Claudio Abbado conducts Schubert, Beethoven & Wagner

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EAN: 4022143956279

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Fanfare (Jerry Dubins - 2014.08.20)

Though the performance on the present disc may be closer in tempos to Abbado's Vienna account, it has a more buoyant feel and more transparent sound to it, largely due, I think, to the lighter sound and crisper articulation of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. World-class ensemble that it is, to my ear, the Vienna Philharmonic has always cultivated a mellower, plusher sound which doesn't "speak" as quickly as does the more sharply defined sound of the Berlin Philharmonic. Between Abbado's Vienna and Berlin Beethoven cycles, I prefer the later Berlin effort. But this version with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe offers a kind of composite of the Vienna's slower tempos and the Berlin's greater clarity.

If it's Abbado's Siegfried Idyll you want, this live performance from the 1988 Lucerne Festival may be your only choice. I wouldn't swear to it, but it doesn't look like there's another recording of him leading the piece. Abbado was no stranger to Wagner—he recorded a complete Lohengrin with Siegfried Jerusalem and Cheryl Studer for Deutsche Grammophon, plus several single discs containing vocal numbers and orchestral excerpts from Wagner's operas, but I don't find another Siegfried Idyll among them.
This is certainly a worthy addition to Abbado's recorded legacy, and it's self-recommending to all fans of this great 20th-century conductor.

»audite« Ludger Böckenhoff • Tel.: +49 (0)5231-870320 • Fax: +49 (0)5231-870321 • info@audite.de • www.audite.de