

## WHAT TO KNOW BEFORE THE SHOW PARALLEL EVENTS

1809

**Beethoven**Piano Concerto No.5 in E-flat major (*Emperor*)**MUSIC**

Mozart's Requiem is performed at a memorial service for Joseph Haydn in Vienna.

**ART**

**Caspar David Friedrich**  
*Mönch am Meer*

**LITERATURE**

The Walnut Street Theatre, now the oldest continually operating playhouse in the English-speaking world, opens in Philadelphia.

**HISTORY**

Robert Fulton patents the steamboat in the United States.

1883

**Brahms**

Symphony No.3 in F major

**MUSIC**

Opening of the first Metropolitan Opera House in New York City.

**ART**

**Pierre-Auguste Renoir**  
*Dance in the Country*

**LITERATURE**

**Carlo Collodi**  
*The Adventures of Pinocchio*

**HISTORY**

The first electric lighting system employing overhead wires begins service in New Jersey, installed by Thomas Edison.

1897

**Parry***Elegy for Brahms***MUSIC**

**John Philip Sousa**  
"The Stars and Stripes Forever"

**ART**

**Paul Gauguin**  
*Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*

**LITERATURE**

**Bram Stoker**  
*Dracula*

**HISTORY**

The first Boston Marathon is held, with fifteen men competing.

## BRAHMS & BEETHOVEN

"The great heroes of the world are so rare, that it is fortunately but seldom in the brief spell of our lives that we have to try and realize what parting with them means."

These words were spoken by Hubert Parry to students at London's Royal College of Music, as part of a eulogy for a recently deceased Johannes Brahms.

For Parry, such parting meant a great deal. A prolific composer himself, as well as an influential writer and teacher, Hubert Parry has been called the "father of 20th century British music" due to his impact on such greats as Elgar, Holst, and Vaughan Williams. But it was Brahms who, for him, was the epitome "of all that was artistically sincere, single-minded, and intellectually honest." The older master's death in 1897 struck Parry with such an emotional blow that he immediately put aside all other creative work and spent every available moment on an orchestral elegy for Brahms. Ironically, its premiere was not at Brahms's memorial, but at his own a few years later.

Brahms, for his part, knew very well that he was standing on the shoulders of his musical hero, Beethoven, whose visionary ability to transform the symphony into a completely new art form left Brahms unwilling to write one until he was convinced that he had reached a sufficient level of artistic maturity. Fortunately, he eventually got there, as evidenced by the masterful, even rapturous, treatment of the simplest of motivic elements that define his third symphony.

And Beethoven was not without his own heroes - Napoleon, for a short time, among them. Even during the French occupation of Vienna in 1809 (leaving the city full of "marching men and misery"), Beethoven somehow managed to compose the last and grandest of his piano concerti. And while the "Emperor" moniker was not of Beethoven's choosing, it accurately reflects this work of impressively regal scale and impact - reminding us, indeed, what rare gems the truly great heroes of the world are.



### BRAHMS & BEETHOVEN

Amica Rush Hour: Friday, October 16, 2026

TACO Classical: Saturday, October 17, 2026

### *Elegy for Brahms*

**HUBERT PARRY** (1848-1918)

*This is a RI Philharmonic Orchestra premiere. This piece is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani and strings.*

A familiar story among composers, Hubert Parry's parents regarded composition as a pastime rather than a profession. This was despite his extraordinary talent: while still a student at Eton, he became

the youngest person ever to pass the Oxford Bachelor of Music examination. So, Parry dutifully studied law and history at Oxford and later worked as an underwriter at Lloyd's of London. But he had a side-hustle writing entries for George Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, which soon led to a full-time musical career. When Grove founded the Royal College of Music in London, he appointed Parry professor of music history—a role in which Parry thrived for the rest of his life.

Parry's admiration for Brahms was well known. He longed, in fact, to study with the German master. And while that dream was never realized, he did learn a great deal from close study of Brahms's scores. His *Symphonic Variations*, for instance, clearly reflect the language and structure of Brahms's own "Haydn Variations." (That influence, in turn, proved far-reaching: Parry's work would subsequently inspire Edward Elgar's iconic "Enigma Variations").

In *Elegy for Brahms*, "Parry uses the romantic orchestra with delicacy to convey his own sense of hollowness and loss," writes American composer Bernard Benoliel. Fittingly, Brahms's presence is felt throughout. Listen, for example, to the graceful way in which the second theme, played by shimmering clarinets, emerges from a series of sighing figures in the strings. Elements of other composers, such as Wagner and Tchaikovsky, can be heard here and there as well. But the piece's inexorable, even spiritual ascent at the end is a brilliant stroke, reminiscent of the coda to Richard Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration*.

Although Parry was determined to finish the *Elegy* in time, it was not, alas, ready for Brahms's funeral. Ironically, the work didn't receive its premiere performance until Parry's own memorial service in 1918 - and then was not heard again until 1977. As a result, it is still unfamiliar to many audiences. Hopefully, more performances like tonight's will help it earn its rightful place in the canon.

## **Symphony No.3 in F major, op.90**

**JOHANNES BRAHMS** (1833-1897)

*Last performed November 17, 2012 with Larry Rachleff conducting. This piece is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and strings.*

When Robert Schumann hailed Johannes Brahms as "a young blood at whose cradle the Graces and Heroes kept watch," the praise, though well meant, helped trigger a severe creative crisis. Expectations that Brahms would become Beethoven's heir as the next great symphonist weighed so heavily that it took him more than twenty years to complete his First Symphony. Yet despite that work's success—and his growing stature as both a pianist and a composer of exceptional piano, vocal, and chamber music—his native Hamburg passed him over (twice!) for the post of chief conductor of its Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir. So Brahms went to Vienna and, famously, grew a beard.

The move seems to have brought Brahms a new sense of freedom—and perhaps romance as well. In the spring of 1883, he heard the 26-year-old alto Hermine Spies sing several of his songs and was smitten. He invited her to his summer retreat in Wiesbaden, wrote her passionate letters, and composed two song cycles for her. Freed from his earlier anxieties, he was also writing symphonies suffused with a new sense of bliss, heard perhaps most clearly in the Third.

Brahms's friends took note of this newfound joy. His protégé Antonín Dvořák exclaimed, "This work surpasses his first two symphonies—perhaps not in size and grand design, but certainly in beauty! What

marvelous melodies are to be found there! It is all love, and one's heart opens wide." Clara Schumann was no less enthusiastic: "All the movements seem to be of one piece, one beat of the heart, each one a jewel! From start to finish one is wrapped about with the mysterious charm of the woods and forests. I could not tell you which movement I loved most."

As Clara suggested, one of the symphony's most striking features is its unifying three-note motif, F–A<sup>b</sup>–F, heard at the opening and recurring throughout. The motive was Brahms's playful answer to the musical signature of his friend, the violinist Joseph Joachim: F–A–E, for "*Frei aber einsam*" (free but lonely). Brahms preferred "*Frei aber froh*" (free but happy), so he altered the notes accordingly, and built an entire symphony from the idea. The tension between major and minor is one of the work's main engines, with A natural and A-flat set against each other from the first three chords onward. Another hallmark is its rhythmic instability, first heard in the opening theme, which hovers between duple and triple meter.

The second movement has the character of a wind serenade, marked by the earthy tone of the clarinet, and features an austere second theme that we will hear return in the finale. The delicately melancholic third movement begins with one of Brahms's most beautiful cello melodies, but soon the major-minor shifts of the first movement return, creating an atmosphere of poignant ambiguity. Clara Schumann called this movement "a pearl, but it is a grey one dipped in a tear of woe."

The fourth and final movement rises quietly but with mounting energy, growing from deep, somber rumblings into sparkling brilliance. Then something unexpected happens: it is as if all the unrest of the earlier movements suddenly and simultaneously erupts from the orchestra before eventually settling into a coda tinged with nostalgia. Once there, a gentle echo of the end of the first movement leads us home to F major.

## **Piano Concerto No.5 in E-flat major, op.73 (*Emperor*)**

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN** (1770-1824)

*Last performed June 12, 2021 with Bramwell Tovey conducting and soloist Emanuel Ax. In addition to a solo piano, this piece is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani and strings.*

"If I had to describe Beethoven's 'Emperor' Concerto in a few words, I would call it a monumental work for piano and orchestra. In many ways it feels almost like a symphony, with the piano often leading rather than merely dominating."

These are the words of tonight's soloist, Denis Kozhukhin.

Composed as Beethoven's deafness forced him to rely on "conversation books" to communicate, the Fifth Piano Concerto stands as a testament to his persistence and resolve. And although soloist and orchestra certainly share the work's assertive energy, the piano is unmistakably its central protagonist.

Unlike most earlier concertos, this one introduces the soloist all at once, overturning the tradition of a lengthy orchestral exposition. After three commanding orchestral hammer strokes, the piano answers each time with an evermore surging cascade of notes. The orchestra then presents the stately main theme, followed by a quieter minor idea in the winds that the horns promptly recast in major. Throughout the rest of

this expansive opening movement, soloist and orchestra engage in a dazzling, tightly woven dialogue.

The Adagio second movement offers Beethoven at his most exalted, with the piano's delicate rising melody set against muted strings in music that resembles a hymn. In fact, Leonard Bernstein admired it so much that he borrowed its opening theme for the song "Somewhere" in *West Side Story*.

"I have many favorite moments in this piece," says Kozhukhin, "but if I had to choose one, it would be the beginning of the second movement. After the heroic, triumphant energy of the first, it suddenly shifts into something that feels almost like a dream—or even a quiet prayer. There is also a remarkable change of tonality at that point, which makes the contrast even more striking. For me, that moment is pure magic."

This sublime, reflective mood lingers—no one is eager for it to end—but Beethoven must lead us to the finale, and he does so with characteristic ingenuity. A soft, sustained B natural in the bassoons and horns slips down to B<sup>b</sup>, nudging the music toward the key of E<sup>b</sup>, the concerto's home key and the destination of the final movement. But there is mystery here: the piano introduces a completely new theme softly and deliberately, and then, without warning, we plunge straightway into a joyful wild rumpus of a last movement with the new theme as its subject.

And yet, Beethoven still has one more surprise in store: the intensity ebbs rather than builds, and a quiet exchange between piano and timpani portends a peaceful close. But that expectation is overturned by a triumphant orchestral outburst in Beethoven's grandest style. The concerto then rushes to its conclusion and the piano's offbeat theme rides above insistent orchestral rhythms, blazing brass, and emphatic timpani strokes. After a brief moment of reflection, the work ends with the same exuberance with which it began.

"It's a piece full of contrasts and unexpected harmonic shifts," concludes Kozhukhin, "but above all it carries an extraordinary sense of optimism. There is strength, vitality, and a kind of heroic energy in it—as if it reflects the struggle of life itself, and ultimately the triumph of overcoming it."