

Great Pianists • Michelangeli





THE EARLY
RECORDINGS • 3
(1939-1948)

GRIEG
Piano Concerto
SCHUMANN
Piano Concerto

Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli

Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala Antonio Pedrotti Alceo Galliera

Great Pianists: Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli (1920-1995) THE EARLY RECORDINGS • 3 (1939-1949)

Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli was born in Brescia, Italy in 1920. He first began to study the violin at the age of three, but around the age of ten began piano studies at the Milan Conservatory with Giovanni Anfossi, graduating with a diploma in piano at the age of thirteen.

During his teenage years Michelangeli studied medicine to placate a father who did not want him to take music as a career, but he returned to music and by the age of nineteen was of a high enough standard to win the first International Piano Competition in Geneva in 1939. The unanimous jury included Alfred Cortot and Ignacy Paderewski. For the following few years Michelangeli taught at the Martini Conservatory in Bologna and gave concerts. In 1940 he gave a sensational début in Rome where he displayed an extraordinary technique and musical insight, but the Second World War interrupted the beginning of his career; Michelangeli joined the Italian air force, but as soon as the war was over, he returned to the concert platform. His first appearance in London in 1946 was with the London Symphony Orchestra at the Albert Hall where he played Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1, in E flat and César Franck's Variations symphoniques.

Michelangeli first toured the Únited States in 1948. He made his orchestral début at Carnegie Hall in November with the New York Philharmonic and Dimitri Mitropoulos playing Schumann's *Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54* and made his solo début at Carnegie Hall in January 1949. He then had a career of teaching and performing, and during the 1950s spent more time teaching. By 1957, on his return to London, he was already being described as 'the distinguished young pianist from Italy'.

Michelangeli spent the rest of his career touring the world, cancelling as many concerts as he gave, and building an aura of aloofness and mystique around himself.

After his London appearances in the late 1950s he toured South America and the Soviet Union, and in 1965 toured Japan. The following year he toured extensively in America, his first visit in fifteen years. In 1973

Michelangeli began teaching at a summer school at Villa Schifanoia near Florence, and in 1980 he visited Japan again but played only one of his five scheduled concerts. In 1988 he had a serious heart attack during a concert in Bordeaux, but continued his performing career until shortly before his death in Lugano in 1995.

Michelangeli's first recordings were made for HMV in Milan in 1939 and he continued to record for the label after the Second World War. However, during conditions caused by wartime constraints he made some recordings for the German label Telefunken, also in Milan, Sessions from September 1942 produced Michelangeli's first commercial concerto recordings when he chose to record the Piano Concerto in A minor. Op. 54 by Schumann and the Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16 by Grieg. Although subsequent radio broadcast performances of these concertos have been issued on LP and CD, these are the only commercial recordings Michelangeli made of the two works. According to John Hunt's discography, Deutsche Grammophon recorded a 1984 performance with Barenboim and the Orchestre de Paris, hoping to release it coupled with the Grieg Concerto, but this never happened as Michelangeli did not perform the Grieg Concerto at this time. The performance of the Schumann Concerto recorded by Telefunken is very relaxed and leisurely. Michelangeli takes his time and plays in a free improvisatory way right from the opening flourish through the cadenza of the first movement, during the slower parts of which he sounds reflective and ruminatory, until he whips up the tempo for the final bars of the coda. At the beginning of the third movement the twenty-two year old Michelangeli was not afraid to fill out and double the piano writing for the first statement of the theme. He also does this in the live performance with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and Dimitri Mitropoulos from 1948, although on that occasion the opening flourish was far more dramatic and masculine.

The Grieg *Concerto*, recorded around the same time, but with a different conductor, is an altogether more focused performance. Curiously, Alec Robertson,

in a 1951 Gramophone magazine review, was totally dismissive of the discs on the grounds of poor recorded sound although his final sentence reveals an obvious prejudice. 'There does not seem to be any point in writing about a recording which it is impossible to recommend: and it is difficult to understand why this muffled tubby affair was thought worthy of issue at all Whatever virtues the performance may have had - and the name of the pianist makes it certain that there were some – are almost wholly obscured. I cannot, however, believe that anything like a perfect match could be made between Grieg and Michelangeli.' Listening to this new transfer one wonders what Robertson would make of it. It is a strong, forthright performance with, for Michelangeli, unusual warmth of poetry in the lyrical sections. The cadenza to the first movement has extraordinary flair and virtuosity and contains impressive dramatic gestures rarely attempted today.

Erotik, from Grieg's Lyric Pieces, was a filler to the last side of the 78rpm set of discs. It is one of the composer's most tender and heartfelt miniatures and this performance has Michelangeli keeping himself in control at the climax. The two other Lyric Pieces were recorded for HMV in Milan during the pianist's first sessions after his win at the Geneva International Piano Competition in that year. The superior sound of these discs captures Michelangeli's fine gradations of tone as well as revealing his poise and clarity of playing. The Debussy work was recorded in London after the War during sessions that produced the famous Brahms Paganini Variations recording (8.111351). Perhaps to give a more reverberant acoustical effect, the piano has been placed further from the microphone, but it captures a glorious climax of sound where Michelangeli paints the reflections in strong colours.

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1 2 3	Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856): Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54 I Allegro affettuoso II Intermezzo III Allegro vivace Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala • Antonio Pedrotti Recorded in Milan, 4th September 1942 Matrices 026629-36; Telefunken SKB3260-63	31:38 15:34 5:20 10:44
4 5 6	Edvard GRIEG (1843-1907): Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16 I Allegro molto moderato II Adagio III Allegro moderato molto e marcato Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala • Alceo Galliera Recorded in Milan, 2nd September 1942 Matrices 026618-24; Telefunken SKB3280-83	31:04 13:09 7:16 10:39
7	Lyric Pieces, Op. 43: No. 5: Erotik (Erotic) Recorded in Milan, 6th September 1942 Matrix 026645; Telefunken SKB 3283	3:25
8	Lyric Pieces, Op. 47: No. 5: Melankoli (Melancholy) Recorded in Milan, December 1939-January 1940 Matrix 0BA3616; HMV DA5379	3:41
9	Lyric Pieces, Op. 68: No. 5: Bådnlåt (At the Cradle) Recorded in Milan, December 1939-January 1940 Matrix 0BA3617; HMV DA5379	3:15
10	Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918): Images, Book I No. 1: Reflets dans l'eau (Reflections in the water) Recorded at Abbey Road Studios, London, 27th October 1948 Matrix 2EA 13375; HMV DB6859	4:56

Special thanks to Neal Kurz, Donald Manildi and Angelo Scottini

8.111396 ADD

3 III Allegro vivace

7 Lyric Pieces, Op. 43:

No. 5: Erotik (Erotic)

Lyric Pieces, Op. 47:

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1939-1949

Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli (1920-1995)

Playing Time 77:58

Tirear o Deneaded Principalingen (1720-1876)						
		obert SCHUMANN (1810-1856): Piano Concerto in A minor,			was a	peerless
	1 I	Allegro affettuoso	15:34			
	2 II	Intermezzo	5:20	aristocrat of	the piano.	He had

Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala • Antonio Pedrotti Recorded in Milan, 4th September 1942 Edvard GRIEG (1843-1907): Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16 4 I Allegro molto moderato
5 II Adagio
6 III Allegro moderato molto e marcato 13:09 7:16 Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala • Alceo Galliera Recorded in Milan, 2nd September 1942

8 No. 5: Melankoli (Melancholy) Recorded in Milan, December 1939-January 1940 Lyric Pieces, Op. 68: No. 5: Bådnlåt (At the Cradle) Recorded in Milan, December 1939-January 1940

Recorded in Milan, 6th September 1942

Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918): Images, Book I 10 No. 1: Reflets dans l'eau (Reflections in the water) Recorded at Abbey Road Studios, London, 27th October 1948

5:20 aristocrat of the piano. He had 10:44 made his recording début for HMV in Milan in 1939, and in 1942 went into studios in the same city to record two major concertos for German Telefunken. Schumann's Piano Concerto is played with a dazzling, almost improvisatory 3:25 freedom, whereas the Grieg Piano Concerto is a forthright, poetic and 3:41 virtuosic performance, albeit one of great warmth. The smaller 3:15 pieces reveal his outstanding gradations of tone. Remarkably, Michelangeli never re-recorded

either concerto again in the studio.

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Ward Marston Special thanks: Neal Kuerz, Donald Manildi and Angelo Scottini

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Cover Photograph: Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli [Private Collection]