

Brahms

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Brahms in Italian

In 1887, indulging his love of beautiful landscapes and mountains, Brahms spent the summer in the Swiss village of Hofstetten bei Thun, a farming community virtually adjoining the town of Thun in the Bernese Oberland. Here he rented the top floor of a large farmhouse on the banks of the River Aar, just at the point where the river, having flowed 40 miles from the capital city of Bern, empties into Lake Thun, the large and lovely lake at the foot of the massive Bernese Alps beyond.

The previous summer, equally spent in Thun, had been a particularly productive one, resulting in the second Cello Sonata op. 99, the Violin Sonatas opp. 100 and 108, and the third Piano Trio op. 101. Brahms had composed two of his most famous songs, “Wie Melodien zieht es mir,” and “Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer” (published in op. 105), and had the pleasure of rehearsing them with the object of his latest flirtation, Hermine Spies – rumors swirled in places as distant as Hamburg and Vienna that he was getting ready to marry.

he wrote over the course of his life, a message written entirely in Italian. The card is addressed to the singer and conductor George Henschel (1850–1934), and is entirely made up of phrases commonly in use by composers for their music, with a few variations perhaps emboldened by the weeks Brahms had spent in Italy earlier that year (Figure 1, page 3).

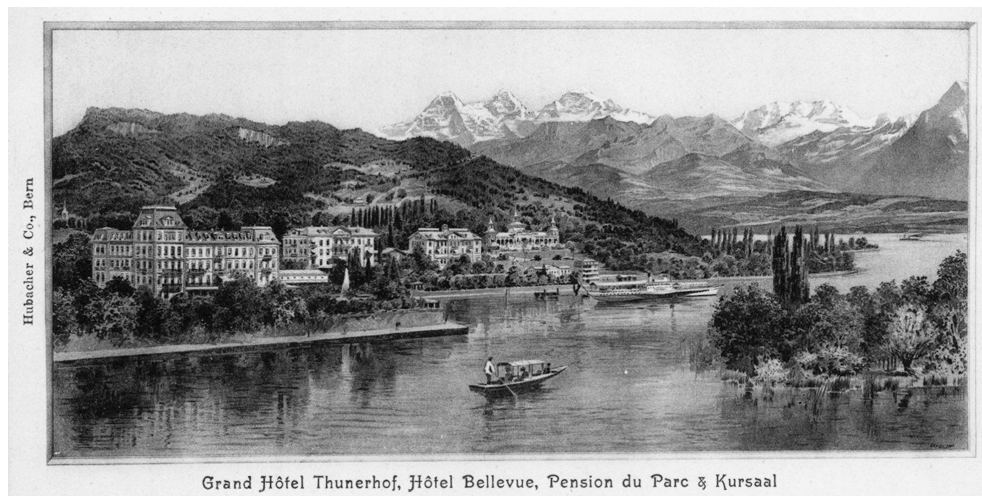
Johannes Brahms in Thun to George Henschel in London, Thun, 10 August 87²:

*Menuetto grazioso da capo
e poi lo stesso con variazioni
elegantissimi ed ancora
dal Segno e da capo
col Repetizione ecc.*

Cordiali saluti!

J. B.

This paper is written in an attempt to discover what led Brahms to write such a curiosity, and why in particular to George Henschel.



An enduring attraction of Thun was the proximity, in nearby Bern, of the writer and journalist, Josef Victor Widmann. With the enthusiastic encouragement of the family, Brahms was a frequent visitor to the Widmann family home in Bern, spending virtually every Sunday with them during his three summers in Thun, at times unceremoniously inviting himself for a dinner or a weekend.¹ As he was godfather to their young daughter Johanna, Brahms would occasionally address Widmann as “father of my bride.”

The summer of 1887 was devoted to a single work, Concerto in A minor for Violin and Violoncello, the Double Concerto op. 102. But it also yielded the rarest of all the many post cards

Brahms and Henschel first met in 1874, at the Nieder-rheinisches Musikfest in Cologne. Henschel had been engaged to sing the part of Sampson in Händel’s oratorio of the same name. Henschel describes the experience vividly in his memoir of 1918, *Musings and Memories of a Musician*, from which it is evident that the two men immediately found themselves in a congenial friendship.³ Henschel and Brahms did not meet again until the next spring, but it’s clear that Brahms kept the singer in mind, and even made plans to hear him sing again in Bonn towards the end of the year:

Johannes Brahms to Georg Henschel, 13 December 1874 (Figure 2)⁴:

L[ieber]. Fr[eu]nd. Gleichzeitig mit Ihnen soll diese Carte in Berl[in]. eintreffen und Ihnen noch ausdrücklich sagen (obwohl Sie es wissen!) wie sehr ich bedauert habe, durch Erkältung verhindert zu sein nach Bonn zu gehen! Ich zweifle nicht daran, daß die Serenade sich sehr gut gemacht hat und beifällig aufgenommen worden ist. Hoffentlich höre ich sie bald einmal [continued in the margin:] anderswo. Seien Sie herzlichst begrüßt von Ihrem J.B.

Bonn, 13.12.74.

Dear friend, This card should arrive in Berlin at the same time as you, to tell you expressly (although you know it!) how much I regretted that a cold prevented me from going to Bonn! I don't doubt that the Serenade did very well and was received with approval.⁵ I hope that I will hear it soon somewhere else. Warmest greetings from your J.B.

In fact, by the time of this message, Brahms had already hired Henschel to sing the role of Christ in his performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* for the coming Viennese performance in March 1875, as well the role of Odysseus in Max Bruch's secular oratorio op. 41 in April, a concert that would mark Brahms's last as conductor of the Orchestra of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. Their friendship seems to have been securely established during that time, as described with warmth by Henschel in his memoir.⁶

Telling proof of Brahms's appreciation of his new friend is the fact that for the rest of his life he saved Henschel's letters, rather than tossing them in the waste paper basket as was his usual practice. The next summer he invited Henschel to join him for a few weeks during his vacation on the island of Rügen, and a steady and cordial contact between them remained, never broken, even during the years Henschel spent in Boston as the first conductor of the newly-formed Boston Symphony and thereafter in Great Britain.

Brahms was the instigator of a boisterous joint letter written to Henschel in Munich in November 1876, where a slightly giddy group of Brahms's friends had gathered in a fine mood, presumably in the glow of the successful premiere of the First Symphony in Karlsruhe one week earlier (4 November), the performance in Mannheim a few days after that, and the forthcoming performance in Munich a few days hence. Henschel, not present, was clearly missed.⁷ One can gather from the signatories that he was already known to these close friends of Brahms: Julius Allgeyer (1829–1900), Hermann Levi (1839–1900), and possibly to a young singer with the Royal Court Opera in Munich, Cornelia Meyzenheim (1843–1923), who also signed the letter.

By 1877 Henschel had moved to England, where success was almost immediate. His outstanding musical abilities included presenting himself as a conductor: he informed Brahms in a letter of 20 October 1879 that he would be conducting the First Symphony op. 68 and the *Triumphlied* op. 55 in a benefit concert for a children's hospital. For the choral work it would be the first performance in England.⁸ By 1886, Henschel had gathered enough financial support to establish his own orchestra, "The London Symphony Concerts," London not having a regular orchestra during the late autumn and winter months, but only a limited season in the spring – the fashionable London Season so much a part of England's social scene. By that time Henschel had married a young American from New England, his former student, and had already spent three years in America as the

first conductor of the brand-new Boston Symphony Orchestra. When living in London, he traveled every summer to America to visit his wife's family. During all this time, Brahms was in the most friendly contact with him, urging him and his wife, for example, to visit him in Pressbaum during the summer of 1881, and congratulating him on the birth of their daughter while explicitly excluding the congratulations from applying to the news that Henschel would be spending his second year as conductor in far-away Boston.⁹

So there can be no doubt about the enduring and relaxed friendship between the two men. If there were anyone to whom Brahms would write such a playful postcard as the one composed of Italian musical instructions, it is not surprising that it should have been to Henschel. But to get any idea of what might have prompted it, we have to return to the Thun summer of 1887.

It was a summer perhaps more relaxed than some others, including visits from several of his best friends. Brahms had arrived in Thun after an almost three-week holiday in Italy. Re-established on the entire top floor of the farmhouse on the Aar, he was again in regular contact with the Widmann family. Max Kalbeck and Eduard Hanslick and their wives came to visit, and Simrock and his wife were urged to come, too. Gustav Wendt (1827–1912) spent time there as well, the distinguished classicist and head of the Gymnasium in Karlsruhe where he and Brahms had met many years before. Brahms and Wendt enjoyed each other's company, meeting over the course of several summer holidays; in 1884 Wendt had honored him by dedicating to him his important translation of the plays of Sophocles, a translation that remained in print for decades. Brahms's flirtation with the singer Hermine Spies continued. He attended a wrestling match with a visitor, and a few days later made a little boat trip with Widmann and Wendt to the pretty vacation town of Merlingen, halfway towards Interlaken on the far shore of the Thuner See.

This apparently tranquil atmosphere is not the whole story, however. In a letter most unusual for the normally close-mouthed writer, that summer Brahms described to an old friend the conditions he required in order to create. The recipient was the pianist and actress Ellen Franz, now Helene Freifrau von Heldburg, already known to him long before her marriage. He needed to explain why he had turned down a tempting invitation to join her and her husband, Georg II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, on holiday.

... I would like to begin with something I have wanted to say to you in strict confidence for the longest time.... Let me now acknowledge that ... I need absolute solitude, not only in order to accomplish what I am capable of, but also, quite generally, to think about my vocation. This is rooted in my temperament, but it may also be readily explained otherwise.

For we "little folk" must realize early on what we are obliged, sadly, to do without.

Well, someone like me, who finds enjoyment in life and in art beyond himself, is only too much inclined to savor both—and to neglect other matters. That might even be the right and the smartest thing to do. But just now, with a new and major work sitting finished before me, I really do take some pleasure in it and have to say to myself: I would not have written it had I enjoyed life ever so splendidly on the Rhine and in Berchtesgaden.¹⁰

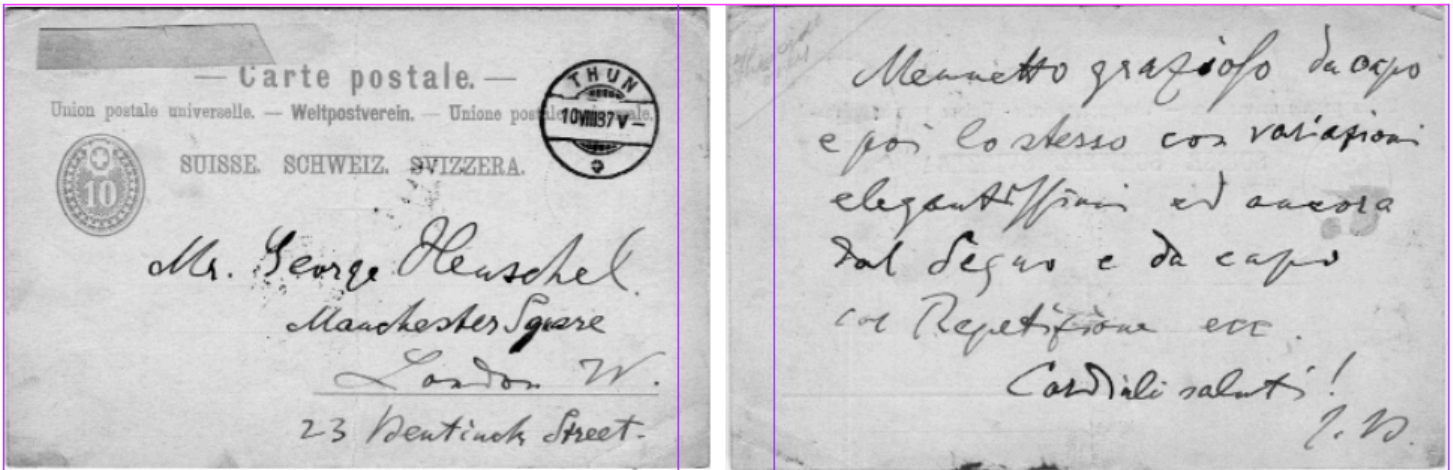


Figure 1. Brahms to George Henschel, Thun, 10 August 1887. Private collection.

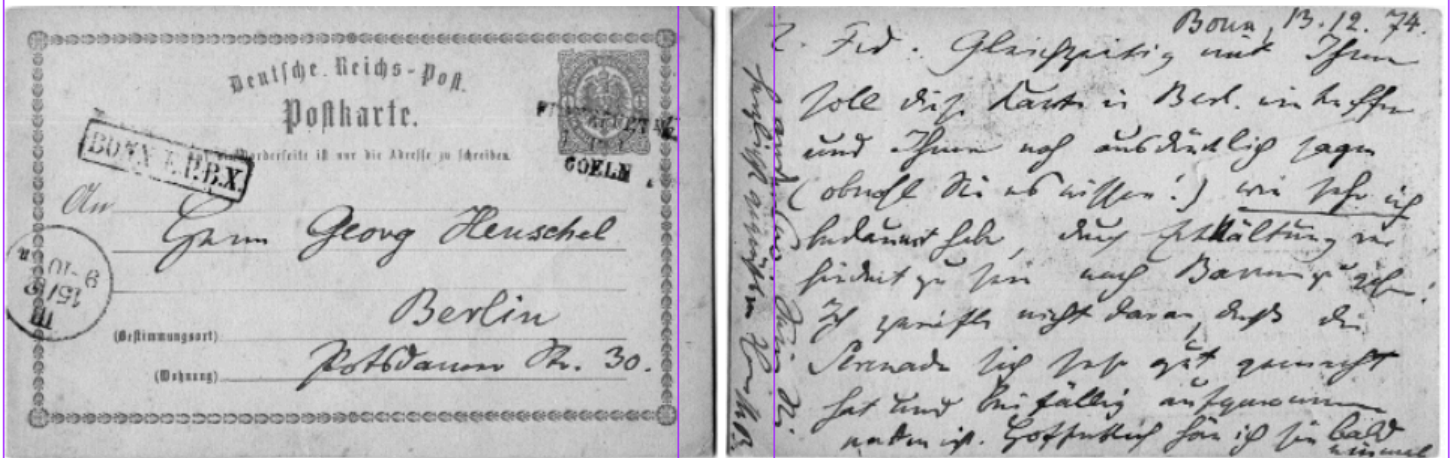


Figure 2. Brahms to Georg Henschel, Bonn, 13 December 1874. Private collection.

The date of this letter is 11 August 1887, and the “new and major work sitting finished before me” is the Double Concerto. (That he understood it as a major work is welcome news to us who love the music dearly, and is quite in contrast to his more usual custom of disparaging his own work.) The next day he packed up the score and parts, ready to send to Simrock.¹¹

On 13 August Brahms wrote to Simrock that he had “answered Henschel, in detail, as usual” [Henschel habe ich wie gewöhnlich ausführlich geantwortet].¹² *In detail as usual* ?? Henschel was by now in London, having returned from his summer visit to America. He was preparing but had not yet moved into a fine new home on Bedford Street, so that the Italian postcard is addressed to a hotel near what is now Wigmore Hall but was then Bechstein Hall, close by the neighborhood of the new house. But given that the postcard to Henschel was written a mere three days before his letter to Simrock assuring the publisher he had “written in detail as usual,” it’s hard to escape the idea that Brahms’s answer to Simrock was tongue in cheek. Henschel was surely already planning programs for his symphony concerts of the coming season, and judging from Simrock’s query as to whether Brahms had answered Henschel, it is likely that the young conductor had already been in touch with Simrock in preparation.¹³ It is possible, and I think likely, that Henschel now had word of the Double Concerto from Simrock himself, and had written to ask about score and parts for his coming season. Was the Italian postcard a playful

way for Brahms to avoid saying anything definite, or even acknowledging the work’s existence? Eventually Henschel was able to program the Double Concerto for his season, and in a postcard dated Vienna [Autumn] 1887 Brahms promised to come to the concerts on 15 and 21 February – “at any rate I don’t know of any “Ifs and Buts.”¹⁴ Henschel’s concerts actually took place on the 16th and 21st of February 1888. They were the first English performances of the Double Concerto, Robert Hausmann and Joseph Joachim traveling to England to perform the solo parts. Brahms did not, in fact, make the trip.

While we can’t know the precise circumstances surrounding the postcard in Italian, no other like it from Brahms is known.

Styra Avins

Notes. 1. For example, see *Brahms Briefwechsel*, Vol. VIII, *Briefe an Joseph Viktor Widmann, Ellen und Ferdinand Vetter, Adolf Schubring*, ed. Max Kalbeck (Berlin: Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft, 1915; repr. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1974), 65–66, letters of 11 September and 14 September 1887. In English, see Styra Avins, *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; repr. 2004), 646 for the amusing letter of 11 September. 2. Private collection, previously unpublished. 3. George Henschel, *Musings and Memories of a Musician* (London: Macmillan, 1918), 44 ff. 4. Private collection, previously unpublished. Translation by Josef Eisinger. 5. *The Serenade in*

Continued on p. 12

Text and Music in Brahms's "Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang," Op. 17, No. 1

The close examination of a song's text can sometimes provide unexpected insight into its provenance. This is the case with Brahms's choral song, "Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang," Op. 17, No. 1, which, it appears, owes its existence in part to a solo setting of the same text by Brahms's friend, Karl Georg Peter Graedener.

In the 1850s, Graedener (1812–1883) was the best-known composer in Hamburg, with his songs, piano music, and chamber music providing the foundation for his success. Brahms met him there in 1854 through their mutual friend, Theodor Avé-Lallemant.¹ Graedener, in mid-career at age forty-two, and the twenty-one-year-old Brahms, just introduced to the world by Robert Schumann's famous "Neue Bahnen" article in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, shared an enthusiasm for Robert Schumann's music, reverence for the works of J. S. Bach, an interest in choral conducting, and the ambition to have their own music played and published. Brahms took an interest in Graedener's works, writing to Clara Schumann on 3 November 1854: "You will be pleased with Graedener; that is a most gifted man. I want to show you an interesting piano sonata. His third string quartet is the most beautiful thing of his that I know. Joachim will be infinitely pleased with it; I would like to hear it played by him. It is regarded as very important. One detects in him the enthusiastic study of late Beethoven."² Brahms did not mention Graedener's songs here, but he must have known at least one of them. Proof of this comes from a comparison of the texts of Brahms's choral song, "Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang," Op. 17, No. 1, and the text of Graedener's solo Lied of the same name. Figure 1 presents the poem as published by the little-known Westphalian poet Friedrich Ruperti, and the text as it appears in Graedener's and Brahms's musical settings.³

There are small differences of orthography and punctuation between these versions, some of which may be printers' errors, but it is likely that Brahms took over the spelling of "lässt" in line 4, the omitted commas after "rinnet" and "Thränen" in line 5, and the omitted comma after "schlage" in line 6, from the text underlay of Graedener's song. More definitively, several word changes indicate that Brahms merged Graedener's version of the text with Ruperti's original version. At the end of line 7, Brahms rejected Graedener's text change to "Glück

herab," keeping Ruperti's original "in's Grab"; he also changed Graedener's "Es" at the beginning of line 3 to Ruperti's "Er." But at the end of line 8 Brahms used Graedener's "das Leben" instead of Ruperti's "mein Leben," even adopting Graedener's exclamation point rather than Ruperti's period after "Leben." Clara Schumann was enthralled with Brahms's Op. 17 songs, even going so far as to copy three of them out from Brahms's manuscript. Her Abschrift of "Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang" shows Graedener's "Glück herab" still in place at the end of line 7. Graedener's "Es" in line 3, however, is already replaced by Ruperti's original "Er." All this suggests that Brahms composed the song initially using Graedener's text underlay and gradually removed some of Graedener's text variants after consulting Ruperti's published text.⁴

Having established that Brahms knew Graedener's setting of "Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang" before writing one himself, it is instructive to compare them. Example 1 presents Graedener's setting, the text of which is translated below:

The full tone of a harp resounds,
Increasing love and longing.
It penetrates to the heart, profound and unsettling,
And causes the eye to well up.
O tears, flow down,
O heart, beat with trembling!
Love and happiness were cast down,
Life is lost!

Probably responding to the quickly changing emotions of the two stanzas, Graedener wrote a through-composed song.⁵ At the outset he spread F major chords upward in the piano, suggesting the sound of a harp, but one senses an unsettled quality in the music, as each of the first three measures begins with a tonic six-four chord. In measure 4, with the beginning of the third line of text, where the sound of the harp "penetrates to the heart," the mode darkens to F minor. The turning figure that has kept Graedener's melody fixated on the fifth scale degree unwinds and rises as the music modulates to A-flat major. The increasingly disturbed tone of the text, "profound and unsettling," is marked by this change of key. The melodic apex is reached on a high E-flat with the word "quellen," where the eye wells with tears. "Quellen" extends for four beats in the slow tempo, making it the most strongly accented word in the song by both pitch and duration. "Quellen" cadences on the first root position tonic chord in the song, but in the chromatic-mediator key of A-flat major, far removed from the song's placid opening.

Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang, Den Lieb' und Sehnsucht schwellen, Er dringt zum Herzen tief und bang Und läßt das Auge quellen.	Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang, Den Lieb' und Sehnsucht schwellen, Es dringt zum Herzen tief und bang Und lässt das Auge quellen.	Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang, Den Lieb' und Sehnsucht schwellen, Er dringt zum Herzen tief und bang Und lässt das Auge quellen.
O rinnet, Thränen, nur herab, O schlage, Herz, mit Beben! Es sanken Lieb' und Glück in's Grab, Verloren ist mein Leben.	O rinnet Thränen nur herab, O schlage Herz, mit Beben! Es sanken Lieb' und Glück herab, Verloren ist das Leben!	O rinnet Thränen nur herab O schlage Herz, mit Beben! Es sanken Lieb' und Glück in's Grab, Verloren ist das Leben!
<i>Ruperti, Dunkles Laub (1851)</i>	<i>Graedener, Op. 23, No. 6 (1856)</i>	<i>Brahms, Op. 17, No. 1 (1861)</i>

Figure 1. Fr. Ruperti's "Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang" with text variants by Graedener and Brahms

1 **Schr langsam** *p* *cresc.*
 Singst. Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang, den Lieb' und Sehnsucht schwellen, es dringt zum Herzen tief und bang und
 Pft. *pp* *p* *schr anwachsend*
 mit Ausdruck

5 *sf* *pp*
 lässt das Auge quellen. O rinnet Thränen nur her-ab, o schla-ge Herz, mit Beben! Es san-ken Lieb' und
 mit Ausdruck

9 *f* *mf* *mf* *p* *pp* *ppp*
 Glück her-ab, verlor-en ist das Le-ben! Fr. Ruperti
cresc. *mf* *pp* *ppp*

Example 1. Carl G. P. Graedener, “Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang,” Op. 23, No. 6. Hamburg: Fritz Schuberth, 1856, Pl. Nr. 981

The second stanza of Ruperti’s text descends into gloom, and Graedener’s melodic line with it, as tears “flow down” in mm. 7–8. The three-sixteenth figures in the piano depict the trembling of the heart as the music reclaims the key of F minor. In a poignant touch, Graedener leaves the piano’s low C sounding alone after the voice releases the word “Beben” (trembling). In line 7, the major mode of F is restored on “Glück” (happiness), and the song’s opening motive is recalled in a short canon, providing a brief recollection of the warmer, more lyrical opening idea as the poet remembers “love and happiness.” The most dramatic moment is reserved for “Beben’s” rhyme, “Leben,” in measure 11. It is followed by absolute silence, signifying a great loss, perhaps the loss of life itself. Since the final vocal phrase ends on a ii⁶ chord—no ending at all functionally, but a sharp breaking off—the loss seems cruelly abrupt. There is a similar gesture just before the coda in J. S. Bach’s C Minor Fugue in the *Well Tempered Clavier*; Book I, a spot that the Bach-loving Graedener surely knew. One thinks also of Robert Schumann’s “Und wüsstens die Blumen” (No. 8 of *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48), in which Heine’s final line, “Sie hat ja selbst zerrissen mir das Herz” (She has herself torn apart my heart) is followed by silence. There we also encounter Schumann’s tendency to discard a previously established piano texture in favor of emphatic chords as the final line of text makes its impact. Graedener used precisely the same technique in m. 11 of “Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang.”

Brahms probably appreciated the strong features of Graedener’s song, and it would not be quite accurate to say that his own setting makes no reference to it. Brahms seems to echo Graedener’s setting of “quellen” with long-held cadential tones and a descending leap (mm. 5–6 in Graedener’s song and mm. 22–23 in Brahms’s), for example. But Brahms hazards a strophic setting despite the strongly contrasting emotional

content of the two stanzas. The text is sung by women’s chorus accompanied by French horn and harp, a literal response to Ruperti’s reference to a harp in the first line. Brahms began with a horn call—two ascending perfect fourths separated by an ascending major second, as shown in Example 2c. This gesture belongs to a network of related musical ideas with which Brahms was engaged in the 1850s. The one shown in Example 2a is found in his letter to Clara Schumann of 6–7 February 1855. Writing from the Schumanns’ Düsseldorf home, Brahms confided, “I am in such a beautiful, peaceful, quiet mood; it is so still. Your image looks down on me so kindly that I would like to remain here for the night, thinking of you quite tenderly; perhaps you are thinking now also of me; that seems just right to me.”⁶ Later in the same letter, Brahms notated Example 2a with the comment: “It says far more than my words.”⁷ So Brahms associated this poignant two-voice fragment, which he later adapted to open the third movement of his String Sextet, Op. 36, with Clara Schumann, and with quietude, distance, separation, and longing.

Brahms continued this letter the following day: “Good morning sweetheart! Just imagine what I dreamed in the night: I had reshaped my failed symphony into a piano concerto and played it. From the first movement to the scherzo and finale—awfully difficult and vast. I was completely inspired. Also, I dreamed very much about you, and beautiful things.”⁸ Subsequently, Brahms reworked the first movement of his “failed symphony” into the first movement of his Piano Concerto, Op. 15. At the end of the solo exposition of this movement, at a moment of supreme repose, the horn intones Example 2b, with the strings whispering underneath, *pianissimo*, in measured tremolo (mm. 199–201). In a later appearance of this motive (mm. 210–215), the horn is accompanied only by the piano in harp-like broken chords. Here the horn becomes



a. In Brahms's letter to Clara Schumann of 6-7 February 1855



b. Johannes Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 15, Mvt. 1, mm. 199-201



c. Johannes Brahms: "Es tönt in voller Harfenklang," Op. 17, No. 1, mm. 1-10

Example 2. Brahms's fourth motive in "Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang," Op. 17, No. 1, and some precursor ideas



Example 3. Johannes Brahms, "Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang," Op. 17, No. 1, mm. 1-10.
Bonn: N. Simrock, 1861, Pl. No. 6133. Only the horn and harp parts are shown.

the bass over which the piano fades away into the heights. At the time Brahms wrote this ethereal passage, it would have been, so far as I know, completely unprecedented as a way of ending the solo exposition of a piano concerto.⁹ It is difficult not to associate this passage with Brahms's peaceful reverie about Clara Schumann, who is a central figure in the concerto's expressive universe.¹⁰

The horn solo that begins "Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang" combines elements already present in Examples 2a and 2b. The opening ascending fourths recall 2a both melodically and, with their solemn, measured quarter notes, rhythmically. The three-eighth anacrusis to m. 5 of Example 2c is prefigured in

2b at the ends of measures 199 and 200. An uncanny sense of aural connection between 2b and 2c comes from the fact that in its first five measures, 2c uses only the written pitches found in 2b. Also, the essential melodic trajectory of 2b is a kind of elaboration of the basic, four-note figure that begins both 2a and 2c. Passages 2b and 2c share initial *piano* dynamics, *crescendos* into high G, and performance directives suggestive of lyric eloquence: *marcato* *ma dolce*, and *espressivo*. There are also timbral associations between 2b and 2c since they both lie in the same part of the horn. This is especially apparent when 2b recurs in the recapitulation of the piano concerto movement, where the horn in D sounds a mere tone higher than the horn in

low C used in Example 2c. Daniel Beller-McKenna has pointed out that for Brahms both the horn and the harp had “a particular capacity to symbolize memory, the past, and distance.”¹¹ The opening horn call of “Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang” literally recalls musical ideas that Brahms associated with earlier times, with distance from his beloved Clara Schumann, and with the piano concerto he first imagined while dreaming of her.

The horn call that begins “Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang” reaches high G three times. With the third high G, preceded by a quickening rhythm and underpinned by a *crescendo* to *forte*, the line seems to seize its destiny firmly. Yet at that very moment the horn motive’s presumed harmonic context of C major is undercut by a B-flat in the harp (m. 5), transforming a hoped-for tonic chord into V⁷/IV. (See Example 3.) Immediately the horn line devolves into uncertainty, sinking down the scale in syncopated steps, abandoning its motivic profile, gradually receding from its *forte* dynamic, and returning in m. 8 to its opening pitches, as if by the end of its course it had gained no ground at all. The length of its final tone (mm. 9–10) suggests that a cadence has been achieved melodically, but the bass, instead of supporting a harmonic cadence, presents the opening pitches of the horn call in augmented retrograde, sinking into the depths of the harp’s range, all the while supporting the same equivocal sonority (G–C–D) with which the passage opened.

The horn and harp, then, in the space of the first ten measures before the voices enter, encapsulate the emotional trajectory of Ruperti’s poem, in which a hopeful opening is swiftly undercut by doubt and loss. The text presents little other than images and feelings. Brahms’s setting responds to this elusiveness. Repeatedly, the women’s chorus pours out confident, abundant sounds, seemingly at odds with the pessimism of the text. Afterward, however, the horn presents a broken version of the

singer’s tones. For example, when the horn repeats mm. 5–10 after the chorus has sung the first stanza, it presents a hesitant, syncopated version of the sopranos’ voluptuous melody in mm. 12–14. The women sing of how the sound of the harp swells the heart with love and longing, their dissonances on high G and E in m. 12 emphasizing their eager desire. But the horn’s syncopated line in mm. 5–10 sings back a halting, distorted version of their music, like an image in a cracked mirror. (Compare bracketed areas *a* and *a’* in Example 4.) Similarly, in the coda the horn (mm. 26–31) distorts the sopranos’ elegant, descending chromatic line from mm. 18–23. (Compare letters *b* and *b’* in Example 4.) There, in stanza one, the women sing of tears welling up, and in stanza two of life ebbing away. The horn’s response breaks their descending chromatic line up into hesitant, sighing figures in mm. 26–28 and persistently syncopates its rhythm. One is reminded conceptually of the final ten bars of the funeral march in Beethoven’s Third Symphony, where the opening melody of the movement is fragmented and distorted. If Brahms’s horn represents a persona, it is somehow flawed, unable to respond to the warmth and sensuality of the women’s lustrous choral sound.

Brahms also responds to the elusiveness of Ruperti’s text through the ambiguity of his setting’s first chord, which merely arpeggiates G, C, and D, the opening tones of the horn call. These tones, especially when played by the horn, imply the harmonic series of C major, presumably the tonic key, but the music provides no functional leading tone to C until m. 12. The Neapolitan progression in mm. 21–22 leaves little doubt that C is the tonic, but, remarkably, all the internal cadences end on the same indecisive chord that opens the song. This makes the song feel weakly punctuated—as if it cannot escape its ambiguous opening sonorities, in the same way, perhaps, that

Adagio, con molt' espressione

The image shows a musical score for Soprano and Horn in low C. The Soprano part is in treble clef with lyrics. The Horn part is in treble clef with dynamics and markings. The score is divided into systems. The first system shows the Soprano part with a repeat sign and the Horn part with dynamics *p espress.* and *f*. The second system shows the Soprano part with lyrics "Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang, den Lieb' und Sehnsucht schwellen," and the Horn part with dynamics *p* and *f*. The third system shows the Soprano part with lyrics "Er dringt zum Herzen tief und bang und lässt das Auge quell" and the Horn part with dynamics *cresc.*, *f*, *poco a poco dim.*, and *p*. The fourth system shows the Soprano part with a repeat sign and the Horn part with dynamics *cresc. f* and *dim.*. Brackets labeled *a*, *a'*, *b*, and *b'* highlight specific musical passages in the horn part.

Example 4. Johannes Brahms, “Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang,” Op. 17, No. 1. Bonn: N. Simrock, 1861, Pl. No. 6133. Only the soprano and horn parts are shown.

Example 5. Johannes Brahms, “Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang,” Op. 17, No. 1, mm. 26–31. Bonn: N. Simrock, 1861, Pl. No. 6133.

its protagonist cannot escape his emotional frailty. Moreover, despite the presence of enough tonal markers to establish C as tonic, the song’s very tonal identity comes into question at the end. The final chord (m. 31) is G–B–D–V in the ostensible key of C. (See Example 5.) So does the song end with a half cadence? Perhaps it does. Yet the concluding sonority is surprisingly satisfying. One can even plausibly hear it as a tonic.¹² So not only the internal cadences but also the final chord of Brahms’s setting are tonally ambiguous. All the features discussed here mark this song as a painful expression of failure: the failure of the opening horn solo to sustain the fulsome sound (“voller Harfenklang”) of its initial, auspicious ascents to high G; the failure of the horn to answer faithfully the alluring singing of women’s voices; the failure of inner cadences to escape the gravity of the song’s equivocal opening sonority; the failure of the final cadence to establish with certainty the “right” key. In all these failures we hear echoed the emotional fragility of the poem’s elusive speaker.

Brahms’s handling of the variants between Ruperti’s published text and Graedener’s altered version demonstrates in microcosm the great care he took over words. Brahms reinstated the end of Ruperti’s strong penultimate line: “Es sanken Lieb’ und Glück in’s Grab,” perhaps attracted to its alliteration. He was probably also put off by the weakness of Graedener’s new rhyme between lines five and seven: “nur herab” and “Glück herab.” More significantly, perhaps he wanted to establish a connection between Ruperti’s emphasis on “Grab” at the end of this line and the final couplet of Eichendorff’s “Der Gärtner,” the third of the Op. 17 songs: “Ich grabe fort und singe / Und grab mir bald mein Grab.” (“I’ll keep digging and singing / And soon I’ll dig my grave.”) The attenuated emphasis on the image of the grave strengthens the intertwined themes of love and death found in all the Op. 17 songs.

But on the other hand, like Graedener, Brahms was uncomfortable with Ruperti’s concluding verse, “Verloren ist mein Leben.” (“My life is lost.”) Perhaps he felt that the final verse crossed over into melodrama, that the personal despair it expresses was not convincingly justified in the course of the poem. Ruperti was employing a common device of Romantic poetry: to make plain the poet’s most intimate connection to the

text at its very end; the last verse’s “mein” is the poem’s sole first-person expression. In any case, both Brahms and Graedener stepped back from the depths of Ruperti’s despondency by altering the last line of text. It may be that Graedener expressed his own ambivalence about the text’s closing sentiment when, in the coda of his setting, he rehearsed fragments of earlier ideas from the song, vacillating between the major and minor modes. One would have to say, though, that Brahms’s setting, which eschewed the kind of overt text painting found in Graedener’s song, but expressed the text through musical structures that emphasize brokenness, frailty, and ambiguity, hit closer to the poet’s mark.

William P. Horne

Notes. 1. For a convenient summary of Brahms’s relationship with Graedener, see “Grädener, Carl Georg Peter,” in Peter Clive, *Brahms and His World. A Biographical Dictionary* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006): 177–79. **2.** *Briefwechsel Robert und Clara Schumanns mit Johannes Brahms und seinen Eltern*, 4 vols., ed. Thomas Synofzik (Cologne: Christoph Dohr, 2022), 1:225: “Ueber Graedener werden Sie sich doch freuen, es ist ein höchst begabter Mann. Eine interessante Sonate für Pf. will ich Ihnen zeigen. Sein 3tes Streichquartett ist das schönste was ich von ihm kenne. Joachim wird sich unendlich darüber freuen, ich möchte es von ihm hören. Sehr groß ist es gehalten, man sieht ihm das eifrige Studium der letzten Beethovenschen an.” **3.** Ruperti (1805–1867) began his professional life as a cadet in the Hanover artillery. However, possibly owing to his loss of the use of one arm in a duel, he turned to academic pursuits, studying history, literature, and languages at the University of Jena. He went to Bremen at the conclusion of his university studies, where he taught at the Hochschule. His poem “Es tönt ein voller Harfenklang” appears on p. 21 of his *Dunkles Laub. Jugendgedichte* (Bremen: Verlag von A. D. Geisler, 1851). The poem also appeared in a popular anthology of German Romantic poetry, *Blüthen und Perlen deutscher Dichtung. Für Frauen ausgewählt von Frauenhand* (Hanover: Rümpler), which ran through thirty-one editions between 1851 and 1899. The anthologized poem is textually identical to Ruperti’s originally published version. **4.** For a

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description of the Clara Schumann Abschrift, see Margit L. McCorkle, *Johannes Brahms. Thematisch-Bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis* (Munich: Henle, 1984), 60–61. The Abschrift is now located at the Heinrich Heine Institut in Düsseldorf. I am grateful to Christian Liedtke of the Heinrich Heine Institut for providing me with scans of the Abschrift. It is undated, but Clara Schumann's letter to Brahms of 22 August 1860 indicates that she had finished copying the first, second, and fourth "Harfenlieder" on that date. See *Briefwechsel Robert und Clara Schumanns mit Johannes Brahms und seinen Eltern*, op. cit., 2:712–13. Clara Schumann also owned an Abschrift of the third of the Op. 17 songs that is in the hand of an unknown copyist.

5. I am grateful to Valerie Goertzen for her help in locating a copy of Graedener's song and for her thoughtful responses to this paper.

6. *Briefwechsel Robert und Clara Schumanns mit Johannes Brahms und seinen Eltern*, op. cit., 1:296: "Mir ist so schön, so friedlich u. ruhig zu Muthe, es ist so still, Ihr Bild sieht so freundlich auf mich nieder, ich möchte die Nacht hier bleiben, recht innig an Sie denken; vielleicht denken Sie jetzt auch an mich, mir ist ganz so."

7. *Ibid.*, 297: "Es sagt immer mehr, als meine Worte." The music in Example 2a was not a momentary inspiration for Brahms. It is a more worked-out version of an idea he entered somewhat earlier in a notebook Clara Schumann had presented to him on 24 December 1854. See George S. Bozarth, "The 'Lieder' of Johannes Brahms," PhD diss., Princeton University, 1978, 153b, note 24.

8. *Briefwechsel Robert und Clara Schumanns mit Johannes Brahms und seinen Eltern*, op. cit., 1:297: "Guten Morgen, Vielliebchen! Denken Sie, was ich die Nacht träumte. Ich hätte meine verunglückte Sinfonie zu einem Clavierkonzert benutzt u. spielte dieses. Vom ersten Satz u. Scherzo u. einem Finale, furchtbar schwer u. groß. Ich war ganz begeistert. Viel habe ich auch von Ihnen geträumt u. Schönes." 9. Jacquelyn Sholes traces this "signal call" or "horn signal" motive through all three movements of Brahms's concerto, and it plays an important role in her interpretation of the work. See Jacquelyn E. C. Sholes, *Allusion as Narrative Premise in Brahms's Instrumental Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018). The intimate interplay between solo horn(s) and the delicate, high tones of the piano in the first movement of Beethoven's 5th Piano Concerto (mm. 513–20 and, especially, 560–65) may well have been in Brahms's ear when he closed his exposition in such an ethereal way. Brahms played this concerto twice in November of 1855, first in Bremen under Ernst Sobolewski (20 November) and then in Hamburg under Georg Dietrich Otten (24 November). For details, see Renate and Kurt Hofmann, *Johannes Brahms als Pianist und Dirigent* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 2006), 36–37.

10. For a critical summary of Brahms's association of his op. 15 concerto with Clara and Robert Schumann, see George S. Bozarth, "Brahms's First Piano Concerto op. 15: Genesis and Meaning," in *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Konzerts. Festschrift Siegfried Kross zum 60. Geburtstag*, edited by Reinmar Emans and Matthias Wendt (Bonn: Gudrun Schröder, 1990), 211–47.

11. Daniel Beller-McKenna, "Distance and Disembodiment: Harps, Horns, and the Requiem Idea in Schumann and Brahms," *The Journal of Musicology* 22, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 47–89.

12. Brahms was a master of plagal tonicization—using plagal sonorities, often minor iv or ii⁰⁷, to establish a major triad as I within a weakly defined tonal context. Thus, the chords in mm. 28–31 may be heard as I – i – V, or as IV – iv – I.

As part of the combined meeting of the Society for Music Theory, the American Musicological Society, and the Society for Ethnomusicology in New Orleans, the American Brahms Society sponsored the pre-conference "Brahms 2022: New Paths, New Perspectives," held 9–10 November 2022. The convergence of all three societies allowed for robust attendance. Among over 30 registered participants, there was a wide range of early-, mid-, and late-career scholars as well as students. Projecting a palpable excitement about resuming in-person meetings, attendees enjoyed a rich offering of paper topics and lively discussions. The conference gave every indication that research about Brahms is thriving.

Paper topics embraced two conference themes: "New Paths" and "New Perspectives," centering on the idea: what constitutes research about Brahms in the 21st century? Driving at the heart of this issue, Natasha Loges's keynote lecture, titled "Under Pressure: Brahms and Musicology in the 21st Century," thoughtfully and provocatively addressed the need for Brahms studies to expand beyond well-established paths, to promote a flourishing scholarly ecosystem. For instance, Loges raised awareness of sustainable scholarly practices and widened our scholarly purview by allowing the perspectives and compositions of some lesser-known female composers to inform our understanding of Brahms and his music, rather than vice versa. Our willingness to adopt such sea changes and newly oriented worldviews, whereby Brahms is shifted away from the center, as Loges indicated, might unlock essential, new scholarly and performative perspectives, thereby ensuring the continued health and growth of Brahms-related scholarship.¹

Sessions also provided a wide array of "New Perspectives," highlighting how current Brahms studies might reevaluate and extend existing work on a range of familiar subjects, including culture, identity, and musical aesthetics.² A paper by Robert Anderson titled "Reevaluating Brahms and Politics: A Perspective from Cultural Nationalism" teased apart existing descriptions of Brahms's cultural and political contexts, and reexamined constructions of Brahms's identity, ideology, and politics in relation to the concept of "cultural nationalism" and contemporary discourse about *Hausmusik*. In "The Brahmsian Sublime," David Keep reoriented reception of Brahms's music away from the aesthetic category of "beauty" and toward musical representations of "the sublime," attuning us to connections between familiar ascending sequential patterns in Brahms's *Ein Deutsches Requiem* and *Gesang der Parzen*, poetic invocations of "divine omnipotence" and "human frailty" in these works, and "the sublime's 'terrifying' and 'elevating' qualities." Tekla Babyak further analyzed expressions of divine power in the paper "Modal Humans and Tonal Gods in Brahms's *Gesang der Parzen*" by realigning an established modal-versus-tonal dichotomy onto Brahms's depictions of human versus divine elements.

The conference also offered new perspectives on Brahms's enduring relationship with literature and books.³ In a paper titled "The Afterlives of Brahms's Library: From the Viennese Courts

to UNESCO's 'Memory of the World,'" Reuben Phillips traced various ways that Brahms's library "has been brought into public view over the course of the twentieth century," thereby examining connections among these posthumous presentations of Brahms's collection and heritage studies. In a paper titled "The Influence of Post-Romantic Literature on Brahms and His Music," Marie Sumner Lott encouraged that we not only consider the influence of Romantic literature on Brahms's compositions, but that we also shift scholarly attention toward "the German Poetic Realists who were his contemporaries."⁴ Both papers by Phillips and Sumner Lott also highlight the enduring significance for Brahms studies of materials housed at the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde.

Brahms's music also continues to inspire extensions of well-established analytical methods and theories about meter, harmony, and sonata form. In a panel on Brahms and meter, Richard Cohn surveyed existing studies on hybrid dissonance, preparing further analysis of interactions between metrical dissonance, form function, and text-music relations. In "Hybrid Metric Dissonances and Formal Function in Brahms's Instrumental Music," Ryan McClelland focused on metrical properties of transitional sections, while Jason Yust, in "Multivalent Displaced Hemiolas in Brahms's Late Songs," showed the expressive potential of "multivalent metric networks." Dani Zanuttini-Frank analyzed meter as implied by parallel instances of repeated rhythmic motives in Brahms's op. 111 String Quartet. These talks offered enriching new analysis of the metrical processes at work in Brahms's music.⁵

Renewed attention to Brahms's harmonic practice was evident in Samuel Hollister's talk, "Uncanny Modulation via Syntactic Dissonance in the Second Movement of Brahms's First String Quintet," which problematized the apparent symmetry of dual Neo-Riemannian transformations and offered a way—via triangular networks—to negotiate between tonal and transformational analyses of the well-known final 13 measures of the piece.⁶ And in "Feinting Repeats, Repeating Feints: The Developmental 'Double Return,'" Benedict Taylor proposed a Sonata Theory typology to describe the specific way in which Brahms repeats, in a sonata's second "rotation," both the tonic and expositional primary theme.⁷

Finally, performance and reception studies continue to inspire new avenues in Brahmsian research. In "Art Versus Profit, George and Lillian Henschel's Performances of Brahms's Lieder," Heather Platt drew attention to the need for continued digitization of newspapers and concert programs, mining data from these materials to reevaluate the apparent truism that the Henschels unequivocally advocated for Brahms's music via their concert programming. Katharina Uhde's paper, "'Becoming' Johannes Brahms, the Composer of Violin Concerto Op. 77," shifted emphasis away from "topics of *Werktreue*, Urtext, historically informed performance," and toward performer-oriented, subjective notions of "becoming," as she explored connections between Joachim, Brahms, and her own experience as a performer of the concerto.⁸

As the American Brahms Society reflects, collectively, on past, present, and future trends in Brahms research, we may all find inspiration in the breadth, richness, and variety of paper topics that this conference motivated. Special thanks to the program committee (Styra Avins, Nicole Grimes, Lucy Liu, Laurie McManus, and Scott Murphy) for curating this

stimulating array of subjects that will surely continue to guide our scholarly path forward.

Loretta Terrigno

Notes. 1. Loges's many invaluable scholarly contributions offer examples of this practice and resources for those who wish to engage with it further. See Natasha Loges, "Hafiz between Nations: Song Settings by Daumer/Brahms and Peacock/Beamish," in *Song Beyond the Nation: Translation, Transnationalism, Performance*, ed. Philip Ross Bullock and Laura Tunbridge (Proceedings of the British Academy: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2021): 13–29, and <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/artist/46> (accessed 20 April 2023) for Loges's biographical sketches of female song composers and her contributions to "SWAP'ra Forgotten Voices" at <https://www.oxfordlieder.co.uk/explore/swapra> (accessed 20 April 2023). 2. Selected studies on these topics include Nicole Grimes, *Brahms's Elegies: The Poetics of Loss in Nineteenth-Century German Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), Daniel Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), Margaret Notley, *Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), and David Brodbeck, *Defining Deutschtum: Political Ideology, German Identity, and Music-Critical Discourse in Liberal Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). 3. Studies and bibliographies that discuss Brahms's own library include Karl Geiringer and M. D. Herter Norton, "Brahms as a Reader and Collector," *The Musical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1933): 158–68, Karl Geiringer and Irene Geiringer, "Brahms's Library in the 'Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde,' Wien," *Notes* 30, no. 1 (1973): 6–14, Kurt and Renate Hofmann, *Die Bibliothek von Johannes Brahms*, Schriftenreihe zur Musik (Hamburg: Wagner, 1974). For more recent studies, also see Reuben Phillips, "Between Hoffmann and Goethe: The Young Brahms as Reader," *Journal of the Royal Music Association* 146, no. 2 (2021): 455–89. 4. Biographical sketches about these poets also appear in Natasha Loges, *Brahms and His Poets: A Handbook* (Woodbridge: Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2017). 5. Selected existing scholarship on meter and phrase structure in Brahms's music includes *Brahms and the Shaping of Time*, ed. Scott Murphy (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018) and Ryan McClelland, *Brahms and the Scherzo* (Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010). 6. Discussion of this passage also appears in Notley, *Lateness and Brahms*, 2016. 7. This extends terminology proposed by James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy in *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). 8. Further recent research on Joseph Joachim includes Katharina Uhde, *The Music of Joseph Joachim* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2018), "Joachim and Brahms in the Spring and Summer of 1853," in *Rethinking Brahms*, ed. Nicole Grimes and Reuben Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), and Valerie Woodring Goertzen and Robert Whitehouse Eshbach, eds., *The Creative Worlds of Joseph Joachim* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2021).



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“*Brahms in Italian*,” continued from page 3

Canonic Form for String Orchestra Op. 23 by G. Henschel? There is a pun here: “beifällig” means literally “approvingly,” but here also suggests “with applause,” since “Beifall” means applause. **6.** *Musings and Memories of a Musician*, op. cit, 54 ff. **7.** See Styra Avins, “In High Spirits: Brahms and Friends to George Henschel, an Unpublished Letter,” *This Newsletter* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 1–5. **8.** See letter in Karl Geiringer, *On Brahms and His Circle: Essays and Documentary Studies*, rev. and ed. George S. Bozarth (Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2006), 342–43. **9.** George S. Bozarth, *Johannes Brahms & George Henschel, An Enduring Friendship* (Sterling Heights, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2008), 136–37 and 141, letters from Brahms to Henschel, Pressbaum near Vienna, 1881, and Ischl, June 1882. **10.** Brahms to Helene Freifrau von Heldburg, [Thun, 11 August 1887]. For the complete letter in translation see *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, op. cit., 644–46. **11.** Letter to Frau Sophie Widmann, [Thun, 12 August 1887]. *Brahms Briefwechsel VIII*, op. cit, 62, n1. **12.** *Brahms Briefwechsel*, Vol. XI, *Briefe an Fritz Simrock*, ed. Max Kalbeck (Berlin: Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft, 1919; repr. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1974), 157, letter 605. **13.** I have not been able to find correspondence between Henschel, Simrock, or Brahms that would shed additional light here. Kurt Stephenson’s *Johannes Brahms and Fritz Simrock, Weg einer Freundschaft: Briefe der Verleger an den Komponisten* (Hamburg, 1961) includes 166 letters from Simrock to Brahms: several dated 1886 and 1888, but none from 1887, either to Thun or elsewhere later in the year. Those quoted here appear in *Briefwechsel XI*, op. cit. **14.** “Ihr Motto (Honi soit) laßen Sie bei uns freundlich für die Karten gelten! Dafür soll auch ganz einfach gesagt sein, daß ich meine Ihnen das Concert für die 15 u. 21^{ten} Febr. versprechen zu können;—ich

wüßte wenigstens kein Wenn o. Aber—brauche also kein größeres Papier! So entschuldigen Sie u. seien freundlichst begrüßt von Ihrem J. Br.”/ “Kindly let your motto (Honi soit [qui mal y pense]) apply to the [post]cards! In that regard, it should be said quite simply that I believe I can promise you the concert for Feb. 15 and 21—at least I don’t know any Ifs or Buts—therefore have no need of a larger piece of letter paper! So excuse me with my friendliest greetings from your J. Brahms.” Postcard in Bern, Schweizerische Nationalbibliothek SLA-Rhyn-01-h/02, <https://www.e-manuscripta.ch/snl/content/titleinfo/1952092>. Translation by Josef Eisinger.

Editors’ Notes

Styra Avins’s research centers on Brahms and contemporaries, with particular interest in correspondence and other primary documents. Recent publications include “Brahms, Beethoven, and a Reassessment of the Famous Footsteps,” *Nineteenth Century Music Review* (2021) and chapters in *The Creative Worlds of Joseph Joachim* (Boydell, 2021), and *Rethinking Brahms* (OUP, 2022). Her chapter in *Joseph Joachim: Identities / Identitäten* (Olms Verlag) is forthcoming.

William Horne is an Emeritus Professor at Loyola University New Orleans. His writings about Brahms have appeared most recently in *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* and *The Creative Worlds of Joseph Joachim* (Boydell, 2021). He is currently working on a study of Brahms’s *Gesänge für Frauenchor mit Begleitung von zwei Hörnern und Harfe*, Op. 17. Horne is also a composer whose music may be heard on the Centaur and Blue Griffin labels—most recently *Chamber Music of William Horne, Vol. 2* (BGR 589, 2021).

Best wishes for a productive and enjoyable summer!