



# ROMANTIC RHAPSODIES

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, AT 7 PM

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, JANUARY 31 & FEBRUARY 1, AT 8 PM

## NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

LAWRENCE FOSTER, *conductor*

JUN IWASAKI, *violin*

### JOHANNES BRAHMS

**Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90 - 33 minutes**

Allegro con brio

Andante

Poco allegretto

Allegro

- INTERMISSION -

### BÉLA BARTÓK

**Rhapsody No. 1 for Violin and**

**Orchestra- 10 minutes**

Lassú

Friss

**JUN IWASAKI, VIOLIN**

### GEORGE ENESCU

**Romanian Rhapsody in D major,**

**Op. 11, No. 2- 11 minutes**

### BÉLA BARTÓK

**Rhapsody No. 2 for Violin and**

**Orchestra- 11 minutes**

Lassú

Friss

**JUN IWASAKI, VIOLIN**

### GEORGE ENESCU

**Romanian Rhapsody in A major,**

**Op. 11, No. 1- 11 minutes**

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*This concert will last one hour and 55 minutes,  
including a 20-minute intermission.*

*This concert is being recorded for future  
broadcast. To ensure the highest-quality  
recording, please keep noise to a minimum.*

## PROGRAM SUMMARY

Beethoven’s dominating position in the music of the 19th century was both an inspiration and a serious problem for composers like Johannes Brahms. Through great effort, Brahms eventually found his own voice as a symphonist. His Third Symphony is a work of special genius that shows the extraordinarily original and individual approach he developed.

You might also see the Beethoven’s-looming position in orchestral music as a metaphor for the domination of a Austro-Germanic repertoire in American concert programming. Against this gravitational pull, composers like Belá Bartók and George Enescu mined the authentic folk musics of Eastern Europe for the material they transformed into glorious virtuoso vehicles in the pairs of rhapsodies that comprise the rest of this program.

# JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90

Born on May 7, 1833, in  
Hamburg, Germany;

Died on April 3, 1897,  
in Vienna

**Composed:**  
1882-1883

**Estimated  
length:**  
33 minutes



**First performance:**

December 2, 1883, with Hans Richter leading the Vienna Philharmonic in its premiere on in Vienna

**First Nashville Symphony performance:**

January 15, 1957, with music director Guy Taylor

Johannes Brahms took years to overcome the paralyzing effect of Beethoven’s symphonic achievement — what was left to be done in the genre after that? — patiently working toward the breakthrough of his First Symphony, which he unveiled in 1876. Its success emboldened the now middle-aged composer with confidence, and he went on to produce his Second Symphony with remarkable speed. After another pause of several years, Brahms returned to the genre with his Third Symphony in F major. Despite attempts by the composer’s enemies to disrupt the premiere, the work earned an enthusiastic reception.

Yet as the official Brahms canon eventually took shape, the Third came to be regarded as one of the most elusive of his compositions, rich in subtleties and paradoxes — the connoisseur’s Brahms. The critic Eduard Hanslick, an

important advocate of the composer in these years, observed: “Many music lovers will prefer the titanic force of the First Symphony; others, the untroubled charm of the Second. But the Third strikes me as being artistically the most nearly perfect.”

Undue emphasis on the “Beethoven problem” by Brahms’ contemporaries tended to obscure how truly original his approach to the symphony was. This had happened with the First (which echoed both Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” and the fate-filled power of his Fifth Symphony), while the relaxed lyricism of Brahms’ Second Symphony evoked comparisons with Beethoven’s Sixth, the “Pastoral.” Similarly, Brahms’ Third Symphony — even according to its original conductor — was said to share a “heroic” quality with Beethoven’s own Third Symphony, the *Eroica*.

Yet for all its moments of surging, dynamic passion, Brahms' Third is remarkably *anti-heroic*. Its sound world is saturated with deliciously unexpected moments of inward-looking intimacy. More fundamentally, the Third subverts the ultimate "heroic" paradigm of an aggressively victorious conclusion. That each of the preceding movements ends quietly only emphasizes the novelty of its ethereal closure, which predates the famously subdued endings of Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" and Mahler's Fourth and Ninth Symphonies.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**T**he opening ranks among the most striking in the literature, with three sustained chords that lead right into the first theme proper, launching what sounds like an epic journey in fully "heroic" mode. As it happens, the Third is the briefest, most compact of Brahms' four symphonies. Instead of taking a far-ranging journey, it will come full circle to end with a variant on this gesture. As for those first three ascending chords, they outline a basic musical figure that is part of the score's DNA.

A famous bit of lore holds that Brahms had devised a personal code for his status as a bachelor: F-A-F, cor-responding to the initials of the phrase "frei aber froh" ("free/unattached but happy"), which represents the Third's three-note motto. Brahms scholars have debunked the validity of this particular association, but, in purely musical terms, the F-A-F motif does serve as a significant unifying element.

The sweeping first theme is connected to another personal element: Brahms' memories of his former mentor Schumann. Here, the reference is to the grand opening theme of the latter's "Rhenish" Symphony, weaving a kind of homage into the Third. But the music is unmistakably Brahmsian, and his style shapes every parameter.

The same holds for the fertile lyricism of the

Third, which is among the most exquisitely tuneful of Brahms' works: savor, for example, the exquisite grace of the second theme, which is initially sung by clarinet and bassoon. This undergoes some surprising transformations — even borrowing the more passionate character of the first theme — before the movement winds down to a subdued close.

The two middle movements, which feature some of Brahms' subtlest orchestral touches, reinforce the wistful, autumnal character often associated with the Third. The Andante brings the earlier clarinet-bassoon combination to the fore. Together, these instruments present the chorale-like main theme, as well as the second one, which "disappears" but returns later in the final movement. Instead of a scherzo, Brahms offers a poignant intermezzo (in C minor to the Andante's C major). Its chief melody imitates the rhythm of breathing, as if alternately inhaling and exhaling its sighs. New rhythmic figures flicker through the intervening middle section.

The final movement begins in F minor, with a mysteriously meandering theme given by the strings in unison. Its suppressed quality contrasts with the violent outbursts that follow, but Brahms continually implies new connections and links between the various musical ideas.

Eventually, the second theme from the Andante reappears, preparing the way for the return to the beginning in the highly original coda. In fact, it's possible to think of the Third as a single "super-movement" made of four large sections. Brahms swerves back to F major and prepares for the recall of the final measures. With a sense of inevitability that doesn't resort to the ham-fisted rhetoric of a Big Statement, the symphony's opening theme lands into place and gently spirals downward through the strings.

*The Symphony No. 3 is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings.*

# BÉLA BARTÓK

## Rhapsodies No. 1 and 2

Born on March 25, 1881,  
in Nagyszentmiklós in the  
Habsburg Empire (now  
Sînnicolau Mare, Romania)

Died on September 26, 1945,  
in New York City

### Composed:

1928-29 (No. 2  
revised 1944-45)

### Estimated length:

21 minutes  
(combined)



### First performance:

Rhapsody No. 1: November 1, 1929, in  
Königsberg, with Josef Szigeti as the soloist  
and Hermann Scherchen conducting;  
Rhapsody No. 2: November 26, 1929, in  
Budapest, with Zoltán Székely as the soloist  
and Ernő Dohnányi conducting

### First Nashville Symphony performance:

These are the orchestra's first  
performances.

**B**éla Bartók's two Rhapsodies for violin, which date from the late 1920s, exemplify the evolution of the Hungarian composer's thinking about the use of folk material and its capacity for renewing modern musical language — rather than serving as a nostalgic nod to the past. Toward the end of a decade in which he had composed some of the most radically challenging scores of his career, Bartók seems to have recognized the audience's need for more readily accessible material. The Rhapsodies were conceived as versatile vehicles for performance as well: Bartók initially composed these pieces for violin and piano, but then prepared versions for solo violin and orchestra and even for string trio; he additionally published a cello and piano version of the Rhapsody No. 1.

The Rhapsodies are not mere transcriptions of appealing folk tunes, neatly packaged for the concert hall. Bartók focused great attention on how to distill the flavor and spirit of his authentic sources. He also made them vehicles for virtuoso performance, evoking folk styles of fiddle playing, as well as the artistry he would further explore in his Second Violin Concerto, from 1938.

By casting these pieces as “rhapsodies,” Bartók moreover reclaimed a genre type that had been popularized by his fellow Hungarian Franz Liszt in the *Hungarian Rhapsodies*. The

two-part structure associated with this type of rhapsody — beginning with a slow section that segues into a virtuosically whirling fast one — derives from the so-called *verbunkos*, a form of traditional dance music used in the mid-19th century to lure recruits into the Austro-Hungarian military.

Bartók brushes aside the Romantic tropes with which this genre had become encrusted — tropes that can even be found in his own early works in the genre. He draws instead on the fresh perspective he gained from his extensive research into authentic folk music sources from Eastern Europe and beyond.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

**T**he standard *verbunkos* dance unfolds in two parts, moving from a slow preliminary section (*lassú*) to a fast-paced, wildly virtuosic movement (*friss*). The authentic folk style, which Bartók painstakingly replicates, also refers to specific melodic and rhythmic contours, such as the typically assertive dotted rhythm of the first theme in the *lassú* that opens the Rhapsody No. 1.

Bartók drew on his store of Romanian folk material for five of the six melodies used in this piece, while only one (in the middle part of the *lassú*) is of Hungarian origin. The first tune in the sequence comprising the *friss*

section resembles (purely by accident) the beginning of “Simple Gifts,” the Shaker melody Aaron Copland later adapted for *Appalachian Spring*. The Rhapsody No. 1 contains the only instance in Bartók’s oeuvre that calls (optionally) for a cimbalom, the hammered dulcimer associated with Magyar and other Central-Eastern European folk culture. The Classical form of the rondo — in which the main theme is contrasted with a series of intervening episodes — is superimposed onto

the slow first movement of the Rhapsody No. 2, followed by a rich offering of no fewer than seven dance tunes in the fast movement. In this evening’s performance, we hear the alternate ending that Bartók provided for the Rhapsody No 1.

*In addition to solo violin, the Rhapsodies are scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets (2nd doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, trombone, tuba, percussion, cimbalom (for Rhapsody No. 1) and strings.*

## GEORGE ENESCU

Romanian Rhapsodies No. 1 in A major and No. 2 in D major

Born on August 19, 1881, in Liveni Vîrnav, Romania (a village since renamed after the composer)

Died on May 4, 1955, in Paris

**Composed:**  
1901

**Estimated length:**  
22 minutes  
(combined)



### First performance:

March 8, 1903, in Bucharest, with the composer conducting.

### First Nashville Symphony performance:

Rhapsody No. 1 was first performed on December 11, 1952, with music director Guy Taylor; Rhapsody No. 2 was first performed on December 2-3, 1968, with music director Thor Johnson

**T**here is an instructive irony in the fact that this music, so closely identified with a particular national origin, was in fact composed in the cosmopolitan capital of Paris, where George Enescu had come from his native Romania to study at the Conservatoire. A versatile performer, he was also a busy conductor and pianist, but he became especially associated with the violin and was the teacher of such legendary figures as Yehudi Menuhin and Arthur Grumiaux.

Born in 1881 into a large family in northern Romania, where he was the only child to survive infancy, Enescu was regularly compared to Mozart and ranks among the most extraordinary child prodigies in music history. He gained admission to the Vienna

Conservatory at age 7 — by then he was both playing violin and composing — and headed to Paris in 1895 to continue his studies.

Enescu was only 16 when his Op. 1 suite *Poème Roumain* was premiered in Paris. In 1901, at age 20, he wrote his pair of *Romanian Rhapsodies* for orchestra, which were first heard in reverse order (according to the composer’s preference) in a concert in Bucharest in 1903. These were published together as Op. 11. There is a tantalizing reference in some documents to a “Third Rhapsody in G minor,” also allegedly part of this publication, but no evidence for such a score exists.

The First Rhapsody in particular gained great popularity — it’s easy to understand why — causing Enescu later to complain that it



eclipsed interest in his subsequent development as a composer.

Enescu would spend much of his life shuttling between his base in Paris (where he is buried) and Romania. Yet for all his identification as the proud musical voice of his native country, he was a widely traveled cosmopolitan and developed a deep interest in world music as well.

## WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Enescu's fresh approach makes the language of both Romanian Rhapsodies especially engaging. He drew from actual Romanian folk tunes for his musical material, but he also sought to imitate the effects of folk playing in his instrumentation, which features numerous notable solos. Each rhapsody contains quotations from Romanian folk song and draws on Eastern European scales and intervals that sounded "exotic" to Parisian audiences. The episodic nature of the music also conveys an improvisatory air, though Enescu's method of composition was, in fact, carefully calculated.

The musicologist Maria Zlateva explains that the more extroverted Rhapsody No. 1 is distinguished by its use of popular dance idioms, which gradually increase in speed, to present "colorful episodes portraying festive scenes from rural life," while No. 2 is more focused on "the realm of song, only periodically interrupted by dance rhythms."

The composer Pascal Bentoiu observed that "Enescu succeeds in materializing the most profound Romanian expression not because he might have used certain melodic cells derived with scientific certainty from folk music, but because of his enormous capacity for sentimental solidarity...for *Einfühling* [empathy]."

*In addition to solo violin, the Romanian Rhapsodies are scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (2nd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 cornets in Rhapsody No. 1, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion, 2 harps and strings.*

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

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS



**LAWRENCE  
FOSTER**  
conductor

Lawrence Foster celebrates his seventh year as music director of Opéra de Marseille in the 2019/20 season, as well as his first as artistic director and chief conductor of the National Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Known for his exhilarating and expressive performances in a wide range of music, he enjoys a major career spanning the U.S., Europe and Asia. He is a champion of the music of

Enescu, and his interpretations are renowned for their faithfulness to the score.

Foster begins his tenure with the National Polish Radio Symphony at the prestigious Enescu Festival, performing music by Adrian Pop, Chopin and Lutosławski. During the season he conducts the complete Schumann symphonies, the piano concertos of Liszt, Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette*, and a concert performance of Ravel's *L'heure espagnole*. He takes part in Beethoven's 250th anniversary year with the Third and Ninth symphonies, and he conducts repertoire ranging from Vivaldi, Mozart and Mendelssohn to Tchaikovsky,

Enescu and Bartók.

Foster's opera season opens at Opéra de Marseille with *Die Zauberflöte*. As a guest conductor he returns to Oper Frankfurt for Britten's *Peter Grimes* and to Opéra de Monte-Carlo for Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*. He has conducted in major opera houses around the world, with highlights including *Troilus and Cressida* at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, recorded for EMI; the first performance of Berg's *Lulu* at Houston Opera; and Enescu's *Oedipe* at the Deutsche Oper, also recorded for EMI.

Following his successful 10-year tenure as

artistic director and chief conductor of the Gulbenkian Orchestra, he now serves as its conductor laureate. He has also held music directorships with the Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona, Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte Carlo, Houston Symphony, Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, Orchestre et Opéra National de Montpellier and the Aspen Festival Music School.

Born in Los Angeles to Romanian parents, Foster served as artistic director of the Georg Enescu Festival from 1998 to 2001. In 2003 he was decorated by the Romanian president for services to Romanian music.



**JUN  
IWASAKI**  
violin

Jun Iwasaki was appointed concertmaster of the Nashville Symphony by music director Giancarlo Guerrero at the beginning of the 2011/12 season. A graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music's prestigious Concertmaster Academy, he has been hailed for his combination of dazzling technique and lyrical musicianship. In a review of Iwasaki's performance at the Mimir Chamber Music Festival, the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* called him "the magician of the evening. He could reach into his violin and pull out bouquets of sound, then reach behind your ear and touch your soul."

Prior to joining the Nashville Symphony, Iwasaki served as concertmaster of the Oregon Symphony from 2007-11, and he performed

with that ensemble at the first annual Spring For Music Festival in 2011. Throughout his career, he has appeared with numerous other orchestras, including the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, Columbia Symphony Orchestra, Blossom Festival Orchestra, Rome (Georgia) Philharmonic, New Bedford Symphony, Canton Symphony, Richardson Symphony, Cleveland Pops Orchestra, Plano Symphony Orchestra and the Cleveland Institute of Music Orchestra. In addition, he has served as guest concertmaster of the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra in 2015, Santa Barbara Symphony in 2010 and National Arts Center Orchestra in Ottawa in 2006. He served in the same position with the Canton (Ohio) Symphony Orchestra from 2005-07.

In addition to teaching at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music, Iwasaki is the artistic director of Portland Summer Ensembles in Portland, Oregon, a workshop for young musicians focusing on chamber music.