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## ***Contrasts: The five pillars of the clarinet–violin–piano repertoire, crowned by the electrifying, rarely recorded Schoenfield Trio***

**BOSTON, MA** — Ongaku Records announces *Contrasts: Bartók, Ives, Khachaturian, Schoenfield, and Stravinsky - Trios for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano* (024-133), a landmark album that gathers what clarinetist Jonathan Cohler calls “the five pillars” of the clarinet–violin–piano trio literature: Paul Schoenfield’s *Trio* (“Klezmer”), Aram Khachaturian’s *Trio*, Béla Bartók’s *Contrasts*, Igor Stravinsky’s *Suite* from “*L’Histoire du Soldat*,” and Charles Ives’s *Largo*. The new release is truly an all-star collaboration featuring Jonathan Cohler, clarinet; Ilya Kaler, violin; Rasa Vitkauskaitė, piano, and four-time Grammy®-Award-winning recording engineer Brad Michel.

### **Schoenfield’s Trio: rare, extraordinary, essential**

Placed first by design, Schoenfield’s 1990 *Trio* is the least recorded and most immediately gripping of the set—“a profound theological statement about cultural transmission and spiritual transformation,” says Cohler. Drawing on Hasidic and klezmer practices—*Freylakh* (a “joyful” Jewish circular wedding dance), *March*, *Niggun* (an improvised and repeated Jewish prayer tune), *Kozatzke* (a Jewish wedding dance after the Cossack dance)—Schoenfield fuses living tradition with sophisticated classical craft. “The *Niggun* is the spiritual center,” Cohler notes. “It’s meditation transformed into ecstatic dance—authentic, deeply felt, and spiritually charged.” Cohler gave early Boston performances of the *Trio* in the late 1990s; this recording champions it as a cornerstone of the repertoire.

### **A meeting of musicians and worlds**

Cohler, Kaler, and Vitkauskaitė bring decades of collaboration to *Contrasts*. “Our different backgrounds mirror the repertoire’s cultural synthesis,” says Cohler. “These compositions speak to identity and belonging as urgently now as when they were written.”

### **Audiophile production, wide availability**

Recorded and produced by Ongaku Records, long known for its audiophile quality recordings and world class artists, *Contrasts* captures the ensemble’s full dynamic and coloristic range—from Ivesian whisper to Bartókian flame—with the clarity and presence that characterize the label’s entire catalogue.

**Streaming/Download:** Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, YouTube Music, Tidal, Qobuz, Deezer

**Digital Release:** August 20, 2025

**Physical CDs:** Amazon, Ongaku Records

**Physical CD Release:** late September 2025

**Recording Location:** Shalin Liu Performance Center, Rockport, MA

## About the Artists

### **Jonathan Cohler — Clarinet • [jonathancohler.com/Bio](http://jonathancohler.com/Bio)**

Conductor and clarinetist Jonathan Cohler has been hailed as “the preeminent, most-recorded [clarinet] soloist of our time” (*Fanfare*) and his performances have been compared to the legendary pianist Dinu Lipatti. Cohler’s recent CD *Cohler plays and conducts Mozart* (Ongaku 024-128)—including Symphony No. 35, overtures to *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*, and the Clarinet Concerto, all in new editions by Cohler—was featured on the cover of *Fanfare* and called the new “standard for Mozart.” Mr. Cohler and multiple-award-winning Lithuanian pianist Rasa Vitkauskaite form today’s leading clarinet-piano duo which was also featured on the cover of *Fanfare Magazine* with their recent CD *Latin Journey* (Ongaku 024-130), their fourth recording together. Mr. Cohler’s recording of Messiaen’s *Quartet for the End of Time* (Ongaku 024-119) with violinist Ilya Kaler is frequently at the top of the Amazon Messiaen charts. As a conductor, Cohler has been compared to the likes of George Szell. Mr. Cohler is Professor of Clarinet and Chamber Music at the Longy School of Music of Bard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is a Vandoren, Rossi, Royal Global, and Silverstein artist, and records exclusively for Ongaku Records. His Facebook Artist page is the #1 classical clarinet Facebook page in the world.

### **Ilya Kaler — Violin • [bit.ly/IlyaKaler](http://bit.ly/IlyaKaler)**

Described by the *Gramophone* as a “magician, bewitching our ears” for his hauntingly beautiful sound, flawless command of the instrument, and mesmerizing phrasing, Ilya Kaler is the only violinist to have won the Gold Medal at the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, the Sibelius Competition in Helsinki, and the Paganini Competition in Genoa. His wide ranging highly acclaimed and award winning recordings of concerti and chamber music for the Naxos, Ongaku, and Melodiya Records labels, include his just released Mendelssohn *Violin Concerto in E Minor* and *Double Concerto in D Minor* with pianist Rasa Vitkauskaite and conductor Jonathan Cohler (Ongaku 024-132). Mr. Kaler has appeared with many distinguished orchestras throughout the world and is the violinist of the renowned Tempest Trio which also records for Naxos. One of the most sought-after teachers in the world, Kaler is violin professor at the Cleveland Institute of Music and has previously taught at DePaul University, Eastman School of Music, and Indiana University. In the summers, he can be found teaching and performing at Chautauqua Music Festival, Heifetz International Music Institute, Keshet Eilon Music Center in Israel, Bowdoin International Music Festival, and the Montreal Chamber Music Festival to name a few. Mr. Kaler also frequently judges the world’s most prestigious violin competitions, including the Sibelius Competition, the Henri Marteau Competition (Germany), and the International Music Competition of China. For six years, he also held the Concertmaster position with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra in New York and he has appeared as guest Concertmaster with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the San Francisco, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore Symphonies. Mr. Kaler studied with Zinaida Gilels, Leonid Kogan and Victor Tretyakov. Later he was influenced and inspired by his long-time mentor, violinist and teacher Abram Shtern.

### **Rasa Vitkauskaite — Piano • [rasapiano.com](http://rasapiano.com)**

Multiple prize-winning Lithuanian pianist Rasa Vitkauskaite has been hailed for “artistry of poetic and observant sensitivity” (*Gramophone*) and dubbed as “a Beethoven interpreter of penetrating insight” (*Fanfare*). Rasa has published many highly acclaimed solo recital, concerto, and chamber music recordings, which have received the highest accolades throughout the international musical press. Her most recent album, *A Concert Piano Christmas at Boston Symphony Hall*, was praised by *Gramophone* for its “remarkable high-wire acrobatics,” while *Limelight* magazine celebrated its “masterful technique and a palpable sense of joy.” Her concerto album including Mozart *Concerto No. 20 in D Minor* and Beethoven *Concerto No. 3 in C Minor* (Ongaku 024-129) was hailed as comparable to the Rudolf Serkin recording with the New York Philharmonic. She has also recorded the *Mendelssohn Double Concerto* with Tchaikovsky Gold Medal violinist Ilya Kaler.

A member of the prestigious Steinway Artist roster and the Recording Academy, Rasa has performed all over the world. Highlights from her recent seasons include a solo recital on the acclaimed Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concert Series at the Chicago Cultural Center, which was broadcast live to hundreds of stations nationwide via WFMT radio. An avid chamber musician, she collaborated with world-renowned artists like violinist James Buswell, Ilya Kaler, clarinetists Jonathan Cohler, Franklin Cohen, and cellist Julia Bruskin. Rasa is also the long-serving, critically acclaimed pianist of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, and founder and pianist of Chamber Music Boston.

## Repertoire Notes

### A concentrated century of innovation

Though earlier and later examples exist, the trio's core is essentially 20th-century, and these five works define it. Each solves the instrumentation's central challenge—balancing clarinet and violin, which share registers yet differ in character.

- **Schoenfield – *Trio* (1990):** blends classical chamber music craft with the rhythms, modes, and spirit of Eastern European Jewish folk traditions. Its movements evoke the vivacious *freylakh*, a devilish *march*, the soulful *niggun*, and the fiery *kozatzke*, creating a vivid narrative arc from joy to introspection to exuberance. The work's infectious energy, lyrical warmth, and virtuosic demands have made it a modern classic in the clarinet–violin–piano repertoire.
- **Khachaturian – *Trio* (1932/1949):** A “fairytale of diplomacy” led to its 1933 Paris premiere under the Société Triton's auspices; Stalin-era repression then delayed publication until 1949. Khachaturian's success lies in treating Armenian and Central Asian folk idioms as structural DNA, not surface décor—yielding an intimate, lyrical, and rhythmically vital chamber masterpiece.
- **Bartók – *Contrasts* (1938):** Conceived by Joseph Szigeti and commissioned jointly with Benny Goodman, *Contrasts* marries Magyar folk rhythm and ornament with modernist rigor, from “Verbunkos” through the atmospheric “Pihenő” to the dazzling “Sebes” (complete with scordatura).
- **Stravinsky – *Suite from “L’Histoire du Soldat”* (1919):** Originally conceived as a small touring theatrical work with narrator, dancers, and seven instruments, *L’Histoire* was halted almost immediately when the 1918 influenza pandemic reached Switzerland. Stravinsky, who contracted the flu himself, created this chamber suite the following year as both a practical concert adaptation and a gift to his patron Werner Reinhart, whose financial support had made the original production possible. Scored for just clarinet, violin, and piano, the suite distills the theatrical score's vivid characters and rhythmic vitality into a lean, high-voltage trio. Its tango, waltz, ragtime, and march retain their popular appeal but are transformed by Stravinsky's sharp rhythmic displacements and modern harmonic edge—music that is at once immediately accessible and compositionally rigorous.
- **Ives – *Largo* (1901-1902):** The genre's starting point. A transcendental, inward meditation from a young Ives stepping beyond European models toward an unmistakably American voice.

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