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David Mellor's Album of the Week
Mahler: Symphony No. 5 - Gürzenich Orchestra, Cologne/Francois-Xavier Roth

Harmonia Mundi



GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony no. 5

Gürzenich-Orchester Köln
François-Xavier Roth



The designation Album of the Week normally means near complete approval of the issue, but sometimes it just describes an album that can't be ignored, but about which serious reservations must be harboured. This is one such.

This recording, made in Cologne last February under the orchestra's new Music Director François-Xavier Roth, can't be ignored, because it was with them, 113 years ago, that Mahler conducted the premiere of what is probably his most buoyant, and happy symphony. However, even before I played it, my heart sank with the reference to Visconti's film "Death in Venice". Because of course Visconti's film is about death, the symphony is about life affirming joy, being composed by Mahler as he was about to embark on his marriage to Alma Schindler.

The famous/notorious Adagietto, I bet, would have taken Mahler at the premiere around 7½ minutes to perform. Roth here takes 11, turning this key movement into something entirely

different from what the composer intended.

For me, in an age of authenticity, it just isn't acceptable to treat this lovely movement in this way, though lots of conductors still do.

Elsewhere the orchestra play well for their new chief, in the light toned manner common to many accomplished, second rank ensembles, and Roth is plainly a good conductor. However, his Adagietto maims this set irretrievably.

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