

JOHANNES BRAHMS

The Romantic composer, Johannes Brahms, was born in Hamburg, Germany on May 7, 1833. His father was a bass player in the local orchestra and was Johannes' first music teacher. By the time he was 7, he fell in love with the piano and began studying it seriously. Several years later, he added theory and composition to his studies.

In his early years, Brahms helped to bring in money for his family by arranging musical scores for the local orchestra as well as playing in different venues. He honed his skills in Hungarian folk music during this time period. While on tour in 1853 with a famed violinist Reményi, he was introduced to two other famous musicians, Joseph Joachim and Franz Liszt. These relationships led him to an association with Robert and Clara Schumann, who became two of his closest life-long friends. Brahms never married and it is thought that his adoration and unrequited love for Clara, who was fourteen years older, was behind it.

Brahms was a rather introverted man with little self-esteem. It was Robert Schumann that encouraged the young composer to persevere with articles in his magazine ***The New Journal for Music***. It was devastating for Johannes when Schumann became ill. He took time to assist his beloved Clara during Robert's illness and when he died in 1856, Johannes remained close to Clara.

In the following years, Brahms took a position in the small town of Detmold. He was recognized as an accomplished pianist, but the recognition as a composer was still struggling. It seemed that his opposition to other composers of the time, including Liszt, with his bristled comments that were often sarcastic in nature, had a negative effect on attracting an audience. He was finally given a post of high esteem when he was offered the job of director at the *Vienna Singakademie*. He would remain in Vienna for the rest of his life.

Another great composer, Ludwig van Beethoven, had a tremendous influence on Brahms. As a perfectionist, living up to the expectations as the "successor" was a rather difficult feat and caused the composer much angst. It is reported that he spent many years writing a single composition to meet his personal expectations.

During the 1870's Johannes held a few positions, but his main focus was on composing. He wrote the ***German Requiem*** and ***Variations on the St. Antony Chorale***, which won him critical acclaim. Towards the end of the decade, he had completed his First and Second Symphonies, Violin Concerto and many songs. It is with these compositions that he secured his reputation as a composer and gained financial success that was generally unexpected for composers of the time.

In the 1880's, Brahms expanded his body of works, adding two more symphonies, violin sonatas, and many more songs. He began to slow down in the early 1890's but was still able to produce some instrumental music.

Brahms died on April 3, 1897 of liver cancer. He is buried in Vienna in the *Zentralfriedhof*. It is said that he gave up the will to live after the death of Clara Schumann just a few months earlier.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Brahms legacy of writing for smaller venues cannot be surpassed. Having been influenced by not only Beethoven, but Mozart and Haydn. He had a love for the Classical form. Like Beethoven before him, his temperament sometimes got the better of him, putting others at arms-length, but this did not deter the great composer. During his lifetime, he composed Orchestra works, including 4 Symphonies; Chamber music, including stringed quartets and violin sonatas; Vocal music and Choral music. His piano compositions included the ***Handel Variations in B^b Paganini Variations***, Hungarian Dances, sonatas, intermezzos, rhapsodies and others. One of his best-loved pieces, ***Waltz Op. 39, No. 15*** also known as Brahms' Lullaby, has been sung to many an infant throughout the years.

Listening Suggestions:

Waltzes Op 39
Rhapsodies Op 79
Intermezzos Op. 118

Bibliography:

Johannes Brahms and His Music. Online: <http://www.sbgmusic.com/html/teacher/reference/composer/brahms-p.html>

Johannes Brahms. Online: <http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Johannes-Brahms>

Kendall, Catherine Wolff. ***Stories of Composers for Young Musicians***. Edwardsville, IL. 62025

Sadie, Stanley (editor). ***The Norton/Groves Concise Encyclopedia of Music***. New York, New York. WW Norton & Company 1988