audite

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf interprets songs by Wolf, Schubert, Strauss, Purcell, Arne & Quilter

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Classic Record Collector (John Steane - 01.07.2009)

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf

The vitality here – the deep and quick play of mind, spirit and technique – is newly astonishing. One thinks one knows Schwarzkopf, and certainly one has heard her in Wolf's Mignon settings times enough to have become familiar with (it might seem) every nuance: but in these performances it's all made new again, the character of the girl, her youth making doubly poignant the adult intensity of her feelings, so freshly illuminated, almost recreated. There must have been something special in the circumstances – the old master and the former pupil, now at the height of her powers, reunited in Berlin after so many, and so fateful, years.

These alone would make the complete broadcast recital an essential acquisition even for those who have caught up with the items previously issued on other labels. The Wolf songs were omitted, as was Purcell's wonderful Blessed Virgins Expostulation, a piece which Schwarzkopf included in several of her recitals in the early 1950s but which is new to the discography. That and Music for a while are lovely examples of the singer's art – and were no doubt chosen to remind listeners that, as she had been a proud ambassadress of the Lied in other countries, so she would now like to bring to Germans the songs of her adopted country by marriage.

For Raucheisen's part in the recital, if at first it seems a little dry and professorial (his renunciation of the sustaining pedal almost too virtuous), that disappears as he enters passionately into the pounding insistencies of Kennst du das Land? In the postlude to Epiphanias he is clearly visualizing with humour and relish the procession of childkings, and in Arne's setting of Where the bee sucks he brings a rhythmic touch achieved by the welljudged play of legato and staccato. The piano itself, if not a period instrument, is appropriately mellow in tone and free from any late-Romantic stridency. The recorded sound, digitally remastered, is not entirely innocent of the hard glare which so often seems to be accepted as the modern guarantee that the engineer has done his improving work. For most of the time the voice is beautifully reproduced but for the occasional exceptions I know what she would have said: "Well, they can say all sorts of things about my singing but I don't think I was ever harsh".

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