

BEETHOVEN Symphony #3 in E-Flat, Op. 55, Eroica; Leonore Overture #3, Op. 72A; Egmont, Op. 84: Overture. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Hamburg State Philharmonic, in the Eroica; Berlin Philharmonic in the Overtures. Japanese Telefunken GT 9169)

BEETHOVEN Symphonies #5 in c, Op. 67; #6 in F, Op. 68, Pastorale. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Hamburg State Philharmonic in the 5th; Bamberg Symphony in the 6th. Japanese Telefunken GT 9170)

BEETHOVEN Symphonies #7 in A, Op. 92; #8 in F, Op. 93. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Berlin Philharmonic in the 7th; Hamburg State Philharmonic in the 8th. Japanese Telefunken GT 9171)

BRAHMS Symphony #2 in D, Op. 73; Academic Festival Overture, Op. 80. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Berlin Philharmonic in the Symphony; Bamberg Symphony in the Overture. Japanese Telefunken GT 9174)

BRAHMS Symphony #3 in F, Op. 90; Hungarian Dances #1 in g; #3 in F; #10 in F. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Bamberg Symphony. Japanese Telefunken GT 9175)

BRUCKNER Symphony #9 in d. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Hamburg State Philharmonic. Japanese Telefunken GT 9180)

DVORAK Symphony #9 in e, Op. 95, From the New World; SMETANA Ma Vlast: The Moldau; From Bohemia's Woods and Fields. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Bamberg Symphony Orchestra. Japanese Telefunken GT 9178)

MOZART Symphonies #35 in D, K. 385, Haffner; #36 in C, K. 425, Linx; Serenata Notturna, K. 239; Six German Dances, K. 509. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Bamberg Symphony Orch. Japanese Telefunken GT 9166)

MOZART Symphonies #38 in D, K. 504, Prague; #39 in E-Flat, K. 543; Serenade in G, K. 525, Eine kleine Nachtmusik. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Bamberg Symphony Orchestra. Japanese Telefunken GT 9167)

MOZART Symphonies #40 in g, K. 550; #41 in C, K. 551, Jupiter. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Bamberg Symphony Orch. Japanese Telefunken GT 9168)

SCHUBERT Symphony #8 in b, D. 759, Unfinished; GRIEG Peer Gynt: Suite #1 plus Solveig's Song. (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Bamberg Symphony in Schubert; Hamburg State Philharmonic, in Grieg. Japanese Telefunken GT 9172)

Also issued but not submitted for review.

BRAHMS Symphony #1 in c, Op. 68 (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Japanese Telefunken GT 9173)

BRAHMS Symphony #4 in e, Op. 98 (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Hamburg State Philharmonic Orchestra. Japanese Telefunken GT 9176)

STRAUSS Waltzes and Polkas (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Hamburg State Philharmonic Orchestra. Japanese Telefunken GT 9177)

BRUCKNER Symphony #6 (Joseph Keilberth, cond., Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Japanese Telefunken GT 9170)

In every age, there are the easy-to-identify superstar conductors; those who imprint every score they direct with their unmistakable personality, and who reap the benefits of mountains of publicity. Most of the time the fame they achieve is merited. But an unfortunate side effect is that other highly talented conductors, lacking in the aura of the superstar, find themselves neglected. Connoisseurs will tell you

that the 1953 monaural recording released by London of Lohengrin, directed by Joseph Keilberth, remains the most satisfyingly led performance of Lohengrin ever put on a commercial recording. Those same knowledgeable collectors will rave over the Keilberth Flying Dutchman, or the Keilberth Bruckner Sixth (never released in any form in this country--but available from Germany and England on a Telefunken disc that in my experience convinced everyone who heard it that its grooves contained one of the most sublime Bruckner performances in history), or over many of the recordings listed above, and available in this country on a variety of Telefunken releases in the 1950s and 1960s.

Joseph Keilberth, whose death in the middle of a performance of the Second Act Of Tristan and Isolde may be the single truly dramatic non-musical act of his life, was one of a particular type of conductor that has always been under-appreciated by the general music-consuming public. This type of conductor can be called, depending on your tastes in language, "self-effacing", "straight forward", "direct", "unfussy", or "honest". The temptation to say "oh, you mean dull" should be avoided, for I most assuredly do not mean "dull". The process by which a performer breathes life into a score is not one I can describe; I suppose that if I could describe it, I'd be a great conductor, or at least a good part of the way toward such a life. But the result, the performance that has life in it, can be heard by the discerning listener--and there is a great difference between those conductors who are just note-readers, and who are indeed dull, and those conductors who are any of the above adjectives but whose music-making comes alive every time. Conductors who fall into that category for me, and the list is by no means complete, would include Rudolf Kempe, Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt, Kurt Masur, Bernard Haitink, and of course, Joseph Keilberth. All of these conductors give performances that cannot be identified on first hearing (the way one can often hear a recording and say, "that sounds like Szell", or "that's the Furtwaengler recording", or "sounds to me like the Toscanini").

I guess what I am saying might at first sound like a put-down. But the fact that Keilberth's Beethoven doesn't sound like Keilberth isn't a negative factor at all. What counts is that it sounds very much like one's idea of Beethoven! The no-nonsense approach to making music of all of the above conductors, combined with their ability to phrase and shape in an extraordinarily convincing way, is their strength. While I would never want to trade the uniqueness of a Furtwaengler, or a Mengelberg, performance--the very special feeling one gets when listening to a highly individual genius like those two is one of music's great experiences--I would also not want to give up the very great satisfaction of listening to a supremely honest, straight-forward reading conducted with great sweep, but no idiosyncrasies. That is what one gets in these recordings, and there isn't a loser in the bunch.

The Eroica offers a good sampling of the Keilberth strengths. My problem in describing them to you is that the strengths of this kind of performance are precisely the most difficult to try to put into words. Those that I jotted down in my score as I listened include

"rugged", "energy", "warmth", "breathing", "phrasing", and "shape". Those last three may be the most important aspects of Keilberth's art. From the two sharp chords that introduce the Eroica, we are aware that this performance is going somewhere. Every measure is phrased with a sense of what is yet to come, with a sense of pointing towards the culmination. And the long phrases, particularly in the second movement, breathe with the lung power of a great singer. Keilberth's career never took him too long away from the opera pit, and the sheer songfulness of his symphonic conducting shows that. I think that when I wrote "warm" or "warmth" in my score at certain passages, it was the sound of the orchestra in all choirs that motivated the remark. The brass may have tremendous power in a Keilberth recording, but never does it get edgy. The strings are always rich and resonant, and the woodwinds always round and full. Within those specifications there is variety of color--but never does it get harsh. I have never heard a Mahler symphony conducted by Keilberth, and I wouldn't be surprised if I wouldn't like it; I doubt that he would have felt at home with the pungency, even ugliness, that Mahler sometimes calls for. But interestingly, the dissonances in the first movement of the Eroica are not glossed over by Keilberth the way they are by many conductors. He bites into them, and one gets an idea of how they must have shocked Beethoven's contemporaries.

And the "energy". The rhythmic pulse is never heavy-handed with Keilberth; there is always a snap. In addition, chords don't run out of energy as soon as they are sounded. One of the things that marks a Keilberth performance is that the full energy one hears at the beginning of a chord is maintained throughout its duration. You may think that's normal--but if you listen carefully to most conductors' work you'll find that not to be the case. The norm is for more energy to be expended on starting a sound than maintaining it, and the result is a slackening off of the quality and quantity of sound after the initial impact of a chord. Keilberth, along with other great conductors, is aware of this problem and knows the psychology of getting his musicians to continue to give all they have, constantly. One hears it again and again; the opening chords of the Egmont Overture, the slow movements of the Brahms Second and Third Symphonies, which are never allowed to sag, and in many other places.

What amazes is that the orchestral sound Keilberth draws from three different orchestras--one of which (the Berlin Philharmonic) is decidedly a better one than the other two--is almost identical. The Hamburg State Philharmonic and the Bamberg Symphony both sound glorious in these recordings.

I can't go into detail on all twenty-eight works here. But everything deserves praise. The Beethoven performances are all extremely powerful, with ringing horns (the Seventh is spectacular in this regard, perhaps because it is the Berlin Philharmonic), beautiful strings and winds, and a simple ruggedness that I find extremely congenial to Beethoven. The two Brahms symphonies are very beautiful; tempi are moderately fast, but there is a leisurely glow about the readings anyway. The Bruckner Ninth has always been highly regarded by record

collectors, and should be. I am even happier that the Japanese have decided to reissue his incredible Bruckner Sixth, though regretfully it wasn't among the discs that were submitted for review. But this Ninth will be a good introduction to Keilberth's way with this composer: the pauses are all given their full due, the orchestral sonority is dark and organ-like, and the phrasing is majestic. The Dvorak-Smetana record is wonderful--full of energy and sparkle; and the Schubert-Grieg record surprised me with not only the expected warm reading of the Schubert, but the astonishingly evocative and tender performance of the Grieg score, a performance with great color about it.

I have saved the Mozart discs for last because they are going to be, to some, the most controversial. In this day of scholarly Mozart, with the historically accurate and moving performances of people like Neville Marriner, one looks at these large-orchestra readings, in the old Middle-European tradition, as being passé. But a funny thing happens, if you just put one on and sit back. The glow grabs you. There is a deeply felt warmth and humanity about these readings, and a feel for the emotional core of these works, that in fact make them some of the most beautiful and moving Mozart I have ever heard. Again, tempi are moderately fast (particularly most of the slow movements) for those used to the Mozart of other German conductors from this period. But there is no sense of rushing--because of the way in which the tempi are handled, and the way phrases are rounded off fully and easily. There is no rushing ahead to the next idea until the last one has been allowed to express itself fully.

In re-mastering these, the Japanese have sacrificed more volume (they must be played at a higher level than most of your records) and some bass (the original Telefunken were among the best recordings of their time) in exchange for getting an enormous amount of music on each disc. The most amazing example is GT 9170, which has the 33'50" Beethoven Fifth on one side, and the 40'34" Beethoven Sixth on the other! In all cases the sound is more than satisfactory, the pressings quiet, and the naturalness of the original engineering comes through well.

It would be gratifying if this re-release were to spark an interest in this conductor's work. For a few years now I have been religiously collecting his records, grabbing any Keilberth performance that I came across. I have heard very, very few that didn't confirm the opinion that I have come to hold: that Joseph Keilberth was a conductor of tremendous power and a deeply felt humanity, and that getting inside of his honest approach to making music is a deeply rewarding experience.

THE ART OF EDUARD VAN BEINUM with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, Amsterdam

Contents: (\* starred items are monaural)

BACH, J. C. Sinfonias, Op. 18: No. 2 in B-Flat; No. 4 in D. (Rec: 10/6, 7/58)

- \*BARTOK Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta (Rec: 10/13-14/55)
  - \*BERLIOZ Roman Carnival Overture (Rec: 9/24-25/56)
  - \*BRUCKNER Symphony No. 5 in B-Flat (Rec: 3/12/59)
  - DEBUSSY Berceuse Heroique (Rec: 5/27-28/57)
  - \*DEBUSSY Images for Orchestra (Rec: 5/24-25/54)
  - DEBUSSY Marche ecossaise (Rec: 5/27-28/57)
  - DEBUSSY Nocturnes - with Women's voices of Collegium Musicum Amstelodamense (Rec: 5/27-28/57)
  - GRIEG Elegiac Melodies, Op. 34 (Rec: 5/1-3/58)
  - \*KODALY Hary Janos: Suite (Rec: 4/11-12/56)
  - \*MENDELSSOHN Symphony #4 in A, "Italian" (Rec: 6/2-4/55)
  - \*MOZART Symphony #29 in A, K. 201 (Rec: 5/25/56)
  - \*NICOLAI Merry Wives of Windsor: Overture (Rec: 4/10/56)
  - \*RIMSKY-KORSAKOV Scheherazade, Op. 35 (Rec: 7/17/56)
  - \*SCHUBERT Symphony #6 in C, D. 589 (Rec: 5/25/57)
  - \*SCHUBERT Symphony #8 in b, D. 759, "Unfinished" (Rec: 5/22-25/57)
  - SIBELIUS Finlandia, Op. 26 (Rec: 6/7-8/57)
  - SIBELIUS Valse Triste, Op. 44 (Rec: 6/7-8/57)
  - SOUSA Stars and Stripes Forever (Rec: 9/26-27/58)
  - \*STRAVINSKY Firebird: Suite (Rec: 4/6/56)
  - \*THOMAS Mignon: Overture (Rec: 4/10/56)
- Philips 6768.023. 8 Discs.

Certain conductors are special because they combine in their music-making elements often considered antithetical to each other. Eduard van Beinum falls into this category, because his conducting brought together the often-perceived-as-disparate elements of tenderness and energy, brilliance and warmth, firmness of rhythmic pulse and flexibility. Philips Records deserves credit for their willingness to take a chance with a set like this, featuring a marvelous conductor who never really achieved the kind of "box office" success usually considered essential for this kind of retrospective. At the same time, Philips deserves a slap on the wrist, at least, for shoddy presentation. This set contains eight discs of material, with twenty-one pieces of music, and the program notes add up to about fifty square inches of material. A very brief biography, with no real insights, is the sum total of this booklet. Nothing about the specific recordings herein, not even the dates of the sessions, is included; nothing about the music; and nothing about what it is that makes Eduard van Beinum special enough to warrant an eight-record set of this scope.

This is not the place for a biography. Suffice it to say that when van Beinum died in 1959, at the age of 59, the world lost a conductor at the height of his powers, one who would be younger than Karl Bohm today had he lived, and who would have given us many more stereophonic recordings than he was able to. Philips wisely chose not to diddle with the mono recordings made available here, and thus this box presents us with a mixture of mid and late 50's recordings in both technologies. The sound is really superb throughout, with two exceptions. One side of mono recordings made in 1956 (Berlioz' Roman Carnival Overture, Nicolai's Merry Wives of Windsor: Overture, and Thomas' Mignon:

Overture) suffers from some kind of mildly annoying tape swish that must have been introduced into the music when making the LP transcription, because the dates of the original recordings are not the same (the Berlioz taking place five months after the other two). The other exception is much more problematic, since it mars what should be the major "find" in this set: the never-before-released concert performance of the Bruckner Fifth Symphony. The problem here is the original recording. The balances are poor; in particular, the trumpets and trombones are very forward, and the horns are often lost. In general the recording is too bright, and lacks real bass definition or presence.

Sad to say, the sound is not the only thing wrong with the Bruckner. I had extraordinarily high hopes for this, since van Beinum made some spectacularly beautiful and moving recordings of Bruckner symphonies (particularly the Seventh for London, and the Eighth for Philips - released in the U.S. on Epic). I have long considered him to be one of the truly great Bruckner performers, and the Concertgebouw tradition is rich in Bruckner history. But this Fifth never gets off the ground. It simply lacks the kind of momentum and energy that Bruckner must have if his music is not to suffer the longeurs. Tempi are not particularly slow, but the kind of architectural overview that gives shape to a Bruckner performance is nowhere in evidence. Short notes in certain phrases are given perfunctory emphasis where they need real weight; there is often a carelessness of articulation; the scherzo is extremely heavy; the finale is aimless, and lacking the rhythmic tension that it must have. I listened to this recording in tandem with the newly released DG performance by Herbert von Karajan, a recording of considerable power; van Beinum's failure, at least on this occasion, to come to grips with this particular colossus, was highlighted even more by von Karajan's success.

The Bruckner is, of course, a major disappointment to those of us who had hoped to find a long-hidden treasure here. But the remainder of the set is so full of joys that it is more than worthwhile. One of the great pleasures to be found is the way van Beinum brings new light to old chestnuts. His Scheherazade performance is, frankly, the finest I have ever heard on a modern recording - even including such wonderful readings as Beecham's and Ansermet's. It has everything. It has a glowing, deeply burnished sound, with vibrant string tone. It has energy where others gush, but it also has the tenderness and warmth that are essential for this music. It just might make you believe in Rimsky-Korsakov's orchestral masterpiece in a way you haven't in years.

The two Schubert symphonies are also triumphs. In particular, the Sixth receives another of those readings that combines elements that other conductors seem to chose between rather than blend: it is muscular but elegant; it is sinewy but also sensuous. The Eighth is similarly done, with a bit more angularity and muscularity than is usually heard. Mozart's A Major Symphony succeeds for many of the same reasons. There is a remarkably infectious energy in the fast movements - with crisp cellos and basses in the finale. But the Andante breathes and sighs

in a wonderful and haunting way. This is bel canto conducting.

It is almost a cliché that one of the marks of a great conductor is the care he lavishes on miniatures. Van Beinum certainly demonstrates the truth that lies at the core of that cliché. The brilliance and joie-de-vivre that he brings to pieces like The Merry Wives of Windsor: Overture and the Mignon: Overture is always tempered by a great warmth of orchestral color, and by tender, beautiful phrasing. The pieces by Grieg and Sibelius are touchingly done too. Also, the two Debussy miniatures are given with extraordinary effectiveness. The Berceuse heroïque is very touching, and the Marche ecossaise is sprightly. The larger Debussy pieces are also highly successful, if often a bit faster than normal. The second of the three Nocturnes, "Fetes", is positively bracing in its brilliance. Throughout the Images and the Nocturnes, van Beinum and the Concertgebouw provide the music with a tremendous variety and range of colors - far more than one might associate with this orchestra in Debussy.

One of the very special attributes of this set is, of course, the great Concertgebouw Orchestra. To indicate that this is one of the world's finest symphonic ensembles is to state the obvious. Part of its special quality must come from the fact that since 1895 it has only had three Music Directors: Willem Mengelberg (through 1945), van Beinum (through his death in 1959), and Bernard Haitink (through the present). The latter did share that post for a few years with Eugen Jochum, until it was felt he had matured enough to have it alone. Such consistency of leadership, and such an overlap too (van Beinum was second in command to Mengelberg from 1938 to 1945, and Haitink was there for a period of time under van Beinum) guarantees a deep instillation of tradition, and of course values. The Concertgebouw manages to play music reverentially, with an inner feeling that glows, and yet with freshness and spirit too. The joy and élan that they bring to Kodaly's Hary Janos: Suite and to Mendelssohn's oft mistreated Italian Symphony will rivet you to your seat. The Mendelssohn, in particular, is lighter and more flexible than one usually hears: again, that combining of grace and warmth with drive. The J. C. Bach Sinfonias from Opus 18 also benefit from having a conductor of such stature approach them. So often these days we get works like this with baroque specialists who have all kinds of scholarly insights in their head, but know very little about getting across the grand line of the music. Van Beinum brings both of these works off with real stature; as in so much of the rest of this set, that magical potion consisting of just the right amounts of ebullient energy and tenderness does the trick.

I don't mean to be tedious about that combining of warmth and drive -- but it does make a significant difference. Van Beinum can push a piece like Bartok's Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta or Stravinsky's Firebird Suite as hard as anyone. But he never sounds hard, the music never takes on that anxiety-producing edge that one finds in so many "brilliant" performances. And that is because the concern with color, the concern with the vertical elements of music-making as well as the horizontal, allows the ear to hear a rich variety of sounds --

and that, in turn, maintains our interest.

Eduard van Beinum was, in short, a superb conductor blessed with a superb orchestra at his disposal. Despite the serious disappointment one feels at the Bruckner Fifth in this set, and despite Philips' refusal to back up the recordings with proper documentary and annotative material, this album is still a success. It represents van Beinum in a tremendously wide range of repertoire, and in performances that are almost all revelatory. It would be nice if the British Decca folk, and their American counterparts at London, put together a similar retrospective from their van Beinum catalogue. They had some truly special performances, including a Brahms First Symphony that will make your hair stand up. Such a release would round out the picture of this extremely under-valued conductor. Until that time, this Philips set will represent him well enough.

Henry Fogel