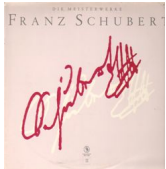


Schubert - Alfonso und Estrella (Harnoncourt) [2005]

Written by bluesever

Saturday, 21 August 2010 13:12 - Last Updated Sunday, 27 April 2014 16:20

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(01) Act 1 (02) Act 2 (03) Act 3 Dorothea Röschmann, soprano (Estrella) Isabelle Vosskühler, soprano (Mädchen) Christoph Leonhardt, tenor (Anführer der Leibwache) Kurt Streit, tenor (Alfonso) René Vosskühler, tenor (Jüngling) Hanno Müller-Brachmann, bass-baritone (Adolfo) Christian Gerhaher, bass (Troila) Jochen Schmeckenbecher, bass (Mauregato) Rundfunk Chor Berlin Berliner Philharmoniker Nikolaus Harnoncourt – conductor

Some might vote for Bizet's *Les Pecheurs de Perles*, which has tunes so magnificent that they help to mitigate against a hopeless libretto, enticing companies to stage the opera from time to time. A somewhat more obscure candidate could be Howard Hanson's *Merry Mount* - the suite from which sweetens the playlist of many a classical radio station. Naxos has released both the original Metropolitan Opera broadcast from the 1930s, in very poor sound, and a more recent concert recording, with Gerald Schwartz conducting. In both, the music engages while the drama distracts.

There is another possibility for that lamentable title: Franz Schubert's *Alfonso und Estrella*, composed to a libretto by Franz von Schober. The score can't be said to boast any of Schubert's immortal melodies, but it has some fine ones nonetheless. Arias, duets, trios, ensembles - the score may be a crazy quilt of "pieces," but each in itself is tuneful and evocative. Nikolaus Harnoncourt is not always the most stylish of conductors, but he has a flair for Schubert, especially the dramatic minor-key passages, as well as the more rhythmically exciting passages. He leads the Berliner Philharmoniker in an excellent performance.

Once seen, viewers may not be interested in returning to *Alfonso und Estrella* as a music drama. However, such are the pleasures of its score that this is well worth considering, if no other opportunity can be found for enjoying its music. ---Chris Mullins, operatoday.com

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