



Richard Strauss: Macbeth, Don Juan, Tod und Verklärung & Festmarsch in C

aud 97.755

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American Record Guide (Roger Hecht - 2018.09.01)

Richard Strauss wrote these three early tone poems when he was the Kapellmeister in Weimar, Germany from 1889 to 1894, making these performances home cooking for the Staatskapelle Weimar. That said cooking turns out to be very good is apparent right from the rousing opening outburst of *Macbeth*. From there the music surges forth with controlled abandon. The second theme, in the winds, supposedly is Lady Macbeth conceiving her dastardly plot and is appropriately icy. Then it becomes one big storm, effectively dramatic and well timed right down to the big pauses.

This performance presents a real challenge to the classic Rudolf Kempe recording from Dresden, with Karabits a little slower, heavier, and more dramatic than the more open and brighter Kempe. It also has a bigger bass foundation, and the Kempe is not exactly bass shy. Both are great performances, and the engineering of each fits the interpretations. Of the other *Macbeths* I know, Gerhard Schwarz is very exciting, though I prefer the German orchestras of Karabits and Kempe. Norman del Mar and Mark Elder are good, Elder less so, but neither is up to Karabits, Kempe, and Schwarz.

The *Don Juan* is slightly brighter in tone—fittingly so—but still rich, muscular, and dashing. The *Death and Transfiguration* reading produces the eerie and other-worldly sections very well, but where it really impresses is in its sheer power in the sections that call for it, especially near the end, where Karabits stretches out some passages to great effect. The *Festival March in C* was Strauss's anniversary gift to "Die Wilde Gung'l", the Munich orchestra he had conducted in his youth. It is a rarity but nothing special.

The music is dark, muscular, and powerful, full of energy, and built like most of this kind of German music should be, from the very bottom of the orchestra up.

The cover of the booklet is black, with a picture of Karabits and lettering in purple and white. The dominant impression emanates from the black, and that is fitting, because black is the color I associate with these performances. (The disc is purple. It should be black.) The Staatskapelle Weimar sounds like the perfect orchestra for this music. If this is the first of a Strauss tone poem project from them, the result will be formidable and could stand with the Strauss of Rudolf Kempe, Herbert von Karajan, Karl Böhm, etc. It is probably closest to Kempe, but darker and heavier. The sound emphasizes the darkness of the performance. The notes are not extensive, but they tell the basic story of the music well enough.

STRAUSS: *Macbeth*; *Don Juan*; *Death & Transfiguration*; *Festival March*
Staatskapelle Weimar/ Kirill Karabits
Audite 97.755—71 minutes

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