

Prelude

“Inside Masterworks”



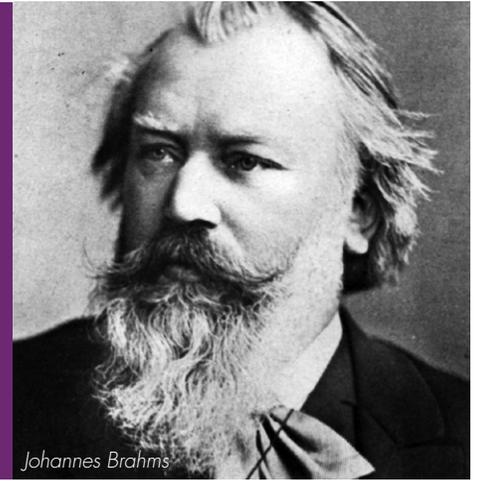
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NOVEMBER 2016

Masterworks #2: Bewitching Brahms November 11-13, 2016

Brahms & Joachim: How a superstar virtuoso helped launch a superstar composer.



Johannes Brahms is a household name. His famous lullabies have soothed babies for two centuries. One of the “three B’s” of classical music, Brahms is in the company of Bach and Beethoven. His friend and contemporary, Joseph Joachim, composer and leading virtuoso violinist of 19th century Europe, is today a virtual unknown. As young men in their early twenties, Joseph’s early recognition of Brahms’s talent helped launch the new composer’s career, and years later, Brahms turned to Joachim for guidance on his new Violin Concerto.

Only two years apart, Brahms and Joachim came from very different worlds. Brahms was born into poverty in 1833, the son of a musician father and a seamstress mother. Young Johannes, showing remarkable talents on piano at an early age, studied music with his father but was obliged to contribute to the family income by playing in dance halls and rough inns in the dock area of Hamburg, the city of his birth.ⁱ



Joseph Joachim

Joachim, two years older, was the son of a well-to-do Hungarian Jewish wool merchant, and lived in a limited area of seven communities available to Jews.ⁱⁱ The family was prominent: Joseph’s cousin Fanny was grandmother to two famous brothers, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein and pianist Paul Wittgenstein.ⁱⁱⁱ

As a young child, Joseph was transfixed by a toy violin his father brought home, and within weeks, could easily reproduce the

music of local gypsies and street musicians. Joseph’s parents quickly recognized their son’s talent and found a proper private instructor for him.^{iv}

While Brahms grew up in poverty without formal music instruction beyond his father’s teachings, Joachim benefited from an upper middle class environment and extensive musical training. Joseph’s debut as an 8-year-old violinist at the National Casino garnered the attention of Count Franz von Brunsvik and his sister Therese, aristocrats and pillars of Pest’s^v musical community.^{vi} Joseph was invited to participate in weekly chamber music *soirées* hosted by the Brunsviks, featuring many musicians including Franz Liszt.^{vii}

At the urgings of his teacher, 8-year-old Joseph went to live with his grandfather in Vienna to continue violin studies. His wealthy grandfather was a leader in the Viennese business community and a tolerated Jew of long-standing, one of only 193 Jewish family heads with leave to reside in Vienna.^{viii} Ultimately, Joseph studied with Joseph Böhm, father of the Viennese school of violin technique. Joseph’s relationship with Böhm was a true apprenticeship;^{ix} Joseph moved in with Böhm and his wife, who lived just two blocks from the Schwarspanierhaus where Beethoven lived and died.^x For the next three years, the Böhms raised Joseph and trained him in the skills he would need as a professional violinist.

In November of 1841, 10-year-old Joseph gave his first public performance as Böhm’s student at a gala benefit performance for a local hospital.^{xi} After two year in study with Böhm, Joseph enrolled at the Vienna Conservatory, receiving

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the highest awards.^{xii} During his years in Vienna, Joseph (age 11) gave a number of well-publicized performances to great acclaim.^{xiii}

In 1843, Joseph's cousin Fanny moved to Leipzig, where Felix Mendelssohn was busily creating a new Conservatory of Music. At Fanny's urging, in the summer of 1843, 11-year-old Joseph traveled to Leipzig to audition for Mendelssohn, determined to study at the new Conservatory.^{xiv} After hearing him play, Mendelssohn took the young virtuoso under his wing, treating him almost as an adopted son.^{xv} One year later, in May of 1844, 12-year-old Joseph gave his now famous London performance of the Beethoven Violin Concerto, conducted by Mendelssohn.^{xvi} Joseph's electrifying performance permanently altered the public's view of the piece, which was rarely performed, viewed as an etude, and had sunk into near oblivion.^{xvii} The contrast between young Brahms and Joachim are compelling: while Brahms was playing piano in German beer halls, Joachim was already astonishing concert audiences as Mendelssohn's protégé.

Mendelssohn's untimely death in 1847 threw Joseph into despair. In 1850, Franz Liszt came to the rescue, asking Joseph (then just 19 years old) to join him as a colleague.^{xviii} From 1850 to 1853, Joseph worked closely with Liszt as concertmaster, chamber music partner and Liszt's pupil.^{xix} In 1853, Joachim struck out on his own, and at a music festival in Düsseldorf, again performed the Beethoven Violin Concerto. Now a mature 22-year old artist, his brilliance captured the attention of many including Clara Schumann (wife of then famous Robert Schumann), who was enthralled: "He played with such deep poetry, with such soul... I have never heard such violin playing and I have never received such an unforgettable impression from a virtuoso."^{xx}



Johannes Brahms

In that same year, the 22-year-old sophisticated Joachim met an impressionable 20-year-old Brahms. Joachim, an established artist, recognized Brahms's talent and introduced his new friend to Robert Schumann, composer and editor of Europe's most influential music journal. Schumann agreed with Joachim's assessment of

Brahms's genius and heralded his "discovery" of a new talent in the music journal, thereby launching Brahms's career.^{xxi}

In 1878, now a successful composer, Brahms challenged himself to compose a violin concerto. Until that point only two violin concertos, Beethoven's and Mendelssohn's, were acknowledged as masterpieces.

^{xxii} A gifted pianist with little knowledge of a violinist's skills, Brahms turned to his long-time friend, composer and virtuoso, Joachim, who was delighted to assist. The bulk of their collaboration was achieved by mail, with draft pages going back and forth. Much of the success of the concerto is credited to Joachim's wise counsel and suggestions.^{xxiii} The New Year's Day premiere in Leipzig featured Brahms as conductor, with Joseph Joachim as the soloist.^{xxiv} And thus was history made.



Joseph Joachim



Today, nearly two centuries later, Brahms, born into poverty and without early formal music training, remains one of the world's most famous

composers. His dear friend and collaborator, Joachim, the "wunderkind" and great virtuoso of the 19th century, has been relegated to near obscurity to all but the most devoted students of music history. But today, we gratefully acknowledge Joachim for introducing the world to Brahms.

Please join the HSO for an all Brahms program, November 11 – 13, 2016, and be enthralled by Cho-Liang Lin's performance of the Violin Concerto.

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Masterworks #2:

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Wondering How the Music Will Sound?

Please try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE below, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage!

Enjoy Hungarian Dance No. 5, with Claudio Abbado conducting the Berlin Philharmonic at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAMxkietiik>

Click this link to hear Joshua Bell's performance of the Violin Concerto with Roberto Tiberiça:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cORvGZ4g558>

Finally, please enjoy a 1991 performance of Symphony No. 4 by the Vienna Philharmonic:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHmkl7GM_es

- i <https://www.gentlemansgazette.com/bach-beethoven-brahms-3-bs/>
- ii <https://josephjoachim.com/2014/10/20>
- iii Ibid; Paul Wittgenstein famously commissioned Ravel's Piano Concerto for Left Hand following the amputation of his right arm due to injuries sustained during World War I.
- iv Ibid
- v Pest and Buda were two cities along the banks of the Danube. Ultimately the cities combined to form Budapest.
- vi Florence May, *The Life of Johannes Brahms*, London: William Reeves (1905)
- vii Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing*, New York: Carl Fischer, 1930
- viii <https://josephjoachim.com/2014/10/20>
- ix Ibid
- x Ibid
- xi Ibid
- xii Ibid
- xiii Ibid
- xiv Ibid
- xv Ibid
- xvi Robin Stowell, *Beethoven: Violin Concerto*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998
- xvii Ibid
- xviii <https://josephjoachim.com/2014/10/20>
- xix Ibid
- xx Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing*, New York: Carl Fischer, 1930
- xxi <https://josephjoachim.com/2014/10/20>
- xxii Ibid
- xxiii Ibid
- xxiv Ibid

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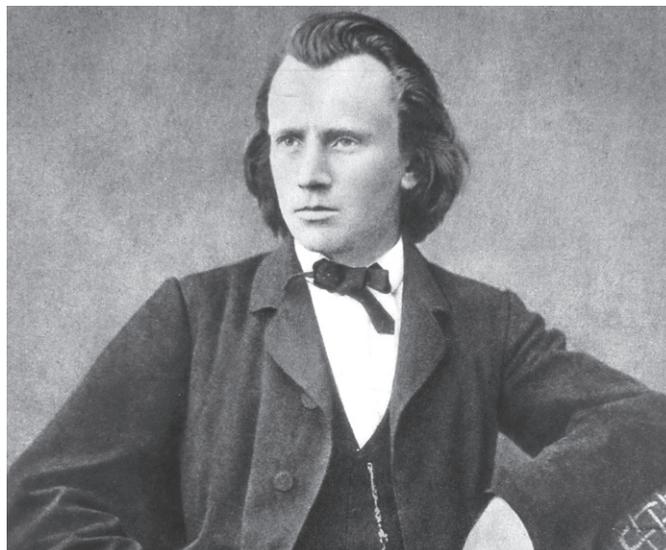
*Recommended recordings
for your listening pleasure!*

Masterworks, November 11-13, 2016

The complete *Hungarian Dances* of Johannes Brahms are available on a budget recording from Istvan Bogar and the Budapest Symphony Orchestra in exciting idiomatic performances and scintillating sound (NAXOS).

Brahms's *Violin Concerto* has been recorded by every great violinist, but a particular favorite is a youthful yet profound performance by Joshua Bell with Christoph von Dohnanyi and the Cleveland Orchestra in fabulous sound (DECCA).

Choosing among the many great performances of Brahms's *Symphony No. 4* is really an impossibility, but Carlos Kleiber's recording with the Vienna Philharmonic is generally recognized as among the greatest (DG), although the sound is somewhat flat and uni-dimensional. For first-rate sound and a great performance, a dark horse is Andre Previn's recording with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (TELARC).



Johannes Brahms