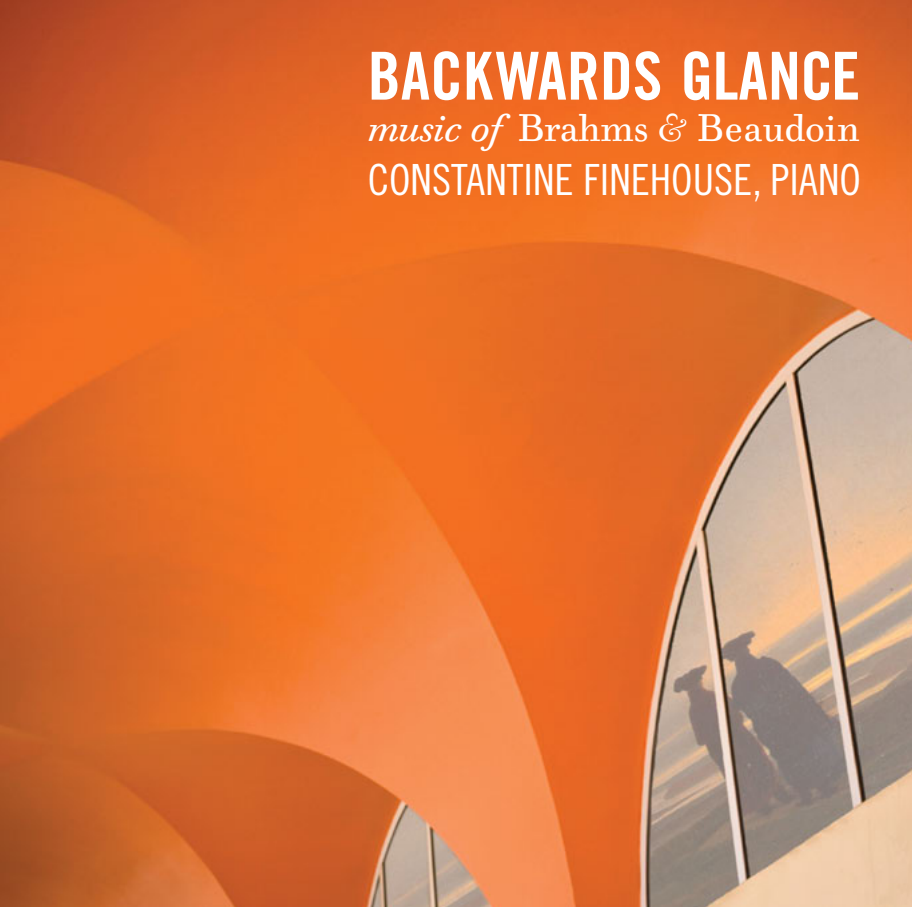


BACKWARDS GLANCE

music of Brahms & Beaudoin

CONSTANTINE FINEHOUSE, PIANO



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Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

- 1 INTERMEZZO IN A MAJOR, OP. 118 NO. 2—*Andante teneramente* 6'27

Richard Beaudoin (b. 1975)

QUI TOLLIS

- 2 I. Serenade—*Adagio malinconico* 0'52
3 II. Movement 3'30
4 III. Serenade—*Andantino cantando* 0'48

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

SONATA NO. 3 IN F MINOR, OP. 5

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6 II. *Andante espressivo—Andante molto—Adagio* 10'35
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8 IV. *Intermezzo [Rückblick]—Andante molto* 4'27
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- 10 LES SIGNES DE MA FAIBLESSE 15'09

*Animé—Très lent—Animé—Calme—Modéré et mélancholique—
mouvement-retenu—Rapide et incisif—Modéré et mélancholique—
au mouvement, tempo giusto—Modéré et lumineux—Décidé et
très rude—Modéré et lumineux—Lent et simple—Lent et
voluptueusement—Andante, tempo giusto*

Total playing time: 61'52



SONATE

VON

Brahms.

OP. 5.

BACKWARDS GLANCE

“Nobody can deliberately walk away from any object without casting a backwards glance to make sure he is walking away from it.”¹

– Paul Valéry: *Mauvaises Pensées et Autres* (1941)

The theme of glancing backwards into the past sits well alongside Johannes Brahms. There is the long shadow cast on him by Beethoven – an anxiety of influence that fed his lifelong fastidiousness and caused countless commentators to link the two composers (e.g. von Bülow’s referring to Brahms’ First Symphony as ‘Beethoven’s Tenth’). On the other hand, there is the fourth movement of his **PIANO SONATA, OP. 5 (1853)**, which bears the title ‘Rückblick,’ or Backwards Glance. The name is paradoxical: while it suits the emotional world of Brahms’ spare *Andante molto*, as the ‘extra’ fifth movement it breaks the mold of the classical four-movement sonata. Deliberately walking away? Glancing back and saying ‘goodbye,’ perhaps?

Though the Sonata is the work of a young man barely twenty, it points to the central preoccupation of Brahms’ entire output – memory. Brahms’ specific interest in memory is sometimes called ‘developing variation’: music that proceeds not as much from idea to new idea, but from idea to variant of that idea. The opening movement gives us the opposing impressions of forward motion and stasis, a series of glimpses which reveal the same object in different lights (the object in this case being quite simple – a falling step followed by a rising leap). Harmonically, Brahms blurs the lines of conventional sonata form by introducing a harmonic region – D-flat major – at the close of the exposition, and hovering on or near it for the whole of the development.

From the moment we perceive this wonderful duality in Brahms’ music – a kind of motion without motion – many of the comparisons to Beethoven become useless. In terms of narrative form, Brahms is simply up to something else entirely.

But such criticisms persist: as recently as 1990, the eminent theorist Walter Frisch writes that the exposition of the first movement of Op. 5 “sounds stiff, even clumsy” and that the “pause after each phrase tends to make the joints in the sonata form painfully obvious.” I am convinced that Brahms wanted these pauses, that in some sense he wanted to *emphasize* these joints precisely because on either side of these pregnant half-cadences he was coloring and re-coloring the same musical object, the same memory. Though perhaps it is not fashionable to cross the German-French divide in the arts, I cannot help make the connection between Brahms’ technique here and Monet’s series of paintings of Rouen Cathedral in the 1890s...

While considerably shorter than the Sonata, Brahms’ **INTERMEZZO, OP. 118 NO. 2 (1892)** casts an even longer shadow through modernism and into the present day. On the surface we have the autumnal mood and the ostensibly clear ABA form. But just below this apparent simplicity is all the complex phraseology and harmonic ambiguity of his late work. Here is a composition that *is* a contemporary of Monet’s Rouen Cathedrals, and one that inhabits a similar world of half-lights and structural cross-fades.

If my three-movement work **QUI TOLLIS (2004)** glances back at anything, it is itself as if in a mirror. The impetus was partly literary, partly musical: I was performing and studying two chamber works by Schubert (whose long wonderful shadow lives with me admittedly more than Brahms’), alongside reading a poem by Neruda from his posthumous collection *Libro de preguntas* (Book of Questions). The two Schubert works – the ‘Trout’ and the C-Major Quintets – illustrate the unique tension created by large areas of transposed repetition. The Neruda poem is a meditation on identity and time, and includes the lines: “Where was the child I once was – inside me still – or gone? ... Why did we spend so much time growing up, only to grow apart?”²

And so in *Qui Tollis* we have two outer Serenades, differing only slightly in pitch and tempo, framing a larger central Movement. The closing Serenade does not answer any of the questions posed by the opening, but registers that the questions

INTERMEZZO.

(Rückblick.)

Andante molto.

p legato

f marcato

ff

p

una corda

pp sempre legato

accel.

rit. dim.

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Chabrier
'Bysage'



Brahms
Op. 5, I M6



Bartók
'The Wooden Prince'



Ives
'Spring Song'



Stravinsky 'Scènes de Ballet' Variations



Chopin 'Raindrop' Prelude Op. 28



Mahler 'Up there on the Hill' from Das Knaben Wunderhorn



Victoria 'O vos omnes'



Dallapiccola 'Cinque Frammenti di Saffo', II



have been asked. The central Movement is made of three musics that continually re-order themselves, a kind of rotating kaleidoscope of sound objects. There is, however, a 'window' in this form – a single section that bears no resemblance to any other music in the work. The title *Qui Tollis* translates roughly as "...who takes away..." as in "Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi..."

What is the role of weakness in music? When are artists ill-constituted? I began **LES SIGNES DE MA FAIBLESSE (2006)** after reading a troubling passage from Nietzsche, whose iconic left-facing portrait is itself a backwards glance: "What is good? All that heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself. What is bad? All that is born of weakness ...What is more harmful than any vice? Active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak..."³ Perhaps remembering Frisch's critique of Brahms' 'painfully obvious joints,' I included in my work an allusion to Brahms' Op. 5, as well as to other works or composers deemed 'weak.' My piece progresses without overt repetitions; instead, several musical characters – motives, figures, rhythms – are nearby at all times, creating the texture by their simple presence and relationship to one another, rather like characters in a film. I recognize the relationship between the autumnal sound of late Brahms and the closing pages of *Les signes*, a connection made quite beautifully in Constantine's hands.

Richard Beaudoin
Amherst, Massachusetts, July 2007

¹ On ne peut s'éloigner consciemment de quelque objet sans retourner la tête pour s'assurer que l'on s'éloigne.

² Dónde está el niño que yo fui, sigue adentro de mí o se fue? ... Por qué anduvimos tanto tiempo creciendo para separarnos?

³ Was ist gut? – Alles, was das Gefühl der Macht, den Willen zur Macht, die Macht selbst im Menschen erhöht. Was ist schlecht? – Alles, was aus der Schwäche stammt...Was ist schädlicher als irgend ein Laster? – Das Mitleiden der That mit allen Mißrathnen und Schwachen...

CONSTANTINE FINEHOUSE

Praised by *Rhein Main Presse Allgemeine Zeitung* for his “interpretations of depth and maturity,” Constantine Finehouse has performed extensively in the US and abroad, including in Trieste, London, St. Petersburg and Odessa. *The Bolcom Project*, made in collaboration with his American Double partner, violinist Philip Ficsor, included an Albany Records CD and a national tour with concerts in Boston, New York, Denver, Santa Barbara, Spokane and at Yale University. *Fanfare* praised the recording as “indispensable to any serious collector with an interest in later 20th-century duo repertoire for violin and piano.” As part of American Double, Finehouse also undertook a tour of Hungary, performing sonatas by Brahms, Bolcom and Ravel. More recently, he performed with violinist Olga Caceanova at Galeazza Castle in Italy and with cellist Sebastian Baverstam at the Concert Artists Guild Winners’ Concert at Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. Finehouse is currently recording William Bolcom’s complete solo piano works for Naxos Records. His upcoming CD with Sebastian Baverstam will feature sonatas by Franck, Shostakovich as well as works by Tony Schemmer. The 2010-2011 season will bring recitals celebrating the Chopin and Schumann bicentennials.

Finehouse serves on the faculty of New England Conservatory’s Division of Preparatory and Continuing Education. He is the recipient of the Vladimir Horowitz Scholarship from Julliard, a 2004 St. Botolph Club Foundation Grant and a 2006 Classics Abroad Project Award. Finehouse was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. His principal teachers include Natalia Harlap, Herbert Stessin, Jerome Lowenthal, Boris Berman and Bruce Brubaker.

For more information about Constantine Finehouse, visit cfinehouse.com.

The artist would like to express his gratitude to Natalia Harlap for her invaluable musical advice on the Brahms compositions, to Bruce Brubaker and Simon Tedeschi for their generous input during post-production, and finally to Steve Hunt and Max Vtiourin, without whose work and dedication this recording would not have been possible.





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