



Wilhelm Kempff

Beethoven Piano Concertos Volume 1



"Kempff strides with Haydnesque gallantry in the First, his brio both bracing and affectionate. The warmth and delicacy of his slow movement is both natural and unaffected, whilst the energy and dynamism of the finale are always controlled by his appropriate touch. The Second Concerto is stylish and gracious, its slow movement emerging beautifully cushioned and relaxed, lyricism fusing with delicacy. Rhythmic pointing informs the finale – that and a puckish, smiling wit, insouciant and alive."

Jonathan Woolf, *MusicWeb International*, 2006

Wilhelm Kempff (1895-1991) is often regarded as being in his absolute prime in the 1950s, just as the era of true high fidelity recordings was taking off. In the earlier years of the decade he recorded both the full Beethoven Sonatas and Concertos for Deutsche Grammophon. These well-received recordings were, however, made at the tail-end of the mono era, and the very beginning of the days of tape recording - within a very short time the technology of recording would advance considerably and stereo would quickly become the norm, especially for classical music recordings. This led to Kempff revisiting both of his major Beethoven cycles in the 1960s again for DGG but this time in stereo, and the relegation of his earlier recordings to the archives, if only for a short time.

Certainly the earlier recordings weren't badly made. A little reverberant for their era, perhaps, and with a sound quality that even by 1957, just four years after the recordings were made, was drawing criticisms in *The Gramophone*: "it is not in any case quite D.G.G.'s best quality, with a resonance that does not sound natural to my ears, and rather tinny sounds at the top of the keyboard". Nearly fifty years later, reviewing DGGs CD reissue in 2006, Jonathan Woolf was to comment: "There is tape hiss, residual but evident. But to compensate the sound is very much forward, very square-on, and this refers as much to things such as the trenchant wind chording as it does to the solo spectrum. It's certainly not a warm sound exactly, there's nothing enveloping or cozy about it; in fact in places it's more than a touch brittle. There are moments when the strings suffer from an endemic swimmy-ness as well which leads to a lack of real focus and bloom."

By returning to these recordings, using the very latest audio restoration technology and Ambient Stereo XR remastering techniques, I hope to overcome as many of the shortcomings as possible of these wonderful recordings. I hope the listener will find a warmer, richer and more engaging sound than in previous issues, allowing a closer rapport with performer and music. Tape hiss has been further relegated to the background, and where there was brittleness or "tinny sounds" there is depth, clarity and space.

Andrew Rose



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BEETHOVEN PIANO CONCERTOS VOL. 1 - NOS. 1 & 2
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beethoven piano concertos volume 1

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BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No. 1 in C major, Op. 15

1. 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (15:06)
2. 2nd mvt. - Largo (12:31)
3. 3rd mvt. - Rondo. Allegro (9:50)

BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat major, Op. 19

4. 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (13:20)
5. 2nd mvt. - Adagio (9:50)
6. 3rd mvt. - Rondo. Molto allegro (6:43)

Wilhelm Kempff, piano

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by Paul van Kempen

XR Remastered by **Andrew Rose**
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Wilhelm Kempff
Cadenzas by Wilhelm Kempff
DGG studio recordings, May 1953

Total duration: 67:20

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