

American Philharmonic – Sonoma County

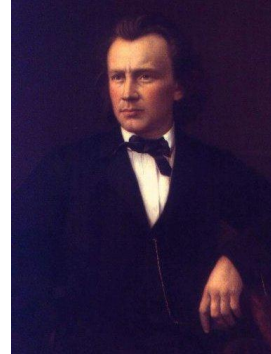
Program notes for 2011-2012 Season

April 1, 2012 – *A World Transformed*

Symphony No. 1 in C minor

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

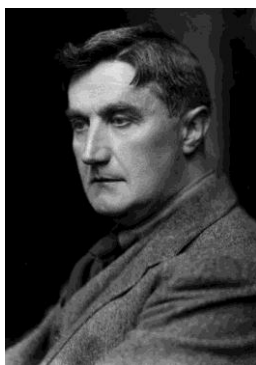
In Brahms' time, the symphony was the pinnacle of the composer's art. However, Brahms was intimidated by the long shadow of Beethoven and his great symphonies, still fresh in the public's mind. Although certainly capable of composing large-scale pieces, he was loath to write anything that could be held up to comparison with a Beethoven symphony. After writing piano works that Clara Schumann called "veiled symphonies," a piano concerto, and two serenades for orchestra, he finally tried his hand at a symphony. He completed the first movement in June of 1862, and the rest in 1876, with many great works appearing in the interim.



The symphony we hear is certainly equal in stature to Beethoven's works. The piece startled the musical world of Brahms' time and was well received despite its depth and absolute seriousness. Brahms was able to capture deep feeling in music that shows inventiveness in style and development but never violates basic principles of composition. A certain subtle similarity to Beethoven was inevitable. When someone commented to Brahms that the last movement was reminiscent of Beethoven's 9th, Brahms replied, "Any fool can see that."

The Lark Ascending

Ralph Vaughn Williams (1872-1958)



Vaughan Williams studied music at the Royal College of Music and received his Bachelor of Music at Cambridge. He was always a composer at heart, learning organ and piano mainly because it was practical for a composer to do so. Between 1896 and 1901, he studied under both Max Bruch and Maurice Ravel, without having his personal style affected by either of these masters. Soon after this, he began studying English folk music and using folk melodies in his compositions. After service in World War I, he dedicated himself to composition and activities relating to his post as a professor at the Royal College of Music.

The Lark Ascending is a sweet, short poem for violin solo and orchestra. Without any actual programmatic content, its pastoral feeling is birdlike and graceful. It begins with an unaccompanied violin solo that leads into a slow first section. The quick middle

section sparkles as a lark in flight, and then the slow theme from the first section returns to end the piece.

Death and Transfiguration

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

This piece is program music, the kind of thing that Strauss did so well. It is more remarkable for the fact that Strauss was twenty-five years old when he wrote this piece, and had not had a brush with death at that age. Strauss's father, a bass player, forbade him to go the way of Wagner's music, but his affection and affinity for that style show through.



Death and Transfiguration is a portrayal of a man's last moments of life and a bit beyond. The man is deathly sick in bed. The first thing you hear is his heavy, irregular breathing. Friendly dreams make him smile. Then he wakes and is racked with pain and fever. The attack passes. He thinks about his childhood, and recollects his life's path and his inability to reach his ideals. He is again assaulted by his illness. The alternating moods are clearly portrayed in the music. Finally he dies, leaving the body and ascending toward the afterlife.

Notes by R. M. Teplitz