



Allusions and beyond

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This disc would be worth getting if all it contained were the wonderful performance of Brandenburg Concerto 5 in Reger's piano duet version. Add the other music in, and you have one of the best discs I've heard recently. Though the repertoire is Germanic, it is balanced stylistically and contains a couple of acknowledged masterpieces. Bjorn Lehmann and Norie Takahashi have impressive individual credentials and have been performing together since 2009.

One is not even aware of the tremendous difficulties required to keep all of Bach's counterpoint clear or the interweaving lines smooth and flowing. It is a performance that uses all of the tonal resources of a modern piano in the most musical ways. It was originally written for solo harpsichord, violin, flute, and string ensemble. Bach was showing off both his own keyboard skill and the new two-manual harpsichord he had just acquired. The first movement cadenza is one of those legendary parts that every keyboard player admires. Reger saw fit to divide it among 4 hands, with virtually no extra notes. The challenge so wonderfully met by Takahashi and Lehmann is to make it sound like only two hands.

Bernd Alois Zimmermann (1918–70) wrote his Monologs for 2 pianos in 1964, a significant reworking of his Dialogs for 2 pianos and large orchestra from 1960. I was impressed with this large five-movement work as performed by the Huber-Thomet Duo (Wergo 6809, May/June 2015). Here it is a little faster and performed as well. It will not be to everyone's liking, but it is a well-written and always interesting work.

The Bach Chorales and Brahms Variations are beautiful music, very well performed. The Brahms lacks a little of the excitement I like in the two Argerich recordings (Teldec, May/June 1995; EMI 58472). Excellent piano sound from Audite and comprehensive booklet notes complete this outstanding release.