

PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA • MANFRED HONECK, MUSIC DIRECTOR

BRAHMS

SYMPHONY NO. 4

MACMILLAN

LARGHETTO FOR ORCHESTRA



PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



BRAHMS FOURTH SYMPHONY FORGING A NEW PATH FORWARD

Throughout music history, there are many extraordinary periods, each one of them immensely intriguing from both the musical and historical points of view. I've long been fascinated when contemplating famous composers living in the same time period and in close proximity. Vienna in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was especially rich in these connections. After first a home for Franz Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Vienna was also the musical home of both Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert, and finally, Johannes Brahms and Anton Bruckner in the last third of the nineteenth century. It is a testament to the magnetism of Vienna that, with the exception of Schubert, none of these composers were actually born in Vienna.

Brahms and Bruckner: two names synonymous with the high romantic period, were both musical giants responsible for not only creating magnificent masterpieces, but also greatly influential in shaping the future musical landscape. While the two

composers were strikingly different in many ways, they were similarly devoted to the symphonic form, lavishing the utmost care on each symphony knowing that it would be regarded as one of the most complete aspects of their respective *oeuvres*. Bruckner was regarded as progressive and a follower of the New German School, while Brahms was viewed as a staunch traditionalist and therefore reviled by his adversaries. And though Bruckner and Brahms respectfully avoided each other, their individual followers fought with fervent zeal. It is for this reason that all of their symphonies were premiered with both the greatest curiosity and simultaneous suspicion.

However, it was the giant Beethoven, looming large in the musical sky, who eclipsed everything. It is not an exaggeration to say that every attempt to compose a symphony was immediately measured against the great Beethoven. Even Richard Wagner famously uttered, "Whoever wants to compose a symphony

after Beethoven must be a megalomaniac." We know that Brahms visibly struggled over this issue and even postponed his plans to compose a symphony for quite some time. His first attempt resulted in a particularly monumental work, the First Piano Concerto, which may well be called a symphony. In a letter to his friend and conductor Hermann Levi, Brahms wrote quite reservedly, almost with resignation, "I will never compose a symphony! You have no idea how it makes us feel to always hear such a giant marching behind us." The shadow of Beethoven was truly omnipresent.

Though the early sketches date back to more than one decade earlier, it was not until 1876 that Brahms completed his First Symphony. He was already 43 years old. (Bruckner, who wrote his official First Symphony in 1866, was already working on his Fifth Symphony at the time). However, one thing is clear. Once Brahms crossed into the realm of his First Symphony, he would not look back, going on to create three more symphonies within nine years. His last symphony, Symphony No. 4, was premiered on October 25, 1885.

BRAHMS THE MAN

Who was this famous composer, of whom Joseph Hellmesberger Sr., then Concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic, spontaneously exclaimed after an evening of chamber music, "This is the heir of Beethoven!" Brahms was born on May 7, 1833, in Gängeviertel, a poor district of Hamburg. His father worked as a professional musician and the young Johannes Brahms received piano lessons beginning at the age of seven.

Brahms' talent was recognized and encouraged early on. At the age of 15, he performed for the first time in front of a Hamburg audience. Through the Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi, a friend with whom he did some early concert tours, Brahms made the acquaintance of the great violinist Joseph Joachim in 1853. Joachim, in turn, not only recommended Brahms to Franz Liszt, but also established the connection with Robert and Clara Schumann which would be of great significance to Brahms. That same year, on October 25, 1853, Schumann wrote under the heading "Neue Bahnen" in the



Neue Zeitschrift für Musik ([The] New Journal of Music) which he had founded, “And he has come, a young blood at whose cradle graces and heroes kept watch. His name is Johannes Brahms, he came from Hamburg, creating there in dark silence, but educated in difficult settings of art by an excellent and enthusiastic teacher, recommended to me shortly before by a revered well-known master. He had, also in his appearance, all the signs that announce us: This is a called one.”

In 1857, Brahms received his first permanent appointment as choral

conductor and piano teacher at the court of Prince Leopold von Lippe-Detmold. When his wish to take over the Philharmonic concerts in Hamburg did not come true, Brahms was offended and left the city, moving to Vienna in 1862. While in Vienna, he lived in an apartment at Karlsgasse 4 until his death. (During my years in the Vienna Philharmonic, I passed this spot, almost daily, on my way to the Vienna Musikverein. Interestingly, just a few houses away, wall plaques remind us of Antonio Vivaldi’s place of death, as well as the school where Josef Strauss studied.)

While in Vienna, Brahms would immerse himself in the musical city, making very few trips abroad, though he would retreat to the countryside during the summer months. It was during this creative period that he wrote almost all of his orchestral works including symphonies, choral compositions, chamber music works, songs and piano music. And interestingly, just like Anton Bruckner, Brahms wrote no operas.

Though Brahms was one of the few composers who made a living solely from the proceeds of his compositions, he nonetheless led a rather simple life. He was reportedly very broad-minded and showed great generosity to friends in need. But though he was sociable, Brahms did not immediately open up to others and sometimes came across as rather introverted. His nature was melancholy, brusque and peculiar, and at times he responded very sensitively to criticism of his works. In yet another similarity to Anton Bruckner, Brahms also remained unmarried. When Brahms died on April 3, 1897, he was highly esteemed and given a burial in Vienna’s Central Cemetery next to the graves of Beethoven and Schubert.

ABOUT THE FOURTH SYMPHONY

The Fourth Symphony was written during two summers in 1884-1885 in Mürzzuschlag, in northeastern Styria, Austria. Interestingly, this is also the same town where Brahms wrote 30 vocal works and today is the site of the Brahms Museum established in 1991. Each time

that Brahms began a new composition, it was typical for him to keep it rather secret. However, it was from his vacation home in Mürzzuschlag that Brahms sent the first movement of the Fourth Symphony to his friend Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, writing, “May I send you a piece of a piece of mine, and would you have time to look at it and say a word to me? In general, the pieces by me are more pleasant than I am, and one finds less to correct about them. But in this region, the cherries do not become sweet and edible - so if you do not like the thing, do not be embarrassed. I am not at all eager to write a bad Symphony No. 4.”

Elisabeth’s initial reply reflected a somewhat reserved skepticism rather than great enthusiasm, though this would later come to her. “One does not tire of listening in and looking at the abundance of witty features, strange illuminations, rhythmic, harmonic and tonal nature. But [...] it is to me as if this very creation were too much calculated for the eye of the microscopist, as if the beauties were not all openly there for every simple lover, and as if it were a small

world for the clever and knowledgeable [...] I have discovered a lot of places only with my eyes." She continued further, "I have my own way with the piece; the deeper I look into it, the more the sentence deepens, the more stars appear..., the more individual pleasures I have, expected and surprising ones, and the clearer the continuous train becomes, which makes a unity out of the multiplicity."

I'm intrigued by this account and, in particular, Elisabeth's reflection of "discovering a lot of places only with my eyes." With this, she implies an unlocking of the richness and inner secrets of the music through investigation of the score. I, myself, have experienced the same and each time I return to the music, am amazed at Brahms' total mastery of the art of elaboration. But it is impossible for the human ear to immediately grasp the abundance of witty changes and reinterpretations that one can perceive when actually looking at the score. Yet, herein lies a key element of Brahms' genius: Brahms was a true master of developmental technique. He could build something

great from something very small, perhaps even seemingly unimportant. And while this earned him praise and appreciation, the same characteristic also elicited biting criticism.

Interestingly, the composer Arnold Schoenberg was one of the few people at the time who championed Brahms' compositional method as modern and radiating far into the twentieth century. In 1933, he drew attention to this technique in his famous lecture, "Brahms the Progressive": "It is to be proved that Brahms, the classicist, the academic, was a great innovator, indeed a great progressor in the field of musical language. The intellectual concentration and compression of the motivic-thematic work has found perfection in this symphony."

With a very different view, the composer Hugo Wolf is credited with this oft-quoted remark about the Fourth Symphony: "The art of composing without ideas has decidedly found its most worthy representative in Brahms. Quite like the good Lord, Herr Brahms also understands

the feat of making something out of nothing." Though Wolf's observation is no doubt unflattering, it also illuminates a fundamental truth. It is not the abundance of melodic ideas that sets the Fourth Symphony apart, but instead the inventive elaboration on core motives that makes this particular symphony a unique work of art. In many ways, Brahms succeeds brilliantly in creating a wide and vibrant canvas out of a seemingly small amount of material. At times, the musical ideas are so artfully developed that the fundamental core is almost difficult to perceive. Brahms' unique genius is then further manifested in his ability to cast these varied elements into a unified whole. Whereas the listener may have the impression that a new theme is created, in reality, it has originated from a core motive that was already introduced. I therefore can't help but think of the question of whether it is invention or elaboration that is more important. Brahms, himself, answered it this way: "That which is actually called invention, that is, a real thought, is, so to speak, higher inspiration, inspiration, that is, I cannot do anything for it. From that

moment on, I cannot despise this 'gift' enough, I must make it my rightful, well-acquired property through ceaseless work." He continued, "What is actually called invention is a musical idea, is first of all an imagination, something for which I am not responsible, for which I have no merit. It is a gift, a gift that I may almost despise before I have made it my own through my work. And with it there is no hurry at all. It is with it like with a seed; it germinates unconsciously and develops."

Brahms would announce his Fourth Symphony to a family friend, calling it "a new sad symphony." He also wrote to conductor Hans von Bülow, "For I fear it tastes of the local climate - the cherries here will not be sweet [...]." With these words, Brahms perhaps sensed that his Fourth Symphony might not be understood and received as he wished. Just two weeks before the premiere, he played a test version (a four-hand version on the piano) for some friends and acquaintances. Upon hearing it, not all of his friends felt great enthusiasm, though this very well may have been due to the fact that the piano by

its nature does not allow for the full tonal colors and orchestral splendor that are so inherent to this Symphony. However, the reaction following the first rehearsal with the Meiningen Court Orchestra was completely different. Hans von Bülow, who led the rehearsal and also conducted the premiere, wrote, “Just back from the rehearsal. No. 4 is gigantic, quite peculiar, quite new, rather individual. Breathes unprecedented energy from A to Z.”

INSIDE THE FOURTH SYMPHONY

First Movement

The opening bars of the Fourth Symphony begin in an unspectacular and almost casual manner. Imperceptibly and mysteriously, the music seems to come out of nothing. As has been said about this opening, it has already begun before it begins. We know that Brahms had originally composed four introductory bars, but then deleted them after finishing the score. From the conductor’s point of view, this opening is one of the most difficult to begin. A conductor must give a precise

signal to start the ensemble, which then elicits an exacting, concrete sound from the musicians. In the case of this movement, such a well-defined and typical start does not embody the desired feeling. But if the conductor does not give a distinct upbeat, it is nearly impossible for the ensemble to begin together. Finding a middle ground that can both awaken the mysterious mood yet provide a clear impetus for the musicians to play together is an art in itself. The great conductor Carlos Kleiber once remarked that he could not conduct this opening. For me, I believe that this shows that he truly understood the music.

The first movement is resplendent in gorgeous melody after gorgeous melody that flow into one another, at times interrupted by briefly striking rhythmic themes. In the case of this Symphony, I find that the traditional view of taking the lyrical second theme slower is not advisable. Rather, the long melody that begins in bar 57 (1:40) is, in fact, already underlaid with a bold, flowing rhythmic accompaniment that helps to keep the music moving.

Throughout the Fourth Symphony, the score has many descriptive details and directions. Nonetheless, as is nearly always the case, thoughtful interpretive choices are sometimes needed in order to achieve the greatest possible clarity. Generally speaking, careful attention to balance is of utmost importance. Therefore, I ask for the less important material to be played quieter so that the more significant thematic lines can stand out in greater relief. One such example is bar 73 (2:04) and following where the strings marked with *sforzandi* (a marking indicating that the notes should be played with a strong initial attack) plus horn and trumpet chords should be withdrawn quite quickly so as to give more space to the *marcato* (with emphasis) motive of the second theme heard in the oboe, clarinet, bassoon, plus third and fourth horns.

I find it typical of Brahms to be rather sparing with dynamic markings. Although a *forte* (loud) in Brahms may very often be played rather expressively, it is the *fortissimo* (very loud) that is an event. Here in the first movement, it takes 129 measures

until Brahms introduces the first *fortissimo* (3:39); for me, this first appearance is cause for celebration! But it is rather short-lived, lasting only a brief time until the soft sounds of the original theme return at the beginning of the development section (bar 136 or 3:50). After a somewhat Viennese-inflected phrase in bar 219 (6:11), it is a challenge for any conductor and orchestra, beginning in bar 227 (6:25), to unify the continuous 39 bar interplay between winds and strings into a single legato line without interruption. The recapitulation occurs in bar 246 (7:05), now augmented, and here again it is important to create a long, sustained line so as to allow the theme to reappear without a break.

I would like to mention one brief thought concerning orchestral legato playing that I find to be especially important in Brahms. To achieve a profound legato sound, I would most typically ask for the string players to change their bows homogeneously and at the same time. This usually works very well and also has visual appeal. However, I find that sometimes this method does not

actually result in a truly sustained legato. Therefore, I ask that the string sections change their bows quite often. With this approach, the notes can follow each other seamlessly and also contribute to the dense and ultra-sustained sound palette that is a true hallmark of Brahms.

Two additional details to share come near the end of the movement. Careful attention to balance is needed in bar 351 (10:02) where the horns clearly anticipate the sixteenth note motive of bar 354 (10:08). The final coda (bar 394 or 11:11) is marked *fortissimo* (very loud) and *piu forte* (louder) throughout. Here, it was important for me to give the tempo rather free rein. Brahms has designed this final passage with dramatic purpose. The music has an incredibly propulsive feel to it. There seems to be no escape and the movement comes to a close with the greatest force.

Second Movement

The second movement is a vocal movement. Though it could be possible to interpret the opening wind lines as gently walking, I instead ask for a *cantabile* (singing)

character which immediately adds to the melancholy color and feeling of longing. Look, for example, in the fourth bar (0:18) where Brahms writes *sempre legato* (always connected) for the nearly identical motives in the clarinets and bassoons, in addition to the dynamic direction of *sempre pp* (always very quiet). I consider these markings valid for the beginning, as well, as it is important to keep in mind that Brahms was, among other things, choir director of the Vienna Singverein at the time. It is clear to see how his affinity for a vocal style also inhabits his writing for purely instrumental works like the Fourth Symphony.

The opening theme continues in bar 13 (1:02), now set in the first horn. But it is the secondary voices in the bassoons that I find quite interesting. Perhaps rather surprisingly, it takes 30 measures for Brahms to feature the violins; up until that time, they pluck exclusively. And now in bar 30 (2:31), their sensual singing is heard for the first time. Here, I ask the violins to begin with the most beautiful and unobtrusive *dolcissimo* (very sweet) sound that blooms to enthusiastic singing. I find

that this singing character, in fact, carries across most of the movement with very few exceptions. Even the dotted triplets in bar 36 (3:07) fit into this sound world. I am reminded of my own violin and viola teachers who always paid special attention to listen for a ringing staccato sound. Though a staccato marking sometimes requires a short sound, it still needs to be sung, especially in Brahms.

Throughout this movement, it is interesting to uncover the many shades of color that exist within the *cantabile* sound world. One such example is bar 61 (5:22), where I ask for a particularly delicate *dolce* on the harmony change. Another passage to mention occurs in bar 80 (7:03) where the vocal wind lines contrast with the strings. Here, the strings are marked with sudden accents, though these accents are short-lived, disappearing just a few beats later and indicating a return to the broadly vocal style. A key moment is the dramatic climax in bar 84 (7:25) which stands out from the rest of the movement. The vehemence and power are staggering! In this passage, the “singing staccato” is not

at all required. I believe that this phrase must be played with the greatest orchestral force, almost reminiscent of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. And though the music returns to an elegiac song only a short time later, Brahms again provides another moment of shock, but this time in a totally different way. Now in bar 106 (9:34), a chant-like passage takes on a somber, dark, ghostly hue. A throbbing timpani foreshadows the sense of death, perhaps reminiscent of Brahms’ own comments on the character of this sad symphony. Very significantly, Brahms asks for a *pianississimo* (very, very soft). This dynamic marking is quite unusual and apart from the third movement, is the only time that it is used in the entire symphony. After a brief moment of pause, the music continues as if nothing has happened, coming to a close with a beautiful, glorious but quiet E Major chord, quite a contrast to the dramatic E minor endings of both the first and fourth movements.

Third Movement

The third movement was the last movement that Brahms composed. It is marked *Allegro*

giocoso, with the word *giocoso* indicating a joking, cheerful and funny character. And indeed this movement is certainly reflective of all three of these attributes! Already in the fifth bar (0:05), Brahms employs his first musical joke, letting the whole orchestra fall exuberantly into an F Major chord. He even accentuates the fall further with a *sforzando* (with emphasis) marking. The jovial and playful mood returns again at bar 51 (0:49). Brahms continues to play with the idea of dramatic falls and leaps especially with the repeated jumps from very low to very high beginning in bar 93 (1:27). I find a touch of Hungarian color in the wistfully, jolly phrase at bar 117 (1:50), while the similar phrase in bar 155 (2:26) disappears into a haunting and mysterious *pianissimo* (very quiet).

The main theme returns again in bar 168 (2:39) before moving into the quiet trio section (2:55). The trio is very chant-like and perhaps reminiscent of the chant section of the second movement, though it is surprisingly short in duration. (Some experts have referred to it as a “failed trio.”) But it would not be Brahms if his signature

art of variation was not on display in this movement, as well. Beginning in bar 258 (4:16), a somewhat ironic march is heard and, typical of Brahms, he does not mark the quarter notes in bar 276 (4:32) with the usual dots, but instead wedge marks which are accordingly more rigorous to play. In bar 282 (4:38), the timpani and double basses form an interesting rhythmic line, adding a sense of nervous restlessness and grumbling. Although the timpani is marked only *pianissimo* while the trailing double bass eighth notes are *piano* (softly), it is important to make sure that this layer is clearly audible, even though the fun motive figurations above are certainly dominant. The dramatic fall motive returns one last time in bar 317 (5:10). I see this entire movement as a brilliant, multi-faceted, fun fireworks display demanding the greatest virtuosity from the full orchestra before Brahms dives dramatically back into the serious world of the fourth movement.

Fourth Movement

The final movement is a *passacaglia*, a Baroque period dance typically in slow

triple time. Throughout, various variations unfold over the *basso ostinato*, a fixed bass line, which in the case of this movement is eight bars in length and constantly repeated. We know that Brahms was particularly fond of the *passacaglia* form and wrote, “In a theme to variations, actually, almost only the bass means something to me. But this is sacred to me, it is the firm foundation on which I then build my stories ... If I vary the melody, I cannot easily be more than witty or graceful or, while atmospheric, deepen a beautiful thought. Over the given bass I really reinvent, I invent new melodies, I create.” For this particular movement, Brahms borrowed the theme, initially only in the winds, from the final chorus of Johann Sebastian Bach’s Cantata 150, “Nach dir, Herr, verlangst mich” (“I long for you, Lord”).

The movement is entitled *Allegro energico e passionato* (lively and fast) and contains 30 variations that are divided into a three-part form: an E minor section (Variations 1-11 or 0:00-2:55), a somewhat quiet major section (Variations 12-15 or 2:55-5:26), and again an E minor section (Variations

16-30 or 5:26-8:22). Once again, Brahms’ genius in elaboration is on full display as remarkably, none of the 30 variations resembles the others. Nonetheless, it is an important task to distinctly define the characters of each individual variation so as to highlight their unique expression.

Throughout the *passacaglia*, there is an interesting interplay between rigidity and freedom. Although a certain rigor is inherent in the *passacaglia* form itself, Brahms nevertheless opens a wide variety of unexpected possibilities and expressions. Already with the second variation in bar 17 (0:27), there are many opportunities to shape the phrase according to the musical flow. Even the third variation (0:40), which seems a bit more controlled (note the marking of *ben marcato* [marked]) has a dance-like feel brought to life with the syncopations in the first and second horns (bar 29 or 0:46). I therefore savor the sounds of the *largamente* (slowly and broadly) indicated by Brahms (0:53), while the variation that follows can be played very freely and with *molto rubato* (maximum push and pull) to bring out the impassioned character.

The center of the movement is the middle block of variations consisting of four slow variations. Collectively, they interrupt the *energico* and *passionato* character and make special use of individual woodwind players in key solo moments. The first of these quiet variations at bar 97 (2:55) is most notable for its special climax featuring a famous flute solo. This passage offers every flutist the real opportunity to demonstrate their personal espressivity and artful phrasing. It is also the first truly great solo moment of the entire movement. I see it as not just any typical phrase, but instead a passage that is imbued with an incredible personal narrative. There is a real story to tell here that is then answered in the two variations that follow. In this performance, Lorna McGhee, our principal flute, coaxes a special and rare sound from her instrument. I find her interpretation remarkable throughout, from the emotional high point of the passage to the soothing *pianissimo* of bar 104 (3:31). The sustained chorale variation of bar 113 (4:18) soon follows. Here, I ask to emphasize the legato markings in the trombones, horns and bassoons more than the underlying

dots below the slurs. The sustained chorale therefore takes on a conciliatory tone and at the same time is songlike, reminiscent of the second movement.

The sixteenth variation (bar 129 or 5:27) almost seems like a recapitulation before veering off in an entirely different direction and ushering in the next variation (bar 137 or 5:40), now filled with great anxiety. Here, I have tried to heighten this restless mood by asking for the strings to incorporate a *ponticello* (on the bridge) sound in their tremolo-like figurations. I intend for this *ponticello* effect to be deliberately disturbing and unpleasant for the human ear. Beginning in bar 153 (6:00), the following variations (Variations 19-25) should be kept quite strict, partly even martial-like in character (bar 193 or 6:57), with an emphasis on the *energico* expression prescribed by Brahms. I believe that the tension here can only be achieved through the contrast of extreme rhythmic discipline against an incredible energetic impetus. A moment of relief is felt in Variation 22 (bar 177 or 6:34) which is strict in tempo, but light in feel, almost like a scherzo. The final

variations (Variations 26-30 or 7:24-8:21) are more lyrical and lovely in expression, and dance-like. Variation 28 (bar 225 or 7:48) is written in the style of a Viennese waltz, thus requiring a slightly lilting tempo. I find the pacing of these last variations to be quite deliberate, with the coda that follows closing the movement with fantastic power, force and urgency. Here, just like Beethoven before him, Brahms makes use of interesting rhythmic peculiarities including hemiolas (bar 273 or 8:48) and syncopations (bar 291 or 9:01), all of which must be played with the greatest possible drive, urgency and vehemence.

With this final movement, Brahms truly succeeded in creating a magnificent work of art that not only concludes this wonderful Fourth Symphony, but also forms the closing point of his symphonic output. Though it is somehow regrettable that Brahms did not write another symphony, in many ways it would be hard to imagine what might follow this grandiose Fourth Symphony. As the young Richard Strauss, fascinated by the orchestral form, reported enthusiastically, “A gigantic work [...] new and original and

yet from A to Z genuine Brahms.” With this Fourth Symphony, Brahms confidently answered the question of how to continue the symphonic form after Beethoven.



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LARGHETTO FOR ORCHESTRA

BY JAMES MacMILLAN

Larghetto for Orchestra was commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in honor of the tenth anniversary of Manfred Honeck as Music Director. It had its world premiere at Heinz Hall in Pittsburgh in October 2017.

COMPOSER'S THOUGHTS ON LARGHETTO FOR ORCHESTRA

In 2017, upon receiving a commission by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra to celebrate the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Manfred Honeck as Music Director, I decided to arrange an earlier choral piece of mine for orchestra. I had set the *Miserere* in 2009, but felt that the music could also have an instrumental existence, too. The resulting *Larghetto for Orchestra* is imbued with the singing quality of the original piece, but is also shaped by its sad

and lamenting character. The work opens with a 'chorale' on a choir of cellos and is soon answered by mourning phrases in the violins, which are punctuated by solemn brass chords.

The middle section presents brass soloists playing monotone-based phrases like plainchant before the cellos return 'in choir' with the opening theme. The chanting eventually returns over a slowly building static chord which gives the 'liturgical' character of the music a strange and ethereal turn of direction. In the final section, the main theme, which so far has appeared in the minor, recapitulates in the major, giving the closing moments of the *Larghetto* a hymn-like sense of devotion within a Celtic modality.

©James MacMillan

MORE ON LARGHETTO FOR ORCHESTRA

The text for James MacMillan's choral work *a cappella Miserere* (composed for the acclaimed London-based choral ensemble, The Sixteen, in 2009) is the penitential Psalm 51 — *Miserere mei, Deus: Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness. According to the multitude of Thy mercies, do away mine offences. Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my faults ...* — and is taken from the Matins service of *Tenebrae* ("darkness"), which encompasses the most solemn moments of the Christian year. The term is applied to the combined Roman Catholic services of Matins and Lauds that bracket daybreak on Thursday,

Friday and Saturday of Holy Week, during which fifteen candles signifying the ebbing life of Christ are extinguished one-by-one after the singing of the obligatory Psalms. The service closes "*in tenebris.*"

MacMillan's *Miserere* and its *Larghetto for Orchestra* analogue not only plumb the images and emotions of the individual verses, but also trace a slowly swelling optimism, from the recognition and repentance of the opening lines to hope of forgiveness at the close.

©Dr. Richard E. Rodda

MANFRED HONECK MUSIC DIRECTOR

Over the last quarter century, Manfred Honeck has firmly established himself as one of the world's leading conductors, renowned for his distinctive interpretations. For more than a decade, he has served as Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, celebrated for their performances in Pittsburgh and abroad, performing regularly in major music capitals. Together they have continued a legacy of music-making that includes many GRAMMY® nominations and a 2018 GRAMMY® Award for Best Orchestral Performance. Honeck and the orchestra serve as cultural ambassadors for the city as one of the most frequently toured American orchestras.

Born in Austria, Manfred Honeck received his musical training at the Academy of Music in Vienna. Many years of experience as a member of the Vienna Philharmonic and the Vienna State Opera Orchestra have given his conducting a distinctive stamp. He began his career as assistant to Claudio Abbado and was subsequently engaged by the Zurich

Opera House, where he was bestowed the prestigious European Conductor's award. Following early posts at MDR Symphony Orchestra and at the Oslo Philharmonic, he was appointed music director of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra. He also served as principal guest conductor of the Czech Philharmonic, and was music director of the Staatsoper Stuttgart.

As a guest conductor, Manfred Honeck has worked with such leading orchestras as the Berlin Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, and the Vienna Philharmonic, among others, and is a regular guest with all of the major American orchestras.

Manfred Honeck was awarded the honorary title of Professor by the Austrian Federal President. An international jury of critics selected Honeck as the International Classical Music Awards "Artist of the Year" in 2018.



JAMES MACMILLAN COMPOSER

James MacMillan is the preeminent Scottish composer of his generation. He first attracted attention with the acclaimed BBC Proms premiere of *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* (1990). His percussion concerto *Veni, Veni Emmanuel* (1992) has received over 500 performances worldwide by orchestras including London Symphony Orchestra, New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics and Cleveland Orchestra.

Other major works include the cantata *Seven Last Words from the Cross* (1993), *Quickenings* (1998) for soloists, children's choir, mixed choir and orchestra, the operas *Inès de Castro* (2001) and *The Sacrifice* (2005-06), *St John Passion* (2007), *St Luke Passion* (2013) and *Symphony No.5: 'Le grand Inconnu'* (2018).

He was featured composer at Edinburgh Festival (1993, 2019), Southbank Centre (1997), BBC's Barbican Composer Weekend (2005) and Grafenegg Festival

(2012). His interpreters include soloists Evelyn Glennie, Colin Currie, Jean-Yves Thibaudet and Vadim Repin, conductors Leonard Slatkin, Sir Andrew Davis, Marin Alsop and Donald Runnicles, and choreographer Christopher Wheeldon. His recordings can be found on BMG/RCA Red Seal, BIS, Chandos, Naxos, Hyperion, Coro, Linn and Challenge Classics.

Recent highlights include MacMillan's *Stabat Mater* for The Sixteen streamed from the Sistine Chapel and premieres of a *Trombone Concerto* for Jörgen van Rijen, the armistice oratorio *All the Hills and Vales Along*, the 40-voice motet *Vidi aquam*, and *Christmas Oratorio* streamed in 2021 by NTR Dutch Radio from the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. The annual Cumnock Tryst festival was founded by the composer in 2014 in his childhood town in Scotland.



PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Now in its 126th season, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra is credited with a rich history of engaging the world's finest conductors and musicians and demonstrates a genuine commitment to the Pittsburgh region and its citizens. Known for its artistic excellence for more than a century, the Pittsburgh Symphony has been led by its worldwide acclaimed Music Director Manfred Honeck since 2008; past music directors have included Fritz Reiner (1938-1948), William Steinberg (1952-1976), André Previn (1976-1984), Lorin Maazel (1984-

1996) and Mariss Jansons (1997-2004).

The Pittsburgh Symphony is continually at the forefront of championing new American works. The Orchestra premiered Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No. 1 "Jeremiah" in 1944, John Adams' *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* in 1986, and Mason Bates' *Resurrexit* in 2018 to celebrate Manfred Honeck's 60th birthday.

The two-time 2018 GRAMMY® Award-winning orchestra has a long and illustrious

history in the areas of recordings and live radio broadcasts. Manfred Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra have received multiple GRAMMY® nominations for Best Orchestral Performance, taking home the award in 2018 for their recording of Shostakovich: Symphony No. 5; Barber: Adagio. As early as 1936, the Pittsburgh Symphony has been broadcast on the radio. The orchestra has received increased attention since 1982 through national network radio broadcasts on Public Radio International, produced by Classical WQED-FM 89.3, made possible by the musicians of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

Lauded as the Pittsburgh region's international cultural ambassador, the orchestra began regular touring in 1896 has embarked on scores of domestic and international tours. In 2019, Music Director Manfred Honeck led the orchestra on an extensive tour of Europe, the 25th in orchestra history.

In the 2021-2022 season, the Pittsburgh Symphony will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Heinz Hall as the home of the orchestra.



PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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ENDOWED BY THE VIRIA I. HEINZ ENDOWMENT

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ASSOCIATE CONDUCTOR

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GUEST ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR

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.....

🎷 PERFORMED ON BRAHMS RECORDING

🎷 PERFORMED ON MACMILLAN RECORDING

ABSENCE OF SYMBOL INDICATES MEMBER OF THE
PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA WHO DID NOT
PERFORM ON EITHER RECORDING.

🎷 PRINCIPAL

🎷 CO-PRINCIPAL

🎷 ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL

🎷 ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

🎷 ACTING PRINCIPAL

🎷 ACTING ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL

🎷 ACTING ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

🎷 EXTRA MUSICIAN

CREDITS

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Recorded Live

Brahms Symphony No. 4 (April 20-22, 2018)

MacMillan *Larghetto for Orchestra*
(October 27-29, 2017)

Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts, Pittsburgh, PA

Soundmirror, Boston:

Recording Producer: Dirk Sobotka

Balance Engineer: Mark Donahue

Editing: Dirk Sobotka

Mixing and Mastering: Mark Donahue

Music Notes: Manfred Honeck

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Photo of James MacMillan: Philip Gatward

Photo of Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra:

Edward DeArmitt

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sound/mirror

We at Soundmirror believe that in a good and successful recording, the sound has to serve the music. While an important goal is to truthfully represent the acoustical event in the hall, another is to capture the composer's intention reflected in the score and its realization by the performer. To achieve these goals, extensive collaboration and communication between the artists and the recording team are of utmost importance. Based on our long experience of recording the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in Heinz Hall, we chose five omnidirectional DPA 4006 microphones as our main microphone array. Supplementing those with "spot mics" to clarify the detail of the orchestration, we worked towards realizing the above goals. Extensive listening sessions with Maestro Honeck and orchestra musicians were crucial in refining the final balance. This recording was recorded in DSD256 and post-produced in DXD 352.8kHz/32 bit to give you, the listener, the highest sound quality possible.

We hope you will enjoy listening to this recording as much as we enjoyed making it.

www.soundmirror.com

BRAHMS

SYMPHONY NO. 4

- I. Allegro non troppo 12:38
- II. Andante moderato 11:06
- III. Allegro giocoso 5:54
- IV. Allegro energico e passionato 9:26

MACMILLAN

LARGHETTO FOR ORCHESTRA

Larghetto for Orchestra 14:56



PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
MANFRED HONECK, MUSIC DIRECTOR

REFERENCE
RECORDINGS
FR-744SACD