

Edwin Fischer.**Brahms** Piano Sonata No. 3 in F minor, Op. 5^a.**Mozart** Fantasia in C minor, K396^b. **Schumann** Fantasia in C, Op. 17^c.**Edwin Fischer** (pf).St Laurent Studio mono (M) (D) YSL78-010 (62mins); rec. Abbey Road Studio No. 3, ^b24/5/34; ^a30/5/49; ^c30-31/5/49. (www.78experience.com)

This is announced as “Edwin Fischer, Volume 1” by St Laurent Studio, so hopes are high for further issues. The Brahms was produced by Walter Legge (engineer Robert Beckett), and originally issued on HMV (DB21213/5). It is Fischer’s only studio recording of Op. 5 (there is also a live RAI broadcast from 1948 and a 1923 Duo Art piano roll on Nimbus (NI8806)). Although available later as a Références LP, it has only been available previously on a Japanese Toshiba-Sinseido CD (SGR7115). Fischer’s muscular approach to the first movement is certainly bold. Although the (brief, unaccredited) booklet note makes reference to the fragile reputation of Fischer’s post-war recordings, it claims he is here in “top pianistic shape”, and yet as early as 1’37” in the first movement one is very aware of insecurities. There is no doubting Fischer’s identification with Brahms’s canvas, nor his ability to project Brahmsian intimacy in the twilit *Andante espressivo*. Fischer’s Scherzo seems to have distinct Schumannesque leanings, a *Carnaval*-like exuberance. The veiled mystery of the Intermezzo is all Brahms’s, however, as is the grandeur of the finale. If Julius Katchen (Decca) in his famous recording is a touch more integrated, Fischer is the more elemental of the two. Fischer’s piano is generally focused, although bass frequencies suffer from some blurring. Some surface noise (crackling) is retained, but not distractingly so.

In contrast, the Schumann *Fantasie* is Fischer’s only recording of that piece. Like the Brahms, this piece oscillates between stormy outbursts and

passages of the utmost *Innigkeit*. Fischer is most drawn to the lyrical elements, and although he provides grandeur for the March, it is the vast line of the final movement that fascinates.

Dating from some 15 years earlier, the Mozart appears as something of an encore. The back of the booklet shows a scan of the Victor issue (8696), despite the assurance that the recording is taken from HMV pressings (DB2377); the date is 28 August 1934, not 24 May. Fischer adds a Bachian purity to Mozart’s intimate utterance. The transfer is so expertly managed that one almost forgets it is a consideration, and Fischer’s justly famous Mozart is magical in its crystalline elegance. **Colin Clarke**