

Janine Jansen: Beethoven & Britten - Violin Concertos (2009)

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Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827) Violin Concerto In D Major, Op. 61 Ré Majeur D-Dur (40:41) 1 *I - Allegro Ma Non Troppo* 22:56 2 *II - Larghetto* - 8:20 3 *III - Rondo: Allegro* 9:25
Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976) Violin Concerto, Op. 15 (32:35)
4 *I - Moderato Con Moto* 9:31 5 *II - Vivace - Cadenza* - 8:35 6 *III - Passacaglia: Andante Lento* 14:29
+ Antonio Vivaldi Violin Concerto in D, R.234 L'inquietudine
7 *III. Allegro*
Janine Jansen - violin Die Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen (tracks: 1 to 3) London Symphony Orchestra (tracks: 4 to 6) Paavo Järvi - conductor

Coupling Beethoven's and Britten's violin concertos was a brilliant idea; both start with timpani tattoos, but the former is much better known, and pairing them together will expose at least some listeners to music they might not ordinarily hear. Taken on their own merits, both violinist Janine Jansen and Die Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen are superb, but bringing them together in the Beethoven concerto was a colossal mistake, for the simple reason that the Dutch violinist and the German orchestra are not playing in remotely the same style. Jansen is a modern violinist who makes tasteful use of the tools of violin playing developed in the 200 years since the concerto was written -- vibrato, glissando, and other tone-enhancing techniques -- while the Bremen musicians eschew nearly all that for the purer style of the composer's own time, albeit on modern instruments. Though individually both Jansen and the Bremen musicians are excellent players, the disjuncture between the styles of the two is unnerving, to say the least. Jansen's technique is fully formed and flashy, while her interpretation is big-boned but lyrical. Led by Paavo Järvi, the orchestra's playing is as tight, sweet, and strong as it is in its series of Beethoven's symphonies. No such problems afflict the Britten concerto since the London Symphony Orchestra is on hand, and the combination is a performance as musical and moving as it is cogent and cohesive. Decca's sound is clear, clean, and transparent, but oddly lacking in depth, warmth, and richness. ---James Leonard, AllMusic Review

This unusual coupling works surprisingly well, God only knows why. Perhaps the Britten's neo-classical (or Baroque) leanings and formal freedom sit well next to Beethoven's echt-Classical language, but whatever the reason the performances of both works are extremely fine. Paavo Järvi's expertise in Beethoven with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen is by now well-known, and in Janine Jansen he has a soloist who matches him for vibrancy and freshness. There's no pseudo-profundity here; just excellent playing in the outer movements, an emotionally affecting Larghetto, and a technically confident cadenza.

The Britten is just as fine. Obviously the London Symphony Orchestra knows this magnificent and still shockingly neglected work as well as anyone. Its quiet ending is probably the deal-breaker for most soloists (or concert promoters), but the work's bittersweet lyricism and formal imaginativeness (the movement sequence is moderato, vivace, cadenza, and passacaglia) qualify it as a masterpiece that Jansen clearly relishes. Only a slight thinness of tone under pressure lets us know that Jansen is not quite as fine as the very best of the competition (here or in the Beethoven), but as a practical matter nothing precludes a firm recommendation if the coupling interests you. ---David Hurwitz, classicstoday.com

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