

# Nineteenth-Century Music and Romanticism: Part 3

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## MUSIC OF JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Whereas Berlioz's program symphony might be heard as a radical departure from earlier symphonies, the music of Johannes Brahms is often thought of as breathing new life into classical forms (~~see figure of Brahms. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes\\_Brahms#/media/File:JohannesBrahms.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johannes_Brahms#/media/File:JohannesBrahms.jpg)~~). For centuries, musical performances were of compositions by composers who were still alive and working. In the nineteenth century that trend changed. By the time that Johannes Brahms was twenty, over half of all music performed in concerts was by composers who were no longer living; by the time that he was forty, that amount increased to over two-thirds. Brahms knew and loved the music of forebears such as Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Schumann. He wrote in the genres they had developed, including symphonies, concertos, string quartets, sonatas, and songs. To these traditional genres and forms, he brought sweeping nineteenth-century melodies, much more chromatic harmonies, and the forces of the modern symphony orchestra. He did not, however, compose symphonic poems or program music as did Hector Berlioz and Franz Liszt.

Brahms himself was keenly aware of walking in Beethoven's shadow. In the early 1870s, he wrote to conductor friend Hermann Levi, "I shall never compose a symphony." Continuing, he reflected, "You have no idea how someone like me feels when he hears such a giant marching behind him all of the time." Nevertheless, some six years later, after a twenty-year period of germination, he premiered his first symphony. Brahms's music engages Romantic lyricism, rich chromaticism, thick orchestration, and rhythmic dislocation in a way that clearly goes beyond what Beethoven had done. Still, his intensely motivic and organic style, and his use of a four movement symphonic model that features sonata, variations, and ABA forms is indebted to Beethoven.

The third movement of Brahms's First Symphony is a case in point. It follows the ABA form, as had most moderate-tempo, dance-like third movements since the minuets of the eighteenth-century symphonies and scherzos of the early nineteenth-century symphonies. This movement uses more instruments and grants more solos to the woodwind instruments than earlier symphonies did (listen especially for the clarinet solos). The musical texture is thicker as well, even though the melody always soars above the other instruments. Finally, this movement is more graceful and songlike than any minuet or scherzo that preceded it. In this regard, it is more like the lyrical character pieces of Chopin, Mendelssohn, and the Schumanns than like most movements of Beethoven's symphonies. But, it does not have an extra musical referent; in fact, Brahms' music is often called "absolute" music, that is, music for the sake of music. The music might call to a listener's mind any number of pictures or ideas, but they are of the listener's imagination, from the

listener’s interpretation of the melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and textures written by Brahms. In this way, such a movement is very different than a movement from a program symphony such as Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique*. Public opinion has often split over program music and absolute music. What do you think? Do you prefer a composition in which the musical and extra musical are explicitly linked, or would you rather make up your own interpretation of the music, without guidance from a title or story?

<b>LISTENING GUIDE</b>		
For audio, go to: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0tgQ4YYwBM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0tgQ4YYwBM</a> <del><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dekswnGJqCS">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dekswnGJqCS</a></del>		
Performed by the Berlin Philharmonic Herbert von Karajan conducting		
<b>Composer:</b> Johannes Brahms		
<b>Composition:</b> Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68, III. Un poco allegretto e grazioso [a little allegretto and graceful]		
<b>Date:</b> 1876		
<b>Genre:</b> Symphony		
<b>Form:</b> ABA moderate-tempoed, dancelike movement from a symphony		
<b>Performing Forces:</b> Romantic symphony orchestra, including two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, one contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, violins (first and second), violas, cellos, and double basses		
<b>What we want you to remember about this composition:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Its lilting tuneful melodies transform the scherzo mood into something more romantic</li> <li>• It is in ABA form</li> <li>• It is in A-flat major (providing respite from the C minor pervading the rest of the symphony)</li> </ul>		
<b>Other things to listen for:</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The winds as well as the strings get the melodic themes from the beginning</li> </ul>		
<b>Timing</b>	<b>Performing Forces, Melody, and Texture</b>	<b>Text and Form</b>
0:00	Clarinet solo with descending question phrases answer phrase in the flutes. (sparse string accompaniment)	A
0:26	Strings get the melodic theme with answer in the winds	

1:01	Second theme: starts with a clarinet solo and then with the whole wood-wind section. Faster note values in the strings provide increased musical tension	
1:26	Return of opening theme (clarinet solo)	
1:41	New theme introduced and repeated by different groups in the orchestra. Gradually building dynamic and layers of the texture (more brass); phrase ends with hemiola. Climaxes to a forte dynamic	B
3:17	First theme returns answer theme in the strings (varied form). Sparser accompaniment again Softer dynamic	'A'
3:32	Second theme: This time it is extended using sequences	
4:00	Ascending sequential treatment of motives from the movement	Coda

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, political and cultural nationalism strongly influenced many creative works of the nineteenth century. We have already observed aspects of nationalism in the piano music of Chopin and Liszt. Later nineteenth-century composers invested even more heavily in nationalist themes.

## GLOSSARY

**Art song** – a composition setting a poem to music, generally for one solo voice and piano accompaniment; in German, a Lied

**Chamber music** – music—such as art songs, piano character pieces, and string quartets—primarily performed in small performing spaces, often for personal entertainment

**Chromaticism** – use of “colorful,” dissonant pitches, that included in the key of the composition

**Concerto** – a composition for a soloist or a group of soloists and an orchestra, generally in three movements with fast, slow, and fast tempos, respectively

**Conductor** – individual who leads an orchestra

**drone** – a sustained pitch or pitches often found in music of the middle ages or earlier and in folk music

**Idée fixe** – a famous melody that appears in all five movements of Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* to represent the beloved from the program

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**Leitmotiv** – “guiding motive” associated with a specific character, theme, or locale in a music drama, and first associated with the music of Richard Wagner

**mazurka** – a Polish dance in triple time, with emphasis on beat 2

**Nationalism** – pride in one’s nation or cultural identity, often expressed in art, literature, and music

**Opera** – a drama almost entirely sung to orchestral accompaniment, with accompanying costumes and staging

**Plagal cadence** – ending of a composition that consists of a IV chord moving to a I chord and most often associated with church music

**Program music** – instrumental music intended to represent a something extra musical such as a poem, narrative, drama, or picture, or the ideas, images, or sounds therein

**Program symphony** – program music in the form of a multi-movement composition for orchestra

**Rubato** – the momentary speeding up or slowing down of the tempo within a melody line, literally “robbing” time from one note to give to another

**Scena ad aria** – nineteenth-century operatic combination of a recitative (“scena”) plus aria; here the aria generally has two parts, a slower cantabile and a faster cabaletta

**Sonata** – composition for a solo instrument or an instrument with piano accompaniment, generally in three movements with fast, slow, and fast tempos, respectively

**Sonata form** – a form often found in the first and last movements of sonatas, symphonies, and string quartets, consisting of three parts – exposition, development, and recapitulation

**Song cycle** – a collection of art songs, unified by poet, narrative, musical style, or composer

**String quartet** – performing ensemble consisting of two violinists, one violinist, and one cellist that plays compositions called string quartets, compositions generally in four movements

**Strophic** – a composition that uses the repetition of the same music (“strophes”) for successive texts

**Symphonic poem** – program music in the form of a single-movement composition for orchestra; sometimes called a tone poem

**Symphony** – multi-movement composition for orchestra, often in four movements

**Ternary form** – describes a musical composition in three parts, most often featuring two similar sections, separated by a contrasting section and represented by the letters A – B – A.

**Through-composed** – a movement or composition consisting of new music throughout, without repetition of internal sections

## CHAPTER X

### OTHER NINETEENTH CENTURY COMPOSERS

**208. Sources.** From the study of leading nineteenth century musicians it is evident that Germany maintained her supremacy, producing composers, writers on music, conductors, orchestras, and all kinds of musical institutions. Musicians of other nationalities, too, frequently studied in Germany, and became so grounded in German musical styles as to be classed ultimately with the musicians of their adopted country.

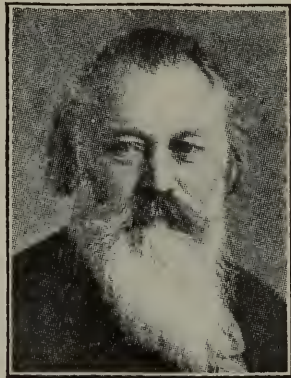
Others, however, of these students who had become fired with the enthusiasm grown from their intercourse with German composers and institutions, on returning to their own countries, sought to develop there new styles which should express the character of their own people. The result was a study of the scales, rhythms, harmonies, and melodies which had lain dormant among the peasant class for centuries, sometimes the undeveloped offspring of mediæval modes, which had survived in the folk-songs and popular dances. Thus exotic forms of music sprang to the fore, presented by composers animated by patriotic zeal, and enriching material which was in danger of becoming hackneyed. Bohemia, Scandinavia, and Russia contributed the largest share of the new ideas, and a number of musicians in these lands attained a high degree of excellence, giving an impetus to music study which is still active.

#### *Section 1*

#### MUSIC IN GERMANY AND BOHEMIA

**209. Johannes Brahms (1833-1897).** Born at Hamburg, the son of a double-bass player, Brahms, while a boy,

attained a mastery over the piano and musical theory, and made his *début* as a concert pianist at the age of fourteen, playing a set of original variations upon a folk-song air. The following years, to 1853, were spent in study, after which he went on a tour with the violinist *Remenyi*, meeting Joachim, Liszt, and Schumann. The last-named heralded him in his paper as the coming musical prophet, and thus drew the eyes of the world upon him. After his first publications, which extend through opus 10, and are characterized by youthful exuberance, Brahms passed several years in a close study of the classics, only occasionally playing or conducting in public. In 1859 he performed his first piano concerto at Leipsic. The serenades for orchestra, op. 11 and 16, struck a note of strong individuality, while the "German Requiem," produced in 1868, established his fame. After 1862 he lived quietly in Vienna, spending most of his time in composition, and only rarely acting as pianist or conductor.



BRAHMS

**210. Brahms's Work.** An unfortunate circumstance in connection with Brahms was the position in which he was placed by the advocates of "absolute" music as their champion. In reality, his opposition to the "programme" school was more fancied than real, as he shows many of the traces of the modern spirit in his free use of materials. Like Bach, he lived a simple, unostentatious life, reflecting in his compositions a normal, genuine character. Though fond of folk-music, he could yet write works of unparalleled complexity; and the profound and reflective style of his greatest compositions is an evidence of the slowness with which he matured, causing him to delay until after the age of forty before writing a symphony. His wonderful complexity of structural work and his lack of tonal coloring sometimes

resulted in a dry, academic flavor. Nevertheless he revealed many new possibilities of classic form by employing old modes and thematic uses, and by revivifying old forms, especially that of the *variation*. - Classed with Bach and Beethoven by von Bülow as one of the three great musical B's, he justified such an association by combining Beethoven's harmonic structure with Bach's interest in individual parts. In the use of melodies and rhythms he invented many novel and complex effects, sometimes thus again reviving old or disused methods.

**211. Brahms's Chamber Compositions.** These include works in nearly all forms.

Of piano works we note three sonatas and a *scherzo*, early and virile compositions which prefigure his later characteristics; short *ballades*, *caprices*, *intermezzi*, and *rhapsodies*, all of much individuality; the brilliant *waltzes*, opus 39; *studies* and *arrangements* demanding a powerful technique; *variations*, of tremendous difficulty; and two *concertos*, in D minor and B flat. They all abound in octaves, thirds, and sixths. The four-hand "Hungarian Dances" are popular.

Other chamber music, of all kinds, includes the famous piano quintet, opus 34. The four-movement form prevails in all these long works, while the developments are lengthy and complex, and the codas elaborate.

**212. Brahms's other Compositions.** His orchestral works include two spirited *serenades*; the brilliant *variations*, opus 56, which form nine tone pictures, ending with one which has the theme in the bass; and four symphonies, of which the second is most popular, and the fourth most learned. Innovations occur in these symphonies, like the substitution of an *allegretto* for the *scherzo* in the first and third. The orchestration, though masterly, is heavy. The "Academic Overture" is strong in thematic development.

There are many chorus works of all kinds, of which the grand and imposing "German Requiem" is in cantata style.

THEMES FROM BRAHMS' FIRST SYMPHONY.

First movement.

Introduction.  
*Un poco sostenuto.*

*Allegro.*

Slow movement.

*Andante sostenuto.*

Brahms' songs, about two hundred in number, weld closely words and accompaniment, displaying much melodic beauty and rich harmony. Love themes predominate, while many songs are in the folk-manner form.

213. Instrumental Writers. *Robert Volkmann* (1815-1883) wrote in a melodious and musicianly style. *Joseph Rheinberger* (1837-1902), for a long time teacher at the Royal School of Music at Munich, produced much chamber music, and eighteen organ sonatas, which are melodious but sometimes dry. *Anton Bruckner* (1824-1896) stands midway between classicism and the new school, and shows in his nine symphonies a wealth of melody and greatness of thought which are marred by a lack of coherency. He was powerfully affected by Wagner's work. *Woldemar Bargiel*, a follower