



06 | 07 Season

Berkeley  
Symphony  
Orchestra

**Kent Nagano,**  
Music Director

Program Notes

# Cello on the Edge

Cello  
on the Edge

May 11, 2007

**Sanford  
Machover  
Brahms**

**First Congregational Church of Berkeley**

# BERKELEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

2006–07 SEASON



**KENT NAGANO, CONDUCTOR/MUSIC DIRECTOR**

**JAMES A. KLEINMANN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**8:00 pm, Friday, May 11, 2007**

**First Congregational Church of Berkeley**

**DAVID SANFORD**

**Scherzo Grosso (2005)**  
**Version for cello and orchestra**  
(World Premiere)

I  
II  
III  
IV

*Matt Haimovitz, cello*

**TOD MACHOVER**

**VinylCello (2007)**  
**for cello (played with Hyperbow), DJ, and live electronics**  
(World Premiere)

*Matt Haimovitz, cello with Hyperbow*  
*DJ Olive, turntables*

— INTERMISSION —

**JOHANNES BRAHMS**

**Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98**

I. Allegro non troppo  
II. Andante moderato  
III. Allegro giocoso  
IV. Allegro energico e passionato—Più Allegro

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## Program Notes

**Scherzo Grosso (2005)**  
**Version for cello and orchestra**  
(World Premiere)

**DAVID SANFORD** (b. 1963)

*David Sanford was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1963. Scherzo Grosso was commissioned in 2004 by the Serge Koussevitzky Foundation in the Library of Congress, and is dedicated to the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky. Sanford composed the work in 2005 for Matt Haimovitz and the Pittsburgh Collective, who gave the premiere on May 29, 2005, at the Knitting Factory, a Manhattan nightclub. The original version (part of Haimovitz's "Buck the Concerto" series) was scored for solo cello and big band, consisting of 5 saxophones, 5 trumpets, 5 trombones, piano, electric guitar, bass, and drum set. The version for full orchestra calls for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets in B-flat, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns in F; 3 trumpets in B-flat, 2 tenor trombones, bass trombone, tuba, 4 percussionists [timpani (one player), glockenspiel, tam-tam, 2 triangles, cymbals, vibraphone, snare drum, 3 tom-toms, small bass drum, suspended cymbals, and crash cymbals], strings, and cello solo. Duration ca. 24:00.*

*The composer has provided the following comments:*

**S**cherzo Grosso was originally written as a concerto for cello and big band in four movements. While the influences in the piece are numerous, the main underlying thread is the memory of Ed Nelson, a trumpet player with the group and close friend of the composer and several other members of the band since their college days at the University of

Northern Colorado, who passed away in 2004. A fundamental trait of Nelson's character was his widely divergent and unpredictable nature; a possible musical genius who received straight A's in college, dropped out only a few credits short of his degree, and often withdrew from public performance for long stretches at a time.

While a simple reading of the concerto's pairing might suggest that the cello represents the "sacred" and the big band the "profane," in actuality both explore all aspects of both tendencies. The band often veers away from jazz and toward a "classical" idiom, breaking down into chamber groups at certain points. At the same time, the cello often acts as a jazz or rock soloist (movements I and IV), or as part of the rhythm section as Deidre Murray and Abdul Wadud have with Henry Threadgill's groups, or Hank Roberts with Tim Berne, among others. Those familiar with Mr. Haimovitz's work won't be surprised to hear him backed by drums, playing unison lines with the saxophone section, or playing in duet with electric guitar. Although most of the piece is fully notated, there are portions of the fourth movement left open for improvisation for cello and the rhythm section.

While the original version includes a typically rough drum set part from which the player takes general rhythmic cues but fashions his/her own beats, the percussion parts in the orchestral version are fully notated to approximate an expansion of the role of the drum set. Also, there are improvised trumpet solos in the second and fourth movements of the original which are replaced by a

notated trumpet solo in the second movement, and notated soli for wind instruments in the fourth. Therefore, the orchestral version is fully notated in all parts.

—David Sanford

**VinylCello (2007)**  
**for cello (played with Hyperbow), DJ, and live electronics**  
(World Premiere)

**TOD MACHOVER** (b. 1953)

*Tod Machover was born on November 24, 1953, in Mount Vernon, New York.*

*VinylCello was commissioned by Matt Haimovitz, who gives the world premiere of the work at tonight's concert (although a reduced version was performed on March 16, 2007, at a concert of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York). The work is scored for amplified cello (played with Hyperbow) and live and pre-produced electronic material manipulated by DJ. Duration ca. 22:00.*

**The composer has provided the following comments:**

**V***inylCello* was composed at the request of Matt Haimovitz who wanted an interactive, electronics-oriented piece to complement a series of unusual concertos for cello that he has been commissioning. I have composed several works for solo cello, some acoustic and some electronic, including *Begin Again Again . . .* for so-called Hypercello (which we designed for Yo-Yo Ma at the MIT Media Lab and which Haimovitz recorded for the Oxingale label) which dramatizes the construction of an enhanced expressive instrument as part of the composition.

For this new work, I was seeking a

way to reimagine the concerto, with the solo instrument spinning a web of sound capable of “competing” with any outside forces. I have also established a mode of give-and-take between soloist and accompaniment so that each “side” reacts to spur-of-the-moment musical felicities, allowing each performance to be unique and giving large portions of the work the character of semi-improvised cadenzas while still preserving a dramatic and coherent overall form.

*VinylCello* is performed on a regular (although amplified) acoustic cello, but the performer uses a Hyperbow, newly designed by my team at the MIT Media Lab. This bow is kind of the musical equivalent to a Nintendo Wii controller: it measures many degrees of movement, acceleration, and pressure of bowing—all wirelessly—while also incorporating several miniature buttons and switches to allow various programs and processes to be precisely initiated. The Hyperbow allows the performer to manipulate and transform his playing—turning notes or textures into wild washes of sound—with a flick of the wrist or a nuanced nudge.

In tonight's version of *VinylCello*, the “orchestral” part is performed by an improvising DJ using a specially composed and prepared “vinyl score” which makes available textures and events which can be accessed and extended in various ways. The “vinyl” material has been created from recordings made by Matt Haimovitz, so the entire complex sound world of the piece literally grows out of Matt's cello. The piece itself is built from small phrases that to me sound like a “talking cello,” not transforming speech Reich-like into music, but rather producing music that imitates the fluid flexibility of rapid-fire conversation.

This dialogue starts on the cello alone, extends to complex polyphony

through the Hyperbow, and then collides with multilayered textures produced by the DJ. *VinylCello* is played in one continuous movement broken up into smaller sections. It is much less about traditional notes and rhythms than about gestural murmurs, exclamations, cries and shouts, merging cello slides and glissandi with DJ scratching and proliferating, and weaving a wide range of surging textures into a swift, compact cascade of shifting moods. *VinylCello* is a pretty wild ride: simultaneously shocking and comforting to hear the collision of strings with vinyl.

—Tod Machover

### **Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98**

**JOHANNES BRAHMS** (1833–1897)

*Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg on May 7, 1833. He died in Vienna on April 3, 1897. He began his E minor symphony in the summer of 1884 while vacationing in the town of Mürzzuschlag in the Austrian province of Styria, and completed the work during the summer of the following year during a stay in the same town. The symphony received its premiere under the direction of the composer at Meiningen, Germany, on October 25, 1885, and publication by Simrock in Bonn followed in October 1886. Brahms scored the work for pairs each of flutes (second doubling on piccolo), oboes, clarinets, and bassoons (adding a contrabassoon in the third and fourth movements); 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones (fourth movement only), timpani, triangle (third movement only), and strings. Duration ca. 39:30.*

**J**ohannes Brahms was, at first, a hesitant symphonist. Well aware of his position

as principal heir to the classically-oriented, Beethoven-Schubert-Mendelssohn-Schumann lineage, he felt overwhelmed by the weight of history. He labored over his first symphony for over two decades, completing it only in September of 1876, well into middle age. The work's moderate success emboldened him to persevere, and his second symphony, of a markedly contrasting character, followed in less than a year. He turned then to other genres for several years, but eventually produced another pair of symphonies, complementary in character, in quick succession: the third in 1883, and the fourth, his final, in 1885.

It seems likely that the impetus for the second round of symphonic composition was provided by Brahms's new association with the court orchestra of the Duchy of Meiningen. Meiningen is in Thuringia, in central Germany, only a few dozen miles south of J.S. Bach's home territory. The realm has a distinguished artistic tradition; the court orchestra dates back at least to 1690, and was directed by Johann Ludwig Bach (second cousin to the more famous J.S.) from 1711–1731. Duke Georg II, who reigned from 1866–1914, built up the ensemble and in 1879 invited Hans von Bülow to take up the post of conductor. Bülow used his tenure there to mold one of the finest orchestras in Europe. Thanks to the Duke's generous patronage, Bülow had extensive rehearsal time with the orchestra, and instituted novel practices, such as holding separate rehearsals with small groups of players, concentrating on details of interpretation. The orchestra soon came to be regarded as a marvel; a Berlin critic wrote after one performance, “It seems as if the spiritual eye were suddenly provided with a telescope, through which a magnificent landscape, previously obscured by mist, becomes fully recognizable to its smallest detail.”

Bülow's conducting career had been built on his position as one of the chief interpreters of the radical Liszt-Wagner school; but after his experiences in the 1870s, when his wife, née Cosima Liszt, abandoned him in order to bear children to, and then to marry, his best friend Richard Wagner, he found his devotion to the cause waning. He found a new appreciation for the music of Brahms, which he had previously thought of as dry and academic. While giving concerts in Vienna in 1881, Bülow told Brahms of his work with the Meiningen Orchestra, and when the composer expressed his admiration and encouragement, Bülow offered the orchestra to Brahms as a sort of laboratory where he could try out new works.

The arrangement worked well for both men. Not only did the Meiningen ensemble act as a "rehearsal orchestra" for Brahms, but its concerts of Brahms's music became famous. Moreover, Bülow frequently took the orchestra on tours, first throughout Germany, and later farther abroad, and Brahms's music figured prominently in the programs. This did much to spread knowledge of Brahms's music and carry his reputation to a wider audience. Thus, it seems fitting that the composer's final symphony should have been given its premiere (under the direction of Brahms himself) by the group with which he had worked so closely.

More tightly written than his other symphonies, the E minor packs a lot of musical discourse into its four movements. Indeed, upon hearing Brahms and a friend read through a two-piano version of the work, the renowned Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick quipped, "I had the feeling that two enormously clever people were cudgeling each other." (Although, to be fair, the same could be said for many a symphony when played on two pianos!) The first movement, for

example, is a model of concision and economy of means. It opens simply, with a series of two-note units separated by rests. The first descends the melodic interval of a third; the next starts another third lower, but rises the interval of a sixth, which is a third flipped upside down (its inversion). Then the whole pattern is repeated a step lower. Next, we hear a drop of an octave, followed by a rising third, which again is repeated down a step. On the macro level, we hear an eight-bar melody; but that melody consists essentially of a series of permutations of a single element: the descending third.

Technical issues aside, this preoccupation with drooping melodic outlines gives the entire first movement a wistful, nostalgic quality. The second movement maintains the same atmosphere of yearning for something lost and out of reach—the principal theme moves only by small intervals, and keeps returning to its first note over and over, as if bound by fetters. When later in the movement the melody finally is able to soar forth, the feeling of release is almost painful in its beauty. The sense of longing is fueled by Brahms's exquisite scoring of the movement. Not a showy orchestrator with the brilliance of Berlioz or Rimsky-Korsakov, Brahms works wonders within a limited, autumnal palette of deep crimsons and burnished golds.

But brilliance does burst forth in the third movement. In place of the customary scherzo-trio-scherzo in quick triple time, Brahms substitutes a full symphonic movement in duple meter that still embodies the humorous and playful spirit of the scherzo (whose name is, after all, Italian for "joke"). To point up the contrast in tone with the second movement, here Brahms throws a few new, brighter colors onto his palette. As he himself drily remarked, "three

kettledrums, triangle, and piccolo will, of course, make something of a show." Though the shortest movement in the entire symphony, it contains just as much variety and richness in its melodic material as any of the other movements crammed into its smaller frame. The overall effect is of great energy and, if one may use a word not often associated with Brahms, exuberance.

Things get serious again in the fourth movement, where the nostalgic mood of the opening of the symphony returns. Indeed, nostalgia, which can take numerous forms, is a common affect in Brahms's music. Aside from a personal wistfulness, a yearning for a lost past colors much of his artistic outlook. Brahms was probably unique among the great nineteenth-century composers in his interest in, and affection for, what we today would call "early music." He owned numerous manuscripts and original prints of music from the 17th and 18th centuries—indeed, they seem to be the only things he spent any serious money on. He was also active as a scholar and editor of old music; he edited the complete harpsichord works of the great French composer, François Couperin, among others.

Of all his symphonies, the fourth shows the clearest evidence of Brahms's antiquarian leanings. This manifests itself in small-scale harmonic matters, such as we encounter in the slow movement, which starts off in the medieval Phrygian mode before settling comfortably into E major, and which then closes with a return of the Phrygian harmony.

But in the case of the symphony's finale, Brahms uses a formal structure borrowed from old music as the basis for the design of the entire movement. The form is a type of "continuous variation," meaning that a basic harmonic or melodic pattern (usually four or eight measures

long) is repeated over and over without interruption while other material is varied melodically, texturally, or dynamically. In the Baroque era, this kind of piece was often called "Passacaglia" or "Chaconne," although Brahms uses neither of these terms. These were derived from older dance forms, which used a repeating bass line as the foundation for lengthy, improvised pieces. In this case, even the choice of the basic theme is an act of homage to the past: Brahms adapted it from the final movement (which is titled "Ciaccona") of J.S. Bach's Cantata 150, *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich*. Years before he wrote the symphony Brahms discussed this movement with Bülow and asked the conductor, "What would you say to a symphonic movement on this theme? But . . . it would have to be chromatically altered in some way." In the event, Brahms did add a chromatic passing tone to the theme, which helps him to spice up the chords which support the theme. In a definitely un-Baroque gesture, the movement opens with the theme in the soprano, harmonized by the full orchestra, and in the course of the work it migrates through various registers, even spending some time in its customary location in the bass. The theme is followed by thirty-one variations of astonishing originality and diversity. Sometimes, the theme is visible right on the surface; at other times, it's only just detectable as a hint of linear motion. And the range among the variations is not only technical, but also emotional. Proud and majestic episodes contrast with evanescent ones. Overall, there is a powerful drive to a monumental conclusion, a fitting capstone to Brahms's symphonic career.

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