

## Michael Endres Reviews

**MOZART Piano Sonatas: in F, K 280; in F, K 332; in c, K 457; in C, K 545; in D, K 576 • Michael Endres (pn) • OEHMS 563 (73:08)**

For this single CD sampler, Michael Endres chooses five of his personal favorite sonatas taken from his five-disc set of Mozart's 18 sonatas for solo piano. The works range in dates from 1775 to 1789, K 280 to K 576, thus giving us an abbreviated travelogue, as it were, through the composer's contributions to the genre from beginning to end.

Having listened to the disc three times now, and having compared it to recordings of these works I have by other pianists, I would make the following unorthodox suggestion: skip this teaser and spring for the whole set. Oehms is a midpriced label, and the five-CD set works out to approximately \$11 per disc. Besides, once you hear the come-on, you're going to want the rest of it anyway.

Of Bavarian birth, Michael Endres (b. 1961) has recorded the complete sonatas and all 400 German dances, Ländler, waltzes, and ecossaises of Schubert, as well as the complete piano works of Ravel, and the complete sonatas of Arnold Bax. His affinity for Mozart, however, strikes me as something special. These are non-demonstrative, ruminative readings that mull over Mozart's scores, particularly the slow movements, as if they were quiet, timeless reveries that put me in mind of the kind of rapt stillness Beethoven achieves in the slow movement of his violin concerto. Endres has all the finger dexterity and technique required to toss these pieces off with bravado if he wanted to, but that's not what he's about. Even in the fast outer movements, he holds himself in reserve.

If you're familiar with Mitsuko Uchida's Mozart, you will find in Endres a somewhat kindred spirit, except that in comparing them, I hear in Endres a communicativeness that seems to go deeper to the core of Mozart's soul and that resonates for me on a deeper personal level. Uchida's beauty has always struck me as being more on the surface.

By no means is this the only way to play Mozart. I also have high regard for the complete set of sonatas played by Maria João Pires on DG, but hers is an entirely different view and approach, one that places emphasis on Mozart's more extroverted side and on the virtuosic elements of these works. Endres, however, shall occupy a place of high favor in my collection. Strongly recommended. **Jerry Dubins**

**This article originally appeared in Issue 30:5 (May/June 2007) of *Fanfare Magazine*.**

## **Mozart: Piano Sonatas/Endres - ClassicsToday**

Jed Distler Artistic Quality: **9** Sound Quality: **10**

The pianistic refinement and interpretive imagination Michael Endres brings to his Mozart sonata cycle easily ranks alongside leading modern-day contenders like Mitsuko Uchida, András Schiff, and Klara Wurtz. It would take longer to cite chapter and verse for each elegantly timed phrase, cleverly scaled dynamic game plan, freshly minted bass line, and surprising accent than to listen to all five CDs. Special moments include Endres' sharply etched, opera buffa approach to K. 279's finale, the headlong cohesion with which he corrals K. 284's lengthy variation movement, the impeccably executed treacherous jumps in K. 310's finale, his no-nonsense brisk tempo for K. 330's first movement (a kinder, gentler replica of Glenn Gould's 1970 recording), and the marvelous chamber-like equilibrium between both hands in K. 332 and K. 576.

Endres' overall excellence is enough to forgive occasional arch moments, such as his mooning over K. 280's main theme in the finale, or sudden diminuendos that draw attention to the pianist rather than demonstrate any melodic logic. On disc many pianists traditionally preface the C minor K. 457 sonata with the K. 475 Fantasia in the same key. Endres does not. The recordings, produced by WDR in 1998, are demonstration-quality all the way. [5/5/2005]

## **Mozart: Piano Sonatas (complete)**

**Our rating: 5.0 out of 5 star rating - BBC Magazine**

By **BBC Music Magazine**

Published: January 20, 2012 at 1:21 pm

COMPOSERS: Mozart LABELS: Arte Nova

WORKS: Piano Sonatas (complete) PERFORMER: Michael Endres (piano)

CATALOGUE NO: 74321 63639 2

Few people will have heard of Michael Endres, but he's a superior pianist. Artur Schnabel, who rarely let reality stand in the way of a memorable aphorism, famously described Mozart's piano sonatas as being 'too easy for beginners and too difficult for artists'. Neither, of course, is precisely true, but the point holds. Mozart's piano writing is so economical, so meticulously judged, so perfectly sufficient to his musical needs, that he leaves the performer nowhere to hide. Because the performer is so mercilessly exposed, and requires such rare sophistication of his interpreters, the truly first-class Mozart pianist is still a relatively rare bird, but the 'relatively' is important. A world that can boast at one and the same time such outstanding Mozartians as Barenboim, Brendel, Goode, Lupu, Perahia, Pires, Roll, Schiff, Uchida, Vásáry and Zacharias (to name only

some) can hardly call itself undernourished. And on the basis of this release, we must add Endres to the list. In his sense of proportion, elegance of phrasing, clarity of articulation and polished tone he need bow to no one. He is historically informed but not a fortepianist manqué, expressive but not overly 'Romantic' (though some might say of him, as was said of that outstanding Mozartian Walter Klien, that he plays Mozart 'as Chopin might have'; card-carrying purists may well question his pedalling and his rubatos), and he's keenly alert to the essentially operatic cast of Mozart's mind (the spirit of dialogue is ever-present but with no excess of characterisation). This set can be as warmly recommended as any comparable cycle in the catalogue. Jeremy Siepmann

## Daniel-Ben Pienaar Reviews

**MOZART Piano Sonatas** (complete) • Daniel-Ben Pienaar (pn) • AVIE AV 2209 (5 CDs: 289:00)

Mozart's 18 piano sonatas, ranging from the early *galant* works to the masterpieces of the middle and late 1780s, are a cornerstone of the repertoire. All of them are beautifully written for the keyboard and the best of them reflect the elegance, nuances, and perfect proportions of the Viennese Classical style. They move with ease from good humor to profundity and from flamboyant virtuosity to intense pathos. Fine complete recordings have been made by Arrau, Eschenbach, Haebler (twice), Horszowski, Larrocha, Klien, Kraus, Pires (twice), Schiff, Uchida, and Zacharias, to list my favorites; and by such fortepianists as Badura-Skoda (twice), Bilson, Brautigam, Lubimov, and Sémerjian.

Daniel-Ben Pienaar, a young South African pianist trained principally at London's Royal Academy of Music (where he now teaches), is the latest to join this elite company. We learn little about him from the booklet, which mentions that he has performed the major sonatas of Schubert and Mozart often in England, and that his other recordings include the complete keyboard works of Orlando Gibbons, Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* (Book 1), and the Chopin ballades. His recording presents the Mozart sonatas chronologically, which is how I will discuss them. It is, quite simply, one of the finest complete recordings I know.

CD 1 (K 279–283) contains works that may have been conceived for the harpsichord and which Mozart is thought to have written down after having performed them on his tours. Pienaar plays them with appropriate clarity and charm in the fast movements (notably the finales of K 281 and K 283) and with welcome pianistic warmth in the slow ones (especially those in K 280 and 282). His pedaling is usually spare, his articulation clean, and his dynamics nicely scaled down. The playing is musicianly and natural, never studied or precious.

CD 2 (K 284, 309–311) takes us into a bolder world, with operatic musical gestures and writing that is idiomatic for the developing piano of the time. Possibly Mozart's finest set of variations concludes the Sonata in D, K 284, and Pienaar

plays it with obvious love and attention to detail: subtle variations of touch, perfect judgment of *subito piano* effects, attention to melodic and harmonic direction, an avoidance of downbeat accents, and an easy projection of the more virtuosic moments as well as of the lovely *cantabile* of variation 11. The highlight of any survey should be the intensely dramatic Sonata in A Minor, K 310—and that's the case with the performance here. He projects a real sense of urgency in the dramatic opening movement and manages to get all the tricky balances and dynamics just right. The development is gripping and ongoing, and the arrival of the recapitulation is almost frightening in its inevitability. The slow movement moves naturally, every detail in place but not calling attention to itself, the middle section urgent without forcing, and the return to the main theme serene and consoling. The finale is not just fast but driving and full of inner life. This is surely one of the finest recordings of this work, to rank with Lipatti's and Kraus's. The other works on this disc are more decorous and straightforward, but they get the same amount of musical attention—and a highlight is the finale of K 311, which is infectiously joyous, almost giddy.

CD 3 (K 330–333) contains works that every Mozartean loves, although I don't think that they are quite top-drawer. I like the way the tempos of the slow movements ebb and flow, as an aria might under a great conductor. The momentary lapses into a minor key (e.g., K 330) are made especially touching by their utterly simple delivery. The lilting tempo of the opening theme of K 331 is perfect, and the successive variations have character without exaggeration of touch, dynamics, or tempo. I don't agree with the quasi-detached left-hand accompaniment in the opening of the slow movement K 332 (Mozart's slurs are authentic)—a small point, considering the lovely projection of the melody above it. The finale of this sonata is as fast, clear, and witty as one could want. K 333 is a joy from beginning to end, not even the fastest notes thrown away, the melodies always flowing naturally "like oil" (as they said of Mozart's own playing).

CD 4 (K 475/457, 533/494) takes us higher still, including the stormy Sonata in C Minor K 457, preceded by the Fantasy in the same key that was published with it, possibly meant as a kind of prelude. Pienaar paces the Fantasy well, playing with full-bodied pianism, building to exciting climaxes in the two *allegro* sections, and keeping the slower sections flowing. There is some occasional slight non-synchronization of the hands, but this doesn't become bothersome. The first movement of the sonata follows without pause and is played in one long breath, with Beethovenian sonorities and meaningful rests. The finale is fast and with plenty of bite. Throughout the brilliant first movement of K 533 there is wonderful clarity and independence of the hands. The music-making is as exhilarating here as it is delightfully naive-sounding in the finale (K 494).

CD 5 (K 545, 570, 576) begins with the familiar Sonata in C, a work studied by every aspiring young pianist. The notes are relatively few here and in the wonderful K 570, and Pienaar plays both of them with disarming simplicity and obvious affection. I like his tempos for the slow movements, which flow naturally and never bog down. The set concludes with K 576, one of the most pianistically

challenging in the series. Pienaar plays it with great clarity and lightness, characterizing each theme duly but without exaggeration and responding to the particular chromaticism of this late music in very subtle ways. His light-fingered sprint through the finale sounds effortless and leaves a broad smile on the listener's face.

In short, Daniel-Ben Pienaar has given us a completely satisfying account of this music, and there is not a weak moment in the lot. Not only does he play the piano brilliantly, but he also plays with a full appreciation of the operatic qualities of the music and with the mercurial changes of mood and touch. We hear solos, dialogues, trios, and choruses, and never just the note-spinning of lesser Mozarteans. I place this complete recording on the level of the ones by Uchida and Pires, and in some individual sonatas I would say it is even higher. An added bonus is his extensive essay in the booklet, full of insight and a model of its kind. The recorded sound is excellent, close but not dry. I recommend this set without reservation. **Charles Timbrell**

**This article originally appeared in Issue 34:5 (May/June 2011) of *Fanfare* Magazine.**

### **Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756-1791) - MusicWeb Review**

#### **The Piano Sonatas**

see end of review for listing

Daniel-Ben Pienaar (piano)

rec. Dukes Hall, Royal Academy of Music, London, August 2008 and September 2009. DDD

**AVIE AV2209** [5 CDs: 288:17]

As professor at the Royal Academy of Music, it is logical that South African-born Daniel-Ben Pienaar's cycle of Mozart's piano sonatas should have been recorded in The Duke's Hall, the main concert hall of that noble institute. Hearing this acoustic again has me dripping with nostalgia. The place has been renovated since I was a student there in the 1980s, but I have the hall's chameleon acoustic written into my musical reference DNA and hearing this has me wondering why it doesn't appear more often as a professional recording venue. By no means too vast to swamp a solo recital or chamber music concert in excessive resonance, it also seemed large-scale enough to house vast forces, and I remember radio broadcasts from the time we performed some of Messiaen's most monumental works sounding as good as from any similarly sized concert hall. Perhaps they've solved the traffic noise problem from Marylebone Road, or isolated the place from vibrations coming from passing trains on the Bakerloo underground line, or perhaps these Mozart recordings were indeed lonely nocturnal sessions. Either way, the recordings sound very good indeed, made under the benign bronze gaze of Sir Henry Wood's bust, present at all times except when casting his alloy aura

over the Proms concert season in the altogether different acoustic of the Albert Hall.

I've been living with Daniel-Ben Pienaar's Mozart for a while now, and have been enjoying it greatly. His approach is brisk and unsentimental, with an overall timing for the entire set of 4:48:18, which tells something of the story against my main reference, that of Mitsuko Uchida on Philips which comes in at 5:25:10. An observation - or lack of observation of repeats in the second section of movements will also play a role in these differences, so if this is something which bothers you then this may be a consideration. Pienaar's timings are more comparable with those of Ronald Brautigam on his BIS cycle played on a historical fortepiano, and even then he is swifter more often than not. This is not to say that his playing is brusque or insensitive, but taking perhaps the most famous of Mozart's piano sonata movements as an example, the opening *Allegro* of the *Sonata No. 16 K545 'Für Anfänger'*, he drives forward at a considerable pace, making the music more exciting than merely charming, introducing drama into the ornamented lines and the transitional modulations. Uchida keeps the music-box lightness of the piece more intact, beautifully handled, but with a less daring emotional range. Pienaar also gives the impression of 'speeding-up' just a little as the music progresses. This is a side-effect of a rubato which takes, and then delays the giving back of musical time. This can be heard in the second movement of the same sonata, the delicate *Andante*. The tempo is stable, but with a little more air given to the opening bars and a more onward moving feel to the following phrases there is a sense of 'leaning forward' just a little more than one might expect. This is less a criticism than an observation. Each time I thought I might be catching Pienaar stretching his tempi a little too much for good taste I found myself corrected on listening properly. In this same movement Uchida now sounds slow and pedestrian by comparison, still very beautiful, but providing us more with the chocolate box stereotype of Mozart, rather than drawing out the subtle turbulence in the music - playing it as we now might imagine Mozart might have played it himself, challenging his audiences and perhaps even shocking them. Just listen to what Pienaar does with the return to the home key at 4:05, holding a little extra suspension of the leading note and giving us a frisson of bi-tonality which would have had even Bartók looking up from his *Népszava*.

This is just one sonata, and a few small examples, but this set is full of this kind of interest. Mozart's piano sonatas have a reputation for a certain kind of 'easiness'; the kind which has music teachers putting them in front of their students so that they can play some 'real' music early on. This is all well and good, but it takes someone like Daniel-Ben Pienaar to come along and show us that there is a good deal more to be discovered. Many sets of this kind are presented chronologically, but Pienaar makes a particular virtue of the sonata's traversal of Mozart's creative lifetime, and most of the discs are titled along the lines of period and location for each subset. He also writes his own intelligent and informative booklet notes,

tackling the subject of playing 18<sup>th</sup> century music on what is essentially a 19<sup>th</sup> or even 20<sup>th</sup> century instrument, and taking an approachable look behind the musical notes with some historical context and brief analysis.

There are numerous complete cycles of Mozart's piano sonatas, and of those I've had at one time or another that with [Lili Kraus](#) has alas gone by the wayside. This is a nice recording and vintage performance, but I never really felt much 'connection' with her playing of the pieces. I've kept the faith with [Ronald Brautigam's](#) excellent fortepiano set on the BIS label, but am reluctant to make too many comparisons due to the differing character of the instruments used. A review of my modern instrument reference with Mitsuku Uchida on Philips can be found [here](#). I still very much admire her solo Mozart playing, but each time I return to one of these pieces after hearing Daniel-Ben Pienaar she seems entirely blown out of the water. You may not always want high drama in your Mozart, but when it comes to something like the *Fantasie K475 in C minor* it's like discovering an entirely new piece. Uchida is quiet and intimate where Pienaar is mysterious and full of surprises in the opening minutes, finding little accents and harmonic emphases and bringing little Mozart face to face with a rather startled looking Beethoven. He isn't shy of the lyrical elements in this and the other pieces, but the undercurrent is more one of narrative than of glimmering beauty - if you open Pienaar's chocolate box your selection won't always be creamy and sweetly fragrant. Take those *tremuli* in the right hand where the music takes off at 4:21. Pienaar gives them full weight: the mechanics of a scene-change at the opera at full tilt into the stormy sea, where Uchida seems almost more apologetic, pointing our attention to the melodramatic two-note bass line but only too glad to return to safer waters as soon as possible.

I could go on and on with comparisons of one sort or another, but the plain truth is I think Daniel-Ben Pienaar's Mozart piano sonatas could entirely revolutionise the way you experience these pieces, and indeed Mozart in general. There is so much about Mozart that we *think* we know; impressions and perceptions more often than not gained from the tourist sales-brochure idea most people will give you if asked on the street. Historical truth can teach us more, and there is a deal more information around for those who are willing to make just a little more effort. What Daniel-Ben Pienaar teaches us is that there is a good deal more mud and substance to Mozart's piano sonatas than most of us suspected, and as a result he has given us a cycle which will make it tough to return to old favourites. As a final reference I brought out one of my Decca remnants, another superb Mozart exponent Andras Schiff. His *Andante grazioso* opening to the *Sonata No. 11 K331 'Alla Turca'* is the one most likely to bring tears to my eyes if the mood takes, and even though Pienaar is alive to the music's simple perfection his onward momentum does rob the music a little of the kind of innocent charm which makes it so moving. Schiff's playing floats on a different kind of lightness to Uchida's and

will always retain its appeal to me, though I relish Pienaar's sense of lively and percussive fun in the 'Turkish' aspects of the last movement in this sonata. The very last work, the *Sonata No. 18 K576 in D major* is played masterfully by Schiff, but with Pienaar's more earthy grounding we are given a shot of energy and joyous street bustle in the opening *Allegro* and final *Allegretto* to go along with the transparent delicacy which is essential to the work, and which both pianists deliver marvellously. The central *Adagio* is another litmus indicator, and Pienaar comes up trumps with beautifully described lines and undulations, the conversational element of the music brought forward without taking away from Mozart's crystalline magic.

I have to say I am surprised and delighted by this cycle of Mozart's piano sonatas: surprised by the amount of substance and sheer musical grit I've missed in so many other performances, and delighted to discover so much more Mozart I had previously felt carried less musical muscle than, say, the piano concertos. Pienaar knows how to point a wise finger to the heart of each movement of each sonata, highlighting the crucial highlight you just know had to be the moment which made Mozart smile to himself as he played and sketched. Pienaar throws away the velvet-lined glass-covered treasure chest of musical jewels to which we've been used, and introduces us to a Mozart who tickles us under the chin with a roll of manuscript paper before sitting down and challenging us to a duel of wits we know we can't win. Was that a whiff of wet ink you caught just then ...?

***Dominy Clements***

## **Mozart: Complete Piano Sonatas - BBC Magazine**

**Our rating: 3.0 out of 5 star rating**

By **[BBC Music Magazine](#)**

Published: January 20, 2012 at 4:35 pm

COMPOSERS: Mozart LABELS: Avie

WORKS: Complete Piano Sonatas PERFORMER: Daniel-Ben Pienaar (piano)

CATALOGUE NO: AV 2209

Daniel-Ben Pienaar has won plaudits for his fine recordings of Bach and Orlando Gibbons, and from the glittering quality of the pianism in this new Mozart cycle it's not hard to see why. His avowed aim in playing Mozart is to avoid the elegance and gracefulness of traditional performance-practice, and to bring out instead the music's nervous energy. It's a valid enough approach, but comes at a price.



Bluntly put, whenever Mozart writes a passage in continuous semiquavers, Pienaar speeds up, and runs the risk of trivialising the music in the process. This happens so consistently throughout the cycle that it must be deliberate, but it's no less damaging for that. Take the famous 'Turkish Rondo' from the Sonata K331. Pienaar begins it well, and he vividly brings out the percussive effect of the rolled left-hand chords in the major-mode episode. But in the spiralling semiquavers that follow, down goes his foot on the accelerator.

The unequivocal masterpieces among the sonatas are the A minor K310, the equally turbulent C minor Sonata K457 (played here with its prefatory Fantasy K475), the contrapuntal F major K533 with its pre-existing rondo K494, and the dazzling final sonata K576. There is much to admire in Pienaar's performances of all four works, and particularly their slow movements.

The last sonata is beautifully played throughout, with admirable variety of colour and shading in its *Adagio*, and the ornate middle movement of the C minor Sonata is no less subtly handled. But the opening movement of K310 – shorn of its repeats – is taken at a whirlwind speed that's hard to reconcile with its imperious 'Allegro maestoso' marking. In the end, Pienaar's tendency to rush is a fatal flaw. For stylish performances of greater consistency, Mitsuko Uchida remains a recommendation. *Misha Donat*