

WEISS-KAPLAN-NEWMAN-TRIO

Yael Weiss, piano
Mark Kaplan, violin
Clancy Newman, violoncello

Piano Trio No. 1 in B Major, Op. 8 (37:04) Johannes Brahms

1. I Allegro con brio (15:04) (1833-1897)
2. II Scherzo: Allegro molto (6:32)
3. III Adagio (9:04)
4. IV Allegro (6:24)

Piano Trio in G Minor, Op. 15 (28:32) Bedřich Smetana

5. I Moderato assai (10:52) (1824-1884)
6. II Allegro, ma non agitato (8:36)
7. III Finale: Presto (9:04)



A few months after we made this recording, the three of us taped a discussion about these two great trios. The following are traditional informative notes, followed by excerpts taken from that conversation.

Yael, Mark, and Clancy

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was but a young man in 1854 when he was working on his Piano Trio in B Major. He completed the work shortly after hearing of his friend and mentor Robert Schumann's suicide attempt. Brahms did not have the chance to share this new work with Schumann as he did so many of his early works, but he did play it for Clara Schumann, who arranged for its first publication that same year. Decades later in 1889, as a mature artist at the height of his powers, Brahms substantially rewrote the work, even though he himself commented on the later version: "I did not slap on a wig, but only trimmed and combed its hair." In fact, a third of the first movement was taken out and entirely new second subjects for the first, third and fourth movements were introduced, among many other changes. While composers not infrequently make revisions to already-published works, rewriting on such a large scale by a composer of Brahms's stature is highly unusual. We have recorded the revised version, the one most often performed on the concert stage.

Yael: Have either of you ever performed the earlier version of the Brahms? I've actually only read through it.

Clancy: I did just once.

Yael: Really? What did you think?

Clancy: Well, as a composer myself, it was definitely a relief to find that one of the "great" composers - Brahms - was in fact human... and was capable of writing something quite flawed: the earlier version. I mean, how often do we get such an opportunity? Imagine if there existed an earlier version of the David... where Michelangelo didn't get the proportions right!

Yael: Obviously there are good reasons why the first version of the trio is so rarely performed today.

Clancy: Definitely. The first movement rambles on and on. There's a fugue in it that just doesn't make sense structurally. And the third movement is missing the middle section that's my favorite part of the whole piece...

Mark: The part that begins with the big cello solo?

Clancy: Okay, so I'm a little biased... but nonetheless, I do think that the earlier

version has a lot of loose ends, whereas in the later version each movement is a complete idea, beautifully presented.

Mark: But even in the first version, we're talking about something that has already passed a lot of internal tests, because here's a guy who burned a lot of stuff he didn't like.

Clancy: That's true. Even though it seems clear to most people today that the revised version is a lot better, it seems like Brahms wasn't so sure. He authorized both versions to remain in print simultaneously.

Mark: Perhaps he had a special closeness to this early work.

Yael: It probably served as a sort of calling card for him when he was a young artist. And it was his first piece to be heard in America... so there must have been something really likeable about the earlier version.

Clancy: The last movement has a beautiful melody - I think he may have borrowed it from Beethoven - which he replaced with that loud, rollicking theme with the unflattering syncopated accompaniment. I think I read somewhere that Clara Schumann wasn't thrilled with the change.

Yael: Maybe she had formed an attach-

ment to that melody, since she would have heard it so many times early on in their relationship.

Mark: However, she did complain about Brahms's reading of the earlier version! She couldn't get used to his constant changes of tempo and said that it was difficult for his colleagues to follow him...

Yael: Yes, that sounds familiar... Actually, it reminds me of an article I read recently with an account of Brahms's performance style. The pianist Fanny Davies, a student of Clara's, heard him play the revised version in London and then ran home to write into her score everything he did: tempos, dynamics, etc....

Clancy: She sounds like a character in her own right!

Yael: Could be... One major thing she noted was how he took completely different tempos for different places, even though it wasn't indicated in the score... for instance, the place where the triplets begin before the second theme of the first movement was twenty metronome marks faster than the opening.

Clancy: That's a big difference!

Yael: I don't know if our recording has a

wide enough range of tempos to say that we were emulating this... but still we hope that kind of freedom is coming across in our performance.

Mark: Not easy to achieve when you're surrounded by microphones in an empty hall!

Yael: Also not easy to achieve is the sense of spaciousness and stillness in the third movement. I think of this movement as the very heart of the piece. And it was a challenge to realize its expansiveness in the context of a recording session.

Mark: All these issues of freedom, range of tempos, even expansiveness, are connected with the question of how we manipulate time. Our whole sense of rubato today is entirely based on making certain things slower, and I think that back in Brahms's time rubato also meant making some parts faster. Today this tends to be frowned upon as "rushing".

Yael: Well, we do it!

Mark: We do a little...

Clancy: *Someone's* got to make up for all the time that's been taken in the last hundred years!

Around the same time that Brahms completed his original B Major Trio, Bedřich Smetana (1824-1884) wrote his only Piano Trio. These trios were the first major chamber music works for both composers. Conceived and composed quite quickly in 1855, Smetana's trio was written "in remembrance of our first child, Bedřiška, who carried us away with her extraordinary talent for music, and who was soon snatched from us by inexorable death - she was but 4 and a half years old." Smetana's chamber music output is very limited compared with that of Brahms, and yet his works in that genre - the piano trio and the two string quartets - are extraordinary and highly original masterpieces.

Mark: Now, we all know that this trio was born in the wake of Bedřiška's death, but it's a question... would you regard it as a programmatic piece of music? Is it telling a story... perhaps of remembrance?

Clancy: I'm not sure. I have a tendency to approach music *as* music. I mean, anything could be perceived as being programmatic, I guess...

Mark: Although if a composer writes a piece called "From My Life" - the title of Smetana's string quartet - then obviously it's about that... And here we have the funeral march in the last movement and the dedication to his daughter.

Yael: I do think there are a lot of programmatic things here, certainly in *his* mind while he was writing it. For me it goes beyond specific references: The work stops and starts a lot - it's sectional, structurally unconventional - and the materials are so different from each other that there seems to be a level of logic behind the piece that's beyond analysis.

Mark: However, within the scope of analysis there are other more specific references to death in the music. For example, there's the descending chromatic scale from D to G - used often in the Baroque period to signify death and grief - that appears in all three movements, starting in the opening violin solo.

Clancy: I noticed it there and throughout the second movement... but where is it in the last?

Mark: In the first four measures, in the violin part... And another death reference: the beginning of the last movement is, arguably at least, a tarantella, which has its own significance relating to death.

Clancy: Anything to do with tarantulas?

Mark: Well, the tarantella is really just a dance from Taranto, in Italy - but the popular superstition is that if you're bitten by a tarantula, you have to dance around in a frenzy in order to stay alive!

Yael: The last movement is interesting for another reason as well... it is actually a revised and expanded version of the final movement from his g minor Piano Sonata, which he wrote a decade earlier. He actually showed that sonata to Clara and Robert Schumann who did not like it at all! It sounded to them very much in the style of Berlioz and Liszt.

Mark: And a decade later, when Smetana and two of his friends played the finished trio for Liszt, he was full of praise!

Yael: I imagine Liszt loved the Chopin-like figurations everywhere and also the contrasts of explosive material with very introspective slow music throughout.

Mark: Yes, and yet it's interesting that the Smetana doesn't have an actual slow movement at all..

Yael: And you might expect a lot of slow music in a tribute to somebody who just died. In fact we do have a lot of slow music...

Clancy: It's just integrated into the rest.

Yael: Yes. The last movement is the most extreme. Even though it begins like a perpetual mobile, it stops and starts. And those spaces between sections are really startling, I think.

Mark: Especially before the second slow section, where it builds to such a climax that you might think it's going to be the end of the piece.

Clancy: Maybe there's something about grief that's got these almost schizophrenic emotions: rage, and tenderness...

Yael: And also the interruptions - that somehow the feelings don't seem to completely express themselves. They're there, but then suddenly: Wow, there's another one! All at the same time - and we move from one to another without any sense of completion.

Clancy: Although, *if* it is telling a story, it seems like by the end Smetana has come to some sort of terms with his grief...

Mark: You mean with the change to major at the beginning of the coda?

Clancy: Yes. After the funeral march decays into that low rumble, suddenly out of nowhere an ascending scale brings Bedřicha out of the coffin and into heaven...

Yael: Wait a second, aren't you the one who wants to hear music as just music?! And here you are going on about heaven! In any case, the bliss is interrupted just before the end by a return to the brooding character of the opening.

Clancy: Although it does end in major...

Mark: Yes, but the audience doesn't actually know that for sure until the very final note!

WEISS-KAPLAN-NEWMAN TRIO

Yael Weiss, Piano

Mark Kaplan, Violin

Clancy Newman, Cello

Combining the talents of three award-winning soloists, the *Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio* brings to each performance its distinctive fusion of authority and experience, energy, and passion. These three musicians comprise an ensemble that embraces the music of the future while offering fresh insights into three centuries of masterworks. Hailed by The New York Times as "Three strong voices, locked in sequence," the *Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio* was founded in 2001 (originally as Sequenza Trio, with Colin Carr), and has presented concerts throughout the US, Europe and the Middle East, with multiple appearances at The Kennedy Center, Wigmore Hall, Baltimore's Shriver Hall, Princeton, UCLA, Indiana and Oxford Universities, Tel-Aviv Museum, and for the Chamber Music Societies of Edinburgh, Santander, Pasadena, Phoenix, Cincinnati, Salt Lake City and Tucson, among others. A performance of Beethoven's Triple Concerto at the Prague Festival was praised for its "rare timbral refinement, nobility and virtuosic brilliance... among the brightest moments of this year's Festival" (*Lidove noviny*, Prague). Other international festival performances have included appearances at the Jeju Island Music Festival in Korea and the Festival of the Sound in Canada.

The Trio is known for its performances of Beethoven's complete cycle of works for Piano Trio, which are an ongoing part of its programming. New music is another feature of *Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio* programs. The group's commitment to new works has resulted in many commissions, including "Juxt-Opposition" by Clancy Newman, which was premiered in 2011 at the National Gallery, as well as "Variations on a Poem" by Michael Hersch.

This CD of Brahms and Smetana Trios is the *Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio*'s first full recording for Bridge Records. Previously (2008) Bridge presented the Trio's recording of Paul Chihara's trio, "*Ain't No Sunshine*", a work the group commissioned and premiered in 2006 at the Kennedy Center.

The *Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio* is well known to American radio audiences through nationwide broadcasts as well as syndicated shows such as WNYC's SoundCheck. An appearance on St. Paul Sunday has been broadcast nationally several times, and was selected for St. Paul Sunday's "Best of the Year" CD.

Mark Kaplan has established himself as one of the leading violinists of his generation. His consummate artistry has resulted in engagements with nearly every major orchestra in America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, including the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestras, the Cleveland and Philadelphia Orchestras, the Chicago and National Symphony Orchestras, the Berlin Philharmonic and London's LSO, RPO and Philharmonia Orchestras. He has collaborated with many of the world's foremost conductors, among them Ormandy, Tennstedt, Maazel, Masur, Dutoit, Bychkov, Conlon, Foster, Gatti, Rattle, Robertson, Salonen, Slatkin and Zinman. Recent concerts have included the Elgar concerto with Leonard Slatkin at London's Royal Festival Hall and appearances with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra and the Malaysian Philharmonic.

Among Mr. Kaplan's most memorable musical experiences: a series of performances of the Beethoven Violin Concerto, conducted by Klaus Tennstedt, with three major orchestras - the New York Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra and the National Symphony; appearances as soloist with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, and numerous projects involving the solo works of Bach. Mr. Kaplan's extensive discography includes solo and chamber works ranging from Bach, Brahms and Sarasate to Bartok, Berg and Nono. Recent releases feature concertos of Berg and Stravinsky, the *Symphonie Espagnole* of Lalo, and works for violin and orchestra by Joan Manen, Max d'Ollone and Lewis Spratlan. Mr. Kaplan currently serves as Professor of Violin at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music.

Cellist **Clancy Newman**, first prize winner of the prestigious Walter W. Naumburg International Competition and recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant, has had the unusual career of a performer/composer. He received his first significant public recognition at the age of twelve, when he won a Gold Medal at the Dandenong Youth Festival in Australia, competing against instrumentalists twice his age. Since then, he has performed as soloist throughout the United States, as well as in France, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, and Korea. He can often be heard on NPR's "Performance Today" and has been featured on A&E's "Breakfast With the Arts". A sought after chamber musician, he has been a member of Chamber Music Society Two of Lincoln Center and Musicians from Marlboro, and is a current member of the Chicago Chamber Musicians and the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman trio.

As a composer, he has been featured on the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center's "Double Exposure" series and the Chicago Chamber Musicians' "Freshly Scored" series. He has received commissions from Astral Artists, the Barnett Foundation, the Carpe Diem String Quartet, the Weiss-Kaplan-Newman trio, and the UBS Chamber Music Festival of Lexington. Mr. Newman is a graduate of the five-year exchange program between Juilliard and Columbia University, receiving an M.M. from Juilliard and a B.A. in English from Columbia. His teachers have included David Gibson, Joel Krosnick and Harvey Shapiro.

A captivating presence on the concert scene is pianist **Yael Weiss**, hailed by many of today's greatest musicians and critics for visionary interpretations of surpassing depth, immediacy and communicative power. Her richly varied schedule has included performances in major venues across the United States, Europe, Japan and South America. Following a recent recital, the Washington Post portrayed her as "a pianist who delves deeply and tellingly into that cloudy area where fantasy morphs into improvisation, inventiveness being common to both."

Ms. Weiss's discography encompasses piano works by over a dozen composers, with recent CD releases "Robert Schumann: Piano Works" and "88 Keys to Joy". She is a frequent guest soloist with orchestras such as Seattle, Chautauqua, Augusta, Redlands, Bridgeport, Israel Chamber, Prague Chamber, Brazil National, and the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra.

She participates at international music festivals including the Marlboro, Ravinia, Banff, Caramoor, Seattle Chamber Music and the City of London festivals.

Ms. Weiss's special projects include performances of the complete cycle of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas. She is also devoted to new works, and has given world premieres of several solo works and concertos written for her.

Ms. Weiss has won numerous honors, including the Naumburg, Kousciuszko Foundation, Winter, and Presser prizes. She has presented masterclasses at top institutions worldwide and served on the faculties of Indiana University and UCSB. At onlineschoolofmusic.com, she has created a fresh resource for musicians and music-lovers. Her own teachers included Leon Fleisher, Ellen Mack, Edward Aldwell and Richard Goode. For ongoing updates and information please visit:

www.yaelweiss.com

Produced, edited and mastered by Silas Brown

Piano Technician: Arlan Harris

Piano: 1910 Hamburg Steinway D, courtesy of Klavierhaus, New York

Recorded at: the American Academy of Arts and Letters,
New York, January 13-15, 2010

Graphic Design: Douglas Holly

Cover Drawing: David Kaplan

Executive Producers: Becky and David Starobin

Photos: J Henry Fair

The Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio is represented by
Jonathan Wentworth Associates, Ltd., NY
www.jwentworth.com

Follow Bridge Records on

twitter

at @BridgeRecords

For Bridge Records: Barbara Bersito, Douglas Holly, Paige Freeman Hoover
Charlie Post, Doron Schächter, Allegra Starobin, Robert Starobin, and Sandra Woodruff

Brad Napoliello, webmaster
E-mail: BridgeRec@bridgerecords.com

Bridge Records, Inc.
200 Clinton Ave. • New Rochelle, NY • 10801

www.BridgeRecords.com

