

Notable in the movement, as indeed throughout the Symphony, are the subtle cross-rhythms which straddle bar-lines, and which give the music a richness of texture and turbulent inner life. In his orchestral colour Brahms seeks to create not sharp contrasts, but a subtly changing balance of strings, woodwinds and brass, like the innumerable degrees of light and shadow through which Rembrandt realizes the underlying monumental structure of his great paintings.

The slow movement, *Andante moderato*, begins with horns, soon joined by the other woodwinds over *pizzicato* strings, in a theme that has the slow lilt of dance music carrying a heavy weight of sadness. The violins come to the forefront with a long, singing melodic line of beautiful serenity. A stormy climax builds up, with triplet figures peeled out by the full orchestra, and then the triplet motif is transformed into a hauntingly lovely melody for the cellos. One of the great moments in this movement comes near the close, when this same consoling melody is taken up and expanded upon by the full string section.

The boisterous third movement, *Allegro giocoso*, had justly been called the only 'true scherzo' in the Brahms Symphonies. In its amiable and vigorous nature it is akin to a robust folk song. The last movement, *Allegro energico e passionato*, is one of the greatest examples of Brahms's 'groundbreaking conservatism'. He adapted the old baroque form of the *chaconne*, or *passacaglia*, with its variations over a ground bass. The basic theme of eight notes is announced by brass, woodwind and drums in eight mighty chords. It is present as the foundation of all the subsequent thirty variations and coda. But unlike the use of the form a century and two before Brahms, here the theme is so absorbed in the harmonic texture, and in melodies which are subtle variants of its basic shape, to the point that often the listener feels, rather than hears, its presence. This is especially so in the reflective middle section of the movement, with its plaintive flute solo, followed by awesome trombone chords. And, as in the first movement, the conclusion is a powerful and confident transformation of the opening theme.