



# BRAHMS

*Hungarian Dances*

Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker  
Fabio Bidini



DE 3558



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# JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897) HUNGARIAN DANCES

*Arranged by Joseph Joachim (1831-1907)*

Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker  
*violin*

Fabio Bidini  
*piano*

- No. 1 in G Minor: Allegro molto
- No. 2 in D Minor: Allegro assai
- No. 3 in F Major: Allegretto
- No. 4 in B Minor: Poco sostenuto
- No. 5 in G Minor: Allegro
- No. 6 in B-flat Major: Vivace
- No. 7 in A Major: Allegretto
- No. 8 in A Minor: Presto
- No. 9 in E Minor: Allegro non troppo
- No. 10 in G Major: Presto
- No. 11 in D Minor: Poco andante
- No. 12 in D Minor: Presto
- No. 13 in D Major: Andante grazioso
- No. 14 in D Minor: Un poco andante
- No. 15 in A Major: Allegretto grazioso
- No. 16 in G Minor: Con moto
- No. 17 in F-sharp Minor: Andantino
- No. 18 in D Major: Molto vivace
- No. 19 in A Minor: Allegretto
- No. 20 in D Minor: Poco allegretto
- No. 21 in E Minor: Vivace

Total Playing Time: 60:14



# JOHANNES BRAHMS 21 HUNGARIAN DANCES

*Arranged by Joseph Joachim (1831-1907)*

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|-----|---|--------|
| 01. | <b>No. 1 in G Minor: Allegro molto</b>        | (3:34) |
| 02. | <b>No. 2 in D Minor: Allegro assai</b>        | (3:42) |
| 03. | <b>No. 3 in F Major: Allegretto</b>           | (2:55) |
| 04. | <b>No. 4 in B Minor: Poco sostenuto</b>       | (4:47) |
| 05. | <b>No. 5 in G Minor: Allegro</b>              | (2:39) |
| 06. | <b>No. 6 in B-flat Major: Vivace</b>          | (3:36) |
| 07. | <b>No. 7 in A Major: Allegretto</b>           | (2:19) |
| 08. | <b>No. 8 in A Minor: Presto</b>               | (3:13) |
| 09. | <b>No. 9 in E Minor: Allegro non troppo</b>   | (2:48) |
| 10. | <b>No. 10 in G Major: Presto</b>              | (1:51) |
| 11. | <b>No. 11 in D Minor: Poco andante</b>        | (3:03) |
| 12. | <b>No. 12 in D Minor: Presto</b>              | (2:57) |
| 13. | <b>No. 13 in D Major: Andante grazioso</b>    | (1:53) |
| 14. | <b>No. 14 in D Minor: Un poco andante</b>     | (2:31) |
| 15. | <b>No. 15 in A Major: Allegretto grazioso</b> | (2:58) |
| 16. | <b>No. 16 in G Minor: Con moto</b>            | (3:03) |
| 17. | <b>No. 17 in F-sharp Minor: Andantino</b>     | (3:32) |
| 18. | <b>No. 18 in D Major: Molto vivace</b>        | (1:29) |
| 19. | <b>No. 19 in A Minor: Allegretto</b>          | (2:16) |
| 20. | <b>No. 20 in D Minor: Poco allegretto</b>     | (2:48) |
| 21. | <b>No. 21 in E Minor: Vivace</b>              | (1:36) |

Total Playing Time: 60:14

**Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker**, *violin* — **Fabio Bidini**, *piano*

Brahms and Joachim



Who actually wrote Johannes Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*? What may sound like a joke at first, is not that easy to answer. The first two books, each containing five dances (Nos. 1–5 and 6–10), were published in 1869 and carry the title "Ungarische Tänze für das Pianoforte zu 4 Händen gesetzt von Johannes Brahms" (Hungarian Dances for piano four hands, set by Johannes Brahms). The same wording was used for books 3 (Nos. 11–16) and 4 (Nos. 17–21), which were printed in 1880. However, the German term "setzen" is ambiguous when used in a musical context: It can mean either "composed" or "arranged." And, since people are often jealous of success, Brahms was frequently accused of intentionally phrasing his titles ambiguously to imply that the intellectual property of others was actually his own.

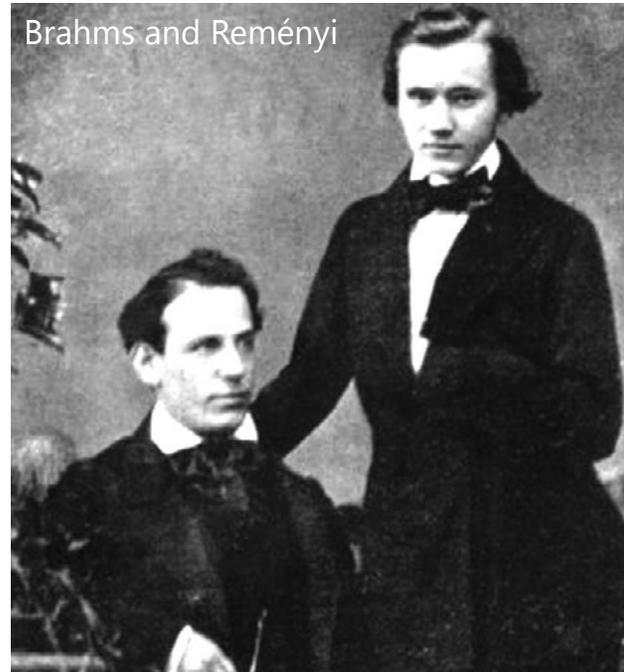
Brahms is somewhat to blame for the misunderstanding—after all, he did fail to name his sources. However, Brahms was always very honest about the fact that almost all of these dances were arrangements of existing melodies. Only the eleven pieces published in 1880 included some that he had composed himself. It is still unclear which of these pieces are indeed his own compositions, but Brahms' friend Joseph Joachim wrote in 1897 that,

in his opinion, numbers 11, 14, and 16 were "pure Brahms."

If most of the Hungarian Dances can only be attributed to Brahms as arrangements with the addition of harmonies and accompanying figures, then where did the melodies come from? One might think that they must be Hungarian folk tunes but, at best, this answer is imprecise. Not until the twentieth century did the studies of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály make it clear that anonymously transmitted Hungarian folk music is very different from the music of the Roma ("Gypsies") that Brahms used in his arrangements. While in the late nineteenth century the two styles were almost synonymous, in reality the *verbunkos* or *csárdás* repertoire of professional Gypsy orchestras had very different sources—country folk music, urban hits, the art music of renowned composers, and the personal compositions of orchestra instrumentalists. Musicologists now attribute the melodies used by Brahms to musicians such as Béla Keler, József Rizner, N. Mértly, or Béla Sárközy. But whether these musicians were the original creators or, like Brahms, they had merely discovered and transformed commonly known melodies, is hard for us to discern today. Brahms certainly appropriated the music of the Hungarian Gypsies. Like many

composers of his time, he was fascinated by the Gypsies' virtuosic and passionate style of presentation, the unusual harmonies and extravagant embellishments, the abrupt changes between slow and fast sections—between deep sorrow and wild exuberance. Brahms had become familiar with Gypsy melodies during his youth in Hamburg. He heard the tunes played by Hungarian musicians who had fled from their country after the failed revolution of 1848, among them violinist Eduard Reményi. Brahms and Reményi toured together in 1852 and 1853. Later, however, after the success of the *Hungarian Dances*, Reményi became one of the first to make the absurd claim that Brahms was guilty of plagiarism. But Reményi also made a positive contribution: He introduced Brahms to the famous violinist Joseph Joachim. This was the start of a lifelong and, artistically speaking, very fruitful friendship. It inspired both Brahms' Violin Concerto and his Double Concerto (written for Joachim and the cellist Robert Hausmann), as well as Joachim's violin arrangement of the *Hungarian Dances*.

Yet many years passed before the original four-hand piano version of the *Hungarian Dances* would be published. In 1867 Brahms, still relatively unknown, asked the Hungarian publisher J. N. Dunkl to publish a few of the dances at a very low price.



Dunkl refused, something he later deeply regretted. "I would have four palaces now if I hadn't been so foolish back then," he is supposed to have said. Brahms' main publisher, Fritz Simrock, was shrewder: In 1869, he paid 80 *Friedrich d'or* for each book as a one-off payment—and made a small fortune with the dances. In order to generate even more revenue, he commissioned arrangements that were as easy as possible to learn, and therefore easier to sell, for every conceivable combination of instruments—including for flute and piano, two violins and piano, piano six hands, and wind orchestra. Brahms wrote his own version for solo piano in 1872, and

arranged three dances for orchestra the following year.

Of all of these versions, however, only the one arranged for violin and piano by Joseph Joachim in 1871 (books 1 and 2) and 1880 (books 3 and 4) gained importance. As a close friend, Joachim was very familiar with Brahms' views, and, as a virtuoso violinist, he was just as familiar with his own instrument. He was also an experienced composer. Brahms valued his advice highly and regretted that Joachim's composing later became secondary to his other activities as a violinist, quartet player, conductor, teacher, and organizer (for example, as the founder of the Berlin Music Academy, known today as the Universität der Künste Berlin). Joachim's Violin Concerto No. 2 written "in Gypsy style" is proof that Joachim was also very familiar with the Hungarian–Gypsy idiom. Born in Kittsee, a town in the Austrian Burgenland then belonging to the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Empire, Joachim was understandably familiar with this style from early childhood. There was also, almost certainly, another reason for Brahms' enthusiastic reception of Joachim's duo version of the Hungarian Dances: The violin is rightfully considered to be the ultimate Gypsy instrument, and Brahms likely heard most of the themes for his arrangements of the Hungarian Dances initially played by violinists. Joachim's approach is thus a kind of

re-transcription of the dances to their original and most idiomatic version of an instrumental ensemble: the violin and piano duo.

—Jürgen Ostmann

Hamburg-born **Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker** is one of today's most renowned German violinists. Joachim Kaiser, the legendary music critic, described her playing as "beguiling" in its powerful blend of reserve and bravura, of tender restraint and intoxicating spirit and esteemed it as "luck" that coincidence had allowed him to become acquainted with Sabrina-Vivian, whose three CDs in their "vitality, intensity and quality," moved his heart. Concert critics admire her innate talent for musical phrasing and Maestro Abbado, former chairman of the jury of the International Abbado Violin Competition, said of her playing: "Her musicality is enchanting, her tone is superb, her technique is incredible, her virtuosity extraordinary. Brava, Super Brava, Bravissima!"

Similarly, the world's leading string music magazine, *The Strad*, was not only enthusiastic about "magical" moments, "tonal elegance . . . admirable technique . . . fire and temperament" on her CDs featuring violin sonatas by Richard Strauss and Sergei Prokofiev, the Scottish Fantasy by Max Bruch and Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, but was thrilled by the "impeccable

intonation . . . honeyed tone . . . mercurial dexterity . . . speed and precision" of her CD *Habanera*, "a program of fireworks and sweetmeats to showcase Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker's technical brilliance. The gifted young German violinist's silky virtuosity makes light of the hair-raising difficulties the music presents." Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker was honored with the Alois-Kottman-Prize in Gold in collaboration with the city of Frankfurt am Main for this recording.

In addition Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker has won first prizes at many national and international violin competitions, most recently at the International Abbado Violin Competition in Milan. She also holds the Hofheim am Taunus Bach Award and the Paolo Borciani Prize for chamber music.

Her collaborations with Max Rostal, Isaac Stern, Yehudi Menuhin, Giuliano Carmignola, Zubin Mehta, and Plácido Domingo have given her valuable inspiration and artistic stimulation.

As a soloist Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker has worked with ensembles such as the Bavarian State Orchestra and with conductors like Zubin Mehta, who characterized her as an "excellent violinist with a huge musicality." Along with appearances at major concert venues such as the Philharmonic Hall at Munich's Gasteig and the Bavarian State

Opera there, the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam, Embassy Theatre in Fort Wayne, USA, Auditoric Nacional in Madrid, Palau de la Música in Barcelona, Théâtre du Palais de l'Europe in Menton and Sala Piatti and Greppi in Bergamo. Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker has performed as a soloist at the Tuscan Sun Festival in Cortona, the Braunschweiger Classix Festival and in concert series such as "Winners and Masters" in Munich, and "Los Nuevos Solistas" in Madrid. Her live performances on TV and on the radio have also been exciting audiences all over the world.

Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker derives particular artistic satisfaction from chamber music and devotes herself to it with a special fervor. In addition to giving concerts with partners such as Fabio Bidini, Johannes Moser and Wolfgang Emanuel Schmidt, she has made several successful chamber music recordings. As a founding member of the Trio Mozart piano trio, Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker has recorded with SONY España and Anfión—productions that were enthusiastically received. She and Fabio Bidini are enjoying an extensive collaboration following the release of several internationally acclaimed recordings.

For more information please see:  
[www.sabrinavivianhoepcker.com](http://www.sabrinavivianhoepcker.com)



**Fabio Bidini** is recognized today as one of the most important pianists and pedagogues. Bernard Holland of *The New York Times* stated: "He is capable of an admirable simplicity . . . truly touching."

At age five he received his first piano lessons and, a half year later, he gave his first public performance. In the following years he won eleven of the most important Italian piano competitions. He graduated *magna cum laude* from the Conservatorio Santa Cecilia in Rome and was one of the youngest graduates ever from that institution. Pianists Orazio Frugoni and Maria Tipo made significant contributions to

his artistic development. After winning top prizes in the Busoni and Van Cliburn International Piano Competitions, doors opened to an international career.

Fabio Bidini's performances combine technical wizardry with poetic lyricism. He made his London debut at the Barbican Center with the London Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Michael Tilson Thomas. Shortly after, he performed at the United Nations as a soloist with the BBC Orchestra Wales and had his highly acclaimed North American debut with the Atlanta Symphony under Yoel Levi.

Since then Fabio Bidini has been a frequent guest of the most prominent orchestras worldwide, including the San Francisco Symphony, Budapest Festival Orchestra, and the Philharmonia Orchestra of London. He has performed in the world's most famous concert halls including Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Royal Festival Hall, Davies Symphony Hall, and the Gewandhaus in Leipzig. He has also collaborated with such leading conductors as Ivan Fischer, Andrey Boreyko, Zoltan Kocsis, Eri Klas, JoAnn Falletta, Barry Wordsworth, Jesus Lopez Cobos, Louis Lane, and Tadaaki Otaka.

Fabio Bidini has repeatedly performed at the most prestigious festivals worldwide,

including the Tuscan Sun Festival Cortona/Napa, Stern Grove Festival, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli International Piano Festival, and the Grant Park Festival.

Also in great demand as a chamber-music partner, Fabio Bidini is the pianist of the highly acclaimed ensemble Trio Solisti, and has enjoyed artistic collaboration with many other ensembles and artists, including the American String Quartet, the Janacek Quartet, the Brodsky Quartet, Zoltan Kocsis, Clive Greensmith, Paul Coletti, Nikolaj Znaider, and Martin Beaver. He is enjoying a continuing partnership with Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker. Mr. Bidini's discography includes fifteen CDs on the Warner, BMG, and Naxos labels, among others. This is his first recording for Delos.

In 2015 Fabio Bidini became the first recipient of the Carol Grigor Piano Chair—a newly endowed position at the Colburn School in Los Angeles. He has been Professor of Piano at the Universität der Künste in Berlin, and at Berlin's Hochschule für Musik. He is also Artist-in-Residence at the Hochschule für Music und Tanz in Köln. He is an official Steinway Artist.

For more information please see  
[www.colburnschool.edu/  
faculty-listing/fabio-bidini](http://www.colburnschool.edu/faculty-listing/fabio-bidini)

### ***Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker and Fabio Bidini on their Interpretation of the Hungarian Dances***

#### ***Intoxicating Joie de Vivre, Deep Melancholy.***

*In Joseph Joachim's version for violin and piano, Johannes Brahms' Hungarian Dances are true "food for virtuosi." Nonetheless, how do you explain the fact that these twenty-one pieces are so seldom played in their entirety?*

*SVH:* When he was transcribing the dances, Joachim stayed as faithful as possible to his friend Brahms' original four-hand piano version. That led to a very dense composition and many passages which are rather atypical, hence uncomfortable, for the violin. Not conventional food for virtuosi! From a violinistic point of view, some of the unorthodox double-stops are extremely demanding, as are the challenging octaves and tenths in all positions, expressive passages in the highest registers of the violin, and, last but not least, the original tempos that also need to be respected in the violin version. They are highly virtuosic compositions, but the technique should always stay in the background for the audience. The wonderful music itself, along with its intoxicating *joie de vivre* and sometimes even deep melan-

choly must be at the forefront all the time. Despite the extreme technical demands required to play the *Hungarian Dances*, their infinite inner musical cosmos makes them absolutely unsuitable for a mere superficial display of virtuosic showmanship. That may be the reason why these masterful miniatures are largely ignored compared to pieces that are common “food for virtuosi.”

*The melodic aspect is found mostly in the violin part in Joachim’s transcription—the piano provides accompaniment most of the time or, at most, plays a counter melody. What is the appeal for pianists?*

*FB:* I think it’s in the music itself. Since I was a small child, I loved the original version of the *Hungarian Dances* for piano four-hands and played them often. The transcription for violin and piano was a real surprise for me. I think the dances sound ideal in this version because like this they are much closer to the traditional Hungarian folk music. From a technical perspective, Joachim’s piano arrangement may not be particularly demanding, but it establishes the harmonic foundation. The piano is also decisively important for the dance character and the rhythmic aspect. Details such as the length of certain notes and the phrasing or articulation requested by Joachim correspond to special instru-

mental tone colors, for example the Hungarian cimbalom. So I do feel responsible for the character of every single dance.

*What demands do Brahms’/Joachim’s dances pose for the ensemble? For example, is the coordination of rubato and the frequent change in tempo a particular challenge?*

*FB:* The most important requirement for an ideal duo is generally that both musicians have a corresponding concept of the pieces. The feeling of the basic tempo should match and both should sense the same rubato. The two musicians must express the character of the music in the same way. If a detail is missing, the ensemble suffers. The music is relatively free, despite its strictly defined style. Sabrina and I feel the *Hungarian Dances* as if we are a single person—our musical collaboration in this great repertoire was very easy and a pure delight!

*Are there any dances that you would like to highlight, which are either exceptions or particularly typical?*

*SVH:* I believe the dances that we hear most often, like Numbers one and five, are particularly typical. But maybe the dances that are played less often could be the more fascinating ones? You cannot stay in

your seat while listening to any of these dances! They stir you to move with the music! But each of the twenty-one dances has its very own individual character—they are all diamonds in the rough, you could say. It was a matter very dear to our hearts to discover each single dance in its own uniqueness and to polish it until all

of its splendid facets would shine brightly! Should you be asked which of the dances you like best, it would be impossible to give an answer. Each one holds its own special magic. You would just want to listen to them from the beginning to the end—again and again!

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Particular thanks to Gabriele and Heinz Holert, who have closely accompanied the development of this recording. Without their generous help this project could not have been realized.

Recorded December 10–14, 2017 at a private venue in Hamburg

Producer/engineer: Valter Neri

Program notes: Jürgen Ostmann

English translation of notes: tolingo

Violin: Carlo Landolfi, 1742

Violin bow: C. Hans-Karl Schmidt

Piano: Hamburg Steinway Model D

Booklet editing and proofing: Lindsay Koob, Anne Maley, and David Brin

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(707) 996-3844 • (800) 364-0645

contactus@delosmusic.com • www.delosmusic.com

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