



Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau sings Gustav Mahler | Daniel Barenboim, piano

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Fanfare (Lynn René Bayley - 2010.09.01)

Very little that Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau ever sang was perfunctory and, over a career spanning more than 40 years, it was usually well sung, but the years before 1975 caught him in fresher, brighter voice. Thus, this 1971 Berlin concert of Mahler songs finds him in particularly good form, and his interaction with Daniel Barenboim produces interpretations of great sensitivity as well as drama. For some reason I've never understood, Barenboim always played better when he accompanied Fischer-Dieskau than at any other time or in any other venue, and such is the case here.

The programming is a bit odd: three of the early Lieder und Gesänge aus der Jugendzeit, then the two Rückert songs, the complete Songs of a Wayfarer, then one more of the Lieder und Gesänge, ending with the seven excerpts from Des Knaben Wunderhorn. It works, but I don't see why he didn't do all four of the Jugendzeit Lieder as a group. Fischer-Dieskau is in excellent voice—this was a year or two before the voice really began to dry out—despite one or two pushed high notes early on. The sound quality is stunning, the voice and piano having natural hall acoustic and reverberance. You almost feel as if you are in the hall when listening to this disc.

Interpretively, there are no surprises except that most of the songs are taken at leisurely tempos that allow him to make some particularly interesting points in the lyrical sections. It's an excellent recital all round. The liner notes, as usual, exalt the singer to a pedestal above all other Lieder singers as the epitome of German art, a pedestal that Fischer-Dieskau himself always found an uncomfortable perch (see his autobiographies). As I've mentioned in earlier reviews, yes, he was wonderful, but Karl Erb, Aksel Schiøtz, and Hans Hotter all preceded him as Lieder singers who combined sensitive word coloring with a clean, unmannered musical approach. It was Walter Legge who turned him from a very fine Lieder singer into an icon who was supposedly *sine qua non* in the history of singing.