

Beethoven Piano Sonata No. 31 in A flat, Op. 110^a.

Brahms Ballade in G minor, Op. 118

No. 3^b; Rhapsody in G minor, Op. 79 No. 2^c.

Handel Suite No. 3 in D minor, HWV428^d.

Schubert Wandererfantasie in C, D760^e.

Edwin Fischer (pf).

St Laurent Studio [®] [Ⓛ] YSL78-013 (54mins;

ADD); rec. Studio No. 3, Abbey Road, London.

Item marked ^a from DB3707/8 (8/11/38);

^bDB6437 (21/2/47); ^dHMV DB2378 (28/4/34);

^eDB2276/8 (22 & 24/5/34).

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I reviewed Vol. 1 of this series ([Ⓛ] YSL 78-010) in the Autumn issue of *CRQ* (page 77). St Laurent Studio have here provided a fascinating snapshot

of Fischer's greatness. As with Vol. 1, there are no booklet notes whatsoever.

The *Wandererfantasie* has been available on a variety of labels. It is a performance of great strength and stamina. Fischer's speed pulls no punches in the first movement, and the heaviness of his *fortissimo* comes across. Surface noise is retained, but its low level is easily assimilated into the listening experience. The Adagio exudes astonishing concentration. Interior playing of the very highest order, there are moments of pure magic for instance in the descending scales around 4'41". If the Scherzo carries with it the occasional Cortot-like palmful, it remains exciting and never purely virtuoso. Fischer's tempo for the finale is remarkable, a hell-for-leather burn that leaves one breathless.

Fischer's Beethoven Op. 110 shows a tremendous grasp of the transcendental serenity so typical of Beethoven's late period in its first and third movements, while the *Allegro molto* is a no holds barred experience. There are some technical barriers here, but the excitement is undeniable. The monumentalism of the Beethoven bleeds into the grand gestures of the Handel suite (three movements thereof: Prelude, "Air & Variations" and Presto), tracked as one. The variations are particularly delicious. Just before five minutes, there is a sudden increase in hiss, possibly due to a side-change. The concluding pieces of the disc act as a reminder of Fischer's command of the Brahmsian idiom. He makes the contrasts in these pieces tell: the robust against melting *legato*, *cantabile*.

Colin Clarke
