Szymanowski & Britten - Violin Concertos (Zimmermann) [2009]



Karol Szymanowski - Violin Concerto No. 1, Op. 35 *1 Vivace Assai 6:00 2 Tempo Comodo - Andantino 5:47 3 Vivace Scherzando 1:24 4 Poco Meno - Allegretto 6:40 5 Vivace (Tempo I) 5:54* Karol Szymanowski - Violin Concerto No. 2, Op. 61
6 Moderato - Molto Tranquillo 5:43 7 Andantino Sostenuto 6:05 8 Allegramente, Molto Energico 3:49 9 Andantino, Molto Tranquillo 5:18
Frank Peter Zimmermann - violin Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra Antoni Wit - conductor
Benjamin Britten - Violin Concerto D Minor, Op. 15
10 Moderato Con Moto 8:48 11 Vivace - Largamente 8:06 12 Passacaglia 13:00
Frank Peter Zimmermann - violin Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra Manfred Honeck - conductor

Eastern exoticism, French impressionism and perfumed lyricism: Polish composer Karol Szymanowski in war-torn Europe in 1916 providing ecstasy without the agony in what he called “a new style and new type of expression for the violin”.

There’s a post-Wagnerian romantic weight, blended with Scriabin’s unbridled sensuality, and a Ravel-ian lushness and refinement of orchestration, and it takes special soloist to soar with the effortless virtuosity Szymanowski demands. Frank Peter Zimmerman is just that, as anyone who heard him at the 2006 Proms in the First Concerto with Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic will know. And while that orchestra’s luxurious sophistication can’t quite be matched by the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra and Antoni Wit, this is an experienced set of Szymanowskians, and it shows in the assurance with which they handle the free-flowing tempos, and the Second Concerto’s more complex textures and Polish folk influences.

If I still have a slight preference for Thomas Zehetmair’s EMI recording with Rattle and the

CBSO, for its special sense of freedom and assurance, you might be wondering why you should bother with this new one at all. Well, these are still some of the finest Szymanowski Concerto performances committed to disc, and if you don't buy it you don't get to hear Zimmermann in an imperious account of Benjamin Britten's Violin Concerto. It's from 1939, and tougher in its way than Szymanowski's 2nd, which was written six years earlier; the opening timpani solo nods in the direction of two great violin concertos. Not just the start of the Beethoven, but also the bare open strings of Alban Berg, whose posthumous premiere Britten had heard in Barcelona in 1936.

Zimmermann's sweetness of tone and intense, unselfish musicality pay dividends in Britten, and the orchestral score snaps into focus through the playing of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Manfred Honeck – just listen to their muscular grip on the scherzo second movement, before Britten's cadenza propels us into one of the most unforgettable accounts of the final Passacaglia I've ever heard. Impeccably recorded, too – the Britten's not just a generous coupling, it really is the icing on the cake. --- Andrew McGregor, bbc.co.uk

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