



Edition Ferenc Fricssay (VI) – L. v.  
Beethoven: Symphonies No. 7 & No. 8,  
Leonore Overture No. 3

aud 95.593

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[www.musicweb-international.com](http://www.musicweb-international.com) (Colin Clarke - 2009.03.17)

Ferenc Fricssay's Fidelio is held by some to rival the great recordings and even stand above them. That he was a fine Beethovenian is further evidenced by the present disc of Deutschlandradio Kultur-licensed performances.

This has to be one of the leanest 'Sostenuto' sections of the first movement of Beethoven's Seventh I have ever heard. Discipline is all, something confirmed by the perfect transition into the Vivace. This, coupled with the dryness of the recording, put me strangely in mind of Toscanini. Fricssay does not take the first movement repeat, something that seems in keeping with the restless, relentless drive. The Allegretto has a similar relentless tread, while the true Presto of the third movement reminds us of what a superb ensemble the RIAS orchestra could be. The finale is remarkable for the quality and precision of its off-beat accents. Here, also, the drive of the first three movements is converted into fire. The sound is more than acceptable – only some unnatural trumpet highlighting towards the end obtrudes - the trumpets protrude because of the harsh, treble-based recording they are accorded.

Comparing Fricssay with Munch in the Eighth - using Decca LXT3053: Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, Kingsway Hall in October 1947 - is fascinating. Munch is direct and punchy. His horns are vibrato-oriented in the Trio – and here it lends to the expressive intent. Fricssay is more intent on stressing the element of dance, especially in the first movement and the recorded sound on Audite is more easily approachable. Clarity of counterpoint is stressed, although not totally at the expense of generated excitement. The finale is heard in extraordinary detail. This is testimony to Fricssay's ear rather than the recording per se.

The Leonore Overture was recorded three months before this Seventh. The introduction is astonishing in Fricssay's painting of the scene - a dark prison cell. The clarinet, when it enters, is less a ray of light, more a representation in sound of severe longing. The main part of the overture sags a little though. By the way, the three parts of the overture are each given a separate track, which seems a little keen. Comparison of this version with Fricssay's live RSO Berlin 5 February 1961 account on the IMG Artists "Great Conductors of the 20th Century" series (reviewed on this site by Terry Barfoot) finds the later version an immediately more arresting account. The recording is more "present" and the first, announcing, chord leaves us in no doubt as to Fricssay's intent. It is fascinating to compare Fricssay pre- and post-departure. He left the orchestra in 1954, initially for Houston but when that failed for the Bavarian State Opera.

Audite are performing great archival services recently. The Fricssay collector should not hesitate.