



Edition Ferenc Fricsay (V) – J. Strauss: Die Fledermaus

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Splendid singing, outstanding conducting and lively action ...

Hard on the heels of the old Decca recording under Clemens Krauss appeared this even older version from German Radio. Recorded in 1949 the sound is quite stunning. The clarity makes every detail fully audible and there is a sheen on the strings that leaves the Decca far behind. It is mono of course but of such remarkable quality that I rarely miss the stereo definition. There is a fair amount of distortion, mainly in duets and ensembles, which is irritating but possible to live with. Contrary to the Krauss issue there is dialogue included and it is delivered with theatrical flair and in high spirits. With no texts enclosed one needs to be fluent in German, but those who are not will almost certainly appreciate the atmosphere and the tangible enjoyment from the artists.

Hungarian Ferenc Fricsay was an excellent advocate of Johann Strauss's music – documented on DG recordings – and his conducting is no less idiomatic than Clemens Krauss's. Even a real sourpuss must be cheered up by the playing of the overture and when the imaginary curtain rises the plucked strings and harp, preceding Alfred's serenading, will almost certainly produce shivers down the spine. And it is the conducting and the playing that time and again will make the listener sit up and prick up the ears. The Waltz of Waltzes, An der schönen blauen Donau, is played as ballet insert near the end of act II and this reading can be compared with the greatest of the many versions that have amassed in my collection.

A Fledermaus without good singers is, however, just a half Fledermaus and the Berlin based cast Fricsay had gathered can compare favourably with any of the commercial sets. Two of the singers here were to appear half a decade later on Karajan's Columbia recording (see review); Helmut Krebs as a clear-voiced and honeyed Alfred and the young Rita Streich as a delicious Adele. As Gabriel Eisenstein we hear Peter Anders, whose 100th anniversary is celebrated this year. He was sadly killed in a car accident in 1954, aged only 46, and this recording is as good an example as any of his capacity. He is a dramatic and more aggressive Eisenstein than most others but he has charm and his singing is glorious – and sensitive. This recording is a worthy tribute to his memory. His Rosalinde is sung by a 22-year-old Anny Schlemm, who sounds more mature than her age and is absolutely splendid in Klänge der Heimat. Herbert Brauer, whose recorded legacy doesn't seem to be too comprehensive, is an excellent Falke and the minor roles are also well taken with an extra plus for Anneliese Müller's 'visual' Orlofsky.

The recording was for a while available on CD (Deutsche Grammophon) some fifteen years ago. I didn't hear it then but I'm happy to have had the opportunity now. Considering the age and some technical shortcomings it will hardly be a first choice

for a library recording but as a complement to one of the classic sets it is highly attractive. The two Karajan recordings, Boskovsky's early 1970s version – for long my favourite version but I tend to waver sometimes – Böhm (without dialogue) and Carlos Kleiber (DG) are the cream; for a splendid DVD version there is Domingo's Covent Garden set with Prey, Te Kanawa and Luxon and for the most Viennese of all the Krauss recording is more than worth the money. Real aficionados will need them all.

