



Johannes Brahms

(1833-1897)

The Sonatas for Violin and Piano

Curtis Macomber, violin

Derek Han, piano

Sonata in A Major, Op. 100 (19:26)

- ① I. Allegro amabile (8:01)
- ② II. Andante tranquillo; Vivace (6:10)
- ③ III. Allegretto grazioso (quasi andante) (5:04)

Sonata in D Minor, Op. 108 (20:18)

- ④ I. Allegro (7:45)
- ⑤ II. Adagio (4:05)
- ⑥ III. Un poco presto e con sentimento (2:55)
- ⑦ IV. Presto agitato (5:18)

Sonata in G Major, Op. 78 (26:21)

- ⑧ I. Vivace ma non troppo (10:27)
- ⑨ II. Adagio (7:25)
- ⑩ III. Allegro molto moderato (8:19)

The music of Johannes Brahms has always affected me in an unusually profound, intimate way: the shape of the melodic lines, the rightness of the harmonic progressions, the eloquence of expression and nobility of purpose. Grandeur and conviction coexist and alternate with great tenderness, nostalgia, and longing.

I remember with fondness various attachments with so many of Brahms's chamber works when I was first introduced to them as a student. These obsessions were characterized by the inability to (and lack of desire to) get the particular work out of one's head and the exhilaration of finding in Brahms someone who finally understood one's most personal, essential feelings. There was (and is) a powerful identification with what this music expresses. As I grow older, Brahms's chamber works with violin, all of which I have studied and performed for several decades, speak to me ever more meaningfully and deeply.

Brahms challenges us performers to interpret his works in the honest, forthright manner in which they were created. It is often noted that Brahms is either a classical romanticist or a romantic classicist. Finding that threshold where clarity of architecture and depth of expression are in perfect balance leaves no room for the spurious gesture or the unconsidered phrase. It is gratifying to return to these works so rich in material for investigation and experimentation.

The three sonatas for violin and piano on this disc were written in less than a decade, from 1879 to 1888, yet their individual

characters are markedly distinct from one another. The A Major (Op. 100) opens with a marking of *Allegro amabile* ('lovingly'), an apt description for so much of this work. Openhearted warmth and songfulness pervade the first movement. (Many writers have observed that the first theme shares its opening pitches with those of the Prize Song from Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*.) Sharp contrast is provided by forceful violin octaves supported by granitic piano chords. The middle movement alternates three stately *arioso* sections (of varying intensity and destination) with two swirling, rustic dance sections. The sonata's finale opens with a noble, valedictory theme which exploits the rich vocal quality of the violin's G string. The optimism which characterizes this sonata (and decidedly not the other two) carries right through to its final jubilant measures.

The D Minor Sonata, begun the same year and a mere eight opus numbers later, could hardly provide more contrast. One finds here, notably in its outer movements, seething, smoldering utterances, gestures on a much grander symphonic scale than the earlier sonatas, and a range of dynamic expression and affect hugely amplified. From the troubled uncertainty of the opening theme comes an eruption of rage, almost violence. Even the more lyrical second subject is disturbed by offbeat accents. Remarkably, the ensuing development section is supported entirely by an A pedal. There is no consolation here; the movement ends without resolution of its crises. Indeed, the D major of the final measures is tainted with B-flats. An Adagio continues in D Major with a full-throated theme on the violin's lowest string over piano chords

of similar depth. Next we have a short, slightly off kilter dance serving as an intermezzo before we are again thrown into the raging seas of the Finale, a frenetic, breathless surge relieved only for very brief periods.

Brahms's Op. 78 Sonata shares many of the vocal qualities of the Op. 100, yet it is suffused with melancholy throughout. The lilting pickup figure at the outset takes on many expressive functions during the course of this leisurely paced first movement, the most extended of all of these sonata movements. The piano introduces the pensive, weighty Adagio, with the violin taking on a more introspective role; a dotted rhythm in the second theme is reminiscent of the first movement motive. The Finale yet again brings back this upbeat figure, but we are now in a G minor filled with wistfulness and anguish. Midway through the movement the music modulates suddenly to the E-flat major of the Adagio in what seems at first to be a restatement of that movement's double-stopped theme; however, these six notes are now used to launch some of the most impassioned and ecstatic measures in the piece. Later, at the movement's closing section, the same six notes (now in G Major) will usher in a very different context, one of peroration and resignation, a poignant farewell.

Curtis Macomber
February, 2008



The playing of violinist **Curtis Macomber** has been praised recently by *Fanfare Magazine* as "remarkable for its depth of feeling as well as for technical excellence."

Mr. Macomber has for many years been recognized as a leading advocate of the music of our time. He has performed in hundreds of premieres, commissions, and first recordings of solo violin and chamber works by, among others, Carter, Davidovsky, Perle, Wuorinen, and Mackey.

As first violinist of the award-winning New World String Quartet Mr. Macomber performed the standard repertoire as well as numerous contemporary works in performances throughout the United States and Europe.

A founding member of the Apollo Piano Trio, a member of the 20th-Century music ensemble Speculum Musicae since 1991, and a member of the Da Capo Chamber Players, Mr. Macomber has also appeared with the New York New Music Ensemble, Group for Contemporary Music, Sea Cliff Chamber Players, and in chamber music series across the country and in Europe. He is a regular participant at La Musica in Sarasota and at the Monadnock Music Festival. He has recorded for Nonesuch, Koch, Bridge, Arabesque, Naxos, and Musical Heritage.

Mr. Macomber is a member of the chamber music faculty of the Juilliard School and the violin faculty of the Manhattan School of Music, and has also taught at the Tanglewood Music Center, Taos School of Music and Yellow Barn Music School. He holds his B.M., M.M., and D.M.A. degrees from the Juilliard School, where he was a scholarship student of Joseph Fuchs and winner of the Morris Loeb and Walter Naumburg Prizes.



Born in the United States of Chinese parents, pianist **Derek Han's** elegant, polished and compelling playing has dazzled audiences across five continents. Having graduated at the age of 18 from the Juilliard School in New York where he studied with Ilona Kabos, and after further studies with Gina Bachauer, Lili Kraus and Guido Agosti, Derek Han launched his international career by winning First Prize and the Gold Medal at the Athens International Piano Competition in 1977 with early engagements as soloist with the Sofia Radio Orchestra and numerous performances at the Marlboro Music Festival at the invitation of Rudolf Serkin.

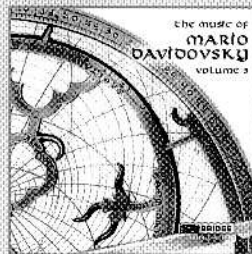
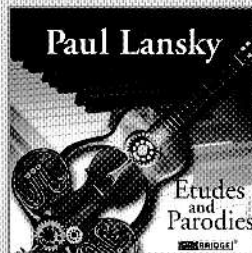
Past seasons have included major tours of the United States and United Kingdom with the Berliner Symphoniker, tours in the U.K. with the Bolshoi Symphony Orchestra and Netherlands Symphony as well as European tours with the Moscow Philharmonic and Buenos Aires Philharmonic. In 1996 Derek Han toured South Africa with the Sinfonia Varsovia under Lord Menuhin in a series of concerts celebrating Lord Menuhin's 80th birthday. Derek Han has also toured South America with the Residentie Orchestra and made European tours with Philharmonie der Nationen, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Budapest Symphony Orchestra.

A prolific recording artist, Derek Han's discography includes the complete piano concerti of Haydn and Mozart with the English Chamber Orchestra and the Philharmonia Orchestra respectively. He has also recorded Beethoven's complete piano concerti live at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw with the Berliner Symphoniker, both Mendelssohn piano concerti with the Israel Chamber Orchestra, and both Edward MacDowell piano concerti with the Chicago Sinfonietta. In addition, he has recorded piano concerti by Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov and Shostakovich, together with the complete Mozart Violin Sonatas, with Joseph Silverstein, and other chamber music works. His latest releases are the Chopin concerti and Rachmaninoff Concertos 1 and 2 with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Derek Han is currently Associate Artistic Director of the La Musica International Chamber Music Festival at Sarasota, USA.

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