

BRUCKNER: Symphony No. 7 in E. Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Hans Knappertsbusch. [Live Performance. Salzburg Festival, Aug. 30, 1949]. DISCOCORP RR-209.

Hans Knappertsbusch could be frustratingly, maddeningly uneven--in the same performance (sometimes in the same phrase). One cannot take for granted that any performance will hold together. At his best, Knappertsbusch was magisterial, dramatic, intense. At his worst, he was without a sense of structure, erratic in rhythmic pulse, and obviously sloppy in preparation of ensemble.

This important release is one of the finest Knappertsbusch performances I have ever heard. Outside of a few moments of rhythmic unsteadiness at the beginning of the Scherzo, and of an occasional sense of groping for proper tempo relationships in the finale (one of Bruckner's less coherently structured movements under any circumstances) Knappertsbusch has everything under firm control here. The long dramatic lines underlying the first and second movements are firmly bound into a solid symphonic statement. If you could convert Bruckner's music into something visual, you would be able to see a steel-like but flexible thread running through the entire work, so strongly does Knappertsbusch preserve the shape of Bruckner's material. This is music always moving to something, music with a sense of inevitability.

Since there are fewer textual or performing version problems with this work than with other mature Bruckner scores, this is not an issue even worth pursuing here. What is worth mentioning, in addition to the remarkable moulding of phrases and shaping of the music noted above, is Knappertsbusch's equally remarkable feel for orchestral textures and colors. One does not usually think of Bruckner as a colorist. One does, of course, note the influence of his background as an organist on his orchestration. But Knappertsbusch uses that influence only as a starting point. By careful adjustment of balances, occasional modification of dynamics, and a unique feel for orchestral tone coloration, he opens up a world of tonal variety in Bruckner that others have not even approached. He gets his string players to vary the intensity of their vibrato. In particular, I don't think I have ever heard so many different kinds of sounds out of a viola section in a Bruckner symphony. Sometimes the sound shimmers, sometimes it is achingly poignant. The winds and brass are similarly encouraged to be keenly concerned with quality of sound as well as quantity. Conductors often give this kind of attention to sonority in Debussy, but it is almost unheard of in Bruckner. When combined with Knappertsbusch's splendid feel for the shape of the score, with those delicious little lingerings as one phrase moves into another, and with the shattering climaxes he could produce, you have a very special document.

It is to Discocorp's credit that the sound of this 1949 radio broadcast is so good that one can hear and talk about Knappertsbusch's sense of color. This sounds, in fact, remarkably rich and full. The surfaces are pristine, and Discocorp's recent decision to start includ-

ing notes is a welcome one. I do wish they spread out onto three sides to avoid the Adagio side-break. Peter Burkhardt's appreciation of Knappertsbusch is particularly appropriate in his paragraph noting the conductor's insistence, against general critical opinion, on Bruckner's "sensuousness." Given the extraordinary richness of this performance, that observation is particularly apt.

Henry Fogel

Alexander Kipnis from Historic Broadcast Recitals Given in 1943/44 and Now Issued for the First Time. MUSSORGSKY: Boris Godounov--Monologue; Clock Scene; Farewell (Shostakovich orchestration) (Philharmonic-Symphony; Fritz Reiner, conductor, 23 July 1944); Prayer (Rimski-Korsakov orchestration); Song of the Flea (Orchestra; J. Stopak, conductor, 1 May 1943); MOZART: Don Giovanni--Madamina (29 May 1943); VERDI: Don Carlo--Ella giammai m'amo (12 June 1943); NICOLAI: Lustigen Weiber von Windsor--Als Büblein klein (29 May 1943); KOENEMANN: When the king went forth to war; KNIPPER: Meadowland (1 May 1943) (Stopak, conductor). SCHUMANN: Dichterliebe, (Op.48) (Wolfgang Rose, piano) (1943); SCHUBERT: Aufenthalt; Gute Nacht; Der Wanderer; Erlkönig (with piano) (1936). Comments by Kipnis from interview with Robert Sherman on WQXR Listening Room. DISCOCORP 210, 211, 2 discs.

The first of these two discs is a historic document of first importance, for the Boris Godounov broadcast with Reiner was the world premiere of the Shostakovich orchestration. The three excerpts, with Kipnis in magnificent voice, are followed by Boris' prayer in the familiar Rimski-Korsakov version. Mussorgsky's Song of the Flea, with orchestra, follows, and the first side is filled out with some comments on Boris.

Perhaps one does not think of Kipnis as Leporello (though he did sing the part at the Met). His performance of the Catalogue Aria is brisk and chatty in less-than-perfect Italian. The great aria of King Philip in Don Carlo is well sung, but halfway through something goes wrong in the recording. Falstaff's drinking song from Nicolai's Merry Wives is properly ponderous. When the king went forth to war was a Chaliapin specialty, and the composer, Koenemann, may be remembered as Chaliapin's accompanist. A very Russian song, it describes the pomp with which the king marches into battle and contrasts it to the fate of the poor serf who goes to fight for him. Meadowland is a souvenir of World War II, a song that helped keep up the morale of the Russian troops. To complete side 2 Kipnis discusses conductors.

The second disc adds up to a Lieder recital. The Schumann cycle cannot be called a complete success. The Kipnis voice was too big and too deep for the character of Heine's young lover. The pauses between the songs might have been tightened up for continuity, and the gremlins seem to have been at work, repeating one song--Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen. Kipnis recorded three of the Schubert songs commercially--the