

In 1959, Capitol Records brought together two towering musical personalities—violinist William Primrose and pianist Rudolf Firkušný—for a recording of Johannes Brahms's two sonatas for violin and piano, Op. 120. Captured in New York, these performances remain a distinguished entry in the discography of Brahms's chamber music, notable not only for their refinement and expressive insight, but also for the convergence of two artists whose musical philosophies, though shaped by different traditions, found deep common ground in this repertoire.

Primrose, a Scottish virtuoso who had elevated the violin to solo prominence in the twentieth century, brought to these sonatas his characteristic warmth of tone, technical control, and rhetorical clarity. A consummate craftsman, he was always mindful of the violin's particular voice—its dusky lyricism, its inwardness—and Brahms's writing in these late works suited him perfectly. Originally composed for clarinet and piano in 1894, the Op. 120 sonatas were later arranged by the composer himself for violin, whose timbre he considered equally expressive. Primrose embraces their autumnal colours and meditative mood with natural authority, shaping each phrase with understated eloquence.

Firkušný, meanwhile, was by 1959 an established master of the Romantic piano repertoire, admired for his luminous tone and poetic sensibility. A Czech by birth and a student of both Leoš Janáček and Artur Schnabel, he balanced intellectual integrity with lyric impulse, never allowing the piano to overwhelm or underplay its chamber role. In this collaboration, his playing is marked by a warm sonority and an unerring sense of ensemble, weaving seamlessly with Primrose's violin in dialogues that feel organic and alive.

The recorded sound, produced during Capitol's golden age of classical sessions, captures the intimacy of the sonatas without sacrificing nuance or dynamic range. Though not as extroverted as some later interpretations—such as those by Bashmet or Kashkashian—this reading is more contemplative, inwardly turned, and perhaps truer to the works' late-Brahmsian spirit. There is no self-indulgence, no showmanship; rather, these are mature artists speaking in a shared musical language, allowing Brahms's music to unfold with dignity and grace.

Though the Firkušný-Primrose collaboration was relatively rare on record, this 1959 recital stands as a testament to their artistry and mutual respect. It is a recording that rewards repeated listening, offering insights not only into Brahms's profound musical world, but also into the artistry of two musicians who served the music above all else.

In 1958, Rudolf Firkušný recorded a selection of Brahms's solo piano works for Capitol Records, offering a deeply personal and introspective interpretation of the composer's mature keyboard style. The programme included the second *Rhapsody*, Op. 79, and various *Intermezzi* and *Capriccios* from Opp. 116–119—late works that distil Brahms's musical thought into compact, richly expressive forms. Firkušný approached these pieces not with overt Romanticism but with poetic restraint and structural clarity, favouring warmth of tone and rhythmic flexibility over virtuosic display. His readings are notable for their inner luminosity and emotional depth, revealing a pianist more interested in character and nuance than in power. At a time when Brahms's piano music was often rendered with muscular intensity, Firkušný's more lyrical and contemplative style stood apart. These Capitol recordings remain a compelling testament to his affinity with Brahms, blending Czech lyricism with a distinctly Central European sense of musical architecture.



# firkušný & primrose

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BRAHMS Two Viola Sonatas, Works for Solo Piano  
Rudolf Firkušný, William Primrose

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### BRAHMS Viola Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 120, No. 1

1. 1st mvt. - Allegro appassionato (7:05)
2. 2nd mvt. - Andante un poco adagio (5:15)
3. 3rd mvt. - Allegretto grazioso (4:00)
4. 4th mvt. - Vivace (5:02)

### BRAHMS Viola Sonata No. 2 in E-flat major, Op. 120, No. 2

5. 1st mvt. - Allegro amabile (7:15)
6. 2nd mvt. - Allegro appassionato (4:45)
7. 3rd mvt. - Andante con moto - Allegro (6:11)

William Primrose, viola  
Rudolf Firkušný, piano

### BRAHMS 10 Works for Solo Piano

8. *Rhapsody* in G Minor (Op.79, No.2) (5:59)
9. *Intermezzo* in G Flat Minor (Op.117, No.2) (3:57)
10. *Capriccio* in F Sharp Minor (Op.76, No.1) (2:40)
11. *Intermezzo* in A Flat Major (Op.76, No.3) (2:16)
12. *Capriccio* in D Minor (Op.116, No.1) (1:56)
13. *Intermezzo* in E Flat Minor (Op.118, No.6) (4:31)
14. *Intermezzo* in B Minor (Op.119, No.1) (3:45)
15. *Intermezzo* in E Minor (Op.119, No.2) (4:31)
16. *Intermezzo* in C Major (Op.119, No.3) (1:38)
17. *Rhapsody* in E Flat Major (Op.119, No.4) (4:52)

Rudolf Firkušný, piano

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on  
photographs of Firkušný (*left*)  
and Primrose (*right*)

Sonatas for Viola & Piano  
recorded 21 May 1958,  
presented in Ambient Stereo

Solo piano works recorded 20  
January and 13, 14, 25 March,  
1959, presented in stereo

All recordings made at Studio A,  
Capitol 46th Street Studio,  
New York City

Total duration: 75:38

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