These are Max Reger’s piano duet transcriptions of Bach’s 6 Brandenburg Concertos made in 1904-1905 and three other major organ works. Reger wrote “Sebastian Bach is for me the beginning and end of all music; on him rest, and from him originates, all real progress!” Countless volumes of piano duet arrangements, well into the 20th Century, seemed obligatory in the music publishing business; but Reger’s stand apart for their inventiveness and quality. He arranged many of Bach’s works in more than one version (solo piano, piano duet, 2 pianos). His many editions of Bach’s keyboard works have fallen out of favor for their excessive and very personal additions to Bach’s original texts. He said that his approach to Bach would “very much challenge the objections of pedestrian blockheads, or more politely speaking, the literal scholars lacking in imagination”. Like Reger’s very enjoyable 2-piano version of the Goldberg Variations (Schumann and Magalhaes, 2Piano 1039213, Mar/Apr 2014), I want the pianists to follow the tempos, dynamics, and phrasing that Reger was specific about in his performance instructions. He had an excellent musical mind and his ideas are well worth hearing—not to mention that the subject matter may be some of the greatest ever written. These are transcriptions in that there is not an added or deleted measure and any note changes are simply displacing a line up or down an octave or revoicing some chords to make them playable by two pianists at one keyboard. Reger wanted these to be as transparent as possible and said Fifth Concerto “was exceptionally difficult to arrange; I made countless attempts before I finally figured out the right one.” The performances here by Takahashi and Lehmann are amazing from every perspective. They make music in every measure: lines are clearly delineated and shaped, they are not shy about using the full dynamic range of the modern piano, and their virtuosity is stunning. When I used the music and listened specifically for how Reger divided up the notes for four hands, I was torn between Reger’s ingenuity and the pianist’s realization of it. Audite’s recorded piano sound is state of the art and the booklet essay is very informative. This is a recording I will return to on a regular basis.

"Mommy! Mr. Reger is picking on me again! He said I was [sob!] a pedestrian blockhead! And I wasn’t even walking! I was riding in the back seat!" Then I woke up.

But that dream was also a prophecy: Max Reger, a composer who gets many more pages in music reference books than people standing in line waiting to buy recordings of his music, eventually called me a pedestrian blockhead. This was an epithet he reserved for anyone who disagreed with his approach to the music of Bach. Carefully placing his monocle in full Charlie McCarthy position, and staring at me with the expression of a kipper who thought he owned the world but suddenly found himself on a plate, skewered by a 24k gold fork, continued: "I am alerting you in advance that my perhaps ‘too personal’ way of playing, and accordingly of editing Bach will very much challenge the objections of the pedestrian blockheads … they will consider my many nuances … too modern and entrench themselves behind the wall of mental laziness, insisting that Bach should be played classically! Such people, who are more Catholic than the Pope, [Oh my, I hope the long line of rabbis and cantors from whom I am descended never see this! DR] cannot be helped." Oh, I don’t know—maybe I am a pedestrian blockhead. That would explain why I have so much trouble finding a hat that will fit me.

One of his colleagues says that Reger was "… capable of expressing, in the most radical way, the idea that the work he had beneath his hands was at that moment his property." This is a very serviceable idea, and no doubt occurred to the pickpocket who had liberated my wallet while I was in Riverside, California staring with fascination at the Parent Orange Tree (one of, and perhaps the only, tourist attractions in that city).

So, as you see in the headnote above, Reger found the time to transcribe lots of Bach's music, including all of the Brandenburg Concertos, for two pianos. This was immensely valuable, for it had the potential to bring this great music to people all over the land, who lived far from the big cities and couldn’t go to concerts, and therefore were doomed to musical ignorance (unless they somehow found the power to go out and buy a record player or a radio—Reger lived well into the 20th century).

So nobody really needed a piano reduction. Well, what did it accomplish? I’m sure that whenever it was played, many audience members thought to themselves, "Wow! It sounds sort of like the Brandenburg Concertos!" and then, around the middle of the second movement, those ideas morphed into the chances that they’d be selling sandwiches during the intermission. So at least this music boosted the take at the concession stand.

Because, after all, the Brandenburgs are totally dependent upon the orchestration. The Brandenburg No. 2 without the high trumpet? It's like the difference between a veterinarian and a taxidermist (with a taxidermist, you get your dog back). Bach was as great an orchestrator as he was in every other phase of music. And if somehow we could arrange to have him listen to this disc—well, Bach told his dear son C. P. E. (known affectionately in the family as Seepy) that his music faded, like Prussian blue; just think what he'd say to Reger.

If you’re a part of a piano duo, you might want to play some of this music as a stunt. But contemplating the
level of difficulty, you’d better leave plenty of practice time, and you’d better be at least as good as the consummate pianists, Norie Takahashi and Bjorn Lehmann, who play flawlessly, at breakneck speed, and as if they were Oscar Peterson seeing how many notes he could cram into a measure of 4/4 time.

Well, you will know immediately whether or not you want this recording, and if you do, it will never be played better than it is here.

Gramophone Mon 16th September 2019  (James Jolly - 2019.09.16)
source: https://www.gramophone.co.uk/blog/the-li...
The Listening Room: Episode 81 (16.9.19)

[…] Max Reger’s two-piano arrangements of Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos are something special, and a new recording from the Piano Duo Takahashi | Lehmann does them proud – Reger’s invention and imagination, and love for the music, jumps off every page. Sample them in the Fourth Concerto.

Gramophone December 2019  (Jeremy Nicholas - 2019.12.01)

Concertos date from the early 1900s. They were so well received, so we are told, that they had to be reprinted only two years later. Who was buying them? I can’t believe they were intended for musical suburban husbands and wives so they had a bit of Bach to belt out on their Bechstein. The technical demands are well beyond the reach of the average amateur but, like many another duet arrangement, offer a completely new perspective on the originals.

Reger’s main preoccupation as a Bach transcriber was, of course, with the organ works and it is his profound knowledge of counterpoint that makes these Brandenburg arrangements so successful.

Moreover, while a couple of Brandenburgs is usually quite enough at one sitting (for this writer, at least), here, once I started I couldn’t stop. It’s many a long year since I enjoyed this marvellous, life-enhancing set so much. Who knew that Reger could be such fun?

A great deal of this is down to the immaculate pinpoint ensemble of Norie Takahashi and Björn Lehmann and the rhythmic buoyancy of their execution. With properly brisk tempos, the outer movements bubble along with an insatiable joie de vivre. They use a minimum of pedal, too, so the complex voicing is always crystal-clear, underpinned by a springy, resonant bass line, while the upper treble, which so often in present-day recordings flies off into a different airier acoustic, here is firmly linked to the lower registers. The piano sound is, to my taste, ideal. All the concertos are recorded on a splendid Yamaha with the exception of No 5. That is played on a Steingraeber in a barely noticeably different acoustic/location.

As far as Reger’s organ transcriptions are concerned, Takahashi and Lehmann offer us two works (the ubiquitous Toccata and Fugue in D minor and the St Anne Prelude and Fugue) which Reger also arranged for piano solo, together with his (only) version of the mighty Passacaglia, BWV582. These provide a judicious contrast to the boisterous Brandenburgs.

Here, in short, is a pair of discs to return to often. In fact, my one complaint about the whole enterprise is the deathless prose of its prolix booklet.
In den Bearbeitungen der Orgelwerke arbeitet das Duo die durch Verdopplungen in den Klavierklang eingearbeiteten Orgelregister herrlich heraus und zeigt den Komponisten als Meister im Umgang mit Klavierfarben.

Radio 100,7 05. Sep 2019 - 14:25 (Luc Boentges - 2019.09.05)
source: https://www.100komma7.lu/program/episode...

CD-Klassik: Bach emol anescht

No e puer Diske mat engem variéierte Programm aus der Literatur fir zwee Pianoen, respektiv véier Hänn op engem Piano, consacréiere si hir nei Sortie ganz dem Max Reger a sengen Transkripioune vu Bach-Wierker. Um Programm stinn nieft enger Passacaglia an zwou Fugen, déi sechs Brandenburgische Konzerte.

source: https://www.rondomagazin.de/kritiken.php...

Norie Takahashi und Björn Lehmann haben Regers Bearbeitungen sorgfältig, ja akribisch erarbeitet und geben sie mit der nötigen konzertanten Spielfreude, aber gleichzeitig mit großer Ruhe wieder.
J. S. Bach, von Max Reger bearbeitet

Die "Brandenburgischen Konzerte" für vierhändiges Klavier

Wenn die großen Meister kreativ genötigt aufeinanderprallen, selbst wenn ganze Epochen zwischen ihnen liegen, können die Funken der Fantasie und der Faszination stießen.

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

The Guardian Sun 27 Oct 2019  (Nicholas Kenyon - 2019.10.27)

Home listening: Bach-Reger, Josquin des Prés and Western Wind

Takahashi/Lehmann make light work of Reger’s Brandenburg duet transcriptions. Plus, more Josquin from the Tallis Scholars

[...] these two very skilful pianists lighten the textures, choose dancing speeds and crisp articulation, and create something that is quite delightful. So this is an enjoyably contemporary, rather postmodern collection.

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

www.ClassicsToday.com 01.01.2020  (Jed Distler - 2020.01.01)

Incisive And Joyful Bach/Reger Brandenburgs

In every way these contenders yield to the Takahashi/Lehmann duo's ensemble proficiency and musical insights. [...] The duo brilliantly streamlines the arrangements’ notey upholstery by virtue of brisk tempos, discreet pedaling, incisive articulation, and sheer joy in music making.

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.
Brandenburgische Konzerte am Klavier

Inhaltsverzeichnis

American Record Guide February 2020 ................................................................................................................. 1
Badische Zeitung Dienstag, 10. Dezember 2019 ........................................................................................................ 1
Fanfare March 2020 ..................................................................................................................................................... 2
Gramophone Mon 16th September 2019 ................................................................................................................... 3
Gramophone December 2019 ..................................................................................................................................... 3
Piano News November / Dezember 6/2019 .................................................................................................................. 4
Radio 100,7 05. Sep 2019 - 14:25 ............................................................................................................................. 4
Rondo 14.09.2019 .......................................................................................................................................................... 4
Süddeutsche Zeitung 27. September 2019 .................................................................................................................. 5
The Guardian Sun 27 Oct 2019 ..................................................................................................................................... 5
www.ClassicsToday.com 01.01.2020 ........................................................................................................................... 5
www.pizzicato.lu 08/09/2019 ........................................................................................................................................... 6