

## **Brahms and Billroth - an Unique Friendship**

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Theodor Billroth and Johannes Brahms were two German boys born in the early part of the 19th century.

Their backgrounds could not have been more different and at first sight their subsequent careers would appear to have been worlds apart.

One would become the leading surgeon in Europe and Internationally renown whereas the other would become the greatest chamber music and symphony composer since the days of Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn.

But their most productive professional years in Vienna brought them together with the development of an unique friendship based primarily on their love and appreciation of music. This association was constructed on a mutual foundation of science and art.

Billroth was an accomplished musician and Brahms valued his opinion so much that he would pass his manuscripts to the surgeon for critical appraisal prior to public performance. These new compositions were initially played and reviewed at the surgeons home, usually late in the evening after the day's surgical work.

The two friends studied and listened together to the music of other contemporary composers including Wagner, Liszt, Chopin and Berlioz. For Brahms this often raised the dilemma of the diehard Classicist living in the fast developing Romantic age.

Although the temperaments of these two friends were very different it is clear that Brahms needed the warmth and poetic extroversion of his friend and in turn Billroth, beset by the problems of life and death in his profession, needed the musical joy which flowed towards him from Brahms.

They died within 3 years of each other and both are buried in the Central Cemetery, Vienna.

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