



UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE

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*“It is not hard to compose.
What is fabulously hard is to leave the
superfluous notes under the table”*

Johannes Brahms

Johannes Brahms

(May 7, 1833 Hamburg, Germany. – April 3, 1897 Vienna, Austria.)

“Some composers we know are lovable, just because the whole world loves them.

Think of Mozart or Tchaikovsky or Puccini

. Brahms is different. In person, he was as prickly as a hedgehog.

It's no accident Brahms has the most famous beard in classical music.

He needed it to give extra force to his frequent snorts of derision.

“If there is anyone here I have failed to insult, I offer him my apologies;”

said Brahms on one occasion, as he was leaving a party.

“It becomes more and more difficult to love Brahms;” sighed one of his best friends,

and many people would say the same about the music.....

..... Brahms is genuinely puzzling, because he combines so many contradictions.

It's true he was deeply aware that the great tradition of classical music

set the bar of quality and seriousness.

He had a foreboding that the tradition was ending, and it was his job to uphold it.....

.....And yet Brahms's music is full of hair-raising premonitions of a new world of feeling,

which was just coming over the horizon.

We shouldn't forget Freud wrote his Interpretation of Dreams in the year Brahms died,

and despite his tetchy insistence that music was going to the dogs

he was keenly interested in the modern world”.

(extracted from an article by Ivan Hewitt in “The Telegraph” - www.telegraph.co.uk - 6th October 2014)

Life



Brahms's father –
Johann Jakob

Brahms was born in Hamburg. His father, who gave him his first music lessons, was a double bassist. Brahms showed early promise on the piano and helped to supplement the rather meagre family income by playing the piano in restaurants and theatres, as well as by teaching. Although it is a widely-told tale that Brahms had to play the piano in bars and brothels, recent research, suggest that this is probably false.



At age 14

For a time, he also learned the violoncello, although his progress was cut short when his teacher absconded with Brahms's instrument.

The young Brahms gave a few public concerts, but did not become well known as a pianist (although in later life he gave the premieres of both his *Piano Concerto No. 1* in 1859 and his *Piano Concerto No. 2* in 1881).

He also began to compose, but his efforts did not receive much attention until he went on a concert tour in 1853 where he met Joseph Joachim, Franz Liszt, and later was introduced to Robert Schumann, who, through articles championing the young Brahms, played an important role in alerting the public to the young man's compositions.

Brahms also became acquainted with Schumann's wife, the composer and pianist Clara, 14 years his senior, with whom he carried on a lifelong, emotionally passionate, but always platonic relationship. Brahms never married.

In 1862 he settled permanently in Vienna and began to concentrate fully on composing. With work such as the *German Requiem*, Brahms eventually established a strong reputation and came to be regarded in his own lifetime as one of the great composers. This may have given him the confidence finally to complete his first symphony; this appeared in 1876, after about ten years of work. The other three symphonies then followed in fairly rapid succession (1877, 1883, 1885).

Brahms frequently travelled, both for business (concert tours) and pleasure. He often visited Italy in the springtime, and usually sought out a pleasant rural location in which to compose during the summer.

In 1890, the 57-year-old Brahms resolved to give up composing. However, as it turned out, he was unable to abide by his decision, and in the years before his death he produced a number of acknowledged masterpieces, including the two clarinet sonatas Op. 120 (1894) and the Four Serious Songs (*Vier ernste Gesänge*) Op. 121 (1896).

While completing the Op. 121 songs Brahms fell ill of cancer (sources differ on whether this was of the liver or pancreas). His condition gradually worsened and he died on April 3, 1897. Brahms is buried in the Zentralfriedhof in Vienna.

"The Three Bs"

"The Three Bs" is an English-language phrase derived from an expression coined



by Peter Cornelius in 1854, which added Hector Berlioz as the third B to occupy the heights already occupied by Johann Sebastian **Bach** and Ludwig van **Beethoven**. Later in the century, the

famous conductor Hans von Bülow would substitute Johannes Brahms for Berlioz. The phrase is generally used in discussions of classical music to refer to the supposed primacy of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms in the field.

Influences on Brahms

Brahms venerated Beethoven, perhaps even more than the other Romantic composers did. Brahms's works contain what some of his contemporaries considered to be outright imitations of Beethoven's work.

There is a story that Brahms was once invited to dinner by a noted wine connoisseur.

In the composer's honour, the man opened one of his finest bottles.

"This," he announced to his assorted guests, "is the Brahms of my cellar."

Brahms nodded, carefully examining the wine - inhaling its bouquet,

swirling it in his glass, and holding it up to the light -

before setting it down without further comment.

"How do you like it?" the host asked with anticipation.

"Well," Brahms replied, "better bring out your Beethoven."

Brahms also loved the earlier Classical composers Mozart and Haydn. He collected first editions and autographs of their works, and also edited performing editions. Brahms's affection for the Classical period may also be reflected in his choice of genres: he favoured the Classical forms of the sonata, symphony, and concerto, and frequently composed movements in sonata form.

A quite different influence on Brahms was folk music. Brahms wrote settings for piano and voice of 144 German folk songs, and many of his lieder reflect folk themes or depict scenes of rural life. His Hungarian dances were among his most profitable compositions, and in orchestrated versions remain well known today.



Brahms was almost certainly influenced by the technological development of the piano, which reached essentially its modern form during his lifetime. Much of Brahms's piano music and many of his lieder make use of the deep bass notes and the pedal to obtain a rich and powerful sound.

Brahms at age 20

Works

Brahms wrote a number of major works for orchestra, including four symphonies, two piano concertos, a Violin Concerto, a Double Concerto for violin and cello, and the large choral work *A German Requiem* (*Ein deutsches Requiem*). The last is notable in not being a traditional, liturgical requiem (*Missa pro defunctis*), but a setting of texts which Brahms selected from the Luther Bible. Brahms was also a prolific composer in the theme and variation form, having notably composed the *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel*, *Paganini Variations*, and *Variations on a Theme by Joseph Haydn*, along with other lesser known sets of variations.

Brahms also wrote a great deal of work for small forces. His many works of chamber music form part of the core of this repertoire, as does his solo piano music. Brahms is also considered to be among the greatest of composers of lieder, of which he wrote about 200. He also wrote a set of chorale preludes for organ shortly before his death, which have become an important part of the standard organ repertoire.

Brahms never wrote an opera, nor did he ever write in the characteristic 19th century form of the tone poem. Brahms strongly believed in absolute music, that is, music that does not rely upon a concrete scene or narrative as the tone poem does.

Despite his (deserved) reputation as a composer of great seriousness and of large, complex musical designs, in his lifetime some of Brahms's most widely-known and commercially successful compositions were small-scale and popular in intention, aimed at the then-large market of domestic music-making.

These included his *Hungarian Dances*, the *Waltzes op.39* for piano duet, the *Liebeslieder Waltzes* for vocal quartet and piano, and some of his many songs.



German postage stamp issued in 1983 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Brahms.

Academic Festival Overture in C minor Opus 80

Brahms composed this for the occasion of his receiving an honorary doctorate of music from the University of Breslau (now the University of Wrocław in Wrocław, Poland).



Eduard Hanslick offering incense to Brahms; cartoon from the Viennese satirical magazine Figaro, 1890

No doubt the premiere was intended to be a solemn occasion. As an unspoken reciprocation of their award, the University of Breslau had anticipated that Brahms, one of the greatest living composers (albeit one who had not attended college), would write a suitable new work to be played at the award ceremony. There is little doubt that what he provided confounded his hosts' expectations. Rather than composing some ceremonial equivalent of Pomp and Circumstance—a more standard response—Brahms crafted what he described as a “rollicking potpourri of student songs,” in this case mostly drinking songs. It is easy to imagine the amusement of the assembled students, as well as the somewhat less-amused reaction of the school dignitaries, to Brahms's lighthearted caprice.

The Academic Festival Overture showcases four beer-hall songs that were well known to German college students. The first, “Wir hatten gebauet ein stattliches Haus” (“We Have Built a Stately House”), was proclaimed in the trumpets. “Der Landesvater” (“Father of Our Country”) followed in the strings, and the bassoons took the lead for “Was kommt dort von der Höh?” (“What Comes from Afar?”), a song that was associated with freshman initiation.

Lastly, the entire orchestra joined together for a grand rendition of “Gaudeamus igitur” (“Let Us Rejoice, Therefore”), a song later beloved by operetta fans for its appearance in Sigmund Romberg's *The Student Prince* (1924).

It was the first melody, however, that was most notorious in the composer's day. “Wir hatten gebauet” was the theme song of a student organization that advocated the unification of the dozens of independent German principalities. This cause was so objectionable to authorities that the song had been banned for decades. Although the proscription had been lifted in most regions by 1871, it was still in effect in Vienna when Brahms completed his overture. Because of this ban, police delayed the Viennese premiere of the Academic Festival Overture for two weeks, fearing the incitement of the students.

Let's begin this morning's listening experience with rendition of the Overture played at the Last Night of the Proms” in 1992 with Andrew Davis conducting and with the rousing choral finale arranged by Sir Malcolm Sargent in which the choir sings the student song 'Gaudeamus Igitur, Juvenes dum sumus' ('Let us rejoice, therefore, while we are young').

Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=YjIGaL9HsDI

Piano Sonata No. 3 in E minor Opus 5

Brahms somehow found time to compose his Third Piano Sonata in mid-to-late 1853, during an extensive concert tour as a pianist. On this tour he was to meet flamboyant violinist Joseph Joachim, an entirely different sort of violinist whose sober musical ideals were very akin to Brahms' own, and who became a lifelong friend and colleague. He was also met Liszt and his considerable band of followers, visited Schumann, who publicly heaped praise on him, and made the acquaintance of Berlioz. It was these months that saw Brahms transformed from a gifted but unknown 19-year-old pianist to a 20-year-old star.

The Sonata was written in the midst of this travel and hubbub and is a work of symphonic proportions and scope, - it has 5 movements and takes about 40 minutes to play through - bursting at the seams with ideas to the point that it needs an extra movement (the 4th) to explore different directions with material from earlier movements. It is Brahms' biggest solo piano work, and indeed his last Piano Sonata (his Opus 1 & 2 also are piano sonatas). (Acknowledgement: laphil.com).



We listen to the finale - a rondo that has nearly everything in it, including a jaunty main theme, swelling lyrical melody, stately marches, and even a few moments of pianistic bravura. The pianist is Cyprien Katsaris from a recording made some 30 years ago.

The Youtube link for the complete Sonata is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9lwn4MOx44&t=834s

Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano in E flat major Opus 40

An unusual combination of piano, violin and horn, the horn trio's calm beauty was inspired by the Black Forest, and the death of Brahms's mother. He was extremely close to her, and began to work on the piece just after she died.

Brahms actually wrote his horn trio (Op. 40) for natural horn, or Waldhorn (like the ones used for hunting) instead of modern valve horn. This type of horn was out of date at the time. It probably didn't help his "bad" reputation as a composer who wrote old-fashioned music!!

The valve horn was an instrument he learned as a young boy. Using a hunting horn for the piece was partly a way of remembering his early childhood with his mother.

This was probably the reason he didn't like the "modern" valve horn, which he thought ruined the special characteristics and sound of the horn. The traditional horn adds an extra dimension of power in loud bits, and a warmer feeling in the quieter parts of the piece. Its simple sound injects the Brahms horn trio with little pictures of nature.

The movements of the Brahms horn trio are also a bit unusual. A typical classical structure has the four movements as:

I. fast tempo, II. slow, III. fast, IV. fast. But Brahms alters that a bit in his horn trio, to run: I. slow, II. fast, III. slow, IV. fast:

1. Andante (Walking pace)
2. Scherzo (Playful)
3. Adagio mesto (Slowly and sadly)
4. Allegro con brio (Quickly, with vigour)

This is a strange move from a composer who was normally completely committed to following traditional structures! But I think that he used a slow movement to start with simply because it was the best way of opening this musical elegy.

Brahms goes even further though (very unusual for him!) and doesn't use sonata form (a grand traditional structure, typically the first movement of a symphony) for the first movement. Instead he simplifies it, with an easy to follow structure.



Brahms was meandering through a summer forest early in the morning when the opening horn melody came to him. Brahms walked a lot, and usually mulled his musical ideas over in his mind while out strolling.

The music has a personal feeling. The second and last movements are lively and evoke images of hunting and exploring in nature.

The third movement is a beautiful well of emotion. It also makes use of a German funeral melody called "Wer nur den lieben Gott lasst walten" (If thou but suffer God to guide thee).

(Acknowledgement: favourite-classical-composers.com).

We listen to the final movement. The performers are (pictured): Dale Clevenger (Horn), Daniel Barenboim (piano) and, Itzhak Perlman (violin). The Youtube link is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqufpr3lk0c

German Requiem Op 45

One of Brahms's most popular and beautiful pieces, it's been called "a grand hymn to life", "an anthem for our time", in that it overturned the concept of a Requiem with a new and positive vision. Rather than dwelling on the judgment of the deceased, he seemed intent on consoling those left behind. It was Brahms who originated the term "human requiem," in a letter to Clara Schumann, Robert's widow and, by then, Brahms's intimate. This human focus, as well as the work's freedom from angry religious judgment, makes it easy to seize on in our more vaguely spiritual time.

History of the Requiem (Acknowledgement: favourite-classical-composers.com).

The work is dedicated to Robert Schumann, Brahms's own mother, and to Humanity.

Brahms may have had early ideas about writing a Requiem, but he was inspired to finish it by the deaths of Robert Schumann and Brahms's mother.

Schumann tried to commit suicide by drowning himself in the Rhine in 1854. Brahms was only 21 at the time, and he and Schumann shared a very special friendship based on strong appreciation of the others' musical abilities. (He also shared a very special relationship with Schumann's wife, Clara).

Years later, after Schumann's death, Brahms's mother also died (1865). This got the composer focusing on death again, and he started to write his Requiem. It took Brahms three years to finish it, and the first performance of the entire piece was in a cathedral on Good Friday. Brahms himself actually didn't like the title A German Requiem; he thought that "humanity" would be better.

The piece pretty much overturned the idea of the Requiem. A normal Requiem in Brahms' time tended to focus on death, God's wrath, Judgement Day, etc. The Brahms Requiem is the exact opposite.



Brahms stitched together the text himself from parts of Luther's Bible, and wrote it so that it comforts the living by talking about love and life beyond death, and offering hope and encouragement for humanity.

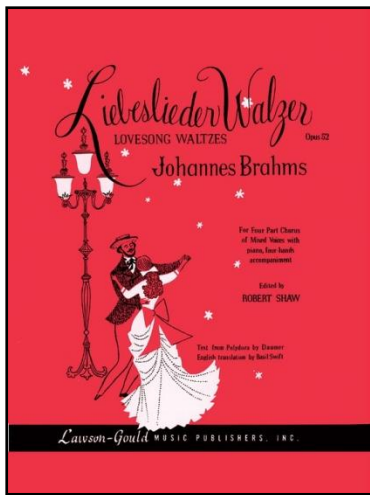
The Requiem is one of the composer's biggest pieces, lasting anything from an hour to an hour and 20 minutes. It needs a full orchestra, a full choir, and baritone and soprano singers and comprises 7 movements'. The movements (with Bible references) are:

1. Blessed are they that mourn: (Matthew chapter 5, verse 4).
Those who sow in tears (Psalm 126: verses 5& 6)
2. Behold, all flesh is as the grass.(1 Peter 1: 24). Be patient, therefore (James 5:7)
The word of the Lord endures for ever (1 Peter 1:25).
The ransomed of the Lord shall return (Isaiah 35:10).
3. Lord, make me to know my end (Psalm 39, verses 4-7).
The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God (Wisdom of Solomon 3:1).
4. How lovely is your dwelling place (Psalm 84 verses 1,,2 & 4).
5. Now you have sorrow, but I will see you again (John 16:22).
See how for a little while I labour and toil (Ecclesiasticus 51:27).
As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you (Isaiah 66:13).
6. Here have we no continuing city (Hebrews 13: 14)
Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep ... (1 Corinthians 15: 51-55).
You are worthy,O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power(Revelation 4:11).
7. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. (Revelation 13: 14)

The music is exquisitely pleasant to listen to (critics called it a masterpiece) and made Brahms famous all over Europe - his ticket to fame and recognition!

We listen to the fourth movement sung by The Hedvig Eleonora Chamber Choir and the Stockholm Sinfonietta conducted by Pär Fridberg. The Youtube link is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1w6KTCFH31Y



Liedeslieder Waltzes Opus 52

For mixed Choir, soloists & Piano (Four hands)

In 1868, Brahms was searching for a new project to equal the popularity of some previous piano-based chamber music. He settled on a romantic song cycle, his sophisticated, delightful *Liedeslieder Wälzer*. They (18 poems) were written about love, and out of love, for Brahms, as usual, was head-over-heels about a lady, whose attention (and romantic interest) he is reputed to have been trying to entice with this musical bouquet.

For lyrics on which to wrap his musical confections, Brahms chose selections from *Polydora: A World-Poetic Songbook*, a collection of German translations and imitations of folk poetry from Eastern Europe (Russia, Poland, and Hungary) by his contemporary, Georg Friedrich Daumer (1800-1875). He wrote the piece for piano four hands and an optional vocal quartet, for performance at home, but the work has over the years grown beyond its composer's original concept to become a standard of the choral concert repertoire.

Though the lyrics did not approach the level of the great German poetry, i.e., Goethe et al (one critic called Brahms's sources "folksy, doggerel verse"), they do express the gamut of human emotion on the subject of Eros, from flirtation to enticement, to strong passion, to domestic harmony, to endless bliss, to various forms of disappointment/frustration, to sweet directness, to sadness at rejection, with a nod to ebullient young love. And the tunes exhibit Brahms's usual elegant, classical sophistication and lush evocativeness: you can hear the raging spring, see the little bird hopping around trying to find a home, view the cocky swain eyeing the ten iron bars on the pretty maiden's front door, and etc. One critic called Brahms's chamber music some of "the most sophisticated and exquisitely crafted of the Romantic era."

(From programme notes of the CBA Symphony Orchestra and CBA Chorus)

We listen to songs 1, 2 & 3:

Rene masdchen	(Speak, maiden, whom I love all too much),	
Am gesteine rauscht die flut	(On the rocks rushes the flood),	
O die frauen	(O the women)	– all Choir
No 7: Wohl schön bewandt war es	(It was well done)	– Soprano
No. 8 Wenn so lind dein Aug emir	(When your eyes look at me)	– Choir
No. 17 Nicht wandle, mein Licht	(Do not wander, my light, out there)	– Tenor
No. 18 Es bebet das Gesträuche	(The bushes are trembling)	– Choir

The Warsaw Phliharmonic Choir is conducted by Florian Helgath, The piano Duo is: Adrienne Soós & Ivo Haag, Soprano: Aneta Kapla Tenor: Mariusz Cyciura.

The youtube link for the complete Song Cycle is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyTzpdBPMSw&t=858s

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D major Op 77

Composed by Johannes Brahms in 1878 and dedicated to his friend, the violinist Joseph Joachim it is Brahms's only violin concerto, and, according to Joachim, one of the four great German violin concerti. The Germans have four violin concertos. The greatest, most uncompromising is Beethoven's. The one by Brahms vies with it in seriousness. The richest, the most seductive, was written by Max Bruch. But the most inward, the heart's jewel, is Mendelssohn's. (Wikipedia).

The work is clearly inspired by the monumental violin concerto of Brahms' idol, Ludwig van Beethoven. The pieces are not only composed in the same key (D major) and share a similar role for the soloist, but they bear striking similarities in structure and form, right down to the unusual way in which the timpani accompanies the soloist's first entrance. The concerto's first audience could not help but be aware of this connection—Joseph Joachim, the soloist at the premiere, performed the Beethoven concerto immediately prior to Brahms' new work on the programme.

(Acknowledgement: Chris Myers at Redlands Symphony.com)

We listen to the final movement where, according to Chris Myers (mentioned above) "Brahms gives the violinist an opportunity to present an energetic rondo with more than a hint of the Gypsy about it.



The movement presents numerous technical demands on the soloist, with its rhythmic complexity and abundance of double-stops. Numerous melodies enter and attempt to shift the mood, but the dance-like melody wins out, concluding the work in a gesture of ebullient joy.

The Soloist we hear is Hilary Hahn, (pictured) with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra conducted by Paavo Järvi.

The Youtube link to the complete concerto is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFl9xuYP5T8&t=1357s

Symphony No 4. In E minor Opus 98

Brahms composed this work during the summers of 1884 and 1885, which he spent at the small town of Mürzzuschlag in the Austrian countryside. This would be the composer's final essay as a symphonist and his penultimate work for orchestra.

The Fourth proved the most difficult of Brahms' symphonies for his contemporaries to apprehend. The inner circle of the composer's Viennese friends, who heard a preview performance on two pianos in September, 1885, generally found it troubling. Eduard Hanslick, an influential music critic, found it like "two very clever people arguing," and Max Kalbeck, who would become Brahms' biographer, went to the composer the following day to plead for revision of the work. Even Theodore Billroth, an intelligent physician whose musical perceptiveness Brahms greatly respected, found it at first "too massive, too tremendous, too full".

The Fourth is the only one of Brahms' symphonies to launch directly into the principal theme of its first movement without so much as a note of introduction. This abrupt beginning disturbed a number of early listeners, including the great violinist Joseph Joachim, who urged Brahms to add a few measures of preparation.



The movement's two main subjects are well defined and strongly contrasted, and Brahms develops both ideas with his customary skill. Many commentators have remarked the modal contour of the melody that forms the basis of the second movement, and Brahms uses its tonal ambiguity to fashion uncommonly beautiful harmonies and melodic variations. By contrast, the scherzo is perhaps the most boisterous music the composer ever produced.

But Brahms has saved his trump card for the finale. This is constructed as a passacaglia*, a set of ongoing variations over a repeating eight-note theme presented at the outset by the winds. Passacaglia form is an old one and was favoured by composers of the Baroque period.

*Passacaglia, (Italian, from Spanish passacalle, or pasacalle: "street song"), musical form of continuous variation in 3/4 time; and a courtly dance.

The part we listen, too, however, is the 3rd movement, as performed at a BBC Proms concert by the European Chamber Orchestra conducted by Bernard Haitink (pictured).

The Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QLuYj2jxoc

Sonata No 2 for Cello and Piano in F major Opus 99



Brahms' First cello sonata showed a young man presenting his credentials as a scholar and a mature gentleman. The Cello Sonata No 2 composed 20 or more years later is the work of an older man composing music with all the passion and sweep of youth. Written during a productive summer in Switzerland in 1886, the F major Sonata was composed for cellist Robert Hausmann, who was renowned for his large and virile tone.

The first movement is extraordinarily bold, the two instruments pitted against each other in a wild, storm-tossed sea of tremolandi ("tremolandi" = with wavering effect). Curiously, the slow movement, in the near-but-unrelated key of F sharp major, may derive from a discarded movement originally written for an earlier sonata that is now lost.. The rich style, however, is definitely late Brahms; if this movement did originate in an earlier work, he must have done some extensive revision before incorporating it.

The Allegro passionato is a wonderfully powerful and dark scherzo; a friend of Brahms's wrote to him (rather irreverently) that she could detect him here 'humming and snorting continually' – a pleasant image. The last movement, like that of the Second Piano Concerto, is almost startling in its lightness of touch, unexpected within this massive framework.

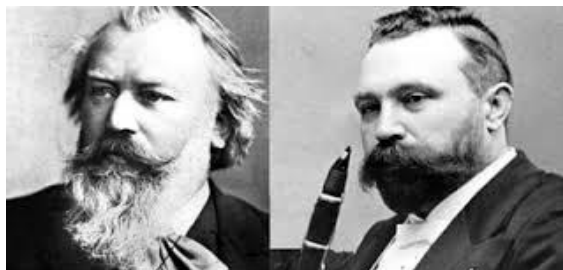
(Acknowledgement Hyperion records).

We listen to the second movement as played in a 1968 performance by Jacqueline du Pré and Daniel Barenboim. The Youtube link is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdN55_o8LLU

Quintet in B Minor, Op. 115, for Clarinet and String Quartet.

In December 1890, the 57-year-old Johannes Brahms decided to retire from composition. He finished his Viola Quintet in G Major and sent it off to his publisher with a note, "With this letter you can bid farewell to my music—because it is certainly time to leave off."



Brahms and Muehlfeld

But just months later, on a trip to Meiningen, he heard the principal clarinetist of the Court Orchestra, Richard Mühlfeld, play in a private recital and was dumbfounded by his artistry.

Indeed, there must have been something exceptional about Mühlfeld: he inspired

Brahms to write four clarinet pieces: the Clarinet Trio in A Minor, the Clarinet Quintet in B Minor, and two Sonatas in F Minor and E-flat Major. Brahms dedicated his B Minor Quintet for clarinet, two violins, viola and cello, written in 1891, to Muehlfeld

Reputed to be one of the summits of the chamber repertoire for clarinet, it is said to be in many ways, an homage to Mozart's classic quintet for clarinet.

The opening Allegro begins with a brief violin duet from which much of the piece grows. Wavering between major and minor, it builds to a staccato statement, driving the further revealing of a second theme. The concomitance of these two ideas, more poignant together than apart, forms the heart of the opening movement.

The Adagio begins with a dreamy melody in the clarinet, tended to by the strings, and then the melody is taken by the violin, gently subverted by the clarinet. In the middle section, the clarinet cries out wildly, before the opening calmness returns.

The Andantino is an easygoing pastorage that turns into an unrestrained Presto, quick and airy, evocative of the outdoors.

A theme and five variations make up the finale, marked *Con moto*. In the fifth variation and coda, the opening of the first movement returns, first as a subtle presence, and then affirmatively—wistfully concluding the quintet with a memory of how it began.

(Acknowledgement:: <http://benjaminpesetsky.com>).

We listen to the third movement – the Andantino – played for us by the Zemlinsky Quartet and Clarinetist Jan Mach.

The Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDfx-hadA1o&t=1445s

Choral Prelude for Organ Opus 122 No 10

Brahms spent the summer of 1896, his last, at Ischl in Upper Austria. In the previous few years he had lost a great many of his closest friends, including the pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow and the scholar Philip Spitta, but perhaps the cruellest loss was that of Clara Schumann, who had succumbed to a stroke in May. The gruelling forty-hour journey which he undertook to attend her funeral undoubtedly took its toll on his own health; the liver cancer that would end his life in April of the following year was already far advanced, and he spent much of his time putting his affairs in order.



It was at Ischl that he composed his last music, the Eleven Chorale Preludes, Op 122. It is intensely private music, and while certain of the chorales he chose treat of death, the collection is not exclusively to do with endings. In fact, the best-known item, *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen*, is concerned with a most important beginning – the birth of the Saviour. Even in the pieces about death, particularly the final setting of *'O Welt ich muss dich lassen'* the emphasis is on the bliss and transcendence which will come beyond mortal life.

Although in a letter he did refer to them as being not for publication, he did not destroy the manuscript as he had done much other material, and he did have a fair copy made of the first seven preludes; his friend and editor Mandyczewski took this as an indication that he may have been planning to add further pieces. They were finally published in 1902.

The 9th and the 10th items are titled "Herzlich tut mich verlangen" ('I deeply long for a blissful end') The first setting has a melody in upper voice with motivic working underneath.

But we listen to the second setting, No.10, which carries the notation: "Cantus firmus in pedal with flowing semiquaver accompaniment".

"Cantus firmus" means "fixed song". The cantus firmus is any preexisting melody that is used as the foundation for a polyphonic composition.

(Acknowledgement: Hyperion Records)

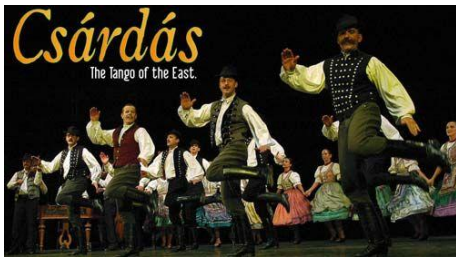
We hear it played by Sebastian Kulcher-Blessing on one of the consoles of the organ of Salisbury Cathedral, England.

The Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwJyudemdpo

Hungarian Dances WoO1

Brahms' Hungarian Dances are a set of 21 dances originally intended for two pianists. The dances were published in that form in two sets in 1869 and in 1880. Some were orchestrated by Brahms himself, and others were orchestrated by his colleagues, including Antonín Dvořák.

The Hungarian Dances capitalized upon two musical trends of the 19th century. One such trend was for dance-style pieces written for piano four-hands (a single piano played by two pianists). The other was for compositions inspired by Europe's diverse blend of minority cultures, particularly the Roma (Gypsy) culture, which was, if not specifically Hungarian, at least strongly identified with that nation.



Both Hungarian-style music and piano four-hands music made early entrances into Brahms's life. He discovered the excitement of Central European folk music as a youth and began writing piano duets while still in his 20s. One important influence was the Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi, whom Brahms had heard in concert at age 17.

Three years later Brahms served as Reményi's accompanist at the piano. Brahms's familiarity with piano four-hands music and his exposure to authentic Hungarian dances led him to try his hand at composing Hungarian-style pieces, for which he knew there would be a ready-made audience.

Most of the dances are rapid, energetic pieces. Imitating the mercurial spirit of Hungarian folk music, some of the dances change tempo midway, as in the fourth dance, where a languid, melancholy introduction gives way to exuberance.

(Acknowledgment: Encyclopaedia Britannica)

Note that the dances carry the suffix WoO1 that is, "Works without Opus". "No opus number" is what Brahms gave his astonished publisher to understand, when he offered him the Hungarian Dances for publication in 1869. He placed a great deal of importance on the fact that he had merely "set" popular Hungarian melodies and not composed new works as such.

Number 5, arguably the most popular of the 21, was based on the czardas (a Hungarian dance with a slow introduction and a fast, wild finish) by Hungarian composer Keler Bela. Bela's best known work "Erinnerung an Bartfeld" ("Memory of Bartfeld") is written on the melodies of typical local folk songs of Sáros county - an administrative county in the Kingdom of Hungary., titled "Bartfai emlék" which Brahms mistakenly thought was a traditional folksong.

Delibes Ballet "Coppélia" was the first ballet to feature national dances: namely the Czárdás (Hungarian) and the Mazurka (Polish) and premiered in Paris on May 25, 1870. With the death three month later of the Paris Opera's choreographer, ballet supremacy shifted to Russia where shortly after Coppélia was staged in St Petersburg.



As we listen to this 5th Hungarian dance we watch a version from Coppélia danced by members of The Bolshoi Ballet.

The Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yd6WduQsd4