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da Camera

IAN HOBSON
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Love Triangle



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Sinfonia da Camera appears under the auspices of the
Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and the College of
Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois.

42nd Season 2025/26

Saturday • October 18 • 2025

Foellinger Great Hall

SINFONIA DA CAMERA CONCERT SERIES



LOVE TRIANGLE

Saturday, October 18, 7:30pm

A program exploring the musical connections of Clara and Robert Schumann with Johannes Brahms. **Schumann's Piano Concerto in A Minor** and **Brahms' Symphony No. 1** anchor the evening, with Ian Hobson as soloist and conductor.



GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY: BENEFIT CONCERT

Wednesday, November 12, 7:30pm

A special 50th-anniversary solo piano recital **celebrating Ian Hobson's debut in Urbana**. Presented as a benefit for Sinfonia da Camera, the program weaves personal history with virtuosic homage to musical legacy.



WINTER FANTASIA

Saturday, December 13, 7:00pm - tickets at thevirginia.org

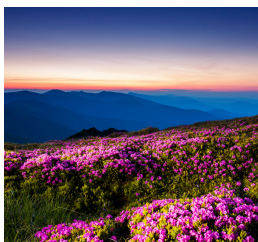
A festive seasonal concert at **Virginia Theatre** with violinist **Andrés Cárdenes** performing **Vivaldi's Winter** from **The Four Seasons** and **Piazzolla's Four Seasons of Buenos Aires**, alongside **Mozart's Horn Concerto No. 4**, **Vaughan Williams' Fantasia on Greensleeves**, and more!



RACH 3

Saturday, February 28, 7:30pm

An all-Rachmaninoff program featuring the **Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor** and **Symphony No. 3 in A minor**, showcasing the composer's sweeping emotional range and enduring genius. Maestro Ian Hobson performs as both soloist and conductor.



AMERICAN SPRING

Saturday, April 18, 7:30pm

A season finale celebrating the richness of American music, from **Copland's pastoral Appalachian Spring** to **Gershwin's exuberant An American in Paris**. The program features **Lowell Liebermann's new Concerto for Alto Saxophone** with **Kenneth Tse** as soloist, and **Don Gillis' playful Symphony No. 5½**.

TICKETS



Tickets may be purchased at KrannertCenter.com, or through the Ticket Office at 217.333.6280 or kran-tix@illinois.edu.

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42nd Season 2025-26

Love Triangle

Foellinger Great Hall | Krannert Center for the Performing Arts
Saturday, October 18, 2025 | 7:30p.m.

Ian Hobson, music director, conductor, piano

Variations on a Theme of Schumann, Op. 23

JOHANNES BRAHMS
(1833-1897)
orchestrated by
ROBIN HOLLOWAY (b. 1943)

Brief Pause

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

ROBERT SCHUMANN
(1810-1856)

- I. Allegro affettuoso*
- II. Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso*
- III. Allegro vivace*

Ian Hobson, piano

Intermission

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68

JOHANNES BRAHMS
(1833-1897)

- I. Un poco sostenuto — Allegro — Meno allegro*
- II. Andante sostenuto*
- III. Un poco allegretto e grazioso*
- IV. Adagio — Più andante — Allegro non troppo, ma con brio — Più allegro*

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Meet the Music Director



Pianist and conductor **Ian Hobson** (Music Director) - called “powerful and persuasive” by The New York Times - is internationally recognized for his command of an extraordinarily comprehensive repertoire, his consummate performances of the Romantic masters, his deft and idiomatic readings of neglected piano music old and new, and his assured conducting from both the piano and the podium.

In addition to being a celebrated performer, Mr. Hobson is a dedicated scholar and educator who has pioneered renewed

interest in music of such lesser-known masters as Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Hummel. He has also been an effective advocate of works written expressly for him by a number of today’s noted composers, including Benjamin Lees, John Gardner, David Liptak, Alan Ridout, and Yehudi Wyner.

In addition to his work with Sinfonia and at the University of Illinois (Swanlund Emeritus Professor), recital and teaching engagements this season take Mr. Hobson throughout the United States and several times to South Korea. Mr. Hobson conducted at Carnegie Mellon University in January 2018.

As guest soloist, Dr. Hobson has appeared with many of the world’s major orchestras; in the United States these include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and The Philadelphia Orchestra, the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Florida, Houston, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, St. Louis and the American Symphony Orchestra, the Orquestra Sinfónica de Puerto Rico. Abroad, he has been heard with Great Britain’s Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, The London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, ORF-Vienna, Orchester de Beethovenhalle, Moscow Chopin Orchestra, Israeli Sinfonietta, and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Since his debut in the double role of Conductor and soloist with the Stuttgart

Chamber Orchestra in 1996, Maestro Hobson has been invited to lead the English Chamber Orchestra, the Sinfonia Varsovia (including an appearance at Carnegie Hall), the Pomeranian Philharmonic (Poland), the Fort Worth Chamber Orchestra (Bass Hall), and the Kibbutz Chamber Orchestra of Israel, among others.

Mr. Hobson is also a much sought-after judge for national and international competitions and has been invited to join numerous juries, among them the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (at the specific request of Mr. Cliburn), the Arthur Rubinstein Competition in Poland, the Chopin Competition in Florida, the Leeds Piano Competition in the U.K., and the Schumann International Competition in Germany. In 2005 Hobson served as Chairman of the Jury for the Cleveland International Competition and the Kosciuzsko Competition in New York; in 2008 he was Chairman of Jury of the New York Piano Competition; and in 2010 he again served in that capacity of the newly renamed New York International Piano Competition.

One of the youngest ever graduates of the Royal Academy of Music, Mr. Hobson began his international career in 1981 when he won First Prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, after having earned silver medals at both the Arthur Rubinstein and Vienna-Beethoven competitions. Born in Wolverhampton, England, he studied at Cambridge University (England), and at Yale University, in addition to his earlier studies at the Royal Academy of Music. A professor in the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois, Hobson received the endowed chair of Swanlund Professor of Music in 2000.



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Notes on the Program

Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 23

Johannes Brahms, orchestrated by Robin Holloway
(Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg; died April 3, 1897, in Vienna)

These variations are Brahms's first publication of an original work for piano duet. Earlier, he had composed a set of variations for piano solo (*Op. 9*). This work, *Op. 23*, has a very strong personal meaning for Brahms in many ways. He chose the "last musical thought" that Schumann had sketched in February 1854, alleging that the melody had been dictated to him by angels or the spirits of Mendelssohn and Schubert. What he did not realize was that this theme was very much like one in the slow movement of his own Violin Concerto. Schumann began to compose the variations on the theme just before his jump into the Rhine River on February 27 and finished the fifth variation the day after he was rescued. His variations did not become known until they were published in 1939, when they became identified as the *Geistervariationen* ("Ghost Variations"). Brahms's work, the *Variations on Schumann's Theme*, however, was published almost a century earlier.

Clara Schumann, Robert's wife and herself an accomplished professional pianist, felt that her husband's theme was holy. When Brahms, Clara's close friend, decided that he wanted to use the theme for a set of variations, she was reluctant because of the stigma she felt was associated with Robert's last years; she made Brahms promise not to reveal when the theme had been composed. When Brahms published Schumann's original piano theme, he did not include the five variations that Schumann had completed but instead composed his own piano variations for four hands. Each of Brahms's variations is quite independent, and Schumann's theme itself is abandoned in the second variation, although Brahms retained the structure and harmony that Schumann had used. Schumann's theme only recurs again in the coda, and the piece ends in meditative calm.

Brahms changed the key and the meter of Schumann's theme and, it would seem, wrote the set as both a celebration of and a farewell to his friend. He did not give it a funereal or melancholy feel and dedicated it to Schumann's daughter, Julie, who was then eighteen. It has been speculated that Brahms had a romantic interest in her, which became stronger over the next few years, but he never spoke of his feelings to

Julie or betrayed them to Clara. Julie married an Italian nobleman in 1869.

According to Malcolm MacDonald, in his biography of Brahms, the *Op. 23* Variations do not have “the exploratory pianism and the almost painful intimacy of expression” that the *Op. 9* Variations for solo piano had. MacDonald noticed elements of keyboard color that evoke orchestral sonorities—and more recently, no doubt Robin Holloway, an English composer, academic, and writer, did too. Holloway has recently orchestrated the work.

The orchestration includes two flutes (the second doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons (the second doubling contrabassoon), four horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in A minor, Op. 54

Robert Schumann

(Born June 8, 1810, in Zwickau, Germany; died July 29, 1856, in Endenich, near Bonn)

Robert Schumann, a German Romantic composer, took piano lessons as a young child and began composing when he was eleven. He initially hoped for a career as a pianist, but due to a hand injury turned instead to composing, conducting, and editing an important musical journal that he founded. In 1840, he married Clara Wieck, his piano teacher’s daughter—an accomplished pianist and one of the first women to achieve prominence as a composer.

Before their marriage, Clara asked Schumann to compose something brilliant for her to perform. Six months after they were married, Schumann complied, writing a one-movement *Fantasy for Piano and Orchestra*. Clara loved it, but publishers persuaded them that there would be little general interest in a one-movement work. What especially captivated Clara was that in the *Fantasy*, “the piano is interwoven with the orchestra in the most delicate way—one can’t imagine the one without the other.” In response to the publishers’ comments, in 1845 Robert composed an *Intermezzo* and *Finale* to accompany the *Fantasy*. Fusing these works together, he created the three-movement *Piano Concerto in A Minor*. Clara premiered it in Dresden on December 4, 1845. The public did not immediately favor it, but within ten years the concerto was widely accepted. By then, unfortunately, Schumann had died.

Unlike the concertos of Mozart and Beethoven, Schumann’s does not treat the orchestra and the soloist as independent elements but instead

joins them into a single, integrated body, resulting in a new texture. The first movement—the original *Fantasy, Allegro affettuoso*—begins dramatically with resounding chords before the introduction of a wistful oboe melody that becomes the main theme of the entire concerto. Almost every thematic element of the work can be traced back to this melody, and this opening, with its apparent simplicity, conceals extraordinary energy. The movement also displays a distinctive Schumannesque quality: in mercurial fashion, it incorporates rapid mood changes. A solo cadenza, which Michael Steinberg described as “part recitative, part a Robert Schumann translation of Bachian polyphony, part flying chords that even ... Liszt would have had to practice hard,” follows, and the march-like coda brings the movement to a forceful conclusion.

The gracious and lyrical *Intermezzo (Andantino grazioso)* contrasts with the first movement, particularly in its more intimate scale. It encloses a passionate, melodic string passage between quiet dialogues of piano and orchestra that both introduce and conclude the movement. Schumann provides an improvisational passage that flows directly into the joyous and energetic finale, *Allegro vivace*, a movement full of spirited syncopations.

The concerto is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings.

Symphony No. 1, in C minor, Op. 68

Johannes Brahms

(Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg; died April 3, 1897, in Vienna)

Twenty-two years before Brahms completed his *Symphony No. 1*, he began thinking about composing a symphonic work when his friend and fellow composer Robert Schumann, in a review of the young Brahms's music, publicly compared him to Beethoven. Eight years later—though he would not complete the symphony for another fourteen years—Brahms began working on what would eventually become his *First Symphony*. His colleagues, especially Schumann, awaited the work eagerly, but their anticipation did not hasten Brahms. “Composing a symphony is no laughing matter,” he once said, and at another time remarked, “I shall never finish a symphony. You have no idea how it feels to hear behind you the tramp of a giant like Beethoven.”

In 1862, Brahms sent Clara Schumann, Robert's wife, a sketch of a first movement—minus its introduction—that would evolve into the *Symphony No. 1*. A few years later, in 1868, he sent Clara a birthday song that later became the horn theme in the symphony's finale. Even though the awe

Beethoven inspired in him was formidable, Brahms understood what he needed to do to follow in his predecessor's footsteps in an acceptable way. Like Beethoven, he sought to synthesize and balance the Classical and Romantic elements in music.

In 1876, when Brahms was forty-three years old, he was offered the position of music director in Düsseldorf. When he tentatively decided to leave Vienna to go there, he wrote to a friend, "I have arrived at the decision to come out with a symphony. ... I just think I ought to offer the Viennese something presentable by way of farewell." He ultimately decided against leaving Vienna, but he did finally allow his first symphony to be performed. The première took place on November 4, 1876, at the Grand Ducal Theater in Karlsruhe. Because he trusted the conductor and admired the orchestra of that small city, Brahms refused other offers to present the symphony elsewhere. Soon afterward, however, he conducted it himself in Mannheim, Munich, and Vienna. At early performances, audiences were puzzled by the work's combination of formal rigor and expansive expression, but it eventually became one of the most beloved symphonies in the repertory.

The symphony opens with a broad introduction, *Un poco sostenuto*, that leads into the vigorous main section of the first movement, *Allegro*. At the outset, Brahms gives the violins a striking ascending figure (by half-steps: C, C-sharp, D), which reappears at many points throughout the movement. The violins announce the first theme, while the woodwinds introduce the second. The music is austere and restless, imbued with a brooding melancholy. The lovely second movement, *Andante sostenuto*, is lyrical and serene but restrained. Two expressive oboe solos are particularly noteworthy. The coda is unusual—a solo for horn with a violin obbligato that culminates in a tender reprise of the chromatic motive heard at the symphony's opening.

Instead of a scherzo like Beethoven's or a minuet like Haydn's, Brahms composed a brief, lighthearted intermezzo, *Un poco allegretto e grazioso*, with a contrasting trio section. The opening subject, first heard in the clarinet, is similar in character to the second theme of the preceding movement, which also features the clarinet prominently. Grove described this melody as "a sort of national tune or *Volkslied* of simple sweetness and grace." Brahms planned the third movement as a foil for the grandeur of the Finale, which—like the first movement—begins with a dramatic *Adagio* introduction. Exceptionally extended, this introduction is nearly as long as the preceding movement. Like Beethoven in his *Fifth Symphony*, Brahms saves the trombones for the final movement, where they first appear in a monumental chorale within the introduction. As the tempo

accelerates, a horn call ushers in the main section, *Allegro non troppo, ma con brio*, with its broad, hymnlike principal theme. This melody clearly recalls Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, prompting Brahms's wry response when the resemblance was noted: "Any ass can hear that." Early listeners went so far as to call the work "Beethoven's Tenth Symphony," but the resemblance is limited; each composer's finale expresses its own journey from struggle to resolution. The symphony concludes with a *stretto*—a speeding-up—and a heroic restatement of the trombone chorale introduced earlier.

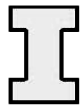
The symphony is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

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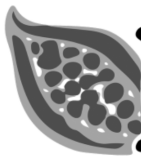
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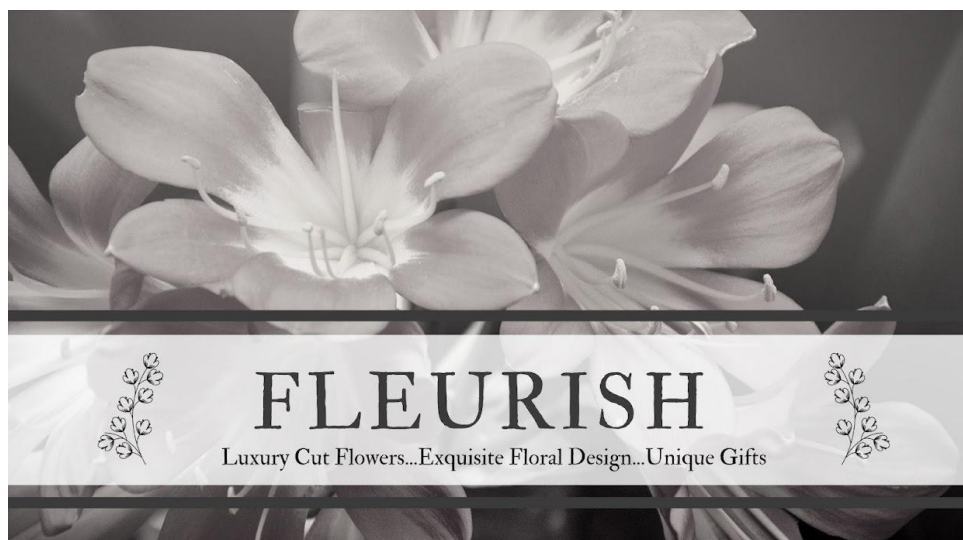
Sinfonia da Camera

In residence at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, this professional chamber orchestra is led by world-renowned pianist, conductor, and educator, Maestro Ian Hobson. Sinfonia da Camera is comprised of University of Illinois faculty, staff, and students, as well as distinguished regional and national freelance musicians. Founded in 1984, Sinfonia has welcomed world-class soloists, commissioned new works, and presented beloved orchestra favorites and hidden gems to local audiences for 40 years.

In its debut season, Sinfonia released an acclaimed recording of French Piano Concerti with music director Ian Hobson conducting from the keyboard; it was the subject of a 90-minute Public Television special. Since that time, Sinfonia has performed over 1,000 musical works featuring more than 150 local and guest artists. Through Maestro Hobson's commitment to excellence in all of the orchestra's endeavors - special projects, recordings, tours, and concerts for the hometown crowd at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts - Sinfonia has achieved national and international recognition.

Sinfonia has been featured on over a dozen recordings and has several projects in the works. In 2011, the Albany label released a Sinfonia recording on another American composer, William Schuman, during his centenary year. A live recording of Sinfonia da Camera's October 6, 2012 concert featuring music by Pulitzer Prize-Winning composer George Walker was recently released on Albany Records. The fourth and final volume of the Ignaz Moscheles cycle was released in 2012. The previous volumes were reviewed by American Record Guide: "Hobson, whose elegant phrasing, remarkable ear for color, and miraculous ability to evenly sustain the most difficult runs - each like a string of pearls - are simply a joy to hear" and "[The concerti] seem tailor-made for Hobson's great panache and free-wheeling style." Ten recordings by Sinfonia da Camera for the Zephyr label have been released to rave reviews at home and abroad.

To learn more about the orchestra, Maestro Hobson, the musicians, administration, and Advisory board visit our website at www.sinfonia.illinois.edu.



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