

EMI opens up the archives to celebrate the great baritone's 85th birthday

# Fischer-Dieskau

## BEAUTY AT ALL TIMES

### Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau

'Recordings from the Archives'

Lieder by **Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Schoenberg and Berg**

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau *bar* with **Daniel Barenboim, Hartmut Höll, Gerald Moore, Aribert Reimann** *pfs* **Yehudi Menuhin** *vn* **Heinrich Schiff** *vc*

EMI © ④ 455431-2 (5h 2' • ADD/DDD)



Dig deep, dig wide, there will always be something left for the archaeologists and archivists of recording to come up with out of the

inexhaustible discography of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. This album presents no new material but brings into the light items that have lain out of view, out of mind, for long enough. Most were recorded in Berlin and are of songs from periods we tend to regard as, respectively, prologue and epilogue to the great age of Lieder. The earliest recordings come from 1959 when Fischer-Dieskau, at 34, was vocally, as Richard Wigmore says in his note, in "glorious first ripeness". The latest were made in 1984 when, at nearly 60, he was in the full maturity of his artistic powers and still had mightily impressive resources of voice to draw upon. From in between, 1971, we hear him in a recital of songs by Mozart, a one-off in this context in that they were recorded in London. In the personal account I also have to say that I enjoyed them most.

The quality of recorded sound has something to do with this. Elsewhere the digital remastering has had its customary effect of sharpening definition at the expense of vocal tone, which is harder and brighter than it sounded in concert halls and (in the case of the Beethoven songs) as heard on LP. But in these Mozart recordings Fischer-Dieskau combines his finest subtlety of response with the most scrupulous *legato* where appropriate and beauty of tone at all times. Barenboim accompanies with a sureness of taste and touch which sometimes recalls Gieseking in his accompaniments for Schwarzkopf.



The Haydn recordings have Gerald Moore for pianist, and how one appreciates afresh the sense of presence he brings. The first four songs and several of the later ones are humorous in character and in all of them the pianist is as much in on the joke as the singer: the chirpy triplets of "Zufriedenheit" and the clang of a buffeted ship in "Sailor's Song" are particularly delightful. Fischer-Dieskau is marvellously vivid, confiding in "Die Gleichsinn", yawning in "Lob der Faulheit". Both do justice to "The Spirit's Song" and Fischer-Dieskau is here completely successful in his dealings with the English language.

The same cannot be said of the Beethoven folksongs. The record was severely reviewed in *Gramophone* on its first release (4/85) on grounds with which I don't entirely agree but certainly the pronunciation is problematic. No doubt Fischer-Dieskau, exceptional linguist as he is, will have made a thorough

study and taken expert advice about his Scottish and Irish accents, but it just cannot be done. Of the other solos, the complaint that his approach is "too sophisticated" is surely unjust: he gives himself wholeheartedly and sings with straightforward gaiety and passion.

Beethoven's own songs occupy two of the four discs, and these were welcomed unreservedly since (as John Warrack wrote) "the songs continue to be one of the most misunderstood parts of Beethoven's work and since Fischer-Dieskau is, as always, such an intelligent expounder". Here they are re-sorted into chronological order, starting with the 13-year-old's "Schilderung eines Mädchens", continuing through the 1816 *An die ferne Geliebte*, up to the deeply moving "Abendlied" of 1820. Taken in sequence, they have an expressive range (now joking, now serious, now tenderly intimate, now majestically impersonal) that might be called mercurial were it not that everywhere there is such a sense of commitment.

With yet another change of pianist, the recital sports an unexpected coda. The composer Aribert Reimann, whose opera *Lear* was written for Fischer-Dieskau as protagonist, worked with the singer extensively in the later years of his career, and here plays for him in some early songs of Schoenberg and Berg. Writing round about the turn of the century, both composers worked largely in the style they inherited, a rich romanticism which Schoenberg wore like a heavy fur coat, Berg more like a smoking jacket. The two songs from Berg's Op 2 are tuneful and good-humoured, the first a lulling "down the river" type, the other a 45-second "Abschied". Two years and one opus number later, Berg was on to sterner stuff with Goethe's thoughts on the limitations of mankind. The voice too takes a plunge, and to all of these demands Fischer-Dieskau answers with the well-resourced assurance of a master. And now, in this year 2010, the master has achieved his 85th year. In recorded output he has outstripped all other singers: enough to keep the archivist busy for many such albums as this.

John Steane