QUINTET for CLARINET and STRING QUARTET
in B Minor, Op. 115

JOST MICHAELS
clarinetist

THE ENDRES QUARTET
At the end of his short life Mozart (1756-1791) made the acquaintance of the clarinetist Anton Stadler, a meeting which resulted in the composer's writing two of his last masterpieces, the Quintet for Clarinet and Strings, K. 581, and the Concerto for Clarinet, K. 622. A century later a similar meeting caused similar effects: Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) made the acquaintance of the clarinetist Richard Muehfeld—"absolutely the best wind-instrument player I know", in Brahms's own words—and wrote between 1891 and 1894 four of his best chamber-music works, the Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Opus 114, the Quintet for Clarinet and Strings, Opus 115, and the two Sonatas for Clarinet and Piano, Opus 120.

When he met Muehfeld, Brahms thought he had nothing more to say in music, and he kept repeating to his friends that he did not want to compose any more. But the remarkably expressive quality of the clarinetist's playing opened for him the door to an almost uncharted world of sound, which, since Mozart, only Weber had hinted at (though he had been, on the other hand, very interested in the technical possibilities of the instrument). Besides, the autumnal shading of the clarinet and its natural lyricism wistful even in the most virtuosic passages, particularly suited Brahms's inspiration at the close of his life, when, to use Deiter's expression, he looked "back musingly over an existence rich in powerful creative works, artistic successes, devotion and love...[but] not without a feeling of grief at all that was no more".

Brahms started work on his Clarinet Quintet in the spring of 1891 and finished it that summer. During the whole time, he was at Ischl, where almost every year he spent what he called his vacation—that is, a period in which composition prevailed over all other activities. The first performance took place in private on November 24, 1891 at Meiningen, in Thuringia, where Muehfeld was the clarinetist of the Court Orchestra; among the players were Muehfeld and Joachim, the celebrated violinist and one of Brahms's best friends. The work was first performed in public eighteen days later in Berlin, during the first concert of the annual chamber-music series given by the Joachim Quartet. A fair idea of the esteem in which the violinist held the work is shown by the fact that this was the only occasion when a score calling for a non-stringed instrument was played in these concerts. The Quintet was so warmly received that the Adagio had to be repeated; it was also repeated in the first Viennese performances, which occurred a few weeks later, in January, 1892.

There are four movements. The main theme of the first, Allegro, evolves from a fluid, tender, sad melody that opens the work and which will reappear at the end of the finale—not as an artificial means of ensuring an outer cohesion, for the inner cohesion is strong and quite evident, but only as "the last word on one idea which has been present to the mind throughout" (H.C. Colles). Both the melody and the theme follow a downward course, as do most of the others in the Quintet. In spite of occasional asperities that seem very much in keeping with Brahms's proverbially difficult temper, the mood remains subdued and resigned. Like the other three movements, this Allegro ends softly.

The second movement, Adagio, is a magnificent lied full of wonder and compassion, written in ternary form (as befits a lied). The central, contrasting section is decidedly Hungarian in flavour, the clarinet being given elaborate rhapsodical runs and passionate outbursts.

The third movement starts with an easy-going tune (marked Andantino) that dispels the latent melancholy of what has come before; the Presto non assai, ma con sentimento, the main part of the movement, is a light, furtive dance very close in style to several of the ghostlike Intermezzos among Brahms's last piano pieces.

The finale, Con moto, is a set of five lovely variations on a simple relaxed theme (only in the second variation is there a suggestion of agitation). Thereupon, as has been said, the opening melody of the first movement returns to lead this masterpiece to a poignant conclusion.
BRAHMS
QUINTET for CLARINET
& STRING QUARTET
in E Minor, Op. 115
Band 1. Third Mvt. Andantino; Presto non assai
ma con sentimento (5:39 min.)

STPL 516.200 Side 2
Rec. in Stuttgart
15:35 min.

Band 2. Fourth Mvt. Con moto (10:05 min.)

JOST MICHAELS, clarinet
ENDRES QUARTET
Heinz Andreas, Josef Rottenfusser, violins;
Fritz Ruf, viola; Adolph Schmidt, cello

STPL 516.200 B
Made in U.S.A.