



**Brahms Complete solo piano music** Volume 5

**Brahms** Sonata No 1 in C major Op 1; 7  
 Fantasies Op 116; *Variations on a theme by Robert Schumann* Op 9

**Jonathan Plowright** (pf)

BIS-2147 SACD, 69 mins



‘Brahms was fully formed at an incredibly early age,’ Jonathan Plowright has remarked. ‘I see no difference between what they call early, middle and late Brahms.’ All the programmes in his complete survey of the original solo piano music – the present volume is the fifth and final instalment – bear witness to this perspective, treating each work as if of equal weight irrespective of its position in the composer’s catalogue.

Plowright has a point. Few composers can claim an Opus 1 that is as accomplished or mature an utterance as his C major sonata of 1852/3. While one can hear that the opening movement’s provenance is rooted deeply in Beethovenian practice, there is also an original mind at work here, not content to ape Classical mannerisms. Its vigour is of a very different type to that of the agile scherzo or the finale, with its opposition of masculine and feminine. Plowright catches the balance of youthful impetuosity and intellectual power in a magisterial reading that has brought this undervalued work to life.

Just as Plowright’s first disc paired the Third Sonata with the *Handel Variations*, so this final volume concludes with another early variation set, the F-sharp minor *Schumann Variations* (1854). Plowright’s reading of this rather wistful work is beautifully polished, each variation flowing inexorably into the next, building quietly to the moving, slow final pair. At the disc’s heart is a sublime performance of the seven *Fantasias*, each one part-capriccio, part-intermezzo. Plowright takes a more measured view than some, but with no loss of momentum or fantasy. With brilliant sound once again in the best tradition of BIS, this is a glorious close to the new benchmark Brahms piano music survey.

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