Robert Schumann & Johannes Brahms: Cello Concerto, Op. 129 & Piano Concerto, Op. 15

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One year after her London concerto debut, then-18-year-old cellist Jacqueline du Pré played the Schumann Concerto in Berlin on March 5, 1963, over the RIAS American radio network.

A wild performance of reckless abandon and emotional impact, this previously unreleased recording puts the scope of her command on full display.

Like a method actor, du Pré sometimes takes a while to feel comfortable when a new movement or episode starts. It doesn't usually take long, and when she finds the right pace she produces hugely entertaining cello playing. Her phrasing of the double stops in the slow movement is sublime. She even plays a two-minute cadenza of her own devising for the last movement.

The cadenza begins like Haydn – formal, sane and grand – and then transforms into something more primitive, as dissonance and distortion alternate with moments of exalted Schumann beauty, always referencing the basic building blocks of the Concerto as only a cellist in love with it can. The climax comes in a poignant, hypnotic series o f triplets which demonstrate du Pré's disciplined, comprehensive approach to cello technique.

Du Pré's awareness of the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra is exceptional. Her dialogue with the French horn in the first movement is pure magic. And at the end of the last movement, when the orchestra is scrambling to finish together, she exerts enough control with the size and rhetorical breadth of her final two chords that she, the conductor, and the orchestra end on an appropriately triumphant, roughly unified note.

The CD also includes, from the same concert, another young phenom, then-22-yearold Argentine pianist Bruno-Leonardo Gelber, playing what would become one of his signature works, Brahms' D minor Piano Concerto. As always, the sound quality on this Audite disc is world class, as are the performers.

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