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Romanticizing Brahms: Early Recordings and the [De]Construction of Brahmsian Identity

Scott, A.M.

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Author: Scott, Anna

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3) The Pianists of the Schumann - Brahms Circle.

3.1) Introduction

As the tenets of the historically-informed performance practice movement push ever farther into later repertoires, they have encountered those performance styles for which we have both documentary and sounding traces. Twenty years ago, Robert Philip predicted that when modern reconstructions of “authentic” Elgar met Elgar as he was recorded, there would be “a collision between two worlds, a real world which no longer exists, and a reconstructed world which never wholly existed except in the imagination.”²⁹² Those of us who may have anticipated a similar cataclysm in the late piano music of Johannes Brahms have since witnessed a strange stalemate: despite believing in the historical validity of their performances, mainstream, HIP and RIP pianists are still reluctant to play in ways that come anywhere near the described and recorded performance styles of the Schumann-Brahms circle of pianists.

On the surface, this gap seems to persist because mainstream pianists continue to believe in an unbroken performance tradition stretching back to Brahms’s day, viewing the long-eradicated unnotated expressive devices evidenced by late-Romantic recordings as mere remnants of that epoch’s as yet unbridled sentimentalism and shoddy technique. HIP pianists tend to rely on more malleable documentary traces such as treatises, ignoring what comparisons between historical utterances and recordings might teach us

²⁹² Robert Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Style: Changing Tastes in Instrumental Performance, 1900 - 1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 228.

about the limits of historical recreationist practices based on non-sounding traces. Even RIP pianists (those consciously reproducing elements of early-recorded pianism) tend to selectively apply only those elements that “do not challenge current notions of good taste or that do not take us out of our comfort zone.”²⁹³

Instead of examining what lies in the lingering gaps between historical traces of past performance styles and the modern historicist acts they inspire, it is common to hear that period performance, even when approached selectively, is a worthwhile and even experimental venture because it affords an opportunity to hear old music with new ears or, as Bernard D. Sherman observes, “HIP Brahms is thriving more than I expected, because it continues to rekindle musicians’ passion for Brahms.”²⁹⁴ Of his own applications of late-Romantic style as captured on early recordings, RIP pianist Neal Peres Da Costa asserts that, “Having *experimented* with this, it becomes almost inconceivable to play this music in the straightjacketed manner nowadays frequently heard. Such a way sounds to me emotionally restricted: devoid of the living, breathing expression that one can so easily imagine Brahms having intended.”²⁹⁵ But how experimental are these forays into period style, and do they really take us anywhere new? Few pianists, Da Costa included, seem willing to imitate the extremity and frequency of nineteenth-century pianists’ use of unnotated expressive devices like dislocation, arpeggiation and tempo modification; while tending to ignore their more serious textual violations like elision and truncation altogether.

²⁹³ Neal Peres Da Costa, *Off the Record: Performing Practices in Romantic Piano Playing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 310.

²⁹⁴ Bernard D. Sherman, “Orchestral Brahms and ‘Historically Informed Performance’: A Progress Report,” last paragraph, accessed July 23, 2013, http://bsherman.net/Brahms_Diapason_Sherman_English.htm.

²⁹⁵ Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 250. Emphasis is mine.

While early-recorded Brahms style tends to be faster and less portentous than modern Brahms style, there is still a tendency among pianists to view the constitutive elements of the former as a “meretricious sugar coating,”²⁹⁶ a decorative flavouring that can be added or subtracted to any degree with few implications for how Brahms's works sound and signify in performance. This tendency seems to be buttressed by a lingering fidelity to the work concept and a pervasive distinction between musical style and content: one that, as Susan Sontag asserts in relation to literary studies, “holds together the fabric of critical discourse, and serves to perpetuate certain intellectual aims and vested interests which themselves remain unchallenged and would be difficult to surrender without a fully articulated working replacement at hand.”²⁹⁷ It is my contention that Brahms as he was recorded is kept at arm's length from modern HIP and RIP Brahms because it threatens to expose a dangerous absurdity at the heart of the 'claims and vested interests' of the aesthetic ideology of Brahmsian control: namely, that according to such ideas, Brahms might today be deemed a historically-*uninformed* Brahms pianist.

By viewing only those elements of early-recorded Brahms style that are compatible with the ideology of control as 'content,' while everything else is dismissed as non-essential 'style,' the hale and hearty Brahms of our imagination remains protected from Brahms as he was recorded, and so the gaps between historical traces and modern historicist acts persist. Perhaps then HIP and RIP Brahms is popular *because* it is nothing like the recorded evidence: it satisfies our appetite for hearing old music with new ears without destabilising the very ideology that pre-structures scholarly and performative

²⁹⁶ Will Crutchfield, “Brahms, By Those Who Knew Him,” *Opus 2*, no. 5 (1986): 18, in Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 42.

²⁹⁷ Susan Sontag, “On Style,” first section, second paragraph, accessed July 23, 2013, <http://www.coldbacon.com/writing/sontag-onstyle.html>.

assessments of that evidence, while also reinforcing performance norms that resist the very experimentation the evidence itself seems to invite. As we have already seen, contemporary Brahms performances that do not communicate mental and physical control risk being labelled historically invalid, leaving performers more aware of the evidence than ever, yet afraid to produce truly experimental 'fully articulated working replacements' for understandings of 'characteristic' Brahmsian sound and meaning. While there is nothing wrong with using historical traces selectively, in order to problematize assumptions of the historical validity of the Brahmsian aesthetic ideology of control and its protective performance norms it seems important to at least *try* to attempt an 'all or nothing' approach to evidence of Brahms's performance contexts.

Before this radical approach can be attempted however, over the course of this chapter I will show how notions of 'authentic' Brahmsian control have been buttressed by highly pre-structured assessments of the performance styles of the Schumann-Brahms circle of pianists. I will argue that descriptions of Clara's preternaturally controlled pianism have been posited as a central ideal to which most pianists in her circle aspired, while deviations from that ideal have been dismissed as historically spurious, non-essential, and thus expendable. To demonstrate the performative implications of this approach, I will offer a brief discussion of how the elements of early-recorded Brahms style continue to be selected and applied according to a Clara-centric ideology of control, resulting in performances that keep the Brahms of our imagination at a safe distance from Brahms as he was recorded.

3.2) The Clara Schumann Ideal

No pianist ever before retained so powerful a hold upon the public mind for so long.²⁹⁸

Although we have no sounding evidence of Clara Schumann at the piano, descriptions of her performances and the precepts of her teaching are found throughout the historical documentary record. While such accounts are undoubtedly laden with the agendas of those positioning themselves within the contemporaneous cultural-political debates already surveyed, the language used to describe Clara's pianism is key to understanding why we continue to be so invested in positing it as central to a unified Schumann-Brahms 'school' of pianism. As Michael Musgrave asserts:

Clara was so intimate with the compositions of Brahms and his artistic values...[and] Brahms in his turn was truly a part of the Schumann artistic tradition. Many descriptions survive...of her teaching and the qualities she sought... [and] though speaking in the first place of playing Schumann's music, the remarks have equal relevance to Brahms.²⁹⁹

Despite having achieved immense success as an interpreter in her own right over a sixty-year concert career, much of Clara's reputation hinged upon her omnipresence in the private and professional contexts that gave rise to the piano music of Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms. She and her pupils championed the former's music

²⁹⁸ "Madame Schumann," *TMTASCC* 25, no. 494 (April 1, 1884): 201, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3359258>.

²⁹⁹ Michael Musgrave, "Early Trends in the Performance of Brahms's Piano Music," in *Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performance Style*, ed. Michael Musgrave and Bernard D. Sherman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 316.

throughout his institutionalization and after his death, while insisting on programming the latter's works at a time when critics still harboured serious doubts as to their creator's merits. Clara was often the first to play through Brahms's newest works, and we know from their correspondence that he took her critiques seriously. Clara's pupil Fanny Davies recalls that, "[Brahms] made it a rule never to publish a new work until he had heard it performed,"³⁰⁰ and it certainly seems reasonable to assume that this familiarity with Clara's pianism had far-reaching implications for his compositional processes.

In viewing Clara as the muse, medium, and guardian of two such towering musical identities, contemporaneous discourse surrounding her artistic contributions tends to be dominated by rather chauvinistic themes, where "to have the honour of playing to Mozart and mending Beethoven's shirts [were] privileges which many a lady pianist might envy."³⁰¹ Many other accounts of Clara's personal and artistic qualities however, though similarly gendered, indeed establish her as an exemplar of deep physical and mental control. As one commentator notes, "[Clara's] wifely devotion...continued its touching manifestations through forty years of widowhood...Through all this...[she] passed unscathed, like some heaven-protected subject of the ordeal by fire."³⁰² So too does Fanny Davies describe Clara as having "not only acted as [Robert's] pioneer, but...like a chosen Priestess...[she] faithfully guarded the soul of his music."

³⁰⁰ Fanny Davies, "Some Personal Recollections of Brahms as Pianist and Interpreter," *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, ed. W. W. Cobbett (London, 1929; 2nd edn. London, 1963), 182 - 84, in George S. Bozarth, "Fanny Davies and Brahms's Late Chamber Music," *Performing Brahms*, 173.

³⁰¹ "Miss Fanny Davies: A Biographical Sketch," *The Musical Times* 46, no. 748 (June 1, 1905): 365, accessed April 9, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/903439>.

³⁰² "Clara Josephine Schumann," *TMTASCC* 37, no. 640 (June 1, 1896): 369, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3368020>.

Discussions of Clara's fidelity to Robert, itself an act of both mental and physical control, are often found alongside accounts of her opinions on issues of composer intent and textual adherence. For Clara, the soul of Robert's music was intimately tied to his notation, and Davies goes on to recall that her teacher often urged her pupils to “play what is written; play it *as* it is written...it all stands there.”³⁰³ Elsewhere it is reported that when attending Anton Rubinstein's concerts, Fanny Davies would follow along with her score noting all unnotated nuances of interpretation. When Clara performed however, it is said that “[Davies] needed no pencil, for she played everything exactly as it was written.”³⁰⁴ Clara's fidelity to canonic bodies in the flesh and on the page was also seen as a function of those other signifiers of mental control, intelligence and modesty:

As the wife of one of the greatest composers since Beethoven, [Clara] might easily have been tempted to espouse with too much ardour her husband's cause...[but] Madame Schumann's character, intellect, and training saved her...By her modesty, prudence, and talents she has gradually achieved a veritable triumph...Though not her husband's sole disciple... [Clara] commands attention as one having special influence and authority...[as] the most faithful, the most earnest, and the most intelligent interpreter of Robert Schumann's pianoforte works.³⁰⁵

Clara's ability to modestly place her ample talents at the service of composer and music is further underlined by an 1867 review in which she is described as “foremost amongst the most intelligent living pianists,” in whose playing “the design of the composer [is] never for one moment...lost in the whirlwind of passages requiring the

³⁰³ Fanny Davies, “On Schumann: And Reading Between the Lines,” *Music and Letters* (July 1925): 214, 215, accessed April 9, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/726684>.

³⁰⁴ “Miss Fanny Davies: A Biographical Sketch,” *The Musical Times* (June 1, 1905): 366.

³⁰⁵ “Madame Schumann” *TMTASCC* (April 1, 1884): 201.

utmost digital dexterity.”³⁰⁶ And as asserted on the occasion of her death in 1896, “[Clara] always played with care, intelligence, and feeling...she brought one as near to the composer as lay in her power.”³⁰⁷ Just as Clara was viewed as a link to Robert Schumann and Brahms’s private and professional worlds, so too was her controlled mind and body the medium whereby audiences could encounter their works unencumbered by the intrusion of a performer's immodest personality and flashy technique.

As with Brahms, Clara's classicist pedigree and her devotion to the music of the past were often invoked as a critique of the ego-driven excesses of her more overtly Romantic contemporaries. As Fanny Davies polemicizes, “The Schumann tradition does not begin with Schumann! It begins with Bach, and goes on through Beethoven, and all the great Masters.” Elsewhere Davies notes that, “there flowed, through Clara Schumann's art, the uninterrupted stream of the world's great musical traditions.”³⁰⁸ Clara's role as a physical and spiritual link to the musical geniuses of the past seems confirmed by obituary notices lamenting that her “bodily presence seemed to place us nearer the time...when the great ones walked our earth,” and that her death “sever[ed] the last great remaining link that bound the music of the present with that of the past.”³⁰⁹ So too was Clara's passing framed as the end of an era of serious music making: “She lived

³⁰⁶ “Monday Popular Concerts,” *TMTASCC* 13, no. 289 (March 1, 1867): 8, 13, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3352655>.

³⁰⁷ “Clara Schumann,” *The Academy* 49, no. 1252 (May 30, 1896): 454, accessed October 24, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/1298650908?accountid=16376>.

³⁰⁸ Davies, “On Schumann,” *Music and Letters* (July 1925): 215; and “Miss Fanny Davies: A Biographical Sketch,” *The Musical Times* (June 1, 1905): 369.

³⁰⁹ “Clara Josephine Schumann,” *TMTASCC* (June 1, 1896): 369; and “Madame Schumann,” *The Manchester Guardian* (May 21, 1896): 6, accessed June 21, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/483290791?accountid=16376>.

through the 'twilight of the gods' into the comparative night of our time...Let us recall...her uncompromising refusal to join in...'the Baal-worship of debased art.'"³¹⁰

Other accounts link Clara to both the past and *future* of serious art, noting "the great interest which she has always taken in the development and progress of music," and that throughout her career she remained "faithful to the old masters, true to her husband's art-work, and generous to the productions of men of various styles and degrees of excellence."³¹¹ Clara's fierce championing of one man however, often drew less sympathetic reactions: "[Clara] was narrow, intolerant, self-centred...[and] lived her life in a mutual admiration society of the smallest kind...'How sad it is there should be no one but Brahms whom one can look up to and admire as an artist.' That was her attitude to the world of living composers."³¹² This intolerance may have been a function of her acute awareness of a performer's role in the construction of nascent canonic identities, as neither her husband nor Brahms enjoyed unanimous critical success during her lifetime:

Critics, blinded by prejudice, spoke slightly of [Clara's] husband's music; and in one influential quarter, and for obvious reasons, her great merits as a pianist were not properly recognized...[A]gainst an indifferent public and a cold, even hostile press, the only arms which Mme. Schumann used were a tender heart, a thinking head, and skilled fingers...hasten[ing] to some extent the hour of victory.³¹³

³¹⁰ "Clara Josephine Schumann," *TMTASCC* (June 1, 1896): 369.

³¹¹ "Madame Schumann," *TMTASCC* (April 1, 1884): 201.

³¹² "The Greatness and Littleness of Clara Schumann," review of *Clara Schumann: An Artist's Life*, by Berthold Litzmann, trans. Grace E. Hadow (MacMillan and Co., 1913) in *The Academy and Literature* 84, no. 2141 (May 10, 1913): 586, accessed October 24, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/1298691218?accountid=16376>.

³¹³ "Clara Schumann," *The Academy* (May 30, 1896): 454.

Similarly, after an 1881 performance of Brahms's *Violin Sonata* Op. 78 it is reported that Clara "assured every possible advantage to a work which, though unequal in its merits, is not unworthy of the somewhat exaggerated reputation of its author."³¹⁴

Eager to distance the practices of the Schumann-Brahms circle from those of the New Germans, Clara actively promoted those composers and performers who shared her critical view of the emotional excesses and physical weaknesses of her Romanticist present: an advocacy that seems to have partly unfolded in her performance and teaching of Robert and Brahms's music. On the performance of the former's music, Fanny Davies recalls:

Even in his wildest and most joyous moments he is never boisterous or vulgar...devoid of the least taint of melodrama, sentimentality, anecdotes and 'art'...We all know that the trend of today is rush and hurry, short cuts, machinery, commercialism, hectic speed, a great deal of superficiality... In order to read between Schumann's lines one must steadily refuse to let any one of these later influences poison one's power of interpretation.³¹⁵

Davies's choice of the word 'poison' is naturally pertinent here. Recalling Clara's performance of her husband's *Piano Concerto in A minor* Op. 54 Davies notes that, "the solo was perfectly free, full of nuance, but without wrong ritenutos and sentimentality...Schumann's 'Allegro Affettuoso' is not an *affected* allegro." 'Affected' here might readily be interpreted as 'afflicted.' Remembering Clara's performance directions for Robert's *Romance in F sharp major* Op. 28, Davies further underlines

³¹⁴ "Monday Popular Concerts," *TMTASCC* 22, no. 458 (April 1, 1881): 180, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3358298>.

³¹⁵ Fanny Davies, "On Schumann," (July 1925): 216.

Clara's distaste for melodrama, rush and hurry, only this time she explicitly invokes themes of the body and mind (Sound Ex. 3.1 and 3.2):

[Clara's] direction was, for the first section, 'Innerlich ruhig' (keep quiet inside); and in the second section the feeling of pressing forward must never become obvious and thus degenerate into an *accelerando*...The emotional balance of the whole work must ever be repose - and the performer must be physically reposeful if he is to enter into the mental repose and convey that to the listener.³¹⁶

In order to be able to communicate this inner and outer repose in performance, Clara's pupils received extensive coaching in the awareness and training of their physical apparatuses as pianists. As pupil Marie Fromm recalls:

Long I struggled to make my fingers obedient in the scales and runs, and many tears I shed over the touch and tone-quality, for the old lady was an iron task-master...The very foundation of her training was that the arm must be absolutely loose, not a single muscle in upper or lower arm or wrist strained or forced, the fingers kept loose in the knuckle-joints, all power and quality coming from the back muscles...To bring the sinews under delicate control...is a long and difficult process.³¹⁷

Clara's students were then expected to put this control to use in the careful delineation of the tonal, textural, rhythmic and structural features of musical

³¹⁶ Davies, "On Schumann," *Music and Letters* (July 1925): 216, 222. Emphasis mine. Clara's pupil Adelina de Lara demonstrates these qualities quite beautifully in her 1952 recording of the *Romance* Op. 28 no. 2, as heard in sound example 3.1. Note the relative temporal stability of the A section as opposed to the elasticity of the B section. Another of Clara's pupils however, Carl Friedberg, recorded the same work in 1953, and his solemn performance as heard in sound example 3.2 is even more temporally and emotionally restrained than de Lara's, whose playing seems quite lilting and restless by comparison.

³¹⁷ Marie Fromm, "Some Reminiscences of My Music Studies with Clara Schumann," *The Musical Times* 73, no. 1073 (July 1, 1932): 615, accessed October 24, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org.access.authkb.kb.nl/stable/918290>.

compositions. In reference to the voicing of polyphonic textures, Fanny Davies remembers how Clara emphasized “the importance of playing chords in a way that will convey to the hearer the significance of the harmonies therein contained.”³¹⁸ On matters of rhythmic detail, Clara is reported to have paid “almost incredible attention to the minutest value of every note she played,”³¹⁹ corroborating Davies’s recollection that she often emphasized “Das 'Getragene': the giving of full value to the inner voices (but never to the detriment of the whole picture); [and] the giving of full value to the basses.”³²⁰ According to Davies, Clara's meticulous attention to local detail served to reveal rather than obscure large-scale musical structure, for “like all great artists [Clara] demanded the subordination of detail to the spirit of the whole.”

Clara's students were also expected to cultivate something of her legendary tone, touch and legato playing. As Fanny Davies continues, Clara insisted that they “acquire the command of a pure *legato*, even in the most rapid passages...to produce beauty of tone and repose.”³²¹ Clara's daughter Eugenie recalls how her mother could make “the legato of the melody hove[r] above that of the bass,” and that Brahms's piano pieces were “plastic creations, glowing with life and tenderness”³²² in her hands: statements that both seem to imply a certain flexibility of rhythm, whereby time and space are needed to produce the tone quality Clara sought. Another pupil describes Clara's tone as clear, full

³¹⁸ Fanny Davies and Frederick Corder, “Robert Schumann: About Schumann’s Pianoforte Music,” *The Musical Times* 51, no. 810 (August 1, 1910): 493, accessed April 9, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/908084>.

³¹⁹ “The Greatness and Littleness of Clara Schumann,” *The Academy and Literature* (May 10, 1913): 585.

³²⁰ Davies and Corder, “Robert Schumann,” *The Musical Times* (August 1, 1910): 494.

³²¹ “Miss Fanny Davies: A Biographical Sketch,” *The Musical Times* (June 1, 1905): 369 - 70.

³²² E. Schumann, *Erinnerungen*, 195 - 96, in Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music: Approaches to Studying Recorded Musical Performance* (London: CHARM, 2009), chapter 6, paragraph 9, www.charm.kcl.ac.uk/studies/chapters/chap6.html.

and warm, with a carrying quality "which made every melody ring out like a song."³²³

The song-like nature of Clara's touch and tone seems corroborated by one of Brahms's inscriptions: "To Frau Klara Schumann, the greatest singer," referring to the way her tone and touch "conveyed like a beautiful human voice every shade of emotion."³²⁴ Much like her insistence on 'keeping quiet inside' in matters of expression, tempo and technique, so too was Clara's tone and touch rooted in deep mental and physical poise, or 'hineinlegen' (to put inside), as Davies explains:

The meaning of the word cannot be realised by technique alone. It suggests something spiritual and emotional, and demands the right touch on the pianoforte, and...[has] behind it the warmth of human affection such as is conveyed by the pressure of a hand one loves...[and] does not mean extreme digging into the keys in order to produce a 'warm' tone.³²⁵

Davies's account here might explain contemporaneous descriptions of Clara's 'covered' technique, whereby the "beautiful quality of tone she produced...was obtained by pressure with the fingers rather than by percussion...[T]he fingers were kept close to the keys and squeezed instead of striking them."³²⁶ This technique may certainly have facilitated Clara's ability to become a disappearing agent in the transmission of musical works, for when sounds are drawn from the instrument in such a way that the hands

³²³ Eva Ducat, "Conversations with Ilona Derenburg (née Eibenschütz)," unpublished transcript, Eibenschutz file, *International Piano Archives at Maryland* (IPAM), in Kathleen Rountree, "The short-lived career of Ilona Eibenschütz," *The American Music Teacher* 43, no. 5 (April 1994): 14, accessed May 13, 2013,

<http://search.proquest.com.access.uthkb.kb.nl/docview/217451599?accountid=16376>.

³²⁴ E. Schumann, *Erinnerungen*, 195 - 96, in Leech-Wilkinson, *Changing Sound of Music*, chapter 6, paragraph 9.

³²⁵ Davies and Corder, "Robert Schumann," *The Musical Times* (August 1, 1910): 494.

³²⁶ Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 294, in Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music*, chapter 6, paragraph 9.

rarely leave the keys, the physical extension of a pianist and the mechanism of their instrument recede while the 'work' performed is allowed to assume a central focus. When the keys are struck vertically from above, suddenly a performer's body and instrument come into view, and the 'work' becomes a vehicle for personality, technique and tool. As Fanny Davies recalls, Clara often insisted that in performance one should "never to think too much of the instrument and too little of the music."³²⁷

That Clara's 'covered' technique is mentioned at all perhaps evidences its peculiarity as compared to that of a new class of professional virtuosos with more vertical and percussive techniques designed to project the expressive and technical capabilities of performers and instruments alike. Clara's "pure and classical form of pianoforte playing"³²⁸ seems to have been remarkable and even old-fashioned for its connection to historical keyboard techniques in general, and with Mendelssohn in particular. As observed after an 1867 performance of Beethoven's *Sonata in D minor* Op. 31 no. 2:

The alternation of *Adagio* and *Allegro* in the first movement...can be readily played precisely as Beethoven has written them; but the power of sympathizing with the composer so as to re-produce his varied phrases of thought as he spoke and felt in the language he had chosen, belongs only to that order of genius of which Mendelssohn was the brightest example, and to which Madame Schumann...may fairly lay claim.³²⁹

³²⁷ "Miss Fanny Davies: A Biographical Sketch," *The Musical Times* (June 1, 1905): 370.

³²⁸ "Crystal Palace," *TMTASCC* 28, no. 530 (April 1, 1887): 215, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3359796>.

³²⁹ "Monday Popular Concerts," *TMTASCC* (March 1, 1867): 8, 13. The original review claims that Clara performed Beethoven's Sonata 'in D minor, no. 2, Op. 29,' but Op. 29 is the String Quintet in C major. The only Piano Sonata in D minor is that of Op. 31 no. 2, and it indeed features alternating recitativo Adagio and Allegro passages in its opening movement.

This Mendelssohn-like element in Clara's playing is again noticed in 1884 when it is observed that, "If we think of Emanuel Bach and Mozart, of Hummel [and] Mendelssohn...we are reminded of a pure and noble style of pianoforte playing, of which...Madame Schumann may be considered the last representative."³³⁰ As implied by the review of her Beethoven performance, Clara's 'pure and noble' style of playing in a way 'sympathetic' to composers probably involved expressive deviations from their texts.

Neal Peres Da Costa's discussion of a 'Leipzig' style of playing as related to a Mendelssohn tradition in the late-Romantic period might be helpful here. In 1904 the *Zeitschrift für Instrumentenbau* in Leipzig heralded Carl Reinecke as "the greatest and most conscientious performer of Mozart" living at the time, asserting that his forthcoming roll recordings of the complete Mozart piano sonatas would preserve "the style of the famous Leipzig Mozart-Players for posterity." According to Da Costa, "Reinecke was a representative of a particular style of playing Mozart that made use of arpeggiation, dislocation, and many other techniques...a tradition going back to Mendelssohn." Reinecke's pupil Julius Röntgen is also reported to have been known for his "ability to give himself unreservedly to a work's emotional content...[and] commune with its creator," as well as for his 'Leipzig' manner: the "arpeggio execution of chords and the delaying of thematic notes in the right hand."³³¹ If Röntgen's concern for the intentions of composers and his use of unnotated expressive devices are all associated with some 'Leipzig' manner of interpretation going back to Mendelssohn, then perhaps Clara's playing bore similar characteristics as well.

³³⁰ "Madame Schumann," *TMTASCC* (April 1, 1884): 201.

³³¹ Anonymous, "Altmeister Karl Reinecke und das Pianola," *Zeitschrift für Instrumentenbau* (September 11, 1904): 1039; Carl Flesch, *The Memoirs of Carl Flesch*, ed. Hans Keller and Carl Flesch, trans. Hans Keller (London: Rockliff, 1957), 215, in Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 162. According to Da Costa, Reinecke's roll recording project was left unfinished.

While Clara's performance approach likely included arpeggiation, dislocation and a certain amount of tempo flexibility, these elements rarely find their way into modern distillations of the essentials of her style. In *Performing Brahms* Michael Musgrave offers one such summation, adapted from the recollections of Clara's pupil Adelina de Lara:

She stresses first and above all Clara's requirement 'to be truthful to the composer's meaning, to emphasize every beauty in the composition,' which implies the thorough study of and knowledge of the score. She required constant attention to tone, rhythm, and phrasing - each phrase as though it were given to a musical instrument. She required tempos proper to the music. She was extremely averse to speed and thought it the curse of modern performance: 'keine Passagen' (no passagework) was her expression, referring to the routine rushing through figurations for brilliance of effect.³³²

It is easy to see why notions of a unified Schumann-Brahms school of pianism have been built around this Clara 'ideal.' Everything about her described performance ideology implies deep mental and physical control: her hyperawareness of how performance style signifies things about composers; her insistence on the cultivation of inner and outer poise; her eschewal of the poisons of over-sentimentalizing and the degeneracy of virtuosic display; her textual fidelity and her willingness to place mind, body and instrument at the service of the composer; and her emphasis on the careful delineation of detail and structure through 'hineinlegen,' 'Das Getragene' and 'Innerlich ruhig.' While none of this suggests that Clara played in a way that we would recognize as controlled or even literal today, it does however seem to offer ample evidence that her performance ideology was rooted in expressive and technical restraint. As such, Clara's

³³² Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 316, from De Lara, *Finale* (London, 1955), 55.

described performance style sits rather comfortably beside the precepts of contemporary Brahms style and its underlying aesthetic ideology.

3.3) Brahms and the Clara 'Ideal'

Efforts to align Clara's pianism with Brahms's are likely buttressed by knowledge of her intimacy with his private and professional life on one hand, and by the palatability of her performance style with regards to the aesthetic ideology of mental and physical control on the other. Like Clara, assertions of Brahms's control at the keyboard are often found in descriptions of the "matchless beauty, clarity, weight and richness"³³³ of his tone, touch and legato playing. In an account reminiscent of descriptions of the vocal nature of Clara's tone and touch, Robert Schumann reports that Brahms was "a player of genius who can make of the piano an orchestra of lamenting and loudly jubilant voices. There were...songs, the poetry of which would be understood even without words...[and] a profound vocal melody runs through them all."³³⁴

While both Clara's and Brahms's tonal palettes are described as beautiful, varied and warm, Brahms's seems to have also been *powerful*, though never noisy. Albert Dietrich recalls that Brahms played with "wonderful power and mastery," while Fanny Davies remembers that, "his touch could be warm, deep, full, and broad in the *fortes*, and not hard, even in the *fortissimos*; and his *pianos*, always of carrying power, could be as round and transparent as a dewdrop." Hanslick too underlines the inner power of Brahms's tone production in his observation that, "the forceful and the distorted are thus simply impossible in Brahms's playing...he seems reluctant to draw a full tone from the piano"; while Rudolf von der Leyen remembers that, "force as such had no place in

³³³ Von Bülow, *Briefe*, 6, 98, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 125.

³³⁴ Schumann, "Neue Bahnen," *NZfM* 39, no. 18 (28 October, 1853): 185 - 86, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 121.

[Brahms's] playing...he never demanded more of an instrument than it was capable of giving without overstepping the bounds of artistic beauty."³³⁵

Like Clara, this restraint seems to have enabled Brahms to place his mind and body at the service of composer and text in performance. In an account echoing Clara's insistence on 'emphasizing every beauty in the composition,' Brahms's pupil Florence May recalls that, "he never aimed at mere effect, but seemed to plunge into the innermost meaning of whatever music he happened to be interpreting, exhibiting all its details and expressing its very depths."³³⁶ This elucidation of detail seems to have been facilitated by Brahms's careful voicing of textural complexities. As his pupil Ethel Smyth reports, "when lifting a submerged theme out of the tangle of music he used jokingly to ask us to admire the gentle sonority of his 'tenor thumb'," while Fanny Davies recalls that, "Brahms played with unbelievable transparency of touch, elegance, simplicity and ease of phrasing...g[iving] out the melodic line very beautifully with the thumb or little finger – not declaiming it, but putting it very clearly and elegantly." Like Clara's insistence on the primacy of musical meaning however, May recalls that, "neatness and equality of finger were imperatively demanded...as a preparation, not as an end. Varying and sensitive expression was to [Brahms]...necessary to the true interpretation of any work."³³⁷

³³⁵ Albert Dietrich, *Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms, besonders aus seiner Jugendzeit* (Leipzig, 1899), 2 - 3 in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 122; Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, "Fanny Davies and Brahms's Late Chamber Music," *Performing Brahms*, 172; Eduard Hanslick, *Aus dem Konzertsaal, Kritik und Schilderungen, 1848 - 1868* (Vienna, 1897), 288 - 90, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 122; and Rudolf von der Leyen, *Johannes Brahms als Mensch und Freund* (Düsseldorf, 1905), 61, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 124.

³³⁶ Florence May, *The Life of Brahms*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (London, 1948), I: 21, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 123.

³³⁷ Ethel Smyth, *Impressions that Remained*, 2 vols. (London, 1919), I: 266, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 124; Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 174; and May, *Johannes Brahms*, I: 18 - 19, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 130.

Alongside descriptions of Brahms's careful 'playing' of detail are accounts of his powerful basses in performance. As Fanny Davies remembers, "one could hear that he listened very intently to the inner harmonies, and of course he laid great stress on good basses," while after the premiere of the revised *Trio in B* Op. 8 Max Graf reports that, "Brahms...as usual introduced thundering basses. Upon this ponderous structure a magnificent and uniform building was erected." Echoing Clara's insistence on the 'subordination of detail to the spirit of the whole,' Brahms's booming bass lines framed a necessary architectural foundation for his intricate textural designs: an approach to playing detail *and* structure that becomes explicitly allied to the trope of mental and physical fitness, as Graf continues:

[Brahms's] playing was devoid of the complicated shading and nuances of colours which characterize players of the Liszt school. He was simple and strong. There was spiritual and musical potency in his playing - no nervous over-sensitiveness running amuck in hundreds of little colour patches. When Brahms played, the design was important and not the colours themselves.³³⁸

There is also evidence that Brahms shared Clara's 'covered' approach to tone production and 'hineinlegen,' whereby sound was coaxed from the inside-out rather than struck from above. Adelina de Lara recalls that, "[Brahms's] hands seemed to rest quietly on the keyboard and brought out a depth and volume of tone, even in the most quiet *pp*," while Hanslick reports that the composer "[shook] octave passages from a relaxed wrist in such a way that the keys are brushed sideways, rather than struck squarely from

³³⁸ Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 172; and Max Graf, *Legend of a Musical City* (New York, 1945; repr. New York, 1969), 105, 103, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 134, 136.

above."³³⁹ In Bruce Hungerford's transcriptions of lessons with Carl Friedberg, Friedberg asserts that in Brahms's piano music, "legato is something you get in the best way if you play...as if you were sorry to leave the tone you just struck...just drawing it out slow. Like a snail...No leg-lifting." Echoing descriptions of Clara's 'hovering legato,' elsewhere Friedberg remarks, "Don't think too much pianistic motion. Just lay your hands on the keys...[so] the melody hangs like spider webs in the air."³⁴⁰ On Carl Friedberg's teaching of Brahms's piano music in general, Hungerford summarizes:

One aspect of [Brahms's] playing, which impressed Carl Friedberg perhaps more than any other...was the ever apparent endeavour on the part of the master to make the piano sound not like a piano - a percussive device - but rather to mould and knead phrases, so that the music sounded as though invoked from the instrument, not punched into it... Brahms's playing gave an impression of great power, but it was more a power from within rather than brute force from without.³⁴¹

As with descriptions of Clara's literal and self-effacing performance approach, references to Brahms's mental control also invoke themes of devotion and modesty, especially as related to a performer's deference to the intentions of composers and the statuses of their texts. As Hanslick reports, "[Brahms] only wishes to serve the composition, and he avoids almost to the point of shyness any semblance or suggestion of self-importance or show," and that, "prompted by the desire to let the composer speak for himself, [Brahms's]...playing resembles the austere Cordelia, who concealed her finest

³³⁹ De Lara, *Finale*, 49; Hanslick, *Aus dem Konzertsaal*, 288 - 90; in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 122 - 23.

³⁴⁰ DiClemente, "Brahms Performance Practice," 61, 66 from Transcript, 226, 282.

³⁴¹ Bruce Hungerford, "Carl Friedberg: Impressions of a Great Artist," date unknown, from the Bruce Hungerford and Carl Friedberg Collections at IPAM, in DiClemente, "Brahms Performance Practice," 88.

feelings rather than betray them to the people.”³⁴² Brahms is also known to have remarked, “When I play something by Beethoven, I have absolutely no individuality in relation to it; rather I try to reproduce the piece as well as Beethoven wrote it. Then I have (quite) enough to do.”³⁴³

One wonders how closely this might relate to accounts of Clara's ability to play Beethoven 'as he thought and felt it' in her Mendelssohn-like 'Leipzig manner': an approach that seems to have included the use of unnotated expressive devices such as arpeggiation, dislocation and tempo flexibility. Florence May recalls a lesson in which Brahms asserted that Mozart's sonata should be played with 'sustained feeling' and a 'deep legato touch,' rather than in a straight and light way. After she expressed her shock, Brahms replied, “it is all there,' pointing to the book.” As May continues:

[Brahms's] interpretation of Bach was always unconventional...and he certainly did not share the opinion, which has had many distinguished adherents, that Bach's music should be performed in a simply flowing style...he liked variety of tone and touch, as well as a certain elasticity of tempo...and he performed them not only with graduated shadings but with marked contrasts of tone effect...[and] with *feeling* of some kind or other.³⁴⁴

May's use of the word 'feeling' in both statements seems related to her reference to 'elasticity of tempo.' So too does Fanny Davies recall that, "The sign \diamond , as used by Brahms, often occurs when he wishes to express great sincerity and warmth, allied not only to tone but to rhythm also. He would linger not on one note alone, but on a whole

³⁴² Hanslick, *Aus dem Konzertsaal*, 288 - 290, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 122.

³⁴³ Heinrich Schenker, L. van Beethoven, *Die letzten [funf] Sonaten von Beethoven: Kritische Ausgabe mit Einführung und Erläuterung* [Op. 110] (Vienna, 1913 - 21), 78, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 130.

³⁴⁴ May, *Brahms*, I: 17 - 18, 69, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 128 - 29. Emphasis mine.

idea... prefer[ring] to lengthen a bar or phrase rather than spoil it by making up the time into a metronomic bar." Davies also remembers that, "Brahms's manner of interpretation was free, very elastic and expansive...[but] the balance was always there – one felt the fundamental rhythms underlying the surface rhythms," and that he "beg[an] phrases well, ends them well, leaves plenty of space between the end of one and the beginning of another, and yet joins them without any hiatus."³⁴⁵

Taken together, descriptions such as these suggest a few important things about Brahms's unnotated tempo modifications: first, they were used in order to relax rather than hasten temporal motion; secondly, they never subverted the sense of a basic, underlying pulse; thirdly, they were prompted on a local level by notated elements like hairpins, phrases, and particularly beautiful melodic, harmonic and rhythmic details; and fourthly, they functioned to delineate the apexes and outer boundaries of larger musical structures. This delineation of both detail and structure through the holding back of tempo certainly echoes Clara's insistence on 'Innerlich ruhig' (keep quiet inside), 'Das Getragene' (giving notes their full value though not to the detriment of the whole), and 'keine Passagen' (no rushing).

Further support for Brahms's use of time to create repose rather than 'rush and hurry' is found in Adelina de Lara's recollection that after playing Brahms's *Scherzo in E flat minor*, the composer exclaimed, "No, no, it is too fast, you must draw it out more, like this."³⁴⁶ Similarly, Fanny Davies observes that in Brahms's performance of the *Presto non assai* second movement of his *Trio in C Minor* Op. 101, "What one usually hears is 'presto.' What one heard from Brahms was 'non assai.'" Elsewhere Davies

³⁴⁵ Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 172.

³⁴⁶ De Lara, *Finale*, 49, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 126.

remembers that, "His phrasing was notable in lyric passages. In these a strictly metronomic Brahms is as unthinkable as a fussy or hurried Brahms in passages which must be presented with adamant rhythm."³⁴⁷ Taken together, these accounts suggest that Brahms played quite steadily though not too quickly in up-tempo material, and quite flexibly though not too slowly in more lyrical material. Indeed, as Davies laments in reference to twentieth-century Brahms performance practice, "the tendency is usually to play the Andantes too slowly, and the quick movements, scherzos, etc., too quickly."³⁴⁸

As in Davies's account just above, themes of control are often implied in observations of changing approaches to Brahmsian tempo. Violinist Franz Kneisel reports that Brahms once asked, "Would you please do me the favour of not taking that too fast?"; Carl Friedberg is known to have instructed Juilliard students that, "for Brahms, one could never play slowly enough"; and Max Rudolf remembers that, "[Brahms] would not have approved of the rushed tempi we now sometimes hear. His music making was relaxed."³⁴⁹ The implication here is that there is an approach to Brahmsian tempo that is 'just right,' in that it best reveals the most essential features of his compositions: features assumed to be detail and structure. As Davies asserts, "All Brahms's passages, if one can call them passages, are strings of gems, and that tempo which can best reveal these gems and help to characterize the detail at the same time as the outlines of a great work must be

³⁴⁷ Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms* 172, 174.

³⁴⁸ De Lara, *Finale*, 49, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 126; and Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms* 172, 174, 176.

³⁴⁹ R. H. Schauffler, *The Unknown Brahms* (New York, 1933), 411; Bernard D. Sherman, in conversations with violist Emmanuel Vardi who studied with Friedberg; and M. Rudolf, *The Grammar of Conducting* (2nd edn. New York, 1980), 359; in Bernard D. Sherman, "Metronome Markings, Timings, and Other Period Evidence," *Performing Brahms*, 112 - 13.

considered the *right* tempo."³⁵⁰ Davies's hesitation to use the word 'passages' here might stem from Clara's admonition 'keine Passagen!'

On the use of other unnotated expressive devices, Florence May recalls that Brahms "particularly disliked chords to be spread unless marked so by the composer for the sake of special effect. 'No arpège,' he used invariably to say if I unconsciously gave way to the habit, or yielded to the temptation of softening a chord by its means." While elsewhere it is reported that Brahms "arpeggiated all chords" and was once criticized for his "'incessant spreading of chords in the slower tempos,"³⁵¹ it is generally believed that teachers impart their 'best practice' to students. May's account certainly implies that, much like choosing 'the right' tempo, so too was the temptation of arpeggiating chords something to be regimented - even if Brahms didn't always practice what he preached.

Michael Musgrave summarizes Brahms's described performance style as having been characterized by a distinctive rhythm and attack, the quality and variety of his tone, and his awareness of the importance of tempo as related to interpretation and spirit.³⁵² To this framework perhaps we might add a covered technique, singing legato tone and powerful basses; the fastidious delineation of rhythmic and textural detail, though not to the detriment of the whole; an approach to expressive tempo modifications dominated by a holding back of tempo rather than a hastening; and the regimented use of all other unnotated expressive devices in order to emphasize musical detail and structure.

³⁵⁰ Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 176. Emphasis mine.

³⁵¹ May, *Johannes Brahms*, I, 18; Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 333; and H. Kroenlein, "Konzertbericht," *Karlsruher Zeitung* (Nov. 9, 1865) in Anselm Gerhard, "Willkürliches Arpeggieren," *Basler Jahrbuch für Historische Musikpraxis* 27 (2003): 123; in Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 139.

³⁵² Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 302.

When Brahms is reported to have fallen short of this controlled ideal, it is almost always framed as a function of his transition from a youthful pianist who performed other composers' works to an aged composer whose works were performed by others. As Fanny Davies recalls, "In the years during which I heard him (1884-96), Brahms had long ceased to practice regularly, and when one has reached the age of fifty, one's fingers are not apt to improve unless used constantly." As we have already seen, Clara too had serious reservations about Brahms's later playing, remarking that, "[he] plays more and more abominably - it's now nothing but thump, bang and scrabble." In addition to ageing and his negligence of practicing, reports of Brahms's tendency to play "more like a composer than a virtuoso" perhaps again evidence a growing chasm in performance standards between an older class of composer-pianists and a newer breed of professional virtuosos. As Marie Schumann observes, "In later years [Brahms] hardly ever played anything except his own compositions - when it didn't matter whether he reached technical perfection or not."³⁵³

Among the symptoms of Brahms's deteriorated later technique were a harshness of tone and an abundance of wrong notes, resulting in the impression that his performances were akin to what Marie Schumann calls a "spirited sketch," whereby he would reduce compositions to their barest essentials. While we have already seen Charles Stanford's recollection that when he heard Brahms perform in 1880, "The skips...were accomplished regardless of accuracy, and it is no exaggeration to say that there were handfuls of wrong notes," Stanford goes on to remark that, "The touch was somewhat

³⁵³ Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 173; Clara Schumann: *ein Künstlerleben*, III: 441, in Robert Philip, "Brahms's Musical World: Balancing the Evidence," in *Performing Brahms*, 351; Hanslick, *Aus dem Konzertsaal*, 288, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 126; and E. Schumann, *Erinnerungen*, 269, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 125.

hard and lacking in force-control; it was at its best in the slow movement, where he produced the true velvety quality, probably because he was not so hampered by his own difficulties."³⁵⁴ Brahms's later shortcomings aside however, many scholars proceed to evaluate whether his 1889 cylinder recording of an excerpt from his *Hungarian Dance No. 1 in G minor* matches descriptions of his performance style: a process that as Michael Musgrave asserts, should be undertaken with extreme caution:

Most descriptions come from later years when he took even less trouble with his playing. Many other descriptions imply that his technical vulnerability led to performances that [were] exaggerated...Thus, though descriptions of his best qualities are invaluable to us in relation to the score, not every feature [is] worth imitating. Rather, features must be taken as representing inclinations or trends.³⁵⁵

If Brahms's best qualities are invaluable in relation to his scores, then the first issue to tackle is reconciling his recorded performance with his notation. (Sound Ex. 3.3) Musgrave suggests that the genre of the *Hungarian Dance* might offer one possible explanation for his many departures from the score, asserting that, "Brahms's scores embody everything he wanted...Yet his recording... show[s] freedoms from the score that were obviously expected...The key issue is of course, 'how free is free and how strict is strict' - and in what *kinds* of pieces?"³⁵⁶ Neal Peres Da Costa also looks to genre in his attempt to resolve conflicting descriptions of Brahms's frequent use of arpeggiation with his rather restrained use of the device on the recording, suggesting that, "[Brahms] may

³⁵⁴ Stanford, *Pages*, 200, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 125.

³⁵⁵ Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 323.

³⁵⁶ May, *Johannes Brahms*, I: 18, in *Ibid.*, 323. Emphasis is mine.

have chosen to arpeggiate less frequently than usual considering the strongly accented character of the *Hungarian Dance*."³⁵⁷

Where the elements of Brahms's approach cannot be explained by genre alone, many will then adopt a score-based approach, whereby a performer's textual departures are assumed to be prompted by the notated elements of scores, with the intention of delineating the most important features of those scores: namely, detail and structure. George S. Bozarth cites Will Crutchfield's observation that Brahms uses dislocation "on just about all the accented first beats where the texture is melody/accompaniment [but] never on big accented chords"³⁵⁸: a practice that certainly echoes descriptions of Brahms's attention to detail and his emphasis of the outer boundaries of phrases. Musgrave observes that Brahms modifies the dotted quarter-eighth pattern of the main idea to two quarters to emphasize the ends of phrases, and that the contrasting *leggiero* section is taken more quickly providing structural contrast between sections. Though Brahms's local rhythmic alterations and larger temporal modifications serve to emphasize detail and structure in a practice Musgrave calls "'structural shaping,' in the sense of unveiling the essential features of the composition by these means," elsewhere he suggests that they might simply be a "hasty if enthusiastic response to the recording medium."³⁵⁹

Neal Peres Da Costa notes Crutchfield's observation that the "runs are played at a notably increased tempo...creating a dashing effect" in Brahms's performance, and that "the final cadence...is tossed off with a fiery snap, faster yet than the tempo of the

³⁵⁷ Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 140.

³⁵⁸ Crutchfield, "Brahms," 14, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 194 (note 20).

³⁵⁹ Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 307, 305.

runs."³⁶⁰ For context, Da Costa cites Fanny Davies's observation that in Brahms's performance of the *Trio in C Minor* Op. 101 a *poco stringendo* marking resulted in an increase of tempo from 76MM to 120MM. In Davies's example however, Brahms's rushing is in direct response to notation and occurs over a restricted range of musical material, while the rushed passages Crutchfield describes do not coincide with an indication to rush, nor do they emphasize detail and structure in the same way as Brahms's quicker tempo in the *leggiero* section. Perhaps this prompts Da Costa to advocate for a cautionary approach, noting that while "tempo flexibility appears to have been an indispensable aspect of 'Brahmsian' style...the boundaries within which this flexibility took place remain relatively unclear."³⁶¹

When comparing Brahms's described and recorded performance style, the trope of 'reasonable doubt' seems to be a particularly pressing one. Few performer-scholars are aware of the extent to which verbal accounts of Brahms's pianism have been selected according to their compatibility with descriptions of Clara's hyper-controlled elucidation of musical detail and structure, and that it is thus against this Clara ideal that we judge Brahms. Though very real and sounding, those features of Brahms's recorded style that are less compatible with the Clara ideal are instead ignored, sanitized, or framed as mere possibilities within a range of other imaginary and more palatable options, ensuring that notions of a unified Schumann-Brahms school of pianism remain safely intact. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to imagine the spirit of Brahms's recording from Musgrave's distillation of the essentials of his described and recorded style: essentials that seem to

³⁶⁰ Crutchfield, "Brahms," 14, in Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 266 - 67, 268.

³⁶¹ Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 184, in Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 264 - 65.

have much more in common with descriptions of Clara's playing than they do with the sounding evidence itself:

A strong sense of the basic musical structure, with strong beginnings and ends of passages, yet an awareness of the distinctive ideas or digressions within them, though not to the detriment of the overall shape; varieties of touch and tone...whether strongly marked or veiled, but always warm, rounded and distinctive; and a strongly rhythmic character where appropriate.³⁶²

Efforts to evaluate the Brahmsian authority of Clara's pupils tend to proceed in a similar manner, the logic being that if Clara's pianism indeed 'has equal relevance to Brahms' as contended by the summary above (and many others like it), then the playing of her pupils (if they can be shown to be faithful representatives of her method) should say something about Brahms's playing as well.

³⁶² Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 307.

3.4) The Schumann-Brahms Pupils

Much has been written about the problems inherent in reconstructing a teacher's performance style from those of their pupils, and for good reason. As Leech-Wilkinson asserts, "family trees tell us no more about the behaviour and tastes of our ancestors than they do about piano teachers," while Will Crutchfield suggests that performance style changes in the first place because students tend to "react to their teachers in myriad ways that are imitative and rebellious...their playing reflects the progressive style of...the new virtuosi on the block."³⁶³ Given Clara's critical attitude towards the practices of pianists outside her circle however, it is likely that her pupils - as compared to Liszt or Rubinstein's for example - were particularly discouraged from playing 'like the new virtuosi on the block.' Perhaps what can be said is that the pianism of her students might evidence a range within which she expected to hear the music of Schumann and Brahms performed: men in whose canonic identities she was so personally invested, and for whom her pupils would also be seen as representatives.

Amina Goodwin (1867-1942) is described in 1910 as "an ardent Schumannite who studied the longest under Clara Schumann,"³⁶⁴ and echoes of the precepts of Clara's teaching are found throughout reviews of her performances. In 1882 it is observed that, "her touch is crisp and firm, her gradations of tone are legitimately produced, and her technique generally of remarkable excellence," while two years later it is asserted that it

³⁶³ Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music*, chapter 6, paragraph 7; Crutchfield, "Brahms," 14; in Da Costa, *Off the Record*, xxxiii.

³⁶⁴ "Miscellaneous Intelligence," *The Musical Times* 51, no. 805 (March 1, 1910): 184, accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/906763>.

was the “thorough appreciation of the composer's meaning which gave finish and character to her play.”³⁶⁵ Referencing Goodwin's poise in performance, one reviewer comments that he could not “remember a time when [she] displayed the slightest nervousness,” and that on the night in question she was “as cool and collected as ever.”³⁶⁶ Goodwin made a series of chamber music recordings in 1904 with the London Trio, and her playing on a track entitled 'Mendelssohn: Scherzo' found on CHARM's online Discography features fluidly brilliant passagework, a delicately crisp tone and attack, and a restrained approach to the use of unnotated expressive devices.³⁶⁷

Nathalie Janotha (1856-1932) is reported to have played “exactly like Clara Schumann”: playing described by George Bernard Shaw as suggestive, poetic, and nobly beautiful.³⁶⁸ Her 1904 recording of Chopin's *Fugue in A Minor*, B. 114 features an improvised introduction, dislocations and local rhythmic alterations, and some rubato playing before the reiteration of the main theme and later to prepare a trilled dominant pedal point (Sound Ex. 3.4). While Janotha's playing of Chopin's fugue has a slightly lilting and restless quality much like Adelina De Lara's recording of Schumann's *Romance* Op. 28, her recording of Mendelssohn's 'Spinning Song' in C major from the *Sechs Lieder ohne Worte* Op. 67 (Sound Ex. 3.5), though taken at a break-neck speed, is

³⁶⁵ “Music in Manchester,” *TMTASCC* 23, no. 468 (February 1, 1882): 83, accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3358566>; and “Miss Amina Goodwin's Classical Chamber Concert,” *The Manchester Guardian* (January 8, 1884): 8, accessed October 23, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/479222240?accountid=16376>.

³⁶⁶ “Amina Goodwin's Concert,” *The Manchester Guardian* (January 17, 1882): 5, accessed July 9, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com/access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/478999526?accountid=16376>.

³⁶⁷ Goodwin's performance with The London Trio can be searched in the CHARM discography by entering 'Mendelssohn' under composer and 'Goodwin' under performer in the 'simple search' function. http://www.charm.kcl.ac.uk/discography/search/disco_search.html

³⁶⁸ Amy Fay, *Music-Study in Germany from the Home Correspondence of Amy Fay* (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 300; George Bernard Shaw, *Shaw's Music*, ed. Dan H. Laurence (London: Bodley Press, 1981), I: 639; in Leech-Wilkinson, *Changing Sound of Music*, chapter 6, paragraph 11.

quite temporally steady and evidences a much more restrained use of local rhythmic alterations and dislocation. As in the fugue, her playing here features an improvised introduction, as well as some dramatic *rubato* playing and an extended improvised flourish before the final reiteration of the main theme: qualities that in both performances could be said to emphasize major structural boundaries.

Leonard Borwick (1868-1925) became known as one of the few “English players...endowed in a rare measure with [Clara’s]...exquisitely sympathetic touch and her wondrous ability of phrasing.”³⁶⁹ Echoing her emphasis on the elucidation of detail and structure, Borwick is reported to have “played with a fine sense of proportion that made its component parts distinct enough in themselves, yet very tangibly dominated by the feeling of the unity of the work as a whole.” Though he could reportedly be “technically and intellectually perfect, though perhaps a little cold,”³⁷⁰ observers sympathetic to the anti-New German polemics of the Brahms-Schumann circle probably viewed this austerity as a positive expression of control. Indeed, throughout Borwick’s reviews one finds references to his ‘chaste expression,’ his ‘Anglo-Saxon mind,’ his ‘perfect clearness and masculine vigour,’ his ‘splendid sanity’ and his ‘sound and wholesome’ approach: themes with clear psychological and physical implications.³⁷¹

³⁶⁹ “Madame Schumann,” *The Manchester Guardian* (May 21, 1896): 6.

³⁷⁰ “Leonard Borwick Plays: English Pianist Again Makes a Deep Impression,” *New York Times* (December 9, 1914): 13, accessed October 23, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/97558007?accountid=16376>; and “Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts,” *TMTASCC* 36, no. 624 (February 1, 1895): 97, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3364044>.

³⁷¹ “Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts,” *TMTASCC* 31, no. 574 (December 1, 1890): 730, accessed July 18, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3362039>; “Music of the Week: The Playing of Mr. Leonard Borwick,” *The Observer* (February 13, 1921): 10, accessed October 23, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/480788506?accountid=16376>; “Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts,” *TMTASCC* 34, no. 601 (March 1, 1893): 151, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3363023>; H. P. Greene, “Leonard Borwick: Some Personal Recollections,” *Music and Letters* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 1926): 17, accessed October 23, 2013,

Despite being credited on a number of recordings featuring baritone Harry Plunkett Greene, it seems that sadly Leonard Borwick left no recordings.

After Clara's pupil Carl Friedberg (1872-1955) gave an all-Brahms recital in Vienna, the composer reportedly sought him out afterwards and declared, "It was lovely, the way you played." The two stayed out together that evening until 6am, at which time Brahms invited Friedberg back to his house where he proceeded to play most of his piano works for the young man.³⁷² Reviews of Friedberg's performances praise his "feeling for tonal beauty and for tonal colouring, within rather restricted limits," his "delicacy, clearness, and independence of articulation," and his "authenticity and rectitude of style, brilliance of technic [sic] and breadth and profundity of insight."³⁷³

While we have already heard Friedberg's solemnly measured performance of Schumann's *Romance in F sharp major* Op. 28 no. 2 (Sound Ex. 3.2), his 1953 recording of the second book of Robert Schumann's *Etudes Symphoniques* Op. 13 is equally remarkable. In the 'Thema' he only uses arpeggiation and dislocation where marked, where a wide stretch of the hand is required, or to delineate inner voices; and in the first variation marked *Poco più vivo*, he slightly lengthens the first note in sixteenth-note groups of four in response to accents. Otherwise, both readings are highly literal and temporally stable. In the lyrical second variation marked *Marcato il canto* however,

<http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/1294599033?accountid=16376>; and "Mr. Borwick's Recital: An English Pianist Coming Unheralded Makes a Success," *New York Times* (December 9, 1911): 13, accessed October 23, 2013,

<http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/97122744?accountid=16376>.

³⁷² "Brahms and Friedberg," *The New York Times* (May 29, 1932): X6, accessed October 23, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/100598792?accountid=16376>.

³⁷³ "Carl Friedberg's Recital: A New Pianist Appears in Carnegie Hall," *New York Times* (November 3, 1914): 11, accessed October 23, 2013,

<http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/97603172?accountid=16376>; and "Friedberg at His Best," *New York Times* (January 10, 1934): 25, accessed October 23, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/100916989?accountid=16376>.

Friedberg uses less local rhythmic alterations, but noticeably more dislocation, arpeggiation and tempo flexibility, using the repeated inner chords to hasten or slow the temporal motion according to the shapes of phrases or in response to hairpin markings (Sound Ex. 3.6).

Though Friedberg's approach seems reminiscent of reports of Brahms's tendency to play quicker material fairly steadily and with a restrained approach to unnotated expressive devices, while favouring noticeably more arpeggiation, dislocation and tempo flexibility in slower more lyrical material, his live 1951 recording of Brahms's *Intermezzo in C major* Op. 119 no. 3 marked *Grazioso e giocoso* is quite another story. Here he tosses off some passages with little regard for accuracy, particularly the two improvisatory sixteenth note flourishes in m. 44 and 48; he makes rhetorical pauses before almost downbeats for emphasis; and he rushes toward the apexes of most phrases, particularly where *crescendi* are indicated, while slowing precipitously in other places. All that being said however, his approach contains many elements that are in keeping with the Clara ideal: his tempo modifications are always 'corrected' afterwards and one always has a sense of the underlying pulse; his playing is light and graceful; and he plays with subtle inflections of tone, time, dislocation and arpeggiation to expressively and structurally shape his performance. (Sound Ex. 3.7) Where elements of Friedberg's performance seem less compatible with the Clara ideal, the presence of a live audience might be a contributing factor.

The next three pupils are featured on a Pearl six-CD set entitled 'The Pupils of Clara Schumann.' The oldest of these, Fanny Davies (1861-1934), was popularly known as Clara Schumann's "most distinguished lady pupil," having "displayed her inheritance

of Clara Schumann's mind and art to the public when other traces of that vanished greatness had almost disappeared."³⁷⁴ The language used to describe Davies's pianism indeed seems to posit her as a true disciple of Clara's method, from her 'beauty of tone and perfection in phrasing' and 'good taste...fluency and clearness,' to her 'pure, expressive...playing' that was 'free from any trace of affectation' and distinguished by 'textural beauty and mental poise.'³⁷⁵ Fellow pupil Marie Fromm also recalls that Davies was "a very good example of [the] easy muscular movement and finely developed finger technique"³⁷⁶ so characteristic of Clara's pupils.

Fanny Davies seems also to have inherited Clara's reverential and literal ideological approach to musical texts. After an 1887 performance of Bach's *Italian Concerto* she is praised for having "[made] no attempt to modernise Bach, as some pianists do, with the idea, no doubt, of exhibiting their cleverness," while it is elsewhere noted that in her performance of Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia*, "the original text was adhered to with praiseworthy devotion, considering that the work is now usually played in a modernised form."³⁷⁷ While we know that pianists in the Schumann-Brahms circle tended to 'play what is there' in an approach that included expressive departures from

³⁷⁴ "Miss Fanny Davies: A Biographical Sketch," *The Musical Times* (June 1, 1905): 366; and "Fanny Davies, 1861 - 1934," *The Musical Times* 75, no. 1100 (October 1934): 899, accessed April 9, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/918459>.

³⁷⁵ "Fanny Davies, 1861 - 1934," *The Musical Times* (October 1934): 899.

³⁷⁶ "Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts," *TMTASCC* 31, no. 574 (December 1, 1890): 730, accessed July 18, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3362039>; "Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts," *TMTASCC* 27, no. 516 (February 1, 1886): 82, accessed April 9, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3361776>; "Miscellaneous Concerts, Intelligence, etc.," *TMTASCC* 32, no. 577 (March 1, 1891): 169, accessed April 10, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3362705>; "Miss Fanny Davies's Recital," *TMTASCC* 27, no. 518 (April 1, 1886): 207, accessed April 10, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3361451>; "Fanny Davies, 1861 - 1934," *The Musical Times* (October 1934): 899; and Fromm, "Some Reminiscences," 615.

³⁷⁷ "Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts," *TMTASCC* 28, no. 530 (April 1, 1887): 216, accessed April 10, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3359798>; and "Miss Fanny Davies: A Biographical Sketch," *The Musical Times* (June 1, 1905): 368.

scores, perhaps relative to what other pianists at the time were doing, neither the extremity nor frequency of Davies's use of unnotated expressive devices qualified as 'clever modernisations.'

On the issue of Fanny Davies's Brahmsian authority, in 1893 she premiered selections from Brahms's *Fantasien* and *Intermezzi* Op. 116 and 117, after which it was observed that though "the sketches are far from easy...Miss Fanny Davies had fully mastered them and her interpretation could not well be surpassed." In the same year, her performance of Brahms's *D Minor Piano Concerto* was deemed to have had "an authority to which only a handful of pianists...can lay claim."³⁷⁸ Like Clara, Davies seems to have also played her part in the construction of burgeoning canonic identities, as evidenced by an account that echoes both Clara and Brahms's controlled tonal and temporal delineation of the features of scores:

People seem unable to make up their minds whether [Brahms] will draw an audience...or keep them away. It depends...on how he is played...[and] Miss Fanny Davies is just the person to do it. She...gives him time to sound, and space to sound in. She spreads the chords instead of crashing them, and leads the melodies gently by the hand. The Gordian knots are not cut but 'smilingly unravelled'...[and] where the writing is crabbed - and of course it is now and then...more use is made of the damper pedal than is quite called for: but the case is urgent, and something must be done.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ "Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts," *TMTASCC* 34, no. 601 (March 1, 1893): 151, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3363023>; and "Miss Fanny Davies: A Biographical Sketch," *The Musical Times* (June 1, 1905): 368.

³⁷⁹ "Miss Fanny Davies," *The Observer* (May 8, 1927): 21, accessed April 10, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/481096191?accountid=16376>. 'Gordian knots' are popularly used as a metaphor for impossible problems that are solved by either cheating or by thinking outside the box.

Davies's recordings could be behind much of the impetus to link Clara's performance style with Brahms's, reflective as they are of descriptions of Clara's emphasis on the mentally and physically reposeful communication of musical detail and structure. Davies's fastidious differentiation of textural complexities through subtly nuanced manipulations of tone, rhythm and attack on her 1930 recording of Robert Schumann's *Dauidsbundlertänze* Op. 6 is captivating. In the fifth piece of the first book marked *Einfach*, Davies uses subtle dislocations and lilting local rhythmic alterations to emphasize the beginnings of phrases, while her tone and touch is evocative of descriptions of Clara and Brahms's 'hovering' and singing legato playing (Sound Ex. 3.8). In the fifth piece of the second book marked *Zart und singend*, Leech-Wilkinson discusses how she can be heard varying the length of time between bass notes and their dislocated (delayed) melodic notes according to their harmonic and structural function on both a small and large scale (Sound Ex. 3.9).³⁸⁰ Perhaps these highly consistent and score-based textual departures are what Clara and Brahms meant by 'playing what is there,' while also providing further context for accounts of Davies's resistance to rendering works in a 'modernised form.'

Adelina de Lara (1872-1961) is also reported to have staunchly "maintained and professed the Clara Schumann method"³⁸¹ throughout her career. After an 1891 concert it is observed that she surmounted the difficulties of Schumann's *Etudes Symphoniques* "with an ease that fairly astonished while it delighted," and that she executed Beethoven's

³⁸⁰ Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music*, chapter 6, paragraphs 13 - 16.

³⁸¹ "Madame Adelina de Lara," *The Guardian* (November 27, 1961): 2, accessed April 9, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/184768266?accountid=16376>.

Thirty-Two Variations in C minor "with remarkable accuracy and finish."³⁸² Elsewhere her playing is described as "firm and crisp...delightfully elastic," and characterized by "plenty of intelligence."³⁸³ De Lara seems also to have been noted for her emotionally restrained approach to performance - one explicitly allied here to themes of health:

Mme. de Lara...heard, learned, and inherited from [Clara] the now almost lost, and perhaps irrecoverable, 'authentic' way of playing...The notes clinked together freely, instead of being, as in most modern performances, clogged together with the syrup of studied expression. For Mme de Lara all the tender sentiment is in the notes...It is a healthy, sturdy sentiment...second in importance to the musical meaning of the notes.³⁸⁴

Present day observers have also enthusiastically underlined the emotional and textual forthrightness of De Lara's recordings, and thus her representativeness of a unified Schumann-Brahms school of pianism as well. As Jerrold Northrop Moore writes in his notes for the Pearl CD set, her 1951 recordings of Brahms's *Intermezzo in E Flat major* Op. 117 no. 1 (Sound Ex. 3.10) and *Rhapsody in G minor* Op. 79 no. 2 (Sound Ex. 3.11) evidence "a wise and dedicated pupil of Clara Schumann, for whom those lessons were the greatest experience of her life, playing...with heart and soul at the service of the music rather than the player's ego."³⁸⁵ Michael Musgrave too praises De Lara's attention to

³⁸² "Music in Birmingham," *TMTASCC* 32, no. 5 (June 1, 1891): 347, accessed April 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3363098>.

³⁸³ "University Intelligence: Gentlemen's Concerts," *The Manchester Guardian* (April 24, 1895): 8, accessed April 9, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/483220969?accountid=16376>; and "Sir Charles Hallé's Concerts," *TMTASCC* 33, no. 589 (March 1, 1892): 148, accessed April 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3361350>.

³⁸⁴ "Two Schumann Recitals," *The Manchester Guardian* (September 17, 1952): 5, accessed April 9, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/479352085?accountid=16376>.

³⁸⁵ Tim Page, "Clara Schumann and Her Pupils," *The New York Times* (April 26, 1987): H32, accessed April 9, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/110781133?accountid=16376>.

Brahms's verbal tempo markings and dynamic indications, her careful tonal delineation of phrases and inner voices, and her restraint in matters of tempo modification. Where she does hold back material in more lyrical sections or second subjects, Musgrave notes that it is in response to hairpin markings or to create contrast between sections.³⁸⁶

Interestingly Musgrave also asserts that, "in [Op.117] De Lara's playing may have been close to Clara's," while her performance of Op. 79 no. 2 "seems to capture what Brahms wanted, with its freedom in response to his markings and slow tempo for emphasis."³⁸⁷ Though implying a split here between Brahms and Clara's pianistic approaches, according to Musgrave De Lara's textual departures are only Brahms-like in that their use is instigated by the presence of notation, and because they elucidate detail and structure through a slowing for emphasis. No mention is made however of De Lara's tendency to rush on both a small- and large-scale: a practice that in Schumann's *Romance* Op. 28 and Brahms's *Intermezzo* Op. 117 no. 1 lend her performances a feeling of underlying restlessness; and in the case of Op. 79 no. 2 has ramifications for both quality of tone and accuracy of technique. Indeed, De Lara's performances of both of these works by Brahms will be discussed at length in the following chapters.

While Neal Peres Da Costa does discuss De Lara's use of local rhythmic alterations, arpeggiation and dislocation in order to create agogic emphasis, to propel harmonic and melodic motion forward and to bring about changes in mood, he too refrains from discussing her tendency to rush over larger stretches of music.³⁸⁸ As with Brahms, the trope of ageing seems to be particularly pertinent here, perhaps given the palatability of De Lara's style in general. While Musgrave invokes themes of the body

³⁸⁶ Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 315.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 317.

³⁸⁸ Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 186 - 87.

and mind when he asserts that her recordings have a degree of historical authority "despite her obvious limitations of technique [body] and occasionally memory of reading [mind]," Tim Page less generously suggests that what he hears on her recordings are "sketchy...run-throughs played by the remains of a good pianist."³⁸⁹ Regardless however, like Fanny Davies, De Lara's Brahmsian historical authority seems unblemished by her recorded legacy.

The sketchy run-throughs of Ilona Eibenschütz (1872-1967) however, turn this discussion towards those members of the Schumann-Brahms circle deemed to have less historical authority in the performance of Brahms's piano music. Having studied with Clara between 1885 and 1890, at first glance Ilona's outlier status seems rather strange. In the years immediately proceeding her time in Clara's charge, Ilona was praised for demonstrating "much intelligence and the excellent results of Madame Schumann's teaching," and for her "gracefulness...combined with energy, lucidity of exposition, melodious phrasing and true intensity of feeling." In another review she is even called "one of the most brilliant and sympathetic pianists of the Madame Schumann School."³⁹⁰

Ilona was also the first to hear and publicly perform Brahms's Op. 118 and Op. 119 piano pieces: selections of which she went on to later record. As Ilona recalls, Brahms appeared at her house one day manuscript in hand, and "began to play...all the Clavierstücke, Op. 118 and 119!...His playing was altogether grand and noble, like his

³⁸⁹ Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 314 - 15, brackets are mine; Page, "Clara Schumann and Her Pupils," H32.

³⁹⁰ "Pianoforte Recitals," *TMTASCC* 32, no. 580 (June 1, 1891): 341 - 42, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3363081>; "Music in Belfast," *TMTASCC* 42, no. 697 (March 1, 1901): 189, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3368115>; and "Our London Correspondence," *The Manchester Guardian* (March 30, 1904): 4, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/474339971?accountid=16376>.

compositions."³⁹¹ Later Ilona overheard him mentioning, "She is the pianist I best like to hear playing my works."³⁹² In a review of her 1894 performance of these pieces, one observer calls Ilona's rendering "artistic and energetic," while another suggests that, "it is hardly possible to imagine better performances of these beautiful works." Ilona's Brahmsian authority seems further confirmed by a review proclaiming that her performance of Brahms's *G Minor Quartet* "was truly memorable for its life and light...she [is] the best interpreter of Brahms before the public. No one could label that composer as a Dryasdust when *she* [is] at the piano, whatever may have been said or thought when one of the more timidly and wrongly reverential school was there."³⁹³

For other observers however, Ilona's performances seem to have been less compatible with expectations of how a pianist blessed with both Clara's teaching and Brahms's enthusiasm 'should' sound. In 1891 it is reported that her playing "was exceedingly nervous...[and] this nervousness spoiled both tone and technique." Two years later it is noted that her playing "lacks distinctiveness,"³⁹⁴ while in 1904 it is said that her performance of Brahms's *G minor Quartet* suffered from "a certain excess of

³⁹¹ Mrs. Carl Derenburg (Ilona Eibenschütz), "My Recollections of Brahms," 599.

³⁹² Allan Evans, liner notes for *Behind the Notes: Brahms Performed by Colleagues and Pupils 1903 - 1952*, Arbiter 160 (CD), 2012, 26.

³⁹³ "Miscellaneous Concerts, Intelligence," *TMTASCC* 35, no. 614 (April 1, 1894): 263 - 65, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3361872>; "Mdlle. Ilona Eibenschütz," *The Observer* (March 11, 1894): 6, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/473805826?accountid=16376>; and "The Magazines," *Academy and Literature* 84, no. 2128 (February 15, 1913): 211, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/1298679246?accountid=16376>. Emphasis from original.

³⁹⁴ "Mdlle. Ilona Eibenschütz," *The Academy* 39, no. 977 (January 17, 1891): 72, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/1298628997?accountid=16376>; and Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts," *TMTASCC* 34, no. 601 (March 1, 1893): 151, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3363023>.

elegance" and "lacked a little dignity."³⁹⁵ Accusations of nervousness, excess and a lack of distinctiveness and dignity seem terribly dire for a representative of a school of pianism constructed in conscious opposition to these very qualities.

Ilona had in fact been 'sent' to study with Clara, in the hopes that some of the habits she had accrued earlier while touring as a child prodigy might be cured. At her audition for Clara, Ilona (whom Joachim called 'the note-eater') reportedly implored, "I know that I make many mistakes in my playing, and have slipped into bad ways, but...I promise that I will do exactly as you tell me."³⁹⁶ Clara too seems to have had serious reservations about Ilona's playing, and while Ilona was away premiering the Op. 118 and 119 pieces Clara wrote anxiously to Brahms, "Between ourselves, I do not think Ilona understands the pieces as they need to be understood. She goes too quickly over everything."³⁹⁷ Though she could certainly be a demanding teacher, Clara seems to have quite hard on Ilona. In an 1890 letter, Clara writes:

I was really rather disappointed yesterday, to note that none of the pieces which you played were perfect, and I think you should therefore, have another fortnight's quiet study here in Frankfurt, to prepare for Cologne and Berlin. I have told you so often of my fear that because of the ease with which you learn you are tempted not to practice CONSCIENTIOUSLY ENOUGH. I COULD PROVE THIS TO YOU IN EVERY PIECE WHICH YOU PLAYED YESTERDAY and would like to go through them all once more with you. I wish I could spare you the experiences which are inescapable if you do not learn to be STRICTER WITH YOURSELF. You will surely see in my candour only motherly concern and forethought.

³⁹⁵ "Our London Correspondence," *The Manchester Guardian* (March 30, 1904): 4, accessed May 11, 2013, <http://search.proquest.com.access.authkb.kb.nl/docview/474339971?accountid=16376>.

³⁹⁶ Ducat, "Conversations with Ilona Derenburg," in Rountree, "Ilona Eibenschütz," 14.

³⁹⁷ *Clara Schumann - Brahms Briefe*, II: 540 - 42, in Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 316.

Following Ilona's January 1891 debut in London, Clara again writes:

You must heed this very carefully: BE PRECISE AND METICULOUS with everything even to the smallest detail. The public expects this of you and must never disappoint...It must be studied and WORKED OUT very CONSCIENTIOUSLY ...especially in the PHRASING...Do not take it lightly because it does not present technical difficulties for you!³⁹⁸

Though it seems reasonable to assume that Clara was as concerned for Ilona's reputation as she was for her own and Brahms's, some of her letters to Ilona are decidedly backhanded. In July 1891 Clara writes, "It gives me great pleasure that B. is so kind to you. He very much likes to have fun with pretty and interesting young girls. I wish however, for your sake, that he would talk about music seriously with you. Did you play to him at all?"³⁹⁹ While this is perhaps evidence of Clara's tendency to "rather enjoy getting her knife in to musical contemporaries, especially if they happened to be pianists,"⁴⁰⁰ here was a pianist famous in her own right and not on account of Clara's teaching nor Brahms's support: one whose performance style seems not to have been defined by control, yet one who would undoubtedly be seen as a representative of a Schumann-Brahms school of pianism.

There is nothing to suggest that Brahms ever heeded Clara's warnings about 'the little Eibenschütz,'⁴⁰¹ but modern ears certainly have. Michael Musgrave finds Ilona's

³⁹⁸ Evans, *Behind the Notes*, 25. The author was reportedly handed these letters by a cellist in London. Capitalization from original.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁰⁰ "Greatness and Littleness of Clara Schumann," *Academy and Literature* (May 10, 1913): 586.

⁴⁰¹ *Clara Schumann - Brahms Briefe*, in Avins, *BLL*, 705.

1903 recording of the *Ballade in G Minor* Op. 118 no.3 (Sound Ex. 3.12) to be perfunctory, lacking in distinctive opening rhythms in response to Brahms's articulation markings, and lacking in contrasts of tone and touch within and between sections. He asserts that Ilona's inattention to notated detail and structure, and her inability to adopt Brahms's practice of 'holding for emphasis,' is a direct result of her brisk tempo and its tendency to accumulate. In sum, he "finds Eibenschütz to be skimming over the surface of the music," and that, "this rendering is not of the 'grand and noble' character that must surely have been present in his playing of this particular piece when she heard it."⁴⁰²

Musgrave's critique of Ilona's 1952 recording of the *Intermezzo in E Minor* Op. 119 no. 2 (Sound Ex. 3.13) runs along similar lines, though here he takes particular issue with her tendency to rush through structural boundaries marked for emphasis through a holding back, or to slow where not marked or structurally warranted. Ilona's blurring and exaggeration of structure here leads Musgrave to assert that, "the impression arises in Op. 119 no. 2 that the sense of a 'structurally shaped' performance has become caricatured," though he suggests that, "such is the extent of the distortion here that one senses that it must have been influenced largely by what she heard from Brahms; that is, that he too rendered the piece freely and shaped it 'structurally' to excess."⁴⁰³ Not only did Ilona imitate the exaggerations and sketchiness of Brahms's deteriorated later practice therefore, to make matters worse her recordings are deemed to be "from her late years and the characteristics of her playing would seem to have become exaggerated."⁴⁰⁴ Ilona's performances are thus exaggerations of exaggerations.

⁴⁰² Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 309 - 11.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

Additional context for Ilona's tempo modifications comes from George S. Bozarth, who again looks to Fanny Davies's annotated metronome markings from Brahms's performance of his *Trio in C Minor* Op. 101. According to Davies's annotations, in the opening statement of the second movement Brahms seems to have made "a brief but clear crescendo to its highest note, followed by a diminuendo that parallels the descending contour, indicating gradations not only in tone but also in rhythm, as Brahms lingered a little on the crest of the melody, lengthening the phrase a bit rather than keeping to a strict metronomic pace."⁴⁰⁵ In Eibenschütz's 1952 performance of the opening thirty bars of the same work however, Bozarth observes that she differentiates both small- and large-scale structure in an approach that involved both a holding back *and* rushing: by playing more slowly while "allowing the tempo to fluctuate with the shape of the melodic line, pushing towards each peak, then relaxing" in lyrical second themes, and by playing at a much brisker though more stable pace in in first themes.⁴⁰⁶ (Sound Ex. 3.14)

While this seems to match Brahms's bifurcated approach to tonal and temporal manipulation in quicker versus slower musical material, and though it is possible that Davies neglected to note that Brahms's 'brief but clear crescendo to the highest note' of phrases was accompanied by a slight hastening of tempo, in his final analysis Bozarth warns that while "such elasticity of tempo was acknowledged by Brahms to George Henschel in 1880...he cautioned that it should be employed 'con discrezione.'" Musgrave too asserts that, "there must have been a limit to the freedom Brahms would have wanted: 'keine Passagen' would surely have appealed to him too in such carefully constructed

⁴⁰⁵ Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 179.

⁴⁰⁶ Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 194 (note 21).

music as Eibenschütz plays."⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, if Fanny Davies is right in that the correct tempo is one that reveals rather than obscures the topography of musical compositions, then Ilona's tendency to blur detail and structure through prohibitively quick tempi, precipitous rushing and unwarranted slowing must surely be *wrong*.

Though both Musgrave and Da Costa notice that Ilona tends to spread chords to create contrast rather than following Brahms's articulation and dynamic markings, Da Costa adds that she also uses the device to underline poignant harmonies, like her spreading of the diminished seventh harmonies that prepare the B section of Op. 118 no. 3.⁴⁰⁸ What Da Costa doesn't mention however is that Ilona's spreading of chords in Op. 118 no. 3 often accompanies her blurring of structural boundaries; and while only the tonic chords on either side of the diminished seventh harmonies that prepare the B section are accented, Ilona's spreading of the latter effectively undercuts the indicated emphasis of the former: issues to which we will return in the following chapters. In any case, while all of this might serve as proof that Ilona was indeed 'playing' detail and structure, just in unexpected ways, the impression left by her performances is not one of control. Ilona's textual departures may *sometimes* elucidate the features of those scores, but in general they are merely means to an end that is quite irreconcilable with current notions of how Brahms's music should sound and mean.

While the tenets of Clara's method do seem to unify the performance approaches of most pianists in her circle, what divides them is the sounding and signifying effect of those pianists' textual departures, and whether they ultimately serve to blur or emphasize a score's detail and structure. Clara, Fanny Davies and Adelina de Lara seemed to have

⁴⁰⁷ George Henschel, *Personal Recollections of Johannes Brahms* (Boston, 1907): 78 - 79, in *Ibid.*, 184; and Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 317.

⁴⁰⁸ Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 186.

espoused a literal and reverential approach to performance, using subtle and highly controlled manipulations of tone and time that revealed both the complexity and simplicity of Brahms's textural, melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and structural designs. Ilona's performances of Brahms's music on the other hand have a "high-strung intensity that pushes relentlessly...[and] a jazz-like nonchalance"⁴⁰⁹: one that compels listeners to encounter her mind and body, and perhaps Brahms's as well. To my ears, her arpeggiations, dislocations and local rhythmic alterations suggest a limp rather than a gallant stride; her tendency to rush and slow unexpectedly, thus blurring the detail and contours of Brahms's sound and wholesome designs, suggests an agitated mind and a vulnerable body; while her harshness of tone, wrong notes and truncations only serve to further dismember Brahms's hale and hearty scores.

Despite the nearly fifty year interval between recording dates, there is a similarity of spirit captured on Ilona's recordings of Op. 118 no. 3 and Op. 119 no. 2 that perhaps warrants a re-examination of both Brahms's enthusiasm for her playing as well as those elements of his described performance style that are less compatible with the Clara ideal: elements typically passed over in distillations of the essentials of his style. What if Ilona's performance style was indeed 'imitative and rebellious' in that by emulating some quality she heard in Brahms's own performances on one hand, she was effectively defying the precepts of Clara's strict teaching on the other?

⁴⁰⁹ Evans, *Behind the Notes*, 26.

3.5) Brahms's Performance Style Reappraised

There is ample evidence that Brahms's pianism had *always* differed from Clara's. As Florence May observes, "Brahms's conception of many works of the great masters, together with his whole style of playing, differed *in toto* from Frau Schumann's."⁴¹⁰ Indeed, there are elements in descriptions of Brahms's performances that simply have no parallel in those of Clara's: elements that are rarely included in modern distillations of the essentials of his style, probably because they are incompatible with the ideology of mind-body control to such an extent as to render their replication *unBrahmsian*. By dismissing these elements as deficiencies or exaggerations however, the literal and reverential performances of Clara's most devoted pupils and the precepts of her playing and teaching have remained linked to Brahms. I suspect that it is precisely this other quality of Brahms's performance style that lies in the gaps between the hale and hearty Brahms of our imagination and Brahms as he was recorded, as well as between his enthusiasm for Ilona's playing and attempts to devalue her historical authority.

While the wrong notes, harshness and exaggerations of Brahms's 'spirited sketches' have traditionally been explained by his deteriorated later pianism, positive and negative reports of his technique appear throughout his lifetime. In the 1850s Walter Hübbe reports that, "[Brahms] does not play like a consummately trained, highly intelligent musician," while Bülow and Dietrich report in the 1880s and 90s that Brahms

⁴¹⁰ May, *Johannes Brahms*, II: 211 - 12, in Philip, *Performing Brahms*, 368.

played with 'matchless beauty and clarity' and 'wonderful power and mastery.'⁴¹¹

Furthermore, many of Clara's pupils seem to have assumed that he had once been a virtuoso, like Fanny Davies's assertion that, "Brahms in his earlier years *must have* been a pianist of remarkable technique [as] clearly shown by the well-known story of his transposing the Kreutzer sonata at a public concert on the spur of the moment."⁴¹²

Inculcated as she was in the Clara ideal, the narrative of Brahms's deteriorating technique might have seemed like the only logical explanation for what she heard in his later performances.

While Clara's method seems to have been defined by a hyperawareness of the link between how pianists play and understandings of composer's identities, Brahms on the other hand seems to have performed with the "radiant serenity of a mind happy in the exercise of his art."⁴¹³ Marie Fromm recalls the levity that accompanied his visits to the household of her teacher, where he and Clara would play duets for the gathered students. Recalling the strange juxtaposition of Brahms's "shockingly bad" pianism as he "[took] the bass, pounding away somewhere near the right notes, while [Clara], of course, was perfect," Fromm remembers that, "he was simple as a child, and played games with us...these were times of pure delight."⁴¹⁴ Fromm's account not only recalls Brahms's childlike love of games, but it also implies that his booming bass lines may have simply been a function of his unbridled abandon in performance, rather than a calculated

⁴¹¹ Walter Hübbe, *Brahms in Hamburg* (Hamburg, 1902), II; letter from Hans von Bülow to Hermann Wolff dated October 20, 1881, in Von Bülow, *Briefe*, 6, 98; and Dietrich, *Erinnerungen*, 2 - 3; in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 122, 125.

⁴¹² Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 173. Emphasis mine.

⁴¹³ J. V. Widmann, *Johannes Brahms in Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1898): 17 - 18, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 123.

⁴¹⁴ Fromm, "Some Reminiscences," 615.

architectural foundation for his delineation of textural complexities. Carl Friedberg too remembers how Brahms played "half-drunk...never were the two hands together, always apart," and with "gusto and freedom."⁴¹⁵

Contrary to Clara's insistence on the cultivation of inner and outer repose by avoiding physical tension, 'rush and hurry' and eccentric displays of personality, Brahms seems to have had a complete disregard for the way he was perceived at the piano. As Ilona Eibenschütz recalls, "he played as if he were just improvising, with heart and soul, sometimes humming to himself, forgetting everything around him," while Albert Dietrich remembers how, "bending his head down over the keys...humming the melody aloud as he played," Brahms could be seen "trembling with inner excitement." Ethel Smyth also describes how Brahms would "accompanying himself with a sort of muffled roar, as of Titans stirred to sympathy in the bowels of the earth": a sound Ferdinand Schumann describes as a "gasping, grumble or snoring."⁴¹⁶

On Brahms's physical presence at the keyboard, Stanford remembers how he would play, "head thrown back and slightly tilted as if listening to the band rather than to himself, the shoulders hunched up and the arms almost as straight as the legs and well above the keyboard."⁴¹⁷ It is hard to imagine a pianist playing with a 'covered' technique whilst sitting at the keyboard in this way, suggesting that there may have been occasions in which Brahms indeed attacked the keys from above; that he may not have shared Clara's emphasis on 'easy muscular movements' in order to communicate inner and outer

⁴¹⁵ DiClemente, "Brahms Performance Practice," 57, from Transcript, 181 - 83; and 58, from Transcript 210 - 11.

⁴¹⁶ Derenburg, "My Recollections of Brahms," 599; Dietrich, *Erinnerungen*, 3; Ethel Smyth, *Impressions*, I: 266; and Ferdinand Schumann, "Brahms and Clara Schumann," trans. J. Mayer, *The Musical Quarterly* 2 (1916): 508; in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 124.

⁴¹⁷ Stanford, *Pages*, 200, in *ibid.*, 125.

repose; and that he may not have been concerned about subordinating his body and instrument to the communication of musical works in performance. As Eugenie Schumann remembers, "I never gained the impression that Brahms looked upon the piano as a beloved friend, as did my mother. He seemed to be in battle with it...when he played passionate parts, it was as though a tempest were tossing clouds...He made one feel the limitations that the instrument placed upon him."⁴¹⁸

Brahms also seems to have been significantly less concerned than Clara about distinguishing his pianism from that of his Romanticist contemporaries, and many descriptions use evocatively poetic language to capture the impression left by his performances. Robert Schumann observes that in Brahms's playing, one was "drawn into ever more enchanting spheres... some of them demoniac in spirit while graceful in form...[a]nd then, like a rushing torrent, they were all united by him into a single waterfall, the cascades of which were overarched by a peaceful rainbow, while butterflies played about its borders accompanied by the voices of nightingales." Gustav Ophüls too seems to describe a lovesick *Joh. Kreisler jun.*, in his recollection of how Brahms's pianism was "full of deep feeling and poetic dreaminess," while Max Graf similarly observes that, "in the great climaxes...ran the undertone of subterranean rumbling like the echo of a remote earthquake...remind[ing] listeners that beneath the heavy boulders of classic form the romanticism of Brahms's youth was buried."⁴¹⁹

Brahms and Clara may also have differed in their approach to performing the music of past composers. Take for example Florence May's account that Brahms's

⁴¹⁸ E. Schumann, *Erinnerungen*, 269 - 70, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 127.

⁴¹⁹ R. Schumann, "Neue Bahnen," *NZfM* 39, no. 18 (October 28, 1853): 185 - 86; Gustav Ophüls, *Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms* (Berlin, 1921): 19 (123); and Graf, *Legend of a Musical City*, 105; in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 121, 123, 134.

interpretation of Bach was 'unconventional' and contrary to the many 'distinguished adherents' who favoured 'a simply flowing style'; or the review proclaiming Ilona to be the best interpreter of Brahms before the public regardless of what someone of the 'more timidly and wrongly reverential school' might say. Though both Brahms and Clara used unnotated tonal and temporal manipulations to 'play what is there,' it is possible that they represented opposite poles within a range of the frequency, extremity and intended effect of those textual departures. It is intriguing to ponder whether Clara may have been one of the distinguished adherents of just such a timidly reverential school of pianism. May certainly seemed startled by the depth and range of expression Brahms asked of her.

Interestingly, while Clara's most devoted pupils were praised for their emotional and physical restraint, this poise was often framed as a lack of depth and power - particularly in weightier repertoires. As one reviewer remarks, "Miss Davies['s] rendering...lacked distinctiveness and character. Beethoven's later works need power *as well as* refinement for their proper interpretation."⁴²⁰ Adelina De Lara is described as having been "physically overweighted" in performance, while her interpretations of Beethoven and Brahms are respectively deemed to be "neat and unpretentious, but unquestionably weak," and "creditable rather than impressive."⁴²¹ Because descriptions of some of Clara's other pupils seem to echo the less celebrated aspects of Brahms's approach to the piano however, their playing styles may give us more clues to how Brahms played than Davies's or De Lara's.

⁴²⁰ "Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts," *TMTASCC* 28, no. 528 (February 1, 1887): 85, accessed April 10, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3360861>.

⁴²¹ "Mr. Popper's Concert," *TMTASCC* 33, no. 587 (January 1, 1892): 23, accessed April 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3365264>; and "Pianoforte Recitals," *TMTASCC* 33, no. 591 (May 1, 1892): 278, accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3362520>; and "Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts," *TMTASCC* 34, no. 599 (January 1, 1893): 23, accessed April 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3362745>.

One such pupil is Leonard Borwick, who is described as having "a mercurial style that had not come to him by [Clara's] teaching." Though Borwick's playing could at times be austere, Brahms famously stated in 1891 that Borwick's performance of his *Second Piano Concerto* "contained all the fire and passion and technical ability [he] had hoped for in his most sanguine moments."⁴²² This might suggest that, like most pianists today, Borwick was able to vary his approach according to a given repertoire or occasion. It is also noted that Borwick played as if "music poured from the instrument in floods of beauty like waterfalls flashing in the sunshine...[and] like champagne sparkling in the light of electric bulbs": a description that invites comparisons with Robert Schumann's poetic account of Brahms's style. Elsewhere it is reported that Borwick played as though "unconscious of the audience...[and] in that reverie at the piano he communed with beauty and saw visions; and when he asked us in, it was to see those visions...not to hear him play"; while another observer notes that his playing "had a certain intensity, verging sometimes on impatience."⁴²³

Descriptions of Borwick's impatient 'visions' are certainly reminiscent of the restlessness of Brahms and Ilona's spirited sketches. Rather than seeking to carefully outline the detail and frame of musical works like De Lara and Davies might do, these pianists' described and recorded performances seem to communicate an impression of spirit of the work in question. Indeed, 'sketchiness' can certainly imply a kind of restlessness, while a 'sketch' can refer to the fleeting impression of a thing, atmosphere or

⁴²² "Fanny Davies, 1861-1934," *The Musical Times* (October 1934): 899; and Greene, "Leonard Borwick," 22.

⁴²³ William Saunders, "Leonard Borwick: A Memory and Appreciation," *The Musical Times* 67, no. 1003 (Sept. 1, 1926): 798, accessed July 18, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/912664>; Greene, "Leonard Borwick," 17, 23; and "Leonard Borwick," *The Musical Times* 66, no. 992 (October 1, 1925): 942 - 43, accessed July 18, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/913463>.

mood. Indeed, Fanny Davies recalls that in Brahms's playing there was a sense of "aspiration, wild fantastic flights, majestic calm, deep tenderness without sentimentality, delicate, wayward humour, sincerity [and] noble passion"; and in her account of Brahms's performance of the *Trio in C Minor* Op. 101 she describes a 'shadowy and mysterious flitting' and an 'undercurrent of breathless agitation.'⁴²⁴

As we have already seen, this restless agitation is certainly evident in Carl Friedberg's live 1951 recording of the *Intermezzo in C major* Op. 119 no. 3. Audience aside, and given the many hours he spent hearing Brahms play his own piano works, it is difficult to imagine his spirited rendition as having been shaped by Clara's precepts alone. Similarly, right after having posited Nathalie Janotha's 'beautiful, suggestive, poetic, sustained and noble playing' as being most reminiscent of Clara's, George Bernard Shaw notes the pupil's tendency to "occasionally brea[k] out in waywardness and displays of strength, suggestive of possession by a fitful musical demon."⁴²⁵ Recalling Janotha's hair-raising performance of Mendelssohn's 'Spinning Song,' Friedberg and Janotha are two further examples of pupils whose described and recorded performance styles align more closely with Brahms's as opposed to Clara's. Another example is that paragon of Brahmsian control, Artur Schnabel. Though Schnabel studied piano with Theodor Leschetizky, after being introduced to Brahms by his composition teacher Eusebius Mandyczewski, Schnabel frequently had the opportunity to hear the composer perform. As noted in 1935:

⁴²⁴ Davies, "Some Personal Recollections," 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 172, 174.

⁴²⁵ Shaw, I: 639, in Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music*, chapter 6, paragraph 11.

Once or twice - in [Schumann's] G minor Sonata and 'Carnaval' - Schnabel played as if he were impatient and dissatisfied with the music...[with] a tendency to hurry in semiquaver passages...a habit which one might describe as Beethovenian of reducing figures and decorations to their barest essentials, often quite apart from any difficulty in playing them clearly; and his tone, above *mezzo forte*, is frequently harsh because he produces it to too great an extent with violent movements.⁴²⁶

Harris Goldsmith observes that in Schnabel's recording of the *Allegro vivace* final movement of Beethoven's *Sonata in E flat Major* Op. 27 no. 1, there are "moments of crazy impulsiveness, a roguish brio, an abandon, [and] a willingness to take high risks."⁴²⁷ (Sound Ex. 3.15) Schnabel can indeed be heard rushing through most sixteenth-note passages in this recording, often hastily reducing the ends of these flourishes before diving into the next one. This is a highly risky practice considering the quickness of his chosen tempo, and there are a few moments where his technical grip falters as a result. His tone in this recording is also frequently harsh, particularly in the punchy staccato right hand eighth note octaves that make up the movement's second subject, and it is easy to imagine him here striking the keys from above with rigid fingers and arms.

Compared to descriptions of Clara's performance ideology and the recordings of her most dedicated pupils, the described and recorded performance styles of Johannes Brahms and Ilona Eibenschütz seem to distinguish them as furthest from the controlled Clara ideal that is currently understood to generally characterize the approaches of the Schumann-Brahms circle of pianists. While it is impossible to know whether Brahms and Eibenschütz played in exactly the same ways, each pianist's approach seems to have

⁴²⁶ "London Concerts: Pianists of the Month: Schnabel and the Schubert Sonatas," *The Musical Times* 76, no. 1103 (January 1935): 68, accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/949150>.

⁴²⁷ Harris Goldsmith, "Schnabel the Pianist," *The Musical Times* 130, no. 1756 (June 1989): 336, accessed November 3, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/966029>.

included truncation, wrong notes, rushing, agitation, a certain negligence of notation, and a more percussively vertical attack resulting in harshness of tone in quicker material; and more attention to detail through arpeggiation and dislocation, the shaping of phrases through both rushing and slowing, and a closer tone and attack in slower material. This bifurcated approach might explain contradictory verbal accounts of Brahms's style, like Stanford's observation that, 'The skips...were accomplished regardless of accuracy...there were handfuls of wrong notes...the touch was somewhat hard and lacking in force-control; [but] it was at its best in the slow movement, where [Brahms] produced the true velvety quality, probably because he was not so hampered by his own difficulties.' Like Schnabel, whose playing also featured these elements 'quite apart from any difficulty,' perhaps it is time to accept that they were a conscious part of Brahms and Eibenschütz's approaches, rather than evidence of minds and bodies deteriorated by age.

More importantly however, the presence of these elements tells us something about what those pianists furthest from the Clara 'ideal' considered to be essential and disposable in the performance of Brahms's piano works. Far from simply communicating mental and physical poise through the careful elucidation of detail and structure, Brahms, Eibenschütz and a number of other pianists associated with the Schumann-Brahms circle seem to have been driven by a desire to communicate the *spirit* of their 'spirited sketches'; viewing their minds, bodies and instruments as more than disappearing agents in the transmission of composers' works and identities. This style of performance may have had much more in common with Liszt's 'spirit over the letter' than Brahms's more politically-minded supporters may have liked: supporters like Clara, who actively discouraged *both* Brahms and Eibenschütz from performing his works publicly. Indeed, perhaps Brahms

admired the 'little note-eater's' playing because it reminded him of that 'undertone of subterranean rumbling' of his own Romanticism: one buried under the boulders of his hale and hearty identity in the imagination of his most ardent supporters.

I propose that it is this dimension that links Brahms and Eibenschütz's spirited performances on one hand, while distancing them from the more lettered performances of Clara Schumann, Amina Goodwin, Fanny Davies and Adelina de Lara on the other. Other pianists in the Brahms-Schumann circle like Nathalie Janotha, Leonard Borwick and Carl Friedberg may have espoused an approach to performance that fell somewhere in the middle of this continuum. This is not to suggest that Clara and her most devoted pupils did not play expressively or brilliantly. Furthermore, and as we will see in the following chapters, Adelina De Lara's performance style is oceans away from what modern pianists of all ethical stripes would call controlled. What I am suggesting is that by ignoring those elements of Brahms and Eibenschütz's performance styles that do not communicate mental and physical control, we have effectively eliminated most of what distinguished their performances from Clara's, and from ours as well.

While all of the above-mentioned pianists use unnotated expressive devices, it is the extremity and frequency of their textual departures that ultimately either elucidate or blur detail and structure, and thus either communicate or subvert current notions of 'characteristic' Brahmsian mental and physical control: notions that have been built around descriptions of Clara's performances and teaching. As their textual departures tend to blur rather than clarify the detail and structure of Brahms's scores, thus representing an approach to performance furthest from the Clara ideal, I propose that

Eibenschütz and Brahms are the most *unBrahmsian* pianists of the Schumann-Brahms circle: a distinction that should give modern performer-scholars serious pause.

3.6) Coda

Discourse surrounding RIP Brahms style still tends to be dominated by the cautionary trope of 'how free is free, how strict is strict, and in what kinds of pieces,' with elements of early-recorded Brahms style being applied in a highly regimented and pointillistic manner: in response to notation and in order to elucidate detail and structure, thereby ultimately reinforcing ideas related to Brahms's hale and hearty canonic identity. While there are remarkably few pianists who primarily use early recordings as evidence of late-Romantic style, Neal Peres Da Costa's RIP Brahms performances, beautiful though they are, are perhaps an unwitting elucidation of the extent to which the aesthetic ideology of control continues to mediate such ventures.

In his performance of the first movement of Brahms's *Cello Sonata in E minor* Op. 38 for example (Sound Ex. 3.16), he uses arpeggiation, dislocation and local rhythmic alterations throughout and he plays noticeably slower in sections marked *dolce* for contrast; but his instances of rushing happen within very restricted ranges (both in amplitude and material covered), they are always in response to notated indications such as crescendi and hairpins, and he always slows to re-establish tempo afterward, as well as to resolve cadences and prepare structural boundaries. In reference to his similar approach in Brahms's *Violin Sonata in G Major* Op. 78, Da Costa asserts that these "changes of tempo...helped us to clarify structural elements and to make our expressive intention bold and clear."⁴²⁸ While Da Costa's temporal modifications are reminiscent of Fanny Davies's recordings, his approach is quite far removed from Adelina De Lara's and

⁴²⁸ Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 307 - 8.

even further from Ilona Eibenschütz's, who tends to rush over *all* phrases, and through indications to slow, cadences, and other structural boundaries. In other words, Da Costa uses tempo to 'play' detail and structure in ways only evidenced by those members of the Schumann-Brahms circle closest to the Clara 'ideal.'

What might happen then if one simply imitated the recordings of the Schumann-Brahms circle of pianists in a process that *includes* the most extreme elements of their performance approaches, allowing them to unravel Brahmsian sound, score and meaning to unknown ends? Expanding upon William Brooks's discussion of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's theory of experimental systems and his distinction between 'technical objects' and 'epistemic things,' when an object (an element of period Brahms style, for example) is used in a predetermined (controlled) way whereby the outcome (control) is already known, it is thus a technical object, as it only engenders further technical objects (more controlled Brahms performances). Conversely, when that same evidence is used as an open-ended 'epistemic thing,' such processes create "not new artefacts but new questions, not new histories but new communities ...adopt[ing] a mode of inquiry precisely to assert that the job is *not* done...[and] that the questions they ask outlast the answers they seem to supply."⁴²⁹ Such processes *are* experimental, as they problematize the very forces that would have them remain fixed and closed: forces like the Brahmsian aesthetic ideology of control. Before early-recorded Brahms style can be used as an epistemic thing however, the recordings of the Schumann-Brahms circle of pianists stand ready for a fundamental re-evaluation: not in order to reaffirm current notions of Brahmsian identity, but rather to problematize them from the inside-out.

⁴²⁹ Brooks, "Historical Precedents," adapted from Michael Schwab ed., *Experimental Systems: Future Knowledge in Artistic Research* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013), in *Artistic Experimentation in Music: An Anthology*, 195.

