



10/16-(6)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Piano Works Vol. 5
 Variations op. 21, 1&2
 Händel-Variations op. 24
 Paganini-Variations op. 35

Hardy Rittner, piano
 Steinway & Sons Piano (1860)

1 Hybrid-SACD

MDG 904 1974-6

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Pioneering Edition

The conclusion and crowning culmination of an epochal project: Vol. 5 rounds off Hardy Rittner's acclaimed Brahms complete recording on historical pianos. The careful selection of lavishly and lovingly restored concert grand pianos perfectly suited to this task enhances the value of this pioneering edition even more. The present release comes with a double high point: Rittner performs the variation cycles, works of the highest virtuosity producing an extraordinary audience impact, on a Steinway & Sons concert grand piano, serial number 553, manufactured around 1860.

Blowing the Mind

The eminent critic and Brahms admirer Eduard Hanslick certified that the two volumes of the Paganini Variations op. 35 could "make the performer lose his mind." What he may have meant can be experienced in the seventh variation of the first volume: the multiple layering of duple and triple rhythm results in an absolutely wild 8:9 ratio – here even listeners will get dizzy.

Bridging the Gap

Even if nineteenth-century feuilletons constructed an unbridgeable gap between Johannes Brahms and Richard Wagner, the Bayreuth master could not get around paying tribute to his fellow composer's Handel Variations op. 24. And indeed: Brahms incomparably interrelates innovative piano playing with reminiscences of times long gone by in what is a highly productive symbiosis. Siciliano and musette as well as canon and carillon recall old forms and mightily culminate in a powerful concluding fugue.

Pianistic Eminence

Hardy Rittner magnificently brings out the special qualities of historical pianos – and here action technology from yesteryear is anything but an obstacle. Silvery double octaves in the eleventh variation of the first volume of op. 35, crystal-clear brilliance in numerous thirty-second runs, frequent fierce growling of the basses – the Steinway grand piano, even in its early years with its famous patented iron-cast plate and diagonal stringing, generates an enormous sound palette and shows itself from its very best side in Rittner's sensitive and powerful hands. This is dazzling musical magic recorded in the finest concert hall acoustics and outstandingly conveyed in MDG's 2+2+2 Recording technology on SACD.

Johannes Brahms: Early Piano Works

Vol. 1: Sonata No. 2 op. 2; Variations op. 9, Ballades op. 10
MDG 904 1494-6



Vol. 2: Sonatas op. 1 and 5
MDG 904 1538-6

Vol. 3: Piano Works op. 116 - 119
MDG 904 1680-6



Vol. 4: 8 Pieces op. 76, 16 Waltzes op. 39, 2 Rhapsodies op. 79, Scherzo E flat minor op. 4
MDG 904 1810-6

