

*Chapel Hill*  

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*Philharmonia*

7:30 p.m. April 30, 2017  
Mooser Auditorium  
Hill Hall, UNC-Chapel Hill

Music Director  
Donald L. Oehler

Passing the Torch

Carnival Overture, Op. 92

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K466

Wolfgang Amadè Mozart (1756-91)

I. Allegro

Andrew Zhen, Piano

Young Artist Concerto Competition Award

Intermission

Serenade No.1 in D-major, Op. 11

Johannes Brahms (1833-97)

Allegro molto

Scherzo. Allegro non troppo – Trio. Poco più moto

Adagio non troppo

Menuetto I – Menuetto II

Scherzo. Allegro – Trio

Rondo. Allegro

*Please join us after the concert for a reception in the rotunda*

## Passing the Torch

“A hundred times a day I remind myself that my life depends on the labors of other people, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give, in the measure I have received, and I am still receiving.”

– Albert Einstein

“Mozart is sweet sunshine”

– Antonín Dvořák

The quadrennial Torch Relay from Olympia Greece to the host city of the Olympics was devised for the 1936 Berlin Summer Games. It is a measure of human resilience that, despite the tradition’s origin in Nazi Germany, the passing of the Olympic torch has come to symbolize a shared dedication to positive values, embodied as Promethean fire kindled by the sun’s rays. In 2016 more than 12,000 individuals participated in carrying the flame to the Rio Games, honoring peace, brotherhood, courage, and creative accomplishment.

A Torch Relay can metaphorically represent the long journey in concert music from the beginning of the Classical era in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, through the Romantic era in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the kindling of Modernism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among hundreds of composers during that span, four stand out as torchbearers who marked out a key route: Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Johannes Brahms, and Antonín Dvořák. This evening’s program features works of the latter three, who would certainly have acknowledged “Papa” Haydn (1732-1809) as the runner of their race’s opening leg.

For almost three decades beginning in 1761, Haydn served as the senior court musician of the Esterházy family. Prince Nikolaus I, his patron for most of that span, constructed an amazing Rococo palace, Esterháza, on swampland in what is now Fertőd, Hungary, a difficult journey from any major city. Haydn set the programs for the estate’s opera house and marionette theater and concerts by its resident musicians. He composed many of the works himself, experimenting with novel forms and effects. Haydn found Esterháza’s isolation liberating: “I was cut off from the world. There was no one to confuse or torment me, and I was forced to become original.” He evolved from an obscure composer to the renowned father of Classical music—the modernizer of its most important genres, the symphony and the string quartet, and the major inventor of the sonata form.

Like Haydn, the three composers of tonight’s concert resided within a Vienna-centric Middle Europe (known after 1867 as the Austro-Hungarian Empire). The handoff from Haydn to Mozart was direct; they met in Vienna in 1781 and, despite an age gap of 24 years, became close friends and reciprocal champions of each other’s work. Brahms knew these two predecessors only through their compositions. He was born nearly a quarter century after Haydn’s death and more than forty years after Mozart’s. However, he avidly collected and studied scores of their works. Finally, reminiscent of the Haydn-Mozart link, Brahms’s relationship with Dvořák took the form of mutual admiration, mentorship, and abiding friendship.



Porcelain bust of Joseph Haydn (Victoria & Albert Museum). Johannes Brahms kept a similar example in his bedroom.

## Dvořák: Carnival Overture

Dvořák, like Haydn, progressed from obscure beginnings to international fame. He was born in Nelahozeves, a tiny village in Bohemia (now the Czech Republic), the son of a butcher-innkeeper. Fans of George Lucas’s *Star Wars* films might think of young Antonín as akin to Luke Skywalker, separated as far by culture and language from the heart of the Austrian Empire as young Luke, growing up on the obscure desert planet Tatooine, was from the nexus of the Galactic Empire. Like Luke, Antonín loved speed—he had a lifelong fascination with steam locomotives. More substantively, with respect to music it was obvious that “the Force is strong with this one.” By age 16 Dvořák had absorbed all that

local teachers could provide, and his father allowed him to go to Prague for a two-year course in The Institute for Church Music to study organ performance and the rudiments of composition.

Dvořák graduated in 1859 and soon epitomized the struggling artist. He eked out his living as a viola player in the Komzak Ensemble, a small dance orchestra that played popular tunes in restaurants. The founding of a Provisional Theater in 1862, part of the Hapsburg Empire's effort to placate its restive Czech minority, gave Dvořák a break. The Komzak band was absorbed into a new opera orchestra, regularly conducted by Bedrich Smetana, the first well-recognized Czech composer. Immersing himself in studying music scores, Dvořák began to compose. In 1873 he married a young singer, Anna Cermakova, who was already pregnant with their first child.

Dvořák applied in 1875 for a state scholarship awarded annually to impoverished artists judged to be exceptionally talented. Johannes Brahms, older by eight years and acknowledged as a Jedi Master of composition, was one of three jury members. As recounted by the conductor Leon Botstein, "Brahms encountered a massive submission from an obscure Czech composer: fifteen works including two symphonies... Brahms was visibly overcome by the mastery and talent of this unknown individual. As a result of Brahms's support, Antonín Dvořák received the stipend." Brahms recommended Dvořák's work to his own publisher, Fritz Simrock, who brought out an edition of Dvořák's *Moravian Duets*. Simrock next commissioned the *Slavonic Dances*, Op. 46. This sheet music sold like hotcakes, catapulting Dvořák to economic solvency virtually overnight. Finally, Brahms prompted a leading music critic to publish an essay in 1878 that made Dvořák an internationally known figure.

Why did the notoriously hypercritical Brahms elect to play Obi-Wan Kenobi to Dvořák's Luke Skywalker? Botstein explains, "What impressed Brahms about Dvořák was the seemingly unlimited inventiveness of Dvořák's melodic materials, his uncanny sense of time and duration, and the dazzling sense of musical line that the younger composer achieved... Brahms's enthusiasm for Dvořák was rooted in his recognition that Dvořák...possessed more than the ability to write novel tunes; Dvořák could in fact write extended musical essays of the quality to which Brahms himself aspired – modern incarnations of classical models."

From early in Brahms's career, an esthetic schism divided two schools within the Romantic movement—a conservative group led by Robert and Clara Schumann, Joseph Joachim, Felix Mendelssohn, and Brahms versus the radical "New German School" of Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner. The former were committed to "absolute" music and the classical forms of Haydn and Mozart. The radical camp sought a definitive break with the past and espoused a "Music of the Future." They focused on programmatic music, music drama, and new forms such as the symphonic tone poems of Liszt. While members of one school often admired works of the other, the debate between them remained heated for decades.

Although grateful for Brahms's mentorship, Dvořák retained an affinity for Wagner. His early compositions were overtly Wagnerian, and he recalled that when Wagner guest conducted his orchestra in 1863, "I was perfectly crazy about him."

In 1891, prior to moving to New York for three years as head of the new National Conservatory of Music, Dvořák composed three "symphonic overtures." These tone poems signaled a revived interest in program music, which became a main direction of his late works. Dvořák originally conceived the overtures as an integrated triptych, but later decided they should stand separately as *Nature's Realm*, *Carnival*, and *Othello*. Dvořák conducted the premiere of all three in Prague in 1892 as part of a farewell tour before embarking on his voyage to America. He presented them again at his inaugural concert in New York in October, celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World.

Dvořák expert John Clapham describes the symphonic overtures as a pantheistic portrayal of "three aspects of the life-force's manifestations, a force which the composer designated 'Nature,' and which not only served to create and sustain



**Dvořák receiving an honorary degree, Cambridge, UK, 1891**

life, but also, in its negative phase, could destroy it.” Biographer Otakar Sourek suggests they portray, respectively, “the solemn silence of a summer night, a gay whirl of life and living, and the passion of great love.”

Today only the **Carnival Overture** is performed regularly. Dvorák had in mind “a lonely, contemplative wanderer reaching at twilight a city where a festival is in full swing. On every side is heard the clangor of instruments, mingled with shouts of joy and the unrestrained hilarity of the people giving vent to their feelings in songs and dances.” The work launches with a boisterous gaiety befitting *Mardi Gras*. The wanderer’s contemplative side appears in the development, which evokes a “Nature” theme, shared by all three overtures. It also includes a lovely dialogue between English horn and flute, echoed by muted strings, that Dvorák tells us portrays “a pair of straying lovers.” The tender interlude gives way to a return of the wild carnival festivities, building to a brilliant coda.

Regardless of any philosophical differences over program music, Brahms provided concrete support to Dvorák that facilitated the publication of the *Carnival Overture* and its two companions. With his friend far away in America, Brahms worked with Simrock on the copy editing and proofreading of the Dvorák overtures. Botstein suggests that in passing his torch to Dvorák, Brahms recognized his friend’s “capacity... to transcend the provincial or partisan... in balancing the Wagnerian and Brahmsian influences in his work.” Through such examples, Botstein concludes, “The potential of the traditional to nurture the possibilities of the new finds ample testimony in what Dvorák learned from Brahms.”



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**Andrew Zhen**, winner of the Chapel Hill Philharmonia’s 2017 Young Artist Concerto Competition, is fourteen years old and an eighth-grade student at Smith Middle School in Chapel Hill. He began to play piano when he was seven and currently studies with Dr. Karen Allred. Andrew has won top honors in local and state piano competitions sponsored by the Chapel Hill Music Teachers Association and the North Carolina Music Teachers Association. Tonight marks Andrew’s first public performance of a concerto.

Andrew is an academic all-rounder and a member of the National Junior Honor Society. He particularly loves math and science, and recently captained his school’s team to a third place finish in the North Carolina State MathCounts competition.

Andrew also enjoys sports. He played on his school’s junior varsity basketball team and varsity Ultimate Frisbee team.

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## **Mozart: Piano Concerto No. 20**

If Haydn and Dvorák seem remarkable for their ascent from obscurity to comfort and fame, Mozart is commonly portrayed as “the divine mystery, the incomparable freak of nature embodied in an impish and vulgar child, who wrote masterpieces before he was ten but was perpetually misunderstood, who was hounded by neglect to a pauper’s grave.” (composer Jan Swafford, *The Vintage Guide to Classical Music*) This legend may be seductive, cautions Swafford, “But almost none of it is true.” Certainly, Mozart’s precocity brought him fame as a small child. His father Leopold exploited Wolfgang and his comparably talented older sister Nannerl, shepherding them on lucrative peregrinations to perform for European royalty. Only after establishing independence from the dual yoke of Leopold and their common employer, Prince-Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg, did Mozart escape sniping suggestions that he was a mere “trained monkey.”

Dismissed from the Archbishop’s service with a kick in the rear, at age twenty-five Mozart set up shop in Vienna as a freelance musician. Over the next decade, despite periodic financial crises, Mozart matured into a great composer. With the success of his final stage project, *The Magic Flute*, Swafford points out that Mozart “was on the verge, in his mid-thirties, of real prosperity” when a sudden illness (possibly a strep infection) took his life.

Subscription concerts to showcase his compositions and virtuosity provided much of Mozart’s income. He wrote the

*Piano Concerto No. 20* for just such an “academy,” on February 11, 1785. Leopold arrived that afternoon for a ten-week visit. He wrote to Nannerl: “There was a vast concourse of people of rank... The concert was incomparable; the orchestra was excellent.” Leopold found his son’s new piano concerto “superb,” even though “The copyist was still writing out [the parts for the concerto] when we arrived, and your brother had not even found time to play through the Rondeau because he had to supervise the copying.” Among Mozart’s twenty-seven piano concertos, this one, in the key of D minor, gained the highest enduring regard among musicians of the subsequent Romantic era and to the present day.

Several nights later Haydn and Mozart played chamber music together, a regular feature of their friendship. The evening’s repertoire included two new string quartets by Mozart from a set of six he published later in 1785 with a glowing dedication to Haydn. Leopold hit it off well with Haydn, to whom he was senior by twelve years. He reported to Nannerl that during the party Haydn said of Wolfgang, “Before God and as an honest man I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name; he has taste, and, furthermore, the most profound knowledge of composition.”

Mozart’s *Piano Concerto No. 20* follows the usual structural conventions of its time: a generally fast opening movement (marked *Allegro*) in sonata form; a slower middle movement (*Romance*); and a brilliant finale (*Rondo: Allegro assai*). This evening, in line with the theme of “Passing the Torch,” our piano soloist, fourteen-year-old Andrew Zhen, exemplifies an exciting new generation of performing talent. He will play the concerto’s first movement.

This concerto appealed particularly to Romantics. It also seems to consistently elicit purple prose from program note writers. The orchestra opens with an agitated murmur of syncopated violins and violas over rumblings in the lower strings, punctuated by, writes Janet Bedell (Carnegie Hall), “lightning bolts in a storm-filled black sky... Woodwinds introduce the second theme... anxiously questioning how to escape this terror. Ultimately, the violins close the orchestral exposition with a poignant melody, pleading for mercy.” The piano enters, initially seeming to calm the tempest. It “refuses to be woven into the symphonic fabric; throughout the movement it plays in defiant opposition to the orchestra, making full use of its entire range.” (James Keller, San Francisco Symphony) Yet the storm music returns and, in a long cadenza, the piano too becomes embroiled in turbulence. “The tempests eventually recede in a *pianissimo* [very quiet passage] fascinatingly seasoned with the distant thud of drums and the curiously and hauntingly hollow low tones of the trumpets.” (Michael Steinberg, *The Concerto: A Listener’s Guide*)

Analysts note the special significance of Mozart’s choice of key for the concerto. He employed D minor only rarely, but invariably used it to invoke deep emotions, as in his unfinished final work, the *Requiem*. The composer Oliver Messiaen comments, “The first movement of the concerto... is in the same key and the same style as the first scene of [Mozart’s tragic opera] *Don Giovanni*—the same anguish weighs down its themes, the same flashes shine in the night (those of Don Giovanni’s sword against the tombs of the cemetery, those of Donna Anna’s imprecations, even those of the Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute*).” It is not surprising that many subsequent performers, beginning with Ludwig van Beethoven who came to Vienna shortly after Mozart’s death, considered this the foremost of Mozart’s concertos. Beethoven first established his reputation in Vienna as a piano virtuoso. He performed the D minor concerto frequently and contributed a powerful cadenza, as Mozart’s own had been lost.

## **Brahms: Serenade No. 1**

Brahms emerged from his teens in Hamburg, Germany as a greatly promising, if potentially troubled, talent. Jan Swafford, in his insightful Brahms biography, conjures an image of the slight, beautifully featured Johannes in the eyes of his music teacher, Eduard Marxsen: “A little towheaded slum child like this, son of that blockhead Johann Jakob and a simple goodwife like Christiane... how could he have acquired this depth of talent and intelligence, this idealism and ambition?” Swafford contends that, in addition, young Johannes acquired psychological scars because his father forced him to make money by playing piano through the night in the “stimulation pubs” of the Saint Pauli waterfront district, where he was an easy target for abuse by sailors and scantily clad “Singing Girls.”



In September 1853 Brahms, age 20, met Joseph Joachim, 21 and already a famous violin virtuoso. They formed a lifelong bond. Joachim was blown away by Brahms's "blindingly strong and fresh" music. "Never in the course of my artist's life," said Joachim, "have I been more completely overwhelmed."

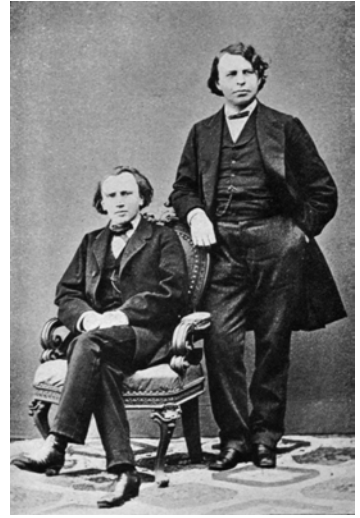
Joachim rushed to introduce his new friend Brahms to Robert Schumann. Now in his early 40s, Schumann was the leading spokesman of the anti-radical Romantic faction—those disillusioned with Liszt and Wagner. While Schumann "had begun as a firebrand and champion of revolutionaries...he [now] wanted nothing to do with the Artwork of the Future. His loyalty was to the past, the line of Beethoven and Felix Mendelssohn." (Swafford)

In a cryptic diary entry Schumann recorded his first impression of the young man who appeared at his door bearing an introductory note from Joachim: "Visit from Brahms (a genius)." Robert and his beautiful young wife Clara, a world-class pianist, insisted that Brahms stay as their houseguest in Düsseldorf for a month, until Joachim returned from a concert tour. Perhaps by that time Brahms already had fallen in love with Clara. Or that may have transpired only when Brahms became her main emotional support after Robert attempted to drown himself in 1854. (Schumann lived out his remaining two years in an asylum, during which time Brahms helped Clara care for her young family). While Brahms withdrew from what had seemed an inevitable marriage to Clara—as he did from other love relationships throughout his life—the two maintained an intense friendship until Clara's death in 1896.

Robert Schumann swiftly published an extraordinary assessment of the young composer in *Neu Zeitschrift für Musik*, a progressive music journal he had founded in 1834. In an essay entitled "New Paths" (*Neue Bahnen*) in October 1853, he proclaimed Brahms to be "a young musician called to give expression to his times in ideal fashion: a musician who would reveal his mastery not in gradual stages but like Minerva would spring fully armed from Kronos's head...a young man over whose cradle Graces and Heroes have stood watch." Going further, Schumann predicted that Brahms would turn to symphonic writing and immediately take his place as the successor to Beethoven. Alluding to that composer's final symphony, the *Ninth*, and its concluding choral movement the "Ode to Joy," Schumann wrote, "If he [Brahms] will sink his magic staff into the region where the massed resources of chorus and orchestra can lend him their powers, we shall have in store for us wonderful insights into the secret and spiritual world."

Schumann's extravagant praise saddled Brahms with an impossible burden. Beethoven stands in the history of music not as an incremental, evolutionary successor to Haydn and Mozart, not a mere participant in an historical relay, but as a larger than life revolutionary figure. No young composer, let alone one who had yet to complete a single work for orchestra, could live up to the vision Schumann painted of Brahms as a Beethovenian messiah whose coming would cause "the truth of art to shine ever clearer, spreading joy and blessing through the world."

Brahms came to feel Beethoven's legacy almost as an overwhelming physical presence. For much of his life, he kept a great white bust of Beethoven over his piano. A full twenty years after the publication of Schumann's article, Brahms wrote despairingly to a friend, "I shall never write a symphony! You can't have any idea what it's like always to hear such a giant marching behind you!" The string quartet genre, for which Beethoven also was renowned, proved similarly intimidating, even though Brahms had long before composed two fine string sextets and other excellent chamber music works. Only when he was well into middle age, in 1876, did Brahms break through with his *Symphony No. 1*. Over the rest of his life, he composed three more symphonies and three string quartets that he considered worthy of publication and performance. No one knows how many additional compositions he consigned to the fireplace.



Johannes Brahms (seated) and Joseph Joachim

**The Serenade in D major**, Opus 11, represents a kind of end run around the young Brahms's "Beethoven problem." Over a summer vacation in 1858, he completed a chamber serenade in four movements for a group of eight or nine winds and strings. (He later destroyed the manuscript of that version). Brahms modeled the work on compositions from the previous century—symphonies and serenades by Haydn and Mozart. In December Brahms acceded to a suggestion from Joachim to expand the work and asked his friend to send him some large music paper "to change my first serenade, now and finally, into a symphony." However, while completing the orchestration Brahms vacillated. For a time he and Joachim compromised and referred to the work as a "*Symphony-Serenade*." After adding two scherzo movements Brahms finally determined that the term "Symphony" was no longer apt and struck it from the title.

For a movement-by-movement analysis of the *Serenade*, conductor Kenneth Woods provides pithy commentary with helpful musical examples ([kennethwoods.net/blog1/2014/08/17](http://kennethwoods.net/blog1/2014/08/17)); quotes below are from him. Like others before, Woods points to an obvious direct reference in Brahms's music to one of Haydn's important works, his *Symphony No. 104*. Interestingly, Woods also finds possible connections to two of Beethoven's symphonies.

- The first movement is marked *Allegro molto* (very fast), but has a relaxed, folksy quality. The opening theme quotes directly from the finale of Haydn's last symphony, No. 104 (one of the London symphonies from 1795), also in the key of D major. The use of four horns evokes hunting scenes and an "outdoors" feeling. Woods suggests that the rustic quality is reinforced by references to the first movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 6, known as "the Pastoral."
- The first *Scherzo* is "shadowy and dark" with a "warm-hearted and rustic trio."
- The *Adagio* is on a grand symphonic scale, the longest and among the most profound of the slow movements in all of Brahms's orchestral music. Woods calls it "wonderful and deeply spiritual." He quotes Michael Steinberg, an outstanding musicologist, who asked of this movement "What is such transcendence doing in a serenade?" before pointing us to Mozart's own transcendent serenades by way of an answer."
- "The two *Menuetti* are gentle, inward-facing intermezzi. The wistful mood will be familiar to anyone who knows the third movements of the first three Brahms symphonies." Steinberg describes the tune of the second minuet as "one of the most tenderly expressive of Brahms's whole life."
- By contrast, "the second *Scherzo*...is extrovert and virtuosic, with a gregarious quote from Handel's *Messiah* thrown in for good measure."
- "The *Serenade's Finale*, like those in so many of Brahms's D major works, hints at gypsy music and evokes a decidedly rustic atmosphere with its driving dotted rhythms."

Regardless of its name, the *Serenade* was Brahms's first major work for orchestra. It marked his kindling of a torch with flame received neither from a contemporary composer nor from the imposing memory of Beethoven, but from Haydn, the father of the classical symphony. While an icon of Beethoven faced him in his workspace, Brahms also kept a bust of Haydn in his bedroom. Yet, even as he reached back to the roots of classicism in the *Serenade*, Brahms also began to apply an unique approach, based on "the perpetual manipulation and development of tiny motivic cells" (Woods), that foreshadowed 20<sup>th</sup> century compositional methods. Brahms's work, for example, strongly influenced Arnold Schönberg, the inventor of the 12-tone technique. Schönberg acknowledged this contribution in his essay "Brahms the Progressive." Thus, while devoting much of his life to deep study and emulation of music of the past, Brahms indeed helped to illuminate the future.