



# BRAHMS

## Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 77

**Johannes Brahms**, born on May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Brahms to 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 Brahms, an uncompromising perfectionist, destroyed many of his works and left some of them unpublished.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*.

**Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77** is a violin concerto in three movements 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 concertos. It is scored for solo violin and an orchestra consisting of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons; 4 horns in D, F, and E, 2 trumpets in D, timpani, and strings. It follows the standard concerto form, with three movements in the pattern quick-slow-quick. Originally, the work was planned in four movements like the second piano concerto. The middle movements were discarded and replaced with what Brahms called a "feeble Adagio." The work was premiered in Leipzig on January 1, 1879 by Joachim, who insisted on opening the concert with the Beethoven Violin Concerto, written in the same key, and closing with the Brahms. Brahms conducted the premiere. Various modifications were made between then and the work's publication by Fritz Simrock later in the year. The technical demands on the soloist are formidable, with generous use of multiple stopping, broken chords, rapid scale passages, and rhythmic variation. Brahms chose the violin-friendly key of D major for his concerto.