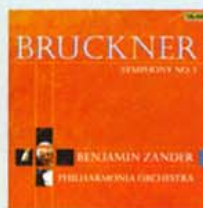


Benjamin Zander:
a born teacher



Fascinating analysis of this cathedral of a work – and a good performance, too



Bruckner

Symphony No 5
Philharmonia Orchestra / Benjamin Zander
Telarc Ⓜ ② 2CD80706 (149' • DDD)
Includes bonus disc of Benjamin Zander discussing
Bruckner Symphony No 5

Yet another Bruckner Fifth? Not exactly. The performance, which has its own distinction, comes with an 80-minute bonus disc of unusual quality and interest. Not since the halcyon days of Antony Hopkins "Talking About Music" have I heard a commentary as lucid, as approachable and yet as musically satisfying as this.

Devised by Zander and his co-producer David St George, it is a multifaceted essay. Mapping the symphony has pride of place and is superbly done. More lucid than Robert Simpson's specialist analysis in *The Essence of Bruckner*, Zander's account contains insights that Simpson either misses or neglects. It also thrives on a rich array of music examples tucked with consummate skill in, around and beneath the narrative.

A born teacher blessed with an exemplary microphone manner, Zander knows that you can't talk analysis for 80 minutes. He begins with pointers to how a big symphony works. Midway through the long first movement he diverts our attention and holds our interest with an interesting digression on the nature of the man who wrote the symphony.

Another distinctive touch is his breathing new life into the old cathedral analogy. The CD comes with a foldaway leaflet. On one side is a

cathedral floor-plan, on the other the structure of the Fifth Symphony laid over that same plan. Nor does Zander stop there. His profound and often moving remarks on time, space, spiritual struggle and spiritual renewal grow naturally out of this.

His trump card is his father Walter Zander, who died in 1993 at the age of 95. In the summer of 1918, while fighting on the Russian front, Walter was sent a score of Bruckner's Fifth Symphony by his mother. His letters home with their comments on what the music meant

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to him have only recently reappeared. These, too, have been woven into the narrative, and very remarkable they are.

Despite his father's urging, Zander did not study the symphony until he was past 60. Antony Hopkins once said that some of his best scripts were written on works he knew little about before writing. Zander seems to have been similarly blessed, creating a remarkable narrative and complementing it with a performance of great lucidity and drive. If the finely geared playing seems a touch lightweight in places, turning up the level of the beautifully judged Watford Coliseum recording helps bulk out the vertical dimension. **Richard Osborne**