

Sunday Matinee

BRAHMS' SYMPHONY NO. 4

Sunday, Mar. 29, 2026 @ 3 p.m.

Carl St.Clair, conductor
Pacific Symphony

BRAHMS

Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98

Allegro non troppo

Andante moderato

Allegro giocoso

Allegro energico e passionato

Performance at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts
Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall



ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

Carl St.Clair, Music Director Laureate



For more than 35 years, Carl St.Clair led Pacific Symphony, making him the longest-tenured American-born conductor of a major American orchestra. He was honored with the lifetime role of Music Director Laureate in December 2025 during the orchestra's 47th season, as well as inducted into

the Orange County Hall of Fame by the Orange County Board of Supervisors. Under his leadership, Pacific Symphony has grown into the largest-budgeted orchestra founded in the past half-century, recognized nationally for its artistic, innovative programming, and community impact. St.Clair also helped catalyze the vision to build a 2,000-seat Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in 2006, the Symphony's permanent home and one of the nation's finest concert venues.

St.Clair has guided the Symphony through many landmark achievements. In 2018, he led its sold-out Carnegie Hall debut celebrating Philip Glass's 80th birthday, which *The New York Times* praised as proof that Pacific Symphony is "a major ensemble!" That same year, he conducted the orchestra's first tour of China. Earlier, in 2006, he led the Symphony on its European debut, performing in nine cities across three countries, including Vienna, Munich, Cologne, and Lucerne, to capacity audiences and widespread acclaim. He also conducted the orchestra's national PBS debut on *Great Performances* with Peter Boyer's *Ellis Island: The Dream of America*. His artistic initiatives include the long-running American Composers Festival and Symphonic Voices, the orchestra's acclaimed opera-in-concert series.

A champion of new music, St.Clair has commissioned and premiered dozens of works. Recent highlights include the 2024–25 premieres of Viet Cuong's *Marine Layer* and Adolphus Hailstork's Piano Concerto No. 3 ("The Way Things Are"). In 2024, Pacific Symphony released the world-premiere recording of Sir James MacMillan's *Fiat Lux*. Other notable commissions include works by Philip Glass, Michael Daugherty, William Bolcom, Richard Danielpour, John Wineglass, and Elliot Goldenthal. His discography also includes collaborations with Yo-Yo Ma, Lukas Foss, and others.

Internationally, he was appointed Music Director of the Thailand Philharmonic Orchestra in 2025 and holds honorary posts with the National Symphony of Costa Rica and Germany's Sinfonieorchester Wuppertal. Earlier positions include General Music Director of Berlin's Komische Oper and of the German National Theater and Staatskapelle in Weimar.

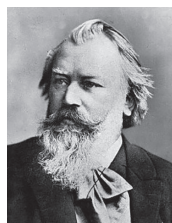
Equally committed to education, St.Clair has overseen the development of one of the country's most comprehensive orchestra-based education networks, reaching more than 50,000 participants annually. Pacific Symphony's award-winning Class Act program, arts-X-press, Youth Ensembles, Heartstrings, and *Symphony on the Go!* bring music to schools and communities across Southern California. He has also taught at Chapman University, the University of Texas, Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, and the USC Thornton School of Music, where he has served for more than three decades as Artistic Leader and Principal Conductor of orchestral programs.

Johannes Brahms

Born: May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany

Died: Apr. 3, 1897, in Vienna, Austria

Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Op. 98



Composed: 1884

Premiered: Oct. 25, 1885 in Meiningen, Germany, with the Meiningen Court Orchestra conducted by the composer.

Most recent Pacific Symphony performance: Oct. 23, 2022 in the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall with Carl St.Clair conducting.

Instrumentation: Two flutes including piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, three bassoons including contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion, and strings.

Approximate duration: 39 minutes.

Even after the success of his first three symphonies and in other forms, Brahms the symphonist never escaped the shadow of Beethoven. “You have no idea what it’s like to hear the footsteps of a giant like that behind you,” he said. When undertaking his symphonies, he isolated himself in the country. In the case of the Fourth, he went to Muerzzuschlag, a quaint resort town in the Styrian region of Austria—a place of trout fishing, hiking and mountain climbing, where the inner workings of sonata allegro form would be the last thing on most people’s minds. The year was 1885, and Brahms was 52: old enough to be thinking about his musical legacy. In his fourth symphony, many listeners hear his farewell to the symphonic form.

Brahms obfuscated to deflect attention from the composing process. He described the symphony as “a few entr’actes and polkas that I happened to have lying around,” rather like a fashionista who’s asked about her new dress and replies “what, this old thing?” (The reference to “entr’actes and polkas” is especially ironic coming from the brilliant technician whose mastery of flowing, integrated development is unexcelled among composers.) But his attitude can’t have been so relaxed or good-humored when, in a trial run-through with his friend Ignaz Bruell, he played a two-piano reduction for a group of close friends. These included the critics Eduard Hanslick and Max Kalbeck, the conductor Hans Richter, and Theodor Billroth, a surgeon and accomplished amateur musician. Their reception was glacial and their comments, with the benefit of hindsight, seem baffling. The next day, Kalbeck, a loyal supporter, suggested that the final movement’s form was inappropriate for a symphony; it is now considered one of the strongest elements in a symphony full of strengths. This movement encompasses the greatest emotional range of all Brahms’ symphonic finales, and it was greeted with tumultuous applause at most early performances.

Based on a Bach chorale, the finale answers an opening movement that is noble yet austere by comparison. The second movement is marked *andante moderato*, a walking tempo. Launched with a beautiful horn theme, it is suffused with a feeling of fond remembrance. The gait is relaxed, yet Brahms’ contemporaries correctly sensed a note of valediction in the music: His friend and former pupil Elisabeth von Herzogenberg compared it to a walk through an idealized landscape with a glowing sunset in the distance, and the young Richard Strauss was reminded of a moonlit funeral march. (Strauss himself would later excel at the musical evocation of moonlight.) As for the third movement, a joyful allegro giocoso, we defer to the famous phrase of the late Olin Downes: “Brahms as Old Bear’s Paws.” Here Brahms not only hews to the traditional scherzo form for a symphonic third movement, but executes it with an exuberance rare in his music—including an uncharacteristically liberal use of glittering percussion.

Michael Clive is a cultural reporter living in the Litchfield Hills of Connecticut. He is program annotator for Pacific Symphony and has written numerous articles for magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and U.K. and hundreds of program notes for orchestras and opera companies. Operahound.com