



G. Mahler: Symphony No. 7

aud 80.476

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On February 5th 1976 the Czech-born conductor Rafael Kubelik strode up to the podium in Munich for a live recording of this work with his much-loved Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra players. Although this account was done under the auspices of the Bavarian Broadcasting Company and now appears as a gatefold double 180g LP on the Audite label, Kubelik had previously recorded this work for DGG with the same Orchestra as part of a complete Mahler Symphonic cycle. They clearly recognised his interpretative strengths and the reputation of these Bavarian musicians for sumptuous, nostalgic and exciting performances of a Symphony that is full of daring and incipient tragedy.

The Seventh really is a demanding Symphony both thematically and structurally. Great Mahler conductors like Kubelik and later, Bernstein have brought their own unique visions to a sonorous composition that is equally organic and elemental in nature, especially when it develops the central idyll of the first movement. Yet this is also a completely uncompromising work in those flickering terrors of a nightmarish third section. Technically it is in the first movement where Mahler takes all the risks and it is here that he comes closest to crossing into atonalism. However, he steps back from this abyss with an extrovert and white-hot finale that triumphantly conveys a resilient, euphoric and purpose-filled redemptive quality. It is the conductor's role to worthily frame these nature themes, his second movement romanticism, the expressionist nightmare and that highly emotive conclusion. This takes nerve, remarkable concentration and a deft handling of the rank-and-file in the orchestra pit. Here Kubelik develops the Symphony along traditional lines. He is convincing, flamboyant, intense and even delicate when required for the string chords that typically precede the scoring for solo violin. His baton is less flashy than Bernstein's was for the famous New York Philharmonic readings of the finale but this Kubelik 'live' cut has snap and synergy throughout instead. This is reflected in his tempo which gives an overall running timing at a little over seventy three minutes whereas Bernstein's Seventh is closer to eighty. A vivid and transparent recording raises the excitement levels even further and the dynamic presentation of instrumental textures is particularly well defined. This is beautifully developed throughout all four movements, but that surreal piercing quality of the clarinet glissandos, which sharply introduces a third movement dreamscape, is really striking. This soon turns to a darker decaying vision-one in which the lean-sounding strings and thumping tubas and contra-bassoons viscously peel away to a grotesque image of a grinning skull beneath the skin. Audite have shown in their re-master just how effective and rewarding the skilful use of engineering can be when drawing out these musical pictures.