

## Music 320

# Johannes Brahms (1833-97)

### General Traits:

- Brahms is sometimes referred to as a Neo-Classical composer because he looked to past for inspiration, borrowing forms and ideas from other musical periods
- Brahms is often identified as the opponent of Liszt and Wagner in the debate over Program music and Absolute music
  - Program music tells a story or paints a musical picture; “absolute” music exists without extra-musical association

**Brahms' Music:** he wrote in most genres: piano, vocal and chamber music throughout his life; most of his orchestral works were later

- **Piano works:** he absorbed many aspects of others' styles, e.g. Schumann, Schubert, Hummel, Chopin, Liszt. Large solo piano works (multi-mvt. sonatas, etc.) limited to early in his career; then often wrote miniatures
- **Chamber works:** he wrote for all sizes of ensembles up to string sextet. In general, this music is conceived for professional musicians, not as *Hausmusik*. Most of the chamber works are very disciplined and restrained, also somber; often uses “dark” instruments (viola, clarinet) for chamber music
- **Orchestral music:** not a large output compared with others, but a significant contribution to 19th century orchestral literature. Some feel his 4 symms are finest since Beethoven. He also wrote some concertos and other orchestral works, e.g. **Academic Festival Overture, Haydn Variations** (St. Anthony Chorale). In symphonies, he used classical notions of form: e.g. first movements are all sonata allegro; 2nds are all adagios.
- **Solo songs:** over 260, mostly Lieder; some folk-song style in simple strophic forms. Accompaniments are restrained: songs focus on voice. Example: **Vergeblisches Standchen**, a strophic song; 3rd strophe is minor mode.
- **Choral music:** greatest master of choral music since Handel and Mendelssohn. Wrote for large Festival size choruses and also small mixed or unmixed. **German Requiem** (1868, shortly after mother's death) is his largest choral work. Not based on usual liturgical texts but on Bible texts. Lots of examples of counterpoint, but also many homophonic textures