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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

PIANO CONCERTO No.4 in G, Op.58

PIANO CONCERTO No.5 in E flat, Op.73 ("EMPEROR")

ALFRED BRENDEL, piano

Vienna Symphony Orchestra

conducted (No.4) Heinz Wallberg; (no.5) Zubin Mehta

Piano Concerto No.4 in G, Op.58

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Allegro moderato | 17.39 |
| 2. Andante con moto | 4.52 |
| 3. Rondo-vivace | 10.42 |

Piano Concerto No.5 in E flat, Op.73 "Emperor"

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 4. Allegro | 19.58 |
| 5. Adagio un poco mosso | 8.33 |
| 6. Rondo -Allegro ma non troppo | 10.28 |

Total Playing Time 72:25

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Beethoven

Piano Concertos

4 & 5 'Emperor'

*Alfred
Brendel*



alto

Beethoven composed the *Piano Concerto no. 4* during 1805-06, at which time he was also working on his *Fourth* and *Fifth Symphonies*. It shows the greatest possible contrast with his previous piano concerto, albeit that they are both similar in scale. The *Third* is the work of a young man, brimful of confidence, as is clear from the lengthy orchestral introduction whilst the *Fourth*, composed five years later, is full of temperament and introverted passion.

Beethoven opens his *Fourth Concerto*, not with an orchestral tutti but with the piano alone playing almost timidly and hesitantly a sighing motif, joined shortly by the strings and the wind. Thereafter the movement mixes delicacy with sturdiness with the piano apparently making an attempt to persuade the orchestra to match its lightness of touch. This 'challenge' is continued into the short second movement, likened by Schumann and others to *Orpheus and the Furies*: the more expressive the pianist's pleading tone, the more unbending seems the orchestra. In the end the tenderness of the piano carries the day and to emphasise its victory it continues in like vein until a suspended chord ushers in the Rondo finale. Once again the orchestra appears more bullish and competitive, and as it answers the pianist's dance it seems mightily heavy-footed in contrast. The shortened cadenza shows the piano making some fun of the lethargic orchestra but afterwards both orchestra and piano appear to settle their differences and trade good-natured insults at the work's end.

The *Piano Concerto no.4*, dedicated to Archduke Rudolf and paid for by Prince Lobkowitz, was premiered in March 1807, with Beethoven as a somewhat unwilling soloist. Perhaps because of its unheroic nature the work was given a rather frosty reception by the Viennese public. However the work is now performed and recorded almost as frequently as its superb successor, the 'Emperor'.

The *Piano Concerto no. 5*, written in the same 'heroic' key of E flat major as the *Symphony no. 3*, was composed under somewhat trying circumstances in 1809 during which time Vienna lay besieged by Napoleonic armies. Beethoven himself remained in Vienna as the bombardment began, holed up in a cellar with his hands over his ears, but later fled to escape the 'desolate and destructive life and misery' that surrounded him.

The flourish that opens this concerto is surely one of the most familiar passages in classical music; here Beethoven asserts the importance of the soloist in a great improvisational gesture. This is followed by a triumphant orchestral tutti which announces the principal ideas of this monumental

movement in no uncertain terms. It is as if Beethoven is blissfully unaware of the problems about to engulf Vienna and its environs. The development section mainly concerns the first idea, punctuated by chromatic runs on the piano at times with an air of mystery, at others with a sense of urgency. Following the recapitulation and as a coda, in the place of the more usual cadenza, piano and orchestra engage in a prolonged and virile dialogue.

The Adagio movement features two lyrical themes of such beauty and tenderness that they appear totally spontaneous; and yet Beethoven's sketches show that he laboured long and hard over this delicate second movement. Beethoven's publisher Czerny likened it to the song of pilgrims in procession. The opening theme, rather sombre when played initially by the orchestra, acquires a gentle and graceful air when repeated by the soloist. After some intermingling of ideas two bassoons play a B natural, then the horns drop down a semitone and the piano seems to hint at a new tune. Without further ado the piano takes off with this new tune at a gallop ushering in the finale. Much of this exhilarating movement is given over to this theme; Beethoven does not expand the lyrical second theme. There is no need for a cadenza for the soloist has established his mastery in no uncertain terms during the course of the work. In the entire repertoire for piano and orchestra, there are few pieces to match this massive concerto for brio and good-natured energy. Beethoven would have been mortified at the notion of this piece being accorded the name of 'Emperor' given to it as a tribute to Napoleon.

Long acknowledged as one of the greatest of all pianists **Alfred Brendel** was born in 1931 in the present-day Czech Republic. His family moved to Zagreb when he was three and it was there that he began his studies in piano and composition, later moving to Graz. He later studied with Paul Baumgartner and attended master-classes given by Eduard Steuermann and Edwin Fischer, whilst developing his understanding of the instrument by collecting recordings of Cortot, Kempff and Schnabel.

Having won a prize at the Busoni Competition in Bolzano (1949) he embarked upon his busy international career in which recordings play a hugely important role. His varied discography extends from Bach to Schoenberg but he is surely best known for his performances from the Classical and Romantic eras. Many of his finest recordings stem from the 1960s when he first became known to a wide audience through his excellent performances (as here) on the Vanguard label and Vox, for whom he became the first artist ever to record the complete piano works of

Beethoven. He has also twice recorded the complete sonatas for Philips as well as recorded an acclaimed cycle of the Mozart piano concertos alongside Sir Neville Marriner.

In addition to winning numerous awards for his recordings, Brendel has also received honorary doctorates from Oxford and Yale Universities and in 1989 was awarded the KBE. For some years he has made his home in Britain.

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