



Wilhelm Kempff

Beethoven Piano Concertos Volume 2



"For many classical enthusiasts, Wilhelm Kempff is synonymous with Beethoven. His complete 1960s sets of the piano concertos and piano sonatas, both on Deutsche Grammophon, have been high on the list of recommended recordings for over half a century. Kempff was born in 1895, so his stereo recordings were made when he was nearly 70. Ten years earlier he set down sets of both in mono which some regard more highly.

The Complete Sonatas have been re-mastered by Andrew Rose of Pristine and are available, either in four Volumes or complete on 8 CDs, at a discount, on PABX033 which I'll be reviewing shortly. Wilhelm Kempff's stereo set was with Ferdinand Leitner, also with the Berlin Philharmonic. When it was released in a DG Galleria triple CD box in 1988, it was one of the first sets of complete Beethoven Piano Concertos I bought. However, Richard Osborne reviewing the discs in "The Gramophone" alluded to the mono set, re-released on LPs, in 1979, and suggested that it was in some way more even more remarkable. Jonathan Woolf in his review of the reissue in 2006 of the complete set (on Deutsche Grammophon DG 476 5299), which I eagerly purchased, wondered whether the Berlin mono recordings could intrigue, excite and move him as much as the later traversal. Jonathan's answer was yes, yes and yes. It was therefore with considerable anticipation that I started listening to the first disc with the two earlier Concertos, No.2 is, in fact, earlier but published afterwards. The simple answer is these patrician accounts sound splendid in their new incarnation and belie their nearly seventy years...

...If there are any sceptics who still don't value this work they only have to listen to this sophisticated but appropriately classical interpretation with empathetic accompaniment from Van Kempen and the Berlin Philharmonic. The years simply roll away with this fresh restoration. It's worth recalling that Van Kempen left behind cherishable recordings of three Beethoven Symphonies reissued by Eloquence both in a double set and in a box set (questionable, because of their provenance) in war-time performances of 2 and 5 on Pristine both which I would love to hear.

The first movement of No. 2 here has the conversational style that Beethoven was to use in a different context, the opening movement of String Quartet Op.18 No.2. However, what tenderness is heard after more original cadenzas to end a transcendent movement. It's hard when listening to this expressive romance, so delicately crafted, that there could be any other interpretation. As in the slow movement of No. 1, Kempff perambulates skittishly whilst the orchestra play a truly breath-taking main theme. Time is taken wisely but there's never a sign of indulgence. Jonathan described the finale as puckish, insouciant and alive. That final point is what I take most from hearing it now. There's no feeling of being studio-bound. This is fresh and spontaneous. If you need a tonic in the current difficult times then this will certainly have a positive effect.

These two fine performances are now in sound that gives the listener sheer joy and you should be ready to marvel at such musicianship. My wife hearing some of it was amazed that it comes from 1953. We owe a huge debt to Andrew Rose for giving us these jewels. These recordings were always special but now can be appreciated without making allowances. It only remains to say, that I'm looking forward to hearing the remaining three concertos and listening to the contemporary recordings of the sonatas."

David R Dunsmore, *MusicWeb International*, 2021 (excerpts) - Review of Volume One (PASC623)



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BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37

1. 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio (15:58)
2. 2nd mvt. - Largo (9:56)
3. 3rd mvt. - Rondo. Allegro - Presto (9:48)

BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58

4. 1st mvt. - Allegro moderato (17:07)
5. 2nd mvt. - Andante con moto (5:18)
6. 3rd mvt. - Rondo. Vivace (10:52)

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, Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin, May 1953

Total duration: 68:59

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