



ANNIE FISCHER, w.Ernest Bour Cond. RAI S.O.,  
Napoli:

Concerto #4 in G (Beethoven), Live Performance, 22  
May, 1972; w.Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos Cond. RAI  
S.O., Torino: Piano Concerto #20 in d, K.466 (Mozart),  
Live Performance, 10 May, 1974.

St Laurent Studio YSL T-1104. Transfers by Yves St Laurent.

“Hungarian pianist Annie Fischer (1914–1995) is not easy to categorize. Some pianists can be described as predominantly lyrical or poetic, some as muscular or dramatic. Fischer was more of a chameleon, adjusting to what she believed were the requirements of the music she was playing. In these two wonderful live recordings she finds a great deal of variety in both scores.

If the Beethoven Fourth Piano Concerto is the more rewarding of the pair, it is in part because of Ernest Bour’s conducting. Although he was considered a modern music specialist, all of Bour’s work was characterized by a considerable degree of serious concentration. He clearly listens carefully to Fischer’s playing and reacts to it with great sensitivity. Beethoven provides many passages of dialogue between soloist and orchestra in this concerto, even beyond the obvious case of the second movement, and these interchanges truly sounds like dialogue in this performance. Fischer’s playing in the first movement is strong, sharply articulated, and carefully shaded.



The hushed entrance of the orchestra after the cadenza is a perfect example of soloist and conductor matching themselves to each other, as is the flexibility of tempo in the coda to that movement. In the slow movement Fischer employs a wealth of soft dynamics but always with a firmly concentrated tone. She and Bour are in rapt communication with each other. One feels with Fischer that every phrase, even every note, is thought about but never to the degree of seeming fussy. The transition into the finale is perfectly judged by Bour, and the sense of conversation between piano and orchestra is, if anything, even stronger here. What I take away

from the entire performance is the sense that every note matters, that every note has its proper

place in the whole.

Fischer is every bit as good in the Mozart d-minor Concerto, elegant but never fussy. My only reservation is that Frühbeck de Burgos' conducting is somewhat workaday. It is by no means inept, but whereas with Bour we get a sense that the conductor considers the solo playing to be special and worthy of his closest attention, here one gets the feeling that Frühbeck was less deeply engaged. While that may keep this performance from being as special as the Beethoven, it is still treasurable. Rarely will you encounter a pianist who combines such warm lyricism with as muscular and strong a rhythmic pulse. Fischer's way with the Beethoven cadenzas is exuberant and even thrilling. She conveys enjoyment in displaying her virtuosity without doing it tastelessly.

Both recordings suffer from the dry mono sound that was typical of RAI radio broadcast recordings in the 1970s, and also from the fact that the orchestras do not have the most polished principals or the richest string sound. These reservations, however, should not deter you from seeking this CD out. Annie Fischer did not like to record, and her discography is nowhere near as large as her talent merits. I have not previously encountered a recording by her of the Beethoven Fourth Concerto, and this account of the Mozart Concerto #20 is fully competitive with her other versions. The recorded sound, dry RAI studios aside, is more than listenable. Yves Saint Laurent has done his usual excellent work in transferring the originals.

Enthusiastically recommended."

- Henry Fogel, FANFARE