

is of great beauty; the ornate decoration is seen in the background and sometimes reflected in the piano.

Beethoven was always a specialty for this pianist, and Sonatas 21 and 28 come across with spacious determination. The only distraction comes when the pianist's perspiring face is seen close-up. Schumann's *Nachtstück* in F and Mendelssohn's 'Spinning Song' complete a program where the only possible complaints are the brief running time and the absence of any extras save a promo of the latest in Euro-trash opera productions from Salzburg.

BECKER

Wild about Liszt

Earl Wild, p

Ivory 7777 [2DVD] 361 minutes+

Combining recital and documentary, these discs run the gamut from a 1974 BBC-TV program to a 2005 Dutch TV interview with Wild on the occasion of his 90th Birthday Concert. The audio tracks include the pianist speaking at the Carnegie Mellon University School of Music and an interview given at the Mannes School International Keyboard Festival—both from 2003. The recitals are drawn from his 1986 appearances at Wynyard, the family estate of the 9th Marquess of Londonderry in the North of England.

Wild's programs were titled "Liszt the Poet", "Liszt the Transcriber", and "Liszt the Virtuoso". As an homage to the composer in the centenary year of his death the performances are self-recommending and have been available in audio for some time. Although the sound is good, and the video recording unfussy, the images are acceptable rather than clear and sharp. This will matter little to Wild's many fans and lovers of Liszt's piano music.

The entire package is a treasure-trove of Lisztian extravagance and a fine portrait of one of the composer's most gifted interpreters. Wild comes across not only as a virtuoso, but a very human figure of some reserve and considerable humility. If you expect virtuosos to be all temperament, Wild doesn't fit the mold. Three cheers for all involved in this project.

BECKER

Giuseppe di Stefano

fr *Rigoletto*, *Traviata*, *Cavalleria*, *Lucia*, *Boheme*, *Land of Smiles*, *Bird-Seller*—Hardy 4027—82 min

If there are any organizing principles behind this program, I don't quite grasp them. The framework is a 1997 interview between Giancarlo Landini and Di Stefano, where the tenor reminisces about his career and states his beliefs about singing. (In a nutshell, it all has to come naturally—you have a voice or you

don't.) The interview is interrupted often so we can hear Di Stefano sing, and again (at great length) so we can enjoy his participation in an Italian TV program called "Il Musicchiere", where he wins a few hundred thousand lire for charity. He talks to Landini about his early days in the Milan cathedral choir and his first singing job, in a restaurant, as the pseudonymous "Nino Florio". He mentions his La Scala debut in the 1940s, but suddenly we fly forward to 1962 to hear him sing the final scene from *Cavalleria*.

And so it goes, back and forth, without apparent structure, from the young singer with the sweetest tenor voice since Gigli to the hard-toned tenor of the 60s and beyond. The program is quirky and undisciplined, rather like the man himself, who hated rehearsing and pushed his voice too hard too soon, but who never lost his irresistible charm. Di Stefano, even in his later years, remained the most personable and likable of tenors, and that comes across here, even when the voice was far past its best. I would have liked to hear more of him from the late 40s and early 50s, and I wish he had spoken more about some of his singing colleagues (Callas is the only one who rates a few words), but he has a good Toscanini story or two. At least we get to hear, repeatedly, that amazing, indeed legendary, top C from Faust's 'Salut Demeure'.

LUCANO

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf

Operetta arias by Strauss II, Heuberger, Zeller, Lehar, with Strauss & Suppé waltzes

Radio Canada Orchestra/ Willi Boskovsky
VAI 4390

I saw Elisabeth Schwarzkopf for the first time at a gala at the old Metropolitan Opera when I was a teenager, where she appeared in a single act of *Der Rosenkavalier*. Even though that opera, then as now, leaves me indifferent for much of its playing time, she seemed incredibly glamorous, despite the fact that I was sitting rather high up. She was the personification of the lustrous, luscious Viennese diva.

Here, from a Canadian television special done at roughly the same time, 1963, is Schwarzkopf close-up, singing Viennese operetta. She is still glamorous-looking, but noticeably stout, and her gown-with-attached-cape ensemble is an obvious attempt to sculpt a very Austrian, torte-filled torso. (She was actually born in Poland.)

No matter: she attacks the familiar operetta arias with a bright, incisive relish and superlative German diction, letting loose a *schlagobers* (whipped cream) soprano that makes the songs even more toothsome than

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