

## **JOHANNES BRAHMS**

The Complete Sonatas  
for Piano and Violin

**Julian Reynolds** piano

**Johannes Leertouwer** violin



**JOHANNES BRAHMS**

The Complete Sonatas  
for Piano and Violin

**Julian Reynolds** piano

**Johannes Leertouwer** violin

**JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)**

**Violin Sonata No. 1 Op. 78 in G Major (1880)**

- |     |                             |       |
|-----|-----------------------------|-------|
| [1] | I. Allegro ma non troppo    | 10:56 |
| [2] | II. Adagio                  | 7:10  |
| [3] | III. Allegro molto moderato | 8:34  |

**Violin Sonata No. 2 Op. 100 in A Major (1887)**

- |     |                                                                      |      |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| [4] | I. Allegro amabile                                                   | 8:59 |
| [5] | II. Andante tranquillo - Vivace-Andante-Vivace di più-Andante-Vivace | 6:53 |
| [6] | III. Allegretto grazioso (quasi andante)                             | 5:53 |

**Violin Sonata No. 3 Op. 108 in D Minor**

*Seinem Freunde Hans von Bülow gewidmet (1889)*

- |      |                                      |      |
|------|--------------------------------------|------|
| [7]  | I. Allegro                           | 8:48 |
| [8]  | II. Adagio                           | 4:09 |
| [9]  | III. Un poco presto e con sentimento | 3:09 |
| [10] | IV. Presto agitato                   | 6:25 |

Total time: 71:02



We made this recording in January 2023, one week before I defended my dissertation on historically informed performance practice of Brahms's orchestral music at Leiden University and received my doctorate.

The research had offered me the opportunity to re-investigate my ideas about contemporary performance style, particularly of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century repertoire. Over the course of the 4-year project, I had rehearsed, performed, and recorded the Brahms symphonies and concertos as a conductor. My dissertation, recordings, and films about the project can be found on my website: [Brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl](http://Brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl).

After so much reading, writing, and conducting, I found that I longed for the experience of applying what I had discovered as a violinist to find out how it had changed my approach to Brahms's chamber music. I called Julian Reynolds and asked if he would be willing to experiment with my findings. We had studied the Brahms violin sonatas together with Josef Suk in Vienna and Prague many years ago and we had recorded the complete Beethoven, Schubert, and Schumann sonatas on period instruments for Klaas Posthuma and his unique label Globe when we were much younger. We might also have recorded Brahms at the time, but sadly and far too young Klaas passed away and Brahms remained our missing link.

Our careers took us in different directions, but we always performed as a duo, not so much as a career, but as a way of maintaining our friendship. We found a beautiful Blüthner grand piano of 1857 in the atelier of Andriessen pianos in Haarlem. Andriessen graciously allowed us to use this instrument and when we

started playing together, we soon found that our approach was different; our experiences had moved us to a new way of working.

I hesitate to write about what exactly is different. After all the proof of the pudding is in the eating. If our performances do not convince you, the listener, there is little point in me talking or writing about it. On the other hand, I feel that there is a good story to tell about changing approaches to performance and artistic priorities.

Historical research can not only be used to challenge the foundations of what some might call proper performance, it can also be used to pave the way for alternative ways to perform the music of the past. Ideas about performance are constantly changing, and it is arguably this process of change that keeps our relationship with the music of the past alive.

Our recording represents our desire to find the freedom to apply the 19<sup>th</sup>-century expressive tools of flexibility of rhythm and tempo, of expressive legato, portamento and vibrato that have been largely forgotten or perhaps discarded over the course of last century. These tools cannot simply be dusted off and re-implemented. As I argued in my dissertation, working with them requires re-inventing them. Portamento for example was a hotly debated subject throughout the 19th century. There is no single model or example of how to apply it today. The same can be said about vibrato. What we can say with certainty is that in the important German violin methods of Louis Spohr and later Joseph Joachim and Andreas Moser, portamento was named as the first and most important means of expression for string players, and vibrato

was described as an ornament. When it comes to flexibility of tempo, we can be sure that the 19th-century concept of tempo was more flexible, and that modifications of tempo were much more frequent than in more modern times, when music making has been increasingly influenced by recordings and exact measurements. We know that Brahms had a particularly free and flexible way of performing his own music. Conductor Max Fiedler, for example, writes in his memoirs that Brahms played a kind of rubato that one could not write down. And pianist Fanny Davies wrote that when Brahms played a hairpin (<>), it was as if he was lost in the moment of beauty and could not tear himself away from it. Brahms himself famously refused to give metronome markings, writing to his friend, tenor and conductor Georg Henschel, that he could not find a meaningful relationship between his flesh and blood and such a mechanical instrument, a feeling perhaps inherited from Beethoven. He also wrote that any “sane musician” would take a different tempo every week.

These and many more are the anecdotes and pieces of historical evidence we have kept in mind when we played this wonderful music. In our efforts we have been guided by other more conceptual historical information too. In his violin method of 1843, Spohr writes about the concept of ‘correct’ versus ‘beautiful’ performance. In correct performance the notes are reproduced carefully, in beautiful performance the performers ‘bring something of their own’ to the performance, which allows the listener to experience the emotions embedded in the score. This idea combined with the harsh words of Joachim and Moser in their method, where they argue that performers who limit themselves to what is printed on the page, by so doing, demonstrate their lack of understanding of the ‘German style’, has encouraged us to not hold back. The tone of the

straight-strung rather than cross-strung Blüthner we have worked with also opened expressive opportunities with its unapologetic directness of tone and sound. Throughout his creative career Brahms was witness to a rapid and ruthless competitive development of piano building, and speculation about him having a favoured type of instrument or maker goes against the rich documentary evidence of the choices he made, or instruments accepted for performance or even in rehearsal contexts. His fame was a commercial magnet to the most innovative and successful instrument makers and he took full advantage of their desire to provide instruments suitable for concertos or recitals. He was successful and wealthy enough to have had the pick of any piano he wished. However, one can justifiably speculate that at least for the chamber works his work instrument at home, a straight strung Viennese J. B. Streicher for which he clearly had great affection, provides a tonal sound template for his unique transparency of melodic, contrapuntal and harmonic writing. Our Blüthner shares many characteristics with this instrument, in touch and clarity of sonority.

Although we hope our playing has a clear and demonstrable connection with historical sources, we have no illusion or pretence that our recording might represent any kind of historical truth or authenticity. Our way of handling flexibility of tempo and sound is nothing more and nothing less than our personal and essentially 21st-century way of using historical information as a source of inspiration in performance, and next week it might be different again.

Johannes Leertouwer



**Johannes Leertouwer** is a violinist, conductor, researcher and pedagogue.

Asked which of these activities he prefers, he answers: "For me they are all intricately connected. You might say that I play and conduct in an investigative way, and I teach and conduct my research in a playful manner.

Johannes studied the violin with Bouw Lemkes in Amsterdam and Josef Suk in Vienna and Prague. He was concertmaster of a number of top-ranking period instrument orchestras and ensembles. His discography includes the complete works of Beethoven for

piano and violin (with Julian Reynolds, Globe records) and the complete works for violin and orchestra of Mozart (with his own Ensemble La Borea, Challenge records). Currently he is the first violin of the Narratio quartet which specialises in Beethoven string quartets. Johannes plays a violin made by the brothers Amati (Antonio & Hieronymus) in Cremona, 1619.

Conducting came as a natural consequence of his activities as an ensemble coach and concertmaster. He took conducting lessons with David Porcelijn

and Jorma Panula, and guest-conducted with a number of orchestras in the Netherlands, Europe and Japan before assuming the post of artistic director and chief-conductor with De Nieuwe Philharmonie Utrecht in 2009. Many of the productions with this period instrument orchestra, ranging from Bach's Matthew Passion and Händel's Messiah to Beethoven and Brahms symphonies and contemporary compositions, have received high praise from critics and public alike.

In January 2003, Johannes obtained a doctorate at Leiden University for his research on historical performance practice of Brahms's orchestral repertoire. Over the course of his research project, he recorded the complete Brahms concertos and symphonies with a special project orchestra. He shares his research on a special website: [brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl](http://brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl).

Johannes is a professor of Historically Informed Performance Practice at Seoul National University in South-Korea. At the Conservatory of Amsterdam, where he has been teaching since more than 35 years, he is now a guest teacher, coach, and conductor for the romantic style.



**Julian Reynolds** is a conductor, pianist, and composer. He studied in London with Albert Ferber and Noretta Conci and in Vienna with Hans Kann. He has a degree in History, Musicology and Analysis from Kings College London University, and conducting from the Guildhall School of Music. He was a finalist in the Busoni Competition. For six years, from age 18, he was pianist with the European Community Youth Orchestra, assisting many of the conductors including Claudio Abbado and Leonard Bernstein. As director of the European Chamber Orchestra Per Musica, founded with Johannes Leertouwer, he toured Europe including the Pesaro Rossini Festival,

the Evian Festival, and recorded extensively with the ensemble (Etcetera and Globe Records).

Appointed Assistant to the Music Director at the Netherlands National Opera in 1986, he conducted or directed from the keyboard numerous performances, and was also Guest Conductor in St. Gallen. He has appeared in major opera houses including Teatro Regio di Parma, San Carlo Napoli, Toronto, the Bolshoi (*La Sonnambula*), Mariinsky St. Petersburg (*Traviata*, *Don Carlo*, *Le Nozze di*

*Figaro*) and the Festivals of Wexford (Weinberger's *Svanda dudák*, CD Naxos), Melbourne, Verona Arena (*Carmen*), Puccini (*Madama Butterfly*) and the Rossini Opera Festival Pesaro. He directed new productions of Rossini (*Elisabetta Regina d'Inghilterra*) Donizetti (*Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Lucrezia Borgia*) Bellini (*Norma*) Verdi (*Nabucco*) for Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie Brussels and Mozart (*Don Giovanni*) Puccini (*La Bohème*) in Riga. As both pianist and conductor he performed and toured with Dame Kiri te Kanawa and the late Dimitri Hvorostovsky. His extensive discography includes DVD's of Bellini's *Norma* (Amsterdam), Puccini's *Trittico* (Modena), two highly acclaimed opera albums with Silvia Tro Santafé (Signum) and works for Piano and Violin with duo partner Johannes Leertouwer. His orchestrations include songs by Alma Mahler recorded by Charlotte Margiono (Globe) also performed in Freiburg, Hamburg Staatsoper and Boston Lyric Opera.

This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is a realistic and holographic 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most older music this means a frontal representation of the musical performance, but such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some older compositions, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices over the full 360 degrees sound scape, and in these cases the recording is as realistic as possible, within the limits of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard. This requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of completely matched, full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels. A complementary sub-woofer, for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to maximally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic & Musikelectronic Geithain monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.



**NORTHSTAR**  
**RECORDING**  
by **BERT VAN DER WOLF**



[www.northstarconsult.nl](http://www.northstarconsult.nl)

**This production is also available as High Resolution digital download  
at [www.spiritofturtle.com](http://www.spiritofturtle.com)**

The work was supported by the New Faculty Startup Fund  
from Seoul National University

Executive producer: Bert van der Wolf - Oude Avenhuis  
Recorded at Evangelisch Lutherse Kerk, Haarlem The Netherlands  
Recording dates: 5-7 January 2023  
Recording: Northstar Recording Services BV  
Producer, engineer, editing & mastering: Bert van der Wolf - Oude Avenhuis  
Recording assistant: Martijn van der Wolf  
A&R Challenge Classics by Marcel Landman, Valentine Laout & Mario Morese  
Liner notes: Johannes Leertouwer  
Cover illustration: Dr. Otto Böhler's Schattenbilder  
Photo page 5: Martijn van der Wolf  
Photo Johannes Leertouwer: garn.nl  
Photo Julian Reynolds: Charles Hart  
Product coordination & booklet editing: Boudewijn Hagemans  
Graphic design: Natasja Wallenburg & Juan Carlos Villarroel

**[www.challengerecords.com](http://www.challengerecords.com) / [www.johannesleertouwer.nl](http://www.johannesleertouwer.nl)**



