



BRAHMS' VIOLIN CONCERTO

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25 & 26, 2019, AT 8 PM
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2019, AT 2 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

KAREN GOMYO, *violin*

ANTONIN DVOŘÁK

Slavonic Dance, Op. 46, No. 1 - **4 minutes**

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 77 - **38 minutes**

I. Allegro non troppo

II. Adagio

III. Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace

Karen Gomyo, violin

- INTERMISSION -

JOHN ADAMS

My Father Knew Charles Ives - **28 minutes**

Concord

The Lake

The Mountain

CHARLES IVES

Three Places In New England

(Version 4: restored and edited by James Sinclair) - **19 minutes**

The "St. Gaudens" in Boston Common (Col. Shaw and his Colored Regiment)

Putnam's Camp, Redding, Connecticut

The Housatonic at Stockbridge

This concert will last two hours and five minutes, including a 20-minute intermission.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Composers may seem to create their singular visions in isolation, but the task of bringing new music to life depends on engagement with long-standing traditions, with other performers and sometimes with other composers. This program is built around two pairs of composers who share certain attitudes and practices. Dvořák and Brahms were actual contemporaries. The former's Slavonic Dances paved the way for his international breakthrough, and their publication was facilitated by a helpful word from Brahms — who supplied the folk music model from which his colleague drew. Around the same time, Brahms composed his Violin Concerto with helpful advice from its intended soloist, in the process creating one of the most beloved concertos in the repertoire.

John Adams came of age in a New England environment very similar to that of Charles Ives. His musical outlook, moreover, shows important affinities for the bracingly original, one-of-a-kind soundscapes that his predecessor pioneered in such masterpieces as *Three Places in New England*. With *My Father Knew Charles Ives*, Adams says, "I made public my homage to him in a piece of musical autobiography, my own Proustian madeleine with a mischievous title."

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK

Slavonic Dance No. 1 in C Major, Op. 46

Born on September 8, 1841,
in the village of Nelahozeves,
just north of Prague

Died on May 1, 1904, in Prague

Composed:
1878

**Estimated
length:**
4 minutes



First performance:

May 16, 1878, in Prague, under
the baton of Adolf Čech

**First Nashville Symphony
performance:**

February 28, 1975, with
conductor Evan Whallon

After starting out his career playing viola in a dance orchestra, Antonín Dvořák focused on his ambitions as a composer. In 1874, he started competing regularly to win an annual Austrian government prize earmarked for "young, talented and poor artists." The prize was administered by a committee in the imperial capital of Vienna, whose selection jury included Johannes Brahms and the powerful critic Eduard Hanslick. They were both so impressed by the Bohemian composer's gifts

— especially by his entry for 1877, a setting of Moravian folk poetry for vocal duet and piano — that they became enthusiastic supporters.

Brahms even recommended Dvořák to his publisher, Simrock. The latter had been delighted by the commercial success of Brahms' own first series of Hungarian Dances, which he published in 1869. These pieces had become a runaway hit, feeding a trendy appetite for what the public perceived as "exotic" musical flavors and boosting Simrock's profile in

the process. The publisher realized he could capitalize on this taste and therefore asked Dvořák to write something along those lines, drawing on folk styles from his corner of the vast Habsburg Empire.

Dvořák responded with a set of eight Slavonic Dances. He wrote them at great speed, preparing piano duets for the lucrative household music-making market, as well as orchestrated versions. These Slavonic Dances accomplished just what Simrock was hoping for, and his relatively small fee for the young Czech composer meant another handsome profit for the publisher.

The rapturous reception also made Dvořák's international reputation, thus paving the way toward future successes. "Here, at long last, is a 100 percent talent and, what's more, a completely natural talent," raved one of the Berlin critics. The Slavonic Dances were performed across Europe and even in New York. Simrock published the first set as Op. 46 in 1878; he later requested a sequel set, resulting in the additional eight Slavonic Dances that appeared as Op. 72 in 1886.

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WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Despite the Brahmsian model, Dvořák developed his own approach for the Slavonic Dances. He focused generally on Czech idioms in the Op. 46 set and then expanded his palette to include Eastern European folk styles for the subsequent set. Brahms had simply arranged preexisting tunes, but Dvořák thought up melodies of his own that merely sounded like folk music transcriptions. His forms are also more extensive than the miniatures represented by Brahms' dances.

The Dance No. 1, in C major, provides a celebratory entrée into the world of the Slavonic Dances. Its specifically Czech aspect is manifest in the lively dance style known as a *furiant* (Czech for "a proud, swaggering, conceited person"). A telltale characteristic of the *furiant*, used for couple-dances, is a shifting rhythmic emphasis, so that the meter seems undecided as to whether it's in triple or duple time. Dvořák's bright orchestration generates a spirit of unbridled joy. In the final measures, he kicks the presto pace into even higher gear.

The Op. 46 Slavonic Dance No. 1 is scored for piccolo, flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, triangle and strings.



JOHANNES BRAHMS

Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 77

Born on May 7, 1833, in
Hamburg, Germany

Died on April 3, 1897,
in Vienna

Composed:
1878

**Estimated
length:**
38 minutes



First performance:

January 1, 1879, in Leipzig, with Joseph Joachim as the soloist and the composer conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchester

First Nashville Symphony performance:

December 23, 1947, with Music Director William Strickland and soloist Joseph Szigeti.

“I reckoned the concerto to be your own...I was certainly your most enraptured listener,” Brahms wrote to Joseph Joachim, recalling the first time he experienced the violinist’s playing: in Hamburg, when Brahms was only 14 and Joachim was 16. The work was the Beethoven Violin Concerto, which left its mark on the contribution Brahms himself went on to make to the genre.

In the summer and early fall of 1878, Brahms composed his Violin Concerto in the same idyllic, Alpine setting in southern Austria where he had finished his Second Symphony the previous summer. Both works share a beguiling mix of passion, serenity and playfulness that welcomes comparisons with his titanic predecessor Beethoven, while also swerving away to trace new directions.

Brahms composed the concerto for Joachim, one of the greatest virtuosos of his age. As the conductor and scholar Leon Botstein notes: “[Brahms] wanted to find a way to reconcile the most serious aspirations of instrumental music with the visceral power associated with the display of virtuoso technique.”

As a result, he was accused at first of writing a concerto “against the violin.” Several features echo Beethoven’s Violin Concerto (also in D major): the dramatic heightening of expectations for the soloist’s entry following an extensive orchestral introduction, the epic span of the first movement, the rapturous

lyricism of the Adagio, and the expressive focus on the instrument’s high register.

Yet Brahms arguably goes even further than Beethoven in synthesizing the concerto format — which is by definition based on the interplay between solo display and the larger ensemble — by incorporating the symphonic form’s integrated textures, grand architecture and continuous development of ideas. In fact, Brahms originally envisioned a four-movement, quasi-symphonic plan for the Violin Concerto, later transferring a scherzo he had projected for the piece to his Second Piano Concerto.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The broad opening theme hints at a kind of cosmic waltz and sets the stage for the first movement’s wide expanse. Yet the Violin Concerto intertwines both the epic and the dramatic. Brahms brings the music to a boil of churning figures just before the soloist makes her entrance in a passionate monologue. The seriousness of the moment is enhanced by a turn to the minor. After a prolonged meditation on the opening material, Brahms entrusts the soloist with a new theme that establishes a lyrical counterweight to the music’s epic and dramatic qualities. The rest of the movement continually realigns these ideas, exploring the implications of this contrast — another lesson Brahms learned from Beethoven’s model.

Instead of writing a cadenza, Brahms left this

space open for Joachim to provide his own. Many violinists have written substitutes, but Joachim's remains the most frequently heard. In the transition to the movement's coda, the violin soars to new heights as the "soul" of the music in a glowing passage that never fails to transport audiences.

Brahms' elaborately wrought integration of the orchestra — never a mere backup band — is apparent even in the relatively simple song form of the Adagio. The exquisite woodwind writing provides a new background against which the violin elaborates the melody, now in an intimate dialogue with the other players.

Following the Adagio's seraphic lyricism, the finale pays tribute to Joachim's Hungarian origins. It uses a rondo format based on an earthy, vigorous main theme that continually

returns. Double-stop writing for the violin emphasizes its rousing character and serves up a lusty invitation to what is almost an additional Hungarian Dance.

Yet moments that echo the weightiness and drama from the first movement occasionally emerge, ensuring a sense of organic unity and inter-connection across the large expanse of this concerto. In the coda, Brahms rearranges the rhythmic pattern of the theme into excited outbursts of triplets. Such constantly fresh thinking, according to Botstein, "helped to transform expectations of what a violin can sound like in the concerto setting."

In addition to the solo violin, the Concerto calls for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons; 4 horns; 2 trumpets; timpani; and strings.

ABOUT THE SOLOIST



KAREN GOMYO *violin*

Praised by the *Chicago Tribune* as

"a first-rate artist of real musical command, vitality, brilliance and intensity," violinist Karen Gomyo continues to captivate audiences. In May 2018, she performed the world premiere of Samuel Adams' new Chamber Concerto, with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Esa-Pekka Salonen, which was written for her.

Other recent highlights include debuts with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London conducted by Jakub Hrůša and the Royal Northern Sinfonia in England with Karina Canellakis, as well as returns to the San Francisco Symphony, Houston Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony and the WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln in Germany.

Strongly committed to contemporary works, Gomyo performed the North American

premiere of Matthias Pintscher's Concerto No. 2 "Mar'eh" with the composer conducting the National Symphony Orchestra, as well as Peteris Vasks' *Vox Amoris* with the Lapland Chamber Orchestra conducted by John Storgårds.

Gomyo participated as violinist, host, and narrator in *The Mysteries of the Supreme Violin*, a documentary produced by NHK Japan about Antonio Stradivarius. She is deeply interested in the Nuevo Tango music of Astor Piazzolla and performs with Piazzolla's longtime pianist and tango legend Pablo Zieglerand, along with his partners Hector del Curto, Claudio Ragazzi and Pedro Giraud. She also performs regularly with the Finnish guitarist Ismo Eskelinen, with whom she has appeared at the Dresden and Mainz Festivals in Germany, and in recitals in Helsinki and New York.

Gomyo plays on the "Aurora, exFoulis" Stradivarius violin of 1703 that was bought for her exclusive use by a private sponsor.

JOHN ADAMS

My Father Knew Charles Ives

Born on February 15, 1947, in
Worcester, Massachusetts

Currently resides in
Berkeley, California

Composed:
2003

**Estimated
length:**
28 minutes



First performance:

April 20, 2003, with Michael
Tilson Thomas conducting the
San Francisco Symphony

**First Nashville Symphony
performance:**

November 11 & 12, 2005, with
conductor Alexander Mickelthwate

Examples of autobiographically inspired composition abound in the standard repertoire, from Berlioz’s love-obsessed *Symphonie fantastique* to the poses Richard Strauss assumes in *Ein Heldenleben*. Yet in *My Father Knew Charles Ives*, John Adams intertwines his own life experiences with references to a predecessor with whom he shares some notable parallels. Moreover, the specific work to which Adams alludes — *Three Places in New England* — is itself shot through with autobiographical traces.

It’s interesting to note the personal parallels between these two composers. Both came of age in rural New England and were initially trained in music by their respective fathers, who were themselves active musicians performing at home in vernacular styles. Adams grew up with ears wide open to popular and classical music, “with little prejudice toward the one at the expense of the other,” as he remarks in his memoirs, *Hallelujah Junction*.

Adams’ own musical worldview has frequently been compared with the fiercely independent outlook of Ives. He moved west to find his own path at the start of his career, instead of accommodating the academic establishment or the modern European avant-garde. “Ives’ music, for all its daring experiments in rhythm and polyphony, always mixed the sublime with the vulgar and sentimental, and

he did so with a freedom and insouciance that could only be done by an American,” Adams observes, adding that “this has always been a model for me.”

Along with such affinities, the composer points to some traits shared by his father and Charles Ives — though, in fact, neither knew the other in real life. But if the timing had differed by just a few years, “the two Yankees might well have met, and it’s not unlikely that they would have become good friends,” Adams explains. “Both were businessmen by day and artists by night. I imagine them exchanging a wry comment in front of the town post office, or, rake in hand, lending each other some help after the first October frost.”

As part of its musical autobiography, *My Father Knew Charles Ives* includes a poignant tribute to the composer’s late father, who had died in the 1990s. His memory is embedded, in particular, in the second movement. The work additionally acknowledges Ives himself as an enormously influential forbear. Adams came to know his music in intricate detail from his repertoire as a conductor. “I drew much from my firsthand experience with Ives,” he writes.

In *On the Transmigration of Souls*, Adams’ Pulitzer Prize-winning commission to commemorate the victims of 9/11, he made creative use of the orchestral techniques

he had learned from Ives. With *My Father Knew Charles Ives*, the composer's next major orchestral work, "I made public my homage to him in a piece of musical autobiography, my own Proustian madeleine with a mischievous title."

Adams has used the term "symphony" sparingly for his large-scale orchestral compositions. Like Ives in his later works (including *Three Places in New England*), he develops forms on the basis of a composition's specific material. But *My Father Knew Charles Ives*, which was written on a commission from the San Francisco Symphony, is crafted with symphonic intricacy and exploits Adams' mastery of orchestral color and design.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The model of Ives' *Three Places in New England* suggested a three movement structure. The title of the first movement, "Concord," calls to mind one of Ives' epic Piano Sonata No. 2 (titled *Concord, Mass., 1840-60*), an ode to the Transcendentalist writers whom Ives admired. It also alludes to Concord, New Hampshire, one of the small towns where Adams grew up. Like the first movement of *Three Places*, "Concord" begins with quiet, reflective music, here evoking the perfectly preserved memory of an idyllic summer morning shrouded in mist.

As a conductor, Adams writes, he has spent lots of time interpreting Ives' Fourth Symphony and *Three Places in New England* and admiring the composer's unique musical Impressionism, with its "highly refined sense of foreground, middle ground and background, an ordering of musical ideas according to their imagined placement in a perspective, just as a painter might fill a canvas with a mix of images."

Similar techniques are at work throughout *My Father Knew Charles Ives*. So is the gesture of embedding musical allusions rich in

associations. The solo trumpet's melody, which stretches over a wide, expressive span, quotes the "question" (posed by the same instrument) in Ives' short tone poem *The Unanswered Question* — which Adams suggests "is to Americans what the four-note tattoo of Beethoven's Fifth is to the Old World." As the march picks up, Adams exhibits his mischievously humorous streak, and we hear snatches of other "familiar" tunes that are actually "as fictive as the title itself."

Adams' memories of childhood and of his father as a younger man blend in "The Lake" — a "summer nocturne" inspired by the dance hall pavilion on a lake that was run by his mother's stepfather. His parents first met there when Carl Adams turned up to play with a touring swing band. A long winding solo oboe melody, tinged with melancholy reverie, emerges against the echoing band sounds, much as Adams describes in his observation of Ivesian technique: "Objects, be they fragments or tunes, atmospheric effects or enormous blocks of sound, appear on the listener's radar as if the composer were moving faders in a grand mix."

The third and longest movement, "The Mountain," refers again to "Concord" before pressing on, with mounting, ecstatic momentum, to its genuinely Adamsian epiphany. Here, the implicit landscape conflates Mount Kearsarge — visible from behind his boyhood home in New Hampshire and an allure to his "adolescent mythic imagination" — with the snow-covered Californian peak of Mount Shasta, which Adams once observed with awe during a hike with his son Sam.

My Father Knew Charles Ives is scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling E-flat clarinet), bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 4 percussionists, piano, celesta, harp and strings.

CHARLES IVES

Three Places in New England

Born on October 20, 1874,
in Danbury, Connecticut

Died on May 19, 1954,
in New York City

Composed:
1903-29

**Estimated
length:**
19 minutes



First performance:

January 10, 1931, with Nicolas
Slonimsky conducting the
Boston Chamber Orchestra
at New York's Town Hall

**First Nashville Symphony
performance:**

These are the orchestra's
first performances.

“Somewhere in Ives, the entire history of American music can be found, whether it's a Copland or a Gershwin or a John Adams moment,” Michael Tilson Thomas has said of this archetypal American maverick composer. Coming of age in post-Civil War New England, Ives stored a treasury of musical experiences from folk traditions and ordinary life on which he later drew.

Three Places in New England might be viewed as a gathering of the topics that fascinated this highly original composer: autobiographical memories, American history, American cultural identity and the myths that have shaped it. Musically, *Three Places* similarly manifests Ives' adventurous outlook by generating collage-like soundscapes from traditional sources, wildly experimental harmonies and a complex layering of events happening simultaneously. “Ives was the first composer to approach the orchestral setting as if it were a giant mixing board,” as John Adams puts it.

Three Places dates from the incredibly productive decade (starting in 1908), during which Ives poured out several of his most significant creations — all during while running the successful life insurance company he established in 1907.

Characteristically, the complicated genesis of *Three Places* spread out in different stages

over many years, as reflected by the many changing titles Ives applied to the composition as a whole and its three movements. At one point, Ives considered including a fourth movement involving the Boston abolitionist Wendell Phillips. He drew on a pair of sketches going back to 1903 for the second movement and wrote the first versions of the other two in 1911. But the music went unheard until the conductor Nicolas Slonimsky offered to perform it, on condition that Ives prepare a reduced version for chamber orchestra.

Slonimsky's 1931 premiere of this version, long after Ives composed it, was pivotal in establishing the legend of Ives the innovator and has since become one of his best-known works. He continued revising for the first published version, but his original scoring for a larger orchestra had to be re-created, in part, by the Ives specialist James Sinclair, who wrote in his preface to his first critical edition: “In this study, I have compared the published chamber orchestra score with surviving portions of the original score for full orchestra and with earlier sources and sketches, in order to develop a new score for full orchestra which retains both the work's original color and the advantages of Ives' later revisions.”

A quest for self-reliant, American alternatives to Old World forms led Ives to envision

various kinds of “symphony.” With his earlier Second and Third Symphonies, according to biographer Jan Swafford, “Ives created, singlehandedly, the nationalistic art music for which Dvořák had called,” though Ives “would denounce [this] as ‘the old medieval idea of nationalism.’”

He then decided to proceed in a different direction by grouping together self-standing pieces into “sets.” Ives referred to *Three Places* by other titles as well: *A New England Symphony* and *First Orchestral Set*. Though each of the three “places” in this set originated independently, they together form what Slonimsky famously described as “transcendental geography by a strange Yankee genius.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The title of the first movement, “St. Gaudens” in Boston Common (Col. Shaw and his Colored Regiment), refers to the 1897 bronze relief sculpture of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts 54th Regiment made by the American sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens to commemorate the Union Army’s famous all-African-American regiment (also the topic of the 1989 film *Glory*). Ives additionally referred to this piece as his *Black March*. If he had carried through with his idea of a fourth movement about a powerful abolitionist, the presence of the African-American experience in *Three Places* would have acquired even more prominence.

The march impulse emerges beneath the impressionistic veil of opaque harmonies heard at the outset and establishes a mood of solemnity, while fragments of old popular tunes are woven in and out of the orchestral fabric.

March idioms come to the fore with dramatically contrasting results in the second movement, Putnam’s Camp, Redding, Connecticut. This “place” presents a feast of signature Ivesian techniques: simultaneous

strands of different music superimposed, quotations of well-known songs (such as “Yankee Doodle”) to elicit memories of patriotic holidays, and shocking dissonances to “defamiliarize” the unfamiliar. He combines these elements into a miniature drama that has visionary moments but is framed by an outrageous, boisterously comic spirit.

Ives wrote out a scenario in the score involving a child at a Fourth of July picnic who goes off wandering as the bands march along. A mysterious chord punctuates the soundscape, marking the moment when the child is confronted by an apparition of the “Goddess Liberty,” whose “face is sorrowful: she is pleading with the soldiers not to forget their ‘cause’ and the great sacrifices they have made for it. But they march out of camp with fife and drum to a popular tune of the day. Suddenly, a new national note is heard. [Revolutionary War hero] Putnam is coming over the hills from the center. The soldiers turn back and cheer. The little boy awakes, he hears the children’s songs and runs down past the monument to listen to the band and join in the games and dances.”

The Housatonic at Stockbridge — shortest of the three sets — begins with quietly reflective music, somewhat like the opening St. Gaudens, but the complex layering of textures and rhythms generates an even more impressionistic aura. Gradually, the music builds to a mighty climax but then gently evaporates — though the memories remain firmly, transcendently implanted.

In this performance, we hear the second critical edition published in 2008 by James Sinclair, which is scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, gong, 2 harps, piano, celesta, organ pedals and strings.

— Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony’s program annotator.