

ELISABETH SCHWARZKOPF
ANTHOLOGY

THREE MOZART ARIAS
with Cleveland Orchestra - George Szell

28 July 1968

Don Giovanni: *In quali eccessi - Mi tradì quell'alma ingrata*
Così Fan Tutte: *È amor un ladroncello*
Le Nozze di Figaro: *Deh, vieni, non tardar*

STRAUSS: FOUR LAST SONGS

BERGEN FESTIVAL, NORWAY
FOUR STRAUSS SONGS

Robert Levin, pianist

4 June 1955

Commentator

Wiegenlied

Ruhe, meine Seele!

Schlechtes Wetter

Hat gesagt - bleibt's nicht dabei

Brahms: *Ständchen*

(encore)

CAPRICCIO (final scene)

with Conservatoire Orchestra - Jean Fournet

Paris 9 March 1958

SIX SONGS BY GUSTAV MAHLER
with Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra - William Steinberg
5 January 1968

Ich bin der Welt

Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt

Ich atmet' einen linden Duft

Rheinlegendchen

Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen

Lob des hohen Verstandes

MAHLER: SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN G MAJOR

with Cleveland Orchestra - George Szell

26 July 1968

Review by Ken Meltzer

FANFARE May/June 2024

From Immortal Performances (IP), a two-disc set comprising recordings of concert broadcasts featuring German soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. The CD cover bills this as a "World Premiere Release." I have not previously heard any of these recordings. The only performances included in the discographic portion of *Elisabeth Schwarzkopf: A Career on Record* (Alan Sanders & J.B. Steane. Portland: Amadeus Press, 1995) are the three Mozart opera arias, part of a July 28, 1968 Cleveland Orchestra Blossom Festival Concert. I've made no secret of my preference for Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's in-performance recordings over her many acclaimed studio discs. As I've written on several occasions, I've long believed that Schwarzkopf was a more spontaneous artist when performing for a live audience, or at the very least, gave the impression of being so. On stage, Schwarzkopf was able to call upon not only her considerable vocal and interpretive resources, but her arresting stage presence and beauty. And perhaps some distancing from the ever-watchful and controlling Walter Legge (EMI's producer and Schwarzkopf's husband) had a salutary effect. For whatever the reasons, Schwarzkopf in live performance was far less inclined toward the kind of micromanagement, both of textual articulation and vocal color, that crops up in her studio recordings. This is not to diminish Schwarzkopf's achievements in the commercial recording studio. If I want to admire Schwarzkopf's artistry, I listen to those discs. If I want to enjoy her singing, I listen to the live recordings.

And all of the performances on the new IP set inspire satisfaction and interest. Three are from the Cleveland Orchestra's Blossom Music Festival's inaugural season in the summer of 1968. George Szell conducts. The opening aria, "Mi tradi," is a souvenir of a familiar Schwarzkopf role, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*. Also part of Schwarzkopf's limited operatic repertoire (during the latter stage of her career) are Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte* and the Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro*. In the Cleveland Orchestra program, Schwarzkopf sings arias for *Così's* Dorabella and *Nozze's* Susanna. Schwarzkopf performs them all with characteristic involvement, keen musicianship, and an alluring vocal quality. Only the occasional opaque lower note or shortness of breath betrays the fact that Schwarzkopf was 52 at the time of this concert, and had been singing for three decades. Likewise, the Strauss *Four Last Songs*, from the same concert, display the work of a superb artist. Schwarzkopf made two celebrated studio recordings of the *Vier letzte Lieder* for EMI; the first with the Philharmonia and Otto Ackermann (1953), the second with Szell and the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra. Schwarzkopf is in more youthful and radiant voice for each (especially the recording with Ackermann). But in the 1968 concert, there is no mistaking the interpretive and vocal authority Schwarzkopf brings to the work. As one might expect, Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra provide glowing accompaniment. It's all captured in fine stereo sound (as are the Schwarzkopf/Cleveland/Szell Mozart arias and Mahler Fourth). For a live Schwarzkopf performance of the *Four Last Songs* of this vintage, I prefer the September 26, 1969 concert with the London Symphony Orchestra and John Barbirolli.

It's included on an IP set documenting Schwarzkopf's stage debut as the Countess in Strauss's *Capriccio* (IPCD 1170-2). But the 1968 Cleveland rendition is masterful as well.

The final Blossom performance is a Mahler Symphony No. 4, from July 26, 1968. Producer Richard Caniell shares his deliberations in deciding to include the complete Mahler 4 performance, thereby devoting some 45 minutes of purely orchestral music to a Schwarzkopf tribute. I agree with Caniell's choice. Mahler himself was adamant that the concluding movement (in which the soprano soloist finally appears), child's explanation of "how everything is meant to be," was the natural culmination of all that preceded it, "the top of the Symphony's pyramidal structure." Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra made a superb studio recording of the Mahler Fourth for Columbia in 1965. Both the 1965 studio and 1968 Blossom concert performance share the Cleveland Orchestra's glorious playing, and a most welcome flexibility and charm from Szell (including some affecting string portamentos). But the 1968 Blossom performance is noticeably fleeter than the 1965 studio rendition (54:14 v. 57:57). The bulk of that difference may be found in the respective finales (8:22 v. 10:21). I find the 1968 finale too hurried (manic in the orchestral interludes) to provide the requisite beauty and satisfaction. Schwarzkopf sings well enough, but doesn't really convince as a wide-eyed innocent youth (the wonderful Judith Raskin is superb in the studio recording). I prefer Schwarzkopf's contribution to the 1961 EMI Mahler 4 with Klemperer and the Philharmonia Orchestra (that finale times at 8:56). Nonetheless, there is no question that the 1968 Blossom Mahler 4 documents a collaboration of exceptional musicians all.

More Mahler, a series of 6 songs, pairs Schwarzkopf with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and conductor William Steinberg. The performance, recording in Pittsburgh's Syria Mosque on January 5, 1968, is reproduced in fine broadcast monophonic sound. Steinberg was a masterful interpreter of Mahler's works. And Schwarzkopf, Steinberg, and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra prove a formidable trio. Throughout, there is a remarkable intensity and unanimity of vision. Schwarzkopf, in fine voice, is breathtakingly expressive, without ever impeding the music's flow. The same is true of the June 4, 1955 Bergen Festival recital, featuring songs by Strauss and Brahms. Here, Schwarzkopf is in prime, opulent voice, and ably partnered by the distinguished Norwegian pianist Robert Levin (1912-1996, not to be confused with the American pianist and scholar Robert D. Levin, b. 1947). The mono broadcast sound is adequate to document these sterling performances. Also presenting Schwarzkopf in peak form is the concluding scene from Strauss's *Capriccio*, a March, 1958 concert performance from Paris. Schwarzkopf may be heard to equally impressive effect, and in better sound, in the complete IP *Capriccio* I've previously noted. But it's always a pleasure to hear Schwarzkopf in one of her signature roles, here joined by the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra and Jean Fournet.

The recordings from Blossom, Bergen, and Pittsburgh include broadcast commentary. The CD booklet features essays by Dewey Faulkner, Richard Caniell's Recording Notes, and artist bios and photos. A worthy tribute to a unique and perennially fascinating artist.

Five stars: Marvelous broadcast performances by Elisabeth Schwarzkopf

