

Brahmsiana

Orchestrated and Arranged by Leonard Slatkin

1. **Capriccio in D Minor, Op. 116, No. 1** for Orchestra
2. **Intermezzo in E-flat Major, Op. 117, No. 1** for Wind Ensemble
3. **Vineta, Op. 42, No. 2** for String Orchestra
4. **Theme and Variations, Op. 18b** for Wind Ensemble and Harp
5. **Andante from Piano Quartet No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 60** for Orchestra
6. **Rhapsody in E-flat Major, Op. 119, No. 4** for Orchestra
7. **Wiegenlied (Lullaby), Op. 49, No. 4** for Orchestra

The concept of the transcription has been around for almost as long as written music has existed. Numerous composers and arrangers have felt compelled to recast works, and several of these pieces were staples of the concert hall when I was growing up. Years went by before I realized that Bach-Stokowski were actually two different people.

Over the course of the pandemic, many of us have had the opportunity to reexamine aspects of our lives that had perhaps faded a bit. During one of my walks in my neighborhood, I had my iPhone on shuffle mode when the Andante from the Third Piano Quartet by Brahms, a piece of great sentimental value to me, popped into my headset. As I listened and reminisced, I started to think about other instruments that might take over certain melodic or accompaniment lines.

When I returned home, I sat down with the original and began to sketch out what an orchestral version might look and sound like. As completion of this project loomed, I started pondering other Brahms pieces that could undergo an orchestral treatment to form a suite.

There are compelling reasons to recast pieces of music, perhaps most importantly, to bring them to a broader public through performance by soloists and ensembles other than those for which they were first intended. This exposure might even encourage some people to listen to the original. Second, “re-composing” provides an opportunity for the transcriptionist to embrace music by a beloved composer while also asserting his or her own creative muse based on years of experience, for example, conducting an orchestra.

These transcriptions can be performed as a set, presented individually, or interspersed with other selections. The suggested order makes the most sense to me musically. Two of them are for winds only, with one augmented by the harp. The English horn and bass clarinet, neither of which Brahms had at his disposal, are included to give a new color to the existing ensemble. My intent was to emulate how these pieces might have sounded around the time of Brahms. There are no notes, rhythms, or harmonies other than those provided by the master.

1. Capriccio in D Minor, Op. 116, No. 1

With its bold opening and the tossing back and forth of syncopated rhythms, this piano piece seemed well-suited for an orchestral palette. Written in 1892 when Brahms was still

in full command of his keyboard skills, this first fantasy exemplifies the *Sturm und Drang* that characterizes the seven-piece set of fantasies as a whole.

2. Intermezzo in E-flat Major, Op. 117, No. 1

Long a favorite of pianists, this first of three pieces in the set evokes a lullaby filled with tender simplicity. I felt that the songlike nature of the work lent itself well to the winds. Brahms included an inscription to accompany its publication in 1892:

*"Balow, my babe, lie still and sleep!
It grieves me sore to see thee weep."*

3. Vineta, Op. 42, No. 2

This unusual work was originally composed for six-part a cappella chorus. It is one of three secular songs Brahms wrote in 1859-61. Arranging the piece for strings alone seemed appropriate for the gently rocking rhythm and atypical ten-bar phrases. Vineta was a mythical city on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea.

4. Theme and Variations, Op. 18b

Originally the slow movement of his String Sextet No. 1 in B-flat Major, Op. 18, this work was transcribed for piano at the request of Clara Schumann in 1860. The dark nature of much of the piece, reminiscent of Bach's Chaconne, seemed perfect for a wind ensemble. I have chosen to add a harp, as several of the arpeggiated figures in the piano version needed a viable alternative.

5. Andante from Piano Quartet No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 60

Among the most beautiful of Brahms's works, the slow movement is one of sadness coupled with cautious optimism. My contribution was confined to orchestrating the piano part, which primarily operates as the accompaniment in this piece. I also chose to have the solo string trio play as in the original, trading off with the full section at certain points.

6. Rhapsody in E-flat Major, Op. 119, No. 4

The bumptious nature of this piece, with its robust and unusual rhythms, cried out for some kind of orchestral treatment. This is one of the rare works that begins in a major key and ends in the minor. It is also the only one in which I have incorporated timpani. Written in 1893, it was premiered with its companion, Opus 118, in London the following year.

7. Wiegenlied (Lullaby), Op. 49, No. 4 for Orchestra

The final work of this grouping is arguably Brahms's most popular composition. What parent has not sung or hummed this memorable melody to a child? Because of the popularity of the lullaby, this is the one piece within this suite that can rightfully be called an arrangement. I have set the song in three verses, each musically distinct. The simplicity of the tune provides ideal closure to this cycle. And if you listen carefully, you will notice just a fleeting reference to the Intermezzo heard previously, also a cradle song.