



G. Mahler: Symphony No. 6

aud 95.480



Badische Zeitung 18.11.2003 (Heinz W. Koch - 2003.11.18)



... Wie spezifisch, ja wie radikal sich Gielens Mahler ausnimmt, erhellt schlagartig, wenn man Rafael Kubeliks dreieinhalb Jahrzehnte alte und vor einer Weile wiederveröffentlichte Einspielung dagegenhält.

Eine gehörige Überraschung gab's schon einmal – als nämlich die nie veröffentlichten Münchner Funk-„Meistersinger“ von 1967 plötzlich zu haben waren. Jetzt ist es Gustav Mahlers drei Jahre später eingespieltes „Lied von der Erde“, das erstmals über die Ladentische geht. Es gehört zu einer Mahler Gesamtaufnahme, die offenbar vor der rühmlich bekannten bei der Deutschen Grammophon entstand. Zumindest bei den hier behandelten Sinfonien Nr. 3 und Nr. 6 war das der Fall. Beim „Lied von der Erde“ offeriert das Symphonie-Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, dessen Chef Kubelik damals war, ein erstaunlich präsent, erstaunlich aufgesplittertes Klangbild, das sowohl das Idyllisch-Graziöse hervorkehrt wie das Schwerblütig-Ausdrucksgesättigte mit großem liedsinfonischem Atem erfüllt – eine erstrangige Wiedergabe.

Auch die beiden 1967/68 erarbeiteten Sinfonien erweisen sich als bestechend durchhörbar. Vielleicht geht Kubelik eine Spur naiver vor als die beim Sezieren der Partitur schärfer verfahrenen Dirigenten wie Gielens, bricht sich, wo es geht, das ererbte böhmische Musikantentum zumindest für Momente Bahn. Da staunt einer eher vor Mahler, als dass er ihn zu zerlegen sucht. Wenn es eine Verwandtschaft gibt, dann ist es die zu Bernstein. Das Triumphale der „Dritten“, das Nostalgische an ihr wird nicht als Artefakt betrachtet, sondern „wie es ist“: Emotion zur Analyse. ...

(aus einer Besprechung mit den Mahler-Interpretationen Michael Gielens)

Bayerische Staatszeitung 13.06.1968 (aw - 1971.06.13)



Ein künstlerisches Ereignis schon als Begebenheiten: denn das '1904 entstandene Werk ist in München seit 46 Jahren nicht mehr gespielt worden. Kubelik erwies sich an diesem Abend aufs neue als wahrhaft berufener Mahler-Interpret. Was er seinen Musikern an Intensität, Expression und klanglicher Differenzierung des Spiels abgewann, war bewundernswert.

BBC Music Magazine December 2001 (David Nice - 2001.12.01)



Collectors who like to keep a chamber of horrors in their CD library must not be without Scherchen's live Mahler Five. Did the Philadelphians know what they were in for when they finally lured the 73-year-old conductor over to America to give the work its first performance in its illustrious concert series? They got not only Scherchen's extremes of fast and slow, but a scherzo where the second waltz strain becomes a lethargic trio, the opening is repeated and the rest disappears until the coda, and a finale with a further 200-odd bars missing (for which the hagiographic booklet note fails to prepare us). Scherchen is invariably master of the mess he makes, but the opening trumpet solo is a disaster and the strings can barely be heard in the dismal Philadelphia acoustics. What a relief, then, to turn to Kubelík conducting the Sixth in Munich four years later. This is a performance of consistent headlong intensity, an inch or two more hair-raising than Kubelík's DG studio recording made the same month, and only relaxing at the still centre of the Andante: not perhaps for those who want to be clubbed over the head by Mahler's marches or scared out of their wits, but decidedly the work of a flexible genius among conductors.

Campus Mag No 61 (- 2001.11.01)



Ecritte en 1903, cette 6ème symphonie sur les 9 composées par Mahler est la plus classique sur le plan de l'écriture musicale mais la plus tragique aussi. C'est son compatriote, le chef d'orchestre Rafael Kubelik qui a donné un nouvel élan à la musique de Mahler dans les années 60 en Autriche, leur pays d'origine mais aussi à Munich, l'orsqu'il était à la tête de l'orchestre Symphonique de la Radio Bavaroise. C'est un enregistrement "live" de 1968 qui nous est ici proposé.

Classic Record Collector 10/2002 (Christopher Breunig - 2002.10.01)



The German firm Audite has given us not only this near complete live cycle of Mahler symphonies (sans 4 or 8), but valuable Kubelik/Curzon readings of four Mozart and two Beethoven concertos. Of particular interest here is 'Das Lied von der Erde', since Kubelik did not record it for DG. Janet Baker fans will welcome a third CD version: and she sounds truly inspired by her conductor. 'Der Einsame im Herbst' may not have the sheer beauty of the version with Haitink but the finale surpasses most on records, with a real sense of the transcendental at the close. Kmentt too makes the most of his words; and the reedy Munich winds suit this score.

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Classica-Répertoire septembre 2005 (Stéphane Friédérich - 2005.09.01)

Une soixante d'interprétations étaient en compétition pour cette symphonie truffée d'écueils : sa virtuosité éblouissante et la débauche d'énergie qu'elle porte en elle ne tolèrent aucune approximation.

...

Nous disposons de deux gravures d'un autre chef tchèque, Rafael Kubelik. En décembre 1968, il dirigea une série de concerts avec le Symphonique de la Radio de Bavière. Le premier est un live caractéristique des aléas d'un concert : accélération progressive du tempo, problème de justesse des cuivres. La vision de Kubelik est lapidaire et elle édulcore les mutations psychologique de la partition.

[Das Orchester](#) 4/02 (Kathrin Feldmann - 2002.04.01)



Zeit seines Lebens wurde Mahler seitens der Kritiker als größtenwahnsinnig und...

Full review text restrained for
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Die Rheinpfalz 12.02.2003 (Gerhard Tetzlaff - 2003.02.12)

RHEINPFALZ

Die Gesamtaufnahme der Sinfonien Gustav Mahlers durch Rafael Kubelik und sein Symphonie-Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, die Anfang der siebziger Jahre des 20. Jahrhunderts bei der Deutschen Grammophon Gesellschaft erschienen war, hatte als eine der ersten kompletten Einspielungen dieses gigantischen sinfonischen Zyklus' den Rang einer Pioniertat, die zwar anerkannt, deren musikalische Bedeutung aber durch die nicht immer mit Recht höher eingeschätzten gleichzeitig entstandenen Gesamtaufnahmen unter Bernstein und Solti sowie bald darauf durch die folgende Flut von Mahler-Interpretationen zurückgedrängt wurde.

Bei Audite sind inzwischen eine ganze Reihe höchst interessanter Livemitschnitte von Mahler-Sinfonien mit Kubelik und seinem Orchester erschienen, die eine Neubewertung der Auseinandersetzung des Dirigenten mit Mahler ermöglichen.

In der Serie der Livemitschnitte der Mahlersinfonien unter Rafael Kubelik mit seinem Sinfonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks liegt auch die Sechste vor (Audite 95480, über Naxos).

Und Kubelik präsentiert sich auch bei dieser Aufführung von 1968 als idealer Interpret des Mahlerschen Oeuvres. Denn auch bei der „Tragischen“ verzichtet er auf Übertreiben. Er lässt die Musik aus sich selbst sprechen. Die Wucht des Marschrhythms des Kopfsatzes kommt ungefiltert, hinter dem scheinbar folkloristisch angehauchten Scherzo werden Abgründe sichtbar, das Andante feiert eine längst vergangene Utopie des Naturtones. Und auch in den gewaltigen Dimensionen des Finales verliert Kubelik, von seinem Orchester bestens unterstützt, nie die Übersicht.

[Fanfare](#) May/June 2002 (Christopher Abbot - 2002.05.01)

fanfare

According to the booklet that accompanies this release, Audite has released an almost-complete cycle of the Mahler Symphonies conducted by Maestro Kubelik (only the Fourth and Eighth are missing). They are all live recordings, made between 1967 and 1982. The orchestra is the Bavarian Radio Symphony, with whom Kubelik was closely associated and with whom he made a memorable Mahler cycle for DG between 1967 and 1971.

In fact, the performance on this disc would appear to be a concert performance that directly preceded the recording made for DG. It was Kubelik's practice to perform the Symphonies in concert and then to go into the studio (in this case, the same venue as the concert: Munich's Herkulessaal) and record the work for release on disc.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the two performances are nearly identical. The DG version has gained a few seconds per movement, but the differences are negligible. Most noticeable is the slightly more expansive development of the first movement, especially in the ethereal "mountain air" music. Orchestral definition is somewhat clearer on DG too, while there is the occasional lapse in ensemble and intonation on Audite that one forgives in a live performance.

As for the performance, it features many of the attractive characteristics of Kubelik's Mahler. His was a dynamic but somewhat understated approach, mostly free of Bernstein hyperbole and less purely driven than Solti. He shared with Haitink both emotional neutrality and the ability to bring clarity to Mahler's contradictory nature. His Sixth begins in an almost frantic manner with an unnecessary accelerando, but it is certainly energetic; the aforementioned development is atmospheric and is a perfect contrast to the relentlessness of the march. The second movement is possessed of much the same energy, but is leavened with whimsy. Not surprisingly, the Andante is starkly beautiful without being schmaltzy.

The finale strikes a balance between the expressionistic episodes, the mountain reminiscences, and the almost manic attempts to forestall the inevitable. The hammer blows (there are two) are not sharp or dry sounding, but the cowbells and celesta are perfect. The final chord is shattering and well judged.

This release would appear to be superfluous were it not for the fact that Kubelik's DG recording is available only as part of his complete set, albeit at bargain price. This performance may be no match for the precision of Boulez or the emotional commitment of Tennstedt, and it lacks the overall mastery of Zander. But it is historically important, since it documents the work of a gifted second-generation Mahlerian.

Fono Forum 4/2002 (Christian Wildhagen - 2002.04.01)



Von Rafael Kubeliks Studio-Zyklus aller Mahler-Sinfonien hieß es oft, er betone die böhmische Seite der Musik – ein allzu billiges Rezeptionsklischee. Kubelik betrachtet Mahler weder ausschließlich durch die Dvorák-Brille, noch verharmlost er ihn folkloristisch. Wie eigenständig seine Mahler-Sicht war, zeigen die bei Audite erscheinenden Mitschnitte aus den 1960er und 1970er Jahren, die als erstaunlich frisch klingende Seitenstücke zum technisch betagten Studio-Zyklus gelten können.

Offenkundig handelt es sich bei den Sinfonien Nr. 3 und Nr. 6 um Aufzeichnungen der Konzerte, die den DG-Aufnahmen vorangingen. Man erlebt alle Höhen und Tiefen von Live-Produktionen: kleinere Patzer und eine im Eifer des Gefechts mitunter nivellierte Dynamik, dafür aber mitreißende Spannungsbögen und eine Natürlichkeit der vorwärts drängenden Agogik, die ihresgleichen sucht. So gehört die „Feurig“ überschriebene Passage im Finale der Sechsten (ab 12'58") zu den atemberaubendsten Beispielen eines virtuos-enthemmten Orchesterspiels. Eine fast fatalistische Sogkraft scheint die Musik in ihren Strudel zu ziehen, auch im Andante gönnt Kubelik dem Hörer keine Oase der Entrückung.

Ausgeglicherener und überragend in seiner großräumigen Disposition wirkt der Mitschnitt der Dritten, der in jedem Moment von der Persönlichkeit des Dirigenten durchdrungen scheint. Kaum ein Detail bleibt da unausgeleuchtet, und allenfalls das zu grobschlächtige Blech trübt bisweilen das Hochgefühl dieser beeindruckenden Aufführung.

Gramophone 08/2002 (David Gutman - 2002.08.01)



Do you remember the 1960s? A time before Mahler symphony series were two-a-penny, when conductors like Abravanel, Bernstein, Haitink and Solti vied to be the first to complete the intégrale on LP (not that any of them would have thought of including Deryck Cooke's performing version of the Tenth)? Rafael Kubelik's ground-breaking DG cycle was generally (though not universally) rated a highlight of his period as chief conductor of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (1961-79). More recently, the conductor's Mahlerian credentials have been boosted by the appearance of some memorable live concert relays, including a quite outstanding (albeit repeat-shy) account of the First Symphony and a Fifth full of insight (Audite, 4/00). I cannot say that the present release holds comparable interest. Its source is a well-preserved, bass-light Bavarian Radio tape dating from the same period as DG's studio sessions. Hence it offers neither an alternative interpretative slant on the work nor even a radically different sonic experience.

True, the conductor excels himself in the slow movement. Here you'll find the luminous string tone, natural pacing and inner simplicity of his best work, along with sonic unvarnished wind and brass playing. (Don't forget how unfamiliar this music must have been at the time: the Sixth had to wait until 1966 for its French première). The eccentric booklet notes tell us that this Andante moderato 'takes off the stifling corset that prevents one from breathing freely in the other movements'. This isn't - I think - meant to allude to Kubelik's brisk, inflexible pacing, but I found such an approach problematical, particularly in the first two movements

where expressive contrasts are consistently underplayed. Given the overall timing shown above, you may be surprised to discover that Kubelik does in fact make the first movement repeat. Only Neeme Järvi races through the music marked *Allegro energico* via *non troppo* (but never mind the qualifier) - at quite such a lick. And although Bernstein runs them close, his famously neurotic march has a rhythmic certainty and an alertness to detail and nuance that elude Kubelik in his headlong dash across country. The generalised élan of the finale is rather undermined by the fluffs and false entries, while its coda serves as an unlikely showcase for brass timbre of a more distinctive and regional variety than is heard from this source today. All in all, a bit of a gabble but a gift for confirmed Kubelik fanciers.

Hi Fi Review Vol. 192, May/June 2002 (- 2002.05.01)

chinesische Rezension siehe PDF

International Record Review 10/2002 (Christopher Breuning - 2002.10.01)

INTERNATIONAL
RECORD REVIEW

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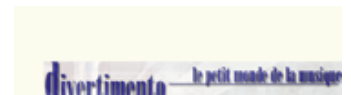
klassik.com 29.11.2001 (Beate Hennenberg - 2001.11.29)



Das Label Audite setzt mit vorliegender Aufnahme die erfolgreiche Reihe der...

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

Monde de la Musique novembre 2001 (Patrick Szersnovicz - 2001.11.01)



Volet central de la grande trilogie instrumentale mahlérienne, la Sixième...

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

Pizzicato 11/01 (Rémy Franck - 2001.11.01)



Weiche Weiten zwischen zwei exzellenten Mahler-Interpretationen liegen können, zeigen diese zwei Einspielungen unter Kubelik und Gielen.

In der live im Müncher Herkules-Saal gemachten Aufnahme peitscht Kubelik sein Orchester stringent und fanatisch durch die Symphonie, mit einem dramatischen und spannungsgeladenen 'Straight forward'-Musizieren, das streckenweise einen atemlos ekstatischen Charakter annimmt. Diese Unerbittlichkeit resultiert denn auch in schnellen 74 Minuten, welche die insgesamt sehr packend gespielte Symphonie bei Kubelik dauert, während der bedächtige Gielen ganze 10 Minuten mehr braucht. Ein enormer Unterschied!

Gielen macht natürlich weitaus mehr Musik hörbar als Kubelik und erzielt eine ebenfalls starke und ergreifende, ja sogar Frösteln auslösende Spannung aus der intellektuellen Durchdringung heraus und aus einem überaus nuancierten Spiel.

Das Schicksal schlägt bei Gielen ganz anders zu als bei Kubelik, hintergründiger, schauriger und mit ausladend großer Wucht. Und es reflektiert die Mahler-Musik nachfolgend in Bergs prächtig resalisierten 'Drei Orchesterstücken', die im Anschluss erklingen, vor dem Andante aus Schuberts 10. Symphonie, das Brian Newbould nach den 1978 gefundenen Skizzen Schuberts fertig stellte. Gielen dirigiert den Klagegesang sehr emotional, gefühlsintensiver jedenfalls als Mahlers Sechste und Bergs Orchesterstücke und setzt so einen ergreifenden Schlusspunkt hinter Musik, deren dämonischen Charakter er zwingend

umsetzt.

Répertoire No 151 (Pascal Brissaud - 2001.11.01)

La même cas de figure se reproduit à l'encontre de Kubelik, dont au moins les Première, Cinquième et Septième de concert parues chez Audite avaient suscité notre enthousiasme. Cette Sixième, captée le même mois (décembre 1968) que l'enregistrement de studio réalisé pour DG avec le même orchestre, en démarque exactement les tempos et les options de base, mais dans un son brouillé sans aucun rapport avec la netteté de l'enregistrement de studio et un débrillé orchestral également très éloigné de la lecture officielle, d'une netteté tranchante un peu pâle et courte de souffle qui ne s'est jamais imposée au premier plan.

Plus extérieur qu'en studio, Kubelik semble mal maîtriser les emballements souvent vulgaires d'un orchestre qui multiplie les fautes (le finale est gangrené par des cuivres en grande difficulté) et les trivialités de phrasé (« Andante » plébéien, sans rien des échappées célestes attendues) que ne compense pas une électricité certaine, mais fort univoque et épidermique. On gagnera à en rester à la version DG, neutre, mais impeccable sur les plans sonore et musical.

Il faut noter, comme possible explication de ce faux-pas, que les lives des autres symphonies publiées par Audite sont très largement postérieurs à l'intégrale DG et qu'ils en renouvellent complètement (cf. la sublime Septième) les paramètres, ce qui n'est pas le cas avec ce brouillon de Sixième.

Rondo 13.12.2001 (Oliver Buslau - 2001.12.13)



Als die Zuhörer am Nikolaustag des Jahres 1968 im Münchner Herkulessaal diese Mahler-Sinfonie hörten, dürfte vielen von ihnen Mahler noch ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln gewesen sein. Die Mahler-Wiederentdeckung hatte gerade erst ansatzweise begonnen; und Dirigenten wie Rafael Kubelik ist es zu verdanken, dass der "Zeitgenosse der Moderne" ins Konzertleben Einzug hielt. Heute sind Mahler-Aufnahmen Legion, und umso mehr erstaunt es, dass bereits diese Pionierinterpretation der Schallplattengeschichte überzeugt - und das so stark, dass man sich kaum jemanden nach Kubelik vorstellen kann.

Der Dirigent gestaltet ohne einen Hauch von Schönklang-Kompromiss (den ich zum Beispiel in vielen etwa zeitgleich entstandenen Bernstein-Aufnahmen wahrnehme) das neurotische Getrieben-Sein des ersten Satzes. Der Marsch geht nicht voran, sondern er verfolgt wie eine wahnwitzige Neurose, gleitet ab in die bizarren Visionen eines Fieberwahns, sodass sogar die oft heikel illustrativ wirkenden Herdenglocken als groteskes I-Tüpfelchen im psychopathischen Rahmen dieser Seelenlandschaft plausibel wirken.

Der dritte Satz, wahrhaftig ausgespielte Romantik-Erinnerung, vollzieht sich fast ohne Nachdruck als idyllische Insel in der Bedrohung, zu der das riesige Finale zurückfindet: die Mahler-Sinfonie als Klangrede, als "Musik über Musik" - dieses oft missverstandene (oder ignorierte) Konzept geht bei Kubelik voll auf.

Der Klangeindruck dieses Remasterings ist sehr transparent; auch im dicksten Orchesterklang ist jeder Kontrafagott-Einsatz deutlich zu vernehmen. Dass winzige Unebenheiten passieren und manches nicht hundertprozentig zusammen ist, unterstützt nur die spannende Live-Atmosphäre, vor der diese Einspielung geradezu birst.

Rondo 6/2001 (Oliver Buslau - 2001.06.01)



Meine stille Liebe:

die Wiederveröffentlichungen der Mahler-Sinfonien mit dem Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks unter Rafael Kubelik (Audite).

The Independent February 22, 2002 (Rob Cowan - 2002.02.22)

Mahler's massive Sixth Symphony runs the gamut of emotion from courageous resolve to inconsolable despair. It's one hell of a piece to get right and the simultaneous release of three very different interpretations helps explain why. The earliest is a bright-toned 1968 Bavarian Radio broadcast by the Radio Orchestra under Rafael Kubelik that runs neck and neck with a contemporaneous DG studio recording by the same artists. Both opt for the fast lane, forging forwards with relentless energy, though the live concert makes rather more sense of the speed. Mahler asks for vehemence and gets it, but the scherzo second movement - the overall tempo is very similar to the first - has a brightly lit quality that's anything but the prescribed "weighty". Kubelik opens the Andante with delectable sweetness, keeping the flow for the duration while the massive finale is swallowed whole. Of the three principal climaxes, two shatter under pressure from deafening hammer blows, though Kubelik's latest rivals drive the point home with even greater force, largely due to their superior sound quality.

Video Pratique Fevrier-Mars 2002 (- 2002.02.01)

Une symphonie marquée par le désespoir absolu, d'une noirceur totale, dévastatrice, tout ceci affirmé avec une énergie démoniaque, forcenée, dans les deux mouvements initiaux. Seul dans cette tempête, l'andante fait figure de havre de paix, vite balayé puisque lui succède un final apocalyptique. Moins sombre que sa version réalisée à la même époque pour Deutsche Grammophon, la présente exécution est néanmoins dirigée avec une frénésie et une énergie implacables par Raphael Kubelik à la tête du remarquable Orchestre de la Radio Bavaroise, captés en direct en décembre 1968.

Wiener Zeitung Samstag, 05. Februar 2005 (Edwin Baumgartner - 2005.02.05)

Rafael Kubelik war der Prototyp des hochintelligenten und dabei grundehrlichen Musikers, einer von jenen, die von Stars à la Karajan in den Schatten gestellt wurden, die das Instrument der Publicity virtuos beherrschten, ihm aber an Tiefenschau das Wasser nicht reichen konnten. Nur als Mahler-Interpret ist Kubelik auch bei seinen Anhängern umstritten: Zu geradlinig, zu nur-musikantisch wären seine Interpretationen. Dieses Urteil gründet sich dabei auf Kubeliks Gesamteinspielung der Symphonien für die Deutsche Grammophongesellschaft.

Nun ist bei audite ein weiterer Mahler-Zyklus unter Kubelik erschienen, der wie ein Gegenentwurf zu den DG-Aufnahmen wirkt. Die audite-Aufnahmen, ebenfalls mit Kubeliks Symphonie-Orchester des bayerischen Rundfunks, basieren auf Live-Mitschnitten, die technisch glänzend überarbeitet wurden. Zu befürchten ist, dass der Zyklus mit den eben erschienen Symphonien 6, 7 und 8 abgeschlossen ist – das Band mit der Vierten dürfte verloren sein.

Kubeliks Mahler ist in den audite-Aufnahmen frei von der musikantischen Freundlichkeit, die in den

DG-Aufnahmen befremdend wirkte. Die Sechste, bei der DG als nettes Stück Nachromantik aufgefasst, mutiert in der audite-Aufnahme zu einer wie von Furien gehetzten Albtraummusik, in der die Nacht von Blitzen grellen Lichts zerrissen wird. Nur Bernstein, Boulez und Szell haben ähnlich kompromisslose Deutungen vorgelegt.

Bei der Siebenten ist Kubelik sogar konkurrenzlos, lässt man Bernard Haitinks frühe Philips-Aufnahme und die extrem analytische Wiedergabe durch Michael Gielen einmal außer Acht. Die Balance von Schattenhaftem und Pompösem gelingt Kubelik ideal, die Nachtmusiken verströmen Leichtigkeit und Duft, und das Finale verliert dank überlegener Tempodramaturgie seine Problematik.

Ein Triumph ist auch die Achte: Ich wage zu behaupten, die Kubelik-Aufnahme sei die beste derzeit erhältliche. Wunderbare Klangbalance und kammermusikalische Durchhörbarkeit stehen im Dienst des grandiosen Gesamtaufbaus. Sanftheit, letzte Zärtlichkeit und eine nahezu besessene Freude am strahlenden Klang weht durch diese Interpretation: Ein inneres Feuer lodert hier, das nur mit dem nicht adäquat wiederzugebenden jiddischen Ausdruck "der Brenn" zu beschreiben ist. Solisten und Chor fügen sich ideal in Kubeliks Konzept.

Eine Beigabe für Audiophile gibt's obendrein, nämlich eine unbearbeitete Version des Originaltonbandes, die man allerdings nur über SACD-Player abspielen kann.

www.ClassicsToday.com 01.01.2000 (David Hurwitz - 2000.01.01)



This live Mahler Sixth sheds less light on Kubelik's way with the music than previous releases from Audite, if only because its 1968 date places it in very close proximity to the studio recording from these same forces. Where this version differs from DG's "official" one, various factors clearly favor the commercial release. Kubelik still takes the music very fast, and the Bavarian Radio Orchestra players deserve credit for keeping up with him. But alongside Kubelik's wonderful way with the first movement coda, ideally paced slow movement, and scorching second half of the finale, there are inevitably small lapses in ensemble, problems that were corrected in the studio (including the tendency to rush, as at the scherzo's creepy second trio which here loses much of its character at such a tempo). In short, if you collect Kubelik's Mahler and have been enjoying this series, you can certainly purchase this knowing that there's nothing shameful or distressing going on—but there's also nothing really new either. Good stereo sound, light on the bass but otherwise warm and transparent, makes for a pleasant (if hardly audiophile) listening experience.

www.musicweb-international.com February 2004 (Tony Duggan - 2004.02.01)



Unlike the Audite release of Rafael Kubelik conducting Mahler's First Symphony in 1971 already reviewed, this "live" recording of the Sixth dates from the same week as his studio recording for DG. In fact I think we can say that this would have been the concert performance mounted to give the orchestra a chance to rehearse and perform the work prior to recording it in the very same hall. Consequently there is really no difference between this and the DG version and if you already have the latter there is no need for you to duplicate it. Unlike the 1971 recording of the First Symphony the Bavarian Radio engineers have given the orchestra pretty much the same kind of sound balance as those of their DG colleagues. Everything is close up with little air around the instruments, the winds especially, and a rather light bass end too. Of course, if you don't own the DG version and are interested in collecting this Audite cycle then you will still need to know about Kubelik in this work.

As I wrote when reviewing the Audite release of the First Symphony, Kubelik's reputation in Mahler is often

misleading. You often see expressions like "understated", "lightweight" and "lyrical" ascribed to it. It's all relative, of course. True, Kubelik is certainly especially effective when Mahler goes outdoors, back to nature and the "Wunderhorn" moods. But he can also surprise us in those later works where a more astringent, Modernist, fractured approach is called for. This is especially the case if you are prepared to see those crucial aspects through the tinted glass of nature awareness and in context with how he sees the works that go before and after them. No better illustration of his ability to take in the advanced, forward-looking aspect of Mahler's work is provided by his approach to this most Modernist of Mahler's symphonies.

Kubelik's performance of the Sixth is astringent and very pro-active. This is the music of a man of action and vigour which, when Mahler wrote it, he certainly was. The first movement is very fast and this certainly stresses the classical basis of this most classically structured movement and therefore, I believe, the nature of the Tragedy embodied. It makes us see Mahler's "hero" prior to the tragedy that overwhelms him in the last movement in that the pressing forward stresses optimism, a head held high, a corrective to those accounts that seem to want to condemn Mahler's hero to his doom from the word go, like Barbirolli, for example. It also has the effect of making the music jagged and nervy in the way the episodes tumble past kaleidoscopically. I must praise the Bavarian Radio Orchestra here for managing to hang on so unerringly to the notes most of the time. Of course the DG studio version means that there are no errors of playing but you could argue that if you are going to hear a one-off "live" performance a few mistakes only add to the tension. Remember, however, that Kubelik's tempi in Mahler are always on average faster than his colleagues and that ought to mitigate a little the speeds encountered here.

The Scherzo is placed second and reinforces the energy, rigour and astringency I remarked on in the first movement. As usual Kubelik is consistent and uncompromising to his vision. Perhaps the speed adopted here does fail to convey the peculiar "gait" of the music and that must be a minus. After this the third movement is beautifully free-flowing and unselfconscious. In fact it is hard to imagine a performance of this movement that could be much better in the way it seems to unfold unassisted, moving in one great breath to a glorious climax that is more effective for being neither under nor over -stated. Notice particularly the nostalgic solo trumpet that is as true a Mahlerian sound as you could wish for. The close-in recording also allows many details to emerge that you may not have hitherto heard so well.

The opening of the last movement is superbly done with trenchancy and harsh detail unflinchingly presented. The main allegro passages emit the same white-hot intensity of the first two movements and yet there remains a controlling mind behind it to guard against the intensity turning into abandonment and so the tension is ratcheted up. There are, as ever, no histrionics from Kubelik. Indeed there is from him just a tunnel-visioned concentration. However, I did begin to feel, particularly after the first hammer blow, that all of this high intensity actually threatens to overwhelm the music's innate poetry where there needs to be a degree more flexibility, a degree more humanity. That this impression crucially impedes the listener's ability to notice contrasting passages where you could reflect on what has gone and what might be to come. I suppose you could say that Kubelik allows no time to catch the breath and I really think there should be some. In fact I think much the same can be said about the first two movements under Kubelik but that it takes the experience of the fourth movement pitched at this pace to really bring this home. The Coda, where the trombone section intones a funeral oration over the remains of the fallen hero is, however, under Kubelik an extraordinary sound with a degree of vibrato allowed to the players that chills to the marrow. That, at least, is deeply moving and well worth waiting for even if my overall verdict on Kubelik in this whole symphony is that it falls short of the greatest.

In the end I am left with the feeling that this is a partial picture of the Sixth, albeit an impressive one, but still a partial one which leaves us unsatisfied. I would advise you to turn to Thomas Sanderling on RS which I deal with in my Mahler recordings survey or Gunther Herbig whose recording on Berlin Classics I nominated a Record of the Month, there is also Mariss Jansons on LSO Live whose recent recording impressed me greatly and Michael Gielen on Hänssler. Look to all of those those first.

Rafael Kubelik views the Sixth as high intensity drama right the way through. A perfectly valid view and thrillingly delivered. But this protean work succeeds when its protean nature is laid out before us and Kubelik, eyes wide open, does not really do that. More space, more weight, more room is needed throughout and at particularly crucial nodal points (the two hammer-blows are too lightweight in preparation and delivery, for example) to really move and impress as this symphony can under those mentioned above.

Kubelik's Mahler Sixth is a very vivid, though very partial, view of the work.



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