Brahms's Exercises for Piano: Rethinking Their Place and Purpose

Brahms's own witty description of his grueling finger-training patterns—he called them "melodious exercises"—has misled more than one scholar to state that Brahms's pianistic work-outs had their roots in the etudes of Chopin and Liszt. As is well known, those pieces are technically difficult but also melodious pieces of music. Had Brahms known that he would succeed in fooling someone, if only for a moment, he probably would have had a good laugh: one hearing, or just a look at the score, forever disabuses one of the notion of a resemblance to Chopin's or Liszt's études. Brahms's title for this collection is different from any other in his works, for these are the only pieces that he called Übungen or "exercises." While he did use the term Studien or "studies," he reserved it for his arrangements of music by other composers. In Brahms's vocabulary, both "exercises" and "studies" refer to pieces specifically devoted to technical training at the piano, but the two types otherwise differ. "Study" denotes a piece of music by another composer to which he has added further technical difficulty: in his arrangement he accentuates a problem inherent in the original. But in an "exercise" he has isolated an aspect of pianistic technique and hammered it home in both hands at the same time, leaving no space for melodies, phrases, or interesting harmonies.

An exercise by Brahms presents a pattern in one key and then proceeds through all the other keys with it, for a figure easy to play in, for example, C major might be extremely awkward in E-flat major. In that instance, the thumb moves in an inch on the keyboard (from a white key to a black one) and also upward a quarter inch and onto a black key, narrower than the white key. Brahms's thoroughly systematic approach means that with each new key, players have to adjust their hands to a slightly different position. Although these exercises may appear to follow in the tradition of those by Carl Czerny (1791-1857) and Johann Cramer (1771-1888), even Czerny and Cramer usually make some concession to musical phrasing and, moreover, often place the repeated figure in only one hand. Brahms's exercises go further in their emphasis on pure technique and in working all five fingers of both hands at the same time.

Hand patterning is one of the most important purposes of Brahms's exercises. Pianists are trained to think in groupings of notes, for which standard hand positions can usually be adopted: the fingers simply drop down onto the keys from each new position. Scales, obviously, constitute the first level of such hand patterning. Brahms, however, aimed his exercises at the needs of advanced pianists who want quick results from highly efficient and strenuous exercises. (They remind me of aerobics classes that I have mistakenly attended.)

(continued on next page)
(Brahms’s Exercises for Piano, continued)

Brahms was at first whimsical about these concentrated exercises, for he titled one of his earliest sketches (owned by the Music Division of The New York Public Library) Fantasietücke in Callots hübscher Manier, or “fantasy pieces in Callot’s boldest manner.” Behind this unusual title lies the influence of E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822), that most fanciful of Romantic writers, and also of course of Robert Schumann. Not surprisingly, these sketches stem from the early 1850s, when the Schumann household exerted its strongest influence on the young Brahms. E. T. A. Hoffmann had invented his own version of the seventeenth-century artist-engraver Jacques Callot’s life—as flighty, imaginative, and even grotesque. That spirit-life became Hoffmann’s inspiration for his two-volume collection of essays (1814), to which he gave the name Fantasietücke in Callots Manier. Brahms’s adaptation of Hoffmann’s title suggests that youthful whimsy served to downplay the earnest nature of his exercises.

Schumann had already used a similar title derived from Hoffmann for his 1837 Fantasietücke, or “fantasy pieces” for piano. In his role as writer Schumann had created the dreamy character Eusebius, an important member of his Davidsbündler. This was an imaginary group of “friends of good music” who opposed the “Philistines,” those who liked superficial virtuoso music and meretricious opera. While one can easily imagine either Hoffmann’s Callot or Schumann’s Eusebius creating “fantasy pieces,” Brahms lacked his own imaginary muse and could only manage to borrow Hoffmann’s. Worse yet, practicing his exercises would have resulted in the cheap virtuosity that so disgusted Schumann’s Davidsbündler. It appears that Brahms the Romantic and Brahms the realist were in conflict in the 1850s.

Near the end of his life, Brahms used a similar title, Fantasien or “fantasies,” for a collection of seven piano pieces, Op. 116. Throughout the summer of 1892 he struggled to find an appropriate title for his collection, at the same time that he was actively considering the publication of the exercises. Might Brahms have remembered his delightful early designation of the latter—“fantasy pieces in Callot’s boldest manner”—when he chose the title for his Op. 116? Kalbeck would seem to preclude that line of speculation when he relates that he suggested the name Phantasien. Since he is taking credit for a perfect choice of title, Kalbeck is clearly not a disinterested witness. We shall never know whether to have complete confidence in Kalbeck’s story. In any case, Brahms’s Fantasien appeared as his Op. 116 in November 1892 and the exercises, without any hint of fantasy or an opus number, in December 1893.

Brahms’s humorous attitude toward his exercises continued in the years after the early sketches. In August 1880 he asked the copyist Robert Keller to “bring order into the manuscript” with these words, “Perhaps you have a more skillful and musical copyist than I and could let him take over a good deal of the trouble . . . Discretion is obviously necessary—so that none of these dumb ideas get stolen.” Elisabet von Herzogenberg received a letter from Brahms later that same year (written on 24 December), along with a manuscript of exercises. Brahms’s words to her were less harshly sarcastic, and he simply called them melodische Übungen or “melodic exercises.” Perhaps he reflected Elisabet’s own phrase, “melodische Übungsstücke [melodious exercise pieces]” or perhaps he considered her ears a bit more delicate than Keller’s.

As Brahms aged, his remarks about the exercises turned more markedly from whimsical to sharp. He wrote to Fritz Simrock in the early 1890s that the cover picture for the exercises should be of torture instruments—especially thumb screws and the iron maiden—and that it should be colored in blood red and flaming yellow. For all the apparent humor toward these exercises, the comment hints at the possibility of some anger or bitterness, that these pieces might be producing strong reactions in Brahms even after forty years. In his youth—in the days before his debut and first tour with the Hungarian violinist Eduard Remenyi—Brahms may already have resented the time-consuming repetition that training as a virtuoso pianist required. Through the Hungarian dances that they subsequently played together on tour, Remenyi provided this diligent, reserved young man with an attractive model of free and loose performance. Remenyi’s carefree lifestyle may also have appealed to the young Brahms, just as later he found the relaxed lifestyle of Vienna more to his liking than the chillier ways of his native city Hamburg. On the other hand, his youthful experiences in the Schumann household and his exposure to the stern side of the couple’s ideals—hard work for self-improvement and success—would have resonated with the harshness of his childhood. For his training as a pianist had been accomplished with North German discipline and thoroughness.

Brahms was never among the top virtuoso pianists, even in his youth. Later he also admitted that he intensely disliked practicing the piano. On various occasions, in fact, he performed in public even though he had allowed his technique to deteriorate through lack of practice. Clara Schumann and Elisabet von Herzogenberg, both superb pianists, despaired over this in letters. Nevertheless he sent exercises to these two good friends.

But Brahms could not escape the piano. In the years around 1880 he was once again drawn back to the instrument, composing the Seven Piano Pieces (Op. 76) in 1879, the Two Rhapsodies (Op. 79) in 1880, and the Second Piano Concerto (Op. 83) in 1881, completing another orchestral piece, the Third Symphony (Op. 90), in 1883. He toured more than usual in these years, conducting his new symphony and playing the solo part in the Second Piano Concerto, with the Rhapsodies as encores. Not surprisingly, there was a flurry of activity concerning the exercises in this period. When Simrock inquired about the possibility of publishing them, Brahms responded with a show of interest in October 1882. During this period, he was composing new and difficult exercises, most likely to prepare himself for more public performances. Although his busy schedule left little time for practice, composing the exercises helped him practice efficiently. But Brahms was not yet ready to publish them.
The idea of publishing the exercises came up again in the early 1890s, another period in which he focused on writing for the piano: Opp. 116 through 119 date from these years. At the same time, he was engaged in compositional closet cleaning in anticipation of retirement. After he had added new exercises to the older, William Kupfer made an engraver’s copy (now part of the collection of Brahms manuscripts in Hamburg), in which Brahms entered numerous corrections and some half-page changes.

The engraver’s copy with Brahms’s corrections was sent to Simrock on 12 November 1893, and proof pages were finally pulled from the plates. This surviving set of pages—not listed in the McCorkle catalogue, but now at the Library of Congress—still did not have numbers for the exercises, nor a total number listed on the title page. Brahms could not solve the problem of how to number some of the exercises; even in the final version it remains unclear why certain exercises have separate numbers and others are labeled together: for example, No. 33a and 33b. Still, the first printing of the first edition was in the music stores by December 1893 (after the four weeks required for processing).

Brahms continued to carry on his little joke about the exercises, telling Simrock as late as November 1893 that the collection contained “höchst melodischen Uebungen” (highly melodic exercises). He now seemed almost embarrassed about these pieces from his personal practice studio. During his later years, Brahms destroyed many composing sketches to prevent people from spying into his compositional work; the long delay in publishing the exercises similarly suggests that he wished to keep his methods for building piano technique private. Yet, in the end, he had spent forty years creating this monument to the piano, and he could not bring himself to throw it away.

One of the most illuminating remarks that Brahms ever made about his relationship to the piano appears in comments about composing for the violin from a letter written to Clara Schumann while he was engaged in work on the Double Concerto, Op. 102. “It is quite a different matter to write [for the violin and cello],” he says, “than to write for an instrument that one knows through and through, as I know the piano. There I always know exactly what I write and why I write one way or another.” Through writing and playing (continued on next page)
these piano exercises over a period of forty years, he acquired an amazingly thorough and advanced knowledge of the instrument, but the collection also suggests the private, lonely, and grueling path of the performing pianist. Brahms did finally manage to reveal this painful part of his life to the world at large.

Camilla Cai

The translations are my own, but Berthold Lützmann’s Clara Schumann: An Artist’s Life, Based on Material Found in Diaries and Letters, trans. Grace Hadow (1913) and The Brahms-Keller Correspondence, edited by George Bazarth in collaboration with Wiltrud Martin (1996) provided a basis for them.

A New Edition of Nancy B. Reich’s Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman

The first edition of Nancy B. Reich’s biography of Clara Schumann (Cornell University Press, 1985) was a landmark. It introduced rigorous scholarly method and an unstinting dedication to balanced biographical and musical portraiture into a body of life and works studies that too often lapse into fanciful and otherwise unscholarly tropes and parables. For readers of this Newsletter, perhaps the most significant instances of such unsubstantiated and even untenable conventional wisdom are the myth of the grinding poverty of Brahms’s youth and the notion of a consummated amour affair between Schumann and Brahms. Reich’s biography built on a series of previously unknown documents from the archives of the Robert-Schumann-Haus, Zwickau, that began to be published in 1971, as well as on a small corpus of other scholarly resources. It also drew extensively on a multitude of unpublished sources and a considerable number of letters previously issued in long-forgotten German music periodicals. The book quickly became a milestone in the scholarly reception history of the remarkable life and the equally remarkable works of this important figure in nineteenth-century music history. In addition to reappearing in two subsequent English editions (Gollancz and Oxford University Press, 1985 and 1987), the biography has been translated into Japanese (1987) and German (1991).

But if the first edition of Reich’s biography focused and directed a rising tide of literature concerning Clara Schumann, it also effectively set a new standard for research on the topic and thus facilitated a wave of other significant scholarly products and tools. These new resources, which range from previously inaccessible letters and medical reports to publications of previously unknown musical works and important studies by a considerable number of scholars, necessitated the present substantial revision of an already exemplary study.

Although the original organization has been retained, it is fair to say that few other features of Reich’s biography have remained untouched in this revision. Indeed, the changes introduced outside the body of the text proper also offer substantive connections to the content of the book. More obviously important are the significantly expanded works-list and the likewise expanded bibliography—both of which are treasure-troves of information. Other features outside the text proper are equally rewarding. New to the revised edition, for example, is a facsimile (p. 19) of the cover of the first of Clara Wieck’s professional diaries, begun by Friedrich Wieck on 7 June 1827. These diaries, many of which are written in Wieck’s hand, provide invaluable documentation of Clara’s activities into September 1840. But they are even more important for the detailed insights that they provide into the nature of Clara’s relationship with her dominating father (who retained possession of them until 1859) and into the ways that he supervised her education. The title page of the first diary, written entirely in the elder Wieck’s hand, reads (in translation): “My Diary / begun by my father / the 7th of June 1827, and to be continued / [inserted, in Wieck’s hand:] Vol. 1 / by / Clara Josephine Wieck.” This facsimile offers visible documentation of a salient feature of Schumann’s early professional life: the startling way that her father seemed to be “taking over her personal identity” (p. 20).

Perhaps most important for readers of this Newsletter is the chapter focused on her relationship with Brahms (pp. 169-89). Along with some essentially cosmetic changes in the text, other revisions emphasize points that were already present. For example, at the beginning of the chapter the assertion that “the friendship between Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms has always been a subject of spirited speculation” (p. 187 in the Oxford University Press edition) is expanded in the revised version (p. 169) to include the appended phrase “and even malicious gossip”—a most appropriate rejoinder to numerous accounts in some pseudo-scholarly literature and much of the popular press. (Reich here draws particular attention to Alfred Schumann [pseud. Titus Frazzeni], Johannes Brahms, der Vater von Felix Schumann: Das Mysterium einer Liebe [Bielefeld: Manfred, 1926].) The chapter is also replete with new footnotes, all of which deal directly with Brahms at least as much as with Clara Schumann. And it remains exemplary in its careful and sensitive portrayal of the two musicians’ extraordinary relationship.

Readers will also notice the revised edition’s increased cognizance of issues of gender and class as they relate to music historiography, as well as its more detailed exploration of Schumann’s influence on pianists and pianism throughout the world. In addition, Reich’s exploration of her relationship with the Mendelssohn family offers considerable insights into Mendelssohn’s professional persona. Indeed, there is considerable evidence that Felix’s and Clara’s professional lives were more than a little intertwined, and obscure sources (such as the unpublished version of Felix’s Piano Fugue in F Minor, Op. 35 No. 4, written specifically for her) invite further exploration of compositional interaction between the two.

More general—but arguably of equal importance—is the skill with which this more complete portrait of Clara Schumann reveals what, to the nineteenth century, was her
Editor’s Notes

The Editor would like to thank the contributors to this issue. Camilla Cai, Professor of Musicology at Kenyon College, is editing the works for solo piano without opus numbers for the new Brahms edition. She is also writing a study of Norwegian and Norwegian-American musicians in Leipzig in the nineteenth century. John Michael Cooper, Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of North Texas, is the author of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy: A Guide to Research (2001) and Mendelssohn’s “Italian” Symphony (2002). With Julie D. Prandi he is co-editor of The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History (2002). Jonathan Bellman, Professor of Music History and Literature at the University of Northern Colorado, is the author of The Style Hongros in the Music of Western Europe (1993) and A Short Guide to Writing About Music (2000), as well as editor of The Exotic in Western Music (1998). With his colleague (and spouse) Deborah Kaufmann, he co-edits The Journal of Musicological Research. John Daverio, Professor of Music at Boston University, has a new book due out by the end of 2002 from Oxford University Press entitled Crossing Paths: Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms.

The little piano piece discussed by Jonathan Bellman and George S. Bozarth on pages 6 and 7 appears in an appendix, “Aus Marie Wiecx’s Stammbuchblättern,” toward the end of Victor Joss’s book (pp. 387-350). Although the book reproduces some of the other excerpts, such as those by Louis Spohr and Ignaz Moscheles, in facsimile, unfortunately the entry attributed to Brahms has been typeset. The Editor is grateful to Professors Bellman and Bozarth for exposing the many questions that the piece presents. For example, are the year and place possible in light of what we know of Brahms’s whereabouts? Would Brahms, self-conscious composer that he was by 1868, have written out such a slight—and to some ears crude—piece, even in a private album? The Editor wishes to thank the following scholars for confirming that, to their knowledge, no new sources for the composition have surfaced: Camilla Cai, the editor of the volume in which the piece is scheduled to appear; Margit McCorkle of the Brahms Cataloguing Project in Vancouver; Gerd Nauhaus of the Robert-Schumann-Haus in Zwickau; Michael Struck of the Brahms Gesamtausgabe Forschungsstelle Kiel; and Matthias Wendt of the Robert-Schumann-Forschungsstelle, Düsseldorf.

We also wish to thank George Bozarth for writing the short notices, record reviews, and obituary for Vernon Gowitz and for his help with the production of this Newsletter, and Timothy Kinsella at the University of Washington for assistance with its distribution.

We wish to correct a typographical error in our last issue: the title of Robert Münster’s article cited under recent publications is “Eine Brahms-Erinnerung von Adolf Sandberger.”

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 August 2002.

Margaret Notley
A Brahmsian Opus Dubium?

A little-known Brahmsian curiosity is Anh.III/6 in Margit McCorkle’s thematic catalogue (Munich: G. Henle, 1984), a single variation on the same Robert Schumann theme on which Brahms had already composed his Variations, Op. 9, and Clara Schumann her Variations, Op. 20—all for solo piano. This theme is the little piece in F-sharp minor included in Robert’s *Bünte Blätter*, Op. 99 (published in 1854, though he composed this piece in 1841). The story goes that Brahms wrote this isolated variation for Marie Wieck, Clara’s half-sister, when he visited her in Baden in 1868. (See, for example, Malcolm MacDonald, *Brahms* [New York: Schirmer, 1990], p. 81 n. 5.) The Brahms works list in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001), notes that the piece was written “by 1868,” that it will appear in Series II, no. 7 of the *Neue Brahms Ausgabe*—the piece has not been widely available up to now—and that it was first published in 1902.

That 1902 publication, interestingly, is not a book about Brahms but rather a book about the Wieck family by Victor Joss, *Der Musikpädagoge Friedrich Wieck und seine Familie* (Dresden: O. Damm, 1902). Oddly, Joss makes no mention of a manuscript original, nor does he discuss Brahms’s visit with Marie Wieck. McCorkle’s thematic catalogue (pp. 674–675) has nothing further to add, beyond the neutral observation that the autograph is missing. Joss offers the variation, without further commentary, on p. 346, and to my knowledge it has not appeared elsewhere. The page from Joss’s book, which is reproduced here, is engraved, with the instruction “Für Fräulein Marie Wieck” and the inscription “Für Fräulein Marie Wieck. Baden, 1868” typeset in fraktur. At the foot of the page is a reproduction of Brahms’s signature.

I contend that Brahms cannot have composed this piece. Perhaps it is a musicological prank by the 33-year-old Joss, something akin to the “discovery” of a snatch of Beethovenian love-song published in *Die Musik* in 1911. (The incident is discussed in Maynard Solomon, *Beethoven* [New York: Schirmer, 1977], pp. 162-63, and the song fragment is given.) More damning than the oddly clouded provenance of the variation, though, is that it is a musically incompetent composition, which (I am willing to say) precludes the possibility of authorship by Brahms, unquestionably one of the foremost musical craftsmen of the nineteenth century.

One obvious problem has to do with the length of Anh. III/6, which is a scant twelve bars: Schumann’s binary-form *Albumblatt* is twenty-four measures long. (For those without a score of the *Bünte Blätter* in hand, the piece is virtually identical to the theme that Brahms presents at the beginning of his Op. 9.) The first section features a full cadence in the tonic in mm. 4 and then a modulation to A major, confirmed cadentially in m. 8. In the second section, which Schumann originally enclosed in double bars, mm. 9–16 modulate to C-sharp minor, and mm. 17–20 return to A major. Because the closing four measures replicate mm. 1–4 almost exactly, the piece can close in the tonic. The variation that appears in Joss’s book is actually not even a complete variation. The composer has placed lugubrious triplet figuration over a slightly simplified version of Schumann’s bass line in mm. 1–8, then simply repeated the first three measures and added a clumsy closing figure. In other words, the most interesting part of Schumann’s harmonic journey has been excised, something that Brahms did not do in his Variations, Op. 9 (or Clara Schumann in her Op. 20).

There is also an inexplicable dual time signature (3/8 in the right hand, with twice as many bars, against 2/4 in the left hand), which results in a straightforward 2:3 texture. A dual signature of 6/8 and 2/4 might have been closer, though still unnecessary; to use 3/8 and bar the right hand differently is simply wrong. Simultaneous duple and triple subdivisions are indeed typically Brahmsian, but he never notated them this way. For example, in the third variation of Op. 9, composed well over a decade before his Wieck variation supposedly was, Brahms notated a similar texture.
much more clearly and simply: both hands are in 2/4, and triplets are indicated for the right hand. Brahms did use dual time signatures at least once, in the seventh of his Variations on a Theme of Paganini, Book 2. Here, too, the signatures are 2/4 and 3/8, reversing after eight measures, but it is a true 3/8 against 2/4, with both hands barred the same way. The 3/8 part is complicated by triplets (unacknowledged by a “3,” by the way), so that what results is a presto 9/4. This variation is more complex than the one that appears in Joss’s book, and therefore merits the dual signature. It stretches credulity, though, to suggest that Brahms would have bothered with different time signatures for such an uncomplicated texture as that in the Joss variation.

Finally, the harmonic writing of this little piece, while basically static, is in two places frankly grotesque. At m. 16 in the right hand (over the end of m. 8 in the left), the piece seems to be modulating to C-sharp minor, and to this end B-sharp, the leading tone of the new key, has been introduced. Almost as if the composer’s mind changed between the first and third eighth notes of the measure, though, a small ornament abruptly lowers the leading tone to B-natural, changing the mode back to minor. Without the expected modulation to C-sharp minor, there is no point to the introduction of B-sharp in the first place, and the sudden “correction” of that pitch can only sound like a mistake. The Picardy-third at the end, similarly, is both unmotivated and jarring.

The possibility that a manuscript of this variation in Brahms’s hand might someday surface cannot, of course, be completely excluded. However, in view of the murky provenance of this little half-variation, the complete absence of anything artistically noteworthy or even well crafted in it, and its stylistic anomalies, that seems extremely unlikely. In sum, this work’s uncontestable place on the Brahms work list, without an “opus dubium” designation, is in clear need of reevaluation.

Jonathan Bellman

I am grateful to Gina Marie Pellegro at Washington University of St. Louis and Jonathan Pearl at the University of California, Santa Barbara, both of whom had access to the book by Joss, a rarity, for their help with this project.

Another Point of View

A curiosity, they are indeed. Especially if these few measures are judged by standards that probably should not be applied to them. To begin with, while there can be little doubt that they are a separate variation on the same theme as that of Brahms’s Schumann Variations, Op. 9 (as Malcolm MacDonald correctly observed), they did not meet the cut for publication. Brahms wrote all sorts of things that upon reflection he rejected as musically inappropriate or even inferior—indeed, he was famous for doing just that—and this could explain any deficiencies that one might perceive in this piece, without necessitating the rejection of Brahms’s authorship out of hand. The inscription at the end is revealing, not so much for what it says as for what it tells us about the purpose of the original manuscript from which Victor Voss’s engraver prepared the printed edition—these measures were jotted down merely as an entry in Marie Wieck’s autograph book (as Margit McCorkle also surmised). To view the little piece in the context of Albumblätter allows the application of standards different than a finished composition would require. Criteria that would justify a verdict of “musically incompetent” if these measures were a polished product of the compositional workshop cannot be brought fully to bear on such a piece of ephemera to decide the issue of authorship.

The parallel thirds and sixths, the tied notes over barlines, and the two-against-three rhythms are all hallmarks of Brahms’s style that should not be overlooked. But the organization of this musical moment has also not been assessed fully. There is after all some art in this artifact. The piece is not too short for inclusion in the Op. 9 Variations. Although the entire middle section of Schumann’s bass line is indeed missing, the complete treble melody is present, filling in 3/8-time diminution the same twenty-four measures that it does in Schumann’s 2/4-time original. (One might note that only six of Brahms’s sixteen variations in Op. 9 are the same length as the theme, the rest ranging from eleven to forty-three measures.) The inscription warns us from the start that this little study is “Frei nach Schumann,” freely adapted from Schumann’s original—and it is the bass line that, while bearing a clear resemblance to the theme’s, goes on its own way: although retaining Schumann’s 2/4 pace, it employs only the first four measures of the theme’s bass, repeating them twice like a varied ground. The second four measures of the bass line on the Albumblatt, which in Schumann’s melody had acted as a consequent phrase that completes the period on the relative major, now serves a dual function, as varied consequent and central developmental section—the type of formal duality with which Brahms experimented in his large-scale sonata movements.

The moment of “retransition” is undeniably rough—a ritardando helps a little, and this is possible, if the grace notes are allowed to suggest a tempo not too lugubrious—and it could be argued that Brahms would have attended to such a weakness, had he readied the piece for public consumption. What Brahms could later do with an unassuming little structure is best witnessed by comparing his brief Sarabande in A major, WoO posthum.5 (which also has a weak retransition) with its grand realization in the central movement of the String Quintet in F major, Op. 88.

Of course, the Schumann variation could be someone’s less than perfect attempt to forge the Brahms style. For one thing, the place and date of the Albumblatt cannot be confirmed: no one has placed Brahms in Baden-Baden during the year 1868, although he was in nearby Straßburg and Basel in September. But one would have to know more about the 33-year-old Victor Joss to consider him capable of such a “musicalological prank” in an otherwise serious book. On the other hand, one does know enough about the 35-year-old Johannes Brahms not to doubt that, if this bit of music is supposed to be something of prank, he was capable of it.

George S. Bozarth
Precision and Soul
A Tribute to David Epstein (1930–2002)

We have all had experiences that, for one reason or another, have left deep traces on our consciousness, even though their specific content eludes our grasp with the passage of time. For me, one such experience occurred about thirty years ago, when I was a violin student at Boston University and a guest conductor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology led our school orchestra in a reading-rehearsal of Beethoven’s \textit{Eroica} Symphony. While most of the particulars of that afternoon session have faded from memory, I still retain a powerful impression of the sheer intensity of the experience, of having been in the presence of a personality whose intellect was just as daunting as his musicianship. The man on the podium, should there be any doubt, was David Epstein—conductor, theorist, composer, teacher—whose death on 15 January 2002 at the age of seventy-one came as a shock from which those of us who knew him well are still recovering.

To return to that rehearsal in the early 1970s: one musical detail still remains firmly imprinted on my mind—David’s insistence that the C# in the fifth bar of the \textit{Eroica}’s opening theme was not just unexpected or unusual, but downright extraordinary. About a decade later, when as a fledgling teacher I was struggling to keep a day ahead of my students on the syllabus, David enriched my understanding of that incredible moment yet again (though not in person), through his penetrating discussion of ambiguity as a “structural subpremise” in \textit{Beyond Orpheus}, the first of his two challenging but inspiring books. Impressed by the intellectual sparks that flew as David revealed that two apparently antithetical approaches to analysis—those of Arnold Schoenberg and Heinrich Schenker—were in fact complementary, I turned to the beginning of the book, intending to read it from cover to cover—a plan that, I must admit, was not realized until somewhat later. But this was all for the best: David’s work was meant to be slowly digested, not rapidly devoured, and for me, the process of assimilation continues to this day.

In time, my relationship with David broadened and deepened in ways that I could not have predicted after our first encounter. Though our paths frequently crossed in the later 1970s and throughout the 1980s—at concerts, conferences, lectures, and master classes—it was only after I joined the Board of Directors of the American Brahms Society in the early 1990s that our collegial relationship developed into genuine friendship. As I soon became aware, David was the music-theoretical conscience of our Society, gently though persistently reminding us that coming to grips with Brahms’s music was our central mission, the fulfillment of which amounted to an endless process of discovery and renewal.

With this aim in view, and working together with Reinhold Brinkmann and Christoph Wolff, David and I spent many hours in planning sessions for a conference celebrating the centennial of Brahms’s death that was held at Harvard University in the spring of 1997. It was entirely typical that on the last day of the event, when many of the rest of us were intellectually energized but physically spent, David was already plotting the next Brahms event. Not long thereafter, he invited Walter Frisch and me to his home to discuss the possibility of organizing a festival-conference devoted to issues of Brahms performance. This event, which took place last April at Boston University, was very much David’s brainchild.

In the weeks and months leading up to these events, there were any number of evenings when I returned home to find a message on my answering machine that began: “This is Herr Brahms calling for Herr Joachim…”—and I knew that a stimulating dialogue with David was in the offing. (I should add that I left just as many messages for “Herr Brahms” as he did for me, and that they were usually relayed by his wife, Anne, who thus became a key partner in our projects.) The ostensible purpose of the ensuing phone conversation was to sort out conference logistics, or to settle on a topic for one of the many lectures that David graciously consented to give for my students at Boston University, or to firm up a rehearsal time—but somehow, we always managed to get sidetracked, veering off into a spirited exchange of ideas on the pieces that mattered most to us. A conversation with David was an adventure. For him, music history was not a litany of facts; theory was not a matrix of abstractions; and performance was not an exercise in the passive transmission of the symbols on the page. Nor were history, theory, and performance independent domains. In our discussions about music, the word he invoked more
than any other was “integration” (“synthesis” was a close second). No wonder he was drawn so passionately to the music of Brahms.

One of the first—and for me, most memorable—in a long series of marathon gab sessions took place shortly after the publication of my review of a volume to which David had contributed an essay on “the mechanisms of motion” in Brahms’s music. When David left a message, indicating that he wanted to discuss some of the issues raised in my review, I feared that he might have taken offense at the reservations I had expressed regarding his interpretation of the proportional tempo relationships in the third movement of Brahms’s Second Symphony. As it turned out—and to my immense relief—David was principally interested in pursuing some of the preliminary ideas that I had floated about the role of “developing” and “contrapuntal” variation in Brahms’s works—ideas that were hardly ready for “prime time” (my phrase, not his), but that he encouraged me to flesh out in ways that had not occurred to me.

When at my urging we did eventually turn to the Allegretto grazioso of Brahms’s symphony, David didn’t make his point by reviewing in detail the argument he had presented in his essay, but rather by delivering much of the movement in his inimitable expressive baritone. (This was only one of many occasions when David broke into song to emphasize a point: I have vivid memories of David’s doing just that while coaching me on his Fantasy Variations for unaccompanied violin, and of his singing along with his own rendition, at the piano, of the first movement of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony during a lecture for one of my classes.) As the witness to a kind of impromptu “performance,” I was thus reminded of a factor that I had failed to take into account in my review. For David, performance was the alpha and omega of the musical experience, at once the point of departure for theoretical inquiry and, even more important, the arena in which the theory was put to the test.

In the Preface to Beyond Orpheus, David wrote that the analytical observations in the book arose “through performance,” and that “the music [was] approached with both a conductor’s perspective and a composer’s training and viewpoint.” And at the corresponding place in Shaping Time, his magisterial study of musical temporality, he identified performance as “the ultimate proving ground of musical verities.” I recognize this now as a striking realization of a suggestive claim made in the early twentieth century by the Viennese critic Karl Kraus: “Ursprung ist Ziel.” In David’s view, performance was indeed both “origin” and “goal.”

In attempting to characterize David’s approach to his work, I can’t resist quoting Robert Musil, another astute critic of Viennese culture. Speaking through the main character of his gargantuan unfinished novel, The Man Without Qualities, Musil described his quest for a “formula” or “expression” that would encapsulate the contradictory tendencies of his time, observing that “Such an expression is always risky, not yet justified by the prevailing state of affairs, a combination of exact and inexact, of precision and soul.” Now unlike Ulrich, Musil’s antihero, David was a man of many qualities. But it seems to me that David’s work will endure because it too was the product of “precision and soul.”

As will be eminently clear from even a cursory reading of David’s writings, his thinking met the highest standards of scientific precision. Indeed, he bolstered his argument in Shaping Time with an impressive array of evidence culled from the fields of cognitive psychology, neurophysiology, anthropology, biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, psychophysics, and statistics. On the other hand, anyone who carefully studies David’s analysis of Brahms’s Intermezzo Op. 76 No. 4 in Shaping Time will understand that what he was after could neither be computed with a pocket calculator nor measured with a stopwatch or metronome. Already in Beyond Orpheus, David had expressed his profound awareness that much of the “power of musical communication lies within the domain of the ineffable and nonverbal—call it affect, expression, gesture, or whatever.” The challenge consisted in discovering a means of access to that domain—and David found it in the temporal realm, arguing that the properties of time “are not purely intellectual or cerebral in nature, but rather are physical, bodily experiences.” And as he went on to say: “What becomes clear at this point is that affect, however we may describe it, and structure are in truth two sides of the same coin.”

“Structure” and “affect”: functions of “precision,” on the one hand, and “soul,” on the other. For me, David’s central accomplishment was his synthesis of these divergent impulses in his life’s work, where he succeeded brilliantly in combining the precision of the theorist with the passionate soul of the performing artist.

In the days after David’s death, I was part of an e-mail loop in which scholars from around the country shared memories of the friend and colleague we had lost. One wrote of David’s generous mentorship of promising young scholars; another of how he managed to be “down-to-earth and brilliant at the same time”; and still another of “the puckish twinkle he would get in his eye, just before he challenged an idea.”

David was all of this and more—good-humored, warm-hearted, deeply humane—which is to say, in short, that he was a Mensch, and it is for this reason, more than any other, that we will miss him so much.

John Daverio

Prize Winners in Quartet Competition in Hamburg

The Johannes-Brahms-Gesellschaft Internationale Vereinigung in Hamburg has announced the winners of its ninth Internationaler Brahms-Wettbewerb. This year’s competition was for string quartets, and the first prize was awarded to the Cuarteto Casals (Vera Martínez Mehner, Abel Tomás, David Quiggle, and Arnaud Tomás), the second prize to the Con Tempo String Quartet (Bogdan Safel, Ingrid Nicola, Andrei Banchii, and Adrian Maniu). Both ensembles were featured in quartets by Mendelssohn, Shostakovich, and Brahms at the final concert of the competition at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg on 10 March 2002.
Recent Brahms Publications, Papers, and Recordings

Books, Articles, and Dissertations


The letters are to Guido Adler, Adolf Brodsky, Carl Georg Peter Grädener, and Ave Lallemant. Biographical, historical, and musicological details precede each letter; the German text is provided along with the translation. Among other things, the letters add significantly to the picture that we have of Brahms in his post-Schumann Hamburg years (that is, the period between 1854 and his first visit to Vienna). S.A.


Johannes Brahms’s reputation during the years between his death in 1897 and the end of World War II in 1945 has received little attention in Brahms-reception studies. The Brahms portrayed at that time was a distinctly German artist whose conservative style was comforting during a socially (and artistically) turbulent time. That image of Brahms is unfamiliar to our modern idea of the composer, shaped as it is by Arnold Schoenberg’s 1947 essay “Brahms the Progressive.” Schoenberg painted Brahms as a harbinger of Modernism whose flexible phrase-structure and supple use of forward-looking harmony led to the emancipation of the dissonance and free prole style of the early twentieth century. Later Brahms scholars have read Schoenberg’s essay largely as a self-serving attempt to legitimize his own atonal language by ascribing some of its principles to a revered master. Yet, when Schoenberg first delivered his remarks as a radio address in 1933, he was also attempting to overturn several decades of increasingly reactionary readings of Brahms, whereby German writers had championed Brahms as a bulwark against a decadent Modernism that was perceived to be driven by foreign elements. This essay examines some of the best-known German writers on Brahms from the first half of the twentieth century (Walter Niemann, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Schoenberg, Karl Geiringer, and others) and traces an increasingly nationalistic and at times even racist trend in Brahms reception. Finally, the uneasy attempts after World War II to deal with Brahms’s German legacy are briefly surveyed. D.B.M.


Papers Presented at Conferences

Paper read at the New England Chapter Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 23 September 2000:


Paper read at the Rocky Mountain Chapter Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Brigham Young University, 9–10 March 2001:


Music


Recordings of Interest


In her first Brahms recording, the young Swedish pianist Francisca Skoogh, second prize winner of the International Michelangioli Competition in 2000, has paired a spirited and deeply felt performance of the Handel Variations with the four-movement suite by Handel in which Brahms found his theme. (Handel also used it as the basis for a set of variations.) Sensitive interpretations of the Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 21 No. 1, the four Clavierstücke, Op. 119, and the Waltz, Op. 39 No. 15 (not cited in the contents) round out this album. G.B.

Schumann, Clara. The Songs of Clara Schumann. Susan Griton, soprano; Stephan Loges, baritone; Eugene Asti, piano. Hyperion, CDA 67249.

With a liner essay by Nancy B. Reich, this CD presents for the first time a recording of the complete extant songs of Clara Schumann, from promising youthful efforts—Walter, written at age 14, is especially delightful—to the mature Sehr Lieder aus "Jucunda," Op. 23, from 1853. Art songs like the deeply sincere Liebet du um Schönhheit, Op. 37 No. 4 (published in 1841, together with eleven other settings of poems by Friedrich Rückert, two by Clara and nine by Robert) and the bleakly fruitless Sie lieben sich beide, Op. 13 No. 2 (poem by Heinrich Heine) establish Clara Schumann’s position in the top ranks of Lieder composers. Settings like the haunting Auf einem grünen Hügel, Op. 23 No. 4, reveal how her compositional efforts, but when she is at her best—and she usually is—one finds in the music no reason for her self-doubts. The twenty-nine songs on this recording are shared equally by Susan Griton and Stephan Loges, her rich, lustrous soprano complemented by his lyrical baritone, and all of these lovely miniatures are beautifully performed, with the assistance of Eugene Asti’s sharply etched accompaniments. G.B.
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In Memoriam Vernon Gotwals

It is with sorrow that we note the passing of one of our founding members and long-time supporters, Dr. Vernon Gotwals (1924–2002).

Best known for his annotated translation of two early Haydn biographies, published as *Joseph Haydn: Eighteenth-Century Gentleman and Genius*, Dr. Gotwals, both as an organist and a scholar, had an abiding interest in the music of Brahms. His article “Brahms and the Organ” for *Music: The A. G. O. and R. C. C. O. Magazine* in 1970 provided the first exploration of the primary sources for Brahms’s organ music, and as such laid the groundwork for all subsequent work in this area.

A graduate of Amherst College and Princeton University, Dr. Gotwals served as college organist and Professor of Music at Smith College for thirty-two years. This position gave him the opportunity to edit, together with Philip Keppler, *Folk Songs for Women’s Voices, arranged by Johannes Brahms* (Smith College Music Archives series, no. 15; 1968), a volume of twenty-eight hitherto-unpublished three- and four-part settings culled from the sets of partbooks prepared by members of Brahms’s *Frauenchor* in Hamburg and donated to Smith College by Sophie Drinker.

The ABS extends it condolences to Dr. Gotwals’s wife, Carol Joyce Gotwals, his sons, and their families.

George Bozarth

Brahms Festivals in Mürzzuschlag and Baden-Baden

From 11 to 15 September 2002 a Brahms music festival will take place in Mürzzuschlag, Austria. The special focus will be on “Johannes Brahms in Italien,” thus on his trips to Italy in the years 1878 to 1893 with his famous traveling friends Theodor Billroth, Carl Goldmark, and Joseph Viktor Widmann, among others. For information about this event, contact the Brahmsmuseum in Mürzzuschlag via e-mail at brahms.museum@netway.at or visit their website at www.brahmsmuseum.at.

The Brahmsgesellschaft Baden-Baden has announced its nineteenth *Brahmstage Baden-Baden* for 30 April to 4 May 2003. Co-sponsored by the Südwestrundfunk, the festival will feature two works—the Double Concerto for Violin and Violoncello, Op. 102, which Brahms first tried out with the Baden-Baden Kurorchester in 1887 and which will be performed at the festival by the SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg, and the seldom-heard cantata *Rinaldo*, Op. 50 (text by Goethe), performed by the Bayer-Männerchor and the Baden-Baden Philharmonic. For further information on this festival, consult the Brahmsgesellschaft’s website (brahms.baden-baden@t-online.de) or contact the society at Maximilainstraße 85, D-76534 Baden-Baden (phone: 7221/99872; fax: 7221/71104).