



YST

Yong Siew Toh
Conservatory
of Music

NEVILLE'S 22 APRIL 2021 / 7PM SENIOR RECITAL

WITH DR CHERIE KHOR

JOHANNES BRAHMS

SONATA FOR VIOLIN & PIANO NO.1 IN G MAJOR, OP 78
SONATA FOR VIOLIN & PIANO NO.2 IN A MAJOR, OP 100
SCHERZO IN C MINOR FROM F-A-E SONATA

YONG SIEW TOH CONSERVATORY CONCERT HALL

Violin Senior Recital

22nd April 2021

1900 Hrs

YST Conservatory Concert Hall

Neville Athenasius Ang

Dr Cherie Khor

PROGRAMME

Johannes Brahms

Sonata for Violin & Piano No. 1 in G Major, Op. 78

Vivace Ma Non Troppo

Adagio

Allegro Molto Moderato

[29'00]

Sonata for Violin & Piano No. 2 in A Major, Op. 100

Allegro Amabile

Andante Tranquillo – Vivace – Andante – Vivace di più – Andante - Vivace

Allegretto grazioso (quasi andante)

[20'00]

Scherzo in C minor from the F-A-E Sonata

[5'30]

ABOUT THE PERFORMER

Neville first started learning the violin at the age of 3 before joining the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (School of Young Talent Programme) to study the piano. To date, he has obtained Associate and Licentiate Diplomas for both violin and piano from ABRSM and Trinity College London, and a Fellowship Diploma from the latter.

Neville's stint in the Singapore National Youth Orchestra has brought him abroad to cities such as Aberdeen and Berlin. Emerging as the winner in the 2014 SNYO Concerto Competition he made his solo debut with the evergreen Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto. He was also selected to participate in the 30th Toyota Youth Orchestra Camp in Tokyo where he collaborated with musicians of the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra.

Neville is presently furthering his studies at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, where he was awarded a full scholarship, with Zuo Jun, its Head of Violin Studies. His previous teachers include Chan Yoong Han and Igor Yuzefovich.

Earlier in 2018, a formal invitation was extended for him to lead the Jungli Youth Orchestra from Taoyuan City, Taiwan, for a performance in Korea at the KBS Hall. Other notable posts include orchestras such as Musicians Initiative, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Orchestra, Singapore International Festival of Music Orchestra and the International Festival Chorus Singapore Orchestra.

As an active orchestral musician, Neville also performs with local orchestras such as the Metropolitan Festival Orchestra, ReSound Collective while also freelancing with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.

JOHANNES BRAHMS (May 7, 1833 - April 3, 1897)

Within the first two decades of his life, Johannes Brahms made an astonishing leap coming from a miserable childhood in the downtrodden harbour area of Hamburg to acquiring an eminent position as a distinguished young composer. From the age of twelve, he began his musical career by giving piano lessons for pennies, and at thirteen, he was performing in Harbour-side sailors' bars. He soon progressed to performing works such as Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata and his own compositions in public concerts, but he made real headway on a concert tour just before his 20th birthday. It was on this tour that he crossed paths with Joseph Joachim, whom he so impressed, and a bond developed immediately between the two musicians, a friendship which, except for a brief period, was deep and abiding. Although only two years older than himself, the 22-year-old Joachim was already a famous artist and sent Brahms to see Robert Schumann in Düsseldorf. At that time, Schumann was Germany's leading composer, and his wife, Clara, one of Europe's greatest pianists. Upon hearing Brahms play his own music, Schumann was so genuinely and deeply moved that he came out of retirement as a critic to introduce Brahms to the music world. "Even outwardly," Schumann writes of that afternoon in September 1853, "he bore the marks proclaiming: 'This is a chosen one.'" Clara also was impressed, and within months, she and Brahms would play duets at that same keyboard, cautiously launching, then more deeply cementing, a life-long relationship that at some points almost dared to be more than friendship.

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 1 in G Major, Op 78

Although this sonata is titled his first violin sonata, Brahms had presumably discarded five violin sonatas that he had composed before he wrote this one, finally deeming it worthy to preserve and present to the world. This work was written in his forties during the summers of 1878 and 1879, when he had already become the mature artist we all know him to be. It was his only piece of chamber music from the same productive period in which he composed the well-known Symphony No. 2, Academic Festival and Tragic Overtures, Violin Concerto, and Piano Concerto No. 2.

This Sonata, much like his Violin Concerto, owes a great deal to Joachim and to Clara Schumann, who was by then a widow. A distinguished pianist and composer in her own right, she responded to a manuscript copy of Brahms' new work: "I must send you a line to tell you how excited I am about your Sonata. It came today. Of course I played it through at once, and at the end could not help bursting into tears of joy." Ten years later, when Clara was seventy and falling ill, she still loved the sonata as much as she treasured the friendship of Joachim and Brahms. To Brahms, she wrote, "Joachim was

here on Robert's eightieth birthday and we had a lot of music. We played the Sonata again and I reveled in it. I wish that the last movement could accompany me in my journey from here to the next world."

Noted to be one of the most lyrical compositions among all of Brahms instrumental works, the violin always takes the leading voice over the piano part written in a perpetually clear and transparent manner such that the two instruments intertwine flawlessly without any imbalance ever existing. Written in three movements (rather than the usual four), Brahms wrote to his publishers that since he had provided one movement short, he would therefore accept 25% less than his usual fee for this particular work.

The Sonata No. 1 is, throughout, a warm and touching lyrical poem for violin and piano. **Vivace Ma Non Troppo** is often characterised as Pastoral, with an opening of a gentle melody sung delicately by the violin above the piano's placid chords. The constant return of the dotted rhythmic motif not just within the first movement but throughout the Sonata, makes for a subtle but powerful means of unifying the entire work. The subsidiary theme, flowing and hymnal, evokes the sense of love and longing for something, or perhaps, someone. A series of intimately tumultuous and uncertain images are briefly suspended by a twinkling of hope. But alas, we roll back into turmoil and uncertainty, finally gleaning an almost sinister twinge in an otherwise brilliant and victorious ending. The **Adagio** presents itself in a rhapsodic fashion, starting with the piano initiating the theme with warmth and pureness. The violin responds with uncertainty and loneliness. As the movement progresses, we are led through the sentiments of one who is in anguish. This springs into a passage of confidence and assurance with both instruments playing in unison. The opening theme of the movement is then reinstated by the violin in the form of passionate double stops before the movement comes to a relieved and tranquil end. **Allegro Molto Moderato** features Brahms' own song *Regenlied* ("Rain Song," op. 59), sharing almost identical opening melodies. With amiable and lyrical movement throughout, the movement provides an image of perpetual searching and exploration. The passionate and expressive melodies portray a pouring of one's heart out to a loved one. This movement is set primarily in a minor key but moves into a luminous major tonality by the coda, which diminishes into a blissful close.

Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 in A Major, Op 100

This Sonata was written in 1886, and the 3rd Violin Sonata, Opus 108, came two years later. His reasons for concentrating on this form of composition at the time may have been personal as well as musical—as each of these works was finished, he sent it as a sort of peace offering to Joseph Joachim, from whom he had been estranged for some time. Brahms, it seems, had sided with Joachim's wife in the couple's divorce proceedings, and bitter feelings were incited between the old friends, though Joachim never wavered in his support and performance of Brahms's

music. The rift was not fully healed until Brahms offered Joachim the Double Concerto in 1887. His second violin sonata, however, came to fruition during Brahms' summer of 1886 spent in Thun in the Bernese Oberland, Switzerland. It was a very fertile and refreshing time for Brahms. During that time, he was often visited by the poet Klaus Groth and the young German contralto Hermine Spies. He found himself very much invigorated by the genial atmosphere and surroundings, saying the area was "so full of melodies that one has to be careful not to step on any". In a short space of time, he produced, in addition to this violin sonata, the Cello Sonata No. 2 in F major, Op. 99, the Piano Trio No. 3 in C minor, Op. 101, and various songs.

The circumstances in which this sonata was written makes it the most closely related to the private world of Brahms' Lieder. Motifs from three of the songs Brahms wrote that summer with Hermine Spies' voice in mind appear fleetingly in the sonata: "*Wie Melodien zieht es mir leise durch den Sinn*", Op. 105 ("Like melodies it steals softly through my mind"; words by Klaus Groth) makes an appearance in the second subject of the first movement. "*Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer*", Op. 105 ("Ever gentle is my slumber"; words by Hermann Ling) and "*Auf dem Kirchhofe*", Op. 105 (words by Detlov von Liliencron) are quoted in the final movement.

The second violin sonata is the shortest of the three sonatas, but yet its length is not reflective of its compositional brilliance. The most lyrical and sunniest of Brahms' three sonatas, it is also deemed by many to be the most difficult of the three to successfully pull off in light of the fine balance to be found between its lyricism and virtuosity. It maintains a radiant, happy mood throughout.

Allegro amabile opens with a youthful and tender appearance by the piano which the violin responds to with a series of coaxing descending figures. Again, the piano begins a second theme, this time a sweet and joyful dance. The violin takes over, unfolding a heroic statement which soon meanders into an intimate, whispered song. After which, the movement comes to a grand close. **Andante tranquillo - Vivace** is a fusion of sentimental and fond moments with a spooky, fleeting Vivace. The final Andante section serves as a reminder of appreciating the beauty of the present moment while the final return of the Vivace serves as a reminiscent of Brahms is also as delightfully playful as he is a big and passionate composer. After this comes the **Allegretto grazioso** finale. This movement replaces the traditional scherzo with an intermezzo of precisely controlled intensity and masterful motivic development. The sonata-form finale resumes the darkly expressive eloquence of the opening movement with its impetuous main theme. A chordal subject initiated by the piano provides contrast, but the unsettled mood of the first theme remains dominant through the remainder of the movement.

Scherzo in C minor from the F-A-E Sonata

If it were necessary for composers to play all of the instruments for which they write, the musical literature would be very scant indeed. Fortunately, it is not. In the case of Brahms, there is no evidence that he ever played the violin. His understanding of the violin came about in a very personal, almost hands-on way. When he was only 17, he went on the road as accompanist to the Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi. At the elbow of this brilliant fiddler, young Johannes learned much about the instrument's technique and, as a bonus, came to know and love the Hungarian music Reményi always included on his programs. But Brahms' debt to Reményi does not stop there, for it was he who introduced the young composer to Joseph Joachim on Brahms' own concert tour three years later.

The personal and musical value of Joachim's friendship to Brahms is impossible to measure. It was Joachim who godfathered Brahms' Violin Concerto and whose spirit hovers over Brahms' three Violin Sonatas, the Double Concerto, and the Scherzo.

The Scherzo is now something of an orphan, although it was intended to be the second movement of a collaborative sonata, conceived as a welcoming gift for Joachim in Düsseldorf, with a first movement written by Albert Dietrich, the third and fourth by Robert Schumann. The recipient was asked to guess the author of each movement, which he did quite easily. The F-A-E of the title are the letters of Joachim's maxim, *Frei, aber einsam* (Free, but lonely), and are used as notes of a unifying motif of the sonata.

Brahms' contribution could hardly be mistaken – the composer's youthful footprints are evident: the taut energy, beginning with the violin's Beethovenesque three-short-and-a-long; the syncopations and cross-rhythms; the intermezzo-like lyricism of a trio that can't resist brandishing some main section materials for the sake of unity; and a closing grandeur which seems to define the "young eagle's" soaring aspirations and his extravagant regard for Joachim.

With the increasing virtuosity of contemporary violinists, the Scherzo is often played at a faster pace than was conventional in the past, including Brahms' time. Allegro begins with a metallic and percussive opening, bringing about a strong heroic character. The second theme more lyrical, but nonetheless still carries the same vigour and energy as before. The Trio appears with a air of a champion, with a grandly triumphant victory in a prominent major tonality gives the feeling that all is won. The opening theme returns once more before the final Coda, where the music firmly settles on a striking C major tonality. As the piece comes to a resounding close, four fervent bursts of C major triad make bold statement in announcing a grand ending.