

## ***Piazzolla Suite for Four Violins and Bass***

JULIAN MILONE

Born 1958

Julian Milone studied composition and the violin at the Royal College of Music, then joined the Philharmonia Orchestra in 1983 at the age of 25. Milone has made his reputation as an arranger, recasting works from the classical repertory as arrangements for groups of violins (their number can run as high as twelve) over the harmonic foundation of a doublebass. Milone has made arrangements of a variety of music, ranging from Paganini to Gershwin, from opera to jazz, from popular tunes to tangos, and SummerFest audiences have enjoyed several of these during the last few festivals. This summer we hear Milone's arrangement—for four violins and bass—of four tangos by Astor Piazzolla.

Piazzolla wrote most of his tangos for a quintet that consisted of bandoneon, piano, violin, electric guitar and bass, but this music translates easily into arrangements. Julian Milone has written of his intentions as he made the arrangements heard on this program: "Having four violins and a double bass for this *Tango Suite*, I have kept as much as possible to Piazzolla's own sound world, but within a more classical context. The violin can be as percussive as a piano, can easily replicate a guitar with pizzicato and can produce the depth of expression of Piazzolla's own instrument, the bandoneon. Add to this the violin's own innate qualities of sound (not forgetting the double bass!), and the virtuosic possibilities within the group are there for all to see."

Piazzolla wrote *Death of an Angel (La Muerte del Angel)* for his Quinteto Nuevo Tango, which he founded shortly after his return to Buenos Aires from New York in 1960. One of his most popular tangos, it opens with a sharply-inflected chromatic episode, full of driving rhythms and angular shapes. A more reflective episode leads to a return of the opening material. The brief *Vayamos al Diablo*, with its deep and driving ostinato, does sound suitably diabolic.

*Oblivion* comes from the sultry side of the tango. Over the melting rhythms of the opening, the haunting and dark main theme sings its sad song, and returns in a number of guises. Piazzolla varies the accompaniment beneath this tune,

and the tango stays firmly within its somber and expressive opening mood.

After returning from his studies with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, Piazzolla had great success in Argentina, but after two decades there (and a heart attack in 1973), he decided to return to Europe. *Libertango*, composed in Italy in 1974, quickly became a hit in Europe, and it remains today one of Piazzolla's most popular works. The title of this brief tango is somewhat fanciful (Piazzolla himself described it as "a sort of song of liberty"), and listeners will be taken more by its pulsing rhythm, which functions as an ostinato throughout, and Piazzolla's sinuous, sensual and dark main theme.

### **Piano Trio in B Major, Opus 8**

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg

Died April 3, 1897, Vienna

The *Trio in B Major* had a curious genesis: Brahms composed it twice. He wrote the first version in 1853, when he was only twenty, and the trio was played in that form for nearly forty years. Then late in life and at the height of his creative powers, Brahms returned to this work of his youth and subjected it to a revision so thorough that it amounted to a virtual re-composition. With characteristic understatement, Brahms said that his revision "did not provide it with a wig, but just combed and arranged its hair a little," but a comparison of the two versions (both have been recorded) shows how greatly Brahms had refined his compositional techniques across the course of his career.

It was the development sections of the early version that bothered the mature Brahms most, and when he revised the trio, he kept the opening section of each movement virtually intact but wrote new second subjects for the first, third and fourth movements. The development sections, which had been episodic and unfocused in the first version, became concise and economic in the second. Brahms had grown more adept not just at developing his material but also at creating themes capable of growth and change, and—as revised—the *Trio in B Major* combines some of the best features of early and late Brahms: his youthful impetuosity has been wedded to an enormously refined technique. Brahms joked

that perhaps he should change the opus number from 8 to 108 but finally decided to let the original number stand, and that is misleading—far from being an early work, the later version offers some of his most mature and sophisticated music.

Cello and piano open the first movement with a theme of such characteristic breadth and nobility that anyone hearing it recognizes the composer immediately. In the first version, Brahms had included the violin in this opening statement; in the later version, he made this glowing melody slightly more concise and eliminated the violin. Also in the revision Brahms eliminated a complicated fugue from the development section.

The scherzo was the one movement that Brahms kept almost intact, only substituting a new coda for the original. It is easy to understand Brahms' affection for this music, with its propulsive opening rhythm and lyric second subject.

The *Adagio* profited greatly from revision, for Brahms composed a new second theme of such autumnal lyricism that it transforms this movement from the effort of a tentative beginner to the work of a master. The finale pulses darkly forward on dotted rhythms, and the conclusion is unusual in that the music ends not in the expected home key, but in B minor.

In its original form, the *Trio in B Major* was performed quickly and widely: the première took place in Danzig on October 13, 1855, and the first performance in America took place the following month, on November 27, 1855, in New York City. The violinist on that occasion was the twenty-year-old Theodore Thomas, who later moved to a raw town in the West and founded the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The première of the revised version took place in Budapest on January 10, 1890.