



BRAHMS
CELLO SONATAS

EMANUEL GRUBER CELLO
ARNON EREZ PIANO

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BRAHMS CELLO SONATAS

Cello Sonata No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 38 (25:57)

- 1 I. Allegro non troppo (13:53)
- 2 II. Allegretto quasi Menuetto—Trio (5:19)
- 3 III. Allegro (6:45)

Adagio from Violin Sonata in G Major, Op. 78 (8:28) *(arranged for cello and piano by Paul Klengel)*

- 4 II. Adagio (8:28)

Cello Sonata No. 2 in F Major, Op. 99 (27:07)

- 5 I. Allegro vivace (8:50)
- 6 II. Adagio affettuoso (6:44)
- 7 III. Allegro passionato—Trio (6:54)
- 8 IV. Allegro molto (4:39)

Emanuel Gruber, cello
Arnon Erez, piano

Dear Listener,

**I am happy to present to you this new recording
of Brahms Sonatas for Cello and Piano.**

These Sonatas, Op. 38 and Op. 99, are part of the great cello repertoire. They are very different from one another. In Op. 38 the first movement starts in the low register of the cello to convey a reflective mood. In Op. 99 the first movement starts in the high register making a powerful heroic statement. In Op. 38 there is no real slow movement. The first movement could be considered the “slow” movement. One can sense that Beethoven’s cello sonatas inspired young Brahms. These sonatas present Brahms’ inner world of drama and intensity, love, tenderness, elegance and humor. They inspire confidence and positivity.

In contrast, the Adagio movement from the Sonata in D Major Op. 78, originally violin sonata in G Major, takes us to a very different world. It is a world of grief, loss, revolt, and sadness. Brahms’ genius is his ability to translate his feelings into music.

I wish you a joyful journey with this amazing music.
Yours, Emanuel

Notes by James M. Keller

Johannes Brahms was about four years old when his father, a professional musician, started giving him music lessons. Early on, he studied violin, horn (valveless “natural” horn), and cello. Piano lessons began at age seven. That is the instrument on which he would excel, but he achieved some mastery of the others, too, reporting late in life that, as a youngster, he played a cello concerto by Bernhard Romberg. His mother had bought him a cello with her earnings as a seamstress, but his hands-on involvement ceased abruptly when his teacher absconded with the instrument. Instead of becoming a performer on the cello he became a composer for the cello, a role that fit as hand to glove. Asked to describe the sound of the cello, many music-lovers would suggest words like “rich,” “warm-hearted,” “noble,” and “dignified.” Asked to describe the music of Brahms, their list might be the same.

He did much of his most concentrated work during his summer getaways, often at some bucolic locale in the Austrian or Swiss countryside. The summer of 1862, however, took him to Germany. Following a visit to the Lower Rhine Music Festival in Bonn, he spent a couple of weeks at Bad Münster in the Rhineland-Palati-

nate. His projects there included initial stabs at his First Symphony as well as the E-minor Cello Sonata and an F-minor Quintet for Two Violins, Viola, and Two Cellos. All three of these pieces would undergo long gestations, which was not unusual for Brahms. The First Symphony would not reach its final form until it was published 15 years later, in 1877. The String Quintet gradually morphed into his Piano Quintet, in which guise it was unveiled in 1866. The Cello Sonata No. 1 detained him still less, but even that occupied him for three years, reaching completion in 1865 and not receiving its public premiere until January 14, 1871, when cellist Emil Hegar and pianist Carl Reinecke played it at the Leipzig Gewandhaus.

Brahms initially envisaged this sonata as a four-movement piece. He completed the first three movements during that summer of 1862 and finally composed the fourth in June 1865—again while on vacation in Germany, this time at Lichtental near Baden-Baden. At some point, likely while writing the finale, he decided to excise the second movement, an *Adagio*. Brahms's acolyte-biographer Max Kalbeck reported that the composer's confidant Clara Schumann "regretted that Brahms, for whom the sonata was too crammed with music, left out the *Adagio*." The first movement is an imposing, stately *Allegro non troppo* in sonata form—largely somber in

tone, but allowing for some passionate outbursts and exceptionally beautiful passages at the end of the exposition and again in the coda where a sidestep to the major mode invests the piece with glowing tenderness. Brahms marks his second movement *Allegretto quasi menuetto*. Minuets had long since disappeared from common use, but Brahms was happy to put his antiquarian interests on display; indeed, in the two orchestral Serenades he published in 1860 we find two Menuettos in the First and a *Quasi menuetto* in the Second. Nobody would mistake the *Quasi menuetto* in the First Cello Sonata as emanating from an 18th-century ballroom, though. It is a delicately tripping fantasy of a minuet, and its contrasting Trio section is in the mode of the emotionally ambivalent *allegrettos* Brahms would cultivate throughout his career.

The backward glance of the *Quasi menuetto* is entirely appropriate in this sonata, which seems to be a Brahmsian salute to music history in other ways as well. This comes to the fore in the third movement, where the very idea of fugal finale strikes one as Beethovenian, perhaps echoing the fugato in the last movement of Beethoven's last cello sonata. Even more unmistakably, this is a salute to Bach, whom Brahms venerated. (In the wake of his

mother's death, a few months before he completed this sonata, Brahms consoled himself by playing the *Goldberg Variations* as tears streamed down his cheeks.) Brahms' fugue subject here is very like the 23rd Contrapunctus from *The Art of Fugue*. The musicologist Karl Geiringer was perhaps the first to point out that the opening theme of the first movement echoes the Third Contrapunctus of that same collection—a less persuasive comparison, since the note pattern there is basic enough that anyone could have landed on it independently, but still somewhat compelling given the unescapable parallel in the finale.

Brahms' Second Cello Sonata followed in 1886, again during a summer vacation, this time at Hofstetten, near Lake Thun in Switzerland. It opens with a passionate, heroic outburst that the composer's friend Theodore Billroth protested "is almost dangerously *à la* Rubinstein," but it quickly settles into a theme of aristocratic grandeur. (This piece received its formal premiere at a house-concert at Billroth's home on November 23, 1886, with the cellist Robert Hausmann joining Brahms.) Arnold Schoenberg recalled how resistant Austrian music-lovers had been to the spirit of this movement, which is filled with metric subtleties. "Nothing is repeated without promoting development," he wrote in 1931. "Young listen

ers will probably be unaware that at the time of Brahms' death, this Sonata was still very unpopular and was considered indigestible. ... [The] unusual rhythm within ... 3/4 time, the syncopations which gave the impression that the third phrase is in 4/4 ..., and the unusual intervals, the ninths contained in the ninth bar, made it difficult to grasp." But this was not a universal reaction when the piece was new. Brahms' friend Elisabet von Herzogenberg, a perspicacious listener and accomplished composer, wrote to him: "So far I have been most thrilled by the first movement. It is so masterly in its compression, so torrent-like in its progress, so terse in the development, while the extension of the first subject on its return comes as the greatest surprise. I don't need to tell you how we enjoyed the soft, melodious *Adagio*, particularly the exquisite return to F-sharp major, which sounds so beautiful."

That *Adagio* is, at heart, the movement Brahms had cut from his D-minor Cello Sonata two decades earlier, at least according to Kalbeck's four-volume biography, published from 1904 to 1914. "[This] heavenly *Adagio*," he wrote, "arouses the feeling that it is the soul of the work, which now had to fashion itself for its body." Although Kalbeck was not always entirely on target, lat-

er musicological study has largely vindicated this assertion. The movement's key of F-sharp minor is harmonically distant from the overriding F major of the Second Sonata, but it is not illogical in light of Brahms' interest in semitone (or "Neapolitan") key relationships. In fact, even within the F-sharp-minor slow movement, the second subject is given out in F minor, somewhat encapsulating the harmonic flavor of the entire sonata.

Following the supernal slow movement comes a potentially violent scherzo (*Allegro passionato*) with a Trio that at one place wends from the key of F to F-sharp, a progression that should no longer astonish us in this piece. "I should like to hear you play the essentially vigorous Scherzo," wrote Elisabeth von Herzogenberg. "Indeed, I always hear you snorting and puffing away at it—for no one else will ever play it justly, to my mind. It must be agitated without being hurried, *legato* in spite of its unrest and impetus."

The finale is by far the shortest chapter in this sonata. After the imposing quality of the first three movements, its non-monumental character makes it seem little more than a coda to the preceding action. Perhaps Brahms had absorbed this idea of the "throwaway finale" from Beethoven's F-minor String Quartet, the *Quartett se-*

rioso, which is deeply serious until it suddenly turns jolly in its fleeting final measures. Though a relative morsel, Brahms's concluding movement is entirely delicious.

Brahms did compose another piece for cello and piano; a concert in Hamburg on July 5, 1851, included a Duo for Piano and Cello by Karl Würth, a pseudonym Brahms was using just then. He later proved ruthless about eradicating youthful works that did not rise to his eventual standard, and the Duo accordingly disappeared. On this recording, however, the musicians include another Brahms work, the *Adagio* from his Violin Sonata No. 1 (Op. 78), made in 1897 by Paul Klengel. Brahms composed this sonata during the summers of 1877 and 1878 in the resort town of Pörtlach, on the north shore of the Wörthersee in the southern Austrian province of Kärnten (Carinthia). Violin sonatas were not particularly in vogue just then, when advances by “Music of the Future” partisans, who promoted program music, were dominating discussion in the music world. Brahms recognized that this piece would provide few thrills for the Futurists, writing to his violinist-friend Joseph Joachim, “My sonata is no more useful for publicity than I am myself.” He underscored this work's connection to the Classical tradition when, presenting a copy of the published edition to

the graphics designer Heinrich Groeber, he inscribed the opening phrases of G- major Violin Sonatas of both Mozart and Beethoven, along with the words “Come, rise to higher spheres!”—a quotation from Goethe’s *Faust*.

Paul Klengel (1854-1936) was a violinist, pianist, conductor, and composer in Leipzig whom Brahms’ publisher, Fritz Simrock, hired to make arrangements of at least a dozen of the composer’s pieces in the period 1892-97. His name was left off this cello arrangement when Simrock issued it in 1897—probably just an oversight, but years later that omission would lead to speculation that the transcription was by Brahms himself. Nonetheless, when Simrock issued a catalogue of Brahms’ works that year, the section on arrangements attached Klengel’s name to this version, and his name figures on the score in the company’s later printings. He transposed the overall sonata down by the interval of a fourth—from G to D—to place the solo part in an optimal register for the cello. This slow movement therefore shifted from Brahms’ original E-flat major into B-flat major. Among Klengel’s creative touches are a number of octave transpositions that keep the piano from operating overmuch in its murky depths, and rewriting the end

of the slow movement to trade some material between the string and keyboard parts.

We don't know if this 1897 arrangement was completed by the time Brahms died, on April 3 of that year. He was certainly familiar with Klengel's earlier transcriptions, and in 1892 he wrote to Simrock about a Klengel recasting of his Clarinet Quintet: "I look at the arrangement with great pleasure, it seems to me to be a very good one indeed." Klengel had an added resource when it came to the Op. 78 project; he could easily have turned for specialist advice to his brother Julius Klengel, an eminent cellist whom Brahms admired greatly and who, in about 1925, would produce his own editions of Brahms' cello sonatas. In fact, it was a conversation with Julius Klengel that yielded Brahms' recollection of having played a Romberg concerto when he was a fledgling cellist himself.

James M. Keller, the longtime Program Annotator of the San Francisco Symphony, is the author of *Chamber Music: A Listener's Guide* (Oxford University Press).



Emanuel Gruber is celebrated as cello soloist, chamber musician, recording artist and teacher. The Jerusalem Post wrote that Emanuel Gruber is “one of our great artists” citing “his extraordinary capacity for projecting the deepest meaning of the music”. Awarded the Pablo Casals prize by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, he also won the Concert Artists’ Guild Auditions in New York City early in his career.

Emanuel Gruber began his cello studies with the distinguished Romanian pedagogue Paul Ochialbi. He graduated from the Rubin Academy of Music in Israel.

Under the auspices of the America - Israel Cultural Foundation, he completed his musical training with Gregor Piatigorsky and with Janos Starker. Before joining the East Carolina University, School of Music faculty in 2004, he served as principal cellist of the Israel Chamber Orchestra in Tel-Aviv. He also played with the Sequoia String Quartet in Los Angeles, Camerata Clarinet Trio, Tel

Aviv Piano Quartet and the Israel Cello Ensemble. He was a founding member of the Tel- Aviv Chamber Music Society.

This Brahms Sonatas CD was recorded with pianist Arnon Erez, who collaborated with Emanuel Gruber in recitals and chamber ensembles for many years. They previously recorded Mendelssohn's and Beethoven's works for cello and piano.



Highly acclaimed for his sensitivity, virtuosity and profound musical interpretation, **Arnon Erez** has gained a worldwide reputation as an outstanding pianist. He studied in Israel with Mrs. Hannah Shalgi, Prof.

Michael Boguslavski and Prof. Arie Vardi, graduating from Tel Aviv University, and later took an advanced course in chamber music with the Guarneri Quartet in the USA. He has performed in numerous major concert halls, including Carnegie Hall in NY, Beethoven Halle in Bonn, Alte Oper in Frankfurt, Herkulesaal in Munich, Musikverein in Vienna. Recently, he has performed repeatedly at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and the Wigmore Hall in London.

Mr. Erez's discography has won much praise and a BBC Music Magazine Choice. It includes: Piano Trios with the Shaham Erez Wallfisch Piano Trio by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Dvorak, Ravel, Faure, Rachmaninov, Arenski and Shostakovich; Violin and Piano sonatas by: Brahms, Grieg, Dvorak, Faure, Ravel, Bloch, Debussy, Janacek, Dohnanyi, Weiner, Bruno Walter, Hanns Eisler, Pizzetti, Castelnuovo-Tedesco and more. With cellist Emanuel Gruber he recorded The Complete Cello and Piano Sonatas by Beethoven and Mendelssohn. Arnon Erez has been the head of the Chamber Music Department at the Buchmann-Mehta School of Music at Tel Aviv University for nearly two decades.

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