ANDRIS NELSONS, RAY AND MARIA STATA MUSIC DIRECTOR
Boston Symphony Orchestra
141st season, 2021–2022

Tuesday, November 23, 8pm
Friday, November 26, 1:30pm
Saturday, November 27, 8pm

ANDRIS NELSONS conducting

ALL-BRAHMS PROGRAM

SERENADE NO. 2 IN A, OPUS 16
Allegro moderato
Scherzo: Vivace
Adagio non troppo
Quasi Menuetto
Rondo: Allegro

{intermission}

SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN C MINOR, OPUS 68
Un poco sostenuto—Allegro
Andante sostenuto
Un poco allegretto e grazioso
Adagio—Più Andante—Allegro non troppo ma con brio—Più Allegro

The Program in Brief…
Until Johannes Brahms composed the *Haydn* Variations in the early 1870s, his two lovely serenades, written when he was in his twenties, represented his only works for orchestra alone. Both serenades were composed concurrently with the dark and roiling D minor piano concerto but are utterly different in form and intent. They continue the tradition of the light and entertaining Mozart-era serenade, never aspiring to the expressive heft and scope demanded of a symphony. The Serenade No. 2 in A omits violins from the orchestra altogether, giving it a particularly warm, dusky—we might even say Brahmsian—tone. The piece is in five movements, of which the first (Allegro) and third (Adagio) have the most weight.

Brahms was 43 when he finished his First Symphony in 1876. Though he already had several works for orchestra behind him, a symphony was something different, requiring a newfound comfort level in writing for the orchestra, and, still more significantly, that he overcome his anxiety of following in Beethoven's footsteps. The First Symphony elicited conflicting responses when it was new, likely due to its disparate elements. The lyricism of the two inner movements suggests a world quite different from the defiant, tension-filled opening movement and boldly structured finale. Certainly we are now more attuned to the contrapuntal density of Brahms's writing than his contemporaries would have been.
Robert Kirzinger/Marc Mandel

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Johannes Brahms
Serenade No. 2 in A, Opus 16
Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany, on May 7, 1833, and died in Vienna on April 3, 1897. He composed his Serenade No. 2 in Detmold in 1858 and 1859, revising it (mostly by adding dynamic markings) in 1875. Brahms himself conducted the first performance on February 19, 1860, in Hamburg, having already heard a private run-through in Hanover the preceding month.

The score of Brahms's Serenade No. 2 calls for a small orchestra without violins: 2 flutes (with piccolo added in the last movement), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, and a string section of violas, cellos, and basses.

For those who know only a bit of Brahms it is generally a pleasant surprise to encounter his two Serenades, written in 1858-59. In them one finds little of the sober, somber, craggy Brahms or his penetrating lyricism. Instead, these are light, largely sunny, at times even folksy outings. Why they turned out that way has, for all his relative youth at the time, a long background.

Born in 1833, Brahms grew up in Hamburg, the son of a street musician, and from early childhood was trained toward a career as a concert pianist. When he brought his first pieces to his teacher, the man realized that he had not a piano prodigy, but a composer prodigy, on his hands. When Felix Mendelssohn died, that teacher observed: "A great master of the musical art has gone hence, but an even greater one will bloom for us in Brahms." Brahms was fourteen at the time. At age twenty he knocked on the door of Robert and Clara Schumann in Düsseldorf, introduced himself, and played them a few of his pieces. That night Robert wrote in his journal: "Visit from Brahms (a genius)." Shortly after, Schumann published an article that called this young student the coming savior of German music—saving it, that is, from what Schumann saw as the vandalisms of Wagner and Liszt, who had turned away from Classical forms and genres. Brahms, Schumann declared, is "a real Beethovener." The article made Brahms instantly notorious around the European musical world. Soon after that, Schumann fell apart and was committed to an asylum from which he never emerged.

Brahms knew that the article had made him famous before he had much to show for it or much sense of where he was headed. It placed a crushing and lifelong burden on his creativity. For some years after, he composed as best he could in a sort of limbo, trying one thing and another. Schumann had called him a "Beethovener," and among other things that meant he was expected to write symphonies. He made a stab at one that did not take off, though it provided the germ of his First Piano Concerto. Brahms knew the musical world was waiting to see what he could do with a symphony, and many were hoping for him to fall on his face. He also knew that his craftsmanship might not be up to the task. That was demonstrated when he got himself into the massive First Piano Concerto, which took an excruciating four years to finish as he struggled with matters of form and orchestration. When he showed the beginning of an orchestral draft to his older friend Joseph Joachim, a violin prodigy and experienced composer, Joachim burst into laughter.

For Brahms these were his years in the wilderness, uncertain in his work and his life and his income. But part of that time he had a pleasant job in the little court of Detmold. There he directed a women's choir and performed solo and chamber music on keyboard, and had capable musicians and a small orchestra at his disposal. Naturally he began to write choral music, which at first he found frustrating. "My stuff is written so impractically!" he groaned to Joachim.

At Detmold in 1858 he produced a Serenade in D major for a chamber ensemble of winds and strings, then turned it into an orchestral piece, his first completed one. On the title page he wrote "Symphony-Serenade" then, probably with a sigh, scratched out "Symphony." He was not going to masquerade this effort as more ambitious than it was. Besides, it was in the mode of a serenade: tuneful, largely cheerful, in six movements. In it he proved himself entirely competent with the orchestra, but not yet with a particularly distinctive voice.

The next year he produced the A major Serenade No. 2, eventually Opus 16, for chamber orchestra. There are five movements, the central one an expansive Adagio and around it two faster dancelike movements. It calls for a full complement of woodwinds and two horns, but strings without violins. That scoring throws the main focus of the piece on the winds, and gives the ensemble a darker cast than usual. The reason Brahms left out the violins is obscure, but he did it once more in the opening movement of his *German Requiem*, beginning that elegiac work with a twilight ambiance.

The modest wind theme that opens the A major Serenade is not particularly "Brahmsian" to our ears, but it is warm and winning, introducing a movement of great charm. The movement also has some elements prophetic of the later Brahms, such as a frequent juxtaposition of duple and triple patterns, and a tendency to roam harmonically beyond the expected for an unpretentious serenade. Roaming harmony and intricate rhythms would be thumbprints of his mature style. The formal outline is traditional sonata form, the second section with a sighing theme, then a lilting one. Brahms would stay true to the old forms, but as here he would handle them freely. He does not repeat the exposition but rather begins the development with a feint at a repeat; the development is long and wide-ranging in keys; and the recapitulation gets back to the home key of A major for a quiet interlude before it arrives at the opening theme.

Second is a jaunty scherzo marked "Vivace," featuring tousled rhythms resulting from two-beat patterns intruding into the three-beat meter. Call the middle Trio section ironically earnest. The central slow movement, much longer than the others, is the most striking of the five not only because it is somber, harmonically searching, contrapuntally dense, and finally sorrowful, all unexpected in the genial genre of the serenade. The movement is also a kind of passacaglia, that being a centuries-old slow dance built on a repeated bass pattern. In his devotion to old forms, Brahms sometimes went back to the Renaissance. He would return to a solemn passacaglia for the finale

of his last symphony. But here again he is free with the form: rather than repeating unchanged, the bass pattern moves around in keys.

The fourth movement, titled "Quasi Menuetto," is a fast 6/4 heard as two-beat 3+3, so really it has little to do with the old Classical-era minuet. But it is dancelike in its lilting and gracious way, with a whispering, rather ironically conspiratorial Trio. The finale is the expected dashing Rondo, brightened with the addition of a piccolo. The recurring theme is a folksy tune, but keeps bursting into triplets, and the main theme keeps changing in a generally untrammeled formal outline. A jubilant ending assures us that it has all been in good fun.

If Robert Schumann had not written his article that thrust the young composer into premature fame and left him burdened for the rest of his life, Brahms might have given us more relaxed, expansive, and delightful outings like the Serenades. As it is, we must be content with the two we have.

Jan Swafford

Jan Swafford is a prizewinning composer and writer whose most recent book, published in December 2020, is Mozart: The Reign of Love*. His other acclaimed books include* Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph, Johannes Brahms: A Biography, The Vintage Guide to Classical Music, and Language of the Spirit: An Introduction to Classical Music*. He is an alumnus of the Tanglewood Music Center, where he studied composition.*

The first American performance of Brahms's Serenade No. 2 was given by Carl Bergmann and the New York Philharmonic Society on February 1, 1862, this also constituting the first performance of any Brahms orchestral composition outside the cities of Hamburg, Hanover, or Leipzig.

The first Boston Symphony performance of Brahms's Serenade No. 2 was given by Wilhelm Gericke on November 6, 1886. The most recent performances by the orchestra were led by Christian Zacharias in November 2019 in Symphony Hall.

Johannes Brahms
Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Opus 68

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany, on May 7, 1833, and died in Vienna on April 3, 1897. He completed his First Symphony in 1876, though some of the sketches date back to the 1850s. Otto Dessoff conducted the first performance on November 4, 1876, at Karlsruhe.

Brahms's First Symphony is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings.

When Brahms finished his First Symphony in September 1876, he was forty-three years old. (Beethoven was twenty-nine, Schubert fifteen, Schumann twenty-two, and Mahler twenty-eight at the completion of their respective first symphonies; Mozart was eight or nine, but that's another story altogether.) As late as 1873, the composer's publisher Simrock feared that a Brahms symphony would never happen ("Aren't you doing anything any more? Am I not to have a symphony from you in '73 either?" he wrote the composer on February 22), and Eduard Hanslick, in his review of the first Vienna performance, noted that "seldom, if ever, has the entire musical world awaited a composer's first symphony with such tense anticipation."

Brahms already had several works for orchestra behind him: the Opus 11 and Opus 16 serenades, the D minor piano concerto (which emerged from an earlier attempt at a symphony), and that masterwork of orchestral know-how and control, the Variations on a Theme by Haydn. But a symphony was something different and had to await the sorting out of Brahms's complicated emotional relationship with Robert and Clara Schumann (only after Robert's death in 1856 could Brahms finally begin to accept that his passion for the older Clara had to remain unrequited), and, more important, of his strong feelings about following in Beethoven's footsteps.

Beethoven's influence is certainly to be felt in Brahms's First Symphony: in its C minor-to-major progress; in the last-movement theme resembling the earlier composer's *Ode to Joy*—a relationship Brahms himself acknowledged as something that "any ass could see" (perhaps less obvious is the relationship between the theme itself and the slow-moving violin phrase of the last movement's opening measures); and, perhaps most strikingly, in the rhythmic thrust and tight, motivically based construction of the work—in some ways quite different from the melodically expansive Brahms we encounter in the later symphonies. But at the same time, there is really no mistaking the one composer for the other: Beethoven's rhythmic drive is very much his own, whereas Brahms's more typical expansiveness is still present throughout this symphony, and his musical language is unequivocally 19th-century-Romantic in manner.

Following its premiere at Karlsruhe on November 4, 1876, and its subsequent appearance in other European centers, the symphony elicited conflicting reactions. Brahms himself had already characterized the work as "long

and not exactly amiable." Clara Schumann found the ending "musically, a bit flat…merely a brilliant afterthought stemming from external rather than internal emotion." Hermann Levi, court conductor at Munich and later to lead the 1882 Bayreuth premiere of Wagner's *Parsifal*, found the two middle movements out of place in such a sweeping work, but the last movement he decreed "probably the greatest thing [Brahms] has yet created in the instrumental field." The composer's close friend Theodor Billroth described the last movement as "overwhelming," but found the material of the first movement "lacking in appeal, too defiant and harsh."

One senses in these responses an inability to reconcile apparently conflicting elements within the work, and the two inner movements do indeed suggest a world quite different from the outer ones. At the same time, these reactions also point to the seeming dichotomy between, as Eduard Hanslick put it, "the astonishing contrapuntal art" on the one hand and the "immediate communicative effect" on the other. But the two go hand in hand: the full effect of the symphony is dependent upon the compositional craft that binds the work together in its progress from the C minor struggle of the first movement through the mediating regions of the Andante and the Allegretto to the C major triumph of the finale.

The first Allegro's two principal motives—the three eighth-notes followed by a longer value, suggesting an abstraction of the opening timpani strokes, and the hesitant, three-note chromatic ascent across the bar, heard at the start in the violins—are already suggested in the *sostenuto* introduction, which seems to begin in mid-struggle. The movement is prevailingly somber in character, with a tension and drive again suggestive of Beethoven. The second idea's horn and wind colorations provide only passing relief: their *dolce* and *espressivo* markings will be spelled out at greater length in the symphony's second movement.

The second and third movements provide space for lyricism, for a release from the tension of the first. The calmly expansive oboe theme of the E major Andante is threatened by the G-sharp minor of the movement's middle section (whose sixteenth-note figurations anticipate the main idea of the third movement), but tranquility prevails when the tune returns in combined oboe, horn, and solo violin. The A-flat Allegretto is typical of Brahms in a *grazioso* mood—compare the Second Symphony's third movement, or the finale of the Piano Concerto No. 2—and continues the respite from the main battle. And just as the middle movements of the symphony are at an emotional remove from the outer ones, so too are they musically distant, having passed from the opening C minor to third-related keys: E major for the second movement and A-flat major for the third.

At the same time, the third movement serves as preparation for the finale: its ending seems unresolved, completed only when the C minor of the fourth movement, again a third away from the movement that precedes it, takes hold. As in the first movement, the sweep of the finale depends upon a continuity between the main Allegro and its introduction. This C minor introduction gives way to an airy C major horn call (originally conceived as a birthday greeting to Clara Schumann in 1868) which becomes a crucial binding element in the course of the movement. A chorale in the trombones, which have been silent until this movement, brings a canonic buildup of the horn motto and then the Allegro with its two main ideas: the broad C major tune suggestive of Beethoven's Ninth, and a powerful chain of falling intervals, which crystallize along the way into a chain of falling thirds, Brahms's musical hallmark. The movement drives to a climax for full orchestra on the trombone chorale heard earlier and ends with a final affirmation of C major—Brahms has won his struggle.

Marc Mandel

Marc Mandel joined the staff of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1978 and managed the BSO's program book from 1979 until his retirement as Director of Program Publications in 2020.

The first American performance of Brahms's Symphony No. 1 was given by Leopold Damrosch on December 15, 1877, in New York's Steinway Hall. The first Boston performance was given by Carl Zerrahn on January 3, 1878, in a Harvard Musical Association concert at the Music Hall.

The first Boston Symphony performance of Brahms's Symphony No. 1 was during the orchestra's inaugural season, on December 10, 1881, under Georg Henschel, who programmed it again in December 1882 and December 1883. Herbert Blomstedt led the most recent BSO performances at Symphony Hall in January 2019; Rafael Payare led the most recent BSO performance at Tanglewood on August 10, 2019.

Andris Nelsons

Ray and Maria Stata Music Director, endowed in perpetuity

The 2021-2022 season is Andris Nelsons' eighth as the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Ray and Maria Stata Music Director. In summer 2015, following his first season as music director, his contract with the BSO was extended through the 2021-2022 season. In February 2018, he was also named Gewandhauskapellmeister of the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig. In October 2020, the BSO and GHO jointly announced extensions to Mr. Nelsons'

contracts. His contract with the BSO was extended until 2025, and his GHO contract until 2027. An evergreen clause in his BSO contract reflects a mutual intention for long-term collaboration beyond the years of the agreement. In fall 2019, Mr. Nelsons and the BSO hosted the Gewandhausorchester in historic concerts at Symphony Hall that included performances by the GHO as well as concerts featuring the players of both orchestras together.

The fifteenth music director in the orchestra's history, Andris Nelsons made his BSO debut at Carnegie Hall in March 2011, his Tanglewood debut in July 2012, and his BSO subscription series debut in January 2013. He has led the orchestra on three European tours and one of Japan; a scheduled February 2020 tour to East Asia was canceled due to the COVID-19 emergency. In the pandemic-affected 2020-2021 BSO season, Mr. Nelsons led the BSO in six of the fifteen concerts streamed as part of the orchestra's BSO NOW virtual season recorded in Symphony Hall. The diverse repertoire ranged from Beethoven symphonies and music of Schumann and Brahms to several recent works by leading young American composers. His BSO repertoire in the 2021-2022 season ranges from favorites by Rachmaninoff and Sibelius to world and American premieres of BSO-commissioned works by HK Gruber, Jörg Widmann, Unsuk Chin, and Kaija Saariaho. This season also marks the culmination of Mr. Nelsons' multi-season joint project with the BSO and GHO to perform and record major works of Richard Strauss, to be released by Deutsche Grammophon.

Andris Nelsons and the BSO's ongoing series of recordings of the complete Shostakovich symphonies for Deutsche Grammophon, so far encompassing ten of the fifteen symphonies, has earned three Grammy Awards for Best Orchestral Performance and one for Best Engineered Album. The latest installment, featuring symphonies nos. 1, 14, and 15 and the Chamber Symphony, Op. 110a, was released in June 2021. Future releases will explore the composer's concertos for piano, violin, and cello, and his monumental opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*. Mr. Nelsons' other recordings with the BSO include the complete Brahms symphonies for the BSO Classics label and a Naxos release of recent American works commissioned and premiered by the orchestra. Under an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon, he has also recorded the complete Beethoven symphonies with the Vienna Philharmonic (released in 2019) and is recording the Bruckner symphonies with the GHO.

Mr. Nelsons frequently leads such orchestras as the Berlin Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and appears with such opera companies as the Bayreuth Festival and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Born in Riga in 1978 into a family of musicians, Andris Nelsons began his career as a trumpeter in the Latvian National Opera Orchestra before studying conducting. He was Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (2008-2015), Principal Conductor of Nordwestdeutsche Philharmonie in Herford, Germany (2006-2009), and Music Director of the Latvian National Opera (2003-2007).