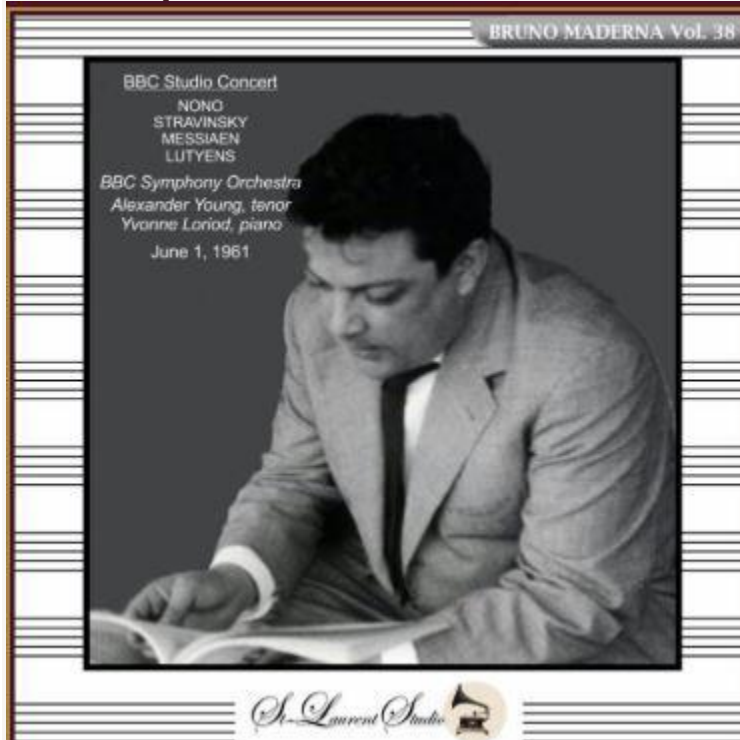


dusted

August 18, 2020

Bruno Maderna — Volume 38 (St. Laurent Studio)



There are multiple current philosophies concerning the restoration of historical recordings, and each has taken on layers of nuance with the advent of more advanced technologies. Yves St. Laurent, a restorationist living in Canada, presents his material in as close to its original state as possible to preserve the complexities of the listening experience. He uses little noise reduction so as not to eliminate the music's highest frequencies, which provide a sense of air and space, ensuring more convincing instrumental timbre and natural dynamics during playback. With wax and vinyl sources, that means leaving all the surface noise intact, as with this BBC transcription set of live performances by the Italian conductor and composer Bruno Maderna. As with the rest of St. Laurent's Maderna series (available [here](#)), the June 1, 1961 concert demonstrates why the still underappreciated conductor was considered so important as he simultaneously united the various strands of music history, sewing modernist garb out of Romantically colored thread.

Maderna's conducting defies the reasonably easy characterization of polar opposites like Leonard Bernstein or Pierre Boulez, of whom he was a contemporary. He is passionate but reticent at all the right moments, evoking a clarity of controlled heat from whatever forces he's helming. It's not that eruptions are anathema to him, far from it, but often, he comes across as an architect in desperate need to communicate; his interviews attest similarly. This performance begins with "Composizione no. 1," an orchestral work by the then fairly young Luigi Nono, which commentator Felix Aprehmanian introduces by highlighting its serialist intellectuality. True, it's second half is imbued with Webern's points and fragmentary phrases, but in Maderna's hands, the ravishingly beautiful string melody pervading the first six minutes is haunting, transparent but an absolutely Romantic utterance as it builds and dissipates in gently pulsating waves. Maderna grasped the breadth and depth of Nono's work long before it became apparent, making this a pioneering performance rife with lyricism but finely etched, a recorded masterpiece, largely down to the responsive playing of the BBC symphony. The same is true of Stravinsky's 1954 elegy "In Memoriam Dylan Thomas," here presented by tenor Alexander Young, the Allegri String Quartet and four trombonists from the BBC Wind Ensemble. Again, Maderna infuses his lyricism with dramatic wisdom, letting loose when the word "rage" is repeated. The counterpoint so beloved of Stravinsky isn't simply rendered but phrased, each line a series of crescendi and decrescendi in glorious microcosm. In comparison, interpretations by Robert Craft and even by the composer come off as just a bit cerebral. The other serial work on the concert is by Elisabeth Lutyens (1906-1983), her "Music for Orchestra no. 1." Maderna is right at home in this lush, transparent and often tumultuous score, which certainly owes a debt to Alban Berg's post-Romanticism. Again, the BBC players, while not infallible, play the work with aplomb, especially the more subdued sections, which they charge with quiet electricity. Their rendering of transitional masses is in complete sympathy with Maderna's direction.

I've saved the best for last. More recent versions of Messiaen's little concerto, "Oiseaux Exotiques," fall prey to the same misreading, but listen to those ascending brass whoops under Maderna's baton and the succeeding wind sonorities as they plateau! Yvonne Loriod, the soloist for whom Messiaen wrote the majority of his piano music, is in excellent form. Every run, stab and cascade, at whatever dynamic level, matches the orchestral articulations perfectly in this bird-song celebration in miniature, and that doesn't often happen in the best modern performances. The long builds are taken slowly, so that no line loses clarity while the slowly coalescing energy remains. Whatever latter-day version might be in your collection, this disc is worth acquiring just for the Messiaen, but the whole program is intriguing and satisfying. If the snap, crackle and pop of a transcription disc won't diminish your listening experience, this latest volume in a superb series needs no further recommendation.

Marc Medwin