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Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756 - 1791)

Piano Sonatas - Volume 4

Sonata in B-flat major, K. 281

Sonata in G major, K. 283

Sonata in B-flat major, K. 333

Sonata in D major, K. 576

William Youn (piano)

rec. Studio 2, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Munich, April/May 2016

OEHMS CLASSICS OC1856 [79:10]

The current disc represents Oehms Classics' continuing project recording Mozart's piano sonatas with the Korean pianist William Youn. Previously, Youn enjoyed a span of successes in three recordings of Mozart's piano sonatas with the same record label. There is a sense that the young pianist is fast establishing himself as a bright Mozartian, and these recordings have been noted for their lyrical poeticism.

In the current fourth volume of the series, two of Mozart's most virtuosic sonatas, the B-flat major (K. 281) and D major (K. 576) sonatas, frame the congenial G major (K. 283) and the ambitious B-flat major (K. 333) sonatas. By presenting the selected works in chronological order, the trajectory of Mozart's musical development is captured well.

Composed in his late teens, youthful vitality is the key word for the B-flat major (K. 281) sonata. Characteristically, Youn's playing suggests an artist who is fully enjoying the occasion, without overheating yet never sparing in control. In the G major (K. 283) sonata, too, Youn's approach befits the lightheartedly melodic nature of the work.

The next two works represent the longest and the last of Mozart's piano sonatas, respectively. While scale in itself is in no ways a determinant of inherent musical qualities, increase of duration tends to typify gravitas of ambition and vastness of conception. The B-flat major (K. 333) sonata certainly demonstrates this point; compared to the two previously presented 'pretty' works, a leap of profundity is clearly evident. Composed in 1783, and at a similar time to the creation of the Linz symphony, this sonata presents a musical texture bearing a wealth of counterpoint, adventurous harmonic progression and emotional complexity characteristic of the maturing composer. On the other hand, the D major (K. 576) sonata was originally written as part of what is known as a series of "easy piano sonatas", written for the Emperor Joseph II's daughter Friederike. For all its intended charm, however, the final score of this work betrays its initial intentions, as in fact Mozart went on to create one of the most technically challenging works

of his piano sonatas through this work.

In these two mature works, Youn's playing continues to enchant. The subtle and inspired playing paints the architecture of the works without any hint of self-indulgence. I would like to concentrate on the B-flat major (K. 333) sonata in particular, as I was impressed with this work the most. In the first movement, where I have heard many emphasizing the second theme by proudly announcing its entrance, Youn tastefully blends the theme with its preceding context. Likewise, while the likes of Pires create inter-movement contrasts by slowing down the tempo significantly for the second movement *Andante Cantabile* compared to the athletic first movement, Youn, as if to demonstrate continuity, avoids such obvious transformation. As one might thus expect, the third and last movement feels as if it is cut from the same cloth as the preceding movements.

Similar traits reside in the *D major* (K. 576) sonata, too. On the outside, Youn's penchant for the avoidance of dramatically conceived contrasts and flexibility of tempo – as are felt amply in the cases of Barenboim's or Arrau's accounts – may give an impression of stodgy objectivism. Yet Youn's aesthetics springs from a different well altogether. Here we have a world of natural finesse and poise. Themes blossom out gently, effortlessly linking to each other. In the Allegros, the music acquires an ebullience of momentous flow. In more relaxed sections, Youn rarely fails to excavate a sense of elegant contemplation in the score. Each note trickles and skips around radiantly and is projected with round care – scintillating pearls are carefully swept by a vision so personal and warm. I am sure the sound engineering has played a significant role here – the presence to the piano is ideally felt throughout the pieces.

If I ever miss Eschenbach's commanding recordings from the 60s, it is due to my thirst for clearly accented playing. I also found myself thinking of Schiff's more forward paced recordings with Decca. Yet Youn's performances with their thoughtful and gentle touch of style are far from being turgid, and in fact are ones I will constantly reach for. The sheer artistic integrity gives birth to a unique form of covert intensity – indeed, 'poetic' may be the best word to describe this phenomenon.

If my memory has not mislead me, Youn is set to release the final statement of Mozart's piano sonatas with Oehms Classics. Assuming the presence of an artistry similar to that demonstrated in the current disc, the completed set will unquestionable stand out as an enduring cycle attracting both newcomers and veterans of Mozart's piano sonata alike.

Young-Jin Hur

MOZART Piano Sonatas: No. 3, K 281; No. 5, K. 283; No. 13, K 333; No. 18, K 576 • William Youn (pn) • OEHMS 1856 (79:10) - Volume 4

In the fourth volume of his ongoing cycle of Mozart's piano sonatas, William Youn's traditional approach comes as a relief after my recent encounter with the "interventionist" Mozart sonatas of Fazil Say. Youn's tasteful interpretations have shapely phrasing, attractive singing sound, and much unashamed legato, along with a variety of articulations that aren't eccentrically exaggerated. He communicates a sense of pleasure in playing the music. He doesn't attempt to transform his modern Steinway—well recorded by Oehms—into an earlier instrument, and doesn't try to invest these charming pieces with more weight and importance than they possess. (Of the four sonatas here, Mozart's contrapuntal mastery in K 576, a work of deeper expression, sets it apart from the others.) Toward the end of his career, Vladimir Horowitz rather unexpectedly recorded three Mozart sonatas, two of which, K 281 and K 333, Youn plays here. In fresh, stylish performances, Horowitz applied the tricks of his trade as only he could, highlighting an unexpected phrasing here, a daring absence (or unexpected preponderance) of pedal there, exaggeratedly crisp "Classical" articulations here, eloquently "Romantic" legato there. It's a valid approach from a unique artist, but listeners seeking the kind of Mozart playing that one's old piano teacher—who might have never heard a fortepiano, or even seen *Amadeus*—would endorse, will do better with Youn, who achieves a Murray Perahia-like sense of letting the music speak for itself. My only criticism concerns ornaments in repeated sections. Youn ventures some, but they're so few and far between that they sound like token efforts. **Paul Orgel**

Mozart's Piano Sonatas, Vol. 5 – an 'enthalling' performance by William Youn - BBC Magazine

Our rating: 4.0 out of 5 stars

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Mozart Piano Sonatas, Vol. 5: Nos 6, 7 & 14; Fantasia in C minor
William Youn (piano) *Oehms Classics OC 1857*

An irresistible account of the [Sonata](#) in D, K284 opens this exceptionally engaging and warmly recorded [Mozart](#) recital. Korean [pianist](#) William Youn, performing on a modern instrument, brings a sparkling array of colours to the quasi-orchestral textures of the opening *Allegro*, brilliant flourishes in the treble balanced by a firm and sonorous foundation in the bass. The rest of the work is equally enthalling – a charming and elegant Rondeau en Polonaise followed by an extended Finale where Youn works hard to maximise contrast and character in each of the 12 variations. In comparison to K284, the Sonata in C, K309 is a much less extrovert work. Youn

perfectly encapsulates its charming mixture of playfulness and humour in the outer movements, and produces some wonderfully expressive cantabile playing in the central *Andante un poco adagio*.

With the C minor Fantasy, K475 and Sonata in C minor, K457, we move into rather different musical territory. Both works may appear powerful precursors of Beethoven's *Sturm und Drang* style, yet Youn steadfastly resists the temptation to over-dramatise the musical argument with heavy articulation and over-use of the sustaining pedal. At the same time, there are moments in the Fantasy where Youn could perhaps have allowed himself to be a bit more spontaneous in responding to the improvisatory nature of Mozart's invention. However, I have no such qualms about the performance of the Sonata. The outer movements are delivered with energy and passion, and there's some lovely tender playing in the *Adagio*. Altogether, a fine conclusion to an impressive complete cycle.

IONARTS - Jens - put's Youn & Zacharias as TOP Choices!

08/22/2018: William Youn's cycle has since been finished with volume 5 and already released in boxed form, too. It shoots to the top of the recommendation list, as expected. If you want to sample one volume only, make it **Volume 4**. Also, having finally listened to it, Christian Zacharias gets an "ionarts' choice" recommendation - but only in one of the original releases. One hopes that if it should ever be re-released, the people at Warner might undo the damage of ordering the sonatas by key, which makes for tedious listening, even with a cycle played with such a light and imaginary touch as Zacharias'.

<https://ionarts.blogspot.com/2016/02/a-survey-of-mozart-piano-sonata-cycles.html>