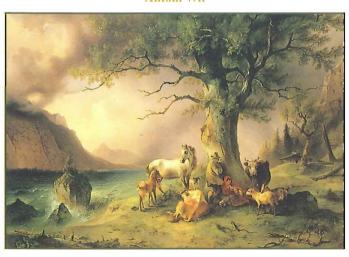




BRAHMS Piano Concerto No. 1 SCHUMANN

Introduction and Concert Allegro

Idil Biret
Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra
Antoni Wit



Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15 Robert Schumann (1810–1856) Concert-Allegro with Introduction, Op. 134

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg in 1833, the son of a double-bass player and his much older wife, a seamstress. His childhood was spent in relative poverty, and his early studies in music, for which he showed a natural aptitude, developed his talent to such an extent that there was talk of touring as a prodigy at the age of eleven. It was Eduard Marxsen who gave him a grounding in the technical basis of composition, while the boy helped his family by playing the piano in dockside tayerns.

In 1851 Brahms met the émigré Hungarian violinist Reményi, who introduced him to Hungarian dance music. Two years later he set out in his company on his first concert tour, their journey taking them, on the recommendation of the Hungarian violinist Joachim, to Weimar, where Franz Liszt held court and might have been expected to show particular favour to a fellow-countryman. Reményi profited from the visit, but Brahms, with a lack of tact that was later accentuated, failed to impress the Master. Later in the year, however, he met the Schumanns, through Joachim's agency. The meeting was a fruitful one.

In 1850 Schumann had taken up the offer from the previous incumbent, Ferdinand Hiller, of the position of municipal director of music in Düsseldorf, the first official appointment of his career and the last. Now in the music of Brahms he detected a promise of greatness and published his views in the journal he had once edited, the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, declaring Brahms the longawaited successor to Beethoven. In the following

year Schumann, who had long suffered from intermittent periods of intense depression, attempted suicide. His final years, until his death in 1856, were to be spent in an asylum, while Brahms rallied to the support of Schumann's wife, the gifted pianist Clara Schumann, and her young family, remaining a firm friend until her death in 1896, shortly before his own in the following year.

Brahms had always hoped that sooner or later he would be able to return in triumph to a position of distinction in the musical life of Hamburg. This ambition was never fulfilled. Instead he settled in Vienna, intermittently from 1863 and definitively in 1869, establishing himself there and seeming to many to fulfil Schumann's early prophecy. In him his supporters, including, above all, the distinguished critic and writer Eduard Hanslick, saw a true successor to Beethoven and a champion of music untrammelled by extra-musical associations, of pure music, as opposed to the Music of the Future promoted by Wagner and Liszt, a path to which Joachim and Brahms both later publicly expressed their opposition.

The monumental nature of much of the orchestral work of Brahms is in part a sign of the great pains that went into its construction. His first piano concerto, which made no concessions to contemporary taste, was, it seems, conceived originally as a sonata for two pianos. This then became a symphony, to reach its final metamorphosis as the *Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 15*, completed in this form in 1859. The original

8.554088

conception in 1854, came at the time of Schumann's illness and was developed during the difficult final years of the latter's life, suggesting, particularly in its slow movement, a Requiem for Schumann.

The concerto had its first private rehearsals, with Brahms as soloist, in Hanover in 1858, with Joachim conducting. They introduced the work to the public in January the following year to a polite reception. This relative success persuaded Brahms to the more ambitious step of a performance in Leipzig with the Gewandhaus Orchestra, conducted by Julius Rietz, once Mendelsson's assistant in Düsseldorf and now established in Leipzig in succession to Niels W. Gade. The reaction of the audience to such a demanding work was hostile, with ironic applause from one or two and hissing from many. A well known critic found nothing good to say about the concerto and even less to commend in Brahms's performance as a pianist, at the time his principal means of earning a living. His later supporter Hanslick, indeed, writing three years later, found that Brahms played more like a composer than a virtuoso, praising his honesty, his interpretative abilities, yet aware of inaccuracies however compelling the whole performance. A subsequent performance of the concerto in Hamburg met a better reception. In the following years the work gradually won wider acceptance, finding its way early into the repertoire of Clara Schumann, a strong advocate. The concerto is massive in its symphonic conception, described by one contemporary as a symphony with piano obbligato, and clearly posed problems to its first audiences, lacking any trivial or superficial brilliance in its writing and calling for sustained attention over its very considerable length. As the symphonies Brahms was to write might seem an extension of the work of Beethoven half a century earlier, so the first of his two piano concertos seemed to continue and develop the pattern set by Beethoven's Emperor Concerto. In November 1855 Brahms had appeared as a soloist with orchestra for the first time in a performance of that concerto and included Beethoven's Fourth Concerto and Mozart's D minor and C minor Concertos in his concert repertoire at this time. These all had an observable influence on his own writing.

The first movement opens with a feeling of tragic significance, the marked trills adding to its ominous nature, before a gentler element, a foretaste of the second subject, intervenes, followed by a sudden outburst from the orchestra, which returns to its opening mood, hushed only by the entry of the soloist. The pianist succumbs, in turn, to the initial theme with its fierce trills, leading to the second subject, a hymn-like theme announced by the soloist. The material is developed in a section that makes heavy demands on the solo instrument and the recapitulation brings its own surprising shifts of key. The massive first movement is followed by a contrasting slow movement. Over the melody of the Adagio Brahms wrote the words Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini (Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord), a reference, it is supposed, to his master, Schumann, although he is also said to have identified the movement with Clara Schumann. The liturgical reference was later crossed out, in an attempt, to conceal, perhaps, such an overt display of feeling. A long-drawn theme is played by the strings, the bassoon joining the bass, with the piano adding its own meditation on the melody. As in the first movement, the horns have a characteristically evocative part to play, however brief, while the piano continues its progress towards a new theme. The mood of the opening returns, extended in a cadenza of great screnity. The last movement, a Rondo, has a marked and energetic opening that may remind one of Beethoven, both in his Concerto in C minor and in other final movements, including, even, in some of the keyboard writing, that of the first piano sonata. The rondo form allows the inclusion of a number of contrasting ideas, an F major episode introduced by the piano and developed by the orchestra and a later episode introduced by the violins, but treated contrapuntally, as is the principal theme, before it has gone too far into a purely lyrical mood. A cadenza, marked quasi finitasia and using a dominant pedal-point, a sustained note to underpin changes of harmony, a feature characteristic of Brahms, leads to a moving conclusion.

Schumann's first Introduction and Allegro apparssionato, Op. 92, for piano and orchestra, had been written in 1849 and given its first performance in Leipzig early in the following year by Clara Schumann. She included the Concert-Allegro with Introduction, Op. 134, in the programmes of her concert tour of Holland in the winter of 1853, the year of the work's composition. It was in February 1854 that Schumann's illness became unavoidably apparent, leading to his attempted suicide and his removal to the asylum at Endenich, where his wife was forbidden to see him, for fear of reviving memories associated with his insanity. Schumann wrote the Concert-Allegro as a thirteenth-anniversary present for his wife and for her birthday

on the same day and gave it to her on 13th September 1853, the month in which they met Brahms for the first time, following this with the present of a new piano and a surprise party. At Endenich he later recalled, almost as a dream, their tour of Holland, the torch-light procession with which they had been greeted in Rotterdam and her performances of Beethoven's Emperor Concerto, music by Chopin and Mendelssohn and the new Konzenstiick in d, the Concert-Alleero.

The Concert-Allegro, preceded by a slow introduction, is a formidable work, a concerto in itself. Schumann himself described his earlier Piano Concerto, to which there are here distinct resemblances in conception, as something between symphony, concerto and grand sonata. Here again it is the piano that enjoys continued prominence, with an extended cadenza that forms an integral part of the Allegro. Schumann's writing for piano and orchestra would have been well enough known to Brahms and it is not difficult to hear similarities in general conception in his two piano concertos, if not in precise musical content, which is very much more substantial and demanding.

Keith Anderson

8.554088

The First Piano Concerto of Brahms and its origins in Schumann's Introduction and Allegro op. 134

A very special friendship had developed between Brahms and Clara and Robert Schumann from the September day in 1853 when the young man first visited them. He had made a deep impression on the couple as a composer and pianist. Schumann expressed his enthusiasm in an article titled "Neuen Bahnen" published in *Die Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in October. He also dedicated to Brahms the *Introduction and Allegro for Piano and Orchestra Op.134* which he had recently composed. Shortly afterwards Schumann showed the first signs of a violent derangement by his attempt to commit suicide. He was taken to a mental institution where he died two years later in 1856.

The tragic events in Schumann's life and the support he gave to Brahms culminating in the dedication of the Op.134 work to him had a profound effect on the young composer. It is well known that during this period Brahms composed his first piano concerto under the strong influence of the dramatic events in Schumann's life. What seems not to have attracted much attention is the fact that there was also a direct inspiration from Schumann's music and that Brahms first piano concerto is

thematically strongly linked to Schumann's Op.134 work. This can be observed in a comparison of the two scores as well as closely listening to the music. Beside the D minor tonality which is the same in both works, one is amazed to discover that the point of departure of the whole of the Brahms concerto is this last composition of Schumann for piano and orchestra. In each of the three movements of the concerto in the main themes and their development there are many direct quotations from Schumann's Introduction and Allegro.* These quotations take all possible imaginable forms to such an extent that Brahms' first concerto could be considered to be a set of magnified variations on the main themes and ideas of Schumann's Introduction and Allegro Op.134. It would require the genius of Brahms to create such an original totally Brahmsian work from ingredients which are so typically those of Schumann

Idil Biret

* For example, compare the trombone solo passage in the coda of Schumann's work (track 4 / 13.33 – 13.42) with that in the Brahms concerts (track 1 / 20.29 – 20.38).

8.554088 5

Idil Biret

Born in Ankara, Idil Biret started to learn the piano at the age of three and later studied at the Paris Conservatoire under the guidance of Nadia Boulanger, graduating at the age of fifteen with three first prizes. A pupil of Alfred Cortot and Wilhelm Kempff, she embarked on her career as a soloist at the age of sixteen, appearing with major orchestras in the principal musical centres of the world, in collaboration with conductors of greatest distinction. To many festival appearances may be added membership of juries for international competitions including the Van Cliburn, Queen Elisabeth of the Belgians and Busoni competitions. She has received the Lili Boulanger Memorial Award in Boston, the

Harriet Cohen / Dinu Lipatti Gold Medal in London, the Polish Artistic Merit Award and the French Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite. Her more than seventy records include the first recording of Liszt's transcription of the symphonies of Beethoven, and for Naxos the complete piano works of Chopin. Brahms. Rachmaninov and the three sonatas of Boulez, with a Marco Polo disc of the piano compositions and transcriptions of her mentor Wilhelm Kempff. Her Chopin recordings have received a Grand Prix du Disque Frédéric Chopin award in Poland and the Boulez recording the Golden Diapason of the year award in France.

The Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra of Katowice (PNRSO) was founded in 1935 in Warsaw through the initiative of the well-known Polish conductor and composer Grzegorz Fitelberg, under whom the orchestra worked until the outbreak of World War II. In March 1945 it was recalled to life in Katowice by the eminent Polish conductor Witold Rowicki. In 1947, Grzegorz Fitelberg returned to Poland and became its artistic director. He was succeeded by eminent Polish conductors, among others, Jan Krenz, Kazimierz Kord and, since 1983.

Antoni Wit. The orchestra has appeared with conductors and soloists of the greatest distinction, such as Leonard Bernstein, Neville Marriner and Kurt Masur and has toured most European countries as well as the Americas and countries of the Near and Far East. It has recorded almost 150 compact discs for Polish and international record companies. For Naxos, the PNRSO has recorded over seventy discs, among them the complete symphonics of Mahler, Tchaikovsky, Schumann and Lutoslawski.

Antoni Wit

Antoni Wit was born in Cracow in 1944 and studied there, before becoming assistant to Witold Rowicki with the National Philharmonic Orchestra in Warsaw in 1967. He studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris and with Penderecki and in 1971 was a prize-winner in the Herbert von Karajan Competition. Study at Tanglewood with Skrowaczewski and Seiji Ozawa

was followed by appointment as Principal Conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice. Antoni Wit has undertaken many engagements abroad with major orchestras, ranging from the Berlin Philharmonic and the BBC Welsh and Scottish Symphony Orchestras to the Kusatsu Festival Orchestra in Japan.

8,554088

BRAHMS

Piano Concerto No. 1

Playing Time 66:15 NAXOS

SCHUMANN

Introduction and Concert Allegro

Idil Riret

Idil Biret
Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra
Antoni Wit

23:42

15:01

12:30

JOHANNES BRAHMS: Piano Concerto No.1 in D minor,

- Piano Concerto No.1 in D minor, Op.15 (51:16)
- Adagio
 Rondo: Allegro non troppo

8.554088

STEREO

DDD

1 Maestoso

- ROBERT SCHUMANN:
- 4 Introduction and Concert Allegro in D minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 134 14:53

in a sonata for two pianos, written in 1854 with a slow movement that is a portrayal of Clara Schumann, composed in 1856, the year of her husband's death. The massive concerto itself is of symphonic dimensions, as remarkable as it is demanding on a performer. Robert Schumann wrote his Introduction and Allegro in 1853, a year in which anxieties about his health and disputes with his employers, the civic authorities in Düsseldorf, were omens of his coming mental breakdown. The new work combines the form of sonata and concerto in an effective single movement, the product of a final period of creativity.

Brahms's Piano Concerto No.1 had its origin

Recorded in Katowice, Poland from 29th to 31st August, 1996

Producer: Günter Appenheimer Sponsored by AGF/GARANTI SIGORTA Music Notes: Keith Anderson, Idil Biret

Cover Painting: Sheltering from the storm by Friedrich Gauermann (1807-62) (Christie's Images, London, UK/Bridgeman Art Library)



8.554088

Concerto