



Edition Géza Anda (III) – Schumann | Chopin

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Audiophile Audition (Gary Lemco - 2008.07.02)

The third in a series of four 2-CD sets devoted to Hungarian virtuoso Geza Anda (1921-1976), this set captures from WDR Cologne studio inscriptions materials that Anda inscribed commercially for EMI, although the Schumann Romance is new to Anda's discography. The WDR studio recording of the Kreisleriana suite (6 April 1954) captures Anda in a decidedly bravura ethos, the music calling for him to indulge both his introspective, wistful character and his exuberant, fanciful imagination. Much of the keyboard writing imitates E.T.A. Hoffmann's demonic caricature of the violinist Paganini legend, so the filigree is all bariolage and leaping or cascading scales. The fourth section, "Sehr langsam," reveals the degree of relaxed, spacious serenity Anda could command, as well as the flying torches of the faster, more acrobatic passages. The "Sehr lebhaft" section juxtaposed against the slow episode sparkles fairy dust along the way, skittish and gamboling. Typically, Schumann's repetitive riffs challenge the interpreter to maintain a dynamic tension to avoid a sag in continuity. When the second slow section (No. 6) develops, the Bach influence--albeit rife with syncopations--tells us what the WTC might have sounded like by Anda. Happily, DGG published an Anda version of Bach's C Minor Partita some years ago. Section 7--"Sehr rasch"--is all knotty, virtuoso avalanches of notes both in counterpoint and in diatonic, sequentially mesmerizing style. Anda's handling of the last section--quick and playful--rebounds light and dark forces, childhood reveries wrapped in adult ecstasies.

His credentials in Schumann well established, Anda turns to the Symphonic Etudes (6 April 1954), whose points of interest include Anda's insertion of just two (Nos. 4 and 5) of the five posthumous variants--in between the middle sections of variants Etudes 6-8-- that stand outside the official edition of the score. The first of the two speckles dainty light on the original theme. The last pages sound particularly heroic, much in the mode of that anti-Philistine ethos Schumann courted as a sign of his own cosmopolitanism. The Carnival (5 April 1960) proves rife with "initiated" touches of the Davids-Leaguer, as in Anda's retaining the Sphinxes of section 9, and the glorious, legato sweetness of his Euebius. The sonic quality of Carnival will delight Anda-phile and audiophile alike. Any number of plastic ritards and luftpausen permeate this blazing suite, with Anda's digital virtuosity often searing through pages; though, again, a pregnant pause, as in the midst of the big, final march, will sharpen even the most accustomed ear to his nuances. When Anda turns on the afterburners, keep a fire extinguisher handy! While Alfred Cortot, Edwin Fischer, Clara Haskil, and Erno von Dohnanyi were Anda's idols, his particular finesse could at times transcend them all. The Romance (6 August 1960), written over three staves and symbolic of lovers Robert and Clara overcoming the obstacle Pere Wieck, conveys an aura of mystery and infatuation lushly atmospheric, three-hand effects, even plummeting a few, poetic depths.

The Chopin Preludes (17 November 1957) open with no romantic dawdling in C Major; it seems the asymmetrically concerted agonies of the A Minor are the text of this reading of Op. 28. The bass harmonies alone warrant admission to this often volcanic realization of the Romantic keyboard's Rosetta Stone. The G Major flies by in even roulades; the E Minor is personal grief escaping only when inward spasms no longer can contain it. Nostalgia and agitation plague the D Major. Some call the B Minor the real "raindrop" prelude; Anda presents such a case to us. A most delicate handkerchief is the A Major, a tissue of truth or lies? The F-sharp Minor rolls out a sea of troubles. Grand, nobly tragic sentiments in E Major, supported by a huge trill and evolving, plastic melodic line. Tendresses in B Major after scintillating filigree in C-sharp Minor. The Presto G-sharp Minor is as close as we come to Anda's playing a ferocious mazurka-tarantella. The F-sharp Major might be Chopin's briefest, lovely nocturne. Magma in less than 40 seconds, the E-flat Minor. Almost five minutes long, the D-flat Major has our troubadour of the piano in a luxuriant, expansive mood, the impassioned lover. The B-flat Minor should assure skeptics of Anda's feline technique when a tiger is required (no less so in G minor). My favorite, the A-flat Major, enjoys that mysterious allure of layered, dynamic phrases and repeated, evocative harmonic shifts. The burnished, descending bass line wins the berries. The Schumannesque E-flat Major's flowing pearls follow the staggered, pained F Minor, a truncated, powerful ballade. Beethoven's Fifth--the C Minor. The last four preludes form a sonic group, and Anda plies them with the delicate affection of an Aeolian harp (B-flat Major and F Major) and obsessive resolution (in D minor). Truth and poetry--Goethe's autobiography--is Anda's rule.

After the temperamental miniatures of the Preludes, the 12 Etudes, Op. 25 (22 July 1955) might appear as an opportunity for us to relax. Indeed, Anda contents himself with polished beauty of tone in many of the etudes; although the harmonic labyrinths of the E Minor (No. 5) and the C-sharp Minor (No. 7) do not elude him, even becoming keyboard tone-poems of formidable virtue. The quicker etudes might suggest Arrau, except the touch is lighter, less metronomic and always sculpting the top line. Often, the agogically-asymmetrical conceived etudes sound like Liszt. A gently ravishing panoply of color in the G-sharp Minor, with its ostinati and whirling figures. Carillons of sound in the D-flat Major, a skater's etude. The so-called "Butterfly" Etude dances free of care but not of charm. The last three etudes form a kind of mini-Appassionato Sonata - big in span, big in molten, primal emotions not skirted by Anda. The legato episodes drip with consolations, especially the A Minor "Winter Wind" Etude, another balladic piece of somber girth and contrary motions that peers into the Abyss. The final C Minor Etude Anda plays like a Romantic tsunami, a torrent of sound from the hands of Schumann's alter-ego, Florestan.