Shaping Time in Brahms's Vier ernste Gesänge

David Epstein's *Shaping Time* presents enough of a challenge that, in the six years since its publication, at least ten reviewers have felt it necessary to respond to his call for dialogue about the validity of a theory of proportional tempo. Some have criticized various aspects of Epstein's methodology, some his proclivity for the Western canon, some again a perceived search for self-justification. Despite their varying degrees of concurrence or dissent, these critics' reviews conclude in much the same way: what Epstein has recorded is a valuable document in that it offers fine performance suggestions from an equally fine musician.

In the spirit of continuing the dialogue that Epstein proposes in *Shaping Time*, I would like to take a slightly different course by examining five performances of Brahms's Vier ernste Gesänge, Op.121, with an eye (or an ear) toward the realization of proportion in the practice of vocal music. Epstein's reluctance to engage with the Western canon's vocal repertory stems from a life spent in close quarters with instrumental repertory, as well as from a suspicion that words add "numerous complexities...to an already difficult subject." With complexity, though, come the possibilities of added richness and of patching a potential disconnection between tempo and words.

In any case, Epstein has set up his argument for the validity of a proportional-tempo practice in the Western canon by reminding the reader that "proportional relations of pulse (thus of tempo) were explicit concerns throughout the late Medieval and Renaissance periods." This implies an overwhelmingly vocal body of music. Every Brahms enthusiast knows what comes next, since the composer of course was fascinated by that part of the Baroque and Renaissance repertory to which he had access. For example, he copied out music by Palestrina and at one point owned the score of a Palestrina Gloria as transcribed by Beethoven. And Brahms is one of the composers Epstein lauds most frequently for building tempo into the "character of the music." Taking into account both the theoretical basis of Western proportional tempo in the late Medieval and Renaissance periods and the fact that Brahms knew some of that musical repertory very well, it seems reasonable to incorporate Epstein's views on proportional tempo into a discussion of his vocal music.

An initial difficulty in prescribing "correct" or perhaps "transcendent" tempos (the latter are employed in the one or two per cent of all performances of a given work that Epstein singles out for greatness) for Brahms's music is encountered in the composer's well-known distrust of metronome markings. This distrust receives some attention in *Shaping Time*, but a few passages from the letters will help to clarify the point. Brahms made the following observations to Clara Schumann on 25 April 1861:

(continued on next page)
(Brahms’s *Vier ernste Gesänge, continued*)

About the proposed metronomization we have already once spoken at length. So you want to do it even so?

I consider it impossible as well as unnecessary; just as I also believe less in Schumann’s faulty metronome than in the uncertainty of making a decision.

Worse yet, to provide metronome markings to some dozens of works now, as you wish, does not seem possible to me.

In January 1884 he wrote to Alwin von Beckerath concerning the tempo for the last movement of the Second String Quartet, Op. 51 No. 2:

I can quite easily start you on a subscription for metronome markings. You pay me a tidy sum and each week I deliver to you—different numbers; for with normal people, they cannot remain valid for more than a week.

And in February 1880 he made the following frequently cited comments to George Henschel on metronome markings in the Requiem:

In my view, the metronome isn’t worth much; at least, so far as I know, many a composer has withdrawn his metronome markings sooner or later. Those which are found in the Requiem are there because good friends talked me into them. For I myself have never believed that my blood and a mechanical instrument go well together. . .

Is that an answer? I know of none better; what I know, however, is that I indicate my tempi in the heading, without numbers, modestly but with the greatest care and clarity.

In light of such strong evidence of composer intention, the question becomes one of where the performing freedom that Brahms saw himself as championing might lie. If Brahms is rejecting metronomic rigidity, then a theory that requires a rigid relationship between tempos seems openly to defy Brahms’s wish for his own music. Another possibility is that Brahms is referring only to freedom of pacing, and that the relationship between tempos in a given piece is meant to be consistent from performance to performance. In other words, a pair of tempos related by the proportion of 2:3 might be realized in performance as quarter note = 40 : quarter note = 60 or, as successfully, by quarter note = 44 : quarter note = 66. Both pairs represent the 2:3 proportion of tempos; a fixed proportion is thus maintained even though the actual pairs of tempos are disparate. Reading Brahms’s comments about metronome markings in this latter way may seem a bit sly, but since the purpose here is simply to further dialogue, perhaps that is tolerable.

Certainly a little deliberate craftiness is necessary when one attempts to bring proportional theory into the world of performance practice, for nothing in the world of theory ever matches up quite right with practice, as we shall see. A few preliminary statements will clarify the methodology employed in examining the five performances of the *Vier ernste Gesänge*. One of the hurdles in achieving an objective analysis of tempo has to do with the difficulties of accurately assessing the length of a given passage.

For this investigation, each movement of each performance was transferred to the hard-drive of a computer, then imported into sound-synthesis software, where a representa-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>I. Andante (Allegro)</th>
<th>II.</th>
<th>III.</th>
<th>IV. Andante con moto (Sostenuto un poco)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Note value that gets the beat</td>
<td>quarter note</td>
<td>half note</td>
<td>quarter note</td>
<td>half note</td>
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<td>DF-D 1960</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF-D 1972</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
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<td>GL 1962-4</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>LF 1991</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>VB 1990</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>44</td>
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Table 1. Comparison of tempos in five performances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I. Andante (Allegro)</th>
<th>II.</th>
<th>III.</th>
<th>IV. Andante con moto (Sostenuto un poco)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DF-D 1960</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>DF-D 1972</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>GL 1962-4</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF 1991</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Reduced proportions of tempos

Key:
DF-D 1960=Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Jörg Demus; Deutsche Grammophon: 1960
DF-D 1972=Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Daniel Barenboim; Deutsche Grammophon: 1972
GL 1962-4=George London, Leo Taubman; Sony: 1962, 1964
LF 1991=Linda Finnie, Anthony Legge; Chandos: 1991
VB 1990=Victor Braun, Antonin Kubelik; Dorian: 1990
Besides making the numbers much more manageable, reducing these proportions more clearly demonstrates the trends mentioned above. For example, the two Fischer-Dieskau recordings, consistently different in terms of metronome markings, are identical in five out of six proportions. Another tendency is to close the cycle at a tempo proportionally similar to the tempo that opened it. Another is to cut the tempo nearly in half from the opening of the second to the opening of the third movement and then to nearly triple it for the beginning of the fourth.

These striking proportional similarities, often present despite some very large differences in tempo between the recordings, may well be water drawn from the same well as Epstein’s dictum that Brahms builds the relationship of tempos into the music. Yet none of these four recordings represents a simple proportion; they look, in point of fact, more like something from the imagination of Iannis Xenakis than from that of Brahms. Do these five recordings, including the one with the simple proportional tempo relationship of 4:4:4:3:4, provide instead an example of another of Epstein’s dictums—the one about the one to two percent of recordings that “get it right”? This would seem a strange assertion: to glorify lesser-known artists over Fischer-Dieskau and, say, Barenboim principally because the tempos chosen by the former can be manipulated into simple quantifiable terms. But that it would seem strange does not mean that it would not have a certain validity.

To give but one example of how such validity might be understood in the Vier ernste Gesänge, let us consider the divergent implications between Victor Braun’s and Antonin Kabelik’s performance of the first two Lieder of the four and Fischer-Dieskau’s 1960 recording with Jörg Demus of the same. The remarkable thing about the Braun/Kabelik recording is the uniformity of the tactus across the expanse of the first two movements. Not only does this suggest conformity of tempo, but also conformity of mood. The two songs’ texts are already close in sentiment, and locking them together in a single tempo tends to reinforce Brahms’ textual coupling.

The Fischer-Dieskau/Demus recording, on the other hand, pushes the tempo continuously faster. The gradual increase over three consecutive tempos shapes the text in a different way, making the second poem an intensification of the sentiment of the first. However, this intensification sets up the crushing defeat of the third song, which begins with Fischer-Dieskau’s cry “O Tod!”. It is hard to resist looking at the next line in the table at Fischer-Dieskau’s 1972 recording with Daniel Barenboim. In that recording the intensification of the second movement through an increase in tempo is even more keenly felt and makes the proportion relating the opening of the second movement to the opening of the third all the more drastic.

Epstein begins Shaping Time with a quote from Shakespeare’s King Richard II. I can think of no better way to close this brief contribution to Epstein’s call for dialogue than to invoke the Bard again. For the dramatic art is one of proportion—knowing how to pace action, knowing when to deliver the climax of a soliloquy, when to deliver the tragic hero his fatal blow. Vocal music, which shares in that drama, also shares in the dramatic use of proportion. Granted, it is not the only way drama is accomplished, but it can be used as a tool to enhance and shape it, and, if not carefully considered, it can lead a performance to a place rather distant from that glorious one or two percent.

Kevin M. Salten

I would like to thank David Epstein for an enlightening conversation in which he shared his insights and suggestions regarding this article.


Competition for Thirteenth 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 2002, 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.
Revisiting the Rumor of Brahms’s Jewish Descent

In 1997, the centenary of Brahms’s death, the work group Exilmusik [Exile Music] at the University of Hamburg published a booklet on the 1933 Hamburg Imperial Brahms Festival. That celebration marking the centenary of Brahms’s birth had been co-opted by the National Socialists when they took control of Hamburg’s political and cultural life earlier in the year. Perhaps the most striking chapter in the book is the closing two-page Exkurs, Peri Arndt’s discussion of “The Rumor of Brahms’s Jewish Descent.” Arndt assembles evidence of a possible behind-the-scenes scandal over the alleged source of the name “Brahms” in the Jewish “Abrahamson.” Brief though her essay may be, it represents the most thorough modern discussion of a curious episode in Brahms reception, the origins of which lay well beyond the festival in question and indeed the National Socialist period itself.

With Fred K. Prieberg, who briefly alluded to the 1933 Hamburg festival and the rumor of Brahms’s Jewish ancestry in his monograph on Wilhelm Furtwängler, Trial of Strength (Wiesbaden, 1986), Arndt cites the exiled German-Jewish actor and writer Paul Walter Jacob as the primary witness to the scandal. Jacob himself, however, never locates the tainted Brahmsfest in question, referring only to “the scandal ... surrounding the Brahms Festival 1933” (Jacob, Musica Prohibita—Verbotene Musik [Hamburg, 1991], 14.)

The Zionist leader Leo Motzkin (also cited by Arndt), who went further in his Blackbook: The Position of Jews in Germany (Paris, 1934) by claiming that “The great Brahms festival planned by the National Socialists had to be cancelled on account of these rumors” (414), likewise fails to identify the city in which the festival was to have taken place. Although Arndt focuses on Hamburg, it is possible that Jacob and Motzkin are referring to some other Brahms festival (which actually may have been cancelled) or to two other separate instances.

Despite these uncertainties, there undoubtedly had been a rumor of Brahms’s supposed Jewish descent, for other writers alluded to it as well around this time. For example, in his article for the third edition of Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians (1932), John Alexander Fuller-Maitland acknowledges the rumor by doubting it: “an assumption that Brahms was of Jewish origin is extremely unlikely.” And Roger Sessions directly cites the rumor in his article “Music and Nationalism: Some Notes on Dr. Göbbel’s Letter to Furtwängler,” which appeared in the journal Modern Music in the fall of 1933 after his return from Germany. Sessions wrote about Wilhelm Furtwängler’s highly publicized dispute with the new National Socialist regime over whether or not to allow Jewish musicians to play in the Berlin Philharmonic. Lamenting the Nazis’ influence on musical life in Germany, he added, “It is rumored that even Brahms’s music has become suspect on account of a Jewish strain in his ancestry.”

How did the rumor begin? Although it is well known that Brahms associated with Vienna’s Jewish cultural elite, there is little evidence that anyone seriously took him to be Jewish during his lifetime. The first published suggestions that Brahms could be Jewish are likely connected to the claim in some German name books (Namenskunden) from the first quarter of the twentieth century that “Brahms” derived from the primarily Jewish names “Abrams” or “Abrahamson.” At least as early as 1914, the fourth edition of Albert Heintze’s Die deutschen Familiennamen, listed “Brahms” as a foreshortening of the name “Abraham,” which is labeled “mostly Jewish.” This derivation appears first in the fourth edition, the second to be edited by Paul Cascorbi. Curiously, Cascorbi takes no note—either right before the entry or in the prefatory material (which is virtually unchanged from the previous edition of 1906)—of this new suggested derivation, which he must have realized would raise German eyebrows.

Cascorbi was not the only name book to list “Brahms” as a shortening of “Abraham” around this time. Several sources from the second quarter of the twentieth century similarly assert that Brahms can be a shortened version of the Old Testament name Abraham. Erwin Manuel Dreifuss, himself Jewish, makes the same claim in a 1927 book on early-nineteenth-century Jewish names in Baden. Other German authors, however, were less willing to accept Cascorbi’s new derivation of Brahms. In Die Familiennamen der Juden in Deutschland (Leipzig, 1935), Gerhard Kessler cites “Brahms” as one foreshortening of “Abraham,” but lists it as a typical uspuration of an Old Testament name by German Protestants at the time of the Reformation (17). Seven years later, at the height of the Nazi period, Konrad Krause puts a more anti-Semitic spin on this line of thinking. In his Die jüdische Namenwelt (Essen, 1942), Krause acknowledges that Jews shortened Abrahamson as a means of what he calls “name camouflaging through word mutilation—much beloved by the Jews” (35). But in a defensively worded footnote he adds: “Johannes Brahms’s name is as Aryan as the man himself: either Brahms shortened the vestigial Brahmost of the place name near Hamburg, Brahmsstedt, or the name is a genitive patronymic of Bramo, the shortened form of the old single name Brandmar (‘known by the sword’)” (151).

In her article Arndt also cites the noted anti-Semitic author Ph. Stauff’s Semi-Kässchen (Erfurt, 1929), in which he makes nearly the same claim for the related name “Brahm.” “Brahm: Aryan name from the Plattdeutsch for ‘Bramble,’ also from Brahmsstedt, in the Dithmarsch region; and Johannes Brahms!” Given the similarity of wording here, one could easily conjecture that Krause based his footnote directly on Stauff’s entry. (Ironically, “Brahm” is a more common Jewish variant, as in the case of the famous turn-of-the-century theater director Otto Brah [1856–1912]. Similarly the famed English tenor John Brah [1777–1856] was of Jewish descent.)

One corner of Brahms scholarship did react to the Jewish rumor, partly because it had a direct stake in settling questions of his roots: studies of his family and ancestry. Lineage (Ahnen) studies were common during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1898 and 1938, a number of such articles concerning Brahms appeared; (continued on next page)
neithertheless, it provides an interesting light on Brahms reception under the pressures of ideology and politics in the first half of the twentieth century.

Daniel Beller-McKenna

Brahms News

At its annual meeting, held this year in conjunction with the national meeting of the American Musicological Society in Atlanta, the Board of Directors of the American Brahms Society elected Daniel Beller-McKenna of the University of New Hampshire to serve as its president. The ABS wishes to thank its outgoing president, John Daviero, who numbered among his accomplishments for the society the conference "Brahms: Historical and Theoretical Contexts for the Performance of His Works," which he mounted at Boston University last spring. Margaret Notley was elected Vice-President, and Syra Avins of Drew University was elected to the Board. William Horne of Loyola University, New Orleans, will assist Margaret Notley in editing the ABS Newsletter.

On 9 September Kurt and Renate Hofmann inaugurated a permanent Brahms exhibit in the Altenstein Castle. Brahms stayed at the castle, located in the Thuringian forest near Eisenach and Meiningen, in November 1894 and October 1895 as a guest of Duke Georg II of Meiningen and his wife. The Hofmanns realized the project with the help of the Foundation for Thuringian Castles and Gardens. With the help of the mayor of Bad Liebenstein, the director of the foundation unveiled a glass case containing, among other things, original photographs of Brahms and the Duke, an original score, and a photocopy of a letter from Brahms. Most of the items in the exhibit come from the private collection of the Hofmanns. As part of the event Kurt Hofmann gave a well-received talk on Brahms's warm relationship with Georg II, which dated back to a trial performance of the Second Piano Concerto in 1881, with the composer as soloist and Hans von Bülow conducting the Meiningen Court Orchestra.

The Brahmsgesellschaft Baden-Baden e.V. has announced that its nineteenth Brahmsstage Baden-Baden of concerts and other events will take place from 30 April to 4 May 2003. For information about this festival, contact the society at brahms.baden-baden@t-online.de, via FAX at (07221) 71104 or by mail to their office at Maximilianstrasse 85, D-76534 Baden-Baden.

The Brahms Museum in Hamburg has acquired a three-page letter that Brahms wrote to Hans von Bülow in 1889. Further information on the acquisition will be published in the next volume of Brahms-Studien, scheduled to appear in the spring of 2002.

The Johannes-Brahms-Gesellschaft Internationale Vereinigung e.V. in Hamburg has announced that the winners of its 2001 competition for a symphonic work for full orchestra of approximately fifteen minutes was won by Jacob Sarwas of Poland with a work entitled ECRU. This work will
be performed by the Philharmonic State Orchestra Hamburg under Ingo Metzmacher. The second prize in this competition was taken by Athanasia Tzanou of Greece for a composition entitled XIL0.

In Memoriam Imogen Fellinger

It is with sorrow that we note the passing of our colleague Dr. Imogen Fellinger at the end of November. Born in Munich in 1928, she was the last direct member of the famous Fellinger family, who were close friends of Johannes Brahms in Vienna. Dr. Fellinger devoted much of her scholarly efforts to Brahms, from her 1957 dissertation on Brahms’s use of dynamics (published as a book in 1961) to her new edition of her uncle’s memoirs of Brahms, richly illustrated with the photographs of the elder composer taken by her great-aunt, Maria Fellinger (1997). Her articles on Brahms explored such topics as his compositional process, his study of early music and activity as an editor, cyclic tendencies in his opuses of songs, his relationship to the music of Mozart, and the reception of his music in the nineteenth century. At the time of her death she was working on an edition of the short piano pieces for the Neue Brahms-Gesamtausgabe.

From 1957 to 1962 Dr. Fellinger served as a research assistant to RISM; from 1963 until her retirement in 1993 she worked on music-bibliographical projects, first at Cologne University and then at the Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung in Berlin. She was chair of the International Association of Music Libraries’ working group on music periodicals from 1979 and a board member of both the Johannes-Brahms-Gesellschaft of Austria and the Neue Brahms-Gesamtausgabe. In addition to her publications on Brahms, she wrote on subjects ranging from Mattheson and Mozart to Wagner, Bruckner, and Wolf. Her bibliographical studies culminated in the publication of Periodica musicallia (1789–1830); a second volume, for 1831–1850, was in progress.

A Chronological Bibliography of Imogen Fellinger’s Writings on Brahms


Michael Musgrave's
Brahms Reader

A reader is an anthology, in musical scholarship usually a collection of primary documents or critical essays, often connected by commentary. Michael Musgrave's A Brahms Reader (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) draws on an impressive array of both firsthand and secondary sources: Brahms's correspondence, the many memoirs of the composer written shortly after his death, several biographies, and essays by various musicians and scholars. In comparison with other recent readers—for example, The Duke Ellington Reader, ed. Mark Tucker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), or The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents, ed. Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, rev. Christoph Wolff (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1998)—the excerpts here tend toward extreme brevity, sometimes to the point of comprising mere snippets. Rather than presenting the documents as discrete entities, furthermore, Musgrave incorporates them into a narrative: he is the book's author, not its editor. Nor does he proceed chronologically, as do the editors of the readers mentioned above, but rather topically. Thus he gathers the twenty chapters into six categories: "Brahms the Man," "Brahms the Composer," "Brahms the Performer," "Brahms the Music Scholar and Student of the Arts," "The Social Brahms: Friendship and Travel," and "Brahms in Perspective." The end result is an illuminating portrait of Brahms and his significance fundamentally different from what would be possible in a biography or monograph—or in a more orthodox reader.

Many of the sources will be familiar to students of this period of music history; much of the book's value lies, rather, in the way that Musgrave juxtaposes and connects the material. One of the most original contributions is his treatment of Brahms's significance in the first half of the twentieth century. In Chapter 19, "Reverence and Reaction in the Twentieth Century," Musgrave goes well beyond the expected references to works by Max Reger and Alexander Zemlinsky, to Heinrich Schenker's reverence for Brahms as the "last great German composer," and to Arnold Schoenberg's essay "Brahms the Progressive." Of particular interest are the reactions of Maurice Ravel, which reverse several stereotypes in the reception history of Brahms. Ravel valued Brahms's themes, "which bespeak an intimate and gentle masculinity," over his development of them: "Scarcely have they been presented than their progress becomes heavy and laborious" (266). And, though Ravel found his own conception of a concerto as a divertissement fundamentally at odds with "Brahms's principle about [sic] a symphonic concerto," in Musgrave's words, "the one area that Ravel singles out directly for praise is Brahms's 'extremely brilliant' orchestration" (267). Brahms has rarely been lauded for either his orchestration or his melodic invention; more typically, critics have cited his ability to build substantial and compelling structures from often unprepossessing themes.

At various points in the same chapter Musgrave discusses the effect of Schoenberg's high estimation of Brahms and his pedagogical use of Brahms's compositions on other members of the self-styled Second Viennese School: Alban Berg, Anton Webern, Egon Wellesz, and Erwin Stein. Musgrave considers Berg's early songs to be "deeply Brahmsian in form and style." Indeed, he believes that Brahms's compositions "had a lasting effect on Berg, who retained a commitment to its values of detailed structural organization, even in the sphere of expressionist opera" (258–259). He supports the latter statement with the following interesting, if laconic observation: "Adorno implies that Berg continued to strive for the 'step by step' quality of Brahms's themes" (259).

In an exploration of Brahms's reception between the two World Wars, Musgrave quotes at length from Wilhelm Furtwängler's address at the centennial celebration of Brahms in Vienna in May 1938. He then contrasts Furtwängler's appropriation of Brahms for a nationalist agenda with Berg's reaction to the speech, observing that the latter's comments "show just how specialized and little known were the views emanating from Schoenberg and his pupils" (264–265). Berg wrote about the event in a letter to this wife: "It was a Nazi-inspired speech on German music, which, he implied, had found its last representative in Brahms. Without mentioning any names he betrayed the whole of post-Brahmsian music... It was horrible having to put up with all this and witness the frenzied enthusiasm of the idiot audience. Idiotic not to realize how the Brahms a cappella songs which followed made nonsense of Furtwängler's tendentious waddle" (265). This fascinating juxtaposition of documents shows the potential of the reader format: Berg's reaction both counters Furtwängler's speech and places it in perspective.

In some instances Musgrave does not seem to have given his sources sufficient critical scrutiny. For example, he quotes Walter Niemann at length on Brahms's politics, from a biography published in Berlin in 1929, without noting the context for Niemann's preoccupations with the composer's "German" or "North German" traits. Throughout the reader, Musgrave seems to prefer Niemann, who did not know Brahms, and both Florence May and Richard Specht, who knew him slightly, over Max Kalbeck, the author of what is usually regarded as the standard biography. Like the comments by the other biographers—or anyone else—Kalbeck's views cannot be taken at face value. He did, however, live in the same milieu as Brahms for almost two decades, which makes him a valuable firsthand—indeed objectively biased—observer not only of Brahms, but also of the Viennese scene. Kalbeck's comments regarding Brahms's German chauvinism surely merit inclusion in a discussion of the composer's political views, just as Niemann's remarks need close consideration: the topic requires nuanced treatment within the different contexts of late-nineteenth-century Vienna and the early Weimar Republic.

Elsewhere, the need to be economical in his comments—even though, as already stated, the commentary is more extensive than in most readers—seems to cause Musgrave
to make misleading statements, as in his discussion of Gustav Nottebohm. Drawing this time on both Kalbeck and Specht, he creates a vivid portrait of Nottebohm, a scholar of Beethoven’s sketches and a member of Brahms’s circle in Vienna. Musgrave writes, “A confirmed bachelor with, in Specht’s words, ‘amorbidly exaggerated teutomania,’ Nottebohm seems to have encouraged Brahms into his bachelor habits and growing misogyny, and they socialized regularly over the years. Specht summarizes Kalbeck’s view of him as a ‘distorting mirror’ for Brahms’s personality” (191). Brahms may well have been increasingly a misogynist—although any consideration of his purported misogyny ideally should include careful placement within the mores of his time and place—but neither of the passages from Specht and Kalbeck cited in the notes mentions the subject. Furthermore, since Nottebohm died in 1882, his influence came to an end before Brahms had turned fifty. Perhaps if Musgrave had allowed himself more space for commentary, he would have separated his own interpretation from the observations of Specht and Kalbeck, as well as clarified what he meant by Brahms’s “growing misogyny” and Nottebohm’s influence on it.

Although there are limitations to the generic mixture of essay and documentary anthology chosen by Musgrave, his book is a considerable achievement, filled with essential material concerning Brahms. One final quibble has to do with the absence of a bibliography, which should be a required item in books of this sort.

Margaret Notley

Brahms & Friends

Music for Viola and Piano

Violist Bernard Zaslav and pianist Naomi Zaslav have released a set of two compact discs containing music by Brahms and his contemporaries (Music & Arts 1087[2]). As we shall see, the title, Brahms & Friends, is misleading, but the recordings themselves are most welcome. The greater part of the first CD is devoted to splendid performances of Brahms’s two late sonatas for clarinet or viola and piano, Op. 120. The second of the sonatas closes with the composer’s final set of variations. It is to the credit of Joseph Joachim that his Variations for Viola and Piano, Op. 10, can follow the late set by Brahms without creating any major sense of letdown. The theme, by Joachim himself, allows formal subtleties in the variations that the young Brahms must have found instructive. For these variations date from the first period of their friendship and thus the earliest years in Brahms’s career represented by extant compositions. If the performance of these variations does not attain the same level of nuance and polish as those of the sonatas, the explanation surely lies in the duo’s longer acquaintance with, and more frequent opportunities to play Brahms’s sonatas.

The second compact disc features five cycles of character pieces for viola and piano that span the period from the mid-nineteenth century—Carl Reinecke’s Phantasiestücke, Op. 43—to the late 1920s—Robert Fuchs’s Sechs Phantasiestücke, Op. 117). While Fuchs, along with Heinrich von Herzogenberg, represented by his Legenden, Op. 62, did number among Brahms’s “friends,” Reinecke and the other two composers, Friedrich Kiel and Hans Sitt, represented respectively by the Drei Romanzen, Op. 69, and the Albumblätter, Op. 39, count only as colleagues. The late date of publication of Fuchs’s cycle—1927, thirty years after Brahms’s death—throws the compact disc’s title further into question.

The relative stylistic uniformity among pieces that cover seven or eight decades reminds us of the tenacity of what its detractors called the “Romantic-Classical” school of composition. All five composers held positions at conservatories, which seem to have provided the institutional support necessary to perpetuate the style. Reinecke taught at the most conservative of them all, the Leipzig Conservatory, as did Sitt, while Herzogenberg succeeded Kiel at the Stern Conservatory in Berlin after the latter’s death. Fuchs, who was reported to pride himself on knowing virtually no “progressivist” music, including even later Wagner, had to be forced in 1912 into retiring from (what had been) the Vienna Conservatory.

Brahms himself had supported Fuchs’s appointment as a teacher of counterpoint at the Conservatory in 1890 and then, in 1895, of composition (previously he had taught only harmony). Fuchs appears to have been a beloved teacher and counted Mahler among his pupils, but he seems to have learned nothing—indeed, to have kept himself isolated—from the innovations of his students, who composed one way for him and another for themselves. The sound of the Sechs Phantasiestücke is vaguely “Brahmsian.” If Fuchs also shows originality, especially in his treatment of harmony—listen, in particular, to the first Phantasiestück—it still remains difficult to reconcile the style in these late pieces with our knowledge of when he composed them.

Several writers, most notably Stefan Kunze (“Klassiker- rezepption in den Kompositionsschulen des frühen 19. Jahrhunderts,” in Schweizer Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft 3, ed. Kurt von Fischer et al. [Bern and Stuttgart, 1978]), have stressed the more or less simultaneous enshrinement of Classical style, codification of sonata forms, and establishment of conservatories in nineteenth-century Europe. But the five cycles performed by the Zaslav Duo on the second CD make it clear that Romantic style and the associated genre of the character piece were likewise cultivated and thus preserved in European conservatories.

The unvaryingly beautiful performances on the second compact disc make the strongest possible case for this repertory. Here the connection is with the middle movements of Brahms’s Op. 120, likewise in the style of Romantic character pieces. Brahms’s affiliation with the five composers on the second compact disc is undeniable, yet somehow transcended the limitations of academic Romanticism—a seeming oxymoron—while the others, for the most part, did not. Therein lies much of the fascination of his compositions.

Margaret Notley
Recent Brahms Publications, Papers, and Recordings

Books, Articles, and Disserations


Kurt Hofmann, “Theodor Avé-Lallemant”
Wolfgang Sandberger, “Johannes Brahms: Motette Es ist das Heil uns kommen her, op. 29, Nr. 1, Autograph”
Renate Hofmann, “Besondere Briefe aus den Nachlassen von Theodor und Johannes Avé-Lallemant (Sammelmappe, angelegt durch Hans Avé-Lallemant)”


Papers Presented at Conferences

Papers read at National Meeting of the Society for Music Theory, Philadelphia, 7–11 November 2001:
Michael L. Klein (Temple University), “Brahms’s Intermezzo in A, Op. 118/1: Bloom’s Strangeness, Riffaterre’s Ungeramaticity, and Wagner’s Tristan”
Peter H. Smith (Notre Dame University), “Brahms’s Sonata Form, Schenker’s Formalheur, and the Idea of Dimensional Counterpoint”

Papers read at A Sense of Place: Seventy Years of Musicological Scholarship at Yale, Yale University, 7–9 December 2001:
Walter Frisch (Columbia University), “Brahms and the Vienna Philharmonic: Traditions of Performance and Recording”
Margaret Notley (University of North Texas), “Brahms in the Twilight of Wienerse Liberalism”

Recordings


Johannes Brahms, Vierkündige Klavierwerke. Christian Köhn and Silke-Thora Matthies, piano. Projected as a set of eighteen CDs, at present five CDs have been issued:
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In Memoriam Bernice Geiringer

With the death of Bernice Geiringer in July, the American Brahms Society lost a dear friend and one of its most constant supporters. The second wife of the eminent Austro-American scholar Karl Geiringer, she was instrumental in setting up and securing funding for the annual scholarship that the ABS established in the name of her husband to support the research of promising young Brahms scholars. She has also helped to underwrite the preparation of a volume of Karl Geiringer’s writings on Brahms, edited by George Bozarth and with an introduction by Walter Frisch (forthcoming). Her presentation at the Brahms Conference at Harvard University in 1997 introduced her for the first time to many of our members; her regular phone calls, "just to see how we were doing," kept her in touch with us and offered encouragement in our endeavors. In 1999 the Board of Directors of the ABS elected her an Honorary Member of our society.

It was always clear in our communications that Bernice had a great zest for living. An accomplished pianist, she was still performing concertos in public even in her eighties. She was born Bernice Abrahms in Minneapolis in 1918. From an early age she showed talent for music, and after several years of piano study began to give recitals and win awards. As a young musician she had the privilege of taking composition classes with Arnold Schoenberg after he settled in Los Angeles in the 1930s. (John Cage was one of her fellow students.) Her notes of these classes are held by the Arnold Schoenberg Center of Vienna and the University of California at Santa Barbara.

The American Brahms Society offers its condolences to Bernice’s sons David and Michael, her daughter Beverly, and their families.

Editor’s Notes

The Editor would like to thank the contributors to this issue. Kevin M. Salfen is a composer and a candidate in musicology at the University of North Texas. A week-long residency by David Epstein at UNT’s College of Music last spring inspired Mr. Salfen’s article. Daniel Beller-McKenna, an Assistant Professor at the University of New Hampshire, is the new President of the American Brahms Society.

We wish to thank George Bozarth for preparing the obituaries of Imogen Fellinger and Bernice Geiringer and for his help with the production of this Newsletter, and Timothy Kimball at the University of Washington for assistance with its distribution.

Correspondence, ideas, and submissions for the Newsletter are always welcome, and e-mail communication is especially encouraged. Materials for the spring issue should be sent to the Editor by 1 February 2002.

Margaret Notley

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ISSN 8765–8357