



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BRAHMS

ARTHUR RUBINSTEIN

GUARNERI QUARTET

Piano Quartets
NOS. 1 & 3



John Dalley, Arnold Steinhardt, Arthur Rubinstein, David Soyer, Michael Tree
Henri Dauman / BMG Classics

Johannes
BRAHMS
THE RUBINSTEIN COLLECTION (1833-1897)

Piano Quartets

No. 1, Op. 25

No. 3, Op. 60

GUARNERI QUARTET

Arnold Steinhardt, *violin* (Op. 25)

John Dalley, *violin* (Op. 60)

Michael Tree, *viola*

David Soyer, *cello*



Produced by Max Wilcox

Recording Engineer: Richard Gardner
Recorded in Webster Hall, New York City

Reissue produced by Nathaniel S. Johnson
Engineer: Thomas MacCluskey

Digitally remastered in BMG / RCA Studios, New York City

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Übersetzung/Traduction: Byword, London

Art Direction: Albert Lee

Design: I:I

Cover photograph by Dorothea von Haeflén

PIANO QUARTET NO. 1, OP. 25

in G minor / g-moll / sol mineur (38:23)

- 1 Allegro (13:00)
- 2 Intermezzo: Allegro ma non troppo - Trio: Animato (8:17)
- 3 Andante con moto - Animato (9:07)
- 4 Rondo alla zingarese: Presto - Meno presto - Molto presto (7:43)

Recorded December 29, 30, 1967

PIANO QUARTET NO. 3, OP. 60

in C minor / c-moll / ut mineur (35:05)

- 5 Allegro ma non troppo (10:41)
- 6 Scherzo: Allegro (4:21)
- 7 Andante (8:57)
- 8 Allegro (10:50)

Recorded December 27, 28, 1967



Brahms was my great love. When there was a birthday or any kind of an anniversary, I would ask for arrangements of Brahms symphonies, chamber music, everything. So, I knew my Brahms completely when I was 13 or 14 years old.

[Arthur Rubinstein]

The spirit of chamber music was evident in his [Rubinstein's] whole approach, Arnold Steinhardt [violinist, Guarneri Quartet] recalled. We were a young and largely unknown quartet at the beginning of our career. Just by dint of his age and fame, he had tremendous power over us. [The members of the quartet were thirty-eight to fifty years younger than Rubinstein.] He could have run the show; he could have told us to play louder here and faster there. But the feeling was really one of true equals, and this was quite a marvelous thing. I've played with elderly musicians who have said, 'I want you to do what you feel you have to do, but I've learned my part this way.' What they're really saying is 'Follow me.' But Rubinstein was not like that in any form. [Rubinstein: A Life by Harvey Sachs]

I had the joy of making records of chamber music with the young and brilliant Guarneri Quartet. We finished, in a short time, the three piano quartets of Brahms...they came out exceptionally well and I still listen to them with great pleasure.

[Arthur Rubinstein]

Arthur Rubinstein began his collaboration with the Guarneri Quartet late in his career. RCA producer Max Wilcox was responsible for bringing the pianist and quartet together. To quote Arnold Steinhardt (violinist, Guarneri Quartet): "One day, while listening to a final edit of one of Rubinstein's recordings, Max casually asked Arthur if he might like to hear the newest recording of a gifted young quartet in the RCA stables. Rubinstein listened thoughtfully to a record of our playing. Perhaps in his next life, Max [Wilcox] will be a professional matchmaker, for Rubinstein liked us and proposed that he, a man already in his eighties, and the youthful Guarneri Quartet join forces for the Brahms Piano Quintet." This momentous "accident" led to a group of additional recordings: the three Brahms Piano Quartets (Nos. 1 and 3 included in this volume, recorded in New York, December 27-30, 1967), the Dvořák Piano Quartet, Op. 87 and Piano Quintet, Op. 81; the two Mozart Piano Quartets; the Fauré Piano Quartet No. 1 and the Schumann Piano Quintet. To quote Rubinstein biographer Harvey Sachs: "One month before his eightieth birthday, Rubinstein had found 'his' string quartet."

Brahms was a complicated man, very reserved, insecure, and extremely reluctant to reveal his inner feelings. This reluctance was clearly evident in his rigorous destruction of manuscripts and personal documents. His standards were high and he was extremely self-critical and difficult to please. He wrote and destroyed about twenty string quartets. He spent years revising and polishing compositions before publication. Brahms was always humbly conscious of being the successor to Mozart (1756-1791) and Beethoven (1770-1827). "You don't know

what it is like hearing his [Beethoven] footsteps constantly behind me. If we can't write as beautifully as Mozart and Haydn, let's at least write as purely." [Brahms]

Although the varied influences of Beethoven, Schubert (1797-1828), Mendelssohn (1809-1847), Schumann (1810-56) and Chopin (1810-49) cannot be denied, Brahms developed a most distinguishable style. He was an individualist in the genuine sense of the word. Although he was a Romantic period composer, Brahms remained faithful to the traditions of the Classical school, probably more than any other composer since Beethoven. "Brahms, it is true, was to a certain degree influenced by Schubert and Schumann, and his music is full of exuberance, but there is always the restraining hand of the classicist in him, and this is the way I understand his music." [Arthur Rubinstein] Clearly Brahms was in a class of his own.

Brahms' three Piano Quartets (Opp. 25, 26, 60) come at the end of his *Sturm und Drang* period (Storm and Stress—a movement in German letters reflected in other arts; its aim was to overcome with emotion, emphasizing an anti-rational, subjective approach to the arts) and at the beginning of his personal kind of Classicism. The fundamental principle of continuous development keeps the divisions between sections flowing, softening the thematic contrasts.

Brahms sent the manuscript of his two piano quartets, Opp. 25 and 26, to his friend and mentor Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim, anxious for his opinion. Joachim responded: "On the whole, all I can say about them is that their deeply earnest nature and the way they broaden out as they progress, especially in the transitions, have taken possession of my heart...the last three

movements of the G Minor Quartet have turned out most beautifully; the second one is so well-balanced and so full of surprising turns, the third so sincere and happily contrasted, and the last sparkling with character! The idea of the first movement is not as original as I usually expect from you, but the way you develop themes is often magnificent! Then, too, your second parts are so firmly moulded in spite of the various contrapuntal and fantastic devices." Pressed by Brahms for more criticism, Joachim added: "The first movement of the G Minor Quartet is still the one I like the least. It seems to me that in originality it is inferior to the following movements, and various irregularities in the rhythmical construction do not seem suited to its character, which would be the only justification for their presence. I wonder whether or not you have tried to fit earlier material into your great work. You can see from my genuine enthusiasm over the other movements that it isn't feeble old age which causes the fault-finding." Whether Brahms made any changes in accordance with Joachim's criticisms, we do not know. Considering Brahms' propensity for revision, I would assume, at the least, that he took Joachim's critique very seriously.

Regardless of Joachim's criticism, this imposing G Minor Quartet, composed 1855-61, is probably the most popular of the three Quartets. I think that the expansive first movement is saturated with musical inventiveness. The manuscript shows that Brahms originally intended to call the second movement a scherzo, but changed the title to Intermezzo. Why? Possibly because its air of irrational mystery and shadowy tone colors, produced by muting the violin, while the viola and cello play without mutes, exhibit little resemblance to the fast, less indulgent scherzos of Haydn and

Beethoven. The central trio (*Animato*), on which Brahms builds the coda, is brighter and more lucid, paving the way for the following slow movement.

This slow third movement, in ternary form, is dominated by a broadly expressive melody; its calm piano octaves accompany the impassioned song of the violin and cello, all combining with a viola counterpoint. It provides an eloquent model of Brahms' chamber-music style. The concluding and boisterous *Rondo alla Zingarese* (Rondo in Gypsy Style) is a sharp contrast to the preceding three movements. The instrumental writing is intense. This movement clearly focuses on the non-German folk elements that are so important in the music of Brahms.

The official premiere was in Vienna on November 16, 1862, with Brahms at the keyboard and members of the then-famous Hellmesberger Quartet. It marked Brahms' first appearance in Vienna. The Viennese public received the G Minor Piano Quartet and the handsome young Brahms very well, though professional critics showed little enthusiasm.

Brahms began work on his third Piano Quartet, in C Minor, around 1855. This was the time that Schumann, his dear friend and mentor, was suffering from severe mental illness, having survived a suicide attempt but still only a short time before his death. Understandably an emotionally difficult time, Brahms, dissatisfied with this Quartet, decided to set it aside until he could detach himself from the traumatic events surrounding its creation. When he resumed work on it about 17 years later (1873), he changed the key, revised the first movement, inserted a Scherzo between the opening movement and the *Andante*, composed a totally new fourth movement and left the third movement unaltered. This revised version

was completed in 1875, twenty years after its initial creation. The tragic character of the quartet remained the same.

The first movement is saturated with despondency. The following Scherzo is agitated, although a calm interlude serves as the Trio. The *Andante*, a favorite of Brahms, is exquisitely beautiful and deeply sentimental. The Finale exudes warmth and charm. The strings indulge in cantabile melodies while the piano is involved with rapid figurations. Hymn-like choral sections offer contrast. Throughout the movement there is a suggestion of sadness.

Once again, Brahms and members of the Hellmesberger Quartet gave the first performance in Vienna, on November 18, 1875.

At any opportunity, Rubinstein would anxiously express his special thoughts and feelings about the music of Brahms. His intimate connection with Chopin's works is legendary. However, when listening to his performances of Brahms—solo and chamber works, coupled with distinguished artists—one has no choice but to acknowledge his impressive interpretive gifts with another master's creations.

—Lynne S. Mazza

Lynne S. Mazza writes about music for a variety of publications throughout the United States