



J. Brahms: Trio op. 101 in C minor

The artist should only provide the essentials, and eliminate everything inessential; in this way he will transform the real into the ideal (Vischer, Goethes Faust). This sentence, underlined by Brahms's hand inside a book found in his extensive private library, perfectly describes the aesthetics of this Op.101 trio and of the master's late style in general.

Never before has Brahms produced such a large-scale four movement piece in such compact dimensions. The entire trio's duration is barely twenty minutes, less than half the length of the then still-unrevised version of his earlier trio op.8. The compact design is achieved through an astonishingly skillful compression of musical ideas. In the first movement, for instance, horizontal melodic motifs can be found reflected vertically in the harmony; accompanimental figurations double on occasion as the main theme; and the beginning of the development offers already a structural repetition of the exposition, making it unnecessary for the main theme to reappear again at the reprise.

However, it is probably the 4th movement that marks Brahms' most significant personal achievement. For Brahms, not unlike Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn and Schumann, had known difficulties in constructing final movements, his fourth movements sometimes seeming distinguished for making up in length what they lack in content. This trio's delightful fourth movement, however, is anything but tedious. Moreover, it presents one of the most special and effective codas Brahms ever wrote.

Next to the passionately symphonic Op. 99 Cello Sonata and the lyrical Op.100 Violin Sonata, both composed in 1887 as Brahms was on summer holiday in Thun, Switzerland, it seemed only natural that the participating instruments have been united in the Op.101 Trio, thus creating a perfect triptych. The location of this summer's stay find its reflection unquestionably in this trio: one can recognize the mighty Alp peaks in the grandeur of the first movement, a misty valley haze in the mysterious

second movement, a yodeling song in the folksy third movement (in which irregular alternating folk meters of $\frac{3}{4}+$ + and + appear twenty years before Bartók started applying such meters...), and the eerie darkness of a midnight journey in the fourth movement.

The fact that Brahms retained the manuscript of this magnificent trio, alongside other significant works like the German Requiem Op. 45 and the Clarinet Quintet Op.115, provides yet another proof of the importance of this trio for him. Its success might have propelled his wish to thoroughly revise the early version of the Op.8 trio, a wish he fulfilled two years later.

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