



crd

Darkness & Ravel works for two pianos Light

ALEXANDER TAMIR | BRACHA EDEN

Foreword

Emma Pauncefort

Sunday 1st May 1983; six days before the official 150th anniversary of the birth of Johannes Brahms. At 7.15pm, a prime evening slot, BBC Two broadcasts *Four Hands Play Brahms*. Introduced by the late Richard Baker, the programme places pianists and educators Alexander Tamir and Bracha Eden centre stage. The aim is to unearth the lesser-known corners of Brahms's oeuvre, going beyond the symphonies, concertos, chamber and choral music, and popular piano pieces to focus on works Brahms arranged and composed for piano duet. The programme makes for a fascinating survey of one instance of the 'composer as the piano' (Tamir) and happily dovetails with CRD's release on vinyl of much of the repertoire surveyed.

It was an exciting year. In March 1983, the 'Compact Disc' system launched in the UK and thus the battle of formats was born with CD being the pricier option. It is curious to look back with a 2025 lens now that vinyl is the prized (and pricier) physical format. But I digress –

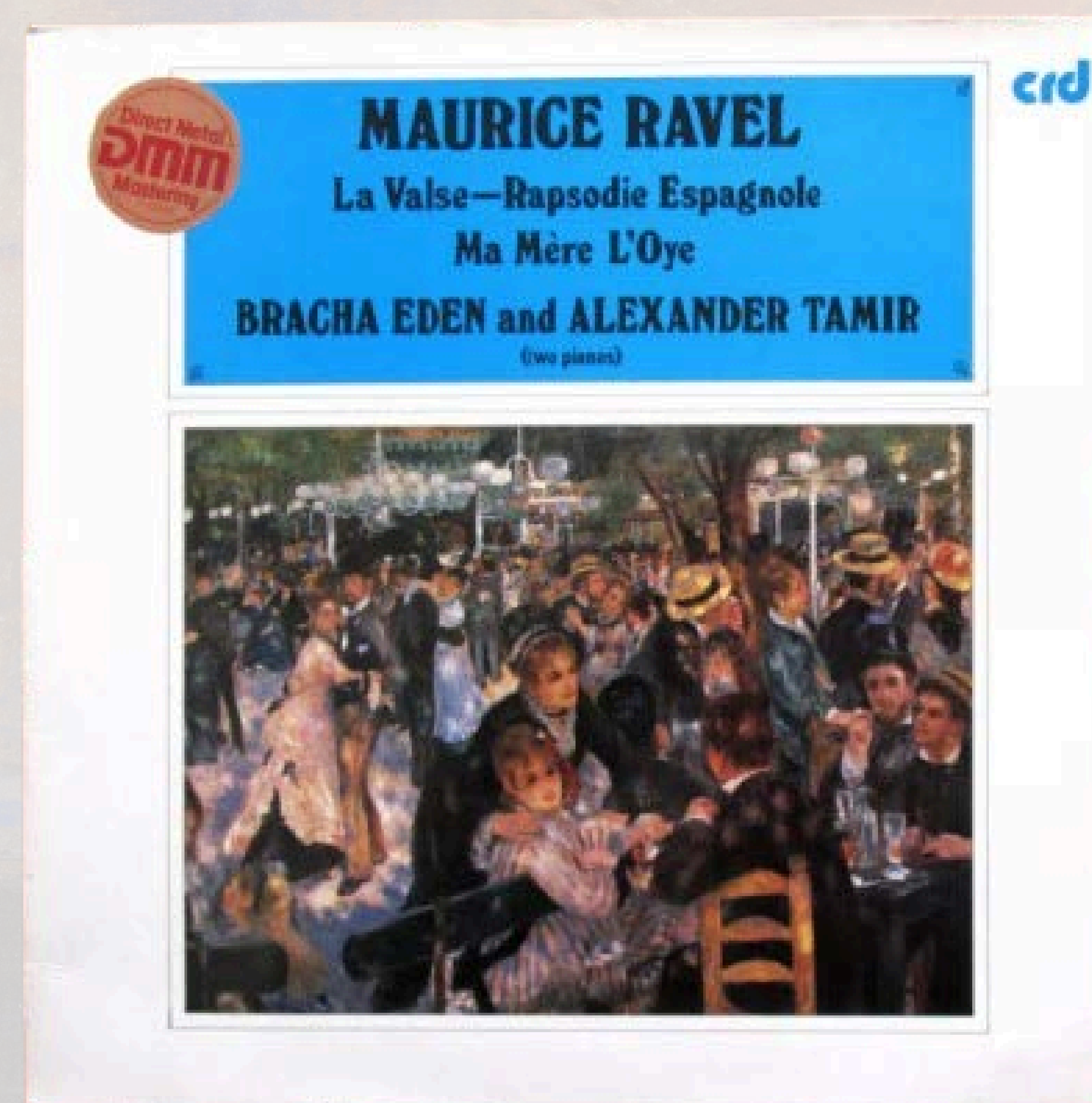
Importantly for this reissue, the Brahms anniversary helped kickstart the relationship between CRD and Bracha and Eden.

Hot on the heels of the aforementioned release came an album of Ravel's works for two pianos. Over 40 years later, the pieces here remain among the few recordings of the works for two pianos by another 'composer at the piano', Maurice Ravel.

Sadly, for this 150th anniversary, we are unable to call on the late Tamir and Eden to lead us through the subtleties and colours of Ravel's compositions. However, we are fortunate to have these performances of works that demonstrate all shades of Ravel – the **darkness** of his writing in the wake of WWI contrasted with the **light** that shines through his pieces for children.

We are delighted to make this recording available, which has been remastered, digitally for the first time, as we mark our own anniversary – 50 years of working with great artists – and we hope you share with us the reverence we hold for our recording and performer forebears.

Emma Pauncefort
Tom Pauncefort
Directors



CRD 1113, LP release, 1983

La Valse, M. 72a 'Poème chorégraphique'

Ravel felt that to qualify as a first-class composer you ought to be able to write a really good waltz, and he liked to quote the story of Brahms inscribing in a visitors' book a few bars of *The Blue Danube* and adding underneath 'Not by Johannes Brahms, alas!' Ravel's output is full of formal dances – minuets especially – but he was slow to make anything out of the waltz. In 1906 he did think of composing a piece in Viennese style, to be called simply *Wien*, but then his interest was diverted south to Spain. His first published involvement with the waltz idiom came in 1911 with the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. These demonstrated that for Ravel the waltz provided no excuse to be self-indulgent, marking as they did a sharp turn away from the atmospheric writing of *Gaspard de la nuit* and nonplussing the audience at their first performance. The *Wien* project finally came to the surface again after the First World War when Diaghilev asked Ravel to write a ballet for the 1920 season of the Ballets Russes.

In the winter of 1919 Ravel wrote to a friend that he was 'waltzing frantically', and the word 'frantically' (we may surmise) referred not only to the intensity of his labours but to the tone of the finished product, which carries on where the first *Valse noble* left off.

La valse, as it now was, was completed first of all in a version for piano solo and then in the two-piano version recorded here, and it was this two-piano version that Ravel and his friend Marcelle Meyer played to Diaghilev in the spring of 1920. Poulenc was present and, having observed the impresario's increasing restiveness as the performance progressed, was not overly surprised when he delivered his verdict: 'it's a masterpiece... but it's not a ballet. It's a portrait of a ballet... a painting of a ballet'. Ravel picked up the scores and walked out without a word.

Diaghilev 's response was possibly prompted by the work's lack of local incident. Its shape is simply that of two crescendos, a longer followed by a shorter, and, in 'painting' this, Ravel had maybe usurped the role Diaghilev normally reserved for himself. Despite this initial setback, *La Valse* was a great success in Vienna in the autumn of 1920 when Ravel played the two-piano with Alfredo Casella, and in its orchestral form (with a slightly altered ending), it seemed to chime in with the mood of postwar Paris which, after escaping from the trenches and the attention of Big Bertha, could now bring itself to look death and destruction in the face as long as they were presented in an artistic form. Ravel, however, would agree only that *La Valse* was tragic 'like any expression – pleasure, happiness – which is pushed to extremes. You should see in it only what comes from the music.'

Rapsodie espagnole M. 54a

The interest shown in Spain by 19th-century French musicians has normally been taken as demonstrating a taste for the exotic. The only intermediate culture is that of the Basques. They are in their own minds a fully independent race, and Ravel credited to his Basque mother not only his prominent chin but also the reserve and stubbornness in his character. Being half-Basque he did not look on Spanish art or music as being in the least exotic, neither did he confine his imitations of the Spanish style to the superficial confectionery of Chabrier's *España*, which contains real Spanish tunes but little or no real Spanish music. It is probably a mistake to regard Ravel's Spanish style as just another in the long list of the borrowed clothes he liked to dress up in; for one thing, his mother was always happier speaking Spanish rather than French and anything that touched her was, for Ravel, automatically imbued with emotional significance.

The completed ***Rapsodie*** belongs to the years 1907-08 and the first performance of the orchestral score was given in Paris on 15 March 1908. But the nucleus of the work was the '**Habanera**', the first of the two pieces that make up the *Sites auriculaires*, written in 1895-7 for two pianos.

The ‘Habanera’ itself dates in fact from 1895 and Ravel states in an autobiographical sketch that ‘this work contains in embryo several elements which were to predominate in my subsequent compositions.’

Ravel’s wizardry as an orchestrator means that in an orchestral performance we are always aware of the changing colours, from ebullient brass at one end of the spectrum to harp harmonics at the other. Indeed, an unduly colour-conscious conductor can succeed in reducing the piece to a mere rag-bag of ear-catching textures. Ravel was aware of this danger and actually reckoned that in the ‘Habanera’ there was too much orchestra for the brevity of the movement. In the two-piano version the music can be heard speaking for itself. We can also appreciate more easily the extent of Debussy’s debt to Ravel when he came to write *La Soirée dans Grenade*, having first borrowed a copy of *Sites auriculaires*. Ravel’s view of the matter is sufficiently plain from the figures ‘1895’ which appear above the ‘Habanera’ – a tidier substitute for the lawsuit he had at one time considered bringing.

Ma mère l'Oye M. 60

Ravel retained all through his life many of the characteristics of a child: enthusiasm, naivety, an occasionally embarrassing candour, egocentricity, and a love of toys and fairy tales. Mme. Ibert remembers that when he got bored at adult parties, which he did rather easily, he had a habit of vanishing; but you could usually find him in the nursery, kneeling on the floor in his evening clothes, playing with the toys. Children loved him and he responded. His friends Cipa and Ida Godebski had two children, Mimie and Jean, of whom Ravel was particularly fond and (Mimie later recalled) 'I would climb up on his knees and patiently he would begin with 'Once upon a time...' And it would be *Laideronnette* or *Beauty and the Beast* or, very often, the adventures he made up for me of a poor little mouse...'

Ravel wrote for Mimie and Jean the suite of five pieces for piano duet called ***Mother Goose***, based on the stories he used to tell them, and he hoped they would give the first public performance. But Mimie's nerve was not up to it. Two other children gave the suite its first performance in April 1910 at the opening concert of the Société Musicale Indépendante, an organisation which Ravel was active in promoting in order to counter the stuffy influence of d'Indy on Parisian music-making: *Mother Goose* served his purpose exactly.

The little mouse does not figure in *Ma mère L'Oye*. Instead, Ravel went to his favourite 17th- and 18th-century storytellers: Charles Perrault, the Comtesse d'Aulnoy and Madame de Beaumont. The title of the suite and of the first two pieces come from Perrault, the second is headed by the passage describing Tom Thumb's surprise at finding the birds have eaten all the breadcrumbs which should have shown him the way home. The empress Laideronnette is depicted having her bath to the accompaniment of music from tiny creatures (pagodes and pagodines) playing on nutshells, and the beast is finally transformed into a prince 'more handsome than Love'. The last movement, '**The Fairy Garden**', comes from Ravel's own imagination, a vision of an idealised world to which Ravel was to return in the second scene of his opera *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* – 'un paradis de tendresse'.

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Alexander Tamir (R)

1931-2019

Bracha Eden (L)

1928-2006

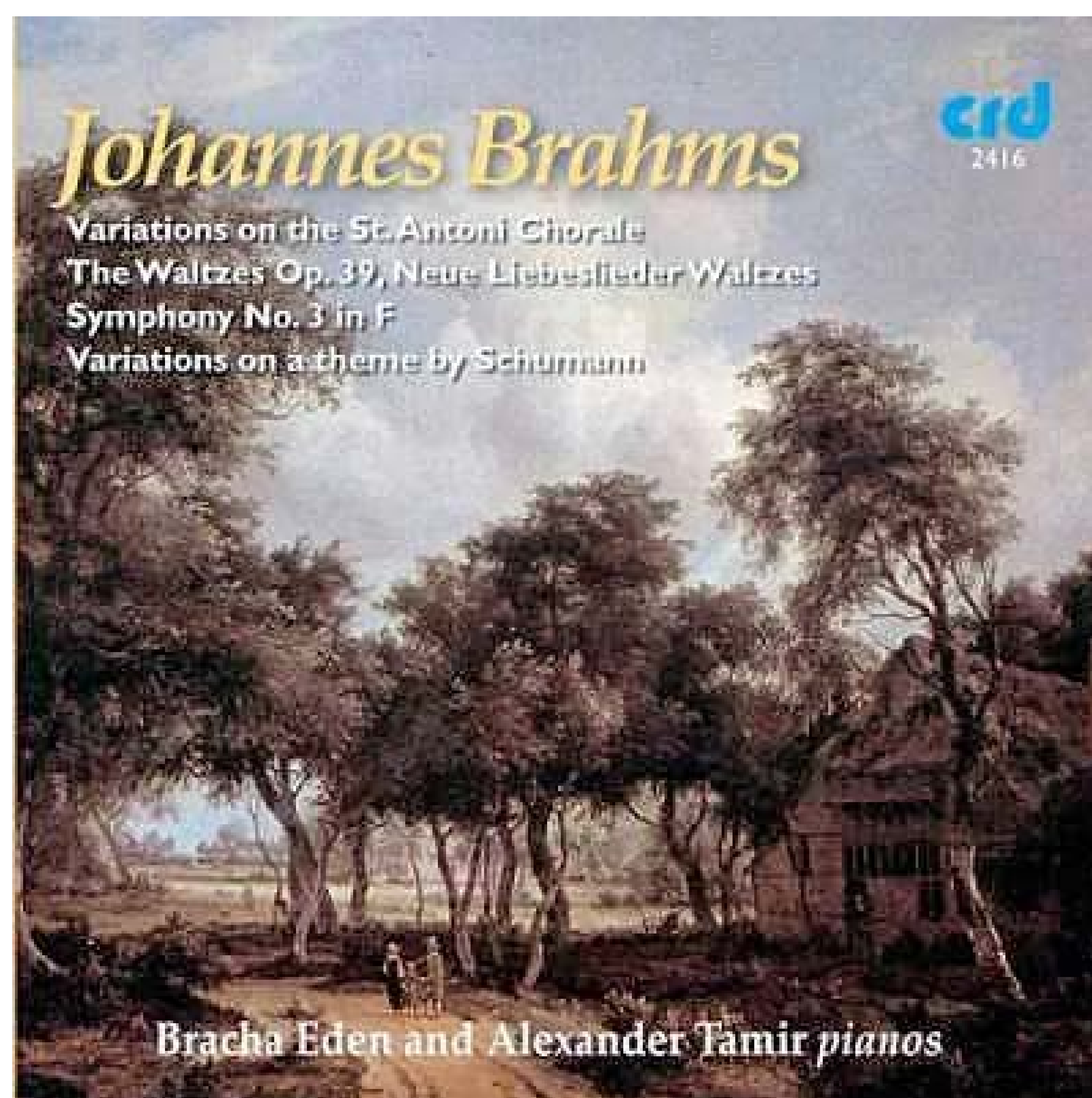


Well-known for their work in expanding the duo piano repertoire, at the time of this recording, Eden and Tamir's reputation was continuing to spread with their annual tours to the Far East, Europe and America.

Based in Israel, Eden and Tamir met at the Jerusalem Conservatory where they studied with Alfred Schroeder who encouraged them to play together as he had done with his teacher, Artur Schnabel. From the outset, their partnership was a success. In 1955 they were invited to perform in the United States and, while there, studied with Vronsky and Babin. Two years later they won the Vercelli Duo Piano Competition, which resulted in a highly acclaimed Italian Tour.

Their reputation for expanding the duo repertoire was well-earnt. They were responsible for introducing Lutoslawski's *Paganini Variations* to audiences outside Europe and, at the suggestion of Stravinsky, were the first to record *The Rite of Spring* for two pianos. Their repertoire contains many lesser-known works which they have premiered.

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Darkness & Light

Maurice Ravel (1975-1937)

1. La Valse, M. 72a (Arr. for 2 Pianos by Ravel)

Rapsodie espagnole M. 54a (Arr. for 2 Pianos by Ravel)

2. I. Prélude à la nuit - Modéré
3. II. Malagueña - Assez vif - Lent
4. III. Habanera - En demi-teinte et d'un rythme las
5. IV. Feria - Assez vif - Modéré

Ma mère l'Oye M. 60

6. I. Pavane de la belle au bois dormant - Lent
7. II. Petit Poucet - Très modéré
8. III. Laideronnette, impératrice des pagodes - Mouvement de Marche
9. IV. Les entretiens de la belle et de la bête
10. V. Le jardin féérique - Lent et grave

Executive Producers **Graham, Tom & Emma Pauncefort**

Producer **Simon Lawman**

Balance Engineer **Victor Fonarov**

Recorded at the Jerusalem Music Centre

Mishkenot Sha'ananim, Jerusalem, Israel

9-12 October 1983

Front cover *The Flower Clouds*, Odilon Redon, c. 1903

Piano **Steinway** 430910 and 430936

Photography Avraham Gat