

Hommage to Brahms

THE TEAM OF PIANISTS
WITH GUEST ARTISTS

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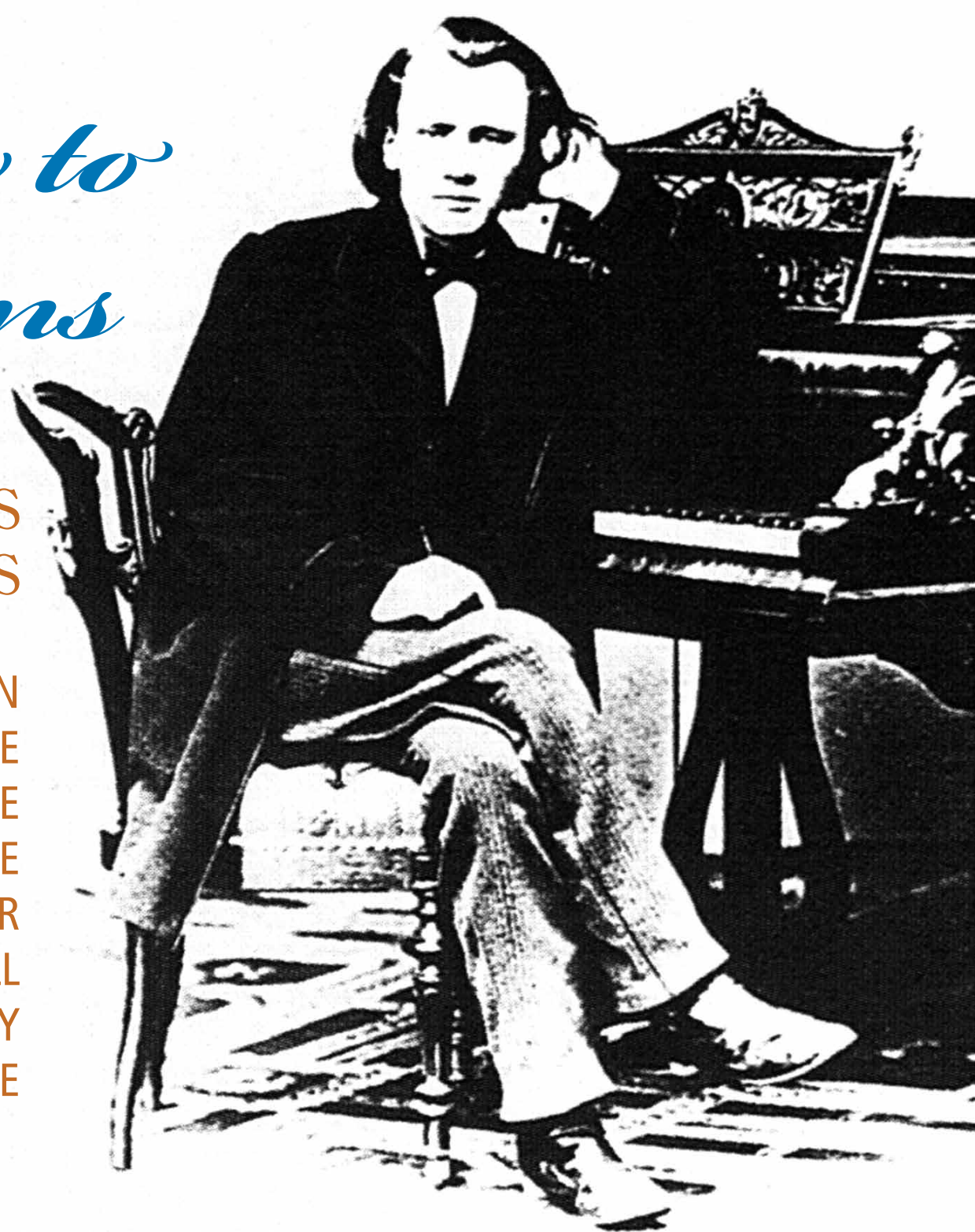
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VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY HAYDN Op 56b

The Variations on a Theme by Haydn were completed in July 1873, and were given their première in August of that year in a private home in Bonn, with Brahms and Clara Schumann at the pianos. Although the orchestral version of the 'Haydn' variations (Op 56a) was always intended by Brahms, the two-piano version is in fact his original one. Following the theme, which is based on the St Antoni Chorale, but now thought not to be by Haydn, there are eight variations and a passacaglia finale.

1 The theme retains the reverent nature of the original chorale, with relatively clear and simple harmonies, and organ-style chordal accompaniment. Set in Binary form, with both halves repeated, this serves as the basis for the formal structure of the variations also.

2 Variation 1 uses the harmonic outlines of the theme, although the hymn tune itself is absent. Instead, Piano 2 has a new theme accompanied by interweaving triplets in Piano 1.

3 Along with variations 4 and 8, variation 2 is set in B flat minor, instead of the tonic B flat major. Here stridently assertive dotted figures create cross-rhythms against the triplets. The resultant turmoil eventually subsides to a calm close in B flat major.

4 Again the reverent 'purity' of the chorale is present in variation 3. The steadfast quaver movement of the beginning reflects Brahms's north German down-to-earth confidence in his craft. Piano 1 introduces a serene melody, and a little later, Piano 2 accompanies this with an elaborate semiquaver obbligato.

5 Variation 4 introduces quite a mysterious atmosphere. The constantly interweaving semiquavers between the two pianos take the listener through various chromaticisms. Here too, for the first time, the 2/4 metre of the original theme is altered: now to 3/8.

6 Another change of metre, this time to 6/8, occurs in variation 5, which is set like a vibrant gigue. Sophisticated use of antiphonal syncopations between the two pianos is employed here to great effect.

7 Returning to 2/4, the powerful, forthright semiquaver rhythms of variation 6 also feature antiphonal responses.

8 The sentimental, or inward-looking, aspect of Brahms's nature is displayed in variation 7 in a moment of pure beauty and calm. The feeling of gentleness is retained throughout, with a lilting, Siciliana-like dotted rhythm, although in the 'B' section there is a hint of the grandeur yet to come.

9 Using words which Alfred Cortot employed to describe the finale of Chopin's Funeral March Sonata, also in B flat minor, variation 8 could be said to create an image of the 'wind howling across the graves', with its frenetic quaver movement encompassing the extreme ranges of the keyboards, and its sudden juxtapositions of legato and staccato at the end of the 'B' section.

10 The finale is cast as an extensive passacaglia, and forms the grand apotheosis of this majestic work. Like the theme itself, it commences with a tenderness reminiscent of the woodwind stops of a pipe organ. Soon, however, this gives way to a build-up of block chords, energetic triplets, cross rhythms of 4s against 3s, before a fugato heralds the last section. Based on the opening motive of the theme, and accompanied by brilliant cascades of semiquaver scales, the exhilarating climax leads into a triumphant presentation of the last phrase of the theme, and then into a short coda which affirms the tonic of B flat major. DC.

INTERMEZZI OP 116 Nos 2 and 4

By adhering to Classical traditions, especially in the area of structural design, whilst at the same time embracing Romantic ideals, Brahms presented

himself with some problems. In his larger works for the piano, particularly his sonatas, there is a tendency for the form to control the directions of the music so strongly, that his freedom to express himself becomes limited or restricted. The result can seem tedious and heavy. Contrary to this, towards the end of his life, he wrote a number of miniature piano pieces, and in these, his musical concepts are so strong that the ideas dictate the structure rather than the reverse. Many of these are intimate in character, but they vary greatly in content, and constitute some of the finest gems of piano literature. Bearing titles such as *Intermezzo*, *Capriccio* and *Fantasia*, they appear under a number of opus numbers, and can be played as single items or as sets.

The two solo works chosen for this recording, both with the title *Intermezzo*, come from seven pieces Opus 116. In this series, these two works each follow lively and exuberant items, providing a respite from the preceding turmoil. On this disc they also provide moments of calm and reflection, coming respectively after the more intellectually demanding *Variations for Two Pianos* and the *Violin Sonata*. The *Intermezzo* Op 116 No 2 has a charming simplicity and great beauty. The *Intermezzo* Op 116 No 4, is on the other hand emotionally much more highly charged. Here there is an expression of melancholy and longing, which reaches an 'other-worldly' detachment or resignation in the middle section. It seems almost as if Brahms was speaking for or to himself. MC.

SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO IN G MAJOR Op. 78

The sonata for violin and piano in G major Op. 78 was composed in the summer months of 1878-9 in Pörtschach, around the time that Brahms wrote the *Violin concerto* Op. 77. It is the first of three published sonatas for piano and violin; three earlier sonatas are believed to have been destroyed.

Robert Schumann's wife, Clara, with whom

Brahms had a long and close relationship, played a role in the background to this work. A letter from Brahms to Clara Schumann, expressing feelings for Clara and her son Felix, a violinist who died at the age of 24, around the time of the composition of this work, is written on the back of a sheet of music paper, on which are notated the first 24 bars of the slow movement. The letter implies that the slow movement is an expression of Brahms's feelings for Clara and Felix.

Of the three movements, the first, *Vivace ma non troppo*, is in sonata form. It begins with an intimate and tender first theme that develops into attractive soaring melodies which alternate between violin and piano. Much of the thematic material in this movement features a characteristic dotted rhythm. Overall, the movement has a sunny disposition, interrupted by fiery moments in the development and by the impassioned grandeur of the coda. Particularly attractive is the way in which the movement unfolds as one long outpouring of melody.

The Adagio is the expressive heart of the sonata. The long-breathed opening theme, in the distant key of E flat major, begins with a sighing motif and is presented firstly by the piano alone. Soon it is restated by the violin, initially in single notes and later, at the recapitulation, with double stops. The dotted rhythm from the main theme of the first movement reappears in here in the guise of a funeral march, at a new tempo, *piu andante*. Throughout the movement this more overtly tragic funeral march battles with the resigned nostalgia of the opening theme till a resolution is reached in the final phrases.

The third movement *Allegro molto moderato*, in a rondo form, sees the reappearance of the dotted rhythm, this time at the head of the opening theme in the violin. The key of G minor, the constant semiquaver movement in the piano part and the tendency of the melody to circle around the dominant note, create a feeling of restrained tension. This is relaxed somewhat in the contrasting

episodes, especially the second in E flat major, the key of the slow movement, where the music builds to the overall climax. Towards the end of the movement, the tempo slows and tension is resolved with a dialogue in G major between piano and violin using fragments of the dotted rhythm theme common to both the first and third movements. Thus the emotional world of the sonata turns full circle as the music returns to the warm lyricism of the opening movement. RC

LIEBESLIEDER WALZER Op 52

The *Liebeslieder Walzer* Op 52, composed in 1868-9, consist of eighteen love songs. The texts are verses from Georg Friedrich von Daumer's *Polydora*. The first edition contains the instruction *ad lib* in regard to the voices, but Karl Geiringer argues that this is misleading since Brahms's wishes were apparently for four individual voices, rather than a choir.

In his music, Brahms composed as a north German, although there were notable Hungarian and Viennese influences. From the age of fourteen he began to undertake professional performing engagements, playing in cafés and sailor's taverns. This would have brought him into contact with both popular music and folk songs, both of which were important influences on the *Liebeslieder Walzer* Op 52.

In 1862 Brahms settled in Vienna, accepting the post of conductor at the *Singakademie*. Viennese influences abound in the *Liebeslieder*, and it is likely that many of these stem from the years that Brahms spent in Vienna. He was acquainted with the 'Waltz King' Johann Strauss and with his music, admiring and respecting the piquant rhythms, vigorous melody and fine instrumentation of Strauss's Waltzes. Brahms himself liked to use Austrian dance music whenever possible, and in fact the ninth song of the *Liebeslieder*, *Am Donau Strande*, actually quotes the rising arpeggio which begins Strauss's *Blue Danube* waltz.

In all, Brahms wrote about 380 songs for one, two or four voices. The voice line is always of paramount importance for Brahms. His melodic lines are fluent, rhythmic and expressive, and adapted to the text without difficulty. The bass line of the piano accompaniment constitutes the harmonic foundation of his melodies. The inner parts of the accompaniment help to express the mood of the song, and although important, are less so than the voice and bass lines. The sketches for Brahms's songs show a Baroque influence in the piano accompaniments; often all that is notated is a figured bass part. Essentially then, Brahms's songs comprise a melody and a bass, as a tonal plan. A striking feature of his songs is the splendid organicity and completeness resulting from a clear form, and the linking of different sections. Within and between the voice and piano parts there is an abundance of recurring motives which serves to unify the songs.

A consideration of the tonal layout of the sixth song reveals an important symmetry. The three 'A' sections are in A major, while the 'B' and 'C' sections are in C sharp minor and F major respectively. This represents two shifts of a third away from the tonic, one on each side of the key. The shift of a third, as well as the mirror-image symmetry, are both traits indicating the influence of Schubert's musical style. Other relationships of a third can be seen between adjacent songs, for example, numbers three and four, and numbers seven and eight. DC

Text of the opening lines of each song with an English translation.

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|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 16 | Rede Mädchen, allzu liebes Das mir in die Brust die kühle Hat geschleudert mit dem Blicke Diese wilden Glutgefühle! | Speak, O maiden all too dear, whose glance has aroused in my calm heart these wild and passionate feelings. | 25 | O wie sanft die Quelle sich Durch die Wiese windet! O wie schön wenn Liebe sich Zu der Liebe findet! | How gently the stream meanders through the meadows! O how beautiful, if love went forth to meet love in such a way. |
| 17 | Am Gesteine rauscht die Flut Heftig angetrieben; Wer da nicht zu seufzen weiss, Lernt es unter'm Lieben. | Against the rocks dash foaming waves; whoever has not yet learned sighing, will learn it through love. | 26 | Nein, es ist nicht auszukommen Mit den Leuten; Alles wissen sie so giftig Auszudeuten. | Nay, there is no putting up with people who know everything and interpret it with poison tongues. |
| 18 | O die Frauen, O die Frauen Wie sie Wonne tauen, Wäre lang ein Mönch geworden, Wären nicht die Frauen. | O women, how they delight and melt the heart; were it not for women, I should long since have been a monk. | 27 | Schlosser auf! Und mache Schlösser Ohne Zahl! Denn die bösen Mäuler Will ich schliessen Allzumal! | Locksmith, hearken! Make countless locks for the evil lips I shall seal with them once and for all! |
| 19 | Wie des Abends schöne Röte Möchte ich arme Dirne glüh'n Einem zu gefallen Sonder Ende Wonne sprüh'n. | Like the lovely evening sunset, I would glow with endless delight, if someone but loved me. | 28 | Vögelein durchrauscht die Luft, Sucht nach einem Aste; Und das Herz ein Herz begehrt's Wo es selig raste. | Bird will search the air far and wide for a branch to light on; so does one heart desire to join another heart in bliss. |
| 20 | Die grüne Hopfenranke Sie schlängelt auf der Erde hin Die junge schöne Dirne So traurig ist ihr Sinn! | The green and tender vines creep low along the ground; the beautiful young maiden is in a melancholy mood. | 29 | Sieh, wie ist die Welle klar, Blickt der Mond hernieder, Die du meine Liebe bist Liebe du mich wieder. | See how the waves shimmer where the moonlight falls; thou who art my love, return my love. |
| 21 | Ein kleiner hübscher Vogel nahm Den Flug zum Garten hin, Da gab es Obst genug, Wenn ich ein kleiner, Hübscher Vogel wär, Ich säumte nicht, ich täte so wie der. | A pretty, little bird flew into a garden laden with fruit. If I were a pretty, little bird, I wouldn't delay, I'd do as he did. | 30 | Nachtigall, sie singt so schön, Wenn die Sterne funkeln, Liebe mich, geliebtes Herz, Küsse mich im Dunkeln! | Nightingale, you sing so beautifully under the twinkling stars, love me, dear heart, kiss me in the darkness. |
| 22 | Wohl schön bewandt War es vorehe, Mit meinem Leben, Mit meiner Liebe. | What happy days I knew once, when my love was all my life. | 31 | Ein dunkeler Schacht ist Liebe Ein ganz zu gefährlicher Bronnen; Da fiel ich hinein, ich Armer. | A dark shaft is love, a dangerous well, into which, alas, I tumbled. |
| 23 | Wenn so lind dein Auge mir, Und so lieblich schauet, Jede letzte Trübe flieht Welche mich umgrauet. | When you gaze at me so gently, with such lovely eyes, all the troubles which once distraught me flee away. | 32 | Nicht wandle mein Licht, Dort aussen im Flurbereich! Die Füße würden dir, die zarten, Zu nass, zu weich. | Wander not, light of my life, far out of reach upon the meadow, where it is too damp and soft for your tender feet. |
| 24 | Am Donaustrande Da steht ein Haus, Da schaut ein rosiges Mädchen aus. | On the Danube shore, there stands a house; and out of it, a rosy maiden gazes. | 33 | Es bebet das Gesträuche Gestreift hat es im Fluge Ein Vögelein. | The foliage trembles where a bird in flight has brushed against it. |

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY HAYDN OP 56b FOR 2
PIANOS — 1: Robert Chamberlain, 2: Darryl Coote

- 1 Theme: Chorale St. Antoni 2'28"
 - 2 Variation 1 1'06"
 - 3 Variation 2 1'05"
 - 4 Variation 3 1'45"
 - 5 Variation 4 1'35"
 - 6 Variation 5 1'00"
 - 7 Variation 6 1'23"
 - 8 Variation 7 2'48"
 - 9 Variation 8 0'57"
 - 10 Finale 4'06"
- 11 INTERMEZZO IN A MINOR, OP 116, NO 2 3'48"
Solo piano: Max Cooke

SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO IN G MAJOR, OP 78
Violin: Marina Marsden, Piano: Robert Chamberlain

- 12 Vivace ma non troppo 10'12"
 - 13 Adagio 6'59"
 - 14 Allegro molto moderato 8'05"
- 15 INTERMEZZO IN E MAJOR, OP 116, NO 4 4'48"
Solo piano: Max Cooke

LIEBESLIEDER WALZER, OP 52, FOR PIANO DUET AND
VOICES — Primo: Darryl Coote, Secondo: Max Cooke
Soprano: Kate Ladner, Alto: Sally-Anne Russell
Tenor: Michael Terry, Bass: Warwick Fyfe

- 16 Rede Mädchen, allzu liebes 1'10"
- 17 Am Gesteine rauscht die Flut 0'44"
- 18 O die Frauen 1'11"
- 19 Wie des Abends schöne Röte 0'42"
- 20 Die grüne Hopfenranke 1'27"
- 21 Ein kleiner hübscher Vogel 2'27"
- 22 Wohl schön bewandt war es vorehe 1'23"
- 23 Wenn so lind dein Auge mir 1'13"
- 24 Am Donaustrande 2'07"
- 25 O wie sanft die Quelle 0'51"
- 26 Nein, es ist nicht auszukommen 1'03"
- 27 Schlosser auf! 0'50"
- 28 Vögelein durchrauscht die Luft 0'47"
- 29 Sieh, wie ist die Welle klar 1'06"
- 30 Nachtigall, sie singt so schön 0'58"
- 31 Ein dunkler Schacht ist Liebe 1'11"
- 32 Nicht wandle mein Licht 2'10"
- 33 Es bebet das Gesträuche 1'12"

Recorded in the studio of Move Records at Eaglemont on December 5 & 6, 1994, and on June 12, 13 & 14, 1995.

Concept: Darryl Coote

Producers: Max Cooke, Darryl Coote and Robert Chamberlain.

Digital recording and editing: Martin Wright, Move Records, assisted by Vaughan McAlley.

Piano technician: Nic Hamilton.

Front Cover Design: Brahms at the Piano, 1856. Photograph by courtesy of the Mary Evans Picture Library, London.

Special thanks: Lilli Stahr for assisting in the interpretation of the Liebeslieder, and Linnhe Robertson for introducing the singers to the TEAM OF PIANISTS.

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