Wilhelm Backhaus

Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Sonatas | Wilhelm Backhaus

Ludwig van Beethoven

2CD aud 23.420

Wochen-Kurier Mittwoch, 4. August 2010 - Nr. 31 (Michael Karrass - 2010.08.04)

Wilhelm Backhaus galt bereits in frühen Jahren als Inbegriff eines Pianisten,...

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Audiophile Audition August 11, 2010 (Gary Lemco - 2010.08.11)

Backhaus stands as among the most consistently satisfying of all Beethoven...

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Morgenpost am Sonntag Sonntag, 12. September 2010 (- 2010.09.12)

Beethovens Klaviersonaten bilden einen eigenen Kosmos in der klassischen Musik....

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Piano News September / Oktober 5/2010 (Carsten Dürer - 2010.09.01)

Richter, Gulda, Backhaus, Fischer etc.

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Märkische Oderzeitung Mittwoch, 15. September 2010 - 21. Jahrgang Nr. 215 (Peter Philipps - 2010.09.15)

Fast akademischer Klang

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Classica – le meilleur de la musique classique & de la hi-fi n° 126 octobre 2010 (Jacques Bonnaure - 2010.10.01)

Une beauté intemporelle

Au soir de sa vie. Wilhelm Backhaus laisse un témoignage conciliant urgence, pureté et d'une intense expressivité.

Une beauté intemporelle

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Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung Donnerstag, 26. August 2010 (Hajo Berns - 2010.08.26)

Wiederhören mit Wilhelm Backhaus und Beethoven

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Süddeutsche Zeitung Mittwoch. 8. September 2010 (Wolfgang Schreiber - 2010.09.08)

Jung und Alt

Wilhelm Backhaus verabschiedete sich von Berlin mit Beethoven

Jung und Alt

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klassik.com Oktober 2010 (Kai Schabram - 2010.10.19)
source: http://magazin.klassik.com/reviews/revie...

'Metronom' oder Mediator?

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Fono Forum Dezember 2010 12/10 (Ingo Harden - 2010.11.17)

Alt und gut

Die Erstveröffentlichung des Beethoven-Abends, den der 85-jährige Wilhelm Backhaus im Mai 1969 in Berlin gab, ist einer der wertvollen Funde auf dem vielbeackerten Feld der Archiv-Bestände. Backhaus galt hierzulande spätestens nach 1945 als der zuverlässigste, aber nicht unbedingt beflügelndste "Klassiker" unter den pianistischen Hausgöttern. Im Vergleich zu Gieseking, Kempff und Fischer ging es bei ihm immer etwas nüchterner zu, sein bekannter Studiozyklus der 32 Klaviersonaten wirkt wie eine Bestätigung dieser Eindrücke.

Die neuen Mitschnitte aus dem RIAS Fundus ergänzen dieses Bild ähnlich aufschlussreich wie Deccas legendäres, im Ton sehr persönliches "letztes Konzert" vom Juli desselben Jahres. Sie machen erfahrbar, was die künstlerische Bedeutung Backhaus' im Kern ausmachte: nämlich über die souveräne (und uneitel eingesetzte) technische Beherrschung des Instruments hinaus der sichere Blick für die inneren Zusammenhänge des Komponierten. Ihnen ordnete er mit großem Zugriff alle Einzelheiten unter, seine "Klassizität" hatte nichts mit den Notenfuchsereien zu tun, die heute gerne mit diesem Etikett versehen werden.

Am eindrucksvollsten offenbart sich dieser große Backhaus im ersten Satz der späten E-Dur-Sonate, deren fantasieartiger Charakter wohl kaum jemals eindringlicher herausgespielt wurde als an diesem Abend. Tadelloses Remastering, vor lauten Akkorden machen sich leise, an entschwundene und fast schon vergessene Tonbandzeiten erinnernde "Vorechos" bemerkbar.

WETA fm Wednesday, 11.17.10, 4:00 pm (Jens F. Laurson - 2010.11.17)

Bits of Beethoven (Sonatas): Steven Osborne, Wilhelm Backhaus, Solomon

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www.ResMusica.com 16 novembre 2010 (Patrick Georges Montaigu - 2010.11.16)

Le dernier Backhaus reste une référence

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Diapason N° 586 décembre 2010 (Jean-Charles Hoffelé - 2010.12.01)

Les studios d'enregistrement, que Wilhelm Backhaus a beaucoup fréquentés, pouvaient ternir sa sonorité, brider son imagination pourtant puissante. Les captations en concert dévoilent un autre artiste, disert, brillant, privilégiant les tempos rapides, et chez Beethoven pliant la forme à un sens de l'improvisation qu'il était un des rares pianistes de sa génération à faire ressortir avec tant de science (Hans Richter-Haaser lui emboîtera le pas). Toujours servi par cette sonorité royale, par ce plein clavier orchestral où l'on entend des clarinettes et des trompettes, l'ensemble rappelle que Beethoven fut le premier à mettre tout un orchestre dans son piano. Quelques doigts récalcitrants dans l'Allegro de la « Pastorale » – le temps que la fabuleuse machine à notes se chauffe – ne devront pas empêcher l'auditeur de se précipiter sur ce double-album. La prise de son, équilibrée et précise, déploie une belle stéréophonie, l'instrument, gorgé de timbres, chante avec profondeur et répète avec élégance : clavier léger, patte de lion. « La Caille » émoustille, tout emportée par son esprit de scherzo. Les paysages de la « Waldstein » montrent un art de coloriste doigts à doigts qui se délie dans les traits et dose de savantes alchimies dans les accords prolongés. Des broutilles ici encore. Et alors ? Une Sonate op. 109 sans métaphysique, chantante avant tout, vient conclure le programme. Magnifique.

Columns - Sound and Music - Novità discografiche Novembre 2010 (- - 2010.11.01)

Fin dai primi anni della sua lunga carriera Wilhelm Backhaus si accostò a ogni opera con la massima obiettività possibile. Sotto questo aspetto Backhaus esercitò una grandissima influenza sui pianisti della generazione successiva e il suo stile esecutivo rappresentò il degno contraltare a quello di Wilhelm Kempff. Il repertorio di Backhaus spaziava dai grandi capolavori del Classicismo e del Romanticismo, partendo da Bach per arrivare a Brahms, con le opere di Beethoven al centro. Durante gli oltre 70 anni della sua camera concertistica Backhaus eseguì un gran numero di volte le sonate di Beethoven, dimostrando ogni volta di possedere mia tecnica assolutamente irreprensibile e una straordinaria capacità di esaltare anche le più piccole nuances espressive. Questo disco della Audite propone un concerto live tenuto da Backhaus a Berlino nel 1969, ultimo anno della sua vita lunga e ricca di soddisfazioni. Le quattro sonate proposte consentono di apprezzare il fraseggio chiaro e trasparente e l'approccio classico di Backhaus, che seppe mettere in evidenza come pochi altri pianisti la raffinata architettura delle sonate di Beethoven senza sacrificare nessun dettaglio e senza scendere mai a compromessi.

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www.musicweb-international.com November 2010 (Jonathan Woolf - 2010.11.01)
source: http://www.musicweb-international.com/cl...

The last testament of this eminent musician

There is something indomitable, indeed magnificent, about Backhaus's recital at the Philharmonie in April 1969, given shortly before his death in the same year. Already in his mid-eighties, and with a vast career stretching behind him, he didn't stint. The programme consisted of four Beethoven sonatas; there were no concessions to other composers, or other forms. Form, indeed, was the essence for late Backhaus, which would be a sympathetic consideration, if nothing else, if the playing were raddled, but the remarkable thing is that it is very much not raddled. Indeed it's only at a few points, when one feels him tire, that one becomes aware of weaknesses in this area. For the main part Backhaus proves remarkably resilient for a man of 85, a performer whose digital control is married to profound resilience and perception.

The Pastoral sonata opens with a real sense of occasion, and it shows a formidable awareness of the need for flexibility within a strongly etched rhythm. The slow movement is neither over-stressed nor over-romanticised, but full measure of pawkiness attends the scherzo – heavy, assuredly, in part at least, but with a gnarly wit and plenty of rubati. This presages a fleet, fluent finale. The E flat major Op.31 No.3 sonata manages to combine strength of sinew and light heartedness of spirit. Its scherzo is full of energetic playfulness and one listens in admiration as Backhaus delivers on the finale's con fuoco marking with commensurate power and not a little swagger. By the Waldstein one begins to feel him tiring. Three years ago I reviewed a performance he gave of this sonata in the Beethovenhalle, Bonn, in September 1959. This earlier live traversal is lighter than the decade-later one under review, and contains fewer slips, though this does seem to have been a work that caused him digital problems notwithstanding the dates of the performances. What he invariably located in it however was a wonderfully sustained sense of piety. The second disc contains only the E major Op.109. It opens in rather 'tripping' fashion, but features a strong Prestissimo, and then the noble unfolding of the finale, which in this performance marries tonal depth to graphic architectural assurance.

Backhaus's complete Beethoven sonata recordings are on the 8 CD Decca Original Masters 475 7198 and various other examples of all the four sonatas played in 1969 exist, from 78s in the case of the earlier two to 1950 Deccas – these in addition to the 1960s Deccas contained in the box noted above. So, there is quite a deal of choice for even the Backhaus completist, but not even that fact should dent enthusiasm for the last testament of this eminent musician enshrined in this recording.

Universitas Nr. 11/2010 (Adelbert Reif - 2010.11.01)

Kaum mehr überblickbar ist die Anzahl junger Pianisten und Violinisten, die...

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La Musica 2010 August (- 2010.08.01)

Beethoven

Beethoven

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Diverdi Magazin marzo 2011 (Roberto Andrade - 2011.03.01)

DIVERDI.COM

Beethoven de referencia

Audite rescata, con maravilloso sonido, un recital de 1969 del gran Wilhelm Backhaus

Hace un año, señalaba en estas páginas a Wilhelm Backhaus (1884-1969) como uno de los grandes pianistas del siglo XX. Su dilatadísima carrera –cerca de 80 años – se extendió justo hasta el final de su vida: se conserva la grabación de su último concierto, que ofreció en la iglesia de Ossiach, Carintia, una semana antes de fallecer. Y su presentación en público había tenido lugar cuando apenas era un niño, en 1892; parece ser que Brahms escuchó al joven pianista y le dirigió palabras de aliento. La consagración de Backhaus se produjo en el Concurso Anton Rubinstein, celebrado en París en 1905, en el que obtuvo el primer premio, venciendo a competidores como Béla Bartók y Otto Klemperer.

Desde entonces, Backhaus fue un pianista de renombre mundial y mantuvo una fructífera relación con el fonógrafo para el que, en 1909, realizó la primera grabación de un concierto para piano y orquesta, el de Grieg, si bien en versión muy abreviada. Entre otros registros históricos figura la primera integral fonográfica de los Estudios de Chopin opus 10 y 25, fechada en 1929, que aun hoy resulta notable. Tanto por el repertorio que cultivó como por la forma de abordarlo, Backhaus fue un pianista clásico, objetivo, fiel a la partitura y, en tal sentido, adelantado a sus coetáneos (citemos solo a Paderewski), que a menudo se permitían unas libertades que hoy juzgamos inaceptables. Antes de la segunda guerra mundial, en su repertorio figuraron, además de Chopin, autores como Liszt o Rachmaninov que no asociamos con el Backhaus de posguerra. A partir de 1945, el pianist se centró en Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms y, especialmente, Beethoven, de quien fue intérprete de referencia: ya en 1928 ofreció en concierto el ciclo de las 32 Sonatas.

Así lo demuestra este magnífico concierto, ejemplarmente grabado en Berlín por la RIAS el 18 de abril de 1969 en la sala de la Filarmonía. Backhaus abordó impávido, a sus 85 primaveras, un programa sin concesiones que superó con toda brillantez, formado por cuatro sonatas de Beethoven. Otros grandes pianistas como Arrau, Rubinstein u Horszowski no hubieron podido afrontarlo a esa edad. La longevidad de Backhaus fue excepcional si consideramos la estupenda forma, física y mental, en que se hallaba en el año de su muerte. La Sonata opus 53 , conocida como Waldstein o Aurora es una de las más insidiosas para el intérprete que Beethoven escribió. Su larga sección de desarrollo en el movimiento inicial exige un férreo control mecánico y, sobre todo, mental , para poder comunicar al oyente el complejo entramado musical beethoveniano, dominio que parece reservado a pianistas más jóvenes de lo que Backhaus era en 1969. En sus manos, la Sonata Waldstein adquiere una intensidad que prende al oyente en la red de su lógica inexorable y no lo deja escapar hasta su conclusión: Backhaus es un magistral arquitecto, un profundo recreador de esta imponente Sonata; las pequeñas imperfecciones mecánicas son irrelevantes. Y no menos admirable es la espléndida calidad de su sonido – poderoso o delicado según se requiera, siempre timbrado y redondo – el mismo que ofrecía en sus primeras grabaciones de comienzos de los años 50 para Decca, captado ahora por los micrófonos de la RIAS alemana en toda su dimensión, con el auxilio de una magnífica estereofonía. Espléndida también la Sonata opus 31.3, otra de las magnas creaciones de Beethoven, en la que Backhaus no solo muestra su autoridad indiscutible sino que responde

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con versatilidad a los muy diferentes estados de ánimo de sus cuatro movimientos – presididos por un desusado buen humor que no suele asociarse al músico de Bonn – que culminan en una brillantísima tarantela final. De nuevo asombra la vitalidad del intérprete, más inspirado y más convincente que en sus grabaciones de estudio. De las otras dos Sonatas ofrecidas en este concierto berlinés, la Pastoral opus 28 y la maravillosa opus 109 en mi mayor, cabe destacar las Variaciones que culminan esta última, por su claridad formal, su noble expresividad y su elocuencia. Uno de esos recitales que no se olvidan, recomendable con entusiasmo.

Fanfare Issue 34:3 (Jan/Feb 2011) (Paul Orgel - 2011.01.01)

fanfare

Passagework is a little smudged here and there, and sometimes, Backhaus bangs or rushes slightly, but considering that this recording of one of his last concerts was made when he was 85, these small imperfections are easily forgiven. Backhaus specialized in Beethoven's sonatas—he first performed the complete cycle in 1928—and he goes for the larger structural picture, not all the precise details. His sound is big and generous and his ability to convey the span of long melodic lines is the most impressive aspect of these performances. From early in his career, Backhaus was considered to be a "classicist" whose playing emphasized textual fidelity and served as a corrective to self-indulgent performances of the time, but these things are relative, and by current standards, these performances are refreshingly impulsive and freely paced. Backhaus isn't afraid to linger or to push forward more than most contemporary pianists, and the music benefits.

Considerable rubato heightens the tender character of op. 31/3's minuet and the playful one in op. 28. Backhaus plays these two warm-hearted sonatas with real affection and no lack of speed in the fast movements. Op. 31/3's Presto finale never lets up and is a technically impressive performance by any standard.

Technical limitations hinder Backhaus the most in the first movement of the "Waldstein" and in the finale's motoric episodes, but he plays the work's central Adagio sostenuto with convincing rhythmic freedom, and the third movement's opening theme sings beautifully. He slows way down for the octave glissando passage and plays each octave with an individual stroke.

If the "Waldstein" is, overall, a performance to avoid, op. 109 is a pleasant surprise, a performance that improves as it goes on. Backhaus's control falters at times in the opening movement with too many arpeggiated chords and some shaky timing, but the prestissimo second movement is solidly played and he rises to the occasion of the third movement's variations—there is no more beautiful movement in any Beethoven sonata—with an eloquent, unfussy performance that is both technically impressive and emotionally soaring.

Listeners seeking refinement of touch should look elsewhere—almost any pianist I can think of would strive for more subtle balances between melody and accompaniment, more clearly delineated degrees of non-legato or staccato, and more sparing pedal—but I recommend this recording for its documentaton of an important Beethoven specialist playing extraordinarily well, considering his age, in three of the four sonatas. The music-making is very much alive. The miking sounds close, the recording is in stereo, and Backhaus's Bechstein is a bright, clear sounding instrument.

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ouverture Das Klassik-Blog Sonntag, 17. Oktober 2010 (- 2010.10.17)

Wilhelm Backhaus (1884 bis 1969) debütierte als Zwölfjähriger im Leipziger...

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American Record Guide 01.11.2010 (John P. McKelvey - 2010.11.01)

This was recorded in concert in Berlin in April 1969, about 10 weeks before the pianist died (July 5). The broadcast tapes give us sound that is less smooth, rich, and sleek than in Audite tapes recorded 20 ears earlier. It is stereo, satisfactory though not outstanding. In these performances, the pianist turns aside from the usual Bösendorfer instrument in favor of a less rich-voiced Bechstein E. It is a very good instrument, though its sound is drier and less sustained than the big, strong Bösendorfer.
These performances lack the clarity and ambience of the ones recorded by Decca, but they compensate with an element of freshness and spontaneity lacking in the studio productions. The earlier works, Nos. 15 and 18 have a spontaneity mighty scarce in the recorded competition. The Waldstein, No. 21, is also very good—a slow though weighty, extremely forceful and powerful account. The splendid account of No. 30, intimate and thoughtful to a fault, has a 17 minute CD to itself, since the 86- minute program is too long for a single disc. Audite does not charge full price, but 24 US dollars is still pretty hefty. The edition is handsomely packaged with copious notes and illustrations. All the pictures show Backhaus not as he looked at age 85, when these recordings were made, but instead about 30 years earlier. The notes are really excellent, and in themselves almost worth the price of the recordings. Backhaus was obsessed with privacy. Information about his life has been hard to come by. The notes go rather far to ameliorate that difficulty, and are definitely quite valuable to anyone seeking to penetrate the veil of silence the pianist erected.

Scherzo Jg. XXVI, N° 265 (Rafael Ortega Basagoiti - 2011.04.01)

Grabación en vivo de cuatro bien conocidas Sonatas del ilustre sordo a cargo de...

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BBC Radio 3 Sat 18 Sep 2010, 10.45 am (Andrew Mc Gregor - 2010.09.18)

BROADCAST CD review

Recent releases:
Kenneth Hamilton talks with Andrew about recent releases of Beethoven piano music.

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France Musique mercredi 13 octobre 2010, 8h40 (Christophe Bourseiller & Jean-Michel Boissier - 2010.10.13)

BROADCAST Musique matin

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France Musique jeudi 20 janvier 2011 (- 2011.01.20)

BROADCAST Concert du midi

Bad Kissingen: Beethoven, Haydn

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Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Concerto No. 4 & Symphony No. 4

Ludwig van Beethoven

CD aud 95.610

Der neue Merker Montag, 23. November 2009 18:39 (Dorothea Zweipfennig - 2009.11.23)

Audite: November-Veröffentlichungen präsentieren zwei große Dirigenten, denen...

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Wochen-Kurier Nr. 51 - Mittwoch, 23. Dezember 2009 (Michael Karrass - 2009.12.23)

In der künstlerischen Partnerschaft zwischen Karl Böhm und Wilhelm Backhaus...

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Audiophile Audition January 25, 2010 (Gary Lemco - 2010.01.25)

The Karl Bohm (1894-1981) legacy here embraces two sessions with Ferenc...

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Pizzicato N° 200 - 02/2010 (Alain Steffen - 2010.02.01)

Große Meister

War es möglich, knapp fünf Jahre nach den Gräueln des Zweiten Weltkriegs die Musik von Johann Strauss so sorglos und naiv zu spielen, wie in den Jahren ihrer Entstehung? Ferenc Fricsay gibt hier eine sehr individuelle Antwort auf diese Frage. Sein Umgang mit der 'leichten' Musik von Strauss ist sehr ernsthaft; er verzichtet auf glanzvollen Orchesterklang und oberflächliche Schönheit, sondern setzt das Ursprüngliche, Kraftvolle, Künstlerische dieser Musik in den Vordergrund. Das mag beim ersten Anhören etwas fremd klingen, aber folgt man Fricsay mit Unbefangenheit, dann erlebt man die großen Walzer und Polkas in einem ganz anderen, neuen Licht. Weit entfernt von dem Happening-Charakter der Wiener Neujahrskonzerte lässt uns Fricsay an einem Strauss-Erlebnis der etwas anderen Art teilhaben. Und trifft dabei voll ins Schwarze. Andere ausgewiesene Strauss-Interpreten wie Clemens Kraus, Karl Böhm oder Herbert von Karajan haben dabei das Nachsehen.

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Auch bei dem Beethoven-Programm mit Backhaus und Karl Böhm wird der Musikliebhaber auf seine Kosten kommen. Backhaus spielt wie ein junger Gott, leichtfüßig und voller Poesie, technisch überlegen und musikalisch einwandfrei. Das hervorwagende Remastering dieser CD lässt durch ihre Transparenz zudem wundervolle Feinheiten in Backhaus' Spiel erkennen. Karl Böhms Beethoven wirkt eher klassisch und entspricht dem damaligen Zeitgeist. Trotzdem sind seine beiden Interpretationen hörenswert, zumal er gerade bei der 4. Symphonie in ungeahnte Tiefen vorstößt und diese Symphonie als ein tatsächliches Nachfolgewerk der großen Eroica versteht.

Welch ein Ereignis, den großen Wilhelm Backhaus hier in drei Live-Mitschnitten aus der New Yoker Carnegie Hall zu hören. Das 4. Klavierkonzert stammt vom 18. März, die Sonate op. 10 Nr. 1 vom 11. April 1956, der ganze Rest ist das komplette Konzert mit Zugaben, das Backhaus am 30. März 1954 im Alter von 70 Jahren gespielt hat: Das reine Beethoven-Programm setzte sich aus den Sonaten op. 13 'Pathetique', op.79. op. 31/2 'Der Sturm', op.81a 'Les Adieux' und op. 111 zusammen, die Zugaben stammen von Schubert, Schumann, Liszt und Brahms. Wir erleben einen erstaunlich jung gebliebenen Pianistin, der mit filigraner und sicherer Technik einen sehr leichten Beethoven spielt. Die Virtuosität ist immer präsent, doch sie hält sich quasi mit einem Augenzwinkern im Hintergrund. Backhaus erweist sich als ein Meister der Gestaltung. Die Melodien fließen mit einer atemberaubenden Natürlichkeit, und die Tiefe ergibt sich aus der Schlichtheit. Zudem wirkt das Programm trotz der unterschiedlichen Sprachen der Sonaten genau so geschlossen und zwingend, wie die Interpretationen. Hoch interessant und so gar nicht im Stil der Fünfzigerjahre ist das 4. Klavierkonzert mit Guido Cantelli am Pult der New Yorker Philharmoniker. Schlank, virtuos und doch getragen von einem tiefen Verständnis nimmt diese Interpretation bereits den 'modernen' Beethoven der Sechziger- und Siebzigerjahre vorweg und zeigt auf eine sehr schöne Weise, wie fließend dieser Stilübergang sein kann und, dass selbst ein Pianist, der noch im 19. Jahrhundert debütiert hat, diese Modernität mitgetragen hat. Im Gegensatz zu Karl Böhm ist Guido Cantelli virtuoser im Umgang mit dem Orchestermaterial und bezieht sich eher auf die Leuchtkraft eines Mozart. Nur hängt diese New Yorker Aufnahme der Berliner klanglich weit hinterher.

Vladimir Horowitz war dreiundachtzig Jahre alt, als er sein umjubeltes Konzert vom 18. Mai 1986 in der Berliner Philharmonie gab. „Himmlischer Horowitz – Die Berliner weinten in der Philharmonie“ konnte man in der Presse vom 20. Mai lesen. Und in der Tat, beim Abhören dieses Mitschnitts spürt man sofort das Großartige und Einmalige dieses Abends. Das Publikum reagierte entfesselt, Horowitz ließ noch einmal seine ganze Kunst aufblitzen. Einmalig die drei Sonaten von Scarlatti, wunderbar Schumanns 'Kreisleriana'. Und natürlich gibt Horowitz gerade bei den beiden russischen Komponisten Rachmaninov und Scriabin sein Bestes, zeigt, wie edel, uneigennützig und wahr man als Pianist diesen publikumswirksamen Stücken begegnen kann. Ein in der Tat historisches Konzert.

Diapason N° 581 juin 2010 (Rémy Louis - 2010.06.01)

Plusieurs parutions (Audite, Hänssler...) ont permis récemment de saluer Karl Böhm interprète straussien. Cœur de ce CD inédit – Don Juan excepté –, la Symphonie alpestre (1952), enregistrée aux fins de diffusion radio, est sa deuxième version, une archive berlinoise de 1939 issue de la DRA ayant connu une édition très partielle. Si elle affiche une durée plus imposante (54') que la gravure avec Dresde (DG, 1957), elle s'en rapproche quant aux rapports de tempos liant les épisodes, et partage sa magistrale clarté polyphonique. Là où Strauss luimême pacifie génialement un tempo de base enlevé (Music & Arts, 1936), Böhm anime un tempo essentiellement retenu avec un lyrisme communicatif, de multiples nuances d'accents et de phrasés. Sa vision est ainsi plus précisément évocatrice (Elégie, Calme avant la tempête) que bien des lectures plus rapides. Si la gravure saxonne entretient souvent le mystère, celle-ci mêle lumière quasi latine et solennité fervente – le remastering de l'excellente bande originale ne nous en cache rien.

Les valses du Chevalier à la rosé révèlent ensuite une perception très sûre du contexte dramaturgique de l'opéra. L'accentuation savante et la décontraction du ton sont réjouissantes, à mi-chemin entre Vienne et

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Munich – et quelle transparence, là encore! Mise au service d'un univers tout autre, elle illumine également un Opus 58 de Beethoven d'un son glorieux (plus que l'édition Tahra), pour les mêmes raisons que ci-dessus. On a l'impression d'assister à ce concert donné en 1950 au Titania-Palast. Onze ans après la singulière gravure avec Gieseking (et Dresde, Emi, 1939), Böhm converse cette fois avec Wilhelm Backhaus. Passion de la clarté, exigence de l'articulation, ferveur rhétorique, flamme intérieure: le maître allemand sculpte le détail au sein du grand geste – la cadence de l'Allegro est extraordinaire, le finale irrésistible. Influence de l'air berlinois ? Dans l'Andante con moto, le legato de Böhm a des tentations furtwänglériennes, plus que dans aucune autre de ses versions (avec Backhaus encore, puis Pollini).

Enregistrée en studio, claire de lignes et assez sombre de propos, la Symphonie n° 4 (inédite, 1952) est intrigante dans son ambiguïté même. Aucun autre de ses témoignages ne donne à l'Adagio introductif une telle densité attentiste, comme une anticipation du début de l'acte II de Fidelio. Un choix volontaire, car l'émotion qui sourd de l'Adagio central participe encore d'une autre nuance expressive, plus lyrique, mélancolique aussi. Etrangers aux imprécations d'un Scherchen (Tahra) comme aux ivresses de Carlos Kleiber (Orfeo), les tempos de Böhm paraîtront sans nul doute modérés pour nos habitudes actuelles (il est vrai que certains sforzatos manquent parfois de tension). Mais, comme souvent, l'élan intérieur et l'animation incoercible du discour demeurent.

Fanfare Monday, 10 May 2010 (Mortimer H. Frank - 2010.05.10)

fanfare

This release is tagged Volume 7 in Audite's ongoing series devoted to Karl Böhm. The concerto is a live account dating from 1950 and may well prove the more interesting item. Backhaus left two studio accounts of the work, both for London/Decca: a fine mono version with Clemens Krauss, a less commanding stereo remake with Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt. If my memory is accurate, the performance featured here is closer to that earlier effort and is in many ways admirable in its unaffected directness and freedom from the excessive breadth that some pianists have imposed on the first movement. There it is interesting to hear how, while echoing Schnabel's tempo for that movement, Backhaus doesn't quite match that pianist's smooth legato phrasing in a few key passages, the solo introduction being a prime case in point. With Backhaus it sounds slightly choppy. Nevertheless this is generally a commanding account, its one major flaw being the unfamiliar and unduly long cadenza that Backhaus favored in the finale, one that may well be his own. In the first movement he plays the familiar one by Beethoven. Sonically the piano comes off better here than the orchestra. It is unusually close in perspective but free of distortion. Typical of tapes of the period, however, the timbre of the orchestra is shrill, with unpleasantly edgy siring tone.

As for the Symphony No. 4, one wonders if this 1952 studio recording was ever previously released – it is not cited in either of the two WERM supplements. (Perhaps a limited issue was produced and confined to Germany.) Sonically it marks a big improvement over the concerto: less harsh if still a bit edgy and remarkable in its wide dynamic range and freedom from the once-common tape-hiss. Musically, it is very close to Böhm's 1972 stereo account for DG with the Vienna Philharmonic, the one marked difference between them being this earlier version's having a few rhetorical emphases in the third movement that the later account avoids. Both include exposition repeals in outer movement and offer tempos that, if slightly broader than usual, remain eminently musical. In short, this is a significant historical release.

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www.ResMusica.com 03/11/2010 (Patrick Georges Montaigu - 2010.11.03)

Beethoven Böhm Backhaus : du grand classique, mais pas très nouveau

Beethoven Böhm Backhaus : du grand classique, mais pas très nouveau

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

Crescendo Magazine mise à jour le 18 novembre 2010 (Bernard Postiau - 2010.11.18)

Contrairement au disque Strauss que nous avons reçu parallèlement à celui-ci,...

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

American Record Guide July-August 2010 (William Bender - 2010.07.01)

It probably needn't be said that these two works belong together like Cavalleria Rusticana and I Pagliacci, the two one-act operas Metropolitan Opera fans used to call ham & eggs. But there is a certain reflective kinship that makes this Beethoven double bill particularly enjoyable—the composer free of his later angst but at the peak of his middle-period genius. The playing by all not only adds to that pleasure but gives the album its real distinction.

Backhaus and Bohm had been concerto partners, and friends, in the years before World War II (their two Brahms concertos remain popular reissues to this day on Naxos and Biddulph), and this reading of Beethoven 4 in 1950 Berlin was one of their first post-war get-togethers, if not the first reunion itself. Both were done for broadcast, the concerto before an audience in the Titania Palast, the symphony in a 1952 "studio" recording in the Jesus Christ Church, both places regularly favored by the Berlin Philharmonic. The RIAS Symphony was Ferenc Fricsay's orchestra, which since 1948 he had quickly built into a first-rate ensemble. Berlin was still divided into East and West, and RIAS stood for Radio in the American Sector. Audite tells us that the sound heard here was drawn from the original broadcast reel-to-reel tapes. The result is very easy on the ears, though the treble is limited and the bass line is sometimes blurry.

The symphony is done in Bohm's usual no-nonsense style, and is endearing. I do not know his later set of the Beethoven nine with the Vienna Philharmonic, but I would be surprised if the Vienna Fourth were as genial, as courtly even, as this one with the RIAS. It is one of Beethoven's more mysterious works. Many a prominent conductor has foundered on its innocent shoreline, trying to lay on meaning and profundity that might have astonished the composer. Bohm seems to have succeeded by simply turning the music over to the orchestra. It often seems that way with Bohm. But it is of course never that simple. He works hard for it in rehearsal. The minuet (III) is perhaps the most charming thing in the performance. At the end of each section—the beginning minuet, the trio, and then the movement itself—Böhm introduces gentle retards that are not called for in the score but are certainly permissible and are like farewell curtsies of a bygone rococo era—and charming.

Wilhelm Backhaus brings one of the 20th Century's great piano techniques to bear on the piano concerto, with electrifying results. He had a familiar ability to make every passage, every phrase, sound just right, ever so easy, fully at the service of the music. This was done without a hint of showing off, unless it be in a cadenza—but even there he seemed to stay cool. Over the years that glistening pearlywhite tone was ceaseless in its ability to pierce even the thickest of orchestral sonorities, though Beethoven's discreet

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orchestrations do not present that kind of challenge. Nor does the man on the podium here.

There is one debatable interpretive moment that occurs right at the start with the piano's delicate solo opening. Beethoven gives seemingly contradictory directions for this passage. The dots over the piano's notes are the familiar indication that the composer wants the music played staccato, or detached. But he also writes p, for soft, and dolcefor sweet. Is it possible to do both? Backhaus clearly favors the staccato approach, though he does his best to be quiet about it. Going back to Leon Fleisher's 1959 recording with George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra (most recently on Sony 48165), one is charmed and convinced by his half-voiced emphasis on the soft and the sweet. Surely Beethoven must have wanted it that way, as a beckoning contrast to what was to follow. Artur Schnabel thought so too in his three recordings of the piece.

www.ClassicsToday.com January 2010 (David Hurwitz - 2010.01.01)

Fresh from their denazification hearings, Backhaus and Böhm team up for a...

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

www.classicstodayfrance.com Janvier 2010 (Christophe Huss - 2010.01.01)

On en apprend à tout âge et il faut toujours écouter attentivement! Il y a...

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

Gramophone Gramophone Awards (Geoffrey Norris - 2013.10.01)

Emerging triumphant from the flames

It was shunned at its premiere but Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto – wildly radical for its time – is now championed by countless performers. Geoffrey Norris discusses his selection of the best available recordings

It's a chilly December evening in Vienna. A good-sized audience has braved the cold and gathered in the unheated Theater an der Wien for a marathon benefit concert featuring the radical composer whom everyone is talking about. He's a bit of an odd ball – often irascible, not a great socialiser, inclined to put people's backs up – but a lot of the music he writes is worth hearing, and he can be relied upon to come up with a surprise or two. Tonight the man himself is going to appear as soloist in his latest piano concerto and, it's rumoured, will do some improvisation in a new piece called Choral Fantasy, which he has knocked together in a hurry because he suddenly realised that a chorus was already on hand to sing parts of his Mass in C. There are to be premieres of two symphonies – his Fifth and Sixth – and a young soprano is standing in at the last moment to sing the scena and aria Ah! Perfido, the composer apparently having had a row with the diva originally booked.

The year was 1808. Beethoven sat down at the keyboard for his Fourth Piano Concerto, which he had already played the previous year at the palace of his well-disposed patron Prince Franz Joseph Maximilian von Lobkowitz. But this was the first time it had been heard by the paying Vienna public. All heads turned

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towards the conductor for a sign that he was going to give a downbeat for the orchestral introduction. That, after all, was the norm in a concerto in that day and age, but the composer played a quiet G major chord followed by a little questioning phrase, and it was only then that the orchestra came in. What was going on? Back in the 1770s, Mozart had done something similarly unexpected in the Concerto in E flat, K271, but even there the orchestra had the first say. More to the point, the new concerto was not riveting or dynamic: it was more as if the composer were poetically communing with himself. Minds wandered. The public were accustomed to sitting through long concerts, but the four hours and more of this one were taking things a bit far. The audience eventually trooped out of the theatre into the bitter Vienna night, frozen to the marrow and feeling short-changed.

As if that weren't enough…

The uncomprehending reception of the Fourth Piano Concerto was just one of the misfortunes to beset this all-Beethoven night on December 22, 1808: the orchestra, ill-rehearsed and annoyed with Beethoven over some earlier misdemeanour, fell apart in the Choral Fantasy and the piece had to be started again. And far from being a benefit night for Beethoven, it is thought that he hardly managed to break even. The G major Concerto never really entered the core repertoire until Mendelssohn – that youthfully perceptive and vigorous campaigner on behalf of unjustly neglected causes, Bach included – rescued it in the 1830s. Clara Schumann took it up in the 1840s. In the 1860s Hans von Billow played it. Anton Rubinstein played it. Liszt admired it. The Fourth gradually overcame its unpromising entry into the world – as such ground breaking and unusual music is so often prone to do – and entered the canon of Beethoven's regularly performed concertos. These days its reception is immeasurably more favourable than that which its first audience was prepared or equipped to give it, and there is no shortage of recordings in the current catalogue. From a long list, I have selected for this comparative review 20 versions that represent some of the great names of the past and a cross-section of the young and seasoned artists of today.

From the earlier era there are Artur Schnabel (recorded 1933), Willhelm Backhaus (1950), Claudio Arrau (1957), Emil Gilels (1957), Wilhelm Kempff (1961), Daniel Adni (1971) and Clifford Curzon (1977). From more recent times, Maurizio Pollini (1992, as well as 1976), Alfred Brendel (1997), Pierre-Laurent Aimard (2002), Daniel Barenboim (2007, plus 1967), Evgeny Kissin (2007), Lang Lang (2007), Till Fellner (2008), Paul Lewis (2009) and Yevgeny Sudbin (2009). In a special category, Arthur Schoonderwoerd (2004) plays a period Johann Fritz piano; and on a modern Steinway Ronald Brautigam (2007) adopts Beethoven's revisions as published by Barry Cooper in 1994.

The matter of time

There is a whole world of difference here between, at the one extreme, the versions by Claudio Arrau, Daniel Adni and the earlier of Daniel Barenboim's two (all of them conducted by Otto Klemperer) and, at the other end, Brautigam's performance with the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra under Andrew Parrott. Whereas Klemperer exploits the full sumptuousness of the (New) Philharmonia Orchestra and takes about 20 minutes to negotiate the first movement, Parrott adopts 'period aware' thinking and sharper pacing with scant vibrato, and clocks up a running time of about 17 minutes for the first movement. That is about the norm in most of the recordings apart from Klemperer's, and, eminent though his performances are, the music does exude an air of lingering in a way that would certainly not have appealed to that first Vienna audience in 1808. Pierre-Laurent Almard with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe under Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Lang Lang with the Orchestre de Paris under Christoph Eschenbach and Evgeny Kissin with the London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Colin Davis all demonstrate a slowness in this first movement – but it doesn't necessarily lead to languor. At times, however, it's a close-run thing, and in other versions the music certainly has more of a lift and a natural flow. Daniel Barenboim, conducting the Staatskapelle Berlin from the keyboard, shaves off just over a minute from the time he took under Klemperer, and the result is a performance that has power, concentration and crucial momentum.

Ronald Brautigam's pacing comes in at about the average, and his recourse to Beethoven's revisions is an interesting facet of his polished and discreetly shaped interpretation: the addition of more florid passages and extra notes and some chopping and changing of register lend the concerto a different perspective – more decorative and, in Cooper's words, 'strikingly inventive and more sparkling, virtuosic and sophisticated than the standard one'. Since these revisions are in Beethoven's own hand on the copyist's orchestral

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score, it is likely that he himself played it in much this way at the 1808 concert, though other artists have not yet followed his or Brautigam's example, at least on disc.

Going the whole hog in speculative performance practice, Arthur Schoonderwoerd on his fortepiano of 1805-10 actually comes in as the quickest exponent of the first movement by the stopwatch, but curiously he also sounds the most effortful, and those wiry, nasal old instruments in the reduced orchestral ensemble of Cristofori are very much an acquired taste.

If it is probably wise to eliminate Klemperer's three recordings from the final reckoning in terms of repeated listening, Artur Schnabel's 1933 performance is testament both to his brilliant artistry and to his characterful interpretative style. The remastered sound is not at all bad, and the relationship with the London Philharmonic Orchestra under (the not then Sir) Malcolm Sargent is secure and spontaneous. One might baulk at the slight ratcheting up of tempo when the piano re-enters at bar 74 of the first movement: Sargent faithfully adheres to the speed that Schnabel suggests during his opening phrase, but Schnabel then decides that he wants things to go a bit quicker after the long orchestral tutti. There are also some orchestral glissandi that speak of the practice at the time when this recording was made, but they do not unduly obtrude and the performance is one of infectious spirit, even if the finale does sometimes threaten to break free of its leash. Of the other 'historical' performances, Wilhelm Backhaus's with the RIAS Symphony Orchestra under Karl Böhm is of an impressive seriousness and eloquence of expression. The Fourth, recorded live in Berlin, was a favourite concerto of Backhaus, one in which he manifested his reputation as a 'devotedly unselfish mouthpiece' for the composers he was playing. This by no means implies a lack of imagination, for Backhaus's performance is one that combines serenity and vitality and also conveys a sure grasp of the concerto's structure. So, too, do Alfred Brendel and the Vienna Philharmonic under Simon Rattle, and Maurizio Pollini in characteristically translucent yet powerful fashion with the Berlin Philharmonic under Claudio Abbado and earlier on with the Vienna Philharmonic under Böhm. From more recent times, there are similarly well-reasoned performances from Till Fellner with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra under Kent Nagano, Paul Lewis with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Jirí Belohlávek and Yevgeny Sudbin with the Minnesota Orchestra under Osmo Vänskä. I cannot pretend that comparisons between any of these make the choice of a preferred version any easier: all of them have searching qualities and interpretative personalities that seem to be in harmony with the music's disposition.

The cadenza issue

Alfred Brendel's performance does, however, raise the interesting question of the cadenzas. Beethoven wrote two for the first movement and one for the last. Many other composers and pianists have supplied their own over the years, including Brahms, Busoni, Godowsky, Saint-Saens and Clara Schumann. Wilhelm Kempff preferred to use his own cadenzas for his recording with the Berlin Philharmonic under Ferdinand Leitner, as does Arthur Schoonderwoerd with Cristofori. Other pianists are divided, if not equally, between Beethoven's two first-movement cadenzas. The one most commonly favoured begins in 6/8 with a quickened-up version of the opening theme in repeated Gs in the right hand. The other, starting with soft octave Gs in the left hand, builds to a swift climax and a torrent of descending thirds. Alfred Brendel and Maurizio Pollini are among the proponents of this more ominous, wilder – if shorter – cadenza, and in his book Music Sounded Out (1995, page 57) Brendel gives his reasons. 'May I assure all doubting Thomases', he says, 'that the cadenza I play in the first movement of the Fourth Concerto is indeed Beethoven's own; the autograph has the superscription Cadenza ma senza cadere ['Cadenza, but without falling down'] ' an allusion to its pianistic pitfalls. I have often been asked why I should waste my time on this bizarre piece when another more lyrical, and plausible, cadenza is available. I think that the [superscription) adds something to our knowledge of Beethoven. It shows almost shockingly how Beethoven the architect could turn, in some of his cadenzas, into a genius running amok. Almost all the classical principles of order fall by the wayside, as comparison with Mozart's cadenzas will amply demonstrate. Breaking away from the style and character of the movement does not bother Beethoven at all, and harmonic detours cannot be daring enough. No other composer has ever offered cadenzas of such provoking madness.' If someone else had written this weird cadenza, he or she would surely have been roundly condemned for shattering the mood of the first movement, but, as it is, it is there as an entirely justifiable option. Brendel's performance of it certainly underlines his point about Beethoven's genius running amok, and the cadenza delivers a similar blow to the senses in the two recordings by Maurizio Pollini. If the choice of the first-movement cadenza is a major factor in your enjoyment of the Fourth Concerto, then this needs to be taken into account.

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Backhaus, incidentally, plays the 'usual' Beethoven cadenza in the first movement, but his own stormy, bravura one in the finale.

There is one recording that has not so far been mentioned. In an effort to keep up the suspense about the ultimate choice in this Fourth Piano Concerto (though the boxes scattered about this review will already have given more than a clue), I have not yet put forward the name of Emil Gilels. Strictly speaking, his recording comes in the historical category, since it was made in 1957 with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Leopold Ludwig, but its sound is exceptionally well remastered and it is a performance of transcendent beauty allied to power, delicacy, control and a palette of colour – both in the piano and in the orchestra – that is second to none. Gilels was in his maturity when he made this sublime recording (coupled with the Fifth Concerto) at the age of 41, and it testifies to the stylistic understanding and thoughtful qualities that distinguished his piano-playing at its best. The first movement is eloquently voiced – 'poetry and virtuosity are held in perfect poise', as a Gramophone review rightly put it; and he gives a vibrant account of the wilder first-movement cadenza that Brendel and Pollini also prefer.

Pinning all one’s hopes on the slow movement
When it comes to the short slow movement, the dialogue between the aggressive orchestra and the ameliorating piano is judged immaculately and poignantly by Ludwig and Gilels.It was the critic Adolf Bernhard Marx who (in 1859) propounded the theory that this movement could be viewed as an analogy of Orpheus pacifying the Furies at the gates of Hades, a romantic notion that has held sway ever since. Whatever was in Ludwig's and Gilels's minds, the orchestra's gradual acquiescence under the piano's gently persuasive influence is pure magic. By contrast, on Clifford Curzon's recording with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Rafael Kubelik – a performance that is otherwise of great distinction – the orchestra sounds merely a bit blunt rather than hostile. Nagano has his Montreal Symphony Orchestra tripping lightly on Fellner's recording; Böhm sounds ominous, if a little ponderous, for Backhaus, though Backhaus's own playing is melting. Leitner gives something appropriately stern for Kempff to answer on his recording. Sargent's crisp note values observe the sempre staccato marking at the start of the slow movement and thus give the music more bite for Schnabel. Belohlávek and Lewis also manage this discourse effectively, as do Rattle and Brendel. It is debatable whether either Abbado or Böhm on Pollini's recordings makes adequate distinction between the two parties in the same, almost visually palpable, way that Ludwig and Gilels do, and on Sudbin's otherwise first-rate recording Vänskä coaxes a surprisingly soft-edged attack from the Minnesota Orchestra at this juncture.

It is odd, perhaps, that after barely being able to put a pin between a good many of the available recordings of the Fourth Concerto, so much should hinge on how the orchestra reacts to the piano in the slow movement, and vice versa. The finales do not disappoint in any of the leading versions, but with the slow movement proving to be, if subjectively, a point where some performances are more clearly defined in impact than others, the final choice would seem to rest on five versions: Backhaus and Böhm with the RIAS Symphony Orchestra from 1950, Gilels with the Philharmonia Orchestra under Ludwig from 1957, Kempff with the Berlin Philharmonic and Leitner from 1961, Brendel and Rattle with the Vienna Philharmonic from 1997 and Lewis with Belohlávek and the BBC Symphony Orchestra from 2009. In addition, there is an irresistible élan to Schnabel's 1933 performance with the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Sargent, and much of textural and interpretative interest in the 2007 version by Brautigam and the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra under Parrott.

The last of these, being the only one to adopt Beethoven's manuscript revisions to the concerto, comes across with a different sort of scintillating zest that is particularly attractive, and the disc (with the piano arrangement of the Violin Concerto as coupling) could be a refreshing addition for anybody wanting a companion to a recording of the received version. Schnabel, Backhaus and Kempff in their different ways bring timeless musicianship to their interpretations, but the mix of vitality and visionary expressiveness in the Backhaus just gives that one the edge – remembering, though, that he plays his own cadenza in the finale. With the recording by Brendel and Rattle (Brendel's third recording of the Fourth Concerto, the others being with Bernard Haitink and James Levine) there is a true meeting of musical minds, the orchestra and piano establishing a mutual understanding of their roles in the expressive and dynamic scheme of things. The interpretative bond between Lewis and Belohlávek is similarly a close and fertile one and has forged not only a compelling performance of the Fourth Concerto but also a complete set of all five.

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But when it comes down to it, the special qualities of Gilels – his poetry, power and poise – put him prominently in prime place.

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