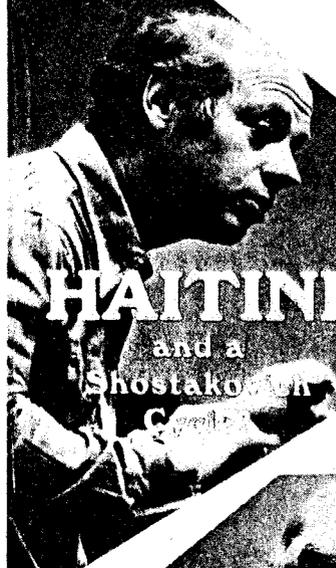


American Record Guide

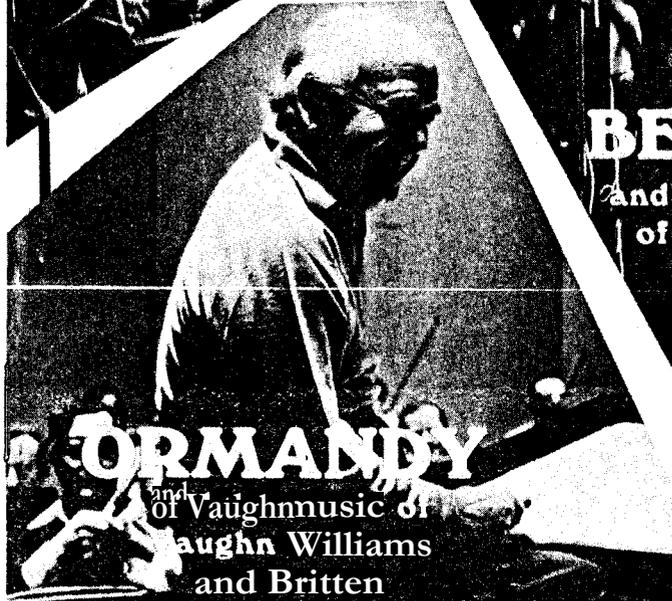
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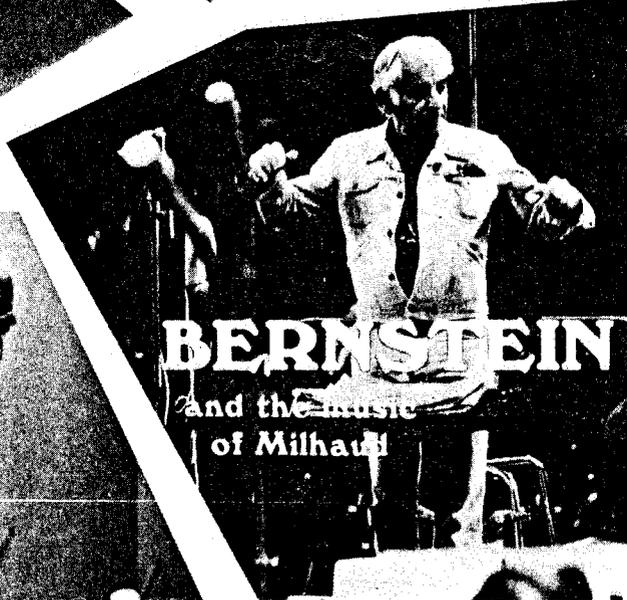
HAITINK
and a
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and the Shostakovich
Symphonies (4 & 5)

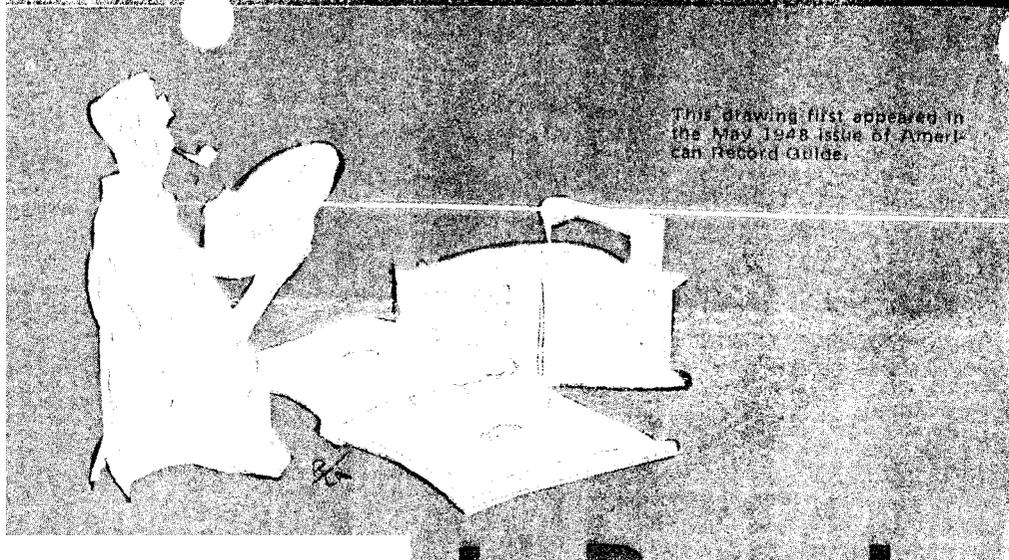


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This drawing first appeared in the May 1948 issue of *American Record Guide*.

Alt

BACH: *English Suite No. 3 in G minor*, BWV 808; *Capriccio in B flat "On the Departure of a Beloved Brother,"* BWV 992; *Tocatta in D*, BWV 912; and the *French Suite No. 5 in G*, BWV 816. Wilhelm Kempff, piano. Deutsche Grammophon 2530 723, \$8.98.

Kempff's pithy, pianistic Bachian style is a welcome antidote to the poisonous harpsichord-on-the-piano approach we've been force-fed these past 20 years. The works of Bach have almost disappeared from the programs of our great pianists. But now with this disc and the discs of Brendel, Johannesen, Weissenberg and others, Bach-on-the-piano may be coming full cycle.

Similar to such noted Bach players of the past as Harold Samuel, Myra Hess, Gieseking, Fischer, Backhaus and today's Sviatoslav Richter and Rudolf Serkin—Kempff has throughout his career performed Bach on the piano. At nine he played and transposed Bach fugues when auditioning at the Berlin *Hochschule* for Heinrich Barth (also Arthur Rubinstein's teacher). Now, in his early 80s, he apparently has started a new series of Bach recordings.

A romantic, Kempff uses considerable rubato, plays unusual text variants and brings out inner Schumannesque lines. Using pedal and touch for color, he achieves infinite varieties of texture and timbre, sometimes imitating a cathedral organ stop, as in the

opening of the *G Major Gigue*, or sometimes the harpsichord as in the gavottes. He does not indulge in overly slow tempi trying the listener's patience as Richter sometimes does in *the Well-Tempered Clavier*, nor does he become Prokofiev-motivic in fast tempi as do Weissenberg and Gould.

Thankfully the *English Suite* is not twanged out eccentrically with inverted touches—i.e., all 16th notes played staccato, all eighth notes legato as we get from some pianists and harpsichordists. The *Capriccio's* Arioso describing the affectionate attempt of the Bach family to deter Johann Jakob from leaving to join the Swedish army as an oboist, the mutual lamentations in the Adagissimo, and the infectious bounce of the Postilion's aria are all masterfully depicted. (Gieseking on Illeodor 2548-730—issued by DG in Europe, available here through Peters International—plays with very little pedal and achieves perhaps greater clarity and pathos in the contrapuntal and lamentation sections.)

In Kempff's performance of the *Toccata*, the antiphonal organ-like phrases in the opening Allegro, the liturgical-response recitatives, the religious-in-mood F-sharp-minor fugue and the bouncing final Fuga are full of individual, communicative touches. The piece in Kempff's hands is exciting, effective and of one fabric.

Reviews tit's

Paul Li AltNouse * John W. Barker • Jack Diether 6 bean Elder 6 Christopher Orient Leslie Gerber • Rafael Kentnierer * Art Lange 4 Audrey Lettish * George L. Mayer Philip Li. **Mogi 1** Jatnek R. Oietteleh. * Ifan Payne • Peter C. Pfnica WIlfarrili. Mired!, 6 Paul kapogjort 4114eiolateiinlond • James Ringo Le•de M. SMOIOY • Mark Starr * Tiiiii P1. towe 111.rtiehird tfatibriet:

Kempff rather old-fashionedly plays some of Czerny's inverted mordents and uses too much pedal in the Allemande of the *French Suite*. And he plays the same suite's Sarabande on the fast side, as he often plays slow movements—cf. Beethoven's *Waldstein Sonata*. (Backhaus on London STS-15065 is more straight-forward, tangible in his effects, virtuosic in the gigue albeit in toto less charming, colorful, and subtle.)

In sum then, this is a not-to-be-missed disc of wonderful works enticingly played with great authority. Kempff's rich, myriad-nuanced golden tone is glorious. —Elder

BACH: "*Italian*" *Concerto in F*, BWV 971; *Chorale Prelude, "Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ"*, BWV 639; *Prelude (Fantasy) in A minor*, BWV 922; *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D minor*, BWV 903; *Chorale Prelude, "Nun Komm' der Heiden Heiland"* BWV 659; *Fantasy and Fugue in A minor*, BWV 904. Alfred Brendel, piano. Philips 9500 353, \$8.98.

In the second of his *six unlectures*, e.e. Cummings urged the creative artist to be true to himself. "I am quite aware that, wherever our so called civilization has slithered, there's every reward and no puniishment for unbeing. But if (creative art) is your goal, you've got to forget all about punishments and all about rewards and all about self-styled obligations and duties and responsibilities etcetera ad infinitum and remember one thing only: that it's you—nobody else—who determine your destiny and decide your fate.... There's the artist's responsibility; and the most awful responsibility on earth. If you can take it, take it—and be. If you can't, cheer up and go about other people's business; and do (or undo) till you drop."

I do not know to what extent this record was other people's "business" but in the full flight of his career was there any

need for Brendel to risk his reputation by venturing on record into a repertoire that is so unusual for him? With an assured career in his (large) corner of the musical market, surely the aged eagle need not have spread his wings except in response to his inner artistic promptings: to risk "being himself." The sleeve note illuminates little; a puffed-up "interview" with Brendel that skims the surface of his feelings about the music and that contains little discussion of the works themselves.

The "*Italian*" *Concerto* (BWV 971) was composed in Leipzig and forms a pair with the *Overture in the French Style* in the *Clavierübung* published in 1735. Schweitzer states that Bach apparently got the idea for such a clavier arrangement of an orchestral work with soloist from a sinfonia, which contains similar themes, in Muffat's *Floregim Primum* of 1695. Whatever the origin of the work it is a happy inspiration and rightfully deserves its popularity for its sparkling inspiration and serene central *andante*. "*Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ*" is a simple, other-worldly chorale prelude composed in Weimar and published in the *Orgelbüchlein* of 1717. The brilliant early *Prelude (Fantasy) in A minor* (BWV 922) is a virtuoso work, also composed in Weimar between 1708-17, and comprises a sequence of dramatic episodes that deserves an essay to itself. "*Nun Komm' der Heiden Heiland*" is one of the *Eighteen Preludes* of 1747-50, composed in Leipzig and probably revised during Bach's last illness. The *Fantasy and Fugue in A minor* (BWV 904) is a mature (1725) and statuesque work of deceptive simplicity. Finally the *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* (BWV 904) is another brilliant virtuoso work that has a long tradition of concert performance. It was composed in Cothen *circa* 1720-23 but the original manuscript is lost and the work is known only from copies, which present problems in performance of what Bach himself intended for the prominent sequences of arpeggio chords. The works gathered on this

record seem to I nothing in common except that each a masterpiece in its own right.

As to the performances themselves, frankly I have never been persuaded by the if-only-Bach-had-owned-a-grand-piano-he-would-have-loved-it school of absurdity (if only George III had tactical nuclear weapons . . .) and I shudder at the thought of Bach thumped out on the piano. However, I must state outright that for me this record contains some of the most arresting Bach playing I've heard in years. The music-making transcends the instrument, and Brendel displays such a mastery of tonal and dynamic control that he appears not to be handicapped by having only one manual on which to play. Indeed, compared to the harpsichord playing of, for example, Kipnis (Angel S-36096), Brendel's performance of the "Italian" Concerto is a marvel of clarity and jaunty rhythms. This opening work displays at once Brendel's clear and distinct voicing of parts (even without two manuals) and a left hand that fascinates with a seeming independent life of its own. Also in evidence, as it is throughout the record, is his practice of pedalling across the rests so that the music seems to move in one unbroken melodic line. The bejewelled rippling of the 32nd notes in the foot-tapping opening *allegro* is most beguiling, and the seductive stillness of the *andante* suspends time and judgment from any consideration of the instrument itself.

Both *Chorales* are exquisitely played (the editions used are Busoni's, by the way) with discrete octave doubling of the chorale itself used most effectively.

In the interview printed on the sleeve, Brendel states that for a time he had been unable to free himself of the influence of the Bach playing of his teacher, Edwin Fischer. A comparison with Fischer's

of the *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* (Seraphim 6045) shows that Brendel owes little to Fischer's wayward interpretation other than a general restrained romanticism in the approach to the music. Brendel makes free use of rubato in the arpeggio chords and of the sustaining pedal across rests; there is an excess of unmarked arpeggiated chords and of left hand leading right,

but he weaves his spells, and all of these combined with the remarkably clear textures of the fugue, and the distinct control and voicing of the interweaving themes, makes this a most satisfying performance. The *Fantasy and Fugue in A minor* is played in a big, almost Lisztian style, and the extraordinary soft, pure-toned playing of the penultimate section is breathtaking. The fugue is most movingly played in an introspective manner, as though Brendel were playing to himself.

And there's the marvellous, early *Prelude (Fantasy) in A minor*. A brilliant showpiece, that hints of Liszt to come, here given a suitably intense and dramatic performance. Concerning tempi in any of these performances, within the context of the record each tempo seems so apt and judiciously chosen that comparisons would be invidious, and this includes, for example, the 'slow' tempo of the *allegro* of the "Italian" Concerto that through the rhythmic vitality of the playing utterly convinces that it could only be so.

One curiosity concerning this record. Brendel had previously recorded only one work by Bach: "Ich ruf' zu dir I lerr Jest, Christ." Why repeat it? —Payne

BALFE: *The Daughter of St. Mark*. See German.

BARTOK: *Sonata for 2 Pianos and Percussion*. See Stravinsky.

BEETHOVEN: *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37; Rondo for Piano and Orchestra in B flat, WoO() 6*. Sviatoslav Richter, piano; Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Kurt Sanderting, conductor. Deutsche Grammophon Privilege Import 2535 107, \$6.98.

Cas. 3335 107, \$6.98.

Originally released in 1963 as DG 138 848 and now re-issued in DG's new Privilege Series, this remains one of the finest recordings of the Beethoven *Third Piano Concerto* extant.

Both soloist and conductor show a sensitive awareness for the work's lyrical as well as dramatic potentialities, which they

manage to convey with a good deal of inner intensity and outward polish.

The *Rondo*, a lightweight work, handled with the requisite esprit and finesse, makes for delightful listening as Richter and the Vienna Symphony romp their way through it. The sonics are superb, and the surfaces flawless. Put this down as a Beethoven must. --Kammerer

BEETHOVEN: *Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat ("Emperor"), Op. 73*. Charles Rosen, piano; Symphonica of London, Wyn Morris, conductor. Peters International PLE 024, \$6.98.

Cas. PCE 024, \$6.98.

In his pursuit of a highly distinguished career as pianist, scholar, and author (*The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven*) Charles Rosen has recorded not only the



Rosen: Impressive collaboration.

great last keyboard works of Bach and much Beethoven, he has also preserved for future listeners his scaling of such musical Mt. Everests as the Elliott Carter *Double Concerto*. And after he has written so well and understandingly of Beethoven at the keyboard, what better idea than to follow up his written thoughts in the form of this new *Emperor* recording. Rosen's collaboration

with London-based conductor Morris and his Symphonica of London is a fortunate one for listeners. Morris has always brought a superb feeling and commitment to what he does, though we have few enough of his domestic releases in the US; the Rosen/Morris team assures a craftsmanship and dedication of unusual quality.

The record at hand joins countless others by great pianists and conductors. It is a finely jeweled, detailed portrait of the great composer in jubilant top form. Some will miss the long sweep of Fleisher/Szell or the elegant long line and warmth of the earlier Rubinstein recordings; instead it is the exuberance in myriad fine details, the fresh presentation of aspects of *style* that comes along so nicely in the performance. The glow of Schnabel/Stock, power of Ashkenazy/Solti, clear-headed restraint of some of the Brendel recordings, these might never have been made where this performance is concerned, for it apparently naves little to previous versions either in imitation or conscious reaction to them.

Accurate ensemble occasionally lapses between sections of the orchestra, and a little over-engineering (or careless microphone positioning) has muddied the string sound. These points, though, are no deterrent to enjoying one of the most refreshing recordings of a Beethoven concerto. Those who enjoy good pianos, too, will love the Presence and clarity of Rosen's instrument. A Bl'isendorfer or I lam burg Steinway? Get this recording if you know and love Beethoven! —Greenleaf

BIZET: *Symphony No. 1 in C major*; **MENDELSSOHN:** *Symphony No. 4 in A major, Op. 90, "Italian"*; National Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Leopold Stokovvski. Columbia M-34567, \$7.98.

It is hard to know which to marvel at more: the freshness and vigor of Stokowski's musicianship right down to the end, or the momentum in his last years that has given us "new" releases of his, like some voice from the grave, many months after he has actually gone. Perhaps this electronic prolongation is the fitting capstone to his staggering career, so vividly immortalized through recordings.