

PROGRAM NOTES

Concerto in A minor for Violin, Cello and Orchestra, Op. 102

Johannes Brahms
(1833 – 1897)

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Vivace non troppo*

The “*Double*” *Concerto* was Brahms’ last orchestral work. He composed it during the summer of 1887 at Thun, Switzerland, a small town near Bern. Brahms had both musical and personal reasons for completing a concerto that featured violin and cello. He and the Hungarian violinist, Joseph Joachim, became good friends when, as a young man, Brahms served as pianist for Joachim on a concert tour. Brahms often relied on Joachim’s advice when writing for violin and, in 1878, he composed his violin concerto for Joachim. Their friendship grew and deepened for nearly thirty years, but was disrupted in 1884 by acrimonious divorce proceedings between Joachim and his wife, Amalie Weiss. Brahms was a friend of both parties, but sided with Amalie in this case and testified against Joachim concerning his unreasonably jealous behavior towards Amalie. Brahms was also a friend of the cellist, Robert Hausmann, a member of the Joachim Quartet. In 1884 Brahms composed a cello sonata for Hausmann and the work pleased the cellist so much that he asked Brahms to consider writing a concerto for him. Brahms hoped to repair his friendship with Joachim and satisfy Hausmann’s request for a concerto with this work that features both instruments. On September 21, 1887, Joachim and Hausmann met Brahms at the home of Clara Schumann in Baden-Baden where they played through the concerto with Brahms at the piano. The first public performance was given a month later at Cologne with Joachim and Hausmann as soloists and Brahms as conductor.

The first movement is in sonata form. Brahms especially liked to work with a motive, a brief idea - in this case the first three notes presented by the orchestra. Another favorite device of Brahms is presented in the third and fourth measures - that of rhythm patterns grouped in three’s sounding against rhythm patterns grouped in two’s. The solo cello then has a cadenza with Brahms’ marking to “. . . be in the manner of recitative, but always in tempo . . .” something of a contradiction. The cello cadenza is followed by a woodwind statement of the second theme and then by a cadenza featuring both solo instruments. Brahms’ economical and effective use of the solo instruments in octaves is noteworthy.

The second movement is in the key of D major and begins with a two-note horn call and woodwind echo. The ensuing folk-like melody, in octaves, is the principal theme of the movement. Brahms divides the orchestra viola and cello parts so that there is an unusually rich, mellow, and warm accompaniment for the melody. Woodwinds begin a middle section in the key of F major and the soloists follow with passages featuring triplets. The solo violin closes this section with descending double stops while the solo cello provides trills. The folk-like melody returns in the key of D major and the movement ends with a peaceful “Amen” cadence.

The third movement begins with a dance-like melody that functions as a rondo theme, returning after episodes of contrasting material. In its original form in A minor it could be thought of as Gypsy music. But Brahms’ mood changes to A major for the ending.

The work is scored for solo violin and cello, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings. YSO and Dr. Baker last performed the work on November 9, 2002.

Scheherazade, Op. 35

Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov

- I. *The Sea and Sinbad's Ship: Largo e maestoso: Lento: Allegro non troppo; Tranquillo*
- II. *The Story of the Kalendar Prince: Lento; Andantino; Allegro molto; Vivace scherzando; Moderato assai; Allegro molto ed animato*
- III. *The young prince and the Young Princess: Andantino quasi allegretto*
- IV. *Festival at Baghdad; The Sea; The Ship Goes to Pieces Against a Rock Surmounted by a Bronze Warrior; Allegro molto; Lento; Vivo; Allegro non troppo e maestoso; Lento; Tempo come I*

The idea for this symphonic suite came to Rimsky-Korsakov in the winter of 1887-88 when he and Glazunov were trying to finish the orchestration of Borodin's opera, *Prince Igor*. Rimsky-Korsakov said of himself that his orchestration had reached, " . . . a considerable degree of virtuosity . . . within the limits of the normally constituted orchestra used by Glinka . . . without the influence of Wagner . . ." He intended to draw upon various episodes in the "1001 Nights" for their fantastic stories, the subject matter of which would serve his purposes for storytelling with an orchestra. The forbidding motto at the beginning, representing the Sultan, starts the tale and the lovely, seductive voice of the solo violin is that of Scheherazade weaving her story. The score of *Scheherazade* is prefaced by the following note:

The Sultan Schahriar, convinced of the duplicity and infidelity of all women, vows to slay each of his wives after the first night. The Sultana Scheherazade, however, saved her life by the expedient of recounting to the Sultan a succession of tales over a period of a thousand and one nights. Overcome by curiosity, the monarch, postponed from day to day the execution of his, and ended by renouncing altogether his sanguinary resolution.

Many were the marvels recounted to the Sultan Schahriar by Scheherazade. She drew from the verses of poets and from folk songs and tales, connecting her stories from night to night. In the first movement, Scheherazade begins her story with Sinbad's travels on the sea. In the second movement, a bassoon solo introduces the theme of the Kalendar Prince. Fanfares and a march complete the portrayal of the warrior prince. The third movement contains love themes, violins representing the prince and clarinet solo representing the princess. These themes are transformed into an exotic dance accompanied by cymbals, tambourine, and triangle. This movement is thought to have influenced Rimsky-Korsakov's student, Igor Stravinsky, in the music for the ballet, *Firebird*. It has also influenced numerous Hollywood composers when they wish to portray something that is exotic and "Turkish." In the last movement, a festival at Baghdad gradually turns into the climax of Sinbad's shipwreck. At the end, it is clear that Scheherazade's storytelling has worked well. The Sultan's theme, heard in the cellos and basses, is quiet and peaceful.

The work is scored for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, tambourine, cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, harp, and strings. YSO and Dr. Baker last performed the work on February 14, 1993.

Program notes by Jim Mohatt