

CARL MARIA VON WEBER***Jubel (Jubilee) Overture, Op. 59***

Carl Maria von Weber was born in 1786 in Eutin, Oldenburg, Germany and died in 1826 in London. He composed this work in 1818 and it was first performed in Dresden the same year. The score calls for 4 flutes, 2 piccolos, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion, and strings.

In 1818 Weber was asked to compose a cantata for a festival to celebrate the 50th anniversary of King Friedrich August of Saxony's ascension to the throne. He composed his *Jubel Cantata*, Op. 58 in an astonishing eleven days, but it was never performed. Weber was co-conductor of the Dresden Opera at the time, along with Francesco Morlacchi, and a cabal of Morlacchi supporters at the opera company saw to it that the cantata was never scheduled. Not to be outdone, Weber then composed his *Jubel Overture*—unrelated to the cantata—to take its place.

Weber used the word “ephemera” to describe such dutiful pieces, but that doesn't mean they aren't highly enjoyable. After the majestic opening chords we hear a succession of stately tunes, first in the oboe, then in the strings, and finally scale-wise figures that lead directly into the *Allegro*. The first tune here is clearly celebratory, but Weber seems to have had particular affection for the perky second theme in the winds, for it comes to be the focus of the development. Before the end, Weber treats us to a big treatment of a tune we all know: “Heil Dir im Siegerkranz.” Yes, you *do* know it: it's “God Save the King,” Germany's national anthem until 1922. Ephemeral, perhaps, and maybe even kitschy—but a great deal of *fun*, too.

EDWARD ELGAR***Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in E minor, Op. 85***

Edward Elgar was born in Broadheath, Worcestershire, England in 1857, and died in Worcester, England in 1934. He began his Cello Concerto in 1918 and completed it the following year. It was first performed with Felix Salmond as the soloist, with the London Symphony conducted by the composer in 1919. The score calls for solo cello, 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, and strings.

After he wrote his Cello Concerto in 1919 (and the Piano Quintet the same year) Elgar all but ceased composing. His beloved wife Alice died five months after the concerto's premiere, a devastating blow, and World War I had pushed aside the Edwardian England that was the context of his music. While the world was sitting up straight and listening to Stravinsky, Bartók, and Schoenberg, he realized that both he and his music were anachronisms. Elgar was popular with the British public, but the musical elites had little use for him. His musical style grew out of romanticism—a pardonable sin—but it did not reject it in favor of something new, which was unforgivable. Aside from his *Enigma Variations* his music went virtually unheard until the 1950s. Today he is appreciated for the beauty and individuality of his melodies, his fine sense of proportion, and the translucence of his orchestra. The Cello Concerto is regarded by many as his greatest work, frequently mentioned in the same breath as Dvořák's—eminent praise, indeed.

The Concerto is unusual in having four movements instead of three, and some take this as a sign that Elgar was thinking symphonically with this work. Another unusual touch is how the soloist begins the first two movements alone, with soliloquies of real musical depth; these episodes make it clear that Elgar had more in mind than creating yet another virtuosic showpiece.

The first movement opens with a cello recitative that is at once noble, melancholy, and breathtakingly long-lined. The orchestra makes only brief comments until the violas introduce a melody that begins the movement proper. The woodwinds contribute a lilting theme that provides contrast, after which the original material returns and winds down to a single low note in the basses.

The cello introduces the second movement with another cadenza. The orchestra seems to prod the music out of its reflective mood and into a perpetual-motion scherzo. With the exception of a briefly-heard “big tune,”

the movement has an extraordinarily light touch. The slow movement that follows is simple yet incredibly rich; sometimes bittersweet, always beautiful.

The orchestra begins the Finale with a rough-hewn march, followed by more reflective music in the solo cello. When the march returns in earnest the movement proceeds in episodes. After a slower and richly chromatic section, the *Adagio* is recalled briefly, and the movement closes with the recitative material that began the concerto.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg in 1833 and died in Vienna in 1897. Sketches for this work date back as far as 1862, but Brahms did most of the composing between 1874 and 1876. The first performance took place at Karlsruhe, Baden in 1876 under the direction of Otto Dessoff. The symphony calls for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings.

“I shall never compose a symphony! You have no conception of how the likes of us feel when we hear the tramp of a giant like *him* behind us.” So said Brahms to his friend, conductor Hermann Levi; the “giant,” of course, was Beethoven.

Everyone wondered how Brahms could have reached his early forties without writing a symphony. After all, at the same age Beethoven had completed eight of his nine, Haydn half a hundred. When Brahms was only 21 his friend Robert Schumann wrote, “But where is Johannes? Is he flying high or only under the flowers? Is he not yet ready to let drums and trumpets sound? The beginning is the main thing; if only one makes the beginning, then the end comes of itself.”

Brahms *did*, in fact, make beginnings, but the ends didn’t quite come of themselves. After hearing Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony Brahms was inspired to compose a symphony in the same key of D minor. He completed three movements before he abandoned the project. The music he produced was good—two of the movements were used later in the D minor Piano Concerto and one found its way into *Ein Deutsches Requiem*—but apparently not good enough. “Composing a symphony is no laughing matter,” said Brahms, no doubt hearing the giant’s footsteps behind him.

Brahms knew that his First Symphony would be seen as an artistic manifesto in an age when such things were taken *very* seriously. Many romantic composers looked upon Beethoven as the Great Liberator, the one who opened the doors to unbridled romanticism. Brahms, on the other hand, was predisposed to believe that much of the strength of Beethoven’s romanticism came largely from his *classicism*, that the dramatic outbursts were all the more powerful because of the surrounding context of discipline. For Brahms, the heart and mind had to counterbalance each other.

Critical reaction to the First Symphony was mixed. The champions of unfettered romanticism took the symphony as a rebuke to their aesthetic and treated it as such; the fans of Brahms’ style, on the other hand, called it “Beethoven’s Tenth.” Those with greater insight delighted in how Brahms’ passion—as refined by his intellect—led to a work whose impact was greater than either.

Today the First Symphony is a monument familiar to all. There is the pulsing introduction to the turbulent first movement; the melancholy second; the graceful, tune-laden third; and the transcendent Finale, with its startling transformation of a reverent trombone chorale into a bold consummation—all are remembered, yet each encounter with the symphony is a renewal.

The comparisons to Beethoven were inevitable, then as now. In a way, both men approached the same destination from opposite directions: Beethoven had pushed outward on the boundaries of classicism, while Brahms applied discipline to the unrestrained romanticism of his age. Brahms waited to issue his First Symphony until he was a master of his craft, not only able to withstand the comparison but one whose own footsteps would ring in the ears of those who followed.