

# BRAHMS CHAMBER MUSIC

## A New Perspective

### Horn player Alec Frank-Gemmill

#### Scherzo in C minor from FAE Sonata

Transcribed by Simon Smith from original for violin and piano

#### Sonata in G minor Op.38

Arranged by Daniel Grimwood from original in E minor for cello and piano

#### Horn Trio in E flat major, Op. 40

**BIS-2478 SACD UK Release date: 30 October 2020**



A new perspective on chamber works by Brahms from the point of view of the horn is offered by **Alec Frank-Gemmill** on a new SACD recording from Swedish label BIS with pianist **Daniel Grimwood** and violinist **Benjamin Marquise Gilmore**.

At the heart of the album's repertoire is the Horn Trio, Brahms' only chamber piece for the instrument with which he was so closely associated, complemented by transcriptions of two other chamber pieces so as to give a voice to the horn – Sonata in E minor Op.38 for cello and piano and the *Scherzo* from the FAE Sonata for violin and piano.

Frank-Gemmill is undeniably one of today's leading horn players, consistently praised for his passionate commitment to his instrument, as well as his musicality, versatility and virtuosity. He makes no excuses for this approach to Brahms recital works:

*"I really believe in the horn as an instrument for chamber music. It doesn't seem odd when string players transcribe these pieces. The Sonata, for example, is frequently played on the viola. Similarly, the Scherzo is very often performed on the cello. I'd like to think that I do these pieces justice and offer a new perspective on the music. Brahms himself sanctioned a version of the Trio with a viola playing the horn part. So I'm just doing this process in reverse."*

The masterpiece that is the Horn Trio is arguably the most important work written for the horn and yet features rarely in recordings and on the airwaves. Although conceived by Brahms for natural horn and frequently played on natural horn nowadays, Frank-Gemmill chose to play a piston horn for this recording:

*"There are advantages to the natural horn in terms of colours and balance but the frequent hand-stopping from the valve-less horn is not to everyone's taste - or perhaps it is better experienced live rather than on disc. In an attempt to have the best of both worlds, I borrowed Aubrey Brain's piston horn from the Royal Academy of Music. This softer-hued horn from the early 20th century seems to fit the piece perfectly and was the very instrument that Brain used in his famous recording of the piece. This set-up has hopefully enabled us to capture both the beautiful tone and also the subtle interplay of the three instruments."*

This is his third recording for BIS, all of them supported by his 2014 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship; *A Noble and Melancholy Instrument* was his ambitious debut album that explored four different horns and period keyboards to match, followed by the equally acclaimed *Before Mozart* which presented neglected and highly virtuosic concertos for solo horn from a range of early 18<sup>th</sup> century composers. Both are touchstones that validate Frank-Gemmill's unceasing quest for new repertoire and challenges for his instrument.

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## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Alec Frank-Gemmill** <https://www.alecfrankgemmill.com>

- Recipient of a Borletti-Buitoni Fellowship 2014 and member of the BBC New Generation Artists scheme 2014-16
- Professor of Horn at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama
- After 10 years as Principal Horn with Scottish Chamber Orchestra, took up same position at Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra in October 2019
- Guests with leading orchestras as principal horn, soloist and director including the Royal Concertgebouw, London Symphony and BBC orchestras, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Düsseldorfer Symphoniker and Sinfonietta Köln
- Chamber music collaborators include pianist Alasdair Beatson and violinists Alexander Janiczek, Philippe Graffin and Pekka Kuusisto, as well as period instrument group Ensemble Marsyas
- Soloist in numerous festivals including East Neuk, Spitalfields, Ryedale, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and St. Magnus. A regular at Open Chamber Music at Prussia Cove
- Began playing horn aged 10 (tenor horn at 6) and period instruments at 19. Studied in Cambridge, London and Berlin. His teachers have included Hugh Seenan, Radovan Vlatković and Marie-Luise Neunecker
- Repertoire extends from Baroque to contemporary
- For the last few years has shifted focus to conducting. Has taken lessons and attended masterclasses with Mark Heron, John Wilson, Sian Edwards and Paavo Järvi and conducted orchestras throughout the UK
- See his 'Insight' films on a range of period horns: [http://www.bbtrust.com/2014/fellowships/alec-frank-gemmill\\_1.html?view=video](http://www.bbtrust.com/2014/fellowships/alec-frank-gemmill_1.html?view=video)

### ***A Noble and Melancholy Instrument:***

*"the musical results are glorious... Fiendish enough on a modern instrument [Schumann's Adagio and Allegro], Frank-Gemmill's fearless, colourful playing on an antique single horn paradoxically makes the piece sound easier."* The Arts Desk April 2017

*"The changes of sound and technology are fascinating, but the programme and the playing are what really make this such an excellent recital"* BBC Radio 3 Record Review May 2017

<https://bis.se/performers/frank-gemmill-alec/a-noble-and-melancholy-instrument>

### ***Before Mozart:***

*"virtuosity is consistently placed at the service of expression... An exceptional disc that confirms and consolidates his reputation as one of today's finest horn players, it makes for compelling and essential listening."* Gramophone June 2018

*"A radiantly engineered recital of heart-warming bonhomie and virtuoso sparkle."* BBC Music Magazine June 2018

<https://bis.se/performers/frank-gemmill-alec/before-mozart-early-horn-concertos>

**Daniel Grimwood:** <https://danielgrimwood.eu>

**Ben Gilmore:** <https://www.sco.org.uk/your-orchestra/who-s-who/922-benjamin-marquise-gilmore>