

never warrant any degree of modification. Yet the Israeli-born pianist Matan Porat had other ideas, and the result is this splendid recording on the Mirare label, his third disc to date.

Porat acknowledged that while *Carnaval* is a quintessential document of Romanticism, he wanted to take a closer look at Schumann's musical mind and expand upon the original score through the insertion of 23 additional short pieces by 18 composers as diverse as Heitor Villa-Lobos, François Couperin and György Kurtág. In so doing, Porat hoped it would not only shed light on music by other composers, but also inspire a greater appreciation for the original score.

And it works! Delivering a polished and elegant performance, Porat has clearly taken considerable care with the placement of the musical selections. As an example, Schumann's *Pierrot* is followed by Villa-Lobos' *A manha da Pierrette*, written in the same coquettish mood. On the other hand, Kurtág's *Ostinato in A-flat*, with its repeated bass notes, forms a fine introduction to Schumann's *Reconnaissance* in the same key, which is followed by the *Prelude in C Minor* from Bach's first book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and in turn, *Pantolon and Columbine*, all demonstrating the same frenetic energy.

Finally, after 43 tracks, what could be a better ending than the rousing *Davidsbündler March*, bringing the set to a most satisfying conclusion? Kudos to Porat, not only for an exemplary performance, but for his skillful reconfiguration of a much-loved piece – recommended.

Richard Haskell

Reawakened – Clarinet Concertos
Robert Plane; BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra; Martyn Brabbins
Champs Hill Records CHRCD160
(champsillrecords.co.uk/691/Robert-Plane-Reawakened)



▶ Three long-overlooked British clarinet concertos here receive their first-ever recordings, “reawakened” by Robert Plane, principal clarinet of the BBC National

Orchestra of Wales.

For unspecified reasons, Richard H. Walthew (1872–1951) left his *Concerto for Clarinet* (1902) in manuscript, unorchestrated until recently completed by Alfie Pugh. Its opening movement resembles Richard Strauss’ “Mozartian” style; the *Andante* and *Vivace* partake, respectively, of Edwardian nobility and jollity. It’s a charming, cheerful work, well worth a listen.

Ruth Gipps (1921–1999) composed her *Clarinet Concerto in G Minor, Op. 9* in 1940, the year she began studying with Ralph Vaughan Williams. His influence pervades

throughout: in the first movement, the clarinet seemingly extemporizes over an outdoorsy walking bass; the bucolic mood is sustained in the pastoral slow movement and the folk-dancy finale. It’s another attractive audience-pleaser.

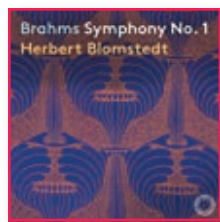
What should have been recognized by now as a major contribution to the clarinet repertoire is the CD’s longest, most colourfully scored, most modern-sounding work – the 28-minute *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, Op. 7* (1950) by Iain Hamilton (1922–2000). Propulsive, irregular, even jazzy rhythms contrast with long-lined, darkly melancholic lyricism, all calling for extreme virtuosity from the soloist, amply provided by Plane.

Another first recording ends the CD – Graham Parlett’s arrangement for clarinet and string orchestra of the warmly lyrical *Fantasy Sonata* (1943), originally for clarinet and piano, by John Ireland (1879–1962), a minor master deserving much greater exposure in North America.

Four fine works, exuberantly performed, making one truly pleasurable CD.

Michael Schulman

Brahms – Symphony No. 1
Gewandhausorchester Leipzig; Herbert Blomstedt
PentaTone PTC5186850
(naxosdirect.com/search/827949085062)



▶ At the risk of stranding ourselves in a past we’ll never relive, we continue to revisit masterpieces from over a century ago. This provides work for my fellow

performers and me, and possibly keeps the public in touch with sonic masterpieces. We might ask ourselves, what is new and different in this latest iteration? Otherwise, is there any point?

I take enormous pleasure in hearing the fine Gewandhaus Orchestra, under Herbert Blomstedt, recraft Brahms’ titanic *First Symphony in C Minor Op. 68* into audible form. The performance has so much clarity and poise, nothing I write in response can mean much at all.

I’m no collector of things, nor of recordings, but I am a repository of memories, and this piece remains on a prominent shelf in the room where professional reminiscence is housed. As a student, the experience of hearing the wonderful energy and intelligence of Brahms’ First fuelled my desire to be among the lucky few who might perform it in a professional setting. Knowing how long he took to knuckle down and live up to his billing as the next great symphonist after Beethoven inspires me to carry on at my advanced age.

It is a fantastic rendition, as good as any out

there I’m sure, and worth owning whether it is one among many, or your first (even only) version. The playing is pure, both delicate and yet powerful. Blomstedt asks for and receives fine and subtle performances from the entire band.

The *Andante sostenuto* second movement is languid and deliciously melancholy. Add in the uplifting finale, with its *wunderhorn* call and its hymn answering Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy*, and perhaps the troubles of today might be more bearable.

Max Christie

Brahms; Bartók; Liszt
Alexandre Kantorow
Bis BIS-2380
(naxosdirect.com/search/bis-2380)



▶ Young French pianist Alexandre Kantorow has already had a distinguished recording career with three award-winning releases. This recital is

his first since winning the Tchaikovsky Competition in 2019 and it too is a real winner. As a thought-provoking musician he now focuses on the Rhapsody, a thoroughly Romantic genre, invented by Liszt followed by Brahms, Rachmaninoff, Ravel, Sibelius etc. and into the modern era with Bartók and even Gershwin.

Kantorow is not looking for popular show pieces, although his program offers plenty of hair raising virtuosity. He starts off with a very effective rendition of the tempestuous Brahms *Rhapsody No. 1* demonstrating a virtuoso Romantic abandon, full of fire, but also a gentle lyricism in the middle part. Kantorow is a truly mature artist who belies his age as evidenced in the most ambitious work on the program, Brahms’ *Piano Sonata No. 2*. This was the youthful composer’s first major piano work and it is full of rich musical ideas, opulent harmonies, yet under strict compositional rigour. It starts off with virtuoso double fortissimo octaves as its opening salvo. I love the *Trio* part of the *Scherzo, Poco piu moderato* – a wonderful melody that enchants the ear.

The second half is devoted to Hungarians. Young Bartók’s *Rhapsody Op. 1*, which harks back to the Romantic era, and in tribute to Liszt, seems to revel in beautiful harmonies and evokes Gypsy music. Very much unlike the later avant-garde Bartók. The fiery second part is a wild Hungarian dance of amazing bravura.

The disc ends spectacularly with Liszt’s *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 11* played with such amazing gusto that it will lift you up from your seat. A gorgeous recording.

Janos Gardonyi