



Liszt *Grandes Études de Paganini*, S. 141; Ballade No 1 in D-flat major, S170 ('Le chant du croisé'); Ballade No 2 in B minor, S171/R16; Polonaise No 1; Polonaise No 2 in E major, S223; *Liebesträume*, S541; *Mephisto Waltzes* Nos 1-4; *Deux légendes*, S175; *Consolations*, S172; *Berceuse* S174 (first version); 'Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude' (*Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, S173/3); *Études de concert*; *Valse oubliées* S215/1-4 **Jerome Rose** (pf) *Medici Classics M40022*, 3 CDs



Jerome Rose's three-CD reissue of Liszt recordings dating from 1974-86 is a 40th anniversary collection with several first performances on CD, as well as winners of Hungary's Grand Prix du Disque. The repertoire is richly comprehensive taking in the familiar and less familiar, early and late works – a powerful overview of Liszt's massive scope and genius. Thereafter, however, praise becomes heavily qualified.

On the credit side, the six *Grandes Études de Paganini* are given with a suitably swashbuckling bravura. Fearless and big-handed, this is no-holds-barred Liszt. 'La Campanella' (No 3) is reeled off with a steely glint and unflinching assurance, while muscles bulge and ripple in the final pages of No 6. Yet in the three *Études de concert* there is little suggestion of their subtitle, 'Trois caprices poétiques'. Masterly to the point of aggression, you will hear nothing of, say, Moiseiwitsch's matchless dexterity in 'La Leggierezza' or Géza Anda's iridescent dream-world in 'Un sospiro'. The opening of 'Waldesrauschen' (the first of the other set of two concert studies) is rushed and flustered, and in the 'Valse mélancolique', Rose is hardly the most elegant of white-tie-and-tails dancers.

Clearly, the outsized appeals more than the small gesture. For instance, in the four *Mephisto Waltzes* Rose shows a shameless disregard for anything beyond display. The blast-off opening to No 2 is brutally limiting and in No 1, the 24-year-old Kit

Armstrong's recent recording for Sony tells of another level of musicianship. In the tranquil resolution of the 'Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude' and parts of the six *Consolations* there is greater inwardness, even when it shows up the obviousness of Rose's playing elsewhere, where sound and fury signify too little. Liszt does not need dynamite to extract his musical essence.

Memorable alternatives to most of this repertoire come from Kempff (his early Decca recording of the *Deux légendes*), Curzon in the *Berceuse*, Brendel in the 'Bénédiction' and Edith Farnadi in the four *Valses oubliées* (to be reissued shortly). Andsnes, too, is far preferable in the *Mephisto Waltzes*, even when he omits No 3, an audacious example of Liszt at his most disjunct and far-reaching.

The recorded sound is brilliant but limited, with a raw edge. There are no accompanying notes about either pianist or composer.

BRYCE MORRISON



Jerome Rose



Brahms *Variations on a Hungarian Melody*, Op 21/2; *Piano Pieces*, Op 76; *Waltzes*, Op 39; *Piano Pieces*, Op 118 **Jonathan Plowright** (pf) *BIS SACD 2127*, 81 mins



Previous volumes in Jonathan Plowright's ongoing Brahms series have gathered critical praise, and this, the third volume, continues the positive trend. BIS's series goes head-to-head with Barry Douglas' survey on Chandos, which itself has been praised by myself in these pages; in the final analysis, though, it is Plowright who wins out with his flawless musicality (as, indeed, Plowright's contributions to Hyperion's *Romantic Piano Concerto* series might imply). As an example, the seventh variation of the *Variations on a Hungarian Melody* reveals Plowright's affinity with Brahms at his most *Innig*; the celebratory final Allegro of this piece is beautifully caught.

Dating from a quarter of a century later, the Op 76 Piano Pieces are sophisticated offerings, and Plowright presents their elusive qualities perfectly, offering a consistency of interpretation throughout that finds a sense of mystery while still being able to honour the relatively robust Capriccio in C-sharp minor. It is an inspired decision to separate the Opp 76 and 118 sets of Piano Pieces with the lighter Op 39 Waltzes. The latter are given a sensitive account that matches that of Tiberghien (Harmonia Mundi), while Op 118 is given a performance of the utmost profundity, culminating in an otherworldly Intermezzo in E-flat minor.

Plowright keeps the collections together whereas Douglas' Op 118 is spread over various volumes. Of these two pianists, Plowright is also the most in tune with Brahms' writing. Icing the cake, his Steinway is stunningly caught by sound engineer Jeffrey Ginn. Unhesitatingly recommended.

COLIN CLARKE