



Medtner Solo Piano Works t Volume 1:
*Mood Pictures Op 1; Fairy Tales Op 51;
Forgotten Melodies Op. 39*
Frank Huang pf
Centaur 3852

Frank Huang brings a distinctively individual voice to Medtner's music. Take the *Mood Pictures*, with its beautiful second movement and fabulously realised slow march for the third. Huang is equally at home in the sweet melodies as he is in the dark mystery of the fifth. Overall, he is preferable to Geoffrey Tozer (Chandos), and while Ekaterina Derzhavina (Phoenix) enjoys a fine recording, Huang pips her interpretatively.

Huang's technique is rock solid, but more impressive is his storytelling in the *Fairy Tales*. Similarly, in his hands the *Forgotten Melodies*

each inhabit their own magical world. The album closes with the *Sonata tragica*, an extended piece laden with emotion. If there is a problem here, it lies with the recorded sound: the treble could do with further definition, and the first track sounds a touch muffled.

GUY RICKARDS

PIANO CONCERTOS



Brahms *Tragic Overture; Piano Concerto No 1 in D minor Op 15* **Cherubini** *Éliza Overture*

Alexander Melnikov pf Basel Symphony Orchestra/Ivor Bolton
Harmonia Mundi HMM902602

This bracing new recording of Brahms' First Concerto offers a thrilling Maestoso

opening, though its broad tempo risks losing momentum as the movement progresses. Both here and in the finale there is a feeling of over-deliberation which is at odds with the passionate impetuosity of Brahms' invention. Still, there are considerable gains, notably in the clarity of Melnikov's finely articulated finger work and tonal mellowness of his restored 1859 (or thereabouts) Blüthner instrument. The latter is heard to best advantage in the lovely central Adagio, which is beautiful.

There are dozens of excellent recordings of the First Concerto in the catalogue, but the keenest competition for Melnikov is the newly released version by Sir András Schiff, directing the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment from the keyboard of, yes, a restored 1859 Blüthner (ECM New Series 485 5770). While there is little difference between the two instruments, there is a world of difference between the two instrumentalists and their approach.

Schiff's interpretation is full of light and somewhat faster overall. He represents the Classical end of the spectrum, whereas Melnikov inhabits the more overtly Romantic. It is this latter quality in the Basel Symphony Orchestra's fierier accompaniment that tips the scales in favour of Melnikov and Bolton.