

Montgomery Philharmonic 2017 - 18 Our 12th Season : Old Friends ... New Friends

Concert 4, Sunday, March 18, 2018: Old Friends ... New Friends

Brahms | Hovhaness | Bernstein

About Johannes Brahms –

Johannes Brahms started his musical studies as a violinist and cellist, first studying 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. Brahms had hoped to be given the conductorship of the Hamburg Philharmonic but it was given to the 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 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. In his final month, 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

Symphony No. 2 in D major – Opus 73 (1877) – Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Soon after writing his *1st Symphony* in 1876, Brahms produced his *Symphony No. 2*, which was composed during one of his most productive periods. During this time, Brahms composed his *Violin Concerto*, Opus 77; the *Academic Festival Overture*; the *Tragic Overture*; and his *Piano Concerto No. 2*, Opus 83. This is notable because Brahms took quite a bit of time crafting each of his works. In fact, he spent nearly 14 years composing his 1st symphony. His process was to work and rework all of the content in his compositions, painstakingly examining each melody, structure, and chord. This symphony was composed in the summer of 1877 and is pastorate in style. Brahms wrote to his publisher in November 1877, saying that the symphony "is so melancholy that you will not be able to bear it. I have never written anything so sad, and the score must come out in mourning." It was thought, however, that Brahms was playing a joke on his publisher because the work, as it was published, turned out to be one of his most cheerful works.

The four-movement work starts in an unusual way, with a short bass and cello solo in the first bar to fool the listener. When hearing it for the first time, one wonders why he wrote those notes for the low strings, but it is all understood as the first movement unfolds. The beauty that Brahms displays in the first movement is awe inspiring in addition to tranquil. His "Brahms' Lullaby" is reworked, with rhythmic changes to disguise the melody. This movement is in classical sonata form.

The equally different start of the second movement showcases Brahms' ability to make one beat sound like another by his melodic structure. It starts with a brooding melody in the cellos paired with an equally brooding counter melody in the bassoon. The second theme is another example of Brahms' displacing the rhythm, with the melodic content a portion of beat behind the real beat. This movement is almost like an auditory *Trompe L'oeil* with all his rhythmic creativity. His use of displaced beats, 2 against 3, and multiple time signatures creates real tension in the movement.

Brahms gives the listener a little break with a gracious scherzo—if there could be such a thing. It starts off quite innocently, but then begins to get a little bit wild in a little presto section. He gets himself out of the presto fix by magically making 6 bars of 2 sound like 2 bars of 3. Things go along quite neatly until he gently slips into 3/8 meter, upsetting the idyllic mood, but it is only a tease because Brahms closes the movement in the original idyllic setting.

The fourth movement is more straightforward. It has a busy, yet quiet, energy that is quite infectious. A joyous outburst calms down into a tranquil section. It is in sonata form like the first and second movements, but the development section is disguised because the listener feels as if Brahms is taking a repeat. What actually happens is that Brahms develops the movement's two themes and appears to slow them down, only to speed up the tempo during the recapitulation. He finishes the movement in a maze of runs in the strings and woodwinds and also large chords in the brass, ending the symphony in a triumphant mood.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

Artifacts –

[Johannes Brahms official website](#)

[Brahms – Symphony No. 2 first edition](#)

[Brahms Manuscripts on display at the New York Public Library](#)

[Manuscripts and letters in the collection at the Library of Congress](#)



1. Brahms Symphony No. 2, Leonard Bernstein & Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

2. Brahms: The Symphonies Berlin Philharmonic

3. Brahms: The Symphonies Gewandhausorchester Leipzig & Riccardo Chailly

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1. [Johannes Brahms: A Biography](#)
2. [Johannes Brahms \(Getting to Know the World's Greatest Composers\)](#)
3. [Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters](#)

YouTube.com Links –

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._2_\(Brahms\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._2_(Brahms))

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGeY14HEleY>