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BRAHMS Piano Trios: No. 1 in B, op. 8 (1889 version); No. 2 in C, op. 87; No. 3 in e, op. 101 • Renaud Capuçon, vn; Gautier Capuçon, vc; Nicholas Angelich, pn. • VIRGIN no number 2 CDs: 90:31

No sooner had I submitted my review copy of another Brahms Piano Trio cycle with the Altenberg Trio Wien on Challenge Classics than here came this new one on Virgin Classics from this very fine French ensemble. I have to admit that something about this release amuses me, though perhaps it cannot be appreciated without reading my aforementioned review. In that contribution, I complained of the fact that so many trio ensembles choose to record both versions of the B-Major Trio (its vastly inferior 1854 now-never-played-in public original, and its drastic 1889 rewrite), leaving out a posthumously published A-Major Trio that is quite likely the real deal. Almost as if Angelich and the brothers Capuçon had anticipated my complaint, they've come up with a solution guaranteed to be bulletproof against reproach. They omit them both, giving us neither the early version of the B-Major nor the unproven A-Major. I don't know why, but that strikes me as very funny. It also results in very short playing time for a two-disc set, just over 90 minutes; so it is good to note that it is being sold for the price of a single CD.

I was recently quite impressed with the playing of Gautier Capuçon on another Virgin Classics disc of Haydn cello concertos. Unfortunately, that recording was spoiled by the up-close sound of heavy breathing. Happily, no such blight afflicts the current release. These are exceptionally talented players and, considering their youth, they display extraordinary sensitivity to Brahms's heartbreak and profound loneliness. The Piano Trios are among the composer's most moving and deeply felt chamber works, spanning virtually his entire creative career. The op. 8, as by now everyone knows, is both an early and a late work. Twenty-five years after he first wrote it in 1854, Brahms returned to it in 1889, performing reconstructive surgery on it so far-reaching that it is hardly recognizable as the same piece. Of the three trios, the B-Major is the lengthiest and the richest in terms of melodic and harmonic material.

Op. 87 was two years in the making, being completed in 1882. It is late-middle or early-late Brahms—take your pick. More tightly constructed and shorter, it still sings with those large Brahmsian gestures and generous melodies. The second movement "gypsy" variations are especially moving. The final Trio in C Minor dates from 1886. Written while Brahms vacationed at the shores of Lake Thun, the work is totally at odds with the peaceful, placid surroundings. It is the shortest of the three, compressed and angst-ridden.

Practically every time I hear a new recording of these works, it seems to eclipse all others I've heard and raved about previously. But please believe me when I tell you that the Capuçon brothers and American-born pianist Nicholas Angelich play

these scores in a way I've never heard them played before. There is intense passion in their playing, and they have a way of finding just the right note in a phrase to emphasize with subtle *portamento* and nuanced shading. Dynamic control is amazing, and Angelich's piano wells up to lift the violin and cello at climactic moments in waves of ecstasy. Angelich also has a way of rolling chords in a way I've not heard before, as at the beginning of the Scherzo of the C-Major Trio, that slips tongue-in-groove into the rhythm of the string parts. A myriad of details emerges that one simply does not hear in other performances. And the tone Renaud produces on his 1721 Strad violin, and Gautier on his 1701 Goffriller cello is—there is no other word for it—soulful.

I've made a friend promise that if I die tomorrow this is the set of Brahms Piano Trios that goes with me. Need I say more?

Jerry Dubins

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AllMusic - Rating: 4*/5*

Brahms: Piano Trios Review by Blair Sanderson

Instead of forming a permanent chamber ensemble, violinist Renaud Capuçon and his brother, cellist Gautier Capuçon, prefer to work with different partners, whom they choose for particular skills and strong affinities for a given project. For this double-disc of **Brahms'** Piano Trios, they have enlisted pianist Nicholas Angelich, a friend and frequent participant in their concerts of Romantic chamber music. Their camaraderie fosters a conversational approach, and their performances are convivial and fleet, with a greater emphasis on momentum than on gravitas. The ardent Piano Trio No. 1, which might be called "young man's music," especially benefits from the Capuçons' agility and light tone, and Angelich's robust playing. The Piano Trio No. 2 is a seriously argued piece, and the trio responds to it with a more subdued mood. Even so, their textures remain transparent and well-defined, an antidote to the thickness so often applied to **Brahms'** mature works. Of a darker cast and perhaps the least-suited to this ensemble's buoyancy, the Piano Trio No. 3 is the only disappointment. The Capuçons and Angelich are assertive and accurate, but they do not penetrate the music deeply enough to make it compelling. Virgin's recording offers natural resonance and clarity, though the cello sounds a little weak in the mix.

Brahms - Piano Trios: B, Op.8, C, Op.87in C minor, Op.101

Nicholas Angelich (piano), Renaud Capuçon (violin) & Gautier

Capuçon (cello)

Reviewed by: Colin Anderson of Classical Source

CD No: VIRGIN CLASSICS 5456532 (2 CDs)

Duration: 90'31"

These are invigorating and sensitive accounts of Brahms's generously expressed piano trios. Beautifully recorded too, with a tangibility and immediacy that is ideal for chamber music; although in fortissimos the closeness can be slightly wearing. However, given these two CDs are selling for the price of one, then this new issue is a tempting addition to the collection. One thing these players do not leave any doubt over is Brahms's passion and warmth; it's not mawkishly presented though, for these excellent, strong-on-teamwork musicians have an overall view of Brahms's structures that is satisfying, a whole view that is lovingly arrived at. It would be a hard heart indeed that didn't respond to the ardour expressed in the first movement of the B major trio.

Throughout these performances, not only are the formal aspects of each movement attended to, but the music glows with an expressive intensity that is not allowed to dominate; dynamic and emotional contrasts sustain each movement in a most favourable way. Occasionally, there is a doubt as to how much pathos these works will yield, but these musicians just keep on the right side of overdoing it.

The C minor trio, the first movement containing one of Brahms's most spontaneously moving ideas, is superbly done and comes close to Decca's Katchen, Suk and Starker recording. High praise! All in all, a fine set of colourful and engaging renditions that will find a home with other distinguished versions of this wonderful music. I'm left feeling that anyone who might think Brahms's chamber music is a little dour, might be converted by these enthusiastic, often burnished realisations.

Good Amazon Review - Alan Lekan

Rating: 5*/5*

I first heard of the Capucon brothers in a 2002 Lugano festival recording paired with Martha Argerich in the zippy Mendelssohn d-minor trio no. 1. Their gorgeous tonal control and razor-sharp ensemble in the rapid-fire scherzos were truly spellbinding. Note to self: keep an eye on these guys.

Now seeing their healthy discography in 2008 does not surprise me. These are very fine musicians - along with Mr. Angelich who is well-paired with them. It has been an absolute thrill to take in their performances here which present to us a very luminous, slower-to-unfold and deeply communicative Brahms. Each of the

three trios is magnificent.

Their overall treatment is exceedingly radiant in tone with somewhat relaxed and notably slower tempos/times compared to other recordings. Compared to say, the Beaux Arts Trio's recordings, this reading here is quite longer in every movement. So often with deliberately slower tempos, a movement is at risk in languishing. Yet, to me, their slower pace really works when combined with their ability to draw out of the inherent romantic ardour within these pieces. It seems these musicians play more from a core of emotional connection felt within the music. I found the overall effect very moving.

Brahms' was twenty before he wrote his first true masterpiece - the Op 8 trio in B major. This piece never quite caught my attention listening to the Beaux Arts recording on Philips Duo. Maybe it was the poorer sound quality of the former, but this piece's greatness finally became obvious to me in the Angelich/Capucan trio's hands. They take their time but it totally gives the music time to breathe and to speak profoundly - so as to savor it more. This is very apparent in the scherzo movement trio which meanders so marvelously with a subtle passion that crescendos to a wonderful climax. Combined with the Capucan's pitch-perfect intonation, the harmonies are indeed luminous and moving. In the wrong hands, Brahms can sound overly anguished - but not here.

It's clear all three musicians are masters of their instruments. (Renaud plays a 1721 Strad while Gautier plays a 1701 Goffriller cello). Nicholas Angelich makes playing these pieces sound so light and effortless. And, in the faster ends of the Op. 8 scherzo movement, you really sense these guys totally enjoy the music and playing together. It's not pretended. Similarly, in the Mendelssohn-like scherzo-presto in the C-major Op. 87, they bring both a zesty playfulness and great precision to those rapid-fire passagework that ranks with the best, yet communicates more nuances.

The Eroica Trio's readings - for different reasons - are also quite appealing. The UK-based Florestan Trio's set is another top choice, especially beautifully sculpted in the slower autumnal movements. As for the Beaux Art's two CD set of Brahms' trios, the horn and clarinet trios are great, but I cannot recommend this set for the piano trios at least compared to the choices above. Maybe part is the inferior sound quality compared to these modern recordings. Such is personal taste.

The lead Amazon review says it well. These are finely wrought readings with compelling musicianship. The trio is supported by very good (but not drop-dead stunning) sound quality. Listening to this CD, I felt unexpectedly moved and deeply awed by the level of individual talent coming together to summon the Brahmsian spirit within these 19th-century compositions. It was an honor to hear such music. Highly recommended - and a bargain as well. Compositions - 5 stars; Performance

- 5 stars; Sound quality - 4 stars.