

you're slightly left wondering why he revisited it.

Isserlis doesn't discuss his reasons in his cheerfully irreverent and hugely informative booklet note, but in truth the moment you press play you're not really going to care anyway, because this is absolutely wonderful stuff. As for whether the interpretations have changed, the answer is a gloriously two-pronged 'yes and no', because these interpretations sing of an artist still thoroughly in tune with his previous thoughts, but who is keen to develop those ideas further. He's been supported every step of his way in this pursuit by the warmly responsive Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, and indeed by the expertly judged subtle glow of the sound engineering.

The tempos are a case in point. Back in 1998 these were a story of breakneck speeds being eschewed, while at the same time giving the distinct impression in the fast movements of heightened drama and momentum. Fast-forward to 2017 and that original approach has generally been cleaved to; but while the differences in duration are negligible, they all involve the addition rather than the subtraction of seconds. The C major's third movement is a particularly golden example because here, despite the addition of 12 seconds to the previous recording's still comparatively unhurried 7'04", what you hear is an exciting lift in virtuosity and velocity – proof that the perception of speed and acceleration is about far more than mere metronome markings.

The theme continues with the tone, articulation and rhythmic articulation. Isserlis's former combination of singing legato and short, period-aware attack are still evident, but with their beauty if anything heightened, and some of the faster figures are now further coloured by the odd bit of deliciously impish, rhythmic skittishness.

What has taken a decidedly upwards whoosh is the sheer confidence and unabashed personality on show, and this is typified by the fresh cadenzas Isserlis has written to supplant his earlier ones; although these are every bit as Haydnesque as before, they also take a few more ear-popping risks. Most striking of all is the C major Concerto first movement's cadenza, which features an out-of-the-blue two-octave swoop from E4 up to the extreme heights of E6. It's more flamboyant than pretty, but one can't help but feel it would have drawn a smile from fun-loving Haydn. Furthermore, Isserlis then provides a beautiful complement with the following central movement's cadenza: a small but perfectly formed creation that glides in

seductively by way of double-stopped strokes, and then finishes by gently mirroring that first-movement rocket-spring with a tender single-octave leap.

Isserlis's celebration of the cello's top register truly flowers in the D major Concerto, possibly in recognition of the fact that Haydn probably wrote this work for the Esterházy orchestra's high-register-loving cello virtuoso Antonín Kraft. Isserlis's first-movement cadenza in particular contains lofty lines of a piercing, ringing sweetness. It's not all sunny sweetness by any means; one of the recording's most heart-stopping moments comes in the first movement where, at 8'27", the cloudless beauty is momentarily shattered by a pair of searing-toned, upwards gasps of pain.

For the disc's additional offerings, Isserlis has looked to contemporaneous works by some of Haydn's colleagues. Two of these are of the bonbon-proportioned (and tasting) variety: the *Adagio* from Boccherini's G major Concerto, and Isserlis's own idiomatic and delightful solo arrangement of Mozart's aria 'Geme la tortorella' from *La finta giardiniera*. However, the meatiest and most revelatory highlight of the three is CPE Bach's Cello Concerto in A major; revelatory because we've largely been conditioned to hearing this composer's music presented as muscular, angular and wild. Yet, while Isserlis does recognise the music's volatility, his delivery emphasises a Haydnesque refinement and elegance that throw an entirely new perspective on the concerto. In fact the recording is worth your money for the Bach alone.

Of course, the main selling point is the two Haydn concertos, and this album is worth acquiring whether you're yet to own a recording of these masterpieces or your collection is already bulging with them. Isserlis's 1998 recording remains classy stuff, but this has superbly trumped it.

Charlotte Gardner (A/17)

Selected comparison:

Isserlis, COE, Norrington (8/98^o) (RCA) 88697 70446-2

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 25, K503; No 27, K595

Chamber Orchestra of Europe /

Piotr Anderszewski *pf*

Warner Classics © 9029 57242-2 (63' • DDD)



I wonder if Piotr Anderszewski has it in mind to record all of Mozart's major

piano concertos. This is his third such coupling; the first appeared in 2002 (Nos 21 and 24 – 4/02), so at this rate he'll be about 80 by the time he finishes. His recordings keep on getting better and better, too – having anyway started out at a remarkable standard – so Mozartians may well be in for decades of treats to come, however piecemeal we are fed them.

Anderszewski habitually pairs a lyrical work with a more dramatic one: the ubiquitous C major, once indelibly associated with a Swedish film, versus the clarinet-imbued *Sturm und Drang* C minor, followed four years later by the serene G major, No 17, set against the agitated D minor, No 20 (5/06). Here it is the very last concerto – often described as 'autumnal' or 'valedictory', given its proximity to Mozart's death (although it may have been started up to three years earlier) – prefaced by the triumphant C major work whose chief motif seems almost to quote the Marseillaise. These have often been thought to signal a departure from the quasi-operatic-ensemble construction of the run of concertos from the mid-1780s, moving towards a more discursive unfolding in K503 and a more simply songlike one in K595. Nevertheless, the wonderful playing of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe shows just how fully the earlier work, especially, is dominated by woodwind conversation and that it can't be too distantly related to the sound world of Figaro's 'Non più andrai'.

Anderszewski's piano is right there in the middle of it, supporting, chattering away in passagework, never once hogging the spotlight at the expense of his first-desk soloists, and pulling gently against the pulse to coax maximum character from the music without compromising its shapely contours. He is aware, too, of the delicate shading of these works, taking, for example, a minute and a half longer than Maria João Pires (with Abbado) over K595's slow movement; the sense of awed stillness he achieves here contrasts with her comparatively playful approach, and Anderszewski's studio conditions show off the COE more finely than the Orchestra Mozart, recorded in concert in 2011. Two years after that Pires performance, Martha Argerich revisited K503 with the same accompanists; Anderszewski is broader in all but the finale than the Argentinian and here provides his own first-movement cadenza, which matches the majesty of its surroundings while tweaking cheekily at the bounds of 18th-century harmonic propriety. (In the absence of a genuine Mozart cadenza for K503, Argerich uses one by her teacher Friedrich Gulda.)