



R. Strauss: Don Juan, W. A. Mozart:
Symphony No. 28 & I. Stravinsky: The
Firebird

aud 95.591

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Karl Böhm was 82 when he made this recording of Don Juan, but you'd never know it. While not quite as fast as those by Kempe or Strauss himself, this is a tremendously vital, enthusiastic performance, played with tremendous gusto by the Cologne Radio Symphony. The horns in particular do themselves proud, and Böhm's mastery of the idiom is everywhere in evidence, nowhere more so than in the tremendous climax he builds just before the ghostly coda. It's a magnificent memento of a great Strauss conductor in his element, and the engineering is also excellent.

The Mozart also has all the qualities that we expect from Böhm: well-chosen tempos, clear textures, and a particularly elegant and focused account of the Andante. Period-instrument performances have made Böhm's Mozart sound a touch dull and fusty to modern ears, but there's no questioning his sheer musicality. The big surprise is his absolutely wonderful account of the Firebird Suite from 1963. With orchestral textures of supernatural clarity and not a trace of stodginess in tempos or stiffness in rhythm, this is certainly one of the most individual and impressive accounts of the piece currently available.

The earlier sonics are a touch boxy, and there are a couple of tiny bobbles here and there (trumpets under xylophone in the Infernal Dance), but it really doesn't matter. This is a significant addition to the Böhm and Firebird discographies (he made no commercial recordings of Stravinsky, though he conducted a smattering of pieces). Audite suggests that more Böhm from this source will be forthcoming, and on evidence here I very much look forward to hearing it.