

Program Notes

What are they?

Program notes are a brief, written description of your piece and its place in history. (One-two paragraphs)

What information needs to be included?

Who: Who wrote the piece of music?

What: What is the name of the piece? Is it part of a larger work?

When: When was the piece written? Include the musical era in which it was written. Historically, how does this piece fit into the composer's life?

Where: Where was the music written?

Why: Was this piece written for a specific reason, such as a celebration? Did the composer have something specific in mind when this piece was conceived?

How: Are there specific musical elements to which the listener should pay attention? Are there any other important points with regard to theory or form that the listener needs to be aware of? For a vocal performer, if the song is in another language, a translation should be provided.

Some examples of program notes:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) composed his "Coronation Mass" for Easter of 1779 in Salzburg. The Archbishop demanded very brief musical settings whenever he was officiating at the mass. However, because this was for Easter, he also insisted that it include brass, woodwinds, and timpani. The result is a blissfully short, splendidly orchestrated "Solemn Mass". Like most of Mozart's compositions, the nickname for the mass was assigned by his publishers. The title "Coronation Mass" was likely given because of the work's prominent performance during the coronation of Francis I in Prague, 1792—one year after the composer's death. As in much of Mozart's sacred music, the "Coronation Mass" is filled with text painting, especially in the Credo. Listen for the descending lines in "descendit de coelis" (descended from heaven"), the forte dissonant chords during "crucifixus", and the joyful choral fanfare, "Et resurrexit tertia die" ("And he resurrected on the third day").

Although Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) intended for the *Liebeslieder Waltzes* to be performed by four solo voices and piano four-hands, it has long been a staple of the choral repertoire. Brahms was a master at composing very sophisticated, harmonically original music within the constraints of rather strict, self-imposed forms. The eighteen *Libeslieder Waltzes*, which are almost entirely in binary form—and are all, of course, in triple time—are amazingly complex in spite of the simple structure. Although the text (written by Brahm's contemporary, Georg Daumer) lacks the sophistication of the great German poems, it contains all of the dramatic elements Brahms needed for composing his masterpiece. From melancholy to romance to fury, Brahms's wonderful word-painting brings out every nuance in this emotionally charged poetry.