

FRANZ SCHUBERT

(1797–1828)

Symphony No. 8 in B minor, D. 759, *Unfinished* (1822) (22mins)

Allegro moderato
Andante con moto

It is tempting to read the *Unfinished* Symphony as a reflection of Schubert's fate: a glimpse of what might have been, had this composer's life not been cut short at the age of 31. Yet Schubert lived for another six years after starting work on this masterpiece. What's more, the period following the completion of his Sixth Symphony in 1818 saw him abandoning a whole series of musical fragments, though none of them as fine as this one, which he began in 1822, and then set aside, leaving two entire movements and 20 orchestrated bars of a third. Clearly Schubert's enemy was something other than a lack of time.

Perhaps it was the standard set by Beethoven, whom Schubert was always too shy to contact, even though they lived in the same city, and whose formidable conception of the symphonic model had a paralysing effect on the younger composer. Perhaps it was the standard set by Schubert himself, as the biographer Alfred Einstein declared: he could never have finished the symphony for "nothing could approach the originality, power, and skill of the first two movements."

Or perhaps insecurity was only part of the problem. Towards the end of 1822, the composer contracted syphilis, the disease that would eventually kill him, and its various treatments – no change of underwear or bedding; no washing except rinsing the mouth – were as humiliating as

they were ineffective. It could be that the illness snuffed out his creative inspiration.

Incomplete though it was, Schubert sent the manuscript to his friend, the minor composer Anselm Hüttenbrenner, who stored it away in a chest. It took more than 40 years to resurface, and only then thanks to some tactical thinking from the conductor Johann Herbeck who, by offering to perform one of Hüttenbrenner's own works, obtained Schubert's score and premiered it in 1865. He tacked on the finale of Schubert's Third Symphony to ensure a stirring conclusion, and over the years, other endings have been suggested, most recently by the Chinese Telecoms giant Huawei, which used the opportunity to showcase the creative potential of Artificial Intelligence.

But it's hard to see what could follow Schubert's visionary writing, which, with its expansive paragraphs and obsessive repetitions, looked ahead to the music of late 19th-century Romanticism. So most of us accept these two completed movements – a whispering, mysterious 'Allegro moderato' and a tender, sun-soaked 'Andante con moto' – as sufficient in themselves: more a finished half-symphony than an unfinished whole.



FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(1809–1847)

Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64 (1844) (26mins)

Allegro molto appassionato
Andante
Allegretto non troppo – Allegro molto vivace

Ostensibly Mendelssohn was the kind of artist to whom everything came easily. Born into a cultured banking family, he received the best musical education money could buy, along with various other privileges reserved for the wealthy. Furthermore, he was a prodigy. By the age of nine, he had given his first piano recital (his violin playing was similarly very fine). By the age of 16 he had already composed 13 string symphonies, a symphony and his famous Op. 20 Octet. With its fluidity and elegance of line, his music, much like that of his hero Mozart, sounded as though it had come to the composer fully formed.

So one might assume that the E minor Violin Concerto of 1844, which exemplifies these virtues, was the product of just a few weeks' work. In fact it had gestated for six years. That's partly because of intervening duties. But a lot of it came down to the composer's respect for the chosen violinist, his close friend Ferdinand David. Mendelssohn was determined to get the piece just right, and the effort, which involved close consultation with David over aspects of technique as well as concerns about structure and balance, drove him into a nervous frenzy.



What emerged was perhaps the composer's most famous masterpiece. Foregoing the customary orchestral exposition, the first movement opens immediately with a sinuous melody that has become the concerto's signature. Over the course of his career Mendelssohn had grown fond of dovetailing his movements, and it is thus, in a concerto that combines a questing 'Allegro molto appassionato', a calm and reflective 'Andante', and an irrepressibly joyous 'Allegretto non troppo – Allegro molto vivace', that he achieves a seamless and propulsive journey from darkness to light.

Interval (20 mins)

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)

Symphony No. 3 in F, Op. 90 (1883) (35mins)

Allegro con brio
Andante
Poco allegretto
Allegro – un poco sostenuto

On attending the premiere of this symphony, the 23 year-old composer Hugo Wolf – an outspoken musical radicalist – delivered a cutting verdict: “Schumann, Chopin, Berlioz, and Liszt, the leaders of the revolutionary movement in music... have passed by our symphonist without trace. ... He comes like a departed spirit back to his home, [staggering] up the rickety staircase.”

He had a point. Brahms was a traditionalist who espoused the symphonic principles of his hero Beethoven. But traditionalism doesn't preclude quality or creative breadth and once he had dared to sign off on his first symphony – 20 years after starting it – Brahms followed relatively quickly with three more: all very different and all of them masterpieces.

This third, composed during the summer of 1883, stands out for its introspection: even the traditionally jubilant final movement (*Allegro – un poco sostenuto*) ends quietly. The shortest and structurally tightest of all Brahms's symphonies, it was written during a stay at a spa resort along the Rhine about 20 miles west of Frankfurt, so it is perhaps more than coincidence that the opening of the first movement (*Allegro con brio*) bears a distinctive resemblance to a spot in the *Rhenish* Symphony No. 3, composed in

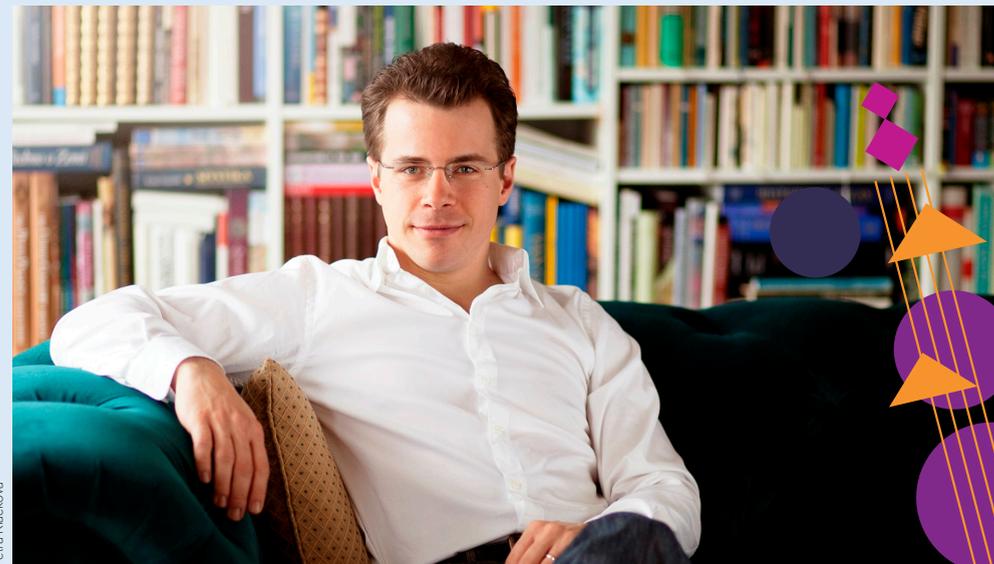
1850 by Robert Schumann. Around this time Brahms was keeping up an intense – though probably chaste – relationship with a young alto named Hermine Spies, and it is possible that the symphony, with its yearning melodies, was to some degree inspired by her. We can't know. Brahms, a famously reticent man, never allowed any of his compositional process to be revealed to the public.

What we do know is that the public, by and large, loved the results, and with the Third Symphony Brahms scored his biggest hit of all. Audiences clamoured to hear the melancholic third movement '*Poco allegretto*' – which many consider to be the heart of the piece – as an encore. Antonín Dvořák praised the work's “magnificent melodies”. Robert Schumann's widow Clara – with whom Brahms had long been in love – rhapsodised in turn about all four movements: “In the first I was charmed straight away by the gleams of dawning day, as if the rays of the sun were shining through the trees,” she said. “The second is a pure idyll; I can see the worshippers kneeling about the little forest shrine, I hear the babbling brook and the buzz of the insects... The third movement is a pearl, but it is a grey one dipped in a tear of woe, and at the end the modulation is quite wonderful. How gloriously the last movement follows with its passionate upward surge!”

Notwithstanding the jeers of Wolf and his fellow musical revolutionaries, the Third Symphony easily established itself as a pillar of the musical canon, and remains so to this day.

Programme notes by Hannah Nepil
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Q&A with Jakub Hrůša



Petra Klackova

Since you took up the position of Principal Guest Conductor with the Philharmonia you've conducted a great deal of Czech music. What draws you to the Austro-German repertoire on 16 May?

I have always been drawn to the Austro-German repertoire. In fact, I don't consider Czech, Austro-German, German, even Hungarian music as separate entities. As you know, I am currently Chief Conductor of the Bamberg Symphony, an orchestra that represents the connected traditions of Central-European music. We cover various kinds of classical music from this huge area and feel familiar with all of it. In music textbooks, it's useful to make very clear distinctions and also rather popular to point out the sharp contrasts between the national schools further in the past, especially in the 19th century – maybe because the underlying feeling of cultural unity then was very strong and people wanted to emphasise differing profiles. However, both in reality and in my personal passion for music, connections between, say, Schubert and Dvořák, Beethoven/Schumann/Liszt and Smetana, Mahler and Suk (one could go on and on) are very

strong, and those composers definitely feel like a 'family'. With the Philharmonia Orchestra, I've already done a lot of Brahms and Mahler, so I am really coming back home with this repertoire.

What do you look forward to the most about conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra at Royal Festival Hall?

As always: for the precision and flexibility of the Orchestra, their incomparable care of sound, their virtuosity and, above all, their humanity and friendship. This is what we always bring to the discerning and knowledgeable audience at Royal Festival Hall.

Brahms incorporated his personal motto “Frei aber Froh” in his third Symphony – what would your musical motto be?

I have no general motto. It depends on what particular perspective you have at the time you formulate it. But let's try and think of one now: prepare and relax; be fanatically interested and immensely faithful to the composer when you are preparing and rehearsing their music but stay true to yourself when you are performing it. Above all: *be true!*