

## Program Notes:

All of the compositions that you will hear today were written with specific goals in mind.

Johannes Brahms wrote his Op. 102 concerto with two specific friends in mind – the Austro-Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim (1831-1907) and the cellist Robert Hausmann (1852-1909), both of whom took part in the first performance of the work. Brahms had been friends with Joachim since 1853 when they were both in their 20s, and several of Brahms' compositions for violin are dedicated to his friend. The relationship, however, cooled in the early 1880s when Joachim's wife, Amalie, was divorcing her husband. Brahms wrote her a letter of support which was highly critical of Joachim. In some ways, the opus 102 concerto, composed in 1887, was a gesture of reconciliation which Joachim accepted.

Cellist, Robert Hausmann, about twenty years younger than both Brahms and Joachim, had been a student at the Berlin music academy founded by Joachim. Joachim recognized his talent and helped him get established, including inviting him to become a member of the famed "Joachim String Quartet".

The concerto for violin and cello is in the traditional three movements (fast – slow- fast) but two solo instruments in a concerto is certainly not traditional at this time. The first movement begins with a full vibrant announcement from the orchestra which has hardly enough time to establish itself before the solo cello interrupts with a cadenza (a rather free section that is completely unaccompanied). This is surprising because cadenzas are usually found toward the end of a movement. A few brief notes from the orchestra are all that separates the first cadenza from a second - this time for both soloists. When the orchestra rejoins the soloists, the rest of the movement continues more as expected, but is still peppered with Brahms' characteristic unconventional rhythms and quirky phrases that make his music so appealing. The slow movement is based on a beautifully expressive melody which is explored by both soloists and orchestra. Brahms had a life-long interest in European folk music (as well as folk tales and poetry), especially the Hungarian style that incorporated elements of Romani (gypsy) music. Brahms had first encountered this style in 1848 when political refugees from Hungary passed through his home town on their way to the USA. Many of Brahms' compositions show this influence, not least the final movement of this concerto with its quirky rhythms and the delightful twists and turns in the melodies.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a growing trend for composers, especially ones who lived in occupied territories, to write music that reflected their national heritage. Antonin Dvorak is a good example of this; growing up in German-occupied Bohemia (now the Czech Republic) he strove to create a musical style that incorporated the sounds and stories of Bohemia. The situation in the USA during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was an interesting one – there was a desire to create a uniquely "American" style of music, but the prevailing attitude was that if a composer wanted to become successful he or she needed to travel to Europe to study. This, of course, was not conducive to developing an "American" musical style. Partly to solve this problem, Jeanette Thurber, founder of the National Conservatory of Music in New York, invited Dvorak to become the Conservatory's director. Dvorak arrived in 1892 and stayed for almost three years. His letters along with newspaper interviews make it clear that he was very aware that

part of his task was to suggest to composers in the USA how they might fashion their own national music. Symphony No. 9 in E minor (“From the New World”) was part of his answer, using features that he found in African-American and Native-American music for much of its source material.

The famous wistful opening of the first movement becomes restless as the music accelerates into the main (faster) part with the horns announcing a rhythmically exciting melody that will form part of the main material of the movement (and will be recalled in the final movement). The slow, second movement (largo) is arguably the most famous movement of the symphony with its plaintive solo on the English Horn – a double-reed instrument akin to an oboe but larger and so lower in pitch. As you listen to the very first notes of the third movement you might think for a minute that the orchestra is playing the wrong music, for Dvorak quotes the scherzo of Beethoven’s 9<sup>th</sup> symphony, but only very briefly before moving into a delightful, ecstatic, dance-like movement. To conclude, the dramatic opening of the finale gathers impetus as it explodes into a wonderful chorale-like melody in the brass, setting the tone for a triumphant ending.

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