

Richard Strauss - Also sprach Zarathustra; Don Juan; Till Eulenspiegel (Karajan) [2000]



01 -09. *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Op. 30 10. *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* Op.28/*Till Eulenspiegels Merry Pranks* 11. *Salome* Op. 54 - *Tanz der sieben Schleier/Dance of the Seven Veils* 12. *Don Juan* Op. 20 Wiener Philharmoniker Herbert von Karajan – conductor

The Dude tiptoes gently around Karajan's old stamping ground. I've always wondered why someone as personally banal and bourgeois as Richard Strauss was attracted to anyone as abstruse and obscurantist as Nietzsche. Even that stylish populariser of philosophababble, Alain de Botton, found interpreting him challenging. Nietzsche's Manichean view of humanity as either übermensch (superman) or untermensch (sub-human) in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* has obviously unsavory undertones. Any inaugural recording of someone with the Berlin Philharmonic is a curiosity in itself. In Dudamel's case, I was intrigued as to whether he would passively succumb to the (admittedly) powerful aura of this sublime ensemble and the sounds they produce and then slip into auto pilot. Fortunately not. His *Zarathustra* is, in parts, quite intimate, even tender, and radiates an overarching unity with orchestral sections achieving a genuine dialogue. He resists the temptation to create a series of tawdry highlights. Unlike Karajan (and Böhm, of all people) he resists the 'Hollywoodisation' of some of the opening chords but, even so, I'll admit the work doesn't completely work for me.

The fugue in the section bizarrely named *The Convalescent* (a man freed from the bondage of desire) is slow and learned, using all 12 notes of the chromatic scale but here, Dudamel and his Berliners manage the occasional wink at the pretentiousness of the proceedings. Similarly, in the *Dance Song*, easily the cheesiest part of the entire work, where it seems as though the cast of *Der Rosenkavalier* are about to arrive. The sound is standard live Philharmonie ie. excellent.

The remaining works don't detract from the overall quality of the enterprise but are not on the

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same level: Dudamel's Don Juan is more James Mason than Errol Flynn and Till Eulenspiegel doesn't have quite the humour of Karajan, who was and remains without peer in this music. Nonetheless, a distinguished release. --- Greg Keane, limelightmagazine.com.au

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