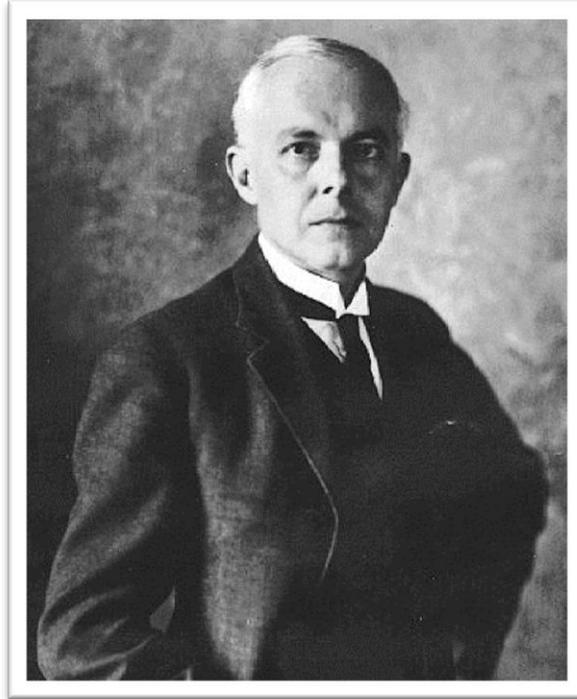


# Bartók Piano Concerti

Comparative Survey, March 2013



## Concerto No. 1

19 performances compared

## Concerto No. 2

19 performances compared

## Concerto No. 3

24 performances compared

## Recommended Recordings

## Discography

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# Piano Concerto No. 1

(1926)

## Overview

For many listeners this is the quintessential Bartok: savage and going straight for the jugular! Many find the Second Concerto convoluted and even abstract in places, and find the Third too lightweight and effervescent to fit neatly into one's preconceptions of Bartok. I enjoy all three, but I'll admit it was the First Concerto that got me hooked. If Bartok had not written another concerto after this, we'd still find this a masterpiece of the genre.

Written the same year that he composed the Sonata, listeners will hear many similarities in the style between the two works: hammered punctuations in the low bass, driving ostinato patterns, and parallel harmonies. This is a work which really explores (and exploits) the percussive capabilities of the piano. It's hard to imagine that Furtwängler was the conductor when Bartok played the solo part at the premiere. I admire Furtwängler as a conductor, but this doesn't really seem like the kind of music he identified himself with. But Bartok was in dire straits financially and took whatever engagements he could, no matter how awkward the situation might be.

As a touring concert pianist, Bartok played on Bösendorfers whenever he could, which was always the case in Hungary, Austria, Italy, and in Amsterdam, and he usually played on Bechsteins when in Germany. Either piano is quite different in sound from the Steinways heard on virtually every recording in this survey. I wonder why nobody has seen fit to give us a Bartok concerto on a Bösendorfer?

## Comparative Review

In this concerto the requirements for the performers are fairly straightforward: convey lots of savage energy, and keep the ensemble cohesion together. There's not a lot of play room for nuance or expressive epiphanies (at least in the outer movements). The real challenge seems to be for the recording engineers. Many of the recordings have problems with balance. If the piano is favored too much then important orchestral details seem too reticent, or submerged behind the piano's blustery noise. If the orchestra is too prominent it seems like the pianist isn't giving enough energy. If the microphones are backed off too far, then there is the danger of picking up too much of the hall's obfuscatory ambience. If too close, then key sections, such as the second movement, seem to lack appropriate atmosphere. Besides all that, the type of microphones used and whether they favor the primary sound only or pick up more of the overtones, these matters all affect our overall enjoyment when we put on the CD at home.

While recording balance is by far the biggest issue, there are passages where the fault clearly lies with the conductor when balances are askew. But in order to point the finger, one has to recognize firstly whether the recording itself is in good balance. Let's take a look movement by movement and see how this plays out.

In the first movement, *Allegro moderato*, just compare the difference between the Pollini and Schiff recordings. With the Pollini recording the DG engineers have put the mics fairly close and this gives the music tremendous visceral punch, completely appropriate for this kind of music. With the Schiff recording the Teldec engineers backed off a bit more than ideal, a choice which pays off in the evocative second movement, but which seriously compromises the level of excitement in the outer movements. That one is fairly obvious to any listener, but now for some more esoteric comparisons. How is it that Anda's piano can sometimes seem to be too forward, and other times too distant? Is it because of knob twiddling in the control booth? That happens. Columbia was notorious for adjusting microphone feeds on the balance mixer, and of course for overusing spot microphone techniques. But that's not the case here. The DG engineers simply didn't get the right sweet spot for the piano microphone. Every time Anda plays passages in the lower half of the keyboard it seems that we are right there next to the piano. Every time he plays in the upper regions we seem to step back several feet. I can live with a more reticent piano perspective during *tutti*s, Anda's tone clusters or shimmering passage work sort of blending in as another color of the orchestra. What I find bothersome is when he is playing only *mezzo forte* in the mid-bass, and thematic details in the woodwinds are completely submerged.

So, that's the story on microphone placement. But wait, we can get even more esoteric and talk about instrumental timbre! The new recording of Zimerman and Boulez on DG has the recording team returning back to Chicago, and it is interesting to hear if newer technologies have improved upon the work they did there back in 1977 for Pollini and Abbado. Well, in terms of background noise, the newer digital recording doesn't have the minimal levels of tape hiss one might notice on the older recording, and percussive details seem to have more three-dimensional realism to them. But (a word that typically negates all of the preceding) the older recording seems somehow more engaging. Were Pollini and Abbado really that more charismatic than Zimerman and Boulez?

We know that from a purely technical point of view, the older recording can't, in fact, be more dynamic than the newest generation digital recording, yet it does seem to have more tactile presence and energy. How can this be? Well, microphone placement and the type of microphones used (direct or omnidirectional) could explain why the earlier recording seems more tactile (closer in) while the newer recording picks up more "dimensionality" (just a few inches further back, and probably using more open field microphones). Woodwinds have a wonderful dimensionality and the piano itself is well-focused within the soundstage, and (unlike Anda's recording) the microphones convey good

balance in all the piano's registers. But, brass seem darker and closed-in on upper harmonics, and cymbals are especially lacking in shimmering overtones.

Compare the opening minute of the Zimerman with the older Pollini version and then compare that with the Ogdon version with Sir Malcolm Sargent on EMI. The brass in the Emi recording positively snarl and have boundless intensity even when playing only mezzo-forte. The Chicago brass for Abbado have less menace at lower volumes than Sargent's, but open up with more vibrancy on fortissimos than Boulez's. The sound of the cymbals in the second movement also sound greatly different in these three recordings. I want to emphasize that the brass and cymbals diverge more than the woodwinds or strings, thus indicating that microphones are not the primary cause (even given closer or more distant placement). Therefore, at issue is the type of instruments used, and how the conductor has indicated that they be played. A cymbal is not just a cymbal, just like a Bösendorfer piano does not sound at all like a Steinway.

I recently took a trip to the local music store where they have a big room full of different kinds of drums, and about 20 different gongs and cymbals to try out. It has been a long time since I took my orchestration class at school, so I poked around and experimented with the sounds each of the percussion instruments made. I can say right off, as somebody who knows next to nothing about percussion instruments, that the cymbals made in Turkey sounded different from the ones made in China, versus the ones made in the U.S. The balance of overtones was different on each due to the differences in thickness, alloy content, and how they were hammered. This doesn't even account for the different types of mallets, hard or soft and wooly, which make a tremendous difference in the type of sound produced. Bigger orchestras, such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, have a backroom full of instruments to choose from. Often the selection of specific percussion instruments will be left to the player, other times the conductor will have specific ideas about the type of sound he wants.

This is what I believe is at issue here (until one of the sound engineers writes me and tells me I'm off my rocker). On the newer recording with Zimerman, either the brass and percussion players have decided themselves to play with a darker sound, or else Boulez has instructed them to play this way. Why would any of this matter? Well, a more vibrant sound conveys more innate energy, even at softer volume levels, than a more rounded (or closed-in) sound. Listeners often talk about one performance having more energy or more sparkle and vitality, and usually attribute those characteristics to the musicians, when in fact there could be technical issues or matters of instruments that are part of the equation. Listeners also talk about a pianist's tone without even understanding that pianos sound different, voicing of pianos can be different, and even tunings can be different. Take the issue of tuning. The amount of stretch between octaves can range from 1 to 10 cents (100 cents = one half step of the scale), the more the stretch the more vibrant the overtones. Thus in a work such as the final movement of this concerto one pianist may seem to have more tone color than another owing to more stretch in the tuning. But that same amount of stretch might be too much in the opening movement of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, where one would want more purity of tone. Often the pianist is blamed for problems that are completely out of their control, such as the recording of the Brahms Second Concerto with Barenboim and Celibidache, where many listeners complain of Barenboim's harsh melodic projection when in fact there was a metallic resonance that the microphone was picking up.

In this concerto I prefer more snarl, more savage dynamic impact, more harmonic shimmer, and a visceral, grab-you-by-the-jugular sense of presence. Therefore, I will respond better to recordings and performances that have more of those characteristics. But other listeners may prefer that some of Bartok's innate savagery be tempered somewhat, and made more polite.

For me, the best, and really ideal balance is achieved in the recording with Pollini and Abbado. The newer recording with Zimerman and Boulez may appeal to listeners who like clarity and focus, but prefer some of the more harsh overtones of brass and percussion softened. And this preference in itself may simply reflect the kind of playback system they have. The recording of Jando on Naxos might also appeal to this listener as it is also less “harsh” (though without the wonderful dimensionality of the DG recording). I can accept these variations in timbre as simply a matter of listener preference. However, what I can’t accept is poor balance. No matter what playback system that I use (or headphones) the Kovacevich/Davis recording frustrates at every turn with important orchestral details that are simply too reticent against the more forward piano. The recording with Schiff/Fischer has the microphones a bit too distant, and that only emphasizes Schiff’s less vigorous playing.

Now that we have matters of recording sound out of the way, I’ll make some observations that relate to the manner of the performance itself. The biggest difference in approach concerns micro vs. macro dynamic inflection. Some performers revel in tiny dynamic details that give each phrase a sense of metric contour, an approach that renders many small points of dynamic energy and crisp articulation. The other approach is for less point-to-point detail, a more rounded sense of articulation, and more concern for the overall arch of the work. I guess, given the savage imagery of the work, the choice of weapon is between a sharp blade or a blunt club. I’m more of a sharp blade listener, and I like a lot of details and metric delineation along the way. Schiff’s micro-dynamic approach works wonders in the Second and Third concertos, but here, he seems to lack vigor, and the microphones only make him seem more diminutive. Donohoe has superb micro-dynamic delineation in the second and third movements, but seems to lack rock-solid rhythmic precision in the first movement. With Donohoe, one is never sure where the metric emphasis will fall. With Pollini there is never any doubt, he and Abbado are like two charging rhinoceroses full of raging testosterone. Even when the dynamic level draws back Pollini always finds a way to keep the underlying tension going. An example of this is demonstrated within the last half minute of the movement where Bartok seems to take one last deep breath before the final charge. Pollini satisfies the need to draw back by giving us a sweeter, more gentle tone in the right hand octaves, but notice how he really emphasizes the innate harmonic tension of those clashing seconds in the left hand? This conveys with expert perception that this is not a false lull where we let our metabolism drop, but that we need to stay alert and at the ready because we’re not there just yet.

Ashkenazy and Solti (and to a lesser degree Jando and Ligeti) take the more macro view of the work. Kovacevich plays with a macro approach, but Davis is more comfortable in the micro mode, and both are sabotaged by poor recording balance (though the Third Concerto fares much better as it was recorded in a different venue). But for those of you who may prefer, or wish to experience, what the macro approach is all about, Ashkenazy and Solti pull it off best. Indeed, theirs is a conception that is almost symphonic in scope. Solti’s climaxes and orchestral sonorities are very big and full, while Ashkenazy passes over the finer details in favor of a big-boned and robust disposition.

The Ogdon/Sargent performance is almost in a category of its own. This is mostly a high-energy rendering of almost overwhelming intensity, and given that they rarely draw back to give us a breather, you might say the conception is more macro than micro overall. But Ogdon’s tone is both very broad and muscular, and also very defined and metrically pointed at the same time. While there can be no doubt about the enthusiasm and energy of these performers, I do find that in the long run, Pollini and Abbado have made some wiser decisions along the way, giving us more than a one-dimensional shot of adrenalin.

The second movement *Andante* is largely a piano solo with percussion *obbligato*. This is where the conductor needs to be vigilant if the percussion players become overly enthusiastic. Even on the best-balanced recordings, I often heard percussion details completely override the subtleties of the

piano line. The percussion should be like punctuations to the piano, not as an equal partner. This is where Schiff's fine work is compromised; the percussion are not at all integral to his conception. Not only that but what kind of drum are they using? The sound is hollow and has a springy flutter like someone beating an old car spring with a wooden spoon, I didn't care for that sound, and was happy to not hear it in any other version. Ashkenazy takes a similar approach to Schiff, using hazy half pedaling to create an evocative atmosphere, and fortunately Solti and the percussion section are much more *simpatico* to his conception. However, the best second movement by far was Donohoe and Rattle. I'd say that their characterization is not only the most effective, but really quite mesmerizing. The way they play it the music sounds like strange things creaking in the night. And the balances are perfect. The only other standout performance of the second movement was Pollini and Abbado, who convey more a sense of feverish tossing and turning, and restless sleep full of flickering and fragmentary images.

The final movement, *Allegro molto*, really requires energy and drive. Anda at 7:12 is just too lethargic compared to the more energetic renderings by Pollini (6:19) and Kocsis (6:26). By the way, timings are tricky because different CDs have the movement cued up to different places. I based my timings consistently from the arrival of the vigorous string passage (many CDs cue up to this point). This section, written in parallel fourths reminds me a lot of Prokofiev's Dance of the Evil Spirits from the Scythian Suite (written a few years before this concerto). I'll just say right off that I find Pollini and Abbado best. The recording perfectly captures the visceral and barbaric nature of this music. The wild flinging rhythms put into mind a kind of ritual dance around a fire. But, as I've said before, Pollini and Abbado not only have the requisite energy but also find ways to shape the music most cogently. Right at the start of the movement you hear the accord they have when the timpani rejoinder perfectly mimics Pollini's phrasing and dynamic contour. Other versions often find the piano and timpani have different inflections. Another example being at rehearsal letter **g** where Pollini clearly delineates each of the passing elisions of groups overlapping one another. Kocsis is exciting but tends to play right over such details. Pollini is more detailed and clocks in even faster than Kocsis. The one thing I like about the Kocsis/Fischer performance is that they really broaden the tempo at the *meno vivo* and make the most of the grand tune at rehearsal **25**, no other version has quite the thrilling impact or sense of glorious transformation. In fact, in many versions this passage passes without much incidence at all. While Abbado is not as big here, Pollini does his best to shape the swirling figurations, and I hear more metric contour than in any other version.

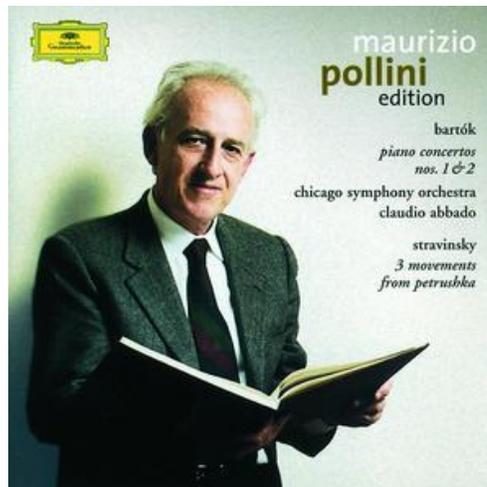
Taking the opposite direction, Schiff (again with Fischer, but with a totally different concept) plays much lighter and conveys a sense of light-headed joyousness. Another little detail that often gets passed over is the ringing gong just before rehearsal **36**. Abbado is a bit wimpy on the gong and also rather reticent on the snare drum punctuations. Fischer (Kocsis version) gives a good solid whack of the gong with deep lingering resonance; his version with Schiff is more reticent. Fricsay (Anda) and Boulez (Zimerman) barely register. Rattle gives the percussionist free reign to give the gong a good whack, but their particular gong is very sibilant and with mostly upper overtones. I suppose it a matter of preference, but I like the gongs with the deeper tones.

Bartok never gives us a finale with driving finish, that was more Prokofiev's style. Bartok likes to build, then drop back and tease the line, build again, pull a sucker punch, and then have a quick final sprint to the finish line. This movement is no different. But to be honest, while these feints are built into the score, that doesn't mean the pianist has to milk them for all they're worth. Just like the detail in the first movement where Pollini satisfies to need to give the ear a break from all the loud dynamics, but in such a way as to not completely dissipate all the underlying intensity, so too does he find a masterful solution here in this movement. Right about at rehearsal **46**, the tempo is suddenly slowed for a final catch of breath, but both Pollini and Zimerman find a way to just barely tap the brakes and not disturb the forward motion too much. Pollini and Abbado close out the movement with tremendous energy, in that regard matched only by Ogdon and Sargent who go beyond exciting

and venture into the realm of truly savage and frightening. Taking a different tact (natürlich), Schiff gives us the slower change of gears Bartok seems to require, but digs in with very emphatic articulation, making this the real dramatic pinnacle, the last stand and oration of the hero, then the sprint to the finish line is like the ecstatic release of tension and spontaneous jubilation.

**Verdict:** For the first movement Pollini and Abbado are the clear standout. Runner-up would be Kocsis and Fischer. In the second movement, Donohoe and Rattle are mesmerizing, and they also do very well in the final movement. For the final movement Pollini and Abbado are my overall favorite, but Kocsis/Fischer are emotionally very stirring and convey a real dignity of spirit. To hear just how differently the same notes can sound, listen to the lighter, more celebratory rendering by Schiff and Fischer.

**Overall recommendation:** Pollini and Abbado (paired with the Second Concerto, and Stravinsky's three movements from Petrushka). The Kocsis recordings are out of print at this time. For a budget recommendation Bronfman and Salonen are consistently good (if not top picks) in each movement, and are very well recorded.



*If you don't require all three concerti on one CD, this is the one must-have for your collection. The Stravinsky Petrushka shows how much Bartók's Second was influenced by Stravinsky's piano writing.*

# Piano Concerto No. 2

(1931)

## Overview

Unlike the propulsive rhythms and primal poundings of the First Concerto, the defining characteristic of this concerto, and the first movement especially, is neo-classicism. But the clean textures and incisive thematic ideas shouldn't mislead someone into thinking this is an easy and lightweight concerto. Among pianists the Bartok Second is considered one of the three most difficult concertos ever written (the other two being the Rachmaninoff Third and the massive Busoni Concerto). The work is riddled with extreme acrobatic leaps and gestures and the pianist must be like the stunt juggler who handles very sharp and dangerous objects. Indeed, Andras Schiff once said of the Bartok Second that it was "the single most difficult piece that I have ever played and I usually end up with a keyboard covered by blood." Kovacevich confessed that "I nearly paralyzed my hands while preparing this piece." Many listeners may just hear the relentless pounding chords and think that it is merely a matter of stamina and energy level that is required for a performer to get through this piece. But one look at the score reveals that these are not simple, compact chords, but often extended passages of that have the hand in cramped and contorted positions, or where the hand is continually stretched to encompass awkward ninths or cramp-inducing ostinatos. One such example happens in the first movement with the left hand required to play an ostinato of a seventh (E-flat and D) alternating with the thumb and second finger playing a second (the upper D and E-flat) which means the hand stretches and contracts back and forth in rapid motion. A really close look at the score while listening reveals that many performers have made some concessions to practicality and have made some simplifications to the near-impossible textures. As nearly as I can reckon, only Weissenberg plays from beginning to end without any alterations or omissions (such as the notorious octave mordents).

Of course, the sad realization is that such torturous writing goes largely unappreciated by the typical listener. So much blood, sweat and tears for so little payoff. During his lifetime Bartok shrugged off complaints about its extreme technical demands, saying in essence that yes it was difficult, but so is life. Somewhere down under all the gentile exterior Bartok must have been a bit of a masochist. Or maybe it's something to do with Hungarian blood, given that fellow Hungarians Liszt and Ligeti have also penned some monstrously difficult piano music.

Speaking of the Hungarian connection, I find it ironic that Bartok, who is so feted in Hungary, and whose image graces the coin and currency of the nation, was born and raised in a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire that is not even part of present-day Hungary. He was born in a small town in what is now part of Romania, and he attended high school (what they call Gymnasium) in what is today a part of Slovenia. But, when given the opportunity to take a full-scholarship study in Vienna, he opted to do his final studies in Budapest, largely because he was averse to the high-brow Viennese culture and their preference for the classic tradition. Of course, as we know, Bartok became a proud exponent of Hungarian nationalism and its expression in both formal and folk music. A similar dichotomy can be pointed out as regards Liszt, who grew up speaking primarily German in his household, conducted most of his correspondence in German, and spent the last decades of his life living and teaching in Germany. By all practical definitions he seems more German than Hungarian, yet he always acknowledged with pride his Hungarian heritage.

When I first began exploring the Bartok concerti back in the Seventies, I preferred the more direct expression of the first concerto, with its primal rhythmic drive and percussive sonorities. By comparison the Second seemed rather chaotic. Then along came the Pollini/Abbado performance in 1977 which had a Second of tremendous clarity and textural detail. The Third, being much lighter in

texture and more conciliatory in expression didn't seem like authentic Bartok to me. It never connected with me until I heard the sparkling and vibrant performance by Donohoe and Rattle in 1989. The reason why it took so long to embrace all three is that choices of recordings were much more limited back then, and as it happens, I seem to have had mostly all the wrong recordings. Even now, after the complete immersion of conducting a comparative survey, there are a few performances that I just don't get a lot of enjoyment from, so imagine a new listener whose only exposure might be that recording.

The key issue for me is **clarity** so that the listener can follow the musical ideas. We don't really need a bludgeoning account by some performer with Schwarzenegger-sized biceps who can brag that he played the loudest for the longest and broke so many strings along the way. Ashkenazy and Solti both pour their hearts and souls into this work, and in those sections where we hear either the piano solo, or the orchestra alone, they give much to admire; but together, they both devolve into a competition about who can make the most noise, and there are seemingly pages of interminably raw, pedal-to-the-metal noise.

Besides clarity I also look for nuance and color and extended passages that have shape and character. That's not to say that I will take nuance over energy in every single case. Consider the cadenza in the first movement. Schiff is much more nuanced and even playful compared to Weissenberg, but I can accept the excitement that Weissenberg's technical prowess brings to this passage, especially since he offers sufficient variation and expression elsewhere. Kovacevich doesn't offer enough variation and despite Penguin's citing Sir Colin Davis as providing vigorous accompaniment, the fact is that either the recording engineers messed up big time, or else Davis didn't have a grasp of proper balances, because 90% of the detailed thematic ideas from the orchestra are buried under Kovacevich's relentless onslaught. These problems of balance are evident irrespective of which playback system or headphones that I use.

Of course, the quality of the orchestra is in many ways more important than who sits at the piano. This is especially so in the atmospheric second movement, where a thin string sound just doesn't convey the wondrous harmonic color of Bartok's open-fifth chordal structures. Ormandy has the advantage of deeply resonant lower strings (celli and bass) and what a foundation that provides for the textures that ride above it. This is where the Budapest Festival Orchestra is lacking, and it shows in the second movement (elsewhere the brass and woodwinds play with remarkable finesse and character). Probably the most superlative range of colors I heard was from the woodwinds and brass of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Abbado.

Well, it won't do to give away the ending before I tell the story, so here's a movement-by-movement assessment of all the performances.

## Interpretive Analysis

### I. Allegro

Much of the piano figurations in this movement show the influence of Stravinsky's Three Movements from *Petroushka*. But Bartok's take on this is much more "down and dirty" and the chordal textures much thicker. The theme itself is actually a very close copy of the transformation theme which appears at the end of Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* (though here it is at four times the tempo). Precision of ensemble and clarity of execution are critical, or the whole thing can just devolve into chaotic noise. Bartok uses a lot of compositional strettis, layering quasi-canonic figurations one upon the other, not truly polyphonic in the strictest sense, but more a perpetual motion of circular figurations and thematic elisions. What I look for are pianists who can shape all the frantic chock-a-block chords into something more subtle and enjoyable, so that we sense the pianist is enjoying the music and not wide-eyed with fear and desperation. Pollini and Abbado shape the phrases nicely, and Donohoe and Rattle also enjoy the give and take of fine ensemble cohesion. But, Schiff is the most relaxed and carefree of all, shaping the very first chords in measure 5 with a subtle give and take elasticity that tells us right away this will not be a tense and blustery performance. Fortunately, all this fine effort is not thwarted by a poor partnership with the orchestra, as the Budapest Festival Orchestra plays with superb textural delineation and a similar light-spirited sense of play. Least effective in this exposition was Kovacevich and Davis where there is an unrelenting battery of shapeless noise from the piano and the brass interjections lack incisive clarity.

The first break we get from all this frenetic activity is at the *Tranquillo grazioso* (beginning at measure 82). Those of you without the score will hear this as the piano solo with lightly rolled arpeggiations soon followed by plucked strings with playful grace notes. Unfortunately, only about one in every three performances convey any sense of play here. I suspect most pianists are scared to death about just surviving the performance without embarrassing themselves. Once again, I found Schiff the most successful, completely relaxed and enjoying the music, with Donohoe also commendably characterful. Least successful was Lang Lang, who got tied up trying to emphasize the difference between the staccato and tenuto indications. As concerns Lang Lang's live performance with Boulez and the Vienna Philharmonic, he was actually fairly well behaved whenever playing with the ensemble, but every time there was the slightest moment of solo playing he really chewed the scenery, to the point of making a mockery of the music. That's all I'm going to say about that performance.

Most often the piano and orchestra play together, but there are a few moments such as the *poco tranquillo* (beginning at measure 120) where there is the opportunity for delightful give and take between the soloist and the large ensemble. Schiff and Fischer pass the lines back and forth with a perfect exchange of rubatos that taper one into the other. Richter also finds some welcome playful nuances here, in a performance with Maazel that is somewhat underappreciated by critics. Apparently Richter himself despised this recording, though given some of his other odd opinions—such as the time he said he actually preferred bad pianos because they challenged him to make music against all odds—I take this all as Richter enjoying the role of being the taciturn provocateur.

The cadenza can be a bit of unflattering noise if not given shape and clarity of execution. My favorite rendering is by Schiff, who finds every opportunity to display voice leading and playful interplay between the two hands. Richter also takes a similar approach. The opposite approach is for technical virility and torrential cascades of double thirds. If one opts for this approach one must have the chops to pull it off! Ashkenazy plows through on sheer adrenalin, while Donohoe also tears it up but with a bit more definition of the thematic line. However, the real jaw-dropper is Weissenberg, who must be heard to be believed. I can't even imagine the digital dexterity required to reposition all the fingers of the hand so quickly to nail each of these quickly changing chords. If this had been a solo recording, I would have suspected that the engineers spliced together a composite from many takes,

but apparently this is how he played it as the orchestral players stood witness. I can appreciate either of those approaches, just as I can when a player opts for the lighter or heavier cadenza in the Rock III, either version picks up on elements of preceding material in the movement. What I don't care for are versions that sort of lay in that hazy middle ground which is neither expressive and playful nor technically commanding and exciting. It is for that reason that both Pollini and Kocsis disappoint, despite fine execution elsewhere in the movement.

Summing up my impressions of the first movement, if I had to pick just one performance I'd go with Schiff and Fischer. In that lighter, more neo-classical mode, I also enjoy the Donohoe/Rattle and the Richter/Maazel. In a more solid, but not blustering mode, I still derive immense enjoyment from the Pollini/Abbado collaboration, and the tip-top playing from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. For a more powerful and symphonic approach (as opposed to chamber-like ensemble) Solti imparts a lot of drama and big tuttis from the orchestra, and Ashkenazy puts the pedal to the metal. Yet, taken as a whole, I often find such an approach fatigues my ears. For pure pyrotechnic prowess coupled with razor sharp metric definition, I confess to being wowed by Weissenberg. If you wonder why I haven't mentioned Anda, it is because, while often being very close to the top contenders, and certainly never approaching the bottom ranks, there are more modern renderings that seem to impress me more. I have a feeling older critics continue to mention Anda as reference standard simply for sentimental reasons, his recordings having formulated their ideas about how the work should be rendered.

## **II. Adagio – Presto - Adagio**

As with a lot of listeners, I find this movement especially appealing and distinctive. The wide spread of the voicing in the strings on five open fifths creates an evocative atmosphere that is at the same time very calm and serene, yet also with an air of the mysterious. There are two characteristics which define the success of the rendering. The first is balance of voicing. Ensembles with thinner sounding string sections are just not as convincing, and it is especially important that the lower strings provide a solid foundation as this is where most of the complex overtones are generated. The conductor may be limited to a certain extent by the compliment of string players and the acoustics, but can in most cases compensate with careful balancing. The Berliner Philharmoniker has the required finesses and silken sheen, but it is the Philadelphia Orchestra under Ormandy that creates the most evocative atmosphere of any versions I heard. One really has an impression of massive weight, floating freely in suspension, like a celestial body. The Budapest Festival Orchestra falls on the other side of things, being insufficient in depth to convey anything of the sort.

The other factor is how the conductor moves the phrases, whether the progression will be a sort of stasis, or if it will be imbued with expressive contour and natural sense of breath. Like I said before, much of this concerto depends more on the conductor and quality of the orchestra than it does on the pianist. Fischer's flow and phrasing maximizes the musical effect given the relatively thin sound he has to work with. He also does well at conveying that odd dichotomy of both intensity and serenity. Maazel also works wonders with the Parisian ensemble, truly mystic yet with an underlying eternal benevolence. Fricsay is also very communicative, though the older technology does not compare against the more modern recordings. Ormandy has the best innate sound, and does well enough not to spoil things, but the shaping and contouring are not as perfect as Fischer and Maazel. But that may be a matter of taste; Ormandy goes more for the monolithic sense of stasis.

Now for the piano entrance. This is often where the magic is spoiled. After all that evocative atmosphere from the orchestra I hate when a pianist comes in matter of fact, seemingly insensitive to the preceding. A pet peeve of mine is when pianists play the lower notes of the left hand passage with a disjointed and disembodied sound that pops out like sore thumb. The more sensitive pianists—and Anda is one of the best in this movement—sort of meld those lower tones into the fabric of the descending line, more along the lines of the what the right hand is doing by phrasing the

octave spans legato. I dock a point off of Kovacevich, Bavouzet and Weissenberg for insensitivity here. Richter is borderline, but I let it pass. The Berlin timpanist is one of the best on record, but much of that is spoiled by Andsnes' dry, detached tone. Aside from Anda, among more modern recordings I find Pollini and Abbado the most satisfying. Pollini and Weissenberg are the only pianists who bothered to have the Steinway's low A detuned to accommodate the low G# sonority Bartok calls for (Weissenberg also adds the upper octave for more power and pitch definition). Remember, Bartok composed and performed as a touring concert pianist on Bösendorfers (before moving to the US). Why on Earth do we not have a single recording made on a Bösendorfer? It seems a natural choice for the combination of both textural clarity and resonant sonority that Bartok calls for.

The scampering presto section was done fairly well by all the pianists, but Weissenberg clearly has that extra reserve of power to give metric definition and punch when needed. Schiff may not have the big eight cylinder engine of power that Weissenberg had, but his technique is like a finely tuned and superbly responsive Porsche. The 32<sup>nd</sup> note passages really sparkle with Schiff. Solti sculpts out some fine detail against Ashkenazy in this section.

The long trilling section is generally done well enough by the pianists (some smoother than others) but the real issue here is again, the balance of the orchestra. Boulez (Berlin) and Abbado get the most character out of the shimmering bowing effects in the strings, but overall Abbado achieves the best balance. Fischer (for Schiff) would be my third pick.

The movement's closing progression is a masterful stroke: we seem to have finally settled in on E major when Bartok delivers a surprise right on the last note. To the ear, the piano's E-flat seems to be a D-sharp serving as the leading tone of E major as the orchestra progresses upward, but then the orchestra settles on C-natural and the piano's E-flat then becomes the dark and tragic expression of C-minor.

In summary, for the second movement I liked the classic Anda/Fricsay version, the Weissenberg/Ormandy, and the Pollini/Abbado probably being my overall top pick. Schiff/Fischer would follow that group, though they place much higher in the outer movements.

### III. **Allegro molto**

In this movement Schiff, Weissenberg and Pollini continue their shoot-out for supremacy, though they are joined here by Donohoe and Rattle who give us a really delightful and colorful finale. Given how prominently the timpani features in this concerto I noticed how all the English recordings have timpanis with very tight, pitch-defined tone, while the continental recordings (especially the Berlin group for Boulez) are deeper in resonance and not as clearly defined. I'm not exactly sure if this is performance tradition, conductor's input or just vagaries of different recording engineers, but it does have an effect on how the piano and timpani interact. It is for this reason that I prefer the sound of the EMI recording with Rattle as the Birmingham timpanist matches the 'speech' envelope of the piano more closely. Throughout, Rattle brings forth much color and enthusiastic playing from the orchestra. You can see how responsive they are to Rattle in the live concert version of the Third Concerto with Schiff in 2006. In the *calmandosi* section toward the end (where the pianist has gentle rolled chords beginning in measure 292) the orchestral soloists really imbue a lot of color and expression to their parts, one of the best I've heard. Donohoe also plays with commanding vigor, but never bangs. They keep a clear ear to the neo-classic nature of the work.

Solti and Ashkenazy (in that order) have a much more symphonic concept, and the orchestral tutti's are very big indeed. Ashkenazy's blunt tone lacks the deft micro-dynamic alacrity of Donohoe. Abbado gets some fine playing from the Chicago group, but Pollini seems less in control here. Sometimes he turns in very compelling passages, other times the double octave passages just seem relentlessly barbaric, and without any real metric definition. Schiff and Fischer are the most playful

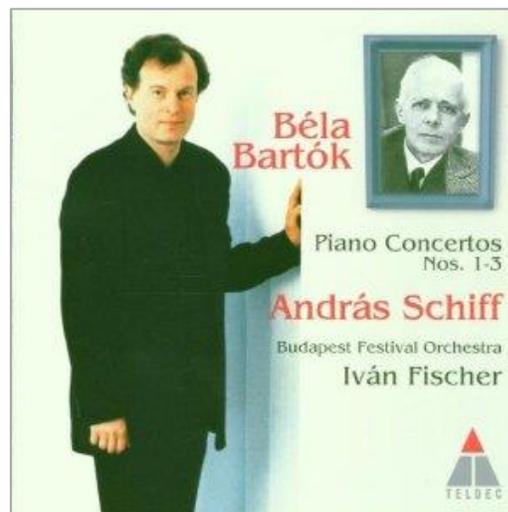
of all, and the recording captures all of the felicities quite nicely. I'd say Donohoe and Rattle have more color and more exciting sense of frisson, while Schiff and Fischer are more relaxed, and focused on dynamic nuance and textural definition.

However, much as I enjoy those versions, and will surely re-visit them often, top honors in this movement must go to Weissenberg and Ormandy. The orchestra sounds great, a sort of ideal cross between the richer and deeper soundstage and resonance of the Berlin/Boulez recording with the superior clarity and metric delineation of the Birmingham/Rattle recording. Every time I do one of these surveys I'm always left wondering why the Philadelphians and Ormandy seem so under-appreciated. As for Weissenberg, well I have several "wow" comments in my notes to the effect that in many passages he is simply without equal. Apparently this CD, coupled with a fine performance of the Concerto for Orchestra, is available only from Arkivmusic.com as an on-demand issue (mid-price).

## The envelope please...

Ladies and Gentlemen, the winner is: Andras Schiff with Ivan Fischer.

This is the one performance more than any other that really gives a true neo-classical characterization to the work. Because of Schiff's falling out with Teldec, this amazing performance is now available at rock-bottom prices on Teldec's budget label, Apex. Of course, as I understand the nature of the settlement, this means Schiff no longer gets any proceeds from sales of these recordings, but hey, just repay him for his fine work and go and hear him live sometime. He still actively performs the Third Concerto.



The interpretive antipode to Schiff would be Weissenberg who really puts in a jaw-dropping performance of propulsive power and precision.

Ormandy provides a luscious backdrop against Weissenberg's chiseled pianism. Also very effective are Pollini and Abbado, and Donohoe and Rattle, for the special and compelling sense of collaborative frisson they offer; both are very well recorded, the DG recording more up-front and visceral, the EMI recording backed-off a bit, but full of sparkle in the treble and with lots of deep impact from the bass drum.

Those are the select four that I'll be playing for my own enjoyment. But there are a few other performances that will probably get a spin every now and then. Among that group: the Richter/Maazel, the Anda/Fricsay, and the Bronfman/Salonen. Yes, this later performance, now on the budget Sony Essentials label is probably the standout offering of that entire line. On the typical low or mid-fi system the sound may seem to lack impact compared to the more visceral DG recording for Pollini and Abbado, but on a high resolution system, with the sound turned up a bit to compensate for the low-level base line, the sound has a wonderful lifelike liquidity to it, and a deep and immersive sense of the soundstage, as if one were standing right there at the front of the stage. Needless to say, as a budget recommendation this far eclipses the pedestrian efforts of Jando on Naxos. I find it tiresome that some critics continue to insist that only Hungarian musicians understand Bartok, which was the principle argument one critic gave in favor of the Jando recording on Naxos. Much as I was disappointed with many other renditions (notably Kovacevich) I'll keep them all on hand for future reference, should the need arise.

**My final verdict:** if you will only have one recording, make it the Schiff/Fischer. If you will consider keeping two recordings on hand that show the range of possibilities in this work, then add the Weissenberg/Ormandy to your collection. If you really like the work and want a few more recordings to add to your play rotation, consider the Pollini/Abbado or the Donohoe/Rattle. The Pollini also has a superb rendering of the First Concerto. Be sure to get the remastered CD which now adds Pollini's performance of Stravinsky Petroushka, an easy way to really see the influence this work played on Bartok's piano writing in this Second Concerto.

# Piano Concerto No. 3

(1945)

## Overview

Bartok's Third Concerto was literally written on his death bed. In 1945, suffering from leukemia, Bartok had a final inspiration, conceived and set to paper in a last effort of feverish activity. All but 17 measures of the orchestration were completed, and those final few measures fleshed out according to indications given by Bartok, by his assistant, Tibor Serly.

But this is hardly a dour and morose work filled with despair and impending sense of loss. It is actually one of the most gently spirited works Bartok ever wrote. There is a sense of playful reminiscence (even childlike regression), smiling beatitude, and inward radiance that many listeners find quite transcendent. Others find this an enigmatic work, disjointed and almost stream-of-conscious in conception, and rather facile in its textures. There is truth in both appraisals, such that one could say that the playfulness and simplicity of the writing are the very source that move it from contrived compositional craft to transcendent utterance.

One thing's for sure: this concerto is nothing like the first two, and is hardly what most people would consider as the stereotypical percussive and barbaric Bartok. I'll confess, the Third took me the longest to come around to, and I still find it somewhat unsatisfying when I look at the score as I listen. But if I put the score down and just listen, the gentle spirit of it washes over me. Paradoxically, fragments of the "tunes" play over in my head, but they are phantoms that are impossible to hold onto or whistle or hum. This is because, while some of the thematic germs are very simple and linger with a powerful resonance, they always devolve into unusual metric groupings, emerging and exiting at various points in the metric contour, sometimes elongating, sometimes truncating. It is this very playful and self-amused stream of consciousness that manifests itself into all manner of irregular rhythmic groupings. In a way, the musical equivalent of a faint and distant rainbow, impossible to see where it starts or finishes.

The second movement, *quasi religioso*, is also highly unusual for Bartok given that he was a man with no practicing faith. Very simple melodic threads form a quasi canonic structure that alternate between strict canon and imitative inversion. The piano provides simple, soft chords that harken back to Debussy or Satie, and the whole movement comes across sounding like a simple Shaker hymn as Copland might have arranged it. This centerpiece, the spiritual center of the work, surrounded by the playful reminiscence of the outer movements could have only been written by a man with a vision of his own end. But it is a sunny and grateful vision, happily allowing moments of joy and contentment to carry him over him to his final moments of life on this Earth.

Bottom line: if you have never been a fan of Bartok, this may be the work to gently ease your way into his world of folk-inspired idiom and consonance-based harmonic language. If you are attracted to the more assertive and percussive side of Bartok, then this work will require a change of gears and a realization that in this final departing effort, the fight and struggle had left the weakened man, and in his final moments he seems to have found peace and resolution.

## Comparative Review

One thing that I look for throughout all three movements is rhythmic cohesion. It is absolutely critical that all the myriad irregular rhythmic groups sound intentional and purposeful, not as unintended accidents or even loosey-goosey improvisational approximations. Therefore, in most cases wistful rubato works against such clarity and cohesion. In the crossing from measure 3 to 4 Anda is already applying rubato and we haven't even heard the first disposition of the theme to get our bearings, or "sea legs" as might be the more appropriate analogy. The first part of the movement requires a deft touch and clear articulations from the piano, and transparency and balance from the orchestral ensemble to ensure that all the delicate details emerge from the texture. None do this better than Schiff and Fischer. I also like Grimaud's sense of flow, but there seems to be a disconnect with Boulez. Playing off the same page, Ashkenazy and Solti are completely simpatico, giving us a much more vigorous and *concertante* version than anybody else. It's not my preferred approach, but it is so well done I enjoy playing their version once in a while. Their version is also the most brisk, at 6:56, and the fun is over before you know it.

There are a few passages with declamatory octaves in the piano, and the pianist must be precise in the weighting and articulation. Grimaud is rather blunt and without shape, Donohoe and Schiff are better, but it is Argerich who not only has plenty of spring in the articulation, but also finds some nice inner voices. Most of the conductors do best to just keep the appropriate balance and clarity of textures. Boulez tries a bit too hard to find distinctive little details—squawking punctuations from the reeds, chicken clucking chatter from the woodwinds, and bleating brass sputterings—all of which really lead nowhere, nor reveal any important thematic ideas. In my view, Dutoit and Fischer extract just the right amount of characterization from the orchestra (Solti's is more of a big-boned symphonic approach).

Beginning at measure 54 the mood changes and it is as if we walked upon a group of musicians playing in an outdoor beer garden in summer. Some performances sound like a Joplin ragtime band, some like an Eastern European Klezmer band, others like a scene from Berthold Brecht's Three Penny Opera.

Up next (beginning at measure 76) is an extended *armonioso* episode with arpeggiations in the piano against woodwinds. Metric contour is important or the piano just sounds out of kilter with the orchestra. Schiff is really outstanding here, perfectly shaping and delineating the line so it all makes sense. A few pizzicato plucks and a fermata and we transition to another memory (beginning at measure 118), this one in haunting parallel fifths. Once again, small nuances of inflection can give a totally different feel to this section.

After this reflective moment the pulse quickens a bit and we find skittering figurations in the piano, with feather-light runs in the upper registers, and a sequence of repeating, pulsating chords. The issues which distinguish one performance from another are how light and ethereal the pianist renders the figurations, and to what degree the pulsating chords convey a sense of drive to the finish. As for the gossamer figurations, none are better than Schiff, though with a bit more weight, Donohoe is also very crisp and well-defined. As for the repeated chords, this passes by with hardly any notice in some renderings, while others register a bit more excitement. With Argerich we get a momentary throwback to the more youthful and vigorous Bartok as she stokes the fire of the speeding locomotive. Her enthusiasm is quite contagious here and brought a smile to my face.

A final detail as the first movement comes to a conclusion: some performers (both piano and orchestra) are very literal in observing the rhythmic values of these final, fading figurations. Donohoe, Anda, and Schiff are all quite literal. But I like a bit of a gentle softening of the edges, as when one nods off to restful sleep. Argerich and Dutoit give us such a gentle fade out, though I especially like how the Berlin soloist and Grimaud have a perfect interplay of inflection (probably one of the few moments in that performance that connected with me).

Before going on to the second movement it is worth noting that in nearly all performances the impression is of stream-of-conscious memories that shift with passing moods and textures. However, with a tighter reign on the tempo (at 6:56, the fastest of the survey), and more *concertante* rendering (with more forceful projection) Ashkenazy and Solti give us a less fragmentary movement that is never without an underlying sense of drive and forward progression. Certainly, all the fascinating details I've talked about are less in evidence with these two, but the musical line progresses with a satisfying directness of expression. It's worth hearing simply for its unique perspective.

As I said in the overview, the writing in the second movement is quite simple, sounding in many places like a Shaker hymn. But one man's religious epiphany is another man's dogmatic ritual. Timings tell a lot about the mood you can expect. The fastest timing comes from Monique Haas at 9:06, and the slowest from Hélène Grimaud at 11:13. That about a 20% differential and you can tell. The thing is, with slow movements, one can seem impatient or insensitive if one tries to hurry things along too much, but, conversely, one can easily sound indulgent by exacerbating an already slow moving forward progression. As it turns out I'm not convinced by either extreme interpretation, but I find the overall most successful rendering is closer to the faster timing. Musically, there's no reason why the canonic figurations and inverted imitations can't proceed at a naturally flow pace without loss of their perceived innocence and humility. And as for the simple chords that follow in the piano, they can have an underlying sense of pulse and yet still convey that sense of valedictory rumination as long as they are sensitively rendered. Then of course, there is the contrasting section (*poco piu mosso* at measure 58) with the fluttering figurations in the piano, and even a strike of the gong with a low cluster chord from the piano. Depending on how the ensemble is balanced, the moods can be somewhat different between the various performances.

Boulez sets up perhaps the best introduction I've heard, but Grimaud seems intent on relaxing the tempo, then Boulez tightens it again. We're talking about very subtle inflections that some listeners might not notice consciously, but I think it conveys a sense of two life forces, not quite working on the same wavelength. There's a bit of the same with Fischer and Schiff, where Fischer seems to want to draw out a more ardent sense of yearning while Schiff wants to be more centered emotionally. But once the *piu mosso* kicks in they are in perfect sync. Probably the most out of sync is Argerich and Dutoit, which surprises me given the razor sharp interplays and enthusiastic back and forth banter of the first movement. The section beginning at measure 80 sounds to me like a precursor to Rautavaara. It can be a wonderfully evocative passage. Donohoe and Rattle work together seamlessly and the back and forth banter sounds like an enchanted forest full of chirping birds. Schiff is also wonderfully characterized here, but my favorite goes back to the old Anda/Fricsay recording. I don't know, maybe it was the sugar rush from the bowl of pistachio gelato I ate, but as I was listening to take notes, the various layers of fluttering and swirling instruments brought forth a very unusual image: playful meteors dashing across the distant purple night sky while nearby flickering fireflies seemed to dance in solidarity with their cosmic cousins. Multiple layers all interconnected. Does anyone else get the same image? Oh, well, I guess I'm alone on that one. But seriously, the art of bringing music to life is to allow the distinctive mood sweep over you while always keeping an ear out for balance and coherence. On that much, at least, I'm sure you'll agree that the better performances tap into that extra dimension of vitality that goes beyond just playing the notes.

Just as with the first movement, clarity and cohesion are essential in the third movement. Off accents and syncopations abound at every turn. Without clearly defined metric profile the music quickly devolves into blustery noise. This is especially true in the quasi fugato section (beginning at measure 230) where delicate details in the orchestration sometimes get lost. Other than that, the only other distinguishing aspect of each performance is to what degree there is a sense of drive at the presto (measure 630) and sense of release on the final upward sweeping crescendo.

I will admit that I find a few spots of the last movement very awkward musically, such that Bartok may have made some slight adjustments had he lived long enough to consider some of the finer details of practical ensemble. Nevertheless, there are two performances where the pianist and conductor have worked out such awkward passages so that they make sense and seem to resolve their disparate trajectories without issue.

For that reason alone I give high praise to Donohoe and Rattle, and Schiff and Fischer. Actually, there's a third, the live televised concert with Schiff and Rattle together, which may be my favored version for this movement (available from Mezzo on DVD) though I prefer Teldec's recorded sound.

Aside from the Donohoe and Schiff, there are two other versions worth pointing out. Argerich and Dutoit are very compelling in this movement: Argerich is full of scampering energy and wonderful characterization (especially in the slower arpeggiated section) and Dutoit finds just the right balance of details to complement her innate *frisson*. The only slight weakness in that recording is the stagnant second movement. Even so, I'm glad I have the CD to play now and then.

Emerging from this comparative survey as a big surprise (for me) was the wonderful discovery of the Louis Kentner and Sir Adrian Boult recording from the 40's which somebody posted on YouTube. I still don't understand the reverence some have for Lipatti's middle-of-the road rendering when Kentner (and Boult) are so much more compelling in just about every aspect that I've discussed here. Kentner has a lot of energy and a wonderfully etched and scintillating tone that gives us detail without blustery pounding. Yes, the few measures of difficult octaves find him scrambling a bit compared to Argerich (who tosses them off like child's play) but for 99% of the work, this is really engaging musicality and pianistic refinement. As I understand it, Kentner gave the European premier of this concerto in 1946. Also of interest—especially if you are studying the work, or a real collector of this concerto—he plays an interpolated ending that I think is more interesting than the interlocking octaves that Bartok borrowed from the Tchaikovsky concerto. Kentner plays octaves tremolos and doubles octaves in contrary motion and the ending in general creates much excitement. Perhaps others will know the origin of this *ossai*, or whether he simply took the liberty of changing those last few measures - or perhaps he fumbled and had to improvise on the spot? Definitely worth a listen!

To recap: in the first movement I most enjoyed Argerich/Dutoit, Kocsis/Fischer, Schiff/Fischer, and for a more symphonic approach, the Ashkenazy/Solti. In the second movement the Schiff/Fischer stands above the rest, though Anda/Fricsay also have some evocative moments, and the Donohoe/Rattle collaboration is very fine. In the final movement Schiff pulls it all together the best, though Argerich, Donohoe and Kentner are also top contenders. All things considered, all three movements given their proper characterization, I find the best overall performance to be the Schiff and Fischer version on Teldec. Schiff's crystalline clarity amazes me every time, and no matter how complex the figurations or textures become everything always makes perfect sense. The recording engineers have also done their part to make sure this is a wonderful listening experience. And remember, this superbly recorded CD is now available at a super budget price on Teldec's Apex label (I've seen it as low as \$4.99). That's just crazy. Get the CD and enjoy!



# Recommended Recordings

## *Piano Enthusiast Reference Recording*



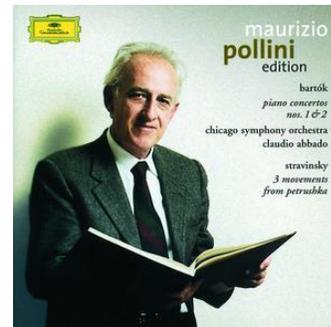
### **András Schiff and Iván Fischer**

For those seeking all three concerti on a single disc this is your best choice, by far. Not only are the performances superb, with Schiff's crystalline tone giving us a detailed and unforced clarity in even the most complex passages, and Fischer's experience with these works bringing perfect balance of ensemble at all times, but the recording itself is wonderfully lifelike and dynamic. Not only that, but these recordings are now available on Teldec's super budget label, Apex.

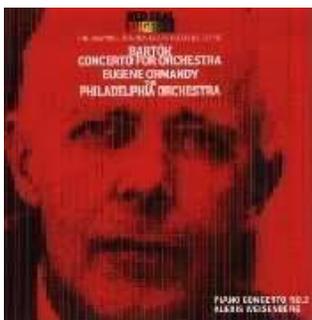
## *Also Indispensable for the Bartok Lover...*

### **Maurizio Pollini and Claudio Abbado**

More vigorous and dynamic than Schiff, Pollini's is my favored version of the First Concerto. The two Italians seem fully charged on cappuccinos, though they never ride roughshod over important thematic details. The Second Concerto is also good though I find Schiff's more neo-classic emphasis more appropriate for that work. The addition of the Stravinsky Petrushka on this CD allows us to hear to what extent the piano writing for the Second Concerto was influenced by Stravinsky. Sound is immediate and very engaging. [DG recording.]



### **Alexis Weissenberg and Eugene Ormandy**



This recording seems to come and go and gets re-packaged every now and then. Although some pianists may prefer the coupling with the Rachmaninoff Third (a noteworthy performance), I never care for the jarring shift of gears between Bartok and Rachmaninoff. I much prefer the coupling with Ormandy's evocative performance of the Bartok Concerto for Orchestra. This version is currently available only through Arkivmusic.com. Either way, Weissenberg's performance of the Second Concerto is a jaw dropper. Rarely have I been so stunned by such visceral pianistic command. And Ormandy's Philadelphians provide a luscious backdrop against Weissenberg's chiseled pianism. The depth of the lower strings gave the *nachtmusik* of the second movement an eerie and otherworldly effect. A very special recording. [RCA recording.]

## Table of Recordings Surveyed

	<u>Artist</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Concerto</u>	<u>Conductor</u>	<u>Orchestra</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Label</u>	<u>Source</u>	<u>Recommend?</u>
1	<b>Anda</b>	Géza	2	Fricsay	Köln Rundfunk Berlin Radio Sym.	1952	Audite	MP3	No
2	<b>Anda</b>	Géza	1, 2, 3	Fricsay	Orch.	1960	DG	LP, CD	No
3	<b>Anda</b>	Géza	2	Boulez	BBC Sym. Orch. Berliner	1973	BBC	MP3	No
4	<b>Andsnes</b>	Leif Ove	1	Boulez	Philharmoniker Orch. Sym. De Montreal	2003	DG	CD	No
5	<b>Argerich</b>	Martha	3	Dutoit		1997	EMI	CD	Yes
6	<b>Ashkenazy</b>	Vladimir	1, 2, 3	Solti	London Phil. Orch.	1979	Decca	LP, CD	No
7	<b>Ashkenazy</b>	Vladimir	1	Haitink	Concertgebouw New Philharmonia Orch.	1980	Live	YouTube	No
8	<b>Barenboim</b>	Daniel	1, 3	Boulez		1969	EMI	LP	No
9	<b>Barenboim</b>	Daniel	1	Boulez	Chicago Sym. Orch.	2005	Live	YouTube	No
10	<b>Bavouzet</b>	Jean-Efflam	1, 2, 3	Nosedá	BBC Philharmonic	2010	Chandos	MP3	No
11	<b>Bronfman</b>	Yefim	1, 2, 3	Salonen	Los Angeles Phil.	1996	Sony	CD	Yes
12	<b>Cziffra</b>	György	2		Budapest Phil. Orch.	1956	Live	YouTube	No
13	<b>Donohoe</b>	Peter	1, 2, 3	Rattle	Birmingham Sy. Orch.	1990	EMI	CD	Yes
14	<b>Douglas</b>	Barry	3	Jarvi	Concertgebouw	2004	Live	YouTube	No
15	<b>Fischer</b>	Annie	3	Fricsay	Budapest?	50's		YouTube	No
16	<b>Grimaud</b>	Hélène	3	Boulez	London Sym. Orch.	2004	DG	CD	No
17	<b>Grimaud</b>	Hélène	3	Ashkenazy		2006	Live	YouTube	No
18	<b>Haas</b>	Monique	3	Fricsay	Berlin Radio Sym. Orch.	1954	DG	MP3	No
19	<b>Jandó</b>	Jenő	1, 2, 3	Ligeti	Budapest Sym. Orch.	1994	Naxos	CD	No
20	<b>Kentner</b>	Louis	3	Boult		40's		YouTube	Yes
21	<b>Kocsis</b>	Zoltan	1, 2, 3	Fischer	Budapest Festival Orch.	1987	Philips	CD	Yes
22	<b>Kocsis</b>	Zoltan	2	Pesko	Orch. Svizzera Italiana	1995	Live	YouTube	No
23	<b>Kocsis</b>	Zoltan	2	Lehal	Budapest Phil. Orch. Berlin Radio Sym.		Capriccio	MP3	No
24	<b>Kocsis</b>	Zoltan	1	Janowski	Orch.		Live	YouTube	No
25	<b>Kovacevich</b>	Stephen	1, 2, 3	Davis	London Sym. Orch. Wiener	1968	Philips	CD	No
26	<b>Lang</b>	Lang	2	Boulez	Philharmoniker	2007	Live	YouTube	No
27	<b>Lipatti</b>	Dinu	3	Sacher	Baden Baden	1948	Live	YouTube	No
28	<b>Ogdon</b>	John	1	Sargent	Philharmonia Orch.	1968	EMI	CD	Yes
29	<b>Paik</b>	Kun-Woo	3	Petrenko	Royal Liverpool Phil.			YouTube	No
30	<b>Pollini</b>	Maurizio	1, 2	Abbado	Chicago Sym. Orch.	1977	DG	LP, CD	Yes
31	<b>Pollini</b>	Maurizio	1	Boulez	Orchestra de Paris	2001	Live	YouTube	Yes
32	<b>Ránki</b>	Deszö	3	Ferencsik	Hungarian State Orch.			YouTube	No
33	<b>Richter</b>	Sviatoslav	2	Maazel	Orchestra de Paris	1976	EMI	LP, CD	Yes
34	<b>Sándor</b>	György	1, 2, 3	Fischer	Hungarian State Orch. Budapest Festival Orch.	1990	Sony	CD	No
35	<b>Schiff</b>	András	1, 2, 3	Fischer		1996	Teldec	CD	Yes
36	<b>Schiff</b>	András	3	Rattle	Birmingham Sy. Orch.	2006	Mezzo	YouTube	Yes
37	<b>Schiff</b>	András	3	Elder	BBC Sym. Orch.	2010	Live	YouTube	No
38	<b>Sermet</b>	Huseyin	3	Nishiwaki	Tokyo Sym. Orch.		Auvidis	MP3	No
39	<b>Weissenberg</b>	Alexis	2	Ormandy	Philadelphia	1970	RCA	CD	Yes
40	<b>Zimerman</b>	Krystian	1	Boulez	Chicago Sym. Orch.	2001	DG	CD	No

