

Reviews

Bach Keyboard Concertos

New

C. P. E. Bach Keyboard Concerto in D, Wq43 No. 2 (H472).

J. C. Bach Six Keyboard Concertos, Op. 7 – No. 3 in D; No. 5 in E flat.

J. S. Bach Keyboard Concerto in E, BWV1053.

Anastasia Injushina (piano); **Hamburger Camerata/Ralf Gothóni**.

Ondine ODE1224-2 (full price, 1 hour 9 minutes).

Website www.ondine.net  Producer Dirk Lüdemann.

Engineer Dominik Blech. Dates November 1st, 3rd and 4th, 2012.

Comparisons:

C. P. E. Bach:

Spányi, Concerto Armonico Budapest/Abráhm (BIS) CD1787 (2012)

J. S. Bach:

Dantone, Accademia Bizantina (L'Oiseau Lyre) 475 9335 (2008)

Anastasia Injushina's early training was at the St Petersburg Conservatory and continued, following her move to Finland in 1991, at the Sibelius Academy. In 2009, she founded the Helsinki Spring Light Chamber Music Festival and continues to serve as its artistic director. Indeed, her interesting new recording of concertos by J. S., C. P. E. and J. C. Bach with the Hamburger Camerata under Ralf Gothóni are imbued with the intelligence and subtlety of ensemble one expects in the finest chamber music-making.

The opening tutti of all these concertos reveal Injushina to be a gifted continuo player of tremendous resourcefulness and imagination. It is a pleasant surprise to hear vivaciously stylish continuo realizations issuing from the case of a modern concert grand. Her solo parts are crisply articulate, lavishly embellished and perfectly tailored, with a keen differentiation between Emanuel's mercurial *Empfindsamkeit*, the more *galant* gestures of Johann Christian and Sebastian's high-Baroque Italianate textures. In fact, Injushina's ability to delineate the stylistic contrasts between the concertos, written over a span of perhaps three and a half decades during a period of rapid stylistic change in European music, is one of this recording's most striking features. Gothóni and his Hamburg musicians are happy participants in the buoyant energy flowing from the keyboard. However, given the often boxy, artificial sound the engineers have conveyed, it is difficult to speak of genuine dialogue between soloist and ensemble. Nevertheless, tempos are unfailingly on target.

Despite the many pleasures of this recording, to my ears at least, one critical dimension, that of sound, is flawed. As in so many instances, technological progress brings with it inevitable



Anastasia Injushina

Stanislav Belyaevsky

trade-offs. Alpheus Babcock's 1825 invention of the iron frame for square pianos – later applied by the Chickerings to grands and incorporated by the Steinways with the addition of cross-stringing – gave instruments greater stability and allowed them to stay in tune longer. The iron frame also made it possible to increase the tension of the piano's strings, a factor in combination with a thicker string gauge, which gave the piano a much louder, more robust sound. As concert halls and orchestras grew in size during the nineteenth century, so did the sound of the piano.

Here's the trade-off: a string held at low tension is able to vibrate more freely than one held taut. The more the string is allowed to vibrate, the wider the spectrum of overtones produced and the richer the sound. The price paid for the piano's greater volume and stability was the narrowing of that spectrum of overtones. This is the reason Scarlatti sounds brilliant and colourful on the harpsichord, with its relatively low string tension, but miniaturized, nude and impoverished on the modern piano, despite that instrument's larger sound and potential for dynamic variation. Whatever one's personal preferences, this objective fact of acoustical physics is indisputably involved.

If we consider Sebastian's E major Concerto a product of the late 1730s, it is probably safe to assume that the composer presided over its performance from the harpsichord. Johann Christian's and Emanuel's concertos, written in the early 1770s in London and Hamburg respectively, could well have been conceived for the piano. (It may be worth mentioning that Silbermann's German pianos, collected so avidly by Frederick the Great for Sans Souci and frequently played there by Emanuel, were, if anything, even quieter than the average contemporary harpsichord.) But the important thing here is not the size of the sound (though that certainly has a bearing on ensemble balances)

but its quality. The harpsichords of Sebastian, the English pianos of Johann Christian and the German instruments of Emanuel all had in common string tensions that were but a fraction of the modern Steinway's. That lower tension, allowing the freely vibrating strings their wide-spectrum overtones, resulted in a richer, more variegated sound. It is a quality that cannot be duplicated on the modern concert grand, with its longer decay and homogeneous silvery sound throughout its registers, even by the most expert pianist in the world. The distinction will be obvious to the most casual listeners.

Compare, for instance, Sebastian's E major Concerto, BWV1053 as played by harpsichordist Ottavio Dantone with the Accademia Bizantina, and Emanuel's D major Concerto, Wq43 No. 2 by fortepianist Miklós Spányi with Concerto Armonico Budapest, with the performances on this recording. Whatever their relative interpretative merits – and certainly Injushina's performances are on a par with those of her colleagues – the sonorous resources of her (modern, more technologically 'advanced') instrument leave her, paradoxically, at a disadvantage.

This is extremely intelligent, thoughtful, committed playing that displays both a grasp of recent trends in performance practice and a deep love of the music. Of all the pianists seeking to make a case for music of this vintage on the modern instrument, I can't think of one who succeeds more eloquently than Injushina.

Patrick Rucker

Bartók

New CD/SACD

Kossuth, BB31. Romanian Folk Dances, BB76. Concerto for Orchestra, BB123.

ORF Radio-symphonieorchester Wien/ Cornelius Meister.

CPO 777 784-2 (full price, 1 hour 5 minutes). Website www.cpo.de. Producer Erich Hofmann. Engineers Andreas Karlberger, Fridolin Stolz. Dates 2011, 2012.

Comparisons:

Concerto for Orchestra:

NYPO/Boulez (Sony Classical) MYK37259 (1973)

Boston SO/Koussevitzky (Naxos) 8.110105 (1944)

Philadelphia Orch/Ormandy

(RCA Japan) BVCC38059 (1979)

Born in Hanover in February 1980, the young German conductor Cornelius Meister, like his parents, is also a pianist. He is garnering prestigious engagements; this summer he conducts Mahler's Fourth at the Salzburg Festival and, next season, he makes his debut with The Royal Opera in *La bohème* (albeit not until July 2014). This Bartók recording, with the orchestra of which he is principal conductor, is in many ways impressive.

Kossuth, based on the life and times of the Hungarian politician Lajos Kossuth (1802-94), is early Bartók (1903) and rarely gives a clue to the creator's identity. For influence, one might cite Richard Strauss and, more pertinently, the symphonic poems and musical