

Australian Chamber Orchestra
Richard Tognetti

LIVE IN CONCERT

BRAHMS SYMPHONIES 3 & 4

An imaginary letter to Brahms

Dear Johannes,

I hope you don't mind me addressing you by your first name, but from the perspective of where I write this, informality is an essential part of the lingua franca; I'm almost tempted to call you Jon, Jimmy, jäck, Jean or even Jehanne.

I write to you from Sydney, Australia; the year is 2020. Australia, separated from Austria by two letters and vast seas, has evolved into a cosmopolitan country with a healthy tapestry of orchestral performances, and naturally with you, Jimmy, as an oft-featured artist.

For reasons of space I need to cut to the chase ... auf den Punkt kommen.

Our live performances are now stalled in their tracks, with our only hope of survival being through recordings. Remember that recording you made back in '89 with your mate Joe J.*, and how sceptical you were about the relevance? You wouldn't believe how recordings have taken off. So we're releasing a recording of your Third and Fourth Symphonies.

You see, we're in a pandemic, actually we're in multiple pandemics – the worst since 1918, 21 years after you died. Strangely, during the '18 pandemic, even though it was deadlier, concerts kept going.

You can't imagine what happened to your beloved Vienna a few decades after you died. Spurred on in part by the anti-semitic words of your pernicious nemesis Wagner, Vienna became a cradle for one of the greatest killing machines humankind has experienced.

The reverberations of that pandemic and those heinous wars continue to this day ... August 17, 2020.

But out of the horrors that occurred in the 20th century, there has evolved a heightened awareness of how we treat our fellow humans, irrespective of creed, race or sex, and our attitudes to those who aren't white, ipso facto privileged and in a position of perceived power, are changing.

Even though you left us with virtually no paper trail of your personal life – going so far as to 'disappear' the no doubt revealing letters between your dear friend Clara Schumann and yourself – your general disdain of women is recorded, and some call you an outright misogynist.

I'm worried that you'll be viewed as the Schopenhauer† of music, so, I think it's necessary to contextualise your conflicted attitudes towards women, and how they emanate from your encounters with ladies of the night, when forced by your father as a young boy to play the piano in seedy bars. As you recollected to your friend Friedländer:

When the sailing ships made port after months of continuous voyaging, the sailors would rush out of them like beasts of prey, looking for women. And these half-clad girls, to make the men still wilder, used to take me on their laps between dances, kiss and caress and excite me. That was my first impression of the love of women. And you expect me to honour them as you do! And indeed one learns nothing good there ...

Although some good came out of this decrepitude – you did cut your teeth learning how to play waltzes and quadrilles – the scents and memories haunted you for the rest of your life. Parallel to your own Hamburg-ian experience, a very famous dance hall band known as The Beatles from England cut their teeth in the same kind of Hamburg bars as yours in the 1960s, although they were much older.

* Joseph Joachim, violinist and good friend of Brahms', and dedicatee of the violin concerto

† Arthur Schopenhauer, German philosopher who espoused vehemently negative views on women

I'm concerned that due to your unfortunate statements about women you're running the risk of getting yourself cancelled. What's that, you ask? Roughly translated as *abgesagt*. If you were a statue, better run and hide. Being a dead, old, white Euro male is not the best position to be in if you want positive resonance at the moment.

We're now in an age where words and thoughts are scrutinised and judged more than one's art. Even though your music transcends modern politics and its intrinsic value resonates beyond the grave, we do need to demystify you, and that's why it's necessary to affect a stance of informality.

Did you query why Clara with her abundant talents wasn't allowed to progress like her husband Robert:

The first year of our marriage you shall forget the artist, you shall live only for yourself and your house and your husband ... just see how I will make you forget the artist – because the wife stands even higher than the artist and if I only achieve this much – that you have nothing more to do with the public – I will have achieved my deepest wish.

... or why Fanny Mendelssohn had to publish her works under her brother's name? You also must have come across Schopenhauer's malignant words on women?

These aren't accusatory questions; it would just help us in advocating your music if we could understand your position more closely.

But for now, let's move on to the music. I'll focus mainly on the Third Symphony, due to space.

As a *frei aber froh*, 'free but happy' 50-year-old bachelor, you wrote it in 1883, the year Wagner died.

It is in the rich key of F major, but the symphony is defined by its *Poco allegretto* third movement in C minor: possibly the most communicable and melancholic movement of all of your oeuvre. Its ambiguous metre and wistful melody have been culturally appropriated and used for countless enterprises outside of your original intention, including by the likes of Frank Sinatra and many other popular artists.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YZiL34Qvi4>

The way you evoke such a musical sensation of *chiaroscuro* is like magic: the strong contrast between light and dark, by setting minor against major keys. These features are threaded throughout the whole symphony and you strike a brooding musical perspective against scintillating lightness and a sense of afterglow. Right from bar one we enter your mysterious world through the notes F – A-flat – F, also standing for *frei aber froh*.

We read in the history books that it was premiered by the all-male Vienna Philharmonic. Did you ever consider that females would one day join their ranks, after pressure from the outside world? The acolytes of the recently deceased Wagner were out in force trying to disrupt the performance, almost culminating in a duel. Did you witness this or is it just gossip?

Already at seven minutes into the first movement you unleash your inner gypsy.

Is it true that you first encountered gypsy music having entered the orbit of a Hungarian refugee (*ein Flüchtling*) and violinist called Eduard Reményi sometime in 1850?

Jim, I'd like to bring your attention to some specific musical moments that I do hope you'll enjoy: the suspension before the horn solo and the release at 3:45 in movement three, with Tim Jones from the London Symphony Orchestra who has joined us in this recording.

Jane Gower's pliant (*geschmeidig*) bassoon playing at about 4:45 (same movement) from original instrument land (by that I mean she chases the sounds and instruments that you would have had in your orchestras).

And then the outburst towards the end when the violins play the final iteration of the melody. We were rather proud of that moment.

All I'll say about the Fourth Symphony is – Oh, the yearning. 'But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.' – Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

Aren't we all yearning for those descending / ascending motifs in your Fourth Symphony? You really delivered here, Jean.

Do you mind if we culturally appropriate your art? Could you have imagined that Australians would attempt to bring your music to life? Would you have been shocked that our motley crew comprises an equal balance of women and men – and people from many different nations?

Indeed, the world has changed a lot since you departed your corporeal state, yet at the moment things feel pretty dire. One thing is for sure, the more we listen to your music and bring it into our contemporary orbit, the better we are.

I do hope you survive any kind of purging. I am not alone in finding your music at once Epic. Magnificent. Generous. Flowing. Majestic. Surprising. Overwhelming. And above all – Joyous.

One last thing: one can't help but wonder what musical path (if any) you would have taken in today's world. As a freelancer, you'd be part of the gig economy and hopefully eligible for Jobkeeper.

Counter to the notion of you being of conventional and conservative instincts, my idea of you alive here with us today, Johannes, is that of a loose cannon, almost veering out of control and having freely absorbed the gypsy spirit. That's what I think of two minutes into the last movement of the Third Symphony, and then when you hit your straps at that melody at 4:35, we lose our collective breath.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Tognetti

Sydney, Aug 17, 2020

Say hi to Clara and Robert, and by the way, we know how much you loved Agathe.

P.S. You weren't very pleasant to Bruckner, nor so nice about Wagner.

P.P.S. But Wagner deserved it.

JOHANNES BRAHMS 1833–1897

Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90

[39'29]

- | | | |
|---|----------------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Allegro con brio | 13'49 |
| 2 | II. Andante | 9'55 |
| 3 | III. Poco allegretto | 6'44 |
| 4 | IV. Allegro | 9'01 |

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

[39'31]

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I. Allegro non troppo | 12'51 |
| 6 | II. Andante moderato | 11'12 |
| 7 | III. Allegro giocoso | 5'55 |
| 8 | IV. Allegro energico e passionato | 9'33 |

Total Playing Time 79'00

Australian Chamber Orchestra

Richard Tognetti *Artistic Director and Lead Violin*



Orchestra

Symphony No. 3

Violin

Richard Tognetti *Artistic Director and*

Lead Violin

Satu Vänskä *Principal*

Glenn Christensen

Aiko Goto

Mark Ingwersen

Ilya Isakovich

Ike See

Doretta Balkizas

Madeleine Boud

Naoko Keatley¹

Katherine Lukey

Lachlan O'Donnell

Thibaud Pavlovic-Hobba

Sharon Roffman

Maja Savnik²

Karen Segal³

Charlie Westhoff

Viola

Christopher Moore *Principal*

Alexandru-Mihai Bota

Caroline Henbest

Jacqueline Cronin

Lisa Grosman⁴

Christina Katsimbardis

Cello

Timo-Veikko Valve *Principal*

Melissa Barnard

Julian Thompson

Daniel Yeadon

Rowena Macneish

Double Bass

Maxime Bibeau *Principal*

Ali Yazdanfar⁵

Sandor Ostlund⁶

Flute

Sally Walker⁷ *

Jonathan Henderson⁸

Oboe

Dmitry Malkin⁹ *

David Papp¹⁰

Clarinet

Nicholas Rodwell¹¹ *

Peter Jenkin¹²

Bassoon

Jane Gower¹³ *

Melissa Woodroffe

Contrabassoon

Simone Walters

Horn

Timothy Jones¹ *

Lauren Manuel¹⁴

Alexander Love¹⁵

Rachel Shaw

Trumpet

Kurt Körner¹⁶ *

Leanne Sullivan

Trombone

Nigel Crocker *

Roslyn Jorgensen

Bass Trombone

Brett Page¹² *

Timpani

Brian Nixon* *Chair sponsored*

by Mr Robert Albert AO

& Mrs Libby Albert

Symphony No. 4

Violin

Richard Tognetti *Artistic Director and*

Lead Violin

Helena Rathbone *Principal*

Satu Vänskä *Principal*

Rebecca Chan

Aiko Goto

Mark Ingwersen

Ilya Isakovich

Zoë Black

Veronique Serret

Doretta Balkizas

Elizabeth Jones

Katherine Lukey

Lachlan O'Donnell

Liisa Pallandi

Holly Piccoli

Ike See¹⁷

Karen Segal³

Viola

Christopher Moore *Principal*

Alexandru-Mihai Bota

Caroline Henbest

Jacqueline Cronin

Ceridwen Davies

Amanda Verner

Cello

Timo-Veikko Valve *Principal*

Melissa Barnard

Julian Thompson

Daniel Yeadon

Leah Lynn¹⁰

Double Bass

Maxime Bibeau *Principal*

Owen Lee¹⁸

David Murray¹⁰

Flute

Georges Barthel *

Marion Ralincourt

Oboe

Josep Domenech *

Rodrigo Gutiérrez

Clarinet

Craig Hill¹⁹ *

Ashley Sutherland

Bassoon

Jane Gower¹³ *

Györgyi Farkas

Contrabassoon

David Chatterton *

Horn

Peter Erdei *

Reinhard Zmölnig

Jonas Rudner

Michael Söllner

Trumpet

David Elton¹⁰ *

Peter Miller²⁰

Trombone

Nigel Crocker *

Ros Jorgensen

Bass Trombone

Brett Page¹² *

Tuba

Edwin Diefes¹² *

Timpani

Brian Nixon* *Chair sponsored*

by Mr Robert Albert AO

& Mrs Libby Albert

Percussion

Kevin Man²¹

Symphony No. 3

Brahms spent the summer of 1883 in the German spa town of Wiesbaden, where he produced his Third Symphony in a mere four months. It is the shortest of Brahms' symphonies, but for this obsessively self-critical composer that was almost miraculous. Hans Richter, who conducted the first performance in Vienna, was perhaps a little over the top in calling it 'Brahms' Eroica' (it was Richter, after, who dubbed the First Symphony 'Beethoven's Tenth') and yet it is a work that essays many emotional states in a highly dramatic fashion, and leads to a conclusion of great peace.

Thirty years earlier, Brahms had contributed to the 'F – A – E Sonata', a work jointly composed with Albert Dietrich and Robert Schumann in honour of violinist Joseph Joachim. The letters stand for Joachim's personal motto 'frei aber einsam' (free but lonely) and provide a musical motif that unites the work. Brahms responded that his own motto was 'frei aber froh' (free but happy). The musical version of this, F – A – F, dominates the Third Symphony, which was written partly as a 'proffered hand' or gesture of reconciliation by Brahms, who had fallen out with Joachim over the latter's divorce some years earlier. But the theme which the motto introduces evokes Schumann, someone dear to both Brahms' and Joachim's hearts.

The motto-motif provides the assertive opening gesture, where it is 'spelled' F – A-flat – F: in F major, the A-flat is chromatic, thus providing a dramatic dissonance at the work's outset. This pattern – the first, third and eighth degrees of the scale – can be found throughout the whole work, as a melodic feature at first, then immediately as an accompanying figure in the bass: a seemingly inconsequential detail, but the major-minor tension pervades the work, giving it its moments of 'heroic' drama. The work's dramatic unity is also as a result of its overall tonal plan: the outer movements are, naturally, centred on the home key of F, while the inner movements focus on its polar opposite, C.

This simple architecture is decorated at the more local level by much more surprising key relations. The F major/A-flat opening is a case in point; the first subject, or thematic group, is a surging music in F major that derives from the opening theme of Robert Schumann's Third Symphony, the 'Rhenish'. Wiesbaden, where Brahms composed the piece, is on the Rhine; Brahms may have been unconscious of the resemblance, though the model of the First Symphony's finale, which almost – and quite deliberately – quotes Beethoven's Ninth, comes to mind. But the second subject, a serene tune sounded by clarinet and bassoon, is in the distant key of A major. A short development leads to the expected recapitulation of the opening material; more important, though, is Brahms' gradual lowering of the temperature to conclude the movement – as he does with all four in this work – softly and calmly.

The *Andante* takes up the pastoral sounds of clarinet and bassoon, alternating wind textures with quiet lower-string passages at first, and such textures moderate any impassioned outbursts during the course of its sonata-design unfolding. The delicate textures at the end of the movement might support Jan Swafford's view that Brahms was not unaffected by the recent death of Wagner, 'his rival, his respected enemy, his shadow', whose sound-world they resemble.

The third movement is effectively a minuet, though in 3/8, not 3/4. Its main theme, characterised by gentle dissonance on the downbeats and a wave-like ebb and flow, is sung first by the cellos against a

diaphanous string texture and then moves upward through the score to the winds. After a contrasting central section introduced by pulsing chords that alternate with rich string scoring, the opening material is recapitulated but in completely different instrumentation, featuring the horn and other winds.

The dramatic focus of the symphony, however, is the finale where, Beethoven-style, assertive, often terse rhythmic ideas contend with athletic, long-breathed melodies, notably one that has the classic Brahmsian tension between duplet and triplet motifs. After boisterous heroics that feature a three-beat rhythm derived from the work's opening motto, the music reaches a state of repose where, against rippling strings, the winds build in intensity to restate the opening F – A-flat – F moment, now purged of any angst.

Gordon Kerry © 2014/15

Symphony No. 4

While it took Brahms 15 years to complete his First Symphony, his next three followed in comparatively rapid succession. The Fourth Symphony was completed, just two years after the Third, in the summers of 1884 and 1885, which Brahms spent in the mountains at Murzzuschlag, Austria. During the intervening winter he received his copy of the 30th issue of the Bach Complete Edition, containing the cantata 'Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich'. He was immediately attracted to the choral chaconne that concludes the cantata, and apparently asked the conductor Hans von Bülow: 'What would you think if someone were to write a symphonic movement on the same theme? But it is too bulky, too straight; one must change it somehow.'

In the summer of 1885 Brahms did just that, drawing his eight-chord theme from the chaconne-like bass line of the cantata's final chorus 'Meine Tage in den Leiden' and creating one of the most extraordinary final movements in the symphonic literature. He wrote 30 variations and a coda on a chromatically altered version of Bach's theme (the fifth note is changed). In this last movement that he ever wrote for a symphony, Brahms summarised his entire career, looking back to the old masters for his theme, but treating it in such an original, technically proficient manner that the result was a work of striking modernity.

Like most great masterpieces of music, the symphony is at once familiar yet strange: the famous critic Eduard Hanslick had trouble coming to terms with it when Brahms and Ignaz Brüll played through a two-piano version. However Hanslick changed his opinion once the orchestral version was premiered, ultimately describing the Fourth Symphony as being 'like a dark well: the longer we look into it, the more brightly the stars shine back'.

Brahms of course took all criticism – especially his own – seriously, and he was as reluctant as ever to let this Fourth Symphony see the light of day. Eventually, after the manuscript was almost lost in a fire at his house, he agreed to let Bülow perform the symphony in rehearsal with his Meiningen Orchestra, and then to schedule a public performance for 25 October 1885, with Brahms himself conducting. The symphony received many further public performances in the months after its premiere, including in Leipzig on 18 February 1886, where the critic in the *Leipziger Nachrichten* wrote that the final movement was 'filled with Bach's spirit'.

But in a sense it is misleading to isolate just one movement of this most unified of symphonies. So much of all four movements emerges from the unforgettable opening theme, with its distinctive falling thirds and rising sixths, that the work as a whole could almost be described as a 'passacaglia-symphony'.

The autumnal mood, lyricism of the main themes, and contrapuntal ingenuity which Brahms brings to his *Allegro non troppo* opening movement make it 'seamless', and while the vague outlines of traditional sonata form are discernible, the unified nature of the development makes any such routine analysis almost irrelevant. Imitations, canons and inversions create the most logically concentrated first movement form that Brahms ever achieved.

The lyrical, elegiac mood is preserved in the *Andante moderato*. For the third movement, *Allegro giocoso*, Brahms expands his orchestra, adding a double bassoon, a third drum, a triangle (for the first and only time in Brahms' symphonies), and replacing the second flute with the piccolo. Where his three previous symphonies had effectively employed 'intermezzo' movements in the equivalent position, here he presents a full-blooded, joyous scherzo.

The final movement, *Allegro energico e passionato*, is a triumph as much of architecture as of music. Out of his 30 variations and coda, Brahms builds a monumental structure while, incredibly, preserving the unity of form and mood within the movement as a whole. Dispensing now with piccolo and triangle, he adds trombones for the first time in the symphony, and writes a massive passacaglia whose variety and beauty remains astonishing to this day, and which surges irresistibly from climax to climax. It is almost as if here in his last-ever symphonic movement, Brahms achieved what he had striven for all his creative life – a magnificent assertion of the dignity of humanity such as perhaps not even Beethoven himself could have written.

Adapted from a note by **Martin Buzacott**
Symphony Services International © 1996

Richard Tognetti

Artistic Director & Lead Violin

'...it's our job to bring the listener in through our portal. A numinous moment when, hopefully, we can make time stand still.'

Richard Tognetti is the Artistic Director of the Australian Chamber Orchestra. After studying both in Australia with William Primrose and Alice Waten, and overseas at the Bern Conservatory with Igor Ozim, he returned home in 1989 to lead several performances with the ACO and was appointed the Orchestra's Artistic Director and Lead Violin later that year. He was Artistic Director of the Festival Maribor in Slovenia from 2008 to 2015. As director or soloist, Richard has appeared with many of the world's leading orchestras, and in 2016 was the first Artist-in-Residence at the Barbican Centre's Milton Court Concert Hall.

Richard is also a composer, having curated and co-composed the scores for the ACO's documentary films *Mountain*, *The Reef* and *Musica Surfica*. In addition, he co-composed the scores for Peter Weir's *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World* and the soundtrack to Tom Carroll's film *Storm Surfers*.

He was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2010. He holds honorary doctorates from three Australian universities and was made a National Living Treasure in 1999. He performs on the 1743 'Carrothus' Guarneri del Gesù violin, lent to him by an anonymous Australian private benefactor.

Australian Chamber Orchestra

'The Australian Chamber Orchestra is uniformly high-octane, arresting and never ordinary.'
– *The Australian*, 2017

The Australian Chamber Orchestra lives and breathes music, making waves around the world for its explosive performances and brave interpretations. Steeped in history but always looking to the future, ACO programs embrace celebrated classics alongside new commissions, and adventurous cross-artform collaborations.

Led by Artistic Director Richard Tognetti since 1990, the ACO performs more than 100 concerts each year. Whether performing in Manhattan, New York, or Wollongong, NSW, the ACO is unwavering in its commitment to creating transformative musical experiences.

Testament to its international reputation, the ACO was invited to commence a three-year residency as International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court in partnership with London's Barbican Centre from the 2018/19 season.

The Orchestra regularly collaborates with artists and musicians who share its ideology: from Emmanuel Pahud, Steven Isserlis, Dawn Upshaw, Olli Mustonen, Brett Dean and Ivry Gitlis, to Neil Finn, Jonny Greenwood, Barry Humphries and Meow Meow; to visual artists and film makers such as Michael Leunig, Bill Henson, Shaun Tan, Jon Frank and Jennifer Peedom, who have co-created unique, hybrid productions for which the ACO has become renowned.

In addition to its national and international touring schedule, the Orchestra has an active recording program across CD, vinyl and digital formats. Recent releases include *Water / Night Music*, the first Australian-produced classical vinyl for two decades, *Beethoven*, a collection of the ACO's acclaimed Beethoven recordings, and the soundtrack to the acclaimed cinematic collaboration, *Mountain*.

aco.com.au



Artistic Director Richard Tognetti
Managing Director Richard Evans

Symphony No. 3 recorded live in concert at Hamer Hall, Melbourne on 23 and 24 August 2015.
Symphony No. 4 recorded live in concert at the Sydney Opera House on 27 and 29 October 2013.
Producer: Maxime Bibeau. Engineer: Simon Lear.

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