

COLORADO COLLEGE



Summer
Music
festival

Program Notes
by
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FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA CONCERT

June 17, 2025

7:30 PM

Celeste Theatre

Overture from *Die Fledermaus*

Johann Strauss II
(1825-1899)

Known as the “Waltz King,” Johann Strauss II was extremely successful and popular during his own lifetime. He was admired by fellow composers Brahms, Wagner, and even the unrelated namesake Richard Strauss, for his appealing music, particularly his waltzes. In fact, Brahms, when asked to sign his wife’s fan, wrote a few measures of the *Blue Danube Waltz* and then “unfortunately NOT by Johannes Brahms.” It could be surmised that he possessed a talent that escaped his more serious musical brethren, the ability to write waltzes and other more popular musics with inimitable style, quality and appeal.

Die Fledermaus is an operetta first performed in Vienna in 1874. It immediately became Strauss’ most successful stage work. The story is a silly and somewhat complicated one about a husband, wife, her lover, a big ball with masquerade costumes, retribution for a prank, and false imprisonment. The details are not worth examination here. It is noteworthy only that the plot is fun and creates opportunities for great Strauss music.

The overture functions exactly as it should. It introduces music that will be a part of the operetta (much like the overtures to Broadway musicals which are made up of the songs yet to be heard). This overture begins with a little three-note motive which appears in the operetta toward the end where the complicated plot is being unscrambled by the various characters. The following melody picks up the tempo to describe the story’s resolution. Next there is a bridge heard in the French horns to the most famous music of this operetta, the waltz that is heard at the ball. This section of the overture is probably as recognizable as the celebrated *Blue Danube*.

Following this moment, there is a rather sad melody that is later associated with the maid who was told she could not attend the ball (eventually she does). But the sad mood is soon dispelled by a lively polka used to express her glee at finally

being allowed to go to the party. Reprises of the polka and the waltz lead to a grand climactic conclusion of this lively and charming work.

Sinfonia Concertante in B-flat Major, Op. 84, Hob.I:105

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

Allegro

Andante

Finale-Allegro con spirito

Haydn composed his *Sinfonia Concertante* for one of his trips to London. A former student of his, Ignaz Pleyel, had been composing some concertante symphonies to great success so Haydn decided to show him the master's hand in this type of work. To put it simply, a "sinfonia concertante" is (and was) a composition for full orchestra and a small group of soloists. Haydn's contribution to this genre was composed for full orchestra and solo violin, oboe, bassoon and cello. The violinist who played and promoted the concert was Johann Salomon. It must have been a great success to warrant the following comment from a prominent critic:

The last performance at SALOMON'S Concert deserves to be mentioned as one of the richest treats which the recent season has afforded. A new concertante from HAYDN combined with all the excellencies of music; it was profound, airy, affecting, and original, and the performance was in unison with the merit of the composition. SALOMON particularly exerted himself on this occasion, in doing justice to the music of his friend HAYDN.

Haydn's sinfonia is indeed a worthy and appealing work. The first movement, *Allegro*, opens with a lyrical melody for the violins which is then taken up and extended by the rest of the orchestra. This is followed by a second theme treated in much the same way. The themes are treated the same way by the soloists, beginning with the violin and followed by the oboe, bassoon and cello. Eventually the entire orchestra comes back together to close this movement.

The second movement, *Andante*, introduces a new lyrical melody heard first in the soloists but soon augmented by the other instruments to enrich the texture. Haydn also gave the horns - they can be such lyrical brass - some beautiful moments of their own before the end of this movement. The solo violin does get a brief cadenza that sounds almost improvisational. After this short movement, the last movement, *Finale - Allegro con spirito*, breaks loose. It opens with a fast scale-like melody for the full orchestra which is answered by the solo violin. This conversation between the soloists is continued until the solo violin gets a slightly more extended fast cadenza for itself. Then the other soloists get moments to show off before the movement comes to a robust close.

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68

Un poco sostenuto-Allegro-Meno allegro

Andante sostenuto

Un poco allegretto e grazioso

Adagio-Più andante-Allegro non troppo, ma con brio-Più allegro

Johannes Brahms

(1833-1897)

Johannes Brahms was born six years after Beethoven died and didn't complete his 1st Symphony until 1876, more than fifty years after Beethoven had completed his 9th and last symphony. And yet Brahms' 1st is often jokingly referred to as Beethoven's 10th! This epithet reflects the nature of Brahms' music. He was in many ways a conservative romantic composer who always held the highest regard and admiration for the balance of classical and romantic elements in Beethoven's work. In fact, he felt Beethoven's long shadow for so many years that he resisted writing symphonies at all because he felt that they would be compared with the supreme masterpieces of his predecessor. He once expressed his reaction to this constant creative tension as "...you have no idea how it feels to hear behind you the tramp of a giant like Beethoven.." It is perhaps for this reason that his first symphony was in gestation for at least 14 years (we know that Clara Schumann had seen portions of the first movement as early as 1862) and only completed in Brahms' 43rd year.

The long time that Brahms took to contemplate this symphony shows in the nature of the music. It is generally full of rich thematic material which is developed in many ways. Melodies are broken into fragments, they are combined with other melodies, and they are used in modulations to new keys. And often fragments that are heard first later evolve into full-blown melodies. The music is, in short, carefully worked out with the purpose of giving the entire symphony a sense of control, balance and unity. This is not to say, however, that the music sounds completely classical. Brahms' romanticism is heard continually in his soaring melodies, his intense harmonies, rhythms, and melodic lines that seem powerfully expressive. As a descendent of Beethoven, Brahms successfully brings emotion and intellect together to serve his musical purpose – a kind of order that can be felt and an expression of vague but powerful personal feelings that cannot be specifically described.

The first movement opens with an extended slow introduction, *Un poco sostenuto* (a little sustained), which presents much of the thematic material of the entire movement. After this introduction, the *Allegro* erupts in a swirl of rhythmic and melodic activity. Following the exposition of the melodies, the development builds to nearly cataclysmic intensity, followed directly by the recapitulation of the main thematic ideas. This is a profound movement on a grand scale.

The slow second movement, *Andante sostenuto* (continuously slow), could hardly provide a greater contrast. Here long lyrical and serene melodies prevail in a simple structure. While the listener may not hear this clearly, Brahms often adds extra measures so that melodies that might have been symmetrical with balanced phrases become slightly irregular. In any case, the melodies impart an impression that they were carefully constructed rather than invented (as if by intuition).

The third movement, *Un poco allegretto e grazioso* (a little fast and graceful), is short and stands where the old minuet or scherzo would normally have been encountered. Perhaps Brahms did not want to seem too old-fashioned and felt that he should do something novel. Still, the music is full of intricate structural nuances. The listener might notice that the first melody, which lasts for 5 measures, is turned upside down in the next five measures.

The finale, like the first movement, opens with a slow introduction. And again, like the first movement, thematic fragments are introduced which will later become full-blown melodies. The first theme in the exposition proper is like a phrase from a hymn and is preserved until the final coda of the movement where it is shouted out by the full orchestra. Sir Donald Francis Tovey, a celebrated English critic in the early 1900s, commented that this theme is so comprehensible and clear that it is Brahms' answer to the celebrated "Joy" theme in Beethoven's 9th Symphony. In fact, when the similarity was pointed out to Brahms, he allegedly said "any ass can see that." It is a melody that the listener is likely to remember. Finally, the coda, or closing section, to this grand symphony is brilliant, climactic, and even hair-raising. We will be swept off our feet. In general, this entire movement, climaxing in C Major, feels strong and optimistic in comparison to the more somber character of the C minor first movement. There is hope for the future.

UPCOMING SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVAL EVENTS

www.coloradocollege.edu/musicfestival

Music at Midday

12:15 p.m. June 18, Packard Hall, free

Children's Orchestra Concert

Featuring Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*

9 & 11 a.m. June 19, Celeste Theatre, free ticketed event

Festival Artists Pre-Concert Recital

5:45 p.m. June 19, Packard Hall, free

Festival Artists Concert

7 p.m. June 19, Packard Hall, ticketed event

Music at Midday

12:15 p.m. June 20, Packard Hall, free

Faculty/Fellow Concert at First Congregational

7 p.m. June 20, First Congregational Church, Colorado Springs, free

Fellow Concerto Readings

2 p.m. June 21, Celeste Theatre, free

The Soldier's Tale

5 p.m. June 22, Celeste Theatre, ticketed event



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