BRAHMS & CONTEMPORARIES | VOL. 3

CHANDOS

Brahms: Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor
Pejačević: Piano Quartet in D minor ▪ Impromptu

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Dora Pejačević

Brahms and Contemporaries, Volume 3

Dora Pejačević (1885 – 1923)

	Quartet, Op. 25 (1908) in D minor • in d-Moll • en ré mineur for Piano, Violin, Viola, and Cello	**21:28**
1	Allegro – Ruhiger (Poco meno Allegro) – Tempo I – Poco meno mosso – Tempo I – Poco meno Allegro – Poco meno mosso – Tempo I	8:01
2	Adagio. Adagio – Più mosso – [Tempo I]	4:29
3	Minuetto. Allegretto – Trio – Da capo al Fine	4:24
4	Rondo. Allegro – Ruhiger (Meno mosso) – Tempo I – Un poco meno mosso – Poco meno mosso – Tempo I – Ruhiger (Meno mosso)	4:32

Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)

	Quartet No. 1, Op. 25 (1861) in G minor • in g-Moll • en sol mineur for Piano, Violin, Viola, and Cello Herrn Baron Reinhard von Dalwigk zugeeignet	**39:00**
5	Allegro – Animato – [Tempo I]	13:38
6	Intermezzo. Allegro, ma non troppo – Trio. Animato – Tempo del Intermezzo – Coda. Animato	7:36
7	Andante con moto – Animato – Poco animato	9:23
8	Rondo alla Zingarese. Presto – Meno Presto – Tempo I – Cadenza [Piano] – Meno Presto – Poco più Presto – Molto Presto	8:21

Dora Pejačević

9 **Impromptu, Op. 9b** (1903) **3:30**
in A flat major • in As-Dur • en la bémol majeur
for Piano Quartet
Arrangement of similarly titled work for solo piano, Op. 9a (1899)
Andante – Più mosso – [Tempo I]

TT 63:59

Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective
Elena Urioste violin
Rosalind Ventris viola
Laura van der Heijden cello
Tom Poster piano

Alexander James

The musicians during the recording sessions

Alexander James

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Brahms: Piano Quartet No. 1 in G minor, Op. 25

The G minor Piano Quartet, like its A major companion, Op. 26 (Volume 1, CHAN 20297), originated during the late 1850s, although the main work of composition fell in 1861, when Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897) was living in the Hamburg suburb of Hamm. As was so often the case for this composer, the route to the definitive text was tortuous, and assisted by advice and criticism from his close friends, above all Clara Schumann (widowed since 1856) and Joseph Joachim. Work was sufficiently advanced during the summer of 1861 that Brahms could send the first two movements of Op. 25 to Clara, who responded at some length on 29 July, not entirely positively:

> There is much in the movement of the G minor Quartet that I like, and some things that I care for less. The first part seems to me too little G minor and too much D major, and I think that owing to the lack of the former it loses clarity.[1]

It is worth unpacking this criticism a little further, as it bears on the larger design of this extensive and expansive opening movement. The G minor first group takes up only thirty-four bars of the 162-bar exposition, and there is already movement away from the tonic in its three-part design. Opening *piano* and *espressivo*, a ten-bar phrase closes squarely in the tonic; after three beats of silence – thus, without any transitional material – a contrasting idea in B flat major, *dolce*, is presented. This yields to the opening material back in G minor, *fortissimo* rather than *piano*. The semiquaver figure that now accompanies the main thematic material moving in crotchets is used as a transition to the second-group key of D (bar 51). A first new minor-mode theme introduced by the cello yields to a second, related one, now in the major, and given to violin and viola in unison. A third theme, *fortissimo* again and now with violin and viola in octaves (thus increasing registral as well as dynamic range), further cements the dominance of D major, as does the *codetta*

[1] In dem G moll-Quartettsatz ist mir vieles sehr lieb, einiges weniger. Der erste Teil dünkt mir zu wenig G moll und zu viel Ddur [*sic*], ich finde, er verliert durch den Mangel an G moll an Klarheit.

material, based on the four-crotchet figure that characterises the first group.

Perhaps because of its thematic breadth and tonal shape, Brahms (in contrast to his procedure in Op. 26) eschews a repeat of this exposition, though this is not immediately apparent as the development begins with a literal repeat of the opening ten-bar phrase, back in G minor, before moving away (Brahms may have had Beethoven's first 'Razumovsky' Quartet, Op. 59 in mind here). There is in fact a sense in which this phrase is both expositional and recapitulatory in function, for when the true recapitulation begins, it does so not with this opening material, but rather with the middle, *dolce*, idea from the first group, now in the tonic major: the minor mode is restored with the return of the *fortissimo* third section of the first group. This is all part of a truncation of the recapitulation compared to the exposition: the earlier second-group D minor theme is omitted (an omission again questioned by Clara), whereas the major-mode one now appears in E flat major; only with the return of the third theme, now *piano* and *tranquillo* rather than *fortissimo*, is G minor re-established for the remainder of the movement.

Thus, the 'lack of clarity' that Clara sensed at the opening of this movement can be understood to be in the service of a larger scheme that involves the long-term delayed recuperation not just of the tonic key but of the opening *piano* dynamic first associated with it: the dynamic identity of material in this movement is just as fundamental to its emotional trajectory as are the tonal and melodic schemes.

As for the second movement, Clara was much more impressed:

> I cannot help thinking that if you had me in mind at all when you were writing it out you must have known that I would be charmed by the scherzo in C minor. In fact, I should hardly call it a scherzo at all. I can only think of it as an allegretto. But it is a piece after my own heart![2]

Brahms had indeed first titled the second movement 'Scherzo' in his much-revised autograph manuscript, so the comments by Clara may have informed his eventual choice of the title 'Intermezzo' for the outer sections, even if her suggested 'allegretto' was substituted by *Allegro, ma non troppo*. Notable for its muted strings and largely

[2] Vom Scherzo in C moll, meine ich, müßtest Du schon beim Aufschreiben, wenn Du an mich gedacht, mein Entzücken gewußt haben. Scherzo würde ich es nun freilich nicht nennen, kann es mir überhaupt nur Allegretto denken, aber das ist ein Stück so recht eigens für mich.

quiet dynamic, as well as its relatively unconventional 9 / 8 time signature (allowing Brahms the possibility of many signature metrical manipulations), this movement, fleet of foot if also wistful, is reminiscent of many Mendelssohnian scherzos.

By September 1861 Brahms was in a position to send the complete work, heavily revised, to Joachim; and it was from manuscript copy that Clara gave a first performance, in Hamburg, on 16 November 1861, together with John Böie, F. Breyther, and Louis Lee. Exactly one year later Brahms himself made his Vienna début as a pianist with the work, the string players being Joseph Hellmesberger, Franz Dobyhal, and Heinrich Röver. The work was well received, especially so the 'gypsy' finale (Brahms had encountered the czárdás and much else of the Hungarian style through his contact with the violinist Ede Reményi in the early 1850s), even though the cellist, according to Brahms's biographer Max Kalbeck, cracked the bridge of his instrument during the performance.

Op. 25 was first issued by the Bonn publisher Simrock in late summer 1863, bearing a dedication to Brahms's early supporter Baron Reinhard von Dalwigk, *Hofintendant* to the Grand Duke of Oldenburg. A four-hand piano arrangement by Brahms was withdrawn in 1870, substituted by a revised version in 1872. In 1937 an orchestral arrangement by Arnold Schoenberg appeared. A great admirer of Brahms's music, Schoenberg claimed that the quartet was not much heard, and when it was, the piano part tended to dominate much of interest in the string parts, which his arrangement sought to bring out.

Pejačević: Piano Quartet in D minor, Op. 25

The Croatian composer Dora Pejačević (1885 – 1923), born in Budapest to a noble family and especially musical mother, would have been twelve when Brahms died, in 1897, the year of two of her earliest compositions. She was largely self-taught, her musical personality shaped in large part through artists and intellectuals, including Schoenberg's friend and associate Karl Kraus, some of whose texts she would later set to music. Like Brahms's Op. 25, her identically numbered Piano Quartet (1908), published in Dresden (H. Bock) and London (Bosworth and Co.), consists of four movements, the inner two in contrasting non-tonic keys (here B flat major and A major); likewise, the Rondo finale makes few concessions to the conventional 'light' character of this genre, and neither is there any hint of a turn to the

major mode for the conclusion of either work: Pejačević, like Brahms, cleaves to the minor mode to the very end. (Beyond their shared opus number, one might point out that these two piano quartets also adopt minor keys particularly associated with a number of darkly dramatic works by Mozart.)

The same is not true, however, of Pejačević's first movement, which arrives at a glorious D major conclusion, reworking the opening minor-mode first group statement, a two-bar descending D minor *arpeggio* embellished by upward-moving triplets. As for this statement itself, one wonders what Clara Schumann would have made of it if she had encountered the score. If Brahms's first movement had 'too little G minor', these first two bars are the only nod to the tonic key that Pejačević provides: bar 3 already moves heavily flatward to C minor harmony (and the piano's *forte* gesture is answered by *piano* strings), which eventually proves to be in the service of a movement down a fifth from D to G, at which pitch the whole opening six-bar unit is reprised, now *fortissimo*, itself moving a further fifth lower, to C.

From a conventional first-movement sonata-form perspective, this would seem a logical destination: C is the dominant of F, the relative major in which one might expect the second group of the exposition to commence. A new theme, introduced in the violin, in F major will indeed arrive, but not before a lengthy tonal digression which also lowers the emotional temper of the music, *Ruhiger (Poco meno Allegro)*. And yet F major, when it comes, is itself present for only two bars: the real destination of this exposition proves to be A major, the home dominant (again, as in Brahms), which, in Pejačević's case, easily sets up the exposition repeat, present here.

The development, arriving in due course, mirrors the falling-fifth relationship between the first two phrases of the exposition in that it sets out from G major. The initial quaver triplet rhythm is evident throughout but there also emerges a dotted version (*Poco meno mosso*) which traces its own melodic outline: this, rather unusually, will re-emerge, almost like an involuntarily recalled memory, before the onset of the quasi-orchestral closing apotheosis to which the initial material is brought.

The slow movement opens with a self-contained eight-bar binary-form statement in which solo piano is answered by strings: not exactly a chorale or hymn, but there is a song-like quality to the melodic line, for all the lush accompaniment below it. The vocal

impulse comes more immediately to the fore in the succeeding *Più mosso*, when the violin is granted an eight-bar solo melody explicitly marked *singend*. The viola begins its own counterstatement, but this is concluded by the re-entry of the violin, which continues to carry the main melodic material while the lower instruments are for the most part grouped with the piano in providing arpeggiaic accompaniment. The opening theme returns in an instrumental *tutti*, its second four-bar phrase greatly extended before the movement comes to its quiet close.

The 'Minuetto' title of the third movement, in A major, suggests convention, and its overall ABA design (the Trio is in the subdominant, D major) bears this out. Nonetheless, while the minuet itself is built of three sixteen-bar units (ABA on a smaller scale), Pejačević shows a Brahms-like inventiveness in the outer units, where the expected 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 phrasing is rejected for something more like 4 + 2 + 6 (complete with Brahmsian hemiolas) + 4. Nor should the 'Rondo' heading of the finale be taken at face value. The rondo theme is never treated to a literal return as, say, in a Mozart piano sonata; rather, it is treated to a series of variations at each reprise. Nor is it tonally closed, but modulates to the dominant for the first episode, *Ruhiger (Meno mosso)*; and as the music of this episode eventually returns in the tonic major, it effectively functions as a sonata-form second group. But, as noted above, this is no 'darkness to light' tonal trajectory: it is to D minor that we return.

Pejačević: Impromptu in A flat major, Op. 9b

The Impromptu, Op. 9b is an arrangement for piano quartet of an earlier (1899) piano composition, Op. 9a. Its mere thirty-six bars harbour a degree of musical subtlety, to say nothing of its emotional reach. To describe it as 'in A flat major' is already too simplistic; it certainly opens peacefully enough in that key (the first two bars of the melody seem almost like a half-forgotten quotation of the beginning of the third movement of Schumann's *Fantasie*, Op. 17), but turns toward C minor after four bars, and it is in that key, rather than the expected A flat tonic, that this opening, repeated section finishes. A contrasting *Più mosso* follows, beginning in E flat major; but this seeming return to convention is confounded when the C minor conclusion of the first section, repeated and intensified, returns at the close. And those same concluding bars, now seeming to function like an ominous refrain, necessarily bring to its close the lightly varied

repeat of the opening section which then ensues. Despite superficial appearances, then, this is no straightforward ABA design, and its tonal journey is, if anything, one from 'light to darkness'. Bearing in mind its solo piano origins, we might consider that the impromptu genre was, for composers of Pejačević's generation, probably most firmly associated with Chopin, who was at the same time the composer of *the* archetypical funeral march. Pejačević's Impromptu is avowedly no march but, as its three sections play out, the tread of grief seems to come ever closer and fall more heavily.

A note by the performers

We can imagine some eyebrows being raised at the description of Dora Pejačević as a contemporary of Brahms; after all, the two composers were born more than fifty years apart, and their lives only overlapped by twelve years. Yet both works by Pejačević included on this album, the third in this series, are unmistakably from the same compositional lineage as that by Brahms; and both are works written early on in Pejačević's remarkable (and sadly all-too-short) life: the Impromptu was composed, originally for solo piano, when she was just fourteen, and the Piano Quartet at the age of twenty-three. Both pieces belong clearly to the romantic tradition, displaying no hint of the more modernist directions which her later works would take.

We were immediately intoxicated by the passionate sweep of Pejačević's Piano Quartet, but also the tenderness of its slow movement, and felt it would make the perfect bedfellow for the First Piano Quartet of Brahms, a piece to which Tom has felt particularly close since student days. Brahms's Piano Quartet is justly one of the best-loved of all chamber works, by both audiences and performers, and few works are more exhilarating to perform: the first movement offers an abundance of glorious themes; the second takes us to a mysterious dreamworld; the third luxuriates in expansive lyricism; then the fiery virtuosity of the gypsy finale sends us headlong to the finish line.

This album brings us to the end of our recorded journey through Brahms's three piano quartets, and it has been the greatest privilege and joy to commit these works to disc, alongside three major piano quartets by composers who deserve to be far better known. However, we are pleased to say that the series does not end here: looking beyond

the piano quartets, we have further albums in preparation, pairing Brahms with his brilliant and lesser-played contemporaries.

Sincere thanks, as ever, to Ralph Couzens, Jonathan Cooper, and all at Chandos for giving us the opportunity to share these wonderful works. Until the next time!

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 enjoyed major residencies at the Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Chipping Campden, Lammermuir, and Ischia festivals, and at the Schwartzman centres at both the University of Oxford and Yale University. 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*. Passionate about inspiring the next generation of musicians, the Collective has featured in the Learning Festival of Wigmore Hall, directed courses for the Benedetti Foundation, and held a visiting professorship at the Royal Academy of Music. Recent performance highlights include collaborations with Hilary Hahn, débuts at the BBC Proms and at the Concertgebouw, in Amsterdam, and two extensive tours of the USA. In 2024 the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective was shortlisted for the Ensemble Award of the Royal Philharmonic Society. For more information, please see www.kaleidoscopecc.com, where you can also find links to the websites of the individual musicians.

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The musicians during the recording sessions

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