

# BRAHMS

## Piano Quartet No. 2

# MAHLER

## Piano Quartet

Anton Barakhovsky, Violin  
Alexander Zemtsov, Viola  
Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt, Cello  
Eldar Nebolsin, Piano

**Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)**  
**Piano Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 26**  
**Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)**  
**Piano Quartet**

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg in 1833, the son of a double-bass player and his much older wife, a seamstress. His childhood was spent in relative poverty, and his early studies in music, for which he showed a natural aptitude, developed his talent to such an extent that there was talk of touring as a prodigy at the age of eleven. It was Eduard Marxsen who gave him a grounding in the technical basis of composition, while the boy helped his family by playing the piano in summer inns.

In 1851 Brahms met the émigré Hungarian violinist Reményi, who introduced him to Hungarian dance music that had a later influence on his work. Two years later he set out in his company on his first concert tour, their journey taking them, on the recommendation of the Hungarian violinist Joachim, to Weimar, where Franz Liszt held court and might have been expected to show particular favour to a fellow-countryman. Reményi profited from the visit, but Brahms, with a lack of tact that was later accentuated, failed to impress the Master. Later in the year, however, he met the Schumanns, through Joachim's agency. The meeting was a fruitful one.

In 1850 Schumann had taken up the offer from the previous incumbent, Ferdinand Hiller, of the position of municipal director of music in Düsseldorf, the first official appointment of his career and the last. Now in the music of Brahms he detected a promise of greatness and published his views in the journal he had once edited, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, declaring Brahms the long-awaited successor to Beethoven. In the following year Schumann, who had long suffered from intermittent periods of intense depression, attempted suicide. His final years, until his death in 1856, were to be spent in an asylum, while Brahms rallied to the support of Schumann's wife, the gifted pianist Clara Schumann, and her young family, remaining a firm friend until her death in 1896, shortly before his own in the following year.

Brahms had always hoped that sooner or later he would be able to return in triumph to a position of distinction in the

musical life of Hamburg. This ambition was never fulfilled. Instead he settled in Vienna, intermittently from 1863 and definitively in 1869, establishing himself there and seeming to many to fulfil Schumann's early prophecy. In him his supporters, including, above all, the distinguished critic and writer Eduard Hanslick, saw a true successor to Beethoven and a champion of music untrammelled by extra-musical associations, of pure music, as opposed to the Music of the Future promoted by Wagner and Liszt, a path to which Joachim and Brahms both later publicly expressed their opposition.

The autumn of 1857 had brought Brahms a court appointment at Detmold, teaching the piano and conducting. He was to return there for the next two years, while continuing to fulfil a series of concert engagements. In January 1860 he returned to Hamburg, living at first with his parents, but soon moving to a house owned by Elisabeth Rösing at the country suburb of Hamm, where the Hamburg Frauenchor that he had established and conducted often met. Here he enjoyed greater tranquillity, undisturbed by the marital disagreements of his parents within the limited accommodation available to them. Clara Schumann appeared as the pianist in the first performance of his *Piano Quartet in G minor, Op. 25*, given in Hamburg in November 1861, on the occasion of the third of a series of Hamburg concerts that featured the Hamburg ladies' choir. The new piano quartet was not his first attempt at the genre. There had been an earlier piano quartet, later transposed, revised and published in 1875 as *Opus 60*.

The *Piano Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 26*, written during the same period, had its first performance in Vienna on 29th November 1862, with members of the Hellmesberger Quartet and with Brahms playing the piano part. The concert followed shortly after Brahms had received the disappointing news of the appointment of Julius Stockhausen as conductor of the Hamburg Philharmonic, a position for which he had hoped. In a letter home from Vienna, however, he was able to report the sympathetic

reception of his new piano quartet and his success with the audience as a pianist. Hanslick, who had followed Brahms's career with close interest, still had reservations, but Clara Schumann preferred the quartet to its immediate predecessor. The work is of some length, and makes wide use of sonata form. The opening subject of the repeated exposition has two elements, a chordal theme and a winding thematic element first heard from the cello. The second subject that follows is replete with the composer's habitual cross-rhythms. The central development unusually includes three variations of the first theme, before its return in recapitulation. The E major slow movement, *Poco adagio*, and scored at first with muted strings, offers a lyrical principal theme, the strings unmuted on its return, after the contrasting secondary material. The extended *Scherzo*, unusually in sonata form, has a D minor *Trio* that uses thematic material from the *Scherzo* in its canonic writing. The quartet ends with another sonata-form movement, its rhythmic first subject with touches of the Hungarian. It makes a splendid and complementary ending to a work that wears the unmistakable stamp of Brahms throughout.

Gustav Mahler not only continued and transformed the great Viennese symphonic tradition but, at the same time, added to the repertoire of *Lieder*, drawing on this tradition also in his symphonies. His achievement and his sense of the joys and sorrows of the world have found a ready audience in the years that followed his death, a period of unspeakable suffering for many.

Mahler expressed exactly enough his own position in the world of his time. He saw himself as three times homeless, a native of Bohemia in Austria, an Austrian among Germans and a Jew throughout the world. The second child of his parents and the first of fourteen to survive, he was born in the Bohemian town of Kaliště (Kalischt) in 1860. Soon after his birth the family moved to Jihlava (Iglau), where his father, by his own very considerable efforts had raised himself from being little

more than a pedlar with a desire for self-improvement to the running of taverns and a distillery. Mahler's musical abilities were developed first in Jihlava, before a brief period of schooling in Prague, which ended unhappily, and a later course of study at the Conservatory in Vienna, where he turned from the piano to composition and, as a necessary corollary, to conducting.

It was as a conductor that Mahler made his career, at first in a series of provincial opera-houses, then in Prague, Budapest and Hamburg, before moving to a position of the highest distinction of all, when in 1897 he became *Kapellmeister* of the Vienna Court Opera, two months after his baptism as a Catholic, a necessary preliminary. In Vienna he effected significant reforms at the Court Opera but made enough enemies, particularly represented in the anti-semitic press, to lead to his resignation in 1907. There followed a final period conducting in America and elsewhere, in a vain attempt to secure his family's future before his own imminent death, which took place a week after his final return to Vienna, on 18th May, 1911.

Mahler's *Piano Quartet in A minor* dates from 1876, the end of his first year at the Vienna Conservatory, where the only completed movement was first performed. The movement was played again at the house of Brahms's friend Theodor Billroth and in the same year in Iglau. The completed first movement was followed by 24 bars of a *Scherzo*, and the manuscript was found in the 1960s by Mahler's widow, Alma. It seems probable that the quartet movement was the prize-winning work that crowned Mahler's first year at the Conservatory. A full account of the work, which is largely within the conventions of the time, is given by Donald Mitchell in the first volume of his important study of the composer.\*

**Keith Anderson**

\* Donald Mitchell: *Gustav Mahler. The Early Years*, London, 1958. pp. 123–127 *et passim*



Alexander Guriyanov

### Anton Barakhovsky

First concertmaster of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Russian violinist Anton Barakhovsky is recognised as one of the foremost artists of his generation. In 2001 he was invited to join the Hamburg State Philharmonic Orchestra as its first concertmaster. As a soloist with orchestras around the world, Barakhovsky has been heard with the St Petersburg Philharmonic, the Russian State Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the NDR Symphony Orchestra, the Hamburg State Philharmonic Orchestra and the KBS Symphony Orchestra, Seoul. An avid chamber musician, Barakhovsky has collaborated with distinguished artists such as Leon Fleischer, Maurizio Pollini, Sabine Meyer, Yo Yo Ma, Kolja Blacher, and Maxim Vengerov. In 1999 he joined forces with violinist Vadim Repin to make a live recording at the Louvre, Paris, released by Erato to critical acclaim. Barakhovsky began studying the violin with Matvej Lieberman, continuing his studies in Hamburg with Mark Lubotsky and Kolja Blacher and in New York at The Juilliard School under the tutelage of the late Dorothy DeLay.



Kirill Bashkirov

### Eldar Nebolsin

Eldar Nebolsin is a former student of the renowned Russian pianist and teacher Dmitri Bashkirov. His albums for Naxos include Rachmaninov's *Preludes, Op. 23 and 32*, both Liszt *Piano Concertos* and *Totentanz*, Ernő Dohnányi's *Variations on a Nursery Theme*, Fernando Lopes-Graça's *Piano Concertos Nos. 1 and 2*, and Chopin's complete works for piano and orchestra. His second solo album of works by Schubert was released in May 2011. Eldar Nebolsin enjoys a busy international career as a soloist, recitalist and chamber-music player, appearing with conductors, orchestras and colleagues of international distinction. In 2005 he was unanimously awarded the Sviatoslav Richter Prize at the First International Piano Competition in Moscow, where he was also honoured with the special award for The Best Classical Concerto Performance. Eldar Nebolsin currently holds a place on the faculty of the International Institute of Chamber Music in Madrid, teaching alongside Ralf Gothoni, and is regularly invited to give master-classes both in piano solo repertoire and chamber music. He is Professor of Piano at the Hanns Eisler Hochschule in Berlin.



Christian Steiner

### Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt

Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt is a prize winner of many international competitions such as the International Rostropovich Competition, Paris and the Tchaikovsky Competition, Moscow. He performs worldwide with prestigious orchestras such as the Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Staatskapelle Weimar, and the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, and in concert and recital at international festivals and venues such as the Ravinia and Piatigorsky Cello Festival (USA), Wigmore Hall, Carnegie and Alice Tully Halls, Suntory Hall and the Berlin Philharmonic Hall. He is the Founder and Music Director of the Chamber Orchestra Metamorphosen Berlin alongside violinist Indira Koch and in chamber recitals has performed with renowned artists including Lang Lang, Christoph Eschenbach, Emanuel Ax, and Gil Shaham. He has released several albums on the Sony label and recorded Cello Duello with Jens Peter Maintz for the Solo Musica label. He had the honour of working with Mstislav Rostropovitch during his later career.

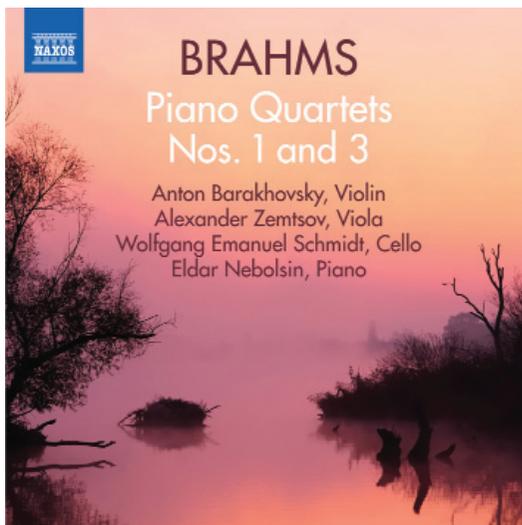


Marije van den Berg

### Alexander Zemtsov

Alexander Zemtsov studied with Elena Ozol at the Gnessin School, Moscow, with Michael Kugel at the Hoogeschool, Maastricht and at the Hanns Eisler Hochschule, Berlin with Tabea Zimmermann. Since the age of 15 he has enjoyed a career as a viola soloist, with appearances in Europe, the United States, Asia and Australia in collaboration with leading orchestras and conductors. A prize-winner of various competitions, he was appointed principal viola of the London Philharmonic Orchestra at the age of 23, leaving that position after 10 years to concentrate on his career as chamber musician and conductor. His recordings include Britten's *Double Concerto* with the LPO, Mozart's *String Trios*, and Fauré's *Piano Quartets*. He has taught viola at the GSMD in London, the MUK in Vienna and since 2015 he has been a professor at the HEMU in Lausanne and HfMT in Cologne. He was recently appointed principal conductor of the INSO Lemberg. Upcoming guest conducting engagements include concerts with the BNRSO, Sofia and Mischa Maisky as soloist, Rijeka Opera and the Mannheim Chamber Orchestra.

**Also available**



**8.572798**

After a period as a court composer at Detmold, Brahms returned to the city of his birth, Hamburg, in January 1860. Here, in relative tranquillity, he explored the then rare piano quartet repertoire. The *Piano Quartet No. 2* received a very sympathetic hearing in Vienna, Clara Schumann even preferring it to its immediate predecessor, the *Piano Quartet, Op. 25* [Naxos 8.572798]. Its lyricism is heightened by a romantically beautiful *Adagio*. Mahler's vibrant *Piano Quartet in A minor* dates from 1876, the end of his first year at the Vienna Conservatory, where the only completed movement was first performed.

**Johannes  
BRAHMS**  
(1833–1897)

<b>Piano Quartet No. 2 in A major, Op. 26 (1862)</b>	<b>48:21</b>
<b>1 Allegro non troppo</b>	<b>16:27</b>
<b>2 Poco adagio</b>	<b>10:44</b>
<b>3 Scherzo: Poco allegro</b>	<b>10:45</b>
<b>4 Finale: Allegro</b>	<b>10:15</b>

**Gustav  
MAHLER**  
(1860–1911)

<b>5 Piano Quartet in A minor (1876)</b>	<b>11:10</b>
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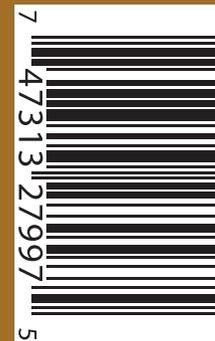
Recorded in Wyastone Concert Hall, Monmouth, Wales, 25–28 October 2012  
Producer: Joe Kerr • Engineer: Andrew Lang • Booklet notes: Keith Anderson  
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**NAXOS**

8.572799

**DDD**

Playing Time  
**59:42**



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