

Prokofiev - Symphony No.1 - Piano Concertos Nos 1,2 (2002)



Symphony No. 1 in D major, Classical, Op. 25 1. *I. Allegro* 2. *II. Larghetto* 3. *III. Gavotte. Non troppo allegro* [play](#) 4. *IV. Finale. Molto vivace* 5. *Piano Concerto No.1 in D Flat Major Op.10*
Piano Concerto No.2 in G minor, Op. 16
6. *I. Andantino allegro* 7. *II. Scherzo. Vivace*
[play](#)
8. *III. Intermezzo. Allegro moderato* 9. *IV. Finale. Allegro tempestoso*
Sviatoslav Richter (Piano) Prague Symphony Orchestra Czech Philharmonic Orchestra Karel Ancerl (Conductor)

Many music lovers will grab this disc for Sviatoslav Richter's incendiary account of the First Piano Concerto, with his jaw-dropping clarity of articulation in the allegro sections and exquisite sense of line and phrasing in the work's few moments of repose. So I'm going to take the excellence and desirability of that performance for granted and suggest that an equally important reason to acquire this disc is to hear Karel Ancerl, possibly the greatest Prokofiev conductor who ever lived, and Dagmar Baloghová's astounding performance of the relatively neglected Second Piano Concerto, the composer's greatest work in the form.

Let's start with Ancerl. He recorded a lot of Prokofiev (comparatively speaking), and all of it is outstanding, including sensational readings of Alexander Nevsky and an expressionistically intense disc of Romeo and Juliet excerpts. What makes Ancerl's treatment of this composer so special is his emphasis on the music's lyrical qualities and his ability to wring every drop of emotion from music often considered ironic at best, mechanical at worst. Take the opening of the Second Piano Concerto: listen to the way Ancerl has the strings linger over the sweet/sour dissonance in the principal theme's second phrase; to the subtle variations in dynamics; and to the intermingling of piano and orchestra that together captures the music's melodic essence. And this in a passage that's usually tossed off as mere accompaniment!

Then there's Dagmar Baloghová, as good as unknown (though reportedly still active as a piano pedagogue in Prague), whose instincts in this music and ability to realize them match Ancerl's note for note. She has the chops for the first movement's insane cadenza: Granted she may not bang as loudly as some of the virtuosos who have assaulted this particular episode, but she actually builds it steadily, step by step, and arrives at its climax at the same time as the music itself (which is more than you can say for the likes of Alexander Toradze). In the second-movement toccata, she's not out to play as quickly as possible but rather aims to find the music's melodic heart and mercurial wit. The finale similarly sparkles and features the most lovely lyrical middle section. With these artists nothing gets left to chance, nothing gets thrown away or glossed over. They play every note as though this is the greatest music in the world, and they make us believe it too.

A dazzlingly swift and precise reading of the Classical Symphony (a touch light on the trumpets) completes an irresistible package. This last item and the First Piano Concerto are perfectly decent mono, the Second Piano Concerto is excellently balanced stereo, and all of the performances have been carefully remastered and sound cleaner and fuller than ever before. So go ahead, buy this for Richter, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if you come away just as enthralled with Ancerl and Baloghová. Certainly if you haven't heard this version, then you can't say that you really know the Second Piano Concerto. ---David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com

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