

CONCERTO CHOICE



Energetic Mozart up there with the very best

Erik Levi is enthralled by the elegant pairing of Manchester Camerata and Jean-Efflam Bavouzet



Winning team: Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and Manchester Camerata

Mozart

Piano Concertos Nos 15 and 16; Quintet for Piano and Winds

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (piano); Manchester Camerata/ Gábor Takács-Nagy

Chandos CHAN20035 71:03 mins

1784 proved to be a vintage year for Mozart, prompting a steady stream of masterpieces, three of which are featured in this enthralling release. First, we have the exuberant Concerto in D major, K451. The opening tutti of the first movement sets the scene for the rest of the performance, the Manchester Camerata under Gábor Takács-Nagy delivering blisteringly energetic articulation in the powerful full orchestral passages, as well as ensuring that there is a vibrant sense of dialogue between strings and wind in the gentler second idea. These contrasts in mood, coupled with the ability to engage in consistently stimulating creative interaction with conductor and orchestra, mark out Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's brilliant account of the solo part. Nowhere is this more effectively realised than in the Finale

Soloist, conductor and orchestra conjure a magical soundworld

where both Bavouzet and Takács-Nagy relish Mozart's wicked touches of humour, particularly where the opening material is transformed into something almost akin to a Viennese waltz. For me, however, the highlight in this performance comes in the central *Andante* where soloist, conductor and orchestra conjure up a magical soundworld, reinforcing admiration for the ingenuity with which

Mozart decorates the simple opening theme.

It's a bonus to supplement these two Concertos with the Quintet for Piano and Wind, K452 which the composer justifiably regarded

as one of his greatest accomplishments. Once again, Bavouzet, working in a stimulating partnership with the orchestra principals, produces an elegant account that more than holds its own with many of the formidable recordings in the current catalogue.

PERFORMANCE

★★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★★



Hear extracts from this recording and the rest of this month's choices on the BBC Music Magazine website at www.classical-music.com

Beethoven

Piano Concertos Nos 4 & 5

Nicholas Angelich (piano); Insula Orchestra/Laurence Equilbey

Warner Classics 9029563417 74:16 mins



Given the competition, you need good reason to issue yet another recording of Beethoven's

last two piano concertos – and this group has one. This is a period-instrument performance, but with a difference: the piano, a fastidiously restored 1892 Pleyel, not the usual underpowered fortepiano, was chosen for its ability to project across a modern concert hall, while possessing a sonority evoking what might have been the character of its original performance. Its sound melds satisfyingly with a small orchestra playing on gut strings and with period wind instruments.

The opening chords of the Fourth Concerto usher in what feels almost like chamber music, so intimate is the sound; Nicholas Angelich's articulation is refined, and the upper register of the piano has a crystalline quality. Thanks in part to Laurence Equilbey's light and flexible touch, piano and orchestra sometimes seem like a single entity; the heaven-versus-hell *Andante* is gracefully restrained, and the Concerto as a whole exudes charm.

Yet the opening of No. 5, the *Emperor*, is as heroic as one could wish, with the Pleyel providing bags of power, and with Angelich making something dramatic out of even his scalar sweeps up and down the keyboard, thanks to its gradations in tone-colour. Angelich's pianism is always a pleasure, and here it casts a lovely spell. *Michael Church*

PERFORMANCE

★★★★

RECORDING

★★★★

Brahms

Piano Concerto No. 1

Ekaterina Litvintseva (piano); Klassische Philharmonie Bonn/ Heribert Beissel

Profil PH 18065 48:52 mins



Brahms's First Piano Concerto is one of musical history's miracles: a work of sweeping

tragedy and epic grandeur written by a composer still in his early