



Edition Géza Anda (IV) – Bartók

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Gramophone (2008.10.01)

Four days before Furtwängler died in Baden-Baden (on November 30, 1954) his arch-rival Herbert von Karajan was conducting Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* at the Grosser Saal of the Vienna Musikverein, a compelling performance now available on Orfeo and featuring the Vienna Symphony Orchestra and a fine (and relatively young) vocal line-up of Antonietta Stella, Oralia Dominguez, Nicolai Gedda and Giuseppe Modesti. I was amazed at just how different this 1954 performance is to another vintage Karajan-led Vienna Requiem recently released by Audite, a performance taped at the 1949 Salzburg Festival with a less consistent but none the less distinguished quartet of soloists – Hilde Zadek, Margarete Klose, Helge Roswaenge (effortful and weighty in comparison with the incendiary performance he gave under Toscanini in London in 1938) and Boris Christoff, captured in his magnificent early prime. The 1954 version is swifter than its predecessor by around five minutes and there are countless subtle differences in terms of articulation and phrasing, and yet both offer valuable insights into an evolving interpretation.

Still, I doubt if Karajan conducted Verdi's Requiem quite as often as Géza Anda played Bartók's Second Piano Concerto, which was more than 300 times. Volume 4 of Audite's unmissable Géza Anda "Edition" includes a light and fiery 1952 Salzburg performance under Fricsay, troubled only occasionally by some quirky balancing. The First Concerto (1957) under Michael Gielen, which is among the most playful versions I've ever heard, is rather better in that respect. The second disc includes a work that I don't recall ever hearing Anda play, the *Contrasts*, where the earnest violinist is Tibor Varga and the clarinetist the WDR Symphony Orchestra's Paul Blöcher. Here, as in the wonderful *Suite, Op 14*, Anda's performance combines flexibility – it's almost rhapsodic at times – with an acute feeling for colour and rhythm. Another Anda "first", at least as far as CD is concerned, is the *Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion* where his duet partner is none other than Georg Solti.

Again, tone colouring and nuance are the principle virtues and if the first movement's shifting rhythmic patterns are sometimes less than watertight, a sense of elemental energy more than compensates. The sound quality is fairly good and I would enthusiastically urge all Bartókians to invest without delay. These sorts of releases tend to have rather short shelf lives.