

# **BRAHMS – HIS LIFE, MUSIC, AND THE TRIO FOR CLARINET, CELLO AND PIANO**

*written by the “B3 CLASSIC” trio*

***AN IMPORTANT NOTE FROM johnstone-music ABOUT  
THE MAIN ARTICLE STARTING ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE:***

We are very pleased for you to have a copy of this article, which you may read, print or save on your computer. You are *free* to make any number of additional photocopies, for *johnstone-music* seeks no direct financial gain whatsoever from any download; whether it be an original work, a transcription-arrangement, or an article, though the name of ***THE AUTHOR*** must be clearly attributed if any document is re-produced.

If you feel like sending any (hopefully favourable) comment about this, or indeed about the *johnstone-music* web in general, simply visit the ‘Contact’ section of [www.johnstone-music.com](http://www.johnstone-music.com) and leave a message with the details - we will be delighted to hear from you !

## BRAHMS – HIS LIFE, MUSIC, AND THE TRIO FOR CLARINET, CELLO AND PIANO

The Brahms trio Op.114 is one of the principal works of chamber music repertory. The mature *creations* of Brahms go, in many cases, hand in hand with the extraordinary careers of four great musicians of the period; the clarinettist Richard Mühlfeld, the violinist Joseph Joachim, the cellist Robert Hausmann, and the conductor Hans von Bulow. In 1869 Joseph Joachim (1831-1907) founded his string quartet, which quickly became famous. He was the dedicatee of the first violin concerto of Bruch, as well as various works Johannes Brahms, amongst which mention should be made of the Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.77 from 1878, and the Double Concerto in A minor, Op.102, for violin and cello of 1887. It is in this renowned quartet that the cellist Robert Hausmann (1852-1909) played; he was in this era a professor, like Joachim, in the Royal Academy of Music of Berlin.

The festival of the city of Meiningen, like that of Bayreuth, attracted notable musicians. In November of 1881, Brahms was requested by the orchestra's conductor, Hans von Bulow, to be invited alongside the Duke of Saxony. The friendship between the Duke and Brahms was immediate, and the visits of the latter to Meiningen became frequent from that date. Bülow offers his orchestra to Brahms to rehearse his new works. Fritz Steinbach, the successor of Hans von Bülow in the orchestra, presented to Brahms the clarinettist of the orchestra, Richard Mühlfeld, in March of 1891. This very month Brahms writes to Clara Schumann "it is impossible to play better the clarinet than the way that Mr. Mühlfeld does". Brahms, who had decided to abandon composition around 1890, and who, without any doubt, had heard the finest European clarinettists in his journeys, became spurred on by the artistry of Mühlfeld, and called him in an affectionate way "Fräulein Klarinette" and "Meine Primadonna".

In the summer of this same year – 1891 – Brahms was to compose his Trio Op.114 and his Quintet Op.115 in Bad Ischl, and both with Mühlfeld as dedicatee. In July he writes again to Clara Schumann: "he is the finest performer of wind instruments that I know". The Trio was published in 1892 by his friend, the editor Fritz Simrock, in Berlin.

In November of 1891 Brahms is invited to Meiningen, where on the 24th of the month, after rehearsing from the manuscripts, the first private rendition of the work was made – along with the Quintet Op.115 – in the court of the Duke of Saxony, George II. The performers were: Brahms at the piano, Mühlfeld on clarinet and Robert Hausmann on cello. These musicians brought about the public premiere of the trio on the 12th December of this year in Berlin; however, there was a triumphal greeting

of the Berlin public from the first instance, even from the dress rehearsal on 10th December 1891. On 17th December, Brahms, Adalbert Syrinek on clarinet and Ferdinand Hellmesberger on cello gave the first performance of the work in Vienna, and which was to follow another performance in this city (21st January, 1892), again with Brahms, Mühlfeld and Hausmann. On the 30th January of 1893 it is again performed by Brahms in Meiningen. From there onwards, the Trio Op.114 has become a 'reference of honour' in the chamber music repertoire, especially in the trios of this instrumental formation. Taking into account that then it was still common to encounter a rapid 'substitution' of works heard in concert programmes, and that - as we have seen - in the framework of only one month the trio was heard twice in Vienna gives an idea of the fine reception it received from the public.

Richard Mühlfeld (1856-1907) initially trained as a violinist, becoming the leader/concert master in the Meiningen orchestra from 1873. He knew the clarinettist Carl Baermann, author of the famous method for clarinet and son of the virtuoso Heinrich Baermann, who inspired the clarinet works of Weber. Mühlfeld self-taught himself the technique of the clarinet, and after a few years his ability on the instrument is evident, passing over to become the principal clarinettist of the orchestra. The interpretative style of Mühlfeld was apparently very personal. In Germany he was openly praised; we already know the captivating spell he cast over Brahms or Clara Schumann. However, his interpretations and his sonority were criticized on places such as Vienna or in England; his possible use of vibrato - remember his conditioning as a violinist - his extroverted and passionate approach might be a possible cause for this. Mühlfeld was a staunch defender of the repertoire from his own time, performing across all Europe the works of Brahms and Weber, amongst others. He also was to give the world premiere of the Trio Op.45 by Robert Kahn in Berlin in 1905, which was to see some of the first fruits in the recording made by the B3 Classic Trio in the CD 'Chamber Music Discoveries' (Warner Music).



*Brahms and Mühlfeld*

One of the legacies of Carl Baermann was the design of a new type of clarinet that would bear his name, and that would prove to be dominant in the German musical World in the second half of the nineteenth Century. This instrument might be said to be the answer from within the German sphere to the so-called Boehm clarinet, created in 1843 in France and later extended to the rest of Europe (less Germany and Austria). The Baermann clarinet conserved more similarities with the classical period clarinet and the early romantic clarinets (similar bore, small mouth-piece and reed, etc.); this instrument was the base from which Oehler created the modern clarinets of the Germanic areas. Its sound is sweet. Clear and compact, providing delicacy in the interpretation, but being capable of offering force when it was required.



*Mühlfeld con su clarinete*

The German cellist Robert Hausmann (1852-1909) was considered in his time an illustrious soloist and teacher. He received his training with the Müller brothers and with A. Piatti. He played a Stradivarius cello (dating from his golden period - 1724), today known as the 'Hausmann'. He formed part of Joachim's quartet during almost thirty years. The friendship and understanding between Hausmann and Joachim were to have a great influence on his artistic evolution. His way of playing impressed Brahms, who wrote for him the second Sonata Op.99, which was premiered by Hausmann in 1886 together with the composer. In 1887 Brahms finished his Double concerto, which his friends Joachim and Hausmann premiered to great success. He was also the dedicatee of many other works, and also Max Bruch wrote for him the Hebrew Adagio 'Kol Nidrei' Op.47 for cello and orchestra.



*Brahms and Hausmann*

Our protagonists were also some of the first who expressed themselves in sound recordings of the primitive cylindrical discs (the phonograph of Eddison appeared in 1877). In a date as early as 2nd December 1889, Theo Wangermann recorded a Brahms performance on the piano; part of *Libelle* of Strauss, as well as a fragment of an arrangement (of 1872) made by Brahms of his 1st Hungarian Dance for solo piano. In this second recording, one can appreciate the use of rubato, some pronounced cadences, and other details which would be now surprising to our ears. The tempo of Brahms for the piece is 80 for the quaver (eighth-note), quite a lot slower than the modern recordings. Also, Joseph Joachim had the honour in being the first violinist in history to record a disc – for the company 'Gramophone', and which is a fascinating and worthy source of information as to the style of violin performance in the 19th century.

The first news of a recording of our trio Op.114 takes us to London, made by Charles Draper, and with his niece Haydn Draper (clarinet), together with W.H. Squire (cello) and H. Harty (piano) in 1925, for the Columbia label. Reginald Kell, with Antony Pini and Louis Kentner, made a recording in 1941 for Decca. There was also a memorable recording of the Quintet Op.115, using the string quartet of Joachim's famous pupil Adolf Busch.

Of all the known recordings of this work from the 1940's onwards, some outstanding versions have been those played by McLane/S. Hawkins/M. Kaye, the Beaux Arts Trio (con G. Pieterse), and, above all, of a live performance from 1955 in the Prades Festival featuring D. Oppenheim, P. Casals and E. Istomin.

Much has been written about the supposed anachronism of the music of Brahms. The final years of the nineteenth century are marked, musically speaking, by the ambivalent influence of Wagner, Liszt, and general cultural matters by French symbolism. Fortunately, the critics and current-day historians have amended this notion with accompanied for so long the Hamburg composer (it would be pertinent here to produce the essay of Schoenberg from 1933, revised in 1947, strikingly called "Brahms the progressive"). Brahms worked in all instrumental genres, except for the theatre and showing, at the same time openly rejecting 'programme music'. He therefore appears as a safe deposit of the classical-romantic tradition, following from Haydn through to Schumann in a tradition in which he was to impose his personal stamp.

His aesthetic search was not based, as in Wagner's case, on extensive preliminary theoretic reflexions as to the need to found a new aesthetic system. Brahms found his path into going into depth in the rigorous study of the language of previous masters, to detect the constructive possibilities that their music offered. This served him in the present work in the use, for example, of the Lydian scale that opens the first movement, or the Phrygian scale of the theme that opens the fourth movement: also the fact - pointed out by Karl Geiringer, the biographer of Brahms - of introducing the second theme of the first movement as an inverted canon.

Chamber music is the field where our composer finds himself in the intimate essence most authentically. It is here where he develops with absolute logical rigour the most dynamic formal principals of classical style: the thematic-motive elaboration which, however, provokes the breaking up of another fundamental aspect of classicism - the regular order of musical time based upon the balance or 'reconciliation' of a phrase. In essence, now it was not about the alternating correspondence of phrases, but based on the varied development of small nucleases of motifs. One might think, for example, about how the arpeggio motif of the cello in the very first bar undergoes transformations, or in the figure of dotted crotchet (quarter-note) plus quaver (eighth-note) of the second bar of the first movement throughout the whole of the rest of the work! On a harmonic level, Brahms increases the functional possibilities of each chord, thus guaranteeing the necessary stability for the construction of large musical architectures. The harmonic discoveries are beautiful; one can observe, for example, the transition from the subdominant in bars 22 - 23 of the second movement, or in bars 77 to 97 of the fourth movement.

All four movements display a high grade of elaboration. The first of them *Allegro, alla breve* is presented in sonata form; its first theme is clear and vigorously diatonic, including elements which Brahms was to develop throughout all of the movement, and indeed the work. Two secondary themes appear, the first as a canon inverting the principal theme, and finally a soaring, gliding third lyrical theme which the clarinet fulfils. The development section is brief, and explores the initial theme which, however, does not appear in the recapitulation. The secondary themes make instead very different reappearances, and the movement ends with a coda of tranquil character which, based on the first of the secondary ideas, closes the movement.

The *Adagio* is of a great self-restraint. The soft low registers contribute to the atmosphere, which is dreamy. Here, more than ever, one has the impression of reality in what Brahms's friend, the music critic Eusebius Mandyczewski said after a performance of the work - "it was as if the instruments were in love with each other".

The *Andantino grazioso*, in the form of a minuet and trio, is of a beautiful airiness, and full of warmth. The initial theme of the minuet is a wonderful melodic inspiration. In the trio, the clarinet takes the reins of this Ländler, for later to reappear in abbreviated form the theme of the minuet, which flows into a coda, *poco sostenuto*, rather freer and of exceptional sonorities.

The Finale *Allegro* carrying alternatives between 2/4 and 6/8 time an interesting rhythmic contrast. Although it is the 'sonata form' which dominates, the thematic treatment is original, for the principal theme passes up to four different secondary themes. After a brief development section, a new secondary idea appears (bars 77 to 97) of rather darker colourings which is helped by the low registers of the instruments, and then a lighter harmonic turning in bar 92 to be able to pass a bridge passage which moves towards the recapitulation (bar 105). It is the principal theme which finally comes out on top, leading the movement to a coda full of vigour and romantic breathlessness.

B<sub>3</sub> CLASSIC TRIO



# VISIT!

**johnstone-music** is a most interesting and very active web page of the British born, now Spanish-based composer, arranger and cellist DAVID JOHNSTONE – a Web page very highly regarded by English-speaking musicians of many nations.  
- Virtually everything is also offered in Spanish -

## What can the web page **johnstone-music** offer you?

**FREE downloads of many original and interesting compositions** – these scores, not commercially published, include pieces for bowed string instruments (violin, viola, cello and double bass), woodwind (flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon), brass, piano and accordion. Chamber music is well represented, and not just by duos, trios or quartets, but also for larger groupings right up to pieces for string orchestra (suitable in scope both for youth orchestras and professionals).

**FREE downloads of transcriptions for Cellists** (classical and popular music) with solos, and pieces for ensembles of varying sizes from duos up to orchestras of cellists. A substantial section ...

*A colourful PDF of all many important published works is also available from the home page of johnstone-music, as a FREE DOWNLOAD. Or visit the publisher – CREIGHTON'S COLLECTION – direct at [www.cccd.co.uk](http://www.cccd.co.uk) clicking firstly in 'Sheet Music' and then in 'Johnstone Music', or by phoning (+44) 29-2039-7711 (also in Spain distributed to shops by Erviti Music, San Sebastian, Guipúzcoa).*

**FREE downloads of ARTICLES** – in two main sections; one of general musical themes, and the other relating specifically to matters of the Violoncello – written by a wide range of professional musicians.

Biographies, performances, audio extracts (some 50 or so), images, links, recordings, chamber music formations, current projects, composition list, sales of CDs and published sheet music etc. –

Interactive sections: Diary, News, Contact, Suggestions, a quick survey, comments etc. Leave your opinions, and receive free publicity of any performance of a work or arrangement of David Johnstone, with links to your web page (or that of the organizers), if desired.

**Enjoy the music !**

**[www.johnstone-music.com](http://www.johnstone-music.com)**