

HEY KIDS, MEET JOHANNES BRAHMS

German Romantic Era Composer (1833-1897)

Johannes Brahms was born on May 7, 1833 in Hamburg, Germany. Germany is the home of pretzels, castles, and super snazzy cars made by BMW, Porsche and Mercedes-Benz.

Johannes' father, a town musician, gave him his first music lessons. By the age of seven Johannes was studying with a local piano teacher and had created his own music notation system.

Johannes practiced hard and was soon giving concerts in Hamburg and playing the piano in restaurants and theaters to help support his family.

At the age of twenty, Brahms met two famous composers: Franz Liszt and Robert Schumann. Schumann was so impressed with Brahms' music that he wrote an article for a music journal that made Brahms famous.



In spite of the acclaim, Brahms never believed he could live up to the standards set by Ludwig van Beethoven. He kept trying though, and in 1868 Brahms wrote one of his greatest masterpieces - Opus 49, Number 4, which is also known as *Brahms' Lullaby*.

In the late 1850's Brahms established a women's choir in Hamburg for which he wrote music and conducted. Because Brahms was always composing, he neglected his appearance and arrived at rehearsals and concerts less than prepared. Sometimes he would forget to attach his suspenders, and have to hold his pants up while conducting, to keep them from falling down.

In 1878, still full of surprises, a typically clean-shaven Brahms grew a beard. In a letter to one of his conductor friends, he said: "I am coming with a large beard! Prepare your wife for a most awful sight."

In 1879 a violinist friend suggested that they tour Hungary to play music. At first Brahms didn't want to go because other musician friends only wanted to play



music and make money, but Brahms wanted to admire the scenery too. His friend told him they could make the tour a vacation. Eventually Brahms agreed.

When Brahms returned home from the tour he was thrilled to be recognized for his piano performances. He was also happy he discovered the folk songs of Hungary. These songs would soon inspire some of his greatest works, the most famous of which is his *Hungarian Dance No. 5*.

In 1889, a representative of American inventor Thomas Edison visited Brahms in Vienna and asked him to play the piano for Edison's newest invention - a recording machine. This historic performance is one of the earliest recordings ever made by a major composer.

The opportunities Brahms had to perform, write, and record music made him one of the greatest composers of all-time. He became so popular in fact, that he is now known as a member of the composers called the three Bs, which stands for Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.