



Johannes Brahms: The Complete Chamber Music for Clarinet

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The young Spanish clarinetist Laura Ruiz Ferreres, professor at the Hochschule für Musik in Frankfurt, embarks here on a recording project of the complete clarinet chamber music of Johannes Brahms: the trio, the quintet, and the sonatas. German-Japanese cellist Danjulo Ishizaka joins her in the trio, the Mandelring Quartet of Germany collaborate in the Quintet, and Viennese pianist Christoph Berner sits at the keyboard in the trio and sonatas.

In her promotional materials, Ferreres presents a puzzling image. On one hand, she wants to be taken seriously as a teacher, boasting expertise in both the French and German clarinet systems and emphasizing the cultivation of an expressive personality; but in her photographs, she looks more like a clothing model than a professional musician.

Her playing has similar contradictions. She renders each score with mature understanding and insight, yet she exhibits the persistent lack of attention to detail that plagues developing students. She spoils an otherwise resonant timbre with a cloudy middle register below the break; she mars her breathtaking dynamic range with a fortissimo that spreads too often; she often loses control of her tongue and throat in the clarion register, producing an awkward scooping sound; and she regularly follows a beautifully done legato line with a display of lazy and sloppy fingers.

Her supporting cast is uneven as well. The Mandelring Quartet has a fragile sound and scrappy technique, and Berner alternates passages of technical brilliance, wonderful touch, and emotional inspiration with moments of structural unawareness and palpable boredom. Ishizaka stands out with his rich and vibrant sound, awesome command, and complete dedication to the music, even if he occasionally loses clarity at pianissimo. In the Second Sonata, at 2:16 in II, the music skips ahead an entire second in what may be a misplaced splice.