

Brahms and Chopin

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Allison Loggins-Hull: *Can You See?*

Allison Loggins-Hull is the new Resident Artistic Partner at the New Jersey Symphony. In 2021, the Symphony commissioned her to write *Can You See?* for a small ensemble. The idea was for Loggins-Hull to arrange our national anthem both to honor the lives of those we have lost, while also setting forth the role of the living. This weekend marks the East Coast premiere of the expanded version for orchestra. Her composer's note relates its metamorphosis.

For this larger iteration, the material is given a curious, yet hopeful treatment. Voices from the original version are orchestrated to achieve a designed delay effect, creating a dreamy soundscape while posing questions relating to the meaning of *The Star-Spangled Banner* and the complicated history of the United States.

Melodic material from *The Star-Spangled Banner* is used throughout the work, often stretched out and surrounded by tension and revolving colors. The strings create a sound world that is cloudy, uncertain, and bleary, questioning if the core meaning of the anthem is in focus. Rhythmic elements evoke a forward-moving motion, while textures and harmonic language nod to the scope and diversity of American music and people.

Frédéric Chopin: Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 11

Frédéric Chopin was born to a Polish mother and a French father. While his music has intuitive French grace, Polish spirit is never far off. Chopin's two piano concertos are teenage works that date from his Warsaw years. That stated, hallmarks of his mature style are already present in the Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 11: delicate filigree work for the pianist, impassioned and noble themes, and unflinching elegance. He completed the E-minor concerto shortly before he left Warsaw. At the time, he fancied himself in love with a soprano named

Constantia Gladkowska. His *Larghetto* is an expression of that infatuation, rendered with remarkable maturity for a young man in his late teens. Though Chopin did not compose operas, he instinctively grasped the relationship between opera and other musical genres. He was one of the most successful composers in merging the delicacy and flexibility of *coloratura* vocal ornamentation with the growing technical capabilities of the piano. Chopin's music often incorporated dance rhythms of his native Poland. The concerto's finale is a *krakowiak* in the form of a rondo. This lively, syncopated dance, which takes its name from Poland's second city, Krakow, was popular in the early 19th century.

Johannes Brahms: Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 68

More than twenty years in gestation, Johannes Brahms' monumental Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 68 was hailed as "Beethoven's Tenth" when it was premiered in 1876. Brahms did emulate Beethoven's rigorous command of form and counterpoint—but the symphony's harmonic richness and emotional content are wholly original, and quintessentially Brahmsian. The work has a broad trajectory from tragedy to triumph. The composer's friend Theodor Billroth likened the symphony's first movement to "a kind of Faustian overture" that might be thought of as a grand introduction to the whole work. Indeed, its complicated chromatic themes and inexorable timpani at the opening are hardly the stuff of which popular "singable" tunes are made.

One unusual feature of this symphony is the presence of two slow introductions, each signaling something portentous and monumental. It is a measure of Brahms' genius that the effect is entirely different in the two: ushering in heroic conflict in the opening movement; introducing serene exaltation in the finale. By contrast, the inner movements are both shorter and lighter in emotional weight. In the slow movement, Brahms indulges in some orchestral decoration, embroidering his already rich music with a rare, breathtakingly lovely violin solo. Here and in the graceful *Un poco allegretto* we have a welcome emotional breather between the mighty pillars of the outer movements.

Listen for a horn call at the beginning of the finale. It introduces a majestic chorale melody that is often compared to the "Ode to Joy" finale of Beethoven's Ninth. From that magical horn call to the majestic closing chords, unforgettable tunes vie with one another, providing this noble movement with some of his most beloved original themes. Brahms' First Symphony remains an audience favorite because of its emotional power and the hymn-like concluding movement.

Allison Loggins-Hull: *Can You See?*

Allison Loggins-Hull

Born: 1982 in Chicago

Composed: 2022; original version composed in 2021

World Premiere: Orchestral version premiered on May 4, 2023, in Cleveland, Ohio. Franz Welser-Möst conducted the Cleveland Orchestra. Original version premiered by the New Jersey Symphony Players on June 9, 2021, in Newark, New Jersey.

Duration: 8 minutes

Instrumentation: piccolo, two flutes (2nd doubling piccolo and alto flute), two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, trombone, percussion (chromatic set of crotales, glockenspiel, tenor drum, snare drum, bass drum, clap stack, four tom toms), and strings

Allison Loggins-Hull is New Jersey Symphony's new Resident Artistic Partner. The Symphony commissioned her in 2021 to arrange the US national anthem both to honor the lives of those we have lost, while also setting forth the role of the living. The original version was for the New Jersey Symphony Chamber Players. Her composer's note relates its metamorphosis to this expanded version.

For this larger iteration, the material is given a curious, yet hopeful treatment. Voices from the original version are orchestrated to achieve a designed delay effect, creating a dreamy soundscape while posing questions relating to the meaning of *The Star-Spangled Banner* and the complicated history of the United States.

Melodic material from *The Star-Spangled Banner* is used throughout the work, often stretched out and surrounded by tension and revolving colors. The strings create a sound world that is cloudy, uncertain, and bleary, questioning if the core meaning of the anthem is in focus. Rhythmic elements evoke a forward-moving motion, while textures and harmonic language nod to the scope and diversity of American music and people.

Listeners should not anticipate hearing clear quotations of *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Instead, Loggins-Hull has deconstructed the anthem's melodic and rhythmic elements, reassembling them with different temporal parameters. Performance instructions in the score direct the string players to move the bow in an even circular motion, resulting in a mix of pitches and sounds "between the notes." The effect is eerie, and a marked contrast with the clipped, precise punctuation of the percussion.

Frédéric Chopin: Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 11

Frédéric Chopin

Born: March 1 or February 22, 1810, in Zelazowa Wola (near Warsaw), Poland

Died: October 17, 1849, in Paris

Composed: 1830

World Premiere: October 11, 1830, in Warsaw; Chopin was the soloist. The concerto was published in Leipzig and Paris in 1833 and in London the following year.

Duration: 43 minutes

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, trombone, timpani, solo piano, and strings

Frédéric Chopin was one of the first keyboard superstars of the 19th century. His musical education in Poland included an intimate knowledge of opera, especially the Italian operas that were fashionable in early 19th-century Warsaw. Chopin instinctively grasped the relationship between opera and other musical genres. He was one of the most successful composers in merging the delicacy and flexibility of coloratura vocal ornamentation with the growing technical capabilities of the piano.

Chopin's finest music is found in his solo piano pieces. He was not a brilliant orchestrator, but his two early concertos, both completed before he was 20, have remained in the repertoire because of the splendid opportunities they afford to the soloist. The French critic and organist Bernard Gavoty has noted:

Still young, he already possessed two qualities that would mark his whole work: bravura, the gift of instrumental virtuosity, and the instinct of harmonic character. Already, before his 20th year, his art was precise.

Chopin's two piano concertos are a far cry from the refined works of Mozart's maturity, yet they are logical outgrowths of his late 18th-century model. The links connecting the two are the Irish composer John Field and his Austro-Czech contemporary Johann Nepomuk Hummel, who was himself a student of Mozart, Haydn, and Salieri. Mozart, Field, and Hummel all composed concertos as vehicles for their own performing careers; most pianist-composers of the era wrote virtuoso works for themselves. While Field and Hummel were both elegant, underrated, and eminently listenable composers, Chopin towers over them in his finely shaped phrases and the exquisite beauty of his passage work.

Chopin completed the E-minor concerto shortly before he left Warsaw and performed it there in October 1830. At the time, he fancied himself in love with a soprano named Constantia Gladkowska, and his letters to his friend Titus Woyciechowski are filled with rapturous descriptions of her. His Larghetto is an expression of that infatuation, rendered with remarkable maturity for a young man in his late 'teens. He wrote to Titus:

I wasn't trying to get strength in it. It's a rather calm, melancholy romance. It must make the impression of a tender gaze turned toward a place evoking a thousand charming memories. It's like a reverie—not on a fine spring day, but by moonlight. The accompaniment is muted—that is, with violins. A sort of comb, placed on the cords, reduces the sonority, while making it nasal and tinkling...

After Italian opera, the most significant influence in Chopin's music is the dance rhythms of his native Poland. The First Concerto's finale is a *krakowiak* in the form of a rondo. This lively, syncopated dance takes its name

from Poland's second city, Krakow. It was popular in the early nineteenth century, and Chopin had already employed it in a *krakowiak* for piano and orchestra from 1828, published in 1834 as Op. 14.

The First Concerto bears a dedication to the German pianist and composer Friedrich Kalkbrenner. One of Chopin's letters to Titus shortly after his departure from Warsaw mentions an interview with Kalkbrenner when he played the E-minor concerto for the older pianist. Kalkbrenner, whose ego was even greater than his talent, first opined that Chopin had the style of Johann Baptist Cramer and the touch of John Field, then invited Chopin to study with him. After Chopin published the concerto, Kalkbrenner returned the compliment by composing variations on Chopin's Mazurka, Op. 7, No. 1. Such exchanges remind us what an extraordinarily rich era this was for music in general, and for the expanding art of the piano in particular.

Johannes Brahms: Symphony No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 68

Johannes Brahms

Born: May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany

Died: April 3, 1897, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1855–1876; the intensive work took place between 1874 and 1876

World Premiere: Karlsruhe, Baden, 4 November 1876. Otto Dessoff conducted.

Duration: 45 minutes

Instrumentation: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings

The moniker "Beethoven's Tenth" has been attached to Brahms' First Symphony almost since it was completed in 1876. Hans von Bülow (1830–1894), the eminent conductor, pianist, and composer, is responsible for thus dubbing the C-minor symphony. He was recognizing Brahms' fulfillment of a prophecy articulated nearly a quarter century earlier, when Robert Schumann hailed then 20-year-old Brahms as successor to Beethoven.

Brahms took the legacy of Beethoven very seriously. He was a brutal critic of his own compositions, and destroyed a large number of sketches, and completed works that did not satisfy him. Nowhere was his self-criticism more merciless than in the realm of orchestral music, because he was keenly aware that his first symphony would be compared to Beethoven. "You do not know what it is like hearing his footsteps constantly behind one," Brahms famously observed.

In a way, everything orchestral that Brahms composed up until the First Symphony was a form of preparation for him to fulfill the daunting legacy Schumann had bequeathed to him. He produced four large, symphonic works while he honed his orchestral skills: the Piano Concerto No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 15 (1854–58), the two Serenades, Op. 11 (1857–58), and 16 (1858–59, revised 1875), and the *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*, Op. 56a (1873). The orchestral fabric of the major choral works he worked on during the 1860s and early 1870s was also significant in strengthening Brahms' command of symphonic resources. *A German Requiem*, Op. 45 (1857–68), was followed by the dramatic cantata *Rinaldo*, Op. 50 (1869), the *Alto Rhapsody*, Op. 53 (1869),

Schicksalslied, Op. 54 (1868–71), and *Triumphlied*, Op. 55 (1870–71). Each of them became a repository for important instrumental as well as vocal ideas.

All along, Brahms had the goal of a symphony in mind. As early as 1854, probably with Robert Schumann's encouragement, Brahms was at work on symphonic sketches. Two decades elapsed before that music found its way into any permanent form. Clara Schumann and Albert Dietrich both saw a draft of the first movement in 1862, in a version not yet preceded by slow introduction. Some five years later, Brahms wrote a letter to Clara including the famous horn theme that became the transition to the hymn of the finale. Not until 1873, however, did he concentrate seriously on the completion of his First Symphony. He waited until the age of 43 to contribute to the symphonic canon.

Brahms completed the First Symphony at Lichtenthal during the autumn of 1876. The premiere took place at Karlsruhe in November. Brahms chose the smaller town because it was a less politically stressful musical community than Vienna or Leipzig. He wrote to Otto Dessoff, conductor of the Karlsruhe orchestra:

It was always my cherished and secret wish to hear the thing first in a small town which possessed a good friend, a good conductor, and a good orchestra.

Dessoff was delighted by the honor accorded his orchestra. Brahms foresaw that the symphony might not have direct popular appeal, writing to Carl Reinecke of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra:

And now I have to make the probably very surprising announcement that my symphony is long and not exactly amiable.

He need not have worried. Dessoff's first rendition was successful enough to warrant repeat performances under the composer's direction in Mannheim and Munich shortly thereafter. The First Symphony cured Brahms' orchestral writer's block. For the next 11 years, his orchestral harvest was bountiful: three additional symphonies, three more concertos, and two overtures.

Von Bülow had good reason to hail the symphony as "the Beethoven Tenth." Because of its heroic stance and C-minor tonality, the work is most often compared with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Both pieces have a general progression from tragic struggle to triumph and victory. Brahms' First bears equal comparison to the Beethoven Ninth (Beethoven's other minor mode symphony), primarily because of the obvious parallel in hymn-like finales.

Brahms' good friend Theodor Billroth likened the C-minor symphony's first movement to "a kind of Faustian overture" that might be thought of as a grand introduction to the whole work. Indeed, its complicated chromatic themes and inexorable timpani at the opening are hardly the stuff of which popular "singable" tunes are made. Hans Gál offers an insightful commentary as to why Wagner and his followers would have experienced impatience listening to the opening movement.

The nobility of this first movement rests on qualities that were alien to the dramatic composer: a thematic interplay worked out to the smallest detail and based on polyphonic structure; a delicate balancing, from beginning to end, of tonal relationships; and a formal design whose grandiose dimensions only become apparent when one experiences the whole movement as a single, great continuum.

The perspective is significant because Wagner's followers comprised a major portion of the listening public in the 1870s.

One unusual feature of this symphony is the presence of two slow introductions, one for each of the outer movements. Slow introductions are rare in Brahms' music, and this double occurrence is unique among his compositions. Both introductions signal something portentous and monumental. It is a measure of Brahms' genius that the effect is entirely different in the two: ushering in heroic conflict in the opening movement; introducing serene exaltation in the conclusion. By contrast, the inner movements are both shorter and lighter in emotional weight. In the slow movement, Brahms indulges in some orchestral decoration, embroidering his already rich music with a rare, breathtakingly lovely violin solo. Here and in the graceful *Un poco allegretto* we have a welcome emotional breather between the mighty pillars of the outer movements.

If there were any shortage of melodies early on, Brahms compensates with abundance in the expansive finale. From the magical horn call to the majestic closing chords, unforgettable tunes vie with one another, providing this noble movement with some of his most beloved original themes.

This information is provided solely as a service to and for the benefit of New Jersey Symphony subscribers and patrons. Any other use without express written permission is strictly forbidden.