The Modernist Brahms

In her once-popular novel *Aimez-vous Brahms?* the French writer Françoise Sagan used the music of Brahms to represent everything easy, sentimental, "romantic"—everything rightly rejected by the book’s sophisticated, world-weary, very modern heroine, Paule. In a brilliant essay first published in the magazine *Salmagundi* (Winter, 1977) and reprinted in his book *Freud, Jews, and Other Germans* (Oxford University Press, 1978), the historian Peter Gay showed that although the Sagan-Paule view of Brahms is more or less the prevailing one today, Brahms’s contemporaries thought of him quite differently. To many of them his music seemed forbiddingly difficult, intimidatingly learned, lacking in direct sensuous appeal, even arid. It was, Gay reminded us, the difficult, learned, perhaps even arid modernist composer Arnold Schoenberg who in 1947 wrote a long and admiring essay called, of all things, "Brahms the Progressive."

I think Gay is right about the way most people view Brahms today. He is a composer almost universally accepted, perhaps faintly patronized, as a Romantic, though one who had a strong traditionalist streak and is therefore on two counts a conservative, the antithesis of the forward-looking Wagner, surely anything but a progressive or a modernist. That there is something not quite intellectually respectable—and perhaps also elusive or (as we say nowadays) "problematical"—about this seemingly most familiar of composers is suggested by the fact that strong opposition to him was voiced, from two very different directions, by two of the most influential English-language music critics of the period since his death, George Bernard Shaw and B. H. Haggin.

Shaw’s criticisms of Brahms, delivered in his usual witty, trenchant style, can, I think, be safely dismissed—indeed, some of the notes that Shaw added to his early columns when they were collectively published as *Music in London* suggest that by 1936 he himself had rather ruefully dismissed them. But as late as 1920 he was still writing of Brahms as "a musical sensualist with intellectual affectations," who "succeeded only as an incoherent voluptuary, too fundamentally addleheaded to make anything great out of the delicious musical luxuries he wallowed in." Brahms? Surely the composer whom these phrases bring first to mind is not Brahms but Wagner. It was Wagner whose...

"intellectual affectations" (as they have seemed to many critics and listeners) led him to write interminable prose tracts that can often, quite fairly, be termed "addleheaded." And it is Wagner, with his silks and velvets and perfumes, his lush orchestration and five-hour musicodramatic extravaganzas, who is more immediately evoked by words like "sensualist," "voluptuary," "luxuries," and "wallowed."

Now this is not at all my own view of Wagner. But it is one that was widely held and often persuasively defended in the...

(continued on next page)
(Modernist Brahms, continued)

1908s, when Shaw wrote most of his music criticism, and that is still accepted in some quarters even today. I think it was largely Shaw's eagerness, as a Perfect Wagnerite, to defend the Master against such slurs that led him to hit upon Brahms as a convenient scapegoat to whom all the nasty words usually applied to Wagner could be easily transferred. The whole operation has the same air of paradox-spinning, of "now-you-see-it-now-you-don't," that we are so familiar with from Shaw's plays. "So you hate Wagner because you think he's a sensualist, a voluptuary, an intellectually pretentious addlehead? Of course you're right to hate all that, but you've got the wrong man: it's really Brahms, whom you mistakenly take to be an austerely conservative laudator temporis acti, that you ought to be gunning for." Well, it won't wash.

Haggin is a very different case. Though he often cited with approval Shaw's objections to Brahms while advancing his own, Haggin's position is really quite different from Shaw's, far more interesting, and deserving of answer by anyone who is seriously interested in Brahms. There are areas of agreement between the two critics, but for Haggin Brahms is not primarily a sensualist or a voluptuary but rather an ice-cold manipulator of empty forms, a man who makes great pretense to deep feeling while actually feeling nothing. In 1945, explaining how he came to dislike much of the music of Brahms, which he had once loved "every note of," Haggin wrote:

What I began to be aware of was the pose of feeling... And not only pose of feeling, but pose of the entire process of artistic creation—of feeling making itself articulate through the substance, procedures, forms of an artistic medium. The very first work that I disliked was the Sonata Opus 99 for cello and piano: here for the first time I became aware of a mere filling out of formal pattern by arbitrary manipulation of synthetic substance—of a form of expression without real expression. And in time I came to dislike the other works of Brahms in which pumped-up attitudes are communicated through synthetically contrived large structures—as against music which communicates something genuinely felt that has dictated the substance and its manipulation into a form.

"I was left," Haggin tells us in a later essay, "with a few works—the sets of variations on themes of Haydn and Paganini and the final passacaglia of the Fourth Symphony, with a few other movements in the symphonies and a few of the songs."

Now this is not a view of Brahms that I subscribe to, but it seems to me undeniable that Haggin, unlike Shaw, is talking about real and important qualities that one can hear in Brahms's music, the same qualities that led Brahms's first critics to object to him as a learned but arid craftsman. Brahms's music is indeed marked by a pervasive studiedness and lack of spontaneity, a density and even knottedness or contortion, a rhythmic and harmonic complexity and a wealth of conscious allusion that can seem disastrously inappropriate to the intended emotional content. All this Haggin noticed and, in his fashion, described accurately. Certainly his view of Brahms is preferable to the simple-minded acceptance of him as an easy-going, immediately accessible, and therefore faintly disreputable Romantic-traditionalist—the Aimez-vous Brahms view.

Where I think Haggin goes wrong is in his apparent assumption that "feeling" in music cannot be communicated through the forbidding sort of surface that Brahms creates. Much has been written about Brahms's struggles to come to terms with his great Romantic predecessors—all the business about hearing the tramp of Beethoven behind him, and so on. It is easy to conclude from this that Brahms was striving for the same comparative directness and spontaneity that we find not only in Beethoven but also in Schubert, Schumann, and Mendelssohn—stressing for it but, lacking the appropriate feeling, failing to achieve it. This is rather like expecting a late Henry James novel to be like Thackeray or Trollope and then, finding that it is not, concluding that James is a failure as a novelist. Brahms's art, like James's, is convolute and very obviously highly crafted, extremely reticent, and often obscure. These qualities make Brahms a genuinely progressive late-19th-century artist rather than a failed Romantic—make him a sort of proto-modernist, if you will. And some of the technical means by which such qualities are attained are the ones pointed out by Schoenberg in his essay: the asymmetrical phrase construction, the complexity of motivic development and intervocal relation, the pervasive harmonic and metrical ambiguity, the frequent blurring of formal boundaries.

The first and best place to become acquainted with this progressive Brahms is in his chamber music— it is significant, I think, that it was a chamber work that first turned Haggin off, and that he eventually came to reject all of Brahms's chamber music. And one reason it has been especially easy for Americans (Haggin excepted) to think of Brahms as a comfortably sentimental Romantic with a strong traditionalist streak is that the works of his most often heard in this country are the ones that involve full orchestra: the four symphonies, the two concertos for piano and the one for violin, the Academic Festival and Tragic overtures, the Haydn Variations, and the German Requiem. The rich, smooth sound of a modern symphony orchestra invites the listener to overlook everything in Brahms that is difficult and strange, quirky and obstinate—everything his contemporaries responded to with such distaste. Occasionally Brahms's songs and short piano pieces show up on recital programs, but his chamber music, while popular in Europe, has been comparatively neglected here. Yet Brahms's chamber music is his most representative body of work, offering the clearest proof that his early critics, while understandably too hard on him, were on the right track, and that Schoenberg was dead right in taking him as a "progressive" composer, a genuine precursor of modernism.

Brahms wrote more chamber music than he did instrumental music of any other sort. All told, the twenty-four surviving chamber works make up almost exactly a quarter of his total output. Moreover, although Brahms's symphonies all reached their final form within a decade, his surviving chamber music spanned virtually his whole
career—from the B major Trio, Op. 8, published in 1854, to the pair of Clarinet Sonatas, Op. 120, which date from 1895, two years before his death. Unlike his great classical and Romantic predecessors, Brahms did not write a continuing body of longer works for solo piano. After the three early sonatas, Opp. 1, 2, and 5, and the Scherzo, Op. 4, his writing for the piano was confined to short pieces. Therefore it is only in the chamber music that we can follow in detail the central effort of Brahms's creative life: his attempt to rework and reinstate the sonata forms of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to provide an alternative to the seemingly formless "endless melody" of Wagnerian music-drama.

Comparison of the two versions of the Op. 8 Trio (the work was extensively revised in 1889) reveals a great deal about Brahms's development. Of the work's four movements Brahms left only the second, the scherzo, virtually untouched, merely tightening and clarifying its ending. In the other three movements he left the primary material more or less intact but then completely reworked the contrasting secondary material—the "second groups" of the expositions and recapitulations, the development sections, the conclusions. In every case he heightened dramatic contrast by substituting for the rather placid music of the early version music that is disturbed, urgent, mysterious. The resulting work is not only more concise than the original one—and, indeed, it is shorter by more than a third—but also more intense, more exploratory, more spacious emotionally. Some critics, perhaps letting their knowledge come between them and the music, have found the contrast between the youthful Brahms, open and melodically free, and the later, more troubled and introverted Brahms too great to be successfully embodied in a single work. But the new music grows organically out of the old, and I doubt that anyone who did not know the work's history would be disconcerted. Brahms's development was so unified and so continuous, his later self so clearly latent in his earlier one, that the revised trio, while not one of his greatest works, nonetheless seems whole and complete.

It is fascinating to follow the course of that development in the chamber works, to hear Brahms extending and deepening his emotional range while perfecting his grasp of form. In the Op. 40 Trio for Horn, Violin, and Piano (1865) he fore completely abandoned sonata form in the opening movement. Instead he created a series of alternating episodes in which the pastoral simplicity evoked by the horn's sonority contrasts with restlessness and turbulence. The third movement is a darkly powerful elegy in which horn and violin wander off into brief solos of unappeased bleakness that suggest the Mahler of forty years later.

The C minor String Quartet, Op. 51 No. 1 (1873), was the first that Brahms saw fit to publish, though evidently he had written and destroyed several earlier ones. It is a work of great terseness and even ferocity. The surging theme with which the first movement opens breaks down almost immediately into short, rhythmically ambiguous fragments, bringing us to a dead stop and a contrasting episode before we are more than a few bars into the work. The third movement, instead of being the usual scherzo or minuet in three-four time, is a restless and disorienting piece with the unusual time signature of four-eight. Only in the trio do we move into three-four, for a little country dance that seems to come from an alien, much earlier world.

The Op. 78 Violin Sonata, composed in 1878–79, while seemingly a freer and more open work than the C minor Quartet, keeps lapsing into tentativeness and obliquity, movingly dramatizing the difficulty of direct, heartfelt speech. Finally there is the Op. 115 Clarinet Quintet (1891), one of Brahms's very greatest works. Instead of pitting the clarinet against the string ensemble, as was usual in pieces for this combination, Brahms thoroughly integrated it into the ensemble, interweaving clarinet and string lines in ever new combinations, so as to create an affecting kaleidoscope of textures.

Brahms's art, then, is an art of indirectness, allusion, ambiguity. And to love Brahms—the real Brahms, not the Aimless Brahms—mock-up—is to be deeply engaged (and, often, deeply moved) by the almost constant tension between the elaborate surface of his music and the feeling that it half-expresses, half-conceals—feeling occasionally communicated directly by fleeting evocations of a pastoral and religious world in which greater directness and spontaneity were, perhaps, possible. Words like "wit" and "elegance," so often applicable to the music of Brahms's classical and Romantic predecessors, are rarely applicable to his. When he lightened his textures, it was usually not to become more sociable but rather to become more private, retreating into a childlike fantasy world.

To expect in Brahms the comparative directness and spontaneity of utterance that we ordinarily encounter in Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and even Schumann is therefore to miss the point. Highly crafted on the surface and densely convoluted beneath, by turns reticent and touchingly forthright, Brahms's music is often obscure and difficult to follow but almost always gives the impression of having something of the greatest importance to communicate. He is a far greater, more varied, and more innovative composer than he is usually given credit for being, his best work characterized not only by impressive scope but also by extraordinary compression and concision as he assimilates and transcends the achievements of his great classical and Romantic predecessors in a wholly original way. During the past decade the community of Brahms scholars and analysts have come to share this view; a popular re-evaluation of Brahms's music now seems in order as well.

William Youngren

William Youngren, Professor of English at Boston College and a lover of Brahms's music, is currently completing a doctorate in musicology at Brandeis University, with a dissertation on C. P. E. Bach. His essay draws upon earlier writings that appeared in Fanfare (September/October 1983) and The Atlantic (July 1985).
Second Geiringer Scholarship Awarded

The American Brahms Society is pleased to announce that Margaret Notley, of Yale University, has been named to receive the Society’s second Karl Geiringer Scholarship in Brahms Studies. This award, in the amount of $1,000, will be used to support the completion of Ms. Notley’s dissertation on the Cello Sonata in F major, the Piano Trio in C minor, and the Violin Sonatas in A major and D minor, entitled “Brahms’s Chamber Music—Summer of 1886: A Study of Opera 99, 100, 101, and 108.” “Reviewers welcomed the change in style they perceived in these late pieces,” she writes.

And since critics of the day tended to view art singlemindedly as a reflection of the artist’s personality, they linked this more accessible, “popular” style to a newly won serenity in Brahms himself. Yet, ironically, the pieces were composed against a backdrop of general crisis in Vienna in which all that Brahms held valuable—in music and otherwise—was under attack.

The most immediate context for the composition of the works was formed from Brahms’s experiences in the summer of 1883, when he spent a considerable amount of time playing sonatas for violin and piano with Rudolf von Beckerath. The repeated collaborations of the two friends on this relatively humble part of the repertoire might well have stimulated the new style of Brahms, and which to contemporaneous listeners sounded more natural, less contrived than Brahms’s earlier style. At all events, these works clearly show, to borrow Tovey’s phrase, a renewed “reaction towards” the Classical style.

There were two broad aspects to Brahms’s creative activity in the productive summer of 1886: the probable composition of three movements of the Cello Sonata in F major around a pre-existing slow movement, and the reinterpretation of discrete facets of Classical style in all but one of the movements in the other three works. A number of connections between different pairs of movements suggest that the four works were conceived as a comprehensive compositional project.

Ms. Notley, who is an accomplished pianist and former student in piano at the Mannes College of Music, holds the degrees of A.B. in English from Barnard College and M. Phil. in music from Yale University. She is currently an Acting Instructor in Music at Yale.

The Geiringer Scholarship is awarded annually, as meritorious candidates present themselves. The competition is open to students who are in the final stages of preparing a doctoral dissertation on Brahms at a university in North America. Only those projects that demonstrate significant original thought and research will be considered competitive. The decision on awarding the scholarship will rest with the Board of Directors of the ABS.

Completed applications will consist of 1) a cover letter, including the applicant’s address, phone number, and institutional affiliation; 2) a concise description of the project (no more than 500 words), in which the applicant’s methods and conclusions are stated clearly; and 3) a brief account (no more than 250 words) detailing the aspect of the project to be completed with assistance from the Geiringer Scholarship, including travel plans, if appropriate. These materials should be submitted, in triplicate, to Professor David Brodbeck, Chairman of the Geiringer Scholarship Committee, Department of Music, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, and must be postmarked no later than 1 May. The application must be supported by two confidential letters of recommendation, including one from the dissertation advisor; these should be sent directly to the Chairman of the Geiringer Scholarship Committee and must also be postmarked by 1 May. Finalists in the competition will be notified by 15 June and asked to submit a sample chapter from their dissertation.

On Record

An “Historic” Performance of the Brahms Requiem?

This review was written at the request of the editor of Historical Performance, the Journal of Early Music America, and appears in the spring 1992 issue.

Johannes Brahms: Ein deutsches Requiem, Op. 45; Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra Révolutionnaire et Romantique; John Elliot Gardiner, conductor; Charlotte Margiomo, soprano; Rodney Gilfry, baritone. Philips 432 140-2.

In his note to this recording, “An Approach to Brahms’s ‘Ein deutsches Requiem,’” John Elliot Gardiner criticizes the majority of performances of the work on the grounds that they obscure its “inherent rhythmic vitality and characteristic ruggedness” by “a prevailing dininess of texture and mood and by what one might call a Wagnerian sostenuto.” “In an effort to expose the several strata of [Brahms’s] inventive part-writing and to uncover the salient features of his glorious choral and orchestral style,” those planning the recording attempted “to reinstate the instruments and associated playing styles of a Brahms orchestra of the 1860s.” Gardiner is careful not to claim too much for the aims of the project: nowhere are the dread terms “authentic” or even “historically informed” mentioned; rather, the emphasis is on the ways in which Brahms’s knowledge of Renaissance and Baroque music contributed to his style, and on how essential it is that clarity of texture in performance serve as a means of illuminating its devices and details.

The instruments chosen for the orchestra included Viennese horns in F, “with their typically ‘burnished’ mellow sound,” Viennese oboes, and small timpani played with hard sticks. For the strings, special attention was given to bowing: according to Gardiner, “we laid particular emphasis on variations of both bow speed and bow pressure in slow, expressive passages, with vibrato used sparingly—for special accentuation or moments of pathos, following Joachim’s injunction to ‘recognise the steady tone as the ruling one and to use vibrato only when the expression seems to demand it.’” No information on the number of string players used in the orchestra is given in the introductory remarks, nor is there any on the size and makeup of the chorus.

Both Gardiner’s essay and Martin Ennis’s informative program notes stress the German Lutheran tradition of
which Brahms was a part, and both mention Schütz’s *Musicalische Exequien* (SWV 279) specifically as a precedent for Brahms’s selection of the Biblical texts. (This parallel—and the several coincidences of text between Schütz and Brahms—is often drawn, but for those who are trying to trace influences, it would be well to emphasize that during the period when Brahms was composing the *Requiem* he still had only limited acquaintance with the music of Schütz.)

More significant influences from Baroque music at this stage of his career are surely to be found in the works of Bach and Handel that he had studied and conducted. To what extent these studies and their effects on Brahms’s style can be reflected in performance, however, is another matter. We must not lose sight of the fact that Brahms was also a product of the music and the performance standards of his own time.

Decisions about the size and composition of the performing forces used in this recording have considerable impact on its overall effect. The number of string players seems not always sufficient to balance the winds, particularly the horns, who frequently play with an aggressive attack that certainly contributes to clarity but may not be to the taste of listeners unaccustomed to it. The choral singing is superb, as one expects from any group conducted by Gardiner, and the control of vibrato is very welcome. On occasion the chorus seems too small; the voices of individual tenors can sometimes be heard in the higher reaches of their range, and the section is clearly fatigued by the end of the sixth movement, a notorious chorus-killer. The characteristic timbre of male altos—a sound Brahms would not have recognized—is audible in a few spots (e.g. atm. 15 of the first movement and m. 313 of the third). While no one using a chorus of trained voices would want to deploy the huge numbers that populated amateur choruses of the nineteenth century, the ideal size for this recording would seem to be somewhat larger.

In this performance the quiet moments are often truly beautiful. The strings are particularly effective in the fourth and fifth movements (the soaring entry in m. 32 of the fourth movement that precedes the tenors’ “Wie lieblich” has to be heard to be believed); and the wind solos in the fifth are elegantly performed. Here, as in the opening movement, the plangent tones of the Viennese oboe are marvelous. In fact, the fifth movement alone is worth the price of the recording. Charlotte Margonie has the perfect voice for the soprano solo—warm and glowing, with sufficient control to sing the long lines in high tessitura demanded by Brahms in an easy, unforced manner, without any of the “pinched” quality produced by sopranos worried both about singing softly and getting to the ends of these phrases. The chorus and orchestra support her in exemplary fashion, with a loving, unaffected rendition of the expressive details of the score. Baritone soloist Rodney Gilfrey is also superb; the dark quality of his voice is ideally suited to the texts he sings with conviction and finesse. I have never heard a more hair-raising rendition of the repetition of “Herr, lehre doch mich” (mm. 67 ff.) in the third movement. For some reason, both soloists sound as though they were recorded from a distance—from the middle of the chorus, perhaps. Each is audible, but not very immediate.

In general, Gardiner shows laudable attention to the details of articulation and dynamics in the published score (I often wonder whether there is any way of knowing how many decibels of swell are implied by the crescendo/diminuendo markings the composer often uses, both to emphasize single notes and to outline short groups or phrases; some as executed here seem too much for their context, especially within piano). A spectacularly successful example occurs in the sixth movement, where the basses accompany “Zu der Zeit der letzten Posaune” with a stunning display of overlapping dynamic waves. In the third movement, at “Siehe, meine Tage” (mm. 48 ff.), the precision with which the string rhythms and dynamics are played provides a rare experience—an opportunity to hear exactly how the passage should sound. In these spots as well as many others Brahms himself provides plenty of interpretive information for a satisfying result.

All conductors of course make their own performance decisions, supplementing the instructions provided in the score; and Brahms—who disliked metronome markings and who when he conducted told his soloists that he would follow them—leaves ample scope for such decisions. Many of Gardiner’s were obviously made in the interest of obtaining the clarity of texture and independence of line that he refers to in his introductory note—and in this direction the effort is eminently successful. For some of his other decisions, though, the aim is less clear and the results not always pleasing.

A few striking features originate from a score annotated by Brahms himself. Thus the pauses that break the momentum at “wo ist dein Sieg” just before the beginning of the sixth-movement fugue, and the acceleration at the stretto entrances of “Herr, du bist würdig” near its end (mm. 330 ff.), can both be traced to Brahms (though he did not include them in the published version of the score). Other decisions by the conductor serve appropriately to extend interpretive ideas already presented or to enhance delivery and sense of the text; an example is the *non legato* performance of the phrase “die loben dich immerdar” in the fourth movement. However, some of Gardiner’s further choices, most of them presumably intended to avoid “Wagnerian sostenuto” in the choral parts, occasionally create an impression of overly fussy articulation or unnecessarily mannered dynamics.

The very beginning of the *Requiem* is often hard to hear in recordings because of the soft dynamic level and low pitch. In this performance the individual string parts are easily distinguished, and when the chorus enters the text can also be clearly heard (in general the diction is excellent—a welcome novelty). With these expert forces, it should be possible to attain and sustain the soft end of Brahms’s dynamic spectrum; however, the results in this performance are inconsistent, as we hear at the beginning of the second movement, when the spooky mood established by the orchestra is broken by the too-loud entrance of the chorus. A number of other troublesome decisions affect this movement: the finicky separations of “Das Gras l i st verdorret” (continued on next page)
(Brahms Requiem, continued)

and "Siehe ich ein Ackermann," and the noisy horns—the part is, after all, only marked piano ben marcato—at the approach to the climax of the orchestral funeral march. Careful observation of Brahms's dynamic markings does much to clarify the many hemiolas in this movement; but there is no obvious reason for the jerky slowing of the tempo at its conclusion.

The third movement works beautifully in terms of the aims of the recording (my only quibbles are once again with articulation and dynamics: there seems no real motivation for breaking up the vocal fugue subject, or for backing away from the dissonance point in suspensions—especially obvious in the soprano passage in mm. 185–87). The horrendous difficulties of the choral parts in this movement are effortlessly surmounted, and the effectiveness of the fugue is greatly enhanced by the precision of the orchestral playing. The performance of the fourth movement, so often the victim of hackneyed "tradition," reminds us in its freshness and clarity that this was immediately the favorite movement of Brahms's friends—who had, of course, never heard it before.

The sixth movement, like the third, is powerful and convincing except for some problems that surface in the fugue. Here, the unusually slow tempo (derived proportionately from that of the previous section) is exhausting for the singers, and the emphasis on small events (another broken-up vocal fugue subject, over-articulated accompanimental string figures) obscures this very long section's sweep and unity. The fugue is always hard to sustain in performance; what is needed here is a little more recklessness and enthusiasm. The final movement is usually taken at the same tempo as the first, but the faster-than-usual speed of this performance helps the singers sustain their lines (the tenors are revived and triumphant), and orchestral details are not lost but take on an effective urgency. A ritardando near the end leads to a conclusion that is at the same tempo as the identical ending of the first movement.

All in all, the recording is an excellent one, and the stated goals of those who produced it have been attained. The larger question which must be asked in this journal is, of course, whether it can be considered in terms of "performance practice" at all. If a performance of a major work of Brahms that suggests his own performing situation to any meaningful extent is to be attempted, does it suffice to consider only issues of "instruments and associated playing styles"? Should issues of balance and vocal quality be addressed? Should an attempt be made to approximate the circumstances of a work's early performances or the probable expectations of its composer? Should a conductor be obliged to justify his or her decisions about what interpretive details to add to the score? We ask such questions about performances of "early music," but is it valid to ask them about Brahms?

I can give no answers to such questions (though I would very much like to hear a recording by Gardiner and his orchestra of some of Brahms's instrumental music—the orchestral serenades for preference). I can only say that I enjoyed a new approach to a much-loved classic, and that I reacted to it as I would to any performance of the Brahms Requiem—more in terms of my own perception of what is effective and satisfying than in terms of what is "historic."

Virginia Hancock

1 Brahms first encountered the music of Heinrich Schütz in Carl von Winterfeld's Johannes Gabrieli und sein Zeitalter (1834), from which he copied works by Palestrina and Gabrieli in the 1850s. Winterfeld's lengthy discussion of Schütz includes a reference to his setting of the "Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen," text, embedded in a longer work (SWV 401); and his volume of musical examples includes three complete pieces ("Fili mi Absalon,"

SWV 269; "Was betrübst du dich, meine Seele?" SWV 335; and "Saul, Saul," SWV 415) and eleven fragments. The Musicalische Exequien is nowhere mentioned (including the setting of "Selig sind die Toten" that concludes it), nor are Schütz's settings of any of the other texts Brahms chose for the Requiem, "Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen" and "Die mit Tränen säen" from the Psalmen Davids (SWV 29 and 42 respectively), and "Die mit Tränen säen" and "Selig sind die Toten" from the Geistliche Chormusik of 1648 (SWV 378 and 391). The 1648 "Selig sind die Toten" was published in new collections twice before 1865—one lacking one of the six parts: Brahms did not own either collection, but could certainly have seen the piece in one of them. In January 1864 he conducted the Vienna Singakademie in a performance of "Saul, Saul," and near the same time he made a partial transcription from partbooks of another of the Symphoniae Sacrae III, "Der Herr ist mein Hirt" (SWV 398).

Although Brahms retained the liveliest interest in the music of Schütz, eagerly greeting Philipp Spitta's complete edition on the appearance of the first of its volumes in 1885 and copying a number of fragments from the Italian madrigals and the Psalmen Davids into his manuscript collection (Gardiner refers to these without noting the late date of the copies), there is no evidence beyond that mentioned above for his further acquaintance with Schütz's style before the completion of the Requiem in the late 1860s. The possible influence of Brahms's study of the complete works on his later choral motets is described by the present writer in "Brahms and Early Music: Evidence from His Library and His Choral Compositions," in Brahms Studies: Analytical and Historical Perspectives, ed. George S. Bozarth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 29–48; see esp. pp. 40–48.


3 Gardiner acknowledges consulting the performing edition of the Requiem prepared by Lara Hoggard. (The piano-vocal score, in English only, was published by Hinshaw Music Co. Inc. of Chapel Hill in 1984, with revised editions appearing in 1986 and 1989; the full score, in both German and English, appeared in 1989.) Hoggard begins with dynamic, tempo, and articulation markings from the standard published scores, but then proceeds to add many more—some taken from a conducting score Brahms himself used (described by Max Rudolf in "A Recently Discovered Composer-Annotated Score of the Brahms Requiem," Quarterly Journal of the Hennetschneider Bach Institute 7/4 [Oct. 1975]: 2–13 ), some from scores used by Brahms and other conductors at the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna (I know from personal
experience how difficult these markings can be to attribute correctly, and some by the editor himself. Inexcusably, Hoggard does not distinguish among these various additions. See the review of the edition by William Weintert in The Choral Journal 31/10 (May 1991): 35–43. I do not mean by this account to suggest that Gardiner has adopted Hoggard’s suggestions; I do feel, however, that recording can give an individual conductor’s decisions something of the same weight that they attain through publication, and that it can be equally difficult to disentangle the composer’s and conductor’s contributions.

Cadenza by . . .

Johannes Brahms: Concerto in D major for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 77; Sinfonia of London; Norman del Mar, conductor; Ruggiero Ricci, violin. Biddulph Recordings, LAW002.

Johannes Brahms left the composition of a first-movement cadenza for his D major Violin Concerto, Op. 77, to the soloist. Starting with Joseph Joachim, for whom the concerto was written during the summer of 1878, a number of violinists and composers have offered up improvisations of their own, some fitting the bill better than others. Sixteen of these cadenzas have now been assembled on one compact disc, appended to a performance of the concerto by Ruggiero Ricci and the Sinfonia of London, under the direction of Norman del Mar. The recording is divided into bands so that, with a programmable CD player, one can preset the cadenza to be inserted into the movement.

The earliest cadenza is of course the one by Joachim, who premiered the concerto in Leipzig on New Year’s Day, 1879. Also from this first generation are cadenzas by the Hungarian violinist Edmund Singer (1831–1912), Joachim’s successor at Weimar and later professor at the Stuttgart Conservatory; by the German-born Hugo Heermann (1844–1935), leader of the Frankfurt String Quartet and one of the violinists to whom Brahms turned for an assessment of his new concerto; and by the Hungarian Léopold Auer (1845–1930), who was first violin of the Imperial Orchestra in St. Petersburg and professor of violin at the conservatory taught a whole generation of great Russian violinists, before emigrating to America, where he joined the faculty of the Curtis Institute. Also represented are the Belgian violinist Eugen Ysaÿe (1858–1931), the Czechs Franz Ondřícek (1859–1922) and Jan Kubelik (1880–1940), and the Viennese Franz Kneisel (1865–1926), long-time concertmaster of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and leader of the influential Kneisel String Quartet, and Fritz Kreisler (1875–1962), who once owned the autograph manuscript of the concerto. Also represented are Joachim’s successors at the Berlin Hochschule, Henri Marten (1874–1934) and Adolf Busch (1831–1952), leader of the Busch String Quartet and founder of the Marlboro Music Festival, as well as three other violinists of our own century, Jascha Heifetz, Nathan Milstein, and Ruggiero Ricci himself. Cadenzas by two non-violinists, the British music critic Donald Francis Tovey (1875–1940) and the composer Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924), complete the set. Varying considerably in length, the cadenzas range from slightly under two minutes (Heermann, Busoni, Busch, and Ricci) to just over three minutes (Auer and Ysaÿe), with the majority clocking in around the two-and-three-quarter-minute mark (Joachim, Singer, Ondřícek, Kreisler, Tovey, Heifetz).

Assessing a series of violin cadenzas is something like judging an Olympic figure skating contest; initially one is simply dazzled by the sheer technical brilliance of the assembled champions. Points awarded for “artistic impression,” though, quickly separate out the true winners. For compositional integrity, the original Joachim cadenza, so often played and familiar to us all, is hard to surpass; sounding less improvised than composed, it progresses with a musically sure hand, reminding one of the considerable compositional talent Joachim displayed early in his career but never fully developed. Most engaging among subsequent efforts are the cadenzas by Ysaÿe and Kreisler. While Ysaÿe’s retransition (a crucial moment in any cadenza) is unconvincing, the rest of his cadenza is tightly organized and thoroughly engaging in its musical progress and technical feats. Equally impressive is Kreisler’s fantasia, with its imaginative review of the movement’s themes and its use of left-hand tremolos and triple-stop harmonies. It is also good to hear once more Heifetz’s taut potpourri of the movement’s themes, although in comparison with some of its more adventurous brethren its renditions of the movement’s themes do seem a bit too close to Brahms’s original presentations. Also worthy of note are the seldom-played cadenzas by Ondřícek, Kneisel, and Busch. Earning the honor of “most eccentric” is Busoni’s cadenza, which has the distinction, dubious at best, of being the only one accompanied by orchestra (mostly pedal points rendered by tremolo timpani . . .).

Ricci’s aggressive performances of the cadenzas are flawless, as are also his renditions of the more dynamic moments of the concerto itself. One could only wish for a little more warmth and relaxation in passages marked dolce and tranquillo.

George S. Bozarth

Readers wishing to acquire a copy of this CD may order it directly from Biddulph Recordings, 35 S. George Street, Hanover Square, London W1F 9FA, England. We would like to thank the recording’s producer, Eric Wen, for sending us a copy and to acknowledge Wayne Kiley, whose program notes provided much of the factual information given here.

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Two additional recordings using period instruments, both of which will be reviewed in our next Newsletter, have been issued in recent months:


Recent Brahms Publications

The following books, papers, dissertation, and editions of music have come to our attention since the last issue of this Newsletter:

**Correspondence**


This correspondence between Brahms and the famous surgeon Theodor Billroth (1829–84), central for the study of Brahms and his music, but long out of print, has been reissued by its original publisher. (Urban & Schwarzenberg, Postfach 20 24 40, Landwehrstraße 61, D-8000 München 2; DM 98 with linen binding, DM 298 with half-leather binding)

**Collections of Studies**


Joachim Draheim, “Die Welt der Antike in den Liedern von Johannes Brahms.”


August Gersmeier, “Brahms und Daumert.”

Heike Benecke, “Mutter-Tochter-Dialoge.”

Ira Braus, “Skeptische Beweglichkeit: Die Metrik von Wort und Ton in So stehen wir, ich und meine Weide op. 32/8.”

Thomas Sick, “Unser Liebe muß ewig bestehen!” Liebestreue in Brahms’ Liederschaffen.”

Clemens Goldberg, “Vergänglichkeit als ästhetische Kategorie und Erlebnis in Liedern von Johannes Brahms.”

Imogen Felling, “Doppelvertonungen.”

**Other Books and Articles**


A collection of essays on Brahms's relationships with the north German poets Klaus Groth, Friedrich Hebbel, Detlev von Liliencron, Theodor Storm, and Johann Heinrich Voss; two additional chapters, by Heinz Josef Herbort and Klaus Peter Jäbus Friction, discuss the Brahms family house in Heide.


A collection of the letters of Clara Schumann to her grand-daughter Julie Walch, née Schumann (1874–1953), together with excerpts from Frau Walch's diaries (including entries about Brahms) and additional letters from Clara and Marie Schumann and Julie Walch; introductory chapters by the editor (who is the great-great grandson of Robert and Clara Schumann) place the correspondence within the context of the Schumann family, its predilection for letter writing, and its values; richly illustrated with family photographs (many previously unpublished) and facsimiles of several of the letters (including Clara Schumann's letter to Brahms of 4 November 1888).


A collection of fifteen studies by various authors, each essay focusing on a particular city or geographical region and placing the music-making of that local in a broad context of socio-political, economic, intellectual, and religious life; of particular interest to Brahmsians will be the introductory chapter “Music and Society” by Jim Samson and Paul Bank’s contribution “Vienna: Absolutism and Nostalgia”, an excellent book for the generalist as well as the specialist. (ISBN 0-13-524174-X, hardbound; 0-13-524182-0, paperback)

**Doctoral Dissertation**


**Music of the Brahms Circle**


Settings of poems by Heine, Rückert, Serre, and Goethe, including six songs previously unpublished. (Hildegard Publishing Company, Box 332, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010; tel. 215-649-8649; $28.50).


**Papers Read at Scholarly Meetings**

William Mahrt (Stanford University), “Brahms as Man- notist: Signs of a Late Classic Aesthetic,” read at the Northern California Chapter Meeting, American Musicological Society, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA, 9 March 1991.
Communications

The Brahms-Institut in Lübeck, Kurt and Renate Hofmann, co-directors, has recently acquired the manuscript copy of Brahms's Clarinet Quintet, Op. 115, which served as the engraver's model for the first edition, published by N. Simrock, Berlin, in 1892. Prepared for the most part by the Hamburg cellist and copyist William Kupfer and revised and corrected throughout by the composer, this manuscript preserves a reading that varies significantly from the one found in the autograph manuscript owned by the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, thereby providing documentation of the stages through which the work passed as it received its trial performances in November and December 1891 and progressed towards publication the following March. The most extensive recomposition took place in the first movement; indeed, entire passages were recast (on the first page, for example, four bars were compressed into two, to yield bars 10–11 of the final version). Since this source was not consulted by Mandyczewski and Gál during the preparation of the *Johannes Brahms Sämtliche Werke*, the full measure of its impact on a critical edition of the quintet has yet to be taken.

The Brahms-Institut acquired the manuscript from the private collection of Dr. Friedrich G. Zeileis in Gallschap, Austria, with assistance from the Posehl-Stiftung and the Kulturstiftung des Landes Schleswig-Holstein. The celebration, on January 20th, to welcome this manuscript to its new home included a lecture "Zur Entstehung und frühen Rezeption des Klarinettenquintetts" ("On the Creation of and Early Critical Reaction to the Clarinet Quintet") by Kurt Hofmann and a performance of the quintet by Bernd Rodenberg and the Miró Quartet of Lübeck. (Copies of the Hofmann lecture may be obtained by writing to the Brahms-Institut, Königstrasse 42, D-2400 Lübeck 1, BRD.)

Founded in 1990, the Brahms-Institut has made an impressive series of acquisitions during its first two years. In addition to the manuscript of the Clarinet Quintet, this archive has acquired the correction sheets for the parts of the First String Quintet, Op. 88 (from the estate of the violist Emanuel Wirth), an autograph of the song *Ein Sommernachtlied*, Op. 14 No. 4 (formerly part of a private collection in London), a portfolio of letters by Joseph Joachim (purchased in England), and the letters from Brahms to the Leipzig publisher C. F. Peters, as well as a number of other Brahms letters, books from the composer's library, poetry albums, and rare editions of the music of members of the Brahms circle.

In addition to directing the Brahms-Institut, the Hofmanns have undertaken to continue the sixteen-volume series of Brahms correspondence begun in the early years of this century under the auspices of the Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft. Volume 17, edited by Kurt Hofmann and Herta Müller and containing the correspondence between Brahms and Duke Georg II of Saxony-Meiningen and his wife, was published last year by Hans Schneider, Tützing (see article in Newsletter IX/2); volume 18, now being prepared by Renate Hofmann, will contain the extant letters between Brahms and the baritone Julius Stockhausen.

Frau Erika Ophuls of Düsseldorf-Benrath has written to inform us that copies of her unpublished three-volume edition of the correspondence between the artist Willy von Beckerath, well-known for his drawings of Brahms, and her father, Landgerichtsdirektor Dr. Gustav Ophuls of Düsseldorf, are available for study by scholars at more than two dozen institutions in Germany and Austria, including the musicological institutes at the universities in Bonn, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, and Kiel, the Bayrische Staatsbibliothek in Munich, the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, the Robert-Schumann-Haus in Zwickau, the Brahms Institute in Lübeck, and the Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung in Berlin (a copy of the full list of locations may be obtained by writing to the ABS Brahms Archive). The correspondence, which extended over a period of thirty years (1896–1926), included discussions of the major composers of the epoch and their music, especially Brahms, Bruckner, and Reger, of musical life in Düsseldorf and other cities in the Rhineland, of the music festivals in Munich, Dortmund, and Wiesbaden, of Ophuls's various writings, including his interpretation of Brahms's *Gesang der Parzen*, Op. 89 (Zeitschrift für Musik 92/1 [January 1925]: 8–13), and of life in the Rhineland during the period of recession and inflation after the First World War. Frau Ophuls also informs us that an abridged version of this correspondence, edited by Siegfried Kross, is planned as volume 141 of the series *Beiträge zur rheinischen Musikgeschichte*. Gustav Ophuls's collection of Brahms's song texts, originally published in 1898, with revised editions in 1908 and 1923, was reissued, newly edited by Kristian Wachinger, in 1983 by Langwiesche-Brandt of Ebenhausen bei München (400 pages; ISBN 3-7846-0115-4; DM 42). Ophuls's *Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms*, first published in 1921 by the Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft, was also reissued at the same time by the same publisher (48 pages; ISBN 3-7846-0118-9; DM 6.80).

On 2 December 1991 the Brahmsgesellschaft Baden-Baden celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. The major projects of this society are the upkeep of the Brahms-Haus in Lichtenthal, which now houses a Brahms museum and an apartment/studio in which scholars, composers, and other musicologists studying Brahms are allowed to reside, and the mounting of a *Brahmsstag* festival every two years. Plans are now underway for *Brahmsstag* 1993, which will take place from the 5th to the 9th of May and present, in addition to works by Brahms and other nineteenth-century composers, the premiere of Wolfgang Rihm's Concerto for Violin. Performers will include the Labecque sisters, the Wiener Streichsextett, the Baden-Baden Orchester, and the SWF-Orchester. Travelers wishing to visit the Brahms museum should be informed that it will be closed January through March 1993 for renovations.

The *Johannes Brahms-Gesellschaft Internationale Vereinigung* and the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg have announced the Fifth International
Brahms Competition for 14–20 September 1992. Held in conjunction with the second Musikfest Hamburg, the competition this year will be for solo piano, with prizes ranging up to DM 10,000. A schedule and information on requirements of age and repertoire may be obtained by writing to the Brahms-Wettbewerb 1992, Hartungstraße 8, D-2000 Hamburg 13; applications with supporting materials must be received by 15 July. All stages of the competition are open to the public.

Discounted Publications for ABS Members

The American Brahms Society is pleased to be able to add two new titles to its list of publications available to its members at special discounted prices:

Nineteenth-Century Piano Music. Edited by R. Larry Todd. Studies in Musical Genre and Repertoires. New York: Schirmer Books, 1990. $34.00 (reg. $42.00), plus $3.00 shipping and handling per copy, payable to Schirmer Books (check only).

Malcolm MacDonald. Brahms. New York: Schirmer Books, 1990. $24.00 (reg. $30.00), plus $3.00 shipping and handling per copy, payable to Schirmer Books (check only).

A review of the MacDonald biography appeared in this Newsletter last spring (IX/1); an essay adapted from Walter Frisch’s chapter on Brahms for Nineteenth-Century Piano Music was published as the “lead” article in the autumn issue of the Newsletter (IX/2). The special prices on these two books are available only through 31 October 1992.

The following publications continue to be available to ABS members at discounted prices:


Johannes Brahms, Alto Rhapsody, Op. 55. Introduction by Walter Frisch. New York: The New York Public Library, 1983. $40.00 (reg. $50.00), plus $2.00 per book (up to $6.00) for shipping and handling, payable to the New York Public Library (check or money order only).

Johannes Brahms, “Felderinsamkeit,” Opus 86 Nr. 2: Faksimile nach dem in Privatsitz befindlichen Autograph. Accompanying notes (German and English) by Ernst Hertrich. Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1983. $41.40 (reg. $46.00), payable to Henle/USA (check, VISA, MC).


Johannes Brahms Autothraphs: Facsimiles of Eight Manuscripts in the Library of Congress. Introduction by James Webster; Notes about the Manuscripts by George S. Bozarth. New York: Garland Publishing, 1983. $120.00 (reg. $151.00), plus $4.80 shipping and handling per copy, payable to Garland Publishing (VISA, MC, AmEx only).

Walter Frisch, Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. $38.00 (reg. $47.50), $11.96 paperback (reg. $14.95), plus $2.00 for first copy, $.50 for each additional copy for shipping, payable to California/Princeton Fulfillment Services (check, VISA, MC, AmEx).


To take advantage of these discounts, please send your order, with payment(s) by check, money order, or credit card, as designated above, to the Society’s office in Seattle; you may use the order form in this Newsletter. All payments must be made in U.S. dollars and include shipping and handling costs, as indicated. If purchasing with credit card, please include your card number and expiration date. We will verify your membership in the Society and forward your order to the appropriate publisher(s), who will send the publication directly to you.
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The American Brahms Society is a non-profit organization. The IRS has determined that donations in excess of dues may be considered as charitable contributions.

I wish to order the following publications now available with member’s discounts (see article earlier in this issue):
Brahms Studies
A Call for Papers

The American Brahms Society announces the continuation of its series of Brahms Studies, to which it invites contributions concerning the life, work, and artistic milieu of Johannes Brahms. The series will be published by the University of Nebraska Press under the editorship of David Brodbeck, who will be advised by an Editorial Board consisting of the Society's Board of Directors. The intellectual scope of the series will be broad: contributions are sought in criticism, analysis, theory, biography, archival and documentary studies, and interdisciplinary studies; translations of important writings that have appeared in foreign languages also will be considered. Each volume will consist of approximately six to eight full-length studies. The first volume is scheduled to be published in early 1994, with subsequent volumes appearing about every three years thereafter. Typescripts should be double-spaced throughout on 8 1/2 x 11 inch-bond paper, with ample margins; three copies should be submitted. Authors whose articles are accepted will be asked to submit their revised text on a floppy disk. Prospective contributors should follow the practices of the Chicago Manual of Style, 13th edition. Submissions and queries should be sent to Professor David Brodbeck, Editor, Brahms Studies, Department of Music, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

The Geiringer Scholarship Fund
A Progress Report

Contributions to the Karl Geiringer Scholarship Fund so far this year have totalled $1,870, increasing our endowment to $11,490. Most of these contributions were made by ABS members, whose response to the appeal they received with their membership renewal notices was most generous. Although the Geiringer Fund is still far short of the amount needed to award an annual scholarship of $1,000 (at current rates, $20,000), the scholarship is being offered once again this year by drawing upon the Society's dues to make up the difference. Needless to say, all additional contributions will be greatly appreciated.

Editor's Notes

The Editor would like to thank George Bozarth for preparing the columns on recent publications and communications to the American Brahms Society and for assisting with the adaptation of William Youngren's essay. At the University of Washington, Margo Maier, Ben Kohn, and David Wilcox worked on the production and distribution of this issue. The Editor welcomes articles, letters, and suggestions for future Newsletters. Material for the autumn issue should be sent to her by 1 August 1992.

Virginia Hancock

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