Re-dating the Premiere of Brahms’s String Sextet in G, Op. 36

In the record of first performances of Brahms’s music, two entries have always attracted attention, not least that of American musicians. First, the claim that the premiere of the Trio in B major, Op. 8, was given not in Germany but in New York on 27 November 1855 at Dodsworth’s Hall (by the pianist William Mason, Theodor Thomas and Carl Bergmann as violinist and cellist, respectively). This was widely known in the English literature long before being included in McCorkle’s Thematisches Verzeichnis—perhaps most obviously familiar from Florence May’s ascribing it “to the lasting distinction of America” in her biography of 1905, which was quoted verbatim by Daniel Gregory Mason in 1933.¹ Second that the premiere of the second String Sextet, Op. 36, was in Boston, by the Mendelssohn Quintette Club on 11 October 1866. This was a less well known fact, only established in the modern literature by McCorkle and the Hofmanns.²

The first of these claims was challenged by Michael Struck in these pages in 1991 and elsewhere in 1997 by showing that the German first performance predated this by several weeks, being on Saturday, 13 October 1855, in the hall of the Gewerbehäus, Danzig.³ The second dating has never been discussed in detail in English, but was challenged and rectified by myself in the course of a paper in German for the Gmunden Kongress in the Brahms year of 1997.⁴

As 2016 saw the 150th anniversary of the premiere of Op. 36, it is interesting to recall and elaborate the background to this error for English readers, and add some parallel information on the American reception of the first Sextet in B-flat, Op. 18. First performances of works other than major concert works can often be difficult to date, usually through lack of surviving programs and undated letters and envelopes that refer to such performances. But the misdating of Op. 36 is an interesting case, caused by the incorrect manuscript annotation of an only partially dated printed program by an authoritative contemporary—no less than Max Kalbeck. The work is listed in a program which details two successive Saturday evening concerts on “October 11th & 18th,” but bears no year. The Sextet is in the first of these, the last of the five items performed.⁵ The annotated year, barely legible as “Boston 1866,” is clarified as “In der Handschrift von Max Kalbeck: Boston 1866” by the Archiv of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde.⁶

It was the assumption that this source was reliable that led McCorkle and the Hofmanns to accept it over the contemporary first German performance. Kalbeck was, however, wrong. There was no performance by the Mendelssohn Quintette Club on 11 October 1866. Subsequent checking of the club’s performances shows that in 1866 its season did not begin until December, and that these days were not Saturdays; also that the Mendelssohn Quintette Club concerts were then at a different venue, the Masonic Hall in Boston. Rather, the exact programs advertised for the two Saturdays appear only in 1873 at the venue of the Boston Meionan, and are reviewed in detailed sequence in Dwight’s Journal of Music.⁷ Thus, in the absence of any other information on alternative performances, the recorded first European performance, 20 November 1866 in Zürich, as in McCorkle, has to be assumed to be the premiere.⁸
As interesting as the mistake itself, however, is how such problems arise. We do not know why Kalbeck made this annotation: perhaps he assumed that, as with Op. 8, an American performance had followed quickly in the same year of 1866. But few in America would have been able to enlighten him. The 1873 program does not note the performance of the Sextet as a first performance, in Boston or elsewhere; and one is struck by the lack of apparent critical interest in the two sextets relative to that excited by the Trio, Op. 8. Though the latter was obviously due to the excitement aroused by the recent publication of Schumann’s famous article “Neue Bahnen” of October 1853, interest had cooled in light of subsequent reviews of Brahms’s music. Discussion only emerges retrospectively, and then primarily in relation to the first Sextet in B-flat, Op. 18, as follows.

In response to a performance of Op. 18 given at the second Euterpe concert on 12 February 1879 at Mechanics’ Hall, Boston, noted in Dwight’s on 1 March and described in a review as “entirely new here,” Thomas Ryan, a founder of the Quintette Club, had written in to proudly remind readers that “our [Mendelssohn] Quintette Club had played both sextets by Brahms six or seven years ago in a series of concerts given in the Meiaonan, where the programmes ... were made up mostly of music new to Boston, including the last two quartets of Beethoven....” Since no other references exist, these were thus the performances that included that on 11 October 1873 and, as the following review of Op. 18 shows, both can be deduced as the American premieres of the sextets.

But their reception had been poor. The review in Dwight’s Journal of Op. 18 on 1 March goes on to criticize the work, noting its “strange combination of instruments, an unpromising experiment prompted more by the conceit of originality than by any inward musical necessity. The violins were overborne and the ensemble rendered dull and opaque by much thickness of the bass and middle parts.... The Allegro was a puzzle from beginning and in the intangibleness [sic] of theme that was experienced with the same composer’s C minor Symphony, a sense all through of something laboured, learned, overstrained and lacking inspiration, lacking any raison d’etre. Now and then a few charming measures, a striking effect, a promise of something genuine at last, but every promise unfulfilled!” The noted performance of Op. 36 was marginally better. Dwight’s reviewer states that “this was, like most of the productions of the new composers, half interesting, half disappointing, leaving one on the whole in doubt. The last of the four movements, however, was decidedly enjoyable.”

This was an interesting reaction, because the Op. 18 Sextet had been well received in Germany and England, although part of the reason must have been the promotion by Joseph Joachim in both countries (and also by the Hellnesberger Quartet in Vienna). But there was no comparable personal impetus in America, unlike that for Op. 8, where William Mason had known Brahms in Germany. But by 1873 the Brahms sextets were the obvious focus for America’s pioneering expanded string chamber group; and the program particularly stresses Alexander Heindl as the additional cellist—and the reviews the resident “Mr Rudolf Hennig ... who has no superior in this country as a violoncellist.”

That such a huge difference was felt as between the Mendelssohn Quintet and the Brahms sextets reminds the modern listener that, though the sextets are among the most mellifluous works of earlier Brahms, their language was far more advanced, and resisted as such by many listeners. But even so, one must grant Thomas Ryan’s justified pride, since his pioneering group had been founded on reverence for Mendelssohn’s quintets, and had given the first Quintet in A major, Op. 18, at its first perfor-

mance in 1849. That the club and its circle regarded the more mature second Quintet in B-flat, Op. 87, as its point of reference is surely clear in the Dwight’s review of Brahms’s Op. 18, which lauds “the delightful old B flat Quintet, op. 87 ... which carried us back to the very first days of the Quintette Club that still bears his name in Boston—and throughout the land.” But the price of this was a fairer judgment of the Brahms, that still had a way to go in proper appreciation: “After this nightmare what ‘a change came over the spirit of our dream’ and over the faces of the audience! The Mendelssohn Quintet was welcomed with sincere delight; and not because it was familiar merely, but because it is intrinsically musical and there is no resisting its enchantment.”

Michael Musgrave


- 2 -
Brahms News

The Board of Directors of the ABS met on 10 November during the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society. The following officers were reelected to two-year terms: Ryan McClelland, President; Valerie Goertzen, Vice-President; and Marie Sumner Lott, Treasurer. Nicole Grimes was elected to the office of Secretary, replacing David Brodbeck. On behalf of the Society, Board members thanked Kevin Karnes for his years of service, and especially for his steady leadership and tenacity as Treasurer during the years of the Society’s transition from the University of Washington office to the University of New Hampshire. Laurie McManus of Shenandoah Conservatory was elected to the open seat on the Board.

Plans are in the works for a Brahms conference, to be held early in 2019. More information is forthcoming!

The winner of the 2017 Brahms Award at The Ohio State University is Ms. Lin Ye, a first-year student from China, double major in piano and psychology, and accomplished flutist. The Brahms Fund was established by longtime ABS member and emergitus philosophy professor Tony Pasquarello, in memory of his son, violinist A. Joseph Pasquarello, and in honor of Johannes Brahms.

Karl Geiringer Scholarship

Lucy Liu, Ph. D. candidate in Music Theory at Indiana University, is the recipient of the American Brahms Society’s Karl Geiringer Scholarship for 2017. The scholarship will support completion of her dissertation, entitled “Modular Discourse in Select Works by Brahms.”

The ABS welcomes applications for the 2018 competition from students in the final stages of preparing a doctoral dissertation written in English. Work relating to Brahms should form a significant component of the dissertation, but it need not be the exclusive or even primary focus. The Society welcomes research in historical musicology, analysis, performance practice, cultural history, and other fields.

A completed application consists of a cover letter and a description of the project of no more than 500 words. Two confidential letters, including one from the dissertation adviser, should be submitted separately. All materials should be submitted electronically as pdf files to Richard Cohn, richard.cohn@yale.edu by 1 June 2018. Finalists will be invited to submit a sample chapter. Recipients will be notified in November. More detailed guidelines are found on the Society’s website.

Recent Publications

Books and Articles


Lorenz Mikoletzky, “Die kulturpolitische Situation in Wien nach 1848,” 11–16


Katharina Loose-Einfalt, “…stowed away in the dusty cupboard of Dr. Schneider, in Vienna”? Eduard Schneider, Johannes Brahms, and the Verwaltung des Schubert-Nachlasses in den 1860er bis 1880er Jahren,” 89–105


Elisabeth Hilscher, “Johannes Brahms und die Wiener Singakademie,” 135–78

Christian Martin, “Berührungspunkte zwischen Brahms’ frühen Chorwerken und Schuberts mehrstimmigen Gesängen,” 179–92


Katrin Eich, “...so manches lustige Experiment’. Johannes Brahms‘ öffentlich gespielte, doch nie gedruckte Schubert-Bearbeitungen für Klavier solo,” 253–70

Walburga Litschauer, “Diese gar leicht bewegten Wienerischen... Klaviertänze bei Schubert und Brahms,” 271–82

Rita Steblin, “The Viennese Composer Johann Wolf (1805–1874). His Role in the ‘Kosegarten Song Cycle’ and in Creating Aleatoric Music,” 283–328


(Continued on p. 12)
In the Land of Seven Fortresses. Johannes Brahms and Joseph Joachim in Transylvania: An Unpublished Letter

Sept. 79

Dear friend,
I have the most urgent request of you—one that is so pressing that it is not enough just to carry it out—you ought to have done so already! With this in mind read on: that I require of necessity for some time (2 weeks): The friend was Ferdinand Pohl, librarian and Archivist at the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, and the cause of Brahms’s unusual excitement was the prospect of an upcoming tour with his old friend Joseph Joachim, to the nether limits of Austro-Hungarian lands. Brahms continued:

Violin Sonatas by Beethoven, 2 in G Major; the one in C Minor; and the Kreutzer Sonata, also the B Minor Rondo for violin and piano by Schubert, finally I’d very much like the D Minor Sonata for ditto by Schumann. The last item perhaps later or, if you cannot find it, not at all. In case you cannot extract them from the Archive, it would be fine, as far as I am concerned, if you bought the Peters editions, and in case the things are not available individually, the complete sonatas of Beethoven for violin and piano. The same for Schubert.

But the things should already have been in the post long ago!!!! You might already have heard from Faber that I am about to make a name for myself—but I, along with it [my name], will be back home by October 1. I can expect Joachim to pick me up any day now to take me to Siebenbürger, Novi Pazar and Bosnien—for that I am in need of the holy scriptures in order to preach to the heathens. Now, however, continue writing in the 3rd volume: “Whereupon the Duke embraced his Capellmeister and presented him with a major decoration, the Duchess, however, embraced the biographer and gave him a delightful smack; then the whole company went, even then, just as one hundred years later, to the Igel.” Whereupon I am your affectionately devoted J. Brahms Pörtschach on the Lake

Sept. 79

Lieber Freund,


That Brahms would agree to a tour at all is notable. From the start of his career he concertized only reluctantly, to replenish his bank account in the days when income from composing was too meager for personal survival. His last serious tours as a concert pianist, apart from concert tours undertaken to promote his own music, occurred in the late 1860s, with Joseph Joachim and with Julius Stockhausen. In fact, letters to Joachim in 1878–79 describe his aversion to any concertizing, and to his ruined fingers.5

But now, Ignaz Kugel, Joachim’s Viennese concert agent, suggested a joint tour with Brahms to a colorful and scenic part of the Empire as an amusing means of joining music-making with a holiday. Perhaps, famous and financially secure, Brahms was ready to travel for the pleasure of it, having had a taste of Italy the previous summer. The men would visit two major cities in the Banat, the southeastern-most portion of Hungary, and several towns in Transylvania, the mountainous region now in Romania—an exotic slice of the Crown Lands of the Empire, inhabited by Hungarians, Romanians, Gypsies, Saxons, and Jews. Appealingly, much of this area was German-speaking due to the seven fortified towns (Siebenbürger) built centuries earlier. Those towns had promoted German culture within the ethnically diverse area, and had even resisted Turkish invasion with some success. The Gypsy populations must also have appealed to Brahms, with his long-standing interest in their music. A letter from Brahms to Joachim as they were planning the tour makes clear that he was ignoring alluring thoughts of another trip to Italy and looking forward instead to traveling in “less civilized lands which interest me.”6

This is not to say that Brahms had no doubts about the undertaking. In the same letter, a first reaction to Joachim’s query as to his intentions regarding the tour read, “Should I give a resounding Yes or make a happy face? I’m not quite sure.” His misgivings were expressed more clearly in an earlier letter to his publisher, Fritz Simrock: “I would quite like to go to Siebenbürigen with Joachim. But unfortunately all concert tours of that sort are a dubious pleasure. To me, in other words I and my potential colleague, always have all too different agendas. I want to travel in comfort, see new lands and new people, and want to have fun while earning the tour. But Joachim, or if it were Henschel, wants to give a concert every day, see nothing, and just make money. So I’d better let it go.” In the end, of course, they compromised and he did go, but not before explaining himself one more time to Joachim: “Actually, I’d like to write another confidential word, that is, that I make the trip gladly simply for my pleasure, willingly leave all business, etc., to you.”8 Joachim clearly didn’t object, for the next day he mentioned the tour in a letter to his friend Philipp Spitta: “Just think, I’m taking a combined concert-pleasure trip of about 14 days to Siebenbürigen with Brahms! Is that not Romantic? We’ll play six or seven times, and I’m looking forward to the business. I believe he [Brahms] wants to warm up before an audience.”9
While the tour is mentioned in most biographies, little detail has been written about it. My aim is to open a window on what must have been a fascinating trip, and for Brahms, a unique schedule of demanding solo performances, requiring him to sit down at the piano and restore his “ruined fingers.” Unable to obtain the scores he needed in nearby Klagenfurt, and aware of the need to practice, he penned his urgent letter to Pohl. One item stands out: its curious ending. In a mind-bending merging of time, place, and personnel, Brahms encourages Pohl to include in the third volume of his Haydn biography an imaginary incident in which the Duke (Count Esterházy) rewards Pohl for his great biography of Haydn; the Duchess his wife engages in a more feminine expression of approval of the author; and all, including Brahms, go off to the Igel, a reference to Brahms’s favorite Stammlokal in Vienna. Brahms took an intense interest in Pohl’s ground-breaking work. Here he blödelt—engages with his friend in erudite silly talk (from blöd, silly or daffy), a kind of jocular nonsense common particularly in letters between men in the German-speaking world.

The friends met in Budapest, spending one day (!) rehearsing. True, for the most part they would be performing music they had played together for over twenty-five years, much of which Brahms undoubtedly knew from memory. But there was one major new work, Brahms’s Violin Concerto, including Brahms, goes off to the Igel, a reference to Brahms’s favorite Stammlokal in Vienna. Brahms took an intense interest in Pohl’s ground-breaking work. Here he blödelt—engages with his friend in erudite silly talk (from blöd, silly or daffy), a kind of jocular nonsense common particularly in letters between men in the German-speaking world.

The premiere of the concerto had not gone so well for Joachim, nor the second performance. He needed more opportunities to perform it, and apparently taking it to the provinces before performing it again in important concert halls appealed to him. “But you won’t play it just to be considerate, will you!” Brahms wrote. For his part, the composer was not convinced that the work was suitable with piano accompaniment. He suggested that Joachim bring along Max Bruch’s G-Minor Concerto just in case. In fact, Joachim chose to bring along Mendelssohn’s violin concerto, commenting that it was usually badly played, and that he knew the tradition after all … reminding Brahms that as a youth he had learned it from Mendelssohn himself.

Traveling with a Streicher piano and Joachim’s two Stradivari, they caught the night train on 13 September for a direct rail connection to Arad, 140 miles southeast across the Hungarian Puszta, the largest prairie in Europe. The Carpathian Mountains were on the eastern horizon. Arad was not quite the hinterland of heathens Brahms seems to have imagined; it was an important transportation hub just at the Hungarian-Serbian border. European influence was strong there, thanks in part to a large military establishment. By the mid-nineteenth century it was a bustling commercial center, with one of the largest Jewish populations of any city in Europe. In 1833 a European-style music conservatory had been established there, only the sixth in all the continent, following a scant eleven years on the founding of the Royal Academy of Music in London.

The Neue Arader Zeitung of 14 September reported that “for today’s concert ‘Brahms and Joachim,’ the rush of people [to buy tickets] was such that since yesterday evening, the seats are almost sold out.” The article went on to admonish concertgoers to arrive on time. Latecomers were to wait in the lobby until the piece then being performed was finished. No searching for one’s seat while the performers are playing, “as is fitting for such world-famous artists,” requirements which were already in place for the next day’s concert in Temeswar. The program followed Joachim’s suggestion to Brahms laid out in the last

---

**DAYS-BY-DAY TOUR SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 Sept</td>
<td>Lv. Budapest on night train</td>
<td>227 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Sept</td>
<td>Arr. Arad; concert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Sept</td>
<td>Concert in Temesvár</td>
<td>59.5 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lv. for Arad after concert</td>
<td>59.5 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Sept</td>
<td>To Schäßburg</td>
<td>358 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Sept</td>
<td>Concert in Schäßburg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Sept</td>
<td>To Kronstadt</td>
<td>117 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Sept</td>
<td>Kronstadt; concert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Sept</td>
<td>To Hermannstadt</td>
<td>114 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Sept</td>
<td>Hermannstadt; concert</td>
<td>172 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Sept</td>
<td>Klausenburg; concert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Sept</td>
<td>Klausenburg; concert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Sept</td>
<td>To Budapest</td>
<td>469 km</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All travel was by rail except for the trip between Kronstadt and Klausenburg, which were not connected by rail until 1908, and the short trip from Temesvár to Arad, made by carriage.*
letter he wrote before departure; Schumann, Phantasiestücke for Piano and Violin; Brahms, Variation and Scherzo; Tartini, Devil’s Trill Sonata; Bach, Adagio, Fugue, Gigue; Beethoven, Romance in F; Schumann, Novellette; Mendelssohn, Violin Concerto. Apart from the Novelletten of Schumann, which Brahms seems not to have performed in public (other than No. 2 many years before), this program, long familiar to both performers, would have been a good choice to present after a night spent on a train. As it happens, Brahms’s rendition of the Novelletten came in for special praise, not common on this tour where it was Joachim’s performances that more often made the greatest impression. We don’t know which or even how many of the Novelletten he played, but they are all notably demanding, some dazzlingly so. The Neue Arader Zeitung’s critic wrote: “In the Schumann Novellette Brahms effortlessly displayed the highest technique for piano that can be attained on that instrument. Noisy applause was also accorded this artist, which he accepted with appropriate grace.”

The next day the pair made the short trip to Temeswar by single track railroad, 37 miles to the south. Temeswar was the historic, economic, and cultural center of the Banat, the first city after New York to have electric street lights. Once more Brahms would have trouble finding his heathens. Announcements of the forthcoming concert by “the Piano Hero and Violin King” had begun by 3 September and had appeared daily thereafter. People swarmed the streets and at the concert were standing in the balconies. The newspaper announced the program: 1. Beethoven, Sonata for Violin and Piano Op. 30 in G Major; 2. Bach, Chaconne; 3. Scarlatti, Caprices for Piano; 4. Spohr, Adagio for Violin; 5. Schubert, Andante, Scherzo, March for Piano; 6. Brahms, Violin Concerto Op. 77 [for piano and violin]. The critic of the Temeswarer Zeitung called the Violin Concerto “doubtless one of the most important compositions today, standing at the same height as other masterpieces.” He wished, however, for an orchestra, although Joachim’s great skill was convincing and his interpretation of the gigantic, unique music would be echoed in the future (i.e., our critic knew not what to make of it, but had hopes for its future). Another critic wrote that it was difficult to conceive how strong Joachim’s right hand must be to play as he did; his was a technical level that no one else had reached so far. His bow arm—his legato, arpeggios, nuances from pp to ff were inimitable, unmatched, and reached the maximum of possibility. Equally unmatched was his “miraculous clarity of sound.” Brahms, he wrote, is less known as a pianist, but the reviewer was deeply impressed by Brahms’s severe and exact interpretation, as well as by his bravura and inward sensitivity, his skill as an accompanist, and his endurance. The Neue Arader Zeitung of 17 September, reporting on the concert in Temeswar, wrote that it was a “brilliant success,” attended by a larger audience than had been seen for many a year, and that it had therefore delivered a far greater financial return than expected. The report went on: anybody who was anyone, by birth, rank, position, anyone with an understanding for music, was present. They held their breath at the wonderful sounds of the Violin King and the rare virtuosity of Brahms, a pianist of the first rank. Stormy applause followed each number; the audience left highly satisfied, conscious of having been present at an evening of rare artistry.

The friends left Temeswar immediately after the concert, traveling back to Arad by carriage, where the next morning they would take the narrow-gauge railway eastward 233 miles directly into the heart of the Carpathian Mountains. Their destination was the small and picturesque fortified medieval Saxon town of Schäßburg. It was the longest journey of the trip, and must have made a powerful impression. The railway followed the rising valley of the Mores River, bordered on both sides by forested mountains, to its meeting with another river, the Tărnavă/Tărnav Mare. This was a landscape dotted with Hungarian and Romanian villages and Gypsy settlements. Still rising, with ever-higher mountains in view, the railway continued east to Schäßburg.

The next evening they gave their third concert, in the Gewerbevereinsaale [the Trade Association Hall]. From a local newspaper of Wednesday, 17 September: “On the occasion of the concert which takes place today, we offer biographical information we believe will interest our readers.” Presented was a brief but accurate summary of the artists’ careers. Joachim was introduced as one of the most outstanding violin virtuosos of the day. Mention was made of his wide-ranging tours, his reputation for preserving the good and the true in the service of art, and his activities as a composer. Brahms was described as one of the most important composers of the day, outranking his contemporaries in power, individuality, and versatility. The program listed was: 1. Schumann, Rondo für Violine u. Klavier; 2. Brahms, Variationen, Scherzo für Klavier; 3. Tartini, Sonata (Larghetto, Tempo guisto, Finale: trillo del diavolo); 4. Schumann, Novelletten für Clavier; 5. Joachim, Romanze aus dem ungarischen Concert für Violine und Clavier; 6. Spohr, Gesangsscene aus dem 8. Concert für Violine und Clavier. A review appeared some days later in the Siebenbürgisch-Deutsches Tagblatt: “Joachim and Brahms, the world-famous artists, have honored us, too, during their vacation tour in Siebenbürgen, with their visit and a concert they gave before a select and numerous public in the Trade Association Hall on the 17th of this month. [Here followed the program.] We heard not virtuosos, but rather artists in the true sense of the word, whose performance defies all description. One has to have heard and experienced the playing of a Joachim, this King of Violinists, to have some notion of him. After the concert we came to know both artists as congenial men who were happy to have visited the beautifully-situated Schäßburg. A merry circle of friends of art entertained us, as well as the great and yet so modest artists, till after midnight!”

The following day, after a light lunch on the glass-enclosed veranda of a fine summer villa with splendid views of the green hills and snowy mountain peaks of the Schäßburg countryside, the men took the afternoon to travel the 90 miles by train through hilly agricultural lands and villages to the important town of Kronstadt, a stronghold founded by the Teutonic Knights centuries earlier at the southern flank of the Carpathian Mountains. Kronstadt, once the site of Teutonic coronations, was now an important center of Romanian and Saxon language and culture. By the time Brahms and Joachim arrived, the predominant population was equally German and Romanian, with Hungarians, Roma, and a small Jewish population in addition. The old city was (and is) still mostly intact.

The 19 September concert had already been announced by 5 September, although without a specific date. Thereafter news articles appeared every few days. A committee of men from the individual choral and music associations—each ethnic group had its own—met to plan a tribute to Joachim and Brahms “in view of their great importance to Art.” On the day of the concert Joachim and Brahms changed their announced program, which now read: 1. Spohr, 8. Konzert (Gesangs-Szene); 2. Brahms, zwei Kapricen; 3. J.S. Bach, Suite für Violine, Präludium, Menuett 1 und 2, Gavotte; 4. a) Schumann, Paganini-Etüde, b) Gluck, Gavotte, c) Schubert, Scherzo für Klavier; 5. Joachim, Romanze aus dem ungarischen Konzert; 6. Beethoven, Sonata A Dur, Op. 47 (Kreutzer Sonata) für Klavier und Violine. The critic of the Kronstädter Zeitung described a sold-out house but
declined to offer a thorough review of the two artists, contenting himself merely to say that Kronstadt’s art-loving public had never yet experienced such pleasure. “Every listener was thrilled by both the piano and the violin playing of the artists.”

The after-concert dinner included toasts and a performance by the full city orchestra, which played several pieces with such excellence that both artists were visibly surprised. Brahms and Joachim were notably different from other artists who had recently visited Kronstadt, the critic went on. While others visit for scarcely 10 to 12 hours, these artists had spent the entire previous day and today’s morning hours visiting the city and the surrounding areas, “thereby combining the Pleasant with the Useful.” Indeed, on the morning of the 19th, they made an excursion to Mount Tämpa, a hulking mountain massif on the edge of town offering brilliant views from the top.

The critic of the Romanian-language newspaper Gazet’a Transilvaniel was more explicit, describing in some detail the arrival of the musicians who had come “all the way to the eastern-most border of the monarchy.” They arrived on 18 September, lodged at Otelul [Hotel] Nr. 1, and were “greeted with enthusiasm by the local musician’s guilds. Brașov’s newspapers reported visits by the celebrated artists among its local residents.” Following the morning’s excursion to Mt. Tämpa, Brahms and Joachim “honored us with a concert. The hall was overcrowded, as expected. The musicians were received with thunderous applause, which only increased to the point of ecstasy between musical selections. What music came out of the Ehrbar piano played by Brahms, and Joachim’s Stradivarius violin! How enchanting the audience found their music-making! To write about it would be impossible for a poet; this short report is not enough to describe it. After the concert a reception was organized in honor of the artists, attended by the mayor, representatives of the local musical organizations, the press, and friends of music, on which occasion the city’s chorus performed a few well-chosen musical selections to express their great admiration for the artists.”

The reporter for the Gazet’a also mentioned the tribute offered to the pair, adding that it was presented by representatives of the musical organizations from German, Romanian, and Hungarian communities. Local artists reported that Brahms and Joachim were extremely interested in Romanian music, and that “late into the night the most able folk musicians were asked to play Ciobanului [a Shepherd’s Song], among other Romanian folk tunes and melodies. Mr. Johannes Brahms, established as the greatest composer today, asked the city’s Kapellmeister to share with him the best Romanian compositions available. The orchestra performed a number of Romanian compositions at the reception, among which a stunning medley, enjoyed with great attentiveness by the artists.” Note the different flavor of this report from the Kronstädter Zeitung’s, which left out any account of Romanian music.

The next morning Brahms and Joachim left for Hermannstadt, the most German of all the towns in Siebenbürgen, a town whose sturdy walls had actually withstood a Turkish siege, and was never conquered. It is unclear how the men traveled, for there was as yet no direct rail link between Kronstadt and Hermannstadt, the two most important cities in Siebenbürgen, due to the difficult terrain which led across the Geisterwald (think Dracula) and a flank of the Carpathian Mountains. One could picture them traveling through the magnificent scenery by coach—but news reports in Hermannstadt recount their arrival by train, and the dignified reception awaiting them on the platform. However they arrived, their piano did not. A Herr von Heldenberg owns a certain place in history for having supplied, at the last minute, his own Blüthner. As the reporter put it, “The wonderful instrument didn’t spare its favors; it seemed to sense its master and sang under his hands lovelier than ever.”

On their arrival the men were treated to a small, friendly banquet “am Alten Berge.” The day of the concert they visited the Music Society Building, where three of Brahms’s choral works were performed “with great precision by our Choral Society, as acknowledged by the composer.” There was more music to come. After the concert a gathering was held in a hotel, at which a few former members of the Men’s Choral Society sang some songs. Brahms joined in. Joachim ended the evening by expressing heartfelt thanks, and joy at finding that music in Hermannstadt was so nobly carried on.

The concert itself began with Brahms’s Violin Concerto—subsequent hearings would reveal its greatness—while the success of the Op. 76 Caprices was immediate. “We declare these pieces, full of the richest, deepest inner life, as the highlight of the evening.” Other works included the Schumann Paganini Etude [sic]; Gluck Gavotte; Schubert March; Tartini “Devil’s Trill Sonata”; Bach Suite for Solo Violin, ending with the Schubert Rondo, Op. 70. The reviewer’s praise was profuse: “We have heard pianists of eminent technical ability, but we have more often had cause to regret than to rejoice when they also sought to make an impression as composers. Johannes Brahms, however, is not only the greatest composer that one can hear anywhere today. The technique of piano playing is for him no longer an issue. In combination, these qualities make an overpowering impression. We acknowledge it joyfully: during these days we have felt a breath wafting from one of the greatest minds. And how Brahms played! Never have we experienced so forcefully the power of unity of content and form, of ideas and their execution, of composition and performance.” Joachim came in for his share of effusive praise: “Joachim’s exceptional significance is the avoidance of any one-sidedness, the calm equilibrium, the complete harmony of all the components that constitute the sum total of his absolute mastery.” His predominant devotion to classical repertory was noted, as was the stormy applause after the Tartini and the unaccompanied Bach Suite. The writer added, “Only such a violinist could be Brahms’s companion.”

The next day they were off to Klausenburg, the last stop on their tour. When the train carrying Joachim and Brahms reached the city on the afternoon of 22 September, a distinguished crowd was waiting on the platform, including the Mayor, the Committee and Vice-President of the Music Conservatory, and other dignitaries. A large crowd was also gathered, greeting the disembarking artists boisterously. Dignitaries delivered speeches, and someone was there to translate: “Honored artists, our dear guests! In the name of the Klausenburg Conservatory I have the honor to greet you most heartily, and to make you welcome. I greet you, great artists, honorary members of our establishment, and thank you for coming and giving us the long desired opportunity to make your acquaintance and to enjoy your artistry. Therefore please accept our deepest thanks and be assured that the brief moment you spend with us will not be forgotten by our music-loving public and particularly by every member of our organization. You are most warmly welcome. We wish you, your art, your exalted profession, a blessed long life!” The previous day, the Conservatory had met and unanimously elected Brahms an honorary member, as Joachim had been elected the year before. The ovations were received graciously, Joachim said “Thank you” in Hungarian, and amidst a cheering crowd the two left the station with an imposing line of carriages carrying members of the Conservatory delegation and town dignitaries who escorted them to the National Hotel where they were staying. Sometime during that afternoon,
Joachim and Brahms were awarded their ceremonial diplomas. This was the grandest reception of the tour, something Brahms would recall later and mention in a letter to Clara Schumann.26 Dinner that night at the hotel, accompanied by Hungarian folk music, ended with the Rákóczi March.

The concert the next evening, 23 September, took place in the Redoutensaal, the building in which Liszt had performed in 1846 (see the photo above). The program read: 1. Spohr, Violin Concerto 8 “in Form einer Gesangsscene,” Op. 47; 2. Bach, Sarabande and Bourrée; 3. Gluck, Gavotte, Brahms, Caprice, Schumann, Paganini Etude; 4. Joachim, Romanze from the Hungarian Concerto; 5. Schubert, March; 6. Beethoven, Sonata A Dur Op. 47, “Kreutzer Sonate.” Once more Brahms’s violin concerto had been cancelled, with the Beethoven sonata taking its place. The large, sold-out concert hall held a noticeably elegant audience who had come from near and far, particularly anxious to see the great Hungarian violinist. As the artists emerged on stage, they were greeted with applause that went on for minutes. According to the account of the reporter Jónás, writing for the Magyar Polgár, every eye and every opera glass swiveled between the two artists, but the moment Joachim raised his violin to his shoulder, the hall fell silent and the public’s attention was riveted by sounds so beautiful, so perfect, one could pray to them. Jónás began his review: “Dear Mr. Editor! Please do not take it amiss that my report sounds somewhat regret, Mr. Editor, that it is not afternoon but 2 a.m. as I write these lines, otherwise I would absolutely have a more elaborate goodbye, so I conclude my report and bid you goodnight!”

Brahms and Joachim left for Budapest the next afternoon. During the tour, Brahms and Joachim played in each city a portion of the copious repertory they had brought with them. Each concert was made up of six sections. The full list of works they performed, compiled from newspaper announcements, follows. (Full details cannot always be determined, given the truncated nature of the published notices. Passages in italics are my comments.) J.S. Bach: Chaconne from the Partita in D Minor, BWV 1004; Suite for Violin: Preludio, Sarabande, Gavotte en rondeau, Menuett I and II, Bourrée, probably from the Partita in E Major, BWV 1006, except for the Sarabande; Adagio, Fugue and Gigue for piano, not otherwise identified; Ludwig van Beethoven: Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Major, Op. 30, No. 3; Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major, Op. 47, “Kreutzer”; Romanze in F, Op. 50; Johannes Brahms: Variations On a Hungarian Song, Op. 21, No. 2? That would have been politic. But perhaps it was his Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 21, No. 1. One has to assume he did not choose his Paganini Variations, Op. 35, because he programmed some of Schumann’s Paganini Etudes. The gigantic Variations on a Theme by Handel were hardly suitable; Caprices, Op. 76: Four of these recently-composed works were included. Which ones did he choose? Violin Concerto, Op. 77, dedicated to his friend Joachim; Scherzo, Op. 4; Arrangement of C. W. Gluck’s Gavotte in A Major from the opera Iphigénie en Aulide, Brahms’s arrangement was dedicated to Clara Schumann; Hungarian Dances, in Joachim’s arrangement for violin and piano; Joseph Joachim: Romanza from the Hungarian Concerto, the Andante movement from Joachim’s Second Violin Concerto, Op. 11; Felix Mendelssohn: Violin Concerto in E Minor, Op. 64; Domenico Scarlatti: Caprices for Piano, undoubtedly sonatas, which we know Brahms promoted. Some years later the pianist Ignace Paderewsky would publish Caprices à la Scarlatti; Franz Schubert: Rondo in B Minor for Violin and Piano, D. 895: Written after his employment by the Esterházy, the Hungarian-tinged Allegro must have seemed a good choice. The men had performed it together since 1855; Andante, Scherzo, and March for Piano: The Andante was from Schubert’s Piano Sonata Op. 42, D. 845. The Scherzo was Brahms’s arrangement of the Scherzo of the Octet, Op. post. 166, D. 803. The March is one for four hands, Op. post. 121, D. 968 B, arranged by Brahms “without a note missing,” according to a newspaper account of the concert in Hermannstadt. He had programmed it since 1853; and Robert Schumann: Paganini Etudes [Caprices] for Piano, perhaps from the set Op. 10, but it is not clear which, or how many of them Brahms played. They are all showpieces—an interesting choice on Brahms’s part, since Joachim rarely played the original versions for violin; Novelletten for Piano: from the 8 Novelletten, Op. 21. Surely Brahms did not play all of them! Perhaps No. 2, which he had played as a young man, but not great uproar occurred when Joachim spoke and addressed the often-expressed complaint that he no longer understood his mother tongue. This pained him, yet he said he had been abroad since the age of five, and his heart and soul remained at home.27 He had frequently tried to master Hungarian; he had tried hard earlier to convince his friend Brahms to partner with him and visit his homeland. He was grateful that wherever he went he was received enthusiastically. In the name of his partner he thanked the understanding Kolozsvár showed him and the friendly reception they enjoyed. He raised his glass to Kolozsvár, his friends, and the musicians. After, we took turns toasting everyone in a spirited mood and the room simply sparkled. I regret, Mr. Editor, that it is not afternoon but 2 a.m. as I write these lines, otherwise I would absolutely have a more elaborate goodbye, so I conclude my report and bid you goodnight!”

A sumptuous banquet followed in the Small Hall of the Redoute. Wine flowed, toasts were given “with a degree of hospitality and warmth that melted the souls of the party. A
since 1862; Louis Spohr, 8th Violin Concerto in A Minor, Op. 47 (In Form einer Gesangsszene); Adagio for Violin, probably from the 9th Violin Concerto, frequently performed in recitals at the time; Giuseppe Tartini, Sonata in G Minor for Violin and Piano, “Devil’s Trill.”

We are left to ponder what to make of Brahms, at age 46, not having toured for some ten years, agreeing to perform such an unusually large and demanding repertory. Only one year earlier he had regretfully demurred from accompanying Joachim in local concerts, citing his growing aversion to concertizing. That some remnant of pride in his enormous pianistic abilities remained, gained as they were by much youthful diligence, is most plainly spelled out in a letter to Clara Schumann fifteen years earlier, after Brahms had toured Switzerland to promote his new Horn Trio, Op. 40. In the space of ten days he had performed his Paginani Variations, Op. 35, twice, Robert Schumann’s Fantasy, Op. 17, twice, Beethoven’s 32 Variations, WoO 80, the Bach Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, his First Piano Concerto, Op. 15, and two of his piano quartets. “Above all, what pleases me the most is that I really have the talent to be a virtuoso…. The bigger the pieces, the better.” The Siebenbürgeren tour can only have strengthened that pleasure. To what purpose? He made one additional short tour with Joachim, making use of the Siebenbürgeren repertory, but thereafter performed only his own works. To Clara he described the pleasure of the journey: “And our kind are so well off! Received by the Mayor and the Committee at the railway station, one is straightway introduced to the best circles, and people don’t know what goodness and kindness to shower on you.” But Joachim’s comment to Spitta may also have had it right; the tour to Siebenbürgen, in addition to the pleasure of the journey, was Brahms’s way of refurbishing his performing skills for the foreseeable future; the Second Piano Concerto and five duo sonatas with piano were still to come, and it is possible that he had something of them already in mind. After all, he had announced to both the Fabers and Pohl that he would return having made a name for himself.

Styra Avins

A Room for Brahms

In November 1894 Brahms spent several days as the guest of Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, and his wife Helene, Freifrau (Baroness) von Heldburg, at Schloss Altenstein, near Bad Liebenstein on the western edge of the Thuringian Woods. Brahms had been a regular visitor to the Meiningen Court since October 1881, when he was invited by Hans von Bülow to rehearse his new Piano Concerto in B-flat Major with the Court Orchestra. This fine orchestra gave early performances of the Third Symphony and the Academic Festival and Tragic Overtures, and premiered the Fourth Symphony. Brahms enjoyed discussing art and politics with the Duke, a great theater impresario, and kept up a lively and warm correspondence with the Duke and Baroness from 1881 until his death (published as Vol. XVII of the Brahms Briefwechsel).

Schloss Altenstein afforded Brahms a peaceful retreat in idyllic surroundings. Its grounds, nearly 400 acres of gardens and woods, feature a waterfall, underground cavern, and other formations, and the Rhön Mountains are visible in the distance. Between 1888 and 1891 Georg II had the Baroque-style palace remodeled after the style of the great English manor houses. Brahms traveled to Altenstein with Richard Mühlfeld, the clarinettist of the Meiningen Court Orchestra who inspired Brahms to compose the Clarinet Trio, Clarinet Quintet, and Clarinet Sonatas, Op. 120. The two musicians gave a private performance of the Sonatas for the Duke and his wife, and Brahms accompanied tenor Ludwig Wüllner in the Deutsche Volkslieder. On 17 November Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann on “Schloss Altenstein” stationery: “I wish (and their Highnesses do, too) that you could sit here at my window, walk out onto my balcony, and then into the splendid park and woods. The most beautiful pheasants, fallow deer, and red deer follow along by the dozens, and the delightful mild weather and the friendly company—would do you a lot of good” (Clara Schumann, Johannes Brahms Briefe [Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1927; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1989], 2:571). Brahms visited this lovely place again from late September to early October 1895.

Kurt and Renate Hofmann also fell in love with Schloss Altenstein upon their first visit (1990), despite the fact that a fire in 1982 had damaged much of the building’s interior. To encourage restoration of the palace while also memorializing Brahms’s connection with Altenstein, they made items in their growing private collection available for exhibit, at first in a display window in the small court museum in 2001. Their dream of a dedicated Brahms Room in the palace became a reality on 7 May 2017, Brahms’s 184th birthday, when two fully restored rooms were opened to invited guests. The Brahms Memorial Room is on the first floor above the ground floor, behind a bay window that looks out over the gardens and woods. Glass cases house copies of items from the Hofmanns’ collection showing Brahms’s relationship with the Meiningen Court, Schloss Altenstein, and the Duke and Baroness: letters, photographs, music prints, and manuscripts; documents relating to Georg II, including his sketches of theater productions; and materials providing information on other persons connected with the court, among them Hans von Bülow, Eugen d’Albert, Richard Strauss, Franz von Lenbach, and Fritz Steinbach. In the center of the room is a bronze sculpture of Brahms, created in 1901 by Reinhold Felderhoff as a model for a Hamburg memorial. A fuller summary of items on display is given in Renate Hofmann and Kurt Hofmann, “Zur Entstehung der ‘Renate-&-Kurt-Hofmann-Sammlung Schloss Altenstein,’” in Bleibende Werte. Schlösser und Gärten – Denkmale einer Kulturlandschaft, Festschrift für Prof. Dr. Helmut-Eberhard Paulus, edited by Simone Balsam (Regensburg 2017), 257–66.

The second room, the so-called “Chinesisches Kabinett,” displays a collection of Chinese miniatures, including numerous specimens from the Hofmanns’ collection of over 500 snuff bottles. These items reflect the European fascination with Asian fashion and furnishings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Altenstein Park are a small Chinese House and a rotunda in Chinese style, both built by Georg I. Georg II brought two giant bronze vases with dragon reliefs from the Chinese Emperor’s summer palace to adorn the entrance to Schloss Altenstein and decorated the interior with Chinese vases and figurines.

The Stiftung Thüringer Schlösser und Gärten has overseen the restoration of the palace since 1995, with funding from both private and public sources. The opening celebration on 7 May featured speeches by the Foundation’s director Dr. Doris Fischer, Thuringia’s Cultural Secretary Dr. Babette Winter, and Kurt Hofmann. Prof. Dr. Christiane Wiesenfeld, Director of the Institut für Musikwissenschaft Weimar-Jena, gave the celebratory address and presented an ornate pillow to Kurt Hofmann, who for years had looked forward to the day when he could nap in the bay window of the finished Brahms Room. Guests were treated to a performance of chamber works of Brahms by the Leipzig Clarinet Quartet “3plus1.”

The target date for restoration of the entire palace is 2021. Altenstein is to become a musical and cultural center, equipped with a concert hall, seminar rooms, and cafe, and providing a venue for a Brahms Festival, an international master class for chamber music, and other projects. For the time being, access to the Brahms Memorial Room and the Chinese Cabinet is possible only as part of a guided tour on certain Sundays. Further details and contact information can be found at http://www.thueringerschloesser.de/index.php?id=22.
President, Ryan McClelland (University of Toronto)
Vice-President, Valerie W. Goertzen (Loyola University New Orleans)
Secretary, David Brodbeck (University of California, Irvine)
Treasurer, Marie Sumner Lott (Georgia State University)
Membership Chair, Daniel Beller-McKenna (University of New Hampshire)
Styra Avins (New York)
Paul Berry (Yale University)
George S. Bozarth (University of Washington)
Richard Cohn (Yale University)
Nicole Grimes (University of California, Irvine)
William P. Horne (Loyola University New Orleans)
Kevin Karnes (Emory University)
Scott Murphy (University of Kansas)
Heather Platt (Ball State University)
Peter H. Smith (University of Notre Dame)

Corresponding Directors
Otto Biba (Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien)
Ludwig Finscher (University of Heidelberg)
Cord Garben (ex officio; President, Johannes-Brahms-Gesellschaft Hamburg)
Kurt Hofmann (Lübeck)
Minoru Nishihara (ex officio; Japan Brahms Society)
Siegfried Oechsle (ex officio; Johannes Brahms Gesamtausgabe)
Robert Paschall (University of Nottingham)
Wolfgang Sandberger (ex officio; Brahms-Institut an der Musikhochschule Lübeck)
Christof Maisch (ex officio; President, Brahmsgesellschaft Baden-Baden)

Advisory Board
Camilla Cai (Kenyon College), Walter Frisch (Columbia University),
Virginia Hancock (Reed College), Margaret Notley (University of North Texas),
James Webster (Cornell University), Christoph Wolff (Harvard University)

Honorary Members
Bernice Geiringer † Renate and Kurt Hofmann Margaret McCorkle Thomas Quigley

Officials of the Society
Richard Cohn, Chair
Geiringer Scholarship Committee
Department of Music
469 College Street
Yale University
New Haven, CT 06511
(richard.cohn@yale.edu)

William Horne and Valerie Goertzen
Newsletter Editors
College of Music and Fine Arts
Loyola University New Orleans
New Orleans, LA 70118
(504) 865-2105 (wphorne@loyno.edu)
(504) 865-2207 (goertzen@loyno.edu)

To join the American Brahms Society, please fill out the form below and mail it with your check (payable to The American Brahms Society) to: The American Brahms Society, Department of Music, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

I would like to become a member of the American Brahms Society.
Name:_________________________________________________________
Address:_____________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
Email:________________________________________________________
Institutional Affiliation:________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________
Please send information on the ABS and a sample Newsletter to the following people:_________________________________________

Annual Dues for 2018 (US dollars and checks only, please):

☐ Regular Member ($25)
☐ Retired/ senior citizen member ($20)
☐ Student Member ($15)
☐ I would like to make a contribution of $_________ to the Karl Geiringer Scholarship Fund. My contribution is in honor/memory of ____________________________.
☐ I would like to make a contribution of $_________ towards the Society’s operating expenses.

Online payment: Dues and contributions may be submitted online, using PayPal or credit card, at http://brahms.unh.edu/membership-paypal.html.

Contributions to the ABS are tax deductible.
Recent Publications, continued from page 3:


Critical Editions


Editors’ Notes

The editors thank the contributors to this issue. Michael Musgrave is Emeritus Professor of Music, Goldsmiths, University of London, Visiting Research Fellow at the Royal College of Music, and serves on the Graduate Faculty of the Juilliard School. He is author and editor of six books on Brahms. As musical editor he is, jointly with Michael Struck, engaged on the Brahms *Requiem* for the *Johannes Brahms Gesamtausgabe*. Other editions for the *Gesamtausgabe* have included the two orchestral Serenades Opp. 11 and 16, and the two Overtures Opp. 80 and 81 (in their duet versions). He also has prepared editions of the *Liebeslieder Waltzes* in both the vocal and four-handed versions (Edition Peters and Carus Verlag).

Styra Avins was born and educated in New York City, where she has had an active career as a cellist. The need for a Brahms letter in English eventually led her to compile *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, a comprehensive volume of Brahms’s letters in English translation (Oxford University Press, 1998). Her continuing interest in Brahms has resulted in the discovery of a number of unpublished letters, including the one presented in this issue. She holds a B.A. in Social Studies from the City University of New York, with undergraduate studies in cello at the Juilliard School and an M.M. degree from the Manhattan School of Music.

We are grateful to Prof. Dr. Otto Biba, Director of the Archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, for supplying the photo on the cover. Ideas, correspondence, and submissions for the Newsletter are always welcome. Materials for the Spring 2018 issue should be sent by 1 March.