

Gernsheim · Brahms Piano Quintets

Formosa Quartet
Reiko Uchida, piano



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**Friedrich Gernsheim: Piano Quintet No. 2 in
B Minor, Op. 63 (30:06)**

**Johannes Brahms: Piano Quintet in
F Minor, Op. 34 (41:13)**

Total playing time: 71:25

Gernsheim · Brahms

Piano Quintets

Friedrich Gernsheim (1839-1916)

Piano Quintet No. 2 in B Minor, Op. 63 (30:06)

1 I Molto moderato (10:38)

2 II Adagio (9:14)

3 III Allegretto molto grazioso e sempre scherzando (3:13)

4 IV Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo presto (6:53)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34 (41:13)

5 I Allegro non troppo (15:08)

6 II Andante, un poco adagio (8:09)

7 III Scherzo: Allegro (7:15)

8 IV Finale: Poco sostenuto, Allegro non troppo (Presto, non troppo)
(10:24)

Total playing time: 71:25

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Although ensconced in the Romantic tradition, the **Gernsheim Piano Quintet No. 2** offers a unique sound world, perhaps containing more spontaneity of gesture and harmony than many of its contemporary works. Its language, born of a line of German composers, evokes a vastness, a landscape of lofty, open spaces that at times seems to transcend its country of origin.

The first movement's B minor is a key of restrained nobility. The first two notes of the movement mark a descending octave, an austere interval that later acquires heroic vibrancy in major keys. The fresh, lovely, *Ländler*-like second theme appears in a movement over which the piano otherwise casts authoritative, orchestral grandeur. A tender melody begins the second movement, miniscule pauses lending it a vulnerability that slowly evolves into a fuller voice. In the ensuing *Sturm und Drang* middle section, the piano meets its equal in the strings, which — welded together in unison — gleam like steel before making way for the piano's fury. The third movement opens and ends full of sparkle, mischief, and grace, smiles turning to uproarious laughs in between. Strong rhythmic ground is established at the start of the last movement before it sweeps forth at a brisk clip, luxuriating in a generous second theme, moments of quiet reverie, and a kaleidoscope of keys before heading for the thrilling coda.

A word about Gernsheim is in order here, since his name and music remain unfamiliar

to many musicians and music lovers alike. The sadly undeserved neglect of his art is due in part to the fact that he was Jewish. Thus — in the distinguished company of such luminaries as Mendelssohn, Schoenberg, and Korngold (among many others) — his sometimes Jewish-themed music was banned as "Entartete Kunst" (degenerate art) during the Nazi era, leaving it to succeeding generations to discover his amazing music anew. Gernsheim was, in fact, an important musical figure and pedagogue in his time, well acquainted with — and respected by — many leading composers of the late-Romantic era. Of particular interest is his friendship with his contemporary Brahms, who wholeheartedly acknowledged him as a master composer.

Neither Brahms the composer nor his immortal **Piano Quintet** need such introduction; suffice it to say that his art embodies the very soul of late German Romanticism. Thus in this masterpiece's venerable, familiar presence, one cannot help but be amazed by the truth of its ageless effect on us. Ask any string quartet player or pianist, and they will likely tell you that the piece is among their top five most-performed. But one never tires of it, so sincere is its sensibility, and every single time one reaches the end of the *Andante, un poco adagio*, one is forcibly struck by its beauty. The human heart is what ultimately connects us to one another, and in Brahms beats one of the sweetest and most extraordinary hearts in music.

Warm thanks go to Sam Ersan, who not only underwrote this recording but also first brought Friedrich Gernsheim to our attention; to Judy Sherman, Bill Maylone, and the University of Chicago's Logan Center; to family and friends whose support helped make preparation possible; and to Panera Bread's Napa almond chicken salad sandwiches, which gave us the energy to ridicule each other's pronunciation of "Gernsheim" between takes.

– *Jasmine Lin*

Winners of the First Prize and the Amadeus Prize at the London International String Quartet Competition in 2006, the **Formosa Quartet** is "one of the very best quartets of their generation" (David Soyer, cellist of the Guarneri Quartet). Its debut recording on the EMI label was hailed as "spellbinding" (*Strad Magazine*) and "remarkably fine" (*Gramophone*), and the quartet has given critically acclaimed performances at the Ravinia Festival, the Library of Congress, the Chicago Cultural Center, and Wigmore

Che-Yen Chen, Ru-Pei Yeh,
Jasmine Lin, and Wayne Lee



Hall in London. Formed in 2002 when the four founding members came together for a concert tour of Taiwan, the Formosa Quartet is deeply committed to championing Taiwanese music and promoting the arts in the land of its heritage.

In its relatively brief existence, the Formosa Quartet's active commissioning has contributed significantly to the 21st-century's string quartet literature. The quartet premiered Taiwanese-American composer Shih-Hui Chen's *Returning Souls: Four Pieces on Three Formosan Amis Legends* in 2014, and the quartet's recording of its first commission from Ms. Chen, *Fantasia on the Theme of Plum Blossom*, was released on the New World Records label in 2013. Other pieces written for the quartet include three pieces by Dana Wilson (*Hungarian Folk Songs*, *The night of h's*, and *Apart*), Wei-Chieh Lin's *Pasibutbut*, and Thomas Oboe Lee's *Piano Quintet* and *Jasmine Variations*.

The members of the Formosa Quartet – Jasmine Lin, Wayne Lee, Che-Yen Chen, and Ru-Pei Yeh – have degrees from The Juilliard School, Curtis Institute of Music, and New England Conservatory, and have been top prizewinners in prestigious competitions such as the Paganini, Primrose, Naumburg, and Tertis competitions. Each summer, the members serve as faculty quartet-in-residence at the National Youth Orchestra of Canada, as well as at their own Formosa Chamber Music Festival in Hualien, Taiwan.

Pianist **Reiko Uchida** enjoys an active career as a soloist and chamber musician, performing regularly throughout the United States, Asia, and Europe. She has appeared as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Santa Fe Symphony, Greenwich Symphony, and Princeton Symphony, among others. As a chamber musician she has performed at the Marlboro, Santa Fe, Ravinia, Tanglewood, and Spoleto Music Festivals; as guest artist with Camera Lucida, American Chamber Players, Formosa, Borromeo, St. Lawrence, and Tokyo String Quartets; and in recital with Anne Akiko Meyers, Thomas Meglitoranza, Jennifer Koh, Sharon Robinson, and Jaime Laredo. Her recording with Jennifer Koh, *String Poetic*, was nominated for a Grammy Award. She is a past member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center Two. A graduate of Curtis Institute of Music, Mannes College of Music, and The Juilliard School, Ms. Uchida studied with Claude Frank, Leon Fleisher, Edward Aldwell, Sophia Rosoff, and Margo Garrett. She currently resides in New York City, where she is an associate faculty member at Columbia University.

Reiko Uchida



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Back row (L-R): Che-Yen Chen, Judith Sherman, Wayne Lee, Ru-Pei Yeh, Bill Maylone
Front row (L-R): Jasmine Lin, Reiko Uchida