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## Composer Jörg Widmann And Pianist Yefim Bronfman March In Step With The BSO

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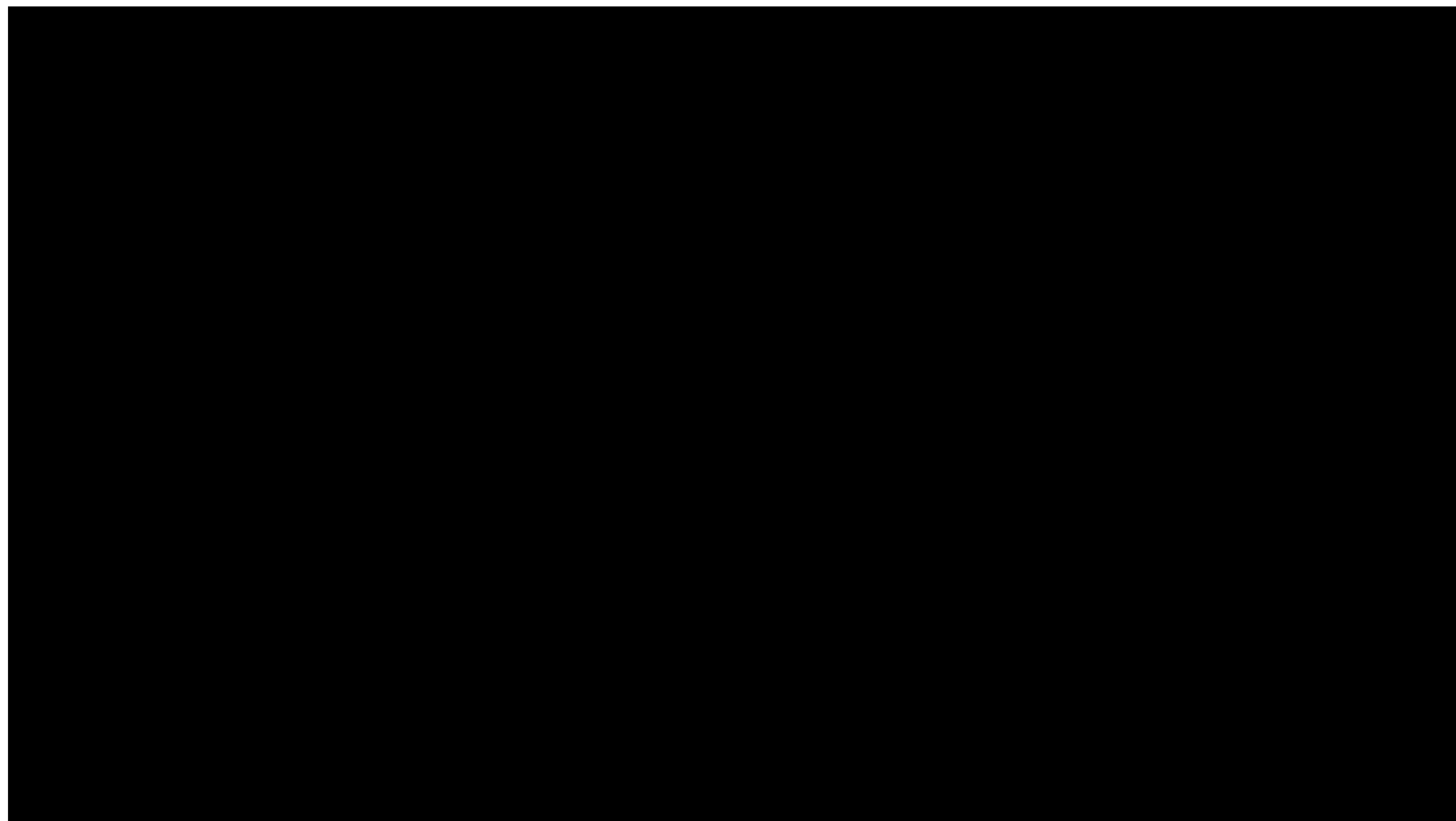
"He has the strength to fight the impact of the orchestra," composer Jörg Widmann says about pianist Yefim Bronfman. "It's a large orchestra, and it

comes over him like waves.”

Widmann is describing “Trauermarsch” (Funeral March), his one-movement piano concerto that he wrote for Bronfman. The pianist will perform the work this week with the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO), on a program that also includes Brahms’ “Ein Deutsches Requiem,” led by music director Andris Nelsons.

“Trauermarsch” was commissioned jointly by orchestras in Berlin, San Francisco and Toronto. Berlin premiered the work in 2014, under Simon Rattle. Then San Francisco gave “Trauermarsch” its North American premiere the next season.

“We’ve known each other for a long time, and performed sonatas together,” Widmann (also a clarinetist) says of Bronfman. “It makes a difference, if you know someone when you write a piece. You do it for the personality of the person. He has this incredible sensitivity of touch, and exceptional strength. That made it possible to create a certain orchestration.”



Widmann spoke on the phone from Berlin, sorry that he would not be coming to Boston for the performance. “I planned to come, but I have this oratorio for three choirs that I’m finishing. It’s for the new concert hall in Hamburg, and the deadline is coming up in January.

“When I was a child,” says Widmann, now 43, “I had this cassette that I eventually almost destroyed by playing it so much. It changed my musical life. It was the BSO, with [Seiji Ozawa](#), playing Mozart’s clarinet and bassoon concertos.”

Although the BSO will not be giving the premiere of “Trauermarsch,” Widmann’s work features prominently in the orchestra’s future. The BSO’s partnering relationship with the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig, where [Nelsons will assume music directorship](#) in 2017, will kick off with a joint commission by Widmann — the first of many such shared premieres. That work — “probably a symphonic piece,” the composer says, “but honestly I still don’t know yet” — will bear Nelsons’ stamp before it gets completed.

When I think about this collaboration,” Widmann says, “Andris is just the right person to do it. You can feel it, when he enters a room, or when he walks onstage. You can read his emotions. He’s always so clear, how he wants a phrase to go, how he wants to shape something. He will have some ideas about how he wants this piece to sound.”

“This exchange,” says Widmann about the Boston/Leipzig arrangement, “can be just the beginning. It’s important in the musical field, but also in this world. The musicians from Gewandhaus already value it, and I feel like it’s something that can make a real difference.”

Widmann and Nelsons have collaborated in the past — most notably, for the composer’s violin concerto in 2012. Nelsons conducted the Berlin Philharmonic in the piece — seen in this video, with soloist Christian Tetzlaff.



“Trauermarsch” is indeed based on a funeral march. But Widmann says, “I wanted to make the rhythm my own,” and it developed in a way that defied the composer’s preconceptions.

“I had in mind a traditional four-movement piece,” he explains. “I wanted to ask questions about the forms, to find out if they were still valid today. I had a short intro in march rhythm, and then it was going to move quickly into a fast first movement.

“But then I got more and more obsessed with the march. I couldn’t even sleep. It took months — I wrote and wrote and wrote — and in the end it turned out to be one continuous movement, as a funeral march.

“I wanted to write a different piece,” he says, almost apologetically. “You have these ideas when you start, and then you go off in another direction. It’s two different energies: am I right, or is the piece right? The piece creates its own logic, and in this case that was stronger.”



Yefim Bronfman (Courtesy Dario Acosta)

Widman's friendship with Bronfman runs deep, and the collaboration during the composition of "Trauermarsch" was strong.

"We talked about it before, and I felt like he trusted what I was doing," Widmann says. "He said, 'You just write it.' But of course when it was written, we went over it. He was in New York, and played the solo parts to me on Skype for an hour-and-a-half. He asked the right questions."

“Trauermarsch” pairs up during these BSO performances with Brahms’ “Ein Deutsches Requiem,” the first concert in the complete cycle of that composer’s orchestral works, which the BSO and Nelsons will give in October and November.


“We’re pairing these great Brahms works with contemporary pieces,” says Nelsons about the cycle, which will include both piano concertos, with soloist Hélène Grimaud, and all four symphonies. “I’m excited about the Widmann piece, and we’ve commission Eric Nathan and Timo Andres to write companion pieces as well.”

*The Boston Symphony Orchestra performs Jörg Widmann’s “Trauermarsch,” along with Brahms’ “Ein Deutsches Requiem,” Thursday through Saturday at Symphony Hall. For more information, visit the [BSO website](#).*

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