

Ligeti - Violin Concerto, Lontano, Atmospheres, San Francisco Polyphony (2013)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Lontano* 15:52 2 *Violin Concerto: I. Praeludium* 4:11 3 *Violin Concerto: II. Aria - Hoquet - Chorale* 8:17 4 *Violin Concerto: III. Intermezzo* 2:31 5 *Violin Concerto: IV. Passacaglia* 6:49 6 *Violin Concerto: V. Appassionato* 6:45 7 *Atmospheres* 10:09 8 *San Francisco Polyphony* 13:41 Benjamin Schmid - violin Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra Hannu Lintu – conductor

The arrow-driven harmonic certainties of Jonathan Nott and the Berlin Philharmonic (in Teldec's Ligeti Project, 8/02 – nla) get straight to the heart of the matter but this new, slow-burner *Lontano* reveals piecemeal riches gradually, reluctantly even, Hannu Lintu savouring the tease. Nott goes for the instant big reveal, and your working assumption is that Lintu must be about to fall into line with Abbado's sensually massaged Vienna Philharmonic recording. But no. As he prises open Ligeti's mulched-up woodwind micropolyphony, giving us access all areas to his fervidly criss-crossing lines, time feels curiously suspended, the high-speed urgency of the music hurtling forwards slowly and unobtrusively.

Lintu is taking his time. This *Lontano* clocks in at 15'47" against Nott's 11'35" and Abbado's 12'44", the slower tempo a shrewd interpretative move that allows for detail and distance. True enough, adapting to this slow-paced, tactical distancing from the surface of Ligeti's material requires a leap of faith. But when the rate of harmonic change starts to dramatically hot up, at around 8'40", and Lintu unexpectedly drops us as though from a terrifying height directly inside the scorched-earth roasting magma of Ligeti's orchestra, that faith is royally rewarded.

Atmosphères (1961) and *San Francisco Polyphony* (1974) – the two orchestral pieces Ligeti composed either side of *Lontano* (1967) – don't undergo quite such radical surgery. *San Francisco Polyphony*'s over-excited, hovering-over-a-cliff-edge cartoon music is meticulously plotted and again benefits from a broader than usual tempo, while Lintu's *Atmosphères* is

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staunchly hard-bitten and granular. Benjamin Schmid turns out to be a milder-mannered soloist in the Violin Concerto than the punky Patricia Kopatchinskaja but his slightly demure personality balances well against Lintu's highly personal Ligeti. And this I like. Ligeti's music – don't even get me started on those damned piano Etudes – is too often reduced these days to the status of modernist lollipops. But Lintu finds something fresh by reconnecting with its radical core. ---
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