

## About this Recording

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[8.573375](#) - CASABLANCAS, B.: Piano Trios (B3:Brouwer Trio)

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### Benet Casablanças (b. 1956) Piano Trios

Benet Casablanças is widely regarded as one of the leading **SPANISH** composers of his generation. He began his musical studies in Barcelona, later moving to Vienna to study with Friedrich Cerha and Karl-Heinz Füssl. He obtained a degree in Philosophy and a Ph.D. in musicology from the University of Barcelona, and has combined his career as composer with teaching and research, lecturing in universities and conservatories, and contributing to a wide range of journals and other specialist media (including the New Grove). His book *El humor en la música* was published in 2000. Over the last three decades, his music has been increasingly performed in Europe, North and South America and Japan, and he is the recipient of many important prizes, most recently as finalist in the Prince Pierre of Monaco Foundation Musical Competition, and was awarded the 2007 National Music Prize of the Generalitat of Catalonia and the 2013 National Music Prize of the Spanish Ministry of Culture.

Casablanças has composed in all the major genres, with important contributions to the chamber music repertory (including four string quartets, recorded by the Arditti Quartet) and in the last two decades has produced a remarkable series of orchestral works, including pieces such as *Three Epigrams*, *The Dark Backward of Time*, *Alter Klang*, *Darkness Visible* and *Sogni ed Epifanie*. His music issues from a profound engagement with the musical legacy of the first half of the twentieth century, and combines a refined and **PERSONAL** harmonic palette with a sharp attention to fine textural detail and a highly-developed sense of dramatic and narrative form. A lyrical impulse, always present, will be highlighted in his first opera, *L'Enigma di Lea*, to a libretto by Rafael Argullol, scheduled for production in 2018–2019.


The works on this recording span almost forty years of the composer's output, and can be grouped into three periods. The first two works chronologically, from 1976 and 1984 respectively, frame a first period defined by the attainment of a prodigious technique and the forging of a personal style and expressive milieu. A second group of works, composed between 1991 and 1996 following the important breakthrough achieved with *Seven Scenes from Hamlet* (1989) [Naxos 8.579004], is inaugurated by significant works such as the *Impromptu—Trio No 2* and the *Second String Quartet*, and moves towards greater luminosity and spaciousness, despite reduced timescales and virtuosic writing. The final group includes some of his most recent compositions, from the years 2007 to 2014, many of which share one of two factors: an interest in translating the Japanese poetic form *haiku* into musical expression, and a desire to commemorate figures close to the composer.

*Dos Apunts* is one of the composer's earliest extant works. These short annotations investigate a melodic lattice which achieves a degree of traction through occasional repetitions or coincidences. Similar material is used in both, with the first being more regular and flowing, while the second explores a greater dynamic range. More substantial is *Moviment per a Trio*, Casablanças' first contribution to the genre and a piece that consolidates his technique and personal voice. Written in homage to Catalan composer Frederic Mompou, the work broadly follows classical models of form, with an opening section that introduces musical material in embryonic state, followed by broad presentations of two themes in violin and cello respectively and a more discursive section including moments of great tension. After revisiting the main ideas, a closing section rounds the piece off in the very highest, most ethereal **REGISTERS**.

During the seven years before Casablanças' next work for trio his language broadens, becoming more malleable and flexible, striving for greater harmonic contrasts and seeking to exploit fully the individual characteristics of the instruments used. *Impromptu – Trio No 2* is impulsive and direct in its manner, although not at the expense of clarity of form and succession of emotional states. The instrumental detail is complex, but elegant and poised throughout, and the piece alternates moments of withdrawn or lyric expression with more tension-laden and rhythmic passages. Following this work, the composer's catalogue contains a series of smaller-scale pieces in which he investigates more concise expressive areas. *Encore* was written as a test piece for a performers' competition, and strikes an appropriately cadenza-like stance, virtuoso and extrovert, linking highly differentiated sections that explore the technical and expressive possibilities of the two instruments, either separately and together. The climax is at the midpoint, after which the two instruments recede to the extremes of high and low. A similar strategy is employed in *Cant per a Frederic Mompou*, a centenary celebration, in which the cello traces a gradual melodic progression from its lowest to its highest **REGISTER**. The piano accompaniment is generally sparse and discreet, unfolding broken chords which illuminate the cello's upwards meandering. *Come un recitativo* is a contribution to an album of short pieces commissioned by Colien Honneger. A first section presents generally abrupt and fragmented gestures, leading to a more flowing passage and a final section that combines both impulses. Inspired by a verse from Rilke, each of the three panels of *Tríptico* is given a descriptive motto—*Amorós, llibrement* (lovingly, freely); *passacaglia*; *Liebeslied*—that defines its mood: passionate, lyric and effusive in the outer movements and darker and more contained in the middle one.

The orchestral works composed between 2001 and 2006 enriched Casablanças' control of colour and large-scale form, and his return to classical chamber ensembles in 2007 shows a new interest in harmonic blocks and their gradual evolution or dissolution. The **BRIEF** *Haiku* for piano trio (2007) explores the various

possible 2 + 1 groupings of the three players, in what comprises a celebration of the formation itself and its wealth of timbral and textural possibilities. This work is the composer's first transcription into musical expression of the Japanese verse-form which employs three phrases of five, seven and five syllables, generally involving an unexpected juxtaposition of images or thoughts. The works that follow explore diverse musical analogies of these formal and expressive devices. They frequently eschew an overly reflexive posture, preferring instead to evoke the *haiku's* origin as a vibrant and even comic form. The first of the *Tres Haikus* from 2008 proposes slow-moving harmonies criss-crossed by faster figurations; the second sets a contemplative mood of shimmering colours from which emerge tentative melodic strands; while the third may be heard as a synthesis of the first two. *Lamento* cites the *haiku* as subtitle and dedication: it was written to commemorate the first anniversary of the death of composer and musicologist Ramón Barce. An opening flourish fades to falling melodic lines, and then to a passage of trills over dense but delicate chords. Bell-like sounds lead to a final sonority with a defiant repetition in the highest register. The brief *Haiku para Zurbarán* opens with a delicate, light-footed melody that gradually expands to stacked sonorities and lightning runs. A final section has a somewhat dark, repeating chord. In 2013, Casablancas composed a second set of *Tres Haikus*, much reduced in scale and in general both more subdued in tone and more clearly reflecting a three-phrase structure. The outer pieces are dedicated to people close to the composer, while the middle one is entitled 'Bursts of light'.

*Impromptu* for piano starts with a lively single-voiced line, the first in a succession of freely-associated ideas, while the thought-process as a whole is articulated by massive chords built up across the registers, and later drawn together in a trilled passage marked 'ecstatic'. *Júbilus* is another work of celebration, here in homage to viola de gamba **PLAYER**  Jordi Savall. The work mediates between music of different periods by means of harmonic and melodic allusions. The outer sections are exultant and assertive, derived from the melismatic Alleluia plainsong, while a more sombre middle section quotes directly from Couperin's *Pompe Funèbre*, a work championed by Savall. *Sí a Montsalvatge!* celebrates the older composer's birth centenary with a paraphrase of Montsalvatge's own *Sí a Mompou*. The note B ('sí' in Spanish nomenclature, but which also means 'yes') is given prominence, while the piece as a whole exhibits a festive and playful demeanour, full of rhythmic vivacity and bright harmonies.

### Benjamin Davies

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