

SOLO REPERTOIRE



**Bach** *Die Kunst der Fuge* BWV 1080  
**Filippo Gorini** *pf*  
 Alpha ALPHA755 – 2 CDs

Bach's *Art of Fugue* is more than a piece of music for Filippo Gorini: it is an all-consuming passion, and this recording is but one part of his multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary examination of the score and its ramifications. Here we get the music, with only a set of haikus and sonnets by Gorini inspired by the piece (*Preludes to The Art of Fugue*) to keep it company.

Gorini is a real thinker's pianist: everything he does comes from the deepest reflection. These performances are correspondingly calm, luminous and utterly clear in revealing Bach's linear workings. His melding of head and heart reveals an almost unique balance: try *Contrapunctus IX* as an example of how complexity can raise the emotions, and how they can then be soothed by the very next piece (*Contrapunctus X*).

Of all the myriad ways of experiencing BWV 1080, Gorini convinces us the ideal way, if not in our head, is on the piano. And when the final Fuga stops in mid-flow, we are left shocked, yet transformed. Unmissable.



**Haydn** *Piano Sonatas t Volume 2*  
**Paul Lewis** *pf*  
 Harmonia Mundi HMM 902372

We are currently spoiled for choice in Haydn on the piano thanks to Paul Lewis' ongoing series on Harmonia Mundi and Jean-Efflam

Bavouzet on Chandos. Both cycles are blessed with state-of-the-art recording and feature top-rank artists.

Lewis here presents four contrasting Sonatas. His exquisite articulation in the C minor Sonata Hob XVI:20 displays a perfect grasp of Haydn's gestural 'tail-ends' that occur after cadences. He uses the sustaining pedal with great intelligence and is unafraid to do so. Lewis is also unafraid to explore the deeper emotional resonances of this sonata's central *Andante con moto*, while Bavouzet is more held back. It is substantive music, and Lewis treats it as such.

The Sonata in E-flat Hob XVI:52 is another substantive offering, and Lewis is nicely big-boned. Contrasts are beautifully highlighted, its playfulness sitting happily alongside *Sturm und Drang*. No wonder Richter loved this piece, and Lewis just as much, at pains perhaps to show the links to Beethoven's early slow movements in the central Adagio.

Lewis finds complementary genius in the shades of the mysterious Sonata in E minor Hob XVI:34, while the D major Hob XVI:51 holds mysteries aplenty too. Revelatory playing makes this album an absolute joy.



**Brahms** *Piano works, including: Chorales Op 122; Paganini Variations; Handel Variations; Klavierstücke Opp 116 and 118; Piano Sonata No 3 in F minor Op 5*  
**Pianist Nada** *pf*  
 MEI Enterprises 6 82131 86689 4 – 3 CDs

Just as Gorini's recording of *Die Kunst der Fuge* is a labour of love, so is this set of Brahms piano works from Pianist Nada. It is the fourth release in her Brahms series and a major achievement.

If the somewhat thin recording was better, this would be an unhesitating recommendation. There is no doubting Nada's musicality, nor her remarkable attachment to Brahms. One of her core traits is that she never over-eggs her pudding, allowing textures to remain clear. Just a touch more depth to the airless piano sound would have sealed the deal.

The inclusion of so-called minor pieces (*Gavotte after Gluck, Serenade and Gigue, Etude No 4 after Bach*) is significant in revealing an alternative side to Brahms – and they represent some of the collection's finest performances. Pianist Nada's thorough way with the variation sets (*Paganini* and *Handel*) offers a considered deconstruction of Brahms' music, while the sweep of Op 117/1 is beautifully realised. Complementing all this is a muscular F minor Sonata with real long-range vision. Fascinating.



**... Le temps perdu ...**  
**Works by Ravel, Liszt, Fauré and Respighi**  
**Imogen Cooper** *pf*  
 Chandos CHAN 20235

As CD playing times seemingly forever increase, the opportunity for recital-length programmes on one disc invites albums such as this one: Imogen Cooper at the absolute height of her powers in repertoire that has percolated in her since her student days in Paris (and later, with Brendel, in Vienna). The music resurfaces exuding infinite richness.

Subtlety is the keyword here. Cooper's performance of Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* sits in the tradition of great French pianism, displaying a delicious touch throughout. There is restraint here, too: Cooper presents the seventh movement as energetic yet still heard through a veil – no blaze of white light for her. The Sonatine seems a logical bedfellow but occupies another world. Cooper's low-pedal approach is fascinating: Ravel the clock technician as well as purveyor of beauty.

How logical to pit Liszt's fountain against Ravel's, two exquisitely even streams of watery thought, equally perfectly realised. Only the Liszt *Hungarian Rhapsody* feels out of kilter, a fine cimbalom impression not enough to elevate a rather restrained account. The revelations come with Fauré's magnificent *Thème et Variations*, a piece that stands at the apex of Fauré's piano output, and Respighi's harmonically sophisticated *Notturmo*. Revelations galore.