

WIENER PHILHARMONIKER

# 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                   | <b>BRAHMS</b> 1833–1897<br><i>Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77</i> | 38' |
| 2                   | <b>BRAHMS</b> 1833–1897<br><i>Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68</i>  | 48' |
| TOTAL MUSIC         |                                                                      | 86' |

## Johannes Brahms

1833–1897

*Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77*

38 minutes

### ABOUT THE WORK

Brahms composed his only violin concerto in 1878, in the glow of a productive summer at Pörtschach on the Wörthersee, the Carinthian lakeside resort where he spent his summers from 1877 to 1879. He wrote it for one man above all: the violinist

Joseph Joachim, the closest musical friend of his life. The two had met in 1853, when Brahms was an unknown twenty-year-old and Joachim already a celebrated virtuoso; it was Joachim who sent the young composer to Schumann with a letter of introduction, setting his whole career in motion. A quarter-century later, Brahms repaid that debt with a concerto written expressly for Joachim's art, and written, crucially, with his help. Brahms knew the piano intimately but was no string player, and he sent Joachim the solo part for advice on its technical detail, accepting some suggestions and stubbornly rejecting others. The collaboration was not always smooth (Joachim found passages awkward, and not all his fixes survived Brahms's editorial obstinacy), but the result is one of the supreme concertos in the literature.

#### 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 filigree 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

### *Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68*

48 minutes

#### ABOUT THE WORK

Few symphonies were born of so long a labour, or so heavy a burden of expectation, as Brahms's First. Its earliest sketches date from the mid-1850s, but he did not complete the work until 1876, when he was forty-three; Brahms himself reckoned that it had taken him twenty-one years. The reason was not idleness but awe. Brahms had been hailed in print as early as 1853, when he was barely twenty, by Robert Schumann, who in a famous article anointed the young man as the heir who would carry German music forward. The anointing was a gift and a curse. To write a symphony in the German tradition meant, inescapably, to follow Beethoven, and the weight of that inheritance very nearly paralysed Brahms. 'You can't have any idea,' he told the conductor Hermann Levi, 'what it's like to hear such a giant marching behind you.'

## 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 clari-

net 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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## Tonight's artists

### **Augustin Hadelich** *violin*

Violin: Augustin Hadelich takes on Brahms's only violin concerto, a work that demands not virtuoso display but the ability to sing as one symphonic voice among many, from the stormy entry of the first movement, through the rapt elaboration of the oboe's Adagio melody, to the fiery, Hungarian-flavoured dance of the finale.

Augustin Hadelich, born in Italy in 1984 to German parents and now an American citizen, is one of the most acclaimed violinists in the world. After a childhood on a Tuscan farm, and recovery from a serious fire injury in his teens, he trained at the Juilliard School and rose to international prominence by winning the gold medal at the 2006 Indianapolis Competition. A Grammy Award winner with a vast repertoire and a celebrated discography, he is admired for the beauty and refinement of his tone, his flawless technique and his deep musical intelligence. He joined the faculty of the Yale School of Music in 2021. His combination of brilliance and lyricism makes him an ideal interpreter of the great Romantic concertos.

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### CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2026-08-22-thielemann>

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