



Paul Kletzki conducts Brahms, Schubert & Beethoven

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After the end of the Second World War, at a time when EMI's Walter Legge was re-establishing continental European contacts, Paul Kletzki became a valued addition to the roster of the company's artists. He directed a performance of Brahms's Fourth Symphony with the Swiss Festival Orchestra – it's better known today as the Lucerne Festival Orchestra – that was released on 78s and was something of a calling card for both orchestra, with which Legge was delighted, and, of course, conductor. The last day of that recording session, 7 September 1946, saw an additional event, namely an evening's charity concert during when Kletzki and the orchestra reprised the Brahms they had just recorded and added two other pieces to form the release now issued by Audite.

His later Czech Philharmonic LP may be more familiar than the 78 but few Kletzki admirers would want to be without the ancillary pleasures of this live performance, notwithstanding its very close approximation to the 78 set. It's a performance of architectural surety and expressive balance. Kletzki was not one for quirks or peculiarities and he invariably saw straight to the heart of things. Thus this reading is flexible but never rhythmically flabby, and whilst the string choirs don't sing out, this may be as much to do with the rather constricted sound as anything else. The horns certainly sound on fine form – albeit there is a touch of distortion, especially noticeable in the second movement – and though the Lucerne winds can be a touch pinched tonally they are well balanced and generally personable-sounding. The Andante is nobly conceived, its narrative finely detailed, the scherzo propulsive. With a powerfully but musically convincing finale all that this really needs is slightly better engineering and a more open top, the better to capture the hall ambience. Otherwise, it reveals Kletzki, yet again, as a musician lacking grandiose pretensions but possessing the firmest architectural strengths.

Much the same goes for Schubert's Unfinished Symphony which, whilst Kletzki jettisons the first movement repeat, is notably well-phrased and conceived in dramatic terms. There's swish audible throughout but principally during the second movement where it becomes quite intrusive. I suspect that attempts to limit this have also taken some of the higher frequencies with it which accounts for the somewhat cramped sound. Nevertheless, the performance itself is deeply impressive, as is the intensity that Kletzki locates in the Leonore Overture No.3. There's some chuffing here, too, and overload hints in forte outbursts.

These relatively minor distractions apart, Audite has done well to restore this concert. Documentation is first class.