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CD Review by Henry Fogel

B. WEBER Piano Concerto.¹ **BRAHMS Piano Quartet No. 3**² • William Masselos (pn); ¹Leonard Bernstein, cond; ¹New York PO; ²Members of the Juilliard Str Qrt • YVES ST-LAURENT 296 mono (54:44). Live: ¹Carnegie Hall, New York 3/25/1961; ²Hunter College Playhouse, New York 1972

This is the fourth in a series of discs devoted to pianist William Masselos (1920–1992) by Saint Laurent Studio, and as with most of these discs it demonstrates the equal comfort the pianist displayed in the most recent music and the German classics. He was comfortably trained in the German Romantic tradition, but unlike so many of his contemporaries he embraced the new as well.

This performance of Ben Weber's Piano Concerto was the second in a subscription series of the New York Philharmonic that represented the world premiere of the work. Masselos later recorded it with Gerhard Samuels conducting, but the drive and commitment of Leonard Bernstein, and in particular his natural feel for the jazzy elements of the work, make this something special.

Ben Weber's Piano Concerto is a work of extreme range of expression. Composed for Masselos and the New York Philharmonic, it was being written at the time of the death of Dimitri Mitropoulos in November, 1960, and the second movement is intended as a memorial tribute to that conductor. The following *Allegro* is jazzy and upbeat for the most part. Weber's music is largely in the 12-tone system, but without the darkness and tight restrictions often associated with it. Weber consciously spoke and wrote about the need to be flexible with the system, and to fight against grimness while using it as the basis for composition. It is this wide range of colors and moods that must have appealed to Masselos, because he was a performer comfortable with dichotomy, with the quick turn from the memorial tribute to the dancing jazz-like elements that live with each other in this concerto. There is in this performance a real sense of pianist and conductor discovering joys in the music as they play it, and the well-balanced monaural broadcast sound is more than adequate.

The Brahms Piano Quartet, from a concert given with the Juilliard String Quartet at the Hunter College Playhouse in 1972, is also a clean, well-balanced monaural recording, and like other chamber music performances Masselos released in this series it shows four musicians on the same wavelength throughout. The piano dominates where it should, and plays a subsidiary role where that is appropriate. The third movement *Andante* is particularly lovely here, but all four movements benefit from the kind of attention to detail given by Masselos and the members. What distinguishes their playing, in fact, is their obvious attention to details of phrasing, inflection, and dynamic shading while maintaining the feeling of spontaneous music-making, and even a sense of joy in the process.

Again, no notes, but excellent reproduction. **Henry Fogel**

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