben der überarbeiteten Fassung auch die völlig ursprünglich belassene Archivaufnahme zum direkten Vergleich anbietet.

Diapason Octobre 2005 (Benoît Fauchet - 2005.10.01)



La Messe en la bémol (1828), chef-d'œuvre de synthèse spirituelle et musicale, jouit d'une discographie luxueuse, presque idéale ; à elle seule, la Radio bavaroise en a fourni deux des interprétations les plus abouties, sous Sawallisch (Emi) puis Giulini (Sony) : à la justesse perpétuelle de ton, fruit d'une approche souple et ductile du premier a répondu la vision très creusée, parfaitement unifiée, du second. Ce live capté quelques années plus tôt ne peut prétendre à une telle postérité, fût-il offert dans un nouveau son, en SACD. Bien installé dans son règne munichois (1961-1979), Kubelik ose une option très personnelle, aérée et articulée, mais qui pose davantage de questions qu'elle n'en résout. Ainsi dès l'entame, cette Messe oppose à l'oreille son esthétique tout en petites césures : pour autant la phrase respire-t-elle, vit-elle vraiment ? Plus loin (Gloria), pourquoi le chœur, qui bonifiera en quelques décennies, propose-t-il ces « Glorificamus te » si verticaux, statiques ? Et nous passons sur le jeu des cordes, étonnamment plus rêches que soyeuses, des fugues par trop empesées ou heurtées, l'intonation un peu problématique (« Miserere » !). Jour sans ? Ce serait occulter les rais de lumière qui traversent de part en part la lecture de Kubelik, comme dans le thème en croix de l'Agnus Dei, qui esquisse des reliefs choraux saisissants (le pupitre de mezzos !). Et le plateau de solistes, bien que peu sollicité dans cette œuvre, est d'une maîtrise remarquable.

[Fanfare](#) May/June 2006 (James Reel - 2006.05.01)

fanfare

Wolfgang Sawallisch recorded all of Schubert's Masses for EMI with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, and with a starry cast of soloists, but I'll take 1960s Rafael Kubelik over 1970s Sawallisch without hesitation. Kubelik was a consistently interesting conductor, even if he was not consistently successful, and he makes the same Bavarian Radio forces sound more like believers—in Schubert and in God—than did Sawallisch.

This is Schubert's final Mass, completed just weeks before his death, but there's no hint of Requiem about it. It's big and symphonic, but symphonic in the Haydn-Mozart sense; Schubert had to conform to conservative Viennese liturgical strictures that had hardly changed in decades.

Kubelik directs a devotional performance, firm but not overtly dramatic. The soloists are good and the chorus sings well, aside from a few stray moments of unsteadiness (as in the last chord of the Gloria), but its enunciation is often mushy. An example of Kubelik's apt but gentle touch: the woodwind figures that punctuate the solo vocal passages in the Credo have a lovely Viennese lilt. This is not the most gripping performance imaginable, but it is sensitive and effective.

This disc's SACD layer includes a version apparently faithful to the original tapes, and a re-mastered version with various unspecified tweakings. The re-mastered version, not the original, is also on the standard CD layer. The re-mastered audio seems closer and more revealing of detail, but it also makes the violins sound a bit harsher. In every case, it's two-channel sound.

Frankfurter Rundschau 13. August 2005 (- 2005.08.13)



Hervorragend: Schubert, Es-Dur-Messe D. 950; Gundula Janowitz, Grace Hoffmann, Albert Gaßner, Waldemar Kmentt, Franz Crass, Chor und SO des BR, Dirigent: Rafael Kubelik; audite 92541. Sternstunde mit einem einmaligen Vokalsolistenteam von 1968.

klassik.com November 2005 (Miquel Cabruja - 2005.11.04)



Licht und Schatten – das könnte das Motto sein, unter dem die letzten beiden...

Full review text restrained for
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Musicus 3/05 (- 2005.03.01)

The logo for 'musicus' features the word in a stylized, outlined font with a horizontal motion blur effect behind it.

In dieser live-Aufnahme von 1968 aus dem Herkulesaal München dirigierte Rafael Kubelik ein gut aufgelegtes Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks. Diese SACD beinhaltet neben der überarbeiteten Fassung auch die ursprüngliche Archivaufnahme.

Muzyka21 październik 2005, 10 (63) (Stanisław Lubliński - 2005.10.01)

Msze nr 6 Schubert skomponował tuż przed śmiercią. Jest to utwór bardzo rozbudowany, trwający prawie godzinę, znacznie wychodzący poza ramy wyznaczone przez liturgie katolickie. W tym utworze ma się wrażenie, że kompozytor poszukiwał nowych form wyrazu dla mszy, różnych od tych stosowanych w jego ostatnich symfoniach.

Firma Audite przypomniała nam w wersji SACD nagranie pod batutą Rafaela Kubelika z 1968 r. Jest to niewątpliwie najlepsza dostępna rejestracja tego dzieła, w czym dyrygentowi bardzo pomogli solisci, chór i orkiestra. Na szczególnie uznanie zasługuje wspaniała kreacja Gunduli Janowitz.

Podkreślić trzeba również bardzo dobre transferowanie sprzed prawie 40. lat do formatu SACD (zresztą na płycie mamy wersję nagrania hybrydowa CD/SACD oraz tylko SACD).

Polecam.

opushd.net - opus haute définition e-magazine Numéro 1 (Jean-Jacques Millo - 2006.01.23)

Schubert et la musique sacrée. Voilà un sujet intéressant qui est, aujourd'hui encore, peu analysé. Et pourtant, avec ses six Messes, le compositeur autrichien aurait pu prétendre à plus d'engouement de la part des musicologues. Cependant, la messe n°6 que nous offre ce document de concert eut une gestation assez longue, puisqu'elle s'étala entre les années 1819 et 1826. Et le temps se jouant de tout et de rien, il fallut attendre l'année 1829 pour que l'ultime chef-d'œuvre sacré de Schubert soit créé, onze mois après sa mort. Au cours d'un concert datant de mars 1968, Rafael Kubelik, entouré des grandes voix de l'époque, la soprano Gundula Janowitz, l'alto Grace Hoffmann, les ténors Albert Gasner et Waldemar Kmentt ainsi que la basse Franz Crass, nous fait entendre une version placée sous le signe d'une profonde inspiration dont le recueillement n'est pas la moindre des qualités. Avec un souffle retenu dont le chœur se fait le messager, Kubelik sait comme personne restituer la mystique plus que la religiosité du jeune compositeur viennois. Et les voix en présence dégagent alors une émotion d'une grande humanité. Aujourd'hui, à l'écoute de tels témoignages nous ne pouvons plus guère le nier. Le gouffre est bien réel entre les interprétations du présent de celles du passé. Le style a disparu emportant avec lui l'humilité des musiciens face aux partitions appréhendées.

www.classicstodayfrance.com Novembre 2005 (Christophe Huss - 2005.11.01)



Rafael Kubelik a de la Messe en mi bémol une vision dramatique (cf. les cuivres très "Jugement dernier" du Domine Deus), une vision qui place cette œuvre dans une tradition de monumentalité inaugurée par la Missa solemnis de Beethoven. On comprend, via de tels jalons, le chemin direct qui mène aux Messes ou au Te Deum de Bruckner. C'est d'ailleurs ici le lien Schubert-Bruckner le plus évident, notamment dans le passage dantesque précité. On remarquera également le dosage toujours très présent des violons, qui mènent cette véritable procession.

Les limites de l'exercice sont ici avant tout sonores, avec une indéniable dureté sur la masse chorale, que le travail sur la bande originale et le transfert en SACD stéréo ne parviennent pas à masquer. Parmi les solistes, les ténors qui se croient dans une représentation de La Chauve-souris, ruinent hélas complètement le "Et incarnatus est" et font de l'ensemble un document complémentaire à la discographie Kubelik.

www.musicweb-international.com January 2006 (John Quinn - 2006.01.03)



The Audite label continues to put collectors in their debt by issuing live performances conducted by Rafael Kubelik. This issue is particularly valuable since I can't immediately recall many instances of commercial recordings of Schubert's music by Kubelik.

There is much fine music in this Mass setting, one of the two most substantial that Schubert composed. I regret that there's not more for the soloists to do. They don't feature at all until the Credo, and then in a limited way, after which they have more to do in the Benedictus and Agnus Dei. Kubelik's team make the most of their relatively limited opportunities to shine. This Mass is a substantial composition in which most of the musical argument is carried by the chorus. Schubert could have pruned it a bit, especially in the Gloria and Credo, without sacrificing much.

In this performance the Kyrie flows nicely. The Gloria starts strongly and Kubelik and his forces make good use of dynamic contrast. I was glad, but not surprised, to find that Kubelik keeps the music moving forward nicely. For my money, however, there are some excessively repetitious passages. The central section of the Gloria, starting at 'Domine Deus' (4:41 in this reading) is dramatic and the Bavarian trombones ring out assertively and darkly. The music is quite jagged at times and Kubelik makes the most of this. But surely Schubert extends this section too much? In even this well paced performance the section lasts over four minutes and I find my attention wandered a bit. Equally, the fugue with which the Gloria rather predictably concludes is too extensive. I like Kubelik's sprightly pacing, despite which his choir articulates the notes well, but even so three and a half minutes is a trifle excessive for the material.

The soloists finally get involved – or some of them do – in an andante terzetto in the Credo at 'Et incarnatus est' When I first heard this performance I thought the section sounded a bit laboured. But the tempo is virtually identical to that adopted by Wolfgang Sawallisch in his fine 1980 EMI recording, by coincidence also with the Bavarian choir and orchestra. A comparative listening exercise suggested to me that the reason that the passage sounds better under Sawallisch is because his soloists phrase the music more lightly and imaginatively. The musical material for this section is echt-Schubert but for all its merits I do wonder if he should have indulged in a repetition of the music after the choir has sung 'Crucifixus etiam pro nobis'. Apart from any musical considerations the repetition of 'Et incarnatus' at this point makes no textual sense. As in the Gloria this movement concludes with a fugue, lasting this time for some four minutes. Once again I found myself wishing that Schubert had edited his material – and it's an exacting sing for the chorus as I know from personal experience. However, Kubelik's choir delivers it very well.

The opening of the Sanctus is majestic in Kubelik's hands. The lively 'Osanna' is well sung; the choir

demonstrates, as they do throughout the piece, lots of commitment and they sing with good, unforced tone. In the Benedictus we hear at greater length from the soloists – the full quartet this time – and they do well.

The concluding Agnus Dei is a powerful movement. In the first four bars that the basses sing there's a tiny moment in which the singing is just less than unanimous. This is remarkable in that it's the only (and very minor) choral blemish that I noticed throughout the whole performance. The choir and orchestra project the dramatic passages here very strongly and they're just as successful in the much more subdued music for 'Miserere nobis'.

This is a very good performance of Schubert's Mass, which, despite its occasional longueurs, is a fine work. Kubelik conducts with dedication and with fidelity to the score. He's well supported by his singers and orchestra. I'd rank this reading as pretty much on a par with Sawallisch's, which I've admired for many years. The recorded sound is very pleasing. I've only listened to the disc as a conventional CD. Audite explain in a booklet note that the recording is presented on what they call a Listen and Compare basis. This means that on an SACD player "one can hear the unrevised historical archive recording [on separate tracks] following the restored version." I'd advise SACD collectors to read the note in full for themselves.

Anyone who doesn't have a version of this work in his or her collection could do far worse than invest in this recording.

www.SA-CD.net March 30, 2010 (John Miller - 2010.03.30)

SA-CD.net

Schubert penned this last, and some would say the greatest, of his sacred works in the summer of 1828, which also proved to be his last year. He was already suffering from the ravages of tertiary syphilis, and was mentally bruised by the rejection of his previous Mass in A flat (D. 678) for performance at the Imperial Chapel. No doubt the self-evident severity of his symptoms stirred religious thoughts in him, and he immediately began Mass no. 6 in E flat major, composed for his friend Michael Leitermeyer, choral director at the Alservorstädter Pfarrkirche in suburban Vienna. It proved to be the only one of his masses not to be performed in his lifetime.

Like its fellow in A flat, the E flat Mass is of symphonic form and (heavenly) length. The solo vocal parts are often of a Lied character but limited to quite short sections of the Credo (et incarnatus est), the Benedictus and Dona nobis pacem of the Agnus Dei. Remarkably, the barcarolle-like 'et incarnatus' (in 12/8 time) has a pair of tenor soloists whose parts intertwine with one another and with the soprano's. There are a number of sections where Schubert repeats and re-integrates sections of texts to provide startlingly dramatic episodes of orchestral and choral textures. The 'Domine Deus' of the E flat Mass's Gloria is a miniature apocalyptic drama based on two phrases used in only three lines of the text, turning the focus away from God to Schubert's personal, subjective beliefs, speaking directly to his own religious convictions rather than those of the Catholic Liturgy.

This disk is one of Audite's "Listen and Compare" series. Tapes from March 1968, recorded live in the Herkulesaal of the Residenz in Munich by Bayerische Rundfunk were carefully restored before digital conversion at 88kHz/24bits to PCM. This otherwise "untouched" stereo version occupies tracks 7-12 on the disc. Tracks 1-6 contain a version which has been through digital signal processing, on a Sequoia workstation with restoring software called "The reNOVATtor", which is "a extremely time-saving tool for mastering or post-production engineers struggling with disturbing noises in live recorded music, interviews or film sound." Audiophiles can compare and contrast the results of the DSP by comparing those "restored" tracks with the unaltered digital copy. The two versions are on the SACD layer of the hybrid disc only.

In this case, I would go so far as to say the processing has been a near disaster. A prominent deep rumble underpins the whole effort, immediately apparent before the music begins, in musical silences and even between tracks. There is virtually no perspective depth of the sound stage, and almost no trace of the hall's

acoustic. The stereo sound stage is distinctly asymmetric, with most of the sound issuing directly from the left speaker most of the time; only very occasionally do instruments or voices clearly appear from the right channel. All the soloists tend to huddle together on the extreme left too, and one keeps thinking that there has been a connection failure somewhere in one's system, turning off the right speaker. When something does clearly come from the right, it seems to come from the speaker itself. This is reminiscent of the "ping-pong" effects of early stereo engineering, and certainly doesn't give a satisfactory illusion of performers in concert.

Amazingly, all these problems go away when listening to the un-restored tracks. The stereo stage is clearly in focus from side to side, with decent front-to back perspective too. There is also a real sense of the hall acoustic. It at last becomes clear that the second violins are on the mid-right, as are the choral basses and tenors, and the soloists are arrayed across the centre of the stage as one would expect. String sound is sweeter and less harsh in climaxes, although there are some traces of HF ringing at volume. The deep bass rumble has gone, and without headphones there is no appreciable hiss, and using speakers only I was not aware of any obvious print-through. Some instruments, e.g. oboes and clarinet do still have a rather thin, pinched sound, but their timbres are more natural than on the "restored" tracks. There is very little evidence of an audience being present and no applause. although there are a few podium thumps.

Awarding audio stars, I would have to say 2.5 for tracks 1-7, and 3.5, nearly 4, for the un-restored plain digitised tracks 7-12. Without a doubt, the latter presents the most musical and listenable experience, but still does not get close to a good recent RBCD sound.

Kubelik is renowned for his honesty and self-effacing dedication to music making of the highest quality. On this occasion, though, he and the choir seem to be performing dutifully rather than being inspired. The music just fails to catch fire, and I found it hard to keep my attention focussed. The main problem is a stoic and metrical approach to rhythm, not dragging speeds. Turn to Hickox's RBCD with his Collegium 90, and we are in another world of passion and commitment, with wonderful articulation of Schubert's often complex and dramatic rhythmic impulses - Hickox makes the 3/4 pieces dance enchantingly; the fugues surge with power and bite which Kubelik and his Bavarian Radio Choir replace with loving heaviness. This involvement is not gained by swifter tempi, just sheer rhythmic élan, expressiveness and transparent textures. Hickox is barely a minute faster than Kubelik over the whole work.

It is, however, a delight to hear Kubelik's soloists (on the un-restored version), especially the creamy-voiced (and much missed) Gundula Janowitz. His two tenors also do a fine Italianate job (although Hickox has Mark Padmore and James Gilchrist, both great Schubertians). But the solos only occupy a few minutes of this music and don't really redeem the whole approach.

By no means would I suggest that any listener acquire this as their only version of Schubert's last Mass; hear Hickox and his vivid period instrument RBCD first. This Audite disc is a curiosity which demonstrates what digital signal processing, with the best intentions, can sometimes do to music.

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