



"Collectors of Klaus Tennstedt's magnificent live concerts, which hold primacy over all but a handful of his studio recordings, owe a great deal to the extensive Tennstedt Edition being steadily compiled by St. Laurent Studio. At present the survey runs to a fairly staggering 39 volumes, of which this Mahler Fourth from Boston in 1977 is a standout, both for the recorded sound, which is excellent broadcast stereo, and for Tennstedt's inspired performance. I've been regularly finding recordings in this series that qualify for FANFARE's Classical Hall of Fame, and the majority have been of Mahler.

The impact of Tennstedt's sudden emergence after years of obscurity in East Germany was vividly captured by Lynne Renée Bayley reviewing a video version of this same concert on ICA. 'I wonder how many readers recall Klaus Tennstedt's early years in the U.S. ... how exciting they were, how he upset the balance of acknowledged great conductors, the brilliance of his interpretations, his wonderful imagination in phrasing and accents. He was like no one else then performing.' (FANFARE 36:1)

What makes this reading of the Mahler Fourth exceptional is its naturalness. Tennstedt doesn't adopt extreme or even unusual tempos. The flow of the music is unaffected by intrusive gestures on his part. Nor is it necessary to listen for inner details not revealed by other recordings. This symphony, like the Beethoven 'Pastorale', is always played at an agreeable level and yet allows for few great performances, which isn't a surprise when the music presents such an appealing, instantly accessible surface.

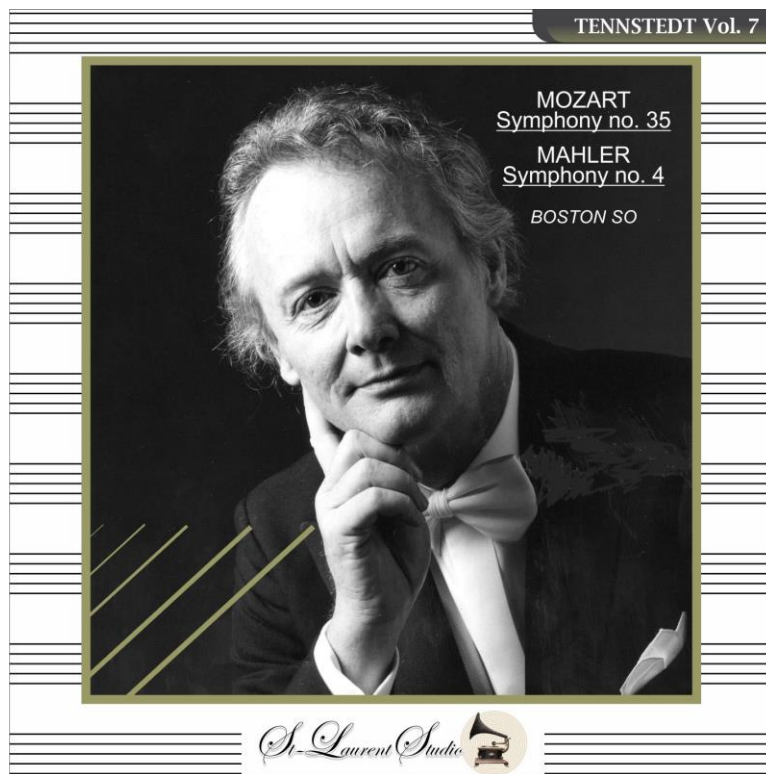
Tennstedt chiefly inserts himself through the magical phrasing that Bayley noted and an ineffable ability to bring vibrancy to every measure. The BSO musicians are responding with real joy in the making of music. The sensitivity with which the Adagio unfolds, the sardonic humor of the devil's fiddle, and the winsome innocence of the finale are all brought out with an extra emphasis, and yet it's the performance as a whole that casts a spell. We are breathing the air of Mahler's world as if we inhabit it. Soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson was a gratifying choice in the finale—her lovely, limpid tone, her unaffected musicality, and her effortless assumption of a vocal part that has its difficulties — these virtues are very welcome, all the more when you realize that the singer was 56 at the time yet sounds twenty years younger.

The concert opened with a traditional, roundly Romantic reading of Mozart's 'Haffner' Symphony. The performance can be viewed on a blurry overdubbed video on YouTube. One sees a sizable string complement on stage, but the most intriguing images are of Tennstedt himself, tall, thin, and gawky, yet sublimely enjoying the music and beaming at the musicians after every movement. I realize that my responses are subjective, but I think other listeners will feel the warm glow that emanates from this 'Haffner', which I don't feel from performances by Böhm, Karajan, or even Bernstein. We are in the same territory as the beloved Mozart of Bruno Walter's late phase, where affection is

compatible with sure musical instincts.

A few last thoughts: The Boston Symphony latched on to Tennstedt as a regular guest conductor after his spectacular debut with the orchestra in two weeks of subscription concerts in 1974, the first devoted to Brahms, the second and more significant to the Bruckner Eighth Symphony (also available from St. Laurent Studio in listenable but not ideal sound). As Henry Fogel noted (41:3), 'By the end of those two weeks, he had become an overnight star. The word flew out of Boston so quickly that Tennstedt was immediately signed by Columbia Artists Management, which instantly began receiving offers for him to guest conduct all the major American orchestras'."

Tennstedt's permanent home was at the London Philharmonic, with whom he made the majority of his studio recordings for EMI, but they reflect his abilities erratically. I'd venture that if you knew Tennstedt only from his official discography, you'd probably classify him as another traditional German in his musical outlook. Even considering the closest comparison, Wilhelm Furtwängler, another conductor who was much better in concert than in the studio, the disparity with Tennstedt was even greater.



The full picture of just how great a conductor he was depends on releases like this one. The remastering by producer Yves St. Laurent is admirable. The original source placed the trumpets and horns a little too close for ideal orchestral balance, and Bryn-Julson is just a bit too distant for all her words to be clearly understood despite her excellent diction. None of those elements bothered me, and while the audience isn't silent, the coughing isn't intrusive."

- Huntley Dent, FANFARE