

2025–2026 | 126th Season
Marian Anderson Hall

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Thursday, October 30, at 7:30

Yannick Nézet-Séguin Conductor
Emanuel Ax Piano

Still *Wood Notes*

- I. Singing River
- II. Autumn Night
- III. Moon Dusk
- IV. Whippoorwill's Shoes
- V. Theophany

Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37
I. Allegro con brio
II. Largo
III. Rondo: Allegro—Presto

Intermission

Brahms Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98
I. Allegro non troppo
II. Andante moderato
III. Allegro giocoso—Poco meno presto—Tempo I
IV. Allegro energico e passionato—Più allegro

This program runs approximately 2 hours.

This concert celebrates the 50th anniversary of Emanuel Ax's Philadelphia Orchestra debut.

This concert is part of the **Dr. Alan Cohen and Ms. Michele Langer Visiting Pianist Fund**.

The October 30 concert is sponsored by **Thomas and Patricia Vernon**.

William Grant Still's *Wood Notes* is a highlight of the Marian Anderson Artistic Initiative. The Marian Anderson Artistic Initiative showcases composers and artists who embody Ms. Anderson's passion for increasing inclusivity, diversity, equity, and access in the performing arts, contributing to the advancement of a more representative art form.

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PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA / 125

Yannick Nézet-Séguin
Music & Artistic Director

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The Philadelphia Orchestra

The world-renowned Philadelphia Orchestra strives to share the transformative power of music with the widest possible audience, and to create joy, connection, and excitement through music in the Philadelphia region, across the country, and around the world. Through innovative programming, robust education initiatives, a commitment to its diverse communities, and the embrace of digital outreach, the ensemble is creating an expansive and inclusive future for classical music. In June 2021 the Orchestra and its home, the Kimmel Center, united. Today, The Philadelphia Orchestra and Ensemble Arts brings the greatest performances and most impactful education and community programs to audiences in Philadelphia and beyond.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin is now in his 14th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. His connection to the ensemble's musicians has been praised by both concertgoers and critics, and he is esteemed by the musicians of the Orchestra, audiences, and the community. In addition to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today's composers, Yannick and the Orchestra are committed to performing and recording the works of previously overlooked composers.

Your Philadelphia Orchestra takes great pride in its hometown, performing for the people of Philadelphia year-round, at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, throughout the community, over the airwaves, and online. The Kimmel Center has been the ensemble's home since 2001, and in 2024 Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center was officially rededicated as Marian Anderson Hall in honor of the legendary

contralto, civil rights icon, and Philadelphian. The Orchestra's award-winning education and community programs connect, uplift, and celebrate nearly 40,000 Philadelphians and 250 schools from diverse communities annually, through inclusive arts education and vibrant engagement that reflect our city's voices and expand access to creative opportunities. Students, families, and other community members can enjoy free and discounted experiences with The Philadelphia Orchestra through programs such as the Jane H. Kesson School Concerts, Family Concerts, Open Rehearsals, PlayINs, and Our City, Your Orchestra community concerts.

Through concerts, tours, residencies, and recordings, the Orchestra is a global ambassador and one of our nation's greatest exports. It performs annually at Carnegie Hall, the Mann Center, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and the Bravo! Vail Music Festival. The Orchestra also has a rich touring history, having first performed outside Philadelphia in its earliest days. In 1973 it became the first American orchestra to perform in the People's Republic of China, launching a now-five-decade commitment of people-to-people exchange through music.

Under Yannick's leadership, the Orchestra returned to recording with 15 celebrated releases on the Deutsche Grammophon label, including the GRAMMY® Award-winning *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*. The Orchestra also reaches thousands of radio listeners with weekly broadcasts on WRTI-FM and SiriusXM. For more information, please visit www.philorch.org.

Music and Artistic Director



Landon Nordeman

Canadian-born conductor and pianist **Yannick Nézet-Séguin** is currently in his 14th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. An inspired leader, Yannick is both an evolutionary and a revolutionary, developing the mighty “Philadelphia Sound” in new ways. His collaborative style, deeply rooted musical curiosity, and boundless enthusiasm have been heralded by critics and audiences alike. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* has said that under his baton the Orchestra is “at the top of its considerable form”; the Associated Press has called it “a premier orchestra at its peak”; and the *New York Times* wrote, “the ensemble, famous for its glowing strings and homogenous richness, has never sounded better.”

Yannick has established himself as a musical leader of the highest caliber and one of the most thrilling and sought-after talents of his generation. He became the third music director of New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 2018. In addition, he has been artistic director and principal conductor of Montreal’s Orchestre Métropolitain since 2000. In 2017 he became the third-ever honorary member of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. He served as music director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic from 2008 to 2018 (he is now honorary conductor) and was principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic from 2008 to 2014. He has made wildly successful appearances with the world’s most revered ensembles and at many of the leading opera houses.

Yannick has shown a deep commitment to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today’s composers and by performing and recording the music of underappreciated composers of the past, including Florence Price, Clara Schumann, William Dawson, Lili Boulanger, Louise Farrenc, and William Grant Still. In 2018 he signed an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon. Under his leadership The Philadelphia Orchestra returned to recording with 15 releases on that label, including *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*, which won a GRAMMY® Award for Best Orchestral Performance in 2022.

A native of Montreal, Yannick studied piano, conducting, composition, and chamber music at Montreal’s Conservatory of Music and continued his studies with renowned conductors, most notably Carlo Maria Giulini; he also studied choral conducting with Joseph Flummerfelt at Westminster Choir College. Among Yannick’s honors are an appointment as Companion of the Order of Canada; Companion to the Order of Arts and Letters of Quebec; an Officer of the Order of Quebec; an Officer of the Order of Montreal; an Officier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres; *Musical America’s* 2016 Artist of the Year; ECHO KLASSIK’s 2014 Conductor of the Year; a Royal Philharmonic Society Award; Canada’s National Arts Centre Award; the Prix Denise-Pelletier; the Oskar Morawetz Award; and honorary doctorates from the University of Quebec, the Curtis Institute of Music, Westminster Choir College of Rider University, McGill University, the University of Montreal, the University of Pennsylvania, Laval University, and Drexel University.

To read Yannick’s full bio, please visit philorch.org/conductor.

Soloist



Nigel Barry

Born to Polish parents in what is today Lviv, Ukraine, pianist **Emanuel Ax** moved to Winnipeg, Canada, with his family when he was a young boy. He made his New York debut in the Young Concert Artists Series and in 1974 won the first Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Tel Aviv. He won the Michaels Award of Young Concert Artists in 1975, the same year he made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut. Four years later he was awarded the Avery Fisher Prize. These current performances, along with a concert at Carnegie Hall, are in recognition of the 50th anniversary of Mr. Ax's first appearance with The Philadelphia Orchestra.

Fall highlights of Mr. Ax's current season also include a tour of Asia that will take him to Tokyo, Seoul, and Hong Kong. Following the world premiere of the concerto written for him by John Williams at Tanglewood in summer 2025, the piece will have its Boston Symphony subscription debut in January with the New York premiere one month later with the New York Philharmonic. He will also return to orchestras in Dallas, St. Louis, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Charleston, Madison, Naples, and New Jersey. In recital he can be heard in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Santa Barbara, Des Moines, Cedar Falls, Schenectady, and Princeton. An extensive European tour will include concerts in Munich, Prague, Berlin, Rome, and Torino. Recent highlights include a continuation of the "Beethoven for Three" touring and recording project with partners violinist Leonidas Kavakos and cellist Yo-Yo Ma, which took them to European festivals including Dresden, Hamburg, Vienna, Luxembourg, and the BBC Proms. He also appeared as guest soloist during the New York Philharmonic's opening week in 2024, 47 years after his debut with that orchestra, and made returns to the Cleveland Orchestra; the National, San Diego, Nashville, and Pittsburgh symphonies; and the Rochester Philharmonic.

Mr. Ax has been a Sony Classical exclusive recording artist since 1987. Following the success of the Brahms Trios with Mr. Kavakos and Mr. Ma, the trio launched an ambitious, multi-year project to record all the Beethoven trios and symphonies arranged for trio. The first three discs have been released. Mr. Ax has received GRAMMY awards for the second and third volumes of his cycle of Haydn's piano sonatas. He has also made a series of GRAMMY-winning recordings with Mr. Ma of the Beethoven and Brahms sonatas for cello and piano. In the 2004–05 season he contributed to an International Emmy Award-winning BBC documentary commemorating the Holocaust that aired on the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In 2013 his recording *Variations* received the Echo Klassik Award for Solo Recording of the Year (19th-Century Music/Piano). Mr. Ax is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and holds honorary doctorates of music from Skidmore College, the New England Conservatory of Music, Yale University, and Columbia University. For more information about his career, please visit EmanuelAx.com.

Framing the Program

Parallel Events

1802

Beethoven

Piano Concerto
No. 3

Music

Cimarosa
I due baroni

Literature

Chateaubriand
René

Art

Canova
*Napoleon
Bonaparte*

History

Herschel
discovers
binary stars

William Grant Still was inspired by the poems of Joseph Mitchell Pilcher for his five-movement *Wood Notes*. He said that the work “has a social significance because it is a collaboration between a Southern white man and Southern-born Negro composer, in which both of the participants were enthused over the project.”

Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 3 is a transitional composition that he worked on for several years. The piece bridges his early Classical style, in this instance emulating Mozart, to his mature middle period and the “heroic” struggles associated with a work like the “Eroica” Symphony, written around the same time.

1885

Brahms

Symphony No. 4

Music

Franck
Symphonic
Variations

Literature

Haggard
*King Solomon’s
Mines*

Art

Van Gogh
The Potato Eaters

History

Galton proves
individuality of
fingerprints

Brahms was undoubtedly the most historically aware of the leading 19th-century composers. This is reflected in older pieces that he collected, edited, or transformed into new music. For the last movement of his final Fourth Symphony, he used the Baroque procedure of the passacaglia in which a musical pattern is constantly repeated, in this instance transforming a brief passage from Bach’s Cantata No. 150.

1947

Still

Wood Notes

Music

Barber
*Knoxville:
Summer of 1915*

Art

Giacometti
The Pointing Man

Literature

Mann
Doktor Faustus

History

India proclaims
independence

The Philadelphia Orchestra is the only orchestra in the world with three weekly broadcasts on SiriusXM’s *Symphony Hall*, Channel 76, on Mondays at 7 PM, Thursdays at 12 AM, and Saturdays at 4 PM.

The Music

Wood Notes

William Grant Still

Born in Woodville, Mississippi, May 11, 1895

Died in Los Angeles, December 3, 1978



With the moniker “Dean of African-American Composers,” it is easy to be drawn to the works of William Grant Still that explicitly reference Black culture and experiences: his Symphony No. 1 (1930), better known as his “Afro-American” Symphony; his indictment of racial violence in the operatic orchestral work *And They Lynched Him on a Tree* (1940); his Suite for Violin and Piano (1943), each movement of which was inspired by an artwork by Richmond Barthé, Sargeant Johnson, and August Savage.

Yet that is just part of a larger picture. Still was long a pastoralist, a creative thread arguably longer than his self-defined “racial” period. The works composed during this “racial” period sometimes overlapped with his interest in evoking locations, geographies, and the people embedded there. There is *Kaintuck’* (1935), a work for piano and orchestra; his Symphony No. 5 (“Western Hemisphere”; 1945), *Lenox Avenue* (1935, rev. 1937); *The American Scene* (1958); his operas *Blue Steel* (1934–35) and *Highway 1, USA* (1963); and the work we hear tonight, *Wood Notes* (1947).

Inspired by Poetry Still was inspired by the poems of Joseph Mitchell Pilcher (1896–1979), a poet and social worker based in Alabama. A native of Woodville, Mississippi, Still remarked in his program notes that *Wood Notes* “has a social significance because it is a collaboration between a Southern white man and Southern-born Negro composer, in which both of the participants were enthused over the project.” Still and Pilcher maintained a correspondence, and *Wood Notes* premiered in 1948 with Artur Rodziński and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Still originally composed *Wood Notes* as a five-movement orchestral work. Sometime after the premiere, however, his publisher decided it functioned “better” as a four-movement piece for a smaller ensemble. While researching the composer’s archives, former Philadelphia Orchestra Assistant Conductor Austin Chanu observed that Still arranged the work for chamber orchestra, omitting the fifth movement, to ensure the work would be published. For over 70 years, this has been the version performed and recorded.

Today, thanks to the research and preparation by Chanu and Principal Librarian Nicole Jordan, with assistance from Still’s daughter, Judith Anne; the Library of Congress; and materials preserved in Still’s archive at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, the original five-movement *Wood Notes* is available as the composer intended.

A Closer Look The first movement, **Singing River**, is quintessential Stillian orchestral writing. The languid pulsing of the cellos supports the lyrical call-and-response between violins, flute, and oboe, building to a dramatic, percussive theme driven by trumpets and trombones. This is Still evoking Pilcher's poetry about the Coosa riverbank that runs through Wetumpka, a town on the outskirts of Montgomery, Alabama.

Flutes, clarinets, and strings pass around triplet figures in **Autumn Night**. The effect is effervescent and gossamer, as the melody, a subtle call, appears and folds back into the texture. **Moon Dusk** has more dimension, its theme solemn and hinting at something uncertain yet majestic. Like the previous movements, Still utilizes the strings, woodwinds, and brass in very deliberate ways: Strings respond to winds and brass layer with the strings, sometimes to support, sometimes to lead; the introduction of brass to increase the drama and tension.

Whippoorwill's Shoes speaks to an under-referenced aspect of Still's aesthetic: uses of juba and cakewalk rhythms and upbeats, which his contemporary Florence Price made a core part of her compositions. It is understandable that publishers saw this as a fitting conclusion, as it is upbeat, cute, and irreverent.

But then we have **Theophany**, the intended final movement. Chanu has provided the following description:

Theophany is different from how one might expect the final movement of an orchestral suite to end. It is slow, lyrical, intimate, as well as grand. ... The term theophany represents a visual manifestation of God to humans, and Pilcher's poem depicts that manifestation as nature. Still uses Theophany as a climax of the entire work, honoring God through nature and his depiction of that honoring through music, which is delicate yet intense and imbued with optimism and adoration.

Theophany is composed in a large A-B-A structure where the A sections are lush and focus on a lyrical, vocal-like melody led by the strings and winds. The middle B section is faster and acts as a development where Still utilizes more atonal and extended harmonies as well as interjections from the brass and percussion. The B section also showcases many different orchestral combinations that create a kaleidoscope of colors.

The melody Still composes is quite intimate in its initial statements from the strings and woodwinds at the beginning of the movement. The shape and phrasing of the melody is incredibly beautiful and sounds like a musical prayer or hymn. As a melodist, Still is able to weave the theme and allow for a natural build to a final grand climax. This climax is Still rejoicing in both his love of nature and of God's representation through nature. It's quite powerful and an intense end to the suite.

I had the opportunity to conduct the full suite last summer in the premiere of the new edition with The Philadelphia Orchestra. It was really special to hear Theophany come to life.

—Alexandra Kori Hill

Alexandra Kori Hill is a musicologist, editor, and freelance writer based in Cincinnati, Ohio. She is co-editor and a contributor to The Cambridge Companion to Florence B. Price (Spring 2026).

Wood Notes was composed in 1947.

The first Philadelphia Orchestra performance was in June 2024 at Temple Performing Arts Center at Temple University; Austin Chanu conducted. Most recently, the fourth and fifth movements were performed on the 2025 Martin Luther King, Jr., Tribute Concert with Damon Gupton on the podium.

The score calls for three flutes (III doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, bell in F, crash cymbal, snare drum, suspended cymbals [small and large], vibraphone), harp, celesta, and strings.

Performance time is approximately 25 minutes.

The Music

Piano Concerto No. 3

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born in Bonn, probably December 16, 1770

Died in Vienna, March 26, 1827



The fifth of April 1803 was a hectic day for those involved in mounting the premiere of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 at Vienna's Theater an der Wien. On the morning of the concert, the composer was still copying out the trombone parts for his oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, one of the other pieces to be premiered that evening. The ink had barely dried before the grueling day-long rehearsal began, a musical marathon made all the more challenging by the amount of music that needed to be practiced: Beethoven's first two

symphonies were scheduled to be performed, along with the oratorio and Third Concerto.

For Ignaz von Seyfried, the newly appointed conductor of the theater, perhaps the most trying part of the concert came when he turned pages for Beethoven, who played the Concerto's solo part. As Seyfried later recalled:

I saw almost nothing but empty leaves; at the most, on one page or another a few Egyptian hieroglyphs wholly unintelligible to me were scribbled down to serve as clues for him; for he played nearly all of the solo part from memory since, as was so often the case, he had not had time to set it all down to paper. He gave me a secret glance whenever he was at the end of one of the invisible passages, and my scarcely concealable anxiety not to miss the decisive moment amused him greatly.

From Performer to Composer Beethoven's audience was familiar with his remarkable pianistic skills by this point, as he had been living in Vienna for more than a decade and had firmly established his reputation as a virtuoso. He was not content, however, to work as a "mere" performer and was hoping to earn a living as a composer. He had studied theory and counterpoint with several Viennese composers, including Haydn, and was now grappling with the challenge of forging a compositional voice that would be heard as distinct from those who came before him, especially the much-loved Mozart.

Mozart's piano concertos were well known to many Viennese concertgoers by the time the 32-year-old Beethoven took the stage to premiere his third mature essay in the genre. He knew this, and deliberately used one of his predecessor's concertos, No. 24, also in C minor, as a model. This was a common practice for many composers in the early stages of their career as a means of paying respect to those who came before while also signaling their intent to surpass. When the orchestra played the opening C-minor arpeggio of Beethoven's

concerto, it probably would not have escaped many in the audience that it was a paraphrase of the beginning of Mozart's concerto in the same key from almost 20 years earlier.

A Closer Look Despite its allusions to Mozart, the main theme of the first movement (**Allegro con brio**) is typically Beethovenian in its elemental simplicity. As with many other themes Beethoven would write during his career, the musical interest lies not necessarily in the material itself, but in how it is developed. The cadenza at the end of this movement, written out years later, is particularly arresting in the way it reworks the opening material in a kaleidoscopic array of stormy moods.

In the words of one of the audience members present on the night of the premiere, the opening of the **Largo** second movement is “a holy, distant, and celestial Harmony.” Its otherworldly quality is derived in part from the harmonic contrast between the previous movement's close in C minor and this movement's hymn-like beginning in E major. In addition, the theme is played extremely softly and with the sustain pedal pressed down, which allows the pitches to resonate and almost shimmer.

The Rondo finale (**Allegro**) alternates between the simple opening theme and several contrasting melodies, including a short fugato in the middle of the movement. The onset of the coda is a particularly dramatic moment of melodic contrast, as the key modulates to C major and the meter changes into a bouncy triple grouping. This move from minor to major, from darkness to light, prefigures many similar transitions in Beethoven's later works, particularly in the Fifth and Ninth symphonies.

—Sean Colonna

Sean Colonna is the associate director of the Language and Thinking Program at Bard College, where he also teaches courses in music history and philosophy and serves as associate editor for The Musical Quarterly.

Beethoven composed his Piano Concerto No. 3 from 1796 to 1803.

The Third Concerto was first performed by The Philadelphia Orchestra in December 1914, with pianist Leonard Borwick and Carl Pohlig on the podium. Most recently on subscription, Emanuel Ax performed the work in February 2020, with Karina Canellakis conducting.

The Philadelphia Orchestra has recorded the Concerto four times: in 1947 for CBS with Claudio Arrau and Eugene Ormandy; in 1953 for CBS with Rudolf Serkin and Ormandy; in 1971 for RCA with Van Cliburn and Ormandy; and in 2021 for BIS with Haochen Zhang and Nathalie Stutzmann.

The score calls for solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

Performance time is approximately 35 minutes.

The Music

Symphony No. 4

Johannes Brahms

Born in Hamburg, May 7, 1833

Died in Vienna, April 3, 1897



Haydn composed over 100 symphonies, Mozart some 50, but the most celebrated 19th-century composers dramatically scaled back on such quantity. Beethoven's formidable nine upped the stakes. The Romantic celebration of originality meant that each new work now carried extraordinary weight. While Mozart had written his first symphony at the age of eight, Beethoven held off until age 29. Many subsequent 19th-century composers waited well into their careers to produce a symphony.

After Robert Schumann more or less discovered the 20-year-old Johannes Brahms in 1853, writing a glowing review that praised him as the new musical messiah, all eyes and ears were on the young composer. Brahms felt under phenomenal pressure to produce an impressive first symphony. He made various false starts and it ultimately took him until age 43 to complete the Symphony No. 1 in C minor. Following the premiere of that glorious work in 1876, the celebrated conductor Hans von Bülow hailed it as “Beethoven’s Tenth.” Brahms’s next symphony, a quite different work in a sunny D major, came quickly the next year. The Symphony No. 3 in F major dates from 1883 and he began the Fourth the following summer.

A Final Symphony Brahms composed the Symphony over the course of two summers in the resort of Mürzzuschlag, not far southwest from Vienna. From the outset he had the idea of ending the work with a passacaglia, a Baroque procedure in which a musical pattern is constantly repeated; specifically, he wanted to use as its basis the theme of the last movement from Johann Sebastian Bach’s Cantata No. 150. Brahms composed the first two movements of the Symphony in 1884 and then the fourth and third (apparently in that order) the following summer.

Brahms was acutely aware that the Fourth Symphony was different from his earlier efforts. With his typical self-deprecating humor, he compared the work to the sour cherries found in the Alpine region in which he was composing. He wrote to Bülow, with whose formidable court orchestra in Meiningen he often performed, that “a few entr’actes are lying here—what [taken] together is usually called a symphony.” But Brahms worried “about whether it will reach a wider public! That is to say, I fear that it tastes of the native climate—the cherries here do not get sweet, you would not eat them!”

Initial Reactions As was often his practice, Brahms sought the opinion of trusted colleagues to whom he sent the score and eventually played through the piece with composer Ignaz Brüll in a version for two pianos. In early October 1885 he assembled a group of friends, among them the powerful critic Eduard Hanslick, conductor Hans Richter, and his future biographer Max Kalbeck. After the first movement concluded, there was no reaction—Hanslick remarked that the experience was like being beaten “by two terribly clever people,” which dissipated some of the tension. The next day Kalbeck suggested scrapping the third movement entirely and publishing the finale as a separate piece.

Despite some polite praise Brahms realized that most of his friends were lukewarm on the piece; he may well have felt that until it was played by an orchestra its true effect could not really be judged. Bülow put the Meiningen ensemble at the composer’s disposal: “We are yours to command.” Brahms could test out the piece, see what he might want to change, and then present the premiere. The event on October 25, 1885, turned out to be a triumph—each movement received enthusiastic applause and the audience attempted, unsuccessfully, to have the brief third-movement scherzo repeated. Over the next month the new work was presented on tour in various cities in Germany and the Netherlands.

The first performance in Brahms’s adopted hometown of Vienna took place in January 1886 with Richter conducting the Vienna Philharmonic. Hanslick was now enthusiastic and compared the work to a “dark well; the longer we look into it, the more brightly the stars shine back.” On the opposing side, Hugo Wolf, who took time off from composing great songs to write scathing reviews, lambasted the “musical impotence” of the Symphony and declared that “the art of composing without ideas has decidedly found in Brahms its worthiest representative.” Another notable Viennese performance came a decade later, with Richter again at the helm, in what proved to be the 63-year-old Brahms’s last public appearance; he died of liver cancer a month later. As Florence May, an English pianist who wrote a biography of Brahms, recalled:

A storm of applause broke out at the end of the first movement, not to be quieted until the composer, coming to the front of the “artists” box in which he was seated, showed himself to the audience. The demonstration was renewed after the second and the third movements, and an extraordinary scene followed the conclusion of the work. The applauding, shouting audience, its gaze riveted on the figure standing in the balcony, so familiar and yet in present aspect so strange, seemed unable to let him go. Tears ran down his cheeks as he stood there shrunken in form, with lined countenance, strained expression, white hair hanging lank; and through the audience there was a feeling as of a stifled sob, for each knew that they were saying farewell.

A Closer Look Although Brahms thought of beginning the first movement (**Allegro non troppo**) with a brief chordal introduction, he ultimately decided to cut these measures and launch directly into the opening theme, a series of limpid two-note sighs consisting of descending thirds and ascending sixths that bind the movement together. The following **Andante moderato** opens with a noble horn theme that yields to a magnificently adorned

theme for the strings. The tempo picks up in the sparkling third movement (**Allegro giocoso**), a scherzo in sonata form that gives the triangle a workout.

As mentioned, Brahms initially had the idea of the final movement (**Allegro energico e passionato**) using the Baroque technique of a passacaglia or chaconne (the terms are often used interchangeably). He slightly altered a ground bass progression from the final chorus of Bach's Cantata No. 150, "Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich" (For You, Lord, Is My Longing) over which he built a mighty set of 30 variations and coda. In 1877 Brahms had made a piano transcription for left hand alone of Bach's D-minor Chaconne for solo violin, which provided a model here, as did the last movement of Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony. The variations, often presented in pairs, begin with a bold statement based on Bach's theme. Despite a section in major, the movement gradually builds in its tragic force to a thrilling conclusion.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

Christopher H. Gibbs is James H. Ottaway Jr. Professor of Music at Bard College and has been the program annotator for The Philadelphia Orchestra since 2000. He is the author of several books on Schubert and Liszt, and the co-author, with Richard Taruskin, of The Oxford History of Western Music, College Edition.

Brahms composed his Symphony No. 4 from 1884 to 1885.

The Symphony has been a favorite piece of Philadelphia Orchestra conductors since its first appearance, in January 1902 with Fritz Scheel. The work last appeared on subscription concerts in February 2025, with Fabio Luisi.

The Orchestra has recorded the piece five times: in 1931 and 1933 with Leopold Stokowski for RCA; in 1944 and 1967 with Eugene Ormandy for CBS (the latter later released on EMI); and in 1988 with Riccardo Muti for Philips.

Brahms scored the Symphony for two flutes (II doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, triangle, and strings.

Performance time is approximately 40 minutes.

Musical Terms

GENERAL TERMS

Aria: An accompanied solo song (often in ternary form), usually in an opera or oratorio

Arpeggio: A broken chord (with notes played in succession instead of together)

Atonality: Music that is not tonal, especially organized without reference to key or tonal center

Cadenza: A passage or section in a style of brilliant improvisation, usually inserted near the end of a movement or composition

Cakewalk: A pre-Civil War dance originally performed by slaves, popularized and diffused through imitations of it in blackface minstrel shows and later, vaudeville and burlesque.

Although no specific step patterns were associated with the dance, it was performed as a grand march in a paradelike fashion by couples strutting arm-in-arm, bowing and kicking, and saluting to the spectators. Originally known as the “prize walk”; the prize was an elaborately decorated cake.

Cantata: A multimovement vocal piece consisting of arias, recitatives, ensembles, and choruses and based on a continuous narrative text

Chord: The simultaneous sounding of three or more tones

Coda: A concluding section or passage added in order to confirm the impression of finality

Counterpoint: The combination of simultaneously sounding musical lines

Fugato: A passage or movement consisting of fugal imitations, but not worked out as a regular fugue

Fugue: A piece of music in which a short melody is stated by one voice and then imitated by the other voices in succession, reappearing throughout the entire piece in all the voices at different places

Ground bass: A continually repeated bass phrase of four or eight measures

Harmonic: Pertaining to chords and to the theory and practice of harmony

Harmony: The combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions

Juba: An African-American style of dance that involves stomping as well as slapping and patting the arms, legs, chest, and cheeks

Meter: The symmetrical grouping of musical rhythms

Op.: Abbreviation for opus, a term used to indicate the chronological position of a composition within a composer’s output. Opus numbers are not always reliable because they are often applied in the order of publication rather than composition.

Oratorio: Large-scale dramatic composition originating in the 16th century with text usually based on religious subjects. Oratorios are performed by choruses and solo voices with an instrumental accompaniment, and are similar to operas but without costumes, scenery, and actions.

Passacaglia: An instrumental musical composition consisting of variations usually on a ground bass in moderately slow triple time

Recitative: Declamatory singing, free in tempo and rhythm

Rondo: A form frequently used in symphonies and concertos for the final movement. It consists of a main section that alternates with a variety of contrasting sections (A-B-A-C-A etc.).

Scherzo: Literally “a joke.” Usually the third movement of symphonies and quartets that was introduced by Beethoven to replace the minuet. The scherzo is followed by a gentler section called a trio, after which the scherzo is repeated. Its characteristics are a rapid tempo, vigorous rhythm, and humorous contrasts.

Sonata form: The form in which the first movements (and sometimes others) of symphonies are usually cast. The sections are exposition, development, and recapitulation, the last sometimes followed by a coda. The exposition is the introduction of the musical ideas, which are then “developed.” In the recapitulation, the exposition is repeated with modifications.

Ternary: A musical form in three sections, ABA, in which the middle section is different than the outer sections

Triplet: A group of three equal notes performed in the time of two

THE SPEED OF MUSIC (Tempo)

Alllegro: Bright, fast

Andante: Walking speed

Con brio: Vigorously, with fire

Energico: With vigor, powerfully

Giocoso: Humorous

Largo: Broad

Moderato: A moderate tempo, neither fast nor slow

Passionato: Very expressive

Presto: Very fast

TEMPO MODIFIERS

Meno: Less

Non troppo: Not too much

Più: More

Poco: Little, a bit



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