



Greater Des Moines Botanical Garden
Friday, May 31, 2019

BRAHMS, String Quartet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 51

- I. Allegro
- II. Romanze
- III. Allegretto molto - Un poco più animato
- IV. Allegro

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was a composer of the Romantic era who composed a total of three string quartets. String Quartet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 51 dates back to 1873, and was among the first string quartets Brahms published, although far from the first he had ever written. Brahms often felt the pressure of following in the footsteps of Beethoven, one of the greatest composers of his generation. Due to this pressure, Brahms didn't publish a symphony or string quartet until he was forty years old.

The works of Brahms feature full, rich textures, which can be found in his first string quartet. Brahms wanted the string quartet to mimic the sound of a symphony, so he used the key of C minor which stretches the range of the string quartet, as C is the lowest string on the cello.

The first movement of the piece is restless and intense, with rapid eighth note patterns moving throughout the instruments. The movement modulates to E Major, and eventually ends on a C Major chord, although the resolution doesn't seem quite complete. The second movement spends much of its time in A-flat Major and is much slower and calmer. The movement is largely homophonic at the beginning and end, with all of the instruments moving together rhythmically. The third movement stays primarily in C minor and brings back the restless rhythmic variations characteristic of the first movement. The trio in the middle offers a much lighter and happier feel, but quickly goes back to the somber tone of the rest of the movement. The final movement mimics some of the motifs in the first movement, and is polyphonic in nature, with each instrument playing their own melodic lines.