

CD REVIEW 72

PETER KATIN plays BRAHMS.
Seven Fantasias (sets 1 and 2), Op 116;
Three intermezzi, Op 117;
Two Rhapsodies, Op 79;
Variations and Fugue on a theme of Handel, Op 24.
Peter Katin (piano)
Divine Art ddv24157 (78.48)

This recital was first issued on Olympia OCD263 and is a recording made at Salen Church Hall, Ski, Norway in May 1990.

Any disc by Katin is warmly welcome. Having listened to his performances for over fifty years, I have never been disappointed even when he plays music that I do not like. He is, without doubt, our finest pianist and to describe his playing would be a long list of superlatives.

The late piano music of Brahms is not loved by everybody. It has been described as mellow and introspective. Some have even said it is dull. But what it is is melodious, intimate, sensitive, graceful, often beautiful, nostalgic, lyrical and perhaps full of yearning. It calls for a pianist of impeccable understanding and, in Katin, we have that pianist.

The seven fantasias begin with a Capriccio in D minor marked *Presto energico*. Katin is, as always, faithful to the score and his playing is lyrical and powerful as required. It is also convincing and makes this two minute piece worthwhile. The Intermezzo in A minor is often strangely beautiful, albeit introspective. It is played with affection. The Capriccio in G minor is marked *allegro appassionato* and is in ABA form with the B section in E flat. Again, it seems to be looking back and I admired the careful modulations, an aspect that Brahms was so adept at.

Then comes three intermezzi. The first in E captures the spirit of introspective yet again with music from the heart to the heart. There is a yearning and the piece is substantial. The playing is of great sensitivity and the legato control is enviable. The second intermezzo is in E minor and unashamedly sentimental as indicated in the score. It is intimate and a piece full of grace. It is also full of interest and infectious with fascinating rhythms made evident in the hands of this great pianist. The third is in E and marked *Andantino teneramente* also in ABA form. The opening section sounds more orchestral than pianistic but the middle section in B is different.

This opus ends with a Capriccio, also in D minor, which is full of interest with a time signature that starts in 2/4 and proceeds to 6/8. One can only admire Katin's playing with his choice sostenutos and enviable legatos.

The three Intermezzi Op 117, are gems. The first has its theme in the underneath of the right hand and what a gorgeous theme it is. Katin does it proud. The second is glorious in the key of B flat minor. This piece is difficult to bring off but presents no problems for Katin. It is beautifully realised. The third Intermezzo is in C sharp minor and has some unison work suggesting togetherness. It becomes a work of yearning with a character of some strange intimacy. Perhaps it is a shade too long.

This Brahms intimacy contradicts the notion that Brahms was always a grumpy old man swilling gallons of coffee and smoking cigars. He was a likeable man and when snowballed by children, he returned the game with enthusiasm and laughter.



The Two Rhapsodies Op 79, are so different. The first in B minor has excursions into other keys and is too long even though Katin does not play the first repeat. The thematic material is memorable.

The second rhapsody is joy. It is marked *molto passionato, ma non troppo allegro*. It is a splendid piece which also goes into B minor and it is so well played. I have listened to many other performances which are not worthy to compare with this performance. Some famous names make heavy weather of it, have erratic speeds and produce dreadful performances.

The Theme, Variations and Fugue on a theme of Handel is a marvellous work based on a theme from one of Handel's Suites for keyboard. After the theme, there are 25 variations and a fugue.

This is a work of wonderful contrasts expertly played with the cleanness of clarity and, as with all of Katin's performances, you know that has studied the work meticulously to produce his unbeatable performance.

I do feel that the engineer does not have enough range in dynamics from *ppp* to *ff*.

But the playing is articulate, accurate, reliable, glorious, serene, intelligent, masterful, superlative and it is unequalled playing.

(See [interview with Peter Katin on this site](#))

Peter Katin is the best!

If you love the greatest piano playing, you will not have to think twice about buying this CD!

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