

R Strauss

Aus Italien, Op 16. Don Juan, Op 20

Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Bertrand De Billy

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Surround yourself with Strauss in these affectionate, vivid performances



Strauss had written a fair amount of orchestral music before *Aus Italien* appeared in 1886 and, two years later, *Don Juan*, the orchestral work which established his reputation

and which he never surpassed for sheer concentration. In 16 minutes, extraordinarily melodically inspired, it is scored with enormous flair. The Vienna Radio SO (founded in 1969) is a first-class ensemble with a rich yet brilliant string patina and excellent wind soloists, and Bertrand De Billy gives a splendidly gutsy performance, exhilarating in its vigour and compelling flow of adrenalin. The contrasting oboe theme is perhaps a trifle cool but the horns are gloriously thrusting in the big climax, matched by the thrilling ardour of the strings.

As a virtually perfect musical structure *Don Juan* rather leaves the four-movement *Aus Italien* behind, though the latter is still enjoyably rich in its melodic flow, while its musical

characterisation is evocatively colourful. The work opens atmospherically: "In the Campagna" lyrically reflects the composer's introspective, comparatively solemn mood as he surveys the countryside from the Villa d'Este; "The Ruins of Rome" brings a lively contrast, picturing "images of past splendour and melancholy".

The highlight of the work is undoubtedly "At the Beach of the Sorrent", a pastoral idyll opening with the evocative magic of "the wind in the leaves, the murmuring of the ocean, the song of the birds". It is unconventionally orchestrated and most beautifully played here to contrast with the whirling tarantella of the "Neopolitan Song" ("mad virtuosity", predictably complete with "Funiculi, funiculà").

The Vienna orchestra is on top form throughout and Bertrand De Billy's performance is warmly affectionate and vivid. The recording sounds superior played as an SACD with the back speakers adding extra ambient lustre to the sound picture. **Ivan March**