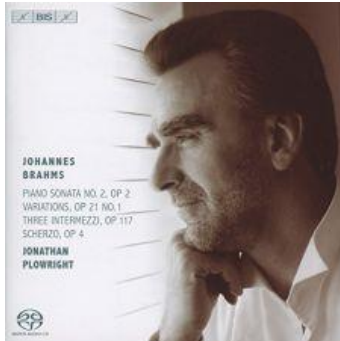


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BRAHMS Piano Sonata No 2. Variations. 3 Intermezzi



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- Sonata for Piano No. 2
- Variations on an original theme
- (3) Pieces
- Scherzo

Brahms's F sharp minor Sonata is at the heart of Jonathan Plowright's second volume of the composer's complete piano works. Written when Brahms was still a teenager, it experiments wildly with both form and technique. Already audacious and formidable, it brims over with thorny obstacles and it takes a master pianist of Plowright's stature to resolve its complication into lucidity. This he does with all of his customary command: in the opening volley of octaves, the more-than-strange transition passage in the *Scherzo* and, most of all, in the convoluted *Andante*, where his playing has an exceptional poise and translucency. The *Variations on an Original Theme*, too, are not without problems of cohesion even when these are resolved in a coda as rich and glowing as anything in Brahms.

But it is in late Brahms, in the three Op 117 Intermezzos, that Plowright shows himself a true and moving poet of the keyboard. In Nos 2 and 3 in particular he conjures an uncanny stillness. And if the early E flat minor Scherzo returns us to Brahms's hectic and storming manner, it could hardly be thrown off with a more magisterial authority. But the chief wonder of this disc remains Op 117, making one look ahead to Opp 116, 118 and 119, those bittersweet confidences of Brahms's final years. BIS's sound is impressive.

Bryce Morrison

