

Schumann - Piano Concerto, Op. 54, Quintet, Op. 44 (1990)

Written by bluesever

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Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in A Major, Op. 54: 1. I. *Allegro affettuoso* 14:52 2. II. *Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso* 5:24 3. III. *Allegro vivace* 10:29

Quintet in E-flat Major for Piano and Strings, Op. 44:

4. I. *Allegro brillante* 8:36 5. II. *In modo d'una marcia* 9:28 6. III. *Scherzo. Molto vivace* 4:41 7. IV. *Allegro ma non troppo* 6:57

Rudolf Serkin – piano Budapest String Quartet Philadelphia Orchestra Eugene Ormandy – conductor (CBS Masterworks – Great Performances 38)

Over the course of his long and illustrious career, Rudolf Serkin came to occupy a niche as an Apollonian interpreter of the music of the First Viennese School, particularly Beethoven. His crisp phrasing and lean tone seemed the epitome of a lofty classical approach, as distinct from the glowing intensity of Horowitz, or the lushness of Arrau. As with most such generalizations, it was an unfairly limiting characterization. There was sparkle in Serkin's playing, as can be heard in these sterling performances of two of Schumann's finest scores.

A music collector who has so far not come under the spell of Serkin/Schumann might balk at adding performances of these very familiar works. But taking the plunge is rewarding. This performance of the Concerto is rightly regarded as one of the jewels in the classical music catalog, and has been featured with several pairings over the decades since its first release. Serkin gives a bracing account of the Concerto, sometimes steely, sometimes burnished gold. Ormandy gets a deft performance from the Philadelphia Orchestra, with just the right touch of plushness that the "Philadelphia Sound" was famous for. The combination is well nigh unbeatable in terms of realizing the many moods of the piece.

The reason to buy this compact disc is the collaboration of Serkin with the equally illustrious Budapest String Quartet. The Quintet was recorded at the Marlboro, Vermont, music school

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cofounded by Serkin. This was late in the career of the Budapest String Quartet. Reviewers had noted that the ensemble was not always as tight as in years past and first violin Joseph Roisman had slips in intonation. This teaming with Serkin seems to have summoned from the Quartet the powers of years past. Serkin leads a taut performance and the Quartet responds with fine focus. Although not always the neatest performance of the Quintet, this is one of the most gripping.

The remastering of these recordings has taken some of the edge off the typically bright sound of 1960s CBS classical production. The Concerto is fairly spacious and clearly articulated. The Quintet is nicely balanced.

This compact disc is an ideal starter for music lovers becoming acquainted with Schumann's music. Those familiar with these works will find much to enjoy here. ----- The Aeolian, amazon.com

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