



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

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I do tend to squirm when faced with yet another Fledermaus, but this 1949 Berlin radio broadcast grabbed me from the start and never let go. If ever you want proof that Die Fledermaus is, indeed, the summit of Viennese operetta, listen to this.

Mind you, this is not its first appearance on CD. It was released not that long ago in an excellent series of German radio broadcasts of operettas on Membran, and it has also appeared on Melodram 29001. But the sound here is excellent, beautifully remastered by Ludger Boeckenhoff.

The cast members are not just top notch and in the flower of youthful energy. Their acting is also on a far higher, fizzier level than is usual in studio recordings. There's none of that whispery reading of the lines that so disfigures a number of EMI operettas. This is due to the libretto adaptation and radio direction by Heinz Tietjen, a theatrical figure of importance before, during, and after the Nazi era. One really has the sense of being in a theatre on a particularly good evening, and the whole performance is infused with a slightly inebriated quality – the fault of King Champagne, naturally.

Ferenc Fricsay's conducting has a well-thought-out deliberateness that is in piquant counterpoint with the dialog. "Schantz" (Strauss) would have been pleased with Fricsay's results. There is also a Berlin buoyancy to the performance that spices up the Viennese lethargy one often settles for in a typical Fledermaus.

Anny Schlemm and Rita Streich are wonderfully vivacious as Rosalinde and Adele, acting out their numbers charmingly and pointedly. The handsome Peter Anders must have been a wonder to see and hear as (a tenor) Eisenstein – he sings robustly and openly. By contrast, the Alfred of Helmut Krebs sometimes ceases singing altogether and drops into a sort of parlando mannerism I found novel but not necessarily refreshing. But this is different from the usual ham opera-tenor characterization one gets from an Alfred. The Orlofsky of mezzo-soprano Anneliese Mueller is also quite rich, and the Dr Falke of Herbert Brauer sets a nice, fruity tone as the evening's sly compere.

The excellent notes by Habakuk Traber (in German and English) help unravel the complicated political situation in immediate postwar Germany. Indeed, this recording was made just at the time of the Berlin Blockade!