

# DVD & Blu-ray

Karajan on film • Domingo's Simon Boccanegra • Karita Mattila's Tosca

## Beethoven


Piano Sonatas – No 2, Op 2 No 2<sup>a</sup>;

No 15, 'Pastoral', Op 28<sup>b</sup>.

Variations on an Original Theme, WoO80<sup>c</sup>

Emanuel Ax holding masterclasses with <sup>a</sup>Samson

Tsoy, <sup>b</sup>Nicolas van Poucke, <sup>c</sup>Claire Huangci pfs

MMF ©  MMF2 031 (101' • NTSC • 16:9 • stereo • 0)

Recorded live at the Verbier Festival Academy

**Emanuel Ax is a genial teacher as he takes three pianists through Beethoven**



The Verbier Festival's Masterclass Media Foundation is a new venture that aims to create a unique archive of some of the world's greatest musicians filmed teaching or giving masterclasses. It is a non-profit-making organisation that will make the archive available to music colleges and students throughout the world and, as the blurb informs us, "form a teaching resource of immense value for this and succeeding generations" – an admirable enterprise.

One could hardly wish for a more genial, insightful and sympathetic guide from the ranks of today's leading pianists than Emanuel Ax. The format of the no-frills production, eschewing any fancy titles, introductory sequence and even liner-notes, is simple: a student plays a couple of movements of a sonata without interruption; Ax, occasionally glimpsed following the score from his seat in the small auditorium, then comes onstage and works through with the pianist what we have just heard, offering suggestions, probing musical decisions and, not infrequently, praising the improvements he hears.

Criticisms? Even when following with a score, it is not always easy to identify to which particular bar or passage Ax is referring. Of the three fine young pianists (about whom, shamefully, we are told nothing), only Claire Huangci engages in any verbal dialogue with Ax. Are students trained to be mute in masterclasses?

While the DVD is basically a teaching aid, there is enormous pleasure in eavesdropping on what is essentially a private lesson and which, as a by-product, helps us realise what great imagination and insight it takes to be a world-class pianist. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## Brahms

Ein deutsches Requiem, Op 45

Solveig Kringelborn *sop* Mariusz Kwiecien *bar*

Swedish Radio Choir; Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

BIS  BIS-DVD1750

(79' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 0)

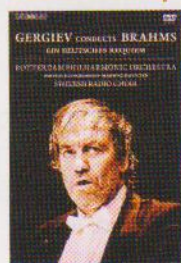
Recorded live at De Doelen Hall, Rotterdam.

May 25, 2008

*Selected comparison:*

Abbado (ARTH) 101 047

**Gergiev directs a curiously disengaged Deutsches Requiem in Rotterdam**



The dark wood of De Doelen Hall and the blond(e) highlights of the Swedish Radio Choir would grace any fine performance of the *German Requiem*, whether to watch or just to hear.

Both the acoustic and the choral singing offer the focused warmth that the Requiem needs if it isn't to sound inappropriately ecclesiastical or sterile. Valery Gergiev's presence may not prepare you for a physically and emotionally contained performance that shepherds us gently past intimations of mortality. If he conducted Tchaikovsky or Shostakovich with the same elegant disregard for the special points of tension and repose such as the pedal-point at the climax of the outer movements, his reputation would be quite different.

Whether you find his approach inward or simply muffled will be down to you. Let's call it muted, and puzzle over the disengagement of words from music. The baritone is as score-bound as Gergiev himself; the timpanist doesn't appear to be following either at the start of the third movement. The soft refreshing rain of the second movement's central section falls on barren soil; despite every word being clear, the choir might as well be la-la-la-ing for all the animation they can bring to a plodding accompaniment. The same goes for the fourth and fifth movements, where Gergiev rides majestically over the hemiolas that make the music drag and sing, that make it Brahms. In every way Abbado, the Vienna Philharmonic, the Musikverein, even the previous members of the Swedish Radio Choir are a preferable alternative on DVD, and that's to reckon without the

filming itself. A mike slants across Solveig Kringelborn throughout her solo, and rarely do we see a musician without a chair, a stand or a seat in the way. **Peter Quantrill**

## Britten

**Death in Venice**

Marlin Miller *ten* ..... Gustav von Aschenbach

Scott Hendricks *bar* ..... Traveller/Elderly Man

..... Old Gondolier/Hotel Manager/Hotel Boy

Razek-François Bitar *countertenor* ... Voice of Apollo

Alessandro Riga *dnr* ..... Tannhäuser


Danilo Palmieri *dnr* ..... Jack

*Stage director* Pier Luigi Pizzi

*Video director* Davide Mancini

Chorus and Orchestra of La Fenice, Venice

Bruno Bartoletti

Dynamic ©  33608

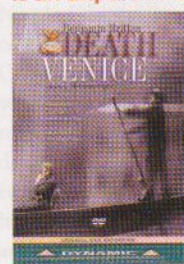
(155' • NTSC • 16:9 • LPCM 2.0 • 0)

Recorded live 2008

*Selected comparison:*

Tear, Glyndebourne, Jenkins (8/01) (ARTH) 100 172

**An Italian Death in Venice that is an unparalleled visual treat**



Even before the opera starts, the beauty of Venice takes hold. The opening credits are accompanied by film of Teatro La Fenice and the city's historic vistas, leading on perfectly to Pier Luigi Pizzi's visually stunning production. Here is *Death in Venice* in high Visconti style, ravishly designed greys and silver blues, and inimitably Italian in the classical elegance of its settings. No other production of this opera has so successfully transported the audience through a series of fully conceived sets – starting off from a graveyard built of piles of books, at the Grand Canal, checking in to a black-and-white marble hotel, and then out on to the beach, where the games of Apollo take place under the gaze of the god's giant statue.

Does the magnificence of the production upstage the singers? Yes, a little, although the cast are well inside their roles. Marlin Miller sings with a refined lyrical sensibility that makes the most of Aschenbach's long stretches of limpid arioso and is alive to the poetry of the words. He also charts the character's decline vividly, but his younger-than-usual Aschenbach comes across as so and perhaps lesser in stature, than either I