Brahms and Hindemith

Clarinet Sonatas

Colin Bradbury clarinet

Bernard Roberts piano

BRAHMS: Sonata for Clarinet & Piano in F minor. Op, 120 No. 1

1.	*Allegro appassionato*	7.23
2.	*Andante un poco adagio*	4.07
3.	*Allegretto grazioso*	3.55
4.	*Vivace*	5.02

HINDEMITH: Sonata for Clarinet *&* Piano (1939)

5.	*Mäßig bewegt*	4.45
6.	*Lebhaft*	2.53
7.	*Sehr langsam*	5.49
8.	*Kleines rondo, gemächlich*	2.50

BRAHMS: Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in E flat. Op. 120 No.2

9.	*Allegro amabile*	7.35
10.	*Allegro appassionato - Sostenuto*	4.47
11.	*Andante con moto - Allegro (Variations)*	6.42

Total Playing time: **55.48**

Colin Bradbury (clarinet)
Bernard Roberts (piano)

BRAHMS: Sonata for Clarinet & Piano in F minor. Op. 120 No. 1 BRAHMS: Sonata for Clarinet & Piano in E flat major. Op. 120 No.2
HINDEMITH: Sonata for Clarinet & Piano (1939)

Brahms had already enjoyed the Christmas hospitality of the music-loving Duke and Duchess of Meiningen (which is in Thuringia, south of Eisenach) for several years. In December 1890 he was invited there again, and at a concert on Christmas Day, in a performance of the Weber Concertino, he heard (apparently for the first time) the playing of a young clarinettist called Richard Mühlfeld.

Mühlfeld was then nearly 35. He had been appointed to the orchestra of the court of Saxe-Meiningen when he was only 17 - but as violinist, not clarinettist. Six years later, in 1879, he became principal clarinettist, and he held that post to the end of his life. On occasions he conducted both the orchestra and a male-voice choir: in 1890 he became director of the court theatre. He was obviously a remarkable man and an outstandingly all-round musician. He was to die tragically young at 51, in 1907.

In 1890, Brahms was in his 57th year, and he had already decided to give up composing (or so he said). Certainly his Second String Quintet in G major op. 111, whose première had just been given at Vienna on 11 November 1890, would have made a splendid finale to his composing career. But in March 1891 Brahms heard Mühlfeld play again - this time Mozart's Clarinet Quintet - and later he played to Brahms privately. A new friendship began: Brahms discussed clarinet technique with great interest. So the harvest of the summer months of 1891, between May and August, was the Clarinet Trio op.114 and the Clarinet Quintet op.115. With the performance of both pieces at the Berlin Singakademie in December 1891 and shortly afterwards at Vienna in December and January of 1892 an entirely new chapter of Brahms' life opened. Their success was immediate and many more performances followed.

Perhaps Brahms had never really intended to give up composing in 1890, for the next two summers were occupied with his last piano pieces opp.116-9 and the completion of another

major project dear to his heart: an edition of 49 German Folksongs in seven volumes. Meanwhile old friends were dying thick and fast around Brahms: the surgeon Billroth, Hans von Bülow, Philipp Spitta. Then a group of his friends in Vienna arranged a fortnight of concerts in their houses early in May 1894 - and begged Meiningen to give Mühlfeld leave to come too. Thus Brahms wrote on 2 May to the Baroness von Heldburg (another title of the chatelaine of Meiningen - a great lady with whom he was on close, even flirtatious terms): 'I must thank you ... because you sent us Mühlfeld; along with his wife and clarinet.'

So the creative magic began to work again: and when Brahms went off to Bad Ischl that summer it was with the two clarinet sonatas already sketched out in his head: they were completed on paper by July. In September Brahms summoned Mühlfeld to a meeting at Berchtesgaden, telling him to bring his B flat clarinet (the Trio and the Quintet had, of course, been written for the A). Both sonatas were performed privately before the Duke and Duchess at Berchtesgaden on 23 September: and in November at Frankfurt for Clara Schumann and friends. They were first publicly performed at the Tonkünstlerverein in Vienna on 7, 8 and 11 January 1895. Brahms then undertook a tour of German cities - including Berlin and Leipzig - with the new sonatas, which were published by Simrock later that same year. Their arrival in England was prompt: Mühlfeld and Fanny Davies (Brahms' English pupil) gave both sonatas their London première in June 1895.

Only the Four Serious Songs and the Eleven Chorale Preludes were yet to come: Brahms died in April 1897. In chamber music, these sonatas were very much his swansong. Yet for the clarinet itself they were something of a new beginning. Composers had written for this late-comer to the orchestra readily enough in wind serenades, but had been chary of using it in chamber music. Even the programming of the Clarinet Quintet at its Berlin premiere had caused controversy amongst the supporters of a concert previously confined to string ensembles. Brahms could point to two first-rank exemplars in the quintets of Mozart and of Weber. Weber and Schumann had used the instrument as a partner in duet. But now it was as if Brahms had realised the clarinet’s full potentialities for the first time, and by his example he gave birth to a literature, Reger and Debussy leading what was eventually to become during the course of the 20th century an overcrowded field.

The key factor was surely the quality of Mühlfeld's playing. But without recordings, we shall never really know enough about this. We know about the instrument he played on: and his actual clarinets have survived. We know of Brahms' affectionate nickname for his young friend: Fräulein Klarinette - which perhaps suggests a certain delicacy, even femininity about his style. But other contemporary witnesses got different impressions: a fiery technique and an unusual use of vibrato. He was a player who appealed to other composers, Liszt and Wagner amongst them, as well as to Brahms: perhaps more than to other players. But all this is, and will ever remain, hearsay. The best evidence about how Mühlfeld played must lie in the music that Brahms wrote for him. As was said of Sir Christopher Wren and St. Paul's : *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice.*

But in another way this was the end of a line. These wonderful clarinet works were not only Brahms' autumnal testament but the late-fallen fruits of a whole way of making music. In them Brahms displayed all the immense skill he had accumulated in the course of a lifetime; and willy-nilly the works enshrine his beliefs about the nature of composition and demonstrate all that he had learnt from the past. When Brahms said “That's how it's done from Mozart to me” he was stating no more than the literal truth. But there was more. The Viennese composers had developed an ideal balance of homophony with polyphony in their work. Brahms went further back into the past, and reinstated the whole range of contrapuntal device - canonic working, the use of augmentation and diminution particularly prominent - which Bach himself had inherited. Brahms made the grand synthesis of setting these ancient elements in the context of late romantic harmony. And in this fertile soil sprouted the seeds of a new way of music-making which in the hands of Schoenberg has dominated the intervening century.

George Bozarth has pointed out how Brahms liked to write works in pairs. Here he was again following Mozart: the Quintets KK. 515 and 516, the piano concertos KK. 466 and 467, wear alternately tragic and comic masks, their creator remaining impartial above them. The contrasts between these two clarinet sonatas - one minor, the other major - cannot be quite so clearly differentiated. Their overall structure is deliberately varied. The F minor sonata is a four-movement work with large-scale movements - sonata, rondo - enclosing an exquisite slow movement and a gentle Ländler. The E flat sonata has only three movements: the opening sonata movement is followed by a stormy scherzo-and-trio: there is no slow movement, but a mixture of tempi in the predominantly slow concluding set of variations.

The opening movements of both works do have a certain tragic/comic polarity. The striding vigour of the F minor's heroic vein is essentially tragic. The E flat sonata's opening movement, if not exactly comic, at least is smiling, '*amabile*', mellow and lyrical through and through: the golden fruit of autumn rather than its storms. But it is immediately contradicted by the Baltic rigour of the succeeding *allegro appassionato*, whose chilly E flat minor recalls the younger, wilder Brahms. The valedictory variations are calm in their mastery: the delicate filigree patterns show fantasy of the rarest, lightest, ripest kind. Only in the sudden outburst of impetuous syncopated rhythms in the vigorous final variation is there an echo of the much more dramatic and extensive rhythmic dislocations (very un-classical!) which are so amazing a feature of the first movement of the F minor work. But the rest of the E flat finale could not be in greater contrast to the heroic finale of the F minor sonata -whose high spirits recall at moments the battling exultation of the Double Concerto.

Hindemith was born two years before Brahms died, so it was natural that his earliest student works should belong to the Brahmsian tradition, together with traces of Reger and Strauss. After 1918 he threw himself into the front rank of the avant-garde in Germany, and indeed by his late twenties (c.1922) could be regarded as its leader. But from the song-cycle *Das Marienleben* of 1923 onwards there began the transformation - a deepening and broadening of his art - which by 1930 had established this prolific creator as the leading German composer of his generation.

The beginning of work on his operatic masterpiece *Mathis der Mahler* coincided with the advent of the Nazis in 1933; and the performance in 1934 of the Symphony that he had drawn from it caused not only the *cause celèbre* of Furtwängler’s resignation but the beginning for Hindemith of an uneasy time of ambivalent relations with the Nazi authorities, only eased by three prolonged visits to Turkey to stimulate music education there.

In 1938 Hindemith resolved the situation by going to live in the village of Blusch ob Sierre in Switzerland, where he found a temporary refuge amid the darkening international scene. He took up an old ambition (dating from 1918) to write a series of sonatas for every orchestral instrument. There may have been a certain didactic aim; and these pieces have indeed become useful repertoire for students and others; they do not deserve their current neglect. Altogether they form a resumption of an older compositional attitude - the wish to make systematic collections of pieces - more typical, perhaps, of a composer of the late baroque. It was an

honourable task which could only have been undertaken by a composer of just that sort of orderly fecundity, whose fluency and technical prowess could produce a complete piece overnight, or who could write a movement during the course of a rail journey.

Hindemith had already started on this task in 1938 with sonatas for bassoon and oboe, a viola sonata (by no means his first), as well as a piano duet sonata. Now in the opening months of that period we know as the Phoney War (the pieces are dated from 3 September 1939 itself to 25 November) in the course of a Swiss autumn he completed sonatas for violin (probably his 5th); clarinet; harp; horn and trumpet. The cor anglais and the trombone sonata had to wait for his arrival in the New World; and sonatas for cello, double bass and bass tuba were added even later.

So it is not extraordinary, though still amazing, to discover that the four movements of this 17-minute clarinet sonata were written in exactly one week: 21-28 September 1939.

The piece can be understood in largely the same way as one would approach Brahms. The lyrical flow of the first movement is achieved by a craftsmanship which leads a wealth of themes seamlessly into each other: the transition to the main secondary material has a touch of dotted briskness, as so often in Brahms. Brahms would not have written the secondary theme which climbs up in perfect fourths - but then Schoenberg, of course, already had in his Chamber Symphony. The texture then thickens in the manner of a development: but when the opening theme returns in its original imitative manner none of its entries are at the original pitch: it is a Hindemithian version of the subdominant recapitulation. Subsidiary themes reappear in the same order - but, not the main secondary theme. Instead there is a prolonged, very beautiful coda in a slower tempo which works out an augmented version of the pitches of the first theme.

The scherzo movement is in fact a 2/2 march, pert and lively, and presented with a very light touch - a sort of fairy march. Two elements are added to it. The first is an outburst of ragtime rhythms which show that the *enfant terrible* of Hindemith in his twenties was by no means dead. The other is a *legato sostenuto* counterpoint in even minims set against the original march. The music keeps on developing (there is no moment of recapitulation) until - like the ending of the last movement - it just vanishes.

In the slow movement a sonorous and noble melody in Hindemith's most eloquent vein is worked out in some twenty bars and followed by an 11-bar codetta-like section ending on a clear triadic chord of F. We will hear a slightly shortened version of this coda at the end of the movement. The middle section moves along a little faster and more flowingly: it is a dialogue between the two instruments loosely in the manner of a two - or occasionally three - part invention. The return brings the primary theme back on clarinet. But now it is much more fully scored, with not only a new countermelody in the right hand of the piano but an incessantly marching dotted theme in the bass. Gradually the texture thins until only this dotted bass is left, repeating like a ground as it dies away. Then the codetta figure heard earlier returns to end the movement.

Kleines Rondo - but at 119 bars this is a reasonably large one. The mood is very much that of the earlier scherzo: if anything even more cheerful and delicately fairy-like, with much use of a silvery upper register on the piano. The very Hindemithian main theme is heard on clarinet, then on piano: and before it is repeated in the dominant on the chalumeau register of the clarinet there are a couple of bars of octaves striding down on the piano which will reappear more prominently later. The second theme floats upwards rather like its equivalent in the first movement but this time outlines not fourths, but a triadic shape. After a canonic reappearance of the main theme in a lower register on both instruments, the octave theme is given its head. After a last *pianissimo* statement of the main theme, the music dances off into the distance.

COLIN BRADBURY was principal clarinet of the BBC Symphony Orchestra for over thirty years, playing concertos in the studio, the Royal Festival Hall and at Henry Wood Promenade Concerts. He took a prominent role under Pierre Boulez in performing both the avant-garde and the classical repertoire of the twentieth century, and as a recital soloist has given many first broadcast performances, including sonatas by Draeseke, Karg-Elert, Koechlin and Castelnuovo-Tedesco and works by Cavallini, Fibich and Caplet.
In the 1980s he began, with Oliver Davies, to research and perform little known music of the nineteenth century. Their discoveries led to the recording of four LPs, and since leaving the Orchestra, new research has provided material for two further CDs. More are planned, and in

the meantime he has founded Lazarus Edition, which is bringing these masterpieces back into print.

For the present recording Colin Bradbury has revived the partnership with Bernard Roberts which dates back to the 1970s when, already professors at the Royal College, the two artists first performed these three works in the many broadcasts and public recitals which they gave together.

BERNARD ROBERTS has long been acknowledged as one of Britain's leading pianists. A particularly profound interpreter of Beethoven, his recording of the complete Beethoven Piano Sonatas has been given the highest praise in the UK, Europe and America. More recently, recording the complete Preludes and Fugues of J S Bach has been an enormous and rewarding undertaking and this 4CD set is now released and is attracting critical acclaim.

He performs at all the major British festivals and has been associated with the Dartington International Summer School for many years. His international career takes him throughout Europe, America and the Far East and he has given masterclasses at many leading festivals including the Van Cliburn Piano Institute in Fort Worth, Texas. Highly regarded as a teacher as well as a performer, his teaching and playing commitments take him on regular visits to France, Germany and Denmark. He retains a Visiting Professorship at the Royal College of Music in London.

In addition to his recital work, Bernard Roberts often appears as concerto soloist with leading orchestras both in the UK and overseas. He is well known to listeners to BBC Radio 3 and he has been the subject of a 40-minute documentary made for BBC television by the director Mischa Scorer. Time is set aside each year for chamber music and he particularly enjoys performing the piano trio repertoire with his sons Andrew and Nicholas.

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Cover portraits of Brahms and Hindemith courtesy of The Royal College of Music (Department of Portraits and Performance History)

Recorded at St. George's, Brandon Hill, Bristol:

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Hindemith :	**July 6/7, 1998**

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Producer :	**John Rushby-Smith**

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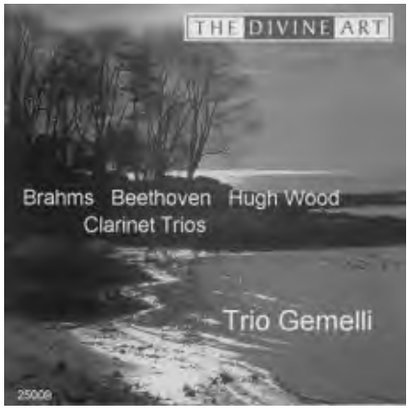

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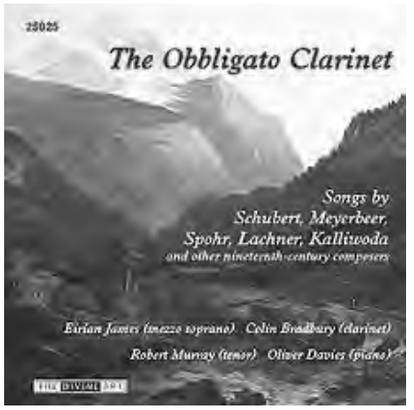

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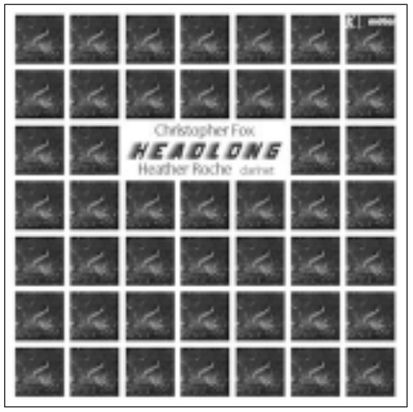

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