

Montgomery Philharmonic 2019 - 2020

Our 14th Season : Editions

Concert 1, October 13, 2019 at 7 PM – The Dance Edition

Brahms | Still | Copland

About Johannes Brahms –

Johannes Brahms started his musical studies as a violinist and cellist, studying first with his father, Johannes Jakob Brahms. He then went on to study piano at age 7 with Otto Friedrich Willibald Cossel, but Cossel complained that Brahms was never much of a pianist because he could never stop composing. At the age of 10, Brahms made his debut in a private concert of Beethoven's – *Quintet for Piano and Winds*, Opus 16, and a piano quartet by Mozart (which one is unknown because the program is lost). After a while, Brahms went to Cossel's teacher, Eduard Marxen (1806–1887) to study both piano and composition. Marxen was a personal friend of both Beethoven's and Schubert's, so he made sure that Brahms' compositions were grounded in the traditions of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert. In 1949, Brahms made his solo piano and composition debut playing Beethoven's *Wallenstein Sonata* and his own composition, a waltz fantasia. This concert garnered him favorable reviews, both as a pianist and a composer, in the local newspaper and launched his early career.

In 1850, he traveled as a pianist with Hungarian violinist Ede Reményi. Reményi introduced Brahms to the czardas and this led Brahms to compose two sets of Hungarian dances, first for piano and later orchestrated. While on one of their tours, Reményi introduced Brahms to Joseph Joachim. This meeting began a friendship of more than 50 years that was interrupted briefly when Brahms took the side of Joachim's wife in their divorce. After meeting Joachim, Reményi took Brahms to Weimar, where he met Liszt, Peter Cornelius, and Joachim Raff. Liszt asked to see one of Brahms' compositions, so Liszt performed Brahms' Opus 4, *Scherzo*, at sight and then performed Liszt's *Sonata in B minor*. While Liszt was performing, Brahms fell asleep. This caused a big rift between Brahms and Reményi, so they parted. After Brahms and Reményi parted, Brahms decided to visit Düsseldorf to visit the Schumanns, with a letter of introduction from Joachim. The letter did the trick and all three became fast friends. After Robert Schumann's attempted suicide, he stayed close to Clara Schumann, handling her business affairs and getting her through her husband's passing.

Brahms' mature period of composition and performing began in 1862. He had hoped to be given the conductorship of the Hamburg Philharmonic but it was given to baritone Julius Stockhausen instead. Later, when the position was offered, he turned it down because he wanted to devote all of his time to composing. In 1863, Brahms met Richard Wagner when Brahms played his *Handel Variations*, Opus 24. Wagner was cordial to Brahms, but it was Brahms who was taken by Wagner's music, not Wagner who was taken to Brahms' music. Brahms' music was backward looking and Wagner was forging a new path musically. Brahms heard this in Wagner's music. Brahms helped with Wagner's preparations for his Vienna concerts and was given a manuscript of part of Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, only to have it be demanded back in 1875.

In the 1870s, Brahms became acquainted with Johann Strauss II and their friends grew to be very close. Brahms admired Strauss' music, especially his waltzes, and encouraged Strauss to publish with his publisher, Simrock. In his later years, he began to write music only for close personal friends. These later years produced song cycles, a clarinet trio, a clarinet quintet, and the two famous clarinet sonatas, along with works for organ and piano. Most of these works were written in Bad Ischl, where he spent his summers. The piano from this summer house made its way to Akron, Ohio, and remained in the home of pianist Margaret Baxtresser until her passing some 10 years ago. Brahms was diagnosed with cancer of the liver but still tried to attend concerts. The month before he died, he managed to attend a concert of his *Symphony No. 4* conducted by Hans Richter and a premiere of Strauss' opera, *Die Göttin der Vernunft*.

Born: May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany

Died: April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria

Nationality: German

Compositions: 2 Overtures, 2 serenades for orchestra, 1 set of variations for orchestra, 3 Hungarian dances for orchestra, 4 symphonies, 4 concerti, 10 works for choir, soloist, and orchestra, 3 violin sonatas, 2 cello sonatas, 2 clarinet sonatas, 5 trios, 3 string quartets, 3 piano quartets, 6 quintets and sextets, 39 works for solo piano, 7 works for piano 4 hands, over 60 song cycles

Father: Johann Jakob Brahms (1806–72), a string and wind player in Hamburg, Germany; eventually became a double bass player in the Hamburg Stadttheater and the Hamburg Philharmonic Society

Mother: Johanna Henrika Christiane, née Nissen (1789–1865), a seamstress

Siblings: a sister, Elisabeth (Elise), born in 1831, and a younger brother, Fritz Friedrich (Fritz), born in 1835

Hungarian Dances, WoO 1 (1858–1868), Nos. 1, 3, and 10 – Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

No. 1 in G minor, Allegro molto

No. 3 in F major, Allegretto

No. 10 in E major (F major for orchestra), Presto

Brahms wrote 21 Hungarian dances, originally for four-hands piano, and then orchestrated only numbers 1, 3, and 10 in 1874. It has been said that the Hungarian dances of Brahms greatly influenced American ragtime composer Scott Joplin. These dances are based on melodies of the Roma people who played in "Gypsy" bands and contributed to the culture of Budapest, Prague, and Vienna. Brahms became interested in the music of the Romas as a young musician through the Hungarian violinists Eduard Reményi, with whom he toured, and Joseph Joachim, one of the greatest violinists of the time.

There is great controversy over whether or not Brahms actually used the melodies of dances that he had heard or whether he plagiarized the melodies that Reményi played for him while he was on tour. In a big argument while on tour, Reményi accused Brahms of plagiarizing some of his own melodies for the *Hungarian Dances*. Brahms was a very serious musician and biographer Jan Swafford wrote that Brahms used the Hungarian dance as a kind of recreation and was quite good at the style. This is a recording from an Edison wax cylinder playing his *Hungarian Dance No. 1* in 1889 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZXL317GPCY>.

Brahms took a long time to arrange the Hungarian dances because he didn't want to take away the freedom that he heard when the Roma musicians played these melodies. When he finally did arrange them, he was turned down by a publisher in Budapest, so 3 years later he went to the N. Simrock publishing company in Bonn, Germany, and they published the first set in 1869. They were so popular that he published three more sets. He was credited only as the arranger, but further research shows that numbers 11, 14, and 16 were melodies original to Brahms. Brahms later arranged the first 10 dances for solo piano and then orchestrated numbers 1, 3, and 10. Additionally, the "Gypsy" style was so popular that Brahms talked Simrock into asking Dvorak to write his famous *Slavonic Dances*.

Instrumentation – Piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, triangle, bass drum, cymbals, violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

Artifacts –

Johannes Brahms official website

A recording from an Edison wax cylinder playing his *Hungarian Dance No. 1* in 1889

Manuscripts and letters in the collection at the Library of Congress



Brahms: Hungarian Dances

Iván Fischer

Brahms: Hungarian Dances

Vienna Philharmonic

Brahms: Hungarian Dances Nos. 1-21

London Symphony Orchestra

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Hungarian Dances: Schirmer Library of Classics Volume 2005 Piano Solo (Schirmer's Library of Musical Classics)

Brahms: Hungarian Dances, WoO 1 (arr. Joachim)

Hungarian Dances 1: 21 Hungarian Dances for Piano Duet with Four Hands (Ungarische Tänze Für Klavier Zu Vier Händen) (German Edition)

YouTube.com Links –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUe-clNbnBE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzHZoE5ZHO4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXT42ghiuZ4>