



Beethoven & Brahms

February 7, 2026 7:30pm

Program

Saturday, February 7, 2026 at 7:30pm
Mary W. Sommervold Hall, Washington Pavilion

Sunday, February 8, 2026 at 3:30pm
Riggs Theater, Pierre SD

South Dakota Symphony Orchestra
Delta David Gier, *conductor*
Lio Kuok-Wai, *piano*

Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897) Symphony No. 3

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Andante
- III. Poco allegretto
- IV. Allegro

INTERMISSION

Robert Carl (b. 1954) *Wind Hymn* (world premiere)

- I. Aerial view
- II. Surface view

??

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770- 1827) Piano Concerto No. 3

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Largo
- III. Rondo (Allegro)

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Program Notes

Symphony No. 3

Johannes Brahms

Written by Anna Vorhes

Born

May 7, 1833, Hamburg, Germany

Died

April 3, 1897, Vienna, Austria

Instrumentation

two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, one

contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, strings

Duration

39 minutes

Composed

Summer of 1883, while in Wiesbaden on the Rhine

World Premiere

December 2, 1883, by the Vienna Philharmonic, Hans Richter conducting

Program Notes

Success as a musician in any era has meant both satisfying public taste and being innovative enough to do something recognizable and unique. Brahms walked a fine line. Musicians respect his pristine construction and his meticulous attention to detail. Audiences loved his ability to use the Romantic tone palate in satisfying ways. The most influential conductor of the Romantic era, Hans von Bulow compared Brahms to Beethoven and the rediscovered Bach. Brahms' publisher picked that up. The "three Bs" became a byword for fine composition. For a composer so self-critical, this was a difficult slogan to fulfill.

Feeling like you might have been born in the wrong era is not unusual in creative personalities. While Brahms didn't write or talk about that concept, his music certainly retained sensibilities of the previous eras. He did not like the bombastic innovations of Liszt, Wagner, and their peers. He did admire the Waltz King Johann Strauss II, admitting he would have been proud to claim "The Blue Danube" as his own. In general, he distrusted purely Romantic era genres and sensibilities. His construction held firmly to the tools used by Mozart, Haydn, and especially Beethoven. The length of compositions was expanded and the orchestra was larger to fit the times, but the genre retained the exacting construction of the previous era.

In a career that included work with Joaquim, one of the top violinists of the time, and Clara Schumann, the most highly respected piano virtuoso, Brahms surrounded himself with examples of excellence. He would not allow himself anything any less. Brahms was his own strongest critic. Those works that did not meet his exacting personal standards, he destroyed.

Brahms composed only four symphonies. The first one was completed in 1876, when Brahms was 43 years old. This third symphony was written in 1882-1883. Brahms was reaching his fiftieth birthday. He was aware of his own abilities, and proud



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of his work. At the same time he was meticulous about composition techniques. In his own words: "It is not hard to compose, but it is wonderfully hard to let the superfluous notes fall under the table." He thought hard about what he created, and worked to make it reflect the glories of the past in the language of his own times. Yet he remained unwilling to trust the Romantic sensibilities, and unwilling to write the programmatic pieces so in vogue.

The first movement of this symphony begins with the kinds of cryptically meaningful motives Brahms had discussed and admired with his friend Schumann. It does not give us an extramusical picture as so many of the composers of the era did. Instead of the first motive, F - A flat - F leads us to believe this may be a minor key symphony. The chosen notes reflect Brahms' motto *frei aber froh*, free but happy. We do explore the expected major key as the second theme appears in A major to negate the A flat that produced the F minor chord. The second and third movements are quiet and emotional. Finally, the fourth movement revisits previous ideas interspersed with new ones as a rondo. It coalesces into a strong and hope filled climax as only Brahms can.

Wind Hymn (world premiere)

Robert Carl

Program Notes

Written by composer

For the past few years, I found myself periodically driving across the western US. And over roughly a decade, I've noticed a striking change. The number of wind farms has exploded. There are places, in particular Colorado and Kansas, where the white rubines stretch as far as the eye can see, ahead and on either side.

For me, their scale and grand motion are inspiring. It comes out of the human instinct to build on a vast scale positive in the face of our climate and energy struggles.

The piece is a tone poem, in two movements played with pause. The first, Aerial View, evokes the passage of a series of farms seen from a great enough distance that each one has a distinct character, parsed into the different sting sections. The second, Surface View, subdivides the strings so as to crate a weaving micropolyphony, as though one is walking amidst the turbines. And out of the motives that make up this motion, the larger hymn emerges.

Piano Concerto No. 3

Ludwig van Beethoven

Written by Anna Vorhes

Born

baptized December 17, 1770, Bonn, Germany

Died

March 26, 1827, Vienna, Austria

Instrumentation

solo piano, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings

Duration

34 minutes

Composed

1803

World Premiere

April 5, 1803, with the composer as soloist

Something to listen for

The first movement of the concerto has a sense of reference to Mozart's piano concertos. It begins with the double exposition sonata form so common in the Classical era of music. A double exposition sonata form means that the two themes of the exposition part of the form are "exposed" by the orchestra without the soloist. The first theme sounds quite militaristic, giving a sense of drumbeat, though the only percussion in the ensemble is the timpani. The second theme is more lyric as those who know the form expect. After the orchestra comes to a sense of closing the section, the pianist enters and embellishes the themes we have heard the orchestra play. These melodies are fragmented, then the recapitulation of the themes begins. You should be able to recognize them as they return. Finally, the piano offers a cadenza, a solo passage giving us a chance to be impressed by the fancy finger work. A coda with the orchestra ends the movement. The second movement begins with the piano playing solo, and as the movement develops returning between explorations of other melodies. The first theme of the rondo (which returns between other themes) is actually rather morose compared to most rondos. There are moments through the movement where a little cheerfulness appears. And to make sure we go on in the right frame of mind after the concerto, the final appearance of the morose theme moves from minor to major, ending in a lovely and happy major key.

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This piano concerto is one of the works that signals the beginning of Beethoven's heroic middle compositional period. Musicologists divide Beethoven's compositional output into three sections. The first section is his exploration of the works of his predecessors from the classical era which include Mozart and Haydn, both of whom Beethoven admired immensely. His first and second symphonies and the first three piano concertos are part of his exploration. During this era, he was not as troubled by the deafness that would plague him soon after. He was able to make his living as a concert pianist. His works would soon develop into styles that are distinct from his forebearers. Here however, there is a resemblance to what came before, especially Mozart's single piano concerto in c minor among that composer's twenty-one piano concertos. The similarity does not erase the distinct differences, but some consider this an homage to Mozart's work.

The occasion for the composition of this particular piano concerto was a benefit concert at the Theater an der Wien. The concert was all Beethoven works, organized by the composer to fund his own living expenses. This was common in the early nineteenth century. His second symphony would be presented after a performance of the first symphony, and this concerto would premiere. His oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives* was also performed. Ferdinand Ries conducted the event.

Unfortunately, the musicians available for this massive performance were second-string Viennese performers. The most skilled musicians had been hired for a performance of Haydn's *The Creation* the same evening. The result was disturbing to the players and the composer. Of course, these works were in manuscript form and tricky to read. This single rehearsal began at 8:00 AM, and by 2:00 PM the musicians were most unhappy. Fortunately, Beethoven supporter Prince Karl Lichnowsky brought in large baskets of bread, cold cuts and wine. Once fed, the musicians went back to work.

Since Beethoven was playing the piano solo himself, he didn't write down all the notes of the piano part. Instead, he made notes and scribbles for himself to help him remember what he intended to do. As it was not at all close to standard notation, the page turner had to guess where the composer was at any given moment. Beethoven's student Ignaz von Seyfried was given the job of turning pages though Beethoven had to nod at him when it was time to turn the page. The composer was also accomplished at improvisation, so the passages that weren't written down were not the same at the rehearsal and at the concert. Fortunately, Beethoven was skilled and popular, so all turned out well.

The next year the concerto was performed again, this time with Ferdinand Ries as the piano soloist.

As you listen to this concerto, see if you can haer similarities to the Beethoven works you know well. This is one of the pieces that marked the end of his youthful compositions through which he honed his ability. His third symphony, the Eroica, was stared shortly after this premiere. It shows him to be ready to take on refining and changing the norms audiences had learned in the earlier part of the era, thus entering his second period of composition. He would become the Beethoven who created melodies and motives we all hum or whistle.



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Guest Artist



Lio Kuok-Wai

piano

Praised for his depth of artistry and technical mastery, pianist Lio Kuok-Wai has captivated audiences worldwide. A graduate of the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music under Gary Graffman, he is the recipient of the Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia's Career Advancement Award, and several scholarships from the Macau Cultural Affairs Bureau and Feltsman Piano Foundation.

Lio made his concerto debut at ten with the Macau Orchestra at the 2000 Macau Arts Festival. Since then, he has performed at some of the world's most renowned venues and collaborated with leading orchestras and conductors, including the China Philharmonic, Hong Kong Philharmonic, Camerata Salzburg, and Houston Symphony. He has worked with distinguished conductors such as Edo de Waart, François-Xavier Roth, and

Michael Stern.

His exceptional talent has earned top prizes in competitions like the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians, the Gina Bachauer International Young Artists Competition, the Steinway and Sons International Piano Competition, and the Chopin International Piano Competition in Asai.

Born in Macau, Lio Kuok-Wai began his musical journey at age five. In 1997, he received a full scholarship to study at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts under Gabriel Kwok.

He has further honed his craft at Yale University, the University of Kansas, and the International Center for Music at Park University. A regular participant at the Marlboro Music Festival, he has performed alongside distinguished musicians such as Kim Kashkashian, Pamela Frank and members of the Guarneri, Juilliard, and Shanghai Quartets.

Lio has also been recognized for his cultural contributions, receiving the Titulo Honorifico de Valor (Honorific Title of Merit) from Macau's former Chief Executive, Ho Hau Wah. He has performed for high-profile dignitaries, including then-President of China Hu Jintao, Prince Edward the Duke of Kent, and Stanley Ho.

Recent highlights include his performance during the Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in 2023 and 2024 fundraising concert for peace at Milan's Teatro dal Verme, honoring the legacy of Fr. Juigi Giussani. He was invited to present the "Spirto Gentil" at the New York Encounter.

In season 2025-26, Lio is making his concerto debut with the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra under Maestro Delta David Gier, performing Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3. In addition, he is giving concerts across the nation, and enjoys exploring anything that concerns the humanities.



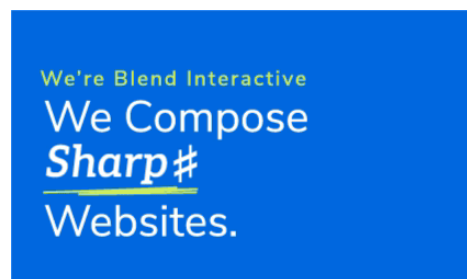
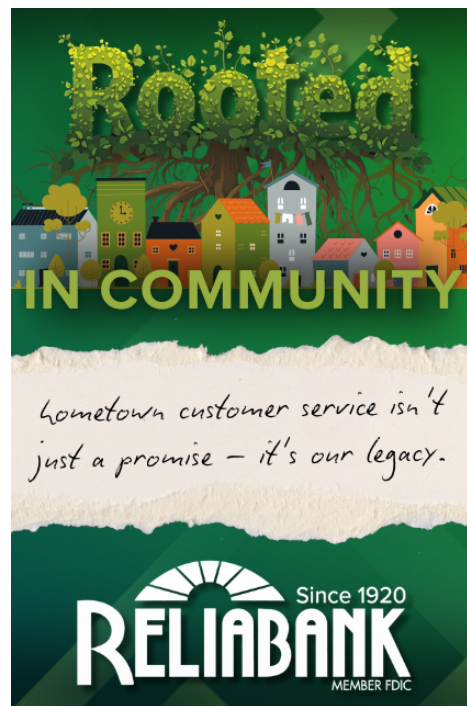
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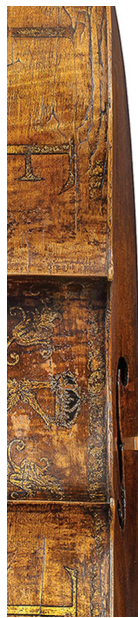
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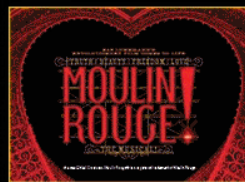
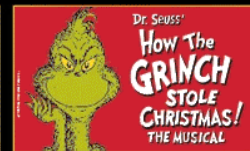
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