

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Sonata in A major, Op. 100 (22:30)

- 1** I Allegro amabile (8:46)
- 2** II Andate tranquillo - Vivace (7:36)
- 3** III Allegretto grazioso (Quasi andante) (6:08)

Serge Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 80 (29:02)

- 4** I Andante assai (6:57)
- 5** II Allegro brusco (6:55)
- 6** III Andante (7:45)
- 7** IV Allegro molto - Poco più tranquillo (7:25)

Johannes Brahms

- 8** *Sonata* (5:31)

Berl Senofsky, violin
Gary Graffman, piano

Recorded in concert at the Library of Congress on March 14, 1975.

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When violinist Berl Senofsky and pianist Gary Graffman played at the Library of Congress on March 14, 1975, they brought to the stage a shared personal and professional relationship of more than twenty years. Their musical partnership was built on mutual respect, similar ideals, a palpable synergy in their music making, and a common heritage that stretched back to pre-revolutionary Russia.

Senofsky and Graffman first met in 1952 at the famed Marlboro Music School in Vermont, both having been selected for an intensive summer of study and performances by Rudolf Serkin. In his immensely readable autobiography, *I Really Should Be Practicing*, Graffman recalled their time together:

Surprised though I was by the amount of accomplishment expected of me in such a short time, I rallied with tremendous enthusiasm when I began to work with the violinist and cellist to whom I had been assigned, Senofsky and Shirley Trepel ...I had known them casually; as soon as we started to play together, however, we became inseparable. Although at Marlboro it was customary to change chamber music partners regularly, as in a square dance, we insisted on playing exclusively with each other for the two summers we spent there...

Shortly after that halcyon time together, both Senofsky and Graffman's solo careers took off, leaving little time to perform with one another in public. They did reunite in the early '60s for a remarkable recording of the Debussy and Fauré Sonatas for RCA. *American Record Guide* praised the "uncannily unified and aware playing of these supremely gifted musicians" and said that they were "a team which RCA should exploit for all it's worth." Senofsky and Graffman made one more recording for RCA in 1965: this time, a trio disc (with Shirley Trepel) of the Brahms C Major and Beethoven's "Kakadu" Variations.

Senofsky and Graffman teamed up once again for a series of mid-'70s concerts that culminated in this performance at the Library of Congress. It was to be the last time they would perform together. Senofsky retired to a quiet life of teaching and coaching chamber music at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, and Graffman suffered a hand injury in 1979, ending his performances of piano music for two hands. More than a quarter century later, upon hearing the tape of this recital, Graffman wrote, "It reminded me once again of what a pleasure it was to make music with Berl, and what a wonderful violinist he was."

Berl Senofsky was born in Philadelphia in 1925. His father, a Russian émigré, was also a violinist, having studied with Leopold Auer, the teacher of Jascha Heifetz, Mischa Elman, and Efrem Zimbalist, among many others. Thus, from the beginning, Senofsky's training was grounded in the grand romantic tradition. At the age of six, he

began his studies with Louis Persinger and, at thirteen, began ten years of study with Ivan Galamian at The Juilliard School of Music. After military service in the army during World War II, Senofsky resumed his career and in 1946, won the coveted Walter Naumburg Award. Shortly thereafter he made his Carnegie Hall debut. For five seasons, from 1950 until 1955, Senofsky was the Assistant Concertmaster of the Cleveland Orchestra under George Szell (Josef Gingold was Concertmaster during this period). Dissatisfied with the life of an orchestral musician, Senofsky then decided to move to Europe and, on a lark, entered the Queen Elisabeth of Belgium Concours.



Berl Senofsky with
Queen Elisabeth of Belgium

Until 1955, the Queen Elisabeth Competition had been won only by Russians (David Oistrakh and Leonid Kogan), and Russians dominated the field of finalists that year once again. To his great surprise, Senofsky won the gold medal, the unanimous choice of a distinguished panel of jurors, including David Oistrakh, Yehudi Menuhin, and Zino Francescatti. To date, he is the only American violinist to have achieved this honor. Thus began a meteoric solo career that eventually included tours of Europe, Asia, Russia, North and South America, Australia, and Africa, and performances with most of the major orchestras of the United States and Europe. During this period, Senofsky was chosen by Sir William Walton to perform his Violin Concerto, under the composer's baton, in an extended tour

of Australia and New Zealand.

For a number of years, Senofsky was in much demand and received glowing reviews. In 1965, after a performance of the Prokofiev Second Concerto with the American Symphony Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski, a feature piece in *Newsweek* magazine hailed Senofsky as "an American musical hero of Bunyanesque proportions, a household name among music lovers in Europe, Australia and South America... He made his extraordinary technique seem like child's play and drew songs of an unfamiliar beauty from his instrument." Despite the early successes and accolades, Senofsky's career never really developed in the manner expected of a Queen Elisabeth gold medalist. Why some careers blossom and others do not is a complex and intriguing subject. Many years later, when it was clear that even winning the Queen Elisabeth was not a guarantee of success, *The Winners*, a 1997 Dutch film, profiled Senofsky and three other Queen Elisabeth laureates, exploring the impact of this prize on their lives and careers.

In later years Senofsky found satisfaction in other musical activities. He established a chamber music series in Baltimore and began a foundation to support American artists who were entering international music competitions. He was appointed to a teaching position at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in 1965, where he taught violin and chamber music until 1996. A number of Senofsky's violin students went on to become international prizewinners. Berl Senofsky is one of only two Americans to have received the decoration

"Officer of the Order of Leopold," Belgium's highest honor.

Gary Graffman, called "one of the great living pianists" by *Newsweek*, was born in New York in 1928. His parents had come to America from the same corner of Russia as had the Senofskys. Vladimir Graffman, his father, was a prominent violinist, and was in Leopold Auer's violin class at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. One of Vladimir's schoolmates there was Sergei Prokofiev. Young Gary, however, was interested in playing the piano and, at the tender age of seven, was taken to play for the formidable Isabelle Vengerova who taught in New York and at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. This grande dame of the piano, who had taught Gary's aunt in Russia and whose later pupils would include Leonard Bernstein, is tellingly described by Graffman in his memoirs: "Although not very tall, she was extremely wide, and she sailed around her studio like an overstuffed battleship in search of the enemy, cannon loaded and ready to fire." Graffman studied with her for ten years and then, later, with both Vladimir Horowitz and Rudolf Serkin.



In 1949, Graffman's career was officially launched when he won the prestigious Leventritt Award. For the next three decades, he toured almost continuously.

During the height of his career, Graffman made a series of highly regarded recordings for Columbia and RCA, including concertos by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, Brahms, Chopin, and Beethoven. These recordings were made with the orchestras of New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Chicago, and Boston, under the direction of Leonard Bernstein, Zubin Mehta, Eugene Ormandy, and George Szell. Graffman's recording of the Prokofiev Concerto No. 3 with Szell is considered by many to be definitive.

Because of an injury to his right hand in 1979, Graffman's performances have been limited to the repertoire for left hand alone, including works for piano and orchestra by Ravel, Prokofiev, Britten, Richard Strauss, Franz Schmidt and Erich Korngold. In more recent years he has played world premieres including Ned Rorem's Piano Concerto No. 4 for left hand, dedicated to Graffman, and William Bolcom's "Gaea" Concerto for Piano and Two Left Hands, with friend and colleague Leon Fleisher.

Graffman joined the piano faculty of the Curtis Institute in 1980, and became its Director in 1986, fifty years after he began his studies there with Vengerova. In 1995, he was named President of the Institute. In addition to his musical activities, Gary Graffman wrote a highly praised memoir, *I Really Should Be Practicing*, subtitled, "Reflections on the Pleasures and Perils of Playing the Piano in Public."

He has also written a number of articles on non-musical subjects and has pursued a scholarly interest in Asian Art and photography. His awards include honorary doctorates from the University of Pennsylvania and The Juilliard School, New York's Handel Medallion, and inclusion in Philadelphia's Walk of Fame.

The recital at the Library of Congress preserved on this disc is an ideal showcase for the Senofsky/Graffman duo. Both performers had played Brahms throughout their careers, and both were known as Prokofiev exponents of the first rank. The performances on this disc reveal a great range of expression, variety of tonal color, and compelling identification with these composers. Senofsky and Graffman command an innate comprehension of large-scale musical structure, while at the same time attending to minute expressive details. These were the hallmarks of their extraordinary collaboration.

—Notes by Noel Lester

*with thanks to Berl Senofsky,
Beatrice Senofsky Enson,
Gary and Naomi Graffman,
Vera Bruestle and Elaine Fine*

**Right: Berl Senofsky with
his son, Greg**



Selected Recordings

Berl Senofsky

The Art of the Violin, Vol. I, Concert Favorites. (Cembal d'Amour)

The Art of the Violin, Vol. II Sonatas by Fauré, Debussy
Prokofiev; *Suite Italienne*, Stravinsky. (Cembal d'Amour)

Queen Elisabeth Competition 1951-2001 (This anthology, produced by
the Queen Elisabeth Competition, includes Senofsky's 1955
performance of the Debussy Sonata)

Gary Graffman

Rachmaninoff: *Concerto No. 2, Rhapsody*
The New York Philharmonic Orchestra
Leonard Bernstein, conductor (Sony)

Prokofiev: *Concertos No. 1 and No. 3*
Cleveland Symphony Orchestra
George Szell, conductor (Sony)

Ned Rorem: *Piano Concerto for Left-Hand and Orchestra*
Curtis Institute of Music Symphony Orchestra
Andre Previn, conductor (New World Records)

Producers: Becky and David Starobin (Bridge Records)
Anne McLean (Music Division, Library of Congress)

Associate Producer: Robert Starobin

Mastering Engineer: Adam Abeshouse

Transfers: The Magnetic Recording Laboratory, The Library of Congress

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Photos of Gary Graffman courtesy of International Piano Archives,
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Photos of Berl Senofsky courtesy of Mr. Senofsky and Dr. Beatrice Senofsky-Enson

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