Edition Géza Anda (II) – Beethoven | Brahms | Liszt

aud 23.408

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Gramophone (Bryce Morrison - 2008.08.01)

GRAMOPHONE

Even if the Beethoven doesn't stand out there's plenty of Anda's artistry here

These recordings dating from 1955-69 and taken from the West German Radio Archives celebrate the artistry of Géza Anda whose tragic death at the age of 54 extinguished a light that could never be replaced. In an age of well trained automata set to shine briefly on the competition circuit, Anda's was a wholly personal voice backed by pianism and craftsmanship of a transcendental sheen and precision.

True, virtually all the works included here on Vols 2 and 3 are duplicated on Testament's nine-CD reissue of Anda's early EMI Londonbased recordings. But duplication is hardly the issue because although Anda had a clear ground-plan for his interpretations, they could fluctuate with subtle differences dictated by circumstances and the mood of the moment. Nothing is radically different yet side-by-side comparison tells us that Anda was essentially a recreative artist who altered his readings as some new diamond-like facet of a work caught his imagination. True, his Beethoven remains for all its quality more reasonable than revolutionary (though quite without the disfiguring quirks of, say, Gould, Mustonen or Pletnev). Yet if his playing becomes brilliantly alive in the finales of both sonatas, he finds his truest voice in Chopin, Brahms, Liszt and, most of all, Schumann. Here he is every inch the virtuoso who uses his phenomenal agility and ear for sonority and texture to such effect that everything emerges in its first pristine light.

Personal idiosyncrasies abound (why such a rapid spin through the central lento of Chopin's "octave" Etude; why such an uncharacteristically flustered way with the E major Prelude's ceremonial tread?) yet they remain like spots on the sun. Few more scintillating or tightly coiled Liszt Sonatas exist and who but Anda could capture Schumann's schizophrenic moodswings, his play of light and shade, so vividly or acutely? Try the third and ninth etudes from the Etudes symphoniques and you may well wonder when you have heard such light-fingered enchantment. Anda's way with two of the five additional posthumous etudes is so magical that you wish he had played them all. His inclusion, too, of "Sphinxes" in Carnaval (written in order not to be played!) is an amusing addition to his coruscating wit and elegance.

Audite's recordings have come up well and, hopefully, Anda's discs of Beethoven's Third Concerto, Franck's Symphonic Variations (among his own favourites), Chopin's Second Sonata and Ravel's Valses nobles et sentimentales will become more easily

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