



Edition Ferenc Fricsay (XII) – J. Strauss: Walzer • Polkas

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Audiophile Audition (Gary Lemco - 2010.08.14)

Hungarian maestro Ferenc Fricsay (1914-1963) maintained a sensitive respect for the music of the Strauss family, even engaging (with tenor Peter Anders) in all-Strauss concerts that would rival the New Year's pageants staged by the Vienna Philharmonic by way of Clemens Krauss and Willi Boskovsky. This Strauss edition from the RIAS archives (6-8 June 1950 and 28 October 1952) capture the world of Austro-Hungarian elegance and epic leisure that defined the period of Johann Strauss's life (1825-1899) and legitimized his claim as "the uncrowned king of operetta." Fricsay, himself the son of a military band-director, gave open-air concerts in Szeged, refining his immense knowledge of the orchestra, particularly the brass, with a panoply of marches, waltzes, and polkas.

The program opens with a polished rendition of *On the Beautiful, Blue Danube*, much envied by Johannes Brahms for its blaze of color and infinite wealth of lyric melodies. Less familiar is the *Overture to Das Spitzentuch der Koenigen*, which may be loosely translated as *The Glittery Cloth of Kings*. After a lengthy introduction, it settles for "Roses from the South" as its melodic kernel. Fricsay slows the tempo to a dreamy barcarolle lilt, then the flute and brass carry the motion along with scurrying strings in a manner much copied by Franz von Suppe and Jacques Offenbach. Fricsay inscribed a complete version of *Der Fledermaus*, but he opts here for here for the frothy *Tik-Tak*, a *Polka-schnell* whose snare drum keeps the peppery filigree moving. From *A Night in Venice*, we experience the enchantment of the *Lagoon Waltzes*, a series of sighing and lilting gestures – the various hesitations in the rhythm reminiscent of the best of Kleiber and Knappertsbusch – whose innate vocalism all but realize he voices of Richard Tauber and Miliza Korjus to our inner ear.

The fervent companion-piece to the *Lagoon-Waltzes*, the eternal *Voices of Spring*, sways and sashays with a slick panache that erases the usual oom-pah-pah basis of the rhythm. The lush orchestration – especially the flute, horns, and harp – seems a mere step away from the presumably more opulent dances by Tchaikovsky. The grandest of all Strauss waltzes, the *Emperor Waltzes*, receives an expansively warm reading, certainly on a par with the *Furtwängler* reading and eminently less tragic. Heraldry and delicate color the interpretation has in spades, a tender nostalgia for a bygone age of noble courtesy. Of an equivalent girth arises *Artist's Life*, whose opening oboe and flute line evolve through the cello line to create a shimmering effect, lithe and light as a cat. Scenes of *La vie bohémienne* coalesce, coquetry as enacted by the likes of Frank Morgan, Albert Bassermann, and Luise Rainer.

The final four entries by Fricsay are devoted to the hectic and rhythmically engaging polkas and scherzi that charm and beguile for the sheer, buoyant energy, their deftness of orchestral imagination. Would that another version of *Eljen a Magyar!* were among them; but the condensed thunder and lightning of *Light Blood* and

Chit-Chat, along with the irrepressible Perpetual Motion and diaphanous Pizzicato Polka, should satisfy the Strauss connoisseur for many repetitions of this glorious disc.

