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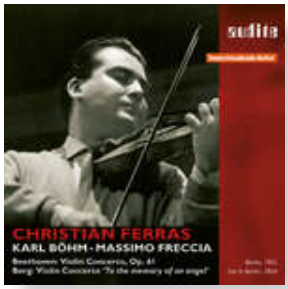

Christian Ferras plays Beethoven and Berg Violin Concertos

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American Record Guide 01.03.2012 (John P. McKelvey - 2012.03.01)

American Record Guide

If you like your Beethoven slow and incomparably well-played you’ll find this release a real treat, indeed a thrilling experience, one of the greatest ever engraved on records.

One end of the spectrum of recordings of the Beethoven concerto is anchored in a famous Heifetz/Toscanini performance with the NBC Symphony, made about 1937 in the utterly dead studio 8H in RCA’s New York facilities. At about 36 minutes, it must also be the fastest, and though Heifetz was technically perfect, the sound kills it. It was the first recording of the work I ever owned, and in the light of 65 years of listening, has to be the worst.

If Toscanini was the fastest, Karl Böhm at 48 minutes is by far the slowest performer, slower by far than Furtwängler and Menuhin in their fine account (four minutes faster than this one). If it weren’t for the level of tension and commitment attained and maintained by everyone involved, it would be a ridiculous flop. Instead, it is flat out the finest account of this difficult work I’ve ever heard. Ferras, then at the ripe age of 18, plays at a level of intensity as well as flawless execution and intonation I could hardly imagine possible. He was at this time at the zenith of his career, one later disrupted by drug and alcohol addiction, and problems of personality—ending in suicide at age 40. Audite’s restoration has brought forth sound of remarkable clarity—perfect in equalization, absolutely free from noise and distortion. It’s a remarkable sonic restoration. The Berlin Philharmonic of the time was Furtwängler’s group, a highly refined and flexible ensemble. Its performance here is, under his friend Böhm, superb.

There is one problem, however, and it is the fault of the original engineers, who carelessly omitted the initial section where the themes are introduced at the beginning of I. It is to be repeated note by note, though this performance, as recorded, omits the first statement entirely—roughly a bit more than one minute of music. Of course, the missing section could easily have been copied and dubbed in, but the producers feared that an exact repetition would not have captured the nuance and total integrity of the performance as a whole. So they left it out. It does not make all that much difference, and unless you’re listening critically, you may not even notice it, but if you’re ruthlessly committed to perfection, you’ll have to copy it and insert it yourself. I have the equipment to do this easily, but I’m not planning to do it.

I had a faint recollection of another performance, somewhere in my archives, that bore some imperfectly perceived and half-remembered connection to this one. I searched my uncatalogued and haphazardly shelved archives, and after a while came on a CD recording of the Beethoven concerto on Urania played by (guess who) Ferras and Böhm with the excellent Frankfurt Radio Orchestra, recorded at about the same time as the Audite! Trembling with excitement I fed it to my player and was rewarded to hear another great performance of this music, with both sections of the introduction in place, and perfectly played. The tempos are also slow, though at 46 minutes they are slightly faster than in the Audite recording. The same high level of interpretation and execution is nevertheless achieved. I’m afraid that recording may be

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difficult to come by, since the Urania label expired several years ago. Still, copies may be around online or from other archival sources. There are other fine performances of the music by Menuhin, Oistrakh, Fritz Kreisler, Szigeti, Milstein, and others too numerous to mention. I must suggest, however, that this recording excels all its competitors.

The same high level of interpretation and execution can be heard in the accompanying recording of Alban Berg’s concerto, with the RIAS orchestra led by Massimo Frescia, though its effect is somewhat less smashing if only because Berg’s concerto, fine as it undoubtedly is, isn’t quite as monumental as Beethoven’s. Nevertheless what is heard is not excelled by any other recorded performance of it that has come my way. A splendid accompaniment is also a substantial asset.

The CD is packaged in an attractive case with extensive notes and commentary, to top off one of the most remarkable musical experiences that has ever come my way. Don’t even think about it, just get it.

Audiophile Audition November 27, 2011 (Gary Lemco - 2011.11.27)

Christian Ferras, v. = Concertos of BEETHOVEN & BERG – Audite

The tragically doomed and extraordinarily gifted Christian Ferras appears in two concertos deeply ingrained in his personality, here restored in excellent sound.

Christian Ferras, v. = Concertos of BEETHOVEN & BERG – Audite

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BBC Radio 3 03.12.2011, 10.20 Uhr (Andrew Mc Gregor - 2011.12.03)

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Classica n° 139 février 2012 (Stéphane Friédérich - 2012.02.01)

Restituée par Orfeo, la prise de son de la Radio autrichienne (live du festival...

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Classical Recordings Quarterly 01.12.2011 (Leslie Gerber - 2011.12.01)

Like all long-time record collectors I have been aware of Christian Ferras, and over the years I have heard a few of his LPs and generally admired his playing. It wasn't until I read the notes for this disc, though, that I learned of his alcoholism and depression, which led him to commit suicide in 1982 at the age of 49.

The violinist playing the Beethoven Violin Concerto on this release was only 18 years old, a good decade younger than at the time of his commercial recording with Karajan. He plays with remarkable poise and maturity, and collaborates intelligently with the orchestra rather than battling it for domination.

The sound quality of the 1951 recording is surprisingly fine for its date, even knowing that it originates from broadcast master tapes. The performance may not supplant those of such geniuses as Szigeti, Grumiaux, or Busch, but it is definitely worth hearing. The opening phrase of the second movement is missing from the existing tape but that is a very minor problem.

Ferras made an EMI recording of the Berg Concerto with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra and Georges Prêtre (there is also another live version with Ansermet and the Suisse Romande Orchestra on Claves). As I recall it was orchestrally superior to this 1964 live performance. Ferras plays fervently here, similarly to what I recall from the EMI version, concentrating more on the lyrical than the spiky qualities of the music. It's interesting to hear Freccia, the one-time conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, who died in 2004 at the age of 98. He was completely at home in twentieth-century music, having been introduced to Dallapiccola and other Italian modernists when he was only 17, and although the orchestra isn't world-class Freccia has it making sense out of somewhat challenging music.

Not a compelling issue for the general collector, perhaps, but violin afficionados may find it worth having and devotees of Ferras will be delighted at the chance to hear newly discovered performances of major works.

ClicMag N° 10s Novembre 2013 (Jérôme Angouillant - 2013.11.01)

Cet enregistrement en studio publié par Audite marque le début de la carrière internationale du violoniste et suit deux concerts qu'il donna à Berlin du concerto Op.61 de Beethoven, à l'invitation de Karl Böhm.

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Crescendo Magazine 01.03.3012 (Bernard Postiau - 2012.03.01)

Les témoignages de Christian Ferras sont suffisamment rares que pour faire la...

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

Das Orchester 04/2012 (Bernhard Uske - 2012.04.01)

Zwei Geiger haben zu Ludwig van Beethovens Violinkonzert den...

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

Diapason N° 602 Mai 2012 (François Hudry - 2012.05.01)

CD émouvant à plus d'un titre! D'abord parce qu'il permet d'entendre le jeune Christian Ferras dans deux interprétations solaires des concertos de Beethoven et de Berg. Ensuite parce que son histoire personnelle se confond avec l'Histoire tout court. Il a dix-huit ans lorsque Karl Böhm l'invite à jouer le concerto de Beethoven lors de deux concerts qui lanceront sa carrière internationale. C'est avec la Philharmonie de Berlin, dans le légendaire Titania Palast. Le lendemain, ils s'installent dans la célèbre Jesus-Christus-Kirche et gravent pour la RIAS la version, inédite au disque, qu'exhume Audite.

Christian Ferras, encore sous le coup de la disparition de son maître bien aimé Charles Bistesi, y déploie un climat unique, élégiaque, merveilleusement suivi, écouté par le grand chef et par les musiciens. Il règne dans cet enregistrement une étonnante ferveur, comme si la présence du jeune Français parmi les Berlinois, au cœur de leur ville en ruines, venait panser les blessures de la guerre, et sceller la réconciliation franco-allemande sous l'égide de Beethoven l'universel. Les phrasés de Ferras sont larges, l'engagement total, l'articulation –la diction – souveraine. Et que dire du climat quasireligieux du Larghetto! Voilà un jeune artiste habité, qui tire une sonorité lumineuse d'un instrument pourtant modeste, bien avant de pouvoir acheter son premier Stradivarius. Un miracle de chant, de gravité, de hauteur de vue; un rendez-vous sur les cimes à comparer avec le concert donné la veille au soir par les mêmes interprètes (Tahra).

Ferras aimait beaucoup le Concerto «A la mémoire d'un ange», dont on découvre ici une troisième version live (1964), après celles de 1957 (Ansermet, Claves) et 1960 (Keilberth, Testament ou Orfeo). Avec l'Orchestre de la Radio de Berlin et Massimo Freccia, son archet frémissant d'humanité et lyrique nous captive de bout en bout. Impossible de donner un ordre de préférence à ce tiercé où le violoniste reste si fidèle à lui-même.

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Diario de Sevilla Sábado 21 de enerode 2012 (- 2012.01.21)

Serenidad y éxtasis

Serenidad y éxtasis

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Die Rheinpfalz Nr. 174 (Samstag, 28. Juli 2012) (kkch - 2012.07.28)

Berg: Violinkonzert mit Christian Ferras

Berg: Violinkonzert mit Christian Ferras

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

Diverdi Magazin febrero 2012 (Roberto Andrade - 2012.02.01)

Como caído del cielo

Los conciertos de violín de Beethoven y Berg por Christian Ferras dirigido por Karl Böhm y Massimo Freccia, en Audite

Entre 2003 y 2004, Testament editó tres CDs que incluían grabaciones EMI y Decca realizadas en los años 50 por Christian Ferras (1933-1982) en los albores de su carrera. El lector interesado puede consultar las críticas en los Boletines correspondientes. Audite propone ahora la asombrosa versión que tocaba aquel jovencito, a los 18 años, del Concierto para violín y orquesta de Beethoven. Se trata de una grabación de estudio, realizada en la berlinesa Iglesia de Jesucristo, con la Filarmónica de Berlín y Karl Böhm, nada menos, el 19 de noviembre de 1951, el mismo día en que Ferras lo interpretaba en concierto con los mismos artistas.

Ferras era por entonces la admiración del mundo musical, no solo en Francia. Su paisano y colega Jacques Thibaud afirmó, en síntesis, que poseía tres cualidades, corazón, inteligencia y dedos, que le situaban en lugar de privilegio entre los violinistas de la época, no precisamente escasa en nombres fuera de serie (¿recuerdan? Se llamaban Oistraj, Heifetz, Menuhin, Milstein...). A los 18 años Ferras era ya un artista completo. Su sonido bellísimo, suave, de esmalte precioso y timbre penetrante, engalanado con atractivo vibrato, se plegaba como un guante a un fraseo que era el colmo de la naturalidad y la elegancia, siempre lírico y cantable, que enriquecía con todo tipo de matices dinámicos y de color. Su Beethoven era impecable musicalmente, espontáneo y fascinante, como caído del cielo. Böhm era – apenas hace falta decirlo – una autoridad en la materia y un óptimo colaborador, atento siempre al equilibrio con el solista. De la orquesta no es preciso hablar.

El Allegro inicial camina a tempo moderado, lo que permite al solista extremar la vigilancia sobre la

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afinación, crítica en este movimiento – en su versión 15 años posterior con Karajan para DG, Ferras tiene problemas, ausentes en 1951. En el Larghetto, la duración de II minutos parece un poco excesiva, aunque el bellísimo canto de Ferras nos transporta a otro mundo en el que el tiempo no parece existir. Muy animado el rondó. Las cadencias son las de Kreisler. En conjunto, una espléndida versión, testimonio de una madurez artística que deja boquiabierto.

El CD se completa con una versión live del Concierto de Alban Berg, favorito del violinista, que lo grabó para EMI en 1963 con Georges Prêtre y del que se conservan, al menos, otras dos interpretaciones en vivo, con Ansermet y con Keilberth (Orfeo, crítica en el Boletín 210). La bellísima obra debió tener una significación especial para Ferras, que se deja el alma cuando la toca. Su excelente colaborador al frente de la RIAS-SO fue Massimo Freccia (1906-2004), interesante director italiano de quien los aficionados veteranos acaso recuerden alguno de sus buenos discos grabados por RCA para la colección que distribuía Selecciones del Reader's Digest. La Wikipedia proporciona amplia información de su polifacética biografía que bien merece conocimiento. Tal vez haya ocasión de comentar en el futuro alguno de sus registros. Como de costumbre en Audite, buen trabajo de reprocesado y muy informativas notas de carpetilla.

Fanfare 01.05.2012 (Robert Maxham - 2012.05.01)

fanfare

Audite's program of violin concertos by Ludwig van Beethoven and Alban Berg captures two moments in the life of Christian Ferras, the first a studio recording from November 19, 1951, made in the Jesus-Christus-Kirche after the 18-year-old violinist had given a live performance of the work at the Titania Palast and more than a decade before he would record the work with Herbert von Karajan and the same orchestra. The young Ferras sounds both flexible and sprightly in the first movement's passagework, producing a suave tone that might be described as almost gustatory in its effect as he soars above the orchestra. That tone lacks the sharp edge of Zino Francescatti's and even the slightly reedy quality of Arthur Grumiaux's, and he never seems to be deploying it simply for the sheer beauty of it: As sumptuous as it might sound, it always serves his high-minded concept of the work itself. And his playing of Fritz Kreisler's famous cadenza similarly subordinates virtuosity to musical effect. Karl Böhm sets the mood for a probing exploration of the slow movement, in which Ferras sounds similarly committed; he never allows himself to be diverted into mannerism or eccentricity, as Anne-Sophie Mutter does in her performance with Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon 289 471 349, Fanfare 26:5 and 26:6). What the young Michael Rabin achieved in the showpieces of Wieniawski and Paganini, Ferras arguably exceeded in the music of Beethoven. The finale's passagework allows Ferras to snap his bow authoritatively (and rhythmically), while without creating nary a soupçon of virtuosic frisson ; Böhm, despite his elevated conception of the stamping orchestral part, never severs the music's contact with earth. Böhm, in fact, proves himself a profoundly sympathetic collaborator, while the engineers provide well-balanced recorded sound that represents the variety and splendor of Ferras's tonal palette and the full weight of the orchestra. Overall, it's a monumental performance.

The live reading of Alban Berg's Concerto came more than a decade later, when Ferras had not quite yet reached the age of 33. Ferras's recording of the concerto, paired with Igor Stravinsky's, appeared on Claves SO-2516 in a live performance from Geneva in 1957 with Ernest Ansermet and the Suisse Romande Orchestra, Fanfare 32:4 (he would record the work in the studio in 1963 with Georges Prêtre and the Paris Conservatory Orchestra). Although the timings of the first section differ by only a few seconds between live performances, the later one with Massimo Freccia seems more forward-moving (I noted the almost static quality of the earlier reading in my review in 32:4), although both parts of the first movement nevertheless sound moody, if not gloomy—and atmospheric, if not surreal—in this reading with Freccia, and the engineers have captured it with striking fidelity. Listeners who remember the powerful effect of recordings of Berg's Concerto by Arthur Grumiaux (from 1967, reissued on Decca Eloquence 480 0481,

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Fanfare 34:1), and André Gertler (reissued on Hungaroton 31635) might begin to wonder whether the Franco-Belgian manner might not, perhaps paradoxically, be uncannily suited to Berg's temperament. The last page of the end of the first movement epitomizes the dreaminess yet desperation that Ferras manages to project. He's equally at home in the tumult of the second movement's opening section, representing the violin's part in the catastrophe with ferocious intensity and the moments of remission with eerie calm. In the final section, based on one of Bach's most chromatically harmonized chorales, he ascends from moments that seem intentionally lethargic, to reach a shattering conclusion and a sublimely untroubled dénouement. Massimo Freccia seems to share Ferras's view of the concerto's dramatic design, not only overall but in detail.

Despite the unquestionable depth and technical command evidenced in these readings, Ferras never became a household name in the United States, even among violinists, and several reference works give him only scant if any mention. Still, it's hard to imagine that these recordings could sound too French, or too slick, or, in fact, too anything, to capture listeners' imagination. And perhaps now the reissue of recordings like these will give collectors something to treasure, thereby effectively offering him a second chance at the general fame he seemed to deserve. Urgently recommended, as a recording of special merit.

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 12.11.2011 (- 2011.11.12)

Frankfurter Allgemeine
ZEITUNG FÜR DEUTSCHLAND

Kurzer Nachtrag, betreffs Beethovens Violinkonzert: Zwar ist das Alte durchaus...

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Gramophone February 2012 (Rob Cowan - 2012.02.01)

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REPLAY – Rob Cowan's monthly survey of reissues and archive recordings

Important first releases – Brahms from Barbirolli in the new Coventry Cathedral and in Boston • A feast from Christian Ferras

Recordings of performances with a dark historical backdrop are fairly plentiful – think of Václav Talich conducting Má vlast in Nazi-occupied Prague, Rostropovich braving Dvořák on the day the Soviets entered Prague, the maverick pianist Maria Yudina playing Mozart for Stalin, harpsichordist Wanda Landowska performing Scarlatti in Paris with anti-aircraft fire exploding in the distance, Gieseking playing the Emperor to the unsettling accompaniment of falling bombs, and so on. Now, to add to this disquieting but uplifting catalogue, Sir John Barbirolli conducts the Berlin Philharmonic in Brahms's Second Symphony, the location the rebuilt Coventry Cathedral, the date June 1962, the whole affair facilitated by the City of Berlin and the Federal Republic as a gift of reparation in memory of the original cathedral, which the Luftwaffe had razed to the ground in the early 1940s. Testament has released a transfer of the Brahms and although the recording is in mono and the cathedral acoustic more ample than is useful for specific instrumental detail, careful microphone placement means that the overall balance is actually rather good. As to the performance, the immediate impression is of a vast dynamic range and a superb instrument playing to the ample spaces available to it, the horns in particular quite overwhelming in their impact. Barbirolli's interpretation is broad and loving, with predominantly dark textures (so much for this being the 'happiest' of Brahms's symphonies!) and, for the finale's blazing last page, a massive slam on the brakes. You can hear an audience presence but, rather than end with applause, the performance closes to respectful silence.

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Coincidentally the Barbirolli Society has released another live Brahms Second, recorded at Boston's Symphony Hall with the city's Symphony Orchestra, part of a concert given three years before the one from Coventry. It's likely that the faster overall pace in Boston is due at least in part to the drier acoustic and the reduced need to avoid converging lines. Still, the effect is quite different, more silken and energised, though the underlying warmth remains. The rest of the programme is fascinating; in fact, we're offered two versions of it: one from January 30, 1959, the other from January 31 (with radio announcements and in marginally inferior sound). Barbirolli's own Elizabethan Suite features superb strings and horns in 'The King's Hunt', there's Delius's The Walk to the Paradise Garden (rather more restrained than expected), and a colourful reading of Wait on's Partita. All the recordings are in stereo.

Another comparison arrives, again involving Testament, which has released a Berlin Philharmonic Concert given at the Salzburg Festival in August 1960 under the direction of Joseph Keilberth. The main item is Bruckner's Ninth Symphony and anyone who recalls Keilberth's 1956 Telefunken recording with the Hamburg State Philharmonic will already know that he had the full measure of the work (that same recording was reissued on CD bizarrely coupled with part of Bruckner's Te Deum!). Prior knowledge of that recording will not, however, prepare you for the impact of this live performance which, in a word, is stunning, the Berlin brass presenting a welter of tone, powerfully projected, the Adagio's crowning peroration as devastating as any on disc – and I do mean any! If perchance you need convincing that Keilberth could come up with the goods in symphonic music, then look no further. The couplings are a buoyant account of Schubert's Rosamunde Overture and Alban Berg's Violin Concerto with Christian Ferras as the soloist, an occasionally rough-edged performance full of intense expression but which doesn't quite gel as an entity. Turn then to a broadcast performance put out by Audite from four years later, when a more mature Ferras was partnered by the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra under Massimo Freccia (a Franz Schalk pupil), and the overall impression is of a performance that's more confident, more skilfully shaped from the rostrum (the work's rhythmic aspects come across with greater clarity), and interpretatively better integrated. As to Audite's coupling, Ferras's 1951 Berlin Philharmonic recording of the Beethoven Concerto under Karl Böhm is the work of a precociously gifted teenager; yet, rather than opt for outward virtuosity, Ferras really plumbs the depths, his playing invariably quiet and softgrained, with some daringly broad tempi yet with real bite in the finale. Böhm's conducting is a model of discreet accompanying, with a firm pulse, neatly pointed phrases in the outer movements and a warmly sustained Larghetto. But there's a significant problem in that the surviving tape, although perfectly adequate sound-wise, lacks the opening measure of the Larghetto. The solution would have been easy: just record the surviving second measure and repeat it (they're musically identical) but, no, Audite decided that this would have invalidated the recording's authenticity. Personally, I would have copied the motif, but there you are ... you can't complain that the people at Audite lack musical integrity.

Hi-Fi News February 2012 (CB - 2012.02.01)

The Berg Concerto was central to Christian Ferras's repertoire. His EMI version is no longer listed here but – like the 24 London bus – three replacements have come at once. (Two actually, as both Orfeo and Testament have the same 1960 Salzburg performance; the one here, also live, is from 1964.) A victim of depression and alcohol dependence, Ferras took his own life aged 49. His early musicianship is shown here in the Beethoven: the execution is masterly for a teenager. Alas the opening motif of the Larghetto was excised back in 1951 and Audite has decided against reinstating it via bars 2-3 (the identical phrase).

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hifi & records 4/2012 (Uwe Steiner - 2012.10.01)

Als der 18-jährige Christian Ferras 1951 in Berlin bei den Philharmonikern...

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klassik.com 21.08.2012 (Johannes Knapp - 2012.08.21)
source: http://magazin.klassik.com/reviews/revie...

Dem Andenken eines Bengels

Beethoven, Ludwig van – Violinkonzert in D-Dur

Dem Andenken eines Bengels

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Märkische Oderzeitung Freitag, 18. November 2011 (p.p. - 2011.11.18)

Legendäres Debüt mit Macke

Legendäres Debüt mit Macke

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

Pizzicato N° 218 - 12/2011 (RéF - 2011.12.01)

Ferras mit Beethoven und Berg

Und wenn es nur darum ginge, zu beweisen, dass das Duo Ferras-Karajan in Beethovens Violinkonzert 1967 besser funktionierte als Ferras-Böhm 1951, wäre diese CD-Veröffentlichung schon interessant. Denn Böhm und Ferras passten zumal in den Ecksätzen nicht wirklich zueinander. Es klingt so, als wolle hier jeder der beiden etwas anderes sagen. Ferras eigentlich so, wie er Beethoven immer spielte, zierlich, rein, elegant, und Böhm mit pathetischer Geste, die zu diesem Spiel nicht passen will. Mit dem Larghetto, aus dem Böhm ein langsamst dahin schwebendes Adagissimo macht, kommt noch am ehesten eine künstlerische Einigung zustande, aber unter wirklich extremen Bedingungen. Kurioserweise fehlt hier übrigens das erste Motiv des Satzes. Dass Audite im Booklet nicht darauf hinweist, sondern nur im Internet, ist ein deutliches Manko! Im Internet erklärt Ludger Böckenhoff dazu: "Es fehlt das erste Motiv! Dies ist offensichtlich 1951 direkt nach der Produktion in der Konfektionierung (Markierung der Satzpausen durch Gelbband) geschehen: Der Techniker hat damals den richtigen Anfang verpasst und dabei das erste Motiv abgeschnitten!" Eine richtige Entscheidung war es, nicht durch Wiederholungsmaterial den Anfang zu

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rekonstruieren.

Die Interpretation des Alban-Berg-Konzerts ist hier im ersten Satz zwar weniger poetisch, nicht so introspektiv, im zweiten brillanter und rhetorischer als in der Live-Aufnahme von Orfeo, die ebenfalls in diesem Heft besprochen wird.

www.classicstodayfrance.com 10/2011 (Christophe Huss - 2011.10.01)

Cette bande originale du Concerto de Beethoven qui marque les débuts de Ferras à Berlin 1951 est dans un état de conservation sonore admirable. Ferras a 18 ans et son insolence sonore donne la chair de poule.

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

www.klavier.de 21.08.2012 (- 2012.08.21)

Dem Andenken eines Bengels

Beethoven, Ludwig van: Violinkonzert in D-Dur

Dem Andenken eines Bengels

Full review text restrained for copyright reasons.

www.opusklassiek.nl februari 2012 (Aarnout Coster - 2012.02.01)

Dertig jaar geleden overleed de Franse violist Christian Ferras (1933-1982). Na...

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