A Multivalent Allusion in Brahms’s First Violin Sonata, Op. 78

It is difficult to overstate Joseph Joachim’s influence on the young Brahms. Almost immediately upon meeting in 1853, they formed a close friendship. In their correspondence from the 1850s and 1860s, we find them consoling Clara Schumann in the loss of her husband first to mental illness, and later to death. They studied counterpoint together, critiqued each other’s compositions, complained about Franz Liszt and the New German School, and planned joint concert appearances. So it is odd that in these early years Brahms never wrote a violin sonata for Joachim and himself to play. It may be that he wanted to explore “new paths” after his early piano sonatas, Opp. 1, 2, and 5, received mixed reviews and were not much performed; he composed orchestral serenades, variations, chamber music, choral works, and finally symphonies, as opportunities for practical experience with these genres presented themselves. But except for his First Cello Sonata, Op. 38, and Sonata for Two Pianos, Op. 34b, a quarter century would pass before he would publish another work in the sonata genre.

The new sonata was for violin and piano, in G Major, Op. 78. One of Brahms’s most intimate works, it was related especially to the Schumann family. In the mid-1850s, when Robert Schumann was confined to an asylum at Endenich and Brahms was in the throes of his love for Robert’s wife, Clara, he would sometimes play with the Schumann children at their home in Düsseldorf, and throughout his life he showed a tender regard for them. This was especially true for Julie, the Schumanns’ third child, with whom Brahms fell in love in the 1860s, and Felix, their eighth and youngest child. When Felix was born, Brahms stood as a godparent, and Felix’s later musical and literary preoccupations may have reminded Brahms of his father, Robert. In 1860 the six-year-old resolved to study the violin. Joseph Joachim would later lend Felix the Guarnerius he had played during his student days at the Leipzig Conservatory and volunteered to teach the boy when he was sufficiently advanced. Felix’s ill health kept him from achieving the mastery he sought as a violinist, but he continued his literary efforts, and in the 1870s Brahms took an interest in the young man’s poems, three of which he set to music (“Meine Liebe ist grün,” Op. 63, No. 5; “Wenn um den Holunder der Abendwind kost,” Op. 63, No. 6; and “Versunken,” Op. 86, No. 5).

Brahms first worked on the G-Major violin sonata at Pörtschach on Lake Wörth in Austria during the summer of 1878, while he was also composing his Violin Concerto, Op. 77, and completed the sonata by June of 1879. During this time Felix Schumann was struggling through the final stages of consumption, from which he died on 16 February 1879 at his mother’s home in Frankfurt. The letter Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann after receiving from her news of Felix’s death reveals the depth of his own sadness as much as his desire to console her:

Beloved Clara, It’s true that with each of your last letters I might have anticipated the mournful news which your letter today brings. But as I held this one in my hand, I was certain of its message, and opened it while holding you in my gaze with all my thoughts…. Gathered within me are the memories of what was good in
the past and the thoughts of the good things I had hoped for and expected.... I wish I were there; for, no matter how long I sat here with my paper writing—none the less I would feel easier and better were I sitting silently with you. From my heart, your Johannes.”

Beautiful though these lines are, Brahms had already expressed his feelings more eloquently. A few weeks earlier, when he knew Felix’s end was near, he had sent Clara a single manuscript page of music, with a letter written on the back. The letter began: “If you play what is on the reverse side quite slowly, it will tell you, perhaps more clearly than I otherwise could myself, how sincerely I think of you and Felix—even about his end.” He knew Felix’s end was near, he had sent Clara a single manuscript page of music, with a letter written on the back. The letter began: “If you play what is on the reverse side quite slowly, it will tell you, perhaps more clearly than I otherwise could myself, how sincerely I think of you and Felix—even about his end.”

The soulful opening of this ternary-form (ABACoda) movement, marked Adagio (the manuscript leaf Brahms sent to Clara is marked Adagio espressivo), begins with a cadence figure, as if some unheard music preceded it. Designated a in Example 1, the gently falling head motive feels nostalgic, like something half-remembered. Its actual function—not as a cadence but as a phrase beginning—is assured when it settles on scale degree 1 in m. 2, with the root of the tonic chord delayed until the second eighth of beat one, leaving a six-four chord sounding briefly on the downbeat. Rising “horn fifths” follow in mm. 2 and 3. Designated as motive b in Example 1, their syncopated rhythms bring with them a sense of gathering momentum and disquiet. The syncopations continue unabated into the second statement of the head motive (a’), further disrupting any sense of repose. The beginning of the second phrase in m. 5 combines a fragment of the head motive, shown as x in Example 1, with the rhythm of the horn fifths passage, while modulating to the dominant key of B-flat major. Finally, in mm. 8–9, the cadence motive, now unsyncopated, appears again (a”) and reclaims its true function by finishing on scale degree 1, albeit in the dominant key, and with the bass motion to the root of I still delayed.

Brahms’s first thematic statement, then, is based entirely on motives a and b. The remarkable plasticity of their treatment does not completely disguise the fact that these thematic elements have appeared together before—in the second movement of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto, Op. 61—Joseph Joachim’s signature work.⁴ There the rising horn fifths, designated as b in Example 2, are played twice, as in Brahms’s sonata, but at the beginning of the phrase. (Though disguised by the voice-leading in the string-choir opening, the horn fifths appear distinctively in mm. 11 and 12, played by a pair of horns.) The cadence figure that opens Brahms’s passage is heard twice at the end of Beethoven’s second phrase, first unadorned and then embellished, shown as motives a and a’ in Example 2. So in his violin sonata Brahms recombined the motives from Beethoven’s iconic slow movement, with Beethoven’s cadence motive placed first and his head motive, rhythmically transformed through syncopation, becoming interior-phrase material. This reordering of the motives, along with their subtle rhythmic transformations, probably accounts for the fact that this rather clear allusion to Beethoven’s Violin Concerto in Brahms’s sonata has not been noticed before now. On the other hand, the shared association of both works with the violin and the location of the material at the same point in the form—as primary thematic material beginning a slow movement—strengthen the associative power of the allusion.

Example 1: Johannes Brahms, Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 78, Mvt. II, mm. 1–9
Example 2: Ludwig van Beethoven, Violin Concerto, Op. 61, Mvt. II, mm. 1–10

Example 3: Ludwig van Beethoven, Violin Concerto, Op. 61, Mvt. II, mm. 60–65
Beethoven presented his theme plainly and straightforwardly four times in succession at the outset of his concerto movement. The solo violin, however, does not play at all during two of these presentations (mm. 1–10 and 31–40). In the other two, the theme is presented prominently in the orchestra, without embellishment, while the violin provides a dialogue-like, sometimes heterophonic commentary on it (mm. 11–20 and 21–30). Only in a later, fifth presentation (mm. 56–65) does the solo violin actually give out the theme in its entirety—in a gently embellished version that prominently features syncopation of the cadence figure. As Example 3 shows, Beethoven’s writing here directly prefigures Brahms’s treatment of the same material in m. 4 of his slow movement. So there is a sense in which Brahms takes this figure up where Beethoven left off with it.

There has been considerable discussion about several unusual features of Beethoven’s concerto movement. Though clearly related to variation form, the movement does not feature variations in which newly-invented motives replace the theme itself while the formal and harmonic structure of the theme are retained, ordinarily a hallmark of Beethoven’s (and Brahms’s) variation writing. Instead, the theme is presented unadorned in the orchestra in each of the first three variations. Beethoven had written other variations in which motivic invention was deemphasized—the second movement of the Piano Sonata, Op. 57, for example—but never a set in which the plain reiteration of the theme was so pronounced. This treatment lends the movement an uncomplicated, dignified character that is elevated to the sublime by the two spacious interludes that separate variations three and four and precede the transition to D major at the end of the movement. The interludes unfold for long stretches over tonic pedals or with very simple, slow-moving, diatonic basses, at times cadenza-like (e.g., mm. 40–44 or 52–55), at times presenting something like measured recitative (mm. 45–52). One might posit that Beethoven wished to lay this elegant music—which at times, with its greatly diminished emphasis on motive, feels almost improvised—over against the omnipresence of the unembellished theme in the variations. Bathia Churgin has suggested that the interludes contribute elements of rondo and double variation treatment to the form. Although this interpretation is supported by many details in the score, it is not unproblematic. The movement remains in the tonic key throughout its entire course—or at least until its modulation to D minor/major in preparation for the attacca onset of the last movement. No other rondo or set of double variations by Beethoven exhibits such tonal uniformity. And there remains the fact that the ten-bar theme is not in binary form, as one would expect of a theme for variations, but is instead a simple, two-phrase period with an embellished cadential reiteration (4 + [4 + 2]). Responding to the brevity of the theme, Owen Jander has proposed that the movement resembles a chaconne, yet when Beethoven clearly intended to write such a piece, as in the Variations in C Minor, WoO 80, he used a conventional, eight-bar harmonic/bass formula with a single cadence at the end. It has also been suggested that the movement was influenced by the uncomplicated, straightforwardly lyrical slow movements of Viotti’s violin concertos, which were very much in vogue in Beethoven’s time. It may be that any or all of these formal and style concepts had a bearing on Beethoven’s slow movement, but the vigorous and contradictory debate about its form only serves to reinforce the fact that the movement stands as a distinctive unicum. Brahms’s attraction to this movement as a source of ideas for the slow movement of Op. 78 was surely grounded at least in part on its ethereal lyricism and its uniqueness as the sole existing exemplar of such extraordinary formal procedures.

In Op. 78, Brahms’s modulation to the dominant key of B-flat major beginning in m. 5 announces that his treatment of the material will not access Beethoven’s remarkable tonal status. The cadence in B-flat at m. 9 signals that Brahms is shaping the material into a small binary form, with the first binary part presented by the piano alone. The violin’s entrance in m. 10 announces the opening of the second binary part with a tonal digression to E-flat minor, confirmed by two weak half-cadences in that key at mm. 13 and 17. Within this section the violin assumes an equal contrapuntal partnership with the piano, but presents no material overtly related to the opening theme. With the return of E-flat major, however, the opening motive (a) of the main theme blossoms forth in the violin to mark the point of rounding in the binary form (mm. 17–19). Since this is “head-rounding,” in which only the opening melodic gesture from the first binary part reappears, its brief return is followed by further elaboration, leading finally to its long-delayed close on scale degree 1 of the tonic key in m. 24. Only after the B section of the ternary form has run its course does Brahms call forth from the violin a full-throated singing of the entire first theme—forte, expressivo, in double stops on the rich G and D strings (mm. 67–76). Here he must have been thinking especially of Joachim, who was widely celebrated for the beauty of his tone and his double-stop playing. At the same time Brahms was casting aside Beethoven’s elegant, ethereal treatment of the violin in the second movement of Op. 61, in which the violin mostly stands apart from the theme and responds to it as if in dialogue, from the bright heights of the E string. In Brahms’s visceral singing of the melody he reclaims Beethoven’s melodic ideas emphatically for the solo instrument.
Aside from its intrinsic interest, the allusion to Beethoven’s Violin Concerto draws Brahms’s Op. 78 Violin Sonata into closer association with Joseph Joachim. As a fifteen-year-old youth, Brahms had heard the concerto at a concert of the Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra on 11 March 1848, with Joachim as soloist, five years before the two met in April of 1853. He later wrote to Joachim:

Again and again the concerto reminds me of our first encounter, of which you, of course, know nothing. You were playing in Hamburg, it must be many years ago; I was surely your most rapt listener. It was a time when I was still subject to chaotic infatuations, and I didn’t mind at all taking you for Beethoven. So the concerto I always held to be your own. Like me, you undoubtedly enjoy recalling single most powerful impressions, such as the C minor symphony, this concerto, and Don Juan.6

The second movement’s main theme, then, which some commentators have begun to call “Felix’s theme,”10 turns out to have sprung from roots in what the young Brahms regarded as Joachim’s “own” concerto, a work he singled out as having made a “most powerful impression” on him. One does not ordinarily associate Joachim with Op. 78. The sonata was not dedicated to him, and he did not give the first public performance.11 But Paul Berry has shown that the autograph of movements one and two of Op. 78 (Wien Bibliotheik im Rathaus, MH 3908) antedates the letter-manuscript he sent to Clara Schumann in February of 1879.12 So Brahms was probably referring to one or both of these movements when he indicated in his handwritten catalog of his works that Op. 78 was partly composed in the summer of 1878.13 This would mean that the slow movement of Op. 78 was conceived concurrently with Brahms’s initial work on his Violin Concerto. At a time when Brahms was absorbed in the violin concerto genre, thinking about Joachim’s magnificent playing of the iconic slow movement of Beethoven’s concerto would have been practically inescapable.

David Brodbeck and Paul Berry have shown that motive a from Brahms’s Op. 78 Adagio also recalls rhythmically the beginning of the slow movement of Robert Schumann’s Violin Concerto, WoO 1, and the closely related opening of Schumann’s Theme and Variations, WoO 24, the same theme Brahms subsequently used for his Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann for piano four hands, Op. 23.14 (See Example 4.) So the allusive web presented by Brahms’s main theme is a complex one, imbued with many values and meanings. Its multivalent allusions connect Beethoven, Robert Schumann, Joachim, and, of course, Brahms himself in an extraordinarily rich circle of associations. Moreover, recognition of the connection between the Op. 78 slow movement and Beethoven’s Larghetto raises an intriguing question: what part might Beethoven’s theme have played elsewhere in Brahms’s sonata? After all, Beethoven’s theme begins with a repeated-note anacrusis in dotted rhythms, a topic taken up in the B section of the Op. 78 Adagio as well as in the head motive of its first movement. In mm. 3 and 4 of the first movement, for example, is it possible that Brahms subtly adapted the rhythm of Beethoven’s twice-repeated motive into the realm of six-four meter, presenting it as interior-phrase material rather than a head motive, just as he had done in the Adagio? In m. 36 of the first movement, do we find in the first four notes of the sonata form’s second theme a reconceived version of Beethoven’s head motive, beginning now on the third scale degree and launched from the downbeat rather than an upbeat? In the first instance the rhythmic profile of Beethoven’s motive is essentially retained (though shifted in the bar and metrically adapted), and the pitch profile slightly altered. In the second instance the pitch shape holds true, but the identity of the original rhythm is nearly lost. In both cases, however, the underly ing profile of Beethoven’s original idea may be discerned. So it would appear that, while we have long known that the last movement of Brahms’s Op. 78 owes much to two of his Lieder, “Regenlied,” and “Nachklang,” which form a musically-related pair in his Lieder und Gesänge, Op. 59, its first two movements, composed earlier than the third one, have very different roots.

William Horne

The publication of Natasha Loges’s book *Brahms and His Poets: A Handbook* offers a long-awaited, comprehensive guide to the poets and literature related to Brahms’s solo Lieder. This volume has surely been anticipated by scholars and performers of this repertoire alike. Whereas existing English-language compendiums on Brahms’s songs—including *Brahms’s Lieder: An Introduction to the Songs for One and Two Voices* by Max Friedlaender (1922 [1928]) and *The Songs of Johannes Brahms* by Eric Sams (2000)—are organized chronologically (by opus numbers) and provide general information about the poets and their work as well as a potpourri of insights about the songs’ compositional genesis, issues of musical interpretation, and selected commentary by Brahms’s contemporaries, the organization of Loges’s handbook by poet allows her to explore the intricate, often previously unacknowledged web of personal, literary, and political connections among the literary figures who inspired Brahms’s songs for solo voice and piano. By addressing all of Brahms’s poets, Loges’s book fills a lacuna in the existing scholarship on Brahms’s songs, which has marginalized many of these authors, and helps rectify misconceptions that have persisted until far too recently: namely, that Brahms set mediocre poetry and that his musical settings merely reflect the general mood of a poem.

Although many recent studies have begun to counter this view of Brahms’s skill as a reader and composer of songs, Loges’s book ensures that future research will acknowledge the care and depth of reading that Brahms lavished upon literature throughout his life—a view of the composer that is amply supported by reminiscences of Brahms’s friends and contemporaries that she cites. Loges provides thorough yet digestible summaries of each poet’s biography and works, illuminates personal relationships between Brahms and his poets, and sheds new light on their relationship to the complex political history of nineteenth-century Europe. Her impressive original research places each poet’s life and relationship to Brahms into a broader *context*—a word that reflects the book’s guiding principle—than previous scholarship on his songs, achieving Loges’s aim of “stimulating fresh encounters with Brahms’s poets as individuals, and encouraging us to encounter the songs anew” (19).

Both the organization and content of Loges’s book focus readers on the social, political, and literary contexts that influenced Brahms’s songs. Entries for each poet are arranged alphabetically, but present information and diagrams that relate each author’s work to formative cultural factors. (Entry headings list each poet’s dates, Brahms’s known solo settings for voice and piano as well as for ensembles, and the dates of each setting’s composition and publication, but Loges clarifies that a detailed study of Brahms’s folksong sources or vocal ensembles falls outside the scope of this compendium.) A table that compares dates for each poet’s lifespan aligns and emphasizes their overlapping segments (30–33). This visually illustrates that Brahms set poetry dating from the seventeenth century through nineteenth centuries as well as many of the same poets as his predecessors such as Schubert (including August von Platen, Heinrich Heine, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich Rückert), but clarifies that the majority of Brahms’s poets were his contemporaries. Maps depict the ever-shifting boundaries of nineteenth-century German and Austrian regions and trace the paths that each poet traveled, illustrating times and places in which poets might have crossed paths (34–35), as Loges’s individual entries further explain. Her maps also depict regions, such as Alsace-Lorraine and Hungary, that were subject to the alternating control of Germany and France or Austria, a situation that caused poetry from these regions to enter only gradually into German-speaking lands.

Each entry highlights Brahms’s personal relationship to the poet and first exposure to his work (indicating when poetry volumes were personal gifts from friends or the poet himself) and lists the compositional chronology of Brahms’s settings. Footnotes indicate the location of newly digitized autographs of the songs, extending the information available in Margit McCorkle’s thematic catalogue and George Bozarth’s study of Brahms’s autographs. Through a comprehensive reading of Brahms’s complete published correspondence (volumes referenced are listed on xv–xvi), cited in the original German as well as in her own translations, Loges documents Brahms’s letters to friends and publishers that mention poets directly, often communicating his desire to own their work. Readers learn, for example, about Brahms’s reading of Goethe from letters between Brahms, Joseph Joachim, and Clara Schumann dating from 1855–1858, a period that predates the majority of Brahms’s Goethe settings. Brahms’s reading of the Goethe-Schiller correspondence and Georg Henry Lewes’s biography of Goethe also suggests that he frequently read large portions of a poet’s work—not just the poetry he set—as well as their biographies published during his lifetime (140, notes 15–17). Loges’s cross-references also emphasize far-reaching connections between poets and members of Brahms’s circle.

She builds on information available in the few English-language monographs that focus on Brahms’s poets, such as Peter Russell’s *Johannes Brahms and Klaus Groth: The Biography of a Friendship* (2006), for example, revealing that Groth facilitated many relationships for Brahms. Groth met Brahms through Joachim and Clara Schumann, was present during Brahms’s final visit to the dying Robert Schumann at Endenich, and, along with the singer Hermine Spies (a pupil of the baritone Julius Stockhausen), inspired the setting “Komm bald” (Op. 97, No. 5), which was dedicated to their friendship. He not only introduced Brahms to the composition student Gustav Jenner, as is well known, but was also involved in Brahms’s communication with the poets Emanuel Geibel, Theodor Storm, and Detlev von Liliencron (153).

Drawing from the poets’ own letters, the entries depict these men’s artistic collaborations in societies established during Brahms’s lifetime, reinforcing Loges’s claim that “Brahms’s settings enshrine the precious networks of collegiality and friendship that underpinned the middle classes throughout Europe across generations” (17). She shows that some of Brahms’s poets aimed to recreate the atmosphere of Berlin’s literary salons from the first third of the nineteenth century in other German regions. Geibel, for instance, not only socialized...
with Bettina von Arnim (who is related to the young Brahms’s world through her daughter Gisela von Arnim and Joseph Joachim) upon his arrival to Berlin in 1836, but in 1856–1857 became a member of the literary club known as the Krokozilile in Munich together with Hermann Lingg and Paul Heyse. Along with Heyse, Adolf von Schack, and Friedrich Bodenstedt, Geibel contributed to “developing Munich’s fledgling cultural, scientific and literary life” after their invitation to the Bavarian court of King Maximilian II (133–34). Similarly, the poet Franz Kugler was a member of the Mittwochgesellschaft (Wednesday Club) in the 1830s—a group that connected him with a number of poets whose work Brahms also set, including Joseph von Eichendorff, Storm, Otto Gruppe, and August Kopisch (261).

Preceding each entry’s second section, titled “Further Context,” that focuses exclusively on poets’ biographies, Loges includes portraits of each poet gathered from libraries in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, and Latvia. These provide a glimpse of still broader social circles, as Kugler was the artist for portraits of Robert Reinick, Ludwig Uhland, Heine, and Geibel, and Heyse drew Theodor Storm. Citations of poets’ letters in this section also reveal their personal opinions about Brahms’s settings, which popularized and disseminated their work. Karl Lemeke writes in 1877 of his pride “about the fate of my lyrics,” while Liliencron praises Brahms’s setting of his “Auf dem Kirchhöfe” as his “highest accolade” (278). The Swiss poet Wilhelm Lübbeke (an acquaintance of Lemeke, whose work Brahms also set), together with Brahms’s friend Theodor Billroth and the pianist Theodor Kirchner, even promoted Brahms’s songs in Zurich (265, note 2). Finally, Loges synthesizes information from nineteenth-century German-language biographies and periodicals that are rarely referenced in English-language scholarship. These sources establish connections between poets who remain at the periphery of Brahms scholarship and well-known literary figures. Friedrich Rückert, for example, edited the Deutscher Musenalmanach that first printed poems of Carl Candidus—a lesser-known figure—in 1840, while the fledgling Candidus sought acceptance into German literary circles from Uhland, a well-regarded scholar in his time (68). Loges also contrasts the reception of poets’ work during Brahms’s lifetime with recent literary criticism and discusses poets’ shifting political or religious outlooks, such as Heine’s conversion to Catholicism and Daumer’s attraction to Islam—a fact that links him with the little-known poet Melchior Grohe (149), who also converted to Islam and lived in Egypt. Her critical approach to interpreting the poetry heightens readers’ awareness of its changed meanings over time.

In addition to placing Brahms’s poets into cultural contexts, Loges cultivates an image of “Brahms the Reader”—a testament to his literary sophistication—that serves as a guiding thread in the compendium. She cites Brahms’s quotation of treasured literary passages in his early collection of quotations (Des jungen Kreislers Schatzkästlein) and describes the complete contents of his unpublished handwritten poetry notebooks (held at the Wienbibliothek im Rathaus) for the first time. The notebooks further demonstrate Brahms’s tendency to engage with a poet’s whole output, since he even copied poems by Hermann Lingg, Candidus, Rückert, and Felix Schumann that he did not set, sometimes postdating the composition or publication of his musical settings. Based on her close firsthand examination of items in Brahms’s library, held at the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde and the Brahms-Institut Lübeck, Loges describes the extensive markings and dog-eared pages that appear in his personal volumes of poetry (e.g., Brahms’s heavily marked copy of Rückert’s collected works, published in 1836–1838), and compares editions of poetry that he might have consulted (e.g., editions of Eichendorff’s Gedichte from 1837, 1843, and 1850), sometimes correcting the information in Kurt Hofmann’s inventory of Brahms’s library. Moreover, her interpretations of poems in light of others gleaned from sources that Brahms owned or might have consulted offer a more nuanced understanding of a poem’s themes than reading it alone. She connects the militaristic connotations of “Auf dem Kirchhöfe,” which originated in Liliencron’s collection titled Adjutantenritte (written in 1883), to an allusion to the Bach chorale “O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden” in Brahms’s setting (Op. 105, No. 4) (277). She also relates biblical symbolism in Rückert’s poem “Führung” (No. 12 in his “Neue Lieder,” subtitled “written in my fortieth year”) to the title and theme of life’s tribulations in “Mit vierzig Jahren,” a poem that Brahms set as Op. 94, No. 1 (340). Additionally, Loges discusses Brahms’s response to two competing literary trends, German Romanticism and Realism, that emerge in the nineteenth century. These categories distinguish Brahms’s admiration for poets who “Goethe and Schillered”—that is, emulated Classical literary forms and themes—from his interest in contemporary poets like Georg Daumer, Storm, Gottfried Keller, Hebbel, and Liliencron, who expressed more sensual-corporeal ideas, highlighting Brahms’s attraction to the developing literary trends of his day.

Through the lens of “Brahms the Reader,” Loges provides new insights about Brahms’s preoccupation with translations of poetry from a diverse range of languages. An Italian influence pervades the work of Heyse and Kopisch—whose Agrumi, an 1838 collection of Italian folk lyrics and legends that Brahms read in 1873 (in a complete edition of Kopisch’s work)—as well as poetry by Kugler, who studied Italian sources despite his “firmly Prussian” political stance and lack of travel to Italy (390). The entry on Hugo Conrat clarifies the authorship of Hungarian poems that interested Brahms, while entries on Siegfried Kapper and Josef Wenzig describe Brahms’s care for German translations that preserved characteristic metrical features of Slavic poetry and explain the political “otherness” that stigmatized poetry from the “eastern reaches of the Hapsburg Empire” and its reception in Germany (77). She also relates biblical symbolism in Rückert’s poem “Führung” (No. 12 in his “Neue Lieder,” subtitled “written in my fortieth year”) to the title and theme of life’s tribulations in “Mit vierzig Jahren,” a poem that Brahms set as Op. 94, No. 1 (340). Additionally, Loges discusses Brahms’s response to two competing literary trends, German Romanticism and Realism, that emerge in the nineteenth century. These categories distinguish Brahms’s admiration for poets who “Goethe and Schillered”—that is, emulated Classical literary forms and themes—from his interest in contemporary poets like Georg Daumer, Storm, Gottfried Keller, Hebbel, and Liliencron, who expressed more sensual-corporeal ideas, highlighting Brahms’s attraction to the developing literary trends of his day. Finally, Loges contrasts Brahms’s lifelong interest in setting translations with his pro-German sentiments, reflected in novels such as Tieck’s Phantasus, which expresses “the Romantic championing of Medieval Germany”—a prevalent theme in some of Brahms’s early settings. Her acknowledgement of poets’ scholarship in foreign languages, such as Tieck’s German translation of Shakespeare’s The Tempest (1794) or reading of Cervantes’s Don Quixote in the Spanish original,
further broadens readers’ understanding of cultural influences that affected Brahms’s poets.

While the book’s original research and detailed footnotes will appeal to scholars, performers will also find an accessible guide to Brahms’s songs in Loges’s compendium. Her perceptive musical analyses offer a wealth of insights. Eloquent poetic translations, analyses of each poem’s meter and sonorous qualities, and interpretations of poetic meaning appear alongside descriptions of Brahms’s handling of declamation, tonality, and musical form in most entries. Loges also identifies Brahms’s treatment of similar poetic images or narratives in different songs, a feature that will help performers program compelling recitals based on a unified theme. Music examples illustrate the analyses and compare other composers’ settings of the same poetry to Brahms’s own, including Ferdinand Hiller’s setting of Platen’s “Wie rafft’ ich mich auf in der Nacht” (Op. 41, No. 3), Josephine Lang’s setting of Christian Reinhold’s “An den See” (Op. 14, No. 4), and Zoltán Nagy’s settings (titled Ungarische Liebeslieder) of Hungarian texts by Hugo Conrat (308, 320, 74). In connection to the recent publication of Brahms in the Home and the Concert Hall: Between Public and Private Performance, edited by Loges and Katy Hamilton (2014), the volume under review also includes details about performance practice. These are gathered from Brahms’s letters to performers in his circle, as well as musical observations by familiar and trusted arbiters of his work, such as Clara Schumann and Elisabeth von Herzogenberg. The entry on Hans Schmidt likewise draws attention to developing conventions of Lieder performance in Brahms’s time. In describing Schmidt’s collaborations with Brahms’s contemporary Raimund von zur-Mühlen, a tenor with whom the poet formed a traveling duo that was among the first of its kind to perform full concerts of songs (371), Loges encourages performers to consider the original practice of programming songs in nineteenth-century recitals.17

Loges’s compendium is a remarkable scholarly achievement and a wonderful reference book for scholars and performers that will surely be welcomed by the Brahms community. Whether readers study the entire volume or occasionally dip into this rich resource, they will undoubtedly be rewarded and inspired by the depth of meaning that Loges finds in personal relationships that shaped the lives of Brahms and his poets, as well as in their collective production of literature and songs.

Loretta Terrigno

Robert Pascall 1944–2018

With the passing of Robert Pascall, modern Brahms research has lost a central figure, as documentary scholar, analyst, and, most prominently, editor.

Following an early interest in musical analysis and formal procedures for his doctoral dissertation, Robert was increasingly devoted to the re-examination of Brahms manuscript and printed sources, especially of the symphonies, of which his knowledge became unrivaled. His fascination with Brahms source studies found focus in his seminal article “Brahms and the Definitive Text” in his edited volume Biographical, Documentary and Analytical Studies (Cambridge University Press) of 1983.

Robert’s text-critical work found a natural outlet in the emerging plans for a new critical edition of Brahms’s works, which went back to the early 1980s with ongoing discussions. His work became central to it, not least in the long-protracted planning of the editorial guidelines, all reflected in his edition of the First Symphony that inaugurated the Johannes Brahms Gesamtausgabe in 1996. This volume set a model for what has followed, which has included his editions of the other symphonies in both the orchestral and piano (four-hand and two-piano) versions. Robert was Vice Chairman of the (formerly named) Trägerverein of the edition, and aptly described by editorial colleague Michael Struck as its “Guter Geist.”

Latterly, Robert’s discovery of Brahms’s continuo realizations for several Bach cantatas performed in Vienna, and about which he wrote for this Newsletter in Fall 2013, will form another volume, one of several source discoveries to his credit. Another, the early, Bach-inspired Gavottes that he discovered as a young man in the Photogrammarchiv of the Austrian National Library in Vienna, eventually led to his recent book connecting one of them, as well as the Sarabande of the Op. 88 slow movement, to the Clarinet Quintet: Brahms Beyond Mastery (RMA/Ashgate, 2013).

Nor was Robert’s work purely philological. As a practical musician (he was organ scholar at Keble College Oxford, and extensively engaged in orchestral and choral performance during his long professorship at Nottingham University—he moved subsequently to Bangor University as Professor), he applied his scholarship to performance, notably advising Sir Roger Norrington, Sir Charles Mackerras, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, and Marin Alsop on historically informed performance of Brahms. Their extensive Brahms recordings reflect this; Mackerras also included Robert’s reconstruction of the first performed version of the second movement of the First Symphony in his recording.

Robert’s understanding of sources was also rooted in his long interest in musical analysis and a wide interest in other German music, including that of Robert Franz, Franz Schmidt, and Bruckner. In 1978 he inaugurated the UK International Conference on 19th-Century Music, and was a founding member of the journal Music Analysis from 1982 and its Chairman 1989–2002. He served as Council Member of the Royal Musical Association 1986–1991 and was made an honorary member in 2009. He was an Honorary Professor of Music Philology at Cambridge University, and from 1983 a Corresponding Director of the American Brahms Society.

Robert and I first met all of 44 years ago (at a conference on Guillaume Dufay at the University of Cambridge), and we remained close colleagues and friends for that whole period. Like so many Brahmsians, I will miss not only his wide knowledge and wise counsel, but his generous support—and his gentle humor.

Michael Musgrave 31 August 2018

Brahms News

We remind readers that the international conference The Intellectual Worlds of Johannes Brahms will be held 1–3 February 2019 at the Claire Trevor School of the Arts, University of California, Irvine. Keynote speakers and their presentation topics are: Julian Horton (Durham University), “Brahms and the Theory of Romantic Form”; and Natasha Loges (Royal College of Music), “Femininity, Fragments, and Fingers: Brahms’s Intellectual World in the 1860s.” More information is available at the conference website, http://brahmsonthepacific.com. For the full program, see http://brahmsonthepacific.com/index.php/program/. The conference is partially funded by the ABS.

The 2018 Brahms Award at The Ohio State University recognized outstanding performances of two students: Nora Dukart, violinist, who performed chamber and solo works of Mendelssohn, Bruch, Smetana, and Saint-Saëns; and Stephen Forster, cellist, who performed Brahms’s E-Minor Cello Sonata. The Brahms Fund was established by longtime ABS member and emeritus professor of philosophy Tony Pasquarello, in memory of his son, violinist A. Joseph Pasquarello, and in honor of Johannes Brahms.

Geiringer Scholarships Awarded

At its annual meeting in San Antonio on 2 November 2018, the Board of Directors voted to award Karl Geiringer Scholarships to two PhD students: Ji-Young Kim of Cornell University and Reuben Phillips of Princeton University. About her dissertation Ji-Young Kim writes:
The music of Robert Schumann has long prompted discussions about the physical and the ideal, embodiment and disembodiment, utterance and imagination. Relatively, scholars have analyzed how, in Brahms’s piano works, allusion and counterpoint take on affective meaning in acts of performance. My dissertation, “Innere Stimmen and Hidden Duets in the Piano Music of Schumann and Brahms,” explores these domains through the lens of “four-handedness”—the evocation of four-hand playing in solo keyboard works.

Recompositions between two-hand and four-hand repertoire provide a historical anchor and open hermeneutic horizons. The dissertation then culminates with two extensive case studies—on Schumann’s Improptus sur une romance de Clara Wieck, Op. 5, and Brahms’s Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 9—where circumstantial evidence hints at four-handedness as a rich channel for experiencing and communicating musical knowledge and intimacy. Interactive modes of engagement in Schumann’s Op. 5 set the stage for Brahms’s Op. 9 two decades later. Drawing on music analysis and primary sources, I elucidate how counterpoint, choreography, and allusion come together to release their emotional power at a particular moment in the year 1854.

In his dissertation, “Brahms as Reader,” Reuben Phillips contextualizes Brahms’s creativity in the 1850s and ‘60s through a consideration of the composer’s engagement with German literature. Drawing on archival research conducted in Vienna, part one of the dissertation is devoted to an investigation of Brahms’s early notebooks of literary quotations known—since their abridged publication in 1909—as Des jungen Kreislers Schatzkästen. In addition to teasing out the aesthetic ideas articulated by the entries in Brahms’s collection, Phillips’ investigation reveals the extent to which, in gathering entries, Brahms was following in Robert Schumann’s footsteps and actually repurposed many of his mentor’s previously-assembled literary treasures. An appendix provides a full transcription of the surviving Schatzkästen source materials. The later chapters of the dissertation enlist Brahms’s beloved works of German Romantic literature in the examination of two compositions from the 1860s: the Trio for Piano, Violin, and Waldhorn, Op. 40, and the Magelone Romanzen, Op. 33. Following the lead of early critics, Phillips explores these singular offerings in the fields of chamber music and song as innovative musical responses to themes and motifs central to the literature of German Romanticism.

Last year’s Geiringer winner Lucy Liu writes of her now completed project, “Musical Prose and Modular Discourse in Select Works by Brahms” (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2018):

This dissertation studies a specific type of Brahmsian “musical prose.” Schoenberg defines musical prose as “the direct and straightforward presentation of ideas, without any patchwork ... and empty repetitions.” Current scholarship holds that developing variation is the primary way of generating musical prose. Yet a number of “prose“-like pieces by Brahms exhibit almost no developing variation. Instead, they employ what I call modular discourse, which does not rely on traditional motivic/thematic working-out to generate new content. Modular discourse presents incises that are not related by a common denominator, and a great number of them very quickly. To demonstrate modular procedures at local and higher formal levels, I analyze the slow movements of Symphonies nos. 1 and 2, the scherzo of Symphony no. 4, the C-major intermezzo of Op. 119, and the allegretto of Op. 135 by Beethoven. All the symphony and quartet movements are made up of multiple rotations. My goal is twofold: within a phrase, to pin down the logic of succession from one module to the next. This is necessary because, on the surface, there is no thread governing the modules’ progression, since each idea seems self-contained and does not call for particular continuations. On a larger scale, I trace the formal-functional recontextualization of modules in later rotations to explain a perceived paradox: given the lack of development of these modules—they often return verbatim or simply transposed—what factors are responsible for the changes in expressive meaning of later rotations? Even though the order by which modules appear is preserved from rotation to rotation, the causal logic usually guaranteed by rotational treatment is missing, leading to a defamiliarization of upcoming material at every turn.

The Society congratulates all three winners!

The ABS welcomes applications for the 2019 competition from students in the final stages of preparing a doctoral dissertation written in English. Guidelines for applications are found on the Society’s website. Materials should be submitted electronically as pdf files to Paul Berry, paul.berry@yale.edu, by 1 June 2019.

Recent Publications

Books and Articles


Scores


Continued on p. 12
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 2019 (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.
Editors’ Notes

The editors thank the contributors to this issue. William Horne is Professor Emeritus at Loyola University New Orleans, where his scholarly work was supported by the Francisco M. Gonzalez, M.D. Endowed Professorship. His Brahms research has appeared in The Musical Quarterly, Notes, The Journal of Musicology, The Journal of Musicological Research, and various essay collections. With Valerie Goertzen, he is Co-Editor of this Newsletter. As a composer, his music has appeared on the Centaur and Blue Griffin labels, including a recent release, Songs by William Horne (Blue Griffin Recording 477).

Loretta Terrigno is on the music theory faculty at The Juilliard School. She earned a Ph.D. in music theory and musicology from the City University of New York, The Graduate Center, with a dissertation that explores temporality in Brahms’s solo Lieder. She holds a B.M. and M.M. in music theory and piano performance from the Mannes College of Music. Her reviews and articles appear in the journals Music Research Forum, Nineteenth-Century Music Review, Notes, and Music Analysis. Her research focuses on nineteenth-century German Lieder, musical narrative, Schenkerian studies, and intersections between performance and analysis.

We are grateful to Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Sandberger and Mr. Stefan Weymar for providing the image of Brahms on the cover. Ideas, correspondence, and submissions for the Newsletter are always welcome. Materials for the Spring 2019 issue should be sent to the editors by 1 March.