

pair that "one of them weeps, the other one laughs," as with the comic and tragic masks in Greek and Roman theater.

Brahms did not, however, give any further hint of a specific "tragedy," nor had he suffered any recent private loss or given any indication of uncommon sadness. He wasn't, in truth, very fond of the title Tragic, referring to the work at one point as the "Dramatic Overture" although a canvass of his friends failed to produce an alternative that anyone liked better. Interestingly, 64 measures at the end of the exposition appeared in a sketchbook from the year 1869, which was principally concerned with the working-out of his Alto Rhapsody and Liebeslieder Waltzes. By then, inward grief over his mother's death had been sublimated in A German Requiem, and he had made the pleasant decision to live permanently in Vienna.

A melancholy streak in Brahms' personality that dated from childhood surfaced regularly in his later music, but "Melancholy Overture" wouldn't have sounded half so well as Tragic, although it more nearly fits the mood of Op. 81. In the event, this structurally traditional work (unlike the Academic Festival) opens with a pair of Beethovenian chords used thematically later on to set up the gloomy and agitated D minor main subject in 2/2 time. This is developed considerably before we hear a more lyrical second subject in F major. A third subject (the one from his 1869 sketchbook, with dotted rhythm and horn punctuation) adds a further element of contrast before the development proper begins *Molto più moderato* -- much slower than the exposition tempo. This development is brief, however, after which the three subjects are recapitulated in reverse order, as Beethoven's did in the Coriolan Overture, and Wagner's in the Flying Dutchman.



That Brahms initially approached the symphonic form with trepidation is fairly evident from the chronology of his works. It wasn't until the age of 43 that he completed his First Symphony. Indeed, the composer's output to that point suggests a conscious process of self-education. A number of smaller-scale orchestral works, including the Variations on a Theme of Haydn and the proto-symphonic Piano Concerto No. 1, suggest preparation for what Brahms clearly saw as the elusive of compositional enterprises. He was to meet the challenge with a skill and individual spirit, one of Classicism refracted through the prism of high Romanticism, that led many to pronounce him heir to Beethoven.

Brahms' Fourth Symphony (1885), his last, provides with its serious tone, striking complexities, and inspired construction a fitting valedictory to his work in this genre. That its impact was immediate if initially puzzling is clear from the account by the biographer Max Kalbeck of its first run-through (at two pianos) for a small and distinguished audience:

"After the wonderful Allegro...I expected that one of those present would break out in a loud 'Bravo.' Into his blond beard [conductor Hans] Richter murmured something that from afar would be taken as an expression of approval.... The others remained persistently quiet.... Finally Brahms grumbled, "So, let's go on!" and gave a sign to continue; whereupon [eminent critic Eduard] Hanslick heaved a sigh and quickly exploded, as if he had to relieve his mind and yet feared speaking up too late: 'For this whole movement I had the feeling that I was being given a beating by two incredibly intelligent people....'"

Each of the movements bears the distinct stamp of the composer's personality. The first begins with a theme in E minor based upon the interval of a third, which also

provides a structural and motivic foundation for the remainder of the work. There is a notable sense of unrest from beginning to end, and the tragic, even fatalistic atmosphere is further and stunningly underlined by the final, minor-key plagal (IV-I) cadence. The second movement, which opens with a brief, melancholy sort of fanfare, gives way to the quietly accompanied winds in perhaps one of the loveliest of any of the composer's themes, granted particular plangency through the use of the flat sixth and seventh scale degrees borrowed from the minor mode. This material is gradually developed into soaring, tutti lyricism that fades into ethereal quiet. The third movement, a lusty, stomping, duple dance, proved so popular in Brahms' lifetime that audiences constantly demanded that it be repeated. The last movement is perhaps most notable of all, cast as it is in the "archaic" Baroque form of a chaconne -- variations over a ground bass. The chaconne's subject is in fact a slight modification of that used by Bach in his Cantata No. 150; though deceptively simple -- essentially an ascending minor scale segment from the tonic note to the dominant, then a leap back to the tonic -- Brahms uses this skeleton as the basis for an increasingly elaborate and thematic harmonic framework. From its first presentation, which is not as a bass line, but as a theme in the winds, Brahms gradually weaves some 34 variations that steadily build in intensity, as though in defiance to the oppressive, insistent rotation of the ground. The final variations lead directly into an ending which reconfirms the weight of tragedy and pathos borne by the first movement.

Brahms composed this work on holiday during the summer of 1880, and Hans Richter led the first performance with the Vienna Philharmonic on December 26 of that year. In two different editions of *Essays in Musical Analysis*, Sir Donald Francis Tovey pontificated at length about the tragedy Brahms had in mind for this companion piece to the jolly Academic Festival Overture. From Ischl in the Austrian Alps the composer wrote to his publisher, "I could not refuse my melancholy nature the satisfaction of composing an overture for a tragedy." To his friend the conductor Carl Reinecke he said of the

Brahms Symphony No. 4

Carl Schuricht Symphony Orchestra Of The Bavarian Radio Orchestra

Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98

1 Allegro Non Troppo 12:09

2 Andante Moderato 10:34

3 Allegro Giocoso - Poco Meno Presto 6:03

4 Allegro Energico E Passionato - Più Allegro 10:23

Tragic Overture, Op. 81

5 Tragic Overture, Op. 81 11:42

Recorded September 1961, in Munich



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