

CD REVIEW 18

LISZT The Two Piano Concertos

Alfred Brendel, Pro Musica Orchestra Vienna, Michael Gielen

Piano Concerto no 1 in E flat;

Piano Concerto no 2 in A;

Cantique d'amour, Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude;

Funerailles (Harmonies poetiques et religieuses)

Regis RRC1362 (74.08)

There is so much to enjoy in these performances. The clarity of Brendel's playing, the reliability of his performances, the faultless finger-work (the cascades are thrilling), the variety of tone, the observation of the score, the poetry and the lyricism. Most noteworthy is that he plays these tremendous concertos as music not as showpieces. They are not vehicles to show off.

The other major considerations are that he plays these masterpieces as complete works not as a series of episodes. They are played as music and for music's sake. Brendel's integrity is also shown in that he allows the orchestral solos to come through and proves that this is a Concerto for piano and orchestra, and incidentally, the orchestra benefits from an exceptional conductor, Michael Gielen noted for his ability in all kinds of music.

The performances are never excessive or over the top. Every detail comes through so much so that you think you are hearing the works for the first time. Brendel considers every note, every nuance and every phrase. He feels the music but never relegates it into sentimentality. He reveals the beauty that other pianists ignore. The scherzo sections are played with real impish humour and the playing is always controlled. Both concertos end magnificently.

However, if you are merely looking for fireworks and a fast tempo you may not respond to these mature performances. If you are looking for honesty and faithfulness to the scores this is for you

The excerpts from Liszt's first set of piano masterpieces Harmonies poetiques et religieuses are brilliantly played. They are incredible pieces and were soon followed by the greatest piano sonata of them all.

There is no point in my saying more

David C F Wright



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