



good enough to make a living. Started too late. But to him, to be a concert pianist was to be like a god. So the thought of me becoming one was a wonderful idea. I rebelled against it. I wanted to be a doctor, architect, footballer – anything but a musician.’ Plowright, with his trademark designer stubble and uncompromising eyebrows, has the rough-hewn physique of a miner. He can stretch a twelfth, ‘a tenth easily – handy for playing Art Tatum,’ he reveals with his dry Yorkshire inflection. ‘My mother shared my father’s ambition but she wanted me to have a rounded education. Somebody told her that there was a music scholarship going at a public school called Stonyhurst College, the top Catholic boarding school with Ampleforth, and she’d been told that a Jesuit education was considered very fine. Well, I was awarded the scholarship. My parents couldn’t afford it, so the school paid for virtually all my fees. It wanted to support me and thought I was a musical talent. I had a wonderful education there. During this time my mother died from cancer. She knew she was dying – she didn’t tell anybody – which was partly the reason she wanted me to go to this school. I went when I was fourteen and my mother died a year later. But there was a marvellous director of music there.

Alexander Kelly 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.

it was this one piece. I was over 30 when I looked around to see if anyone had recorded any Paderewski, and there was nothing about, so I got the money together to record it myself’ [Master Musicians ESCD004]. He had already made his first recording for Kingdom [KCLCD 2016] of Brahms’s *Two Rhapsodies*, Op.79, the F minor Sonata and the *Klavierstücke*, Op.76. ‘Did it in three hours. That’s all I had, so you do it. Like a live performance. My latest recording for Hyperion with three days was total luxury!’

The path that any artist takes from cradle to piano stool to concert platform is always unique and often interesting. Plowright’s was stunningly unlikely. ‘Both my parents were keen amateur pianists. My father was a builder, an on-site foreman, who came from a mining family. Typical working-class, you could say. He loved the piano – we had a little baby grand – though he was never

He was actually an organist and quite authoritarian – which was what I needed. Someone to kick me up the bum and do some work. He certainly did that.’

The moment when Plowright realised that he had more than just a gift was after one of the frequent recitals at Stonyhurst. ‘People like Peter Frankl, Janina Fialkowska – and George Malcolm. Now, I was always trundled out as the star pupil and told I must play something for them. And Malcolm told one of the people there, after I had played, “this is a one-in-a-million person here.” Quite frightening. Especially as I still didn’t want to be a pianist at this stage. Anyway, the director of music got in touch with his old piano teacher, Alexander Kelly, at the Royal Academy. The school arranged for me to go down to London once a month and have four- or five-hour lessons with Kelly, because Stonyhurst’s head of music realised

above
Jonathan Plowright,
with his sister Sally (l)
and silverware, 1970

Photo courtesy of
Jonathan Plowright
opposite

Jonathan Plowright
Photos Diane Shaw