in his approach. The big moments become all the more thrilling when they arrive. In a word, this performance is totally engrossing. Little could improve the vivid, perfectly balanced recorded sound.

The Six Piano Pieces, op. 118, were recorded separately in June 2020 in the Gewandhaus, Leipzig. The piano sounds lifelike in its richness and depth, and Kim takes full advantage in readings that range from the ravishing sweep of Intermezzo No. 1 and the songful lyricism of Intermezzo No. 2, where Kim handles the most delicate passages without letting the melodic line sag, to the swaggering extroversion of Ballade No. 3. He handles cross-rhythms with clarity and lack of clutter, and where Brahms's writing becomes psychologically more ambiguous, as in Intermezzo No. 4, he rises to a mature level of subtlety. Although I often think of op. 118 in terms of an aging composer's wistful melancholy, Kim makes me hear Brahms's entire career being recapitulated in miniature. It will be fascinating to follow his artistry as it matures even further. **Huntley Dent**

BRAHMS *Hungarian Dances* Nos. 1–3, 5–7, 10: See DVOŘÁK.

BRAHMS Intermezzi, op. 117: See SCHUMANN.

BRAHMS Rhapsody in b, op. 79/1. **Piano Sonata No. 2. BARTÓK Rhapsody,** op. 1. **LISZT *Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 11** • Alexandre Kantorow (pn) • BIS 2380 (SACD: 66:28)

As far as the piano world is concerned, 23-year-old Alexandre Kantorow is the cynosure of every eye. For a young French pianist to win the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow in 2019 was an international coup. Since 1994 when Nikolai Lugansky won silver (no gold was awarded that year), a total of 17 gold, silver, and bronze medals have been given, counting a few shared places. Of these, Russians won 12 medals, including three of the five gold medals. In 25 years the only non-Russians to win gold are the Japanese pianist Ayako Ushara in 2002, who didn't gain a celebrated career—she made three CDs, none currently in print—and Kantorow, who was already on his way to fame. (The Tchaikovsky also brought to wide notice another spectacular French pianist, Lucas Debargue, who came in fourth in 2015, creating an outcry over his low placement.)

Kantorow's first two releases on BIS featured Russian composers, including a great reading of Rachmaninoff's Piano Sonata No. 1, and three Saint-Saëns piano concertos. This new release, which should be titled *Rhapsody*, since music of that name comes from the three composers on the program, is post-Moscow. The Bartók and Liszt were recorded in Paris in September 2019, three months after his win, with Brahms following in January 2020, recorded in Finland. Hardly anyone has heard a note from this thrilling virtuoso that earned the slightest complaint, and the same is likely to continue with this disc. Kantorow is set to join Yuja Wang and Daniil Trifonov as a media star, I imagine, as well as a superb musician. At the very least he will have the luxury of writing his own ticket.

I was a little taken aback, though, by the aggressive opening to the first work on the program, Brahms's Rhapsody No. 1 from op. 79. As highly charged as the piece is, Kantorow seems to overwhelm it at first, but nothing else is amiss—his reading is confident, musically impeccable, and virtuosic. Among Brahms's three youthful, wildly ambitious piano sonatas, the most popular is No. 3, but Kantorow performs No. 2 instead (it reminded me that Sviatoslav Richter made famous recordings of Nos. 1 and 2 but never No. 3. He also didn't record Rhapsody No. 1 either, only No. 2—the prerogative of genius).

Kantorow plays Sonata No. 2 with such theatrical flair that perhaps only Richter makes for a fair comparison. The banged-out opening of the *Rhapsody* is also revealed as anomalous, because his *fortissimos* in the sonata are rounded and powerful. That Brahms was only 19 when he finished the sonata in 1852 remains one of the wonders of his career. He took Schumann more than Beethoven as his model, although the heroic scale of the music, which at times verges on hectoring, needed Beethoven as a precursor, I think. The performer is called upon to express a wide range of emotions, and although it might be too early to say that Kantorow has Trifonov's magical lightness of touch, the slow movement is lovely in its tenderness. More importantly, both Brahms pieces are interpreted as if the pianist has had a lifetime of experience.

As with most reviewers, the Bartók piano works I encounter are almost always from his maturity, and I had to scramble to acquaint myself with the 20-minute Rhapsody, op. 1, which appeared in 1904;

there is also a later version for piano and orchestra. The 23-year-old Bartók was already moving toward a nationalist Hungarian style, but his early works clearly grow out of the milieu of the time, meaning German music. As the program note says of the Rhapsody, "If its virtuoso aspect brings Liszt to mind, it is to Brahms that we turn in terms of color," which neatly links the three composers on this disc.

Going on, the program note says, "[The Rhapsody] is in two sections. The first is slow and improvisatory in nature; the second is fast and has the bipartite form of the *csárdás* with its *lassú* and its *friss*. In the first section we find gypsy-style improvisations with impassioned repetitions of various motifs and imitations of the sound of the cimbalom." Bartók was still several years away from deciding to do serious field work with Kodály, so none of these gestures are authentically Hungarian; Debussy is peeking over the young composer's shoulder at times.

In every respect Kantorow delivers a wonderful performance, filled with color, technical brilliance, and the charm of a virtuoso letting fly for our entertainment. He knows the secret of making a second-tier piece of music great by playing it as if it is a masterpiece. Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* No. 11 from 1847 has a few special characteristics, according to the annotator: "[The second section] has the feeling of the famous *verbunkos*, a military recruitment dance, before a rapid conclusion in the style of a *csárdás* with plenty of panache."

Panache is Kantorow's strength throughout the program, but it is combined with probing emotional maturity, which is rare. I doubt that any prediction will come true for him other than the prediction of greatness. He is well on his way, as evidenced by this release, the best solo piano recital I heard this year. **Huntley Dent**

⬇ BRAHMS Symphonies Nos. 1–4 • Philippe Jordan, cond; Vienna SO • WIENER SYMPHONIKER 021 (164:05) Live: Musikverein, Vienna 9/25–29/2019. Reviewed from a WAV download: 44.1 kHz/16-bit

Some new recordings mark beginnings—for example, an artist's or ensemble's debut album, or a maestro leading an orchestra to which he has recently been appointed chief conductor. In contrast, these recordings of Brahms's four symphonies, made in the fall of 2019, mark an end, in this case, to Philippe Jordan's tenure as Music Director of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. They follow closely on the heels of his Beethoven symphony cycle which received positive, if not rave, reviews in recent past issues. Some goings are cause for good-riddance rather than regret; Jordan's leave-taking is not one of them. He can depart Vienna with his head held high and with a very fine Brahms symphony cycle in his portfolio with the orchestra he has led since 2014.

Once before, in an unrelated review, I referred to the "three T's" of performance: Tempo, Tone, and Technique. In hindsight, I believe that two more factors should also be considered, Tenor and Timing. As a general observation, I can say that overall, Jordan's Brahms strikes me as within normal ranges of each of these parameters. His tempos, unlike in his Beethoven, are not pressed, but neither do they lag. The tone he draws from the orchestra, again unlike in his Beethoven, makes no pretense to period practices that are light on vibrato and lean on body. Jordan is of a mind that Brahms's symphonies are too late for that. The sound is what one would expect from a Middle or Central European orchestra appropriate to the time and place, like that of the Wiener Symphoniker. Of technique, the players are as sure-fingered as any, and as for tenor, the Viennese orchestra has this music in its sinews and bones.

On the issue of timing, I am not referring to the prosaic matter of minutes and seconds, to the elapsing of time, that we often cite in comparing performances; for that particular measure, while interesting, only tells us that one performance is slower or faster than another; it doesn't tell us how the performances differ in their myriad details or in their character. Time and timing are not the same things. The saying, "timing is everything" is what is pertinent here. It's about how transitions are handled, how dynamics are graduated and phrases shaped to create feelings of expectation, elation, and mystery, and it's about what happens in between the notes. Does the conductor get the timing just right for the emphasis on an entrance and the release on an exit? In all of these things, the timing can be judged irrespective of whether the tempo results in a slower performance or a faster one—within reason.

Jordan's tempos, as already noted, are neither too fast nor too slow; ergo, they are within reason and within the range of the normal. His timings, as the term is defined above, are mostly unerring.