



BRAHMS

Double Concerto for Violin, Cello and Orchestra in A minor, Op. 102

Johannes Brahms, born on May 7, 1833 in Hamburg was a German composer and pianist and one of the leading musicians of the Romantic period. Brahms spent much of his professional life in Vienna, Austria, where he was a leader of the musical scene. In his lifetime, Brahms's popularity and influence were considerable; following a comment by the nineteenth-century conductor Hans von Bülow, he is sometimes grouped with Bach and Beethoven as one of the Three Bs. Brahms is often considered both a traditionalist and an innovator. His music is firmly rooted in the structures and compositional techniques of the Baroque and Classical masters. He was a master of counterpoint, the complex and highly disciplined method of composition for which Bach is famous, and also of development, a compositional ethos pioneered by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Brahms aimed to honor the "purity" of these venerable "German" structures and advance them into a Romantic idiom, in the process creating new approaches to harmony, melody and, especially, rhythm. While many contemporaries found his music too academic, his craftsmanship have been admired by subsequent figures as diverse as the progressive Arnold Schoenberg and the conservative Edward Elgar. The diligent, highly constructed nature of Brahms's works was a starting point and an inspiration for a generation of composers.

The **Double Concerto for Violin, Cello and Orchestra in A minor, Op. 102** was Brahms' final work for orchestra. It was composed in the summer of 1887, and first performed on 18 October of that year in the Gürzenich in Köln, Germany. Brahms approached the project with anxiety over writing for instruments that were not his own. He wrote it for the cellist Robert Hausmann, a frequent chamber music collaborator, and his old but estranged friend, the violinist Joseph Joachim. The concerto was, in part, a gesture of reconciliation towards Joachim, after their long friendship had ruptured following Joachim's divorce from his wife Amalie. (Brahms had sided with Amalie in the dispute.) The concerto makes use of the musical motif A-E-F, a permutation of F-A-E, which stood for a personal motto of Joachim, *Frei aber einsam* ("free but lonely"). Thirty-four years earlier, Brahms had been involved in a collaborative work using the F-A-E motif in tribute to Joachim: the F-A-E Sonata of 1853. Joachim and Hausmann repeated the concerto, with Brahms at the podium, several times in its initial 1887-88 season, and Brahms gave the manuscript to Joachim, with the inscription "To him for whom it was written." Clara Schumann reacted unfavourably to the concerto, considering the work "not brilliant for the instruments". Richard Specht also thought critically of the concerto, describing it as "one of Brahms' most inapproachable and joyless compositions". Brahms had sketched a second concerto for violin and cello but destroyed his notes in the wake of its cool reception. Later critics have warmed to it: Donald Tovey wrote of the concerto as having "vast and sweeping humour."