

Carolinas Concert Association

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833 in Hamburg

Died April 3, 1897 in Vienna

In 1853, Brahms embarked on a concert tour with the Hungarian violinist Eduard Hoffmann (a.k.a. Reményi). It was during their stop at Göttinger, near Hanover, that Brahms came to meet Joseph Joachim, the virtuoso violinist - also a composer and conductor - with whom he established an immediate rapport, flourishing into their long friendship. Joachim proved to be enormously influential in Brahms' career, as well as in the younger man's development as a composer. When Brahms wrote his masterful Violin Concerto in 1878, he asked his friend for technical advice regarding the solo part. Joachim - for whom the work was composed and to whom it is dedicated - assured Brahms that "...most of the material is playable, but I wouldn't care to say whether it can be comfortably played in an overheated concert hall until I have played it through myself without stopping."

Joachim introduced Brahms' Violin Concerto on New Year's Day, 1879, at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, with the composer at the podium. The premiere of the work was not entirely well received. Through the dedicated advocacy of Joachim, the concerto soon gained its deserved recognition and a very secure place in the repertoire.

The main theme of the first movement (*Allegro non troppo*) is announced by violas, cellos, bassoons and horns. This subject, and three contrasting song-like themes, together with an energetic dotted figure, *marcato*, furnish the thematic material of the movement. The solo violin is introduced, after almost a hundred measures for the orchestra alone, in an extended section, chiefly of passagework, as a preamble to the exposition of the chief theme. With great skill, Brahms unleashes his two essentially unequal forces: the tender, lyric violin and the robust orchestra. In the expansive and emotional development, the caressing and delicate weaving of the solo instrument about the melodic outlines of the song themes in the orchestra is most unforgettable. A particular high point is provided when the long solo cadenza merges with the serene return of the main theme in the coda that concludes the movement.

This feature is even more pronounced in the second movement (*Adagio*), where a dreamy oboe introduces the main theme against the background provided by the rest of the woodwinds. The solo violin makes its compliments to the main theme and announces an ornamental second theme. Adding the warmth of its tone, the soloist proceeds to embroider its