

As was to be the case with each of his four symphonies, in No. 1 Brahms sets forth the main weight of his arguments in the first and last movements. In No. 1, each is prefaced by an introduction in slow tempo. The one which begins the symphony sets the sombre, dramatic mood which also characterizes the more vigorous but equally austere first movement proper. The second movement offers a restful interlude, one with scarcely a moment of contrasting drama. Even though the third movement is hardly a rollicking scherzo, it provides a breath of fresh, lighter air to balance what has preceded it.

At this point, listeners may be wondering where this sequence of moods is leading. Brahms at first withheld his answer. He began the finale with a prelude which is virtually as stark in tone as the one which opened the first movement.

But its fatalistic grumblings are quickly dispelled by the arrival of the heartfelt, chorale-like melody which is the principal theme of the finale's main body. Brahms acknowledged its family relationship to the Ode to Joy theme from Beethoven's Ninth ("Any jackass can see that!" was how he put it). He built this movement with vast architectural and instrumental skill, as the symphony unfolds towards its grand, affirmative conclusion.

**BRAHMS** *Symphony No. 1 in C Minor*

**KUBELIK** *The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra*



Brahms needed many years to develop his own, individual approach to symphonic writing. A large part of his difficulty sprang from his awe of Beethoven (a feeling shared by virtually every composer who lived after Beethoven), even though many of his supporters and colleagues – including the celebrated musical couple, Robert and Clara Schumann – saw him as the earlier composer’s true symphonic heir. “I shall never write a symphony,” he told a friend, conductor Hermann Levi. “You have no idea how the likes of us feel when we hear the tramp of a giant like him behind us.”

Time and circumstance eventually convinced Brahms to renounce that vow. When he was 21, his first hearing of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony so overwhelmed him that he set out to compose a symphony of his own. His sketches refused to fit that form, so he ended up using them in his Piano Concerto No. 1, and A German Requiem. Several years and several pieces later (the two charming orchestral serenades included), the Variations on a Theme by Joseph Haydn (1873) finally announced to the world that Brahms had arrived at a unique and commanding orchestral style. In it, warmth and body of sound took precedence over instrumental color for its own sake, in marked contrast with contemporaries such as Tchaikovsky and Dvořák.

Meanwhile, he had been working on his official first symphony. He finally felt it ready to be heard, some 20 years after he had begun it. The first performances, in 1876, won great successes, confirming in Brahms’s mind that he really did possess the necessary skills to follow in Beethoven’s footsteps as a great composer of symphonic music.

Brahms’s admirers included the eminent conductor and pianist Hans von Bülow, whose impressive and extremely varied list of premières included Wagner’s operas *Tristan and Isolde*, and *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*; he also performed the solo part at the first performance of Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1. It was he who grouped Brahms together with Bach and Beethoven as the “Three Great B’s of Music.” He and others expanded upon this adulation by referring to Brahms’s First Symphony as “Beethoven’s Tenth.”

Though the composer may not have appreciated the comparison, it certain senses it is inescapable. The symphony’s atmosphere of victory through struggle, for example, links it with Beethoven’s symphonic ideals, especially with those expressed in his Fifth (which is also set in the same key, C Minor) and Ninth Symphonies. Brahms’s use of a chorale-like melody in the finale calls the Ninth to mind, as well.

# Brahms Symphony Nr.1

## Rafael Kubelik - Vienna Philharmonic

- 1 Un poco sostenuto - Allegro - Meno allegro 14:03
  - 2 Andante sostenuto 9:23
  - 3 Un poco allegretto e grazioso 4:43
  - 4 Adagio - Più andante - Allegro non troppo ma con brio  
Piu allegro 16:52
- Total Time 45:01

Recorded by Decca 1957

Engineer - James Brown

Producer - Erik Smith



For more info e-mail us:  
[admin@highdeftapetransfers.com](mailto:admin@highdeftapetransfers.com)  
or visit our website:  
[www.highdeftapetransfers.com](http://www.highdeftapetransfers.com)