



St Laurent Studio YSL T-1124

SERGIU CELIBIDACHE Cond. Munich
Phil.: *Symphony #7 in E*, [Nowak Ed.] Bruckner

*Live Performance, 15 Feb., 1990, Bucharest,
Romania*

"Reviewers like me, who respond enthusiastically to the Bruckner conducting of Sergiu Celibidache, trip over ourselves attempting to explain how a performance so much slower than the norm can possibly be not only effective, but magical. To put Celibidache's tempi into perspective, in my collection there are 21 recordings of the Nowak edition of the Bruckner Seventh. The range of timings, leaving Celibidache's two slowest ones, goes from 62:45 to 71:31, so at close to 80 minutes this new performance from Bucharest in 1990 is more than ten percent longer (or slower, if you wish) than the slowest by other conductors. (According to abruckner.com, there are no less than 13 recordings of the Bruckner Seventh under Celibidache, and their timings are not invariably slow, since they vary from 66 minutes to 86 minutes.)

The differences from other conductors are significant in three of the four movements, less so in the Scherzo. So how does he make it work? The overall success stems from the compilation of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of tiny details - details of dynamic shading, instrumental balance and color, along with varying the weight of chords and molding phrases with infinite care. The music never stops flowing despite the slow tempos. Each phrase leads inevitably into the next and follows logically from what preceded it. Achieving all this over the span of a very long symphony is not simple. It requires rehearsing with great patience, shaping the weight and color of every note in the score.

From the very opening Celibidache builds tension in the two bars of tremolo in the violins, subtly adjusting dynamics in such a way as to invite the cellos and horns to enter with the main theme. No bar stands alone, and so it goes for almost 80 minutes. I once heard a conductor, giving a pre-concert talk to an audience not familiar with Bruckner, tell his listeners to imagine the process of a Bruckner symphony to be like that of a flower slowly unfolding and blossoming. That is a precise description of what happens in this performance.

One of the trickiest aspects of conducting Bruckner is dealing with his pauses, silences that he explained by declaring, 'Whenever I have something important to say, I must stop and take a breath first'. The conductor is called upon in these pauses to maintain momentum through the silence. Celibidache often does this with just a touch of emphasis on the last sound preceding the pause, allowing the first note after the rest to grow slowly rather than begin abruptly. And I cannot think of a performance of anything where I encountered more degrees of piano and pianissimo, and all the possibilities between them. Often one's reaction to a Bruckner performance is to speak of its majesty, its grandeur, its religious or mystical aura. My reaction to Celibidache's Bruckner is to speak of the music's beauty.

These characteristics hold true throughout the entire symphony here, so there's no need for me to extend this review to Brucknerian length. I will only add that of the Bruckner Seventh recordings (all live) by Celibidache with which I am familiar, this new one has become my favorite. I attribute that to the fact that he had brought the Munich Philharmonic on tour to his native Romania, giving the performance extra meaning and intensity.

If Bruckner is a composer of any importance to you, you should know this recording. I should probably add that if you like your Bruckner only crisply articulated, incisively accented, and fast, Celibidache may not be your cup of tea. Even so, your mind might be open to a more expansive approach, in which case this reading could be surprisingly persuasive.

The stereo broadcast sound is fine, and it has been well transferred by producer Yves St. Laurent."

- Henry Fogel, **FANFARE**

