



Gustav Mahler: Symphony No. 7

aud 95.476

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[American Record Guide](#) (Gerald S. Fox - 2001.11.01)

As with the Kubelik recording of Mahler's Symphony 2 (July/Aug 2001), this 1976 concert performance of Symphony 7 is not to be confused with his 1970 studio recording with the same orchestra. I do not have that earlier recording on hand, but if memory serves, both have the same shortcomings. Although this is a well-conceived, straightforward performance, Kubelik ignores so many of Mahler's detailed notations--details that must be observed if Mahler's rampant imaginative ideas are to be realized--that the performance becomes a mere playing of the notes. For instance, the soaring, ecstatic flight of the strings in I (11:05-12:25) is neither soaring nor ecstatic. In the coda, the wild, screaming piccolos and the heavily scored battery--snare drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, tambourine, timpani, triangle--are scarcely heard (compare with the Horenstein, where they are heard best), and much orchestral color is thereby lost. In II, Mahler surely had more mystery in mind in this 'Night Music' than Kubelik gives us. The "Shadowy" (Mahler's word) III is very unshadowy under Kubelik's baton. (To experience that, try Bernstein or Thomas). The phantasmagoria is almost completely missing. Even the famous fffff(!) pizzicato (four bars after cue 161; "so intensely incited, that the strings strike the wood") sounds like a mere pluck (try the Sony Bernstein!). IV is quite good; Mahler's imaginative combining of guitar and mandolin in this movement is clearly heard (not so in many recordings). The finale brings us back to blandness. True, it is very spirited, but the movement's wild humor is in short supply. In the coda, Mahler throws every thing in but the kitchen sink, but here we do not hear much of it. In short, the movement's delicious vulgarity is lacking.

Despite the fact that many of the instruments (especially percussion) are scarcely heard, the recording has good sound. There are those who prefer their Mahler underplayed, with emotions held in check. I can recommend this recording to them, but as I have said often in these pages, underplayed, unemotional Mahler is an oxymoron.