



HERBERT von KARAJAN

Cond. Berlin Phil.: Symphony #7 in E (Bruckner) [1885 original version, ed. Haas].

St Laurent Studio [YSL T-1087](#), Live Performance
1 Sept., 1982, Lucerne Culture & Congress Centre
Transfers by Yves St Laurent

“By adding this live Bruckner Seventh from Lucerne to the discography, St. Laurent Studio brings to 13 the total recordings under Karajan listed at [abruckner.com](#). That might argue for much of a muchness, but this magnificent reading, which falls just shy of the inimitable standard set by Furtwängler, displays some special qualities that deserve notice. There are actually only three Bruckner Sevens by Karajan on his two major labels, EMI and DG. The total timings are telling.

1971 (EMI) Berlin PO 68:09

1975 (DG) Berlin PO 64:32

1989 (DG) Vienna PO 66:15

At 63:29 the Lucerne reading is the fastest, and most of the added momentum comes in the first movement. One can actually feel it as a listener - there is no lingering or massaging of the famous first theme in the cellos as it spins out. Karajan urges the theme forward without diminishing its intensity. This gives the whole movement a lift that is absent in other performances, including Karajan's. Over the past year St. Laurent Studio has been releasing some great live Mahler from Karajan, which has disproved the canard that he was so disciplined, live and studio performances sound the same. In fact, like most conductors Karajan

responded to the atmosphere of the concert hall. Just as there is more palpable excitement and contrast in those Mahler performances, the same holds true for this Bruckner Seventh. The extra lift in the first movement extends to the Adagio, which is unusually emotional in the way phrases swell and subside. Karajan comes closer than in his previous recordings to enlivening this music. Bruckner marked it to be 'very solemn and very slow', yet I prefer how Karajan urges it along with added drama, and the Berlin strings are at their lustrous best.



Comparatively, the Scherzo fits the pattern of Karajan's studio readings, which is to say that it is very powerful, the brass section playing with seismic force yet managing to sound beautiful. For once the finale doesn't sound disjointed but carries through the arc of the previous movements. The sense of overall momentum and excitement is sustained in every measure, and there are moments of ravishing beauty from the gleaming Berlin violins.

Sonically I'd call this very good FM-broadcast stereo. The source isn't revealed, but the only flaw I can detect is noticeable pre-echo on the tape whenever a loud tutti passage is followed by a pause. The pre-echo isn't so intrusive that it was hard for me to adjust to, and for long stretches it isn't present.

I would say that Karajan's valedictory Bruckner Seventh from Vienna in 1989, just months before he died, holds a special place in my heart, but for a more animated reading this Lucerne performance is all but unsurpassed."

- Huntley Dent, FANFARE