

of his symphonic works. There are some who speculate that perhaps he wouldn't have made so many changes if he had had the opportunity to hear his 'first' versions, and if he hadn't received so many 'critical' suggestions even from those whose intentions may have been good.

In any case, the Fourth Symphony was the only one of his symphonies that Bruckner provided a descriptive label for, when he called it "Romantic." This came several years following the premiere, with the composer describing 'the first movement as a scene for the days of chivalry, the

second as a rustic love scene, and the third as a hunt broken by a dance interlude.' When asked about the final movement, the composer stated: "I'm sorry, but I have forgotten what it was about." But since the music had come first anyway, it is perhaps enough that he referred to this symphony with the subtitle "Romantic", as it aptly reflects the spirit therein, complete with the Wagnerian influence of the full sounds of the brass.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, strings

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

## Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor Op. 30

Orchard

- I Allegro ma non tanto** (ca. 15 min.)
- II Intermezzo: Adagio** (ca. 10 min.)
- III Finale: Alla breve** (ca. 14 min.)

Rachmaninoff was due to embark on his first concert tour of America in the fall of 1909, with the plan to unveil his latest work, this, the Third Piano Concerto. He was sequestered away in the family's country estate, Ivanovka, where he finally completed the piece, dating it 23 September 1909 (in the traditional Julian calendar of the time). This was only nine days before he was to leave on his journey to America, hardly

enough time to prepare sufficiently for a performance of a work of such magnitude. So Rachmaninoff, now replacing his composer's hat for that of his performer's tails, resorted to practicing the work on board the ship using a silent keyboard.

The *Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor* was premiered on November 28th at the New Theatre in New York with Walter Damrosch conducting. In January of the following year, Rachmaninoff performed the work again, this time at Carnegie Hall with Gustav Mahler conducting. One review in the *New York Herald*

commented that 'its great length and extreme difficulties bar it from performances by any but pianists of exceptional technical powers.' In fact, in ensuing years, Rachmaninoff himself made various cuts and revisions of cadenzas, perhaps in response to some of the critics. However, many now believe those cuts to have been to the detriment of the work as a whole, and often the work now is performed as originally composed, with the choice of the various revised cadenzas left up to the preference of the soloist.

While Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto is renowned for its technical and musical demands on the pianist, it has been said that the composer's talents were not 'virtuosity for the sake of virtuosity,' (Evgeny Kissin); instead the writing displays the passion and musical genius of Rachmaninoff as both composer and performer.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, snare drum, cymbals), strings, solo piano

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

## Symphony No. 4 in E minor Op. 98

Orchard

- I Allegro non troppo** (ca. 12 min.)
- II Andante moderato** (ca. 11 min.)
- III Allegro giocoso** (ca. 6 min.)
- IV Allegro energico e passionato** (ca. 10 min.)

After taking fifteen years to publicly present his First Symphony, due to his hesitancy to follow in Beethoven's footsteps, Brahms finished his Second Symphony within four months of the first, somehow having broken through this mostly psychological barrier it seems. It then took him more than five years to complete his Third Symphony, however the Fourth Symphony came within the following year, after having

spent the summers of 1884 and 1885 working on it. Contributing to this outpouring of symphonic writing in a relatively short amount of time was the generous offer of conductor, Hans von Bülow, who gave Brahms full use of the Meiningen court orchestra as a 'rehearsal orchestra.' This also was to be the start of the famous 'Brahms tradition' long established from that point on, with the same ensemble continuing to perform the composer's music even after his death. In October of 1885, after rehearsing the Fourth Symphony with this group, Brahms toured with them through Germany and the Netherlands.

One can hear in this work various elements which are said to be typical of Brahms' symphonic writing: the strong opening movement and even more magnificent finale, the two of which provide solid bookends for the middle movements; The third movement using an atypical form, for example in this last symphony, a modified sonata form, since it does not include the traditional development section; And his use of variation, as opposed to contrasting themes, can be heard throughout the work. In the final movement, the theme, taken from Bach's Cantata no. 150, can be heard thirty times, however with an added chromatic twist and with such subtlety that one may not even realize it has been repeated to such an extent.

Other common features found in Brahms' symphonic writing can be heard in his use of instrumentation. In particular, his use of the Classical orchestra, complete with double woodwinds, as well as discretion in layering various timbres so as to create unique sounds, for example in the inner voicings, all created works that represented a tremendous influence from the Classical tradition, yet also pointedly moved forward to developing a style and following of his own. It is difficult to imagine Brahms ever

considered the possibility of never writing a symphony given the depth of creativeness and wealth of ideas that can be seen to have culminated in this his last symphony.

It seems Robert Schumann's statement, written for the *Neue Zeitschrift Musik* more than three decades earlier that Brahms would "give ideal expression to the times" was right on the mark. He had felt from the first time he heard Brahms perform several of his piano works that he had the ability to continue Beethoven's legacy, stating that he heard 'veiled symphonies' in his early piano sonatas. Although Schumann would not live to hear Brahms' symphonic works, Clara would become a lifelong companion to the composer providing tremendous personal and professional support as a pianist and composer herself. One might wonder if it hadn't been for both Robert and Clara's encouragement, if Brahms would have found the courage to pursue his symphonic works to the extent that he did.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes (doubling on piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, triangle, strings

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