Wilhelm Furtwängler’s Brahms Essays of 1933–34 and the Clash of Political and Cultural Nationalism

Anniversaries furnish a useful vantage point from which to view shifts in their subjects’ historical meaning. As it happened, the Brahms centennial in 1933 shortly followed Hitler’s seizing of the German Chancellorship. A glut of nationally tinged tributes to Brahms reflected the politics of the day. Music history has paid little attention to Brahms reception during this period, particularly if compared with the heightened interest scholars have shown for the Nazis’ use of music by Brahms’s contemporaries Richard Wagner and Anton Bruckner. Among the most frequently cited and reprinted examples of nationalistically stamped Brahms literature from that time are a pair of essays by the pre-eminent German conductor of the day, Wilhelm Furtwängler. The first of two Brahms essays he penned originally served as the inaugural address for a week-long centennial festival in Vienna. This event was sponsored jointly by Vienna’s Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde and the Berlin-based Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft, of which Furtwängler was Chair. His essay offers a poignant example of Brahms reception during die Wende [turning point] — the designation for the official drive toward political, social, and cultural transformation that followed Hitler’s coup — articulating a type of German nationalism that Furtwängler regarded as strictly cultural.

Brahms festivals were plentiful throughout Europe in 1933, especially in German-speaking lands. The celebrations in both Hamburg and Vienna, which naturally drew special attention, were disrupted by racist incidents. In Hamburg Alfred Rosenberg’s Kampfbund für deutsche Kultur suspended festivities briefly because some Jewish performers had been hired for the event. A few weeks later, the larger Vienna Brahms-Fest was rocked by rumors that the composer’s name derived from the Jewish “Abramson.” It was in this climate that Furtwängler made his remarks on 16 May 1933.

Furtwängler himself remains a problematic figure because of his ambiguous relationship with the Nazi regime. Although he actively sought first protection and then safe passage for many Jewish members of the Berlin Philharmonic, his critics have contended that he may have been motivated less by compassion than by a will to exercise his influence. And, wittingly or not, Furtwängler provided the Nazis with a symbol of cultural legitimacy by staying in Germany and continuing to conduct there and in Austria throughout the war. In few accounts was Furtwängler a Nazi or an open anti-Semite. Rather, he believed in an idealized, purely “cultural” German nation beyond the reach of politics and the ideology of the Third Reich, which led him to opine, “There never was a Nazi Germany — only a Germany under the heel of the Nazis.” Such statements are generally regarded nowadays as wishful denial, but we can better understand his view of Brahms if we accept that he sincerely (continued on next page)
(Furtwängler’s Brahms Essays, continued)

held that vision of Germany. Nearly all of Furtwängler’s essays on canonic German composers are laced with references to their German identity; many of them, indeed, focus on this point.

Thus, in his 1933 address Furtwängler places Brahms in an explicitly German artistic lineage:

Brahms belonged to the giants of German music, which begins with Bach and Handel, is carried forward by Beethoven, and in which a colossal physical power is combined with the greatest tenderness and sensitivity. His character and stature are thoroughly Nordic. To me he has always seemed like an offspring of the greatest old German or Dutch painters, such as van Eyck or Rembrandt, whose works unite intimacy, fantasy, and fervent, often impetuous vibration with a wonderful sense of form.

Furtwängler writes that Brahms had “the special ability to live out and to feel the great suprapersonal community of the Volk,” expressed in his music through the folk-like qualities of his melodies:

Like the great ones before him, Brahms was able to write a melody that was his own to the final detail, yet sounded like a true folk song. Or, expressed another way, he could write a melody that was an authentic, indisputable folk song—and yet undeniably also by Brahms. The process was completely different from that of someone like Mahler, for example. Mahler was a foreigner in the realm of folk song, no matter how ardently his restless soul wished and longed for it like a safe haven. He took it upon himself to create “artificial” folk songs. Brahms himself embodied the Volk, embodied the “folk song.”

On the face of it, little new ground is broken here. Early in Brahms’s career commentators had identified folk-song qualities in his music; indeed, this has continued to be a familiar theme in Brahms reception. But any focus on an artist’s völkisch credentials in Germany in 1933 warrants close scrutiny given the place of das Volk in Nazi ideology. And Furtwängler holds our attention when he bestows the same connection between folk song and personal style on another pair of composers: “Wagner and Bruckner possessed the same gift, and I have no hesitation in maintaining that it represents creativity at its highest and constitutes the mark of a genius.” Echoes of folk music are less obvious in the compositions of these two composers (particularly Wagner), but völkisch rhetoric of this type would become rampant, especially in the cult of Bruckner that developed during the 1930s.

And consider Furtwängler’s quite different appraisal, in the quotation above, of Gustav Mahler’s use of folk melody. Furtwängler’s comments are laced with the catchwords often found in anti-Semitic writings at the time: “foreigner,” “restless,” “artificial” (he does make complimentary remarks about Mahler in other essays). While Mahler may have been cited for his status as a modernist as much as for his Jewishness, the two identities were not easily separated at that time in Vienna—and elsewhere in Europe. For by 1933 a strong strain of anti-Semitism had become apparent in the cultural battle against modernism. Anti-Semitic music critics at least as far back as Wagner had first accused Jews of merely aping German speech in a futile effort to make themselves sound German, then quickly drawn a connection to Jewish attempts to write music in the German tradition. Furtwängler merely omits the first step. By the early twentieth century, reactionary German ideologues had forged a dichotomy between pure art, which can spring only from das Volk, and the empty derivative art of Jews that had corrupted an originally folk-based German culture. Modernism was the focal point for those discontents.

It is an odd twist of history that in 1933 Brahms could be brandished as a man of the Volk and a tool of anti-modernism. After all, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century it had been Brahms’s own values—rational thought, formal clarity, belief in scientific progress, loyalty to Bismarck and the Prussian state—that defined “modernity.” Because of these values Brahms’s supporters had seen him as a bulwark against the art and ideas of Wagner, who railed against the earlier brand of modernism. Apparently Furtwängler shared some of this sentiment; without criticizing “the incomparable figure of Wagner,” he obliquely condemns “the developments that came with Wagner and which exercised such a fascination on [Brahms’s] contemporaries.” Brahms, by contrast, receives Furtwängler’s praise for his “passionate objectivity.”

The last paragraph in Furtwängler’s address, presented in full below, sums up the picture of an anti-modernist, ultranationalist Brahms, a view that reached its peak in the political climate of Austria and Germany in the 1930s:

The Volk, the folk song from which Brahms descends is German. He was able to accomplish what he did by the strength of his Germanness. And not—this must also be stated—because he wanted to be a German, but rather because he was a German. He could be nothing else; and if his heart was open to all sorts of inspirations from beyond Germany (also a typically German attitude), his Germanic nature instinctually sought to overcome and subdue these influences. His art, in its bitterness and sweetness, in its apparent exterior hardness and inner resilience, in its imagination and abundance as in its self-discipline and compactness, is German. He was the last musician to reveal to all the world’s eyes, with undeniable clarity, the greatness of German music.

After the Second World War, Furtwängler argued that this forcefully nationalistic reading of Brahms was not intended to support the new Nazi regime back home, but rather to stake out a cultural turf distinct from political developments of the time—an argument that his defenders are still making today. Certain turns of phrase make this claim hard to accept: for example, the emphasis (Furtwängler’s) in the line “not because he wanted to be a German, but rather because he was a German,” which seems almost openly anti-Semitic in light of Furtwängler’s comments about Mahler. Furthermore, no comment about “overcoming and subduing” foreign inspiration made in the Germany (or Austria) of 1933 can be read so innocently as Furtwängler would have it. Yet Furtwängler apparently did distinguish between contemporary political reality and the nationalistic cultural agenda that he espoused. While his rhetoric may have stirred pan-German sentiments among the Austrians in his audience, he was speaking in a still independent Austria, which he claimed as a German
whether we speak of Goethe or Rembrandt, Bach or Beethoven. Bound up with this increasing inner insight is a growing alienation from one's surroundings, an onset of loneliness, a transcendence of one's own time.

Brahms is plucked from his own time in a familiar gambit that links him more closely to other "timeless" masters than to his contemporaries. As the essay unfolds, that from which Brahms would have dissociated himself becomes clear: "He would relinquish neither himself nor his art to the spiritual crisis that has plagued Europe for the last fifty years"—in other words, modernism. In large part, Furtwängler is rehashing his anti-modernist thrust of a year before. But now, instead of pitting Brahms as a child of the Volk against modernism, he places him above the fray, a model to whom contemporary musicians and audiences can look for guidance out of the "Crisis of Our Time." A side effect of this maneuver—perhaps an intentional one on Furtwängler's part—is to render Brahms apolitical, unsullied by the worldly issues of his day, as well as by its artistic direction.

Brahms still maintains much the same reputation that Furtwängler afforded him: a composer of Classical instincts in a Romantic musical climate, the absolute-music composer par excellence. (Even the recent focus on allusion in his music does not change this fact: we are still speaking of "music about music." ) But claiming universality and detachment for Brahms's art itself constitutes a kind of cultural nationalism. German intellectuals and artists had been making such claims about German art (especially music) since the early nineteenth century. Indeed, much of our modern attitude towards absolute music as an abstract and elevated art form developed from that philosophical tradition. One may read Furtwängler's comments as apolitical, and therefore disassociated from Nazi ideology, but they speak to a form of cultural nationalism that could be (and was) exploited by the Nazis themselves, i.e., the elevated, transcendent, and spiritual status of German art music. In the end it is difficult to separate cultural from political nationalism as Furtwängler wished to do, just as it has been difficult for his biographers and other historians to agree on whether and to what degree he was complicit in, or resistant to, contemporaneous political realities. Even more difficult to determine is whether and/or how artists' attitudes and biases (cultural, political, etc.) should affect our appreciation and understanding of their creative work (the example of Wagner looms large here).

With the present essay I make no attempt to settle such scores. Rather, through a critical reading of Furtwängler's remarks on Brahms I hope to suggest how some of our most common platitudes about Brahms's music (universality, objectivity, timelessness) derive in part from an earlier, long-standing tradition of German cultural nationalism.

Daniel Beller-McKenna

Original versions of the two essays critiqued here may be found in Wilhelm Furtwängler, Ton und Wort, 6th edition (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1955). The author wishes to thank Marilyn McCoy for assistance with the translations used here.
Brahms in Accorde with Klinger

Part II

The first part of this essay explored the complex iconography of the frontispiece to Max Klinger’s *Brahmsphantastie* (1894), entitled “Accorde,” and the disillusionment of its fantasy of absolute music in the following image, “Alte Liebe.” It was also observed that Klinger has become little more a disconcerting footnote in Brahms scholarship, “Accorde” itself evidence of a fantastic delusion. But what about Brahms himself—would not the composer be in the best position to assess the appropriateness of Klinger’s vision of a new musical mythology?

Beyond his repeated expressions of approval for an early version of the print “Im Grase” (which accompanies the notation for the song “Feldeinsamkeit” in the *Brahmsphantasie*), we do not know in any detail how Brahms would have interpreted Klinger’s work. Still, he clearly found a great deal of aesthetic value and an affinity to his own musical efforts in it—so much so that he feared even his most cultivated friends might need help to see what was so apparent to himself. To Clara Schumann he wrote:

They are not really illustrations in the ordinary sense, but magnificent and wonderful fantasies inspired by my texts. Without assistance (without an explanation) you would certainly miss the sense and the connection to the text. How much I should like to look through them with you and show you how profoundly he has grasped the subject and to what heights his understanding and imagination soar. But without this you would certainly be able to admire only a few [images]. . . . I could be your interpreter and share the pleasure it would give you. (4 January 1894)

And Eduard Hanslick reported that Brahms compared Klinger’s fantasies to his own recently completed cycle of seven *Fantasien*, Op.116, telling him to “bring some time” for their contemplation. (These *Klavierstücke* were composed and designated as fantasies during the time when Brahms was viewing proofs for the *Brahmsphantasie*.) Brahms urged his friends to acquire copies of their own. He himself sent a copy to Joseph Joachim with this comment:

In your quietest hours immerse yourself in its pages. No matter how high and wide Klinger’s fantasy takes him, image, word, and sound will merge for you, and you, just as I, will be delighted and touched by the beauty and the deep, serious expressiveness of the pictures (14 October 1894).

It is unfortunate that apparently no one accepted Brahms’s offer of interpretation, for a more resounding endorsement of Klinger’s vision could hardly be imagined—except for what he imparted to Klinger himself (12 December 1895). His response to the artist includes this rare and remarkable aesthetic credo:

Looking at [the *Brahmsphantasie*], it is as though the music therein resounds further into infinity and everything that I wanted to say is stated more clearly than is possible in music, and yet with just as much mystery and foreboding [doch eben so geheimnisreich und ahnungsvoll]. At times I am inclined to envy you that you can have such clarity with your pen; sometimes I am glad that I don’t need to be that clear. Ultimately though, I must conclude that all art is the same and speaks an equivalent language.

Much could be said to elucidate this response from Brahms. Or one could simply dismiss Brahms’s kind words as a concatenation of harmless clichés gleaned from *Der junge Kreislers Schatzkästlein*, his youthful collection of Romantic aphorisms.

The second possibility points to Brahms’s (and Klinger’s) roots in the aesthetics of absolute poetics as theorized by Early Romanticism in conjunction with the philosophical Idealism that emerged in the wake of Kant. Schooled in the tradition of enlightened Classicism established by Goethe and Schiller, this generation of poet-philosophers (born with Beethoven around 1770) provided many of the foundational texts exalting music as part of a “new mythology” for a post-revolutionary age of secular humanism. It was left to the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, and others to romanticize the philosophical Idealism of Hegel and Schelling into a poetic theory and practice. Ludwig Tieck, Wilhelm Wackenroder, Jean Paul Richter, and E.T.A. Hoffmann were among the most prominent writers to explore and expand the poetic possibilities of the specifically musical absolute.

From the perspective of this movement, the philosopher had to possess as much aesthetic power as the poet, just as the poet had to inform his work with philosophical power. They proclaimed a “new mythology” of aesthetic ideas in the service of reason as the means through which the poet-philosopher could communicate to the people at large, and thus elevate—enoble—both the individual and society as a whole. Yet the inner world of Romanticism was imbued with the melancholy and longing associated with what Schiller called the “elegiac idyll.” In his essay *On the Naive and Sentimental* he maintained that even the most perfectly drawn idyll of happiness and fulfillment will be revealed as elegiac through the materiality of its representation: “even without the poet’s volition, this discord will be betrayed by every stroke of the pen.” Novalis expressed the same insight with the aphorism “we seek the absolute, but find only the material.” Thus, for Early Romanticism the absolute is a necessary, but impossible ideal.

(An important metaphor for the Romantics’ mundane, immanent transcendence was the notion of *Schweben* (hovering, floating, or fluctuation). *Schweben* describes a view of art (or music) as open-ended allegory in which the “pure” beauty of formal technique (the law of reason) gives shape to an excessive or “replete” content of cultural signification (the freedom of worldly fantasy). The Early Romantic absolute is thus not found at the eternal poles of purity or plenitude, but as a subjective condition between them, among the disparate elements brought into a constellation from the perspective of the viewer.)

This philosophical context helps to explain Brahms’s offer to guide his friends’ contemplation of the often obscure “hieroglyphs” found in the *Brahmsphantasie*, for aesthetic understanding of the new mythology was best cultivated through dialogue between friends. Let us now consider the composer’s words to Klinger.

First, Romantic musical language put the allegorical potential of the various topoi, styles, emblems, tropes, effects, etc. to coherent use within a classicist context of mythology and philosophy for the higher purpose of humanistic *Bildung*. Brahms’s reference to the “equivalent language” of
the arts implies not so much a simple translation of individual icons from one medium to another as a sharing of basic themes of human experience. The new mythology sought its originality in the realignment of conventions and allusions to past practice, in particular those of the pastoral tradition with its elegiac overtones. This depth of idealistic content, historical awareness, seriousness even in jest, and pursuit of utopian hope intimated timeless truths and universal qualities that approach the absolute, yet remain absolutely dependent on the historical moment.

Second, as the Romantics often emphasized, the understanding of their works requires—and stimulates—a mental Besonnenheit, an alertness or presence of mind, a Witz that actively perceives and integrates both details and the greater idea. Brahms’s stated ambivalence about compositional clarity should not cause us to overlook this aspect of aesthetic reception: the very lack of representational clarity can awaken a greater sense of Besonnenheit by requiring more interpretive imagination from the listener.

Finally, the key words in Brahms’s letter to Klinger are the “mystery and foreboding” that qualify our human approach to the absolute. The ultimate mysteriousness of great works of art acknowledges that the absolute can never be fully attained by human means, that there will always be something beyond our understanding. And the melancholic sense of “foreboding” anticipates the inevitable failure of all representation in a self-reflexive consciousness that terminates the flights of fantasy. In contrast to the certainty of the absolute afforded by faith in a transcendent God, the antimetaphysical metaphysics of the Romantics places responsibility on the individual’s sense of his or her own worldly limitations and motivations.

Klinger grew up loving the music of Robert Schumann, to whom he dedicated the print cycle *Reitungen Ovidischer Opfer* (Opus II, 1879) as an affectionate testimonial. Schumann’s *Kreisleriana*, a cycle of seven piano Fantasien, gives musical life to the eccentric Kapellmeister found in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s cycle of essays by the same name published in his *Fantasietücke in Callot’s Manier* (1815). Indeed, Brahms’s initial reaction to Simrock’s plan of using Klinger’s work for the Lieder in Opp. 96 and 97 had been to suggest that such imagery seemed more appropriate for Schumann’s work. Brahms also admired Callot’s etchings and possessed about 200 reproductions. Like Klinger, the French mannerist Jacques Callot (1592-1635) was a technical innovator in etching and engraving. E.T.A. Hoffmann had praised Callot for his ability to “assemble in a small space such an abundance of motifs, emerging beside each other, even within each other, yet without confusing the eye, so that the individual elements are seen as such, but still blend with the whole.” Is it simply a coincidence that Hoffmann’s original illustration for the title page of his book of fantasy-pieces shows the “ancient German troubadour” at sunrise playing a harp with a bardic head atop its pillar?

Klinger’s affinity with Romantic mythology could be demonstrated further by comparing the imagery of “Accorde” with any number of Early Romantic texts that describe transcendent or “absolute” qualities of music. Indeed, this image might almost be considered to represent graphically Hegel’s philosophical distinction, within Romanticism, between the empirical realm (of the pianist on the dais) and an inner spiritual realm in which the reconciled heart “hovers over the waters…like a ringing tone…in a rotation of birth, death and rebirth.” Another example is Joseph Berglinger’s poetic account of music “hovering before my senses” in Tieck and Wackenroder’s *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst*, which also includes the well-known analogy between heart-strings and harp-strings. This idyll is destroyed when Berglinger realizes that it was, as Schopenhauer would later put it, “only a beggar’s dream, in which he is king, but from which he must awake, in order to realize that only fleeting illusion had separated him from the suffering of life.” Berglinger dies condemning music.

Like Wackenroder and Hegel, many Romantics—E. T. A. Hoffmann in particular—were wary of the misuse of the “otherworldly” powers of music, sensing an ungodly presence, a charge that would lead to the rejection of the Early Romantic school. Acrimonious anti-Romantic sentiments can be found in writers as diverse as Goethe, Hegel, Heine, Kierkegaard, and later Carl Schmitt. Indeed, the end-of-the-century culture wars involving Brahms and Liberalism stem in part from this earlier condemnation of romanticism as ungodly, pathological, escapist, and elitist. As early as the

Illustration drawn by E. T. A. Hoffmann for the Title Page of his *Fantasietücke in Callot’s Manier*

(continued on next page)
first decade of the nineteenth century several poet-philosophers retreated to the transcendence to be found in institutionalized religion. By the end of the century much of the mythology of Romantic music had become buried under a formalist ideology that lent musical study scientific legitimacy, while at the same time New German program music and music drama overwhelmed the European musical language with the immediacy of commercial phantasmagoria.

This is why it is so important that Klinger’s allegory “Accorde” be contextualized by the disillusionment of “Alte Liebe” on page two. By itself, the frontispiece easily turns into sentimental kitsch. “Accorde” might seem to represent the pianist as a divinely inspired composer of a metaphysical music subsumed into the transcendent beauty of a love-death, presenting an encounter with the sublime without the distortions and critical stance of avant-garde Modernism. In this selective viewing the hallucinatory wonder of the print “Evocation,” the frontispiece to Part II of the Brahmsphantasie, replaces “Alte Liebe” as the adjunct to “Accorde.”

By the early twentieth century Klinger’s high art had been converted into mechanically reproduced wall-posters offered to a burgeoning market of Bildungspilister who all too easily could identify Klinger’s image of musical plenitude with the nationalist and spiritualist meaning they thought they heard in the music of Wagner and Bruckner. As suggested above by Meier-Graefe, in this interpretation the sociopolitical significance of Klinger’s self-reflexive allegory of a hovering musical absolute regresses into the reified symbolic absolutism of a dangerous myth of German destiny.

Yet, as I hope to have shown, the metaphysical swindle that led to World War I should no more be laid at the feet of Klinger than at those of Brahms. At least in his graphic work, Klinger creates a sense of a mysterious, foreboding transcendence that is simultaneously a critique of fin-de-siècle metaphysics. His handling of the theme of death as absolute does not reek of decadence and degeneration, nor does it lead to a utopia born of sickly sentimental dreams; instead, he follows a long European tradition of vanitas vanitatum, but from a humanist perspective.

In his final year, afflicted with what would be his fatal illness, Brahms returned to Das Junge Kreislers Schatzkästlein, the collection of romantic aphorisms left untouched for so long, in order to add a fourth section: more poetic quotations from Jean Paul and Goethe were accompanied by a few political observations from Bismarck. As Brahms reread Meisters Wanderjahre and Quintus Fixlein, his thoughts must have extended to Klinger, to whom he dedicated the Vier ernsten Gesänge, Op.121. Perhaps, too, as he turned the pages of the Brahmsphantasie, he regretted the loss of Clara Schumann to share his interpretation.
Brahms in Boston

A festival-symposium entitled "Brahms: Historical and Theoretical Contexts for the Performance of His Works" will be held at Boston University on 5-7 April 2001. Organized by John Daverio and funded by a grant from the Humanities Foundation at Boston University, the event will include formal paper sessions, performance workshops, and two public concerts.

Seven speakers will present papers related in various ways to the festival theme:
Daniel Beller-McKenna, "Performing Culture in the Obbligato Lied: Brahms's Songs, Op. 91, for Alto and Viola"
George Bozarth, "Brahms on Welte-Mignon Piano Rolls, 1903-25"
David Brodbeck, "On Some Enigmas Surrounding a Riddle Canon by Brahms"
John Daverio, "Against the Grain: Brahms's Conception of the Virtuoso Violin Idiom"
Walter Frisch, "The Brahms B-flat Major Piano Concerto: Perspectives on Performance and Recordings"
Margaret Notley, "Volksconcerte and Concepts of Genre in Brahms's Vienna"

Workshop leaders David Epstein and George Bozarth will coach student performers in selected movements from the Clavierstücke, Op. 118, and the G-minor Piano Trio, Op. 101. The concerts, to be held on 5 and 6 April, will include performances of the Violin Sonatas in G major and A major; the Horn Trio; the Lieder for women's voices, two horns, and harp, Op. 17; and the choral part songs, Op. 104.

All events will be open to the public. For further information, contact John Daverio at daverio@bu.edu.

Brahms Society News

In June 2000 the Brahmsgesellschaft Baden-Baden e.V. released its second compact disc, which contains the Piano Quintet, Op. 34, and the First Symphony, Op. 68. This recording, which is not available commercially, can be purchased directly from the Brahmsgesellschaft for DM 25. This society has also announced its eighteenth "Brahmstage Baden-Baden" for 25-29 April 2001. For further information, write to the Brahmsgesellschaft at Maximilianstraße 85, D-76534 Baden-Baden, or use their new e-mail address, brahms.baden-baden@t-online.de.

The Johannes-Brahms-Gesellschaft in Hamburg has announced an international competition for string quartets to take place 4-9 September 2001. The first prize will be a series of concerts and DM 32,000, the second prize, DM 26,000. The competition is underwritten with a generous contribution by the Vereins- and Westbank. Contestants need to submit an application and entrance fee of DM 150 by 15 August 2001; for further information, contact the Johannes-Brahms-Gesellschaft, Peterstraße 39, D-20355 Hamburg.

As part of the "Brahms-Festival Lübeck 2000: Hommage à Bach," held 30 April-7 May 2000, the Brahms Institut in Lübeck mounted an exhibition "Auf Bachs Spuren wandeln: Brahms, Bach und die alten Meister," an illustrated catalogue for which can be obtained from the Institut, Königstraße 42, D-23552 Lübeck.

Max Klinger, Statue of Brahms,
Hamburger Musikhalle

Brahms understood the distinct advantages of the various media to suggest the absolute—the difference in "clarity" between a pen and a piano—yet he concluded that "all art is the same and speaks an equivalent language." Like Klinger's, Brahms's Romantic absolute was a poetically replete absolute that both presupposes and furthers a rich cultural Bildung through which one might briefly hover in a state of aesthetic transcendence. Klinger's imagery can tell us much about the music of Brahms, just as musical tradition suffuses his art. Klinger provides no specific translation of singular meanings, but rather reveals the Classicist-Romantic spirit that informs their shared—but beleaguered—esthetic tradition. The music of Brahms would be well served by the reawakening and exploration of the fantasy of absolute music.

Thomas K. Nelson

Part I of this essay appeared in the Spring 2000 issue of the Newsletter. Klinger's dedicatory copy of the Brahmsphantasie, fully intact within its deluxe leather binding, can be viewed in the Brahms-Archiv at the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg—bring a friend and plenty of time. His statue of Brahms can be seen nearby in the Hamburger Musikhalle.
**Brahms at Auction**

The Sotheby's auction of Printed and Manuscript Music in London on 8 December 2000 will offer for sale the engraver's models for Brahms's *Clavierst"cke*, Opp. 118 and 119 (items 18 and 19). Both manuscripts were prepared by William Kupfer, Brahms's regular copyist in the 1890s, and corrected by the composer. Running to 24 pages, the manuscript of Op. 118 has a suggested price range of £29,000-11,000; Op. 119, at 16 pages, is listed at £6,000-8,000.

**Competition for Twelfth Annual Geiringer Scholarship**

The American Brahms Society is seeking applicants for its Karl Geiringer Scholarship in Brahms Studies, which is awarded annually, as meritorious candidates present themselves. The competition is open to students in the final stages of preparing a doctoral dissertation at a university in North America. Work relating to Brahms should form a significant thread within the dissertation, but it need not be the only one. The Selection Committee welcomes applications from students whose research might be concentrated instead on music by members of the Brahms circle, questions concerning musical life in later 19th-century Vienna, and so forth. Only projects that demonstrate significant original thought and research will be deemed competitive. The decision to award the scholarship rests with the Board of Directors; the winner will be announced in November 2000, following the regular annual meeting of the Board.

Completed applications will consist of 1) a cover letter, including the applicant's address, phone number, e-mail address, 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 Karl Geiringer Scholarship, including travel plans, if appropriate. These materials should be submitted, in triplicate, to Professor Walter Frisch, Chair, Geiringer Scholarship Committee, Department of Music, Columbia University, MC 1820, 2960 Broadway, New York, NY 10027, and must be postmarked no later than 1 May 2001. The application must be supported by two confidential letters of recommendation, including one from the dissertation advisor; these should be sent directly to the Chair of the Geiringer Scholarship Committee and must also be postmarked by 1 May. Finalists in the competition will be notified by 15 May and asked to submit a sample chapter from their dissertation.

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The new program of the Rogue Valley Medical Center in Medford, Oregon, to play "Brahms's Lullaby" at the birth of every child has encountered opposition. Playing the thirty-second recording, it has been maintained, "could undermine efforts to make sure newborns are secure, and could disrupt sleeping patients." (The Associated Press)

**Brahms Conducted**

In his biography of Anton Webern, Hans Moldenhauer transmits a reminiscence by Hans W. Heinsheimer:

My most poignant memory of [Webern] is a performance of Mahler's Eighth Symphony. As the audience rose in applause, he lifted, not without difficulty, the huge, heavy score over his head. The work, not the conductor, was to be applauded. I have often thought of that gesture of proud modesty, never encountered again.

This single image captures the thesis of Gunther Schuller's book *The Complete Conductor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Schuller protests what he sees as a pervasive tendency among professional conductors to take unacceptable liberties in performing the standard orchestral repertory. He writes that "the score is a precious, unique, sacred document which should be relied on for all the information it can yield, and that the conductor should have "an absolute commitment to expressing with utmost fidelity the information the score contains."

Schuller quotes selectively from composers and conductors from Mattheson to Bruno Walter to establish a broad view of conductorial traditions and a critical perspective on issues such as tempo nuance, but the real work of his book lies in a detailed examination of conducting and performance problems in selected orchestral masterworks. Of particular interest to ABS readership is Schuller's exploration of Brahms's First and Fourth Symphonies. I shall concentrate here on his discussion of the First, to which he devotes nearly a hundred pages of text. Schuller approaches his task from the perspective of a professional hornist, conductor, and composer and bases his observations on an extensive review of recorded performances. One wishes for a bibliography to complement his extensive discography. It is nevertheless evident that Schuller worked from the first edition score and parts of Brahms's First published by Simrock in 1877, the score as edited by Hans Gál in the Brahms *Sämtliche Werke*, the score published by Ernst Eulenberg (n.d.), and Brahms's autograph of the second, third and fourth movements (Pierpont Morgan Library, New York; published in facsimile by Dover in 1986). Schuller's tone is often polemical, so that one must read around a certain amount of invective, e.g.: "I guess I will never understand how a man of Bernstein's basic talent and intelligence could allow himself such tempo excesses, wreaking havoc with Brahms's classic form, and in effect recomposing and restructuring the music to his own whims and ego-driven fantasies." It is also disappointing to discover blatant inaccuracies—wrong notes and the like—in a number of musical examples. Still, with these caveats aside, Schuller provides an engaging and substantive rehearsal of the score.

In numerous passages where Brahms's harmonic-metrical stresses do not correspond to strong beats, Schuller argues for a performance in which a sense of the notated meter is audibly retained. He views such passages as syncopations on the motive or phrase level, and reasons that they can be heard that way only when the notated meter is perceived:

I go so far as to suggest that the terms "metrical ambiguity" and "harmonic ambiguity," as used by [Walter] Frisch, [David] Epstein,
and other writers, are incorrect, that is, they do not apply to Brahms’s music. “Ambivalent” yes, “ambiguous” no . . . It is not that the metric design is displaced or dislocated; it is the rhythmic shapes, phrases, and patterns which are dislocated over an inviolate and immutable regular metric sequence. It is the tension(s) between and among those contending forces that Brahms wishes to express.

There is something of the conductor’s perspective in this position—the conductor, after all, must be aware of the notated meter in such passages—but Schuller advances an intriguing premise and effectively calls for further reflection on Brahms’s metrical complexities.

Schuller proceeds from a conviction that Brahms’s symphonies are fundamentally Classical in conception and that “precise proportional tempo relationships between slower introductions and the main allegros abound in the classical literature.” He therefore favors such a relationship between the introductory Un poco sostenuto and the following Allegro in the first movement (in a 3:1 ratio) and between the Adagio and Più andante in the fourth movement (in a 2:1 ratio). He stops short of recommending that all tempi in the symphony should be related to a fundamental governing Takt or beat, an idea advanced by Epstein and others. However, he does consider the possibility that in the first movement “the introduction and coda ought to be identical (or at least ‘closely related’) in tempo.” Apparently Schuller did not realize that Brahms made himself clear on this point, writing to Fritz Simrock on 30 October 1881, “Have I not asked you once already to have meno allegro type set at the end of the first movement of my first symphony (instead of piú sostenuto). It is pretty important, because people always take the tempo of the introduction [there].”

Schuller makes a convincing case for dozens of instances where Brahms’s notated dynamics yield more subtle and convincing readings than those heard in most recorded performances. He also discusses problems in Brahms’s notation of dynamics, suggesting, for example, that Brahms’s unusual ppf marking (mm. 289–90 of movement IV) “simply means poco f, and that it indicates ‘no more than mp.’” Nikolaus Harnoncourt takes a similar position, suggesting that Brahms’s poco f is very close to piano (interview in Harnoncourt’s 1997 recordings of Brahms’s symphonies, Teldec 0630–13136–2). A helpful perspective on this issue may be found in the music of Eduard Marxsen, Brahms’s Hamburg teacher, who used the ppf marking habitually and formulaically. In his early Piano Sonata, Op. 8, for instance, Marxsen’s ppf markings always appear after a passage marked p or pp, and usually mark a reiteration of the previous phrase, as in the opening of the second movement:

(Note also the Brahmsian ambivalence of the main tempo marking!) The implication is that the second phrase should simply be “played out” a little more than the first. Whether ppf also implies mp is not clear, but it is worth noting that Marxsen does not use mp in this sonata, though his dynamic palate includes mf, and he uses ppf where mp would seem appropriate. More to the point is the fact that the passage marked ppf in Brahms’s First is placed in an analogous position to that in Marxsen’s sonata. The passage in question is the Alphorn theme played by the horns and then the oboe, but following a statement of the same motive by the violins. Brahms’s ppf may imply not so much an absolute dynamic as a particular kind of response to the violins.

Schuller does not align himself with the historical performance movement. A case in point would be his position on the thorny issue of tempo nuance; that unless the composer marked a tempo nuance in the score, any expressive variation of tempo should be so slight as to be “imperceptible.” This approach is healthy, in that it makes the reader aware of tempo nuances in performances that may be illogical or excessive, but there can be no doubt that it is far removed from the common practice of Brahms’s epoch. (Brahms’s own pronouncements about “elastic tempo” are sufficiently diverse as to be maddeningly contradictory. But when taken together with anecdotal evidence of his playing and such artifacts as Fritz Steinbach’s notes on tempo nuance in performances by the Meiningen Court Orchestra, they leave little doubt that Brahms was comfortable with expressive tempo nuances that would be noticeable to most listeners.) Schuller’s principle of fidelity to the score, however, draws him toward the historical performance camp. He notes, for example, that modern orchestral string playing has gradually adopted the practice of using too many bows, producing “a bigger, louder, more ‘exciting’ sound,” which is “somehow automatically considered better than adhering to the composer’s original dynamics and conception.” Students of historical performance have come to much the same conclusion, observing that old orchestral parts generally show considerably more notes taken under one bow than is now the case. Schuller is also willing to countenance the use of smaller string sections, not for the sake of historical authenticity per se, but because it allows the natural balance of Brahms’s orchestration to emerge.

Occasionally Schuller errs with historical information, as when he states that the finale of the Fourth Symphony is based on a chorale from Bach’s Cantata 150. Furthermore, some readers will find it disingenuous that, having so eloquently called for fidelity to the score, Schuller proposes a few—admittedly a very few—retouchings of his own. But ultimately the strength of The Compleat Conductor is that, like Webern, Schuller simply holds the score before us, insisting on its primacy. From this vantage point he goes beyond a position of anti-orthodoxy in relation to mainstream conductorial practice to embrace the precision and cleanliness so characteristic of conductors of 20th-century music. In so doing he invites a fresh hearing of Brahms’s symphonies as powerful and expressive musical utterances very much apart from their conventional interpretive trappings.

William Horne
Recent Brahms
Publications and Papers

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

Books and Articles


A comparison of the sole remaining source for the Ballades, Op. 10, with descriptions in Brahms's correspondence with Joseph Joachim shows the Ballades to be a partial reworking of the *Blätter aus dem Tagebuch eines Musikers*, a work long regarded as lost. This revised view of the Ballades' origins means that at least some of them were composed before "Sommer 1854," the date Brahms later assigned to them in a handwritten catalogue of his works. The evidence in the correspondence also indicates that the Ballades originated in the following order: first, the second, third, fourth, and fifth, with the position of the third Ballade uncertain. It is also clear that, although the Ballades were generally regarded as a genre with strong literary roots, the third and fourth of Brahms's Op. 10 ballades originated as purely instrumental compositions. The revised view of their genesis links the Ballades to Brahms's youthful penchant for E.T.A. Hoffmann, to the Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann, Op. 9—and originally a part of the *Blätter aus dem Tagebuch eines Musikers*—and to the beginning of Brahms's close friendship with Clara Schumann in the spring of 1854.


Given Brahms's anxieties about Beethoven and his frequent use of musical allusions, he has seemed ripe for a musical allusion of Harold Bloom's theories as advanced in *The Anxiety of Influence*. Yet the application does scant justice to Brahms's compositional situation and practice, since for him establishing a relationship to the past was subordinate to other concerns. Brahms's emphasis on non-referential musical discourse, which allows his allusions to operate primarily on a subliminal level, does reflect anxiety. Still, it is less an "anxiety of influence" than an "anxiety of allusion," a phrase that places his anxiety between the past and his audience rather than in direct relation to the past. The article considers as examples prominent allusions to Beethoven in Brahms's First Symphony and a more complex "allusive web" in his Third.


The Adagio seems to have achieved cult status with the canonization of the Classical repertory and the increasing number of performances of Beethoven's late quartets after 1850. An elevated genre unto itself, the Adagio was distinguished not only by tempo but also by a melodic style and quality of expression that some musicians associated with Wagner's *unsendliche Melodie*. Unusual forms in adagio movements by Brahms, Dvořák, and Bruckner may not have been ends in themselves, but rather contemporary by-products in the composers' responses to the slow-movement aesthetic captured in the special understanding of "unaufhaltsamkeit." Parmer, Dillon. "Brahms and the Poetic Motto: A Hermeneutic Aid?" *Journal of Musicology* 15 (1997): 353–389.

This article proposes that Brahms used poetic mottoes to enrich the experience of his instrumental music. Detailed text-music analyses of works for piano for which documentary evidence clearly indicates a textual adjunct show that the value of taking these mottoes seriously lies precisely in the potential they have for fresh insight into well-known compositions, as well as aspects of style, broadly defined. The imagery and implied narrative of "Junge Liebe" and "Bitle" by C. O. Sternau clarify the expressive trajectory and formal design of the two Andantes from the Piano Sonata, Op. 5. The theme of the abandoned mother in two poems from Herder's *Sämmer der Völker*, "Lady Anne Bathwell's Lament" and "Wehgeschrei der Liebe," is shown to underpin the tonal progressions throughout the Intermezzi of Op. 117. Finally, the gruesome situation of the "Eduard Ballade" sets in clear relief both the dialogic structure and the dramatic reversal of themes in the "Eduard" Ballade, Op. 10. Relieving Brahms from the burden of absolute music in this way makes audible hidden meanings in works the poetry of which has gone unheard for too long.


Papers Presented at Conferences

Paper read at "Seminar di Filologia Musicale" in Cremona, 2 May 2000:


Papers read at "Toronto 2000: Musical Intersections," 1–5 November 2000:


Music of Johannes Brahms


This new Urtext edition, prepared by the Italian Brahms scholar Andrea Massimo Grassi, author of a dissertation on this work (see Newsletter 16/1), is the first edition to be based on comparison of the autograph score, the engraver's copy written by William Kupfer and corrected by Brahms, the composer's corrected copy of the first edition (the *Handexemplar*, Berlin: Simrock, 1892), and a revised second impression that appeared after 1897.
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Editor's Notes

The Editor would like to thank the contributors to this issue. Daniel Beller-McKenna, vice-president of the ABS, teaches at the University of New Hampshire. Thomas K. Nelson is currently writing a review of a recent book about absolute music for The Journal of the American Musicological Society. William Horne, a composer and musicologist, teaches at Loyola University in New Orleans. Drs. Horne, Knapp, Notley, and Palmer provided their own abstracts.

We wish to thank the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna for giving us permission to print the excerpt from Marxsen's Op. 8. We also thank George Bozarth for help with the writing, editing, and production of this Newsletter, and Timothy Kinsella at the University of Washington for assistance with production and distribution.

Correspondence, ideas, and submissions for the Newsletter are always welcome, and e-mail communication is especially encouraged. Materials for the autumn issue should be sent to the Editor by 15 January 2000.

* * * * *

Margaret Notley

The ABS is trying to increase its membership by 10% in each of the next five years. To do so we need your help! Please let your friends and colleagues know about our society and encourage them to consider joining the ABS to support its worthy projects. If you would like to have extra copies of any Newsletter to distribute to individuals or at your lectures or concerts, please request them from the Brahms Archive.

Nota Bene

Brahms has finally made it into Valhalla, the memorial hall built to the specifications of King Ludwig I in Regensburg in 1842. According to the rules of this institution, commemorative objects must be financed privately. Through the efforts of the International Brahms Gesellschaft in Hamburg, funds were raised to pay for a bust of the composer by the Prague sculptor Milan Knobloch.

The dancer Janie Brendel presented an unusual "Evening of Brahms" in New York City, 28 September–1 October: five ballets choreographed to music by the composer. The pieces included Lieder, intermezzi and waltzes for solo piano, and movements from the chamber music. Two works, the Romanze, Op. 118 No. 5, and the Piano Quintet, Op. 34, were performed without dance. The event received a very positive review in The New York Times.

At its national meeting in Toronto in November, the American Musicological Society presented its prestigious Alfred Einstein Award to Margaret Notley of the University of North Texas, who is a member of the Board of Directors of the ABS and Editor of its Newsletter. This award recognizes an article of exceptional merit by a scholar in the early stages of his or her career. The prize-winning article, "Late-Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music and the Cult of the Classical Adagio," appeared in 19th-Century Music 23/1 (Summer 1999): 33–61. To our knowledge, this is the first time that the award has honored a study on Brahms.

George Bozarth

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