



Jorge Bolet: The RIAS recordings, Vol. II

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International Piano (Bryce Morrison - 2018.05.01)

Of audite's Jorge Bolet series turns out to be a mixed bag. Bolet was always an uneven pianist and even in his heyday his performances could veer from grand seigneur opulence to lethargy. As his one-time mentor, Abram Chasins put it, 'Jorge, you play fast, but you don't sound fast!' Yet here his greatness is more than evident in Liszt's First Concerto and the Wagner-Liszt 'Tannhäuser' Overture. What eloquence as well as daunting command in the concerto. Bolet wrings the last ounce of poetry from the Quasi adagio though the heat is on in the final pages, where he thunders Liszt's rhetoric to the heavens. Time and again he turns what can easily seem a raddled war horse into music of distinction. The Tannhäuser transcription was always a Bolet speciality and formed a major part of his legendary 1974 Carnegie Hall recital, an event that at last brought him the fame that had long eluded him. The strength and majesty of his performance are overwhelming and you can only wonder at such musical empathy, to say nothing of what American journalists were fond of calling his 'blow-your-socks-off virtuosity'.

It's surprising, then, to find him oddly withdrawn in Liszt's Second Concerto, his first entry rapid and cool-headed, the growling second subject lacking impetus. He sinks gratefully into repose when required, but despite a thundering tearaway coda his general refusal to step into the limelight goes against the grain of Liszt's more overt gestures. So too in the three 'Petrarch Sonnets', where his thunderous climaxes to 104 and 123 and welcomes surges of drama compensate for a lack of ardour elsewhere. Beg, borrow or steal Kempff's performance of 123 on Music and Arts and you will hear an intimacy and glow missing from Bolet's more prosaic offering.



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Liszt Piano Concertos; 'Petrarch Sonnets' from *Années de pèlerinage*; **Wagner-Liszt** 'Tannhäuser' Overture **Jorge Bolet** (p) Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra; Lawrence Foster, Edo de Waart
 Audite 97738, 79 mins
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