



The Charlottesville and University Symphony Orchestra

Saturday, April 17

Old Cabell Hall Auditorium

music The Charlottesville and University Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Music Director Carl Roskott, presented a program consisting of two major works: the *Violin Concerto, op. 47* of Jean Sibelius (1865-1957), and the *Symphony No. 1 in C minor, op. 68*, of Johannes Brahms (1833-97). The soloist in the Sibelius concerto was Hasse Borup, regular concertmaster of the orchestra. A native of Denmark, Borup has a natural affinity for Scandinavian composers, including the Finnish Sibelius. Although the violinist has long been an admirer of Sibelius and his concerto, this was his first public performance with orchestra of the work, and thus a major step in his career.

The *Violin Concerto* was Sibelius' only concerto, although he composed many symphonies, some of them among the most familiar works in the repertoire. In this work, a depiction of Finland's bleak landscape and ancient culture, expressed through rough-hewn melodies and darkly ominous, often dissonant harmonies, is combined with the brilliant virtuosity of a late Romantic violin concerto. Written in 1902-03 and revised in 1905, the concerto is one of the most demanding in the repertoire, and Borup met the physical challenges of its long cadenzas, double-stopping and using the highest notes in the violin range, with spectacular agility. Despite occasional intonation problems, it was an impressive performance.

Brahms' *Symphony No. 1* occupied the composer from 1855 to 1876. He was notoriously a perfectionist, and knew that he was following in the footsteps of the greatest of symphonists, Beethoven. He was also deeply moved by the final illness and death of his friend Robert Schumann, and reflected that in the work. This dramatic and profound symphony was immediately recognized as a worthy partner of Beethoven's ninth, and was even dubbed the "tenth" by critics, to Brahms' dismay.

Brahms paid homage to Beethoven in a number of ways, not least by his adoption of the "fate" motif of Beethoven's fifth symphony in the main section of the first movement, and by the main theme of the fourth movement, which bears a resemblance to the "Ode to Joy" in Beethoven's ninth. These borrowings, conscious or not, indicate Brahms' aspiration to match Beethoven, yet with his own sense of complex forms, modally inflected harmonies and rich orchestral textures. Conductor Roskott and the excellent, largely student orchestra made the most of the drama in the work and gave it an exciting performance.—Martin Picker

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