BRAHMS Symphony No. 2 in D, op. 73. **Hungarian Dances** (orch. Brahms)**: No. 1 in g; No. 3 in F; No. 10 in F. Hungarian Dances** (orch. Dvořák)**: No. 17 in f♯; No. 18 in D; No. 19 in b; No. 20 in e; No. 21 in e** • Marin Alsop, cond; London PO • NAXOS 8.557429 (65:06)

Brahms's First Symphony with Alsop and the London Philharmonic received two notices in *Fanfare* 28:6. James Reel, who reviewed the SACD version, was not as kindly disposed towards it as I was, though I too found fault with some passages that seemed overly slow and heavy-handed. Here we have Alsop's second installment in her traversal of the Brahms symphonies, a performance that elicits from me no sympathy whatsoever.

The three-note incipit intoned at the beginning by the horn, and on which the whole of the first movement is based, sets a decent enough tempo. But almost immediately there is a noticeable applying of the brakes as the rest of the orchestra joins in; and at 1:14 Alsop encourages a broad *tenuto* in preparation for the next theme that practically brings the music to a dead standstill. Brahms's Second has sometimes been called his "Pastoral," but this performance milks the cow dry. Too bad, for Alsop takes the lengthy exposition repeat, allowing us to hear Brahms's beautiful first-ending lead-back, and the playing of the London Philharmonic is radiant.

The second movement, which opens with what must surely be one of Brahms's most lyrical, soaring melodies, is literally butchered by Alsop, who hacks it into small strip-steaks by disjointing phrases into two-beat units. She, and anyone else interested in how this melody should sing and flow, needs to hear Bruno Walter's way with it in his earlier mono recording with the New York Philharmonic.

The third and fourth movements offer little improvement, the former being not only too slow, but lacking the charm implied by its *grazioso* marking, and the latter wanting for energy and drive. Overall, this is a limp, and listless Brahms Second. Except for its exceptionally fine orchestral playing, I find nothing to recommend it.

The CD is filled out with a selection of eight of Brahms's Hungarian Dances, which in Alsop's readings once again strike me as either too slow (No. 3 in F and No. 20 in E-Minor), or lacking in the smoldering Gypsy passion that informs them (No. 1 in G Minor and No. 17 in F♯ Minor). While much else of Alsop's work has been highly rewarding, now, halfway through her Brahms symphonies traversal, I am forced to conclude that this is a composer for whom she hasn't a strong affinity. **Jerry Dubins**