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# American Record Guide



## Gershwin at 80

Observations and  
a Discography

**Holst: An Original Musical Mind**  
**Historic Reissues**

**LISZT:** *Sons on Bach's Cantata "Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen"; Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, No. 4 "Pensées des morts"; Fantasy and Fugue on the Theme B-A-C-H: Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, No. 3 "Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude".* Alfred Brendel, piano. Philips 9500 286, \$8.98.

I cannot help but wonder what view we would now have of Shakespeare had he decided to write a second version of, say, *Richard III* rather than a new play on the subject of Hamlet, or how we would now judge da Vinci for producing a third version of the *Madonna of the Rocks* rather than turning to a new subject, the *Mona Lisa*. Apparently, the recording medium is becoming so easy to squander that some performers seem to prefer to snap away at the same subject over and over again rather than move on to taping new works.

On Brendel's recent Bach disc, out of the dozens (hundreds?) of works that he could have played, he chose to repeat a work that he had already once recorded. And here again in this magnificent Liszt recital, 50 percent of the performances are of works that he has already recorded. And it appears that his basic conceptions have not changed. Thus, while it is true that, for example, he has become more expansive (e.g. 17'09" for the new *Bénédiction* against 15'34" for the 1957 version still available on Turnabout 34414E) there appears to be little fundamental change in concept or in detail. (Only the clock notes a difference, the senses perceive little variation.) This is not to belittle Brendel's achievement in particular, but, generally speaking, not all the multiple playback channels, multi-miking, retakes, editing and splicing, quadraphonics and surround-sound video cassettes can turn bad art into great. Somehow there seems to be a belief among many that more equals more, when some sumptuously sounding empty music making heard on record lately has made me wonder, crabbed-minded that

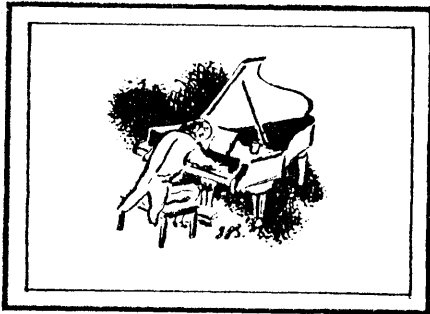
I am, whether more in fact equals less.

The *Variations on "Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen"* is a late work from 1862 when Liszt was 51. The theme is taken from the opening chorus of Bach's cantata of the same name but it also includes, at the end, the final chorale "Was Gott thut, das ist wohlgethan." It is a giant of a work, given a stunning performance, and the recording encompasses extremes of dynamic range with only a hint of pre-echo here and there. "Pensées des morts" is No. 4 of the set of *Harmonies poétique et religieuses* composed between 1845 and 1852. It is in fact a revision of an early piano work (1832) called *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* which he reworked and fitted into the larger framework. Brendel's performance is big, emotional and penetrating, but it was while listening to this work that I first sensed a degree of classical restraint and a lack of élan; others may not find this as noticeable.

The *Fantasy and Fugue on the Theme B-A-C-H* is an even later work (1871) and is Liszt's own transcription of his earlier *Prelude and Fugue on BACH*. Brendel is no Nyiregyhazi but he produces prodigious tone when required as

he so amply demonstrates here, yet his playing never becomes raucous or ugly; he seems incapable of producing anything but the most lovely of sounds.

The score of "Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude" is prefaced by a quotation from Lamartine: "Whence comes, O God, this peace that overwhelms me? Whence comes this faith with which my heart flows?" This is given a most seductive performance in which Brendel emphasizes the continuity and grand sweep of the music. The tender opening and yearning left hand melody set the mood for the whole work. There is power a-plenty, but what sticks in mind are the shimmering right hand arpeggio figures from measure 104 to 112 that are so preciously delicate. By contrast, Arrau (Philips 6500 043), is less seductive, and his overuse of rubato and hesitation exposes the seams



of the work, robbing it of the lyric continuity that Brendel manages to project.

The piano is beautifully recorded, but the producer is not credited. Brendel contributes an interesting sleeve note on the music. I do not know what contractual arrangements make Philips use portraits of Brendel for Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven and Bach, but reproductions of paintings for Liszt; however the graphic designer (again uncredited) has selected for the cover a very lovely but too sunny and picturesque Courbet for the music.

—Payne

**MARTINŮ:** *Sonata da Camera for cello and chamber orchestra* (1940); *Concertino for cello, winds, piano, and percussion* (1924). **ROUSSEL:** *Concertino for cello and orchestra*, Op. 57 (1936). Sasa Večtomov, cello; Prague Chamber Soloists conducted by Eduard Fischer (1), Collegium Musicum Pragense conducted by František Vajnar (2), Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by František Vajnar (3). Supraphon Stereo 1 10 2084, \$7.98.

This unusually interesting record presents two previously unrecorded works, Martinů's *Sonata da Camera* and Roussel's late *Concertino*. Martinů's early *Concertino* was previously documented on an earlier Supraphon disc (SUA 10877) as performed by André Navarra in a somewhat more assertive performance. The present recording suffers from some pre-echo in this work only, as the grooves are too close together on some of the orchestral attacks. This does not plague the Roussel, which shares a side with the *Concertino*.

This is one of Roussel's concise, 12-minute works in his vigorously rhythmic late style. This performance could have been somewhat better integrated. The orchestra commences rather lethargically and has to be speeded up on Večtomov's first entrance. This tends to soften the outlines of a work which, however, is so concise that it makes its point even under less than optimum circumstances.

The major work is Martinů's 26-minute *Sonata da Camera* which, more rightly should be termed a cello concerto. Martinů is very precise about his terms, however; the generally low-keyed atmosphere and lack of brass and percussion

appears to have determined the title, which he never again used. Written just before his escape from Paris to America, it may have been written on the train between Aix and Marseilles; a trip Martinů made daily for a period while attempting to find passage out of France to avoid the war. There is a certain quietly obsessive quality about several of the works of this time that contributes to my fantasy.

Večtomov's style is neat and precise, and his conductors are thoroughly at home with the idiom, making these excellent performances. The Martinů *Concertino* is one of his earliest works, composed in Paris under the influence of that hotbed of the then avant-garde. It already shows certain of Martinů's fingerprints, the nervous rhythms and virtuosic woodwind writing, but the melodies have not yet attained the Czech curves that give them character later on. This work has a refreshing verve, however. All in all, this disc provides an important addition to the supplies of cello literature, Martinů and Roussel. No mean accomplishment.

—Moore

**MENDELSSOHN:** *Piano Trios* Opus 49, in d, and Opus 66 in c. The Mirecourt Trio ABC Classics AB-67026, \$6.98.

This record is pleasant enough, but does not further illuminate two works done to perfection by the Beaux Arts and Rose/Stern/Istomin Trios. Tempo alone cannot carry off even an inspired Mendelssohn work like the d-minor, and the lesser c-minor work is almost trite in this competent but shallow read-through. Somewhat "homogenized" sound and pale bass further hamper the disc's effectiveness. Good, clean record surfaces from a company that has surmounted earlier pressing problems.

—Greenleaf

**NIELSEN:** *Quartet No. 1 in g*, Op. 13; *Quartet No. 4 in F*, Op. 44. Nielsen Quartet, Deutsche Grammophon 2530920, \$8.98.

This early *String Quartet in g minor* was written in 1888 but revised and published in 1900. The influence of Johann Svendsen and Brahms is apparent as well as some personal elements (e.g., the cadence