

## **BRAHMS – PLUS PULITZER PRIZE WINNING COMPOSER**

### **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)—*King Stephen Overture***

In 1811, a deaf and humiliated Beethoven performed in public for the last time. His capacity as a composer, however, was unencumbered. The same year, Emperor Francis I of Austria, seeking to appease the Hungarian public, engaged Beethoven to commemorate the 11<sup>th</sup>-century founder of the Kingdom of Hungary, King Stephen I. Beethoven's full work, about forty minutes long, featured choral settings of celebratory texts, and was performed for the opening of a new theatre in Pest. Both grand and light-hearted, the work's opening is among Beethoven's most beloved overtures.

### **Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)—*Red, Red Rose***

Robert Burns wrote his famous lyric "A Red, Red Rose" in 1794, and his words have been absorbed by songwriters ever since, attracted to the verses' lilt and emotion. While the most famous version of "Red, Red Rose" is the song made popular by singers like Eva Cassidy and Jean Redpath, several other musical settings of the text have been made by other composers, including a little known one by Robert Schumann. Caroline Shaw's new setting of the Burns was made in 2016 for mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra.

### **Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)—*Other Song***

*Other Song* was written as a fun homage to the musician Sara Bareilles, specifically referencing Bareilles' famous *Love Song* and *Once Upon Another Time*. At the Kennedy Center in 2018, Caroline Shaw and Sara Bareilles shared a bill with the National Symphony and conductor Edwin Outwater, on a show curated by Ben Folds. Shaw penned *Other Song* for the occasion, scoring it for brass and woodwinds only, and performing it herself. (Like her violin concerto *Lo*, she had not fully written out the solo voice line at the time of performance, and it continues to change.) The underlying themes of the song are searching, the creative process (specifically of writing a melody), and perhaps love. The last line, "I go where you go," is a paraphrase from the Book of Ruth.

### **Caroline Shaw (b. 1982)—*Lo***

Originally conceived as a piece for orchestra with a solo violin threaded lightly through, *Lo* is essentially a violin concerto stripped of the usual virtuosic decoration that usually comes with that form. It opens with the simplest gesture, a slow, unadorned scale, climbing patiently up while different sections of the orchestra play fragments of music that is yet to come. Throughout its three movements (performed attacca), the solo violin part weaves in and out of the varied orchestral texture, sometimes etching a fluid melodic shape that contrasts with the stark chordal texture, and at other times blending into its surroundings. Unusually, the violin part has never been written down since *Lo* premiered in 2015, and the composer has always been the soloist, continuing the shape and change the piece with every performance. Caroline Shaw has performed *Lo* nearly twenty times since its premiere, but an official recording has not yet been made.

Caroline Shaw, 2019

## **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)—Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98**

In many ways, the various competing threads of Romantic-era music stemmed from a near-universal adoration of Beethoven. As a symphonist, Brahms the Classicist composed music as a modern extension of the model set forth by Beethoven, but he also dug deeper into the past, fascinated by the antiquated scores of Baroque masters like Bach. At his peak of maturity, Brahms melded the lessons of the past into his final symphony to create a deeply personal and severely modern statement.

The defeated sighs of the work's opening progress organically, with gut-punching reconfigurations of the original material harnessed into a tragic climax. The traumatic opening movement is countered by a warm, even nostalgic, *Andante*, with winding lines evoking the spaciousness of nature. The unrestrained jollity of the third movement conveys the optimism fitting for a symphonic finale, but the feeling is short-lived. The final movement is a tormented *passacaglia*, in which a set of variations unfolds over a recurring subject. As the form is borrowed from Bach's time, so is the repeated line, pulled from a Bach cantata, "For Thee, O Lord, I long" (BWV 150). The developing drama reveals a mortal conclusion in this near-autobiographical masterpiece.

Chaz Stuart, 2019