



G. Mahler: Symphony No. 8

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“I have just completed my 8th – it is the greatest I’ve ever done. And so particular in content and form that it is impossible to write about it. – Imagine that the universe starts sounding and ringing. It is no longer human voices but the planets and suns that are circling.” These were the words Mahler wrote on his newly created powerhouse to one of his protégés, Willem Mengelberg, in 1906. In this live performance of Mahler’s Eighth Symphony from Munich on June 24th 1970, Rafael Kubelik and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra (BRSO) attest to this Mahlerian vision through a combination of technical command and musical coherency.

Kubelik takes Part 1 of this work on a rather fast pace. Along with the live performances from Bernstein (1962, Sony), Gergiev (2008, LSO Live) and the studio performance of Bertini (1991, EMI), his is one of the selected few who takes this section under 22 minutes. The tonal E Flat chord from Eberhard Kraus on the organ gave a platform to the mighty proclamation introduced by the forces of the vocal choruses and soloists. Together with the instrumentalists, they add to weight the text’s spiritual profundity.

Part I is often viewed as a mass-oratorio, and the choral expertise of these soloists (especially with Edith Mathis and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau) and those of Rafael Kubelik’s craftsmanship of delivering an emphatic invocation to the spirit of the Creator that paves the soft cantabile that presents the vocalists with soft tranquility is particularly uplifting. Although one may feel that the final “Gloria Patri Domino” sounds restrained from a full rejoice, the projection by the vocalists and unison of the orchestra and Kraus in accelerated tempo does appeal as to bring this “crowning apotheosis” onto a new dimension of this finite universe.

Part II is set to poetry on Goethe’s “Faust,” and has been dubbed as Mahler’s closest rendition to an operatic composition that he never realized in his lifetime. Here, the soloists each take on a different personality: Arroyo as Magna peccatrix, Spoorenberg as Mater gloriosa, Mathis as Una poenitentium (Gretchen), Hamari as Mulier Samaritana, Procter as Maria Aegyptiaca, Grober as Doctor Marianus, Fischer-Dieskau as Pater ecstaticus, and Crass as Pater profundus. In this Part, Donald Grobe and the Erna Spoorenberg each give ethereal demonstrations in their roles, with poignant sensitivity and a powerful grip to the lasting emotions from the score. Somewhat disappointing is the final segment of this 52-minute section, where one of the sopranos misses the mark in a high note. This aside, Kubelik together with the musicians of the BRSO provide sympathetic accompaniment throughout, and in the final last minute, they over-triumph the human voices with their gigantic ending like thunders descended from the heavens.

Excellent notes from Erich Mauermann accompanies this Audite disc, made available from the archives of the Bavarian Radio.

