

# New Paths

Saturday, February 3, 2024 • 7:30 p.m.  
Shorewood Performing Arts Center

**Harmonia Orchestra**

**William White**, conductor



BÉLA KÉLER (1820–1882) / ARR. JOHANNES BRAHMS / ORCH. ALBERT PARLOW  
Hungarian Dance No. 5

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)  
Overture to *Manfred*, Op. 115

CLARA SCHUMANN (1819–1896) / ORCH. WILLIAM C. WHITE  
Three Romances, Op. 22

*Andante molto*  
*Allegretto*  
*Leidenschaftlich schnell*

**Stephen Provine**, violin

— **intermission** —

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)  
Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73

*Allegro non troppo*  
*Adagio non troppo*  
*Allegretto grazioso (quasi andantino)*  
*Allegro con spirito*

*Please silence cell phones and other electronics, and refrain from the use of cameras and recording devices during the performance.  
Harmonia wishes to thank Marc McCartney and the Shorewood Performing Arts Center team for their assistance this evening.*

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## Harmonia Orchestra and Chorus

William White, music director • George Shangrow, founder

1916 Pike Pl. Ste 12 #112, Seattle WA 98101 • 206-682-5208 • [www.harmoniaseattle.org](http://www.harmoniaseattle.org)

## Maestro's Prelude

Dear Listeners,

Harmonia's theme this season is "prophecy," and tonight we examine the prophetic words of that well-known oracle, Robert Schumann, concerning a young whippersnapper named Johannes Brahms. It was in 1853 — only a month after their first meeting — that Schumann predicted Brahms would be the great new voice in German music, "a young blood at whose cradle heroes kept watch. . . . When the powers of the orchestra and chorus lend him their aid, further glimpses of the spirit world will be revealed to us."

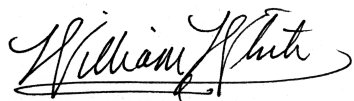
Although this prediction overwhelmed Brahms, there can be little doubt that he did in fact carry out the prophecy. Sadly, Robert Schumann did not live to hear the results, but another Schumann, Robert's wife Clara, was there to witness Brahms' rise to prominence — and, more than that, she played a major role in Brahms' development, providing feedback on all of his music over the decades.

The story is a fascinating one and I'll narrate it in condensed form during tonight's concert, but I would urge you to read the excellent program notes that follow, which lay out the many interweaving strands that connect these three titans of 19th-century music.

I've been interested in the *Manfred* Overture ever since I learned it was the opening work on Leonard Bernstein's 1943 New York Philharmonic debut. (If you saw *Maestro*, you've heard the first three notes.) It used to be a repertoire staple but now it's hardly heard. I can't for the life of me figure out why, and I'm very happy to introduce it to Harmonia audiences tonight.

Clara Schumann's Three Romances prove that she was a composer with a remarkable talent and a real voice. Her music is being performed more and more, but her output consists almost entirely of songs, piano pieces and a bit of chamber music, so we almost never hear her on the orchestral stage. It struck me that these Romances could work extremely well in a transcription, but it took some doing: what you are hearing tonight is version 4.0 — at least! I think they're sounding splendid, but no matter what you think of the arrangement, the key thing is to enjoy the thoroughly excellent playing of Harmonia's concertmaster, Stephen Provine, an avocational musician who outshines many at the top of the professional strata.

Finally: Brahms. Conductors don't like to admit to favorites among composers, since our profession demands we be fully committed to whatever piece we're currently directing, but behind closed doors you'll hear many maestros admit that Brahms' music is their favorite to conduct. (I myself couldn't possibly comment.) There are plenty of musicological reasons to explain why that is, but your ears are certain to give you all the explanation you need.



## Solo Artist

Violinist **Stephen Provine** is concertmaster of Harmonia and a former concertmaster of the Cascade Symphony. He holds a degree in computer science from Harvard University, where he was concertmaster of the Bach Society Orchestra and studied chamber music with Robert Levin. Mr. Provine grew up in the UK, studying with Richard Deakin, Lesley Hatfield and Harry Cawood. He has been a software engineer in the Developer Division at Microsoft for 22 years, where he currently works on engineering systems with a focus on supply-chain security. He lives in Bellevue with his wife, two daughters and Bella, the cat.



## Program Notes

The middle son of a working-class musician and a seamstress, Johannes Brahms began his musical studies on violin and cello. At age seven, he demanded to learn the piano, despite the Brahms family not having a keyboard (or the means to acquire one). Hannes displayed such a remarkable talent that three years later his first teacher declared that he had taught Brahms everything he could and handed him over to Eduard Marxsen, a respected piano pedagogue and published composer who Brahms biographer Jan Swafford describes as "Hamburg's most prominent musician in those days." Hannes begged for composition lessons alongside his piano studies. Marxsen eventually gave in.

In 1848, violinist Eduard Hoffmann, a Hungarian political exile who had renamed himself Ede Reményi, visited Hamburg and remained there until 1851 (when he fled to America with the police on his tail). During this time Brahms made Reményi's acquaintance and accompanied him in a private recital. The two hit it off and continued to concertize, with Brahms in the process learning the "Hungarian" or "gypsy" music that Reményi performed to great acclaim. Brahms may have believed this "Hungarian" style to be derived from actual folk music, yet it "arose not as the spontaneous outpouring of peasants," according to Swafford, "but instead as urban popular music played mostly by gypsy bands in streets and cafés."

Marxsen schooled Brahms in the music and techniques of the masters, with Hannes playing and studying Bach, Mozart and Beethoven rather than such "modern" composers as Frédéric Chopin or Robert Schumann. When Luise Japtha, an older Marxsen pupil, showed Brahms a Schumann aria, he pointed out its technical faults. Nevertheless, in March 1850 when the renowned pianist Clara Wieck Schumann arrived in Hamburg to play her husband's concerto with him conducting the Hamburg Philharmonic, Brahms sent a packet of his compositions to the Schumanns'

hotel seeking comment. It was returned unopened. This sank Hannes' opinion of Robert Schumann even further.

In December 1852, Reményi reappeared in Hamburg and he and Brahms resumed their music-making. The following April they set out on a concert tour, playing repertoire that included music by Brahms as well as Reményi's Hungarian melodies. Toward the end of May, they arrived in Hanover, where Reményi looked up an old Hungarian acquaintance, the virtuoso violinist, conductor and composer Josef Joachim. Only two years older than Brahms, Joachim had begun touring as a child prodigy and had almost single-handedly forged a place for the Beethoven concerto in the standard repertoire. "Never in the course of my artistic life," the famed violinist would remember half a century later, "have I been more completely overwhelmed" as when Brahms sat down to play for him. The young man's compositions simply blew him away.

Joachim arranged a private performance by Brahms and Reményi for his employer, King George V of Hanover, and bid them adieu with a letter of introduction to Franz Liszt. When they arrived at Weimar, Liszt listened respectfully to Brahms' music, but Brahms committed the *faux pas* of falling asleep (or so the story goes) as Liszt played his own sonata. Soon thereafter, Reményi and Brahms, whose relationship had been an uneasy one during their tour, parted ways. Brahms journeyed to Göttingen and spent the summer rooming with Joachim, who taught university lectures there. The two became fast friends and would remain close confidants for the rest of their lives.

On August 26, Brahms set out from Mainz on a hiking tour of the Rhine. Joachim implored him to call on the Schumanns when he reached Düsseldorf. Brahms was not so sure that he would, but in the end he listened to Joachim.

Robert Schumann had grown up in the town of Zwickau, 70 km south of Leipzig. The son of a bookseller and publisher who died when he was a teen, Robert had ambitions of becoming an author (he wrote potboiler novels as a young man), composer and pianist, but his mother and a financial guardian insisted he study law. Enrolling at the University of Leipzig, he began taking piano lessons from Friedrich Wieck, whose nine-year-old daughter Clara was a child prodigy at the keyboard. He spent the following year at Heidelberg (where he also neglected his legal studies) before making the decision to become a musician.

Robert returned to Leipzig and moved into the Wieck household for a time, studying piano and music theory with Friedrich, who promised he could make Schumann "one of the greatest living pianists" within three years—even as young Clara's talents at the keyboard far outshone Robert's. Experiencing a weakness in one of his fingers, he "decided to improve his manual dexterity with an invention of his own," as biographer Judith Cherniak explains, "immobilizing the middle fingers on his right hand one at a time so that the neighboring weak fingers would be strengthened." This resulted in him paralyzing all three middle fingers, ending his hopes of becoming a piano virtuoso and, by age 22, setting him on the path to become a composer.

He also took up music criticism. In April 1834, Schumann published the first issue of *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (the "New Journal for Music"), which he would edit for the next decade, with the mission statement "to pay close attention to past times and their works, and to insist that only from such a pure source can the best new art be created."

The year that Clara turned 16, she and Robert fell in love. Clara's father would have none of it. "He threatened to shoot Schumann," writes Cherniak, "he banned all communication between the lovers. He took Clara on tour, and he insisted she return Schumann's letters. The lovers were not to meet again for 18 months." A protracted legal battle ensued before Robert and Clara wed on the eve of her 21st birthday. Marie, the first of eight children (one of whom would die in infancy), was born the following year, which also saw the composition of Robert's first two symphonies.

In 1844 the family moved to Dresden, then in 1850 to Düsseldorf, where Robert was engaged as director of the orchestra and chorus. Initially the Düsseldorfers welcomed the Schumanns, but Robert's inexperience as a conductor led to discord with the choir (who rebelled at his programming of the Bach Passions) and eventually the orchestra (who felt he played too much of his own music). Fortunately, Robert began to earn enough from the publication of his compositions to supplement his part-time conducting salary (although the money Clara made as a performer and teacher also supported their family). Robert would produce fully a third of his mature works during his few years in Düsseldorf, including his "Rhenish" Symphony.

By the time Brahms arrived at Robert and Clara's doorstep, Robert had been suffering for some time from an onslaught of physical ailments brought about by the final stages of syphilis, a disease that had lain dormant since he had become infected in 1831. Robert reacted enthusiastically to Brahms' compositions, returning to music criticism to author an article, "Neue Bahnen" ("New Paths") in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* that praised the young composer as someone "fated to give expression to the times in the highest and most ideal manner." (The implication being that Brahms provided an alternative to the "music of the future" championed by Liszt and Richard Wagner.)

Robert's condition continued to deteriorate, the syphilis affecting his brain and causing him (during his more lucid moments) to fear that he might harm Clara. On February 27, 1854, clad in a robe and slippers, he walked through a rainstorm to a bridge spanning the Rhine and plunged into the frigid waters. Some fishermen quickly hauled him out of the river and returned him home. He would spend the remaining two-plus years of his life in an asylum at Endenich, near Bonn, forbidden to see Clara until his final days (although Brahms, Joachim and others would visit). Meanwhile, Brahms helped Clara run the Schumann household, in the process falling in love with her—but by the time Clara was ready to reciprocate his feelings, Brahms turned away: "after all the misery and joy they had shared over the last two years," writes Swafford, "and the overpowering love that arose out of it, there would be no marriage."

Johannes and Clara would remain close until her death four decades later (just a year before Brahms succumbed to liver cancer). Despite many later infatuations (and one hastily revoked engagement), Brahms would never marry.

### **Béla Kéler (arr. Johannes Brahms)**

#### **Hungarian Dance No. 5**

*Kéler was born February 13, 1820, in Bártfa (then part of Hungary, now in Slovakia) and died November 20, 1882, in Wiesbaden, Germany. He composed Bártfai Emlék Csárdás, piano pieces memorializing his home town, in 1858; they were published the next year. Brahms used one of these as the basis for the fifth of his Hungarian Dances, published for four-hand piano by Simrock in 1869. In 1876, Simrock issued an orchestration by Albert Parlow, scored for pairs of woodwinds (including piccolo), 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, triangle and strings.*

Brahms first visited Vienna in 1862 and soon established the city as his home base, initially living in hotels, then taking modest accommodations where he would remain for his final 24 years, even after he became a very rich man. One of his haunts during the 1860s was the Café Czarda, where he enjoyed the “Hungarian” pseudo-folk music typically played by two violins, cimbalom and bass.

On his first visit to the Schumanns he had played some of his “Hungarian melodies” and would sometimes include them on his piano concerts. Occasionally the *alla zingarese* style would intrude into his more serious music, as in the finale of the G-minor piano quartet. “After years of playing his Hungarian dances for friends, and occasionally giving Clara a manuscript to play from,” writes Swafford, in 1867 he sent seven of them to a Hungarian publisher, who inexplicably turned them down. Two years later, he offered 10 dances for four-hand piano to Fritz Simrock for a flat fee. Simrock would reap the financial benefits when these works became a smash success — and remain forever indebted to Brahms, publishing all but one of his remaining works.

Brahms insisted he be listed as “arranger” of this music, thinking his source material was actual folk melodies. What he did not know was that certain tunes had been crafted by fellow composers, as was the case with the fifth Hungarian Dance, deriving from a *czardas* by Béla Kéler published for solo piano a decade earlier. Brahms would orchestrate three of these dances in 1874 for a concert he conducted at the Leipzig Gewandhaus; bandmaster Albert Parlow did the honors for the fifth and sixth dances a couple years later.

### **Robert Schumann**

#### **Overture to *Manfred*, Op. 115**

*Robert Alexander Schumann was born in Zwickau, Saxony, on June 8, 1810, and died near Bonn on July 29, 1856. He composed music for Byron’s Manfred between April and November 1848, conducting the first performance of the overture (which calls for pairs of woodwinds, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings) at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on March 14, 1852.*

Robert Schumann long aspired to write for the stage, making sketches for an operatic treatment of *Hamlet* as early as 1831. Over time, he considered some 40 other possible

librettos on subjects that included Till Eulenspiegel, Tristan and Isolde, and Göthe’s *Faust*. He worked on the latter for many years, eventually producing a quasi-oratorio. In 1847 and 1848, he composed what would be his only opera, *Genoveva*, but before the ink was dry he had turned his attention to Lord Byron’s 1817 dramatic poem *Manfred*.

“Never have I devoted myself to a composition with such love and energy as to *Manfred*,” he declared, later writing to Liszt (who gave the first complete performance at Weimar in June 1852) that it “should not be advertised to the public as opera, *Singspiel* or melodrama.” Schumann’s *Manfred* is simultaneously none of these things, yet all of these things, with vocal numbers and instrumental interludes bracketing long recitations of Byron’s text.

The title character of *Manfred* is a nobleman living in a Gothic castle in the Bernese Alps. He summons seven spirits in a quest to forget a dark secret involving his deceased beloved, Astarte. Schumann masterfully sets the mood with three abrupt chords yielding to a slow introduction that accelerates to an “impassioned tempo.” Brahms was particularly enamored with this overture, which he conducted on at least one occasion.

### **Clara Schumann (orch. William C. White)**

#### **Three Romances, Op. 22**

*Clara Josephine Wieck was born in Leipzig, on September 13, 1819, and died in Frankfurt on May 20, 1896. She composed this work for violin with piano accompaniment during July 1853, dedicating it to Joseph Joachim. William White’s orchestration, heard for the first time this evening, calls for pairs of woodwinds and horns, plus strings.*

Friedrich Wieck’s obsession with turning his daughter into a piano virtuoso involved many questionable parenting decisions, but to his credit he also encouraged her development as a composer during a time when music written by females was met at best with curiosity and more often with derision. (Sadly, this persisted long after Clara’s death.)

In her teens, Clara Wieck composed a piano concerto and a number of solo pieces, along with some *lieder* and a piano trio after her marriage to Robert. As her family grew, she stopped writing music altogether, until 1853, when the Schumanns moved into a new Düsseldorf residence where she had her own dedicated room with a piano. “Today I began to compose again for the first time in several years,” she wrote on May 29, setting about to create piano variations on a theme by her husband as a birthday gift to him.

In June she wrote three romances for solo piano and in July composed three romances for violin and piano. She had been deeply moved in May 1853 at a performance of the Beethoven violin concerto by Josef Joachim, to whom she dedicated these miniatures. Clara and Joachim would later tour extensively in England and throughout Europe.

### **Johannes Brahms**

#### **Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73**

*Brahms was born in Hamburg on May 7, 1833, and died in Vienna on April 3, 1897. He composed this symphony largely*

during the summer of 1877. Hans Richter conducted the Vienna Philharmonic in the first performance on December 30 of that year. The score calls for pairs of woodwinds, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.

Schumann's praise that vaulted Brahms to fame at an early age brought with it a heavy burden. For a time (during Robert's illness and his lovesickness for Clara) he became unable to compose. From that first meeting, the Schumanns urged him to write for orchestra, but Marxsen had neglected to teach him orchestration and the shadow of Beethoven loomed. ("You have no idea what it's like to hear the footsteps of a giant like that behind you.") For the longest time he avoided two genres inextricably linked to Beethoven: symphony and string quartet. And he would never write an opera (not for lack of trying to find a suitable libretto), although that had more to do with Wagner than Beethoven.

By his own accounting, Brahms composed and burned at least 20 quartets before he published an entry in that genre. Symphonies would wait even longer. He began sketching a symphony in D minor not long after meeting the Schumanns, but that music found its way into a piano concerto and his *German Requiem*. Then came two multi-movement orchestral works he dubbed "serenades," looking back to Mozart and Haydn rather than Beethoven. Sketches for the first movement of his C-minor symphony date from as early as 1855, but it took two decades before he could solve the problem of how to handle a finale and find the appropriate structures for the middle movements. With the debut of his monumental Symphony No. 1 in late 1876, the floodgates opened: a second symphony would come to fruition in a matter of months over the following summer.

Brahms had developed a pattern where he would devote four months to composing at a resort town each summer, then spend the rest of the year performing, editing the music of other composers (including Schumann), attending to administrative matters, and enjoying Viennese social

life. The summer of 1877 marked the first of three spent at Pörschach on Lake Wörth in southern Austria. "The melodies fly so thick here that you have to be careful not to step on one," he wrote to Viennese critic (and chief cheerleader for Team Brahms) Eduard Hanslick.

The symphony opens with a motive (D-C#-D) in the lower strings that will form the basis for much of the melodic material throughout the symphony. The mood is idyllic on the surface, but quite soon trombones and tuba cast a gloomy shadow. Brahms had planned to reserve the low brass for the finale (as he had done in his first symphony, following Beethoven's lead) but, describing himself as "a severely melancholic person," he explained to a correspondent that his symphony is "followed by a little essay about the great 'Why?'" (referring to his other major work from that summer, the motet *Warum ist das Licht gegeben*). "It casts the necessary shadow on the serene symphony and perhaps accounts for those timpani and trombones." A second subject brings to mind Brahms' famous *Lullaby*, but here again the bass line suggests a melancholy minor key.

The second movement, in B major, is the only true *Adagio* in any of Brahms' four symphonies. It opens with a descending cello melody juxtaposed against an ascending bassoon line. Brahms wrote scherzos in other genres, but avoided them in his symphonies, perhaps in deference to Beethoven. Here, the third movement opens with a gentle  $\frac{3}{4}$  *Ländler* sung by solo oboe (the work's opening semitone motive, upside down) that shifts to a  $\frac{2}{4}$  presto, seamlessly drifting back to slower  $\frac{3}{4}$  and then a quicksilver, Mendelssohnian  $\frac{3}{8}$  before a gentle coda based on the beginning material.

From its opening notes, the finale contains all sorts of allusions to the D-C#-D motive, opening *sotto voce* but before long exploding into a joyous "last dance" à la Haydn. The trombones, melancholy no more, have the thrilling final word with a brilliant D-major chord.

—Jeff Eldridge

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