



deux-elles

BRAHMS SOLO PIANO WORKS

MARTIN
ROSCOE

Brahms turned twenty years of age in 1853 and it proved to be a momentous year for him. He took on a tour accompanying the extrovert Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi, who introduced him to Joseph Joachim, a relationship that was to prove lifelong, mostly happy, but turbulent at times too. Since Joachim was surrounded by an influential circle of musicians in Germany, he was able to recommend the young composer to Liszt and the Schumanns. The meeting with Robert and Clara Schumann in particular was a momentous and influential one. A few years earlier, Brahms had sent Robert a parcel of his earliest scores, juvenilia, probably now long lost, which had been returned, unopened, the recipient too busy to read them. But meeting in person produced a strikingly different result and he left the older man in no doubt about his flourishing genius: he was welcomed into the Schumann household and the older man, writing in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, praised the younger man in glowing terms. Clara was impressed with Brahms's fine piano playing too and on his first visit, he played them his two Sonatas Opp. 1 and 2 as well as the second and fourth movements of

his F minor Sonata, the only parts of the work that he had written down at the time. This third Sonata proved to be the last for his instrument. Later in life, he complained of how difficult he found composing with the shadow of Beethoven looming over his shoulder, and it is perhaps significant that this music is much closer to Schubert's emotional world - with its extremes of passion - than it is to Beethoven's.

The Sonata's beginning could hardly be more dramatic, its turbulent mood not even becalmed by the whispered phrases that follow. All the ideas flow from the figure in the opening bar, and this accounts for the compact dimensions of the movement.

Brahms prefaced the *Andante* second movement with lines from Otto Inkelmann, (one of a number of pseudonyms of C. O. Sernau, a now long-forgotten poet): Der Abend dämmert, das Mondlicht scheint, / Da sind zwei Herzen in Liebe vereint / Und halten sich selig umfangen (Evening draws on, moonlight shines, two hearts are united in love and embrace each other

blissfully). This is dreamy music of affecting simplicity and directness, and Inkelmann's words must have spoken directly to Brahms and to the Schumanns. From its tender beginning, the music becomes increasingly fervent and the coda produces a new theme, whose *crescendo* crowns the movement.

The Scherzo is demonic and curiously prophetic of Liszt's First Mephisto Waltz in its sinister mood. But Brahms does not treat us to an orgiastic piece of music propelled by a programme, instead shaping his ideas over traditional lines. The Trio provides relief, with its broad, rich chordal theme. If this movement forms the apex of the five movements' arch-like structure, the Intermezzo which follows mirrors the Andante second movement. Brahms marked it '*Rückblick*' (Looking backwards) and, to use a visual analogy, is rather like a photograph of the same scene taken at a different point in the year; if the second movement presented a Summer view, then this is Winter. Its transformation is a free variation: the music, turned from major into minor, speaks of tragic loss. Not for the first time in the Sonata

are we reminded of orchestral sonorities. It was over twenty years later that Brahms completed his First Symphony, but he is said to have destroyed many before. Here we have a symphony for the piano. Part of the music's bleakness comes from its economy of gesture, and this seems to look beyond the symphonies to its perfection in his late sets of elliptical pieces for piano, one set of which is included in this recital. It was daring to break the spell of this movement with a rondo of such brilliance and energy. There is a moment of rest at the heart of the movement, with a chordal theme whose melody returns in the whirlwind coda, now clothed in counterpoint. The end silences any doubts. Here is a new and novel voice.

From the year 1865, there followed over a decade of silence in Brahms's writing for solo piano, with the exception of one short piece, the F-Sharp Minor Capriccio that was destined to open his Op. 76 set of eight pieces. The set was printed in 1879. Other bigger projects had intervened including, notably, a Concerto for Joachim. In that year, Brahms wrote the Two Rhapsodies that make up his Op. 79. These are bigger in scale ▶

than the recent collection of pieces and more ambitious in their organisation, with a robust and sometimes heroic character. Brahms had originally called the B Minor piece Capriccio, and to some extent it seems to inhabit the volatile mood of his earlier years when he had to fight for attention as an unknown youth. But the anger is soon tempered with a dark, wistful tune which expands from its first short appearance to form the gently consoling heart of the piece with the atmosphere of a lullaby; it returns to bring peace over proceedings in the coda. The G Minor Rhapsody creates a powerful impression with its striding opening, continually seeking a way forward. The contrasting idea, with its insistent accompanying figure, adds to the unrest. Brahms develops these themes in the way he might have done in the opening movement of a sonata, albeit with some sense of compression. By the time this second idea returns at the end, little is changed, but the tension is gone. A great drama has happened in a small space.

By the time Brahms wrote his final solo piano music, the twenty pieces which make up his

Opp. 116-119, he was in his sixtieth year and was living in virtually self-imposed retirement from composing. In 1892, he had lost younger close friends and his sister Elise, who was two years his senior. His thoughts were often dark. His own diagnosis of liver cancer was not far in the future and he no doubt dwelt on past quarrels and potential relationships with women that had not materialised. Are these thoughts that perhaps coloured Op. 118?

While the first Intermezzo is an ardent prelude to the set, its *molto appassionato* sweep a journey towards a tonality, and its ambiguities resolved only towards towards the end, the second Intermezzo is a hopeful *temeramente* love song. The middle section has a benign ghost of a half-remembered canonic duet pass through it, but its centre is a rich chordal passage derived from the same material, now hushed, secretive and intimate.

The most outgoing music in the set comes in the third piece, which Brahms called Ballade, perhaps a harking back to his Op. 10. Here the

central section is withdrawn; Brahms asks for *the una corda* (“soft”) pedal in a gentle lullaby. This moment of warmth and tenderness colours the return to the opening material, which now grows towards a *fortissimo* climax in the coda. But it is a climax which swiftly disappears in the space of just ten bars.

The fourth and fifth pieces, in the minor and major like the first two pieces of the set, are again pieces of greatly contrasted characters, the first of the pair gently restless with its close canon in the opening melody. Its central hesitating thought is fractured and still, perhaps a glimpse into the future that Schoenberg would find so progressive in this nineteenth-century master. Those fractures also shape the return to the opening idea, increasing its underlying agitation and compression. The glorious Romance which follows combines

two intertwined melodies, and a four-note kernel - now inverted in its shape - provides for a brighter and faster middle section, with a free, more open-air feel.

The final Intermezzo is Brahms at his most lonely and inconsolable. Out of its shadows emerges a distant martial idea which quickly flares up into a sustained angry outburst, but the private undercurrent of doubt returns and a painful final gesture denies the *tierce a picardie* ending which Brahms allows in the other minor-key Intermezzos in this set.

Brahms and his dedicatee, Clara Schumann, no doubt played them in private, but the first public hearings of this music came in 1894 in London, the year after they appeared in print. ■

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MARTIN ROSCOE

With an extraordinary career spanning over five decades, **Martin Roscoe** is unarguably one of the UK's best loved pianists. Renowned for his versatility at the keyboard, Martin is equally at home in concerto, recital and chamber performances. His enduring popularity and the respect in which he is universally held are built on a deeply thoughtful musicianship and his easy rapport with audiences and fellow musicians alike. Martin is Artistic Director of Ribble Valley International Piano Week and the Manchester Chamber Concerts Society, and has recently stepped down as Co-Artistic Director of the Beverley Chamber Music Festival.

With a repertoire of over 100 concertos performed or recorded, Martin continues to work regularly with many of the UK's leading orchestras, having especially close links with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Hallé Orchestra, Manchester Camerata, Northern Chamber Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, where he has given over ninety performances. Other orchestral highlights have included BBC Symphony Orchestra and Royal

Philharmonic Orchestra. Martin also performs widely across Europe, Canada, Australia and the Far East, sharing the concert platform with eminent conductors such as Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Mark Elder, Gianandrea Noseda, and Christoph von Dohnányi.

A prolific recitalist and chamber musician, Martin tours the UK extensively every season, including regular appearances at Wigmore Hall, Kings Place and Bridgewater Hall. He has long-standing associations with Peter Donohoe, Kathryn Stott, and the Maggini Quartet, and worked closely with Tasmin Little and the Endellion String Quartet during their long and illustrious careers. Recent collaborations include with Jennifer Pike, Tai Murray, Fenella Humphreys, Liza Ferschtman and the Brodsky and Carducci Quartets. One of his most important ensembles, the Cropper Welsh Roscoe Trio (2005-2016), performed many times across the UK, most notably at Wigmore Hall. More recently, Martin formed the Roscoe Piano Trio with Fenella Humphreys and Jessica Burroughs for a celebratory concert in honour of Peter Cropper. The Trio has since gone on to perform across the UK, most notably at Bridgewater Hall.

Having made over 600 broadcasts, including seven BBC Prom appearances, Martin is one of the most regularly played pianists on BBC Radio 3. Martin has also made many commercial recordings for labels such as Hyperion, Chandos and Naxos. He has recorded the complete piano music of Dohnányi, Nielsen and Szymanowski, as well as four discs in the Hyperion Romantic Piano Concerto series. For the Deux-Elles label, Martin has recorded the complete Beethoven piano sonatas, for which he received unanimous critical acclaim.

Teaching has always formed an important part of Martin's life and the development of young talent helps him to constantly re-examine and re-evaluate his own playing. He is currently Professor of Piano at the Guildhall School of Music in London and has been awarded his Fellowship there.

Martin splits his free time between the stunning English Lake District and the Scottish Highlands, which provide inspiration and relaxation, and also enable him to indulge his passion for the countryside and hill-walking. ■

www.martinroscoe.co.uk



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JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Piano Sonata No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 5

1	Allegro maestoso.....	10:44
2	Andante espressivo.....	10:54
3	Scherzo. Allegro energico.....	4:46
4	Intermezzo. Andante molto.....	3:27
5	Finale. Allegro moderato ma rubato.....	7:27

Rhapsodies, Op. 79

6	No. 1 in B Minor. Agitato.....	9:23
7	No. 2 in G Minor. Molto passionato, ma non troppo allegro.....	6:05

Piano Pieces, Op. 118

8	No. 1, Intermezzo in A Minor. Allegro non assai, ma molto appassionato.....	2:00
9	No. 2, Intermezzo in A Major. Andante teneramente.....	5:46
10	No. 3, Ballade in G Minor. Allegro energico.....	3:18
11	No. 4, Intermezzo in F Minor. Allegretto un poco agitato.....	2:44
12	No. 5, Romanze in F Major. Andante—Allegretto grazioso.....	3:59
13	No. 6, Intermezzo in E-Flat Minor. Andante, largo e mesto.....	4:52

Total playing time: 75:25