



B. Bartók: Piano Works

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Right off the bat, it should be noted that this SACD featuring Nicolas Bringuier playing piano music by Bela Bartok was recorded by Audite's engineers in 44.1kHz 24 bit PCM. While it's commendable that this is clearly stated on the first page of the booklet, it would have been more useful to print this information on the back cover of the jewel box, thus allowing a potential buyer all the facts before a purchase decision.

As to the matter of sonics, well, through a stereo setup it sounds like an extremely well engineered Red Book CD. One just has to compare it to a few recent SACDs recorded at higher sampling rates to dispel any doubts. For instance, when listening to Schumann: Piano Works - Paolo Giacometti on Channel Classics or to Beethoven: Complete Piano Sonatas Vol. 3 - Igor Tchetuev on Caro Mitis, there's a degree of transparency and detail in both the foreground and background that is simply lacking from Audite's recording. That impression becomes even more pronounced during softer passages, where the limitations of the 44.1 kHz barrier somehow seem to muffle the tone of Bringuier's otherwise fine sounding Kawai piano.

With the technical stuff out of the way, it should be said that Bringuier's interpretation provides a wonderful glimpse into Bartok's rather extensive piano output, with a special mention to the masterful piano sonata, which closes the disc. Compared to Zoltán Kocsis' complete transversal on a Philips RBCD set, Bringuier sounds less impulsive in the area of dynamic contrast, which is not really a bad thing due to the natural extremes already present in Bartok's own writing. A more apt comparison would be to Murray Perahia with a very similar program on a CBS Masterworks RBCD. Bringuier seems to bring more clarity to the picture, whereas Perahia brings more coherence, which ultimately feels like a more relevant factor when trying to make sense of Bartok's demanding musical language.

For now, within the confines of a 44.1kHz stereo environment, I could go either way between Perahia or Bringuier for selected piano pieces, with Kocsis as an outside option on the complete set front. But multichannel devotees willing to overlook all this talk about sampling rates, should seriously consider giving Bringuier's sensitive reading an edge over the competition.