

Five questions for...

JONATHAN PLOWRIGHT PIANIST



1. Brahms' three piano sonatas were all written virtually before he was 20. Why do you think he never wrote a fourth?

I can only assume that he felt he had made his 'statement' and had showed the world what he was capable of. To me his was a natural progression from Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin of the tradition of large scale sonata form. As his mastery was complete, perhaps it was time to do something else?

2. Are they as demanding as they sound?

They are, and certainly the Second takes a few listenings before you start to appreciate everything he is saying. I don't feel that these Sonatas need to be as bombastic as they are sometimes interpreted. When he composed these he was a young 'lion' and impatient to take on the world. I believe that the portraits of him as an older, rounder, grumpier looking man can sometimes unnecessarily influence our thinking...

3. The Second Sonata has an unusual structure. What challenges does it present?

I've never felt it to have an unusual structure as such. Brahms works within the confines of the 'sonata' and pushes boundaries to their

extremes, and in doing so creates a feeling of freedom. One of the main challenges is to step back from the music, to avoid getting so lost in it that the overall architectural shape is distorted. I practise all music at first without pedal, and this is particularly helpful in this Sonata to gain a stronger understanding of the textures and musical lines.

4. The Intermezzi are often considered to be profound meditations on death. How do you interpret them?

My interpretations are not wholly influenced by what may or may not have been going through a composer's mind when he wrote a particular piece of music. My interpretations are drawn more from what I see on the score and from what I understand of a composer's language – a scenario emerges from this. I do know that in his late 50's Brahms was reflecting, like a lot of people do at this age, about his life and contemplating old age. I feel rather than being meditations on death, perhaps they are meditations on his life?

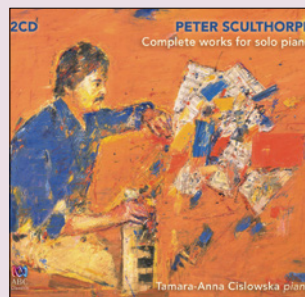
5. What's next? More Brahms? Or further investigations of lesser-known Polish rep?

A bit of both actually! This past summer I

returned to the Hyperion Romantic Piano Concerto Series to record a CD of music by Ludomir Rozycki to be released next year. My next Brahms CD for BIS (Volume 3 in the complete series) is being recorded in January 2015, which will hopefully be out in October 2015. Also in October 2015 I shall be recording more Polish Piano Quintets by Rozycki and Ignaz Friedman for Hyperion with the Szymanowski Quartet.

Jonathan Plowright's Brahms Volume 2 is out now on BIS and reviewed on page 76

TOP OF THE JAN LIMELIGHT CHART



PETER SCULTHORPE
Complete Piano Works

Tamara-Anna Cislowska who collaborated with the composer, plays piano music spanning the whole of Sculthorpe's long career.

See the full chart on p69

MOMENT MUSICAL

by *Don Fish*



"Bach's Bad-Tempered Clavier"