



London Philharmonic Orchestra

BRAHMS

SYMPHONY NO. 1

SYMPHONY NO. 2

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI *conductor*

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

BRAHMS

SYMPHONY NOS. 1 & 2

'You don't know what it's like always to hear that giant marching along behind me', Brahms once wrote to a friend. The giant in question was Beethoven, the composer who at the start of the nineteenth century had taken the genre of the symphony beyond absolute music and turned it into a powerful expression of the human condition. Beethoven's symphonies – in particular the Fifth, Seventh and Ninth – made such a deep impression on the composers of succeeding decades that for a while, ironically, they almost seemed to have brought symphonic writing to a halt; so unwilling were composers to allow themselves to be measured against the greatness of Beethoven that they either wrote no symphonies at all, or, if they did, deliberately wrote works that modestly avoided confronting Beethoven on his own mighty terms.

Yet if Brahms was as oppressed as the next man, he clearly also felt that one day he would have to throw his hat into the symphonic arena. He was not alone. In 1853 he had met and befriended Schumann, who promptly hailed him in the press as a major talent and made clear his belief that in Brahms he had found someone destined to be the greatest symphonist of the age. Brahms did attempt a symphony around this time, but, ever one of the most self-critical of composers, soon discarded the project. By 1862 he was showing friends the first movement of a new symphony, but he was certainly in no hurry to finish it; despite constant encouragement and increasing public anticipation, he

did not complete it until 1876. The premiere of this First Symphony finally took place in Karlsruhe that November.

The ways in which Brahms's First Symphony shows its debt to Beethoven are not hard to identify. On the most obvious level, many passages in the first and last movements simply sound like Beethoven; one theme in particular – the famous striding main theme that springs forth after the long slow introduction to the finale – drew immediate comment for its resemblance to the 'Ode to Joy' theme from Beethoven's Ninth, to which insight Brahms is said to have replied 'any fool can hear that!'. More meaningful is the way in which Brahms mimics the typical Beethovenian symphonic journey from darkness to light in the form of an audible triumph against adversity over the course of the four movements. Beethoven's Fifth is the outstanding model for this, and it is surely no coincidence that Brahms chooses to begin it in the same key of C minor – Beethoven's most characteristic and dramatic – and to end it, as Beethoven does, in a more optimistic C major. If the outer movements show Brahms at perhaps his most Beethovenian, however, the two central ones are more typically his. The slow second movement is radiant, rich and song-like, and includes an enchanting oboe melody later heard to even greater effect on solo violin. The mood of this movement may owe something to its equivalent in Schumann's Fourth Symphony, but in the third movement Brahms is at his most original; where

Beethoven would invariably have chosen a vigorously rhythmic, almost aggressive movement of the scherzo type, Brahms writes a movement that is neither fast nor slow, and breathes gentle contentment and joy.

Brahms's response to descriptions of his First Symphony as 'Beethoven's Tenth' may have been dismissive, but the time and trouble he took over the work suggest that he was fully aware of the historical significance of a debut symphony by a composer who had been declared Beethoven's artistic heir even before he had produced the evidence. The wait was worth it; in this one work he restored to life a genre that many of his contemporaries had presumed dead.

If proof were needed of the rewards of thus confronting life's obstacles, the Second Symphony provides it. Having taken the best part of two decades to produce a first symphony that seemed to describe its own hard-won victory, Brahms not only composed his next in just a few months over the summer of 1877, but found in it a relaxed, almost pastoral atmosphere that speaks of anything but creative struggle.

The prevailing mood of the work is unmistakably sunny, yet this is far from being the whole story. Unlike the First, it both begins and ends in light, but while Brahms was undoubtedly overstating the case when he told friends that he 'had never written anything so sad' and that it would have to be printed 'on black-edged paper', his teases

are not without justification. The Second is never tragic, but in its first two movements it offers music of profound melancholy, occasionally darkening to the elegiac.

Such feelings are not evident as the symphony begins, its gentle triple-time and smooth melodic contours seeming to offer a world of unalloyed pastoral contentment, but it is not long before a quiet drum roll and some troubled chords from the trombones and tuba cloud the air; though the sun appears to return, especially in a broad second theme that seems to be related to Brahms's famous *Wiegenlied* (or 'Lullaby'), the mood is never quite the same again. The command of emotional tone is masterful in this movement, but Brahms's technical control is no less impressive; the three-note figure outlined by the cellos and basses in the very first bar reappears in many guises to become a crucial thematic unifier throughout the work.

The second movement reaches depths of feeling as great as in any of Brahms's works, its falling theme (announced at the outset by cellos) and rising counter-melody on bassoons setting the mood for an *Adagio* of rich complexity and sustained passion. There is awe, perhaps even a hint of terror, in the fortissimo outburst towards the end, but the movement has a settled if sombre close.

The trumpets, trombone and tuba fall silent in the *Allegretto*, and the mood lightens for a rustic serenade

in which a sedately piping main theme appears three times, interleaved with faster variations of itself. The finale opens quietly but with barely concealed excitement, and indeed the joy cannot be contained for long, bursting free within twenty bars. Rarely, if ever, did Brahms show such rampant exuberance, yet even here his intellect maintains its grip; the generous theme of the second melody returns late on almost as a chant, albeit one whose syncopations impart an air of expectancy, before it is let loose and transformed again to power the music to a brilliant finish.

Programme note © 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

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is known as one of the world's great orchestras with a reputation secured by its performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, its trail-blazing international tours and its pioneering education work. Distinguished conductors who have held positions with the Orchestra since its foundation in 1932 by Sir Thomas Beecham include Sir Adrian Boult, Sir John Pritchard, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt, Franz Welser-Möst and Kurt Masur. Vladimir Jurowski was appointed the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor in March 2003 and became Principal Conductor in September 2007.

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

concerts between September and May each year. In summer, the Orchestra moves to Sussex where it has been Resident at Glyndebourne Festival Opera for 50 years. The Orchestra also performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous tours to America, Europe and Japan, and visited India, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Australia, Oman, South Africa and Abu Dhabi.

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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**Mahler: Symphony No. 1
(Vladimir Jurowski)**

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)

CD1	44:16	Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68
01	14:51	Un poco sostenuto – Allegro
02	8:11	Andante sostenuto
03	4:40	Un poco Allegretto e grazioso
04	16:34	Adagio – Più andante – Allegro non troppo, ma con brio

CD2	41:31	Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73
05	18:33	Allegro non troppo
06	9:01	Adagio non troppo
07	4:54	Allegretto grazioso (Quasi Andantino)
08	9:03	Allegro con spirito

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

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