



Bach-Reger Transcriptions for Piano Duet: Brandenburg Concertos Nos. 1-6 & Organ Works

aud 23.445

EAN: 4022143234452



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www.musicweb-international.com (05.05.2020)

Quelle: <http://www.musicweb-international.com/cl...>



Anyone who knows me will appreciate my liking for the German composer Max Reger, who due to his vast output of organ music and his fondness for counterpoint was often described as the Bach of the twentieth century. In fact, Bach was his musical hero, stating that "Sebastian Bach is the beginning and end of all music; upon him rests, and from him originates, all real progress!" It is fitting then that some of Reger's finest transcriptions, whether for orchestra or piano, are of the music of Bach. Whilst I have a lot of Reger, including a few discs of transcribed Bach, I don't have a set that contains all of the Brandenburg Concertos, so when offered the chance to review this set, I jumped at it.

Reger's transcriptions for piano four-hands of the Brandenburgs had their beginnings in a request from the Peters publishing house for a two-hand version in 1904. With the Fifth Concerto giving him particular difficulties the following year, this led to numerous attempts to arrange the work until he came up with the one we have here. Up until then, Reger had concentrated on transcribing Bach's organ music, but agreed, with the resulting edition selling out within two years and needing to be re-published. It also led to a new request, for Reger to produce transcriptions of the Orchestral Suites.

These transcriptions are, therefore, a labour of love, with the result being something quite wonderful. As already stated, I do have recordings of some of these transcriptions, but sadly not all, and I must admit to having returned to them regularly, enjoying them every time I listen to them. This recording only served to further my liking for these pieces; Reger managed expertly to keep the nature and spirit of the original whilst making them more accessible to everyone. The result being wonderful music and being arranged wonderfully well; what is more is that here, in the Piano Duo Takahashi|Lehmann, we have a performance that surpasses each of the performances of the concertos that I already have. The performance is excellent with the Piano Duo Takahashi|Lehmann showing great dexterity and understanding of each other which leads to wonderful ensemble playing. I did not miss the orchestra once, which is something I can't say about every recording I have heard before.

The other three works on this set are all transcriptions of Bach's organ pieces, and I suppose the obvious place to start is the now infamous Toccata & Fugue in D minor, BWV565. With questions still asked about its composition, it is probably the piece that most people will associate as being by Bach. Here the performance by the Piano Duo Takahashi|Lehmann lives up to the sparkling transcription. Here, if anything,



Reger added new impetus to the work, with the performers rising to every challenge set. However, the first transcription of an organ piece we encounter on this set is the wonderful Passacaglia in C minor, BWV582, a real tour de force for the organist. This arrangement makes the most of Bach's sonorities, something that is brought out to the full here. The final work on the disc is the popular Prelude & Fugue in E flat major, BWV552 'St Anne', another truly wonderful organ work, Reger made two arrangements of this piece, the other for solo piano. Again, the Piano Duo Takahashi|Lehmann sparkle in their performance, and their's again, is the finest recording of this transcription that I have heard, making this a wonderful inclusion in this set.

As already stated, Norie Takahashi and Björn Lehmann are wonderful throughout, their's is a real partnership, with the resulting performance being excellent, one which has soon become my "go-to" recording for these works and Reger transcriptions in general. The recorded sound is also excellent which only serves to heighten the enjoyment of this performance. The accompanying booklet, in German and English is good, but a little more insight might have been good. But this is no reason not to invest, and it will be a real investment, in this excellent recording, especially as it retails for little more than the price of a single CD. One of the finest recordings of transcriptions of Bach that I have heard in a very long time.

RECOMMENDED

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

Transcriptions for Piano Duet by Max Reger

Brandenburg Concerto No.2 in F Major, BWV1047 [11:26]
 Brandenburg Concerto No.5 in D major, BWV1050 [21:36]
 Brandenburg Concerto No.1 in F Major, BWV1046 [19:19]
 Passacaglia in C minor, BWV582 [12:56]
 Toccata & Fugue in D minor, BWV565 [7:46]
 Brandenburg Concerto No.4 in G major, BWV1049 [15:14]
 Brandenburg Concerto No.6 in B flat major, BWV1051 [15:25]
 Brandenburg Concerto No.3 in G Major, BWV1048 [11:02]
 Prelude & Fugue in E flat major, BWV552 'St Anne' [13:26]
 Piano Duo Takahashi|Lehmann
 rec. 2016/19, Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin-Dahlem, Germany
AUDITE 23.445 [2 CDs: 128.12]

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Stuart Sillitoe



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