



the usually sympathetic critic Eduard Hanslick, he complained, "all through I felt I was being thrashed by two terribly clever men." Its premiere was given by the Meiningen Orchestra under Hans von Bülow on 25 October 1885.

The dryness of the symphony's background might lead some to expect a rather dour work, but the Fourth Symphony is Brahms at his most passionate, poetic and compelling. Its first movement (*Allegro non troppo*) launches straight into its powerfully autumnal world with a theme whose sweet falling thirds and rising sixths instantly create a sense of melancholy. A trenchant secondary theme follows and the movement culminates in one of the most intense climaxes Brahms ever conceived.

The second movement (*Andante moderato*) opens with a horn call, timelessly reaching back to the language of the medieval church modes. A gentle theme in the clarinets, presently leads to a more vigorous idea, dispelled by a theme in the cellos of surpassing beauty. Now the themes and ideas are repeated, tinged with a sense of transient loss. In the closing bars the opening horn call returns, passing magically through its three implied keys, opening out through new and strange casements.

The third movement (*Allegro giocoso*) is the only true scherzo in any of Brahms's symphonies (the others substitute a gentle *intermezzo*). Robust, bright and steely, it introduces an instrument rarely heard in Brahms's orchestral music: the triangle. It was written after the other three

movements, and was clearly intended it as a contrast to the darker nature of the rest of the symphony.

The finale (*Allegro energico e passionato*) is a compact and relatively short movement, moving inexorably towards its tragic conclusion. Based on a theme from Bach's Cantata No.150 (*Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich*), Brahms cast the movement in the ancient baroque form of a passacaglia. The eight chords heard at the outset are, in one form or another, repeated continuously through some thirty-four different variations, always changing and yet unchangeable. Only briefly, at the centre of the movement, does Brahms relax its onward drive with a brief interlude featuring an elegiac flute solo and sombre chorale for the three trombones before the music rushes impetuously towards its tragic conclusion.

CD: Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Carlos Kleiber (Deutsche Grammophon 457 706-2)

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-97)

The young Brahms was the personification of the romantic musician. Handsome and boyish, he was introduced to Schumann at the age of twenty, who declared him as, "one of those who came as if sent straight from God... there was nothing that I could tell him to take away or to add". Yet Brahms's talents were hard won. The son of a poor musician, he was brought up in one of the most squalid areas of Hamburg. By his teens his exceptional talents were recognised, but he was obliged to earn a living playing in the bars and brothels of Hamburg's harbours.