

lished artist who, throughout a lengthy career, has won numerous competitions and has made frequent appearances with the world's leading orchestras, conductors, and chamber groups. He has also recorded the complete piano sonatas of Beethoven and the complete piano works of Brahms, though for some inexplicable reason neither he nor his recordings are that well known in the US.

Violist Pierre-Henri Xuereb, on the other hand, was a name new to me, though his bio states that he was William Primrose's last student, and that he studied at Juilliard and Boston University, after which he was invited by Pierre Boulez to join the Ensemble Intercontemporain. Xuereb has recorded for a number of leading labels, and now teaches viola at the Paris Conservatoire.

Brahms, as you've now been told repeatedly, originally wrote these two viola sonatas for clarinet, but put his personal stamp of approval on their alternate versions. They are very late Brahms, a final tribute to clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, with whom Brahms played the sonatas on September 23, 1894, at the Villa Soletalp in Berchtesgaden. The music is deeply reflective, sorrowful, and longing, but then so is much else that Brahms wrote. So what else is new?

I wish I could be a bit more enthusiastic about this release, because the works are very well played and nicely recorded, but Xuereb draws from his viola the kind of thin, astringent, nasal sound that is not to my liking. When I listen to these sonatas played on viola, what I want to hear is that rich chocolaty mocha sound—you know, Robert Frost's "the woods are lovely, dark and deep"—that kind of sound. Technically, Xuereb's execution is beyond reproach—and perhaps it's not even his fault that his instrument speaks with the voice it does—but in the upper reaches of the A string, especially, his tone is pinched and strained. De Groote, of course, having recorded Brahms's complete piano works, is perfectly tuned in to the composer's moods, but there's not much he can do to soften his partner's more strident moments.

The two songs of op. 91, *Gestillte Sehnsucht* and *Geistliches Wiegenlied*, are among Brahms's most drop-dead gorgeous creations, and they would be a most welcome bonus if Miomira Vitas's alto were more closely suited to the character of the music, and if her intonation did not more than occasionally wander off pitch. Her voice strikes me as more mezzo-soprano than true contralto. Like Xuereb's viola, it doesn't have sufficient darkness, depth, or weight to convey the sense of late autumn longing that suffuses these songs. Though only a minor inconvenience, Talent does not provide texts or translations; and, in one of the more truly peculiar redactions of musical nomenclature I've yet to encounter, they designate the two songs "Sonatas for Alto, Viola, and Piano." I suppose that makes Schubert's *Shepherd on the Rock* a sonata for soprano, clarinet, and piano. Actually, given its length and ternary form, it probably comes closer to fitting the bill than do these Brahms songs.

There are many fine recordings of the viola sonatas without the two songs. But if you want these works as coupled here, I still favor a CD from the German label Bayer (100 037), with violist Ulrich Koch, pianist Sachito Nakamura, and alto Gabriele Preiser. **Jerry Dubins**

BRAHMS *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann. Variations on an Original Theme. Variations on a Hungarian Song. Variations in d. Variations on a Theme by Handel* • David Korevaar (pn) • IVORY 74004 (78:23)

David Korevaar is not a name new to me or to recording. I had the pleasure in *Fanfare* 28:2 (Nov/Dec 2004) of reviewing his Koch release of solo piano works by Lowell Liebermann, and in my personal collection I have a very fine Centaur CD of piano quartets by Saint-Saëns and d'Indy with the Prometheus Piano Quartet, of which Korevaar is the pianist. He has also recorded both books of Bach's *WTC*. My high expectations for this latest Brahms disc were not disappointed. I can also tell you up front that the original master for this CD was recorded direct to the SADEiE Artemis 24-Bit High Resolution digital workstation, and the sound is incredibly lifelike. The upper partials, especially, ring true with that sense of "being there" concert-hall realism.

Theme and variations play an important role in Brahms's music, and not just in his solo keyboard works. As you can see from the above headnote, the Variations in D Minor is a transcription of the variations movement from the B \flat Major Sextet. And the last movement of the Fourth Symphony, as is well known, is a chaconne, which is a set of variations built over an eight-bar chord progression. On the present CD, Korevaar gives us approximately half of Brahms's variations-based

