



ATEM DER STATUEN

German Romantic Music for Clarinet and Piano

Chen Halevi | clarinet

Noam Greenberg | piano

Brahms | Schumann | Berg | Koch





ATTEMPT UNDER STATUE

Chen Halevi | clarinet
Noam Greenberg | piano

Johannes Brahms | Sonata in E flat major op. 120/2

1. Allegro amabile (8:03)
2. Allegro appassionato (5:18)
3. Andante con moto (7:06)

Alban Berg | Four Pieces op. 5

4. Mäßig (1:10)
5. Sehr langsam (1:43)
6. Sehr rasch (1:02)
7. Langsam (2:43)

Robert Schumann | Fantasiestücke op. 73

8. Zart und mit Ausdruck (3:16)
9. Lebhaft, leicht (3:14)
10. Rasch und mit Feuer (3:54)

Sven-Ingo Koch | Hommages

11. Andante espressivo (1:29)
12. Etwas frei (3:07)
13. Adagissimo (2:12)
14. *Nacht und Träume* (Rubato) (2:30)

Johannes Brahms | Sonata in F minor op. 120/1

15. Allegro appassionato (7:25)
16. Andante un poco Adagio (4:49)
17. Allegretto grazioso (3:58)
18. Vivace (4:52)

Total Playing Time: 68:35 min.

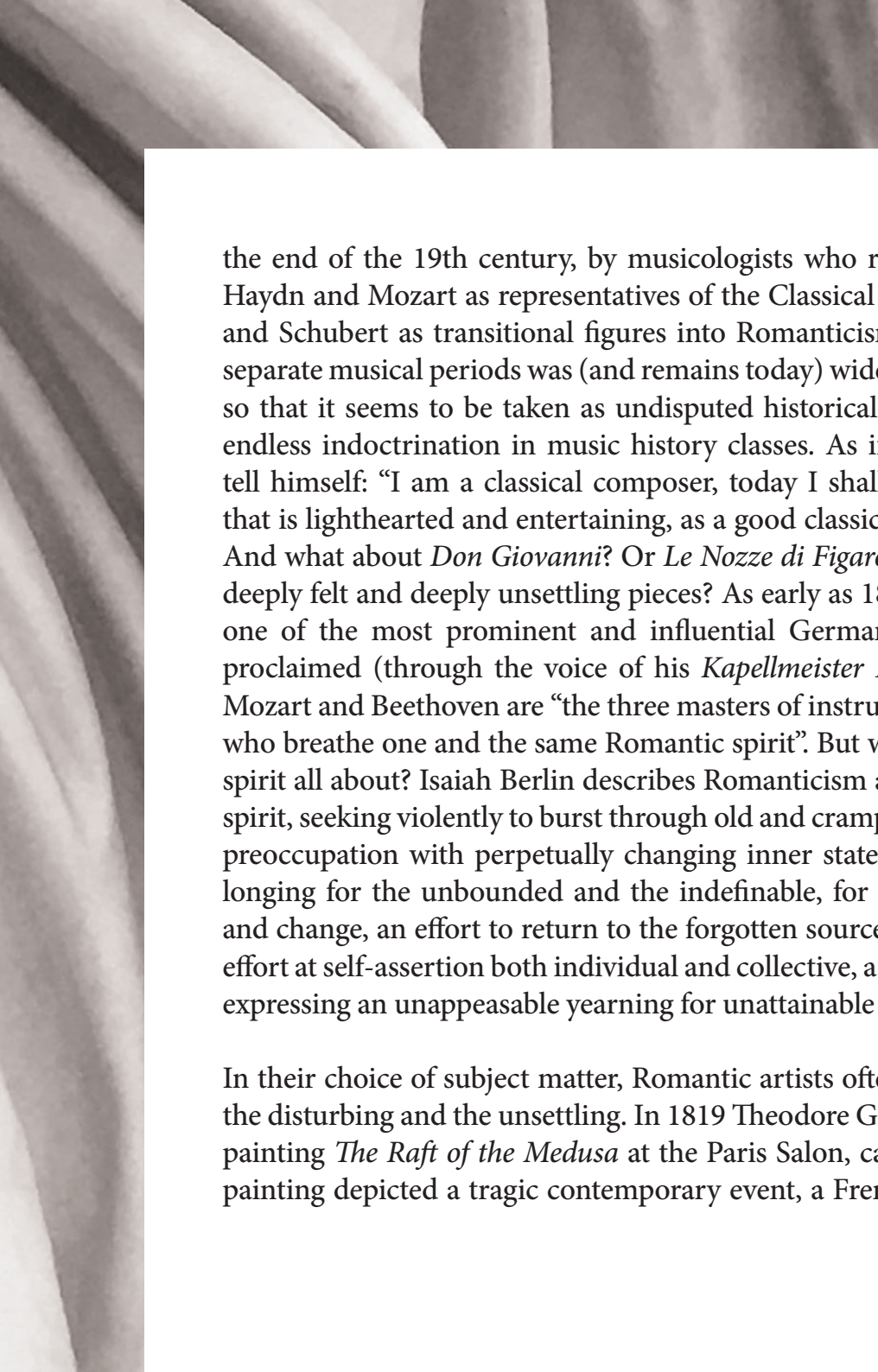
To Charlotte L. - Our poet muse

ATEM DER STATUEN

This CD is a journey through German Romantic music for clarinet and piano dating from the mid-19th century to the beginning of the 20th, and even the 21st centuries. A contemporary piece in a CD of Romantic music may seem like an anachronism, so let us begin with an attempt to highlight certain aspects of that most elusive artistic movement, one that, despite being fairly recent in historical terms, and having a far-reaching influence even to our own day and age, still remains somewhat misunderstood.

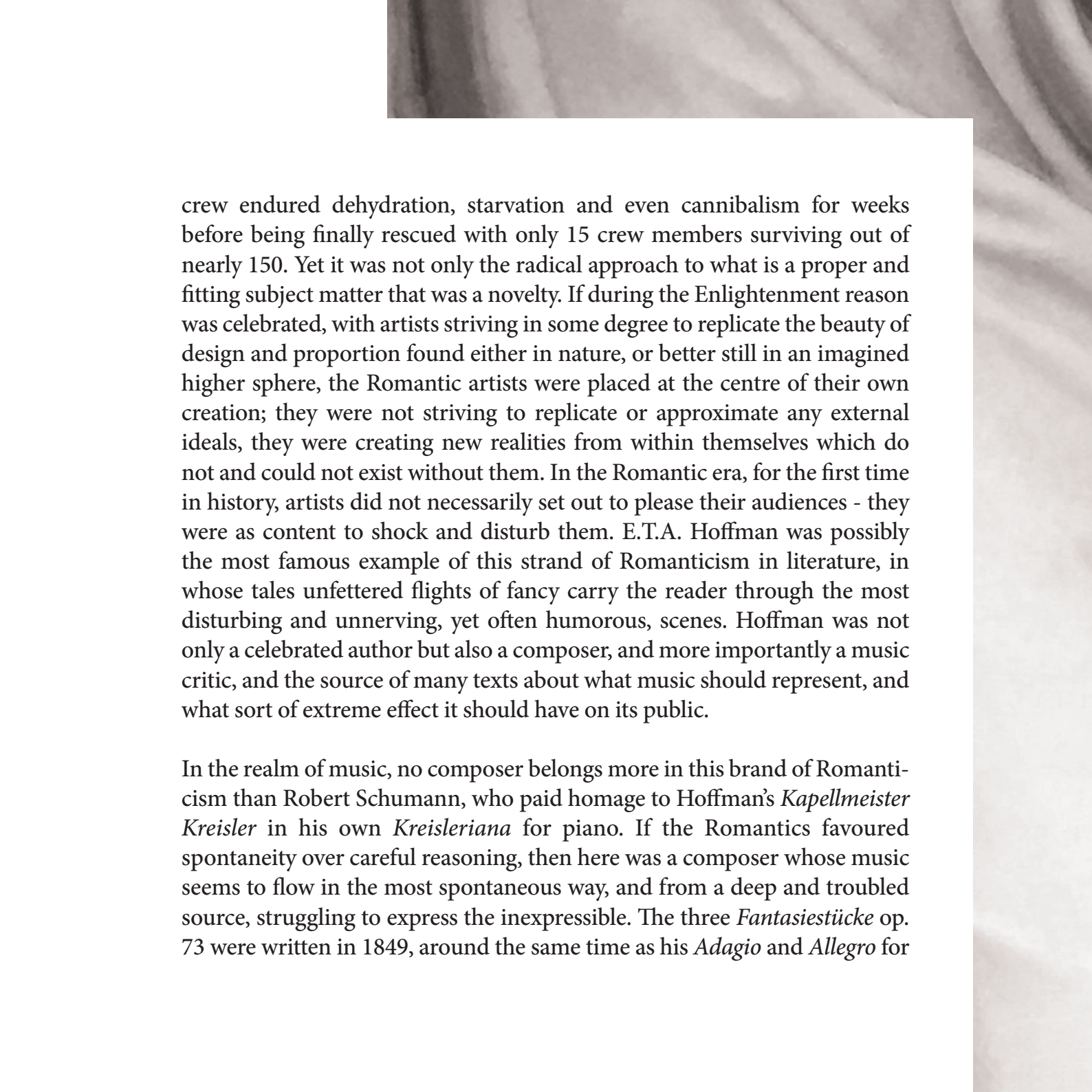
Casting aside the most banal commonplaces, what is left with which to categorise Romantic music? Is it music that deeply stirs the soul and inspires the most intense passions? But does not a Bach cantata do just the same? Is it music that defies convention? But does not much great music defy convention? Is it music that breaks unexplored ground, a music of the future, the blessed fruit of the composer's brave and free imagination? But doesn't a Beethoven symphony or one of his late string quartets fit into that category too? "Well", one could argue, "Beethoven was the first Romantic composer, was he not?" And indeed he was, at least as far as personality is concerned - Beethoven, unlike any composer before him, embodied the Romantic ideal of an artist at odds with society, fighting against tradition and raging against fate in his struggle to give birth from the depths of his soul to ultimately unattainable spiritual perfection.

There seems to be a significant difference between how the early Romantics perceived themselves and the artificial division between Classical and Romantic styles, a division which was invented decades after the fact, at



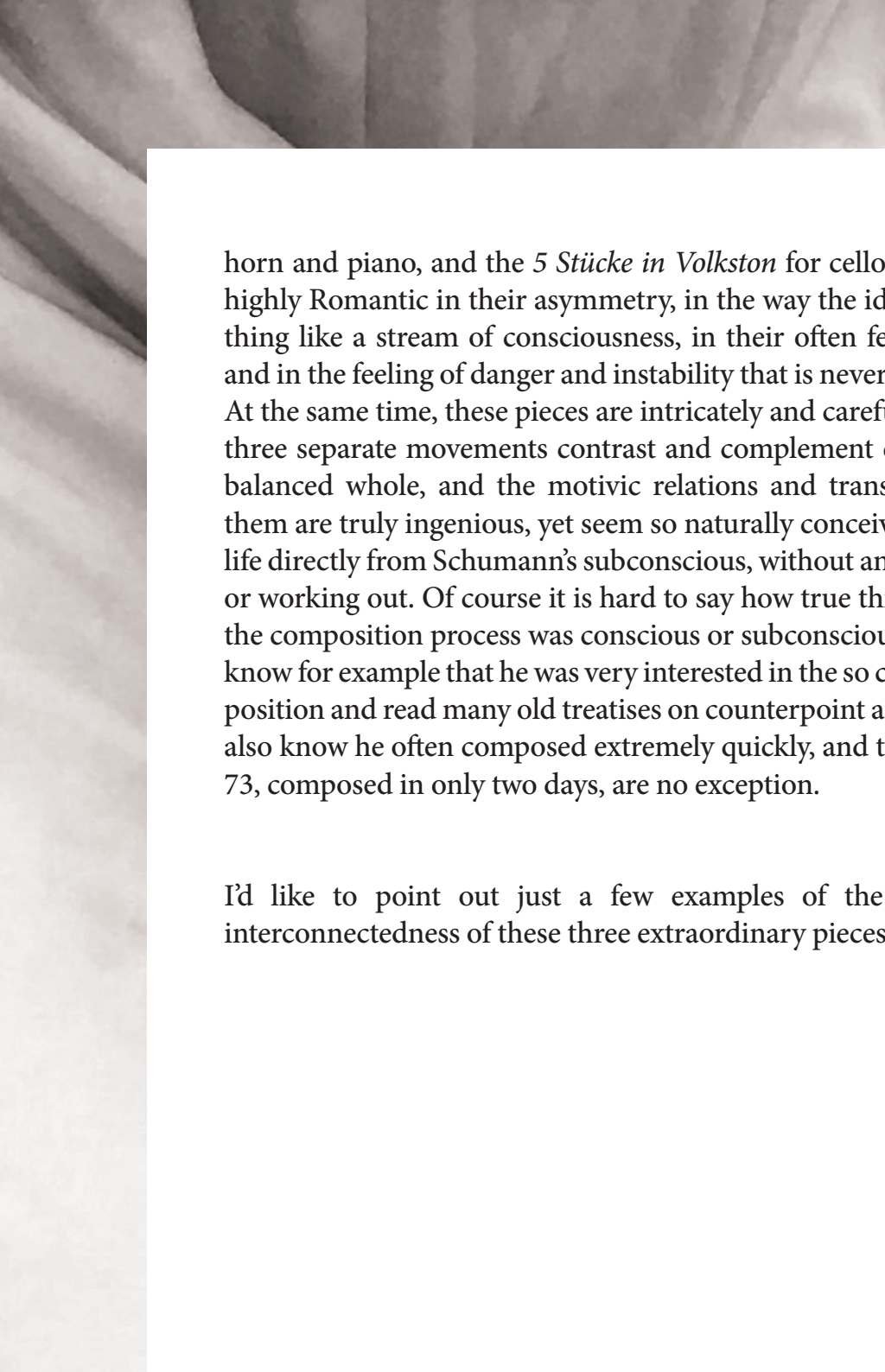
the end of the 19th century, by musicologists who retrospectively placed Haydn and Mozart as representatives of the Classical style, and Beethoven and Schubert as transitional figures into Romanticism. This division into separate musical periods was (and remains today) widely accepted, so much so that it seems to be taken as undisputed historical fact, perhaps due to endless indoctrination in music history classes. As if Mozart was able to tell himself: "I am a classical composer, today I shall write another piece that is lighthearted and entertaining, as a good classical composer should." And what about *Don Giovanni*? Or *Le Nozze di Figaro*? Or countless other deeply felt and deeply unsettling pieces? As early as 1810 E.T.A. Hoffmann, one of the most prominent and influential German Romantic authors, proclaimed (through the voice of his *Kapellmeister Kreisler*) that Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven are "the three masters of instrumental compositions who breathe one and the same Romantic spirit". But what is that Romantic spirit all about? Isaiah Berlin describes Romanticism as "a new and restless spirit, seeking violently to burst through old and cramping forms, a nervous preoccupation with perpetually changing inner states of consciousness, a longing for the unbounded and the indefinable, for perpetual movement and change, an effort to return to the forgotten sources of life, a passionate effort at self-assertion both individual and collective, a search after means of expressing an unappeasable yearning for unattainable goals."

In their choice of subject matter, Romantic artists often preferred the odd, the disturbing and the unsettling. In 1819 Theodore Géricault presented his painting *The Raft of the Medusa* at the Paris Salon, causing a scandal. The painting depicted a tragic contemporary event, a French shipwreck whose



crew endured dehydration, starvation and even cannibalism for weeks before being finally rescued with only 15 crew members surviving out of nearly 150. Yet it was not only the radical approach to what is a proper and fitting subject matter that was a novelty. If during the Enlightenment reason was celebrated, with artists striving in some degree to replicate the beauty of design and proportion found either in nature, or better still in an imagined higher sphere, the Romantic artists were placed at the centre of their own creation; they were not striving to replicate or approximate any external ideals, they were creating new realities from within themselves which do not and could not exist without them. In the Romantic era, for the first time in history, artists did not necessarily set out to please their audiences - they were as content to shock and disturb them. E.T.A. Hoffman was possibly the most famous example of this strand of Romanticism in literature, in whose tales unfettered flights of fancy carry the reader through the most disturbing and unnerving, yet often humorous, scenes. Hoffman was not only a celebrated author but also a composer, and more importantly a music critic, and the source of many texts about what music should represent, and what sort of extreme effect it should have on its public.

In the realm of music, no composer belongs more in this brand of Romanticism than Robert Schumann, who paid homage to Hoffman's *Kapellmeister Kreisler* in his own *Kreisleriana* for piano. If the Romantics favoured spontaneity over careful reasoning, then here was a composer whose music seems to flow in the most spontaneous way, and from a deep and troubled source, struggling to express the inexpressible. The three *Fantasiestücke* op. 73 were written in 1849, around the same time as his *Adagio* and *Allegro* for



horn and piano, and the *5 Stücke in Volkston* for cello and piano. They are highly Romantic in their asymmetry, in the way the ideas roll out in something like a stream of consciousness, in their often feverish changeability, and in the feeling of danger and instability that is never far from the surface. At the same time, these pieces are intricately and carefully constructed. The three separate movements contrast and complement each other in a well-balanced whole, and the motivic relations and transformations between them are truly ingenious, yet seem so naturally conceived, as if springing to life directly from Schumann's subconscious, without any laborious planning or working out. Of course it is hard to say how true this is, or how much of the composition process was conscious or subconscious for Schumann. We know for example that he was very interested in the so called science of composition and read many old treatises on counterpoint and voice-leading. We also know he often composed extremely quickly, and the *Fantasiestücke* op. 73, composed in only two days, are no exception.

I'd like to point out just a few examples of the wonderful motivic interconnectedness of these three extraordinary pieces -

The piano accompaniment in the third bar of the first piece:

Zart und mit Ausdruck. (♩ = 80.) Componirt 1849.

Clarinetto in A.

Pianoforte.

presages the opening melody of the second piece:

Lebhaft, leicht. (♩ = 138.)

The coda of the second piece includes a variant of the opening melodic idea of the third piece. Compare this from the coda of the second:

with this, in the following movement:

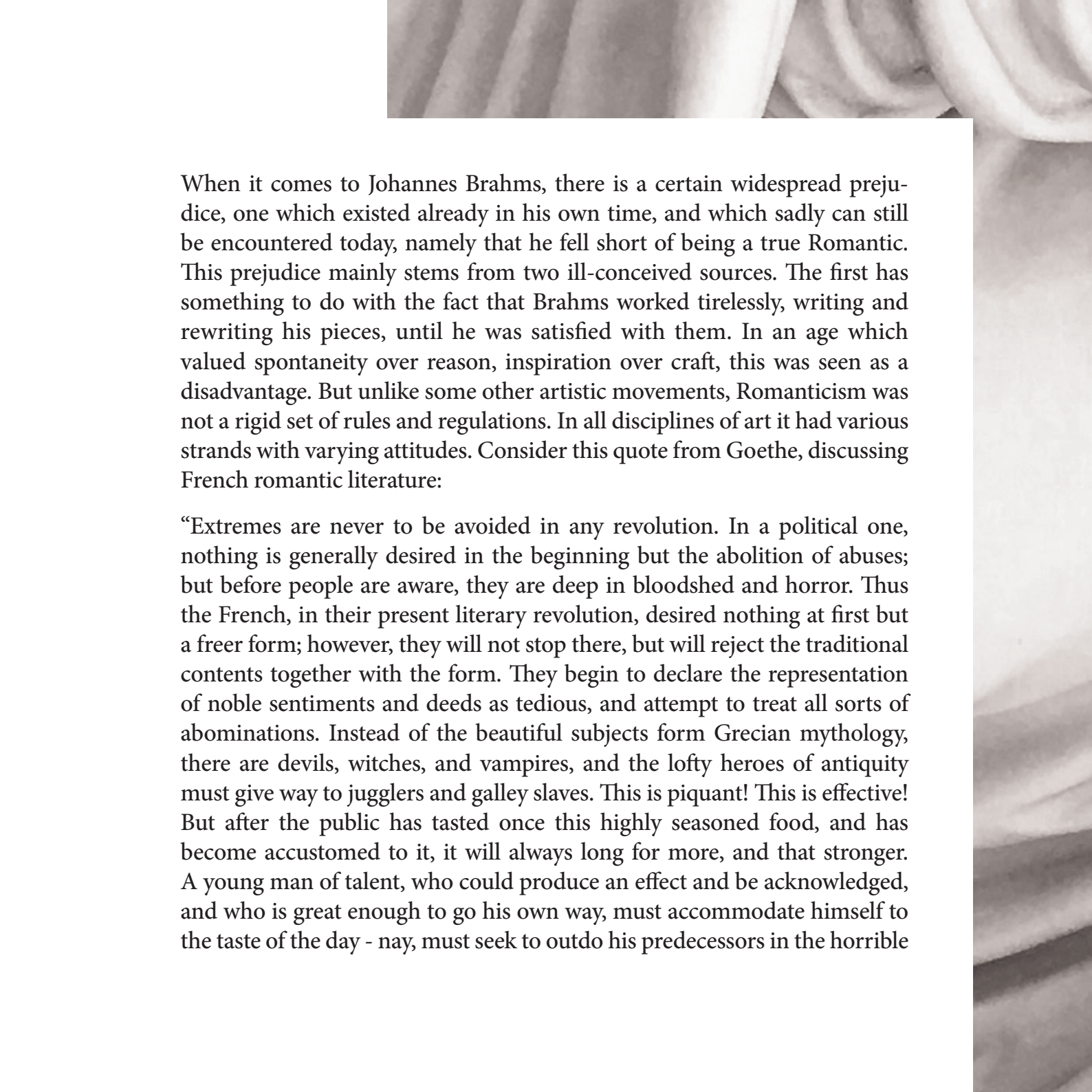


and the third piece includes both a return, in an entirely new context, of the opening theme of the first piece:



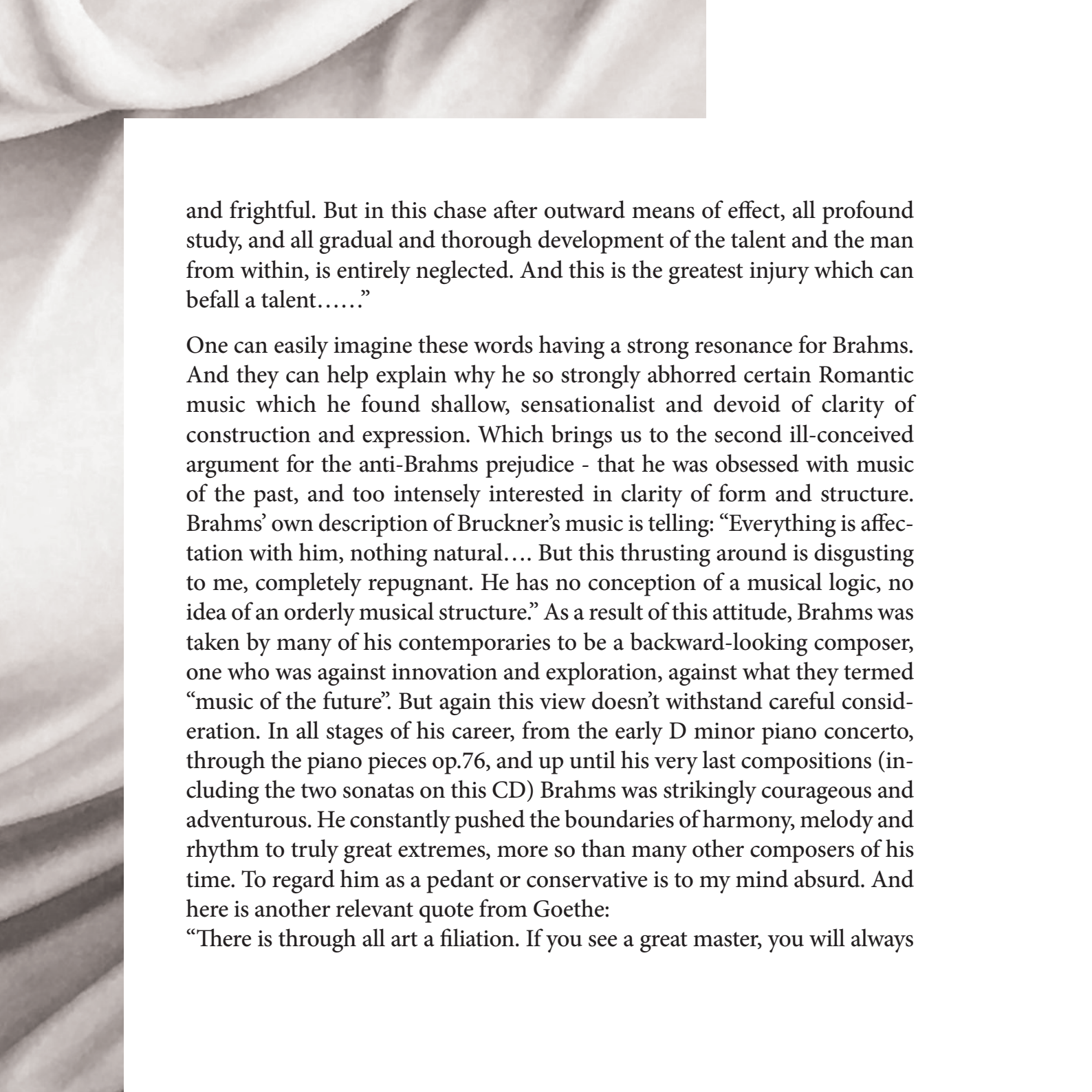
and also of the second:





When it comes to Johannes Brahms, there is a certain widespread prejudice, one which existed already in his own time, and which sadly can still be encountered today, namely that he fell short of being a true Romantic. This prejudice mainly stems from two ill-conceived sources. The first has something to do with the fact that Brahms worked tirelessly, writing and rewriting his pieces, until he was satisfied with them. In an age which valued spontaneity over reason, inspiration over craft, this was seen as a disadvantage. But unlike some other artistic movements, Romanticism was not a rigid set of rules and regulations. In all disciplines of art it had various strands with varying attitudes. Consider this quote from Goethe, discussing French romantic literature:

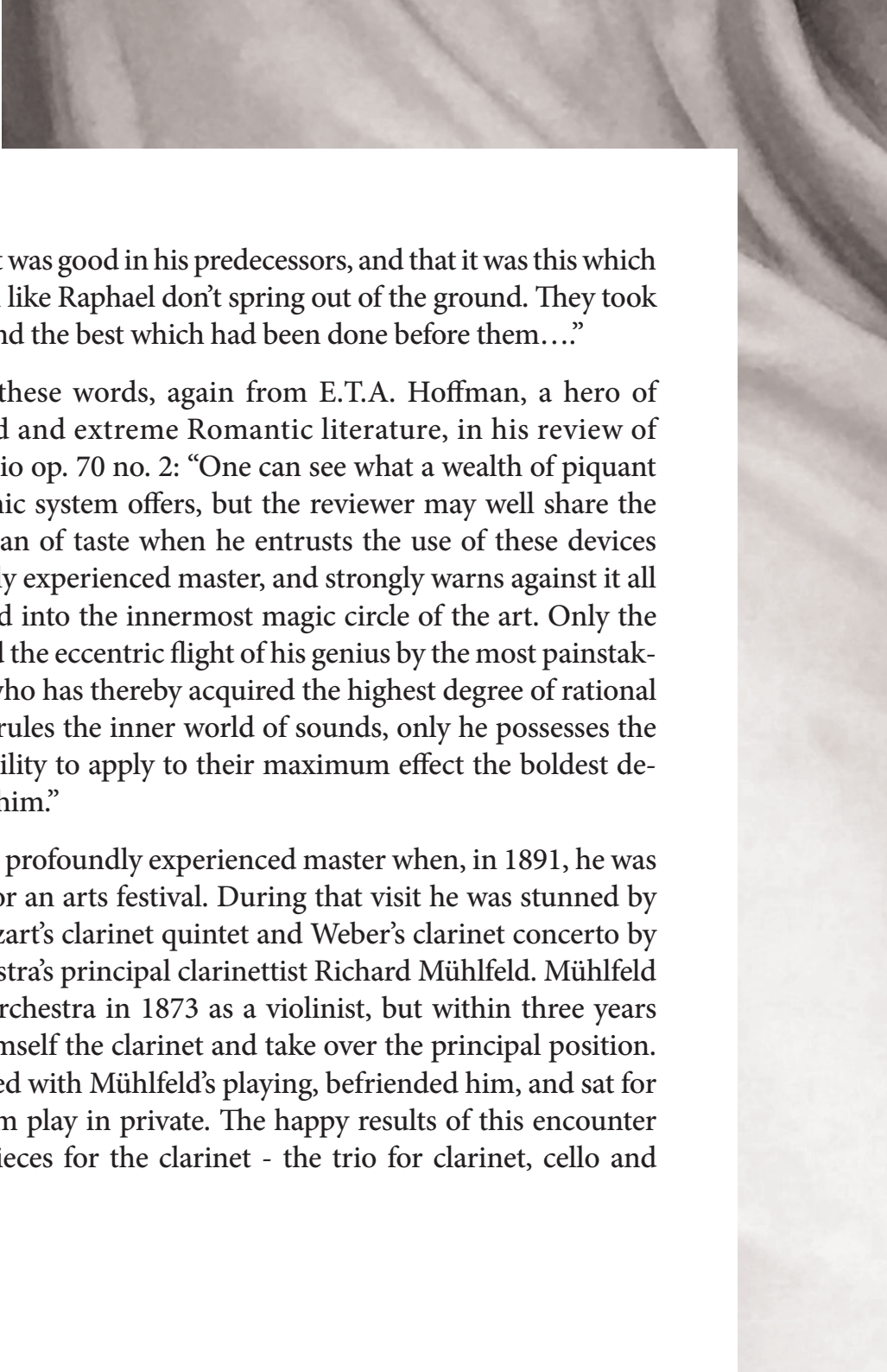
“Extremes are never to be avoided in any revolution. In a political one, nothing is generally desired in the beginning but the abolition of abuses; but before people are aware, they are deep in bloodshed and horror. Thus the French, in their present literary revolution, desired nothing at first but a freer form; however, they will not stop there, but will reject the traditional contents together with the form. They begin to declare the representation of noble sentiments and deeds as tedious, and attempt to treat all sorts of abominations. Instead of the beautiful subjects from Grecian mythology, there are devils, witches, and vampires, and the lofty heroes of antiquity must give way to jugglers and galley slaves. This is piquant! This is effective! But after the public has tasted once this highly seasoned food, and has become accustomed to it, it will always long for more, and that stronger. A young man of talent, who could produce an effect and be acknowledged, and who is great enough to go his own way, must accommodate himself to the taste of the day - nay, must seek to outdo his predecessors in the horrible



and frightful. But in this chase after outward means of effect, all profound study, and all gradual and thorough development of the talent and the man from within, is entirely neglected. And this is the greatest injury which can befall a talent.....”

One can easily imagine these words having a strong resonance for Brahms. And they can help explain why he so strongly abhorred certain Romantic music which he found shallow, sensationalist and devoid of clarity of construction and expression. Which brings us to the second ill-conceived argument for the anti-Brahms prejudice - that he was obsessed with music of the past, and too intensely interested in clarity of form and structure. Brahms’ own description of Bruckner’s music is telling: “Everything is affectation with him, nothing natural.... But this thrusting around is disgusting to me, completely repugnant. He has no conception of a musical logic, no idea of an orderly musical structure.” As a result of this attitude, Brahms was taken by many of his contemporaries to be a backward-looking composer, one who was against innovation and exploration, against what they termed “music of the future”. But again this view doesn’t withstand careful consideration. In all stages of his career, from the early D minor piano concerto, through the piano pieces op.76, and up until his very last compositions (including the two sonatas on this CD) Brahms was strikingly courageous and adventurous. He constantly pushed the boundaries of harmony, melody and rhythm to truly great extremes, more so than many other composers of his time. To regard him as a pedant or conservative is to my mind absurd. And here is another relevant quote from Goethe:

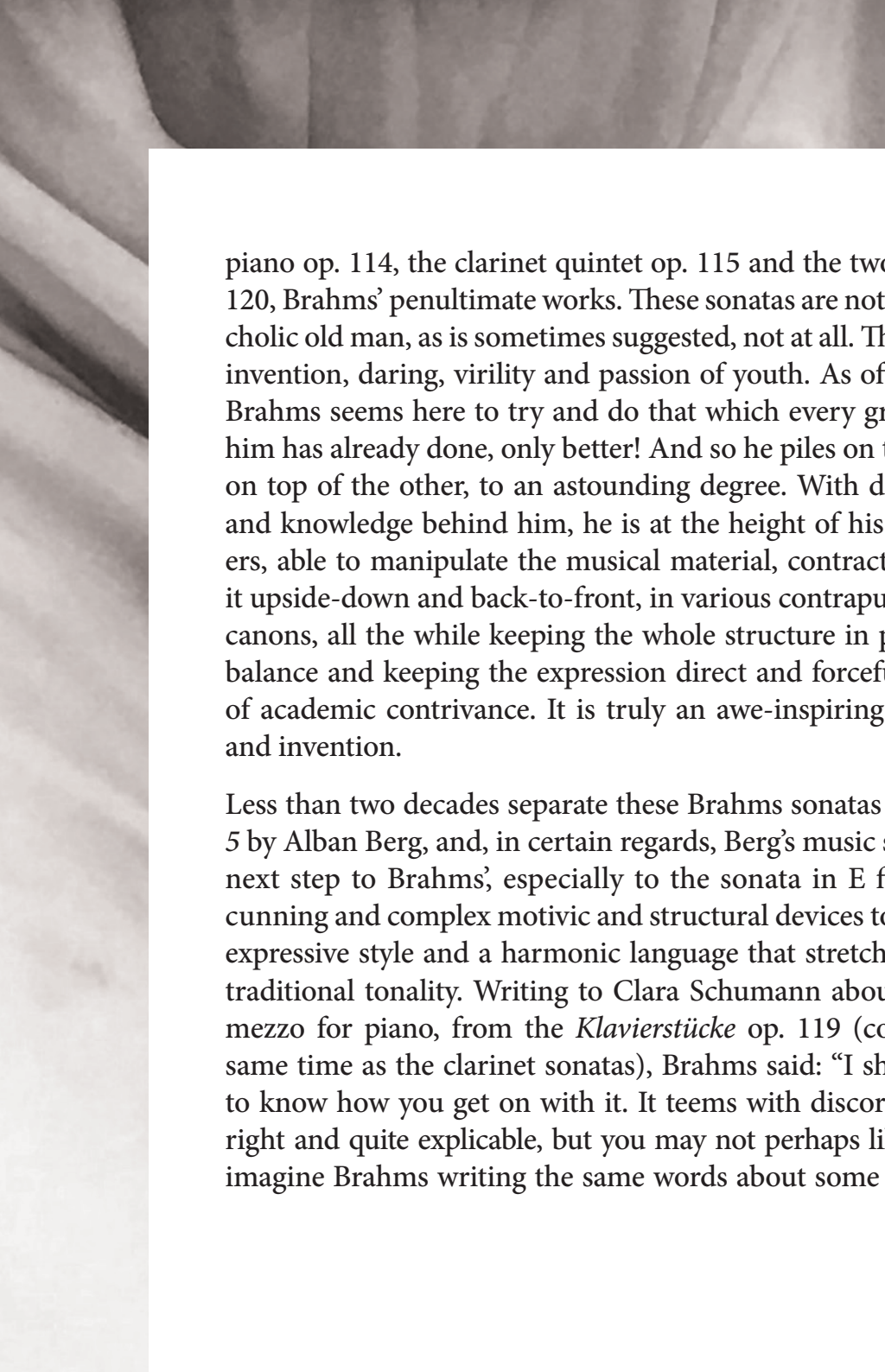
“There is through all art a filiation. If you see a great master, you will always



find that he used what was good in his predecessors, and that it was this which made him great. Men like Raphael don't spring out of the ground. They took root in the antique, and the best which had been done before them...."

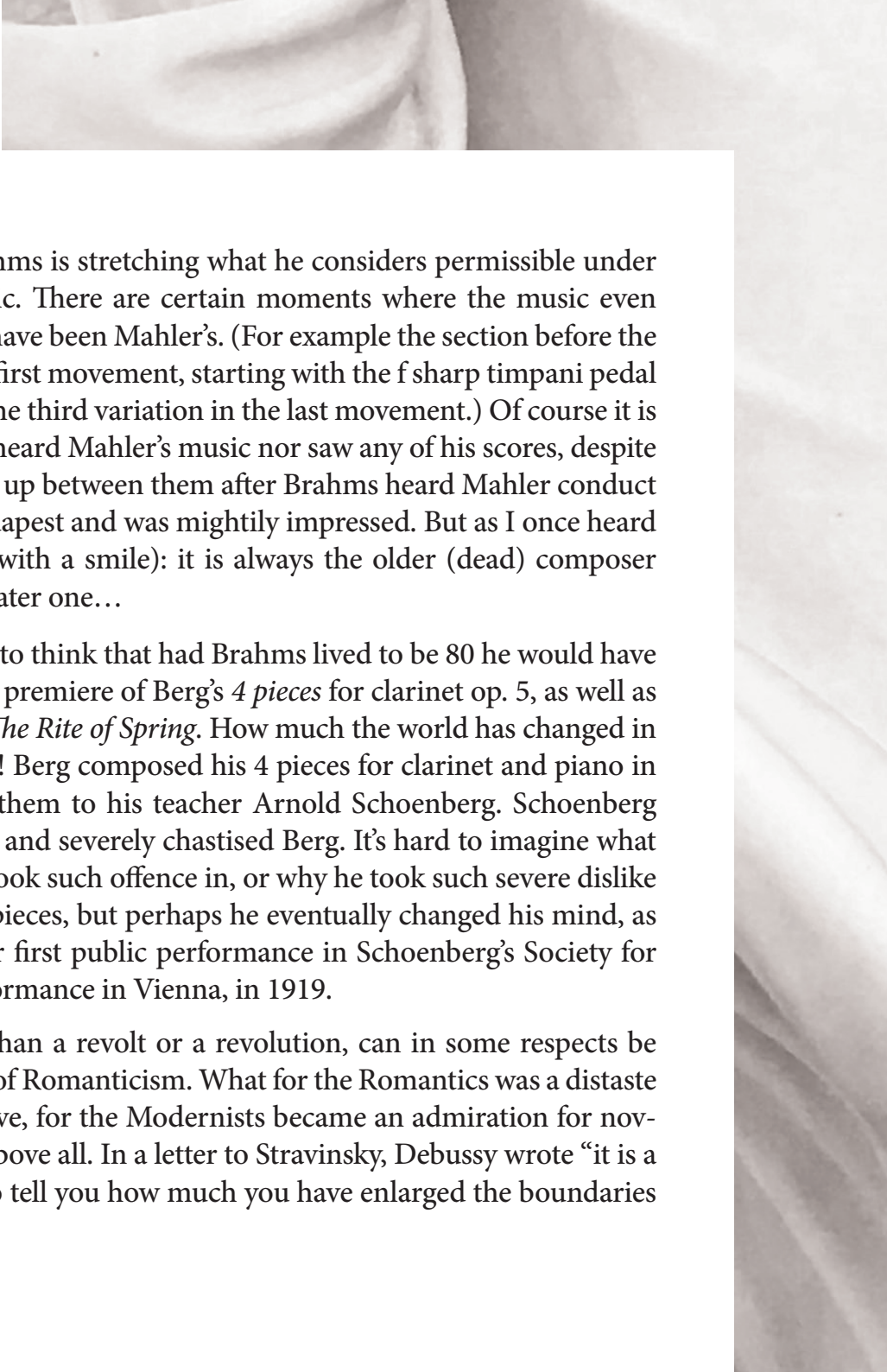
Consider then also these words, again from E.T.A. Hoffman, a hero of the more intoxicated and extreme Romantic literature, in his review of Beethoven's piano trio op. 70 no. 2: "One can see what a wealth of piquant effects the enharmonic system offers, but the reviewer may well share the view of every musician of taste when he entrusts the use of these devices only to the profoundly experienced master, and strongly warns against it all those not yet initiated into the innermost magic circle of the art. Only the artist who has bridled the eccentric flight of his genius by the most painstaking study of his art, who has thereby acquired the highest degree of rational awareness, and now rules the inner world of sounds, only he possesses the full and confident ability to apply to their maximum effect the boldest devices that art affords him."

Brahms was indeed a profoundly experienced master when, in 1891, he was visiting Meiningen for an arts festival. During that visit he was stunned by performances of Mozart's clarinet quintet and Weber's clarinet concerto by the Meiningen orchestra's principal clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld. Mühlfeld actually joined the orchestra in 1873 as a violinist, but within three years managed to teach himself the clarinet and take over the principal position. Brahms was enthralled with Mühlfeld's playing, befriended him, and sat for hours listening to him play in private. The happy results of this encounter are four immortal pieces for the clarinet - the trio for clarinet, cello and



piano op. 114, the clarinet quintet op. 115 and the two clarinet sonatas op. 120, Brahms' penultimate works. These sonatas are not the work of a melancholic old man, as is sometimes suggested, not at all. This music is full of the invention, daring, virility and passion of youth. As often before in his life, Brahms seems here to try and do that which every great composer before him has already done, only better! And so he piles on the complexities, one on top of the other, to an astounding degree. With decades of experience and knowledge behind him, he is at the height of his compositional powers, able to manipulate the musical material, contract and expand it, turn it upside-down and back-to-front, in various contrapuntal guises and strict canons, all the while keeping the whole structure in perfect harmony and balance and keeping the expression direct and forceful, without any trace of academic contrivance. It is truly an awe-inspiring feat of musical skill and invention.

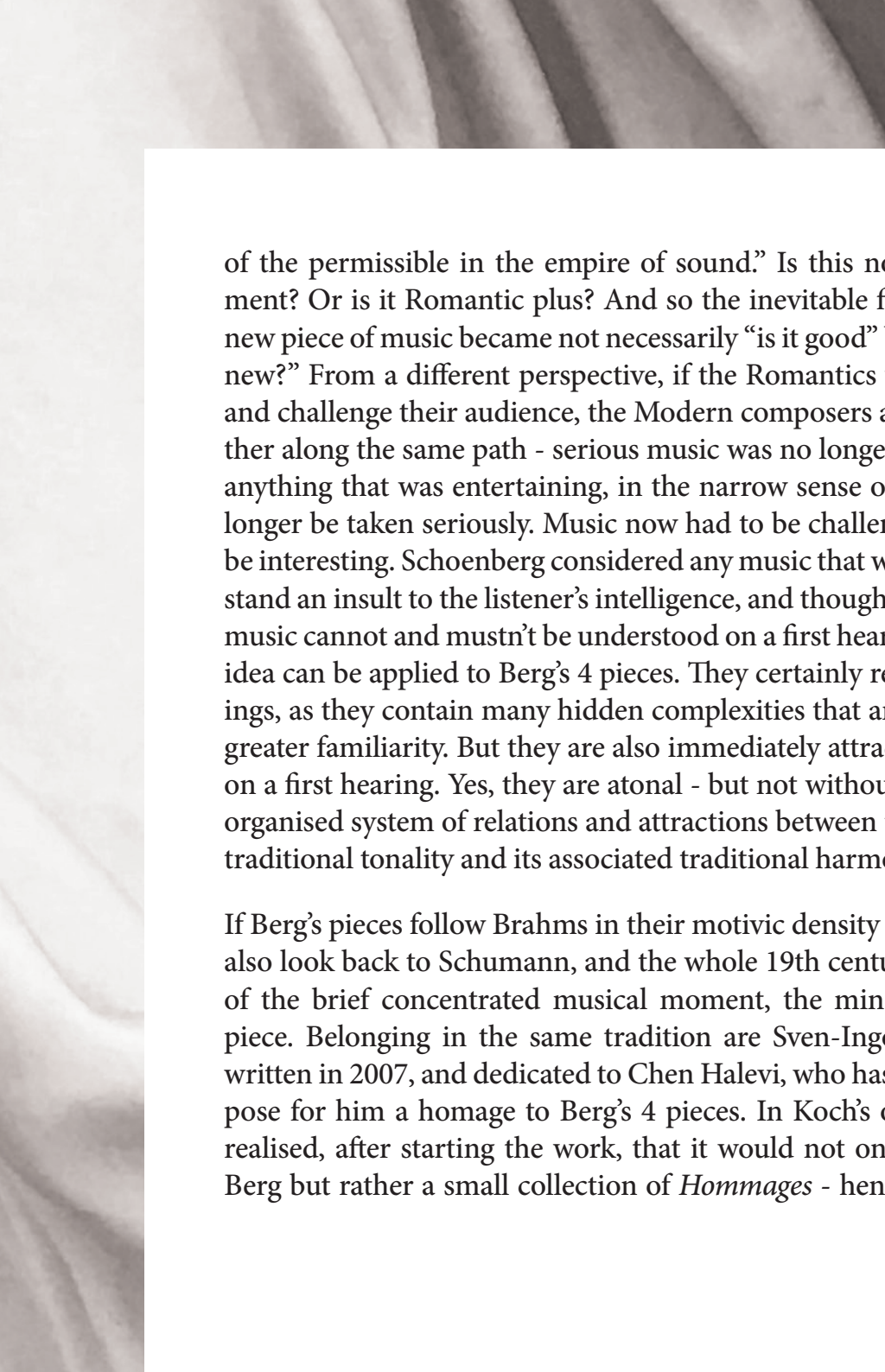
Less than two decades separate these Brahms sonatas from the *4 pieces op. 5* by Alban Berg, and, in certain regards, Berg's music seems quite a natural next step to Brahms', especially to the sonata in E flat, which combines cunning and complex motivic and structural devices together with a hyper-expressive style and a harmonic language that stretches the boundaries of traditional tonality. Writing to Clara Schumann about his B minor intermezzo for piano, from the *Klavierstücke* op. 119 (composed around the same time as the clarinet sonatas), Brahms said: "I should very much like to know how you get on with it. It teems with discords. These may be alright and quite explicable, but you may not perhaps like them..." One can imagine Brahms writing the same words about some sections of the E flat



sonata. It is as if Brahms is stretching what he considers permissible under musical law and logic. There are certain moments where the music even sounds as if it could have been Mahler's. (For example the section before the recapitulation of the first movement, starting with the *f* sharp timpani pedal point, or the end of the third variation in the last movement.) Of course it is likely Brahms never heard Mahler's music nor saw any of his scores, despite the friendship struck up between them after Brahms heard Mahler conduct *Don Giovanni* in Budapest and was mightily impressed. But as I once heard György Kurtág say (with a smile): it is always the older (dead) composer who steals from the later one...

It is almost shocking to think that had Brahms lived to be 80 he would have been able to hear the premiere of Berg's *4 pieces* for clarinet op. 5, as well as *Pierrot Lunaire* and *The Rite of Spring*. How much the world has changed in only a decade or two! Berg composed his *4 pieces* for clarinet and piano in 1913 and dedicated them to his teacher Arnold Schoenberg. Schoenberg didn't like the music, and severely chastised Berg. It's hard to imagine what exactly Schoenberg took such offence in, or why he took such severe dislike to these marvellous pieces, but perhaps he eventually changed his mind, as they were given their first public performance in Schoenberg's Society for Private Musical Performance in Vienna, in 1919.

Modernism, rather than a revolt or a revolution, can in some respects be seen as an extension of Romanticism. What for the Romantics was a distaste for anything derivative, for the Modernists became an admiration for novelty, for innovation above all. In a letter to Stravinsky, Debussy wrote "it is a special satisfaction to tell you how much you have enlarged the boundaries



of the permissible in the empire of sound.” Is this not a Romantic sentiment? Or is it Romantic plus? And so the inevitable first question about a new piece of music became not necessarily “is it good” but rather “is it really new?” From a different perspective, if the Romantics were happy to shock and challenge their audience, the Modern composers again took a step further along the same path - serious music was no longer entertainment, and anything that was entertaining, in the narrow sense of the word, could no longer be taken seriously. Music now had to be challenging and difficult to be interesting. Schoenberg considered any music that was too easy to understand an insult to the listener’s intelligence, and thought that a good piece of music cannot and mustn’t be understood on a first hearing. I’m not sure this idea can be applied to Berg’s 4 pieces. They certainly reward repeated hearings, as they contain many hidden complexities that are only revealed with greater familiarity. But they are also immediately attractive and compelling on a first hearing. Yes, they are atonal - but not without tones, and a highly organised system of relations and attractions between them, only without a traditional tonality and its associated traditional harmonic functions.

If Berg’s pieces follow Brahms in their motivic density and complexity, they also look back to Schumann, and the whole 19th century musical tradition of the brief concentrated musical moment, the miniature, the character piece. Belonging in the same tradition are Sven-Ingo Koch’s *Hommages*, written in 2007, and dedicated to Chen Halevi, who has asked Koch to compose for him a homage to Berg’s 4 pieces. In Koch’s own words - “I soon realised, after starting the work, that it would not only be a *Hommage* to Berg but rather a small collection of *Hommages* - hence the title - to com-



posers who recently became (or always have been) very meaningful to me. Small traces of Schubert, Schumann, the Ligeti piano etudes, and maybe also Rameau are audible.” Well, I’d say some of these traces are more easily heard than others! The influence of Ligeti’s etudes can be quite easily noticed, especially *Automne á Varsovie* in the second movement, and *L’escalier du diable* in the fourth. Other allusions are more secret, for example in the very opening bar of the first movement both clarinet and the left hand of the piano are playing the inner voices (second violin and viola) from the opening of the slow movement of Schubert’s string quintet in C. Apparently Koch heard the opening bars of this movement repeated again and again as they were being rehearsed in an adjacent room while he was composing. Is it a modern piece? Can we call it a Romantic piece? Perhaps it’s best to not theorise about it too much. In the words of Paul Valéry, “One cannot get drunk, one cannot quench one’s thirst, with labels on bottles.” I would say this much though: in its courageous insistence on pursuing an individual vision, in its originality, in its lack of concern for general attitudes regarding what contemporary music should be, in its restless striving for new modes of expressivity, and in its use of carefully constructed systems of organisation, the piece, if not Romantic, has its eyes and ears to the future, but its feet well rooted in the “electrical soil” from which grew the many wonders of German Romanticism.

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Chen Halevi Noam Greenberg

CHEN HALEVI

clarinet

Chen Halevi is considered to be one of the most versatile clarinetists of today; playing recitals, concertos and chamber music with equal acclaim. His playing covers an impressive range of repertoire from performing on period instruments to the most up to date contemporary music. He is a pioneer of a new school of playing; looking at what the clarinet and clarinetist should be in the 21st century.

As a teenager he made his debut with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra under Zubin Mehta. Since then he has worked with many leading orchestras in the U.S, Europe, and Japan. A great lover of chamber music, Chen Halevi has performed with many of the most prominent musicians and quartets today. His passion for chamber music makes him a welcome guest at festivals across the world.

Internationally acknowledged as a passionate contemporary musician,

Halevi's close ties with composers have led him to perform a great number of works dedicated to him by the most eminent composers of our time.

His commitment to contemporary music goes beyond this. In 2007 Halevi founded ClaRecords, with the aim of supporting contemporary composers through commissions, recordings and performances. Another goal of ClaRecords is to stimulate dialogue between different art forms in the 21st century.

Halevi's wide interest in other cultures has led him to explore a Multitude of musical styles ; through this journey he has formed various musical collaborations which include TangoFactory -an ensemble expanding the horizons of tango through performances of contemporary new tangos as well as revisiting the old masters .Other projects explore the musical roots of the Middle East through the centuries and its colorful sound.

This is the second CD which Halevi is releasing on Cobra Records, following the highly acclaimed Winds Unlimited disc, 'Harmoniemusik from Mozart's Favourite Operas'. This shows yet another musical side of Chen Halevi, this time on period instruments exploring woodwind repertoire from the classical and romantic period.

Another important component of his work is as a teacher. Halevi is keen to spread his school of playing through teaching and masterclasses. He is currently clarinet professor at the Trossingen Hochschule for Music in Germany.

NOAM GREEN BERG

piano

Israeli pianist Noam Greenberg studied at the Rubin Academy in Tel Aviv and at Yale University, before moving to London to study with Maria Curcio. Of decisive influence was his visit to the International Musicians' Seminar Prussia Cove in 2001, for Master Classes with Ferenc Rados and András Schiff. Many lessons with Ferenc Rados followed in Budapest, and regular visits to the Open Chamber Music Seminars at IMS Prussia Cove, including their national tour. Noam now enjoys a busy concert schedule as soloist, recitalist and chamber musician in both the traditional repertoire and new

music and has appeared regularly on many European stages including the Wigmore Hall in London, the Vienna Konzerthaus and Musikverein, the Berlin Konzerthaus, Parco della Musica Roma, Concertgebouw Amsterdam and the Auditorio Nacional Madrid. An avid performer of contemporary music, he was for four years the solo pianist of the Israeli Contemporary Players, Israel's foremost contemporary music ensemble, and has given many Israeli premieres including Ligeti's Piano Concerto, in a performance broadcast live by the European Broadcasting Union.

He performed often in festivals including Lucerne, Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Banff, Norfolk, Lapland, Orlando, Schleswig-Holstein, Stage-Barcelona, Plush, and Zeitkunst. He was a member of the Waldstein Ensemble, together with Gerhard Schulz, Guy Ben-Ziony and Lilia Bayrova, with whom he toured extensively. Among his regular and recent chamber music partners are clarinettist Chen Halevi, violinists Pekka Kuusisto and Gerhard Schulz, singers Mark Padmore and Ailish Tynan, cellists Pieter Wispelwey and the Ardeo String Quartet, to name a few. As soloist he has performed with many orchestras both in his native Israel and abroad.

He taught masterclass courses annually at Burg Fesitritz in Austria, and has also given masterclasses at the Britten Pears School in Aldeburgh, the Royal Northern College of Music, and the Hochschule fur Musik in Detmold. He is artistic director of the Music at Tresanton festival, which he founded in 2006. The festival takes place every year in November, has a devoted following, and is regularly broadcast by BBC radio 3. Noam lives with his family in London.



Chen Halevi | clarinet
Noam Greenberg | piano

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