

Chapter 23: The Revival of the Symphony: 1875–1900

- I. Introduction
 - A. Many new concert halls were built in the 1850s and 1860s, but successful new symphonies were rare. The majority of works were by past masters.
 1. The rebirth of the symphony was led by Johannes Brahms.
 2. Anton Bruckner also helped revive the symphony.
 - B. The symphony flourished outside German-speaking Europe. Composers include Franck, Saint-Saëns, Dvořák, and Beach.
 - C. The traditional, nonprogrammatic, multimovement symphony fell on hard times after Beethoven's Ninth premiered. The genre was no longer considered a site of real creative energy.
- II. New halls and new orchestras
 - A. As urban areas grew, so did the need for larger concert halls.
 - B. The development of the classical canon
 1. As the audience for symphonies grew, the genre was falling into decline.
 2. The repertory, then, was necessarily an older one: Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.
 3. A growth in music journalism accompanied the increase in music halls and permanent orchestras.
 4. Concerts became social functions, which caused the number of works usually performed to narrow, thereby establishing a canon of expected pieces.
 5. This situation went against the creativity of composers who wished to have their new works performed.
 6. This led to the definition of classical music as that which is part of the permanent collection of pieces.
- III. New paths: Johannes Brahms
 - A. Brahms grew up under the early Romantics, but was the first composer to grow up with our modern ideas about classical music.
 - B. Brahms's symphonic attempts
 1. Concerned about his place in history and living up to Schumann's expectations, Brahms was hesitant to write a symphony.
 2. When Schumann was committed to an asylum, Brahms took over as the head of the Schumann household *and* as the poster child for the Mendelssohn/Schumann heritage in the War of the Romantics.
 3. Brahms began a symphony in D minor, but through various stages it became the first movement to his Piano Concerto in D Minor.
 4. At his first major composition he composed a serenade entitled "Symphony-Serenade."
 5. Brahms knew that, considering Liszt's new challenges to the idea of a symphony (the symphonic poem), post-Beethoven symphonies would have to look different.
 - C. Brahms's chamber music and "developing variation"
 1. Before establishing himself as a symphonist, Brahms worked on chamber music, twenty-four works in total.

2. Like the symphony, chamber music had fallen by the wayside because the New German School composers were not interested in it.
3. The nineteenth century saw an increasing interest in middle-class musical aristocracy, musical connoisseurs who looked beyond fireworks to substance.

D. Brahms's choral works

1. Brahms's first fame came as a composer of choral music.
2. He directed one of the main choral societies in Vienna, the Singakademie, and he worked on older repertory, enlisting the help of musical scholars to publish the scores.
3. Brahms's *A German Requiem* is not a liturgical work.
4. Brahms's initial success with pure orchestral music was the set of Variations on a Theme by Haydn of 1873.
5. With his *German Requiem* and Haydn Variations, Brahms's fame grew.

E. Brahms's First Symphony

1. By the time he was forty, Brahms was highly acclaimed.
2. In 1876, Brahms offered a real challenge to Wagner with his Symphony No. 1.
3. Instead of the traditional use of themes, Brahms overlays motives in ever-varying contrapuntal textures.
4. The orchestration is particularly heavy and dark.
5. Wagner and his circle saw Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as the work that essentially said universal music had to include text to be complete.
6. Hans von Bülow, an ardent member of the New German School, conductor of Wagner's operas, and a well-respected pianist, was moved to hail Brahms's First Symphony "Beethoven's Tenth Symphony" in print.

IV. The symphony as sacrament: Anton Bruckner

A. The other main symphonist in Vienna was Bruckner, who was ten years older than Brahms.

1. The two did not get along.
2. Bruckner also started composing symphonies later in life.
3. Bruckner was an organist and choirmaster. Some said he was the greatest organist and improviser of the day.
4. Hanslick (and others) heard elements of Wagner's dramatic music in Bruckner's symphonies.
5. Bruckner's symphonies sound similar to organ improvisations in both the use of harmonic structures and the orchestration.
6. He used Beethoven's Ninth as a model, but with Wagnerian harmonies.

V. The Czech master: Antonín Dvořák

A. Brahms's symphonies stimulated a new interest in the genre.

1. Dvořák was the leading Czech composer after Smetana and also a protégé of Brahms.
2. Dvořák composed nine symphonies, in which he recycled themes from movement to movement.

B. Dvořák in America

1. In 1892–95, Dvořák lived in the United States, serving as director of a National Conservatory of Music in New York City.
2. During this time, he composed the “New World” (Ninth) Symphony.
3. Questions immediately arose as to what “New World” meant.
4. An examination of the second movement reveals some of the issues.
5. Dvořák commented that it was a sketch for another work, possibly on the *Song of Hiawatha*.
6. Dvořák also admired African American spirituals, and one of the students at the National Conservatory, Harry T. Burleigh, sang many for him.

VI. The “Boston School”

- A. Edward MacDowell, an American-born but European-educated composer, had already incorporated Native American melodies in his “Indian Suite.”
- B. Another member of the Boston group was Amy Marcy Beach (née Cheney).
 1. She was not allowed to study in Europe, although she did study composition privately.
 2. Beach also taught herself using textbooks from the Paris Conservatoire and by attending rehearsals of the Boston Symphony.
 3. She was a highly successful pianist, debuting with orchestra at age sixteen.
 4. Her Symphony in E Minor achieved a degree of international success.

VII. Symphonies in France

- A. In addition to Dvořák’s “New World,” American symphonists looked to César Franck’s Symphony in D Minor as a model for composition.
 1. Franck was a Belgian who taught organ at the Paris Conservatoire.
 2. Unlike other French composers, Franck made his reputation solely on instrumental music.
 3. In 1871, after the Germans defeated the French, French musicians (headed by Saint-Saëns) formed a National Music Society with the motto *Ars gallica*. Its purpose was to support serious French compositions.
 4. Saint-Saëns wrote five symphonies.