

BRAHMS

String Quartet No. 3

Clarinet Quintet

New Zealand String Quartet
James Campbell, Clarinet

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) String Quartet No. 3 in B flat major, Op. 67 Clarinet Quintet in B minor, Op. 115

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg in 1833, the son of a double-bass player and his much older wife, a seamstress. His childhood was spent in relative poverty, and his early studies in music, for which he showed a natural aptitude, developed his talent to such an extent that there was talk of touring as a prodigy at the age of eleven. It was Eduard Marxsen who gave him a grounding in the technical basis of composition, while as an adolescent he was able to earn some money by playing the piano for private and public entertainment and by teaching, gradually winning a local reputation as a performer.

In 1851 Brahms met the émigré Hungarian violinist Reményi, who introduced him to Hungarian dance music that had a later influence on his work. Two years later he set out in his company on a concert tour, their journey taking them, on the recommendation of the Hungarian violinist Joachim, to Weimar, where Franz Liszt held court and might have been expected to show particular favour to a fellow-countryman. Reményi profited from the visit, but Brahms, with a lack of tact that was later accentuated, failed to impress the Master. Later in the year, however, he met the Schumanns, through Joachim's agency. The meeting was a fruitful one.

Schumann, in 1850, had taken up the offer from the previous incumbent, Ferdinand Hiller, of the position of municipal director of music in Düsseldorf: the first, and last, official appointment of his career. Now in the music of Brahms he detected a promise of greatness and published his views in the journal he had once edited, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, declaring Brahms the long-awaited successor to Beethoven. In the following year Schumann, who had long suffered from intermittent periods of intense depression, attempted suicide. His final years, until his death in 1856, were to be spent in an asylum, while Brahms rallied to the support of Schumann's wife, the gifted pianist Clara Schumann, and her young family, remaining a firm friend until her death in 1896, shortly before his own in the following year.

Brahms had always hoped that sooner or later he would be able to return in triumph to a position of distinction in

the musical life of Hamburg. This ambition was never fulfilled. Instead he settled in Vienna, intermittently from 1863 and definitively in 1869, establishing himself there and seeming to many to fulfil Schumann's early prophecy. In him his supporters, including, above all, the distinguished critic and writer Eduard Hanslick, saw a true successor to Beethoven and a champion of music untrammelled by extra-musical associations, of pure music, as opposed to the Music of the Future promoted by Wagner and Liszt, a path to which Joachim and Brahms both later publicly expressed their opposition.

Brahms made a significant contribution to chamber music repertoire. His first attempts were made in the early 1850s and are now lost, but in 1853 he wrote a movement for the composite violin sonata by Schumann and his pupil Albert Dietrich, intended for Joachim. After the first of his *String Sextets*, in 1860 he turned his attention to the *Piano Quartets* and the *Piano Quintet*, followed in 1865 by the second *Sextet*. His first string quartet, the *String Quartet in C minor, Op. 51, No. 1*, was written between 1868 and 1873, and is more or less contemporary with the *String Quartet in A minor, Op. 51, No. 2*, completed in the same year. A third quartet, the *String Quartet in B flat major, Op. 67*, followed in 1876, and in 1883 and 1890 Brahms added two *String Quintets*. His last chamber music was written for the clarinet: a trio, a quintet and two poignantly moving sonatas that were composed in 1894.

In 1872 Brahms had succeeded Anton Rubinstein as director of the Vienna Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde concerts. After three years he found himself glad to resign, and in 1875, during his summer holidays at Ziegelhausen, near Heidelberg, he completed his *Piano Quartet, Op. 60*, and worked on his last string quartet, the *Quartet in B flat major, Op. 67*, published the following year with a dedication to Professor Theodor Wilhelm Engelmann, his host in Utrecht during a concert tour of Holland in January 1876.

The first movement of the new quartet starts with a cheerful theme that soon allows the intrusion of cross-rhythms. The second subject, appearing after a transition that touches on the minor, is a happy dance tune, and

these elements form the substance of the central development and subsequent recapitulation. The F major slow movement introduces a moving and extended melody for the first violin, followed by a middle section that brings moments of drama and changes of metre, with the return of the first theme prefigured in an apparent variation of what is to come. The muted D minor third movement, marked *Agitato*, in which the viola alone remains unmuted, offers thematic material of some intensity for that instrument, which plays a leading part also in the A minor *Trio*, to join in the gentle D major conclusion with the other instruments. The last movement brings a simple melody, followed by eight variations. The first of these is dominated by the viola, which starts the second variation. The third brings triplet figuration, the fourth a sombre opening for first violin and cello two octaves apart, the fifth a change of key to D flat major and the sixth a *molto dolce* G flat major. The seventh variation, in doubled speed, brings back the key and principal theme of the first movement, followed by a final variation that recalls the transitional material of the first movement, in B flat minor. The movement, the longest of the four, ends with a coda that combines elements of the seventh variation, and therefore the first movement, with the theme of the finale, a statement of perfect unity.

In December 1890 Brahms wrote to his publisher, Simrock, offering his *String Quintet, Op. 111*, and his revision of the early *Piano Trio, Op. 8*, as works marking the end of his career as a composer. Later in 1891 he was at work again, inspired by the playing of the clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, whom he had heard with the Meiningen Orchestra in March. Mühlfeld had started his career as a violinist in the spa orchestra, directed by his father at Salzungen. In 1873 he joined the Saxe-Meiningen Court Orchestra, again as a violinist, to become principal clarinetist in 1879, retaining the same position until his death in 1907. His playing impressed Brahms, with whom he collaborated in the first performance of the *Clarinet Trio* in Berlin in December 1891, when he also played the new *Clarinet Quintet* with the Joachim Quartet. In January

1895 he joined Brahms in the first performance in Vienna of the two *Clarinet Sonatas*, works that they played in later performances elsewhere in Austria and in Germany.

As with the viola, for which these works were also arranged, the clarinet has a particular register and timbre that seemed admirably fitted to the autumnal mood that Brahms now made his own. The movements of the quintet are closely related thematically. The first, in tripartite sonata-allegro form, starts with a theme that soon develops in a fuller form, when it is taken up by the viola and cello, echoed by the violins. A new element is introduced in the following transition, with its brusquely separated notes and rapid triplet figuration, leading to the expressive second subject, a dialogue between the clarinet and the first violin. These materials are developed in the central section of the movement, to be followed by the return of the first subject in recapitulation. The B major second movement starts with a melody for the clarinet, accompanied by the composer's favoured cross-rhythms in the string parts. The B minor central section of the movement is based on the first subject of the opening movement and the main theme of the second, treated imaginatively, with delicate arabesques from the clarinet. The movement ends with the return of the principal theme. The third movement suggests the theme to come in an opening *Andantino*, modulating to D major, after which the scherzo proper starts, introduced by the strings. The counterpart of a trio section appears, marked by the plucked string accompaniment with which it begins, and this is followed by the return of the scherzo. The quintet ends with a theme and five variations, the melody itself related in outline to the main themes of the preceding movements. The cello dominates the first variation, the first violin and then the clarinet the second. The third is in rapider figuration, the fourth, in B major, largely a dialogue between clarinet and first violin, and the fifth, in which the viola assumes importance, in B minor again, more closely related to the first movement, with a reminiscence of which the whole work ends.

Keith Anderson

James Campbell

The distinguished Canadian clarinetist James Campbell has performed as soloist and chamber musician in over 35 countries with more than 65 orchestras including the Boston Pops, the Montreal Symphony and the London Symphony. He has collaborated with Glenn Gould and Aaron Copland and toured with over 35 string quartets, including the Guarneri, the Amadeus (when he replaced an ailing Benny Goodman on a tour of California) the New Zealand and the Vermeer. He has been named Canada's Artist of the Year, awarded the Queen's Gold and Diamond Jubilee Medal, an Honorary Doctorate of Laws, and Canada's highest honour, the Order of Canada. James Campbell has been Artistic Director of the Festival of the Sound since 1985 and has been Professor of Music at the famed Jacobs School of Music of Indiana University since 1988. He regularly gives master-classes throughout the world.



Photo: Kirill Bashkirov

New Zealand String Quartet

Celebrating its thirtieth season in 2017, the New Zealand String Quartet has established a distinguished international reputation for its engaging performances. The ensemble's discography includes all the quartets by Mendelssohn, Bartók and Berg, and they are currently engaged in recording the complete Brahms string quartets and quintets for Naxos. Other recordings include works by Ravel, Debussy, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Dvořák, Wolf, Takemitsu, Tan Dun, and New Zealand composers including the complete chamber works for strings by Douglas Lilburn. Acclaimed débuts in London's Wigmore Hall, the Frick Collection in New York and in Washington's Library of Congress have led to regular touring in Britain, Europe and North America. The ensemble has also toured in Mexico, Japan, Korea, and China, with regular visits to Australia. The Quartet has performed concertos with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and collaborated with many internationally renowned artists, including jazz performers Mike Nock, Wayne Marshall, Jim Hall and Uri Caine, and traditional instrumentalists such as Turkey's Omar Farouk Tekbilek, New Zealand's Richard Nunns and Horomona Horo, and the Forbidden City Chamber Orchestra from China. The ensemble has been Quartet-in-Residence at the New Zealand School of Music at Victoria University since 1991, where the current members are Associate Professors. Violinist Helene Pohl and violist Gillian Ansell are co-artistic directors of the biennial Adam Chamber Music Festival in Nelson. Each of the members on this recording has been awarded the MNZM honour for services to music in New Zealand. nzsqu.org.nz



From left to right: Gillian Ansell, Douglas Beilman, Helene Pohl, Rolf Gjelsten

Photo: Scorpion Media

Also available



8.573433

Brahms wrote his *String Quartet in B flat major, Op. 67* in 1876 and its largely unclouded and cheerful qualities culminate in a theme and variations finale of exceptional imagination and mastery of form. His last chamber music was inspired by a great exponent of the clarinet, Richard Mühlfeld, for whom he wrote four works including the *Clarinet Quintet*. This dazzling masterpiece is notable not only for its underlying elegiac mood but for its thematic interrelation and the wide expressive range of the solo instrument. The first two *String Quartets* can be heard on 8.573433 in performances described by *ClassicsToday* as "... passionate expressions of these scores."

**Johannes
BRAHMS**
(1833–1897)

String Quartet No. 3 in B flat major, Op. 67 (1876) 37:06

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|---|---------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Vivace | 10:37 |
| 2 | Andante | 7:53 |
| 3 | Agitato (Allegretto non troppo) | 8:03 |
| 4 | Poco allegretto con variazioni | 10:23 |

Clarinet Quintet in B minor, Op. 115 (1891)* 39:23

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|---|---|-------|
| 5 | Allegro | 13:20 |
| 6 | Adagio – Più lento | 11:28 |
| 7 | Andantino – Presto non assai, ma con sentimento | 4:57 |
| 8 | Con moto | 9:24 |

New Zealand String Quartet
Helene Pohl, Violin I • Douglas Beilman, Violin II
Gillian Ansell, Viola • Rolf Gjelsten, Cello
James Campbell, Clarinet*

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 Producers: Norbert Kraft & Bonnie Silver • Engineer & Editor: Norbert Kraft
 Booklet notes: Keith Anderson
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Playing Time
76:36



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