

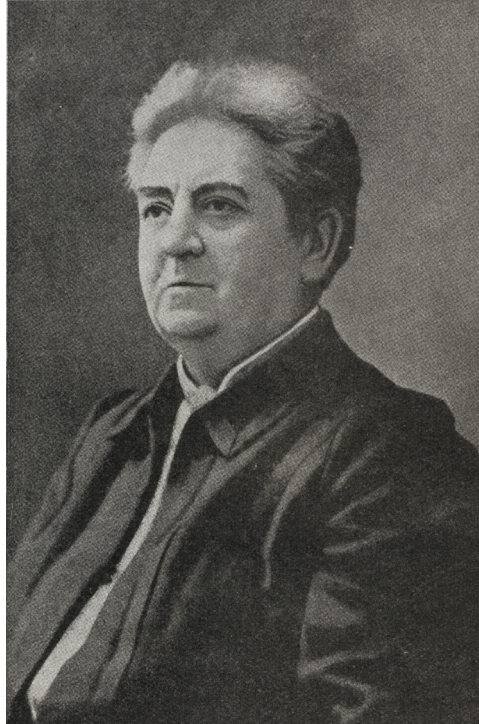
BRAHMS & CONTEMPORARIES | VOL. 2

CHANDOS

Brahms: Piano Quartet No. 3 in C minor
Héritte-Viardot: Piano Quartet No. 1 in A major
'Im Sommer'



KALEIDOSCOPE CHAMBER COLLECTIVE



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Louise Héritte-Viardot

Brahms and Contemporaries, Volume 2

Louise Hérítte-Viardot (1841 – 1918)

Quartet No. 1, Op. 9 'Im Sommer' (1883) 23:58

in A major • in A-Dur • en la majeur

(In Summer)

for Violin, Viola, Cello, and Piano

Dem hochverehrten Meister Herrn Generalmusikdirektor

Dr. Franz Lachner

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| 5 | Des Morgens, im Walde (Morning, in the Woods).
Allegro un poco animato | 7:23 |
| 6 | Fliegen und Schmetterlinge (Scherzo) (Flies and Butterflies).
Presto – Più Moderato – Presto – Più Moderato – Presto – Tranquillo –
Presto – Tranquillo – Presto – Con molto brio – Più Moderato –
Presto – Più Moderato – Presto – Più Moderato –
Presto – Più Moderato – Presto | 5:46 |
| 7 | Die Schwüle (Sultriness). Lento – Andantino –
Lento. Tempo I – Poco meno lento | 6:14 |
| 8 | Abends, unter der Eiche (Bauerntanz) (Evening, under the
Oak-tree [Peasant Dance]). Vivo – Allegretto – Poco ritenuto –
Tempo I (Allegretto) – Poco ritenuto – Con brio –
Tempo I – Tranquillo ma non lento – Tempo I – Animato –
Un poco moderato – Allegro | 4:35 |

Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)

Quartet No. 3, Op. 60 (1855 – 75)

35:13

in C minor • in c-Moll • en ut mineur
for Piano, Violin, Viola, and Cello
Frau Dr. Elisabeth Rösing zugeeignet

1	Allegro non troppo	10:59
2	Scherzo. Allegro	4:10
3	Andante	8:35
4	Finale. Allegro comodo – Tranquillo e sempre pianissimo – Tempo I – Ben sostenuto	11:26
		TT 59:11

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective

Elena Urioste violin

Rosalind Ventris viola

Laura van der Heijden cello

Tom Poster piano

Brahms / Hérítte-Viardot: Piano Quartets

Introduction

At first blush, the pairing of the two compositions offered on this disc might be regarded as a staging of one of the principal aesthetic debates of the later nineteenth century, namely that between so-called 'absolute' and 'programme' music – music that, on the one hand, is purely about itself or, on the other, has some representational meaning or inspiration. His cultivation of genres such as symphony, string quartet, and sonata placed Brahms in the former camp, opposed to the 'moderns', headed by Liszt and Wagner, who championed the symphonic poem and music drama. Thus, while the four movements of Brahms's Piano Quartet, Op. 60 bear titles that indicate nothing beyond tempo and character, those of Hérítte-Viardot's Op. 9 invite us to conjure specific times of day, locations, creatures, even meteorological conditions, all within the overall seasonal period of summertime.

Brahms: Piano Quartet No. 3 in C minor, Op. 60

But this distinction is itself too absolute. In

a letter to Theodor Billroth of 23 October 1874 accompanying a working manuscript of the quartet, Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897) referred to it as 'an illustration for the last chapter in the life of the man in the blue coat and yellow vest',¹ and arranging to send the *Stichvorlage* (the version intended for printing) to the publisher Fritz Simrock, he advised, on 17 August 1875, that

on the cover you must have a picture, namely a head – with a pistol pointed towards it. Now you can form an idea of the music! For this purpose, I will send you my photograph! You could also make use of blue coat, yellow breeches, and top-boots...²

The reference, found elsewhere in his correspondence, is unmistakable: Brahms was

¹ etwa eine Illustration zum letzten Kapitel vom Mann im blauen Frack und gelber Weste

² Außerdem dürfen Sie auf dem Titelblatt ein Bild anbringen. Nämlich einen Kopf – mit der Pistole davor. Nun können Sie sich einen Begriff von der Musik machen! Ich werde Ihnen zu dem Zweck meine Photographie schicken! Blauen Frack, gelbe Hosen und Stulpstiefeln können Sie auch anwenden ...



The musicians during the recording sessions

The musicians during the recording sessions



Alexander James

The musicians during the recording sessions

likening himself to the hero of Goethe's hugely influential and semi-autobiographical 1774 novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (The Sorrows of Young Werther), whose unrequited love for Charlotte, eventually married to Albert, precipitates his suicide.

When we reflect that the origins of the quartet – at that time in C sharp rather than C minor – reach back to 1855, it is not difficult to work out that Brahms's Charlotte was none other than Clara Schumann: the famous meeting between Brahms and the Schumanns had occurred in 1853, and early the following year Robert was taken into the sanatorium at Emden where he would die, on 29 July 1856. Just a few months later, on 18 October, Clara noted in her diary that 'he [Brahms] has composed a wonderful Adagio for his C sharp minor Quartet – profound...'³ In November 1856 Brahms tried the piece out in its then three-movement form in Hamburg with Joachim, who took the manuscript away and sent Brahms various suggestions for improvement. Brahms returned to it in 1869, but the final stages of work stem from the winter of 1873/74. The finishing touches extended to summer 1875, when Clara also heard it in rehearsal. Her subsequent comment,

³ Zu seinem Cis=moll=Quartett hat er ein wunderschönes Adagio komponirt – tiefinnig...

in a letter to Albert Dietrich (23 July 1875), that the first two movements had been composed earlier than the last two suggests that the 'wonderful Adagio' of 1856 cannot have been entirely identical to the E major *Andante* that forms the third movement of the quartet as published by Simrock in November 1875. It was premiered in Vienna on the 18th of that month, when Wagner and his wife, Cosima, were among the audience.

Despite the correspondence with Simrock, no material trace of the 'programmatic' origins of Op. 60 is to be found in that edition; nor do there survive manuscript sources, other than for the eventual finale, to bear witness to the lengthy and complex genesis of the work, which was published with no declared dedicatee. One circumstance, though – the downward transposition from C sharp to C minor – speaks volumes. Not only does this bring Op. 60 into the orbit of the important series of other works by Brahms in this key – Symphony No. 1, Op. 68 (begun 1862, published 1877), the Alto Rhapsody, Op. 53 (1870), the *Schicksalslied*, Op. 54 (1871), and String Quartet, Op. 51 No. 1 (1873), among them – it also casts a line back to that 'giant'⁴ whom Brahms always heard stalking his footsteps: Beethoven, for whom C minor was a

⁴Riese

key inexorably associated with fate, never more so than in his Fifth Symphony, Op. 67.

But the Fifth Symphony is also the *locus classicus* of the ‘darkness to light’ trajectory in Beethoven, whereby the unrelenting minor mode of the first and third movements gives way to the unclouded triumphal C major of the finale; Brahms had shown in the Alto Rhapsody that he could achieve the same effect, albeit in a much more serene, less tub-thumping context. What is notable in the Piano Quartet in C minor, however, is the vacillation between major and minor that unsettles the conclusion to the work: the chorale that defines the material of the second group in this sonata-form finale is recapitulated conventionally enough in the tonic major, but that modal shift is then reversed by the return of first-group material in the minor mode. The closing triads are again major triads; but the abrupt assertion of a *forte* close following the lengthy *pianissimo* and *tranquillo* bars during which C begins to sound more like the dominant of F minor than a tonic in its own right feels like a desperate attempt to convince rather than a conclusion that grows naturally from what has preceded it.

The first movement is even more radical, in that Brahms entirely eschews one of the most binding principles of sonata form:

that non-tonic, second-group material from the exposition should be assimilated (even ‘resolved’) to the tonic in the recapitulation. In this case, the E flat major second group is recapitulated in the dominant (G major), a fifth sharpward of its expected key. The movement ends unequivocally in C minor; moreover, the low-register unison octaves on C that usher in the final reminiscence of the opening bars are the last in a series of such gestures that across the course of the movement have staked out the so-called ‘lament’ tetrachord, C – B flat – A flat – G, which perhaps secretly imparts something of the programme behind Brahms’s ‘Werther’ Quartet.

Héritte-Viardot: Piano Quartet No. 1 in A major, Op. 9 ‘Im Sommer’

Brahms did not return to the medium of the piano quartet after Op. 60; indeed, its two companion pieces (Opp. 25 and 26) had been published over a decade earlier. But it was one that also attracted his much younger contemporary Louise Héritte-Viardot (1841 – 1918) whose mother, Pauline Viardot, had been the soloist in the première, in Jena, on 3 March 1870, of Brahms’s Alto Rhapsody. Héritte-Viardot was herself a singer – a contralto to Pauline’s mezzo-soprano – as

well as a pianist and conductor. Born in Paris, she was much travelled, for a period living at the Cape of Good Hope where her husband (they had married in 1862) served as consul. She later settled in Germany; in Frankfurt, where she taught singing at Dr Hoch's Konservatorium, she enjoyed the friendship of both Clara Schumann, who had known her since her birth (Robert and Clara had known her mother well), and Brahms. Ill health, which had long dogged her, and to which she ascribed the beginning of her composing, caused her to resign that position, whereupon she settled in Berlin, and subsequently Heidelberg.

In her *Memories and Adventures*, published in 1913 in London, where she had lived in the early 1890s, she wrote that

I have composed over 300 works, and
I suppose they will all be published
in good time, though I care very little
about it.

Just as well, one might say, for her assumption is well wide of the mark. Nor was she any stranger to the dim view usually taken of female composers during her lifetime; she records how her cantata *Das Bacchusfest* (1880) was one of the final two scores in contention for a prestigious composition prize (10,000 francs and three public

performances) in Paris when a member of the jury recognised her handwriting and persuaded his colleagues that the prize could not possibly be awarded to a woman. On another occasion she spotted the score of her 'Spanish' Piano Quartet, Op. 11 in a music shop window; entering the shop and requesting a copy, she was told that it was not in stock. Pointing out its presence in the window, she was told, 'Oh, that isn't by a woman. A woman can't compose a quartet!'

But Hérítte-Viardot certainly could compose. Op. 11 is one of three piano quartets; it was published by Breitkopf & Härtel, in 1883, the year that also saw the publication of *Im Sommer*, Op. 9, recorded here. The sequence of four movements making up this work shares with Brahms's Op. 60 the placement of the slow movement after the scherzo, rather than the more conventional order, in which the slow movement is placed second. But whereas Brahms observes the convention that the scherzo maintain the overall tonic key (placing it second therefore allowed him to continue the dark mood already established in the first movement; setting the slow movement in the distant key of E major casts it as a dreamlike escape from waking reality), Hérítte-Viardot sets both her inner movements in non-tonic keys, giving

the work an overall sequence of A major – D minor – B flat major – A major.

In *Memories and Adventures*, she wrote of what we might describe as her partial synaesthesia:

there are only certain keys which suggest definite colours to me, the others vary according to the mood of the moment.

On the basis of the correlations she goes on to make in this passage, Op. 9 can be described as overall grass green (the two outer movements) shaded by nut brown and copper (second and third movements), although none of these is among her more 'definite' colours; Brahms's Op. 60, the key scheme of which is also that of Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto, Op. 37, would have been for her much more vividly a combination of brown (C minor) and deep blue (E major). Beyond key and colour matches, she also admitted as 'almost ridiculous' her firm identification of certain keys with the days of the week: A major 'is quite certainly Monday', while D minor 'is Friday'.

The first movement is cast as an expansive sonata form, the recapitulation of which is considerably truncated compared to the exposition. The substantial second movement eschews the usual scherzo-and-trio design and is marked by frequent changes of tempo.

All movements demonstrate an ambitious deployment of chromatic harmony. As for the programmatic aspect, this needs little explication in words: the horn call motif that features prominently in the first movement is a classic evocation of the forest, for example. The ascending and descending demisemiquaver figure first introduced in the *Pitt Moderato*, soon after the opening of the second movement, is reminiscent of 'Vogel als Prophet', from Schumann's *Waldszenen*, Op. 82; and the drone fifths with grace notes that launch the finale immediately conjure the bucolic world of the title, though one hopes for the sake of the performers that the sultry conditions of the preceding slow movement have somewhat abated: this is demanding writing, especially so in the piano part, likely to work up a sweat.

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A note by the performers

For the second volume of this series, our investigations into Brahms's unjustly overlooked contemporaries led us to Louise Hérítte-Viardot. Like Brahms, Hérítte-Viardot wrote three piano quartets, of which the one heard here, subtitled *Im Sommer*, caught our attention immediately.

Programmatic chamber works from the romantic period are relatively rare, and Hérítte-Viardot's nature-inspired movement titles herald music of irresistible freshness and melodic appeal – it is hard not to be charmed by a piece in which all four players get to evoke buzzing flies and fluttering butterflies.

In stark contrast to this summery outdoor world, the Third Piano Quartet – published eight years before Hérítte-Viardot's – is one of Brahms's most intense and tragic works. Brahms, who generally preferred to write 'absolute' music, unusually hinted at a programmatic or literary inspiration behind this piece, darkly suggesting to his publisher that the cover of the score might depict a man with a pistol to his head, in reference to Goethe's popular novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. However, while three of the quartet's four movements are dark and turbulent, the slow movement is a gift of pure radiance, gently unfurling itself from one of the most exquisite cello melodies ever written.

It feels fitting to reunite Hérítte-Viardot and Brahms here – the two composers moved in overlapping social circles and were acquainted through Hérítte-Viardot's mother, the famed opera singer Pauline Viardot. Pauline was a lifelong friend (and sometime neighbour in Baden Baden) of Clara

Schumann's, and Hérítte-Viardot recalled in later years that

my greatest pleasure was my friendship with Clara Schumann, who had known me since my birth, and Brahms, when he came to see her.

Enormous thanks, as ever, to Ralph Couzens, Jonathan Cooper, and all at Chandos for enabling us to bring this wonderful music to a wider audience. And now off to prepare for the next volume!

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Hailed by *The Times* for its 'exhilarating performances', the **Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective** was dreamed up in 2017 by Tom Poster and Elena Urioste, who met through the BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists scheme. The Collective operates with a flexible roster which features many of today's most inspirational musicians, both instrumentalists and singers, and its creative programming is marked by an ardent commitment to celebrating diversity of all forms and a desire to unearth lesser-known gems of the repertoire. In 2020, it was appointed Associate Ensemble at Wigmore Hall, where the group makes multiple appearances each season and, in May 2021, was invited to give the Hall's 120th

anniversary concert. It broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3 and has recently been ensemble-in-residence at the Aldeburgh Festival, Kettle's Yard, Ischia Music Festival, and Cheltenham Festival where the group gave several world premières and collaborated with Sir Simon Russell Beale and the cast of *The Lehman Trilogy*. Its previous recordings for Chandos Records have been named Editor's Choice in *Gramophone*, shortlisted for *BBC Music Magazine* and *Gramophone* awards, and appeared in the list of '10 best classical records of 2022' in *The Times*.

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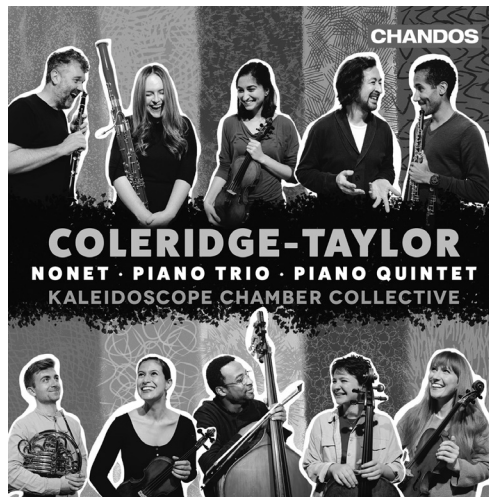


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Jonathan Cooper

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Brahms and Contemporaries

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