Richard Strauss - Also sprach Zarathustra • Tod und Verklärung (1990)

Also sprach Zarathustra op.30 *1. Einleitung 1:40 2. Von Den Hinterweltlern 3:39 3. Von Der Grossen Sehnsucht 2:20 4. Von Den Freuden Und Leidenschaften 2:01 5. Das Grablied 2:06 6. Von Der Wissenschaft 4:08 7. Der Genesende 4:53 8. Das Tanzlied 8:14 9. Nachtwandlerlied 4:18 10. Tod und Verklärung op.24* Glenn Dicterow – violin New York Philharmonic Giuseppe Sinopoli – conductor

Richard Strauss was arguably the greatest composer of what we often call the "symphonic tone poem." Often composed with extremely large orchestras in mind, not to mention often brooding subject matter, these tone poems, composed at the height of late German romanticism near the end of the 19th century and into the first decades of the 20th century, were not only incredible orchestral showcases, but also pieces that laid the groundwork for many of the biggest works of the ensuing hundred years, from Schoenberg's "Gurrelieder" onward. Two of Strauss' best-known tone poems are paired together on this fine recording made by the New York Philharmonic in 1989 under the direction of Giuseppe Sinopoli.

Strauss often described himself, rather self-deprecatingly, as being a "first-rate composer of second-rate music." But there's definitely nothing second-rate about either "Death And Transfiguration" (composed in 1890) or "Also Sprach Zarathustra" (composed in 1896), both of which share not only the typically large-scale orchestrations of Strauss' musical approach, but are also philosophical and metaphysical meditations on matters of life and what lies beyond. "Zarathustra", derived from Friedrich Nietszsche, of course, has been a part of the concert repertoire ever since its opening Dawn passage was used in imposing fashion by director Stanley Kubrick in his 1968 sci-fi classic 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY; while "Death And Transfiguration" is a brooding, shocking, but ultimately uplifting study at the last few hours of a man's life, and how his transfiguration to another life allows him to find in the heavens the serenity that is not always attainable on Earth.

Sinopoli, who would enjoy a significant tenure in the 1990s as the principal conductor of Strauss' favorite orchestra, the Dresden State Orchestra, prior to his untimely death in April 2001, ably conducts the New York Philharmonic in this Deutsche Grammophon recording. The demands of Strauss are by no means beyond them (they've recorded "Zarathustra" on at least two occasions, in 1970 with Leonard Bernstein, and in 1980 with Zubin Mehta), but they are given the added boost of Sinopoli's intrinsic knowledge of the composer. The sound quality is up to both the first-rate standards of both the D.G. engineers and the Avery Fisher Hall concert venue where this recording was made.

Even if one has plenty of recordings of these Strauss masterpieces, one can't go wrong with this particular Strauss recording, showcasing one of the world's great orchestras and an underrated conductor. --- Erik North, amazon.com

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