



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

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Audiophile Audition (Gary Lemco - 2007.12.17)

A rather voluptuous reading of the Richard Strauss Don Juan

Repertoire usual and unusual from Karl Böhm (1894-1981), the former a rather voluptuous reading of the Richard Strauss Don Juan (20 September 1976), a composer over whom Böhm maintained a decided hegemony for two generations. The soul of flexible, responsive color, this performance has impetuous ambiance to spare, especially in the timbral relationships of oboe, flute, brass, and harp. The emergent, heroic fanfare enjoys a string halo of some girth and later attains massive harmonization in the Bruno Walter mold.

The Mozart C Major Symphony (30 March 1973) proceeds in a staid, demure, galant tempo, utilizing a reduced ensemble, detailed articulation, and phraseology that pushes the melodic line stage-front. A dreamy haze surrounds the gentle Andante, an otherworldly beguilement with other dimensions. Some may find the Menuetto Allegretto a tad dainty in Viennese style, although the middle section exerts more gristle. The last movement achieves just the right allocation of scampering and expressive figures, their respective weights applied in facile, graceful measure, the warbling motifs delicately ingenuous.

The music of Igor Stravinsky rarely appeared in Böhm's programs and never in his discography; but he did lead the German premier of *Jeux de Cartes* in Dresden, and he conducted *Le Chant du Rossignol* in 1923. This 1919 version of the *Firebird* (5 April 1963) exudes color and drama, the striking care in the string glissandi of the first section complemented by the percussive clarity of the keyboard, winds, and the flutter of the brass. Lovely viola intonations for the *Dance of the Princesses*, the orientalisms indebted to Rimsky-Korsakov. Virtuoso ensemble marks the *Danse Infernal*, the brass and percussion in fine fettle, the metrical asymmetries assimilated into one gorgeous gesture of black magic. The same homogeneity of tone transitions the lovely *Berceuse* to the blazing *Finale*, a peroration grand as it is unique in Böhm's color arsenal.