

A recording involves rather more people than you might first think. Sometimes the team comes together by chance. On other occasions, a recording involves craftsmen whose lives and work have long been entwined. Such is the case with this recording of Brahms.

Brahms is a composer we cannot avoid, yet he remains both near and very far from us. Would we have liked to shake his hand? To hear him laugh? Would his voice have got on our nerves or would his words have intrigued us? There's no way of knowing. On the other hand, his music is imprinted on us physically, and gives its colours to a large part of our lives in their most precious dimensions.

When Philippe Bianconi and I reimmersed ourselves in the world of Brahms's sonatas with this recording in mind, we suddenly realised that we had first begun to tackle these works at the very start of our partnership, thirteen years before. From that first joint encounter with Brahms I had long remembered how frustrated I had been at a performance in Brittany when I could not coax my violin into producing the timbre that I sought in the 2nd Sonata. That memory was like an engine driving me on over the years to make technical changes and improvements that brought me closer to producing the sounds that the work inspired in me. But despite my efforts the present project would perhaps not have got off the ground without another craftsman, the violin-maker Christian Bayon. In January 2006, he brought me a marvelous instrument he had just made. It opened up a whole new field of potential sound and made it possible to bring years of exploration into material existence.

Less unexpected was the choice of Jean-Martial Golaz as sound engineer and artistic director. I made my very first recording in 1989 under his direction, and since then we have worked together on seven other recordings. The many hours of music and shared developments over the years have given us great confidence in each other. We know what each of us can do, and that simplifies a lot of things. The choice of the studio was a natural consequence of working with Jean-Martial—his preferred location for this kind of group is the now legendary *salle de musique* at La Chaux-de-Fonds (Switzerland). It allowed a completely natural recording environment, with only a single pair of microphones (Neumann TLM 50), one for each instrument, making for a configuration very close to that of an audience at a live performance.

The piano was chosen in close consultation with Philippe Bianconi and with Francis Morin, the piano-tuner, who had deep familiarity with the instrument that we finally chose; I had also had the pleasure of working with him on an earlier recording. A few weeks before the recording was scheduled I had to decide on a bow, from among those that had been magnificently rehaird at the same time (so as to all have the same degree of wear) by Edwin Clement, my bow-maker. After much thought I chose a nineteenth-century bow made by Nicolas Maline which produced a timbre and possessed a potential that came closest, in my mind, to the spirit of Brahms's music and to the physical sensations that would immerse me in it.

The balance of a recording is a fragile thing. People may be inclined to forget that, apart from the composer and the performer, it hangs on the artistry and skill of several other indispensable partners in the creation of magic.

Tedi Papavrami

The balance of a recording

