

# Johannes Brahms

## Lullaby



This month **Bridget Mermikides** arranges and transcribes the most famous lullaby ever - a truly beautiful piece by Brahms.

### ABILITY RATING



Moderate

INFO	WILL IMPROVE YOUR
<b>KEY:</b> Em	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Melody/accompaniment
<b>TEMPO:</b> 104 bpm	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fingerstyle technique
<b>CD:</b> TRACK 29-30	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Classical repertoire

GERMAN COMPOSER and pianist Johannes Brahms (1833-97) is a leading figure of the Romantic period. The core of his music might be considered traditionalist and rests on the foundation of such Baroque and Classical masters as Bach and Beethoven, in whose company the term 'The Three Bs' is sometimes made. Despite his traditionalist sensibilities, Brahms forged new compositional approaches that are hugely influential in the history of Western music and to a diverse range of composers including the serialist Schoenberg, the English nationalist Elgar, Ligeti (who composed *Lux Aeterna* featured in 2001: a Space Odyssey) and the modernist Luciano Berio. In addition to these high-minded musical disciplines, he has also had a great influence on the music of popular culture and film, and one can, for example, hear the unmistakable fingerprint of Brahms in John Williams' *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* themes. It's easy to get the impression from his music that Brahms was an entirely serious character,

**“I hope you enjoy this lovely piece and that it works on whoever you are attempting to render unconscious”**

but he in fact had a wicked wit, enjoying practical jokes, veiled compliments and creative teasing of his friends and rivals, and was extremely self-deprecating about his work and fame. One example: when a quartet finished playing one of Brahms's new works, the violinist asked the composer if he liked their tempo: "Yes," he replied, "especially yours!"

Despite his serious compositional style, he did write immensely popular 'light music', of which this month's piece is a great example. Written to celebrate the birth of the son of a dear friend (and ex-lover), *Wiegenlied* Opus 49, No. 4, now known as Brahms's Lullaby or Cradle Song is a short work for piano and voice that has been adapted, arranged and sung by parents through the ages. It is one of those pieces that everyone seems to know at some level even if they are unaware of its origin. Part of the brilliance of this composition is that Brahms managed to use an extremely simple child-like melody and basic harmony in a very sophisticated way: the piece uses a tonic pedal tone throughout, that is to say that the key of the piece (in this case Eb) remains in the bass throughout the chordal progression. The effect of this is to add a harmonic sophistication and perfectly judged soporific atmosphere. I've maintained the original key by using drop D tuning and a capo on the 1st fret. For clarity, the transcription is written (and is perfectly playable) in the 'open tuning' of D major.

The 18-bar melody is traditionally played twice and I've arranged it in a similar way here, the second rendition with the melody an octave higher. This arrangement is slightly easier than previous articles, but as ever is best approached with careful rather than rushed practice. I hope you enjoy playing this lovely piece and that it works on whoever you are attempting to render unconscious. Have fun! 



Johannes Brahms: both genius and wit!

### TECHNIQUE FOCUS

#### NAIL CARE & TONE

For the best tone on a classical guitar, plucking hand fingernails are essential. The nails of the first, second and third fingers, and the thumb, should be grown beyond the fingertip and filed to the same shape as the fingertip. Using a very fine nail buffer the nail edges should be polished smooth and each should be individually practiced - plucking both rest and free stroke on open strings to work on producing a consistent and clear tone - no scratchiness! This can take months to achieve so patience and dedication are the key.

DEA / A. DAGLI ORTIGETTY



**TRACK RECORD** Brahms's Lullaby has been recorded countless times by classical performers and popular artists like Celine Dion, Kenny G and Linda Ronstadt. For an introduction to Brahms's other music I'd recommend his *Hungarian Dances*, performed by New York Philharmonic and *Concerto For Violin And Orchestra in D Major, Op. 77* performed by Itzhak Perlman with its wonderfully expressive middle movement.



**CD TRACK 30**

**[Bars 2-6]** We set up the gentle vibe and the melody begins at the end of bar 2 with the two F# quaver notes. On bar 3 use a half barre across the top three strings and play the first melody note A with a first finger rest stroke. The half barre remains in place till beat three of bar 6. Use rest stroke on the melody notes wherever possible and follow the suggested plucking hand fingering.

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## PLAYING TIPS

## CD TRACK 30

**[Bars 7-9]** Continue the plucking using a mixture of rest and free stroke; the main objective is to make the melody notes stand out (using rest stroke) from the accompaniment notes (free stroke). Bar 7 requires a four-string barre up until the last quaver where it is released. In bar 9, beat 2, keep hold of the A and G notes; let them to ring through the rest of the bar for a dom 7th sound.

**[Bars 18-20]** As well as making a full tone on the melody, leave plenty of space between the melody notes and accompaniment notes to help the ear to

distinguish between the two parts. At the end of bar 18 the melody begins an octave higher. The fingering here is fairly straightforward: a half barre is needed in bars 19 and 20.

**[Bar 21 to end]** From bar 21 there is a fair amount of precise fretting hand fingering. This is designed to help produce the smoothest musical results so please do try it. This particular performance is played fairly slow and with lots of space, but if a faster rendition is preferred then go for it! Enjoy.



Chord symbols: D, Dmaj7, D6, A9/D, A7/D, A7, A7/D, A/D, A, A13, Em/D, A7, A7/D, Em/D, A7/D, A7, D, D7, G/D, G/A, D, D/A, A7/D, A/D, Aadd9, D, D7, G/D, G/A, D, D/A, A7/D, D, A7, D.

Measure numbers: 21, 25, 28, 31.

Other markings: *rit* (ritardando) in measure 31.