gestures, even when viewed from all kinds of angles. The camera ungallantly shows Eschenbach's non-adherence to Henry Wood's precept that conductors should not sweat – never an easy rule to keep, but lapses can usually be concealed from the audience in a concert hall. Zimmermann is among the musicians shown while resting, and not every facial nuance seems to be occasioned by the music going on around her. When she is playing, her features are often obscured by artily out-of-focus hand-flapping from the conductor. Often enough, the hands are all we get, apparently disembodied and reminiscent of something from the saga of the Addams family. She, and Berlioz, deserve better.

Julian Rushton
University of Leeds

Brahms

Trio in A minor for Viola, Cello and Piano op. 114
Viola Sonata in F minor op. 120, no. 1
Viola Sonata in E♭ major op. 120, no. 2

Lawrence Power *va*, Tim Hugh *vc*, Simon Crawford-Phillips *pf*

Hyperion Records CDA67584 (65 minutes: DDD)
Notes and translations included.

The story of Brahms's encounter with the clarinettist Richard Mühlfeld has decidedly fairy-tale overtones. Brahms had announced his retirement to his publisher Fritz Simrock in December 1890, declaring 'quite generally, it is time to stop'.[1] All thoughts of retirement, however, were quickly dispensed with several months later, when he attended a performance given by Mühlfeld at the court in Meiningen. Galvanized by the clarinettist's playing, Brahms was filled with a new lease of creative energy, inspired not only to resurrect his compositional career but also to return to the concert platform. He returned from Bad Ischl at the end of the summer of 1891 with the Trio op. 114 and Quintet op. 115 in tow, and put aside his long-held aversion to performing in public in order to play these and later the two sonatas op. 120, published in 1895, with Mühlfeld. This late burst of creativity not only contributed four of the cornerstones of the clarinet repertoire, it also broadened the horizons of the long-neglected viola. The Trio and two sonatas were also published in a viola arrangement and it is in this version that the three works are presented on this Hyperion recording.

Although the sonatas in particular are central to the viola repertoire, the viola arrangements have never enjoyed the popularity of their clarinet counterparts, a circumstance that is due, at least in part, to the intrinsic role of the clarinet in their conception. Mühlfeld's playing was a genuine discovery for Brahms, who had previously paid little attention to the solo qualities of the instrument. He described Mühlfeld's clarinet playing in raptures as 'absolutely the best I

[1] Styra Avins, ed., *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, trans. Avins and Josef Eisinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 674.

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know' to Clara Schumann,[2] and his excitement regarding the new compositional possibilities is palpable in the letter he wrote to Fritz Simrock from Bad Ischl in 1891 alluding to his new Trio and Quintet: 'if you hear as much clarinet there in the mountains, think about whether it will sound better as a trio with piano or as a quintet with string quartet.'[3] Brahms was generally cynical of the nineteenth-century preoccupation with arrangements; he castigated Simrock in the case of op. 120 for being interested only in the arrangements and not the originals.[4] Yet he was aware of the role that arrangements had to play in the propagation of his compositions, particularly in cases where the instrumentation was somewhat specialized and performing options thus limited. Mühlfeld was essentially irreplaceable in Brahms's opinion. As he explained to Clara Schumann, 'clarinet players in Vienna and many other places are quite fairly good in orchestra but solo they give one no real pleasure'.[5]

These circumstances render the Trio and sonatas an uneasy prospect for the contemporary viola player, particularly given the fact that Brahms himself was less than convinced about the quality of the sonata arrangements, describing them to Joachim as 'very awkward and joyless'.[6] Yet the recording under review may have done much to assuage Brahms's doubts. In the hands of Lawrence Power, the viola arrangements of the Trio and in particular the sonatas emerge from the shadows of Mühlfeld and establish themselves as independent works in their own right. Power is one of the most interesting proponents of the instrument to emerge in recent years. A dedicated viola player as opposed to a violinist who doubles up, he makes no attempt to push the tone of the viola in the direction of the solo violin. Instead, he focuses his attention on the inherent qualities of his instrument, emphasizing its ephemeral veiled sound. Power's viola playing is especially suited to the intimacy of the two sonatas. Joined on the piano by Simon Crawford-Phillips, a musician of considerable sensitivity, the two capture beautifully the spirit of the works. Avoiding the pitfalls of the autumnal nostalgia associated with the sonatas in which performers too often get mired, they exude the energy of a rejuvenated Brahms, and interact with delicate virtuosity to provide an imaginative reading of the music. The duo are very effective in the slower movements, demonstrating a considerable expressive palette. Particularly noteworthy is the sound world that they produce in the 'Andante un poco Adagio' of the F minor sonata. Power's viola tone here is positively ethereal, while Crawford-Phillips responds with a subtle soundscape in which elusive harmonies appear to emerge out of the air. The result serves as a reminder of the Debussy-like quality that is often present in the textural writing of late Brahms. It also embraces the improvisatory spirit that Brahms himself perceived in these works. He observed to Clara: 'If you could extemporize a little in F minor and E Flat major you would probably chance on the two sonatas.'[7]

The viola does not have the same impact in the faster movements. I don't feel that its tone is bright enough to pull off the bell-like passages in the final movement of the F minor Sonata, and, for the same reason, it occasionally disappears behind

[2] Berthold Litzmann, ed., *Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms, 1853–1896*, 2 vols (London: Edward Arnold, 1927): II, 196.

[3] Johannes Brahms, *Briefwechsel*, 16 vols (Berlin, 1912–22; repr. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1974): XII.4, 50. [Hereafter *Bw*]

[4] *Bw*, XII.4, 165.

[5] Litzmann, ed., *Letters*, II, 196.

[6] *Bw*, VI.2, 295.

[7] Letter dated 3 August 1894. Litzmann, ed., *Letters*, II, 262.

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the piano part in the faster passages of the opening movements of both sonatas. This problem becomes more apparent in the Trio, when Power and Crawford-Philips are joined by Tim Hugh on cello, and the denser grouping gives rise to issues of balance. The viola is not a natural soloist in a chamber setting, and the distinct tone of the clarinet offers far more scope for contrast of colour and texture. Yet there is much to enjoy in this performance. The playing is never anything but musical and the intelligence of the performers is clearly apparent. The Trio has never fared as well in the popularity stakes as its partner piece the Quintet; its concise style of writing has none of the accessibility of the Quintet's sweeping melodies. This is a work, however, that deserves repeated listening. As is the case with the Quintet, the Trio seamlessly combines the old and the new. Allusions to Brahms's youthful scherzo style in the opening movement, and reminiscences of his *Liebeslieder* waltzes in the 'Andante grazioso' are offset by a terseness and economy of thought that could only be late Brahms. Power, Hugh and Crawford-Phillips are comfortable in this milieu. The interaction between the three is both thoughtful and passionate and makes for a very enjoyable recording of the Trio. Essentially, this is a very enjoyable recording, which does much to promote the validity of the viola arrangements.

Elaine Kelly
University of Edinburgh

Chaminade

Piano Music Vol. 1

Peter Jacobs *pf*

Helios CDH 55197 (71 minutes: DDD)
Notes and translations included.

Peter Jacobs is effectively carving out a niche for himself as a champion of piano music by lesser-known English and French composers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His recordings of the piano works of John Foulds, Frank Bridge and Déodat de Séverac, among others, demonstrate that such relatively unknown composers produced music worthy of recognition, preservation and study. *Piano Music by Cécile Chaminade, Volume 1*, the first of a three-volume set, does so brilliantly. The music Jacobs has chosen to make his speciality was largely ignored by twentieth-century commentators, who dismissed it as 'light' music lacking seriousness, complexity, innovativeness or monumentality – values central to the modernist aesthetic that dominated critical and academic discourse on music throughout much of the century. In the wake of postmodernism, we are no longer shackled with these biases, and composers who shunned modernism's aesthetic mandates just as it was emerging as a hegemonic critical paradigm have now begun to receive attention that has long been overdue.

Chaminade's posthumous reputation has suffered from even stronger biases based on her gender. Chaminade scholar Marcia J. Citron is among several writers