

stark music—and if it's to sound implacable rather than merely arid, it needs a greater sense of expectation and a subtler differentiation of mood. Thus, Waldemar Malicki's more searching account of the first movement draws out the music's dramatic striving (Accord 242 852, reviewed by David Johnson in 14:4); Plowright's is comparatively static. Similarly, in Malicki's hands, the entry of the fugue in the finale intensifies the conflict; in Plowright's, it simply breaks the momentum.

Still, Malicki's reading is out of print (as is Anton Kubelik's exceptional interpretation)—and in any case, it was coupled with some of Paderewski's lesser efforts. Plowright's discmates are more substantial, and his playing here is generally more convincing than in the Sonata. Yes, there are moments of disengagement in op. 23: the fourth variation, for instance, could be more demented, just as more could be made of the darkness in the sixth. Still, the bigger variations blaze (listen to the 14th), and many of the quieter ones emerge with exceptional grace. The performance of op. 11—a distinctly lesser work—is even better: whether in the dazzle of Variation 8 or the fine grading of dynamics of Variation 11, Plowright consistently captures the music's shifting moods; and his account of the fugue has all the forward pressure missing from his reading of its cousin in the Sonata.

The sound is a bit woollier than in Hyperion's best recordings, but certainly no barrier to appreciation; Adrian Thomas's notes are informative. All in all, recommended, especially to those who have yet to make the acquaintance of this music. **Peter J. Rabinowitz**

**PADEREWSKI Theme and Variations**, op. 16/3. **Piano Concerto**.<sup>1</sup> *Fantaisie Polonaise*.<sup>1</sup> **SCHARWENKA Piano Concerto No. 1**.<sup>2</sup> *Polish Dance*, op. 3/1 • Earl Wild (pn); Arthur Fiedler, cond;<sup>1</sup> London SO;<sup>1</sup> Erich Leinsdorf, cond;<sup>2</sup> Boston S<sup>2</sup> • IVORY 77003 (2 CDs: 91:56)

Except for the *Polish Dance* (originally released on a Reader's Digest LP that eluded my grasp), I've lived with all of these recordings for more than 30 years. Yet whenever I put them on, I'm struck by their freshness. In part, that's because this repertoire isn't played that often: you're not likely to bump into it on the radio or on your local concert series. Even more, though, the spirit comes from Wild's scintillant playing, which refuses to take anything for granted but—simultaneously—refuses to take anything too seriously, either. Because of this rare and paradoxical combination of commitment and *insouciance*, of meticulousness and *panache*, Wild can play with the music without playing down to it, making it come alive to a degree unmatched by any other pianist (except for Hamelin in his rather different, but equally effective, recording of the Scharwenka First, 29:5). The succulent rubato in the first movement of the Paderewski Concerto, the searing virtuosity in the *Fantaisie Polonaise* (amplified by Wild's idiomatic elaborations of the score), the sheer drive of the Scharwenka First, the clarity of the fingerwork, and power of the climaxes throughout—all represent mid-period Wild at his most vital and compelling, able to convince you, as you're listening, that the three piano-and-orchestra works are every bit as worthy as, say, the Tchaikovsky First. Fiedler is a superlative conspirator; and while Leinsdorf is hardly the partner I'd choose for a jaunt through Scharwenka, even he seems alchemized by Wild's playing.

All of these performances have been available on CD before, but only the *Fantaisie Polonaise* remains in print, on a *potpourri* disc celebrating Ivory Classics's fifth anniversary (26:5). The reprocessing is excellent too. Strongly recommended. **Peter J. Rabinowitz**

**PAISIELLO La Daunia felice** • Federico Guglielmo, cond; Donatella Lombardi (*Cerere*); Marina De Liso (*Pale*); Luca Dordolo (*Vertumno*); Furio Zanasi (*Cassandro*); Collegium Musicum del Conservatorio U. Giordano di Foggia (period instruments) • DYNAMIC 516 (63:34 □) Live: Foggia 5/12-14/2004

Harmlessly beautiful—rather than potently so—it'd still be a mistake to regard this compact opera as mere confection. After all, its composition commemorated a grand occasion: the wedding of Prince Francesco of Naples to Maria Clementina, Archduchess of Austria, at a time in the Napoleonic era when peace was tenuous at best. Still, the whole of the Bourbon court made the trip to Italy, commencing with two months' worth of wedding celebrations—no small garden party affair.

Paisiello's operas tended to be florid constructions, with plenty of orchestral decorations and no vocal line or obbligato left without an additional emphatic flourish—which frequently is then answered with one of its own, coyly enough. *La Daunia felice* is hardly an exception—the libretto's