This program will last approximately two hours, which includes one intermission.
October 19–21, 2023

David Robertson, Conductor
Yefim Bronfman, Piano

LIGETI
(1923–2006)
Mifiso la sodo (Vidám Zene)
(Cheerful Music) (1948; US Premiere)

LIGETI
Concert Românesc (Romanian Concerto)
(1951)
Andantino
Allegro vivace
Adagio ma non troppo
Molto vivace
(movements played without pause)

Elena FIRSOVA
(b. 1950)
I. Andante
II. Allegro
III. Andante

YEFIM BRONFMAN

Intermission
BRAHMS (1833–97)  
**Serenade No. 1 in D major for Large Orchestra, Op. 11 (1857–60)**  
Allegro molto  
Scherzo: Allegro non troppo  
Adagio non troppo  
Menuetto I — Menuetto II  
Scherzo: Allegro  
Rondo. Allegro  

The October 19 performance is supported by a generous bequest from **Edna Mae and Leroy Fadem**, loyal subscribers from 1977 to 2023.  

Guest artist appearances are made possible through the **Hedwig van Ameringen Guest Artists Endowment Fund**.  

Stream New York Philharmonic recordings on **Apple Music Classical**, the new app designed to deliver classical music lovers the optimal listening experience. Select New York Philharmonic performances are syndicated on **The New York Philharmonic This Week** (nyphil.org/thisweek), the award-winning weekly radio series.  

Follow the NY Phil on **Facebook**, **Twitter**, **Instagram**, **TikTok**, and **YouTube**, and at **nyphil.org**.  

PLEASE SILENCE YOUR ELECTRONIC DEVICES.  
PHOTOGRAPHY AND VIDEO RECORDING ARE PERMITTED ONLY DURING APPLAUSE.
Notes on the Program

*Mifiso la sodo (Vidám Zene) (Cheerful Music)*

György Ligeti

This year marks the centennial of the Hungarian-Austrian composer György Ligeti, one of the most important and influential avant-garde composers of the late 20th century and an exemplar of the creative artist in exile.

Ligeti first achieved recognition in the 1960s for “micropolyphonic” works in which eerie, swarming masses of sound coalesce and disperse. In the decades that followed, his tireless exploration of world traditions, jazz, and popular music, his experimentation with microtonal tuning systems, and his borrowing of techniques and forms from the Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque periods encouraged younger composers — like his students Unsuk Chin, Roberto Sierra, Hans Abrahamsen, and Martin Bresnick — to think more playfully about the boundaries and possibilities of concert music. Ligeti’s works have found a home both in the standard concert repertoire and in dozens of films, including several by Stanley Kubrick. This concert, featuring two Ligeti pieces, begins the New York Philharmonic’s honoring of his legacy this season with performances of music from across his oeuvre.

Ligeti began his studies at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest in September 1945. Like all Jewish Hungarians of that generation, his early life had been marked by trauma. His father and younger brother died in concentration camps. Ligeti himself had been sent to a forced labor camp in 1944 and only barely escaped with his life. Perhaps because of such early experiences, he was initially amenable to the promises and ideological views of far-left politics during his first couple of years as a student.

Throughout this time, Ligeti composed many vocal works that conformed with the ideology of accessible art “for the people.” However, his leftist sympathies began to wear thin by 1948, as the Hungarian Communist Party aggressively consolidated power. At the All Union Congress of Composers held in Moscow in January 1948, Andrei Zhdanov — the Soviet Union’s “propagandist-in-chief” — laid out the artistic and political tenets of socialist realism that were to be implemented throughout the rapidly expanding Soviet Bloc. By the spring Zhdanov’s doctrine was being adapted to the particularities of Hungarian musical culture,

In Short

**Born:** May 28, 1923, in Dicsőszentmárton, Transylvania (now Târnăveni, Romania)

**Died:** June 12, 2006, in Vienna, Austria

**Work composed:** August–September 1948, in Budapest, Hungary; Ligeti began revisions in 1951 but abandoned the effort after the first 40 measures. The work remained in manuscript until 2022, when the Paul Sacher Stiftung and Schott Music brought it to publication.

**World premiere:** June 22, 2023, by the Münchener Kammerorchester, Jörg Widmann, conductor, at Munich’s Prinzregententheater

**New York Philharmonic premiere:** these performances, which mark the US premiere

**Estimated duration:** ca. 7 minutes
and committees were established to enforce musical conformity to its ideological principles. Emphasis was placed on vocal music (instrumental works were deemed to be more prone to the overly complicated “formalism” of bourgeois music); melodies were to be simple and tied to local folk traditions, while lyrics were to reflect the experiences of common people. And, in the words of music historian Laszlo Dobszay, all music was expected to adhere to “an optimistic and heroic form of expression,” reflecting Stalin’s vision of an ideal Soviet state.

The draconian enforcement of these strictures provoked Ligeti to react against socialist realism and to explore more radical musical ideas in private. In a letter to the Swedish musicologist Ove Nordwall, dated January 2, 1975, he recalled:

My “left” sympathies were strongest in 1945–46. ... By 1947 I was already a bit more skeptical. From the autumn of 1948, I was an unequivocal opponent (that is, from the moment I realized that the communists were establishing a dictatorship through violence — initially by imprisoning the Social Democratic deputies)!

It was in this moment of mounting censorship and personal disillusionment that Ligeti composed Mifiso la sodo. As if

In the Composer’s Words

In a 1983 interview with the British music critic Paul Griffiths, Ligeti reflected on his experience as a composer during the tumultuous period in which he composed Mifiso la sodo:

[In 1947–8, I wanted to write a very simple, diatonic music, because I believed that music ought to be more popular. ... From 1948 to 1949 everyday life changed radically: the totalitarian Stalinist dictatorship began. It was terrible; it was really like the Nazis. This was the time of Zhdanov in Russia. So any new kind of music was prohibited, which made things difficult in Hungary because Bartók was the great national composer. They didn’t want to prohibit Bartók, and so his name was kept, but at concerts or on the radio you heard only the first string quartet or the sixth string quartet. They were tolerated, but the second quartet to the fifth were not, the Music for Strings not. The [Miraculous] Mandarin was in the repertory at the opera, and from one day to the next they put it away. The list of people who were prohibited even included Britten or Darius Milhaud.

It was a very bad situation, and I became an anti-communist. It wasn’t just a matter of cultural policy: people were just disappearing into concentration camps, or prison, or being killed. It was a terrible time from 1948 until the death of Stalin in 1953. And I had a very strong feeling that I had to write radically new music, not this kind of pseudo-popular music, though all the time I was writing Hungarian folksong arrangements and choruses that were even performed and even published.
to thumb his nose at Zhdanov and Stalin, he filled this orchestral work with ironic allusions to Beethoven’s \textit{Eroica} Symphony (see sidebar, below). The pseudo-Italian title — a sequence of solfege syllables (mi-fi-sol-la-sol-do) — calls to mind tedious student vocal exercises, though there are no vocal parts in this work. And, in a sardonic jab at the notion of mandated optimism, he subtitled the piece, “Vidám zene” (“Cheerful Music”).

Of course, Ligeti was forced to write this work, and numerous subsequent “formalist” works, “for the desk drawer” — that is, in secret. When he fled to Vienna after the Hungarian Uprising in October 1956, he left behind most of his music, save for a handful of significant

Listen for … Musical Jokes

\textit{Mifiso la sodo} sets its tone with a couple of musical jokes. The opening chords are a cheeky quotation of the opening to Beethoven’s Symphony No. 3, \textit{Eroica}. Beethoven originally dedicated his symphony to Napoleon Bonaparte — whom he celebrated as a champion of democratic ideals — but famously scratched out the dedication when Napoleon crowned himself emperor in 1804. Ligeti’s orchestration is identical, only here the chord is D major rather than E-flat major, and whereas the \textit{Eroica} continues seamlessly in E-flat major and 3/4 meter, \textit{Mifiso la sodo} promptly trips over its own feet, hurtling us into an altogether different key area and meter (now 2/4) just moments into the piece. \textit{Mifiso}’s inauspicious start is a far cry from the heroic, stately expression established by Beethoven.

\begin{music}
\begin{musicnotation}
\setlength{\abovedisplayskip}{10pt}
\setlength{\belowdisplayskip}{10pt}
\begin{musicSubstring}
\setlength{\abovedisplayshortskip}{10pt}
\setlength{\belowdisplayshortskip}{10pt}
\input{Mifiso_1.pdf_tex}
\end{musicSubstring}
\end{musicnotation}
\end{music}

This leads directly to Ligeti’s next joke. The first melody of the piece, played by the violins, presents the solfege syllables outlined in the pseudo-Italian title: mi-fi-sol-la-sol-do (“fi” rather than “fa” because the melody is not written in a major key, but rather in the Lydian church mode). This frenetic, breathless melody is passed between various instruments, transposed to different keys, turned upside down, and made to overlap with itself. Perhaps we are listening to a vocal exercise gone off the rails in a choir rehearsal.

\begin{music}
\begin{musicnotation}
\setlength{\abovedisplayskip}{10pt}
\setlength{\belowdisplayskip}{10pt}
\begin{musicSubstring}
\setlength{\abovedisplayshortskip}{10pt}
\setlength{\belowdisplayshortskip}{10pt}
\input{Mifiso_2.pdf_tex}
\end{musicSubstring}
\end{musicnotation}
\end{music}

In the latter half of the piece, a “short-short-short-long” rhythmic motif grows increasingly pervasive, and it becomes clear that Ligeti is making ironic reference to another heroic work from Beethoven’s middle period: his Fifth Symphony.
compositions. Some of these pieces — such as the Six Bagatelles, Musica ricercata, and the Sonata for Solo Cello — would be published in the following decades. Mifiso la sodo, however, remained in Ligeti’s desk drawer until 2022. In anticipation of his centenary, Ligeti’s publisher, Schott Music, and the Paul Sacher Stiftung (the stewards of Ligeti’s complete archive) collaborated to bring this early gem to light.

We tend to think of Ligeti as a composer whose musical life began only after he fled to the West — the Ligeti who composed Atmosphères (1961), San Francisco Polyphony (1973–74), and Le Grande Macabre (1978), and whose music reached international audiences through Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey. This view overlooks a significant period in his creative development. Indeed, characteristics that came to define Ligeti’s later music — his penchant for comic irony in the face of trauma, for layered musical references, for playful language — were already on full display in Mifiso la sodo. In this work from his student days, we hear a fiercely witty musical intellect coming into its own against the grain of a history of violent oppression.

**Instrumentation:** two flutes (one doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

— Nicholas Emmanuel, a visiting assistant professor of musicology at the University at Buffalo
Concert Românesc (Romanian Concerto)

György Ligeti

Growing up in a Jewish family in a Hungary that was by turns dominated by Hitler or Stalin, young György Ligeti did not experience life as a bed of roses. Unlike his father and his brother, he managed to survive internment in a labor camp. Despite his perilous situation, he was able to cobble together a firm musical education, and he spent the years immediately following World War II studying at the Academy of Music in Budapest. He produced the stream of folk-based choral music that was de rigueur in Hungary at the time, but he also worked at blatantly experimental pieces, building on the models of Bartók and the few other groundbreaking composers of whose music he was aware — and he prudently kept these scores to himself.

Ligeti became part of the great Hungarian exodus of 1956 and settled in Germany, where he avidly soaked up the thriving culture of contemporary music. Within a couple of years he became associated with the avant-garde center of Darmstadt and started producing captivating works of daring complexity, often within very free rhythmic frameworks. In 1960 his dramatic Apparitions for Orchestra was premiered in Vienna, and it boosted him to a prominent position among experimental composers. Its dense, cloud-like textures — the result of great clusters of orchestral sounds — weave vaguely through the slowly evolving piece, sometimes in “micropolyphony” (Ligeti’s word) in which canons at the unison unroll in seemingly random fashion. In the course of the 1960s Ligeti grew increasingly fascinated with the possibility of music displaying a harmonic center (an inherently unorthodox idea at the time). This interest led him in the direction of the now-classic Lontano, composed in 1967.

The new-music community was watching Ligeti closely well before he was thrust into a sort of popular fame in 1968. That was when, without the composer’s knowledge or permission, Stanley Kubrick incorporated three of his compositions — Atmosphères, Lux Aeterna, and Requiem — into the soundtrack of 2001: A Space Odyssey. In 1980 Kubrick would make further, now authorized, use of Ligeti’s music (this time of Lontano, among other pieces) to help create the creepy background to The Shining, together with excerpts from works by Bartók, Penderecki, and Berlioz. Ligeti’s scores usually project a sensual appeal to which audiences overwhelmingly respond, even though the vocabulary is not that of most other music.

Writing in Music, Society and Imagination in Contemporary France (Routledge, 1994), François-Bernard Mache proposed a metaphor that may help listeners understand how such music is built:

In Short

Work composed: 1951
World premiere: in a private orchestral rehearsal in Budapest in the 1950s, but not officially premiered until August 21, 1971, at the Peninsula Music Festival in the Gibraltar Auditorium, Fish Creek, Wisconsin, with Thor Johnson conducting The Festival Orchestra

New York Philharmonic premiere: November 24, 2004, David Robertson, conductor

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: March 18, 2011, Esa-Pekka Salonen, conductor

Estimated duration: ca. 12 minutes
Musical technique is like the technique of plaiting and consists of bringing ordered networks into being, in composing various types of intersections. In a way that is comparable to the techniques used in the textile industry, musical skill works on a fibrous material to which it gives glowing color, profusion, mobility.

We may sense this impulse toward “weaving” a musical composition even in

### Listen for … the Alphorn Effect

Ligeti suggests the sound of the alphorn at the beginning of the third movement of the Concert Românesc. Two solo horns (one seated far enough away to create an echo effect) intone bucolic horn calls, with the score advising that the players should keep their right hands out of their instruments’ bells entirely and not adjust the fifth and seventh overtones (indicated by asterisks in the following passage) as they normally would:

![Image of musical notation]

The alphorn effect returns at the end, the last gasp of a “false ending” that nearly refuses to close despite numerous resounding chords from the full orchestra.

The composer recalled his first, youthful encounter with an alphorn (or “alpenhorn,” as he calls it):

The alpenhorn (called a bucium in Romanian) sounded completely different from “normal” music. Today I know that this stems from the fact that the alpenhorn produces only the notes of its natural harmonic series and that the fifth and seventh harmonies (i.e., the major third and minor seventh) seem “out of tune” because they sound lower than on the piano, for example. But it is this sense of “wrongness” that is in fact what is “right” about the instrument, as it represents the specific “charm” of the horn timbre.
such an early Ligeti score as the *Concert Românesc* (1951). Its four movements — played without pause and totaling only 12 minutes — may be taken as a sort of autobiographical snapshot by the composer. “I grew up in a Hungarian-speaking environment in Transylvania,” he wrote:

While the official language was Romanian, it was only in secondary school that I learned to speak the language that had seemed so mysterious to me as a child. I was three when I first encountered Romanian folk music, an alpenhorn player in the Carpathian Mountains.

Ligeti here continues the tradition of such works as Enescu’s Romanian Rhapsodies and Bartók’s Romanian Folk Dances, infusing the “symphonic-folk” tradition with sounds that are both modernist and listener-friendly.

**Instrumentation:** two flutes (one doubling piccolo), two oboes (one doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, three horns (one seated offstage and fulfilling an echo function), two trumpets, suspended cymbal, crash cymbals, snare drum, bass drum, and strings.

— James M. Keller, former New York Philharmonic Program Annotator; San Francisco Symphony program annotator; and author of *Chamber Music: A Listener’s Guide* (Oxford University Press)

---

**In the Composer’s Words**

Late in life, Ligeti reminisced about the musical attitudes and activities of the period in which he produced his *Concert Românesc*:

In 1949, when I was 26, I learned how to transcribe folk songs from wax cylinders at the Folklore Institute in Bucharest. Many of these melodies stuck in my memory and led in 1951 to the composition of my Romanian Concerto [*Concert Românesc*]. However, not everything in it is genuinely Romanian as I also invented elements in the spirit of the village bands. I was later able to hear the piece at an orchestral rehearsal in Budapest — a public performance had been forbidden. Under Stalin’s dictatorship, even folk music was allowed only in a “politically correct” form, in other words, if forced into a straitjacket of the norms of socialist realism. Major-minor harmonizations à la Dunayevsky were welcome and even modal orientalisms in the style of Khachaturian were still permitted, but Stravinsky was excommunicated. The peculiar way in which village bands harmonized their music, often full of dissonances and “against the grain,” was regarded as incorrect. In the fourth movement of my Romanian Concerto there is a passage in which an F-sharp is heard in the context of F major. This was reason enough for the apparatchiks responsible for the arts to ban the entire piece.
The two artists featured in this evening’s piano concerto, composer Elena Firsova and Yefim Bronfman, are both Russian émigrés. Bronfman was a young teenager when his family resettled in Israel. Firsova had to stay much longer. She was already a fully formed composer when, in 1991, she and her husband packed their suitcases and prepared their two young children to move to London.

Her life had begun as the child of physicists. Her father, Oleg Firsov, made important contributions to the theory of atomic collisions; her mother concentrated on teaching. The young Firsova, meanwhile, found her vocation in music — and at an early age. She started composing when she was 12, and had gained wide experience before she entered the Moscow Conservatory. There she and a classmate, Dmitri Smirnov, found a mentor in Edison Denisov, the institution’s lone modernist. He in turn introduced them to Philipp Herschkowitz, a Romanian-born musician who had studied with Anton Webern in Vienna in the 1930s.

In 1972 Firsova and Smirnov married, and embarked on a shared program of making sparks through the culturally stagnant Brezhnev era. They were, inevitably, among the seven denounced in 1979 by Tikhon Khrennikov, head of the Union of Soviet Composers, and their opportunities were curtailed. The situation eased under Mikhail Gorbachev, so much that in 1987 a record was released on the state label with music by the two of them and their allies. In 1991, however, foreseeing uncertainty in the collapse of the Soviet Union, they left.

They arrived in London, where they had both received performances and a warm welcome. Firsova had a piece ready for the 1992 Proms, auspiciously titled Augury and setting lines by William Blake for choir and orchestra. London, then, it would be.

Firsova and Smirnov both thrived in their new environment, and Firsova, always a generously creative composer, became a prolific one. By now, she has composed more than 200 works that have assigned opus numbers, with an emphasis on chamber pieces for both standard (14 string quartets) and non-standard formations.

The poetry of the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam (1891–1938) has been a persistent inspiration and challenge, drawing Firsova to find ways the singing voice can fly, at once exultant and fragile. “Mandelstam’s poetry,” she has said, “is written exactly as I would like to compose my music. I feel close to him, to his inner sensations, his attitude towards art and death.” She particularly values her Mandelstam cantatas, each setting a sequence of poems for a solo singer with a small mixed group of instruments. Three of these were recorded in Moscow in 2004, during a brief time when her music was

In Short

**Born:** March 21, 1950, in Leningrad, USSR  
**Resides:** in London  
**Work composed:** 2020, in London  
**World premiere:** June 16, 2022, by the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Jakub Hrůša, conductor, Yefim Bronfman (its dedicatee), soloist, at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam  
**New York Philharmonic premiere:** these performances, which mark the New York Premiere  
**Estimated duration:** ca. 20 minutes
accepted, if not welcomed, back in Russia. She hardly regrets her subsequent renewed exile. As she puts it: “The war against Ukraine fills me with deep shame. I count myself lucky that I left Russia 30 years ago and was last there 17 years ago.”

In Britain, she became a valued teacher, while also answering commissions from around Western Europe. For her Piano Concerto, the principal commissioner was the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, acting while Bronfman held a position there as artist-in-residence. He duly gave the first performance with the orchestra in June last year.

The work, like very many concertos, is in three movements, but these do not follow the usual fast-slow-fast plan. Instead, the three-minute first movement is a kind of introduction, or preparation — the conjuring of a dream. Two basic ideas are brought forward by the piano right at the start: a scale trailing up into the sky and a three-note shape that goes down and

---

**In the Composer’s Words**

Elena Firsova includes this comment with her Piano Concerto:

The music of my Double Concerto for violin and cello, from 2017, was very personal and reflected my meditations about the mystery and meaning of Death. You possibly know a relevant quote from *Doctor Zhivago* by Boris Pasternak: “Art is constantly preoccupied with two things: It always meditates about Death and in this way inevitably creates Life.” The introduction and both movements of the Double Concerto were based on the motif of Beethoven’s final movement of his String Quartet, Op. 135, “Muss es sein?” Only in the beginning I use the motif in its retrograde form and later, of course, in inverted form.

I mention this because my Piano Concerto in a certain sense is a kind of a twin composition with my Double Concerto. The music material of all three movements is based on the same motif. I did it absolutely unconsciously in the beginning, realised it only when I finished the first movement and was astonished how different the music is from the Double Concerto!

I would say only that in the Piano Concerto I concentrated more on the problems and questions of Life, but at the end everything is inevitably coming to the clock which reminds us that everything has its end. As in the Double Concerto, the last movement of the Piano Concerto is the main and longest part of the music.
then back up to a dissonant note. This is the motif to which Beethoven gave words in his final string quartet: “Muss es sein?” (“Must it be?”)

Hammered or subtly discovered, the question runs through the two further movements, which constitute a disruption, again only three minutes long, and a continuation of the dream.

Instrumentation: three flutes, three oboes, three clarinets, three bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, whip, woodblock, temple blocks, tom-toms, snare drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, tam-tam, tubular bells, orchestra bells, vibraphone, and strings, in addition to the solo piano.

— Paul Griffiths, a music critic for many years and the author, most recently, of Mr. Beethoven (New York Review Books)

Firsova’s Piano Concerto is presented under license from G. Schirmer, Inc., copyright owners.

Must It Be?

At the head of the last movement of his last string quartet, Beethoven famously placed a key to the words we should imagine the instruments singing: “Must it be?” (“Muss es sein?” in the original German) in the slow introduction and “It must be!” in the allegro that follows. The former concludes indeed with a musical question mark in the shape of a note requiring resolution; the latter provides that resolution and also an answer, by turning the motif upside down.

What, however, is it that must be? Beethoven may well have been making a joke about some payment he had to make, or that was due to him, but a tradition has developed of understanding the question on an altogether higher plane. What must be? Destiny. Death.

This is the interpretation Elena Firsova has in mind. In her first movement the piano, lightly accompanied, searches for the “It must be!” theme — searches for the answer to a question that has not yet been posed. Then it is, by the piano, at the start of the much more fully scored second movement. Escapes are attempted, but the question is forcibly repeated.

The finale picks up from the first movement, drifting on but eventually caught by the question. The music builds to a climax, followed by a cadenza in which the piano has to face not only the question but also its own part in making the question a demand at the start of the preceding movement. Once more the dream continues, but the question remains.
Johannes Brahms

“I shall never write a symphony!” Johannes Brahms famously declared in 1872. “You can’t have any idea what it’s like to hear such a giant marching behind you.” The giant was Beethoven, of course, and although his music provided essential inspiration for Brahms, it also set such a high standard that the younger composer found it easy to discount his own creations as negligible in comparison. Nonetheless, the young Brahms proved relentless in confronting the challenge of the orchestra; by the time he provisionally completed his Symphony No. 1 (in 1876), he had brought to fruition such symphonic pieces as his Piano Concerto No. 1, his Variations on a Theme by Haydn, his orchestration of three Hungarian Dances, and his two Serenades for Orchestra.

The First Serenade (in D major, Op. 11) came into being over the course of about three years, and during that time it evolved in a typically Brahmsian way, passing through several genres and taking on different structures before it found what the composer considered to be its proper form. It began life as a chamber piece — probably first as a three-movement octet for winds and strings, then as a four-movement nonet for flute, two clarinets, bassoon, horn, and four strings. That is how the piece developed through most of 1857 and 1858, and that is the form in which it was unveiled in Göttingen, in 1858, to no special note. But Brahms felt the piece was still not quite right. On November 8, 1858, his friend and sometime muse Clara Schumann wrote to him:

The other day I heard for the first time a serenade of Mozart’s for 13 wind instruments and realized that it was specially planned for these 13 instruments, whereas yours needs a full orchestra.

Had Brahms been thinking the same thing, or was this letter the impetus that led him to consider scaling up to orchestral forces? Whatever the case, exactly a month later Brahms (in Detmold) wrote to his friend Joseph Joachim (in Hannover), asking for the tools he would need:

I beg you to send me, along with the serenade, half or maybe an entire quire of manuscript paper, wide format with 16 (or 14) staves, and about a quarter of a quire of narrow paper with 20–24 staves. ... I need the paper to convert my first serenade into a symphony, at

In Short

Born: May 7, 1833, in Hamburg
Died: April 3, 1897, in Vienna, Austria
Work composed: 1857–60, during which time it went through several versions for markedly different instrumentations
World premiere: the final version, which is performed here, on March 3, 1860, in Hannover, Germany, Joseph Joachim, conductor
New York Philharmonic premiere: March 29, 1912, with Walter Damrosch conducting the New York Symphony (which merged with the New York Philharmonic in 1928 to form today’s New York Philharmonic)
Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: January 27, 2009, Riccardo Muti, conductor
Estimated duration: ca. 50 minutes
At the Time

During the years when Johannes Brahms was composing and revising his Serenade No. 1, the following events were taking place:

- **1857** Liszt's *A Faust Symphony* is premiered in Weimar, Germany. American civil engineer E.G. Otis installs the first safety elevator at the Haughwout Building (right), at 488 Broadway in New York City.

- **1858** In London, Charles Barry designs the third Covent Garden Opera House. At Lourdes, France, the Blessed Virgin Mary is said to appear to Bernadette Soubirous.

- **1859** Gounod’s opera *Faust* is premiered in Paris, and Verdi’s opera *Un ballo in maschera* is premiered in Rome. James McNeill Whistler’s painting *At the Piano* (below) is rejected by the Paris Salon, prompting his move to London.

- **1860** In the US, Abraham Lincoln (right) is elected President, and baseball becomes popular in New York and Boston. In England, Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* and George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* are published.
long last. I can see that this work is a sort of hybrid creature, neither this nor that. I had such a big, beautiful conception of my first symphony — and now!

With appropriate paper in hand, Brahms expanded the instrumentation of his piece to the dimensions of a chamber orchestra, probably with single winds and perhaps 15 string players. This also seems to be when he enlarged the structure by two scherzo movements. The premiere of the new six-movement chamber-orchestra version of the D-major Serenade ensued on March 28, 1859, at the Wörmerscher Saal in Hamburg, with Joseph Joachim conducting the Hamburg Philharmonic Society.

But Brahms was still not done. In 1859 he rescored this serenade for full orchestra — its final form. The title page proclaims that it is “for Large Orchestra,” which it is in the sense that Brahms uses a complete orchestra as defined by the late symphonies of Mozart and Haydn and the first four of Beethoven, and adds to that a larger than usual complement of horns (though without the trombones that would become increasingly employed in symphonies following Beethoven’s Fifth). However, it is certainly not large when compared to orchestras in contemporaneous works by, say, Liszt or Wagner. In fact, perhaps the notation “for Large Orchestra” should be read as a way to distinguish Brahms’s Serenade No. 1 from his Serenade No. 2, “for Small Orchestra” — curiously, a chamber orchestra that included a smaller group of winds (though with piccolo added), no timpani, and a string section without violins — which the composer had begun while still working on the First.

**Instrumentation:** two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

— J.M.K.
New York Philharmonic

2023–2024 SEASON

JAAP VAN ZWEDEN, Music Director
Leonard Bernstein, Laureate Conductor, 1943–1990
Kurt Masur, Music Director Emeritus, 1991–2015

VIOLINS
Frank Huang
The Charles E. Culpeper Chair
The New York Philharmonic

Sheryl Staples
The Elizabeth G. Beinecke Chair

Michelle Kim
The William Petschek Family Chair

Quan Ge

Hae-Young Ham
The Mr. and Mrs. Timothy M. George Chair

Lisa GiHae Kim
The Shirley Bacoct Shamel Chair

Kuan Cheng Lu
The William and Elfriede Ulrich Chair

Sharon Yamada
The William and Elfriede Ulrich Chair

Elizabeth Zeitser
The William and Elfriede Ulrich Chair

Yulia Ziskel
The Friends and Patrons Chair

Qianqian Li
Principal

Lisa Eunsoo Kim* In Memory of Laura Mitchell

Soohyun Kwon
The Joan and Joel I. Picket Chair

Duoming Ba

Hannah Choi
The Sue and Eugene Mercy, Jr. Chair

I-Jung Huang
Dasol Jeong
Alina Kobialka
Hyunjoo Lee
Kyoung Ji Min
Marié Schwalbach
Na Sun
The Gary W. Parr Chair
Audrey Wright
Jin Suk Yu
Andi Zhang

CELLOS
Carter Brey
Principal
The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Chair
Patrick Jee***
The Paul and Diane Guenther Chair

Elizabeth Dyson
The Mr. and Mrs. James E. Buckman Chair
Alexei Yuenquxi Gonzalez
Maria Kitsopoulos
The Secular Society Chair
Sumire Kudo
Qiang Tu
Nathan Vickery
Ru-Pei Yeh

BASSES
Timothy Cobb
Principal

Max Zeugner*
The Herbert M. Citrin Chair

Randall Butler
The Ludmila S. and Carl B. Hess Chair

Ryan Roberts

ENGLISH HORN

Ryan Roberts

OBOES
Liang Wang
Principal
The Alice Tully Chair

Sherry Sylar*

Robert Botti
The Elizabeth and Frank Newman Chair

Benjamin Adler*
Pascual Martinez

Fortezza
The Honey M. Kurtz Family Chair

E-FLAT CLARINET

Benjamin Adler

FLUTES
Robert Langevin
Principal
The Lila Acheson Wallace Chair

Alison Fierst*

Yoobin Son
Mindz Kaufman
The Edward and Priscilla Pilcher Chair

PICCOLO
Mindz Kaufman

CELLOS
Carter Brey
Principal
The Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Chair
Patrick Jee***
The Paul and Diane Guenther Chair

Elizabeth Dyson
The Mr. and Mrs. James E. Buckman Chair
Alexei Yuenquxi Gonzalez
Maria Kitsopoulos
The Secular Society Chair
Sumire Kudo
Qiang Tu
Nathan Vickery
Ru-Pei Yeh

BASSES
Timothy Cobb
Principal

Max Zeugner*
The Herbert M. Citrin Chair

Randall Butler
The Ludmila S. and Carl B. Hess Chair

Ryan Roberts

ENGLISH HORN

Ryan Roberts

OBOES
Liang Wang
Principal
The Alice Tully Chair

Sherry Sylar*

Robert Botti
The Elizabeth and Frank Newman Chair

Benjamin Adler*
Pascual Martinez

Fortezza
The Honey M. Kurtz Family Chair

E-FLAT CLARINET

Benjamin Adler

(Continued)

The Digital Organ is made possible by Ronnie P. Ackman and Lawrence D. Ackman.
Steinway is the Official Piano of the New York Philharmonic and David Geffen Hall.
BASS CLARINET

BASSOONS
Judith LeClair
Principal
The Pels Family Chair
Roger Nye
The Rosalind Miranda Chair
in memory of Shirley and Bill Cohen

CONTRABASSOON

HORNS
Richard Deane*
Principal
R. Allen Spanjer
The Rosalind Miranda Chair
Leelanee Sterrett
The Ruth F. and Alan J. Broder Chair
Tanner West

TRUMPETS
Christopher Martin
Principal
The Paula Levin Chair
Matthew Muckey*
Ethan Bensdorf
Thomas Smith

TROMBONES
Joseph Alessi
Principal
The Guiney F. and Marjorie L. Hart Chair
Colin Williams*
David Finlayson
The Donna and Benjamin M. Rosen Chair

BASS TROMBONE
George Curran
The Daria L. and William C. Foster Chair

TUBA
Alan Baer
Principal

TIMPANI
Markus Rhoten
Principal
The Carlos Moseley Chair
Kyle Zerna**

PERCUSSION
Christopher S. Lamb
Principal
The Constance R. Hoguet Friends of the Philharmonic Chair
Daniel Druckman*
The Mr. and Mrs. Ronald J. Ulrich Chair

HARP
Nancy Allen
Principal

KEYBOARD
In Memory of Paul Jacobs

HARPSICHORD
Paolo Bordignon

PIANO
Eric Huebner
The Anna-Maria and Stephen Kellen Piano Chair

ORGAN
Kent Tritle

LIBRARIANS
Lawrence Tarlow
Principal
Sara Griffin*

ORCHESTRA PERSONNEL
DeAnne Eisch
Orchestra Personnel Manager

STAGE REPRESENTATIVE
Joseph Faretta

AUDIO DIRECTOR
Lawrence Rock
* Associate Principal
** Assistant Principal
*** Acting Associate Principal
+ On Leave
++ Replacement / Extra

The New York Philharmonic uses the revolving seating method for section string players who are listed alphabetically in the roster.

HONORARY MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY
Emanuel Ax
Deborah Borda
Zubin Mehta

Programs are supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the New York State Council on the Arts, with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.
The Artists

David Robertson — conductor, artist, composer, thinker, and American musical visionary — occupies prominent podiums in opera, orchestral, and new music. He is a champion of contemporary composers, and an ingenious and adventurous programmer. Robertson has served in numerous artistic leadership positions, such as chief conductor and artistic director of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, a transformative 13-year tenure as music director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, and with the Orchestre National de Lyon, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and, as protégé of Pierre Boulez, the Ensemble intercontemporain. He appears with the world’s great orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, Vienna Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic, São Paulo State Symphony, and Seoul Philharmonic orchestras, as well as major ensembles and festivals on five continents.

In 2023, Robertson made his first return to Sydney, and begins a three-year tenure as the inaugural creative partner of the Utah Symphony and Opera. Since his 1996 Metropolitan Opera debut, he has conducted a variety of Met projects, including the 2019–20 season opening premiere production of the Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (for which he shared a 2021 Grammy Award, Best Opera Recording) and its 2022 revival. He made his Rome Opera debut conducting Janáček’s *Káťa Kabanová*.

Robertson is a Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France, and is the recipient of numerous artistic awards. He serves on the Tianjin Juilliard Advisory Council, complementing his role as director of conducting studies, distinguished visiting faculty, at The Juilliard School. In the 2023–24 season he will conduct the Seattle Symphony, Royal Danish Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie Orchester-Berlin, and the Minnesota Orchestra, among others, and will lead The Philadelphia Orchestra at Carnegie Hall.

Internationally recognized as one of today’s most acclaimed and admired pianists, Yefim Bronfman stands among a handful of artists regularly sought by festivals, orchestras, conductors, and recital series. His commanding technique, power, and exceptional lyrical gifts are consistently acknowledged by the press and audiences alike.

Following summer festival appearances in Verbier, Israel, Aspen, Grand Teton, and Sun Valley, his 2023–24 season begins with a European tour celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Munich Opera and Orchestra with concerts in Lucerne, Bucharest, London, Paris, Linz, Vienna, and Munich. He visits Japan and South Korea in partnership with Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and throughout the season returns to US ensembles including the New York Philharmonic and Minnesota, Boston, Kansas City, National, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco symphony orchestras. He travels to Spain and Carnegie Hall with the
Munich Philharmonic for performances of the Brahms concertos, then appears with the Budapest Festival Orchestra in Europe. His extensive winter-spring recital tour includes appearances in Ljubljana, Milan, Berlin, Cleveland, Chicago, Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, La Jolla, and Carnegie Hall.

Born in Tashkent in the Soviet Union, Yefim Bronfman immigrated to Israel with his family in 1973; there he studied with pianist Arie Vardi, head of the Rubin Academy of Music at Tel Aviv University. In the United States, he studied at The Juilliard School, Marlboro School of Music, and the Curtis Institute of Music, under Rudolf Firkusny, Leon Fleisher, and Rudolf Serkin. A recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Prize, in 2010 Bronfman was honored with the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in piano performance from Northwestern University, and in 2015 with an honorary doctorate from the Manhattan School of Music.
Jaap van Zweden became Music Director of the New York Philharmonic in 2018. In 2023–24, his farewell season celebrates his connection with the Orchestra’s musicians as he leads performances in which six Principal players appear as concerto soloists. He also revisits composers he has championed at the Philharmonic, from Steve Reich and Joel Thompson to Mozart and Mahler. He is also Music Director of the Hong Kong Philharmonic, since 2012, and becomes Music Director of the Seoul Philharmonic in 2024. He has appeared as guest with the Orchestre de Paris; Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw and Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestras; Vienna, Berlin, and Los Angeles philharmonic orchestras; and London Symphony, Chicago Symphony, and Cleveland orchestras.

Jaap van Zweden’s NY Phil recordings include David Lang’s prisoner of the state and Julia Wolfe’s Grammy-nominated Fire in my mouth (Decca Gold). He conducted the first performances in Hong Kong of Wagner’s Ring Cycle, the Naxos recording of which led the Hong Kong Philharmonic to be named the 2019 Gramophone Orchestra of the year. His performance of Wagner’s Parsifal received the Edison Award for Best Opera Recording in 2012.

Born in Amsterdam, Jaap van Zweden became the youngest-ever concertmaster of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra at age 19 and began his conducting career almost 20 years later. He was named Musical America’s 2012 Conductor of the Year, was profiled by CBS 60 Minutes on arriving at the NY Phil, and in the spring of 2023 received the prestigious Concertgebouw Prize. In 1997 he and his wife, Aaltje, established the Papageno Foundation to support families of children with autism.

The New York Philharmonic connects with millions of music lovers each season through live concerts in New York and around the world, broadcasts, streaming, education programs, and more. In the 2023–24 season — which builds on the Orchestra’s transformation reflected in the new David Geffen Hall — the NY Phil honors Jaap van Zweden in his farewell season as Music Director, premieres 14 works by a wide range of composers including some whom van Zweden has championed, marks György Ligeti’s centennial, and celebrates the 100th birthday of the beloved Young People’s Concerts.

The Philharmonic has commissioned and/or premiered important works, from Dvořák’s New World Symphony to Tania León’s Pulitzer Prize–winning Stride. The NY Phil has released more than 2,000 recordings since 1917, and in 2023 announced a partnership with Apple Music Classical, the new streaming app designed to deliver classical music lovers the optimal listening experience. The Orchestra builds on a longstanding commitment to serving its communities — which has led to annual free concerts across New York City and the free online New York Philharmonic Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives — through a new ticket access program.

Founded in 1842, the New York Philharmonic is the oldest symphony orchestra in the United States, and one of the oldest in the world. Jaap van Zweden became Music Director in 2018–19, following titans including Bernstein, Toscanini, and Mahler. Gustavo Dudamel will become Music and Artistic Director beginning in 2026 after serving as Music Director Designate in 2025–26.
Generous support for Yefim Bronfman’s as well as Katia and Marielle Labeque’s appearances is provided by Michael P. N. A. Hormel and The Donna and Marvin Schwartz Virtuoso Piano Performance Series. Semyon Bychkov’s appearance is made possible through the Charles A. Dana Distinguished Conductors Endowment Fund. Conductors, soloists, programs, prices, and sale dates are correct at the date of printing and are subject to change. © 2023 New York Philharmonic. All rights reserved. Programs are made possible, in part, by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature. © 2023 New York Philharmonic. Photo Credits: John Zorn by Scott Irvine, Bryce Dessner by Shervin Lainez, Unsuk Chin by Priska Ketterer.
We’ve partnered with Thompson & Associates — a values-driven, national estate planning firm — to help NY Phil supporters leave a legacy that aligns with their personal and philanthropic goals.

Join us for a complimentary seminar with an expert from Thompson & Associates to learn more about how you can provide for your loved ones by minimizing federal and state taxes, while supporting your favorite charities for years to come. This informative session is confidential, casual, and comes with no costs or obligations to you.

To RSVP or learn more about planned giving at the NY Phil, visit nyphil.org/planned-giving or contact us at plannedgiving@nyphil.org or (212) 671-4781.

*The seminar will take place following our Donor Rehearsal featuring virtuoso Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider performing Beethoven’s Violin Concerto. Donor Rehearsal attendance is only available to current NY Phil members, and is not required to participate in the seminar. Reserve your spot by visiting the “My Benefits” webpage on your membership account at nyphil.org, or by calling (212) 875-5381. To learn more about Donor Rehearsals or becoming an NY Phil member, visit nyphil.org/membership or call the number above.
Your love of music could last several lifetimes — and with **planned giving at the NY Phil**, it can!

By including our Orchestra in your estate plans, you can minimize the tax burden for your loved ones while uplifting our vital work on stage, in schools across New York City, and in the lives of millions worldwide. There are many ways to include the NY Phil in your legacy giving, including:

- Bequests
- Charitable Trusts
- Retirement Plan Assets
- Insurance Policies
- Tangible Personal Property
- Qualified Charitable Distributions

By supporting the NY Phil in your bequest today, you can enjoy **exclusive member perks** — and the satisfaction of knowing your impact will last generations.

To learn more about planned giving at the NY Phil — including our personalized, confidential, and complimentary legacy consulting — visit nyphil.org/planned-giving or contact plannedgiving@nyphil.org or (212) 875-5753.