After Brahms

3 intermezzi for orchestra

Composer: Avner Dorman
Year: 2014
Duration: 7 min
Orchestration: 2.2[(ca)].2.asx+tsx.2/4.2.2.1/timp/str
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Program Note

Composer note
After Brahms: Three Intermezzi for Orchestra is inspired by the late piano compositions of Johannes Brahms (Opp. 116, 117, 118, and 119). The first intermezzo derives its structure and underlying texture from the left hand arpeggios of Brahms' Intermezzo, Op. 118, No. 1, and these figures appear in the lower strings and brass. While the high strings and winds evoke the original descending melodic line, they clash with Brahms' accompanimental texture both rhythmically and harmonically. The middle and low winds contend with the accompaniment as well, providing harmonic contrast. As the piece progresses the explosive elements of the texture ultimately take over, erupting energetically in both rhythm and sound.

The second intermezzo draws its inspiration from Brahms' Intermezzo Op. 119, No. 1. The original descending arpeggios change in a series of meter shifts — each bar is one pulse longer or shorter than its predecessor, creating a pendulum-like pattern. Following an ABA' form, the middle (B) section is reminiscent of popular music of the day, much like in Brahms' original intermezzo. In Brahms' case that piece could be a waltz, and in After Brahms, it evokes a pop song of the early 21st century. The final A section includes more syncopation and a wider palette of orchestral color. The end of the piece utilizes Brahms' original harmony while expanding the range and colors of the orchestra, closing in the deep register of the tuba.

While the last intermezzo, elegiac in its character, is not directly inspired by a specific Brahms piece, it is perhaps the most Brahmsian in its emotional expression and musical content. The continual descending lines, the suspended lyrical inner voice, and the variety of expressive cross-rhythms all recall Brahms' style. This piece explores these devices in the context of present-day compositional techniques, while calling on the kind of introspection and reflection so often found in Brahms' music.

— Avner Dorman

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