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Fischer Duo Releases New Brahms Album

**Cello Sonatas and Songs, Op. 91
with Abigail Fischer, mezzo-soprano**

**Release Date: November 2, 2018
Centaur Records**

Digital downloads and CDs available to press on request.

www.fischerduo.com | www.centaurrecords.com



New York, NY – The **Fischer Duo** (Norman Fischer, cello; Jeanne Kierman, piano) releases its new, all-Brahms album on **Centaur Records** on **November 2, 2018**. It includes the two cello sonatas by Brahms along with his op. 91 songs for alto, cello (instead of the viola, as usually heard) and piano. The vocalist is their daughter, mezzo-soprano **Abigail Fischer**, making this album a special family affair. The album is produced by multiple Grammy Award winner **Judith Sherman**, and engineered by **Francis Schmidt**.

Norman Fischer reflects, “From my perspective, everything about this project has been about love. Our dear friend Judy Sherman was just amazing helping us in the recording process, and got such a gorgeous sound. Working with Abby was so special, as you might expect! Also, there is much love in our duo which has been playing this music for nearly five decades. When I listen to these performances, it is exactly the way I imagine the music – after performing and teaching these masterpieces – and that rarely happens in a recording.”

The **E Minor Sonata, Op. 38**, written in 1862 and completed in 1865, reaches back to earlier music with influence from Bach’s *Art of the Fugue* and Romberg’s *E Minor Sonata*. The work also was designed to be played by dedicated amateur players. Over 20 years later, a mature Brahms wrote his **F Major Sonata, Op. 99** with a different mandate. The demanding cello and piano writing covers the whole register of the instruments and is famously taxing. It is futuristic for its time, with rhythmic displacements, harmonic adventures into unusual territory, and orchestrational additions like pizzicato and tremolandi.

Similarly, the **Two Songs, Op. 91** come from different eras, also over 20 years apart. The songs are written for and inspired by the composer’s friendship with violinist/violist Joseph Joachim and his wife, the lustrous contralto Amalie Schneeweiss. The first song, “**Gestillte Sehnsucht**,” is set to a text by Friedrich Rückert, and was written during a troubled time in the Joachims’ relationship. This song carried Brahms’s hope of bringing the Joachims back together. The second song, “**Geistliches Wiegenlied**,” was composed in 1863 after the birth of their son (named Johannes after the composer), and quotes the ancient Christmas carol, “Joseph dearest, Joseph mine,” an obvious nod to Joachim.

This album was recorded May 11-13, 2015 (sonatas) and December 21, 2016 (songs) in Stude Concert Hall, Shepherd School of Music at Rice University in Houston, Texas.

The **Fischer Duo** was founded in 1971 and specializes in both the classical masterworks of Beethoven, Brahms and Schumann as well as music of our own time. The duo has succeeded in putting a signature touch on all of their recording projects, even within the standard repertoire. Their French CD *Imaginées* (praised by *Gramophone* as

“brilliantly and affectionately played”) included the premiere recordings of Nadia Boulanger’s *Trois Pièces* and George Auric’s *Imaginées II* plus Norman Fischer’s arrangement of the Ravel *Don Quichotte* songs; their Chopin and Liszt album was the first collection of the cello and piano repertoire by both composers on a single recording (“Technically effortless and secure, the playing is simple, direct, intense and expressive,” *Strings Magazine*); and their Beethoven Sonata set included an extra CD with the only recording of Beethoven’s first draft of the A Major Sonata and Czerny’s adaptation of the “Kreutzer” Sonata.

They have premiered over 30 new scores by composers such as George Rochberg, Augusta Read Thomas, Robert Sirota, Pierre Jalbert and Richard Wilson. They continue to actively perform throughout the United States and twice have served as Artistic Ambassadors for the USIA with tours to South America and South Africa, and recently have had residencies in Singapore, Beijing and Leipzig.

Brahms Cello Sonatas | Centaur Records | Release Date: November 2, 2018

The Fischer Duo: Norman Fischer, cello; Jeanne Kierman, piano with Abigail Fischer, mezzo soprano

Sonata No. 1 for Cello and Piano in E Minor, Op. 38 (1862-5) (27:33)

1. I Allegro non troppo 15:04
2. II Allegretto quasi Menuetto 5:33
3. III Allegro 6:56

Sonata No. 2 for Cello and Piano in F Major, Op. 99 (1886) (28:07)

1. I Allegro vivace 9:09
2. II Adagio affettuoso 6:53
3. III Allegro passionato 7:27
4. IV Allegro molto 4:38

Two Songs for Alto, Viola (or Cello) and Piano, Op. 91 (pub. 1884) (11:00)

1. Gestillte Sehnsucht (Rückert) (1884) 5:36
2. Geistliches Wiegenlied (Geibel) (1863-64) 5:24

Norman Fischer has concertized on five continents and in 49 of the 50 United States. He was cellist with the Concord String Quartet through its 16-year career and winner of the Naumburg Chamber Music Award, two Grammy nominations and an Emmy. In over 1000 concerts the quartet performed 18 Bartok cycles, 36 Beethoven cycles and premiered 50 works. Fischer’s chamber music expertise has led to performances with the American, Audubon, Bair, Cavani, Chester, Chiara, Ciompi, Cleveland, Dover, Ensø, Emerson, Jasper, Juilliard, Mendelssohn, Schoenberg, and Telegraph string quartets, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, Banff, Chamber Music International, Context (including a complete Beethoven piano trio cycle on period instruments), and Houston’s Da Camera Society. Fischer is Herbert S. Autrey Professor of Cello and is Director of Chamber Music at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. He also holds the Charles E. Culpepper Foundation Master Teacher Chair at the Tanglewood Music Center, where he has been on the summer faculty since 1985.

Jeanne Kierman has a distinguished career as an international pianist, having performed in Asia, South America and Africa. Kierman has performed for Da Camera of Houston, Chamber Music International, the Banff Centre, Mohawk Trail Concerts, Chamber Music Ann Arbor, and the Skaneateles Festival. Kierman has recorded for the Northeastern, Gasparo, Bridge, and Albany labels. Formerly on the faculties of Dartmouth College and the Oberlin Conservatory, Kierman currently serves as Artist Teacher at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. She also holds a Dalcroze License and shares her gifts in Eurhythmics seminars, classes and workshops. Since 1992 she has been on the summer faculty at the Greenwood Music Camp in Cummington, MA.

Known for her “serenely captivating” operatic presence “and disarming intimacy,” (*New York Times*), the versatile mezzo soprano **Abigail Fischer** has made a vibrant career starring in contemporary operas such as Missy Mazzoli’s *Song from the Uproar* and Du Yun’s 2017 Pulitzer Prize-winning *Angel’s Bone*, as well as in more classic operas such as the title roles in *Carmen* and *Cenerentola*, with companies such as Los Angeles Opera, Chautauqua Opera and

Cincinnati Opera. As a soloist with orchestra, Fischer has performed with ensembles such as the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Kansas City Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Columbus Symphony, Rhode Island Symphony, New Bedford Symphony and Virginia Symphony. As an early music performer, she has worked with the American Bach Soloists, Rebel Baroque, Early Music New York, Boston Baroque and Mercury Houston. In 2017 Fischer made her Italian stage debut in Bolzano, Italy in Toshio Hosakawa's *The Raven*, a setting of the Edgar Allan Poe text. She has sung the title role in Britten's *Rape of Lucretia* with Opera Memphis, Testo in Monteverdi's *Il Combattimento* with Gotham Chamber Opera, and premiered Lee Hoiby's *This is the Rill Speaking* with American Opera Projects. Originally trained as a cellist, she has worked often as a vocal chamber musician, from the Marlboro Music Festival and Chamber Music Northwest, to St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble. She has premiered Elliott Carter's *Mad Regales* and Bernard Rands' *Walcott Songs* at the Tanglewood Music Festival, numerous John Zorn chamber works all over the world including the Lincoln Center Festival, and Nico Muhly's *Elements of Style*, also at Lincoln Center. She is a graduate of the Eastman School of Music (MM), Vassar College (BA) and Lorenzo di Medici in Florence, Italy (Certificate in Italian language and literature).

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