

Ann Arbor May Festival

THE UNIVERSITY MUSICAL SOCIETY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig

KURT MASUR

Artistic Director and Conductor

PETER RÖSEL, *Pianist*

WEDNESDAY EVENING, APRIL 29, 1987, AT 8:00
HILL AUDITORIUM, ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

*This Festival is dedicated to Gail W. Rector, the Musical Society's
retiring director and president, in recognition of his thirty years
of devoted service and invaluable contributions to the Ann Arbor community.*

P R O G R A M

Concerto No. 1 in D minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 15 BRAHMS

Maestoso

Adagio

Rondo: allegro non troppo

PETER RÖSEL

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67 BEETHOVEN

Allegro con brio

Andante con moto

Scherzo: allegro

Finale: allegro

*Gewandhaus Orchestra/Masur: Philips, Vanguard, Angel, and Vox/Turnabout Records.
Peter Rösel: Eterna, EMI, Eurodisc, and Tocuma Records.*

*The Musical Society expresses gratitude to Ford Motor Company Fund for underwriting costs of the
May Festival house programs.*

PROGRAM NOTES

Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15 JOHANNES BRAHMS (b. May 7, 1833; d. Apr. 3, 1897)

Brahms composed his First Piano Concerto between the years 1854–58; before reaching its final form, the work underwent a series of sweeping transformations. Much of the first movement was originally intended as a symphony but Brahms, at twenty-one years of age, evidently did not feel secure enough in his command of orchestral writing to offer the public such a work. Point in fact, his first symphony was not completed until 1876, twelve years later. Abandoning the concept of a symphony, he transformed the score into a sonata for two pianos. Following a brief stay at Detmold in the autumn of 1856, where he was employed as pianist, chamber musician, and conductor of the court choir, Brahms began in earnest to work on the Concerto. In addition to his official duties at Detmold, he had many opportunities to conduct the court orchestra and consequently absorbed much of the rudiments of orchestral technique. This experience allowed him to turn his attention to the musical material of the two-piano sonata with fresh insight, which ultimately resulted in the creation of his first concerto for piano and orchestra. It is interesting to note that Brahms later altered the third movement of this concerto and transformed it into the “Behold All Flesh” section of his “German” Requiem.

The première of the Concerto No. 1 in D minor took place on January 22, 1859, in Hanover, with Brahms as the soloist and conducted by Joseph Joachim. The work was met with critical acclaim. Its première in Leipzig five days later, however, was a stinging failure. The work was met with open hostility. Critics used disparaging adjectives in referring to it — “incomprehensible,” “dry,” “waste, barren dreariness,” and “shrillest dissonances,” for example. In regard to the Leipzig performance, Brahms wrote:

“The first movement and the second were heard without a sign. At the end, three people attempted to clap, upon which a quite audible hissing from all sides forbade such demonstrations . . . This failure has made no impression at all upon me . . . I believe it is the best thing that could happen to me; it makes one pull one’s thoughts together and raises one’s spirits. All the same, the hissing was rather too much, wasn’t it?”

Fourteen months later, on March 24, 1860, the Concerto had its first performance in Hamburg. His father, Johann Jakob Brahms, was playing the double bass in the orchestra, many of his family were in the audience, and the performance scored as both personal and financial successes for Brahms. The Concerto’s masterful combination of technique, pianistic idiom, and style, plus its powerful and richly contrasted emotional extremes, confirms that Brahms had, indeed, established a new conception of the concerto form. The work was published in 1861.

In the first movement, *Maestoso*, Brahms demonstrates his masterly skill in the assimilation of musical material originally intended as a symphony into the concerto context. The movement is darkly hued in its orchestration and evidences the principle of the *ritornello*, as established by Vivaldi and Bach in the first movements of their concerti, wherein a recurring orchestral passage is alternated with musical excursions provided by the soloist. Brahms first presents a wide-spanned orchestral *ritornello* and then introduces the soloist with an entirely different theme, thus highlighting the special status of the soloist. The ensuing musical dialogue between the orchestra and soloist establishes the balance of power between these two elements for the remaining duration of the work.

The *Adagio* movement interweaves the soloist and orchestra into a dialogue of great depth and breadth, thus creating an almost song-style quality to the music. While at work on the concerto in 1856, Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann (with whom he was entirely infatuated at the time) the following: “I am also painting a lovely portrait of you; it is to be the *Adagio*.” On the manuscript, above this movement he inscribed: “Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domine.”

The final movement, *Rondo*, marked *Allegro non troppo*, features a relaxed and free dialogue between soloist and orchestra.

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67 LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (b. Dec. 15 or 16, 1770; d. Mar. 26, 1827)

The Fifth Symphony was the first work to make Beethoven widely known outside of Austria. It was also the first work to spread (approximately after 1810) the fame of the master all over the world. Beethoven was occupied with the composition of this symphony at the little village of Heiligenstadt, near Vienna, in 1807, and he completed the work probably early in 1808. He had actually been working on the score for a number of years, but for various reasons it had been laid aside for the completion of numerous other compositions. The first performance was given in Vienna on December 22, 1808. Requiring greater instrumental resources than any of Beethoven’s earlier symphonies, the Fifth, in addition to the pairs of woodwinds, horns, and trumpets, calls for several instruments borrowed from the more colorful opera orchestra: a piccolo, three trombones, and a contrabassoon.

The first movement is dominated by a rhythmic four-note figure that probably has a wider recognition than any other theme or technical device in the whole world of music. “Thus Fate knocks at the door” is the significance Beethoven himself is quoted as having placed on this opening theme which establishes within the first bar a mood of despair and oppression. It forms the core of the first subject of the movement and the first two bars of the more lyrical second subject. This second subject arrives early in the movement, introduced by the horns, with the new melody taken by the violins.

Relief from the struggle comes with the second movement, where the predominant mood is consolation and meditation. As in the first movement, the mood is established with amazing technical economy within the first few bars. The cellos sing a lovely melody, which forms the principal theme of the movement. The second theme follows in the same mood but with more assurance.

In the *Scherzo* movement, after the solemn introduction of a broad melody in the basses, a relentless marchlike theme reminiscent of the "Fate" motif is given out by the horns and taken up by the full orchestra. After an extended development, there follows one of the most exciting passages in this or any symphony. A soft tapping on the drums creates an air of expectancy, and the whole orchestra seems poised for a great moment. Then the strings enter dramatically with a faint suggestion of the *Scherzo* theme and are joined directly by the full orchestra, which rises with increasing intensity to a triumphal march.

This march passes directly into the broad melody of the *Finale*. Two more distinctive themes follow in rapid succession, one a lilting measure in triplets, the other lively and vigorous. After a development passage, there occurs another of the musical surprises that make the Fifth Symphony remarkable. The rhythmic *Scherzo* makes a brief final appearance, followed by the passing review of all the themes of the movement. The tempo is increased, the triumphant march is recalled, and the symphony is brought to a conclusion with a succession of resounding chords.

About the Artists

For the first time in the long history of the Ann Arbor May Festival, a foreign orchestra provides the nucleus of this annual spring event. The **Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig** and Kurt Masur, however, are certainly not "foreigners" in our city; from 1974 to 1984 they have performed five concerts in this auditorium, all to resounding applause. Moreover, there is a century-old connection linking Leipzig with Ann Arbor: Albert A. Stanley, founder of the May Festival in 1894, received four years of musical training at Leipzig's famous Hochschule für Musik, as do, traditionally, most of the Gewandhaus Orchestra members. Currently, eighty-five percent of the orchestra's musicians, including Maestro Masur, have studied at the "Conservatorium" founded by Felix Mendelssohn in 1842.

It is considered a civic honor to be invited to join the Gewandhaus Orchestra, and many members remain with the ensemble all through their careers, sometimes for as long as 30 or 40 years. Although the orchestra's full roster numbers 200, only 150 of these musicians travel overseas when the orchestra goes on tour. The remaining 50 members play at Leipzig's opera house and at St. Thomas Church (where Bach was music director and where weekly concerts of his cantatas still continue). They also perform as part of the nine string quartets, three chamber orchestras, four wind quintets, brass ensemble, and early music ensemble, all integral parts of Leipzig's musical fabric.

The musical life of the city of Leipzig has been a rich and varied one since the sixteenth century, with frequent concerts in churches, schools, and coffee houses. In the late 1600s the foundation of a concert tradition was laid, with the flourishing of an institution known as the Collegium Musicum. These were amateur ensembles which gave extremely popular concert series in a number of Leipzig coffee houses. In 1729, J. S. Bach became music director of a Collegium Musicum which had been founded 25 years earlier by Georg Philipp Telemann. It wasn't until 1743, however, that the citizens, merchants, and music lovers of Leipzig donated the funds necessary to pay salaries for professional musicians, thereby establishing Germany's first concert orchestra. This step changed forever the way music was made, replacing the friendly and casual gatherings with more formal concert performances which were the forerunner of today's orchestral concert programs.

In 1781 this professional orchestra was baptized when it took up permanent residence in the Gewandhaus (cloth house), the imposing structure which was the home of Leipzig's prosperous linen merchants. Throughout the orchestra's 241-year history, an illustrious list of conductors, including Felix Mendelssohn, Richard Wagner, Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, Arthur Nikisch, Bruno Walter, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Otto Klemperer, Fritz Busch, Erich Kleiber, and Sir Thomas Beecham, have established and maintained a distinguished musical tradition, further enhanced and strengthened by Kurt Masur since his appointment as music director in 1970.

When Mendelssohn took over as principal conductor of the Gewandhaus in 1835, he actively revived repertoire from past composers while continuing to foster contemporary works. He also ushered in a renewed interest in the music of Bach, which had gone largely unperformed since the composer's death in 1750 — even in Leipzig which had been his home for so many years. (Mendelssohn is generally credited with rescuing Bach's monumental "St. Matthew" Passion from oblivion with performances in Berlin in 1829 and in Leipzig in 1841.)

Until the nineteenth century, direction of the orchestra during performances was shared by the concertmaster and the keyboard player, who was often the composer. Mendelssohn was one of the first to conduct from the podium, guiding the orchestra's interpretation of the music and establishing precedents for the art of conducting that we recognize today. He was also the very first Gewandhaus conductor to use a baton. Mendelssohn is generally acknowledged as the creator of the orchestra's acclaimed balance and unanimity of ensemble that remain hallmarks of the orchestra to this day.

Repertoire of the Gewandhaus continues to expand. Under Kurt Masur's direction, the orchestra performs music from the mid-eighteenth century up through the present and regularly gives premières of works by native German composers. Ten new works alone were commissioned for the gala opening of the Gewandhaus Orchestra's new concert hall which opened in 1981.

As one of the world's outstanding conductors, **Kurt Masur** fits well into the lineage of conductors who preceded him. While most world-renowned, jet-age conductors spend anywhere from twelve to fifteen weeks with their orchestras, Mr. Masur spends six to seven months each year leading the Gewandhaus at home in the orchestra's concert hall, at the Leipzig Opera, at the weekly Bach cantata performances in St. Thomas Church, and on tour. The remainder of his time is spent conducting such prestigious European ensembles as the Berlin, Vienna, Czech, Leningrad, Stockholm, and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras, the Dresden Staatskapelle, l'Orchestre de Paris, and London's Philharmonia Orchestra. In the United States he has led the Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, and Dallas Symphonies, the Philadelphia and Cleveland Orchestras, and the New York Philharmonic. Maestro Masur participates in major music festivals worldwide, including those in Salzburg, Tanglewood, Ravinia, Prague, and Warsaw.

Born in Silesia in 1927, Mr. Masur's first musical training was at the piano. He attended the Leipzig Hochschule für Musik from 1946-48, where he took his first conducting course. After graduation, he held positions at the Erfurt and Leipzig opera theaters, became a conductor of the Dresden Philharmonic in 1955, and returned to opera three years later as music director of the Mecklenburg State Theater of Schwerin. From 1960-64 he was senior music director at Berlin's Komische Oper, whose world tours were instrumental in building his international reputation. After numerous guest-conducting appearances in Europe, Mr. Masur was appointed chief conductor of the Dresden Philharmonic in 1967, a post he resigned two years after being named music director of the Gewandhaus Orchestra.

Kurt Masur made his American debut with the Cleveland Orchestra in 1974, the same year he made his initial United States tour with the Gewandhaus. Since then, they have appeared regularly in North America and have been featured in New York with a Beethoven Cycle at Carnegie Hall in 1985 and a Brahms Cycle at Avery Fisher Hall in 1986. During the current tour they are appearing at Carnegie Hall, in Pasadena and San Francisco, then continue their tour to the Far East.

Maestro Masur and the orchestra have recorded extensively for Philips Records. Their discography includes all the Brahms symphonies, overtures, and concerti, with Misha Dichter, Salvatore Accardo, and Heinrich Schiff; the works for violin and orchestra of Bruch, with Accardo; and orchestral songs of Richard Strauss with Jessye Norman and Siegfried Jerusalem. Several new recordings were released in 1986, including the nine Beethoven symphonies, three twentieth-century flute concerti with Aurele Nicolet, and Beethoven's Triple Concerto with Ulf Hoelscher, Heinrich Schiff, and Christian Zacharias.

Pianist **Peter Rösel**, a native of Dresden, has been artist-in-residence with the Gewandhaus Orchestra of Leipzig since 1976, making fifteen solo appearances with the orchestra annually. In addition, he has appeared as guest artist with major orchestras in North and South America, Europe, the Soviet Union, Japan, and Mexico. He also performs frequently at summer festivals in Europe, including Ascona, Berlin, Budapest, Prague, Salzburg, and Wiesbaden.

Deemed "a pianist of extraordinary gifts" by the *Washington Post*, Mr. Rösel has won prizes at several international competitions. They include Zwickau's Schumann Competition, Moscow's Tchaikovsky Competition, and Montreal's International Music Competition. In recognition of his musical accomplishments, he has been honored with a National Prize by his native East Germany.

Mr. Rösel's repertoire is comprehensive, ranging from Mozart to Prokofieff to new music written especially for him, such as East German composer Udo Zimmermann's recent piano concerto. The pianist's discography numbers over thirty recordings, which include all of Rachmaninoff's piano concertos with conductor Kurt Sanderling and the complete keyboard works of Brahms.

Born in Dresden in 1945, the son of a conductor and a singer, Peter Rösel began to play the piano at the age of six. He graduated in 1969 with highest honors from the renowned Moscow Conservatory, where he studied under the great pedagogues Dmitri Bashkirov and Lev Oberin. Mr. Rösel resides in Leipzig and is currently a professor at the Carl Maria von Weber School of Music in Dresden.

As a featured soloist on the Gewandhaus Orchestra's current tour of the United States, Peter Rösel is appearing in Ann Arbor for the first time.

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