

# KEYBOARD KIDS COMPANION

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## MEET THE COMPOSERS JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born: May 7, 1833    Died: April 3, 1897

Johannes **Brahms**, who lived during the Romantic period, was born in **Hamburg**, Germany. His father was a musician, and his mother, a seamstress. Although they were poor, Johannes had a happy childhood. His sister Wilhelmine (called Elise) was two years older than he. His brother Friedrich was two years younger. All three were musically talented, but Johannes most of all. Johannes learned to play **cello**, piano, and French horn. He loved music, reading, and playing with tin soldiers. When he was a teenager, he had bright blue eyes, long blonde hair, and he was very slender. When Johannes grew up, he became very round and grew a long, bushy beard. He was sloppy, and he hated shopping for clothes. He often wore flannel shirts and old, baggy, patched pants that were too short. He constantly smoked cigars. He was engaged, but never married.



Johannes Brahms began playing the piano in bars to help support the family when he was only thirteen years old, and he started concert touring at fourteen. When he was twenty, he toured with the famous Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi. Brahms didn't take his music books on the tour—he had all of his parts memorized! At one concert, he performed on a very out-of-tune piano; he transposed the entire piano part of a violin sonata to a different key! Another famous violinist, Joseph Joachim, heard the concert and was so impressed that he helped Brahms meet Franz Liszt and Robert and Clara Schumann. Brahms also met other famous musicians, including Richard Wagner and Johann Strauss II.

Robert and Clara **Schumann** became his best friends. Brahms took piano lessons from Clara, and Robert wrote an article that helped to make Brahms famous. Brahms and Clara remained very close friends when Robert became ill and died. Brahms helped her with the children. Many people say that he was in love with Clara his whole life.

Brahms moved to **Vienna**. He woke up very early and loved working in the mornings. He enjoyed pubs, coffee houses, and long walks in the woods. He said that being outdoors helped him to think more clearly. Brahms spent many summers in the country.

In 1889, a representative of inventor Thomas **Edison** visited Vienna and invited Brahms to make an experimental recording (see *Famous Compositions*). The voice of Brahms can be heard, as well as his performance of his first *Hungarian Dance*. This is the first recording we have made by a major composer. He described the experience in a letter to Clara. He told her that he thought the invention was cool, but he didn't see any practical use for recording oneself. (It seems impossible today that Brahms didn't realize recording would become such a powerful study tool for musicians, a standard for entertainment, and so much more!)

Brahms wrote almost all kinds of music except opera. He is famous for his symphonies, piano music, the folk melodies he used (such as Hungarian dances), and his *Lullaby*. Brahms loved the music of Beethoven and Schubert, and he liked to write with their classical musical forms in mind rather than the looser modern music of his day. The music of Brahms is known for beautiful melodies and rich, thick harmonies, some unusual for the time. He said that his music was deeply influenced by Clara and once wrote, "By rights, I should have to inscribe all my best melodies, 'Really by Clara Schumann.'"

Brahms did not teach many students, but he taught Eugenie, Robert and Clara Schumann's daughter. He was also the teacher of Max **Steiner**, Oscar award-winning film score composer for famous movies including *Gone with the Wind*, the 1933 version of *King Kong*, and *A Summer Place*.



Brahms' grave in Vienna, Austria

Brahms died at age sixty-three in Vienna, only a few months after the death of his beloved Clara. He made lots of money and gave lots away, but he still died a wealthy man. He was given a place of honor next to the graves of the composers he admired most—Beethoven and Schubert. All the boats in Hamburg harbor lowered their flags to half-mast on the day that Brahms died—the last of "The Three Bs."

## SOME FAMOUS COMPOSITIONS BY JOHANNES BRAHMS

**Piano Concerto No. 1:** Leon Fleisher/New York Philharmonic Orchestra, Pierre Monteux conductor. [youtu.be/jdvJnhEFOHQ](https://youtu.be/jdvJnhEFOHQ)

**Hungarian Dance No. 1:** (Excerpt) performed by Brahms; recorded on Thomas Edison cylinder, 1889. Modern performance by Julian Katchen. [youtu.be/H31q7Qrjjo0](https://youtu.be/H31q7Qrjjo0)

**Intermezzo in B-flat Minor, Op. 117, No. 2:** performed by Vladimir Horowitz. [youtu.be/RooR3nsYWzw](https://youtu.be/RooR3nsYWzw)

**Symphony No. 1 in C Minor:** Vienna Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein conductor. [youtu.be/EGRqIGOAPcE](https://youtu.be/EGRqIGOAPcE)



## ALL ABOUT BRAHMS

Read about the life of Brahms on page one.  
The answers to this puzzle can be found in bold.

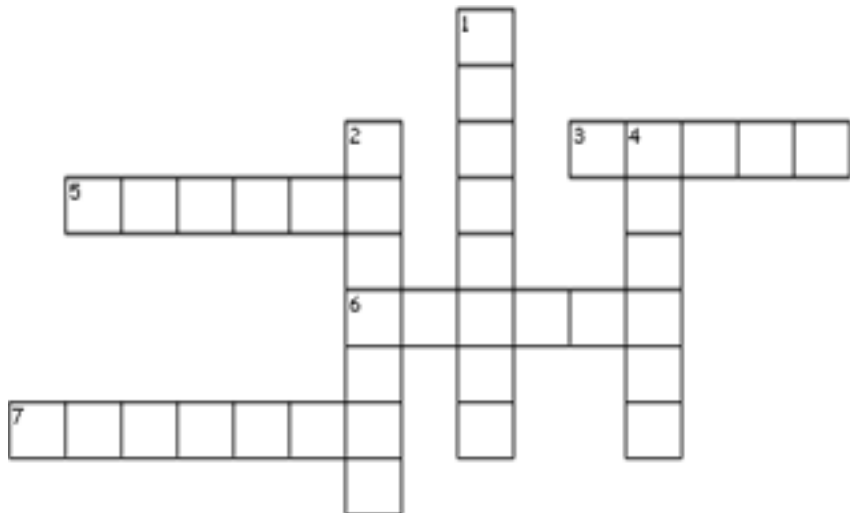


### Across

- Brahms played the \_\_\_\_\_, piano, and horn.
- He moved to, and died in \_\_\_\_\_, Austria.
- The three Bs: Bach, Beethoven, and \_\_\_\_\_.
- Oscar-winning Hollywood composer of music for 1933 version of *King Kong* and *Gone with the Wind*. Studied with Brahms.

### Down

- Best friends of Brahms: Robert and Clara \_\_\_\_\_.
- Brahms birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_, Germany.
- Invented device that recorded Brahms' voice and playing; Thomas \_\_\_\_\_.



## RECITAL TIME

Students everywhere are busy preparing for special spring performances. Whether you will perform live or online, these tips will help you perform your best. Unscramble the letters to fill in the blanks.

### GOOD REVIEW WORK INCLUDES:

Slow practice, each hand \_\_\_\_\_ loena

Eyes on the music! Double check all details, such as \_\_\_\_\_ amsciyn

Select and practice re-\_\_\_\_\_ spots to prepare for the unexpected in performance. tatsr

Rehearse in your performance \_\_\_\_\_ lohtecs

Try out your performance for family and friends to build \_\_\_\_\_ fidnoceen

Take a tip from sports coaches: Make \_\_\_\_\_ of your rehearsals. dercignso

(And don't forget to watch them!)

[Click here for the answers.](#)