



BRAHMS
Serenade No. 1

DDD
8.553227

TCHAIKOVSKY
Serenade for Strings

BRT Philharmonic Orchestra, Brussels
Vienna Chamber Orchestra
Alexander Rahbari • Philippe Entremont



Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)

Serenade No. 1 in D Major, Op. 11

Pyotr II'yich Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893)

Serenade for Strings in C Major, Op. 48

Brahms was born in Hamburg in 1833. His father was a musician, a double bass player, and his mother a seamstress some seventeen years older than her husband. The family was poor, and as a boy Brahms earned money by playing the piano in dockside taverns for the entertainment of sailors. Nevertheless his talent brought him support, and teaching from Eduard Marxsen, to whom he later dedicated his *B Flat Piano Concerto*, although claiming to have learned nothing from him.

The greater part of Brahms's career was to be spent in Vienna, where he finally settled in 1863, after earlier seasonal employment at the small court of Detmold and intermittent periods spent in Hamburg. In Vienna he established a pattern of life that was to continue until his death in 1897. He appeared as a pianist, principally in his own compositions, played with more insight than accuracy, and impressed the public with a series of compositions of strength, originality and technical perfection. Here was a demonstration that, contrary to the view of Wagner or Liszt, there was still much to be said in the traditional forms of music. Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* was not the last word. Critics, indeed, hailed Brahms's *First Symphony* in 1876 as Beethoven's Tenth. Brahms came to occupy a unique position in Vienna, his eccentricities and gruff tactlessness tolerated as Beethoven's had been, his musical achievement unquestioned, except by the fanatical supporters of Wagner.

The *Serenade in D major, Opus 11*, was written during the months early in his career Brahms spent at the court of Detmold, its period of composition overlapping with that of the *Serenade in A major*. Like its companion it was published in 1860, the year of its first performance in Hanover, although it seems that it had at least been played through in Detmold in its original forms as an octet by players from the orchestra, led by the violinist Karl Bargheer. Clara Schumann, already an influential advocate of Brahms insisted that the *Serenade* should be played at a benefit concert in Vienna in 1860, if she was to take part, and urged the two *Serenades* on other influential conductors.

In six movements, largely following earlier tradition, the *Serenade* owes something to Brahms's study of classical models. The surviving autograph suggests that the work was conceived as a symphony-serenade, and in length, at least, it is ambitious. It starts in a happy pastoral mood, to which a more ominous strain is added, in the tones of Beethoven, before becoming recognisably and unequivocally Brahms. The lilting first *Scherzo*, a contrast to the substantial opening *Allegro*, touches a rustic mood in its section, and is followed by a slow movement of contour, in which that most characteristic of all instruments used by Brahms, the French horn, has its due prominence - otherwise classical in its scoring, the *Serenade* calls for four French horns rather than the two horns of the earlier period. The first *Minuet* lightens the tranquil mood with a moment of peasant jollity, delicately scored, before the intervention of a more poignant element, against the continuing ostinato accompaniment. The French horn introduces the second *Scherzo*, with more than a touch of Beethoven in pastoral mood. A final *Rondo* brings the *Serenade* to an end.

As a composer Tchaikovsky represented a happy synthesis of the West European or German school of composition, represented in Russia by his teacher Anton Rubinstein, and the Russian nationalists, led by the impossibly aggressive Balakirev. From Rubinstein Tchaikovsky learned his technique, while Balakirev attempted time and again to bully him into compliance with his own ideals. To the nationalists Tchaikovsky may have seemed relatively foreign. His work, after all, lacked the primitive crudity that sometimes marked their compositions. Nevertheless acceptance abroad was not universal. Hanslick, in Vienna, could deplore the "trivial Cossack cheer" of the violin concerto and other works, while welcoming the absence of any apparent Russian element in the last of the six symphonies. In England and America there had been a heartier welcome, and in the latter country he had been received with an enthusiasm that exceeded even that at home. In his diary of the American concert tour of 1891 he remarked on this and on the curious habit of American critics, who tended to concentrate their attention on the appearance and posture of conductor, rather than on the music itself. At the age of 51 he was described in the American press as "a tall, gray, interesting man, well on to sixty".

The *Serenade for Strings* was written in the winter of 1880 to 1881 and dedicated to the cellist Konstantin Albrecht and general factotum of the Moscow Conservatory. The work started as either a symphony or a string quartet, before it took final shape as a suite for strings, the movements of which established a coherent relationship in key and suggested symphonic structure in their arrangement. It was first performed in Moscow in 1882 and won immediate approval from Jupiter, as the composer's former teacher, Anton Rubinstein, was known. It proved pleasing to critics and public in equal measure and has continued to occupy an important place in string orchestra repertoire.

The first movement, described as in the form of a sonatina, opens with a slower introduction, followed by a first subject in which the composer continues, by dividing the sections of the orchestra, to offer a rich texture, contrasted with the livelier second subject. In the second movement Tchaikovsky reminds us of his particular gifts as a composer of ballet. The waltz melodies bring with them admirably calculated contrasts of key and movement in music that never ceases to be suavely lyrical. This is followed by an *Elégie* more patently Russian in inspiration, in which the composer's genius for melody is coupled with a remarkably deft handling of string texture and subtle manipulation of what is fundamentally a simple scale. The *Finale* in its opening leads gently from the key and mood of the *Elégie* to a Russian melody, based on a descending scale, a provenance that is emphasised, finally illuminating the origin of the initial bars of the *Serenade* and the genesis of the whole work.



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STEREO

BRAHMS
Serenade No. 1

DDD

Playing
Time:
74'33"

TCHAIKOVSKY
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Vienna Chamber Orchestra* • Philippe Entremont*

BRAHMS:
Serenade No. 1 in D Major,
Op. 11

- 1 Allegro molto (9:31)
- 2 Scherzo: Allegro non troppo (8:13)
- 3 Adagio non troppo (12:57)
- 4 Menuetto I & II (3:42)
- 5 Scherzo: Allegro (3:02)
- 6 Rondo: Allegro (6:16)

TCHAIKOVSKY:
Serenade for Strings
in C Major, Op. 48*

- 7 Pezzo in forma di Sonatina (9:32)
- 8 Walzer (3:53)
- 9 Elegie (9:10)
- 10 Finale (Tema Russo) (7:47)

Recorded at the Concert Hall of the BRT in Brussels in June 1990 (Tracks 1- 6)
and at Casino Baumgartner in Vienna
from 19th to 21st February 1990 (Tracks 7 - 10).
Producers: Günter Appenheimer (Tracks 1 - 6) &
Karol Kopernický, Hubert Geschwandtner (Tracks 7 - 10)
Engineer: Jo Tavernier (Tracks 1 - 6)
Music Notes: Keith Anderson

Cover Painting by Savrasov

English Text /
Deutscher Text /
Texte en français



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