NAXOS

Ferdinand RIES

Piano Concertos

Op. 42 and Op. 177

Introduction et Rondeau brillant

Christopher Hinterhuber, Piano

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra • Uwe Grodd

Ferdinand Ries (1784-1838)

Piano Concertos, Vol. 5

In this fifth and final recording of the complete works for piano and orchestra by Ferdinand Ries we encounter the first and last of his published concertos and one of his final essays in the genre he did so much to champion: the large-scale independent concert rondo. As such, this recording broadly frames Ries's entire creative output in the concerto (the first published work was not the first to be composed) as well as reflecting the profound stylistic shift that began to emerge in the works of Beethoven's younger contemporaries. When viewed in its entirety, Ries's cycle of fourteen works for piano and orchestra stands as one of the finest musical achievements of the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Unlike his teacher Beethoven, whose deafness drove him from the concert platform relatively early in his career, Ries remained one of Europe's most celebrated virtuosi until well into the 1830s. His receptiveness to new musical trends and his ability to develop and exploit them was as fundamental to his success as an artist as it was to his close contemporary Hummel. This quality of Ries is reflected in the formal diversity of his works for piano and orchestra. In addition to concertos, there are several sets of variations, two large-scale rondos and a polonaise. Beethoven, by comparison, restricted himself principally to the solo concerto, the genre Mozart had brought to the peak of perfection in the mid-1780s, although the *Choral Fantasia*, *Op. 80*, with its lengthy fantasia-like introduction for the piano and subsequent theme and variations structure, bears some similarity to the sets of variations later written by his pupil.

Ries published nine concertos, the first for violin and the remaining eight works for the piano. The concertos were numbered sequentially in order of publication and as a consequence the numbering of the first six works is not only misleading, since the sequence of piano concertos starts with *Concerto No. 2*, but the individual publication dates bear little relation to the actual dates of composition. The explanation for this rather confusing state of affairs is probably straightforward. Ries composed piano concertos first and foremost for his own use. Like Mozart and Beethoven before him, he withheld works from publication while they were still largely unknown to his audiences. Whether he continued to perform the works is uncertain but there seems little doubt that his decision to delay their publication reflected his wish to prevent others from doing so. In the 1820s Ries published three of his earlier concertos: the *Fourth Concerto, Op. 115* (1823), composed in Bonn in 1809; the *Fifth Concerto, Op. 120* (1823), place and date of composition uncertain; and the *Sixth Concerto, Op. 123* (1824), composed in Bonn in 1806. With the publication of these works and a seventh more recent work the stage was set for the composition of Ries's last two concertos and several smaller works for piano and orchestra.

Ries's concertos inevitably invite direct comparison with those of his teacher. Beethoven's influence is certainly there to be seen not only in the overall scale and structure of the works but also in their rugged, powerful orchestration. But in many other respects the works are dissimilar and intentionally so. Their musical organization is deft – there are numerous examples of clever motivic manipulation in the concertos – but it is also apparent that they are not thematically-driven in the manner of Beethoven's works. They are melodically rich but not motivically dense and in this quality they bear a similar relation to Beethoven's works as Pleyel's do to those of Haydn. The solo writing is also very different and its pianism, like Hummel's, looks forward to Chopin and Mendelssohn rather than back to Beethoven's great Middle Period sonatas and concertos. While the large-scale structure of Ries's concertos still conforms closely to that of the late eighteenth-century concerto, their internal musical organization differs considerably, particularly in the matter of tonal architecture. Ries's harmonic vocabulary is not

fundamentally different from Mozart's but the range of tonal relationships is greatly expanded. Another striking feature of Ries's concertos is the proliferation of tempo markings within a single movement; when combined with carefully marked *rallentandi* and frequent cross-rhythms in the solo part, the music demands an expressive flexibility in performance that is almost as foreign to Beethoven as it is to Mozart. The rhapsodic quality of Ries's style is heightened further by the interpolation of cadenzas – some surprisingly extensive in scope – in the middle of movements rather than before the final tutti; cadenzas also serve on occasion to introduce movements rather than to function as a link between movements. That Ries experimented with this approach in his very earliest concerto illustrates his determination first to discover and then to assert his distinctive voice as a composer.

During his eventful tour to Russia in 1811-1812 which culminated in his hurried flight to escape the invading French army, Ries successfully negotiated the publication of his *Piano Concerto in E flat* with the Leipzig publisher Ambrosius Kühnel. The work appeared in 1812 with a dedication to Archduke Rudolph of Austria, a fellow Beethoven pupil (albeit one rather more socially exalted than Ries himself) whom the composer had very likely met on occasion in Vienna. Ries probably composed the work with his lengthy European tour in mind and the interpolation of an *Air russe* in its finale may be an indication that he intended from the outset to perform the work in Russia. If so, then it is an early example of a practice that was to serve Ries very well in the future. In 1813 he wrote the brilliant *Introduction and Variations on Swedish National Airs*, *Op. 52* [Naxos 8.557844] – the first independent concert work of its type – for one of his two major concerts in Stockholm, and followed it four years later with the equally clever and highly entertaining *Introduction and Variations on the National Air of 'Rule Britannia'*, *Op. 116* (1817) [Naxos 8.570440] for his English audiences and the lovely *Introduction et Variations brillantes in F*, *Op. 170* [Naxos 8.570440] which takes as its theme the tune 'Soldier, soldier, will you marry me'. If the inclusion of the *Air russe* was not connected to the tour then it is possible that its inspiration came from Beethoven's inclusion of Russian themes in his *'Razumovsky' Quartets, Op. 59*.

The composer of the *Piano Concerto in E flat* was a far more experienced artist than the young man who wrote the *C major Concerto* in 1806 [Naxos 8.557638]. That work understandably exhibited numerous stylistic influences from Beethoven's *First* and *Third Concertos* in spite of its often strikingly individualistic touches, but in the *Op. 42 Concerto* Ries succeeds in creating a more consistently distinctive style of musical expression in spite of the overwhelming impression that Beethoven's *Fourth* and *Fifth Concertos* must have made on him. What Ries had learned in the course of the previous few years was how to conform to structural and stylistic expectations on a fundamental level and yet do so in imaginative and even subversive ways. This is evident from the outset in the *E flat Concerto* with its prolonged avoidance of the tonic at the opening of the first ritornello and the introduction of the second theme, with its clever motivic link to earlier material, in the relative minor. The dissolution of this charming and rather quirky theme into strident, militaristic fanfares is skilfully accomplished and demonstrates a new level of technical virtuosity in Ries's work. It is in the piano writing, however, that we see the new flexibility in Ries's writing both on the expressive and structural level; the interpolation of a lengthy cadenza before the arrival of the second theme, cast in the dominant minor rather than the relative minor signalled in the opening ritornello, is particularly effective. Ries's handling of the orchestra, already impressive in the *C major Concerto*, also displays advances particularly in the writing for the wind instruments. Even the timpani's rôle is expanded to enable it to combine in solo passages with the piano.

Ries's sense of instrumental colour is also to the fore in the exquisite *Larghetto* slow movement with its haunting clarinet solo above unison pizzicato strings. Once again the movement begins with a strong element of tonal ambiguity. Although notated in A flat major the

music remains resolutely in the minor mode throughout its opening phases before modulating far and wide in the central part of the movement. The piano naturally plays a prominent rôle in the evolving musical drama, at times embellishing the thematic material and at others providing a rippling wash of background colour against which the music unfolds. The increased flexibility of Ries's tonal thinking is apparent towards the close of the movement at which the orchestra settles on a B flat – very distant from the opening of the *Larghetto* in A flat minor – but now revealed to be the dominant of E flat, the key of the *Finale*: this serves as the launching pad for a brief cadenza-like passage (technically an *Eingang*) which links the *Larghetto* to the *Rondo Finale*.

One of Ries's many gifts as a composer was the ability to write memorable rondo themes; the theme to the *Finale* of the *Op. 42 Concerto* is no exception. The theme itself incorporates quirky, offbeat *acciaccature* in the solo part which suggest a certain exoticism as does some of the early and slightly manic episodic material. The *Air russe*, carefully labelled as such in the score, forms the basis of the central episode of the rondo and its development. Given the nature of the earlier material it is likely that the use of this theme was part of Ries's conception of the movement from the outset. It adds a thrilling dimension both to the *Finale* and to the work as a whole. It is hardly surprising that Ries chose to make his début in London with this concerto on 21st May 1813 in spite of his recent première of the *Concerto in C sharp minor, Op. 55* [Naxos 8.557638].

After his retirement from the London concert stage in 1823 Ries returned to his native Rhineland living first at Bad Godesberg and later in Frankfurt. He remained active both as a composer and performer throughout the 1820s and 1830s. He was director of the Lower Rhenish Music Festival eight times between 1824 and 1837 and in 1834 he was appointed head of the city orchestra and Singakademie in Aachen. The *Introduction et Rondeau brillant*, *Op. 144*, composed in 1825, follows the structural models that he had developed in the works composed since the *'Swedish' Variations* of 1813. In common with several of these works, the rondo theme of *Op. 144* is foreshadowed in the introduction. The theme is not derived from the arresting opening bars in the orchestra, however, but from the idea presented first by the piano. Although this theme and the rondo theme that follows are closely related, the change of tempo and recasting of the surface detail utterly transforms its character. The return of a truncated version of the original introductory theme towards the end of the movement reasserts the fundamental importance of the link between the two major sections of the work while highlighting their expressive differences. It is as typical of Ries's care with structural planning, the consequence of his deep admiration for Beethoven's music, as the virtuosic demands of the solo writing is of his distinctive style of pianism. The clarity and brilliance of Ries's orchestration also contributes to the appeal of the work.

Nearly eight years were to elapse before Ries composed the *Concerto in G minor, Op. 177*, the last of his eight piano concertos. On the surface the work does not appear to represent a significant advance on the earlier concertos in its musical structures, style of pianism and expressive range. Even the choice of tonality is not especially remarkable by this time given the increased prevalence of minor mode works and indeed it is arguably less enterprising than Ries's choice of C sharp minor in the *Third Concerto* composed in 1812. Nonetheless, the *G minor Concerto* displays a further refinement of technique in the way in which Ries organizes his large-scale musical structures and critically in his writing for orchestra.

One of the fascinating aspects of Ries's *œuvre* (and Beethoven's too for that matter) is the way in which so many apparently revolutionary details in the late works had been anticipated in his earlier compositions. In the case of *Op. 177*, for example, the opening of the movement is tonally ambiguous: it sounds for all the world as if the work is in B flat major and it is only after a few bars that one realizes that the correct key is G minor. This elliptical approach to establishing the tonic is similar to that encountered in the *E flat Concerto* but

it is compressed in time. Similarly, the second movement, which is cast in D major, creates the illusion of a link to the *Finale* by suggesting that it is functioning as the dominant of the next movement, a technique he had employed in a slightly different manner in the *Op. 42 Concerto*.

One of the most remarkable features of *Op. 177* is its orchestration. Ries's writing for wind instruments had been impressive from the outset of his career and his fascination with their distinctive qualities is evident in works such as the *Grand Septuor, Op. 25*, the *Piano Quintet in B minor, Op. 74* and the *Grand Ottetto, Op. 128*. His writing for horns and trumpets in his orchestral works remained by comparison somewhat limited largely on account of the physical design of the instruments. In the *G minor Concerto*, however, we see a new flexibility in writing for the horns, one in which the instruments play in a wide variety of keys within the same movement. Ries features the horns prominently throughout the work signalling their expanded role by assigning them important thematic material. Nonetheless, fine though the orchestration undoubtedly is, our attention is almost invariably focussed on the soloist. Ries's piano writing shows no weakening of inspiration in its thematic ideas nor does it suggest that his powers as a performer were in any way diminished. The stamina required to perform the outer movements is immense and the lilting, *Larghetto con moto* second movement with its exquisite filigree embellishments and subtle manipulation of internal metre demands the finest of musical sensibilities to perform it as perhaps Ries himself did. It is difficult to imagine Ries's audience reacting with any less enthusiasm than they had at his numerous other premières and yet from this time on his star began to wane as younger composers and performers began to take centre stage. Within five years of its composition both he and Hummel were dead and with them the last links to the golden age of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven were severed.

Allan Badley

Christopher Hinterhuber


Photo: Nancy Horowitz

Born in Austria, Christopher Hinterhuber studied with Axel Papenberg, Rudolf Kehrer, Lazar Berman, Avo Kouyoumdjian and Heinz Medjimorec and received further artistic encouragement from Oleg Maisenberg and Vladimir Ashkenazy among others. After winning several top prizes at international piano competitions in Leipzig, Saarbrücken, Pretoria, Zurich and Vienna, he performed as 'Rising Star' 2002/3 at the major European concert halls and Carnegie Hall, New York. The last few years have seen him play in major international festivals and in collaboration with many distinguished conductors and orchestras. Highlights of the 2012/13 season will be concerts in many cities in Europe, the United States, New Zealand and Japan. He often gives master-classes in Asia and Europe and has been professor of piano at the University for Music and Performing Arts in Vienna since 2010. His recordings for Naxos include works by C.P.E. Bach, Haydn, Hummel, Ries, Schubert and Zemlinsky.
www.christopherhinterhuber.com

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra


Photo: Patrycja Szwarczynska

The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra is the country's only professional full-size orchestra and one of the world's oldest national symphony orchestras, in existence since 1946. The orchestra is continually on the road, touring as many as a hundred symphonic concerts as well as dozens of dedicated concerts for children and small communities each year. While they present all their main programmes in Auckland and Wellington, they tour New Zealand extensively. In 2010, the NZSO completed the most prestigious and successful international tour in its history, appearing at Lucerne's KKL, Geneva's Victoria Hall, the Shanghai World Expo and Vienna's Musikverein. Earlier tours have featured concerts at the BBC Proms, the Snape Maltings in England and the Aichi World Expo in Japan. Led by Music Director Pietari Inkinen, the NZSO has won consistent praise in the press for its performances, both in concerts and recordings. The NZSO has an extensive catalogue of recordings, mostly on the Naxos label. www.nzso.co.nz

Uwe Grodd


Photo: Godfrey Boehnke

The New Zealand based German conductor and flautist Uwe Grodd first gained worldwide recognition when he won First Prize at the Cannes Classical Awards 2000 for the *Best Eighteenth Century Orchestral Recording* with his CD of *Symphonies* by J.B. Vanhal (8.554341) with the Hungarian Esterházy Orchestra. Two further recordings of music by Johann Nepomuk Hummel have received Editor's Choice in the British magazine *Gramophone* in 2004 and 2008. His recording of the complete works for piano and orchestra of Beethoven's longstanding friend and student Ferdinand Ries (1784-1838) with Christopher Hinterhuber began in 2003. Performance highlights of recent years include eight concerts with the Mexico City Philharmonic in 2004, including Bruckner's *Fourth Symphony* and Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* and the final, televised open-air concerts of the 53rd and the 54th Handel Festival in Halle, with a combined choir of 280 voices and the State Philharmonic Orchestra. They were followed with a highly successful season in the Halle Opera House of Handel's opera *Imeneo*. Uwe Grodd is also deeply committed to contemporary music, especially that of New Zealand composers. He has been involved in more than fifty commissions and conducted the premières of the New Zealand operas *Len Lye: The Opera*, by Eve de Castro-Robinson and Roger Horrocks, and *Galileo* by John Rimmer and Witi Ihimaera. From 1998 until 2002 he was Artistic Director of the International Music Festival New Zealand. He is Professor of Conducting and Flute at The University of Auckland, New Zealand. www.uwe-grodd.com

The orchestral parts and scores of the following works are available from:

www.artaria.com

Sources

The sources upon which the editions used in this recording have been made are:

Piano Concerto in E flat, Op. 42
Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE500
Stockholm, Statens Musikbibliotek - The Music Library of Sweden (Bureau de Musique edition, 1812)

Rondeau brillant, Op. 144
Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE506
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale (Schott edition, 1825)

Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 177
Edited by Allan Badley - Artaria Editions AE507
Paris, Conservatoire de Musique: 27735 (Kistner edition, 1834-1835)

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RIES: Piano Concertos, Volume 5

8.572742

The fourteen works for piano and orchestra of Ferdinand Ries stand alongside those of Hummel as the finest and most important of their kind from the early decades of the 19th century. Intensely lyrical and yet displaying at times a rugged Beethovenian grandeur, Ries's eight concertos are works of impressive musical stature. In this fifth and final recording we encounter the first and last of his published concertos and the virtuosic *Rondeau brillant*, *Op. 144*. "Sparkling performances… the recording is first rate." (*Penguin Guide* on Vol. 3, 8.570440).

Ferdinand
RIES
(1784-1838)

Piano Concertos, Volume 5

	Piano Concerto in E flat, Op. 42	**29:52**
1	Allegro con brio	13:12
2	Larghetto	5:07
3	Rondo: Allegro non troppo	11:33
4	**Introduction et Rondeau brillant, Op. 144**	**17:52**
	Piano Concerto in G minor, Op. 177	**30:22**
5	Allegro con brio	13:18
6	Larghetto con moto	7:24
7	Rondo: Allegretto	9:40

Christopher Hinterhuber, Piano

New Zealand Symphony Orchestra • Uwe Grodd

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