

BRUCKNER: *Symphony 3*

Berlin Philharmonic/Daniel Barenboim
Teldec 13160 (Atlantic) 60 minutes

This recording now stands alongside Eugen Jochum's as the best Bruckner 3. It ideally demonstrates the elusive combination of musicianship and engineering that define what is meant by the "art" of recorded sound. That it was accomplished in a concert performance based on Bruckner's own notorious 1877 debut is also interesting. This version is transitional between the first of 1873 and the published one of 1878. It is here seamlessly presented in a compelling, lyrical, and richly moving fashion. It's the kind of recording that, without being eccentric or over self-conscious, encourages the listener to experience the work anew.

In Nov/Dec I praised Sieghart's reverent approach; but Barenboim's more expressive, heartfelt, and concentrated reading causes me to reconsider. With Barenboim in tune with Jochum's emotional lyricism, having at hand Jochum (and Karajan's) monumental orchestra, and with stunning sound that surpasses Sieghart's, this new recording must now be the top recommendation, regardless of controversies over preferable versions.

The sound on this Teldec disc does miracles for Bruckner's ubiquitous brass. It's a broad, big sound, but not distant—rather close, in fact—well-blended and ideally sonorous. This is very tricky engineering: to get immediacy and bite without stridency and glare—smoothness without rounding of the highs. Here we have a recorded texture that really allows the brass to burn with expressive energy.

Barenboim is exemplary at pulling the composer's shifting moods together: now bold and grand, now tender and melodious. This pulsating unity is achieved with meticulous care in the transitions—no small accomplishment considering this is early Bruckner. II has a feeling of tender refinement; but when called on, the Berlin strings deliver great passion and beauty. Then the tide turns, and a sense of rhythm dominates in III. Ebbing tenderness becomes a lively, spontaneous dance. Who else has made this so charming and likable? In IV, Jochum certainly has the edge in drama and excitement, but Barenboim is not lacking in these qualities; he is simply more stately. You can hear him once in a while, emphatically mouthing directions in the barely audible background.

There may be other versions of 3 worth considering, but this highly effective recording should be on the shelves of all Bruckner lovers.

HALDEMAN

March/April 1997

AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

Diese Aufnahme steht jetzt bei mir neben Eugen Jochums CD als die beste Bruckner Sinfonie Nr. 3. Sie zeigt in idealer Weise, die schwer bestimmbare Kombination von musikalischem Können und der Tonaufnahmetechnik, die festlegt, was unter der "Kunst" des aufgenommenen Klangs" zu verstehen ist.

Der Klang dieser Teldec-CD tut Wunder an Bruckners ständig vorhandenen Blechbläsern. Es ist ein breiter und großer Klang, aber nicht entfernt - vielmehr nah und gut gemischt, ideal wohlklingend. Dieses ist eine sehr knifflige Aufnahmetechnik: Es gibt Unmittelbarkeit und Biss ohne Schärfe und Grellheit, also Sanftheit, ohne die Höhen wegzunehmen. Hier haben wir eine aufgenommene Struktur, die wirklich die Blechbläser mit ausdrucksvoller Energie durchkommen lässt.

Es mag noch drei andere Fassungen geben, die man in Erwägung ziehen könnte, aber diese hochgradig wirkungsvolle Tonaufnahme sollte in den Regalen aller Bruckner-Liebhaber stehen.

Anton BRUCKNER (1824-1896)

Symphony No. 3 (1877 version)

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra/Daniel Barenboim

Rec December 1995, Philharmonie, Berlin (live recording)

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In whichever version (1873, 1877 or 1889) Bruckner's Third is a marvellous symphony. In this reviewer's opinion this was the first of the symphonies to proclaim the full range and power of his genius. Daniel Barenboim, in common with an increasing number of interpreters, chooses the 1877 revision, which differs most markedly from the first version by having various cuts in the finale.

Traversing the finale's structure is therefore a particular challenge, and it is one that this performance succeeds in making successfully. The choices of tempi are well made, and though one may cavil at the occasional detail, the general effect is altogether commendable, so too the long-term vision. Barenboim is an experienced hand in this repertoire and it shows. Likewise the balancing of orchestral sections is effective and sometimes penetrating in its observation of detail. For example, the lyrical *gesangperiode* of the first movement can seldom have been articulated with more loving care and attention, yet always with a feeling of the utmost spontaneity.

As a Bruckner acoustic the Philharmonie in Berlin has been captured inconsistently, but it sounds well here, so all praise to the producer and engineer, Martin Fouqué and Eberhard Sengpiel. This is a live performance and the audience are particularly self-effacing and well behaved; would like that it were always so. The playing of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra is quite wonderful, with sure tone and complete accuracy. But above all the quality of the dynamic range is remarkable. This is not to be taken for granted, and owes something to the recording as well. Both the pianissimo playing and the climaxes are striking in their effect.

Als Bruckner-Akustik ist die Philharmonie in Berlin schon recht widersprüchlich eingefangen worden, aber es klingt gut hier; somit volles Lob dem Produzenten und dem Ingenieur, Martin Fouqué und Eberhard Sengpiel. Dieses ist eine Live-Aufnahme und das Publikum ist recht zurückhaltend und gut erzogen; es wäre zu wünschen, dass es immer so sei. Das Spiel der Berliner Philharmoniker ist ausgezeichnet, mit sicherem Ton und extremer Genauigkeit. Aber vor allem ist die Qualität des dynamischen Ausdrucks bemerkenswert. Dieses kann nicht einfach vorausgesetzt werden und verdankt sicher auch einen Teil der Tonaufnahme. Das Pianissimospiel und die Höhepunkte sind eindrucksvoll in ihrem Ausdruck.

In Bruckner capturing the right sound counts for so much, and for rather more than might be the case with other composers. Phrases need the chance to breathe, and the string sound needs to expand resonantly. Rarely can this venue have contributed so effectively to recorded performances, as witnessed by the magnificent climax that releases the recapitulation.

Bei Bruckner zählt das Einfangen des richtigen Klangs ganz besonders, ja eher mehr, als es der Fall bei anderen Komponisten sein mag. Musikalische Phrasen müssen die Möglichkeit haben zu atmen und der Streicherklang muss sich resonanzartig verbreitern. Nur selten wird dieser Ort so wirkungsvoll zu Tonaufnahmen beigetragen haben, wie durch den großartigen Höhepunkt bezeugt, den die Reprise offenbart.

As far as the interpretation is concerned, there are some questions also, most notably in the last two movements. The tempo in the third movement scherzo is on the slow side, and some might call it sluggish, but any doubts are redressed in the finale, where Barenboim handles the intricacies of the structure with great cunning and true understanding.

If in the final analysis Bernard Haitink's 1990 recording with the Vienna Philharmonic (on Philips) is to be preferred, in truth there is little to choose. And Barenboim has an advantage in terms of price. It really is a memoir of a special occasion, and 'special occasion' is a description that is apposite as far as any performance of a Bruckner symphony is concerned. **Terry Barfoot**