



Edition Géza Anda (II) – Beethoven | Brahms | Liszt

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Audiophile Audition (Gary Lemco - 2008.06.16)

The second of a four-volume collection from WDR archives celebrating “the troubadour of the piano,” Geza Anda (1921-1976), this splendidly-mounted set features great piano sound and an orchestral ensemble thoroughly attuned to their conductor-soloist (28 November 1969). The brilliant Mannheim rockets in the first movement clarinets, for instance, rarely resonate so firmly as Anda negotiates delicate and tempestuous filigree with seamless perfection. A blink of an eye and we are mesmerized by the recapitulation, the martial rhythm and rockets re-establishing their hegemony over the materials. The counter-theme all but percolates out of the speakers as Anda’s *arioso* and *marcato* figures proceed with lyrical authority, easily rivaling similar exercises by Edwin Fischer and Andor Foldes. A true dialogue between the hands for the cadenza, Anda’s pearly play liquid, polyphonic, and serene. Exquisite trills and big pedal chord usher in the march once more, the coda a resounding thump. Anda’s essentially vocal virtuosity permeates the *Largo*’s extended song, the woodwinds and French horn once more complementing the intensely rich focus of the keyboard, the trills with clarinet, and the sighing urgency of the last pages, offset by the piano’s wistful meditations. The playful, exuberant *Rondo* retains its *scherzando* character under Anda, who does not so much drive but lull the energies forward, the articulation of the dancing passages over the winds and horn lucidly piquant. The middle section is a wild *gavotte-rumba*, all shoulders and hips, that suddenly breaks off into bucolic reveries. Pungent humor informs the last pages, busy with woodwind and string nuances, and Anda’s silken playing, a true *tour de force* on all counts.

The solo recital 22 July 1955 delivers us the Beethoven D Major and A Major Sonatas and the B Minor Liszt. Brazen, extroverted chords open the Op. 10, No. 3, which proceeds in Haydnesque turns (sans exposition repeat) to a hard-edged brilliance reminiscent of Richter’s way with this piece at Carnegie Hall, 1960. Anda gauges the *Lento e mesto* as the emotional kernel of the sonata, its starts and stops indebted more to C.P.E. Bach’s emotionalism than to Haydn for the storms and stresses. The central dirge, countered by a pearly tenor filigree, invokes a gloomy descent into forbidding crevasses of the spirit. A classical *Menuet* leads to the pungent three-note motif whose development and harmonic ventures herald much for future Beethoven. The enigmatic Op. 101 Anda plays for its beguiling innocence mixed with interior, colorist excursions that Schumann and the Romantics will find inspirational. Anda’s improvisatory, hesitant style builds the inwardness to a rarified pitch, only to dissipate like the Cheshire’s Cat’s torso, leaving the smile alone to hang in space. The syncopated march asserts its kinship to the second movement of Schumann’s *Fantasia*, Op. 17. Anda makes the *Adagio* prior to the fugue sound like Scriabin; then, the cyclic opening measures culminate in a huge trill and the highly concentrated procession of syncopated riffs which Anda treats like touch-pieces.

The Brahms F Minor Sonata (16 November 1957) finds in Anda a passionate acolyte aligning the inflamed spirit of the work with Beethoven, Liszt, and Schumann. The shifts in register and timbre Anda negotiates with glittering energy, especially in the bass chords, which often resonate with figures borrowed from the Beethoven's Appassionata and Schumann's C Major Fantasy. The Andante is all Schumann, the sequences playing against each other with music-box clarity. Only once before, with Jorge Bolet, have I enjoyed such generous innigkeit in this music, although we must give Artur Rubinstein his due in this tender music, beholden to Rellstab's poetry for its lucid, nocturnal pearls. A whiplash Scherzo from Anda--easy on the pedal--proceeds to the Ruckblick (recall) Intermezzo, a "fate" motif progression Brahms will utilize again in his Op. 34 Quintet. The Finale exploits upbeats and syncopations, brilliant runs, angry polyphony that suddenly opens outward in bucolic song. Anda plays the plastic second period as one of Schumann's Marches Against the Philistines, the musical palette splashed luxuriously for our delectation. The 1892 Intermezzi wax romantically nostalgic by Anda, who imbues the first two, in E-flat Major and B-flat Major, with rainy-day, melancholy innocence. The C-sharp Minor always conveys a Kurt Weill, postwar Berlin sensibility, a bleakness underlying the anguished ritornello that marches sadly forward.

The Liszt Sonata from 1955 powers its furious way into our consciousness with explosive thrusts, all urgency and alternately demonized or empyrean ecstasies. Anda takes a breathless--though not shapeless--approach, the ground-theme always outlined in bass chords and fiercesome tremolos. It becomes apparent the whole for Anda is a study in characterization, the transformation of an initial motif and affect into a thousand, labyrinthine faces. The staccato "fate" motif melts into anguished, limpid nocturnes, etudes, and fughetts. The tension Anda imposes on the periods eliminates any emotional sag; yet Anda can bask in a rhetorical phrase or arioso lament with timeless rapture, his trills as aspiring as Jacob's Ladder. A fine sound document of an artist who died just as he reached his artistic prime.