



PACIFICA

QUARTET

MENACHEM

PRESSLER

BRAHMS PIANO QUINTET / **SCHUMANN** STRING QUARTET NO. 1

CEDILLE

BRAHMS

PIANO QUINTET IN F MINOR, OP. 34 (45:01)

- 1 I. ALLEGRO NON TROPPO 16:19
- 2 II. ANDANTE, UN POCO ADAGIO 8:57
- 3 III. SCHERZO: ALLEGRO 8:13
- 4 IV. FINALE: POCO SOSTENUTO—
ALLEGRO NON TROPPO 11:20

SCHUMANN

STRING QUARTET NO. 1 IN A MINOR, OP. 41, NO. 1 (26:25)

- 5 I. INTRODUZIONE:
ANDANTE ESPRESSIVO—ALLEGRO 9:46
- 6 II. SCHERZO: PRESTO 3:59
- 7 III. ADAGIO 6:05
- 8 IV. PRESTO 6:26

TOTAL TIME: 71:39

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

BY ROBERT STRONG

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897) PIANO QUINTET IN F MINOR, OP. 34

When Brahms was twenty, his compositions attracted the attention of Joseph Joachim, one of Europe's leading violinists, who introduced him to Robert Schumann. Amazed by the quality of Brahms's compositions, Schumann extolled the younger composer in an influential music journal as "one of the elect" who would "give an ideal expression of our times." Brahms was instantly famous. Despite this, he failed to win appointment to the orchestra in his native Hamburg, where the Philharmonic directors never forgot that he came from that city's slums and, as a teenager, helped support his family by playing piano in dockside bordellos. He settled in Vienna, where he rose to prominence as the acknowledged heir to the classical Viennese masters.

Brahms came of age when the innovations of Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner, and others were radically changing the style of music composition. Brahms was torn because he viewed himself as a preserver of the great classical music tradition of Haydn and Mozart, but he was also drawn to the more powerful expression of emotion found in the new romantic music. His model was Beethoven, who blended tradition and innovation in music with

strong emotional impact. Laboring to match the great Beethoven was a burden Brahms found hard to bear. "You do not know," he wrote, "what it is like to hear [Beethoven's] footsteps constantly behind me."

Cautious and famously self-critical, Brahms worked carefully, revising frequently and (unlike Beethoven!) often seeking the opinions of others. This was especially true of the Piano Quintet Op. 34. Brahms first composed it as a string quintet with two cellos. After rehearsal, Joseph Joachim, now Brahms's close friend and advisor, told Brahms it "lacked charm." Brahms transformed the piece entirely, but he and Joachim both felt this version was too orchestral for a string quintet. Brahms re-wrote the piece as a sonata for two pianos. This time Clara Schumann, Robert Schumann's widow, intervened to suggest that the warmth of strings would be better suited to many of the work's ideas. Brahms revised the material yet again into its final form as a piano quintet. It combines virtuoso playing in the piano part with the full range of expression from a string quartet and is now considered one of the greatest chamber music masterpieces.

The dark first movement begins quietly with a brief thematic statement played in unison by the piano, cello, and first violin. This is followed by a passage of forceful running notes in the piano. Though seemingly unrelated, the running notes are a faster, rhythmically modified version of the opening statement transposed into a different key. British musicologist Ivor Keys has shown that the entire first movement is built from these

two brief statements. That Brahms could build such an epic movement from so little musical material shows his mastery of thematic variation.

The lyrical *Andante* is a serene refuge from the tumult and majestic sweep of the first movement. Clara Schumann described it as "one long melody from start to finish." Though its mood is sunny, it is mixed with tinges of melancholy.

The *Scherzo's* driving rhythm begins quietly in the cello's opening pulse under a sinister rising theme. The movement builds quickly through a syncopated passage to a full-voiced, heroic march. As in the first movement, Brahms weaves these brief early statements into an extended musical texture that is grand in scale. The *Scherzo* is propelled forward by a strong rhythmic beat. Syncopation and frequent use of half-step notes and harmonic shifts impart an agitated intensity to the music. The trio section provides some respite, but tension remains in the ceaseless syncopated undercurrent. The *Scherzo* returns, and the movement surges wildly to its strong half-step ending.

The *Finale* opens mysteriously with deeply chromatic notes rising to strong chords. The strings sob and cry out over the piano's chords in a mood of desolate sadness. After the introduction fades, the faster body of the movement continues the high drama by switching abruptly between different temperaments, some buoyant, some pleading, and some almost savage. A rushing coda leads to a false ending a hundred measures before the quintet rises passionately to its dramatic conclusion.

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)

STRING QUARTET IN A MINOR, OP. 41, NO. 1

Robert Schumann studied music and composed from a young age, but it was only at age twenty that he threw over his mother's ambition that he become a lawyer and resolved to devote himself solely to music. During intensive training to be a concert pianist, he permanently injured a finger on his right hand, perhaps with an exercise device he designed to speed his training. This made a career as a concert pianist impossible, but he was undeterred and centered his musical ambitions on composition. He wrote of his intention to go beyond the confining limits of Classical music and express himself directly to "the human heart." Music, in his view, was a universal force without boundaries. "I am affected by everything that goes on in the world — politics, literature, people... and then I long to express myself in music."

He founded a magazine called *New Journal For Music* and became the most influential critic of the age, supporting young composers of the new Romantic movement and debunking those who he felt were too limited in their musical expression. He wrote articles for the magazine using two pseudonyms, each representing one side in the cultural debate — the passionate, forward-looking Florestan, who desires artistic freedom; and the restrained, deliberate Eusebius, who follows existing rules and conventions.

He composed parts of his early piano compositions to reflect the temperaments of these two imaginary personas, most famously in *Carnaval*.

Schumann composed nothing but works for piano in his first nine years as a composer. In 1840, he composed nothing but songs, many of which were inspired by his love for the gifted pianist Clara Wieck, whom he married that year after the couple's long and acrimonious legal battle with her father. 1841 was a year of composing for orchestra. In early 1842, Schumann's diary records that he began to have "quartet thoughts." He prepared for this project between mid-March and early May by studying the music scores of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Haydn. He began composing in June with his usual manic intensity and completed the three string quartets of Op. 41 in less than five weeks. By the end of the year he had also composed the Piano Quintet, the Piano Quartet, and a piano trio.

There was a great deal of Schumann's alter ego Florestan in his own highly emotional personality. Throughout his adult life he suffered from mood swings and veered between extremes of buoyant creativity and depression. His chamber music has an impulsive, improvisational quality and is composed in sharply contrasting moods and styles that often change abruptly. This pattern (Florestan vs. Eusebius, if you will) is evident in his String Quartet in A Minor, Op. 41, No. 1.

After opening with a slow, somber contrapuntal introduction in the quartet's home key of A minor, the first movement changes to a bright song in the key of F major (the "wrong" key according to convention). A spiky, heavily accented passage in a darker mood interrupts the song repeatedly, but the contest is resolved when the song gently closes the movement.

The *Scherzo* combines energetic rhythmic galloping with music of elfin delicacy in the style of Mendelssohn, to whom the quartet is dedicated. The sighing *Intermezzo* section is an oasis of calm in contrast to the rushing *Scherzo*.

A brief passage of pensive recitative in the cello and violin opens the *Adagio* to introduce the movement's beautiful main theme. Schumann's talent for song writing is clearly heard in the tender aria. After a pause, the music becomes more agitated, still lyrical but with a dramatic edge that is no longer tender. The original song gradually re-emerges, and the cello ends the movement with a return to the opening recitative.

The final movement is high-spirited and witty. A perpetual motion series of rapid running notes drives the movement along in exciting fashion. Schumann explores the running note series in a variety of ways: upside down, as counterpoint, with gypsy inflections, expanded to orchestral proportions, and, near the movement's end, as a slow bagpipe tune over droning accompaniment. After pausing for a solemn chorale, the running notes race to the quartet's exuberant close.

PACIFICA QUARTET

Recognized for its virtuosity, exuberant performance style, and often-daring repertory choices, over the past two decades the Pacifica Quartet has gained international stature as one of the finest chamber ensembles performing today. The Quartet tours extensively throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia, performing regularly in the world's major concert halls. Named the quartet-in-residence at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music in March 2012, the Quartet was also the quartet-in-residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2009–2012) — a position that has otherwise been held only by the Guarneri String Quartet — and received the 2009 Grammy Award for Best Chamber Music Performance.

Formed in 1994, the Pacifica Quartet quickly won chamber music's top competitions, including the 1998 Naumburg Chamber Music Award. In 2002 the ensemble was honored with Chamber Music America's Cleveland Quartet Award and the appointment to Lincoln Center's CMS Two, and in 2006 was awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, becoming only the second chamber ensemble so honored in the Grant's long history. Also in 2006 the Quartet was featured on the cover of *Gramophone* and heralded as one of "five new quartets you should know about," the only American quartet to make the list. And in 2009, the Quartet was named "Ensemble of the Year" by *Musical America*.

In 2008 the Quartet released its Grammy Award-winning recording of Carter's quartets Nos. 1 and 5 on the Naxos label; the 2009 release of quartets Nos. 2, 3, and 4 completed the two-CD set. In 2013, the Quartet completed its four-volume survey of the entire Shostakovich cycle, along with other contemporary Soviet works, on Cedille Recods, garnering glowing reviews: "The playing is nothing short of phenomenal." (*Daily Telegraph*, London)

SIMIN GANATRA
VIOLIN

SIBBI BERNHARDSSON
VIOLIN

MASUMI PER ROSTAD
VIOLA

BRANDON VAMOS
CELLO

MENAHEM PRESSLER

Menahe Pressler, founding member and pianist of the Beaux Arts Trio, has established himself among the world's most distinguished and honored musicians, with a career that spans almost six decades. He continues to captivate audiences throughout the world as a performer and pedagogue, playing solo and chamber music recitals to great critical acclaim while maintaining a dedicated and robust teaching career.

Born in Magdeburg, Germany in 1923, Pressler fled Nazi Germany in 1939 and emigrated to Israel. Pressler's world renowned career was launched after he was awarded first prize at the Debussy International Piano Competition in San Francisco in 1946. This was followed by his successful American debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Maestro Eugene Ormandy. Since then, Pressler's extensive tours of North America and Europe have included performances with the orchestras of New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Dallas, San Francisco, London, Paris, Brussels, Oslo, Helsinki, and many others.

For nearly 60 years, Menahe Pressler has taught on the piano faculty at Indiana University's world-renowned Jacobs School of Music, where he currently holds the rank of Distinguished Professor of Music as the Charles Webb Chair. Equally as illustrious as his performing career, Professor Pressler has been hailed as "Master Pedagogue" and has had prize-winning students in all of the major international piano competitions, including the Queen Elizabeth, Busoni, Rubenstein, Leeds, and Van Cliburn competitions among many others.

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