

Martha Argerich & Evgeny Kissin (Verbier 2001)

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- *Mozart: Sonata for 2 pianos KV 521* - *Debussy: Nuages; Fêtes for 2 pianos* - *Milhaud: Scaramouche* - *Lutoslawski: Paganini-variations for 2 pianos* - *Mozart: Sonata for 2 pianos KV 448 (3rd mvt)* Martha Argerich -piano Evgeny Kissin - piano Live 2001, July 26. Salle Médran, Verbier.

Verbier is 1500m above sea level and is in the Val de Bagnes not far from the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc in south-central Switzerland which seems a strange place to hold a musical festival. But the Verbier festival is now in its second decade and attracts an astonishing array of many of the world's most famous musicians who play together, have fun, run master-classes and help teach a new generation of musicians. This DVD records the 10th anniversary celebration on July 22, 2003. As this coincided with the 150th anniversary of Steinway and Sons, they provided eight of their grand pianos as part of the celebration.

Possibly never before have so many famous musicians collaborated in one concert as the above list of artists illustrates. Even this list does not tell the full story as the "Birthday Festival Orchestra" includes such famous musicians as Kremer, Repin, Tetzlaff and others. The concert started with Argerich and Kissin playing the Mozart Sonata for Two Pianos, a mature Mozart piece of considerable beauty. Smetana's Sonata in one movement for two pianos and eight hands is a rarity, which is really interesting, tuneful and at times complex; it sounds quite percussive and modern in places. Extracts of the Happy Birthday Variations by Heidrich follow; this comprised variations in the style of Haydn, Beethoven, a Tango and Czardas and was played with style by the orchestra.

The Bach concerto for four pianos is another fascinating rarity – contrapuntal and very complex at times but with a haunting slow movement and a rousing finale.

The rest of the concert is a grand bash with eight pianists playing eight excellent pianos. With such forces, playing together at all is almost impossible, but with pianists of this calibre the result is amazingly good - providing that you don't expect subtlety and exact precision. The artists seem to be enjoying themselves and it is really good fun. As you would perhaps expect the Gottschalk "Union" arrangement was probably the most suitable for this treatment. The Rossini is quite a subtle piece and showed the strain of the octet treatment the most. All most enjoyable – and finally Barbara Hendricks joined to conclude the Concert with Happy Birthday.

Throughout the musicians were clearly enjoying themselves as was the audience and the atmosphere is caught very well on this DVD. -- Arthur Baker, MusicWeb International

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