

**CD No: BUDAPEST MUSIC CENTER RECORDS BMC CD 063**

**Duration: 49'19"**

---

**Beethoven**

Symphony No.5 in C minor, Op.67 \*

**Eötvös**

zeroPoints

*Ensemble Modern* \*

*Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra*

*Peter Eötvös*

---

## Beethoven & Eötvös – Budapest Music Center

This is an inspiring CD, one that links a masterly new piece with a classical boundary-breaking symphony. The linkage is indivisible.

---

Peter Eötvös wrote *zeroPoints* in 2000 for the LSO and Pierre Boulez. A successful premiere ensued. Boulez has since conducted it in Chicago and the composer has returned it to London. Short it might be at 14 minutes or so, but there's much scintillating invention in it. Large dimensions are suggested through concise, clear and interrelated ideas. Lucidity of sound (sound being so important to Eötvös both in terms of personal nostalgia and in original creativity) and musical innovation combine for a gripping piece. Does Eötvös consciously recall Bartók at a couple of points? First, in eerie string tremolos that recall *The Miraculous Mandarin* and *Concerto for Orchestra*, then in the cryptic xylophone conclusion reminding of *Music for strings, percussion and celeste*. The performance, under the composer, is excellent. One reservation is that the very vivid sound is too loudly transferred; there are moments of harshness at odds with Eötvös's refined ear.

---

Beethoven's Fifth. Anything new to say? Yes. This is a lean and muscular account that strips away accretions without it becoming a 'back to basics' account that is a slave to editing and compromising of interpretative imagination. Incongruous, maybe, to have the unconventionally constituted Ensemble Modern (certainly in terms of a full body of strings) playing it. Eötvös supplies a note in which he speaks of "carefully designed electro-acoustical amplification ... faultless technology and relatively few strings." In other words although the musicians are human beings, the few personnel making up the strings have been enhanced. Something worries me about this – yet, if I didn't know, I wouldn't have guessed. However, I'm not sure it's quite as clear-cut as Eötvös suggests. Without pointing to the circumstances, I can report that there is a slight halo around the sound, which could be natural acoustic, and that there are also 'points' of sound that seem a little artificial. The recording overall is a tad aggressive also.

---

The dry-toned strings is as much to do with vibrato as 'electrical interference' – and now we can talk about the performance. It's fast, not as ludicrously so as some 'authentic' renditions, and there is plenty of heft, with a compelling sense of gravitational pull to offset the explosive timpani and horns and the unimpeachable sense of direction.

---

For all Eötvös's sense of impulse, there's no rush or fluster, and no lip service paid to excitement for its own sake. The 'Andante con moto' has both grandeur and sentiment within its coursing veins. Indeed this is a Beethoven 5 of unstoppable force, which is never brazen, forced or throwing the baby out with the bath water. The Scherzo is played twice – whether Beethoven wanted it so is another matter – (all other repeats are in place) and the Finale steps out with an appropriate 'light out of darkness' blaze. Eötvös joins a select band of conductors who bring out the trombones at (here) 7'54"-7'56" – mandatory in terms of harmonic resolution. The sense of achievement, come the final bars, is palpably thrilling – an *accelerando* to triumph.

---

If a comparison is needed, then it's with Carlos Kleiber's famed VPO account on DG. Eötvös's leonine vitality and care for characterisation is similar, although I'm bound to say there's something more tactile about Eötvös's approach and I'd therefore place it with George Szell's Concertgebouw version, long my 'desert island' choice.

---

An invigorating release, then, that warrants investigation.

---