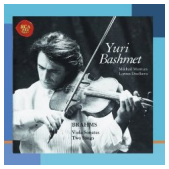
Brahms – Viola Sonatas & Songs op.91 (1999)



Sonata For Viola And Piano, Op. 120 No.1 1. Allegro Appassionato 2. Andante Un Poco Adagio 3. Allegretto Grazioso 4. Vivace Sonata For Viola And Piano, Op. 120 No.2 5. Allegro Amabile 6. Allegro Appassionato; Sostenuto 7. Andante Con Moto; Allegro; Piu Tranquillo Two Songs, Op. 91 8. Quelled Longing (Gestille Sehnsucht) 9. Sacred Lullaby (Geistliches Wiegenlied) Larissa Diadkova – contralto Yuri Bashmet – viola Mikhail Muntian – piano

Yuri Bashmet is a phenomenal musician and a superstar in his native Russia, despite the fact that his chosen instrument is the mild, rather doleful viola. Brahms's two late clarinet sonatas, transcribed for viola, are a staple of the repertoire. Among the versions I've heard, Bashmet's stands out for the beatuy of his tone--he never sounds creaky or buzzy--and the ultra-sensitive phrasing he applies everywhere.

My reservation is that hearing sensitive viola playing gets a bit tiresome in this music, which is already among Brahms's most introverted, if not outright melancholy. I wish Bashmet had punched it up a bit. He needed an equal partner at the piano rather than the reticent, though highly musical Mikhail Muntian. Every mezzo and alto of repute has recorded Brahms's two songs with viola Op. 91, in luscious lullabye mode, and here the version with Bashmet and Larissa Diadkova is as beautiful as any. --- Santa Fe Listener, amazon.com

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