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Menahem Pressler

DVD

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 31, Op 110 **Chopin**
Mazurkas - No 5, Op 7 No 1; No 7, Op 7 No 3; No 13,
Op 17 No 4. Nocturne No 20, Op *posth* **Debussy**
Estampes **Schubert** Piano Sonata No 21, D960

Menahem Pressler *pf*

Idéale Audience International ©  307 9668
(88' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live at the Cité de la Musique, Paris,
March 2011



Near-nonagenarian pianist on
film at the Cité de la Musique

After many years as the pianist in the celebrated
Beaux Arts Trio, Menahem Pressler made a
dramatic return to his first fame as a solo artist.
And here, at the age of nearly 90, he makes you
more than ever aware of his probing and deeply
committed musicianship. His students were
privileged indeed, though he could be a stern

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taskmaster. I recall a very public crossing of
swords in Chicago when I objected to his cruel
onslaught on a luckless young pianist. There,
Pressler's much-loved warmth and geniality
vanished as if by perverse magic.

But at this recital one can only celebrate a
blessedly old-fashioned freedom and intensity,
a sense, most notably in Beethoven's Op 110
and Schubert's B flat Sonata, of the heavenly
and transcendent. There is true exultance at the
close of both sonatas, in music which provided
a profound solace in the aftermath of Pressler's
escape from Nazi Germany, when he remained
traumatised by bewilderment and pain. His
performance of *Estampes* is gently chiming and
caressing in 'Pagodes' and a far cry from a more
clear-sighted if often pedestrian French
wisdom. His Chopin, too, particularly the
C sharp minor Nocturne, is enviably sensitive,
making it hardly surprising that he has little
time for the many immaculate, note-perfect but
ultimately sterile competition-groomed
performances of today. Beautifully and simply
filmed, this DVD is a classic tribute to a great
artist still active in the autumn of his career, and
with only a passing and marginal frailty to
suggest his age. **Bryce Morrison**