

~~deeply lyrical, allows both players to  
make an indelible impact.~~



Pictured: Margarita Höhenrieder, with Leon Fleischer, conductor

Beethoven: The 5 Piano Concertos - Margarita Höhenrieder, pianist; orchestras conducted by Leon Fleischer, Fabio Luisi, Herbert Blomstedt, and Martin Haselböck (Accentus Music 3-DVD set)

Accentus Music, founded in Leipzig, Germany as recently as 2010, shows why it has moved to the forefront of audiovisual production companies for classical music in this outstanding DVD release of Beethoven's complete piano concertos. Pianist Margarita Höhenrieder shines brightly in well-crafted performances that reveal the essential qualities of each of these five masterworks.

Höhenrieder's performances are a joy to watch on DVD, especially her nimble fingers as she encompasses Beethoven's tricky passagework with superbly accomplished hand-crossings, particularly in the Largo of Concerto No. 1, and she is well in command of the brilliant *attaca* transitions from slow movement to spirited finale in Nos. 3 and 5.

She is also in complete possession of the technical demands in Beethoven's music without any showy mannerisms, only the occasional smile that breaks forth over her countenance when she has successfully mastered a difficult passage that must have flummoxed his contemporaries. And she brings out the really soft and tender beauty in all his slow movements, particularly the Andante com moto in No. 4 and the less-often cited Adagio in No. 2. Additionally, she is superbly seconded by the following orchestras and conductors:

Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Op. 15 – Fabio Luisi, Staatskapelle Dresden  
Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 19 – Leon Fleischer, Kammerphilharmonie Amadé  
Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 37 – Leon Fleischer, Württembergisches Kammerorchester Heilbronn  
Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58 – Martin Haselböck, Bamberger Symphoniker  
Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73 – Bruno Weil, Bayerisches Staatsorchester

Without intending to slight any of these outstanding masters of the baton, I would like to focus for the moment on the late Leon Fleischer (1928-2020). He was revered by many people for his courage in overcoming the career-threatening effects of focal dystonia, a crippling condition of his right hand brought about by "seven or eight hours a day of pumping ivory," as he expressed it in a 1996 interview with the New York Times. He compensated by exploring the left-hand piano repertoire, establishing himself as a gifted teacher on the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory for many years, and undertaking yet another career as a conductor. To Fleischer, it all fits in. As he says in an interview on DVD2 of the present release, "The best way to learn is by teaching." That would seem to be counter-intuitive to many people, but Fleischer shows how well that works out in the obvious affection and rapport she shares with Höhenrieder, his former student.

And speaking of teachers and students, the booklet annotation makes much of Fleischer's lineage. At the age of nine, he was accepted as a pupil by Artur Schnabel (1882-1951). Schnabel, in turn, had studied under Theodor Leschetizky (1830-1915), who was a student of Carl Czerny (1791-1857), and Czerny was a student of Beethoven. Of course, it isn't possible to transfer genius, much less wisdom, from one generation to the next (if it were, the whole world would be in better shape than it is today). But it is possible to transmit a certain amount of artistic temperament, to say nothing of basic keyboard technique, from master to pupil. Beethoven, by contemporary reports, was a small man for his generation at 5 feet, two inches, or 158 cm. At his height and with small hands in keeping with his overall dimensions, he would necessarily have held them close to the keyboard whenever he played, which would have had a definite impact on his intricate passagework. (Höhenrieder, a well-proportioned woman of normal modern stature, also does this in the videos). So maybe there is something to the notion of artistic lineage, after all!