



Solomon plays Beethoven, Schumann, Bach, Chopin & Brahms

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Admire Solomon will know that a number of years ago APR released a two disc set of his Berlin recitals [APR7030]. This set replicates those performances, but for the significant addition of the Carnival performance.

According to Bryan Crimp's biography, Solomon spent eight days in Germany in February 1956. He performed the Beethoven Second Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic and Cluytens, and played recitals in Detmold, Wuppertal, Hamburg and Frankfurt. Whilst in Berlin he was taped in two broadcast performances by RIAS. These are the surviving performances, excellently reproduced, though quite drily recorded. Regarding the differences between the APR and this new Audite transfer I will note that Audite's is reproduced at a slightly lower level than APR's but otherwise I don't find any dramatic differences between them.

The recital plays to Solomon's accustomed strengths. The Op.2 No.3 sonata is purposeful and intrepid. Solomon's sculpting of dynamics in the central movement is especially noteworthy; voicings are brought out with unselfconscious definition – refined, meditative or via the sepulchrally interjectory bass. The brilliant clarity of his articulation is fully audible in the finale, which is played with seemingly effortless control, but not a trace of false urbanity. The companion Beethoven sonata is the Moonlight. Earlier in his career Solomon had taken the opening movement with gravely deliberate slowness. Now he had seemingly reconciled himself to a greater sense of spine in the music, so his tempo is several notches faster for the Adagio sostenuto, a feature I welcome. There is still, however, something unavoidably funereal – not ponderous – about the tempo he adopts. The Allegretto acts as both relief from this introspection, and also a motor for the crispness of Solomon's playing of the finale.

He made an admired recording of Carnival in the summer of 1952 for Walter Legge and EMI. This live performance four years later is, not surprisingly, similar in outline, though occasionally it differs in detailing. What impresses yet again, however, is the real consonance of the playing, a marrying of tonal production and expressive control. The result is not, perhaps, the most lavish of readings but it builds cumulatively, never allowing incident or detail to override architecture. His Preamble is manly, the rubati in the Valse noble splendidly realised, and Florestan marvellously characterised.

We lack a significant body of Bach recordings from Solomon. There are some transcriptions, a couple of Preludes and Fugues, and one such arranged by Liszt, but the return is small from a player so distinguished. His Italian Concerto is thus greatly to be welcomed. There's nothing withdrawn or sturdy about his playing of it, with smartly etched rhythm in the outer movements and delicate refinement in the central

one. It makes one wish he'd recorded the Goldberg Variations, or some of the French Suites. Note the little sulphurous bass detonations in the finale, where drive and clarity are armed together. There are three pieces each by Chopin and Brahms to be negotiated. Of the former, the Fantasie is elegant, musically refined, and full of dappled control and poetic spirit. The Brahms trio include a performance of the E major Intermezzo that enshrines introspective probity, assured balances between the hands and no false gestures. You seldom, if ever, got those with Solomon.

His admirers, who will probably have the APR, will now be faced with dilemma of this previously unreleased Carnival. There is surprisingly little live Solomon, so my view is to go for it.

