'In Him We Welcome A Strong Champion'

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If the author's identity were unknown and the date of his praise erased, what Robert Schumann wrote of the 20-year-old Johannes Brahms could rightfully also be said of Artur Rubenstein. Schumann wrote in his famous "New Paths" back on Oct. 28, 1853:

"Sitting at the piano, he began to disclose wonderful regions to us. We were drawn into even more enchanting spheres. Besides, he is a player of genius who can make of the piano an orchestra of lamenting and loudly jubilant voices. . . . In him we welcome a strong champion."

Schumann's was generous, heartfelt praise, intended to smooth the way for a man whose genius was every bit as great as Schumann believed.

And the same words are so incisively right for the most celebrated pianist of our day, Mr. Rubinstein, who will play Brahms' "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in D minor, No. 1," with the Utah Symphony Orchestra and its music director and conductor, Maurice Abravanel, Wednesday in the Tabernacle.

At the time Schumann wrote his article, Brahms seems to have had far less confidence in his own powers than did Schumann. It was nearly a quarter of a century before he produced his "Symphony No. 1." What really was to have been his first symphony turned into the "D minor Piano Concerto."

Actually, the concerto first took shape as a sonata for two pianos, which Brahms brought to show Schumann's noted pianist wife, Clara. Together, they played the sonata through several times.

Obviously, Brahms' "thinking" was orchestral, symphonic in scope. In the following months, he set about making a symphony of the sonata, but he had technical difficulties with the orchestration, despite the help of a scholarly friend, Julius Grimm.

Finally, Grimm suggested a solution to this conflict between pianist and orchestral concepts, namely a piano concerto. Brahms agreed.

The first two movements of the sonata became the first ("Maestoso") movement and the second ("Adagio") movement of the "D-minor Piano Concerto." (The third movement of the sonata, set aside for many years, eventually became the chorus, "Behold All Flesh," in the "German Requiem.")

It was first performed on Jan. 22, 1859, with Brahms at the piano.

"Maestoso" — what an opening theme for a timid young man starting his first orchestral score!

Brahms hurls his heavy theme like a thunderbolt. The timpani roar in the background, and the heavy trills of the theme descend like a shower of fiery sparks as this figure is developed.

The manuscript for the gentle "Adagio" movement originally bore the inscription: "Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini." Brahms always referred to Schumann as the master, or "Domine," and the "blessed person" who came "in the name of the master" was Schumann's gentle wife, Clara.

The colossal finale, "Rondo: Allegro non troppo," combines the brilliance of a traditional 18th Century show-piece, with a symphonic weight that almost balances the great first movement, "Maestoso."