



## J. Brahms: Clarinet Chamber Music

aud 92.554



American Record Guide May/June 2007 - Vol. 70, No 3 (Paul L. Althouse - 2007.05.01)



After completing his second string quintet in 1890, Brahms declared his intention to retire at age 57. We are glad he changed his mind, and before his death in 1896 he wrote several memorable pieces: 20 short piano works and four chamber pieces for clarinet, three of them included here.

This is quite wonderful. Campbell, a Canadian native who studied with Robert Marcellus, is a terrific player with excellent breath control and pure, non-wheezy tone. He sounds good at all dynamic levels and uses no vibrato (unlike, for example, Stoltzman in the slow movements of the sonatas). Campbell has surrounded himself with talented colleagues. I was particularly impressed with some deft playing by pianist Jean-Pascal Meyer in the trio, but in truth all the players deserve high praise for bringing these late, autumnal works to life so beautifully.

As our Overview (S/O 2006) pointed out, there are several fine recordings of Brahms's clarinet pieces, but this one is certainly worthy of inclusion.

Audiophile Audition February 2007 (Gary Lemco - 2007.02.15)

In surround sound, Daniel Raclot's cello opening makes a lovely A Minor triad to which the clarinet and piano respond to begin the 1891 Trio. Clarinetist Arthur Campbell is a pupil of Robert Marcellus, renowned for several recordings with George Szell. Campbell projects a sweet sonority in the middle and low (chalumeau) registers of his chosen instrument, the delights of which first struck Brahms when he heard Richard Muehlfeld of the Meningen Orchestra. The longest movement, the Adagio, conveys an autumnal sensibility in the manner of a folk song. The soft pizzicati and demure piano part from Jean-Pascal Meyer (rec. 7-10 November 2005) create an intimately haunted atmosphere. A rusticity of feeling infiltrates the third movement, which sways in the manner of the Op. 65 Liebeslieder Walzer. The middle section is Schubert, a laendler that almost frolics with good nature. The cello takes up the last movement Allegro, whose Hungarian ethos revels in rhythmic shifts (hemiola) from 6/8 to 2/4. Nice balance and separation in the mid-range, courtesy Ludger Boeckenhoff.

For my money, Campbell shines in the opening of the F Minor Sonata (1894), where he infuses the chromatic lines with dark passion, abetted in each figure by pianist Frances Renzi. In the more subdued passages, the two make for some expressive intimacy on a high order of execution - potent rainy-day music. Both the Andante un poco Adagio and second intermezzo, the Allegretto grazioso, sound like an improvised meditations on falling-scale sequences. A contrapuntal carillon opens the last movement, which evolves into a bubbly rondo rife with warm recollections.

The E-flat Sonata was the first chamber work of Brahms I ever heard on record; and perhaps someday an enterprising soul will reissue the Benny Goodman/Nadia Reisenberg collaboration from CBS 78s that so

moved me. The first movement is marked Allegro amabile, and certainly Campbell and Renzi perform with warm geniality of spirit. Lovely, singing lines, a strong, flexible vocal line in all parts mark this charming rendition. The ensuing Allegro appassionato achieves something of the organ's sonority in terms of color and mixed timbres. For his final effort in chamber music expression Brahms ends with a thoughtful theme and (six) variations, and the pregnant pauses between Campbell and Renzi speak as eloquently as their harmonized dialogues. For ambiance, intimacy, and audiophile presence in your Brahms library, you need only acquire this fine disc.

CD Compact 03-07 (Verónica Maynés - 2007.03.01)

Algunas de las más hermosas piezas dedicadas al clarinete son, sin lugar a dudas, las que Johannes Brahms escribió en sus últimos años: el trío Op.114 para piano, clarinete y violoncelo y las dos sonatas para clarinete y piano Op.120, piezas presentes en este precioso compacto. Falta, pues, el quinteto Op.115 para clarinete y cuerda, que se podría haber añadido repartiendo las obras en dos compactos y abaratando precios; pero ya se sabe, las discográficas están en crisis y las razones económicas son siempre las que pesan a la hora de sacar un nuevo disco a la venta. Dejando estas consideraciones a un lado, el registro aquí comentado contempla el Brahms más profundo e interiorizado, el de la última etapa, meditativo y absorto, que explora nuevas fronteras gracias a un hecho puntual: el encuentro con Richard von Mühlfeld, clarinetista virtuoso que descubre al maestro las maravillosas peculiaridades y virtudes tímbricas del bellísimo instrumento, e impulsa la creación de cuatro piezas introspectivas y melancólicas que se sitúan en lo más alto de la literatura clarinetística. Inicia el compacto el trío Op.114, con Daniel Raclot al cello, Jean-Pascal Meyer al piano y el clarinetista Arthur Campbell, músicos que efectúan un perfecto dibujo de la variedad de atmósferas que Brahms caracteriza en la partitura, con lecturas capaces de verter todas las posibilidades de los instrumentos, tanto en lo técnico como en lo expresivo, en lo indefinible, en todo lo que subyace en la profundidad de la grafía musical. La transparencia de planos y el empaste son cualidades destacables tanto en la ejecución del trío como en las sonatas Op.120, que aquí se exhiben con una técnica fluida que se rinde a la exigencias del sentimiento, nostálgicas en el fraseo, cálidas en los giros expresivos y siempre conservando un punto de objetividad que no desvirtúa la verdad escrita, aún a riesgo de caer en lo excesivamente calculado. En cualquiera de los casos el registro en cuestión se vende por sí solo pues, desgraciadamente, el insuperable Brahms no cuenta tampoco con tanta discografía -aunque los catálogos digan lo contrario- disponible en el mercado. Peor está el panorama editorial. Si el lector es un admirador del músico de Hamburgo, intente hacerse con algún libro sobre el tema en castellano y verá cuál es el estado de la cuestión en el país del culto a Operación Triunfo y Gran Hermano. Quien firma estas líneas jura que recorrió hasta ocho librerías «especializadas» para encontrar y regalar el maravilloso libro de Amedeo Poggi y Edgar Vallora Brahms, repertorio completo, una especie en vías de extinción, objeto de culto para todo melómano sibarítico y, para colmo, casi el único volumen dedicado al autor en el idioma de Cervantes; en otras lenguas, como las meigas: haberlas, haylas. Pero, a ver quién los encuentra. Aún así, no hay que perder la esperanza en cuanto a la cultura musical. España lidera el ranking de piratería discográfica de la Unión Europea. En algo tenía que destacar.

Ensemble - Magazin für Kammermusik 6/2006 (Diether Steppuhn - 2006.11.01)

ensemble

Man kann Brahms' wunderbare späte Klarinettenwerke nicht oft genug hören. Dass sie immer wieder neu eingespielt werden, hat zu tun mit der ergreifenden Klangsprache einer fast schmerzhaften, weltentrückten Altersweisheit und mit dem Wunsch junger Klarinettenisten, sich mit diesen emotional wie technisch anspruchsvollen Stücken als instrumentale Meister zu präsentieren. Hier gelingt dies den amerikanischen und französischen Instrumentalisten in ihrer – besonders im Surroundklang – Herz und Sinne bewegenden Interpretation absolut überzeugend.

[Fanfare](#) July/Aug 2007 (Jerry Dubins - 2007.07.01)

fanfare

Brahms's four works for clarinet—the trio and two sonatas recorded here, plus the Quintet, op. 115—were all products of the composer's late years, and byproducts of his relationship with the virtuoso clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld. The sonatas, in both their originally conceived versions for clarinet and their composer-sanctioned versions for viola, along with the trio and quintet, have been covered in these pages a number of times; so brevity is in order.

Canadian-born clarinetist Arthur Campbell, now a US resident, received his degrees from Northwestern University, earning his doctorate as a student of renowned clarinetist Robert Marcellus. Pianist Frances Renzi, who partners Campbell in the sonatas, graduated from the University of North Texas, and then pursued graduate studies at Juilliard under Rosina Lhevinne and Beveridge Webster. French pianist Jean Pascal-Meyer, heard here in the trio, studied with, among others, Gabriel Tacchino and Gaby Casadesus. Cellist Daniel Raclot studied at the Limoges Conservatory in France, and took further training under André Navarra and Genevieve Joy.

One would be hard-pressed to find a recording of these works poorly played on today's modern clarinet, (Campbell plays Leblanc, Opus II models). And therein is the dilemma, for there are so many recordings to choose from. What it comes down to in the end, I think, is one's preference for the style or school of playing. There's the English school, represented by artists past and present, such as Reginald Kell, Jack Brymer, Janet Hilton, and Thea King. The approach, not unlike that of a certain school of English singing, emphasizes a "white" sound that is light on vibrato, pure of tone, precise in pitch, and smoothly regulated or modulated between the instrument's register breaks.

The French school, of which Gervase de Peyer is probably the most famous exponent, tends to cultivate a somewhat less focused sound in favor of a richer color palette and a more pronounced vibrato. Between the two—English and French—my personal taste leans towards the former. I've long had de Peyer's Angel/EMI LP of the Mozart and Brahms clarinet quintets with the Melos Ensemble in my collection, though I've never much cared for the performances.

That brings us to the American school, which has managed to produce, in my opinion, the finest clarinetists of all—Stanley Drucker, David Shifrin, Richard Stoltzman, Harold Wright, and let us not forget Benny Goodman; and now Arthur Campbell can be added to this prestigious list. The American approach is one that adopts the best attributes of the English style, (the purity of tone and pitch and well-balanced registration) while eschewing the bland "white" sound in favor of the richer color palette and vibrato of the French school, but without the flaw of flabby focus.

This latest entry then into a highly crowded field is highly recommended for exquisite playing, enhanced by a wonderfully warm and perfectly balanced recording. The hybrid SACD will play on all CD players; and, of course, when played on a system equipped for full surround sound will add an extra degree of dimensionality.

Le Monde de la Musique Mars 2007 (Patrick Szersnovicz - 2007.03.01)

*Musikana*  
Le monde de la musique virtuelle

Le méconnu Trio pour clarinette, violoncelle et piano op. 114 et les deux magnifiques Sonates pour clarinette et piano op. 120 parachèvent en 1891 et en 1894, avec le plus célèbre Quintette pour clarinette et cordes op. 115, la création instrumentale de Brahms. Usant de métamorphoses structurelles qui annoncent le principe de variation continue bientôt cher à Schoenberg, Brahms invente dans son Trio op. 114 une « prose musicale » ou la maîtrise architecturale génère une rhétorique neuve. Contrairement à la musique de chambre avec clavier antérieure de Brahms, ce n'est pas le piano qui domine mais plutôt la clarinette – ou l'alto, dans la deuxième instrumentation prévue par le compositeur dans les Sonates op. 120. Chacune des sonates a son profil expressif, la Première, celle en fa mineur, offrant une invention mélodique digne d'un des plus grands duos composés par Brahms, la Première Sonate pour violon et piano dite « Regensonate ».

Bien accompagné par Frances Renzi, le clarinettiste Arthur Campbell ne détrône pas dans les Sonates op. 120 les rares références du passé (Kell/Horszowski, Wlach/Demus, Leister/Demus, De Peyer/Barenboim, Portal/Pludermacher) ni même des versions plus récentes (Leister/Oppitz, Frost/Pontinen), mais il fait montre d'un souci de la phrase brahmsienne et rend justice à la mélancolie des transitions, à la liberté mélodique comme à l'incessante imagination rythmique du vieux Brahms. Maigre de belles inflexions, un jeu d'ensemble remarquable et une certaine recherche de la perfection plastique, l'interprétation du Trio en la mineur avec Daniel Raclot et Jean-Pascal Meyer manque un peu d'originalité, d'intensité et de profondeur.

opushd.net - opus haute définition e-magazine Numéro 22 (Jean-Jacques Millo - 2007.01.30)

Regroupant les trois grandes partitions de musique de chambre pour clarinette de Johannes Brahms, sans le quintette, le programme de ce disque nous plonge dans les dernières années du compositeur. Dans "L'histoire de la Musique" parue en 1963, Claude Rostand décrivait ainsi la musique de chambre de Brahms : "Il n'y est, bien entendu, toujours question que de musique pure, sans intentions ou prétextes vraiment littéraires. Toutefois les sources d'inspiration en sont souvent très visibles : tel poème comme dans la Regen Sonate Op.78, ou comme dans la Thuner Sonate Op.100 ; ou bien un sentiment de la nature généralement un peu mélancolique comme dans les deux Sonates Op.120 pour clarinette et piano, ...le Trio Op.114 pour piano, violoncelle et clarinette, le Quintette Op.115 pour clarinette et cordes". Le Trio en la mineur fut officiellement créé en 1891 à Berlin avec l'inspirateur de l'œuvre, le clarinettiste Richard Mühlfeld. Ce dernier fut également à l'origine des trois autres partitions que Brahms écrivit pour cet instrument. Les deux Sonates pour clarinette et piano Op.120 furent composées, trois ans plus tard environ, en 1894 et sont véritablement les dernières œuvres de musique de chambre du compositeur allemand. Le jeune clarinettiste canadien Arthur Campbell, résidant aux USA, parvient à donner au poids nostalgique de ces pages, chaleur et finesse, sans pathos aucun. Accompagné, dans le Trio, par le pianiste français Jean-Pascal Meyer et Daniel Raclot au violoncelle, Campbell trouve un bel équilibre instrumental pour un message musical d'une richesse expressive remarquable. Et les deux Sonates, avec la pianiste américaine Frances Renzi, sont tout aussi abouties. Avec une prise de son quelque peu agressive, ce disque demeure une belle surprise.

Pizzicato N° 169 - 1/2007 (Isabelle Trüb - 2007.01.01)

*pizzicato*

Malgré tout son classicisme, la musique de Brahms parle d'abord au cœur. C'est bien le cas dans cet enregistrement des œuvres maîtresses pour l'instrument à la sonorité chaleureuse qu'est la clarinette, et dont Brahms raffolait. Si le Trio op. 114 démontre une maturité et une générosité d'expression chez un compositeur au faite de sa carrière, les deux Sonates op.120, qui font partie du répertoire des altistes, sont également des chefs d'œuvre à part entière. Les Sonates sont interprétées par Frances Renzi, une pianiste sensible qui dialogue avec Arthur Campbell à la clarinette avec un timbre et un phrasé soignés. Le clarinettiste possède une technique solide et suit les méandres romantiques de la partition avec aisance. Il éprouve parfois de la peine à maîtriser le timbre dans les passages les plus doux. Jean-Pascal Meyer donne un caractère plutôt tendu à la partie de piano dans le Trio, alors que Daniel Raclot charme par sa sonorité généreuse et sa présence à la partie de violoncelle.

Scherzo Año XXII - Núm. 220 - Junio 2007 (Juan Carlos Moreno - 2007.06.01)

*sch*erzo  
REVISTA DE MUSICA

El clarinete es el instrumento de la madurez de Johannes Brahms, aquel al que, como Mozart hiciera décadas antes, dedicó algunas de las páginas más hermosas y personales del final de su vida. Como las tres que aquí podemos escuchar, tres maravillas de poesía, en las que el instrumento muestra sus acentos más cálidos e íntimos. Nos las sirven unos jóvenes solistas que, con el clarinetista Arthur Campbell como a la cabeza, secundado por los pianistas Frances Renzi, en el trío, y Jean-Pascal Meyer, en las sonatas, han sabido captar su esencia más profunda. El secreto en estas obras es simplemente dejarse llevar por su canto, por una melodía que fluye incesantemente, a media voz, sin grandes tormentas románticas, sino más bien con austeridad. Y eso es algo que estos músicos consiguen plenamente. La calidad de la toma de sonido, de una gran pureza y proximidad, acaba de hacer plenamente recomendable este bello trabajo.

The Clarinet December 2007 (Justin O'Dell - 2007.12.01)

Arthur Campbell has released a new compact disc with three of the four chamber music works with clarinet by Johannes Brahms. The Trio in A Minor, opus 114, and both clarinet sonatas are beautifully captured in this hybrid Super Audio CD in surround sound format. This type of recording can be used in any CD player, but when played by equipment especially designed for it, the listener is rewarded with a depth of sound and range of dynamics much wider than available on ordinary CDs. When you have an SACD player, proper amplification, and five speakers, the result is truer to a live performance.

Arthur Campbell, according to the biographical notes accompanying the CD, was one of only three doctoral students of Robert Marcellus at Northwestern University in Illinois. A native of Canada, Dr. Campbell won the ICA's International Clarinet Recording Competition in 1996 and the top clarinet prize in the National Music Festival of Canada (1988). Campbell chose first-rate musicians with whom to collaborate on this recording. Daniel Raclot, principal cellist with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio-France, pianist Jean Pascal Meyer (in the trio), and wonderful pianist Frances Renzi (sonatas) all generously contribute their developed artistic personalities to these masterworks.

The Trio is the opening work on the disc. Mr. Raclot roots out just the right expression with his solo at the beginning. Too often, cellists miss the opportunity to convey the poetry and poignancy of this opening. Raclot's version radiates a melancholic wistfulness, and one imagines Brahms' tentative first scribbles as he emerged from retirement to pen this sublime work for its dedicatee, Richard Mühlfeld. I especially enjoyed the taut, composed character set up by pianist J.P. Meyer in the first half of the transition. He holds back slightly and he sets up a terrific push forward just when the clarinet joins the transition. Now the

tempo carries enough momentum to welcome the second theme. Raclot penetrates beautifully with a searing, full sound here. Later in the movement, when it is the clarinetist's duty to call in the recapitulation, Campbell phrases it purely, instead of evoking longing. His attractive, lengthy phrases and clear sound are free of sentimentality, allowing the music to speak without interference. Campbell shines in the opening of the slow movement. He relishes the chance to show off his silky, soft sound. The third movement is also very well played, but it would benefit from a little more collective contrast from the group. The main tempo, while slow, could have been more effective if the trio section had a little more Teutonic rollick. The approach is thoroughly elegant and unhurried, but sometimes I thought of a pavane more than of a Ländler. The definition of character set up by Raclot is confident and chiseled in the opening of the last movement, however. He pilots a strong and powerful primary theme. The movement is full of fire and excitement. This trio performs expertly together, and one senses they are enjoying the music to the fullest.

Both of the opus 120 sonatas are played very well. Frances Renzi's contributions as both pianist and duo partner are commendable. Renzi has a beguiling sound, marked by clear textures and judicious use of pedaling. She supports Campbell so he can sing freely, but at the same time she succeeds as a full and sensitive chamber music participant. Campbell takes his opportunities to full advantage in the sonatas. His expression recalls that of his great master teacher, Marcellus. The phrasing is straightforward and within beats, and he rarely strays from what the composer asks. There are occasional touches of boldness, which add to the personality of the artist. Listen to the climax of the development of the second sonata, for example. For me, I found the slow movement of the F minor sonata particularly satisfying. Campbell's lucid tone and spot-on intonation make for a performance that is easy to listen to. He takes it beyond the workmanlike, with some of the tenderest playing one could wish for. Renzi superbly performs the last movement of the first sonata. She at once conveys the neo-classicist in Brahms' opening refrain, but she adeptly unleashes all the requisite power called for in the second episode.

All in all, this new Brahms release is an appealing newcomer to a bookshelf crowded with Brahms' sonatas. The use of advanced recording technology lends it further interest.

www.banddirector.com March 2007 (Michael Bennett - 2007.03.14)

This is a beautiful recording in all sense of the word. The Trio in A minor, Opus 114 features internationally known clarinetist Campbell and French compatriots Meyer and Raclot. All play with sensitivity, passion, and flawless technique. While not as well known as the two Brahms sonatas it's a favorite of serious clarinetists.

The two sonatas, Opus 120, Nos. 1 & 2, are staples of clarinet recital literature and have been recorded by a number of artists over the years, none better than this collaboration between Arthur Campbell and Frances Renzi. This may be THE definitive recording of these two beautiful sonatas.

Recorded in Berlin in Surround Sound and having already been awarded the Belgian Supersonic Award (equivalent to a Grammy in the U.S.), it displays artistry of the highest level and a wonderful example of recorded sound.

This disc belongs in any serious collection of clarinet recordings.

www.classicalcdreview.com March 2007 (R.E.B. - 2007.03.01)

The Brahms chamber works featuring clarinet are magnificently played by Canadian-born Arthur Campbell assisted by pianist Frances Renzi and cellist Daniel Raciot in the Trio, and pianist Jean-Pascal Meyer in the two sonatas. All recordings were made November 7-10, 2005 in Siemens Villa in Berlin, produced by Ludger Böckenhoff, who with his staff produced a totally natural, encompassing sonic atmosphere. A beautiful recording!

www.musicweb-international.com December 2007 (Tim Perry - 2007.12.13)



This hybrid SACD brings together three of the four masterpieces Brahms wrote for Richard Mühlfeld, the self-taught virtuoso clarinetist who inspired the composer to come out of compositional retirement. The missing piece, the gorgeous Clarinet Quintet Op.114, is frequently coupled with the Clarinet Trio, its immediate predecessor in Brahms oeuvre. Here it is replaced with the two sonatas for clarinet and piano which date from three years later.

American clarinetist Arthur Campbell turns in polished performances of the sonatas, with Frances Renzi a sympathetic associate artist. Their accounts emphasise the dreamy beauty of Brahms' writing, and Campbell's variation of tone is quite beguiling in and of itself. The performance of the first sonata is perhaps more successful. Here Campbell and Renzi find more ardour in the first movement than they manage to project in the second movement of the second sonata, both of which are marked "allegro appassionato". They also turn in a lovingly detailed accounts of the first sonata's allegretto grazioso third movement and dancing vivace finale.

For the trio Campbell is joined by a pair of French musicians, both of whom raise the intensity somewhat without erasing the lyricism of Brahms' conception. Together the three musicians deliver a fine performance of this piece. The beauty of Campbell's tone is compromised a little in the upper extremes of his register in the first movement, but elsewhere it remains warm and mellifluous. My only serious reservation here concerns the balancing of the sound, which favours the piano and clarinet but obscures Raclot's cello. Perhaps this problem is unique to the CD stereo layer of the disc, and is not repeated in the SACD layers, which I have not heard. Certainly the sound is otherwise excellent, closely recorded perhaps but lacking nothing in warmth.

The booklet notes, in both German and English, are helpful, even if the picture of Brahms selected to adorn Michael Struck-Schloen's essay depicts the composer in his youth rather than the gentleman of late middle age who penned these works.

If you prize the autumnal beauty of these pieces above their latent passion, these accounts will give you pleasure.

Les trois œuvres pour clarinette de Brahms font partie des chefs-d'œuvre du répertoire consacré à cet instrument. Ces œuvres ont été maintes fois enregistrées et comptent nombre de versions de référence. La version proposée par ces quatre interprètes, même si elle est honorable, ne risque pas à se dégager du lot. On reprochera tout d'abord une prise de son trop lointaine qui donne l'impression que la chaîne hi-fi n'est pas dans la pièce où se trouve l'auditeur. Ces trois œuvres ont le même principal défaut : elles sont jouées uniformément, sans véritables nuances (surtout dans le Trio), et donnent toujours l'impression que le tempo stagne et n'avance pas, même dans les mouvements rapides, au risque de provoquer l'ennui. Certains mouvements se distinguent du climat de monotonie générale et sortent l'auditeur de sa torpeur : le troisième mouvement de la Sonate en mi bémol majeur malgré des problèmes de justesse à la clarinette et le dernier mouvement de la Sonate en fa mineur.

Les musiciens nous présentent trois œuvres majeures du répertoire que tout mélomane doit posséder. Cette version est loin d'être parfaite, mais, justement parce qu'elle ne l'est pas, présente un côté humain que le CD avec ses possibilités de montage et de travail sur le son a parfois gommé. Ce n'est pas toujours juste, ni au bon tempo, le son n'est pas très beau mais on entend des interprètes de qualité dans des conditions proches d'un concert, avec ses imperfections mais aussi ses émotions plus directes et moins policées.

## Inhaltsverzeichnis

American Record Guide May/June 2007 - Vol. 70, No 3.....	1
Audiophile Audition February 2007.....	1
CD Compact 03-07.....	2
Ensemble - Magazin für Kammermusik 6/2006.....	3
Fanfare July/Aug 2007.....	3
Le Monde de la Musique Mars 2007.....	4
opushd.net - opus haute définition e-magazine Numéro 22.....	4
Pizzicato N° 169 - 1/2007.....	5
Scherzo Año XXII - Núm. 220 - Junio 2007.....	5
The Clarinet December 2007.....	5
www.banddirector.com March 2007.....	6
www.classicalcdreview.com March 2007.....	7
www.musicweb-international.com December 2007.....	7
www.ResMusica.com Mars 2007.....	8

