



Robert Schumann: Complete Symphonic Works

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Fanfare (Peter Burwasser - 2016.10.01)

Fanfare This is the sixth and final volume of Audite's survey of the complete symphonic works of Robert Schumann. As is often the case with such productions, the last volume is the mop-up of miscellanea and usually seldom heard music. The Manfred Overture that opens the program is by far the best-known work here. It bursts forth with the heft and swagger that has been noted with unanimity by previous Fanfare reviewers of this series. Nearly all of the music on this CD is inspired by literature, and Holliger and his Cologne based band play with a fearless sense of theatricality. I will also echo my colleagues in praise of the orchestra's lucidity of texture (it has been suggested that the use of smaller string sections in the WDR Symphony Orchestra helps to achieve this, although there is nothing in the notes for this volume to corroborate that claim) and for the excellence of the Audite audio engineering, a quality I am well familiar with from other Audite recordings.

While there are no revelations in this program, the music is generally of high quality, even though it comes from the end of Schumann's career, perhaps something of a rejoinder to the "truism" that Schumann's abilities and imagination had eroded somewhat at this point. The problem for the listener, at least this one, is that the blustery nature of this dramatic music becomes a bit wearisome by the end of a complete listening. In hindsight, it may have made more sense to have included these dramatic overtures in more varied programs of symphonies and concertos, as is usually the practice in presenting such work. The exception is the early attempt at symphonic writing by a 21-year-old Schumann, the incomplete Symphony in G-Minor, named for the city it was premiered in, Zwickau. It is replete with lovely writing, with the composer's signature firmly in place.

The complete set of Schumann orchestral music by these forces is certainly a success by almost any measure. I would offer one caveat, and that is that the WDR SO, while excellent and a great pleasure to hear, lacks the ultimate degree of polish and finesse of the top-tier orchestras of the world. But I'm not sure how much that matters in this material, given that a certain degree of lustiness, if anything, enhances the expressiveness of the music.