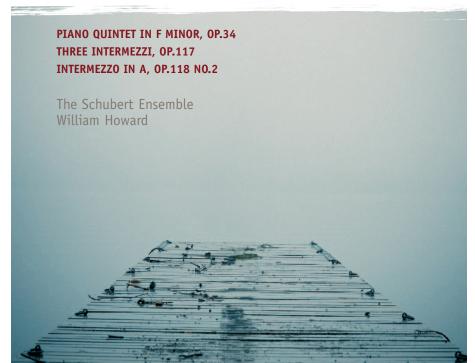


Johannes Brahms



JOHANNESS BRAHMS (1833-1897)

PIANO QUINTET IN F MINOR, OP.34

1.	Allegro non troppo	15:40
2.	Andante, un poco adagio	08:42
3.	Scherzo: Allegro	07:39
4.	Finale: Poco sostenuto ~ Allegro non troppo ~ Presto, non troppo	10:52

		THREE INTERMEZZI, OP.117	
ļ	5.	Intermezzo No.1 in E flat major	04:42
(6.	Intermezzo No.2 in B flat minor	04:16
	7.	Intermezzo No.3 in C sharp minor	06:25
8	8.	INTERMEZZO, OP. 118, NO.2 IN A MAJOR	05:54

Total time: 64.14

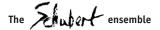
Recorded at The Music Room, Champs Hill, West Sussex, UK

Piano Quintet (tracks 1 - 4):

Produced by Chris Craker, engineered by John Timperley, 11th & 12th April 2002

Solo piano Intermezzi (tracks 5 - 8):

Produced & engineered by David Lefeber, 15th May 2007



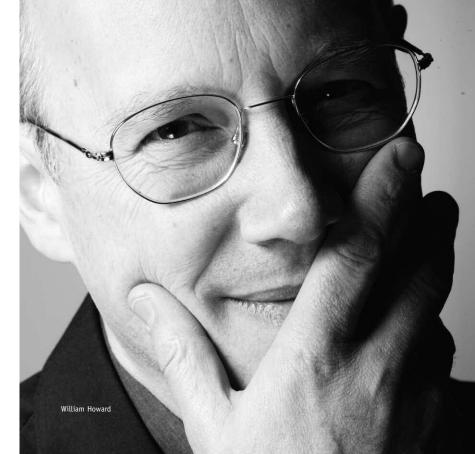
Simon Blendis, Jan Peter Schmolck - violins Douglas Paterson - viola Jane Salmon - 'cello William Howard - piano

The Schubert Ensemble has established itself over 27 years as one of the world's leading exponents of music for piano and strings. Regularly giving over 50 concerts a year, the Ensemble has performed in over 40 different countries. In 1998 the Ensemble's contribution to British musical life was recognized by the Royal Philharmonic Society when it presented the group with the Best Chamber Ensemble Award, 2009 saw a busy international schedule, with performances in the Czech Republic, Norway, Gibraltar, Spain, Holland, Canada and the USA, as well as appearances across the UK. The Ensemble released two new recordings for the Chandos label, of works by Martinu and Fauré, both of which have received wide critical acclaim. Its Finding Fauré Festival at London's King's Place was a critical and popluar success, and was followed there in June of this year with another four-day Festival, Saint-Saëns' Paris, part of which was recorded for future broadcast on BBC Radio 3. Autumn 2010 will see the start of a three-concert series at Wigmore Hall featuring the music of Georges Enescu, which continues into 2011, as does their involvement with the Leeds International Concert Series, whose 2010-11 season has been curated by the Ensemble with a Viennese theme. This year also sees several overseas trips, with a return to Spain and a major tour of China in October, the Ensemble's first visit to this country. Alongside its busy concert schedule, the Ensemble has established a reputation for innovation in the field of new music,

education and audience development. This year will see the Ensemble continue its Residency at the Birmingham Conservatoire, as well as giving workshops and masterclasses around the country. The Ensemble has built up strong relationships with many of the UK's leading composers, and has an impressive list of over 80 commissions. In June of 2009 the Ensemble gave the world premiere of a piano quintet by Jonathan Dove at the Spitalfields Festival, and this year sees the premiere of a new piano quartet by Joe Cutler at the Cheltenham Festival in July. In the recording studio the Ensemble has produced over 30 critically acclaimed CDs of works by Schubert, Schumann, Hummel, Dohnányi, Judith Weir, John Woolrich, Fauré, Korngold, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Louise Farrenc, César Franck, Elgar, Martin Butler, Piers Hellawell, Vaughan Williams and Martinů. It has appeared on TV and radio in many countries and is familiar to British audiences through regular broadcasts on BBC Radio 3.

WILLIAM HOWARD

William Howard, founder of the Schubert Ensemble, also makes regular appearances as a soloist in recitals and concertos, and can be heard regularly on BBC Radio and Classic FM. He has played at most of Britain's major festivals and is a regular visitor to the Dartington International Summer School. He has toured as a soloist in many countries, most particularly in the Far East and in the Czech and Slovak Republics, which he has visited many times. Solo recordings include works by Schubert, Smetana, Dvořák, Fibich, Anthony Powers, David Matthews and Judith Weir, who has also written a piano concerto for him. His performance of Czech music has earned him a medal from the Czech Ministry of Culture and his Fibich recording (on Chandos) has been awarded a Diapason D'Or in France.



As with so much in Brahms' life, the genesis of his *Piano Quintet*, *Op.34* was fraught with indecision and introspection. The work began life as a string quintet, written for two violins, viola and two cellos (the same combination as that used by Schubert in his *C major String Quintet*, *D956*), and received effusive compliments from Clara Schumann. Yet the violinist Joseph Joachim, as was so often the case, mixed his praise with numerous reservations, which were sufficient to undermine the composer's confidence in the work.

The discrepancy between Clara's opinion and Joachim's lies in their differing approaches to Brahms' music. In this case, Clara focused on the musical content – and, as such, her praise may be applied to the quintet in its final incarnation:

What inner strength, what richness in the first movement, with the first subject immediately seizing hold of you! ... I can't tell you how moved I am by it, and how powerfully gripped. And what an Adagio – it sings and sounds blissful right up to the last note! I start it over and over again, and don't want to stop.

Joachim, however, focused on the work from the perspective of a performer, and, though recognising the innate qualities of the musical material, anticipated difficulties with its texture:

... a piece of the greatest significance, full of masculine strength and sweeping design – that much is immediately apparent to me... The quintet is difficult, and I fear that without an energetic performance it will sound a little unclear.

That was in 1862, in response to viewing the score; by April 1863, Joachim had performed the work several times, and his misqivings had crystallised into certainty:

What I miss in it for unalloyed pleasure is, to pinpoint it in a single phrase, an attractive sonority... the instrumentation is not energetic enough to my ears to convey the powerful rhythmic convulsions; the sound is almost helplessly thin for the musical thought. Then again for long stretches everything lies too thickly.

So deeply did Brahms feel these criticisms that he not only rescored the work as a sonata for two pianos, but also destroyed the score of the string quintet in the process. Brahms remained pleased with the two-piano version, even after he had re-written it for piano quintet, asserting that 'it is particularly attractive in this form, and it will probably be well received as an interesting work for two pianos.'

The duo, later published in 1874 as Op.34b, was premièred by Brahms with Liszt's pupil Carl Tausig at the Wiener Singakadamie in 1864. This version had its problems too, however, and this time it was Clara who pointed them out. Robert Schumann himself had, in the article *Neue Bahnen* ('New paths') of 1853, described Brahms' chamber music as 'symphonies in disguise'; similarly, Clara thought a two-piano sonata too restrictive for the wealth of ideas Brahms was trying to express:

... it is not a sonata, rather a work whose ideas you could – and should – distribute among the whole orchestra... The very first time I played it I had the impression of a transcribed work... please, dear Johannes, do agree just this time, and rework the piece once more.

Brahms duly set about rearranging his material yet again, this time for piano quintet. This was not a simple amalgamation of the two previous versions of the work, however; as a genre the piano quintet has unique demands, requiring a

delicate balance between the dialogue of an intimate chamber work, and the virtuosity of a solo concerto, albeit in a pared-down context. Not an easy balance to strike; yet, at last, Brahms had found the medium through which his material could speak most eloquently.

Indeed, the work is possibly the most coherent of Brahms' early maturity. Small-scale surface details are played out at a structural level; for instance, the opening theme's emphasis on D flat becomes part of a large-scale enharmonic play on the keys of D flat major and C sharp minor, which permeates the entire work. The unification of melodic and harmonic elements in this manner demonstrates real compositional sophistication, as does the use of thematic transformation, in which themes recur in different contexts, exhibiting different characteristics each time. A striking example of this comes in the first movement's development section, when the main theme, initially heard in bare octaves, returns with, to use Tovey's phrase, 'the lift of an ancient ballad'.

The Piano Quintet was premièred in 1866 at the Leipzig Conservatoire. Brahms dedicated the work in both its forms to Princess Anna von Hessen, who had been entertained by a rendition of the two-piano version performed for her by Brahms and Clara. So delighted was the Princess with the dedication, that she presented Brahms with the manuscript score of Mozart's great G minor Symphony, No.40.

The conductor Hermann Levi, who had played through the two-piano version with Clara, said of Brahms' Piano Quintet:

The quintet is beautiful beyond measure; no one who didn't know it in its earlier forms – string quintet and sonata – would believe that it was conceived and written for other instruments. Not a single note gives me the impression of

an arrangement: all the ideas have a much more succinct colour. Out of the monotony of the two pianos a model of tonal beauty has arisen; out of a piano duo accessible to only a few musicians, a restorative for every musiclover — a masterpiece of chamber music.

Schumann's analysis of Brahms' chamber music as bottled-up symphonies proved to be prophetic. When at last the symphonies began to emerge in the 1870s, Brahms' attitude to his other output – especially that involving the piano – shifted. With the symphonies he had finally found an outlet for his large-scale ideas, and so he relied less on the piano as a means for grand expression, favouring it instead as a vehicle for shorter, more intimate works. It would, however, be deceptive to label these pieces 'miniatures', as their character often possesses far greater profundity than the term implies. Even on a small scale, Brahms plumbed great depths of emotion.

The *Drei Intermezzi*, *Op.117*, epitomise this vertiginous contrast between scale and depth. The very choice of the title 'intermezzo' lulls the listener into a false sense of security, suggesting as it does rather light, incidental, almost throwaway pieces. This is all the more puzzling when one considers that 'intermezzo' is generally used to mean 'in between', and as such is usually sandwiched between other music, so to group together three consecutive *Intermezzi* is rather curious.

Yet any initial puzzlement the listener may feel is swiftly swept aside by the sheer emotional impact of these pieces. There is a delicate desolation to 0p.117 so personal that to listen to them almost feels like eavesdropping on private moments of reminiscence and grief. Musically, the rhythmic and textural

complexity of the pieces is remarkable, with Brahms blurring the distinction between musical 'foreground' and 'background' in an almost Impressionistic style that is as skilful as it is emotive.

The *Intermezzi* also bear a kinship with the 'ancient ballad' alluded to by Tovey when describing the *Piano Quintet*; all three pieces have been related to Scottish ballads, though only with the first is this made explicit. Writing to his friend Rudolf von der Leyen, Brahms referred to the Op.117 pieces as 'lullabies of my sorrow'. In the first piece, Brahms uses a gently rocking 6/8 meter to create this quality of a mournful lullaby, and prefaces the piece with a quotation from a Scottish ballad by Herder, from his Volkslieder:

Sleep soft, my child, sleep soft and deep. It pains me so to see you weep.

Brahms' Four Pieces, Op.119 were his last works for solo piano, started in 1892 and premiered in London in 1894. The Intermezzo No.2 alternates mercurial passages in with another poignant lullaby, possessing that wistful nostalgia which characterises so much of Brahms' most touching music. Even in this brief context, Brahms achieves an exquisitely-rendered combination of pleasure and longing. It is this nuanced, bittersweet emotion that makes Op.119 a fitting farewell to the piano, the instrument which had, for so long, been at the heart of much of Brahms' finest music.

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Also available ...



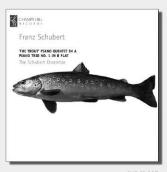
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