



BRAHMS

Symphony No. 3, Op. 90

Johannes Brahms, born on May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, in the family of Johann Jakob Brahms and Johanna Henrika Christiane Nissen, was a German composer and pianist and one of the leading musicians of the Romantic period. Brahms spent much of his professional life in Vienna, Austria, where he was a leader of the musical scene. In his lifetime, Brahms's popularity and influence were considerable; following a comment by the nineteenth-century conductor Hans von Bülow, he is sometimes grouped with Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven as one of the Three Bs. Brahms composed for piano, chamber ensembles, symphony orchestra, and for voice and chorus. A virtuoso pianist, he premiered many of his own works; he also worked with some of the leading performers of his time, including the pianist Clara Schumann and the violinist Joseph Joachim. Many of his works have become staples of the modern concert repertoire. Brahms, an uncompromising perfectionist, destroyed many of his works and left some of them unpublished. Brahms is often considered both a traditionalist and an innovator. His music is firmly rooted in the structures and compositional techniques of the Baroque and Classical masters. He was a master of counterpoint, the complex and highly disciplined method of composition for which Johann Sebastian Bach is famous, and also of development, a compositional ethos pioneered by Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven. Brahms aimed to honor the "purity" of these venerable "German" structures and advance them into a Romantic idiom, in the process creating bold new approaches to harmony, melody and, especially, rhythm. While many contemporaries found his music too academic, his contribution and craftsmanship have been admired by subsequent figures as diverse as the progressive Arnold Schoenberg and the conservative Edward Elgar. The diligent, highly constructed nature of Brahms's works was a starting point and an inspiration for a generation of composers. Despite his reputation as a serious composer of large, complex musical structures, some of Brahms's most widely known and most commercially successful compositions during his life were small-scale works of popular intent aimed at the thriving contemporary market for domestic music-making; indeed, during the 20th century, the influential American critic B. H. Haggin, rejecting more mainstream views, argued in his various guides to recorded music that Brahms was at his best in such works and much less successful in larger forms. Among the most cherished of these lighter works by Brahms are his sets of popular dances—the Hungarian Dances, the *Waltzes*, Op. 39, for piano duet, and the *Liebeslieder Waltzes* for vocal quartet and piano—and some of his many songs, notably the *Wiegenlied*, Op. 49, No. 4 (published in 1868). This last was written (to a folk text) to celebrate the birth of a son to Brahms's friend Bertha Faber and is universally known as *Brahms's Lullaby*.

The Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90 was written in the summer of 1883 in Wiesbaden. The premiere performance was given on 2 December 1883 by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, under the direction of Hans Richter and was the shortest of Brahms's four symphonies. The symphony is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, a contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings. The symphony is in four movements which are *Allegro con brio* (F major), in sonata form, *Andante* (C major), in a modified sonata form, *Poco Allegretto* (C minor), in ternary form (A B A'), and *Allegro* (F minor/F major), in a modified sonata form. At the beginning of the symphony the motto is the melody of the first three measures, and it is the bass line underlying the main theme in the next three. Brahms created a unique kind of third movement that is moderate in tempo (*poco allegretto*) and intensely lyrical in character. The finale is a lyrical, passionate movement, rich in melody that is intensely exploited, altered, and developed. The movement ends with reference to the motto heard in the first movement.