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THE CHARACTERSTÜCKE OF JOHANNES BRAHMS

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

THE CHARACTERSTÜCKE BEFORE BRAHMS

With the advent of the Ballades, Intermezzi, Capriccios and Rhapsodies of Johannes Brahms the musical world was to witness the apex of a development of a particular style of pianoforte composition which began in the nineteenth century with the publication in 1803 of a group of seven pieces called Bagatelles,¹ opus 33 by Ludwig van Beethoven. This style thus originated was the Characterstücke. Willi Apel² says of such Characterstücke:

A term rarely used, yet much to be recommended, to cover an important branch of 19th-century music (chiefly for the pianoforte) which includes a large repertoire of short pieces published under many different fancy names, such as Bagatelle, Impromptu, Moment Musical, Capriccio, Fantasia, etc., aside from special titles of a more or less programmatic nature, such as: Albumblatt, Der Dicter spricht (Schumann), Jeux d'eau (Ravel), The Maiden's Prayer, etc. The last title has been deliberately included here in order to hint at the vast production of third-class literature which, of course, deserves no further mention here. Briefly, the character piece is the favored and

¹"Bagatelle--A short piece, usually for the pianoforte. The name was used by Francois Couperin ('Les Bagatelles,' see his Pieces de Clavecin), and, in particular, by Beethoven, whose Bagatellen (op. 33, op. 119, op. 126) mark the beginning of the extensive literature of 19th-century character pieces." Willi Apel, "Bagatelle," Harvard Dictionary of Music, ninth edition (Cambridge, 1955).

²Ibid., "Character pieces."

characteristic form of Romantic piano music, where it serves as the vehicle of expression for every conceivable mood, thought, vision, or emotion.

Naturally, no general statements can be made with regard to so diversified and so markedly personal a repertory. However, the great majority of these pieces are written in the ternary form A B A, a form which proved especially suitable for the expression of two contrasting moods, the first dramatic (A), the other lyrical (B), or vice versa.

Robert Schauffler,³ a biographer of Beethoven, says:

The first drafts of most of the Bagatelles known as opus 33 were probably written in 1782. Here we have the first glimpse of Beethoven in his role as emancipator of music. The lad of eleven actually sounded a new note in the history of piano literature. These little pieces, though not so remarkable in content as was Beethoven's highly original use of the word 'Bagatelle,' were designed to be powerful factors in freeing the piano from its slavery to the larger forms exclusively.

Two Bagatelles without opus numbers in C minor and C major were composed in 1797 and 1803. Seven Bagatelles, as opus 33, were finished in 1799-1802 just after the Pathetique Sonata, opus 13, was completed. His pianoforte compositions, other than some variations and rondos, were mostly sonatas and sonatinas, a somewhat larger form which Beethoven must have felt he was overworking. Hence, we find the incentive to try something smaller for the piano.

In 1810 there appeared another Bagatelle, alone and without a companion or an opus number, following swiftly on the heels of the magnificent Sonata in E flat major,

³Robert H. Schauffler, Beethoven, the Man Who Freed Music (New York, 1929), pp. 17-18.

opus 81a. So again it seems that Beethoven, after finishing a major work, would relax with these smaller bagatelles. This unusual characteristic is exemplified in the next appearance of a set of Bagatelles, opus 119, which was composed in 1823 after the Sonata, opus 110 (1821), and before opus 111 in 1822.

This appearance of the Bagatelles, opus 119, is an incredible event in piano literature. At sight they seem to be very easy piano pieces, designed for young students and composed by a young Beethoven. The former statement proves to be true but they no doubt require an advanced musician for a musical and interesting performance. Occasionally, also, they betray the age of their composer and their chronological position among the piano works; for example, in number three of opus 119 there is a d⁴ which hitherto had appeared seldom; and only in the late works, such as opus 101, 106 and 111, is anything written above c⁴. Further proof that an even higher note existed at that time on the piano keyboard can be found in the following example from the Allegro movement (finale) of the Sonata in A major, opus 101:

⁴Apel, op. cit., "Pitch Names," System I.



Fig. 1--Beethoven, Sonata, opus 101, fourth movement, measures 200-203.

The long pedal tone trill in the seventh Bagatelle, opus 119, also dates the composition, or rather alters a first impression that these might be early works. This trill lasts for ten measures in the left hand while much figuration occupies the player's right hand.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for Beethoven's Bagatelle No. 7, measures 17-27. The score is written on six systems of staves, each with a treble and bass clef. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system shows a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system includes dynamic markings: *crs.*, *poco*, *a*, and *poco*. The third system continues the melodic and rhythmic patterns. The fourth system features a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a rhythmic accompaniment. The fifth system includes dynamic markings: *al f* and *piu f*. The sixth system shows a treble staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with a rhythmic accompaniment, ending with a double bar line and a *ff* marking.

Fig. 2--Beethoven, Bagatelle No. 7, opus 119, measures 17-27.

This is employed on a somewhat larger scale in the Sonatas, opera 53, 106, 109 and finally in opus 111.

These Bagatelles, opus 119, are simple harmonically and melodically; the rhythm is diversified (with a slight preference for 3/4 meter) and the form is usually simple song form. Some are very short and, as a group, they are so closely knit it seems that they would be interesting variations if a common theme could be found.

Six Bagatelles were written in 1823 as opus 126 following the great opus 120, the Diabelli Variations. These were probably finished from earlier sketches. Beethoven worked on them after the Ninth Symphony was practically complete in his mind and in the sketchbooks--at the close of 1823 at the latest. They may not have been finished until the middle of 1824. The pieces were conceived as a homogeneous series, the numbers being linked together by key relationship. On the margin of a sketch for the first Bagatelle of this opus Beethoven wrote "Cycle of Trifles" ("Kleinigkeiten"), which fact, plus their separation from each other (all but the first two) by the uniform distance of a major third and their unity of style, establishes a cyclical bond. When he offered them to the publisher in 1824 he remarked that they were probably the

best things of the kind he had ever written.⁵ They are certainly more complex material than the opus 119 and are a bit more difficult to play. Perhaps Beethoven had taken the criticisms of the earlier Bagatelle opera to heart and was consciously striving to make the new set more interesting, yet to retain the simplicity of style set forth in opus 33.

If the Characterstücke took its earliest form in the Beethoven Bagatelles, it might have arisen through a desire for a smaller form for pianoforte pieces, a form born quite naturally in the midst of the great massive structures of the sonatas.

The Ecossaise⁶ of Beethoven are characterstücke also but do not occupy a place of importance as do the Bagatelles. The first ecossaises were composed in 1823 after the aforementioned Bagatelles, opus 119, of 1822, and the Sonata in C minor, opus 111. They were written just following the massive opus 111 to provide evidence again of

⁵Alexander Wheelock Thayer, The Life of Ludwig van Beethoven (New York, 1921), Vol. III, pp. 142-143.

⁶The ecossaise, a term whose originator is not known, was a country dance in Vienna, as well as in Paris, as a change from the waltzes, German dances and Ländler in 3/4 time and as a counterpart to the galop in 2/4. The later name, Schottish, which is simply the German translation of the original, became familiar in Britain spelled "schottische," but it has no special connection with Scotland. It would seem as if these ecossaises had been the first of Schubert's works to become known outside Vienna. Erich Otto Deutsch, The Schubert Reader, translated by Eric Blom (New York, 1947), p. 50.

Beethoven's use of these smaller forms to follow up a larger work.

Although Beethoven's use of the title "bagatelle" was almost exclusive with him in the nineteenth century, "ecossaise" appealed also to Franz Schubert. Schubert composed three sets of ecossaises. The first two sets bear the dates 1815-1823 and 1815-1824. They are without opus numbers. The last set, a later work, is listed in Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians as "Damenländler und Ecossaisen," and is numbered opus 67 (1826).

Schubert, with his Viennese heritage, had an unequalled opportunity to know real dance music and to develop it. He was a member of a gay, lighthearted Viennese group which often gathered for musicales and dancing, and thus he had a constant performing stage for the more than three hundred dances that he composed. Schubert's inspired and artistic touch in writing dance music can be seen by contrasting his set of Eight Ecossaises with a set of Six Ecossaises composed by Beethoven. Beethoven's six are all written in E flat and all employ the same refrain, seemingly showing his impatience in the composition of these pieces. Schubert's eight, however, show a rarity of moods blended to make a whole. They are arranged in four pairs, each marked with a

da capo repeat. Six different keys are used throughout the set and every ecossaise has a character of its own.⁷

The Ecossaises were surpassed in charm and beauty only by the Impromptus,⁸ opus 90 and 142, and the Moments Musicaux, opus 94. When these were first performed, audiences must have been surprised by their freedom of treatment, though our modern taste finds it hard to detect anything particularly novel or striking in this direction; on the contrary, their superior beauty lies largely in the perfect harmony and congruity which exists in their poetic content. Schubert proves in all his instrumental compositions, short or long, in the sonatas and fantasies, or the impromptus and moments musicaux, that he observed the classical forms as naturally as his inspiration flowed.⁹

⁷Kathleen Dale, "The Piano Music of Franz Schubert," The Music of Schubert, edited by Gerald Abraham (New York, 1947), p. 115.

⁸Apel, op. cit., "Impromptu - a name used as a fanciful designation for 19th century character pieces of the Romantic period. The best-known examples are Schubert's Impromptus opus 90 and opus 142 and Chopin's Impromptus op. 26, 36, 51, 66. The title does not refer to the presence of improvisatory elements in these pieces (all of which are in straight style and form), but is meant to characterize their somewhat casual origin in the mind of the composer."

⁹August Spanuth, Preface to Selected Piano Compositions by Franz Schubert (Boston, 1912), p. vii.

Schubert's beautiful and pleasing piano music has been neglected in the concert world. While Mendelssohn, Chopin and Schumann have enjoyed a vast popularity, Schubert has, by comparison, been left out of the minds of music lovers. Liszt did much to call attention to the wealth of music left by this Viennese composer by programming it and by his own arrangements of some of Schubert's work, for example the Soirees de Vienne. Schubert's music may still find a recognition and popularity all its own, being a welcome respite from the music of the progressives, such as Debussy, Ravel and Scriabine, which can be tiring if heard at too great a length, or as a naive and delightful contrast to the rich music of Chopin and the powerful and sentimental music of Schumann.¹⁰

Schubert, as a musician, ranks highest as the most original and productive lyric composer that the world has ever heard. By transferring the form of the "Lied" to the pianoforte, as in his impromptus and especially in his moments musicaux, he established a model for miniature piano works which was to be widely imitated by Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin and Brahms.¹¹

¹⁰Ibid., pp. viii-ix.

¹¹Theodore Baker, Preface to Franz Schubert, Composition for the Piano (New York, 1897).

Felix Mendelssohn's major representatives of characterstücke are the Songs Without Words (Lieder ohne Worte).¹² There are eight volumes with the following opus numbers: 19, 30, 38, 53, 62, 67, 85 and 102. Each volume contains six "Songs." Although these works do not display the finest of Mendelssohn, their abundance and popularity cannot be overlooked.

Just as the term "Nocturne" is always associated with the name of Chopin so has the "Song Without Words" become almost a synonym for the name Mendelssohn, not only because he probably invented this original and suitable title but because in these wordless songs he has addressed his largest audiences.¹³

Further explanation for their popularity is found in Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians:¹⁴

Mendelssohn saw music from a hedonistic standpoint; thus, one of his principal objectives was, simply, to give pleasure. Therefore, his melodic invention is frequently limited by a desire to exact the minimum of intellectual effort on the part of his audience.

¹²Apel, op. cit.; "'Lieder ohne Worte' - Songs without Words, the title of several of F. Mendelssohn's collections of piano pieces, written in the style of a Lied, that is, with a singable melody and a pianistic accompaniment, frequently in broken-chord patterns."

¹³Constantin Sternberg, "An Appreciation," Preface to Felix Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words (New York, 1915), G. Schirmer, Inc.

¹⁴Percy M. Young, "Mendelssohn," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, fifth edition, edited by Eric Blom (London, 1954).

Biographer Schima Kaufman¹⁵ perhaps underestimates their musical significance in saying:

His Songs Without Words have been thumped out on conservatory pianos, whistled by street urchins, and ground out by roving bands and hurdy-gurdies. His very success with these 'graceful trifles,' in the minds of thousands obscured the path to his truly important works. The author of a charming primer was not suspected of having been the author of a brilliant book for adults as well! Il Trovatore and Otello!

A more reliable opinion is that of Robert Schumann.¹⁶ He is more sympathetic and apparently admired the "Songs" for their simplicity. He wrote of the opus 53:

At last another book of genuine Songs Without Words. They differ little from Mendelssohn's earlier ones save in their greater simplicity and, in the melodic sense, in their lighter, often popular tunes. This remark applies especially to the number which the composer has himself entitled 'Folk Song'; it springs from the same source from which Eichendorff, for instance, drew his admirable poems. . . . We can never have too many of these. This popular vein, which is beginning to show itself in many compositions by our younger artists, excites bright hopes for the immediate future--an open eye might have perceived intimations of it in Beethoven's last works--though this may appear strange to many people. The third song, in G minor, is also popular in tone, but unlike that of a chorus; it sounds more like a four-part song. Let it also be noticed that in his Songs Without Words Mendelssohn has progressed from the simple Lied through the duet to the polyphonic and choral style. This is often the case with the truly inventive artist; at the very time when one is inclined to believe that he cannot make further progress, quite unexpectedly he has

¹⁵Shima Kaufman, Mendelssohn, A Second Elijah (New York, 1934), p. 313.

¹⁶Robert Schumann, On Music and Musicians (New York, 1946), p. 212.

already taken a step forward and won new ground. It cannot be denied that some other things in this fourth book remind us of older pieces from the earlier volumes; certain turns and repeated figures even threaten to become mannerisms. This, however, is a reproach that a hundred other artists would gladly purchase with sacrifices--I mean the reproach of being so recognizable from a certain turn that everyone could take his oath upon it. Therefore let us joyfully look forward to many new collections!

With such an enthusiastic publication as this last essay, it would seem that Mendelssohn would be a great admirer of his champion, Schumann. On the contrary, Mendelssohn, although a personal friend, always reserved his opinion of Schumann's musicianship. Mendelssohn's attitude towards Schumann could be accounted for by the fact that Schumann's occupation as a newspaper critic might have been distasteful to Mendelssohn and that the latter could not reconcile himself to the idea of a journalist and musician being united in the same personality.

It should be taken into consideration how very opposite they were to each other in temperament as in methods of musical output. Annie Patterson¹⁷ discusses this difference in personality:

Even in personality they were diverse: Schumann was reserved and taciturn and did not shine in social converse, preferring letter-writing to speech whenever possible. Mendelssohn, with his wondrous charm of expression and magnetic personality--although also an adept at correspondence--was the pet and idol of society, never failing to fascinate whatever circle he moved in by his polished and bright manner and address.

¹⁷Annie W. Patterson, Schumann (London, 1903), p. 25.

Added to this, the music of the two men is so diverse: the clear form, smooth harmonies and general symmetry of Mendelssohn's have little in common with the veiled mysticism and, at times, intense passion displayed in the daring tone combinations of Schumann.

Schumann's representatives of the characterstücke are considerably more vast than any other composer's heretofore mentioned. There are so many of these "character pieces" in Schumann and they have assumed such a prominent and permanent place in all piano literature that it is amazing that from the simple bagatelles of Beethoven there has sprung a medium or style of enormous proportions in the works of Schumann and Chopin yet not to reach its peak until Brahms.

While the aforementioned composers usually included a number of pieces under one collective title, Robert Schumann went a step further toward individualization and programmatic thought by choosing separate names for each piece, for instance in his Kinderszenen, opus 15, or the Fantasiestücke, opus 12.¹⁸

This latter musical monument contains "Des Abends," "Aufschwund" (the popular "Soaring"), "Warum," "Grillen,"

¹⁸Apel, op. cit., "Character pieces."

"In der Nacht" (Schumann's favorite of the group),¹⁹ "Fabel," "Traumes Wirren," and "Ende vom Lied." Although they are all in flat keys, with the exception of "Fabel" which is in C major, and form a homogeneous whole, they can be played independently of each other without serious loss of effect.²⁰

These lyrical pieces were written in 1837, the year following the great Fantasy in C major, opus 17. Schumann chose to provide suitable names for music that was already written, not to write "up to" fancy titles; and a reflection of this laudable habit may be found in the Preludes of Debussy where the names follow instead of precede the pieces. On nomenclature J. A. Fuller-Maitland²¹ writes:

¹⁹Schumann speaks of this in an early letter to Clara Wieck: "After I had finished it, I found, to my delight, that it contained the story of Hero and Leander. Of course you know it, how Leander swam every night through the sea to his love, who awaited him at the beacon, and showed him the way with lighted torch. It is a beautiful, romantic old story. When I am playing 'Die Nacht' I cannot get rid of the idea; first he throws himself into the sea; she calls him, he answers; he battles with the waves, and reaches land in safety. Then the Cantilena [the slow middle section] when they are clasped in one another's arms, until they have to part again, and he cannot tear himself away, until night wraps everything in darkness once more. Do tell me if the music suggests the same things to you." Robert Schumann, Early Letters, translated by May Herbert (New York, 1930), pp. 274-275.

²⁰Kathleen Dale, "The Piano Music," Schumann, A Symposium, edited by Gerald Abraham (London, 1952), p. 53.

²¹J. A. Fuller-Maitland, Schumann's Pianoforte Works (London, 1927), p. 36.

For the most part Schumann's little compositions fit their names excellently. 'Des Abends' is a charming picture of evening tranquillity, and 'Aufschwung' with its buoyant rhythm gives us the energy of soaring aspiration. We need not ask what the question of 'Warum?' may be, but never was a question asked more eloquently. 'Grillen' is sufficiently whimsical, and in 'In der Nacht' we have a faithful representation of a restless night with a short sleep in the middle of it, a sleep not quite undisturbed, for the figure of accompaniment in which the arpeggios just overlap precludes the idea of deep slumber. Whether 'Fabel' is a chequered dream we cannot tell, but 'Traumeswirren' certainly is, and it is one of the most beautiful of the series. The solemn 'Ende vom Lied' forms a noble close to the whole.

Other collective names introduced by Schumann are:

Noveletten, Nachstücke, Bunte Blätter (Colored Leaves), and Albumblätter (Albumleaves). These, along with the Fantasiestücke and Carnival, opus 9, are the greater part of the pianoforte pieces of Schumann which have made his name known to the general public. Fuller-Maitland says:²²

They were more or less directly inspired by some poetical or fanciful idea, which was often avowed openly, although in some instances the external suggestion was concealed. Upon almost all of them the influence of Jean Paul Richter is powerful, and all are more or less youthful works, completed, if not published, before the composer's marriage in 1840. A great number are short pieces of the simplest form, bound to each other by some common title, and by some whimsical idea in the composer's mind. The longer pieces have seldom any more elaborate pattern than the da capo form, and while some have no recognizable form at all, a good many have short sections that are often repeated.

The later "character pieces" seem to have lost the intensity of inspiration that was obvious in the earlier

²²Ibid., p. 15.

works. Kathleen Dale²³ in her essay on Schumann's piano works says that the later pieces as a whole "indicate a change of mood from the poetic to the prosaic." She says further:

Here and there an example of the composer's former stylistic witchery enchants the listener and reminds him of the first-period works. Such pieces as Vogel als Prophet and Verrufene Stelle (Op. 82), Theme, Winterzeit, Knecht Rupprecht and No. 30 of Op. 68, the second Fantasiestück of Op. 111 and Versteckens and Gespenstermärchen (Op. 85)--to name some of the more fantastic works of 1848-9--could have been written by no one but Schumann at his best. They bear his magic imprint while many of their fellows might easily have come from the pens of his contemporaries and disciples, Kirchner, Gade, Jensen, and Sterndale Bennett. The many conventional piano pieces of Schumann's last period may add nothing to his reputation. When, however, they are considered in relationship to the production of his best and most fruitful years, they may serve to emphasize the unique and inimitable quality of his splendid earlier works. Even if Schumann had written nothing after his thirtieth year, he would still be entitled to his unassailable position as one of the most individual and imaginative of all composers of piano music.

Mention has been made of Mendelssohn's reserve in venturing opinions of Schumann, and how surprising this fact is! Schumann, however, found still less favor in the eyes of Chopin than Mendelssohn. Indeed, Chopin has been quoted as remarking that the Carnival, opus 9, was not music at all. The contemplation of this indifference of a great artist to the creations of one of his most distinguished contemporaries is saddening, especially if it is remembered

²³Dale, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

how devoted Schumann was to Chopin. Had it not been for Schumann's enthusiastic praise and valiant defense Chopin's fame would have spread more slowly in Germany.²⁴ Schumann²⁵ writes: "He is a pupil of the first masters--Beethoven, Schubert, Field. We assume that the first molded his mind in boldness, the second his heart in tenderness, the third his hand in flexibility." And further:

Combined with all this and the favorable influence of the moment, Fate also distinguished Chopin among all others by endowing him with an original and pronounced nationalism--that of Poland. And because this nationalism is in deep mourning, it attracts us all the more firmly to this thoughtful artist. It was well for him that neutral Germany did not at first receive him too warmly and that his genius led him straight to one of the great capitals of the world, where he could freely poetize and nourish his wrath. If the mighty autocrat of the North /the Czar of Russia, Nicholas I, who had crushed the Polish Revolution of 1830/ knew what a dangerous enemy threatened him in Chopin's works, in the simple melodies of his mazurkas, he would forbid this music. Chopin's works are guns buried in flowers.

The Polonaises and Mazurkas are the results of this nationalism. In the Polonaises Chopin becomes epic and dramatic:

they are historical and political--grand in their memories of misfortunes and their visions of triumphs. In them the composer transcends the limits of his subjectivity--his individual egoism expands into national egoism.²⁶

²⁴Frederick Niecks, The Life of Chopin (London, 1890), Vol. II, p. 113.

²⁵Schumann, op. cit., pp. 131-132.

²⁶Niecks, Programme Music (London, 1907), p. 215.

They conjure vivid impressions in imaginative minds but are not true representatives of characterstücke as are the Preludes, Etudes and Nocturnes. If Chopin did not create the prelude or the etude or the nocturne, he completely transformed and revived them. Although he could not improve on the preludes of Bach, he offered a modern equivalent of their beauty, perfection and variety. The etudes of Moscheles were only poor indications of the immense possible difference between the purely technical study and the artistic type originated by Chopin. Similarly, the credit for the invention of the nocturne, given by Chopin himself to John Field, is an almost over-generous tribute to a minor composer who was fortunate enough to blaze the trail for his immeasurably greater successor.²⁷

Much, of course, has been written about the Preludes but again Schumann's impressions bear better reading:

I must mention the Preludes as most singular. I will confess that I expected something quite different: compositions carried out in grand style, like his Etudes. We have almost the contrary here; these are sketches, the beginnings of studies, or, if you will, ruins; eagles' pinions, wild and motley pell-mell. But in every piece we find, in his own pearly handwriting, 'This is by Frederic Chopin'; even in his pauses we recognize him by his agitated breathing. He is the boldest, the proudest poet of these times. To be sure, the book also contains much that is sick, feverish,

²⁷Ernest Hutcheson, The Literature of the Piano (New York, 1948), p. 187.

repellent; but let everyone seek for what becomes him.²⁸

There is a prelude for every key in opus 28, starting with C major, then A minor, G major, then E minor and so on --major, relative minor, etc. They are very short but full of meaning. Some pianists program the entire set but this may be tiring listening for they were not arranged in an interesting order, that is, varied moods, fast-slow order. Usually the ear tires of slow playing more quickly than of fast playing; hence, in a sonata or symphony the proportion is normally three fast movements to one slow movement. This natural predilection of the ear should be respected and pianists should limit themselves to judicious selections of these small masterpieces.²⁹

Various essays on the Etudes present interesting and enlightening reading. James Huneker³⁰ wrote:

October 20, 1829, Frederic Chopin, aged twenty, wrote to his friend Titus Woyciechowski, from Warsaw: 'I have composed a study in my own manner.' And November 14, the same year: 'I have written some studies; in your presence I would play them well.'

Thus, quite simply and without booming of cannon or brazen proclamation by bell, did the great Polish composer announce an event of supreme interest and importance to the piano-playing world.

²⁸Schumann, op. cit., pp. 137-138.

²⁹Hutcheson, op. cit., p. 211.

³⁰James Huneker, Chopin, The Man and His Music (New York, 1900), p. 139.

Of the alleged influence of Liszt on Chopin's Etudes Huneker clarifies the question:

Lina Ramann, in her exhaustive biography of Franz Liszt, openly declares that numbers nine and twelve of opus 10 and numbers eleven and twelve of opus 25 reveal the influence of the Hungarian virtuoso. Figures prove the fallacy of her assertion.³¹ The influence was the other way, as Liszt's three concert studies show--not to mention other compositions. When Chopin arrived in Paris his style had been formed, he was the creator of a new piano technique.³²

Treatises may be written on the technical problems of each Etude but more important is the fact that each is a piece of dramatic or lyrical poetry. Chopin never gave titles to these poems, consequently they have suffered from treatment by imaginative editors. Such titles as "Revolutionary," "Harp," "Butterfly," "Winter Wind" and "Ocean" did not originate with Chopin. Again it was Schumann, in a reference to opus 25, who said of the first and familiar study in A flat that it is "more a poem than a study" and proceeded to speak of Chopin's own performance of this piece:

One makes a mistake, however, if he thinks that Chopin would have had every one of the little notes there heard clearly; it was more a surging of the A flat major chord, here and there raised on high anew by the pedal. But one perceived wonderful, great-tones melody running through the harmonies, and

³¹Chopin's Etudes, opus 10, were written in 1829; Liszt's Transcendental Etudes were written in 1851.

³²Huneker, op. cit., p. 140.

only in the middle did there appear at one point alongside that principal part a tenor voice, gradually taking shape as it rose out of the chords.³³

The Nocturnes must have occupied much of Chopin's thoughts and inspirations. Their opus numbers range from 9 to 62 with many groups of nocturnes being published under the same opus. The "mysterious" Chopin is heard in these night songs. Chopin, seldom exuberantly cheerful, is sad and complaining in many of the nocturnes, whereas Field was happier and less morbid. Chopin enriched the form originated by Field, giving it dramatic breadth, passion and even grandeur. Set against Field's naive and idyllic Nocturnes, Chopin's are often too bejewelled for true simplicity. And, also, Chopin is so desperately sentimental in some of these compositions. They are not altogether in the taste of his generation; they seem to be suffering from anemia. However, there are a few noble nocturnes; and pianists themselves may be blamed for the sentimentalizing of some others. More vigor and a less languishing interpretation will rescue them from lush sentiment. Chopin apparently loved the night and its soft mysteries, and his Nocturnes are true night pieces. Most of them are considered feminine in character, but the

³³ Alfred Einstein, Music In the Romantic Era (New York, 1947), p. 218.

poetic side of men of genius is feminine and in Chopin the feminine note was sometimes overemphasized, particularly in these nocturnes.³⁴

According to Huneker,³⁵ Chopin was

the master of his material, if not of his mortal tenement. He strove to shape his dreams into living sounds. One is loath to believe that the echo of his magic music can ever fall upon unheeding ears. He may become old-fashioned, but, like Mozart, he will remain eternally beautiful.

Five years after the publication, in 1846, of Chopin's last set of Nocturnes, opus 62 (B major and E major), the musical world beheld the first composition of a new genius, Johannes Brahms, who was to reach the summit of character-stücke composition in his Ballades, Capriccios, Intermezzi and Rhapsodies.

³⁴Huneker, op. cit., pp. 252-253.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 386-387.

CHAPTER II

THE CHARACTERSTÜCKE OF BRAHMS

Johannes Brahms' representatives of characterstücke may be catalogued in two ways; grouped according to names they are as follows:

Ballades, Op. 10, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4
Ballade, Op. 118, No. 3
Capriccios, Op. 76, Nos. 1, 2, 5, 8
Capriccios, Op. 116, Nos. 1, 3, 7
Intermezzi, Op. 76, Nos. 3, 4, 6, 7
Intermezzi, Op. 116, Nos. 2, 4, 5, 6
Intermezzi, Op. 117, Nos. 1, 2, 3
Intermezzi, Op. 118, Nos. 1, 2, 4, 6
Intermezzi, Op. 119, Nos. 1, 2, 3
Rhapsodies, Op. 79, Nos. 1, 2
Rhapsody, Op. 119, No. 4
Romance, Op. 118, No. 5

According to chronological appearance they are:

Balladen, Op. 10, 1854
Klavierstücke, Op. 76, 1878
Zwei Rhapsodien, Op. 79, 1879
Phantasien, Op. 116, 1891-1892
Drei Intermezzi, Op. 117, 1892
Klavierstücke, Op. 118, 1893
Klavierstücke, Op. 119, 1893

This latter grouping (according to opus numbers) will be used in this study because of occasional connecting links between various pieces within an opus, for example the opus 76 which will be discussed later.

The general form of these character pieces has been mentioned previously as being usually simple song form,

A B A. In the following discussion references to the "A" section of a piece will be called section one, "B" section will be section two and the final "A" section will be section three. Occasionally, however, there is a deviation from the simple A B A treatment, such as is found in the Ballade in D Major, No. 2, which has three sections that are treated as follows: A B C B A. Similar variants from simple form will be discussed to avoid confusion. But unless otherwise stated, the form of each of these characterstücke can be considered simple A B A.

Balladen, Op. 10

The Balladen, Op. 10, are interesting musical narratives, but they are disappointing if one expects their proportions to compare with Chopin's giants of the same name. The four by Brahms are in the following keys: D minor, D major, B minor, B major; and yet, in spite of the parallelism of the pairs of key relationships they are quite different in mood, texture and inspiration.

The Scottish ballad "Edward" was apparently the inspiration for the first Ballade, in D minor, possibly the only ballade of Brahms having an actual literary origin. Brahms used the same poem as the text for the Ballade, Op. 75, No. 1, for contralto and tenor.¹ It is

¹Edwin Evans, Handbook to the Pianoforte Works of Johannes Brahms (London, [1936?]), p. 107.

not clear why Brahms was interested in this "Edward" ballad; the music of the first Ballade is nowhere suggestive of the Scottish influence. Perhaps it was merely the story itself that interested him. Walter Niemann² says: "The Scottish ballad Edward, from Herder's Stimmen der Völker, already known to us through Carl Loewe, has inspired the young composer [to set the words to music]."

In the first "A" section of this "Edward" Ballade, marked Andante, the musical phrases seem to fit the stanzas of the ballad closely and the mood cast by the incongruous Scandinavian harmony, strangely reminiscent of some of Edvard Grieg's piano works, is certainly tragic. The second, or "B" section in D major provides an interesting contrast to the first section. The open fifths, octaves and great chords are excellent examples of what Evans³ calls Brahms' "symphonic period." Brahms was almost asking too

²Walter Niemann, Brahms (New York, 1947), p. 228.

³Evans, op. cit., p. 27: "The first period of the Brahms piano works is described as 'symphonic,' . . . in virtue of its orchestral character."

much of the pianoforte in his earlier works, as J. A. Fuller-Maitland⁴ explains, but in the later pianoforte works it is found that he abandoned such orchestral texture and sought more pianistic effects. The second section is followed by a repetition of section one, the theme of which is only slightly varied by triplet accompaniment. This piece seems actually to be a musical adaptation of the poem in that the words could often be actually sung to the melodic line. This can be seen vividly in the following example:

Andante

DEIN SCHWERT, WIE IS'S VON BLUT SO ROTH? ED-WARD? ED-WARD.

Fig. 3--Ballade, No. 1, Op. 10, measures 1-3

⁴J. A. Fuller-Maitland, "Brahms," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, third edition, edited by H. C. Colles (New York, 1936): "In the beginnings of composition, the piano is the medium most generally and easily accessible; its practical utility makes young composers apt to ignore its essential characteristics; and, for all the skill with which Brahms treated it in combination with other instruments, we may doubt if the individual charm that belongs to it was fully realised by him until a comparatively late date. He was greatly interested in its technique throughout his life; but his chief anxiety, if we may judge from his works, was to get from it the utmost fullness of effect, to make it, as far as possible, represent an orchestra, rather than to allow its gentler characteristics full play."

Although the inspiration for this work is known, and the story is clearer with knowledge of its origin, the narrative character of the music could speak for itself without help from a literary source.

The second Ballade, Op. 10, in D major, is a fine contrast in mood to the first in D minor. In this piece there is a deviation from the usual ABA form. The three subjects herein are dealt with in the following order: A B C B A. In section one, "A," of this D major Ballade there are two stylistic features of some significance: the octave melody and the extensive use of rolled chords.

This lilting melody in octaves is sentimental and yet masculine. Evans⁵ says:

A constant feature of Brahms' melodies is that they are always manly. It was so entirely his nature to incline to a vigorous expression that even in the portrayal of feminine sentiment he always chose those emotions which by nature of their strength allowed of an expansion of his thought in the same direction.

The rolled chords in the right hand establish the harmonic background against the rhythmic pedal point in the left hand.

⁵Evans, op. cit., p. 111.



Fig. 4--Ballade, No. 2, Op. 10, measures 20-23

A faster tempo is chosen again for the second or "B" section. The tempo marking is Allegro ma non troppo (doppio movimento). "Full orchestra" is used--octaves, double notes and big chords. This second subject ". . . portrays the exciting events connected with the narrative."⁶ Following this fast second section there is in the "C" section the insertion of some unusual music. In 6/4 time there are six quarter notes to the measure, each preceded by a quick grace note, as can be seen in Figure 5. This is the only appearance of grace notes in such quantity in all the characterstücke of Brahms. Just what the composer must have had in mind is not clear, but the harmony and persistence of rhythm give this music an agitated and nervous

⁶Ibid., p. 110.

Molto STACCATO e leggero

Fig. 5--Ballade, No. 2, Op. 10, measures 52-53

quality which finally calms some few measures later with the repetition of this theme minus the grace notes; rather, they are incorporated on the beat with a pianissimo and legato indication, as shown in Figure 6. The vigorous

Fig. 6--Ballade, No. 2, Op. 10, measures 69-70

second section subject returns as an almost exact repetition of its original appearance, but its energy diminishes as it modulates to B major. This new key lends an even richer harmonic background than the original key (D major) and once

again the octave melody of the first section is introduced. In a closing section the previously mentioned single-note basses take on unexpected significance in the last eleven measures of this Ballade, appearing incorporated in the melodic line.

The third Ballade in B minor begins with a fast and virtuosic section, and yet it is subtitled "Intermezzo." This is somewhat puzzling, for almost without exception the later intermezzi are slow and contemplative, whereas the title "capriccio" was chosen for the more lively compositions. Perhaps in this early opus Brahms actually intended this third Ballade to be of an interlude type, falling between two slower pieces and thereby providing more interesting contrast. He was to use the title "intermezzo" to some extent later, but apparently with an entirely different mood in mind.

The syncopated beginning of this piece creates a rather diabolic effect. The eighth note open fifth in the bass beginning on the last beat of the measure, followed by five beats of rests and then another chord, destroys a definite feeling of beat. The following are the beginning measures of the third Ballade:



Fig. 7--Ballade, No. 3, Op. 10, measures 1-4

Brahms was from the outset no respecter of the bar line, as can be seen in Figure 7 and also in his first pianoforte composition, the Scherzo, opus 4. The vast rhythmic complexity which was to characterize his later pianoforte works, symphonies, chamber music and songs, was more than merely suggested in these earlier pieces.

In section one of the Ballade in B Minor there are found octaves, unison runs, double notes, chords and syncopated rhythm, all of which have imaginative treatments. This piece may easily have inspired some of Serge Prokofieff's piano pieces.

In section two (the fast section having appeared first in this Ballade) there is a contrasting mood, if not a change of tempo. There is four part harmony high in the treble with the interpretative indication pianissimo sempre legato. The rhythm herein further puzzles the listener, but generally this section has little musical significance.

Finally, the first section returns with the initial mood restored; this time, however, it is more subdued, as though echoing the threats of the beginning, and dies away slower and softer. This piece is like a miniature Chopin Scherzo.

The fourth Ballade, in B major (form A B A B), tells a less interesting story than its three predecessors. It is more a lyrical poem than a dramatic epic. The "A" section melody is always in the soprano, accompanied by descending eighth notes establishing the harmonic background. The second section is marked Piú Lento, a deviation from the usual methods of contrast and it is more interesting than the first section. It is a duet of the sort Schumann conceived in the middle section of the "Reconnaissance" from the Carnival, opus 9. Evans says that it is as though the listener is imposing his own short observations upon what he is being told by the narrator.⁷ The first section theme reasserts itself with a slight rhythmic change in the accompaniment and the piece continues as before, interrupted this time, however, by a chorale-like interlude. The second section Piú Lento follows the "chorale" in a different key. The story ends with the initial melody (in fragmentary form) interrupting the Piú Lento duet shortly before the close.

The most striking factor involved in the appearance of these Ballades was the comparative absence of figuration and

⁷Ibid., p. 116.

bravura passagework. If the Chopin Preludes had surprised Schumann, these Brahms Ballades no doubt startled him. Schumann seems more pleased than startled, however, in the following excerpt from a letter to Clara Schumann, quoted by Florence May:⁸

. . . and the Ballades--the first wonderful, quite new; only I do not understand the doppio movimento⁹ either in this or the second, is it not too fast? The close is beautiful--original! The second how different, how diversified, how suggestive to the imagination; magical tones are in it. The bass f sharp at the end seems to lead to the third ballade. What shall we call this? Demoniacal--quite splendid, and becoming more and more mysterious after the pp in the trio. And the return and close! In the fourth ballade how beautifully the strange melody vacillates at the close between minor and major, and remains mournfully in the major.

These Ballades mark the end of the first period of Brahms' piano compositions. He was to abandon the piano for awhile for the purpose of trying his hand at larger works. Evans¹⁰ says of this move:

. . . it is natural that the piano should soon prove an inadequate voice, and that in justice to himself he should by and by abandon it in favor of means presenting more of the diversity and fullness requisite for complete expression of his thought.

When later on, therefore, Brahms returned to piano composition it was with the consciousness of having asserted his mastership in another domain. He

⁸Florence May, The Life of Johannes Brahms (London, 1905), Vol. I, pp. 173-174.

⁹Ibid., Vol. I, p. 174: "The doppio-movimento was changed before publication to allegro ma non troppo, no doubt in deference to Schumann's suggestion."

¹⁰Evans, op. cit., p. 10.

could thus no longer feel the same temptation as formerly to overburden his beloved clavier by calling upon it for effects held by many to be out of proportion to its resource; and difference of style became the natural result.

Klavierstücke, Op. 76

The Klavierstücke, Op. 76, is the first evidence of this difference in style mentioned in the excerpt from Evans just quoted. These eight characterpieces were composed sometime around 1878, the year following the completion of the second Symphony in D major. Brahms was near the age of forty-five when they were written. He had stated his desire to compose flashy technical show-pieces in the Paganini Variations which have long been acknowledged as the most difficult set of variations existing in piano literature, and the Handel Variations which contain a wealth of music but still lean toward the virtuosic appeal. He had completed two symphonies, hundreds of songs and a good portion of his chamber music. Yet the piano was obviously still dear to him. Perhaps his association with Clara Schumann kept alive his interest in the piano. She writes at great length of the opus 76 in a letter to Brahms, suggesting a few slight harmonic changes, the addition of a few repeats, and comments: "I can play them quite well now, but most of them are terribly difficult."¹¹

¹¹Berthold Litzmann, editor, Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms (New York, 1927), Vol. II, p. 38.

They are indeed difficult but magnificent pieces. On first observation it can be plainly seen that the thick chordal symphonic style that has been mentioned pertaining to the early piano works is no longer used. In fact, it would be a difficult task to attempt an orchestration of these pieces in opus 76, whereas the Scherzo, Op. 4, and even the Ballades would lend themselves easily if not aesthetically to orchestration.

There are four capriccios and four intermezzi in opus 76 but they are arranged often in irregular nominal order. For instance, the order is not always intermezzo, capriccio, intermezzo, et cetera. Their present arrangement is surely not the result of careless printers. The connecting links between some of the pieces are hardly coincidental. For instance, the first Capriccio in F sharp minor ends with a soft F sharp major chord, the dominant of B minor, the key of the following Capriccio. Although they are both entitled "capriccio" the moods are very different. The first Capriccio in F sharp minor opens with a rolling arpeggio figure¹² which continues for

¹²Brahms' arpeggiated figures are mentioned by J. A. Fuller-Maitland, "Brahms," Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians, third edition: "In the A major quartet for piano and strings, op. 26, the leading feature of the beautiful slow movement, the sweeping arpeggios, could not have produced exactly the effect they do on any instrument but the piano, and over and over again a kindred impression is produced by such means. Compare the finale of the violin sonata, op. 100, the intermezzo in E flat from op. 117, that in E flat minor, op. 118, no. 6, and numbers of other

thirteen measures before the principal theme is introduced. The melodic structure of the entire piece is built around the first four notes of this theme. This theme undergoes augmentation and mirror imitation. The arpeggiated introductory material is restated and leads to a block chord statement of the main theme. The octave basses provide an



Fig. 8--Capriccio in F sharp minor, Op. 76, No. 1, measures 14-15.

accompaniment figure which is actually an augmentation of the sixteenth note accompaniment of the principal theme in its original appearance. The coda follows immediately with a combination of the principal theme in the tenor register accompanied by the arpeggiated introduction figure in the soprano. The harmony is major, an A sharp having been used in the harmonic background of this coda, and the final three

instances, in all of which there is a sense of some threatening doom, something portentous, conveyed by the arpeggio figure, a figure which surely was never before turned to such account since it was invented."

dotted half note chords are F sharp major chords. Such ingenious melodic devices as are used in the Capriccio make this piece one of Brahms' most intensely emotional compositions.

The next Capriccio, in B minor, has witnessed considerable popularity. This is not difficult to understand, though, for it is a happier piece than its emotional predecessor. It would appeal to an unmusical listener because it is charming and fast and has the relentless drive of a toccata. The musician would find interest in many parts of this piece. It has three major subjects developed in the following order: A B C B A. The coda is a mixture of the B and C subjects. There is nothing unusual about the rhythmic or melodic devices used, but the modulations bear comment. Within five measures, in one section of this Capriccio, the following keys are traversed consecutively: E major, F major, B flat major and F sharp major. This music would also make a good staccato study for the pianoforte. It is by no means easy but it does not look difficult, thereby often receiving poor performances by incapable pianists who should not play mature Brahms. It ends quietly and gracefully, almost announcing the following Intermezzo in A flat Major, Op. 76, No. 3.

This A flat Intermezzo is certainly unusual music. It seems at first sight to be whimsical music, but after more

careful observation its sensitive and serious qualities become more obvious. J. A. Fuller-Maitland¹³ comments that this Intermezzo's ". . . strange accoustic effects produced by sustaining the thin high chords upon a fleeting accompaniment produces an impression quite new to music." As can be seen in the following example, in section one there is an intricate intertwining of the melody between the hands, a trait that has become prevalent in Brahms' characterstücke:



Fig. 9--Intermezzo in A flat major, Op. 76, No. 3, measures 4-5.

The eighth-note accompaniment is difficult to play well and the arpeggiando marks do not make things easier.

Triplets are used for the second theme melody. This triplet section reaches a climax of extraordinary beauty which brings to mind a similar climax in an early

¹³J. A. Fuller-Maitland, Brahms (London, 1911), p. 95.

Rachmaninoff work.¹⁴ The beginning theme re-enters after this climax in almost exactly its original state with intertwined melody, et cetera. The insertion of the 3/2 signature at the beginning of the fourth bar from the end is undoubtedly intended to lengthen the feeling of "line" in the last phrases. Bar lines placed every four beats would destroy the clarity of the phrases as can be seen by the following:

The image displays a musical score for Rachmaninoff's *Élégie*, Op. 3, No. 1. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems of staves. The first system shows the right hand (treble clef) and left hand (bass clef) staves. The right hand part begins with a 3/2 time signature and a *dim. e rit.* marking. The left hand part follows. The second system continues the piece, showing a change in the right hand part to a 3/2 time signature. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines, illustrating the author's argument about the placement of bar lines.

¹⁴ *Élégie*, Op. 3, No. 1.

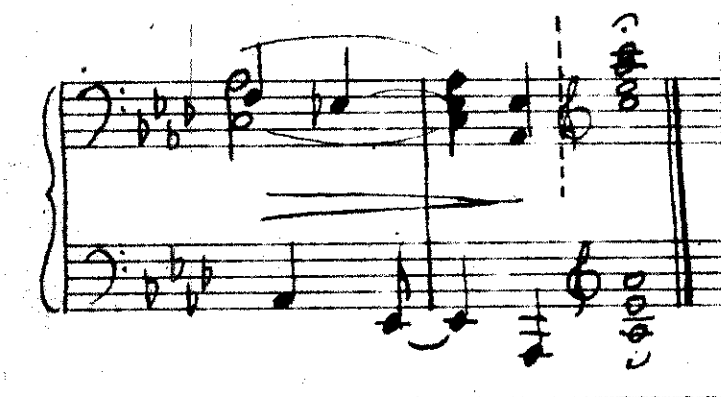


Fig. 10--Intermezzo in A flat Major, Op. 76, No. 3, measures 27-30.

The last A flat major chord contains the first note E flat of the next Intermezzo in B flat major. Nothing particularly novel occurs in this piece. It has the Brahms atmosphere, clearly recognized at times in section "A" when the bass echoes a rhythmic or melodic figure that has just been heard in the melody. The initial melody is quite simple; this fact and the aforementioned echo of thematic material in the bass (the notes indicated by x's) can be seen in the following examples:

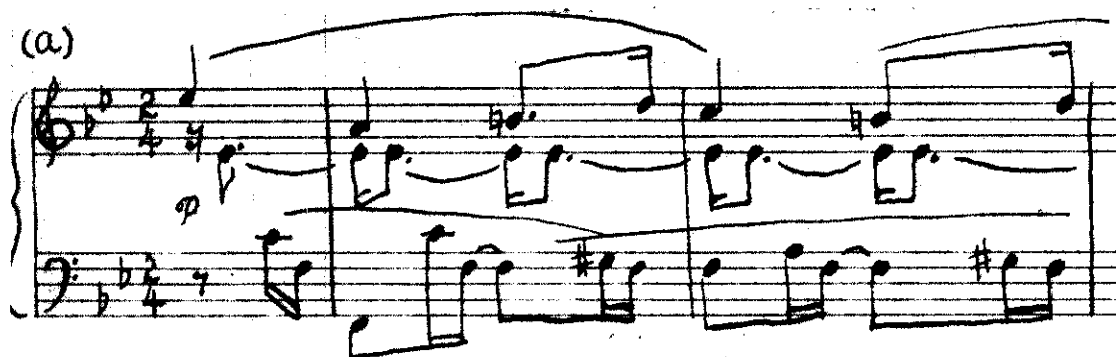




Fig. 11--Intermezzo in B flat Major, Op. 76, No. 4, a) measures 1-2, b) measures 6-7.

This piece seems like a simple but troubled dream, interrupted by some sense of foreboding expressed by the double thirds and sixths in the middle and lower register of the piano which form a second theme. This section is quite short (seven measures) and the initial mood is restored by a new melody similar to the first theme. The double note section is repeated again at the end, but in a higher key which has a less ominous effect than the first time this figure entered. James Huneker¹⁵ considers this piece enigmatic but significant. He says:

This Intermezzo is more shy, more diffident [than the other pieces in opus 76]; marked Allegretto grazioso, its graciousness is veiled by a hesitating reserve which becomes almost painful. Note where the double notes begin; mark the progression and its dark deflection. But it is a beautiful bit of writing, with something in it of the nocturne, and full of enigmatic trouble.

¹⁵James Huneker, "The Pianoforte Music of Johannes Brahms," Selected Piano Compositions of Johannes Brahms, Rafael Joseffy, editor (Philadelphia, 1910), p. xiii.

The next Capriccio in C sharp minor (Op. 76, No. 5) takes up the sense of foreboding that was threatened in the previous Intermezzo in B flat major and becomes a tempestuous and passionate character piece. The form is rhapsodic but the two fast sections separated by a short lyrical section might be considered broadly as A B A. The agitated feeling expressed in the first section by a relentless rhythmic drive is abated only by a short tranquil section, but not for long. Then appears in the return of the fast section following the lyrical part "B" an ingenious use of an effective rhythmical device that can be found often in Brahms. It begins (see Figure 12a) with a succession of fast three-note figures. Eight measures later (see Figure 12b) the same figure, having been repeated several times, assumes larger proportions in its big chords and octaves, thereby reaching more dramatic heights. Finally (see Figure 12c) these three-note figures, previously primarily rhythmic, now become agitated melodic



(b)

(c)

Fig. 12--Capriccio in C sharp minor, Op. 76,
a) measures 71-72, b) measures 80-82, c) measures 87-88.

phrases. For fifteen measures this melodic figure builds to a climax which hardly has time to abate before the coda

commences with the same tense three-note figures, accompanied by repetitive descending bass octaves and inner figuration. The piece ends with full and fortissimo C sharp minor chords.

The Intermezzo in A Major, Op. 76, No. 6, follows the C sharp minor Capriccio. A calmer mood prevails here. Clara Schumann¹⁶ liked this piece less than any of the others in this opus. She complained of its being too "Chopinesque." William Murdoch¹⁷ also says:

This Intermezzo has slow-moving triplets throughout, with many cross-rhythms, characteristic of Brahms in a reflective mood. The soft transient harmonies remind one of Chopin, yet the f sharp minor section often has a Mendelssohnian flavour. As a composition it is rather slight, charming and tender, not particularly interesting nor of much character.

Edwin Evans¹⁸ believes that it has an affinity with a later intermezzo.

Although not so fully developed, the general trait of this piece is the same as that of Opus 118, no. 2. In other words, it consists of music which appears not to seek a climax, but to revel in serenity and evenness of sentiment. It is a tonal expression of contentment.

. . .

The only unusual feature in this Intermezzo is the extreme use of the rhythmic device two-against-three. In section

¹⁶Litzman, op. cit., p. 38.

¹⁷William Murdoch, Brahms (London, 1933), pp. 254-255.

¹⁸Evans, op. cit., p. 189.

one the triplet figure is found constantly in the treble, whereas in section two the bass has the triplets in the accompaniment. The piece ends with a quarter note A major chord followed by a single quarter rest. The beginning chord of the melancholy Intermezzo in A Minor, Op. 76, No. 7, that follows is in almost the same chordal position as the final chord of its predecessor. The theme of the first section is stated at once, and just as quickly do we notice a similarity to the F minor Nocturne, Op. 55, of Chopin. The following examples show the likeness in the melodic lines:

Moderato semplice

(a)

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the first three measures of 'Intermezzo in A Minor, Op. 76, No. 7'. The score is written on two staves, treble and bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Moderato semplice'. The first measure has a dynamic marking 'mp'. The notation includes various notes, rests, and accidentals, with some notes beamed together. The piece is in A minor, as indicated by the key signature (one flat) and the presence of sharps for F# and C# in the melody.

Fig. 13a--Intermezzo in A Minor, Op. 76, No. 7, measures 1-3.



Fig. 13b--Chopin, Nocturne in F Minor, Op. 55, No. 4, measures 1-2.

This Intermezzo has two moods, as do most all of these characterstücke. The first is lonely and melancholy, as is expressed by the simple chordal theme. Nine measures later the second theme is introduced. The eighth note accompaniment in broken chords gives this section a more restless mood than the initial section had. This "B" part is considerably longer than the initial section, but finally comes to a complete halt, followed by a half note rest. Then the first theme is restated in its exact original form. The final A minor chord heralds the beginning of the last piece of this opus, the Capriccio in C Major, Op. 76, No. 8. This connecting link between these pieces can be seen in the following examples:

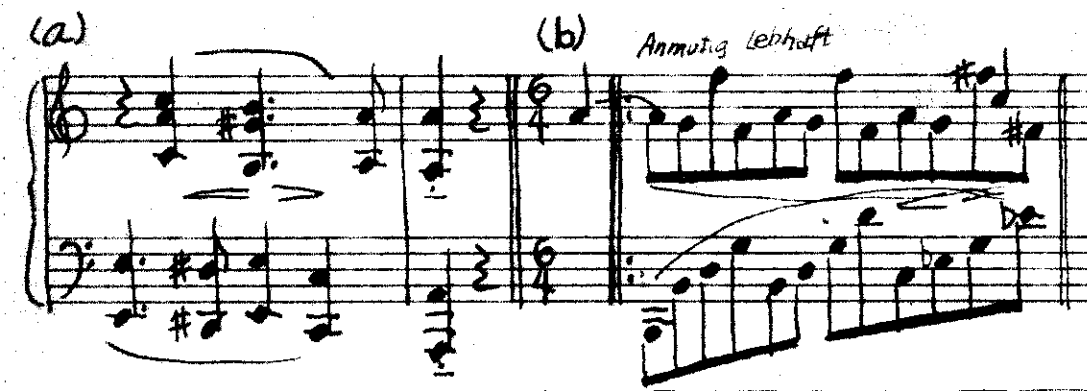


Fig. 14--a) Intermezzo in A Minor, Op. 76, measures 46-47; b) Capriccio in C Major, Op. 76, measure 1.

This connecting link seen in Figure 14 might have been more obvious had Brahms written a fermata over the first note of the Capriccio.

The mood reflected within this gay piece is truly caprice-like. Besides the B minor Capriccio of this same opus, this is no doubt the most difficult one of the group to play. Figuration is more prevalent here than in any of the other characterstücke yet encountered. The eighth-notes are quite fast and require light and accurate finger work, and the last five measures of the piece with their double notes and octaves provide challenge to the more mature pianists. The melody does not contain as much interest as does the harmony. Sudden and often startling modulations are prevalent in this piece. Some of these modulations may be seen in the following example:

Handwritten musical score for the first system. The treble staff contains chords and a melodic line. The bass staff contains a melodic line. A handwritten label "A major" is written below the bass staff. The notation includes various accidentals and a "rit." marking at the end of the system.

Handwritten musical score for the second system. The treble staff contains chords and a melodic line. The bass staff contains a melodic line. A handwritten label "B major" is written below the bass staff. The notation includes various accidentals and a "rit." marking at the end of the system.

Handwritten musical score for the third system. The treble staff contains chords and a melodic line. The bass staff contains a melodic line. A handwritten label "B major" is written below the bass staff. The notation includes various accidentals and a "rit." marking at the end of the system.

Handwritten musical score for measures 25-34 of Capriccio, Op. 76, No. 8. The score is written on two staves. The upper staff contains a melodic line with several accidentals (sharps) and a dynamic marking 'p'. The lower staff contains a bass line with a 'cres.' marking and a chord labeled 'E MAJOR'.

Handwritten musical score for measures 25-34 of Capriccio, Op. 76, No. 8. The score is written on two staves. The upper staff contains a melodic line with several accidentals (sharps) and a dynamic marking 'p'. The lower staff contains a bass line with a chord labeled 'A MINOR'.

Fig. 15--Capriccio, Op. 76, No. 8, measures 25-34

The Violin Concerto in D Major and the G Major Sonata follow the Klavierstücke, Op. 76. Brahms, however, was still interested in the pianoforte. Soon there appeared the two Rhapsodies, Op. 79.

Zwei Rhapsodien, Op. 79

The young Brahms can be heard in the massive chords and double notes that comprise the opening of the first Rhapsody, Op. 79, No. 1, in B-minor. The title is slightly

misleading as it is also for the number two of this opus and the Rhapsody, Op. 119, No. 4, in that its form is more concise than the name implies. This piece could be analysed in sonata-allegro form if the "recapitulation" contained a theme of the "exposition" restated in the tonic key, but this does not happen; consequently, the piece fits easily into a rondo form, the sections of which appear in the following order: A B A C A B A.

The vehement mood initially established in section "A" by the chords and double-notes fades into a more placid but still agitated one with the transition to section "B". The first subject in D minor of section "B" bears melodic resemblance to one of Edvard Grieg's, which fact may be seen in Figures 16a and 16b:



The image contains two musical excerpts. Excerpt (a) shows a piano score for Brahms' Rhapsody in B Minor, Op. 79, No. 1, measures 30-33. It features a treble and bass clef with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The melody in the treble clef is marked with a long slur. Excerpt (b) shows a piano score for Grieg's 'The Death of Åse' from Peer Gynt Suite I, measures 1-4. It is marked 'Andante doloroso' and features a treble and bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody in the treble clef is marked with a long slur.

Fig. 16--a) Rhapsody in B Minor, Op. 79, No. 1, measures 30-33; b) Grieg, "The Death of Åse" from Peer Gynt Suite I, measures 1-4.

Grieg apparently did not hesitate to "lift" melodies from the compositions of other composers. This melody of Brahms' used in "Åse's Death" was not the first to be admired by the Norwegian composer. The main theme of the first movement of Grieg's Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 16, strangely resounds with thematic material found in Brahms'

Scherzo, Op. 4. It is interesting that Huneker¹⁹ asserts that it was Brahms who used Grieg's theme from "Åse's Death." He says:

Perhaps, to show that no hard feelings were his because Grieg used a theme for the Norwegian concerto taken from the E-flat Scherzo, Brahms ingenuously introduces as a lyrical part [in the Rhapsody, Op. 79, No. 17] the theme from Grieg's Peer Gynt suite. . . .

This, unfortunately, is not logical. The Peer Gynt Suite I was composed around 1888, whereas Brahms' Rhapsody appeared in 1880. Huneker, of course, may have had evidence (not introduced in the source just quoted) that Brahms had somehow seen the music to "Åse's Death" long before it was published but this seems improbable. It is illogical also that the similarity in themes is purely accidental.

The development of this D minor subject of part "B" brings to mind the fact that in both Rhapsodies, Op. 79, Brahms takes a subject, presents it once, then presents it again immediately in a higher key. Such thematic emphasis is extremely effective and raises climactic tension to a higher degree. Section "B" ends with some scale passages that are almost unique in the piano works of Brahms. These act as modulatory devices for the purpose of returning to the key of section "B" (B minor) for its repetition. The

¹⁹James Huneker, "Preface," Selected Piano Compositions, edited by Rafael Joseffy (Philadelphia, 1910), pp. viii-ix.

first is simply a three-octave F major scale. It is followed two measures later by a three-octave G flat major scale which is really F sharp major in that it functions as the dominant of the following key. Usually, simple scale passages do not enrich a composition, but in the present instance they seem to magnify the frantic mood of this piece.

After the scales, section "A" is repeated with slight variation for the purpose of modulation. The "C" section enters in B major. It is another lyrical masterpiece and is actually the second half of the aforementioned D minor subject of section "B"; this time, however, it is in the major key with a different harmonic background. This section is quite long, especially if its three parts are repeated as they are written. Finally, the lyrical section ends with a sudden minor chord announcing the return of the violent first subject of section "A." Once again this section unfolds itself, is interrupted by section "B" again and states itself once more before it pauses just before a coda which changes the previously passionate mood into a sad and mournful one, even though the harmony changes to major four bars from the end. The D minor subject of the "B" section makes a beautiful reappearance in the low register tenor in this coda. William Murdoch²⁰ says of

²⁰Murdoch, op. cit., p. 258.

this coda: "The coda is wonderful. Brahms had learnt the art of coda-writing in his youth. Bach and Beethoven had been his teachers and the aptness of his studies can be proved by the superb examples with which his works are concluded."

The second Rhapsody, in G minor, Op. 79, No. 2, is marked Molto passionato, ma non troppo allegro. This is the most strangely named of all the rhapsodies, for it is in a clear sonata-allegro form. There is no introduction. The main theme of the exposition enters with triplet figure accompaniment which lasts throughout the piece. There are four subjects heard in the exposition of this piece, all of which are slightly different in character. The first, which is announced without introduction, appears, as did the second subject melody of the first Rhapsody, in two keys, one statement following the other immediately. The second subject is chordal and staccato in contrast to the first subject which is marked legato. It is interrupted by the lyrical third subject which introduces itself in right hand melodic octaves and left hand arpeggiated accompaniment. The fourth and last subject of this exposition inserts a different mood entirely. The perpetual right hand triplet accompanying figure and the octave melody in the minor key found in the left hand give this subject a more serious quality than is found in the other three subjects. After

this appears there is found a double bar repeat sign, the conventional indication found at the end of the exposition in sonata form. Immediately thereafter commences the development section. The first subject of the exposition is treated with harmonic and melodic development but its initial rhythmic background (the triplet figure) remains the same. Subjects two and three of the exposition do not appear in this development. Subject four, however, receives quite lengthy treatment, even appearing combined with the first subject. The recapitulation commences as did the exposition with the first subject's sudden announcement. This section unwinds itself as it did in its previous state with the third subject's appearance in the tonic key being the final authentication of the surmise that the piece is in sonata form. A short coda with arpeggiated left hand figures in triplets and a slow trill-like figure in the right hand ends this Rhapsody.

A few more stylistic features in this G minor Rhapsody bear mentioning. An interesting pianistic device, hitherto used seldom in Brahms' pianoforte works, is employed from the beginning of this piece and is found intermittently throughout the three sections therein. It is the crossing over of the left hand to continue briefly the melodic phrase the right hand has commenced, as is seen in Figure 17.



Fig. 17--Rhapsody, Op. 79, No. 2, measures 1-2

Many keys are traversed in this Rhapsody, a now established characteristic of Brahms. In fact, the tonality of G minor is not heard until the eleventh bar, the piece having already suggested the keys of E flat major, F major, C major, G major, A major, E major and B major. The rhythm is basically very simple, the triplet figure predominating the rhythmic background. There are no new time signatures or tempo changes after the initial indications. The mood is not as stern as in the B minor Rhapsody and this piece appeals more to the emotions, whereas the first Rhapsody is more intellectual. According to William Murdoch the B minor Rhapsody ". . . is all more intellectual than emotional."²¹ He says of the G minor Rhapsody: "The second Rhapsody is a far more emotional piece of music . . .

²¹Ibid., p. 258.

it has always suggested a passionate lovesong, with its fervor, intensity and dramatic fire."²²

After the rhapsodies appeared, it was to be sometime before Brahms composed any more characterstücke. In the interim there appeared, among other works, the overtures, the B flat Major Concerto for piano and orchestra and the Symphonies, Nos. 3 and 4. In fact, when he started the Phantasien, Op. 116, he was to see the publication of only six more opera before his death in 1897.

Phantasien, Op. 116

The Capriccio in D Minor is the first in this series of phantasies. The tempo indication is Presto energico. A burst of energetic octaves and chords begins this virtuosic piece. There is much harmonic beauty in all of Brahms' music, but it is epitomized in this composition. The descending diminished seventh arpeggi with left hand octave doublings appear several times. This is a show-piece of the proportions heretofore not attained in any of Brahms' characterstücke. Its cross-rhythms and short two- and three-note phrases give this Capriccio a breathless character that is carried through to the very last chord.

The following piece, the Intermezzo in A Minor, Op. 116, No. 2, contains less of interest than the other

²²Ibid.

phantasie pieces in opus 116. The two-against-three rhythmic problem is encountered in the opening $3/4$ (andante) section in which the right hand has the eighth notes which form the melody, while the accompaniment has the triplets. The meter changes to $3/8$ with the sudden use of sixteenth notes (non troppo presto) for the "B" section. Part "B" contains an unusual amount of figuration. The left hand has simple eighth notes while the right hand is occupied with sixteenths. Almost each beat in every measure of this $3/8$ section contains an octave leap; the same direction for these leaps is never consistent, for example in the first measure of this section the first beat in the right hand is made up of an octave skip up, whereas the second beat is an octave skip down, et cetera. This section is followed by a restatement of the initial theme which ends the piece.

The Capriccio in G Minor, number three of this opus, opens with exciting passage work. It is marked Allegro passionato. An unusual feature appears in the ninth bar. For five consecutive bars there are parallel passage-work runs, such that are not often found in Brahms, building up to an augmented restatement of the initial theme. Rather than parallel passage-work the hands usually are made to go in opposite directions. This unison figuration recurs several times in this piece so there must have been some significant reason for its use. It creates a whirlwind-like

drive. The Un poco meno Allegro middle section is all chordal music, as in direct contrast with the running passage-work of the beginning and end of the piece. The melodic material herein can be traced back to a motive of the original theme of section one, but this second section is of such a different character and mood that it is difficult to recognize any trace of the former theme without stretching the imagination. This is an effective and brilliant piece with its passage-work and chordal "B" section, yet it does not seem to be as difficult as the D Minor Capriccio of this same opus 116.

The Intermezzo in E Major that follows this preceding vigorous work is a pleasing contrast. At once it is obvious from the simple, not-too-long phrases that this piece displays Brahms at his lyrical best. There is some more hand-crossing to do in this piece, but in this case it is all done with the right hand crossing over the left.

The initial thematic material starts as a melody in the right hand but a second voice joins it at its second statement. The following duet is no doubt one of the most beautiful in all piano literature and it has long been a source of speculation as to which voice should be the predominating one.

Evans²³ marvels at the fact that there are three subjects introduced in this piece and all are sufficiently taken care of and yet the piece extends only to seventy-two bars. He comments: "Generally speaking Brahms, in his later pianoforte works, has well taught us that the contents of a piece are by no means to be estimated by the bulk of it." These three subjects are not developed in any sense of the word but rather they are introduced and repeated in such a clever pattern that it seems as though they are being developed. Section one reveals theme I and theme II in the following manner: I, II, I, II. Section two introduces the third theme (new melodic material). And section three combines the three: I, III (slightly varied), II. There is very little variance in the repetitions of these themes; they are restated, usually as they had initially appeared.

This Intermezzo, according to Philip F. Radcliffe,²⁴ was originally entitled "Nocturne." This might very well be a good title for the piece. Although it is much shorter than any of the Chopin nocturnes, it has the same atmosphere found in these latter works and it would certainly not be overshadowed by any of them.

²³Evans, op. cit., p. 219.

²⁴Philip F. Radcliffe, "Brahms," Grove's Dictionary, fifth edition, edited by Eric Blom (London, 1954).

The Intermezzo in E Minor, number five of opus 116, is marked Andante con grazia ed intimissimo sentimento. The "intimissimo sentimento" has been encountered previously in the middle section of the fourth Ballade, Op. 10, in B Major. Evans²⁵ comments thus on such markings:

It relates to a particular intricacy, and happens in passages which seem to pertain to keyboard mysteries which the composer has himself unlocked, and which he smilingly hands over to us for solution. There is much meaning in Huneker's phrase when he says that "the intimacy is all on the side of the composer . . ."

The most unusual feature of this Intermezzo is the hidden melody of section one. It can be heard when the piece is played but cannot be easily discerned from the musical page. The circled notes in the following example trace this melody through the opening bars:



Fig. 18--Intermezzo in E Minor, Op. 116, No. 5, measures 1-2.

²⁵Evans, op. cit., p. 221.

This is a mysterious and enigmatic composition, completely understood, perhaps, by Brahms alone.

The following Intermezzo in E Major, Op. 116, No. 6, is the antithesis of its predecessor. It is quite simple and without mystery, and there is melodic beauty here that is surpassed in this opus only by the fourth Intermezzo, in E major, Op. 116, No. 6. The theme is stated at once but it is rather a dialogue between the alto and soprano than a single theme, as may be seen in Figure 19:

Fig. 19--Intermezzo, Op. 116, No. 6, measures 1-4

There are dialogues of this kind in a great deal of the piano works of Brahms. The lyrical sections of the Piano Concerto in D Minor, Op. 15, are literally teeming with themes occurring simultaneously. Such is, of course, one of the most appealing of Brahms' characteristics, but these themes present perplexing problems in trying to emphasize the most important one in performance. The beautiful

arpeggiated E major chord at the end of this Intermezzo is reminiscent of the similar chordal arpeggiandi in the second Ballade, Op. 10.

The diminished seventh chord is completely overworked in the following and final Capriccio in D Minor, of opus 116. Brahms always seemed to favor diminished sevenths, for instance in the opening Capriccio of this opus 116; that is, the descending arpeggi that have been previously mentioned are all diminished sevenths. There are fourteen such arpeggi in that piece and many diminished seventh chords and arpeggi can be found in the works between these Capriccios, numbers one and seven, but in this number seven the structure of practically every chord in the first section is diminished. With such prevalence of one type of harmony, interest is defeated at the outset and boredom naturally ensues. Although the piece is brilliant, it is a strange choice for the final piece in such a remarkable collection as this opus 116. Evans²⁶ comments on the little cadenza found in the middle (measures 49-63) of this piece:

[The quasi-cadenza] is of very ordinary character; nor can it be said that he does much with it. Separately considered, it is about as weak a piece of writing as we shall find; but having the popular quality of brilliancy, it will never lack admirers.

²⁶Ibid., p. 225.

Following this cadenza is a repetition of section "A." The time meter is changed to 3/8 for the closing section which ends the piece with a brisk chordal treatment of the diminished seventh arpeggiated figure of the first section theme.

Drei Intermezzi, Op. 117

According to William Murdoch²⁷ these pieces were composed at the same time as the Phantasien, Op. 116. They are all lyrical and unpretentious pieces. The first Intermezzo in E flat major has perhaps the most interesting background of the three. Brahms was apparently inspired again by a Scottish poem contained in Herder's Stimmen der Völker in Liedern, as he was by the "Edward" ballad which was the inspiration for the first Ballade, Op. 10. As before, the music fits the stanzas of the poem almost perfectly.

Evans²⁸ explains the origin of the Scottish title:

The inspiration for this piece like that of the first ballade of op. 10, is taken from a poem contained in Herder's "Stimmen der Völker in Liedern"; and is likewise one which Herder translated from Percy's 'Reliques of Ancient Poetry' (Vol. II, p. 194); the original title in this case being 'Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament.'

The form (A B A) is quite simple. The 6/8 meter (Andante moderato) gives the music a lullaby effect. The

²⁷Murdoch, op. cit., p. 266.

²⁸Evans, op. cit., p. 228.

harmony of section one is unusually simple for Brahms. The first three measures of the piece are all based on the tonic chord in E flat. The theme is stated at the very beginning, and the following example will show how the words from the poem might be sung to the music:

The image shows a musical score for Brahms' Intermezzo, Op. 117, No. 1, measures 1-4. The score is in E-flat major, 6/8 time, and consists of two systems of piano accompaniment with vocal lines. The first system shows the first three measures with the lyrics "denn Schlaf sanft mein Kind, schlief sanft und schön! Mich". The second system shows the next measure with the lyrics "dauert's sehr, dich weinen sehr.".

Fig. 20--Intermezzo, Op. 117, No. 1, measures 1-4

The second section is in the key of E flat minor. It is marked Piu Adagio; this fact and the change to the minor key give this "B" section a different, perhaps sadder, mood than is found in section one.

The "A" section reappears with the initial melody beautifully intertwined between the hands instead of being entirely in the right hand as it was in its original statement. Figure 21 shows the reappearance of the section one subject:



Fig. 21--Intermezzo in E flat Major, Op. 117, No. 1, measures 38-39.

There is only one forte indication in the entire piece and this is found five measures from the end. It is followed by a diminuendo and ritardando indication which gives the piece a serenely tranquil ending.

At first sight the second Intermezzo, in B flat minor, effects a striking visual impression. The notes are practically all thirty-second or sixteenth notes but the meter is $3/8$ and the tempo indication is Andante non troppo e con molto espressione; therefore, the piece is not as fast as it appears to be. Section one is characterized by arpeggi.

Even the right hand melodic figure is more ornate than is the usual Brahms melody. The actual melody, however, is probably the notes circled as such in the following example:

Andante non troppo e con molto espressione

p dolce

Fig. 22--Intermezzo, Op. 117, No. 2, measures 1-3

The second section is less restless and ornate than is section one, the thirty-second notes having been abandoned for the use of sixteenths and eighths. The melody of this "B" part is derived from the section one melody, as seen in Figure 23. A short cadenza-like transition connects section two with the restatement of section one. This

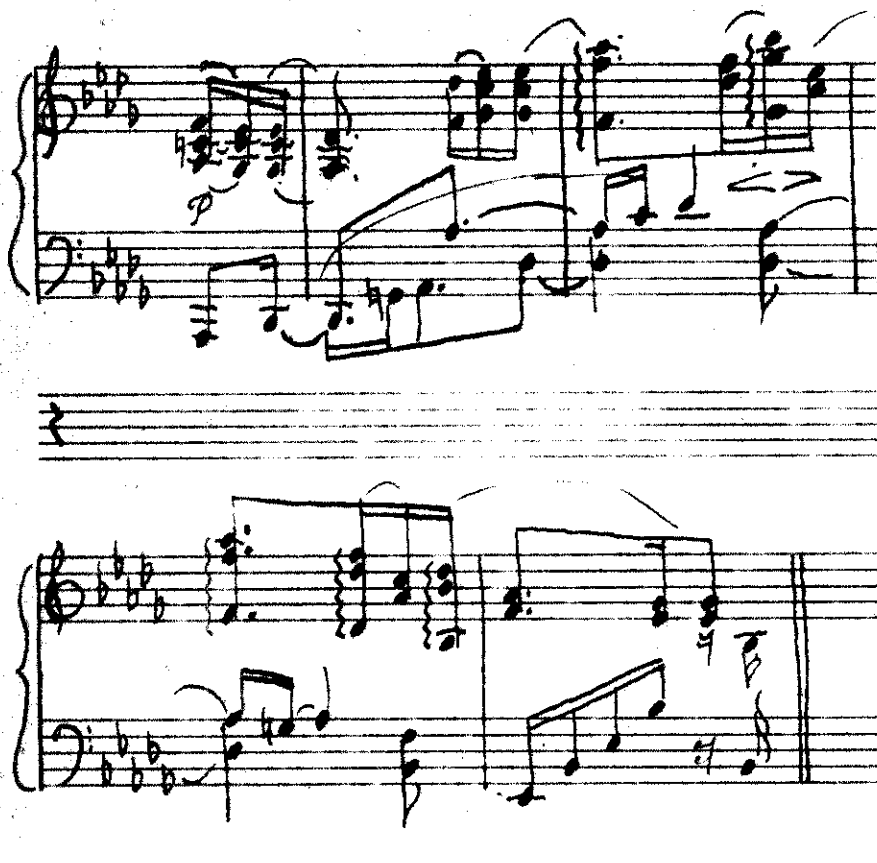


Fig. 23--Intermezzo, Op. 17, No. 2, measures 23-26

cadenza-like period is almost entirely a great long arpeggio usually built on a diminished seventh chord, rising and falling without melody and creating a purely harmonic effect. The thirty-second notes, having re-appeared in the cadenza, lead back to a varied statement of section one. A closing section soon follows, reminiscent of part "B" in its lack of figuration and chordal structure, and the piece ends with a long two-measure B flat minor arpeggio.

The third Intermezzo, in C sharp minor, completes opus 117. It is perhaps the best single piece example of

Brahms' piano style. There are three sections (A B A form), all of which contain specific characteristics of Brahms' music. In section one, the theme is stated at once appearing in unison form with single notes in the right hand and octaves in the bass. The theme itself is a five bar subject. Other thematic material is phrased also in five bars. The main theme appears in middle voice and is augmented at a point five bars before section two commences. The "B" section is in the key of A major. There is more figuration found here. Diminished arpeggios and syncopation characterize this middle part. A short transition leads back to a variation of the initially stated theme; this same variation appeared first in section one. The piece ends with the main theme somewhat augmented with a Piu Lento indication.

This piece might have been inspired by some somber story. The music has a narrative quality that is suggestive of the Ballades, Op. 10. It might be compared with number three of opus 10, not because the notes in the two pieces are similar but because they seem to have a similar basis of inspiration.²⁹

²⁹Ibid., p. 233.

Klavierstücke, Op. 118

The Klavierstücke, Op. 118, and the Klavierstücke, Op. 119, are Brahms' last representatives of the characterstücke.

William Murdoch³⁰ expressed regret of this fact:

Opus 118 is a little more important than the opp. 116 and 117, and suggests to us that this new phase of the composer's self-expression was developing in emotional fervour and texture; . . . if his health had permitted him, . . . pianoforte literature would have been enriched by many more solos of this genre. His technical ideas in his new style were expanding. He had by no means come to the end of his inspirations, nor of his resources for tone-color. From the pianist's point of view his sudden failure in health was a calamity, for the pianoforte had become once more the favourite medium for the expression of his feelings, as it had been in his youth.

The first piece in opus 118 is the Intermezzo in A Minor. The most striking feature herein is the fact that the A minor harmony is seldom heard. The entire first section could be considered to be in either C or F major. The vigorous melodic subject of this section is introduced at the very beginning, accompanied by a long arpeggio phrase, one of Brahms' favorite technical devices which can be seen in Figure 24:

³⁰Murdoch, op. cit., p. 270.



Fig. 24--Intermezzo, Op. 118, No. 1, measures 1-4

The second section melody is in octaves also. It provides for the first time in this piece a feeling of the A minor harmony. Section two is rather short and leads into the restatement of the initial section's melody. A coda, begun by a diminished seventh arpeggio ascending and descending for four measures, ends the piece with a major chord employing the tierce de Picardie.

The following piece, the Intermezzo in A Major, Op. 118, No. 2, is more lyrical than its predecessor. The melodies of section one are quite simple, always in the right hand while the left hand is occupied with an eighth-note accompaniment. The non-harmonic tone appoggiatura in measure thirty-five, which is a mirror imitation of the main theme, is especially beautiful. Figure 25a shows the initial theme of section one and Figure 25b shows the appoggiatura of the imitation:

(a) *Andante teneramente*

(b)

Fig. 25--a) *Intermezzo*, Op. 118, No. 2, measures 1-2;
b) measures 35-36.

Section two is in F sharp minor. The often used device, right hand melody accompanied by arpeggiated triplets, is found in this section. This part "B" lasts for eight measures (unless the repeat signs are observed) until a canonic chorale-like interlude in which the chords in the right hand are imitated at the octave two beats later in the left hand, interrupts for another eight measures. After this the "B" section theme is repeated, this time, however, with a duet between soprano and alto. The sixths and thirds used in this duet provide beautiful harmony.

Section "A" returns almost in its original state to be followed by a closing section marked un poco animato for a few measures, but three measures from the end there is the expected piu lento indication.

The Ballade, Op. 118, No. 3, follows the A major Intermezzo. The tempo indication Allegro energico is almost unnecessary because the staccato right hand chords and the octave basses, as can be seen at first glance, mark this an energetic and volatile work. The music has a narrative quality, as did the Ballades, Op. 10, and the form is A B A, the usual form found in opus 10, but here nothing is known of the literary inspiration for the work. Evans³¹ suggests that "the story from which this ballade is founded hails from the North, that it relates to noble deeds and the characters in it are courtly."

It is one of the best examples of the melodic contrast between masculine and feminine expression.³² Section one is composed entirely of the mood of the robust initial subject set forth from measure one. Section two is in B major, a key not closely related to F minor. The modulation is hardly regular. The last measure of section one has a G major seventh harmonic background, as though section two would be in C major. However, this G major seventh

³¹Evans, op. cit., pp. 241-242.

³²Ibid., p. 242.

actually functions as an augmented sixth chord in the new key of B major, beginning in the following measure. This "B" part is marked *pianissimo* and has right hand double notes for the melodic figure accompanied by a rising and falling arpeggio accompaniment. The melody seems to be in no way derived from or connected with the vigorous section one melody. This is mentioned because the contrasting sections of these pieces usually contain melodic or harmonic devices connected in some way with previously stated material. In other words, seldom is there found completely new material introduced in the second or contrasting section. There is, however, in this second ("B") section, a four-measure phrase which echoes the energetic first section but it is marked *espressivo* and is still within the quiet mood of this second part. The "A" section returns almost exactly as it was initially stated and the piece closes with a very soft (indicated *una corda*) reminder of the second section subject, heard this final time in the minor key.

The following Intermezzo in F minor is, according to Evans,³³ far better to look at than to listen to. The canonic device used in all the sections of this piece is fascinating to follow but the absence of actual melody, or

³³Ibid., p. 244.

interesting harmony for that matter, gives this music less significance compared with the lyrical masterpieces in opus 118. The first section canon can be traced in Figure 26a. Section "B" is also canonic with less figuration than is used in section one. The beginning of this part is seen in Figure 26b:

(a) *Allegretto un poco agitato*

The image displays a handwritten musical score for piano, labeled (a) *Allegretto un poco agitato*. The score is written on three systems of two staves each. The first system shows the beginning of the piece, with a treble and bass clef, a key signature of two flats, and a 2/4 time signature. The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplets. The second system continues the piece with similar rhythmic patterns. The third system shows the end of the piece with a double bar line.

(b)

Fig. 26--Intermezzo, Op. 118, No. 4, measures 1-11;
a) measures 1-11, b) measures 52-58.

Section "A" returns with thicker chordal structure given to the triplet figures. The canon herein unwinds and the piece ends in the major key, which is another use of the tierce de Picardie as in the Intermezzo, Op. 118, No. 1.

The following piece, Romanze, Op. 118, No. 5, is the only example of the use of this title in all the character-stücke of Brahms. Exactly what a "romance" would be is not always easily determined, but this opus 118, number 5 seems more of a pastorale. There are the usual three sections in this piece. Section one contains a simple subject being

treated almost without figuration with a pastorale quality. There is nothing unusual in section one although it is very expressive music. Section two, according to Evans,³⁴ is a village dance. It is marked Allegretto grazioso in 4/4 (Alla breve) time. The most interesting quality of this section, other than its light and happy mood, is the pedal bass. For thirty-one measures the first bass note of each measure is the same. The other bass notes in all these measures are only slightly varied to change the harmony. The return after part "B" of section one with a simple restatement of the initial subject ends this Romanze.

The final piece of opus 118, the Intermezzo in E flat Minor, No. 6, is perhaps the most difficult of all the Brahms characterstücke. The most exacting interpretation is required here, as well as complete technical control.

The piece is in a rather nebulous A B A form; that is, it may be considered more rhapsodic than simple but there are three contrasting sections. Section one opens with the initial theme appearing alone in the right hand. It is interrupted by an ascending and descending diminished seventh arpeggio in the accompaniment, as can be seen in Figure 27a. From this point on, until the second section enters, this initial thematic material is presented in

³⁴Ibid., p. 246.

different keys, sometimes wholly and sometimes fragmentarily, always, though, with the arpeggiated accompaniment.³⁵ Section "B" establishes an entirely different mood. Its octave melody and strange chordal accompaniment can be seen in Figure 27b:

(a) *Andante, largo e mesto*

p sotto voce

(b)

p sotto voce

³⁵See footnote 12 in this chapter.

The image displays three systems of handwritten musical notation for a piano piece. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The first system (a) shows measures 1-3, featuring a melodic line in the treble and a chordal accompaniment in the bass. The second system (b) shows measures 40-43, with a more complex texture involving overlapping lines and chords. The third system (c) shows measures 51-53, characterized by a dense, fortissimo chordal accompaniment in the bass and a melodic line in the treble. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals.

Fig. 27--Intermezzo in E flat Minor, Op. 118, No. 6;
 a) measures 1-3, b) measures 40-43, c) measures 51-53.

The theme of section one appears rather surprisingly in the midst of this "B" section but it is not out of the character in this section, because here it appears fortissimo with chordal accompaniment. (See Figure 27c.) Section "A" is

restated immediately following part "B." The initial mood is resumed and the piece ends with a long arpeggiated E flat minor figure. Lawrence Erb³⁶ says that this Intermezzo, Op. 118, No. 6 ". . . is perhaps the most eloquent expression of the tragic in all piano music."

Klavierstücke, Op. 119

The Intermezzo, Op. 119, No. 1, in B minor (Adagio) is the first in this set of four piano pieces. Technically, it is a simple piece with few outstanding characteristics. The section "A" melody is introduced from the very beginning with slow descending sixteenth notes for an accompaniment. The right hand melodic figure accompanied by off-beat chords played by the right hand is a device also found often in Robert Schumann's piano music such as the Blumenstück, Op. 19. In section "B" there are a few arpeggio basses that accompany the melody. These mark the music, as do most all of Brahms' arpeggios when used as accompanying figures with an infallibly recognizable trait. Section "A" reasserts itself and moves to a coda or closing section, the melody of which sounds like section "A" but the rhythm is like section "B." The piece ends softly with a B minor chord.

³⁶Lawrence Erb, Brahms (London, 1905), p. 109.

The Intermezzo, Op. 119, No. 2, in E minor, is also of small proportions. The meter is 3/4 with the tempo marking Andante un poco agitato. The theme of section "A" is introduced immediately and just as quickly it is seen that this piece is quite unique among the characterstücke. There are no other such pieces written quite like this with the almost perpetual use of the rhythmic figure of two sixteenths followed by an eighth. A similar rhythmic device was used in the Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 9 (1854). This rhythmic figure in the Intermezzo can be seen in the following example:



Fig. 28--Intermezzo, Op. 119, No. 2, measures 1-2

This figure is interrupted by a more melodic triplet subject which uses the melodic notes that were implied in the initial subject. This, however, lasts only five measures. Some new material is introduced, similar to the initial subject, which acts as a transition passage back to a statement of the initial subject. This section ends with

a B major seventh chord modulating to E major, the key of section two. Marked Andante grazioso, this "B" section gets its melody from material in section one, although it is very well disguised with different rhythm and harmony. (See Figure 29.) The melody is accompanied by ascending

The image shows a musical score for measures 36-39 of the Intermezzo, Op. 119, No. 2. The score is written for piano and consists of two systems. The first system shows measures 36-38, and the second system shows measure 39. The key signature is E major (three sharps) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo and mood are marked 'Andantino grazioso'. The melody is in the right hand, and the accompaniment is in the left hand, featuring ascending eighth-note arpeggios. The piece is marked 'molto p e dolce'.

Fig. 29--Intermezzo, Op. 119, No. 2, measures 36-39

eighth-note arpeggios and there is very little of interest except the lyrical melody. A very simple modulation (G sharp of the tonic triad in E major is naturalled) starts the insistent sixteenths and eighths of section one again

and the piece goes through its initial development again and even commences the second section, this time in E major, as though to repeat it also, but only a fragment of that theme is introduced and the piece ends three measures later in E major.

The next piece, the Intermezzo in C Major, Op. 119, No. 3, marked Grazioso e giocoso, is one of the few characterstücke that does not have two contrasting subjects. The whole piece is built on the beginning subject found in the alto voice. This theme appears in several keys, major and minor, sometimes legato, staccato, augmented and in unison octaves, but never is new thematic material introduced. Nor is there a change of tempo indicated after the Grazioso e giocoso. A tenor figure that goes almost unnoticed in the seventh bar of the piece is reheard occasionally but without significance until the thirteenth bar from the end when it becomes a melody introduced at the climax of the piece, only to have importance for five bars. The piece ends with an ascending chordal passage similar to the difficult ending passage in the Capriccio in C Major, Op. 76, No. 8.

The last piece of opus 119, the Rhapsodie in E flat Major, Op. 119, No. 4, is, as were the Rhapsodies, Op. 79, strangely named. It could be analyzed in a sort of sonata form but a clearer and more logical analyzation is possible. The whole piece is nothing more than a large three-part song

form. Each part, however, possesses three specific subjects thereby almost creating entities within themselves. Thus, the form of this piece may be briefly outlined as: $\begin{matrix} \text{aba} & \text{cdc} \\ & \text{(A)} & \text{(B)} \end{matrix}$ plus a coda. The first subject of section "A" is obviously heard more than the others. It is robust and chordal in its five bar phrases and is somewhat remindful of Brahms' early piano pieces. The second subject of part "A" is mainly chordal also, but it has some descending sixteenth-note broken chords set against deep basses, never heard, however, for more than three consecutive beats. Following this, the first subject is reheard, as can be seen in the foregoing outline. Section "B" opens with a new subject (c) in the relative minor key and the mood herein is changed by the new key and the use of triplets that are found at the first beat of every measure for nineteen measures in this section. The basses in this section provide pedal-point harmony for thirteen measures. Murdoch³⁷ terms this subject "Schumannesque." He says: "Brahms was conscious of the similarity, for in a letter to Clara Schumann he writes: 'I expect to see you smile over a round dozen of the bars.'" Exactly why this first subject of part "B" is the part about which Brahms was referring is not clear. Unfortunately, Murdoch does not solve the mystery

³⁷Murdoch, op. cit., p. 280.

by comparing it with a Schumann composition. The second subject (d) of this section is the first use of lyrical music in this piece. It is in the key of A flat major and the melody is in right hand eighth-notes. A rather Mendelssohnian effect is attained by the arpeggiandi marks that appear in both hands in this section.³⁸ A restatement of the C minor (c) subject reappears slightly augmented with the use of octaves (still marked piano) before the restatement of section "A." This return of section "A" offers a rhythmic, melodic and harmonic variance of its initial subject, now called A₁, after which appear subjects two (with right hand broken chords) and finally a restatement of subject one in its original state. The reiteration of subject one is quickly followed by a long coda in E flat minor. The piece ends with bravura octaves and chords.

It is interesting that this last piano solo of Brahms would contain so much that is reminiscent of his youthful piano works. The heavy chordal structure is the most glaring example of this fact. Evans³⁹ comments on this: "The general trait is that this piece is too heavy for the piano. It has not the appearance of having been designed

³⁸Compare this section with Mendelssohn's Song Without Words, Op. 62, No. 6.

³⁹Evans, op. cit., p. 256.

for the instrument." Murdoch⁴⁰ suggests that perhaps Brahms realized this might be his last pianoforte composition and he wished to prove that his youthful vigor was still intense and that he could write quite as powerfully for the piano as in the days of the F minor Sonata, Op. 5, No. 3, though with more affection.

Conclusion

This study has not been an attempt at a formal analysis of the characterstücke of Brahms, but rather a discussion of the development in the Romantic era of this type of piano solo with special emphasis regarding some of the outstanding features found in the pieces of Brahms. Fortunately, Brahms' pianoforte music was composed in three distinct periods of the composer's life thereby offering at the outset a comprehensive chronological outline. These periods, as have been mentioned in the foregoing chapter of this study, are aptly called by Evans⁴¹: I. Symphonic (1853-1856), II. Technical (1861-1866), III. Contemplative (1870-1880, 1892-1893).

In Brahms' "symphonic" period there appeared, other than his first representatives of the characterstücke (the Ballades, Op. 10), the three sonatas (opera 1, 2, 5) the

⁴⁰Murdoch, op. cit., p. 280.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 33.

Scherzo, Op. 4, and the Variations on a Theme by Schumann, Op. 9. The term "symphonic" implies, of course, the predominant orchestral character of these piano pieces. The more formal works of this period, that is the sonatas and Scherzo, are more orchestral than the ballades. The thick heavy chordal structure found in this period demanded more from the piano than it was able to give.

In the second or "technical" period there were no informal piano pieces (i.e. characterstücke) composed. Therein appeared the vast sets of variations, such as the Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24, and the Studies (Variations on a Theme by Paganini), Op. 35, about which Evans⁴² says:

If the variation form may be considered technical for the executant, it is no less technical for the composer. Like the scale from the executive point of view, which can somehow be played by the merest pupil --but which requires a master for its finished performance, the variation-form may be easily filled by an ordinary student--though the 'philosophic variation' . . . [of Brahms' type] is ever of the rarest. . . . There is no variation which could not easily be taken and amplified into a larger work; nor any two of them which resemble one another, [except] in the one thing--that they have a common basis in their theme.

Evans also groups within this second period the first piano-forte Concerto in D Minor, Op. 15, the Variations for Four Hands, Op. 24, and the Valses, Op. 39.

⁴²Ibid., p. 33.

The third or "contemplative" period contains the greater part of Brahms' pianoforte works discussed in the previous chapter of this study. The various titles, such as "intermezzi," "capriccios," "rhapsodies," et cetera, although they are neither specific nor programmatic titles, can be generally categorized according to mood. The title "intermezzo" and "romance" has been applied to the pieces of more pensive character, whereas the "capriccios" and "rhapsodies" uniformly appear to be in a quicker movement. There is found a predominance of the slower pieces, as is seen by the fact that there are nineteen pieces with slow tempo indications, such as Andante or Adagio, as compared with the eleven pieces with indications Allegro agitato, Presto energico, et cetera. This is not surprising, however, because Brahms seems to have inherited from Schumann a "horror of display for display's sake,"⁴³ and consequently preferred to play and compose lyrical rather than brilliant technical music. The form used in the majority of these pieces is simple A B A, with the A sections contrasting in mood with B section; however, in the rhapsodies, one of which can be analyzed clearly in sonata-allegro form, a larger scope is used. In this "contemplative" period is

⁴³J. A. Fuller-Maitland, "Brahms," Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians, third edition, edited by H. C. Colles (New York, 1936).

found more pianistic music than Brahms had hitherto composed. The instrument is utilized to its fullest effects, and a definite change in style is obvious in these pieces.

It is interesting that Murdoch⁴⁴ considers this change in style so radical that he states:

If one were to examine the pianoforte works of Brahms, without knowing anything of his other compositions or of the great changes that took place in his style and outlook, one might easily conclude that they were the work of two men. Almost a dual personality is revealed. . . .

This is only partly true, for there are characteristics found in the late works that were quite definitely suggested in the early pieces, such as the disregard for the position of the bar-line which brought about rhythmic complexity, and the radical contrasts in tonality. And, indeed this latter "contemplative" period is not without some music, such as the Rhapsody, Op. 119, No. 4, that is reminiscent of the youthful "symphonic" period. Evans⁴⁵ opinion, as in opposition to Murdoch's, seems the more agreeable:

Never in the whole history of music were first works so completely representative of their composer; and, as events have proved, so epitomical of his entire career. . . . In Brahms . . . it would be difficult to point to any characteristic of the later works, the germ of which is not to be found in those of this first period.

⁴⁴Murdoch, op. cit., p. 207.

⁴⁵Evans, op. cit., p. 25.

Composition of characterstücke witnessed its height in Brahms' informal piano solos of the first and last periods but this appealing style of composition will, without doubt, always maintain considerable popularity. Certainly Debussy was not averse to the use of the "prelude" type of composition and composed twenty-four pieces with that general title, although each had a specific impressionistic title. Characterstücke can be sketchily traced down to the present through Ravel (Miroirs), Poulenc (Novellettes and Impromptus), Prokofieff (Sarcasms), Bartok (Bagatelles) and Shostakovich (Preludes). Whatever may be the outcome of contemporary innovations, such as new tonal systems, et cetera, the simple form of the characterstücke will easily lend itself to infinite use.

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