

Brahms

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Brahms, the Bible, and Robert Schumann

Brahms's life-long and intimate familiarity with the Bible is frequently cited in the secondary literature. The most direct and compelling evidence of that familiarity derives from his numerous settings of biblical texts, many of which artfully combine diverse passages from the Old Testament, Apocrypha, and New Testament. One can also point to the five copies of the Bible in various translations that Brahms owned (two complete, three New Testament only). However, there are surprisingly few statements by Brahms concerning the Bible in the written record. The few general comments in his letters are mostly unrevealing. For example, in a letter of 14 July 1880 to his close friend Elisabet von Herzogenberg, Brahms remarked that he would love to compose some new motets as she had requested, but asked her to suggest some texts since "there is nothing heathen enough in the Bible"—nor could he find suitable texts in the Koran, for that matter. This comment, while interesting, does not provide any clear sense of how Brahms studied the Bible throughout his life, how often he read it, or the degree to which he was familiar with biblical texts.

More numerous and telling are the comments about the Bible that Brahms made in his letters when he was discussing his own biblical settings. Most commonly, he liked to show off his knowledge of scripture, as in a letter to Otto Dessoff concerning the motet "Warum ist das Licht gegeben?" Op. 74 No. 1 (1878), where Brahms wrote, "I enclose a trifle, for which perhaps my Bible-knowledge is to be praised." And again, in a letter to Joseph Victor Widmann, Brahms asked whether his friend had noted a subtle irony in the second of the *Fest- und Gedenksprüche*, Op. 109, where Brahms had taken Jesus's description of the Devil as "ein starker Gewappneter" ("a strong man armed") out of context: "Have you completely missed the theological, Jesuitical sophistry in No. 2 of the *Sprüche*? (Or merely kept silent about it.) I always wanted to ask you earlier whether something like this is really permissible."

Such quotes are provocative, but none is conclusive enough to warrant the assertion that Brahms was a life-long student and well-versed reader of the Bible. Instead, that claim is based on a number of statements that are attributed to



J. J. B. Laurens, Robert Schumann (October 1853)

Brahms in the published recollections of his friends. Two such quotes are particularly noteworthy and are frequently paraphrased by later writers. One, involving Brahms's study of the Bible as a youth, was related by Richard Heuberger: Brahms praised the manner in which young Protestants learn, or learned, the Bible. He said, "We learned the Bible by heart, without understanding any of it. Should a light ignite in one later, then one already has all of the material which then suddenly comes to life. As a lad I was always fanciful and a day-dreamer. Thank God none of my teachers cared, and I had to learn notwithstanding my *Schwärmerei*. Children cannot understand all that they have to learn."

This is—to my knowledge—Brahms's only recorded statement about his early reading of the Bible, and it does not

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(Brahms and the Bible, *continued*)

suggest a life-long interest in, or serious study of scripture. On the contrary, Brahms makes it quite clear that, although he became familiar with the *words* of the Bible at an early age, he had no interest in their *meaning* until later. We must conclude, then, that at some point in Brahms's adult life a "light," as he says, was ignited in him that inspired his appreciation of the Bible.

A second reported statement by Brahms, as recalled by Rudolf von der Leyen, begins to explain the nature of that inspiration. In his recollections, *Johannes Brahms als Mensch und Freund* (1905), Leyen wrote:

On one occasion we spoke about Robert Schumann, Brahms's great and most beloved friend, and specifically about the sad time of his sickness in Endenich. Brahms told me that Schumann longed for the Bible there, and that this desire was understood by his doctors to be a new symptom of his mental illness and was, for the most part, denied. "People just don't understand," said Brahms, "that we North Germans crave the Bible and do not let a day go by without it. In my study I can locate my Bible even in the dark!"

Although he criticized the doctors for treating Schumann's legitimate need of the Bible as a further sign of his mental illness, Brahms was acutely aware of how badly Schumann's mind had deteriorated during his hospitalization at Endenich. His comments, therefore, speak less to his opinion of Schumann's mental condition than to his identification with Schumann as a fellow "North German" Bible reader.

Leyen's story may even implicate Schumann as a significant figure for Brahms's interest in the Bible as an adult, especially when considered along with another, more obscure anecdote. In his 1931 article "Brahms as I Knew Him," Arthur M. Abell, a Viennese reporter for the American journal *Etude*, recalls meeting Brahms near the end of the composer's life and asking him to what he owed his deep interest in the Bible. Brahms, according to Abell, replied, "It was Schumann who first aroused my deeper interest in the Holy Writ. Schumann always was quoting the Bible. Then the death of my mother gave my studies of the scripture a new impetus." According to Abell's quotation, Schumann played a much greater role in Brahms's appreciation of the Bible than has generally been reported in Brahms scholarship to date. And taken together with Leyen's story, we are presented with two separate accounts in which Brahms himself draws a connection between Schumann and the Bible.

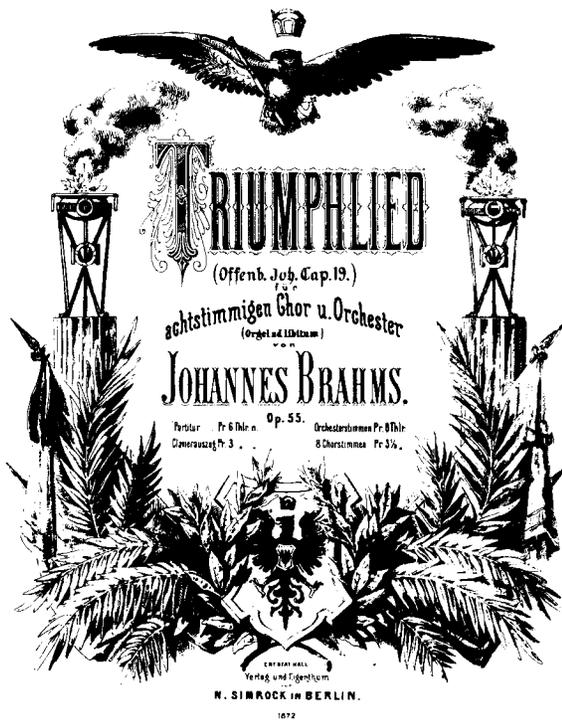
While Abell's story is little known, the Leyen and Heuberger anecdotes cited above account for a good deal of Brahms's reputation as an expert on the Bible. Countless later writers have repeated one or both of the central ideas from each: i.e., that Brahms studied the Bible from childhood (Heuberger), and that he could find his Bible in the dark (Leyen). A typical conflation appears in Walter Niemann's popular Brahms biography from 1920, when he refers to Brahms as one

who confessed to his friend Rudolf von der Leyen that like a true North German, he longed for the Bible every day, never let a day

go by without it, and could lay his hand on the Bible in his study, even in the dark—who from his childhood upwards was a devoted believer in the Bible.

Like most other writers, Niemann retains Brahms's reference to "North Germans" from Leyen's quotation, which resonates strongly with the mention of "young Protestants" in Heuberger's account, although from it Niemann retains only the reference to Brahms's childhood. Niemann thereby elevates the importance of Brahms's North German Protestant heritage for his reputation as a Bible expert: Brahms—the thinking goes—set so many biblical texts because he was an avid reader of the Bible, and he was an avid reader of the Bible because he was a North German. It is true that his Protestant heritage did play a role in his biblical settings, since, as Brahms himself said, memorizing texts from the Bible as a youth provided the raw materials for his later interest in the Bible. However, the catalyst for Brahms's productivity as a composer of biblical texts was not his childhood education, but rather Robert Schumann. Omitting Schumann from the transmission of Leyen's quote, as Niemann and all later writers do, obscures the role that the older composer played in sparking the necessary light in Brahms. At the same time, it places a necessary emphasis on the issue of German nationalism inherent in Brahms's use of the Bible.

In looking for evidence of Schumann's influence on Brahms's biblical settings, an obvious starting point is Brahms's first great success as a composer, *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Op. 45. Not only is the Requiem his largest setting of biblical texts, but biographically it reflects a particularly personal reaction to death—Brahms's coming to terms with the death of Schumann in 1856, and of his own mother in 1865. As an immediate source of inspiration, the death of Brahms's mother cannot be overlooked for its importance in the genesis of the Requiem; Brahms's own comments to Abell make this clear. But if we consider that at least part of this work was composed more than a decade earlier (i.e., the second movement), it is reasonable to imagine that the overall idea for such a piece had begun taking shape prior to 1865. Despite the date of its completion, twelve years after Robert Schumann's death, Schumann's influence on the Requiem can hardly be overemphasized. Opus 45 is Brahms's first large work for "the powerful masses of the choir and orchestra," for which Schumann specifically called on him to compose in "Neue Bahnen." Prior to the Requiem, Brahms's only settings of biblical texts amounted to just a few short works. Compared to those early pieces, *Ein deutsches Requiem*, which includes sixteen separate passages from Luther's Bible, manifests a veritable explosion of biblical text setting by Brahms. No fewer than five of the Requiem's seven movements contain passages from separate and often disparate books of the Bible. Brahms mixes texts from the Old and New Testaments in movements 1 and 2, from the Old Testament and the Apocrypha in movement 3, and from the Old Testament, Apocrypha, and New Testament in movement 5. And whereas his earlier sacred music conveyed traditionally set texts, both biblical and non-biblical ("Ave Maria," Psalm 13, "O bone Jesu," "Regina coeli," etc.), the majority of the texts in the



Requiem appear to have been freely selected by the composer without recourse to any historical model. Moreover, there is no nineteenth-century precedent for such a large-scale and original concatenation of biblical texts in a musical work, nor had there been anything in Brahms's previous sacred compositions that could have led one to expect such a work from him.

Brahms's Requiem is widely understood as his attempt to fulfill the promise of "Neue Bahnen." That Schumann's 1853 essay placed pressure on Brahms is not mere historical conjecture. Brahms wrote a letter to Schumann three weeks after the essay was published, expressing his fear that "the public praise you have spent on me will have raised the expectations of my achievements so inordinately that I don't know how I can do them justice to the same degree." Although "Neue Bahnen" contains no direct mention of the German musical tradition, it was hardly coincidental that most of the "chosen ones" whom Schumann named were Germans (Naumann, Normann, Bargiel, etc.) or composers working in Germany. Moreover, Schumann begins the essay by referring to his earlier critical writings: "It has been years since I have made myself heard in this place so rich in memories." Brahms and the regular readers of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* would have been familiar enough with Schumann's writings to understand that the one who "would and must come," and who was to give "the highest expression to the age in an ideal manner," was to be a German, and was to lead German music forward on the path that Beethoven had laid out.

The Teutonic undercurrents in Schumann's prophecy may have been enough to lead Brahms towards composing a grand work on biblical texts. Since Herder, language had been understood as a most important and defining element

of a people, and Luther's translation of the Bible was recognized as the earliest canonical document of the German language. Nationalistically minded Germans, in particular, regarded their language as the "most pure," according to Liah Greenfield (*Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, 1992), and even elevated it to "an object of worship" during the liberation of Germany from French control in the early nineteenth century. Brahms would have understood his large-scale setting of biblical texts as one way in which he could engage the German cultural tradition and thereby embark on the specifically German path as Schumann bade him.

Ein deutsches Requiem contains little that could be construed as explicitly nationalistic save its designation *deutsches*, which Brahms downplayed anyway, commenting to the conductor Carl Reintaler, "As for the text, I must admit that I would just as soon leave off the 'Deutsch' and simply put 'Menschen'." However, his next setting of biblical texts, the *Triumphlied*, Op. 55 (1871), vividly realizes the patriotic connotations of Luther's Bible. Brahms composed this boisterous three-movement work for double choir and orchestra, based entirely on texts from Revelations, to celebrate the Prussian victory over France in 1870 and the resultant establishment of the German *Kaiserreich* in the following year. Brahms's decision to use a text from the primary-apocalyptic book of the Bible to celebrate the arrival of German nationhood relates to millennial thinking that had long been associated with nationalistic attitudes in religious movements such as Pietism. Although the *Triumphlied* is rarely performed today (and is generally held in low esteem), it was often heard as a sister work to the Requiem during the nineteenth century and was highly successful throughout Brahms's lifetime—Clara Schumann even called it "certainly the deepest and grandest piece that has been written in the genre of church music since Bach." The *Triumphlied* continued to be received with enthusiasm in the waning years of the nineteenth century, when the unabated optimism of 1870 had long since turned to cynicism and discontent among many Germans.

After Op. 55, Brahms set no more biblical texts for chorus and orchestra, choosing instead smaller genres like a *cappella* motets (Op. 74 No. 1, Op. 109, and Op. 110 No. 1) and songs (the *Vier ernste Gesänge*, Op. 121). His struggles with the "Neue Bahnen" legacy turned towards the symphony (a genre with Teutonic connotations of its own), and some have argued that Brahms's Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68, completed in 1876, is the true realization of Schumann's published expectations. Brahms's contemporaries, however, understood *Ein deutsches Requiem* to be closely connected to Schumann and his 1853 essay, as several accounts of the work's early performances attest. Following the 1868 première of Op. 45 in Bremen, Clara Schumann wrote in her diary:

This Requiem touched me as church music never has. . . . As I saw Johannes standing there like that with the baton in his hand, I continually had to think of my dearest Robert's prophecy "let him but once take the magic wand, and work with the orchestra and choir,"—which is fulfilled today.

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And Adolf Schubring, a friend of Brahms and one of the first major critics to survey his music, began his review of the published score to Op. 45 (*Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 13 January 1869) with the same passage from "Neue Bahnen" that Clara (mis)quoted above: "If he directs his magic wand where the power and masses of the choir and orchestra can lend him their strength, then we will have before us wonderful glimpses into the secrets of the spiritual realm." Schubring went on to assert that

with the first performance of Brahms's *Deutsches Requiem* on Good Friday, 10 April 1868, before an audience of 2,500 in the Bremen Cathedral, these prophetic words of Robert Schumann . . . were fulfilled. . . . There thousands, who until this time knew practically no music by Brahms, hardly even his name, astounded, attentive, deeply moved by a [piece of] music, . . . in a word a modern masterwork, heard "the highest expression of our age spoken in an ideal manner." Even those of us who had seen the flight of the young eagle grow and unfold had not conceived of such soarings, and our prayers and joy combined to form a feeling, somewhat as the astronomer must feel, who in the arches of heaven above the whole earth finally sees the star shining, which he had long ago predicted he would find—without, however, believing he would.

It is significant that this particular critic should assess the Requiem as the realization of Schumann's expectations. Schubring's review of the score to Op. 45 was the last in a series of twelve essays entitled "Schumanniana" that appeared in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* and the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* between 1860 and 1869. Perhaps the fact that he closed his series based on Schumann's name with a review of the score to Op. 45 is evidence enough for the relationship Schubring saw between *Ein deutsches Requiem* and "Neue Bahnen."

Brahms himself made the connection between his mentor and Op. 45 clear in a stormy exchange with Joseph Joachim that seriously jeopardized their friendship. Joachim, who was appointed the music director of a Schumann festival that took place in September 1873 at Bonn, consulted with Brahms throughout the preceding winter and spring about which musical works to perform there. After failing to persuade Brahms to compose a new work for the occasion, Joachim suggested a performance of the Requiem, asking Brahms whether he would like to conduct the work himself. Later, when Brahms learned that the Requiem was not to be performed after all, he was deeply hurt. He explained to Joachim why the matter meant so much to him:

Had you simply considered the affair and me, then you would have known how very profoundly a work like the Requiem belongs above all to Schumann. How it naturally, therefore, must appear to me for secret reasons that it would be sung for him too.

Brahms's reaction to the canceled Requiem performance at Bonn demonstrates that he associated Op. 45 closely with Schumann, and his comments suggest that he may very well have intended for this large-scale work to justify Schumann's praise. And while the size and grandeur of the work answered the public side of Schumann's expectations, the use of biblical texts might have been Brahms's personal way of acknowledging the role that Schumann played in sparking his interest in and reading of the Bible.

Daniel Beller-McKenna

Clara Schumann Centenary, 1996

The 100th anniversary of the death of Clara Schumann is being commemorated in Germany and Austria this spring by a number of special events. We thank Nancy Reich for providing us with the following list:

Symposium zum 100. Todestag von Clara Schumann, Hochschule für Musik und darstellende Kunst; Vienna, 22–24 April.

Clara Schumann Ausstellung, Stadtmuseum, Bonn, opening early in May (to be accompanied by a descriptive catalogue with essays).

Festival CLARA: Ein Musikfest zu Ehren Clara Schumann, Zwickauer Musiktage 1996; Zwickau, 16–19 May.

Clara Schumann: Ein Porträt in Wort und Musik, presented by the Robert-Schumann-Gesellschaft of Düsseldorf; Tonhalle, Düsseldorf, 19 May.

Concert of music by Clara and Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms, Schumannhaus, Bonn, 20 May.

Ceremony at Clara Schumann's grave in the Alter Friedhof, Bonn, 20 May.

Concert and Symposium, Kulturinstitut Komponistinnen gestern-heute and Zur 800-Jahrfeier der Stadt Heidelberg; Heidelberg, 5–6 June.

Brahms in Boston, 1997

A Call for Papers

The American Brahms Society, in collaboration with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the music departments of Harvard University, Boston University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is planning a conference, *Brahms the Contemporary: Perspectives on Two Centuries*, to be held in the Boston area, April 17–20, 1997, as part of a "Boston Brahms Festival" of concerts and lectures on Brahms and his Romantic predecessors, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Schumann, that will take place throughout the spring months. During the conference the Boston Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Bernard Haitink will join with Emanuel Ax in a performance of Brahms's Second Piano Concerto.

The program committee invites proposals for forty-minute presentations in the following areas:

- Brahms and the Idea of the Symphony
- 19th-Century Lied Traditions
- Brahms and the Process of Musical Thinking
- Brahms: Politics and Ideologies
- Brahms in America

Please send four copies of abstracts (250-300 words) by April 1 to John Daverio, Boston University, School for the Arts, Music Division, 855 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215.

Simrock Treasure Trove Goes to Brahms-Institut Lübeck

The Brahms-Institut Lübeck, founded in May 1991 by its directors, Kurt and Renate Hofmann, has by now far surpassed in scope the Hofmanns' extensive personal collection, its original basis (see Newsletter VII/1 [Spring 1990]: 5 and X/1 [Spring 1992]: 9). In February 1995 it was further and stunningly enriched by the acquisition of thirty-two copyists' manuscripts of works by Brahms, many of them *Stichvorlagen* (engraver's copies), from the estate of Fritz Simrock. All were thought to be lost and were accordingly listed as "verschollen" in the McCorkle catalogue. After the works were published, the manuscripts remained in Simrock's possession. Nothing more was known of them until 1992, when they were rediscovered and offered for sale by one of his heirs. Grants from a variety of governmental and private sources made acquisition of the find by the Brahms-Institut possible.

The manuscripts, amounting to a total of about 500 pages, were prepared by various copyists. Many of the manuscripts have corrections and revisions—some very significant—in Brahms's hand (for example, the first ten bars of the B flat major String Sextet, Op. 18). For twenty-one of the works there are no surviving autograph manuscripts; these copies are therefore the closest sources we have to the composer and are of crucial importance in preparation of the new critical edition.

Although in such a rich collection it is difficult to identify items of special significance, in press reports of the acquisition Kurt Hofmann mentioned three in particular: the first movement of the First Symphony, Op. 68; the String Sextet, Op. 18, with its original beginning; and a hitherto unknown early version of the song "Lerchengesang," Op. 70 No. 2.

Here follows a list of the manuscripts newly acquired by the Institut:

Orchestral works: Serenade, Op. 16; First Symphony, Op. 68 (first and last movements)

Works for chorus and orchestra: *Schicksalslied*, Op. 54; *Triumphlied*, Op. 55; *Gesang der Parzen*, Op. 89

Chamber music for strings: Sextets, Opp. 18 and 36; Quartets, Op. 51

Vocal ensembles with piano: Quartets Op. 92; *Tafellied*, Op. 93b

Choral works *a cappella*: *Chorlieder* Opp. 62 and 93a; Motets Op. 74

Solo *Lieder* and duets: Op. 19 No. 5; Op. 46 Nos. 1 and 3; Op. 47

Nos. 2, 3, and 5; Op. 48 Nos. 1, 5, and 6; Op. 61; Op. 69 Nos. 1–3

and 5–8 (original keys) and 1–9 (transpositions, 2–4 for high voice,

1 and 5–9 for low voice); Op. 70 (original and transposed); Op. 71

(original and transposed); Op. 72 (original and transposed);

Op. 75; Op. 91 (score, voice and viola parts); Op. 121

A catalogue of these new acquisitions has now been published (see "Recent Brahms Publications" in this Newsletter). The Hofmanns' archive is on the top floor of a building in the center of Lübeck. Their friendliness and the wealth of the collection make research in the Brahms-Institut both a pleasant and valuable experience. The address is Königstr. 42, D-23552 Lübeck; phone and fax are 0451/706833.

Virginia Hancock

Engraver's model for the *Vier ernste Gesänge*, Op. 121 (page 14),
showing Brahms's revisions in the fourth song (Brahms-Institut, Lübeck)

Competition for Seventh Annual Geiringer Scholarship

The American Brahms Society is seeking applicants for its Karl Geiringer Scholarship in Brahms Studies. This scholarship is awarded annually, as meritorious candidates present themselves. The competition is open to students who are in the final stages of preparing a doctoral dissertation at a university in North America. Although work relating to Brahms should form a significant thread within the dissertation, it need not be the only one, and the Selection Committee welcomes applications from students whose research might be concentrated instead on music by members of the Brahms circle, questions concerning musical life in later 19th-century Vienna, and so forth. Only those projects that demonstrate significant original thought and research will be considered competitive. The decision on awarding the scholarship will rest with the Board of Directors of the ABS and the winner will be announced in November 1996.

Completed applications will consist of 1) a cover letter, including the applicant's address, phone number, and institutional affiliation; 2) a concise description of the project (no more than 500 words), in which the applicant's methods and conclusions are stated clearly; and 3) a brief account (no more than 250 words) detailing the aspect of the project to be completed with assistance from the Geiringer Scholarship, including travel plans, if appropriate. These materials should be submitted, in triplicate, to Professor John Daverio, Chair, Geiringer Scholarship Committee, School for the Arts, Boston University, 855 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02215, and must be postmarked no later than 1 June 1996. The application must be supported by two confidential letters of recommendation, including one from the dissertation advisor; these should be sent directly to the Chairman of the Geiringer Scholarship Committee and must also be postmarked by 1 June. Finalists in the competition will be notified by 15 June and asked to submit a sample chapter from their dissertation.

The Geiringer Scholarship Fund *One Last Step!*

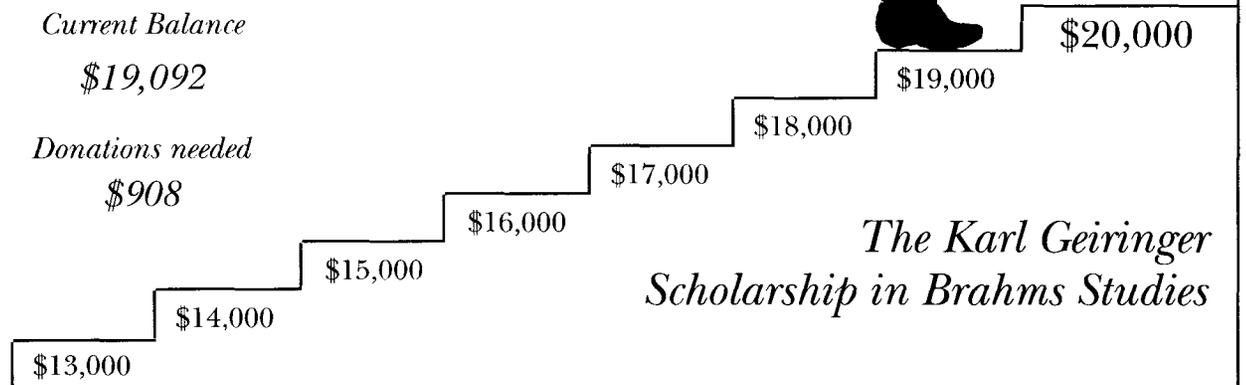
During 1995 contributions in the amount of \$2,962 (including \$2,120 from members of the ABS) have increased the endowment fund for the Karl Geiringer Scholarship to \$19,092, only \$908 short of our goal of \$20,000.

If you have put off making a contribution (or an additional donation!) to the Geiringer Scholarship Fund, now is the time to do so, if you wish your name to appear on the final list of contributors, which will be published as a supplement to the Spring 1996 issue of this Newsletter. (To make a donation, you may use the membership form on page 11.)

Experience the joy of knowing that you have helped the best and brightest young Brahms scholars to launch their careers. The record of papers delivered and articles published by past recipients of the Geiringer Scholarship continues to attest to the high calibre of our winners. The financial support provided by this award—coming, as it does, right at the end of work on the doctoral degree, when funds are typically running low—is timely, and the professional recognition the scholarship affords helps to focus attention on the work of these aspiring scholars as they seek their first academic positions.

To take this final step in our fundraising campaign we need your support. Please join us in our effort with a generous contribution, and help to put us "over the top" before the next issue of this Newsletter!

*Help us to mount the final step!
Contribute generously!*



Apthorp on Brahms

William Foster Apthorp (1848–1913) was one of the most prominent critics and writers on music in late 19th-century America. A graduate of Harvard University who also studied in France, Germany, and Italy, he served as a music critic for the Atlantic Monthly and contributed articles to Dwight's Journal of Music and two Boston dailies, the Courier and the Evening Traveler, before becoming in 1881 the chief of the first music department of the Boston Evening Transcript, a position in which he remained until 1903. For ten years (1892–1901) he wrote essays for the program booklets of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, including the appreciation of Brahms reprinted here. In 1898 he collected these essays together in a book entitled By the Way. At first unenthusiastic about Brahms's music, Apthorp spoke from personal experience in relating how for many in American audiences it took some time to come to appreciate the art of Brahms.

Brahms stands, in sense, alone among contemporary composers. One may even say that no great composer ever held exactly the position Brahms does among musicians at the present time. The peculiarity of his position lies in the fact that, though thoroughly imbued with the artistic spirit of his day, though wholly modern in feeling, Brahms's modes of musical expression seem at first sight directly to contravene this spirit, and to belong to another age. This paradox is, however, only apparent; for the discrepancy between his feeling and his modes of expression is merely superficial, and vanishes utterly if we take the trouble to look beneath the surface.

There can be no doubt that the composer who has left the deepest impression on the music of the present day was Richard Wagner. He was unquestionably the most complete incarnation of the modern musical spirit. He had all its strenuousness of feeling, all its nervous energy, passionateness, and restlessness; he had, too, that wonderful sense for colour, that tendency to look upon colour as one of the chief factors of artistic expression, which is almost distinctively characteristic of our age. He had the essentially modern instinct to subordinate the plastic elements in Art to the emotional, to value force of expression more highly than musical form, to rate truthfulness of expression higher than all else. In a word, his modes of expression were essentially dramatic. In this—apart from the vigour and calibre of his genius—we find all-sufficient explanation of the enormous influence he has exerted upon musical composition outside of Germany; that is, in France and Italy. The opera, and dramatic composition in general, have for generations and generations held the first place in the musical activity of these countries; both France and Italy may be said to have been, in a manner, predestined to feel and respond to so potent a dramatic influence as Wagner's, even though his modes of musical expression were, in one way, quite foreign to their soil. Although what may be called Wagner's habitual musical idiom, his musical dialect, was essentially un-French and un-Italian, it was so intrinsically and thoroughly dramatic that both Italians and Frenchmen were peculiarly able to understand it.

Now, Brahms is, at bottom, quite as modern in feeling as Wagner; in him we find all the passionate strenuousness, the

emotional stress of the Bayreuth master; his fondness for forcible expression is no less marked, and he exhibits but little more inclination to sacrifice it to purely musical beauty. Neither can it be truly said that his habitual modes of musical expression are really less appropriate to this modern spirit of his than Wagner's were. Only, the important difference is to be noted that, in Brahms, the dramatic element in expression falls out almost completely. In short, Brahms seems to be the only living composer of high distinction who has remained utterly untouched by the specifically Wagnerian influence; modern though his feeling be, his modes of musical expression are not only purely musical, but essentially undramatic in character. This is one thing that makes him as truly original and individual as Wagner was. It also abundantly explains the faint response his music has called forth in France and Italy, in both of which countries he is still virtually unknown, save to a few specialists. The undramatic quality in his musical expression renders it as incomprehensible in France or Italy as the distinctly German idiom of his music is foreign there.

Though it is unquestionable that Brahms's modes of expression are, for the most part, inveterately undramatic, and he has from the first given ample evidence of looking upon Music as an independent and self-sufficient art, fully able to accomplish its own ends by its own means, it is none the less true that unmistakably dramatic elements, at least elements of vivid dramatic suggestiveness, crop up now and then in his writing. Now and then, if perhaps not often, one finds a passage in Brahms that plainly finds its reason of being in an underlying dramatic idea.

Take, for instance, the opening of the first movement of his F major symphony (No. 3, opus 90). Here we find the immediate juxtaposition of two themes,—or say, of theme and counter-theme,—one in F major, the other in F minor. Considered from a purely musical point of view, this is little else than a solecism; the unharmonic cross-relation between the A-natural of one theme and the A-flat of the other has no purely musical justification. For note that this is no mere accident of contrapuntal voice-leading, justified—like many a cross-relation in Sebastian Bach—by the nature of musical scale itself; it is, on the contrary, something firmly established in *principio*, something characteristic and functional in the whole scheme and development of the movement. To explain it as a mere whimsical *tour de force*, as a curious trick in polyphonic writing that it entered the composer's head to attempt, is to shoot wide of the mark; no composer of Brahms's dignity does that sort of thing nowadays, the bare supposition is unworthy and impertinent. The only artistic justification of this extraordinary juxtaposition of two themes in the same key, but in different and conflicting modes, is that Brahms—consciously or unconsciously—looked upon each of these themes as the dramatic impersonation of a special phase of emotion, and sought to represent, in their juxtaposition and combined development, something of the nature of conflict between two opposing principles. Call these principles Light and Darkness, Joy and Sorrow, Good and Evil, or only Major and Minor; the exact determination of them matters not a whit.

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(Apthorp on Brahms, *continued*)

All that is needful to justify the apparent musical solecism is to recognize that a conflict between two opposing forces lay somehow in the composer's mind, and that his two seemingly irreconcilable themes were conceived as dramatic, or quasi-dramatic, embodiments of these forces. The theme starts out joyously in the major, with its glowing major 3rd; the forbidding counter-theme creeps up on it from below, in the minor, as if to say, with Iago:

. . . O, you are well-tun'd now!
But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,
As honest as I am.

Again, one finds in Brahms's music frequent moments of such vivid, irresistible, extra-musical—poetic or picturesque—suggestiveness, that one can hardly escape the suspicion that some corresponding extra-musical image must have hovered, at least sub-consciously, before the composer's mental vision as he wrote them.

But more definitely dramatic than this Brahms has never been. Whatever of extra-musical suggestiveness one may find in his writing at times, he has given no outside clew to lead the listener to a specific interpretation of a composition, and has never written anything even distantly approaching "program-music"; few composers have written so exceedingly few works with suggestive titles as he. On the whole, he invests his music with somewhat less frequent romantic, extra-musical suggestiveness than one finds either in Bach or Mendelssohn, let alone Schumann. His music, in general, is pure music and little or nothing else.

It has often been wondered at that a man of Brahms's power, genius, and originality should have done so little pioneer work in the way of seeking for and developing new musical forms; that he should still be content to work, almost without exception, in the old traditional cyclical forms of sonata, symphony, concerto, and their correlatives in the domain of instrumental chamber-music, and evince an equal indisposition to seek for new forms in his vocal writing. But it seems to me that those who have wondered at this fail to appreciate the originality of the work Brahms has done in these forms; he treats them with absolute freedom, in some ways with conspicuous novelty of conception; that his freedom of treatment is in no wise revolutionary nor subversive, does not make it any the less free. What Brahms has to say is indefeasibly his own; and his finding that he can say it freely and completely in the traditional cyclical forms does not detract one whit from his originality. He is far more at home in these forms than Schumann was; his instinct seems to run in parallel lines with their very scheme. There are no shackles whatever on his inventiveness nor his imagination; he seems to have taken to them naturally and to express himself as easily in them as the old classic masters themselves. One can, therefore, see no good reason for his abandoning them.

Brahms's work is in general characterized by enormous solidity and stoutness of construction. In his earlier period he threw himself somewhat open to the charge of abstruseness; yet, though this charge is not wholly unfounded, it has often been exaggerated. His whole style was so individual,

and withal so novel, that it took the world some time to get used to it; a good deal that seemed abstruse and incomprehensible in his earlier works seems quite clear now. In this matter he has had the same experience that all original composers have had, time out of mind. Still, it is not to be denied that there was some abstruseness of style in the works of his earlier period, beside not a little of youthful "storm and stress." But it may be said of him, as Schumann once said of Mendelssohn, "the more he writes, the clearer and more transfigured (*immer klarer und verklärter*) does his expression become!" Especially in his later works does Brahms show himself to be well-nigh the only composer since Beethoven who has known how to preserve something of the old Hellenic serenity in his music. Even Schumann did not quite succeed in this; and, as for others since his day, their tendency has been in the opposite direction.

Although Brahms is noteworthy for adhering to the traditional cyclical forms, the freedom with which he treats them is none the less noticeable. And, though he in general carefully preserves both the chief outlines and the distinctive characteristic of whatever form he may have selected, his choice of forms—say, for the separate movements of a symphony or a quartet—is at times strikingly unconventional. His avoidance of the traditional minuet and scherzo forms is peculiarly noteworthy; in all four of his symphonies there is not one movement that can rightly be called a scherzo. One movement in his D major symphony (No. 2, opus 73) has some of the characteristics of the minuet; but its rhythm equally recalls the old *Ländler* waltz. The finale of his E minor symphony (No. 4, opus 98) is a set of variations on an eight-measure passacaglia; a hitherto unheard-of form for a symphonic finale! Characteristic also is Brahms's fondness for moderate *Allegros*; the modern "slow *Allegro*" might almost be called his natural gait. He applies it to the first movements of three of his four symphonies; only the third begins with a frank *Allegro con brio*. As a rule, it is only in short middle movements—substituted for the traditional scherzo—and now and then in a finale that he writes in a really brisk tempo. It is noticeable that, whenever he does write a genuine *Allegro molto* or *Presto*, Hungarian traits of melody or rhythm are pretty sure to crop up sooner or later. But his music is in general essentially Teutonic; Slavic or Magyar touches are to be found only here and there.

It was for some time a legend that the intellectual element largely preponderated over the emotional in Brahms's writing. Some tinge of reason may seem to have been given to this legend by the fact that his music always is profoundly intellectual; perhaps so by the essentially undramatic nature of his habitual modes of expression, by a certain reserve of style and an occasional touch of something very like asceticism. But the legend is really none the less ridiculous, and hardly calls for refutation; for it is of the things that die of themselves. With all its intellectuality, Brahms's music is rich in the truest and deepest emotional quality, internal warmth, what the Germans call *Gemüth*, and passion. The charge of "cold intellectuality," brought against Brahms, belongs to the same category as the charge of melodic poverty that has been brought against every original composer that ever wrote: a flash in the pan of purblind criticism.

Recent Brahms Publications and Recordings

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

Brahms Correspondence

Robert Münster, ed. *Johannes Brahms in Briefwechsel mit Ernst Frank*. Johannes Brahms-Briefwechsel, Neue Folge, vol. 19. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1995. ISBN 3-7952-0821-1.

Brahms first met the pianist, composer, and conductor Ernst Frank (1847-89) in Vienna around 1870, when Frank was the young second choirmaster of the Court Opera and conductor of the Singakademie. A warm friendship developed (one postcard from Brahms is addressed to "Bruder Spatz" and signed "Dein Bruder in Apollø!") which continued after Frank left Vienna to assume positions in Mannheim and later in Frankfurt, where he became a close friend of Clara Schumann; a letter of recommendation from Brahms helped Frank to secure the position of Kapellmeister in Hanover in 1879. The two collaborated on performances of Brahms's music, and Brahms took a special interest in Frank's efforts to complete Hermann Goetz's opera *Francesca da Rimini* after the composer's death. The eighty-three documents published here include the sixty-one letters and postcards between Brahms and Frank first released by Alfred Einstein (*Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 4 [1922]) and twenty-one communications issued here for the first time. Münster's commentary includes copious excerpts from contemporary reviews of Brahms's music.

Books and Articles on Brahms

Reinhold Brinkmann. *Late Idyll: The Second Symphony of Johannes Brahms*. Translated by Peter Palmer. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995. ISBN 0-674-51175-1.

Originally published as *Johannes Brahms: Die zweite Symphonie: Späte Idylle* (Munich, 1990), this engaging book attempts to place Brahms's second essay in the symphonic genre within major intellectual trends of late nineteenth-century Europe, as well as within the context of the composer's other works and those of his musical predecessors, especially Beethoven. A series of analytical chapters charting the course of the symphony are framed by discussions of the composition's genesis and historical position and of its blending of idyllic and melancholic tone within the monumental form of a symphony. The discourse is enriched by close interpretation of documentary evidence and assessment of revisions in the autograph manuscript, and by relevant digressions to the artistic creations of such contemporaries as Theodor Fontane, Thomas Mann, Adolph Menzel, and Gustav Klimt.

Kurt and Renate Hofmann. *32 Stichvorlagen von Werken Johannes Brahms*. KulturStiftung der Länder-PATRIMONIA, vol. 107. Kiel: KulturStiftung der Länder, 1995. ISSN 0941-7036.

This bulletin on the large cache of engravers' models and other manuscripts for vocal and instrumental works by Brahms recently acquired by the Brahms-Institut in Lübeck (see article on page 5

of this Newsletter) contains introductory remarks by Jörg Auckenthaler, the great-grandson of Fritz Simrock, describing the discovery of these important materials in a family attic in Basel; two essays by Kurt Hofmann, "Zu den Beziehungen zwischen Johannes Brahms und Fritz Simrock" and "Zur Bedeutung der Stichvorlagen und Abschriften von Werken von Johannes Brahms"; and a detailed catalogue of the collection (which also contains a number of early printed editions with textual revisions, several letters to the Simrocks, autographs of two works by Franz Wüllner, and a lock of Brahms's hair) prepared by Renate Hofmann. Illustrating this little volume are a photograph of Fritz Simrock (1900) and facsimilies of pages from the collection's manuscripts of the First Symphony; the Sextett, Op. 36; the songs *An eine Aeolsharfe*, Op. 19 No. 5, and *Lerchengesang*, Op. 70 No. 2; the *Schicksalslied*; the motet *Warum ist das Licht gegeben*, Op. 74 No. 1; the *Balladen und Romanzen*, Op. 75; and the *Vier ernste Gesänge*.

Basil Smallman. *The Piano Quartet and Quintet: Style, Structure, and Scoring*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. ISBN 0-19-816374-6.

In the central chapter of his broad historical narrative, "The Ascendancy of Brahms," the author perceptively assesses the three Piano Quartets and the Piano Quintet, drawing upon the recent style-critical writings about this repertoire by Frisch, Sisman, Webster, and others. Smallman's early book, *The Piano Trio* (Clarendon Press, 1990), will also be of interest to lovers of Brahms's chamber music.

Lucien Stark. *A Guide to the Solo Songs of Johannes Brahms*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995. ISBN 0-253-32891-8.

For each of Brahms's Lieder this survey provides the original German text, information on the poem's sources and alterations introduced by Brahms, a prose translation, an accounting of date and place of composition and earliest known public performances, succinct commentary on the structure of the song and the relationship between word and tone, and a summary of critical reaction in the Brahms circle. An introductory essay on Brahms as a composer of songs and an appendix containing brief biographical accounts of Brahms's poets round out a nicely produced volume that will surely find its way to the bookshelves of singers, teachers, and all other lovers of Brahms's lyrical art.

Papers Presented at Conferences

Papers read at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, New York City, 2-5 November 1995:

Mark Evan Bonds (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), "Contexts of Allusion in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of Brahms's First Symphony."

Thomas Nelson (University of Minnesota), "Klinger's *Brahmsphantasie* and the Cultural Politics of Absolute Music."

Heather Platt (Ball State University), "Schumann's Presence in Brahms's Lieder."

Christopher Alan Reynolds (University of California, Davis), "Brahms and His Musical Seed-Corn: The Claims of the (Un)consciousness."

(continued on next page)

(Brahms Publications and Recordings, *continued*)

Paper read and panel sessions held at the annual meeting of the Society for Music Theory, New York City, 2–5 November 1995:

Peter H. Smith (University of Notre Dame): “Brahms and the Neapolitan Complex: ^bII, ^bVI, and Their Multiple Functions in the First Movement of the F-Minor Clarinet Sonata.”

Triptych Symposium: Brahms, “Im Herbst,” Op. 104 No. 5. David Loberg Code (Western Michigan University), organizer.

Panel I: Pedagogy. Clair Boge (Miami University, Oxford, Ohio), Virginia Hancock (Reed College), Robert Wason (Eastman School of Music).

Panel II: Analysis. Hallgerd Aksnes (University of Oslo), Daniel Harrison (Eastman School of Music), Mary Hunter (Bates College), Marianne Kielian-Gilbert (Indiana University), Wayne Slawson (UC Davis), Larry Zbikowski (University of Chicago).

Panel III: Performance. Joel Lester (CUNY), Elizabeth West Marvin (Eastman School of Music).

Music of Brahms and His Circle

Johannes Brahms. *Rácóczy Marsch*. Edited by Michael Töpel. Kassel, Basel, London, New York, and Prague: Bärenreiter, 1995. BA 6557.

The first edition of Brahms's version for solo piano of one of the most popular marches of the nineteenth century (also arranged by Berlioz and Liszt, among others). Brahms's rendition survives in an autograph manuscript written out in the early 1850s—when Brahms is said to have performed this rousing Hungarian march “to brilliant effect”—and preserved in Clara Schumann's estate (now in the Robert-Schumann-Haus in Zwickau). The editor has modestly filled out a number of passages incompletely notated or indicated with abbreviations in the manuscript, especially near the end of the piece. One suspects that in performance Brahms may have improvised more elaborate solutions.

Robert and Clara Schumann. *Liederalbum für Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient*. Edited by Angelika Horstmann. Kassel and Basel: Bärenreiter, 1994. ISBN 3-7618-1219-1.

This lovely facsimile edition of a handwritten Lieder-Album prepared for the illustrious soprano Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient ca. 1845–49 contains, in addition to eleven songs by Robert Schumann (including *Widmung*, *Der Nußbaum*, *Die Lotosblume*, and *Mondnacht*), two impressive songs by Clara Schumann, *Liebeszauber* and *Ich hab' in deinem Auge*, Op. 13 Nos. 3 and 5.

Recordings of Interest

Johannes Brahms. *Piano Quartets, Opp. 25, 26, 60*. Italian Piano Quartet. Corrado Bolsi, violin; Angelo Bartoletti, viola; Sandro Meo, cello; and Riccardo Cecchetti, piano. Symphonia, SY 94D26.

In this first recorded performance of Brahms's piano quartets on period instruments, the strings of the Italian Piano Quartet reveal some of the beautiful effects that can be achieved by performing late Romantic chamber music with restrained vibrato and detailed articulation. The trio of strings plays as one, and such moments as the muted beginning of Op. 60 are magical. One also enjoys the

clarity that a straight-strung 1880 Bösendorfer brings to Brahms's writing in low registers. Yet this particular piano is not a very colorful one; moreover, the piano playing, while technically impeccable, is generally perfunctory, with indifferent tone and, at times, unsteady pace. In general this quartet adopts a “hard-driving” approach that is well suited to scherzi—the second movement of Op. 60 is the high point of the set—but permits too little breathing space in more lyrical situations. The quicker decay of the Bösendorfer's tone will automatically create nicely tapered slurs and phrase endings, if the pianist allows them to happen.

Johannes Brahms. *Brahms in Meiningen: Clarinet Sonatas, Op. 120; Piano Intermezzi, Op. 117*. Keith Puddy, clarinet, and Malcolm Martineau, piano. Biddulph Recordings, WHL 017–18.

The instruments used on this recording are a seven-foot Bechstein piano from 1881 and Richard Mühlfeld's stained-boxwood, eighteen-key B-flat clarinet, made by Georg Ottensteiner in Munich, ca. 1875. The attributes of this pairing include an easy balance between the instruments and greater clarity for the piano's inner voices. What is not apparent on this recording is the warmth of tone that was a hallmark of Mühlfeld's playing; Puddy's tone is rather thin and lacking in shadings of color, his dynamic range limited. Despite lovely moments, not enough attention is paid to expressive details (which is not the case with the new Campbell-Hokanson recording; see below). Dynamic shadings and articulation notated by Brahms are often ignored or, in the piano, obscured by over-pedaling (Martineau has a particular aversion to staccato markings). One also misses the strong fundamental bass above which Brahms is said to have erected his piano textures in performance.

Johannes Brahms. *Clarinet Sonatas, Op. 120*. Gustav Jenner. *Clarinet Sonata in G major, Op. 5*. James Campbell, clarinet, and Leonard Hokanson, piano. Marquis Classics, ERAD 125.

Coupled with performances of Brahms's sonatas most grandly conceived and expertly executed is a lovingly played rendition of the one clarinet sonata composed by Brahms's student Gustav Jenner. Inspired, like his mentor, by the artistry of the clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, Jenner created a four-movement work, premiered in 1899, that clearly reveals the influence of Brahms in its gentle opening Allegro moderato, cast in a gracious waltz tempo (*a la* the Allegretto grazioso of Op. 120 No.1), and of Schumann in its quirky, episodic finale. Both movements are worthy of attention, as is also the quaint, Ländler-style third movement, reminiscent of Brahms's *Liebestlieder* Waltzes; less interesting is the rambling Adagio espressivo. Though lacking in the rhythmic dynamism and strong architectural sense of his teacher, Jenner possessed a sure sense of line and enough Romantic fantasy to make his music engaging.

Robert Schumann. *Violin Sonatas, Opp. 105 and 121*. Clara Schumann. *Romances, Op. 22*. Fabio Biondi, violin, and Luigi Di Ilio, piano. Opus 111, OPS 30–77.

Violinist Fabio Biondi, whose extensive repertoire on the “Opus 111” label ranges from Boccherini to Malipiero, unites the rich sound of his 1740 Testore violin with the full-bodied tone of Luigi Di Ilio's 1846 Erard piano in broadly conceived and highly emotional performances of Robert Schumann's multi-faceted violin sonatas and Clara Schumann's three heartfelt Romances. Biondi's depth of tone, unerring sense of line and repose, finely graded dynamics, and expressive use of vibrato and portamento all bespeak a profound understanding of this music.

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The American Brahms Society is a non-profit organization. The IRS has determined that donations in excess of dues may be considered as charitable contributions.

I wish to order the following publications now available with member's discounts (see article in Spring 1995 issue):

Editor's Notes

Thomas Quigley informs us that Scarecrow Press will be publishing a second volume of his *Brahms Bibliography* in 1997. It will follow the format of the first volume, and will cover the time period 1982 to 1996; the current working file contains just over 1,500 citations. This autumn Quigley is taking a research trip across the United States, visiting significant library collections to see Brahms materials unavailable to him locally and to examine various in-house indexing projects for entries on Brahms. He would like to receive comments on the first volume of the bibliography, as well as leads to information that might not be readily accessible through usual bibliographic sources. He may be reached at 101-2255 York Ave., Vancouver, BC, Canada, V6K 1C5, or by e-mail (thomqui@freenet.vancouver.bc.ca).

Robert Parkins, University Organist and Professor of the Practice of Music at Duke University, has recorded elegant performances of the complete organ works of Brahms on the Naxos label (catalog no. 8.550824). Professor Parkins used the edition prepared for G. Henle Verlag by George Bozarth (1987).

Lucien Stark of the University of Kentucky has sent the program for the second year of a three-year cycle presenting the complete *Lieder* of Brahms. The three concerts for this season are scheduled to take place at the University on 10 October (Opp. 57-59, WoO posth. 23), 14 November

(Opp. 63, 69, 70), and 26 March 1996 (Opp. 71, 72, 84, 85). Dr. Stark, pianist and ABS member, is artistic director of the series. His *A Guide to the Solo Songs of Johannes Brahms* was published this autumn (see "Recent Brahms Publications" in this Newsletter).

The Editor wishes to thank Sydney Keegan and David Wilcox at the University of Washington for their assistance with the production and dissemination of this Newsletter.

Correspondence, ideas, and submissions for the Newsletter are always welcome, and e-mail communication is especially encouraged. Materials for the autumn issue should be sent to the Editor by 1 September 1995.

Virginia Hancock

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In Case of Brahms, Exit Here . . .

"The First Symphony of Brahms seems to strive after the unattainable; it is full of irritant and restless discords; it has strange, climbing, grasping phrases which seem to be trying to drag down something which still glides upward from their reach; its pastoral motifs often break away in suggestion of storm and confusion; and strings are frequently urged to the very top of their compass, and at times, as in the first and last movements, a sort of Walpurgis Night sweeps down and whirls everything away in a rhythmic chaos."

Boston *Daily Advertiser*, 29 December 1883

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