PROGRAM NOTES
By Steven Ledbetter

HECTOR BERLIOZ
Overture to *Béatrice et Bénédict*

Hector Berlioz was born in La Côte-St.-André, Isère, France, on December 11, 1803, and died in Paris on March 8, 1869. He completed his opera Béatrice et Bénédict *in 1862 and conducted the premiere at Baden-Baden on August 9, making a few revisions in the score soon after. Berlioz wrote his own libretto, adapted from Shakespeare's play* Much Ado About Nothing*. The orchestra includes two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two cornets, three trombones, two harps, timpani, and strings.*

By the last decade of his life, Berlioz was an embittered old man. He had fought French philistinism for years with energy and wit, but finally, in failing health, he was disheartened by the long, frustrating effort to mount his great opera *Les Troyens* (*The Trojans*), which he was never to see in its entirety. One of the few bright spots in his life in the late 1850s was the few weeks he spent every summer at the resort of Baden-Baden, where the manager of the Casino, Edouard Bénazet, engaged him to conduct a gala concert under ideal circumstances at the height of the season, with an orchestra selected from the best players in Europe.

Bénazet built a theater at the resort and commissioned Berlioz to write the opera that would open it. It was to be his very last complete work, and the only opera that he had no trouble bringing to performance. Berlioz's lifelong devotion to Shakespeare expressed itself in a comedy adapted from *Much Ado About Nothing*, with its wonderfully fresh and oblique view of love in a story of merry sparring partners in a battle of endless wit. Beatrice and Benedick (Shakespeare's spelling), are tricked into falling in love—or, rather, confessing the love they already feel but conceal out of a misplaced pride. The overture to this lighthearted comedy, which concentrates almost totally on music associated with the title characters and omits the romantic and darker episodes, perfectly captures its mood of quicksilver brilliance. The composer's own description is perhaps the best: "It is a caprice written with the point of a needle."

JOHANNES BRAHMS
Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 77

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany, on 7 May 1833 and died in Vienna on 3 April 1897. He wrote the Violin Concerto in the summer and early fall of 1878, but the published score incorporates revisions made after the premiere, which was given by the dedicatee, Joseph Joachim, in Leipzig, on January 1, 1879, with the Gewandhaus Orchestra under the composer's direction. In addition to the soloist, the score calls for two each of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. In addition to the soloist, the score calls for two each of flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. Duration is about 38 minutes.

The Violin Concerto of Brahms is both a close collaboration of two great friends and the testament to their friendship. Brahms was twenty in May of 1853 when he met the violinist Joseph Joachim, who was also a fine conductor and a solidly grounded composer in his own right. Though just two years older than Brahms, Joachim was already a well-established

musician. A close bond of shared artistic ideals sprang up between the two men at once and remained unbroken for more than thirty years. (There was a rupture between them in the middle 1880s, when Brahms clumsily tried to help patch Joachim's failing marriage. Brahms later composed his Double Concerto as a peace offering; it was accepted, but the two never regained the unfettered frankness of their earlier friendship.)

It is not clear when Joachim first asked Brahms to write him a concerto, but, in any case, the violinist had to wait a number of years before receiving the work. Not until the summer of 1878 did the composer feel ready to essay the concerto, his first since the Piano Concerto No. 1, which had been a catastrophic failure with the audience at its premiere in 1859. Brahms drafted the score during a fruitful summer in Pörtschach, a favorite Austrian beauty spot where, as he wrote, "So many melodies fly about that one must be careful not to step on them." In fact, the Violin Concerto bears some resemblance in mood to another D-major work composed in Pörtschach the preceding summer, the Second Symphony. Not only do the two works share a key, but also a family resemblance in their melodic character.

At first Brahms planned the Violin Concerto in four movements and in fact drafted all four, but eventually he replaced the two middle movements with a new slow movement. One of movements thus removed was a scherzo, now apparently lost. Still, its planned inclusion in the Violin Concerto is of interest for showing that the inclusion of a large and very difficult scherzo in the Second Piano Concerto, which Brahms started sketching in 1878 and then put aside until after he had finished the Violin Concerto, was not just a freak. Something within him wanted the concerto to aspire to the condition of the symphony.

On August 21, 1878, Brahms suggested to Joachim that they collaborate on the final details of the solo part, since the composer was not himself a violinist. At first Joachim received only the violin part to edit, and he complained that it was impossible to do a proper job without having at hand the entire score. But Brahms did not want to let the score out of his hands until he felt he had finished the work, and that took the rest of the year, so Joachim was unable to complete his editing before he had to play the premiere on New Year's Day, 1879.

Joachim, of course, was the soloist, and the normally shy and retiring Brahms conducted. The critical response was certainly more favorable than it had been for the piano concerto two decades earlier, but Brahms was still regarded as a composer of severely intellectual music that made extraordinary demands on its listeners, and despite Joachim's ardent championing of the concerto, it did not really join the standard repertory until after the turn of the century.

But Brahms and his friends were clearly pleased, as we can infer from this amusing description of the evening's aftermath as reported by a Bostonian, George W. Chadwick, who was a student in Leipzig at the time and soon to become one of America's leading composers. A few days after the premiere, Chadwick wrote to a friend in Massachusetts:

> Joachim played Brahms' new concerto for the violin in the Gewandhaus that night under Brahms' own direction, and about one o'clock I saw the precious pair, with little Grieg (who is here this winter) staggering out of Auerbach's keller (of Faust renown) all congratulating each other in the most frantic manner on the excellent way in which they had begun the New Year. I thought to myself that Johnny Brahms might be the greatest living composer but I did not believe it could save him from having a "Katzenjammer" [hangover] the next day about the size of the Nibelungen Trilogy, as many a lesser composer has had.

The process of revision began again after the performance. The intensity of the collaboration is made clear by the composer's manuscript score, which bears the marks of

extensive revision in Brahms's hand—this often consists of a reduction in the orchestral texture for the benefit of the soloist—and even more elaborate revisions to the solo part, made in red ink by Joachim himself.

What early audiences found difficult to follow in Brahms was the abundance of his invention. He was never simply content to state a musical idea and then restate it in the same way. Rather, he begins to develop his ideas from the moment they appear, and the impact of so much material seemed overwhelming to listeners encountering these works for the first time, as they still can today to a newcomer. The opening orchestral ritornello flows in long musical paragraphs, but these are made up of strikingly varied themes interwoven and designed so to be capable of development separately or in combination. The sheer profusion of ideas—three strongly contrasted themes arrive in the first two dozen measures and three more not long after—must have bewildered many first-night listeners. Yet Brahms intertwines this material, linking it into an astonishingly compact preparation for the soloist's entrance.

Following a unison melody in the lower strings and bassoons at the outset, the orchestra's soft entrance on an unexpected harmony is clearly a Brahmsian homage to Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto. Yet precisely at the moment of that harmonic surprise, a new phrase begins in the oboe, and it leads in turn to an assertive leaping figure that brings in the full orchestra for the first time. Already Brahms begins developing his materials by presenting the opening theme in a kind of free canonic imitation between the bass and treble instruments. The energy generated by this passage seems for all the world the beginning of a modulation to a thoroughly traditional secondary key, A major, but instead it returns to the home key to introduce a new series of thematic ideas.

This second part of the orchestral exposition teases by aiming at, yet never quite reaching, a new lyric melody in the normal secondary key. Instead, the massed strings play a marchlike figure in a sharply dotted rhythm—in D *minor*—followed by a passage of sixteenth-note fiddle work that finally brings in the soloist.

The soloist's entrance is dramatic: a timpani roll launches an upward rush and references to the figure heard at the outset (though now in the minor), punctuated by the orchestral strings in the rhythm of the marchlike figure. Behind the soloist's sweeping arpeggios, they convert the opening phrase into broad sequence of phrases, as the solo violin's part becomes gradually gentler, finally closing on the soloist's first statement of the opening theme, now in a higher octave, with an important new accompaniment in the violas. Presently the soloist begins to expand on the themes heard in the orchestral ritornello, causing us to reconsider what we have already heard. Following a new phrase of "sublime calm" (in Tovey's phrase), the lower strings sing the second phrase from the opening against a new counterpoint in the solo part. The leaping figure that follows now becomes the accompaniment to a new theme for the soloist. Through this passage the transition to A major is finally made, and the themes that follow, still familiar from the orchestral statement, though enriched with countermelody in the violin, appear in the dominant. Finally, the long awaited moment arrives. We have been teased and denied a culminating lyric theme in the opening section. Now it appears—swaying, cajoling—as a master stroke for the soloist.

The marchlike figure and the racing sixteenths bring the full exposition to an end, solidly in A major until the measure that *should* produce the final confirming chord, but there a fortissimo orchestral tutti destroys the sense of that key as it begins the journey of the development.

Almost at once Brahms's homage to Beethoven again becomes apparent as he moves suddenly to the key of C, far afield from his home tonic. This new key confirms, on the one hand, the unexpected appearance of a C-major chord in the ninth measure of the concerto, while at the same time it becomes an homage to Beethoven, whose Violin Concerto (in the same key) made an identical move at the corresponding point. The choice of Beethoven's composition as a model for his own was a natural one, not only because of Brahms's general admiration for Beethoven, but also because it may be considered the only earlier violin concerto that could be said to occupy the level at which Brahms aimed.

The development blends soloist and orchestra in reinterpreting the ideas already heard in new combinations and expressive development, constantly enriched in content as a new counterpoint in turn becomes the basis of further working-out. Eventually a dominant pedal signals that the recapitulation is imminent. The kind of material that had introduced the soloist earlier returns intensified with new additions from the orchestra; these foreshadow a powerful moment of arrival, which is not long in coming.

The main theme is sounded forth full volume by the winds, while the upper strings feverishly play the countersubject that had been added when the soloist first played the main theme. Though much of the recapitulation follows a "normal" course, echoing the exposition, with the necessary changes of key, there are two wonderful surprises: the solo violin's lyric theme is heard first in the unexpected and bright key of F-sharp, though quickly enough it moves to D. By way of compensation, the last orchestral statement, coming in *fortissimo* to introduce the cadenza—just when we expect all the surprises to be past—is in the unusually dark key of B-flat, precisely as far from the home D in one direction as F-sharp was in the other. Thus, to the very end of the movement, Brahms's astonishing sense of musical architecture on the large scale is balanced with the most refined attention to tiny melodic detail.

The slow movement was an afterthought, replacing two whole movements that Brahms decided to cut before the premiere. (Characteristically self-effacing, Brahms described them as "the best parts.") The new Adagio begins with a woodwind passage referred to by violinist Pablo de Sarasate when he explained why he did not intend to learn the new concerto: "Why should I stand there and let the oboe play the one good tune in the piece?" This is, of course, a calumny. The oboe, accompanied by the winds, does indeed have a great, broad melody in F, but as soon as it ends, the strings enter, and the soloist begins an equally remarkable elaboration. Following a more passionate interlude in the very distant key of F-sharp minor, the oboe and solo violin take up the lovely melody again and close in a mood of utter tranquility.

Brahms had been introduced to Joachim by a Hungarian violinist, Eduard Remenyi, with whom he was touring and who taught Brahms about the style of so-called "gypsy" music. The finale of the Violin Concerto is one of his most delightful essays in imitating that exotic style. It is essentially a rondo, with a memorable "gypsy" theme heard at the outset that returns on several later occasions, but the surprises that Brahms brings to the venerable form--unexpected returns of nearly-forgotten material, unusual choices of key, and lively changes of meter—help make this finale, filled with fire, flash, and energy, one of his most vivid creations. When the "gypsy music" finally races home in a new triplet rhythm, we are left breathless with delight.

VASILY KALINNIKOV
Symphony No. 1 in G minor

Vasily Sergeyevich Kalinnikov was born in Voina in the Oryol district of Russia on January 1 (old style) or 13 (new style), 1866, and died in Yalta on December 29/January 11, 1901. He

composed his first symphony in 1894-95. Vinogradsky conducted the first performance in a concert of the Russian Musical Society in Kiev in 1897. The score calls for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, two bassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussions, harp, and strings. Duration is about 35 minutes.

Vasily Kalinnikov might have developed a reputation to match those of the leading Russian romantic composers of his day had he lived a normal lifespan. Unfortunately his health was never hale, and the tuberculosis from which he suffered led to a breakdown in his late twenties that forced him to spend the rest of his short life—he died just before his thirty-fifth birthday—in the warmth of the Crimea, at Yalta.

Further complicating the sad account of his life is the fact that family poverty prevented him from getting the kind of professional training that would have been called for as soon as his musical talent showed itself in his youth. His family intended him for the church; when he went to study at the local seminary, he took over the choir at the age of fourteen. He received scholarship support to attend the Philharmonic Society School in Moscow, where he took lessons on the bassoon and had some composition lessons, though not with the leading figures at the conservatory (one of his teachers was a statistician by profession, and an amateur composer). Lack of funds forced him to leave the conservatory and work as an instrumentalist, playing bassoon, timpani, or violin in theater orchestras.

Still he attracted the attention of important people, including Tchaikovsky, who recommended him for appointment as conductor at the Malïy Theater in Moscow and a year later at the Moscow Italian Theater. But the latter appointment lasted only a few months before his health decreed that he leave Moscow for Yalta. There he concentrated on composing. He was helped by the young Rachmaninoff, who arranged for the leading Russian publisher, Jurgenson, to acquire some of Kalinnikov's songs and other works, providing a small, but steady income.

During this period he composed his two symphonies, premiered in 1897 and 1898, respectively. When Rimsky-Korsakov saw the First, he declared that it showed unmistakeable signs of talent but contained too many technical mistakes. Listeners today are unlikely to find these, and it is believed that Rimsky simply had a score filled with copyist's errors. In any case, the symphony was an instant success and was soon performed in Vienna, Berlin, and Paris as well as Russia. It is the work of Kalinnikov that remains most firmly in the repertory.

Kalinnikov was a great admirer of the writer Turgenev (also born in Oriol) and of the evocation of Russian life in his novels. He wished to accomplish much the same sort of thing in his own works, though in a purely abstract music, not attempting narrative. His themes, while original, are designed to evoke elements of Russian folksong, and he had clearly studied the music of his contemporaries Borodin and Tchaikovsky, whose qualities may be sensed in the Kalinnikov symphony without being in any way imitations.

The first movement grows out of a melody with a lyric turn of Russian cast, later heard in a more vigorous, marchlike mood. In the late 1880s, Kalinnikov undertook the study of fugue and counterpoint, and his studies show especially in the development of the movement, contrapuntally conceived with a colorful orchestration and a strict fugato passage. The second and third movements were both encored at the symphony's premiere, bespeaking their immediate attractiveness to the audience. The second movement, with its sadly sweet oboe melody and swelling answer in the strings is one of the passages that most strongly evokes Kalinnikov's champion Tchaikovsky. The Scherzo drives away the poignancy of the previous movement with a lively Russian dance and a return to a more melancholic material in the middle

section. The finale recalls elements that have gone before (including the very opening of the symphony), combining these with new material to build to a triumphant finale.

© Steven Ledbetter (www.stevenledbetter.com)