



London **Philharmonic** Orchestra

BRAHMS
SYMPHONY NO. 3
SYMPHONY NO. 4

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI *conductor*
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

BRAHMS

SYMPHONY NO. 3 IN F MAJOR

When Johannes Brahms's famous and, for his admirers, frustrating reluctance to embark on a symphonic canon finally ended with the arrival of his First Symphony in 1876, a floodgate opened. The First had been about 15 years in the making, but with it behind him Brahms composed his Second within a year. The Third then followed in 1883, and the Fourth and final symphony in 1884–5.

By the 1880s Brahms had taken to spending the summer months out of Vienna, and in 1883 his chosen getaway was the southwest German spa town of Wiesbaden, with its fine view of the Rhine valley. The similarity of the opening theme of his Third Symphony to that of Schumann's Third, the 'Rhenish', has often been remarked, and it may be that the great river awoke memories for Brahms of times spent with his early mentor in Düsseldorf, another Rhineland town, 30 years before. The fact that the first movement is permeated by the three-note sequence F-A-F, identified by one of Brahms's early biographers as a personal cipher for the words 'Frei aber froh' ('free but happy'), suggests a further level of reminiscence; in 1853 Brahms had contributed a movement to a violin sonata jointly composed with Schumann and Albert Dietrich as a gift for the violinist Joseph Joachim, making use of Joachim's note-cipher of F-A-E – 'Frei aber einsam' ('free but lonely').

The F-A-F motto is presented right at the beginning of the piece, in the rising top line of its first three chords, and then

forms the bass to the proudly plunging first theme that immediately follows. Those chords have alternated major and minor (by changing the A of the second chord to an A flat), and this agile tonal ambivalence continues to be a feature of the movement, whose demeanour has been aptly described by Malcolm MacDonald as one of 'irascible exhilaration'. A new theme in A major brings momentary calm, but the mood is soon whipped into a passion again, and when this second theme reappears in the central development section, it is in a whirling, almost macabre minor-key transformation. The main themes are then recapitulated as normal, after which a further portentous restatement of the motto and first theme initiates a toughly worked-out coda. The movement ends, however, in peace.

For Clara Schumann the *Andante* brought to mind 'worshippers at a woodland shrine', but if the opening hymn-like melody carries an immediate suggestion of pastoral music-making, the emotional shadows cast by the repeated notes of a troubled second theme ensure that a deeper philosophical landscape has opened up by the time the movement reaches its end.

For the third movement Brahms provides an eloquent, medium-paced intermezzo instead of the customary scherzo. He had done the same in the First Symphony, but this time the music is more haunting, led off as it is

SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN E MINOR

by a yearningly plaintive cello melody, and although a central section injects what seems like some rather forced humour, it soon subsides to a reprise of this first theme melancholically rescored first for horn and then for oboe.

The finale opens in the minor with a stealthy running theme, but this is soon interrupted by a solemn transformation of the repeated-note material from the *Andante*, followed by a sudden, openly belligerent response from the full orchestra. The movement proceeds to juggle these components in a mood of intense excitability that not even the vain attempts of a smoother second theme can calm, but this is not how the Symphony will end; eventually a muted horn blast ushers in a slowed-down viola version of the running theme, and from here the music winds down, switches to the major, and closes in a gentle reminiscence of the Symphony's first theme, with the F-A-F motto in attendance.

In October 1885 the pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow visited rehearsals for Brahms's Fourth Symphony, and reported to a friend that it was 'stupendous, quite original, quite new, individual and rock-like. Breathes incomparable energy from start to finish.' No-one could deny that, though there were those among Brahms's friends who were initially baffled and disappointed by the work's unusual nature and form. Bülow, however, had had an insight into its most striking innovation a few years earlier when Brahms showed him a chorus from Bach's church cantata *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich* (BWV150), consisting of variations over a repeating, rising bass-line. 'What would you think of a symphonic movement written on this theme one day?' Brahms had asked. 'But it is too heavy, too straightforward. It would have to be chromatically altered in some way.' The result is there to hear – including that chromatic alteration in the form of a prominent sharpening of the fifth note – in the extraordinary passacaglia finale of this symphony, a movement which, by turning to a formal model from Baroque times, finds a new solution to the problem of how to conclude a big and powerful symphonic work.

But it is not just this granitic statement that makes the Fourth one of the greatest of Romantic symphonies. There is the tightly motivic first movement, whose marking of *Allegro ma non troppo* is realised not just in the restless poetic beauty of the first theme but in the way that the second theme, a surging, passionate cello melody heralded

by brass fanfares, serves to increase the sense of forward motion rather than (as was more customary) relax it. Perhaps for the same reason, there is no repeat of the exposition, though the central development does start out as if it were one with a clear return to the opening theme. By contrast, the moment of recapitulation is disguised, the opening figure being heard slowed down on woodwind amid a cloud of string flourishes, before the first theme resumes its course as if nothing had happened. A substantial and impassioned coda then drives the movement to a stormy finish.

The elegiac and delicately scored *Andante moderato* gains depth by playing off the emotional distance of a modally inflected main theme against the warmth of a more conventionally major-key second. The reappearance of the latter on full strings in the second half of the movement forms a rich climax, before the music subsides to the sombre mood of the opening.

The third movement, the only one among Brahms's symphonies to qualify as a scherzo, is taut and vigorous – powerful enough in its material, it has often been said, to form a finale in itself. Interestingly, it was the last of the Symphony's movements to be composed, which suggests that its terse energy and ebullience (it was not often that Brahms called for a triangle) were precisely calculated to prepare the way for the stern majesty of the finale.

The form and genesis of that finale has already been described, but not its effect. Following the example of Bach's D minor Chaconne for solo violin (a work Brahms admired greatly), the 30 variations over the eight-note bass-line are shepherded into contrasting sections which give the music a broad emotional contour that prevents it from succumbing to repetitiveness. Indeed, the impression is of implacable momentum and controlled strength, so that by the time the variations have been crowned by a vehement coda, we have witnessed a rare spectacle: a 19th-century symphony that ends convincingly not in triumph, but in tragedy.

Programme notes © Lindsay Kemp

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI *conductor*



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One of today's most sought-after conductors, acclaimed worldwide for his incisive musicianship and adventurous artistic commitment, Vladimir Jurowski was born in Moscow in 1972 and studied at the Music Academies of Dresden and Berlin. In 1995 he made his international debut at the Wexford Festival conducting Rimsky-Korsakov's *May Night*, and the same year saw his debut at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, with *Nabucco*.

Vladimir Jurowski was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 2003, becoming the Orchestra's Principal Conductor in September 2007. He also holds the titles of Principal Artist of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Artistic Director of the Russian State Academic Symphony Orchestra. He has previously held the positions of First Kapellmeister of the Komische Oper Berlin (1997–2001), Principal Guest Conductor of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna (2000–03), Principal Guest Conductor of the Russian National Orchestra (2005–09), and Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera (2001–13).

Vladimir Jurowski is a regular guest with many leading orchestras in both Europe and North America, including the Berlin, Vienna and St Petersburg Philharmonic orchestras; the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra; The Philadelphia Orchestra; the Boston, San Francisco, Chicago and Bavarian Radio symphony orchestras; and the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden and Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

His opera engagements have included *Rigoletto*, *Jenůfa*, *The Queen of Spades*, *Hansel and Gretel* and *Die Frau ohne Schatten* at the Metropolitan Opera, New York; *Parsifal* and *Wozzeck* at Welsh National Opera; *War and Peace* at the Opéra national de Paris; *Eugene Onegin* at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan; *Ruslan and Ludmila* at the Bolshoi Theatre; *Iolanta* and *Der Teufel von Loudon* at the Dresden Semperoper; and numerous operas at Glyndebourne including *Otello*, *Macbeth*, *Falstaff*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, Peter Eötvös's *Love and Other Demons*, and *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

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The London Philharmonic Orchestra has been Resident Symphony Orchestra at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall since 1992 and there it presents its main series of

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The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski. **lpo.org.uk**



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JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)

35:52 **Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90**

- | | | |
|----|-------|------------------|
| 01 | 13:12 | Allegro con brio |
| 02 | 8:05 | Andante |
| 03 | 5:51 | Poco allegretto |
| 04 | 8:44 | Allegro |

39:43 **Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98**

- | | | |
|----|-------|-------------------------------|
| 05 | 13:00 | Allegro non troppo |
| 06 | 11:30 | Andante moderato |
| 07 | 5:40 | Allegro giocoso |
| 08 | 9:33 | Allegro energico e passionato |

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI *conductor*
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Pieter Schoeman *leader*

Recorded live at Southbank Centre's **ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL**, *London*