

1833-1897 | *Johannes Brahms*

Johannes Brahms was one of the greatest symphonic composers of the 19th century. His was the musical Romantic era that recognized a star performer for his or her individual talent. In earlier times, most composers wrote works that they themselves performed or conducted. By the mid-1800s many composers were beginning to write for other virtuosos.

Like many other composers, Johannes Brahms grew up in a musical family. His father played double bass in the Hamburg city orchestra, and as a child, Johannes studied piano. Born in 1833, he soon displayed the astonishing musical talent that was to lead him to become a concert pianist. Renowned violinist Eduard Remenyi chose young Johannes to be his accompanist on tour and often introduced him to the leading musicians of the era. He became close friends with Clara and Robert Schumann of Düsseldorf, who were already established names in musical circles and supportive of young Brahms' talent.


Johannes fell deeply in love with Clara and, after Robert's death in 1854, he moved to Düsseldorf to help her. In 1859, he moved again to Hamburg, where he founded a women's choir and began to write choral music while finishing his first piano concerto. This piece met with early success but his rejection of the popular "New German School" of writing probably cost him the acceptance and promotion of the leading music publisher in Leipzig. Clara Schumann, however, encouraged him to expand his talents and by 1862, he had completed several important compositions.

In 1868, Johannes settled permanently in Vienna where he continued to play his own compositions on concert tours. He earned sufficient income from these performances and publications that he turned down both a life contract from a publisher and an honorary doctorate from Cambridge University. Brahms was extremely critical of his own work and he destroyed much of what he composed. In his compositions, the romantic impulses of the era are restrained by the classical spirit of the past.

This is exemplified in his *Variations on a Theme by Handel* and *Variations on a Theme by Haydn*. His four symphonies are considered among the greatest ever written. Brahms frequently conducted his own orchestrations, as was the norm at the time, but this ended when fellow composer ||:Richard Wagner wrote a vicious article attacking his style. From that time forward, Brahms devoted himself strictly to composing.:||

Brahms loved choral and chamber music and, towards the end of his long life, he composed exquisite romantic songs in which words, melody, and piano accompaniment are inseparably blended. His ||: lullaby is one of the most recognizable melodies in the world. :||

Brahms died in 1897 at the age of 64 and was buried with honors in Vienna's central cemetery.



QUESTIONS:

1. In which period of music did Brahms compose his music? _____
2. In which city was Brahms born?

3. _____ proclaimed Brahms the “new messiah of music.”
4. In what compositional style did Liszt and Wagner write that Brahms refused to use? _____
5. To whom was Brahms’ *Piano Sonata #2* dedicated? _____
6. Brahms particularly admired and studied the music of which other composer?

7. A more common title for Brahms’ *Wiegenlied Op. 49, #4* for voice and piano is _____.

**STUDENT
INVESTIGATION NOTES:**

