

MOZART Piano Concertos: Nos. 5–6; 8–9; 11–27; Concerto for 2 Keyboards in E \flat . Concerto for 3 Keyboards in F. Rondos: in A; in D. Harpsichord Concertos: in F; in B \flat ; in D; in G; in D; in G; in E \flat • Viviana Sofronitzki (fp, hp); Linda Nicholson (fp); Mario Aschauer (fp); Tadeusz Karolak, cond; Musicae Antiquae Collegium Varsoviense (period instruments) • PRO MUSICA CAMERATA 4151 (11 CDs: 722:15)

Some decades ago, I read a review of the complete Mozart piano concertos played by Géza Anda that made the point that there is something uniquely satisfying and intellectually stimulating about listening to the works under the hands of a single pianist and with the same orchestra. I've thought of the wisdom of that comment repeatedly in the ensuing years, and not only when Mozart was in question. I remember the growing power of Ashkenazy's Beethoven when I listened to all the sonatas in order. Now I have listened to all the piano works listed above, beautifully played on period instruments by Viviana Sofronitzki, daughter of the more famous Vladimir, and I experienced a similar effect. The pieces are played on fortepiano (and harpsichord) and with a small orchestra, but this is not small-scale playing. Nor is it perfect. The horns sound a little awkward in the first movement of No. 19, and the finale of No. 14 seems oddly weighty. There are small faults, in other words, in a set of magnificent music. Sofronitzki plays forcefully; each note sounds precise. At times we hear the two hands in energetic conversation in places where the left hand would be submerged in the typical modern piano performance. At the same time, she makes the melody count by leaning into a note, then backing off, by judicious emphasis. Though this is not a sentimentalist's Mozart, I am listening to crisp playing of the slow movement of the early Concerto in B \flat , K 238, and marveling at Sofronitzky's lyricism. The movement that follows involves the horns and for a few seconds the ensemble sounds muddled. But then the piano emerges and all is right again. Usually the playing is sprightly, touching, elegant, everything a Mozart recording should be.

There have been other period-instrument versions of these pieces, including Jos van Immerseel's complete set. This is the equal to those by Immerseel I have heard. Among modern instrument recordings, we still have Perahia's complete collection, in which he seems at times with his delicacy to be imitating some idea of a fortepiano. Perhaps it should not be surprising that a pianist lightening up to imitate an early instrument is less powerful than a fortepianist letting it all hang out on her smaller-toned keyboard. **Michael Ullman**

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AllMusic Review by James Leonard - 4 1/2*/5*

These are truly first-rank performances of what were once invariably called **Mozart's** Piano Concertos but are now often called his Fortepiano Concertos or, in Polish, his Koncerty Fortepianowe. The Polish nomenclature is apt here since all the performers are Polish: soloist **Viviana Sofronitzki**, orchestra **Musicae Antiquae Colegium Varsoviense**, and musical director **Tadeusz Karolak**. As a fortepianist, **Sofronitzki** has a supple technique, a subtle tone, a smooth delivery, and a marvelous gift for legato phrasing even on the supremely non-legato fortepiano. The **Musicae Antiquae Colegium Varsoviense** is a small orchestra playing period instruments with effortless skill and pronounced character. The woodwinds are especially noteworthy, particularly in the E flat major Concerto, K. 482, where they are practically full partners with **Sofronitzki**. **Karolak** contributions are two-fold. First, he carefully shapes the orchestra's performance, and second, he expertly melds their performance to the soloists to create a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Captured in clear but resonant sound, these performances deserve to be heard by anyone who enjoys **Mozart's** Fortepiano Concertos. It should be added that **Mozart's** seven harpsichord concertos are also included here, and that **Sofronitzki** acquits herself as admirably on that instrument as on the fortepiano.

Gramophone Review - Mozart Complete Fortepiano Concertos

Mozart's piano concertos in inconsistent performances on period instruments

Author: Jed Distler

Recorded in 2004-06, this Mozart piano concerto cycle first appeared on the small Pro Musica Camerata label. In the main, fortepianist Viviana Sofronitsky (stepdaughter of the legendary Russian pianist Vladimir), conductor Tadeusz Karolak and the Musica Antiqua Collegium Varsoviense offer less consistent satisfaction in comparison with complete period instrument sets from Bilson/Gardiner/English Baroque Soloists (DG) and Immerseel/Anima Eterna Orchestra (Channel Classics). The strings prove alarmingly uneven: scrawny-toned in K503's Rondo, hideously ill-tuned in K595's first movement, yet firmly focused in the sparsely scored K413, 414 and 415 group and the youthful first four concertos, where Sofronitsky's nimble harpsichord mastery oozes sparkle and wit. However,

her fortepiano artistry yields mixed results. Her heavy-handed articulation, pounded out Alberti basses and crude down-beat accents rob certain Rondo movements of their prerequisite animation and lilt, such as those in K271, 450, 459, 482 and 595. And when you juxtapose her brusque, dynamically unvaried treatment of the latter's *Larghetto* with Bilson's graceful lyricism, her faster basic tempo actually seems slower.

Orchestrally speaking, little sense of long line and amorphous melody/accompaniment textures yield rudderless slow movements in K271 and K456 while, at the same time, the rich contrapuntal writing in the *Adagio* of K488 could hardly be more vibrant and robust; the first bassoonist really shines here and in the *Allegro assai*'s rapid solo licks. Strange how percussively the busy passagework in the outer movements of the E flat Double Concerto (K365) registers, whereas the more difficult-to-balance Triple Concerto (K242) benefits from superior microphone placement. Could the latter hold true for the vigorous, incisive K451 performance, as well as the D minor K466 and D major K537, where Sofronitsky's range of nuance and expression noticeably opens up? She provides simple descriptive notes for the works on each individual disc, while an essay by Jan Weber provides a good general overview of Mozart's achievements in the genre. In short, this cycle's best performances are well worth hearing; but, if you want a period-instrument Mozart concerto cycle, the Bilson/Gardiner edition remains first choice for superior artistic finesse and more judiciously balanced engineering.

MusicWeb Review - Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791)

The Complete Fortepiano Concertos

Viviana Sofronitsky (fortepiano and harpsichord)

Linda Nicholson (fortepiano: K242, K365)

Mario Aschauer (fortepiano: K242)

Musica Antiqua Collegium Varsoviense/Tadeusz Karolak

rec. Warsaw, December 2004-March 2006, location not given.

ETCETERA KTC 1424 [11 CDs: 52:15 + 73:20 + 68:28 + 77:21 + 69:25 + 71:59 + 75:31 + 73:56 + 61:49 + 63:56 + 34:15]

CD 1 [52:15]

Piano concerto No.9 in E flat major "Jeunehomme", KV.271 (1776) [31:34]

Piano concerto No.14 in E flat major, KV.449 (1784) [20:39]

CD 2 [73:20]

Piano concerto No.11 in F major, KV.413 (1782/3) [22:02]

Piano concerto No.15 in B flat major, KV.450 (1784) [23:38]

Piano concerto No.19 in F major, KV.459 (1784) [27:12]

CD 3 [68:28]

Piano concerto No.25 in C major, KV.503 (1786) [29:09]
 Piano concerto D major No. 26 "Coronation", KV.537 (1786) [30:14]
 Rondo A major, KV.386 (1782) [8:45]
 CD 4 [77:21]
 Piano concerto No.12 in A major, KV.414 (1782) [24:41]
 Piano concerto No.13 in C major, KV.415 (1782/3) [26:49]
 Piano concerto No.21 in C major, KV.467 (1785) [25:39]
 CD 5 [69:25]
 Piano concerto No.5 in D major, KV.175 (1773) [21:46]
 Double concerto No.10 in E flat major, KV.365 (1779) [24:28]
 Triple concerto No.8 in F major, KV.242 (1776) [23:07]
 CD 6 [71:59]
 Piano concerto No.22 in E flat major, KV.482 (1785) [33:17]
 Piano concerto No.24 in C minor, KV.491 (1786) [28:09]
 Rondo D major, KV.382 (1782) [10:19]
 CD 7 [75:31]
 Piano concerto No.6 B major, KV.238 (1776) [19:46]
 Piano concerto No 20 in D minor, KV.466 (1785) [31:26]
 Piano concerto No.23 in A major, KV.488 (1786) [24:15]
 CD 8 [73:56]
 Piano concerto No.7 in C major, KV.246 (1776) [21:43]
 Piano concerto No.16 in D major, KV.451 (1784) [23:16]
 Piano concerto No.17 in G major, KV.453 (1784) [27:53]
 CD 9 [61:49]
 Piano concerto No.18 in B major, KV.456 (1784) [32:49]
 Piano concerto No.27 in B major, KV.595 (1791) [28:58]
 CD 10 [63:56]
 Harpsichord concerto No. 1 in F major, KV.37 (1767) [18:12]
 Harpsichord concerto No.2 in B major, KV.39 (1767) [16:48]
 Harpsichord concerto No.3 in D major, KV.40 (1767) [12:20]
 Harpsichord concerto No.4 in G major, KV.41 (1767) [13:29]
 CD 11 [34:15]
 Harpsichord concerto After J.C. Bach in D major, KV.107 Nr.1 (1765) [14:19]
 Harpsichord concerto After J.C. Bach in G major, KV.107 Nr.2 (1765) [10:21]
 Harpsichord concerto After J.C. Bach in E flat major, KV.107 Nr.3 (1765) [9:33]

Whichever versions of Mozart's piano concertos you may have, and there are many very beautiful recordings around, you owe it to yourself as a true fan to hear these works performed with a period orchestra, and the kind of keyboard instrument and sound which Mozart would have heard and worked with on a daily basis. I will be hanging onto my set with Murray Perahia and the English Chamber Orchestra on Sony Classics whatever anyone else comes up with, but with today's

instrument builders coming up with ever finer reproductions of early pianofortes the time is more than ripe for an exploration of the authentic 'sound' in these works. Having heard instrument maker Paul McNulty's fortepianos in other fine recordings, in particular those by Ronald Brautigam for the BIS label I was more than ready to have a good listen to this set from the Etcetera label. There's a little 'Licenced' mark at the bottom right of the box and indeed the re-release status of this set is evidenced on these pages with its Pro Musica Camerata label appearance reviewed by David R. Dunsmore.

I agree with his comments, and will come to the slightly 'short-changed' feel with some of the concertos later, but in general I've enjoyed this set immensely. The McNulty piano has a fine tone, different to a modern grand piano, but that hadn't been invented yet so I'm not going to be comparing with any of these versions. Listening is a pleasure, and there's no feel of academic dryness about either the soloist or the orchestra. What is true is that the balance has a realistic feel, which means that the piano is quite soft in relation to the orchestra – a realistic perspective which sees the instrument blend nicely with the ensemble at times. You don't need to strain to hear it, but neither is it rammed to the front of your speakers. This also means that the transverse flutes for instance are also relatively soft, adding a halo to the orchestral sound rather than kicking through. Concerti where the winds are important have some tremendous moments, such as the bassoon runs in the *Allegro assai* of *K 488*, but don't expect massive waves of sound from your loudspeakers – these are the voices of the 18th century, possessing a tender fragility as well as great inner strength.

Taken on their own terms these are all excellent performances, and I could go from concerto to concerto pointing out little points of magic until the cows came home. The feel of equal teamwork and strength from a fine specialist period orchestra and soloist comes through strongly, and those tender slow movements have an intimate chamber-music feel without being skinny or lacking in expressive weight. There are a few movements where the tempi might arguably have been a little swifter, but there is no point at which the music drags or becomes in any way leaden. The timpani might have been a bit crisper sounding, the sound full and well tuned but more of a 'thud' sound than from some period orchestras, but in any case the recordings are full-sounding and a joy from beginning to end.

There have been numerous recordings of Mozart's keyboard concertos on fortepiano, notably by Robert Levin and Malcolm Bilson. Of the 'complete' sets, that with Jos van Immerseel on Challenge Classics is one of the closest competitors, and though this only has the solo concertos comparison is of interest. Van Immerseel's Anima Eterna orchestra sounds a little bigger, but the Warsaw players are equally convincing, and a little closer sounding in relationship to the soloist. Taking a favourite movement such as the *Romance* from the

Concerto No.20 in D minor K 466 honours are about equal in the exquisite first section, Sofronitsky as warm and expressive as anyone, though with a tad extra distance closer to the orchestra and further from the microphone, the sustained lyrical line demands perhaps a little more in trust from the listener. Van Immerseel takes that stormy second section with a far greater sense of contrast however, and a faster and more dramatic tempo. Sofronitsky is convincing enough in her approach, but quite a few degrees less exciting; the operatic nature of the music flattened into layers of texture rather than moments of true emotional impact. That operatic character is very much a part of the image Van Immerseel creates in the opening *Allegro* as well, darkly brooding, the air crackling with suspense and anticipation. By comparison Sofronitsky is lighter and more airy, giving plenty of dynamic contrast, but taking a more horizontal view of those opening syncopations. I still like this, but it's a more gently pastoral feel than the ever-striving Van Immerseel. Those sequences at about 7:20 in this movement sound more like something being moved through in order to reach the recapitulation with Sofronitsky, where with Van Immerseel one can imagine Beethoven hearing it and sketching bits of the storm scene from his 'Pastoral' symphony in the carriage on the way home afterwards. Maybe, maybe not, but these gradations can make all the difference in such a crucial masterpiece.

These are the aspects of this set which account for that slightly 'short-changed' feel mentioned earlier. Exquisite in their own right, the bigger concerti do sometimes have the sense that a tad more drama, some more daring extremes might have been thrown into the mix. The *Concerto No.27 in B flat major K 595* is wonderful, but that lightness of touch takes a little of that startling quality away from, say, the opening *Allegro*. Perhaps it's a case of too much niceness and not enough grit, which is not so say that points are missed or that there is no sense of personality in the playing. It's more a question of 'hey, what was that?' rather than 'wow, he did *what?*' in the listening experience. Taking other great concertos into account, such as *K 503* and *K 537* and the sunnier side of Mozart is heard at its best here. It is perhaps the darker, more confrontationally painful side which is less easy to access in these performances. You can let any recording wash over you; it's just that Sofronitsky and her band give us an easier time in doing this than some others.

Where this collection has a distinct advantage is in its completeness. The early arrangements made by Mozart in 1767 and 1772 are played on the harpsichord, and have a crisp energy which is quite electrifying. The answer is also provided to the question, what do two or even three fortepianos sound like? Rollicking good fun is the answer in both the *Allegro* and *Rondo* of *K 365*, with plenty of playful interplay between the well-spaced soloists and a fine sense of rhythmic punch. The three soloists in *K 242* create some fascinating effects, like a giant single fortepiano when playing in unison, and with a music-box charm when moving in

Mozart's impeccable lines through each other's musical paths. The *Adagio* of this concerto is meltingly affecting, with its gliding muted strings and orchestral brushstrokes creating arcs of colour over the softly conversing fortepianos. There are individual disc recordings of these pieces which have their own special qualities, such as that with the Haydn Sinfonietta Wien and Ronald Brautigam *et al* on BIS-SACD-1618, but even with a more spectacular approach from all concerned I still find Sofronitsky's charm hard to beat. Take the little two note gesture which ends the first melodic phrase in the first movement of the triple concerto *K 242*. Sofronitsky and her team take this with a lighter touch on the second note, much as Murray Perahia/Radu Lupu do in their Sony recording. Brautigam and friends wallop this little musical corner as if shooting a clay pigeon out of the sky rather than allowing it to hang in the air like an echo, which is the approach I prefer.

To conclude, this is a very fine set of the complete Mozart *Piano Concertos* played on fortepiano and with a period instrument orchestra. You can indeed find thrills elsewhere, but Viviana Sofronitsky delivers on almost every level, with only a suggestion that a little more intensity and drama might have been thrown into the mix at times. All of the dynamic contrast and weight is here; in proportion, and reflecting the smaller sound of the solo fortepiano and the nicely rounded sonorities of the period orchestral winds. This is different to the modern sound, and should be seen as an alternative or a companion to other favourite recordings. Becoming used to the fortepiano in this context takes little effort, especially with the fine instruments made by Paul McNulty, which for me are another good reason for liking the set. This fortepiano has plenty of life to the sound, and also comes out with a muffled 'soft pedal' effect on occasion which is the equivalent of a mute on a violin and quite special. You may not ultimately prefer it to your best modern boxed collection, but if you love Mozart and fancy a change this is quite the ticket – and I fancy little Mozart would have been quite happy with it as well.

Dominy Clements