



Gustav Mahler: Symphony No. 3

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MUSIC

There were improvements to be made on Abbado's 1980 Vienna recording of Mahler 3, especially given dim timpani strokes and sour chording in the final bars, and this live 1999 performance with the Berlin Philharmonic in London's Royal Festival Hall gains in terms of refinement. Surprisingly, perhaps, the lyrical high-spots move faster than before, rather than slower, relating more tellingly either to their folksong roots (the posthorn serenade) or to the world of searing music drama, whether supporting the deeply expressive phrasing of alto Anna Larsson or bringing the Parsifal touch to the finale. Abbado's miraculous flexibility has been honed to a fine art, as the flower-piece now tells us, and the inner-movement textures are as supernaturally and beautifully 'live' as Rattle makes them on EMI. The explosive 'panics' of the Symphony, though – and I use the term in the original, godlike sense Mahler intended – are never as threatening as either Rattle or Kubelík, in another live performance captured just before his 1968 studio recording, make them. Kubelík's reading dates from a time when every orchestral nerve was straining to register the shock of the new, and if this occasionally means sour intonation and brass solos much less rounded than those of Abbado's aristocratic Berliners, it does come closer to the anarchic voices of nature which resonate throughout the Symphony. This and other later instalments in Audite's Kubelík Mahler cycle are much nearer in time to his DG studio recordings than revelatory early instalments, but his intensely mobile, very Bohemian point of view is worth hearing in either format.