Ernö (Ernst von) Dohnányi – Piano Concertos (2010)

Piano Concerto No.1 in E minor, Op.5 *01 I. Adagio maestoso - Allegro - Molto adagio 02 II. Andante 03 III. Vivace - Tranquillo - Tempo I - Molto tranquillo - Vivace -*
Piano Concerto No.2 in B minor, Op.42
04 I. Allegro - Legato - Animato - Meno mosso - A tempo - 05 II. Adagio, poco rubato - 06 III. Allegro vivace - Piu mosso - A tempo
Howard Shelley - piano BBC Philharmonic Orchestra Matthias Bamert – conductor

Ernst (or Ernö) von Dohnányi was Bartók's classmate, saw his music dismissed by the Nazis as too Hungarian (and, moreover, related by marriage to Dietrich Bonhoeffer) and by the Hungarian Communists as not Hungarian enough, and ended up as a teacher at Florida State University. He suffered a final indignity when modernist fundamentalists rejected his music as too conservative, but a modest revival has been helped along by the fame of his grandson, conductor Christoph von Dohnányi. The two piano concertos here could each be programmed by a middle-rung symphony orchestra and visiting pianist and would send an audience home happy. Although they were composed almost 50 years apart, they are recognizably similar in structure. Both first movements introduce the piano early and use it to subject the orchestral material to lively questioning in complex, rather episodic dialogues. The middle movements are lushly lyrical, and the finales are more motoric, with the sole hints of Hungarian flavor in a generally Brahmsian style. Originally recorded in 2002 and 2004, the two concertos were put together in a sensible 2010 reissue. British pianist Howard Shelley and the BBC Philharmonic under veteran conductor Matthias Bamert deliver engaging, not overly sentimental readings that fit the music, and the Chandos sound is unimpaired in the reissue. At a budget price this is a nice find for those interested in national styles, or, indeed, any lover of the late Romantic concerto. --- James Manheim, Rovi

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