
Listen for the Themes within Brahms' First Symphony

By Eric Jun

Brahms composed in the height of the Romantic era, the era ushered in by Beethoven following the Classical period. As Brahms' reputation grew, so did expectations and excitement for the creation of his first major composition. The public expected Brahms' first major composition to continue Beethoven's legacy and to live up to the intellect and dignity of Beethoven's works. In fact, Brahms himself venerated the legendary composer, and kept a marble bust of Beethoven that overlooked the space in Brahms' house where he composed. The shadow of Beethoven's imposing legacy drove Brahms to take his perfectionist ideals to the extreme, rewriting and revising his first symphony for almost twenty years. When the composition was finally complete, Brahms felt that premiering the piece in Karlsruhe, located a couple of miles from Vienna, would diminish the pressure of the staunch Beethoven supporters and harsh music critics. In the end, Brahms had little reason to worry as his symphonic debut exceeded the enormous expectations he carried on his shoulders.

Brahms' musical genius is made easily evident in his first symphony with his incorporation of many carefully crafted themes. A musical theme is often more than just a rhythm or melody that is repeated throughout a piece; themes can represent a specific idea, thought, or image. Beethoven's first symphony contains several recognizable themes including the themes of "fate," of "turning," and the noble "Alphorn" theme. The "fate" theme, a definite homage to Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, represents fate knocking at people's doors with an ominous four note pattern and is introduced by the strings and timpani. The "turning" theme, a joyous, churning sequence of notes, is introduced later in the fourth movement by the winds and timpani. The "Alphorn" theme is meant to be played by a shepherd's horn, an element of the orchestration that Brahms planned long before he completed the composition. There are more themes incorporated into the piece that pay homage to Beethoven such as the theme similar to the "Freude" theme from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Several of these themes are altered throughout the piece with different dynamics, key signatures, and instruments. For example, the opening theme is first played energetically by the woodwinds and strings using pizzicato (or plucking). It is later played more rhythmically and stridently, this time with strings using their bows.

Although Frost's arrangement for string orchestra that will be played during TYSO's concert changes the orchestration and condenses the piece, the simplicity and brevity of the arrangement allows listeners to recognize the various themes within Brahms first symphony. Frost's arrangement makes it easy for both experienced and inexperienced listeners to appreciate the genius, beauty, and passion of Brahms' First Symphony.

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Antonio Vivaldi's "Autumn" Paints Vivid Images

By Natalie Wiese

The Four Seasons is a collection of four violin concerti that Vivaldi composed in 1725 that is regarded as his most famous work. Vivaldi's inspiration to write these songs was Marco Ricci's paintings of the seasons, which Vivaldi strove to bring to life through music. Vivaldi was so serious about recreating the different times of year that he even published four sonnets to go along with each of the four concerti. Vivaldi was successful in his composition as he was able to capture the essence of the paintings, and make it possible for his audience to vividly imagine each season. It is the vivid imagery that the Four Seasons concerti evoke that helped lead to the popularity of this collection.

Each of the pieces in Vivaldi's Four Seasons is divided into three movements. They all follow the same structure of a fast section, followed by a slow section, and concluding with another fast section. "Autumn," the third piece of Vivaldi's Four Seasons, begins with an Allegro movement that describes the village celebrating the bountiful harvest. The music is upbeat as the people dance around joyously. The next section of the song is the slower Adagio molto which describes the village relaxing since they know they will be all prepared for winter. In the third movement, also Allegro, Vivaldi uses a victorious theme to describe hunters with their hunting dogs pursuing game. This section is syncopated with a long first beat and a short second beat similar to the gallop of a horse, which is quite fitting as the hunters can be pictured chasing the animal on horseback. As the animal tries to outrun the hunters, the song changes to a quick upbeat tone. Once the hunters have captured it, the upbeat syncopated rhythm that was played at the beginning of the song returns.

Enjoy the Triangle Youth String Sinfonia's performance of Richard Meyer's arrangement of the third movement from Vivaldi's "Autumn," and imagine the exciting hunt that the music describes!

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A Baroque Favorite by Bach

By Pranav Krishnakumar

Johann Sebastian Bach was one of the most influential composers of the Baroque era, the era during which music took a shift in focus from rhythmic patterns to complex melodies, and the orchestra started to come into existence. Some of Bach's well known pieces include the "Art of Fugue", "Goldberg Variations", and his Brandenburg Concertos. The Brandenburg Concertos, some of the most widely played Baroque pieces, were written on commission from Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg, who fell in love with Bach's music when he heard it performed in Berlin. Brandenburg Concerto No. 3, which will be performed by the Triangle Youth String Orchestra during this concert, is the third of the six Brandenburg Concertos. It was originally written for 3 violins, 3 violas, 3 cellos, a bass, and a harpsichord, but the string orchestra arrangement by Richard Meyer will be played during this concert.

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 is separated into 3 movements: Allegro Moderato, Adagio, and Allegro. The Allegro Moderato and Allegro movements feature themes that are repeated several times throughout their respective movements, called ritornellos. Both Allegro movements are fast paced, and include melodies layered between the higher and lower strings, a musical technique common in Baroque music. The Adagio movement is a short, slower movement originally meant to feature a violin or harpsichord cadenza, but sometimes played without. This piece is the shortest of the Brandenburg Concertos, but performance time varies due to Bach leaving off tempo markings for the first movement. Consequently, different orchestras will play the piece at different speeds.

With its pleasing, characteristically baroque melodies, Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 is a favorite of many. If you have yet to hear the piece performed, know that you are in for a treat with the Triangle Youth String Orchestra's performance of it.

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