



BRAHMS

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 83

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.

Written twenty-two years after his first piano concerto, the **Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 83** was completed in 1881. With four movements instead of the usual three, the concerto is considerably longer than other concerti up to that time. The first movement features an unusually-placed cadenza, in the exposition. It appears after the main theme is introduced with a horn solo, with the piano interceding, and the woodwind instruments proceed to introduce a small motif (borrowed, perhaps unconsciously, from the opening of the first movement of his Serenade No. 2). The second movement, a scherzo, is a tumultuous movement. The piano and orchestra introduce the theme and develop it before a quiet section intervenes. Soon afterwards the piano and orchestra launch into a stormy development of the theme before coming to the central episode (in D major). The central episode is brisk and begins with the full orchestra before yet another quiet section intervenes; then the piano is integrated into the orchestral effect to repeat the theme of the central episode. The beginning section returns but is highly varied. The slow movement is in the tonic key of B-flat major and is unusual in utilizing an extensive cello solo within a piano concerto (the source of this idea may be Clara Schumann's Piano Concerto, which features a slow movement scored only for cello and piano). Brahms subsequently rewrote the cello's theme and changed it into a song, *Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer* ("My Slumber Grows Ever More Peaceful") with lyrics by Hermann Van Lingg. (Op. 105, No. 2). Finally, the last movement consists of five clearly distinguishable sections, which introduce and develop five different themes.