

Johannes Brahms

“It is not hard to compose but it is wonderfully hard to let the superfluous notes fall under the table.”

Johannes Brahms was a prominent German pianist, composer and conductor born in the city of Hamburg in 1833. Music was introduced to him from an early age by his father, a skilled musician who mostly played the French horn and double bass.

At age seven, Brahms was sent to a reputable school where he quickly became an accomplished pianist and composer. Unfortunately, as a perfectionist, he destroyed many of his early works, which he wrote under the pseudonym of G.W. Marks and Karl Würth. As a teenager, he played the piano along his city's waterfront, in taverns and dance halls as a means to financially support his family. At the age of fifteen, Brahms performed his first solo concert.

Brahms was offered various positions in Germany and Vienna from 1857 onwards, including teaching piano, conducting music for a local choir in Hamburg and directing several seasons for the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Brahms was also working on his first symphony at the same time, which took him around 20 years to complete. When Symphony No. 1 premiered in 1876, the community jokingly called it “Beethoven's Tenth” because it contained a great deal of stylistic similarity and quality to his predecessor's famous work.

Brahms was particularly fascinated by the compositional techniques and practices of classical masters such as Joseph Haydn, Heinrich Schutz, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Johann Sebastian Bach. He wrote several significant works including symphonies, serenades, piano concertos and sonatas, and over 200 songs, making him one of the greatest musicians of the second half of the 19th century.



DID YOU KNOW?

For his mastery and significance as a composer, Johannes Brahms is often grouped in with the classical masters Bach and Beethoven. Together they were known as Germany's famous “Three Bs”.

FUN FACT

One of Brahms' beloved compositions titled, Good Evening, Good Night, widely known as Brahms' Lullaby (1868), is a famous song used in many children's music boxes.

MUSICAL TERM

Sonatas: A musical composition that typically consists of two to four parts, usually for a solo instrument or a small instrumental musical group.

