



F. Schubert: Mass No. 6 in E-flat major, D 950

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Audiophile Audition (Gary Lemco - 2005.12.02)

Schubert drafted his E-flat Mass on a commission from Michael Leiternmayer in June 1828. Schubert followed the Viennese tradition in liturgical music quite rigorously, restricting his use of wind writing without flutes, two horns, two trumpets, and three trombones to support the choir. The expansiveness of the textures, comparable to those of the "Great" C Major Symphony, includes rich harmonic modulations and repetitions as well as long-phrased melodies, several of which recall the Overture to Rosamunde. Schubert employs fugal counterpoint from the antique style for his Gloria, Credo, and Sanctus sections; although, with his typical modesty, Schubert expressed a desire to study further with Simon Sechter, the Viennese master of the contrapuntal exercises. The completed Mass was performed posthumously on 4 October 1829, eleven months after Schubert's death.

Recorded 22 March 1968, this elegant performance captures conductor Rafael Kubelik (1914-1996) in top form, demonstrating his capacity to balance weighty blocks of sound and shifting semi-operatic textures. The solo voices, embedded into the tissue of the choral concept, eschew the high coloratura virtuosity we find in Mozart's Great Mass in C Minor. We do have a magnificent trio in Et incarnatus est and lovely soli in the Agnus Dei. The Sanctus achieves a dramatic impact more akin to Weber's Wolf-Glen scene from Der Freischuetz. The blending of classical Viennese sacred music tradition in the manner of Haydn and Mozart and Schubert's own subjective style occurs with silken precision, a performance to rival Erich Leinsdorf's equally convincing 1960 version featuring tenor Fritz Wunderlich (Testament SBT 1111). Kubelik's vocal cast congeals seamlessly, wherein Gundula Janowitz sails in the Benedictus, and the Dona nobis pacem, with its dark agogics and the full vocal quintet and chorus, hurls itself forward in mighty declamation. In augmented surround sonic splendor, courtesy of Otto Petzak, the totality of the effect proves piously spellbinding.