



Edition Géza Anda (III) – Schumann | Chopin

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Fanfare (Steven E. Ritter - 2009.03.01)

For those with only a tangential or cursory familiarity with the art of Géza Anda, it may come as somewhat a surprise to hear that he was an acknowledged expert in the music of Schumann and Chopin. Remembered today primarily (in the popular mind) for his recordings of Mozart (especially from the movie *Elvira Madigan*) and more notably his affinity for Bartók, his inclusion in the pantheon of greats performing Romantic music seems tentative at best; yet it cannot be denied that this aspect of his art has been singularly ignored by the current generation, and his name is rarely mentioned as influential.

This is a sad thing, for Anda has much to contribute to our current understanding of these composers. Hearing the razor-sharp and crystal clear Schumann on these discs, I am surprised once more at his ability to bring a modern sensibility to these works while simultaneously injecting a sense of old world Romanticism that is on par with about anything I have heard from pianists past. In fact, if current research is to be believed (I know, that opens up a whole kettle of sometimes smelly fish), then what the more ascetic players bring to this music may actually be more in line with the way the composers themselves used to play it. But I shall not pigeon-hole anyone into that construct either, being a firm believer that each generation must discover these composers for themselves.

Anda certainly did that, albeit helped by a number of people who provided him with a plentitude of unerring role models: Dohnányi, Kodály, and Weiner at home, and Haskil, Cortot, and Fischer in Paris. Haskil particularly comes to mind as you listen to the perfectly proportioned upper and lower lines of *Kreisleriana*, for instance. It is always a shocker to hear how many pianists downplay the significance of the bass line in Schumann, which is absolutely critical in any legitimate performance. Anda ignores none of it, and knows its importance, as did his friend and colleague Clara Haskil; their performances of this music are remarkably similar and equally illuminating, Anda having the edge in conciseness while Haskil demonstrates the buoyancy inherent in Schumann's work.

The Chopin is also well worth rediscovery. I do not think that this composer spoke to Anda in the same way as some others, certainly not Schumann. The Romantic ethos is still there, but Chopin was a miniaturist in a way that Schumann rejected, and his short-burst works do not allow the performer as much time to develop an emotional argument. Anything the performer wants to say must be prepared completely before the first note sounds, and sometimes I feel that Anda needs more of a warm-up period. But more often he is fully prepped for the challenge, and when that happens, as in most of the preludes, we are in for some magical moments upheld by a technique that is second to none.

Audite presents these pieces in wonderful mono sound, the type that initially made some people skeptical of stereo, clean, clear, and almost—almost—sounding two-channel. This is a great tribute (Volume 3 of 4) to a vastly underrated artist, and an early candidate for this year's Want List.

