



BRAHMS

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Four Hand Piano Music Vol. 14 Piano Quartet No. 2 • Five Waltzes

Silke-Thora Matthies • Christian Köhn



Johannes Brahms (1833–1897): Four Hand Piano Music, Vol. 14

Piano Quartet No. 2 • Five Walzes, Op. 39

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 the boy helped his family by playing the piano in summer inns.

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 his first 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.

In 1850 Schumann had taken up the offer from the previous incumbent, Ferdinand Hiller, of the position of municipal director of music in Düsseldorf, the first official appointment of his career and the last. 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.

The autumn of 1857 had brought Brahms a court appointment at Detmold, teaching the piano and conducting. He was to return there for the next two years, while continuing to fulfil a series of concert engagements. In January 1860 he returned to Hamburg, living at first with his parents, but soon moving to a house owned by Elisabeth Rösing at the country suburb of Hamm, where the Hamburg Frauenchor that he had established and conducted often met. Here he enjoyed greater tranquillity, undisturbed by the marital disagreements of his parents within the limited accommodation available to them. Clara Schumann appeared as the pianist in the first performance of his *Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25*, given in Hamburg in November 1861, on the occasion of the third of a series of Hamburg concerts that featured the Hamburg ladies' choir. The new piano quartet was not his first attempt at the genre. There had been an earlier piano quartet, later transposed, revised and published in 1875 as Opus 60. Brahms himself performed the quartet with members of the Hellmesberger Quartet on his first concert appearance in Vienna in 1862. The critic Hanslick was at first less impressed by the work, while he found Brahms's playing more that of a composer than a virtuoso, a judgement not entirely to the latter's discredit.

The *Piano Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 26*, written

during the same period, had its first performance in Vienna on 29th November 1862 by the same performers, in a concert in which Brahms played his *Handel Variations* and keyboard works by Bach and by Schumann. The concert followed shortly after Brahms had received the disappointing news of the appointment of Julius Stockhausen as conductor of the Hamburg Philharmonic, a position for which he had hoped. In a letter home from Vienna, however, he was able to report the sympathetic reception of his new piano quartet and his success with the audience as a pianist. Hanslick, who had followed Brahms's career with close interest, still had reservations, but Clara Schumann preferred the quartet to its immediate predecessor. In 1870 the publisher Simrock asked Brahms for a four-hand piano arrangement of both quartets. He agreed to supply these, asking that his name as arranger should be included. Simrock did not agree to this last request, and printed the four-hand piano version of the *Quartet in G minor* without this acknowledgement and with many mistakes, as the proofs had not been sent to the composer for correction. This led Brahms to delay the arrangement of the second quartet until 1872. He had at first asked for a fee of fifteen Friedrichsdor, having received only twelve for each original composition, but was not pleased to receive in 1872 only the earlier agreed fee. His complaint persuaded Simrock to send a further fifteen Friedrichsdor.

The work, which is admirably suited to piano duet, is of some length, and makes wide use of sonata form. The opening subject has two elements, a chordal theme and a winding thematic element first heard from the cello. The second subject that follows is replete with the composer's habitual cross-rhythms. The central development unusually includes three variations of the first theme, before its return in recapitulation. The slow movement, *Poco Adagio*, and originally scored at first with muted strings, offers a lyrical principal theme, the strings unmuted on its return, after the contrasting secondary material. The extended *Scherzo*, unusually in sonata form, has a D minor *Trio* that uses thematic material from the *Scherzo* in its canonic writing. The quartet ends with another sonata-form movement, its rhythmic first subject with touches of the Hungarian. It makes a splendid and complementary ending to a work that wears the unmistakable stamp of Brahms throughout.

Brahms completed his sixteen *Waltzes, Op. 39*, in 1865, publishing them in a piano duet version in 1866 and a version for solo piano the following year. He dedicated the work to Eduard Hanslick, the genre and dedication both, perhaps, a tribute to Vienna, where he had been welcomed. In 1897 the publisher Rieter-Biedermann issued a two-piano version of five of the waltzes, included in the present recording.

Keith Anderson

Silke-Thora Matthies and Christian Köhn

The pianists Silke-Thora Matthies and Christian Köhn, with individual solo careers, came together in 1986 to form a piano duo and played their first concert in public the last day of October 1988. As a duo the two players have won wide acclaim, with international prizes, and appearances in recital and as soloists. They broadcast regularly and have been responsible for a number of first performances of music by notable contemporary composers. They have held international master classes for piano duo and duet playing. In addition to their recordings of Brahms for Naxos, they have also recorded works by Dvořák and Giselher Klebe.

Silke-Thora Matthies was born in Gütersloh, in North Rhine-Westphalia, and studied in Detmold with Renate Kretschmar-Fischer and at the Juilliard School of Music in New York with Joseph Kalichstein, winning first prize at the New York Gina Bachauer Competition and further awards in the Budapest Liszt/Bartók Competition, the Bordeaux Jeunes Solistes, and the Cleveland (Ohio) Robert Casadesus Competition. She has recorded music ranging from Domenico Scarlatti to the contemporary and appears as a soloist and recitalist in Germany and abroad. Since 1992 she has served as a professor of piano at the Hochschule für Musik Würzburg in Bavaria and in October 2003 became Rector of the school. She leads master classes and is often a jury member for international piano competitions.

Christian Köhn was born in Bochum, North Rhine-Westphalia, and studied in Dortmund with Joseph Matthias Blome and in Detmold with Renate Kretschmar-Fischer. He won prizes in the Hamburg Steinway Piano Competition, and the Dortmund International Schubert Competition, with awards from the Hamburg Oscar-und-Vera-Ritter-Stiftung and the Bonn German Music Competition. His career has taken him as soloist and recitalist to various countries of Europe and the Near East. At the Musikhochschule Detmold he is an assistant professor of piano, and is the editor of *Brahms Four Hand Piano Music*, published by Bärenreiter.

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Brahms was an accomplished pianist, whose output for the piano spanned his entire life. In addition to his solo works he made four-hand piano arrangements of many of his orchestral, chamber and vocal scores, to give them greater accessibility. The great *Second Piano Quartet*, the gentlest and most expansive of the three, is notable for its lovely slow movement and Bach-inspired large-scale scherzo. In contrast, the delicate and playful *Waltzes* are delightful miniatures with occasional hints of Magyar rhythms.

Johannes
BRAHMS
(1833-1897)

Four Hand Piano Music Vol. 14

Piano Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 26 45:52
(arranged for piano duet – one piano, four hands)

1 Allegro non troppo	14:37	3 Scherzo: Poco Allegro	10:37
2 Poco Adagio	11:22	4 Finale: Allegro	9:16

Five Waltzes, Op. 39 6:32
(arranged for piano duo – two pianos)

5 No. 1 in B major	1:00	8 No. 4 (No. 14)	1:12
6 No. 2 in E major	1:21	in G sharp minor	
7 No. 3 (No. 11) in B minor	1:16	9 No. 5 (No. 15) in A flat major	1:44

Silke-Thora Matthies • Christian Köhn

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Cover Picture: *Landscape in the Riesengebirge, 1810-11* by Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840)

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