

Brahms Forgery Debunked. More About the Puzzle Canon WoO posth. 29

Translated by Josef Eisinger

A previously unknown album leaf "by Johannes Brahms" is currently again being offered for sale on the autograph market. The item in question is a manuscript of the puzzle canon WoO posth. 29 to Ludwig Uhland's famous-notorious text: "When will heaven cease to punish us/ with albums and with autographs." When associates of the Brahms-Institute in Kiel were asked for advice in connection of a possible purchase, doubts arose regarding the genuineness of the sheet: Although the hand-writing is similar to Brahms's, the first note of the canon is missing, and so is any marking of where the text begins, which typically is always indicated in the composer's manuscripts that are actually by him (see the illustration). Furthermore, the dedication "To Herr Lud. Kramer /10-Jul. 1896" is problematical, because no evidence could be found of an acquaintance between Brahms and a person with that name. A further indication is the imprecise key signature which would not be expected in a notation in Brahms's hand. One obtains complete certainty, however, by a comparison with the facsimile of the canon presented in the "Illustrated Music History" by the music historian Emil Naumann:[1] Sometime in the Spring of 1885, Naumann must have asked Johannes Brahms for an autograph to be included in this publication, for on 2 May 1885 the composer wrote to him[2]:

Honored Sir,

Herewith the promised scribble [the album page with the puzzle canon for the facsimile, see illustration] in a most usable form, as you will discover.

I recall that you had asked for the beginning of the Academic Overture; However, I do not have the manuscript and I can hardly copy it like an album page. Regarding the desired catalogue, you need not trouble Herr Simrock; you can find it in many places, and very adequately, in the index by Papst in Leipzig. A boorish publisher would furthermore not even acknowledge that it is more important to be better represented in other areas of music history, than in our small one. You will probably be more interested in the text-puzzle of my autograph, than in the all-too-

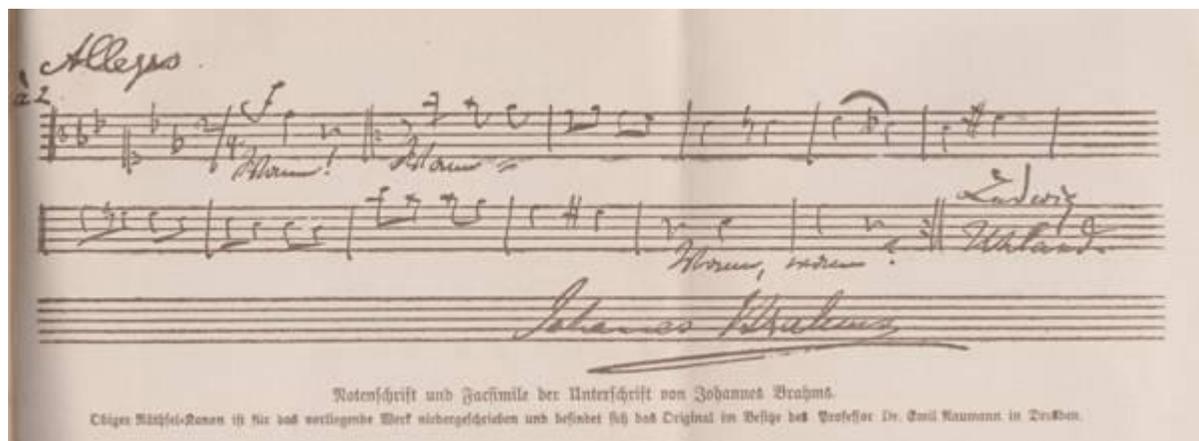
[1] Emil Naumann: *Illustrierte Musikgeschichte*, vol. 2, Berlin and Stuttgart (W. Speemann) [1885], facing page 1089.

[2] University Library Johann Christian Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main, Sig.: Mus. Autogr. J. Brahms A4, with kind permission.

childish note-puzzle. I wonder if you are going to spare your readers the trouble? Lastly, my ardent greetings to your wife and may you soon write a happy *Fine!*

Your most devoted

J. Brahms



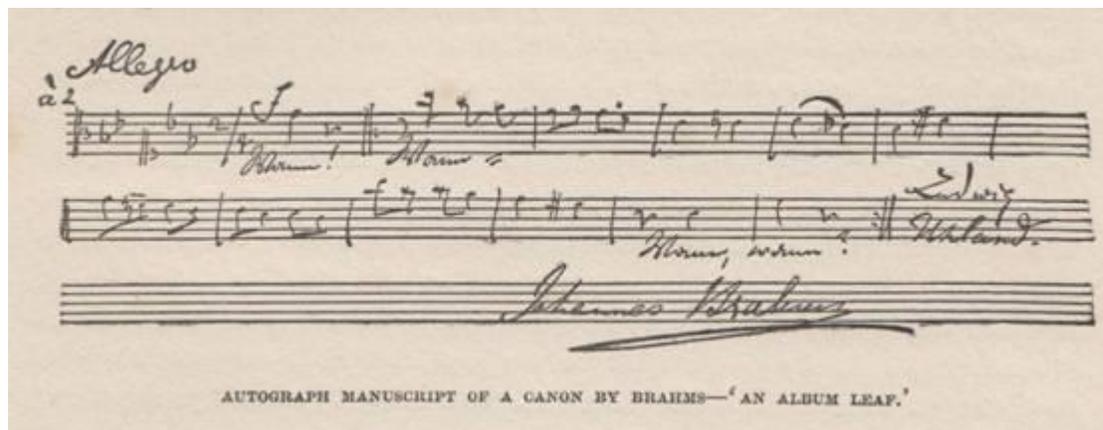
Naumann - who has been identified as the recipient of this letter - was apparently also interested to obtain a Brahms works catalogue for his comprehensive, two-volume "Illustrated Music History". Since the Robert Keller's catalogue for the Simrock Verlag was at that time still in preparation, Brahms simply referred Naumann to P. Pabst's "Catalogue of Printed Compositions by Johannes Brahms," published in Leipzig.

A comparison of the facsimile in Naumann's "Illustrated Music History" with the album leaf in question shows that the latter is indeed a copy that has great similarity to the former. In order to let his forgery seem like a separate transcription, done by the same hand, the copyist omitted the text indication and moved the name of the text's author "Ludwig Uhland" to appear under the lower note system, near its end. What is decisive in deeming the manuscript to be indubitably a forgery is the recognition that the writer was evidently poorly schooled in music: For he omitted, on the one hand, the first note of the canon, and on the other hand, interpreted the question mark which extends into the lower note system near the end of Brahms' manuscript, erroneously as a note sign. As a result there is in this spot of the questionable manuscript a meaningless small hook (without knowing this circumstance) between the two lowest lines of the system. This error establishes unequivocally the relationship between the facsimile and the album leaf.

However, the forger probably did not use as his model the facsimile that appears in Naumann's Music History, but a later reprint in a different publication. The illustrations of the album page in Fuller-Maitland's "Masters of German Music", as well as Fuller-Maitland's "Brahms" can be eliminated as models, since they lack the signature "Johannes Brahms".[3] On the other hand,

[3] Fuller-Maitland: Masters of German Music. New York (Scribners) 1894, facing page 80. Also Fuller-Maitland: Brahms. Authorized German edition by A. W. Sturm, Berlin and Leipzig (Schuster and Loeffler) 1912. Illustration annex, page 72.

the reproduction in the Brahms monograph by the Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford may well have served as the forger's model.[4]



In subsequent publications of Naumann's facsimile some inaccuracies were introduced by the reproduction techniques used, and they manifest themselves in various ways in the forgery. The 'natural' sign in the 4th measure of the upper system in Stanford's monograph appears as two spatially separated strokes above the uppermost line of the system, instead of a graceful little hook started from below. And these two strokes re-appear, somewhat more distinctly, in the forgery. The Stanford reproduction, furthermore, makes it possible to explain another error in the forged album leaf. In measure 3 of the lower system, the forger mistakenly writes instead of the eighth notes c-b and b-a (as read according to the key signature), the eighth notes c-b followed by a quarter note a. In copying, the forger had apparently slipped one space to the right and interpreted the last note as a quarter note - based on the small gap in the beam joining the two eighth notes, this gap being an artifact introduced in the reproduction of the facsimile for the Stanford volume. Another finding that suggests that Stanford's Brahms monograph could have been the model for the forgery is the added dedication "Herrn Lud. Kramer / 10-Jul. 1896". The use of a hyphen in writing the date suggests that the language background of the forger is English or American.

Assuming that the forger's model was not the Naumann facsimile, but Stanford's qualitatively inferior reproduction, it can be concluded that the forger's motives were dishonest: If the copy had actually been made in 1896 from Naumann's Music History, published in in 1885, the album leaf could be construed as a jocular present to the copier's acquaintance, Herr Lud. Kramer. However, if we acknowledge, as the above considerations suggest, that the copy was made, at the earliest, in the 1920s, using as its model the Stanford monograph (or subsequent publications based on it), it must be concluded that one is dealing with a deliberate forgery, whatever the motives.

Collectors are therefore warned against purchasing the album leaf in question, which in recent years has repeatedly been offered for sale in the autograph market place.

Claus Woschenko, 16 July 2013

[4] Charles Villiers Stanford: Brahms, London (Murdoch) [192?] page 19.

