

HIGH SCHOOL NIGHTS

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR JANUARY 23, 2026

HOUSTON,
SYMPHONY

“The Houston Symphony welcomes conductor Marin Alsop back to Jones Hall for a program featuring “three B’s” that are especially close to her heart: Barber, Bernstein, and Brahms...Berstein became an important mentor to Alsop, who would go on to...be the first woman to serve as music director/principal conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, the Sao Paulo Starte Symphony Orchestra, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, and most recently the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra...Alsop’s first commercial recording was dedicated to the music of Samual Barber. Alsop also became the first woman to conduct commercial recordings of the complete Brahms symphonies.” –Calvin Dotsey

You can find the full program, complete with conductor and artist bios, [on our website](#).

The resources below were compiled for you to use as you see fit, to complement your current classroom objectives or pass along to individual students attending who you think would benefit from certain ideas.

SAMUEL BARBER’S ESSAY NO. 2

Samuel Barber completed his *Second Essay for Orchestra* soon after the United States entered World War II, as he was waiting to be called for the draft. To a friend, Barber wrote:

“I have been composing very hard, and my music has been going so well that it seems incongruous for times such as these, but I’ve taken the attitude that it is better to continue in one’s own job tutta forza until one’s draft board decides otherwise.”

[Listen
Here!](#)

LEONARD BERNSTEIN’S SERENADE FOR VIOLIN, STRINGS, HARP AND PERCUSSION

Serenade was inspired by Plato’s *Symposium*, a text that recounts a dinner party where each guest makes a speech on the topic of love. Each movement of *Serenade* depicts one or more party guests with their distinct characteristics. This performance will feature our concertmaster, Yoonshin Song.

In the final movement, Socrates is depicted giving the final speech when suddenly he is interrupted by Alcibiades, a dashing Athenian general. Bernstein writes, “The famous interruption by Alcibiades and his band of drunken revelers ushers in the Allegro, which is an extended rondo ranging in spirit from agitation through jig-like dance music to joyful celebration...”

Listen and consider the following:

- How do the non-solo instruments support the solo instruments in advancing the portrayal of each character?
- What do you believe each character is saying about love? What techniques does Yoonshin use to portray the personality and beliefs about love?

[Listen
Here!](#)

Videos to Learn More:

[Midori on Leonard Bernstein’s Serenade | WDR Symphony Orchestra](#)

[Marin Alsop and Leonard Bernstein](#)

[Marin Alsop reveals 10 things in a conductor’s brain during a symphony concert](#)

JOHANNES BRAHMS'S SYMPHONY NO. 2 IN D MAJOR

Brahms's *Symphony No. 2* is wrought with themes introduced by solo instruments (or a family of instruments) that carry and develop throughout the orchestra.

One example of this occurs in the final movement, which opens with the violins playing the following theme in unison:



Play this excerpt on your instrument. Next, listen to the final movement and consider the following:

- What “solos” do you hear during this movement? Do any of them play part of the theme introduced by the violins (the excerpt above)?
- How does the “solos” you hear in this movement compare with the solos in Bernstein’s *Serenade*?
- Do you have to play by yourself to play “soloistic?” What can you do to play more soloistic while you are playing in your school ensemble?

Listen
Here!

Videos to learn more:

- [Quick Guide: Brahms Symphony No. 2](#)
- [Brahms: Symphony No. 2 Q & A with Alondra de la Parra and horns](#)
- [Johannes Brahms | Short Biography | Introduction To The Composer](#)
- [There's More to Brahms Than You Think](#)

We are looking forward to seeing you all at Jones Hall soon!