

Great Conductors of the 20th Century Vol.09 - Erich Kleiber

Written by bluesever

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CD1 Franz Schubert - Symphony No. 5 in B Flat, D.485 1. *I. Allegro* 2. *II. Andante con moto*
3. *III. Menuetto (Allegro molto) & Trio* 4. *IV. Allegro vivace*
Ludwig van Beethoven - Symphony No. 6 in F, Op. 68 'Pastoral'
5. *I. Allegro ma non troppo (Awakening of cheerful feelings on arriving in the country)* 6. *II. Andante molto moto (Scene by the brook)* 7. *III. Allegro (Merry gathering of the country folk)* 8. *IV. Allegro (Storm and tempest)* 9. *V. Allegretto (Shepherds' Song. Happy and thankful feelings after the storm)*
CD2 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart - Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, K.550
1. *Molto allegro* 2. *Andante* 3. *Menuetto* 4. *Allegro assai*
Richard Strauss
5. *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op.28*
Antonin Dvorak
6. *Carnival Overture, B.169*
Josef Strauss
7. *Sphären-Klänge, Op.235*
Johann Strauss
8. *Der Zigeunerbaron: Overture* 9. *Du und Du, Op.367*
Czech Philharmonic Orchestra (2), London Philharmonic Orchestra (3, 5, 6, 7),
Sinfonieorchester des Norddeutschen Rundfunks (1, 4), Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (8)
Erich Kleiber – conductor

Erich Kleiber (1890-1956) was both a master of the Viennese classics and a keen advocate of modern music. There are some real gems in this 2-disc set, but I feel that EMI could have been a bit more selective in its choices of both repertoire and specific performances.

CD 1 consists of two "live" recordings: a 1953 Schubert 5th with the North German Radio, and a Beethoven "Pastoral" Symphony from 1955 with the Czech Philharmonic. The Schubert is rather similar to the classic Fritz Busch recording with the Winterthur Symphony (badly in need

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of CD transfer), although the latter had a lighter hand and a bit more warmth. Nevertheless, for me, this Kleiber joins the Busch and Beecham accounts at the top of the list.

Unfortunately, the Beethoven seems rather matter of fact and uninflected compared to Kleiber's superb 1953 studio recording for Decca with the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, which would have made a better choice. However, the latter is soon to be re-issued on a six-disc Kleiber set (Decca 4756080), along with such fare as his 1950 Beethoven 7th & 1952 Ninth, the 1956 Mozart 39th and 1947 40th (also included here), and a stellar 1953 Schubert 9th from Cologne. So, with hindsight, I would have preferred foregoing the 6th altogether and going instead for the 1938 Beethoven 2nd with the Belgian National. It was the only pre-war 78 rpm set to nearly match the excellent Weingartner (Kleiber's last mvt. was more virtuosic). That 2nd had a so-so transfer on a deleted Teldec CD - so its inclusion here would have been most welcome. And that would have freed up some space for the live Berg "Wozzeck" Suite that was once on Originals CD 842. Kleiber premiered the work and it would have been a logical choice, especially since Kleiber is not represented here by ANY modern music at all.

CD 2 opens with the 1949 studio Mozart 40th with the London Philharmonic (LPO), a distinguished but rather problematic interpretation. Like Furtwangler, Kleiber uses the original version without clarinets and, rather surprisingly, he omits the important 1st mvt. repeat. This reading is on the fast, vehement, and detached side (not unlike his famous Beethoven 5th, which better survives that approach). The poor Minuet sounds hasty and out of sorts. Since this reading will soon be on Decca anyway (and probably in a better transfer), I wish EMI had omitted this and given us Kleiber's wonderful #33, along with his magnificent 1934 "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" - the finest account I have ever heard.

On the other hand, this witty "Till Eulenspiegel" is an unalloyed delight - fully on an equal plane with classic accounts by Krauss, Furtwangler and Georgescu. The Dvorak "Carnival" was un-needed - it's already available on Naxos in better sound. I would have preferred more Johann Strauss - Kleiber's interpretation, on an Archiphon CD, of the "Blue Danube" is utterly astonishing (I have reviewed that disc here at Amazon). The Joseph Strauss "Music of the Spheres" is a welcome rarity - it's Kleiber's sole recording of the work. The "Gypsy Baron" Ov. with the LPO is a bit more exaggerated than his early 1930's account with the Berlin Phil. The LPO strings are a trifle strait-laced here - the Vienna Phil. "Du und Du" Waltz that immediately follows is played in a far more uninhibited and idiomatic style.

So this set, like most of the other entries in EMI's "Great Conductors" series, is a mixed bag: a few brilliant items nestled among others that do not represent the conductor at his very best. But if you get that forthcoming Decca set, the Archiphon Strauss Waltzes CD, and a trio of

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superlative opera recordings (Figaro, Rosenkavalier, and the "live" Freischutz), you will have a much fuller view of just why Kleiber is regarded as one of the greatest of all conductors.

---Jeffrey Lipscomb

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