

pressquotes

LEONIDAS KAVAKOS – VIOLINIST/CONDUCTOR

“Leonidas Kavakos is one of the most comprehensively gifted instrumentalists of his time. His playing combines a sweet, singing tone with virtuoso technique and penetrating intelligence.”

Boston Globe, November 2013

“Leonidas Kavakos, who I find to be the most interesting violinist on the circuit today, giving a masterclass at NEC on Prokofiev's First Violin Concerto. Picking up his violin and demonstrating the power and energy of playing “ugly” as the composer intended, making beauty all the more extraordinary.”

Huffington Post, December 2013

CONCERTO REVIEWS

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra & Jansons / Berliner Philharmonie / Brahms

“... The genius Kavakos dissects the work with clinical precision. He preserves the composition without slipping into sentimentality.”

„... der genialische Kavakos sezirt das Werk mit klinischer Genauigkeit. Er bewahrt die Komposition davor, in Sentimentalitäten abzugleiten.“

Berliner Morgenpost, September 2014

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra & Jansons / KKL Lucerne / Brahms

“The Brahms Violin Concerto was one of the highlights of this year's summer festivals. Leonidas Kavakos played this work as if second nature, so supple, so lovingly sung ... and with his powerful, delightfully rounded tone, he was the perfect partner for the orchestra and its conductor.”

[„... das Violinkonzert von Brahms, das zu einem Höhepunkt des diesjährigen Sommerfestivals wurde. Leonidas Kavakos spielte dieses Werk so selbstverständlich, so geschmeidig, so liebevoll kantabel ... Und mit seinem kräftigen, herrlich gerundeten Ton war er genau der richtige Partner für das Orchester und seinen Dirigenten.“]

Neue Zürcher Zeitung, September 2014

Boston Symphony Orchestra & Denève / Tanglewood Festival / Szymanowski

“Saturday's fullest meal, however, came courtesy of Szymanowski's Second Violin Concerto, a late work of imaginative color and deep-welled melody, poetically rendered here by soloist Leonidas Kavakos, who also made the most of this work's blistering cadenza. The violinist further held the Shed spellbound with his hushed encore, Tarrega's “Recuerdos de la Alhambra” in Ruggiero Ricci's arrangement, performed here with a technique at once exacting and subtle.”

Boston Globe, August 2014

Vienna Symphony Orchestra & Jurowski / Musikverein / Szymanowski

“Kavakos shines with Szymanowski ... Here, Leonidas Kavakos put nonchalant virtuosity over backwards to summon the dazzling Symphony Orchestra, the rapturous sultriness of the fin de siècle, which rises in the work of 1932/33, again.”

[“Kavakos glänzt mit Szymanowski ... Dabei legte sich Leonidas Kavakos nonchalant virtuos ins Zeug, um mit den schillernden Symphonikern die schwärmerische Schwüle des Fin de Siècle zu beschwören, die in dem Werk von 1932/33 nochmals aufersteht.”]

Die Presse, June 2014

London Philharmonic Orchestra & Jurowski / Royal Festival Hall / Bach, Hartmann

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"His performance ... had a rapt intensity that held his audience spellbound. Kavakos knows how to play quietly yet still command attention. And his interaction with his colleagues is exemplary, showing that what he really wants is the respect of his fellow players, not of his audience."

Mail on Sunday, February 2014

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra & Chailly / Musikverein / Sibelius

"...the most spectacular violinist of our time ... When he plays, you can see the musicians move to the edge of their seats. They can hardly believe that a man of flesh and blood is able to elicit these sounds on a violin ... pure magic ... This was music making of the highest level."

["...de spectaculairste violist van onze tijd ... Als hij speelt, zie je de musici naar het puntje van hun stoel schuiven. Ook zij kunnen nauwelijks geloven dat een mens van vlees en bloed in staat is zulke klanken aan een viool te ontlokken ... pure tovenarij ... Dit was muziek maken van de allerhoogste categorie."]

Het Parool, January 2014

Gewandhausorchester Leipzig & Chailly / Salle Pleyel / Brahms

"Kavakos took the audience's breath away. He is unquestionably one of today's stars of the bow."

Resmusica, December 2013

New York Philharmonic & Bringuier / Lincoln Center / Prokofiev

"Mr. Kavakos's playing combines utter mastery of the instrument with rich sound and searching musicianship."

New York Times, June 2013

Orchestre de Paris & Paavo Järvi / Salle Pleyel / Sibelius

"... a performance of such terrifying intensity and so many blazing risks ... that it was two Bach encores and ten minutes more before the Salle Pleyel audience would let him go."

Arts Journal, April 2013

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra & Jansons / Kennedy Center / Bartók

"... a golden tone and an easy command of this concerto's challenges ... Kavakos brought fire aplenty to the skitterings of the final movement... but the urbane restraint he brought to the second movement was even more notable."

Washington Post, February 2013

Philadelphia Orchestra & Nézet-Séguin / Carnegie Hall / Szymanowski

"...Kavakos soared in the ethereal indulgences, crackled in the propulsive Kochanski cadenza yet always avoided the traps of expressive excess."

Financial Times, five stars, January 2013

London Symphony Orchestra & Vänskä / Sibelius

"I can't remember when I last heard such a soaring roar of applause in the Barbican Hall. And then slowly, one by one, the audience rose to its feet. This was no diva: this was Leonidas Kavakos at the end of his performance of Sibelius's Violin Concerto ... the most desolate, distant solo voice imaginable – here, as everywhere, sung out in a perfect intonation that seemed superhuman. Kavakos played with a fierce concentration and clarity, facing the orchestra during their interludes and finding a rare depth of resonance and detailed involvement with them."

Times, five stars, December 2012

"...Kavakos made his entry with a notably spacious and singing tone ... The little bursts of solo pyrotechnics punctuating the first movement were exquisitely done, and in the elegiac Adagio his sound was compelling even when it sank to a whisper. The final Allegro saw orchestra and soloist

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achieving an ideal synergy, with Kavakos's sound shining brightly against the bass-heavy backdrop."

Independent, five stars, December 2012

"...the Violin Concerto received one of those defining performances that summed up everything you could possibly want from this great work. Kavakos was extraordinary, seeming almost reluctant to let his opening gambit of frozen isolation defrost enough to spread its wings and start gathering into hyper-expressive identity."

Classical Source, December 2012

London Symphony Orchestra & Bychkov / Barbican / Berg

"A violinist with just the heroic strength and purity of tone to penetrate through Berg's turbid and sometimes over-scored concerto. Kavakos made it seem all of a piece, with everything aspiring towards a celestial purity. I've never heard the crabbed four-part canon for solo violin in the 2nd movement — a curious island of hard-nosed modernism in this deeply romantic piece — seem so easy and natural. As if inspired by Kavakos's example, the orchestra attained a pearly delicacy of sound."

Daily Telegraph, November 2012

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra & Jansons / Salzburg Festival / Bartók

"... the single most sensational performance I have heard at this year's festival ... the integrity and artistry of his performance ... showed a profound understanding of the score. There was place in his performance for charisma and flair too — punishing technical passages were dispatched with electrifying panache — but with gaze firmly fixed on his strings he concerned himself with playing the concert at hand."

Bachtrack, September 2012

New York Philharmonic Orchestra & Gilbert / Korngold

"Mr Kavakos dispatched the intricate, dazzling violin part with gleaming tone and brilliance."

New York Times, June 2012

London Symphony Orchestra & Gergiev / Stravinsky

"Neo Classical, neo Baroque, neo pretty much everything, the Violin Concerto was in every sense "celebrated" by the remarkably brilliant but unassuming Leonidas Kavakos."

Independent, May 2012

Berliner Philharmoniker & Dudamel / Korngold

"Once again, Leonidas Kavakos drove the audience at the Philharmonie wild with his aristocratic, velvety, lyrical tone, playing Erich Wolfgang Korngold's violin concerto. You might not agree with me, but this piece is in essence a real show piece; a compilation of adventure movie soundtracks. If he hadn't performed the piece with a pinch of cheekiness, and hadn't attempted a little dangerous flirtation with the audience, but instead had leaned stoically into his Stradivarius in the lyrical moments, and simply played alongside the orchestra in the vivacious passages, then I'm sorry, but he'd have missed the point."

Der Tagesspiegel, April 2012

National Symphony Orchestra & Eschenbach / Kennedy Center / Brahms

"...it was the Brahms that made it a special evening at the Kennedy Center's Concert Hall ... Kavakos has, at his fingertips (or, perhaps more accurately, in his bow arm) both the silvery tone that many violinists prize, as well as a gutsy generous warmth where he needs it. His double stops are effortless, and his legato sounds as if he could draw it out forever. But most of all, he has the sense to use all this intelligently and to avoid anything showy."

Washington Post, November 2011

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CONDUCTING REVIEWS

London Symphony Orchestra / Barbican & Usher Hall / Beethoven

"If you judge a conductor on the sound he draws from his players, then, based on the Prometheus Overture, success was assured. The LSO was at its legendary, sumptuous best, with a wrap-around spread of depth and clarity, Kavakos's rather angular, heavily gestural conducting adding an extra hit of pressure to the pace ... Preconceptions, though, were blown away by the LSO and Kavakos's incendiary partnership in the 'Eroica'. Kavakos's canny half-concealment of the shadow of instability seeded into the Symphony's opening bars pricked up your ears not only for a wealth of detail to come but also for Kavakos's long-range imagination in keeping things in reserve, so that the first movement was like a controlled explosion of vitality, crafted with immense care ... both masterly and outstandingly clear. The LSO capped this far-sighted, accomplished reading with brilliantly characterful playing."

Classical Source, June 2014

"A fluid, physical conductor, Kavakos used his body to clearly articulate what he wanted the music to do, encouraging the LSO to reach right into the heart of Beethoven's music. Consequently, the symphony was a glorious profusion of colours and textures, all perfectly balanced rhythmically and harmonically in this enthralling interpretation."

Scotsman, June 2014

"... from the very first notes it was clear that in the Greek violinists' direction we have a maestro in the making ... sometimes it needs someone different to bring a truly terrific performance out of an orchestra, some of the playing was breath-taking at times."

Musical Opinion, July 2014

Gürzenich Orchester / Cologne / Bach, Sibelius, Beethoven

"Beethoven's Eroica, so fiery, strong, almost bursting with vitality and verve."

Köln Rundschau, March 2014

Boston Symphony Orchestra / Symphony Hall / Mozart, Prokofiev, Schumann

"Kavakos directed with minimal gestures yet was able to sculpt phrases so that they emerged with unforced elegance. Kavakos's tempos were quick and he achieved a textural transparency that gave the winds a vivid, punchy presence. The first violins got a solo bow for their treacherously high passages in the second movement, and the breathless finale could have served as a master class in rhythmic precision."

Boston Globe, November 2013

Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Wiener Musikverein / Haydn, Mozart, Schubert

"With relaxed, expressive hands he painted lines in space indicating mood, shaping and intention, and the Symphoniker followed his lead with perfection ... Kavakos got his baton out and conducted without score and with a new stature of majesty and command, guiding the orchestra... There was magic to spare."

Bachtrack, June 2013

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RECITAL REVIEWS

Barbican Hall, with Yuja Wang / Brahms

"Kavakos ... was in his element. He has a naturally noble sound, thanks to his fabulous bow control which can sustain an even unblemished line from tip to heel. It felt exactly right for Brahms, whose own control over his musical materials was equally iron. And in the slow movements, where Brahms relaxes and indulges his taste for rich sonorities, Kavakos's clean, pure line kept sentimentality at bay."

Daily Telegraph, October 2014

Salle Pleyel, with Yuja Wang / Brahms

"In the three Brahms Sonatas, all of which act as a showcase for the violin, [Kavakos] was given the opportunity to exploit the thousand and one shades of his instrument."

Toute la Culture, April 2014

Carnegie Hall, with Enrico Pace / Beethoven

"... the beautiful sound and elegant musicianship of Mr. Kavakos ... Mr. Kavakos and Mr. Pace performed with refinement and impeccable taste ... with a dramatic flair."

"There was the visceral appeal of Mr. Kavakos's beautiful tone ... Mr. Kavakos showed a remarkable ability to match his sound to the quality of the movement."

New York Times, March 2014

Boston Jordan Hall, with Enrico Pace / Beethoven

"Kavakos ... combined a penetrating sound — a tonal signal impressive for both its power and bandwidth — with uncannily clean technique."

Boston Globe, February 2014

Barbican, with Nikolai Lugansky / Janáček, Brahms, Stravinsky, Respighi

"It was a real treat: they're both fantastic players, at once intelligent and intense, and together they form a genuine partnership of equals, with no sense of the piano taking a subordinate or accompanying role ... Kavakos and Lugansky achieved something near perfection with Brahms's Violin Sonata No 1 in G major — a beautifully considered, understated performance in which every phrase spoke volumes. Stravinsky's Duo Concertante, meanwhile, was the embodiment of virtuosic neoclassical cool, with Kavakos displaying dexterous refinement ... this was an outstanding evening: bliss from start to finish."

Guardian, five stars, December 2012

Wiener Musikverein, with Emanuel Ax / Beethoven

"The pianist and the violinist performing at the Wiener Musikverein were on the same wavelength. Kavakos played his solo programme without soloistic behaviour, and Ax accompanied him on the piano with the most delicate layers of sound. And vice versa: Kavakos performed the violin sonatas as chamber music, not as acts of daring. Accompaniment and solo changed places in clear contrast to each other, and the structure of the pieces was sketched out with great depth of field. On a musical level, this was an intimate dialogue between violin and piano ... Kavakos adapted his technical means to the stylistic requirements of Beethoven's period. His vibrato was not poured like a thick sauce over all the pieces, but instead was consciously used for expressive effect. His light, swift bow strokes produced a sound rich in overtones and lingering *sforzati*. Kavakos and Ax enlivened the closing Sonata in C minor with strong accents and long, soaring melodic lines, moving the audience to delight."

Wiener Zeitung, October 2012

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RECORDING REVIEWS

Brahms *Violin Sonatas*, with Yuja Wang / Decca Classics 0289 478 6442 4

“Quite magnificent ... Kavakos is violinistically impeccable, sustaining Brahms’s lines perfectly, with every note dead in tune ... with deep intensity of feeling.”

International Record Review, July 2014

“Leonidas Kavakos and Yuja Wang show the way, their expression precisely tailored to the expressive curves clearly shown in the score ... Wang and Kavakos give consistently outstanding performances ... Kavakos delights in finding an ideal expression for each phrase: of the four violinists heard on these discs, he shows by far the widest range of colours.”

“A strikingly vibrant and expressive partnership. The collaborative spirit shown by Kavakos and Wang has you gripped from the word go.”

Gramophone Magazine, Editors Choice, June 2014

“[Kavakos’s] sweet tone is matched by Wang who is admirably discreet in the more richly scored writing ... Yet this reticence serves to give greater intensity to those few passages where both players become more expansive in expression.”

BBC Music Magazine, June 2014

“... Wonderfully vital, intelligent and enjoyable ... their interpretation bears all the hallmarks of having grown organically over time and blossomed into something approaching perfection”

Sinfini Music, May 2014

“Kavakos is an endearing figure, a superb violinist uninterested in playing to the crowd, and concerned only to be a worthy partner to the musicians he plays with. And it’s the inwardness of his playing that captures the imagination here ... Kavakos is a scholarly musician who penetrates to the heart of this lovely music, with a passionate commitment to release its inner meaning, and not the slightest bit interested in projecting himself as a big bold extrovert virtuoso at the music’s expense.”

Mail on Sunday, 5 stars, April 2014

Gewandhausorchester Leipzig & Chailly / Brahms *Violin Concerto*; Brahms *Hungarian Dances* & Bartok *Two Rhapsodies*, with Peter Nagy (piano) / Decca Classics 0289 478 5342 8

“[this] superb recording ... demonstrates not only the wonderful poise and instinctive elegance of Kavakos’s playing – there’s not a note out of place, while his pianissimo sound, in the closing moments of the first movement especially, is a marvel – but also the transparency that is such a characteristic of Chailly’s Brahms with this orchestra.”

Guardian, October 2013

“A tasteful and beautifully-executed performance ... How is it that Greek violinist Leonidas Kavakos has such impeccable sound, articulation and musicality, and can still keep a kind of raw human quality in his playing? His musical phrases have the motion of an arrow soaring on its own momentum. No technical feat, however difficult, seems to keep it from hitting its mark every time ... a breathtaking performance of the Brahms Concerto, clear and streamlined, with no murkiness in the Romantic texture.”

Violinist.com, December 2013

“...Riccardo Chailly and the Leipzig Gewandhaus are a glory, rich-toned but translucent and supporting violinist Leonidas Kavakos’s purity of tone and inspired phrasing at every step. Tempos are spacious, with plenty of room for the music to breathe, but momentum is never lost and Chailly calibrates an ideal balance. Kavakos’s violin tone is super-refined and elegant. And though devoid

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of sentimentality it is certainly not so of feeling; one astonishing nuance in the central slow movement, just before the main theme returns, almost stops the heart..."

BBC Music Magazine, December 2013

"... Leonidas Kavakos's account of the violin concerto is the finest to appear on disc in years. Fabulously poised with an exceptional dynamic range, Kavakos's playing misses nothing, yet never draws attention to itself unnecessarily."

Guardian, December 2013

"Utterly magical. A real artist of distinction. You can't get better than this."

Classic FM, December 2013

Beethoven *Violin Sonatas*, with Enrico Pace (piano) / Decca Classics 0289 478 3523 3

"The unrivaled elegance and beauty of Leonidas Kavakos's sound would be reason enough to embark with him on a traversal of the complete Beethoven sonatas for violin and piano, but it's the probing musicianship he and the excellent pianist Enrico Pace bring to it that make the ride so thrilling. The conversations, arguments and flirtations between violin and piano that Beethoven writes into these sonatas are all rendered with spirit and impeccable taste."

New York Times, December 2013

"Kavakos' tone is both sweet and full-blooded, never overblown; Pace's contribution is lithe, characterful and sensitive ... In the hands of Kavakos and Pace the opening chords of Op.12 No.1 are a positive statement of intent for the whole cycle – bold, incisive and bristling with energy – and the set proceeds to bubble along with terrific energy; slow movements are graceful and luminous. The honeyed opening melody of the "Spring" sonata, and the dreamy, mill-pond tranquillity of its Adagio, are highlights ... The duo doesn't succumb to the temptation of imposing a late-Beethovenian romantic weight onto these early works – the performances sing and dance with youthful vigour, paying due homage to the music's classical roots, and finely harnessing the exciting romantic frisson that Beethoven injects into the mix. Aptly, the grandeur is notched up for the final sonata – Kavakos' professed favourite – Op.96 from 1812."

BBC Music Magazine, March 2013

"In their beautifully balanced survey of Beethoven's Sonatas for Violin and Piano, Kavakos and Pace allow us to eavesdrop on 10 intimate conversations between musical equals ... Each work has been thoroughly investigated, from Pace's unruffled response to the rough humour of the three Opus 12 sonatas, to Kavakos's subtle intensification of tone in the A major Sonata and the exquisite simplicity of the opening arpeggio figures of the very last Sonata in G major."

Independent, five stars, February 2013

"It is simply breath-taking, the way in which Kavakos gets straight to the point with a dry, almost defiant and yet sensitively balanced tone; not shying away from the drama, whilst still shaping the piece with confidence and boldness. He stays well clear of virtuoso affectedness and showmanship, whilst still performing in a unique manner which reveals the inspiration for Leo Tolstoy's deeply philosophical and ethical response to the piece. Even the less spectacular pieces, such as Op.12/2, are most enjoyable, Kavakos' delicate playing brings out every nuance. This recording is a delight."

Der Spiegel, January 2013

Camerata Salzburg / Mendelssohn *Violin Concerto in E minor* / Piano Trios No.1 & No.2, with Enrico Pace (piano) & Patrick Demenga (cello) / Sony 88697433032

"The quality fibre of this serious artist is immediately on show in his violin's opening statement, with its finely spun tone and scrupulously enunciated rhythms. He keeps his interpretation fresh and personal as Mendelssohn leads him from turbulent passion through liquid song to the finale's delicate sparkle. The orchestra is a good partner, too ... Deluged with performances in this

intermusica

Crystal Wharf, 36 Graham Street, London N1 8GJ
Tel: 020 7608 9900 Fax: 020 7490 3263
mail@intermusica.co.uk www.intermusica.co.uk

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centenary year, I was beginning to think I never wanted to hear the work again. Kavakos's interpretation showed me I was wrong."

Times, July 2009