



BRAHMS Piano Concerto No. 3 in D, after Violin Concerto, op. 77 (arr. Lazić). **2 Rhapsodies**, op. 79. **Scherzo in e \flat** , op. 4 • Dejan Lazić (pn); Robert Spano, cond; Atlanta SO • CHANNEL 29410 (SACD: 66:10)

Dejan Lazić has been working on this arrangement of the Brahms Violin Concerto for many years, having fallen in love with the piece when much younger and considering it a masterpiece that should no longer be kept from the hands of pianists. I had, upon receiving this disc, a *lot* of qualms, admittedly premature, but not without reason as my past experience with this sort of thing cannot be considered quality time. I emphatically do *not* like Beethoven's reworking of his Violin Concerto, and I have to believe that if Brahms was writing this music for the piano he would have done things a lot differently.

There. I feel much better. But now the mea culpa: This is one outstanding recording, and Lazić has done everyone a service by coming up with this very serviceable and idiomatic arrangement. Mind you, this is not going to replace the original, and I will not even begin to compare it with any of the great violin versions. That's not the point. What is the point is that anyone coming to this work in this version, while not able to ascertain any kind of new insights to the piece, will be able to admire the performance to no end, and to understand that pianists now have access to a work that is transformable and transferable to a new idiom that is able to convey its emotive and pristine core to an audience.

Brahms would have done it differently; there are passages where some of the third and sixth harmonies in the winds get obscured by the piano filigree. And there are other areas where the sustaining power of a single note on the violin simply is not possible on the piano and either gets left alone or doctored in an unsatisfactory manner to try and re-create the effect of the violin. But for the most part Lazić leaves such things alone and lets the sheer power of the music speak for itself in the new medium. Robert Spano's Atlanta Symphony Orchestra plays with a glistening beauty that is captured magnificently by the Channel engineers, almost transforming the usually horrid acoustic of Symphony Hall Atlanta into something resonant and attractive. I was not able to get any substantive response from the ASO offices about this recording or the current status of the ASO contract with Telarc—I have heard it is in jeopardy since Telarc was bought out (and apparently straying from the SACD format—there goes the audiophile angle), and it would be nice to see if Channel is entering into any agreement with them; I just don't know. But the differences between the Channel approach and Telarc's are instructive, the former backing the orchestra up a bit from the microphones while Telarc is more immediate. Both have advantages depending on repertoire. Here it works well, in excellent surround sound.

The Scherzo is from 1851 and is the earliest surviving composition from the 18-year-old composer. At 11 minutes it is significant, and reflects the influence of Beethoven and, especially, Schubert. Lazić gives a fine performance. And fortunately he includes the two Rhapsodies as well, two of everyone's favorite pieces, and these readings are absolutely top-notch in every way, in tempo, voicing, and overall arch. In fact, I now rank these with my three previous favorites, by Lupu (London), Rubinstein (RCA), and Klien (Vox). This is definite Want List material for sure, and deserves the highest recommendation. **Steven E. Ritter**