

Emil Gilels was one of the great pianists of history. He was a master of a wide repertory from the time of Bach to his own era, and one of the first pianists to adopt a modern, more objective style of playing and interpreting music.

His family was musical; his sister Elizaveta had a national reputation as a solo and chamber violinist, and married fellow violinist Leonid Kogan. Emil entered the Odessa Institute of Music and Drama in 1922 to study with Yakov Tkatch and Berthe Ringold. Following a successful debut as a child prodigy in 1929, he transferred to study with Reingbald at Odessa Conservatory. (Some biographies confuse Ringold and Reingbald.)

In 1933 he won the first All Union Musicians' Contests, initiating its rapid rise to become the leading musical performance competition in the U.S.S.R. Even with this success, he carefully continued his education, remaining at Odessa Conservatory until he graduated in 1935. After that he continued his studies as a graduate student at the Moscow Conservatory with Heinrich Neuhaus.

In 1938 he took another prestigious first prize at the Ysaÿe International Festival in Brussels. In the same year he was engaged as a teacher at Moscow Conservatory. He planned to launch his international career in 1939, beginning with a visit to the New York World's Fair, but the outbreak of World War II in Europe prevented his travel.

During the war he was evacuated to the East in 1941 when the German armies reached the outskirts of Moscow. He resumed his career in 1946, and soon won the Stalin Prize. He finally made his first appearance outside the Soviet Union in 1947, when he visited several European cities, but frigid diplomatic relations between Washington and Moscow prevented his appearance in the United States until 1955, when he became the first prominent Soviet performing artist to play a concert there on October 3, with the Tchaikovsky First Piano Concerto in Philadelphia, Eugene Ormandy conducting. The resulting storm of acclaim led to his returning to the U.S. 13 more times.

He debuted in England in 1959 to similar success. He became known for his refined yet powerful performances of great concentration and attention to the inner logic of the music. He was noted for his performances of Bach, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Brahms, and Shostakovich. He made numerous recordings, both for the Soviet state recording agencies (many of which are reappearing in improved sound on compact disc) and on Western labels. He was a two-time recipient the Order of Lenin.

BRAHMS CONCERTO No. 2
GILELS · REINER · CHICAGO SYMPHONY



Portly, grey-bearded, and a celebrity, on the eve of his 45th birthday, Johannes Brahms began sketching themes for the Second Piano Concerto following the first of eight trips to Italy. He put these aside, however, to compose the D major Violin Concerto. Still in a symphonic mode after his Second Symphony, he added a scherzo to the B flat Piano Concerto's otherwise traditional three-movement form. Brahms finished composing it on July 7, 1881.

Before the Budapest premiere on November 9, however, he tried the music at Meiningen with Hans von Bülow's orchestra, during closed rehearsals of other repertory. He returned there after Budapest for a public performance on November 27, conducted by Bülow, who talked up the work to his former father-in-law, Franz Liszt. Liszt requested a score, and later on wrote to Brahms, "At first reading this work seemed to me a little gray in tone; I have, however, come gradually to understand it. It possesses the pregnant character of a distinguished work of art, in which thought and feeling move in noble harmony." Praise indeed from an acknowledged old master, whose 1853 invitation to join his "New German Music Verein" Brahms had cursorily declined.

Brahms incorporated several quite daring (for him) changes in procedure. He jettisoned the usual orchestral exposition in the opening movement; after the solo horn plays a wistfully expansive first theme with piano arpeggios, extended by the strings, the soloist unleashes a virtuosic cadenza that propels us into the exposition. Additional themes pour forth as if from a cornucopia, always paced by the piano, leading to a tempestuous development section that never loses sight of the opening

horn theme. Its formal restatement signals a mostly benign reprise. There's a brilliant close, though, which poses a serious structural problem for soloist and conductor: how do you keep the ensuing scherzo from sounding anticlimactic, or worse yet, superfluous?

Without appearing to understate or rein-in the opening Allegro non troppo movement, it dare not be played to the hilt. The entire work's structural fulcrum has to be the end of the scherzo, an Allegro appassionato in D minor with a soft-grained second theme; otherwise, the remaining two movements risk outstaying their welcome. Helpfully, the scherzo boasts a brilliant D major trio section, and a tempestuous close. But it must sound harrowing in order for the ensuing Andante to work its calming charm.

The solo cello begins and ends the third movement with a poignant B flat melody that Brahms recalled five years later in his song *Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer*. The middle portion, however, grows expressively high-strung until the clarinets restore calm with a piano-accompanied duet of russet beauty.

Brahms marked his sonata-rondo finale Allegretto grazioso, although it accelerates later on as the solo writing becomes more and more brilliant, but this never becomes threateningly powerful. Some have claimed to hear "gypsies" in the string writing; but even if so, it would be what Hungarians call *Verbunkos*, subliminally remembered from Brahms' teenage tours with the violinist Reményi, who first introduced him to Liszt.

BRAHMS PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2

Emil Gilels, piano

Fritz Reiner Chicago Symphony Orchestra

1 Allegro Non Troppo 15:57

2 Allegro Appassionato 8:06

3 Andante 11:58

4 Allegretto Grazioso 8:48

Total Time: 44:49

Transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape

Engineer - Lewis Layton Producer - Richard Mohr

Recorded by RCA Released 1959



For more info e-mail us:
admin@highdeftapetransfers.com
or visit our website:
www.highdeftapetransfers.com