

# Tribute to Johannes Brahms

World Premiere performed May 7, 2006

Composer: John Blakelock

John Blakelock was born in San Diego. His father was in the Navy and as a result, his family moved many times while John was young. When he was two years old, his family moved to Treasure Island and then later, to Concord. When John was four, his family left California and eventually settled in Maryland. He spent most of his life in a rural part of Maryland known as the "Eastern Shore," between the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. He first took composition lessons at Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland, and went on to receive a B.A. in music. Later, he attended The Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. and received a Master's degree in composition. John Blakelock currently resides in Berkeley.

In addition to his skills as a composer, John played the euphonium. John tells us that he originally wrote this "Tribute to Johannes Brahms" for his undergraduate senior thesis recital. As a euphonium player, he was familiar with the instruments and the sound of a brass quintet, and writing for this ensemble seemed like a natural choice. John had been exposed to Brahms' Symphonies in his undergraduate studies and had great admiration for them; especially the 3rd and the 4th symphonies.

John was struck by Brahms' use of a diminished seventh chord in the beginning of his 3rd symphony. A seventh chord is a [chord](#) consisting of a [triad](#) plus a note forming an [interval](#) of a [seventh](#) above the chord's [root](#). In its earliest usage, the seventh was introduced solely as an [embellishing](#) or [non-chord tone](#). The seventh destabilized the triad, and allowed the composer to emphasize movement in a given direction. As time progressed and the collective ears of the western world became more accustomed to [dissonance](#), the seventh was allowed to become a part of the chord itself, and in some modern music, and jazz in particular, nearly every chord is a seventh chord. A diminished seventh has a double-flatted seventh, making it the same as a major sixth (root, minor third, diminished fifth (tritone), diminished seventh (sixth))

John decided to start his composition in a similar fashion to Brahms, basing much of the harmonic and melodic content in the piece around the diminished seventh chord. One of the ideas John wanted to try in this piece was the possibility of transforming the sound of a diminished seventh — from something that passes on and resolves — to something in itself. Another aspect of Brahms' music that John wanted to emulate was the use of counterpoint, and the importance of interior lines in his music. John wanted to write a piece where every voice has equal importance.

Since his undergraduate days, John has revisited the composition several times and has made considerable changes, but the formal concept of the piece and the melodies remain the same.

John contacted the Menlo Brass about having us record "Tribute to Johannes Brahms" for his composition portfolio, as part of his future application to doctoral programs. The Menlo Brass made that recording on February 14, 2006. Click on the link below to download the MP3 file.

The Menlo Brass was pleased to present the World Premiere Performance of "Tribute to Johannes Brahms" by John Blakelock on 5/7/06.

*Dear Menlo Brass Quintet,*

*Here is the final version of "Tribute to Johannes Brahms." I am very pleased with the outcome. I want to thank you all again for your openness and willingness*

*towards me and my music. I enjoyed working with the group and regard your performance of my piece a gift. All the best.*

*Sincerely,  
John Blakelock*

