

## Great Pianists on Music & Arts:

CD-1147(t) **Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. Two Newly Discovered Broadcast Recordings.** Mozart: Piano Concerto in d, K.466 Karl Munchinger cond. Stuttgart Phil. Orch., Stuttgart, Liederhalle, (22.11.1967). Beethoven: Sonata No. 3 in C, Op. 2 No. 3 Paris, Salle Pleyel, (11.11.1975). Premiere recordings issued by permission of the Estate of Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli.

CD-1145(t) **Walter Gieseking Plays Beethoven Concertos.** Piano Concerto No. 1 in C, Op. 15, Philharmonia Orchestra; Rafael Kubelik from Columbia (UK) 78s LX 1230/2, CAX 10333/40 Rec. EMI Studio No. 1, Abbey Rd., London, 13 Oct. 1948. Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat, Op. 73, "Emperor" Grosses Funkorchester, Artur Rother Rec. Saal No. 1, Haus des Rundfunks (Reichsender Berlin), 23 Jan. 1945. The only complete recording of a classical work in stereo surviving from WWII! Restoration (2004): Aaron Z.

CD-1141(2) **Rudolf Serkin Plays Beethoven.** The 1945-1952 Solo Piano Recordings for American Columbia. CD No. 1: Piano Sonata No.14 in C-Sharp Minor, Op.27 No.2 ("Moonlight"), May 28-30,1951. Piano Sonata No.8 in C Minor, Op.13 ("Pathetique"), June 5, 1945. Piano Sonata No.23 in F Minor, Op.57 ("Appassionata"), July 14 & 29, 1947. Piano Sonata No.26 in E-Flat, Op.81a ("Lebewohl"), May 1 and 28-30, 1951. CD No. 2: Beethoven: Piano Sonata No.21 in C, Op.53 ("Waldstein"), September 8-10, 1952. Beethoven: Piano Sonata No.30 in E, Op.109, July 22, 1952. Beethoven: Fantasy in G Minor/B Major, Op.77, December 1, 1947. Beethoven: Piano Sonata No.24 in F-Sharp, Op.78, December 1, 1947. Technical reconstruction (2004): Graham Newton. Liner notes: Donald Manildi.

CD-1133(t) **Robert Casadesu In Concert:** Saint-Saëns: Concerto No. 4 in C Minor for piano, Op. 44. Franck: Symphonic Variations. Both with ORTF, Jascha Horenstein Montreux Festival Sept. 26, 1961. Ravel: Concerto pour la main gauche. Het Concertgebouworkest, Eduard van Beinum Concertgebouw Amsterdam October 23 or 24, 1946. Technical Reconstruction, 2004, by Maggi Payne.

CD-1132(2) **Backhaus Plays Brahms:** The Celebrated HMV Piano Solo Recordings. All Ballades, Scherzos, Waltzes, Rhapsodies, Intermezzos and other works for solo piano recorded by Wilhelm Backhaus between 1929-1936. Notes by Bryce Morrison Restoration: Maggi Payne & Graham Newton.

CD-1128(2) **Johann Baptist Cramer (1771-1858):** Seven Late Sonatas. John Khouri, 1813 Broadwood Grand Piano.

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MICHELANGELO  
PLAYS BEETHOVEN

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

ORTF, Jean Martinon  
1970 Lausanne Festival  
(stereo)

## Piano Sonata No. 4 in E-flat Op. 7

Bonn, 1970  
(mono)



*Issued with the kind cooperation of the estate of Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli*

# MICHELANGELI PLAYS BEETHOVEN

## *Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat, "Emperor" Op. 73 (39:38)*

ORTE, Jean Martinon, 1970 Lausanne Festival (stereo)

- |                                     |       |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1) I. Allegro                       | 20:29 |
| 2) II. Adagio un poco mosso         | 08:12 |
| 3) III. Rondo (Allegro-Piu allegro) | 10:37 |
| 4) Applause                         | 1:20  |

## *Piano Sonata No. 4 in E-flat, Op. 7 (34:27)*

Bonn, 1970 (mono)

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| 5) I. Allegro molto e con brio           | 09:52 |
| 6) II. Largo, con gran espressione       | 10:19 |
| 7) III. Allegro                          | 05:51 |
| 8) IV. Rondo: Poco Allegretto e grazioso | 07:59 |

Total Time = 1:15:38

*"Emperor" Concerto previously unreleased; Sonata previously released on LP only*

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*Sound restoration by Aaron Z. Snyder*

*Photographs by Foto Studio Pedrotti (Trento) and Festival Pianistico Internazionale Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli (Brescia), Italy.*

pianist collaborated with a strong, inspired podium presence. In this previously unpublished 1970 "Emperor," Jean Martinon provides a vigorous and clear orchestral framework, whose distinct woodwind and brass timbres reflect the sound of French orchestras from the early to mid-20th centuries. It contrasts to the broader, more genial sonority of the Viennese musicians under Carlo Maria Giulini's leadership in Michelangeli's live 1979 commercial "Emperor" for DG.

An aesthetic of fierce control and absolute accounting for every note governs Michelangeli's way with Beethoven's *Sonata in E-flat Op. 7*, his second to largest work in the genre, next to the mighty "*Hammerklavier*" *Op. 106*. Reviewing the pianist's 1970 studio recording in High Fidelity, Harris Goldsmith accurately described "the patiently coaxed detail and ultraclarity of partwriting" where "inner lines emerge from the fabric with a spatial immediacy, the result of endless hours of drudgery and experimentation. Yet is it really desirable for each strand of sound to come forth in glorious technicolor? Must every detail unsubtly pounce upon the unsuspecting listener like a fierce panther upon its prey?" While the live performance from Bonn offered here substantiates some of Goldsmith's quibbles, such as the third movement's outsized accents, plus the pianist's aforementioned "breaking of hands," the recording itself cogently conveys how Michelangeli's sonority penetrated and congealed in a first-rate concert hall, thereby creating a viable context for his so-called pianistic "effects." Could it be that Michelangeli, who arguably cancelled more concerts than he actually played was first and foremost a public performer?

Lastly, Michelangeli's reputation as a teacher plays a major role in his artistic legacy. He taught regularly up until the mid-1970s. The late Walter Klein recalled learning a lot concerning touch and the use of the pedal. "There are no lessons in the usual sense. A lesson would last an afternoon or a whole morning, you know. I didn't work technique with him, just expression, phrasing, breathing." Other students like Martha Argerich, however, received less attention. On the subject of her former teacher, Argerich told writer Dean Elder, "Once he said to David Ruben from Steinway, 'Oh, I've done a lot for that girl.' And David said, 'But Maestro I know that you gave her only four lessons.' And he said, 'Yes, but I taught her the music of silence.' It's all very mysterious."

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*Revised and augmented from an essay originally published in Gramophone magazine.*

devices, appeared more important than the consecutive flow of the music.”

Another bone of contention concerned Michelangeli's frequent non-synchronization of the hands—a trait common to many Romantic pianists (in the same way today's period instrument ensembles are fond of dynamic swells), but taboo among modern keyboard practitioners. His pupil, Renato Premezzi, suggested that Michelangeli employed this device towards structural and expressive ends, allowing the bass to set up and enhance the treble, adding dimension to the texture and sonority. Sometimes the effect proves disconcerting, but when it works, it works beautifully, such as in the pianist's late recording of the Mozart *C Major K. 415 Concerto*. Listen to the slow movement, where Michelangeli offsets the right hand cantilena against the left-hand accompaniment to ravishing effect, suggesting two distinct pianos in different acoustic spaces. His earlier 1953 performance (EMI), by contrast, is polished, yet conventional. Astute listeners may also catch the pianist's idiosyncratic textual emendations: the Schumann Carnival's filled-in bass octaves, and a coda of his own making in Clementi's *B-flat Sonata Op. 12 No. 1*. No 20th century pianist was more closely identified with Brahms' *Paganini Variations*, yet Michelangeli had no qualms about regrouping Brahms' original sequence, omitting a variation or two, making a cut in Book One's finale, or rewriting a tricky rhythmic figure in order to ensure absolute note perfection.

No musical compromises, however, mark the frightening poise and proficiency that inform Michelangeli's peerless way with Schumann's *Faschingschwank aus Wien*, or hair-trigger scintillation that breathes fire and ice in Rachmaninov's *G Minor Concerto*. Some will find it easier than others to reconcile Michelangeli's awesome command and authority with his sectionalized, overly studied accounts of the Chopin First *Ballade* and Second *Scherzo*. With the French Impressionists, Michelangeli's fusion of poetry and precision set Empyrean standards in this repertoire. His classic 1957 Ravel *Concerto* is a case in point. Michelangeli's seamless, eerily perfect “singing sword” trills in the first movement prove that one can indeed “bend” notes on a piano. Two years later Michelangeli performed *Gaspard de la nuit* in the BBC studios, honoring Ravel's precise dynamic, pedaling, and phrasing directives via inhumanly contoured gradations of touch and tone. Listen to Debussy's *Images Books One and Two* on DG, and you'll understand why Michelangeli regarded the piano pedals as the instrument's lungs.

As with Vladimir Horowitz and Arthur Rubinstein, Michelangeli chose his public Beethoven with great care, perhaps trepidation. Numerous existing live “*Emperor*” *Concerto* performances attest to the aristocratic flair and pinpointed control he brought to the outer movement's bravura passages, along with uncommonly even and rhythmically centered scale playing that many pianists would give their eyeteeth to achieve. Such details took on a bracing, forward momentum when the



## Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli: Maverick Virtuoso

A recent discussion with a pianist colleague broached the topic of “process pianists” versus “product pianists.” Process pianists thrive on spontaneity, audience contact, acoustics, the instrument itself, and just plain being in the moment. Two antipodal process pianists, Vladimir Horowitz and Rudolf Serkin, never played twice the same way, nor do Martha Argerich, Daniel Barenboim, Alicia De Laroccha, Evgeny Kissin, and Frederic Rzewski today. Process pianists, to be sure, are often perfectionists, but show up differently from product pianists. Product pianists think twice before

moving, so to speak, and nearly nothing in their art happens overnight. To them, process usually occurs prior to rather than during concert time. Sergei Rachmaninov, Rosalyn Tureck and Dinu Lipatti typify product pianists, and, more recently, Krystian Zimerman, and Piotr Anderszewski, both who emulate the late Glenn Gould's painstaking approach to recording.

Whether or not Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli was the 20th century's ultimate product pianist, his legendary and enigmatic standing in the international classical music arena continues to make good copy. In many respects, the pianist fueled the flames of mystery that surrounded him. Even at the start of his career, Michelangeli had mastered the art of making himself scarce. Like Gould, Horowitz, Argerich, and Richter, Michelangeli harboured a reclusive streak, did not enjoy the most robust health, and was prone to cancel engagements, or even whole tours, at the last minute. He proved equally parsimonious in regard to the works he chose to perform in public, and it's safe to say that Michelangeli had the smallest active repertoire of any great pianist. (In private, however, Michelangeli's students and colleagues attested to the enormous amount of music he knew).

According to his wife's memoirs, Michelangeli likened playing piano to being a waiter. "Waiters," he said, "carry trays full of glasses with two hands and all goes well. But a pebble is enough to make them trip and cause everything to drop." The "pebble" in question was often the piano itself. Like the princess distracted by the small pea buried under fourteen mattresses, Michelangeli's hypersensitive fingers and exacting ears could ascertain the tiniest imperfections in a piano's action, tuning, or voicing. "No piano in the world," he supposedly claimed, "is good enough for Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*." In later years Michelangeli traveled with his own Steinway Models C and D, and sometimes used both pianos in the same recital. His friend and frequent collaborator conductor Sergiu Celibidache witnessed four technicians "trying for a whole day to make his instrument playable for his ear, and his consciousness."

Although he was playing piano in public by age seven, Michelangeli claimed not to have liked the instrument, finding it "far too percussive." He recalled his childhood violin and organ studies in a 1977 *New York Times* article, saying how "out of these studies, I found my own way of playing the piano. I discovered that the sounds made by the organ and the violin could be translated into pianistic terms. If you speak of me tone, then you must think not of the piano but a combination of the violin and the organ." A shoulder ailment, however, forced him to give up the violin and concentrate on the piano. The boy progressed rapidly. During his mid-teens Michelangeli introduced Schoenberg's piano music to Italian audiences. He programmed demanding fare like *Gaspard de la nuit*, the Brahms *Paganini Variations*, the Bach-Busoni *Cbacomne*, Beethoven's "*Emperor*" *Concerto* and

*Op. 111 Sonata*, the Schumann and Grieg *Concertos*, plus Chopin's *B-flat Minor Scherzo*: all works that would remain his lifelong repertoire fixtures. He also spent a year at the Laverna monastery, but plans to become a Franciscan brother fell through.

In 1938 Michelangeli entered the second Eugene Ysaÿe International Music Contest in Brussels, where Emil Gilels won prize. Michelangeli placed seventh, but his special qualities did not go unnoticed. His Grieg *Concerto* performance stood out. "The martial passages were handled in a marked manner, this affirming his transcendent as well as transparent technique, especially in the rhythm," wrote the music critic from "*Le Nationale*" (May 30th, 1938). The next year Michelangeli won first prize at the Geneva International Competition, where Ignace Jan Paderewski chaired the jury. One of the jurors, Alfred Cortot, crowned Michelangeli "a new Liszt." An incomplete recording of that composer's *E-flat Concerto* survives from the occasion, and Michelangeli's blazing, yet impeccably poised virtuosity justifies Cortot's praise.

The pianist's first commercial recordings soon followed, and already he sounded like Michelangeli. His singular pianism appears fully formed, in addition to his remarkable powers of projection and concentration. The sheer beauty and control of sound he brought to his 1941 HMV Beethoven *Op. 2 No. 3 Sonata* totally transcends the work's purely pyrotechnical considerations. Notice, too, the slow movement of Bach's *Italian Concerto*, where the fullness of tone and specificity of shape make an indelible impression, as they also do in his Scarlatti playing. Pianist and writer John Bell Young aptly defined the components governing Michelangeli's imposingly groomed surface style, writing that "the cumulative power of his rhythm relies heavily on motivic definition and micro-dynamics, where even the smallest metrical (and motivic) units give way to discreet affective shading; to ignore this for a theory that a beautiful sound alone can hold a work together is nothing if not unintelligible."

Michelangeli's technical mastery has rarely, if ever, been questioned, yet critical consensus remains sharply divided over certain aspects of his musicianship. Even his friend and colleague Sviatoslav Richter (no stranger to controversy himself!) wrote that ["Michelangeli's] fanaticism and the extreme instrumental standards he sets for himself prevent his imagination from taking flight, and stop him from expressing any real love for the work he's performing so impeccably." "He really is a modern pianist who tries to be Romantic, but he simply does not feel Romanticism," wrote Harold C. Schoenberg in the *New York Times*. "All his Romantic devices sound arbitrarily superimposed, and, as such, forced and artificial. In Michelangeli's playing there was no consecutive sweep. Lines were constantly being broken, and both the (Beethoven *Op. 111*) *C Minor* and the (Chopin) *B-flat Minor Scherzo* came out as a collection of details. The piano itself, and certain pianistic