

Chopin with a twist

Jonathan Plowright's new *Hommage à Chopin* disc features music by the likes of Grieg, Godowsky and Busoni – all written in tribute to the great Polish composer. The easy-going pianist talks to Erica Worth

Tell me a little about the origins of your *Hommage à Chopin* disc for Hyperion.

I knew that every man and his dog would bring out a Chopin disc this year, so mine looks at Chopin from a different angle. I have to give credit to [actor, writer and broadcaster] Jeremy Nicholas. It was his idea, and when Hyperion said to him, 'who do you think would be good for this?', he suggested me.

Jeremy sent me a load of 'homage' pieces, some that I knew, some that I didn't. I also hunted through my collection. I didn't want to do a tongue-in-cheek CD. I wanted this to be a serious homage, in the true sense of the word, so there were certain pieces that I felt were too light-hearted. Maybe they would be fine for a different type of recording, but putting them on this disc would have confused the issue.

How long were you given to make the recording?

The initial idea for the project came in March or April last year, and we recorded it at the beginning of August. It was a really long, tough summer, believe me! Thank goodness it wasn't nice weather, or I'd have wanted to be outside.

You must learn repertoire quickly.

Yes, I do. But I found this project quite difficult. I've done recordings mainly of the same composer. In many ways that's easier because you get into the mind of the composer. You notice all the little idiosyncrasies. You think 'he's going to do this now, because he's done that before' – that kind of thing. The difficulty with this disc was getting into the mind of several composers. Pianist-composers tend to write the way they play. And some might have had different-sized hands, some found particular things easier to play and so on – so you have to be a man for all seasons.

