

Program Notes

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg Overture, WWV 96

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is unique among his mature operas—not only as his only comedy but also as a work rooted in real-world history rather than mythology. Premiered in 1868, the opera tells the story of a guild of master singers in 16th-century Nuremberg and the young knight Walther von Stolzing, who seeks to win a song contest (and the hand of Eva Pogner) by breaking from rigid musical traditions. The opera is a meditation on the nature of artistic creativity—balancing the old with the new—and its overture captures this spirit in grand fashion.

Built with symphonic precision, the overture introduces several key themes from the opera: the stately, almost ceremonial **Meistersinger theme**, the soaring and lyrical melody associated with **Walther's love song**, and an energetic, contrapuntal passage representing **the excitement and rivalry of the singing contest**. These themes are layered with increasing complexity before arriving at a triumphant conclusion, mirroring the opera's resolution, where artistic innovation prevails within the framework of tradition.

Unlike Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* or *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which begin with moody, scene-setting preludes, *Meistersinger* opens with an overture that is not only self-contained but frequently performed as a concert piece. Its grandeur, contrapuntal craftsmanship, and exuberant spirit make it one of Wagner's most immediately engaging orchestral works.

MIRAGE Concerto for Cello and Orchestra

Andrea Casarrubios (1988)

Andrea Casarrubios' Cello Concerto, written in three stages between Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago, was completed in 2024 for the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra. The composer will perform the work as a guest soloist in April 2025. The first movement, Mirage, evokes desert landscapes, where the music fluctuates between disorientation—like the hot air that distorts the horizon—and a delirious, fierce dance. The intimate second movement, Mensajes del agua, offers a serene oasis of contemplation, and the music is meant to provide a moment of renewal. As the Cadencia unfolds, the solo cello and members of the orchestra engage in an exhilarating and liberating dialogue, breaking the calm and initiating a new phase of

transformation. This liberation leads into the final movement, Marcha, the most expansive and stirring moment of the entire work. It is at this turning point that the cello, combining both intensity and learned wisdom, ascends toward a triumphant summit, bringing the piece to a grand conclusion.

One of the most unique features of this concerto is its bold “choose-your-ownending” concept — the work has had three distinct finales, each adapting to different programming ideas. The first version of this concerto was premiered in 2019 by the composer alongside conductor Rubén Fernández at the National Auditorium in Madrid. The second version debuted in 2021 in the United States with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, cellist Thomas Mesa, and Maestro Jacob Joyce, paired with the music of John Williams. The most recent revision, expanded into four movements, will be performed in 2025 alongside Manuel de Falla’s *El Sombrero de Tres Picos* and Claude Debussy’s *La Mer*.

-Andrea Casarrubios

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 73

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Brahms composed his *Second Symphony* during the summer of 1877 in the lakeside town of Pörschach am Wörthersee, and the setting seems to have left an imprint on the music. Where his First Symphony wrestled with the weight of Beethoven’s legacy, the *Second* feels more natural, flowing, and unburdened. Critics and audiences often describe it as Brahms’ “*pastoral*” *symphony*, but that label oversimplifies a work that, beneath its outward warmth, is filled with introspection and subtle tension.

The symphony begins with an unassuming, almost murmured theme in the cellos—pastoral, yes, but with an undercurrent of melancholy. This tension simmers throughout the first movement, occasionally giving way to moments of radiant lyricism. The **second movement**, one of Brahms’ most deeply expressive, unfolds in long, searching phrases, tinged with longing. The **third movement** is an elegant contrast: a graceful waltz-like melody in the oboe, interrupted by livelier, dance-like episodes. The **finale**, however, is where the symphony truly transforms—emerging from a subdued opening into an exhilarating, jubilant conclusion.

Though often considered Brahms’ most relaxed symphony, the *Second* is a masterclass in balance: between light and shadow, motion and stillness, complexity and simplicity. It is music that breathes—effortlessly constructed yet deeply felt, intimate yet symphonic in scope.