

that the finer points of playing the piano were beyond him and I needed, you know, an expert.'

After Stonyhurst, Plowright went to Birmingham University, but failed all his exams on the history of music and analysis. At the end of the first year they politely suggested he might be better off at a music college. 'Mad panic! So I went back to audition for the Academy. They were marvellous and accepted me immediately, but I felt I was there under duress because I had just been at a loose end and hadn't known what else to do. Terrible! Alexander Kelly was very clever. He didn't push me. He knew I was just doing the bare minimum. But gradually, over the first year, I began to enjoy playing the piano, really for the first time.'

The Academy was followed by the Peabody in America for a year. 'To be honest, I don't think it developed my playing at all. We were taught in a very different way from Alexander Kelly, who was an enormous influence on me musically. I would have discussions with him; he treated me as an equal. We were sounding blocks for each other. He did teach me, but you never felt he was doing so. He was a great humanitarian. I went from that to an old, very strict piano professor, who'd sit on the same stool as you and watch your fingering. It was not what I needed at all. So I decided to make the best out of the situation: I put on a recital at Carnegie Recital Hall and did a few competitions. But ultimately I trod water for a year. When I came back, though, things went very well. In four years I did nine Purcell Room recitals and three Wigmore.'

Choosing to programme composers like Paderewski and Stojowski was partly a pragmatic response to market forces. 'Who in their right mind is going to record Plowright in Beethoven, Chopin and Brahms?' he asks with characteristic candour. 'There are a million-and-one versions of these, and ultimately you will always be compared. Only very rarely will you come out on top. But I also thought that Paderewski, Stojowski and various other composers were actually worth listening to again, because they were so big in their time. They must have had merits. I can't see that it was just a brief fashion, that there was just air and no substance. There is substance – as we have found out. There must be hundreds of other composers who have suffered the same fate.'

With his works so highly esteemed during his lifetime, it seems extraordinary that Stojowski has so completely fallen out of the repertoire. 'It's a puzzle,' Plowright agrees. 'Stojowski's musical genre is in the same Romantic idiom as Rachmaninoff's and, though people have criticised Rachmaninoff

