

CD Review —**Brian Thornton: *Brahms Cello Sonatas***

by Hannah Schoepe



Capturing the essence of human emotions, Brahms’s cello sonatas are undeniable gems. Cleveland Orchestra cellist Brian Thornton and pianist Spencer Myer share a beautiful interpretation of the sonatas in their new album *Johannes Brahms Sonatas for Cello and Piano*, released on the Steinway & Sons record label.

The playing on the album is magnificent, and the balance between the players is beautiful. Thornton captures the contrast between power and intimacy that makes Brahms’s writing so special. Both partners complement each other well, and are meticulous in their ensemble and phrasing.

Sonata No. 1 in e opens with a grumbly melody in the lowest register of the cello, creating a brooding sense of tension. The opening bars expand into a melody that the performers gorgeously restate throughout the movement. The playful Allegretto quasi Menuetto holds an intimate surprise, introducing an unexpectedly tender lyrical line in its development. Thornton and Myer juggle its various moods with the utmost sensitivity, and capture the sprightly, cheerful mood of the concluding Allegro.

The *Sonata in F* is more extroverted. Brahms was ready to get the party started, and the opening Allegro vivace begins dramatically, the players bringing out the tumultuous emotional outbursts with panache. Their interpretation of the Adagio affettuoso is a heartfelt display of longing, sadness, and anguish. Thornton and Myer play the energetic Allegro passionato vivaciously, and the final movement, with its surprising percussive elements contrasted with sweet lyricism, is a feast for the ears.

Though the CD’s packaging puts the cello in the foreground, it should be remembered that Brahms — himself a pianist — originally titled the pieces “Sonata for Piano and Cello.” In these magnificent performances, both instruments are of equal importance.

The album is highly enjoyable, showcasing two artists of the highest level. *Johannes Brahms Sonatas for Cello and Piano* is available on [Spotify](#), [Amazon](#), [iTunes](#), and [Naxos](#).

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