

A Symphony and a Concerto: All Brahms

Saturday, August 22, 2026 · 11:00 · Großes Festspielhaus
Christian Thielemann, conductor · Augustin Hadelich, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	BRAHMS 1833–1897 <i>Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77</i>	38'
2	BRAHMS 1833–1897 <i>Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68</i>	48'
TOTAL MUSIC		86'

Johannes Brahms

1833–1897

38 minutes

Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement (Allegro non troppo) is broad and symphonic, opening with a long orchestral exposition before the soloist enters, and when the violin does arrive, it is not with a pretty tune but with a stormy, declamatory flourish, as if seizing the argument by force. Listen to how Brahms treats the solo line throughout as a partner in a symphonic discussion rather than a star above an accompaniment: the violin spins long lyrical paragraphs, then plunges into dense passagework that interweaves with the orchestra. The movement's emotional range is wide, from sweeping grandeur to moments of intimate songfulness, and it builds to a cadenza (traditionally Joachim's) where the soloist alone reflects on the movement's themes before the orchestra returns for the close.

The second movement (Adagio) is the concerto's lyrical heart, and its most famous stroke is that the great opening melody is given not to the violin but to a solo oboe, singing a serene, hymn-like tune over gentle winds. This is the very passage Sarasate refused to stand idle through. When the soloist finally enters, it does not simply repeat the oboe's theme but elaborates and embroiders it, decorating the melody with tender fili-

gree and rising to passages of rapt, almost vocal expression. Listen for the dialogue between violin and woodwinds, a conversation of unusual intimacy and warmth.

The finale (*Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace*) bursts in with a swaggering, Hungarian-flavoured main theme, a nod to Joachim's Hungarian birth and to the gypsy idiom both men loved. It is a rondo, the bold, dancing refrain returning between contrasting episodes, full of off-beat accents, fiery double-stops, and rhythmic drive. Listen for the music's earthy, foot-stamping energy and its sudden flashes of brilliance, and for the closing pages, where Brahms transforms the theme into a brisk, march-like coda that drives the concerto to a high-spirited, triumphant finish.

Johannes Brahms

1833–1897

48 minutes

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement opens with one of the most arresting introductions in the repertoire: over a relentless, pounding timpani pulse, the strings strain upward while the winds press downward, two lines pulling in opposite directions in a knot of tension. Listen to that slow introduction closely, because its rising and falling chromatic shapes are the seeds of the entire symphony. When the main *Allegro* arrives it inherits this agitation directly, restless, contrapuntal and churning, and the movement stays gripped by C minor struggle almost throughout, its energy more anxious than heroic.

The second movement (*Andante sostenuto*) is a balm after the storm: a warm, songful slow movement in E major, with long-spun melodies passed among oboe, clarinet, and strings. Listen near the close for a tender, soaring solo violin, rising above the orchestra in one of Brahms's most intimate touches, a moment of pure lyric repose.

The third movement takes the place of the expected scherzo, but Brahms refuses the boisterous Beethovenian model. Instead he writes a gentle, graceful intermezzo (*Un poco allegretto e*

grazioso), led off by a flowing clarinet melody, with a faster, more buoyant central section. It is relaxed and conversational, a deliberate easing of pressure before the great final reckoning.

The finale is the heart of the work and its goal. It begins in shadow, a slow and ominous introduction in C minor full of foreboding, until suddenly the clouds break and a horn rings out with a broad, glowing call. Brahms had jotted this melody on a card to Clara Schumann in 1868 ('Thus blew the shepherd's horn today!'), fitting it to the words 'High on the mountain, deep in the valley, I greet you a thousand times'; here it sounds like a summons to dawn. A solemn trombone chorale answers, and then, out of this radiant threshold, the strings launch the great main theme, the broad, hymn-like tune so often likened to Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy.' From there the movement drives forward with mounting jubilation, and at the very end the trombone chorale returns in blazing C major brass, sealing the symphony's long journey from darkness to triumphant light.



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