

all his/her strength to compete with the massive orchestral bursts, the pianist boldly takes over the mighty utterances that began the movement.

Brahms wrote the words "Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini" at the head of the slow movement, but whether the words are an homage to Robert Schumann (whom Brahms sometimes called Domini), a portrait of Clara Schumann (the most popular interpretation, and one seemingly supported by a letter from Brahms to Clara), or some other reference is unknown.

The rondo-theme of the finale is introduced by the piano alone, and, later on, the soloist gets his/her one and only chance to impress the audience with a cadenza -- though it is dramatic necessity, not garish virtuosity, that demands the cadenza in the first place.



Brahms Piano Concerto No. 1

RUBINSTEIN / REINER

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Johannes Brahms was 20 years old when, in 1853, he first made the acquaintance of Robert Schumann through a letter of recommendation provided by the famous violinist Joseph Joachim. It was Schumann's unabashed praise of the music that Brahms showed him that, more than anything else, provided the young composer with the courage necessary to begin work on a full-scale symphony the next year. That courage, however, fell short in the end -- Brahms felt himself too inexperienced and was too haunted by the "footsteps of a giant" (Beethoven) to begin fruitful symphonic work -- and Brahms reorganized the material he had written as a sonata for two pianos. By 1858, this sonata for two pianos had itself been reborn as the Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15.

The Piano Concerto No. 1 as we know it today is a complete reworking of the ideas and themes of the original duo-sonata source; much of it is completely new music. The premiere of the piece in January 1859 was not the failure that it is sometimes portrayed to have been, but the cold response at a follow-up performance in Leipzig left a bitter taste in Brahms' mouth that he never forgot -- Leipzig remained an enemy for the rest of his life.

The concerto is in three movements: Maestoso, Adagio, and Allegro non troppo. The orchestral exposition to the giant Maestoso is mighty, epic, and tragic in no small portion; much later, a radiant, chorale-like second idea is offered by the soloist, who Brahms provides with the kind of rich, deep sonorities so characteristic of his piano writing. At the recapitulation, which is ushered in by a massive climax in which the pianist is forced to use

Brahms Piano Concerto No. 1

Artur Rubinstein, piano
Fritz Reiner - Chicago Symphony Orchestra

1 Maestoso 21:37

2 Adagio 13:17

3 Rondo: Allegro Non Troppo 11:22

Total Time 46:20

Recorded by RCA 1954 Engineers - Leslie Chase, Lewis Layton
Producers - John Pfeiffer, Richard Mohr



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