

STRAUSS *Symphonia Domestica*, *Metamorphosen*

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François-Xavier Roth's Strauss series with his SWR orchestra has been garnering glowing reviews in these pages. This new instalment emphatically deserves another one.

As before, one of this latest disc's greatest assets is the outstanding quality of the recorded sound. Airy and incredibly detailed, analytical but never clinical, transparent but not short of weight: it means that even Strauss's most congested passages come across with astonishing clarity.

That, of course, is of enormous benefit in that often most congested of works, *Symphonia domestica*. Here, with an orchestra on stunningly virtuoso form, it almost dances along. The woodwind-playing is brilliantly characterful and vivid; the strings, more silky than velvety, are no less alive and responsive, and Roth coaxes some exquisitely tender phrasing from them.

The sound of the full orchestra, though not as glamorous or burnished as Karajan's BPO (who is?), is immaculately blended, and there's some especially refined and musical playing from the brass – listen to the way they phrase in the *Adagio*'s various climaxes (at 2'10", for example). Roth's conducting is on the swift side, and some might feel he rushes on a couple of occasions. But it's irresistibly full of energy and life: the sheer hustle and bustle and invention of the music is conveyed beautifully.

Above all, though the pictorial details are never short-changed, Roth manages to make this sometimes intractable score make such clear and obvious symphonic sense. The result will surely win over *Domestica* sceptics and is in many ways a revelation: a recording that confidently repositions the piece very much as a work of the nascent 20th century, not as a dubious hangover of the 19th.

Matters are a little bit more complex with *Metamorphosen*, a work that laments the tragic course of the very century that the *Symphonia domestica* seems here to announce. Roth and his players bring similar virtues to this late work, so it's an account that is perhaps a little bit short on elegiac gravitas, and one that arguably doesn't plumb the depths that, say, Karajan's various accounts do, moving though it is.

Again, though, the sheer musical intelligence on display brings enormous rewards, and the performance – recorded a year after *Domestica* with no less clarity, but at a slightly lower level – highlights the sheer ingenuity once more of Strauss's invention.

A poorly translated booklet-note is a minor drawback, but this is an outstanding release. Highly recommended.

<https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/strauss-symphonia-domestica-metamorphosen>