

The Broadway Symphony

George Shangrow, conductor

presents

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra
in B-flat Major, Op. 83

Allegro non troppo

Allegro appassionato

Andante

Allegretto grazioso

Anne Taffel, guest pianist

— Intermission —

Symphony No. 1 in C-minor, Op. 68

Un poco sostenuto: Allegro

Andante sostenuto

Un poco allegretto e grazioso

Adagio; allegro non troppo

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PROGRAM NOTES

by Gary Fladmoe

Johannes Brahms — Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in B flat major, No. 2, Op. 83

Brahms' two piano concerti stand as gigantic monuments to the pianist's art. They have proved the downfall of many a pianist. Like much of Brahms' music they sound deceptively simple, but the complexity of the music and the technical demands made upon the soloist belie that simplicity of sound.

The second concerto could almost be described as a symphony for piano and orchestra for such is the scope of the work. Eduard Hanslick, the assumed head of the "anti-chromatic society" which railed against the excesses of Wagnerian music, described the work as "a symphony with piano obbligato." That perhaps underestimates the role of the piano and tends to relegate the concerto to the realm of parlor music. One needs only to hear a few bars to realize that the music has certainly gone beyond the petite confines of parlor music.

The first concerto, written in 1854, never received much acclaim until the second was completed and performed in 1881. The second concerto was successful from the beginning, except in Leipzig. It was only when Brahms made his final appearance as a conductor in 1895 in Leipzig that the city "discovered" the greatness of both concerti. In that particular performance, both concerti were played to enthusiastic response.

The work begins *Allegro non troppo* with horn, piano, and woodwinds treating a first theme in dialogue fashion. The piano then renders a cadenza which gives way to a tutti statement of both first and second themes which are then developed in a long and elaborate section.

The second movement is a scherzo, *Allegro appassionato*. It is the opinion of one Max Kalbeck that the movement had originally been intended for use in the violin concerto. The piano states the first theme powerfully. Tranquil strings contrast with the second theme and lead to the trio section. The return to the scherzo material is then greatly altered.

An expressive *Andante* serves as the third movement. A solo cello intones a melody resembling Brahms' song "Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer." A second melody in the piano and clarinet seems to quote another Brahms song, "Todessehnen." The first theme returns in the cello continuing through the coda section against a flourish of trills and arpeggios in the piano.

The finale is a rondo based on three themes. Its grand scope provides a dynamic conclusion to the concerto. The music is replete with melody and rhythm which suggest a Hungarian flavor, a trait not surprising in view of Brahms' use of Hungarian influences in other settings.

Anne Taffel leads an active career as soloist and recitalist throughout the United States and Europe. Critics have acclaimed her powerfully emotional interpretations of the Romantic repertoire, the energy and daring of her playing, her strength and grace. Her performances of the monuments of the piano literature, from the "Appassionata" Sonata, to the "Wanderer" Fantasy and, most recently Liszt's dazzling "Reminiscences de Lucia di Lammermoor" have been hailed for their technical prowess and poetic magic and nuance.

Beginning piano study at the age of five, she received a scholarship to Juilliard when she was only 13. By the age of 15 she had made her debut as featured soloist with full orchestra.

After earning a *baccalaureat* in music at the Oberlin Conservatory and acquiring her Masters in Performance from New England Conservatory in Boston, she spent time in Europe at the Vienna Hochschule für Musik and the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria.

While touring the United States and Europe, she has received widespread critical praise. United States tours have included performances in Carnegie Recital Hall, Jordan Hall and the Cleveland Art Museum as well as on National Public Radio.



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Johannes Brahms — Symphony in C minor, No. 1

The first symphony of Johannes Brahms has, in this writer's opinion, been mistakenly described as Beethoven's "Tenth Symphony" or the logical evolution of music following Beethoven's ninth and last symphony. The listener can make a self-directed decision, but the rhythmic complexity, expressive timbre, and overall scope of the work would seem to suggest that Brahms had gone beyond the direct evolutionary influence of Beethoven.

The timpani notes at the beginning have also been programmatically described as the sounds of the footsteps of Beethoven as he haunted Brahms and pushed him into the symphonic forms. The case for succession breaks down even more when one realizes that Brahms did not complete his first symphony until 1876, some forty-nine years after the death of Beethoven. He had made some earlier attempts at symphonic writing, but the three movements about which we know to be representing his real first symphony ultimately found their way to the D minor piano concerto and *A German Requiem*.

Brahms was prone to self-criticism, and the Beethoven footstep theorists have some support from Brahms himself from this Brahmsian characteristic. The composer was concerned about the fact that Beethoven's epic fifth symphony was in C minor, and he had reservations about his choice of that key for his own first work in the symphonic form. He has been quoted as saying, "You have no idea how it feels to hear behind you the tramp of a giant like Beethoven."

The tie to the past was also upheld by Brahms' apparent revulsion at the unbridled romanticism of those like Berlioz and Liszt and the emerging style of Richard Wagner. Brahms seemed to tie himself to the Classic ideal, although importing his own stamp upon it.

The *First Symphony* opens with an introduction, *Un poco sostenuto*, and after a rather lengthy beginning gives way to the first theme in the violins. The woodwinds then state the second theme. The two themes are then developed in an expansive movement of seeming foreboding.

A lyric second movement, *Andante sostenuto*, features the woodwinds with a contrasting middle section for the strings.

Brahms avoids the use of the scherzo as his third movement. Instead an almost frolicsome *Allegretto* is heard. Again the woodwinds occupy the center stage with melodic material reminiscent of a national tune or *Volkslied*.

The fourth movement, *Adagio*, opens with a dramatic introduction which culminates in a majestic horn melody. This gives way to one of the most famous and beautiful of Brahms' melodies. The movement moves to a rousing close through a grand development of the thematic materials.

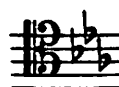
The music shows a perfect grasp of architecture and design. Its contemplative tenderness and epic qualities have forever secured its place in the hearts and minds of concert-goers throughout the world.



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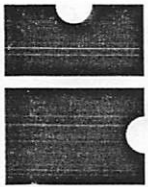
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