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

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6) Discussion of Results and Conclusions

Whether or not their artistic practices are consciously guided by ethical principles such as historical authenticity, modern pianists continue to be highly invested in notions related to the characteristics of 'proper' Brahms style. This understanding of what makes a performance recognisably Brahmsian is reinforced by widely accepted norms for the interpretation of Johannes Brahms's piano music: precepts whose prescriptive language and sounding outcomes are believed to be at least partly rooted in historical fact, thereby leading to performances that Brahms himself might recognize or that preserve something of his intentions. Seemingly buttressed by nineteenth-century verbal accounts of Brahms's musical contexts, these performance norms are however less reconcilable with the composer's own 1889 cylinder recording and with the recordings of his pupils. Given pianists' continued adherence to the mores of modern Brahms style and their either tacit or explicit faith in its historical verity, this thesis initially asked why their performances are so unlike those of the composer and his pupils.

Theories that posit changing tastes and performance standards as the interstitial padding that keeps early-recorded Brahms style at arm's length from modern Brahms style overlook the fact that early recordings of Frédéric Chopin's, Robert Schumann's and Franz Liszt's piano music have in recent years been warmly received by performers and consumers of classical music alike, while Brahms's music as performed by those who knew him can trigger near allergic reactions and suspicious attitudes regarding the value of early recordings as evidence of late-Romantic style. I hypothesized that this is because

early-recorded Brahmsian pianism collides as much with the supposedly historically grounded precepts of modern Brahms style as it does with prevailing aesthetic notions concerning the composer's rarefied canonic identity.

While Kevin Korsyn argues that modern Brahms scholarship is ruled by an aesthetic ideology of unity, whereby understandings of the composer's mastery of formal procedures have led to the elevation of narratives like cohesiveness and integrity, and the suppression of those of heterogeneity and complexity, by questioning the performative implications of these themes I hypothesized that all activities in the spheres of Brahms scholarship and performance are in fact mediated by a pervasive aesthetic ideology of control. Like both coherence and complexity, the language of modern Brahms style is rooted in deep mental and corporeal restraint: parameters understood to distinguish Brahms's identity from those of his Romantic contemporaries. This relativist understanding of Brahmsian identity is protected by norms dictating that performances of his music are to be expressively- and technically-controlled in general, and literal, detailed, structural, and tonally- and temporally-measured in particular. Because early-recorded Brahms style clashes with modern understandings of Brahmsian identity and its associated performance norms, I hypothesized that the aesthetic ideology of control mediates how evidence of Brahms's musical contexts is collected and then translated into musical acts; leading pianists to shape his music in ways that might never have occurred to him while still believing in the historical validity of their performances.

This thesis thus sought to better elucidate the origins of the Brahmsian aesthetic ideology of control and the modes by which it is currently reinforced in scholarly and performance spheres, thereby resulting in persistent gaps between what pianists believe,

know and do. It also asked what happens to understandings of Brahmsian identity when documentary and sounding evidence of the composer's musical contexts is applied at the piano with the intention of problematizing rather than reaffirming the aesthetic ideology of control. It was hypothesized that this would catalyse a critical shift in our understanding of Brahmsian identity to one that includes rather than suppresses the emotional and physical inhibitions and fallibilities more typically associated with Romantic pianism; that this shift would open up a palette of expressive and technical resources previously suppressed by the precepts of modern Brahms style; and that these resources, when applied experimentally, would reveal new insights into just how historically-informed modern pianists are prepared to be, thereby further elucidating the gaps between modern Brahms style and Brahms as he was recorded.

In the first chapter entitled "Brahmsian Minds and Bodies: The Aesthetic Ideology of Control," we saw how pianists who understand what it means when someone describes their performances as 'a little too Schumann and not enough Brahms' are the inheritors of powerful ideas concerning Brahms's canonic identity. These notions were shown to have been borne of contemporaneous polemics in which Brahms's supporters fought to distance his controlled mind and body from the "utter degeneracy"⁴⁷⁴ of the New German School composers' colouristic, theatrical, superficial, sentimental and virtuosic musical practices on one hand, and their excesses, weaknesses, diseases and lunacies on the other. As the language of these dialectics is ripe with bodily and psychological implications, like Goethe's assertion that "the works of today are Romantic...because they are weak, sickly or sick...[while] the old works are

⁴⁷⁴ Deiters, "Johannes Brahms," 11.

Classical...because they are energetic, hale and hearty,"⁴⁷⁵ the historical documentary record is resplendent with explicit references to Brahms's inner and outer control, thereby reinforcing modern beliefs in the authenticity of his canonic identity as "historical rather than futuristic, traditional rather than ground breaking, and ultimately classical rather than *echt romantisch*."⁴⁷⁶ The principle themes of these polemics were then shown to have informed the language of modern Brahms style and its associated performance norms, as demonstrated by extracts of modern reviews of concerts and recordings.

While Brahms's supporters emphasized the logic and rigor of his compositions and his predilection for academicism and broody introspectiveness, his critics' accusations that he was "a commonplace and mechanical music-spinner who could write an elaborate work without once exhibiting so much as a momentary flicker of divine fire," underlined his contempt for ego-driven pursuits like sentimentality, effect and virtuosity: themes reinforced in modern concert reviews, with Brahmsian pianists being praised for their "patrician disregard for all forms of bloated excess or exaggeration."⁴⁷⁷ Brahms's mind is also understood to have been behind his "intense involvement with the music of the past": one "bolstered by the expectation of a poetic future, and shaped by a critical awareness of the present." His identity as the artist "out of joint with his times"⁴⁷⁸ is similarly reinforced in modern performance spheres, with pianists being expected to avoid overt Romantic markers like extreme temporal and tonal fluctuations, and to instead adopt a performer-neutral approach like that of Radu Lupu, who "sits down at the

⁴⁷⁵ Goethe, in Sainte-Beuve, *Selected Essays*, trans. and ed. Steegmuller and Guterman, 5.

⁴⁷⁶ Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit*, in Moseley, "Is There only Juan Brahms?" 162.

⁴⁷⁷ Parker, "Music and the Grand Style," 178 - 79; Morrison, "Brahms - Handel Variations," <http://www.gramophone.co.uk/chart/review/brahms-handel-variations>.

⁴⁷⁸ Grimes, "In Search of Absolute Inwardness," 143 - 44; Kerman, "Counsel for the Defense," 442 - 43, in Korsyn, "Brahms Research and Aesthetic Ideology," 89.

piano like a court stenographer at a tedious trial, and proceeds dispassionately to do his job...[with] poetic seriousness rendered by what might be called self-effacing technique.” This approach is also fuelled by contemporaneous descriptions in which Brahms's stoic, hermitic, and even ascetic tendencies are framed as evidence that his "real life, the object of all his sympathies and energies, [was] that which passe[d] within."⁴⁷⁹

Throughout the expressly biblical and nationalistic language of these polemics, Brahms's internal control is implicated in narratives concerning his moral and ethical nature, the "catholicity of his taste," his commitment to the "eternal religion" of Classical form and counterpoint, and his role as "the guardian of German music."⁴⁸⁰ In their attacks on the structural ambiguity of Wagner's works, we have seen how Brahms's supporters held up the unity of his works as proof of an equally coherent mind: one capable of creating music that was "not painted word by word, but as a whole, and consequently structural interests never suffer[ed]."⁴⁸¹ While Brahms's opponents asserted that his works were scientific, inhuman and artificial, these narratives all continue to fuel expectations that modern Brahms performances are to be structural above all else.

We have also seen how late-Romantic accounts of Brahms's body have informed the language of modern Brahms style, with pianists being praised for energetic yet modest displays of physical power, like Garrick Ohlsson who "produce[s] great masses of sound that never bec[o]me clangorous."⁴⁸² While Brahms's industry, economy and

⁴⁷⁹ Rockwell, "German Bill," review of Radu Lupu (piano), in *New York Times Music Review* (January 29, 1991); Deiters, "Johannes Brahms," 10.

⁴⁸⁰ "Johannes Brahms," *The Musical Times* (May 1, 1897): 298 - 99; Schenker, quoted and trans. by Mast, "Commentary," 151, in Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 280; Kalbeck, "Feuilleton: Johannes Brahms," *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* (7 May 1897): 1, in McColl, "A Model German," 10.

⁴⁸¹ Walker, "Brahms," 124.

⁴⁸² Oestreich, "The Piano at Full Power," review of Garrick Ohlsson (piano), in *New York Times Music Review* (January 12, 1998).

humility are underlined in descriptions of the unassuming nature of his mode of dress and manners; his self-restraint is emphasized in accounts that he was “as temperate in drink as in meats...[because] he is too keenly conscious of the[ir] depressing effects.”⁴⁸³

Modern performances described as characteristically Brahmsian also tend to be imbued with highly gendered language. In polemics designed to conflate the New Germans' practices with the less controlled state of femininity, Brahms's supporters assert that his music "is the outcome of a thoroughly masculine nature," that his "harmony is robust, never effeminate," and that like Bach's music, Brahms's is "strong, deep, vigorous, flowing, steady and true like a great river, and not a thing of erratic bubbles and splashes.”⁴⁸⁴ This language lives on today, with typically Brahmsian performances being described as manly, robust, martial and agile; or with innuendo-laden terms like deep, virile, vigorous, thrusting and penetrating. After Robert Schumann designates him as the 'Messiah of German Music,' so too does the German-ness of Brahms's body become a ubiquitous rallying cry amongst those aghast at the New Germans' claims of hyper-nationalism. We have seen how such currents generated much of the language of modern Brahms style, from words like universal, objective and timeless; to athletic, outdoorsy, vital, and healthy; to those filtered through a post-WWII lens like imposing, dour, sober, emotionally limited, square, pure, and conservative.

While the language of modern Brahms style was born of polemics between those vying to claim a foothold in a nascent musical canon, it is also clearly linked to contemporaneous conflations of health and aesthetic evaluation. Indeed, the single-

⁴⁸³ Rogers, "Genius and Health," 515.

⁴⁸⁴ "Manliness in Music," 460; Adler and Strunk, "Johannes Brahms," 129; D. C. Parker, "Music and the Grand Style," 163 - 64.

minded fervour of each side of the Brahms-Wagner debate even drew accusations of pathological fixation on an *idée fixe*, or monomania. Viewed in art circles as a “quintessentially Romantic illness,”⁴⁸⁵ a linkage of insanity and artistic genius that Brahms's supporters desperately fought to subvert, monomania was understood to manifest in creative, introverted, sentimental, passionate and heroic figures, and to result in obsession, melancholy, restlessness, hallucinations, suicidal despair, madness, and even death. In medical spheres, monomania was also understood to affect those with “minds of a meditative and exclusive cast, which seem to be susceptible only of a series of thoughts and emotions; individuals who, through self-love, vanity, pride, and ambition, abandon themselves to their reflections, to exaggerated projects and unwarrantable pretensions.”⁴⁸⁶ As these descriptors encapsulated everything Brahms’s supporters so despised in the New Germans’ practices in general, and in Berlioz’s musico-erotic monomaniacal delusions in particular, they had all the more reason to link Brahms’s particular brand of genius not only with the control of his mind but with its health as well.

The symptoms of monomania however bore an unfortunate resemblance to Robert Schumann’s own malignant obsessions, hallucinations, suicidal despair, and death. I argued that well-meaning assertions that Brahms “knocks into the proverbial cocked hat the idea that genius inhabits an unsound brain and crazy body”⁴⁸⁷ implicated his beloved mentor with those practices deemed to be less sound. While Brahms’s critics invoked themes of surgery to attack the academicism of his music, this narrative continues to be enthusiastically taken up by those underlining his trajectory away from the rambling and fragmentary Schumannism of his youthful works towards the clear-eyed coherence of his

⁴⁸⁵ Brittan, “Berlioz,” 228.

⁴⁸⁶ Esquirol, *Des maladies mentales*, II, 29, in *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁸⁷ Rogers, “The Health of Musicians,” 620.

later style. Though Roger Moseley and Siegfried Kross discuss how Brahms later excised the formal corruptions of earlier works like the *Trio* Op. 8 in favour of clarity, concision, organic integrity and the primacy of sonata form; in light of the evidence put forth in this chapter I asserted that these corruptions represented something much more insidious to Brahms's supporters: namely, Schumann's diseased mind and body, and both men's musico-psychological fixation with E. T. A. Hoffman's Kapellmeister Kreisler.

We have seen how the young Brahms revelled in Hoffman's *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* and *Kater Murr*: tales detailing the restless and fantastic adventures of Kreisler, with whom Brahms and Schumann deeply identified. While the story of Kreisler's life is recounted in *Kater Murr* in a fragmented narrative style that may have indeed informed the capricious, shifting, allusive and episodic quality of Brahms's earlier musical style, his youthful letters suggest that these qualities had permeated his consciousness as well. He signed many of his letters and compositions *Joh. Kreisler jun.*, and is reported to have been "chock-full of crazy notions" and to have painted "his apartment full of the most beautiful frescoes in the manner of *Callot*." In a letter that seemingly evidences his struggle to expunge these tendencies and adopt a more formally rigorous style, Brahms reports: "I often quarrel with myself – that is, Kreisler and Brahms quarrel with one another. But usually each has his decided opinion and fights it out. This time...both were quite confused, neither knew what he wanted."⁴⁸⁸

While Brahms's outward compositional trajectory from restless fragmentation to unified coherence indeed seems to reflect Kreisler's metamorphosis in *Kater Murr*, whereby the "fragmentary [and] bizarre character" of his artistic work disappears and he becomes "a calm, thoughtful man who, no longer buzzing wildly around in vague,

⁴⁸⁸ Joachim, *Briefwechsel* 5 and *Clara Schumann-Brahms Briefe*, I, 9, in Avins, *BLL*, 42, 51.

endless spaces, holds firmly to the established path,”⁴⁸⁹ I argued that I was less convinced of Brahms’s inner resolution of his early Schumannian and Kreislerian tendencies. Firstly, this resolution was externally imposed by scathing criticisms of the formal failings of his earlier works; secondly, Brahms’s letters reveal his lifelong love for Schumann and the importance of the latter’s memory to the extra-musical content of his later compositions; and thirdly, Moseley’s and Kross’s metanarrative of notational resolution doesn’t account for issues of performance style. Indeed, while Brahms’s later revised version of his *Trio* Op. 8 may be more formally coherent than its earlier conception, we have seen how many of the Schumann-Brahms pianists didn’t ‘play’ structure at all, or at least, not in the ways we’ve come to expect. Their performances of the surgically precise detail and structure of Brahms’s late piano works are instead rather aptly characterised as capricious, shifting, allusive and episodic.

It was thus my assertion that Brahmsians past and present have framed the resolution of Brahms’s outward musical language to fit a metanarrative of internal control: one designed to distance him from the comorbidity of insanity and Romanticism as represented by Berlioz, and the added threat of corporeal disintegration should one’s mental affliction go unresolved, as exemplified by Schumann. Expanding upon Joseph N. Straus’s and Edward T. Cone’s discussion of Schubertian intersections of music, madness and disease, I suggested that Schumann was the promissory note in Brahms’s evolving and public canonic body: one that needed to be purged lest it “burs[t] out with even greater force, revealing itself as basically inimical to its surroundings, which it proceeds to demolish.”⁴⁹⁰ Brahms’s internal resolution of his Schumannian past however, is not

⁴⁸⁹ Hoffman, *Kater Murr*, 233, 216, in Kross, “Brahms,” 199.

⁴⁹⁰ Cone, “Schubert’s Promissory Note,” 233 - 41, in Straus, “Normalizing,” 150.

satisfactorily demonstrated by studies based on the notational features of his works or on agenda-laden accounts of his biography. While such discourse indeed paints a picture that fulfils Brahms's prophetic assertion that if he ever lost the name Kreisler he would “withdraw as a hermit into the solitude of an office and lose [himself] in silent contemplation of the documents to be copied,”⁴⁹¹ his letters and performance contexts suggest that this retreat was and still is accomplished primarily in the imaginations of his most ardent supporters.

Though Brahms and many of these supporters destroyed much of what they perceived to be incriminating pieces of personal correspondence, given the tirelessness of their campaigns to fashion his burgeoning canonic identity into one of supreme control it is likely that these excised letters evidenced his experience of less restrained physical and psychological states. Nevertheless, in the second chapter entitled "The Lullabies of My Sorrows: Brahms's Late Piano Works Op. 116 - 119," I argued that Brahms's letters *still* resist current understandings of his canonic identity, especially as related to the extra-musical content of his late piano works. While Straus asserts that composers' late styles can include qualities of solitude, alienation, concision, authorial belatedness, anachronism and nostalgia, themes indeed invoked at length in scholarly discussions of Brahmsian lateness, I argued that such narratives tend to be explored in ways that underline the composer's control. Strauss, Moseley and Margaret Notley for example, link the presence of these qualities in Brahms's late music to his deference to the music of the past, his Classical lineage, his commitment to his principles, and his liberal open-mindedness.

⁴⁹¹ *Briefwechsel*, v, in Avins, *BLL*, 12.

While Straus also asserts that late style works can represent "impaired bodies or minds and their failure to function in a normal way,"⁴⁹² I further argued that it is no wonder that such themes are notably absent with respect to a composer whose identity seems so deliberately constructed to repel questions of illness and instability. Introduced by Schumann as "a musician who would reveal his mastery not in gradual stages but like Minerva would spring fully armed from Kronos's head," and memorialized as having "passed away before any sign of weakness or senility was apparent in [his] work,"⁴⁹³ Brahms's lifelong sturdiness continues to be underlined in discussions of his late style. Even discourse that raises extra-musical tropes such as his despair over the deaths of those closest to him later in life still emphasizes the resigned nature of that sadness or, as Ernest Walker puts it in 1899, his "acceptance of the facts of things"⁴⁹⁴: themes leading to performances of his late works that are serious, portentous and static.

We have seen however that Brahms's later feelings of alienation and solitude actually seem to have been precipitated much earlier by the loss of Robert Schumann in 1856 and his mother Christiane just nine years later. While events surrounding Schumann's earlier suicide attempt and hospitalization brought the young Brahms into Clara Schumann's Düsseldorf home, a domestic environment in which he both revelled and despaired, so too did the death of his mother conjure both painful and joyous memories of his troubled childhood home in Hamburg. As Brahms would later recall both households with a potent mixture of delight, wistfulness and pain, already one senses the seeds of a dynamic rather than resigned brand of nostalgia.

⁴⁹² Straus, "Disability and 'Late Style,'" 12.

⁴⁹³ Schumann, "Neue Bahnen," *NZfM* 39, no. 18 (1853): 185 - 86, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 66; "Brahms," *The Musical Times* (May 1, 1897): 297.

⁴⁹⁴ Walker, "Brahms," 128.

Brahms's letters from the 1850s also evidence his experience of other less controlled mental and physical states; the disintegration of the man with whom he shared his early Kreisler affinities and his infatuation with Clara having shaken him to the core. As Brahms hadn't produced a single work in nearly six years, his friends and family began to worry that he had become restless, distracted and melancholy: states associated with "malignant musico-erotic fetish[es]" that "exert a hostile influence on [the artist's] whole existence" as "he gives way to a 'distracted condition of the mind.'"⁴⁹⁵ Brahms's feelings for Clara indeed seem to have driven him to distraction, and he writes in 1854 that he feels "confused and indecisive," and that he has "to restrain [him]self forcibly just from quietly embracing her."⁴⁹⁶ These sentiments perhaps shed new light on his letter from later that year in which he confesses: 'I often quarrel with myself – that is, Kreisler and Brahms quarrel with one another...both were quite confused, neither knew what he wanted.'

While Brahms's early Kreislerian tendencies are typically discussed in notational terms, his experience of turmoil and fragmentation at this time clearly references internal and physical states as well. The obsessive and moody nature of his letters is also reminiscent of assertions that monomania affects those 'endowed with a brilliant, warm and vivid imagination; [and] minds of a meditative and exclusive cast, which seem to be susceptible only of a series of thoughts and emotions.' Perhaps Kreisler here represents the lovesick poet who, 'buzzing wildly around in vague, endless spaces,' internally wishes to embrace Clara, while Brahms is the young composer who restrains himself externally out of near filial duty to her husband.

⁴⁹⁵ Hoffman, "Automata," trans. Ewing in *The Best Tales of Hoffman*, 100 - 101, in Francesca Brittan, "Berlioz," 212.

⁴⁹⁶ Joachim, *Briefwechsel* 5, in Avins, *BLL*, 47 - 48.

Brahms's letters from around this time are also resplendent with traces of pure levity: from his incessant teasing of Clara's young children, to accounts of his love for long candlelit evenings of food, drink and music in the company of his closest friends, with Clara “dancing around the room for joy,” and with "J[Joachim] and Gr[imm] lying on the sofa at dusk, and [Brahms] playing in the next room.” Remembering these blissful times, Brahms would later write, “How dear to me are all the works which came into being this winter...they remind me so much of twilight hours at Clara’s.”⁴⁹⁷

After Robert's death however, and Brahms's subsequent move away from Clara's home, the dissolution of his family in Hamburg, and the death of his long-suffering mother, Brahms's feelings of nostalgia and solitude do deepen. Having lost two family units in such quick succession, it is perhaps understandable why, in 1864 and 1872 respectively, he would write: "My real friends are the old friends...my heart can take pleasure in them more and more only in my imagination," and “holidays I always spend all alone...given that my own people are dead or far away.”⁴⁹⁸ Once aware of the potent emotional mixture each domestic situation represented however, it seems reasonable to again suggest that Brahms's sadness at being separated from many of those he loved, either through death or by circumstance, was not ruled by inert resignation but rather by a shifting, fleeting and fragmentary kind of nostalgia.

We have also seen that Brahms's feelings of alienation stem partly from his tendency for cruelty, meddling and jealousy. Indeed, throughout my discussion of the many professional and personal rifts for which he was partly if not primarily responsible, I asserted that any discussions of Brahmsian lateness that are inclusive of themes of

⁴⁹⁷ Joachim, *Briefwechsel 5 - 6 and Clara Schumann - Brahms Briefe*, in *Ibid.*, 49, 64 and 83.

⁴⁹⁸ *Clara Schumann-Brahms Briefe*, in *Ibid.*, 293 - 94, 439.

alienation should also necessarily include the less controlled states of anger and callousness. Interestingly, the single-minded 'self-love, vanity, pride, and ambition' of Brahms's role in many of these rifts also seems reminiscent not only of contemporaneous medical discussions of those most susceptible to monomania, but to accusations levelled at the New Germans as well. We have also seen that Brahms was deeply affected by the mental and physical deteriorations of his closest friends: those like the surgeon Theodor Billroth for example, to whom Brahms writes in 1886, "It always sounds a bit melancholy when you write of feeling increasingly lonely. I have a sympathetic understanding for it, and wish you would be wary." Brahms's concern seems reflective of the polemics of his supporters, who warn that, "idleness and introspection are ruinous to health." When Billroth finally succumbs to illness in 1892, Brahms writes that he had "sensed that loss for years."⁴⁹⁹

A rift with Clara Schumann however, in addition to Brahms's hyperawareness of her frailty as perhaps evidenced by his *ossia* for the *Intermezzo in E Minor* Op. 116 no. 5, appears to have directly informed the composition of his late piano pieces Op. 116 - 119. I asserted that these pieces came into being at a time when the potential loss of his greatest ally and last living connection to his memories of her husband and their Düsseldorf home must have weighed heavily on his mind. I suggested that nostalgic reminiscences of those beautiful and tragic days of his youth were as much on Brahms's mind during the composition of his late piano works, as was his fear of losing Clara in his old age. As such, I argued that these pieces truly capture the dynamism of Brahmsian nostalgia, as they conjure past love and sadness, they anticipate future loss, and they also

⁴⁹⁹ *Billroth - Brahms*, in *Ibid.*, 639; Rogers, "Genius and Health," 518; Widmann, *Briefwechsel* 8, in Avins, *BLL*, 712 - 13.

served as a therapeutic elixir for the renewal of Brahms and Clara's friendship in the presentness of his old age. Brahms also seems not to have been immune to feminine charms in his old age, as letters between he, Elisabet von Herzogenberg, Hermine Spies and of course Clara are full of flirtation and jealousy. Perhaps these qualities too should be included in discussions of Brahmsian lateness.

Though Brahms is framed as having died in full control of his mental and physical apparatus, Clara's death in 1896 seems to have precipitated the advancement and conspicuousness of the terminal illness he had tried for so long to hide. While Brahms continued to consume copious amounts of food, wine and tobacco despite doctors' orders, as evidenced by Carl Friedberg's reminiscences and thereby refuting claims regarding his temperance in such matters, soon the mental and physical corrosion he had long stood by and watched in his close circle of friends was at his own doorstep. He complains of suffering from irritability, despondency and pain; while Friedberg's assertion that the composer's physical and mental distress is 'written in' to the fabric of his late piano works contests any notion of an earthly departure with Minerva's armour intact. Indeed, Straus's assertion that composers' late styles often represent non-normative bodies and minds is surely reflected in Friedberg's detailing of how the *Intermezzo* Op. 116 no. 5 captures Brahms's later corpulence, his overindulgence in his favourite vices, his waddle and shortness of breath, and his suicidal despair as he sought to escape a mind and body riddled with cancer.⁵⁰⁰ I ultimately asserted that Brahms's designation of his late piano pieces as 'the lullabies of his sorrows' hints at a dynamic, shifting and restless brand of nostalgia in which the joyous and painful memories of friends, colleagues and places past

⁵⁰⁰ DiClemente, "Brahms Performance Practice," 59 - 60, from Transcript 368 - 70.

comforted him in the presentness of an old age characterized by the mental and physical deterioration of both himself and those he loved.

While unfolding, fragmentary and fleeting qualities of sadness, alienation and nostalgia indeed fleck Brahms's letters, so too are these letters evidentiary of the less controlled mental and physical states of anger, callousness, irritability, confusion, coyness, obsession, fantasy, moodiness, levity, bliss, despondency, melancholy, jealousy, vanity, pride, despair, disease, pain, overindulgence, and death. As such, I argued that discussions of lateness in Brahms that reinforce notions of the soundness of his physical and mental apparatus are pre-structured by an aesthetic ideology of control. Furthermore, while discussions of Brahms's trajectory away from his early Schumannistic tendencies and towards the coherence of his later style seem predicated on notational categories and agenda-laden accounts of his life and work, Brahms's letters clearly evidence him to have continued to experience unresolved inner and outer states until his death. All of this seems to again point to the conclusion that Brahms wasn't nearly as far removed from his Romantic context as Brahmsians past and present like to believe.

As emphasized throughout this volume, at the junction of the minds and bodies of musicians lies the act of performance. Unfortunately however, the aesthetic ideology of control is shown to have pre-structured modern assessments of evidence of Brahms's performative contexts in the third chapter of this volume entitled, "The Playing Styles of the Schumann-Brahms Pianists." Expanding on Susan Sontag's assertion that distinctions between style and content "hol[d] together the fabric of critical discourse and serv[e] to perpetuate certain intellectual aims and vested interests,"⁵⁰¹ I argued that by regarding evidence of Brahms's performance contexts that reinforces the aesthetic ideology of

⁵⁰¹ Sontag, "On Style," <http://www.coldbacon.com/writing/sontag-onstyle.html>.

control as content, while as else is viewed as superficial and thus disposable style, modern Brahmsians have avoided the awkward conclusion that according to modern Brahms performance norms, Brahms would today be considered an *unBrahmsian* pianist.

In order to examine how dissections of Brahms's musical contexts have been pre-structured by the 'aims and vested interests' of the aesthetic ideology of control, I demonstrated how notions of a unified Schumann-Brahms school of pianism have been built around highly palatable descriptions of Clara Schumann's hyper-controlled performance ideology. Indeed, as Michael Musgrave asserts, "Clara was so intimate with the compositions of Brahms and his artistic values...[and] though speaking in the first place of playing Schumann's music, [her] remarks have equal relevance to Brahms."⁵⁰² As Clara was keenly aware of the links between performance style and composer identity, and given her tireless championing of Brahms, it is no wonder that descriptions of her performance ideology are laden with the language of mental and physical control.

As we have seen, contemporaneous discussions of Clara's approach included assertions of her literalism, as evidenced by her urging of pupils to "play what is written, play it *as* it is written...it all stands there"; and her distaste for sentimentality, affectation, melodrama, virtuosity and especially "rush and hurry,"⁵⁰³ as evidenced by her admonition 'keine Passagen.' She is also reported to have underlined the importance of carefully delineating the tonal, rhythmic and textural details of works, though never to the detriment of the whole, as demonstrated by her emphasis of 'Das Getragene'; and the cultivation of a singing, connected and covered tone and attack through inner and outer poise, as evidenced by her emphasis on 'hineinlegen.' While Clara's approach seems to

⁵⁰² Musgrave, "Early Trends," in *Performing Brahms*, 316.

⁵⁰³ Davies, "On Schumann," 215, 216.

have included temporal elasticity, arpeggiation and dislocation, in the context of her performance ideology most modern observers tend to assume that their use was similarly restrained and functioned to elucidate musical detail and structure.

I then discussed how modern distillations of the content of Brahms's performance style tend to select for evidence that aligns his approach with that of Clara's. Musgrave for example 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.⁵⁰⁴ Based on other contemporaneous accounts detailed throughout *Performing Brahms* and *A Brahms Reader* however, to this framework I added a covered and 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 ruled by the holding back of tempo; and the regimented use of unnotated expressive devices in order to delineate musical detail and structure. When Brahms is reported to have fallen short of this Clara 'ideal,' I asserted that it is almost always framed today 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.

Narratives concerning the exaggerations and wrong notes of Brahms's deteriorated later style and the impression that his performances were akin to a kind of "spirited sketch" become particularly pertinent in light of his 1889 cylinder recording. Musgrave, Neal Peres Da Costa and George S. Bozarth connect many of Brahms's textual departures, rhythmic alterations and tempo modifications to "descriptions of his *best* qualities...in relation to the *score*." Those elements of Brahms's recorded style that are

⁵⁰⁴ Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 302.

less supported by Clara-centric descriptions of his playing or that are irreducible to notational categories are either ignored as evidence of ageing and lack of practice, or dismissed as a "hasty if enthusiastic response to the recording medium."⁵⁰⁵ I also observed how caution seems to pervade assessments of the flexibility and abandon of Brahms's recorded style, as evidenced by Musgrave's questioning of "how free is free and how strict is strict - and in what kinds of pieces," and Da Costa's assertion that, "the boundaries within which this flexibility took place remain relatively unclear."⁵⁰⁶ I argued that Brahms's recording *does* evidence boundaries, and that the extent to which we take him at his word tends to be related to our investment in notions of Brahmsian control.

Assessments of the described and recorded performance styles of the pupils that Clara Schumann and Brahms shared unfold along similar lines, with the approaches of those reported to have embodied Clara's teachings like Fanny Davies and Adelina De Lara for example, being understood today as historically authoritative with regards to the performance of Brahms's piano music. Musgrave for example praises De Lara's literalism, her careful tonal delineation of details, and her holding back of tempo for emphasis, while no mention is made of her tendency to rush. As we have seen, Musgrave also invokes the trope of ageing minds and bodies when he asserts that De Lara's recordings have historical authority "despite her obvious limitations of technique and occasionally memory of reading."⁵⁰⁷ As in the case of Brahms's recording, emphasizing De Lara's age at the time of recording implies that those elements of her approach that are less reducible to Clara-centric notions of control are disposable.

⁵⁰⁵ E. Schumann, *Erinnerungen*, 269, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 125; Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 323, 305. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁰⁶ Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 323; Da Costa, *Off the Record*, 264 - 65.

⁵⁰⁷ Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 314 - 15

Other pupils like Nathalie Janotha, Leonard Borwick and Carl Friedberg for example, seem to have generally adhered to principles of Clara's teachings, while at times exhibiting episodes of "waywardness and displays of strength"⁵⁰⁸ related to the presence of live audiences or the specific notational features of musical works. As such, their historical Brahmsian authority is also generally uncontested. Evidence of Ilona Eibenschütz's performance style on the other hand, posits her as furthest from the Clara 'ideal.' Clara wildly disapproved of both Eibenschütz's playing and Brahms's enthusiasm for it, and in his comparison of Eibenschütz's recordings to his Clara-based summary of the essential elements of Brahms's style, Musgrave asserts that her playing lacks authority because of its paucity of contrasts of tone and touch; because she is negligent of detail and structure; and because her playing is not governed by the practice of holding for emphasis. Surely aware of the correlation between Eibenschütz's and Brahms's recorded performance styles, Musgrave suggest 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."⁵⁰⁹ What Eibenschütz heard from Brahms of course, were his deteriorated later 'sketches.'

I however argued that many features of Brahms's performance style that are today dismissed as evidence of an ageing mind and body had always been a part of his performance style, and that his "style of playing differed *in toto* from Frau Schumann's." Indeed, observers note as early as the 1850s that he "does not play like a consummately trained, highly intelligent musician."⁵¹⁰ Those who heard him play later in life seem to have assumed that he had once been a virtuoso based on agenda-laden descriptions of his

⁵⁰⁸ Shaw, I, 639, in Leech-Wilkinson, *The Changing Sound of Music*, chapter 6, paragraph 11.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁵¹⁰ May, *Johannes Brahms*, II: 211 - 12, in Philip, *Performing Brahms*, 368; Hübbe, *Brahms in Hamburg*, II, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 122, 125.

earlier performance style, like those with which Robert Schumann launched the young composer's career for example. While Clara was intensely aware of the role of performers in canonic identity-making, Brahms seems to have espoused a much more carefree approach to performance, playing with the "radiant serenity of a mind happy in the exercise of his art," as he "pound[ed] away somewhere near the right notes."⁵¹¹

In descriptions often passed over in favour of those evidencing control, Brahms is reported to have often hastily reduced musical figures and to have played with gusto and freedom, as if he was half drunk or just improvising. Contemporaneous impressions of Brahms's performances also imply a Kreislerian kaleidoscope of less controlled mental and physical states reminiscent of those evidenced by his letters; including poetic dreaminess and demoniac passion, wild fantastic flights and wayward humour, and shadowy flitting and breathless agitation. Based on the presence of these qualities in descriptions and recordings of Brahms's and Eibenschütz's playing styles, I argued that the Schumann-Brahms circle of pianists was not unified around a Clara-centric ideal, but rather that these performers represented a spectrum of approaches; that the performance styles of those furthest from the Clara ideal cannot be entirely explained by the trope of mental and physical deterioration; and that these outlying approaches may tell us more about how Brahms actually played.

Indeed, those pianists in the Schumann-Brahms circle whose performance styles were furthest from the Clara ideal seem to have espoused an approach to performance ruled by a desire to communicate the *spirit* of their 'spirited sketches,' with a view of their minds and bodies as more than disappearing agents in the transmission of

⁵¹¹ Widmann, *Johannes Brahms*, 17 - 18, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 123; Fromm, "Some Reminiscences," 615.

composers' works and identities. I argued that by dismissing the less controlled elements of their styles as circumstantial or spurious, one effectively eliminates just about everything that distances their version of Brahms from our own. This further suggests that many of these stylistic elements were in fact essential content where Brahms's performance style is concerned.

Expanding on William Brook's discussion of Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's theory of experimental systems therefore, I suggested that in order for the recordings of the Schumann-Brahms circle of pianists to reveal their secrets about modern performer-scholars' investment in the aesthetic ideology of control, these traces need to be handled with a view to creating "not new artefacts but new questions, not new histories but new communities...precisely to assert that the job is *not* done...[and] that the questions they ask outlast the answers they seem to supply."⁵¹² In the fourth chapter entitled, "Analyses of the Schumann-Brahms Pupil Recordings," I began by discussing the concrete ways in which modern Brahms style plays out in Brahms's *Rhapsody in G Minor* Op. 79 no. 2, *Intermezzo in E flat Major* Op. 117 no. 1, *Ballade in G Minor* Op. 118 no. 3 and *Intermezzo in E Minor* Op. 119 no. 2: the same works recorded by Adelina de Lara and Ilona Eibenschütz. By examining representative modern recordings it was revealed that regardless of the nature of the work in question, each performance surveyed was literal, detailed, structural, temporally and tonally measured, and expressively and technically controlled.

Literal and detailed playing was shown to entail giving all notes and rests their full value; playing materials simultaneously when notated vertically; never adding,

⁵¹² Brooks, "Historical Precedents," adapted from Schwab ed., *Experimental Systems*, in *Artistic Experimentation in Music: An Anthology*, 195.

subtracting or altering musical materials; reacting to every instance of notation with some appropriate action; and limiting departures from the score to those that highlight detail and structure. Structural playing involves rendering parallel indications similarly or in ways staggered to elucidate structure; shaping local details according to their structural weight; maintaining temporal and tonal consistency within sections and creating contrast between them; and defining the outer edges of structures through the holding back of tempo. Performances are temporally measured when they afford enough time to elucidate local details though not so much so as to subvert structure; when they avoid rushing and rhythmic alterations; when the unnotated taking of time is used to clarify structure; and when an underlying sense of the pulse and divisions of the measure are clear.

Performances are expressively and technically controlled when lyrical passages sound introspective as opposed to sentimental, and when difficult passages sound resolute as opposed to flashy and harsh; when pianists play with a deeply connected approach to tone and attack; and when bass and soprano lines ring out clearly. For all of these reasons, the modern performances surveyed were shown to communicate a serious and portentous version of Brahms that reflects current understandings of his canonic identity.

In order to truly "criticize the frame around the discipline, the mental enclosure that pre-structures and limits the field by restricting the questions that are asked,"⁵¹³ I proposed an approach to Adelina de Lara's and Ilona Eibenschütz's Brahms recordings whereby these sounding traces would be analysed and copied with the same reverence lavished upon documentary sources. I asserted that this single-minded approach was not intended to preserve or even to recreate these women's performances, but rather to make their styles part of my own mental and physical apparatus as a pianist today. Tropes of

⁵¹³ Korsyn, "Brahms Research," 91.

caution, inspiration and authentication would be sidestepped in favour of an approach whereby early-recorded sounds are taken at face value: anything that was audible, either with the ‘naked ear’ or with the help of visualisation software, would be described and copied without judgement. As expected, at the end of the analysis and style copying phase it was revealed that the differences between early-recorded and modern Brahms style lie not in superficial mannerisms and eccentricities, but rather in fundamental tensions as related to the pillars of modern Brahms performance norms: mores that are both buttressed by the aesthetic ideology of control and understood as historically sound.

Adelina de Lara’s approach for example is far from what is considered literal and detailed today; with arpeggiation and dislocation being used almost everywhere, and with the latter occurring more frequently at the slower outer edges of musical structures and with the former used more frequently over their faster middles. De Lara’s arpeggiations and dislocations also lead to localized asynchronicity between the hands and the overlapping of discretely notated materials. Elsewhere, she doubles, adds and removes notes for effect, emphasis or voicing; she plays tied notes again for extra resonance; she cuts slurs, note and rest values, and *fermati* when rushing; she often plays inner lines more prominently than soprano lines; she rushes over *crescendi*; she often ignores indications to reduce temporal and tonal intensity in lyrical materials, resulting in reduced contrast between subjects and sections; and she sometimes overemphasizes local details resulting in the undercutting of rhythmic and structural clarity.

So too is De Lara’s approach to structure very different from our own, as she uses both rushing and slowing to unify and delineate phrase groups and sections, while often softening the boundaries between these structures by rushing, eliding, shortening the

values of notes and *fermati*, and by ignoring indications to modify tonal and temporal intensity. While she does contrast larger sections from one another, she doesn't necessarily maintain consistency of time and tone within them, and she often shapes reoccurring materials differently and in ways that do not elucidate overall structure. She does however sometimes achieve structural contrast by shifting between an 'outer' or more vertical approach to tone and attack in slower passages, and an 'inner' or more horizontal approach in faster one. Her approach does not read as temporally controlled to modern ears either, as her tempo often accumulates from phrase to phrase, while her rhythmic alterations can blur a clear sense of the pulse and the divisions of the measure.

In sum, I found that playing like Adelina De Lara does not sound or feel either expressively or technically controlled today due to her treatment of detail, tone, time and structure. This should give those who would conflate Clara Schumann's pianism with Brahms's serious pause, given that De Lara is reported to have staunchly "maintained and professed the Clara Schumann method."⁵¹⁴ As we have seen, by emphasizing the similarities between De Lara's playing style and descriptions of Clara's, while dismissing her technical missteps and the lopsided and subtly breathless quality of her approach as evidence of a deteriorated mind and body, De Lara's Brahmsian historical authority continues to remain intact. By imitating her playing style however, I found that these less controlled qualities result from her highly consistent tendency to rush slightly over most phrases; her use of rhythmic alteration, dislocation and arpeggiation; her softening of structural boundaries; her use of a more vertical tone and attack in lyrical passages and a more horizontal one in faster passages; and her weighting of the hands and ears inwards when rolling or voicing materials. I asserted that because these less controlled elements

⁵¹⁴ "Madame Adelina de Lara," *The Guardian*, 2.

form the content of De Lara's approach, they would have to be applied with the same frequency and to the same degree if modern RIP pianists hope to capture the spirit of her Brahms recordings. In other words, even if one chooses to replicate the performance styles of those pianists closest to the controlled Clara ideal, it is vital to acknowledge and experience how that control actually feels, sounds, and signifies today.

At the extreme opposite end of the spectrum of approaches represented by the Schumann-Brahms circle of pianists however, one finds Ilona Eibenschütz. Rather than arpeggiating and dislocating almost everywhere, she instead tends to use these devices while rushing through, eliding and truncating musical materials at the boundaries of musical structures. While De Lara's dislocations and arpeggiations often result in a local disjointing of the hands, Eibenschütz's result in large amounts of material becoming overlapped where otherwise notated discretely. Elsewhere, she also doubles, adds and alters notes much more freely than De Lara, she plays tied notes again, and she rewrites or omits vast sections of material. Like De Lara though to a much more extreme degree, Eibenschütz ignores *fermati* when rushing or where blurring structural boundaries, she bypasses indications to reduce temporal or tonal intensity in lyrical materials, and she alters the values of notes and rests almost everywhere. While Eibenschütz generally has little time to shape local complexities of due to the briskness and precipitousness of her tempi, when she does relent in order to do so these instances assume near structural significance.

Eibenschütz also shapes all structures large and small with an approach to tempo modification that is primarily defined by rushing. When the outer edges of these structures are not blurred through combinations of arpeggiation, rhythmic alteration,

truncation and elision, she tends to take time before or after rather than at the structural boundary itself. This subversion of structure is often further compounded by her tendency to render the preparatory and subsequent measures of structural boundaries in rhythmically- and harmonically-ambiguous ways. Elsewhere, while there is rarely much contrast between sections in her playing, there tends to be a high amount of consistency within up-tempo sections and much less consistency within more lyrical ones. Like De Lara however, Eibenschütz does achieve some structural contrast by alternating between an 'outer' and 'inner' approach to tone and attack. As related to temporal matters, like De Lara but again in more extreme ways, Eibenschütz's tempo tends to accumulate from phrase to phrase; she lengthens and shortens notes while sounding others early or late, thereby obscuring rhythmic regularity; and she ignores most *fermati*, indications to slow, and the values of notes and rests. Unlike De Lara, Eibenschütz's tempo almost never settles anywhere and rarely affords the time and space to shape local details; her truncation and elision of musical material happens beyond logical divisions of the measure, thereby subverting any sense of underlying pulse; and she not only ignores indications to slow in lyrical passages but often uses those passages in order to further increase tempo over entire sections and even works.

Given the strictures of modern Brahms style and its underlying aesthetic ideology of control, it is no wonder that Ilona Eibenschütz's Brahms style continues to struggle to claim even a modicum of the historical authority conferred upon De Lara's. She simply does not 'play' detail and structure in the hyper-controlled ways we've come to expect based on agenda-laden accounts of the composer's musical contexts and on conflation between his pianism and that of Clara Schumann. Nothing about Eibenschütz's approach

communicates Brahms's hale and hearty Classical identity; making his enthusiasm for her playing all the more difficult for many to bear, and leading to accusations of earthly weakness on his part (one of the only weaknesses he is afforded) and opportunism on hers. Indeed, in Eibenschütz's playing local details are transformed from organs into interstitial fluid, the skeletal boundaries of musical structures become fully permeable membranes, and tempo perpetually threatens to dismember the mental and physical apparatus instead of functioning as a life-giving, ordering and stabilising pulse.

I argued however that the consistency and facility of Eibenschütz's approach, despite the fifty-year chasm between the two recordings surveyed here, suggests that she was simply uninterested in using detail, tone, time and structure to communicate control. Given Brahms's admiration of her approach to his piano works, it is her consistency and facility that perhaps pose the greatest threat to the aesthetic ideology of control and the canonic identity it protects: one cannot simply select for those elements in Eibenschütz's style that reinforce modern notions of Brahmsian control while dismissing others as evidence of a deteriorated mind and body. Her Brahms style is what it is from start to finish, and it is time for it to be recognized as not only historically authoritative, but much closer in spirit to Brahms's own pianism than that "of the more timidly and wrongly reverential school"⁵¹⁵ as well. Indeed, to borrow from Bruce Haynes, Eibenschütz's style is authentic because, quite simply, it is the real thing.⁵¹⁶

Having learned Adelina De Lara's and Ilona Eibenschütz's Brahmsian dialects from the inside-out, it was then time to apply their styles experimentally in works for which I had no sounding model. In the fifth and final chapter entitled "Experimenting

⁵¹⁵ "The Magazines," *Academy and Literature* 84, no. 2128 (February 15, 1913): 211.

⁵¹⁶ Haynes, *The End of Early Music*, 10.

with the Recordings of the Schumann-Brahms Pupils,” I adopted an approach inspired by Robert Philip’s assertion that learning to slide like Romantic violinists might mean sliding almost everywhere while abandoning the notion that clean playing is tasteful playing, and Mary Hunter’s discussion of how nineteenth-century expressive embellishments were first learned as ‘riffs’ abstracted from musical works then later applied “as the spirit moved the performer, and not necessarily at predetermined places in any given piece.”⁵¹⁷ I thus set out to liberally insert elements of each pianist’s approach, allowing those elements to unravel Brahmsian sound, score, and identity in works that were strikingly different to their early-recorded models.

In the case of the *Intermezzo in E Major* Op. 116 no. 4, having identified modern performances of this work as being characterized by a resignedly nostalgic quality, I looked to recreate the dynamism evidenced both by my early-recorded models, and by my investigations into Brahmsian nostalgia and lateness as well. I did this by lengthening triplet upbeats while rushing between them; by allowing tempo to accumulate from phrase to phrase; by shortening and lengthening note and rest values as needed; by encouraging an extreme independence of the hands; by allowing materials that are notated discretely to overlap; by blurring the outer edges of phrase groups and sections and ignoring indications to slow or reduce tonal intensity; and by overemphasizing some complexities while glossing over others. I focused on these tendencies not only because they are essential elements of both De Lara’s and Eibenschütz’s styles, but also because they cannot be applied in pointillistic ways. Indeed, while I also arpeggiate and dislocate almost everywhere, if I did so while otherwise controlling detail, time and structure, I would not be allowing these devices to ‘infect’ and unfurl my performance in quite the

⁵¹⁷ Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Style*, 235; Hunter, “To Play as if from the Soul,” 391.

same ways evidenced by the historical sounding evidence. Despite having had a general idea of what I was going to do once I arrived in the recording studio, the results of this initial ‘experiment’ were still startling.

In my performance of this work as heard in Sound Ex. 5.2.1b, one hears how in the A section time indeed becomes suspended at triplet upbeats before swinging into and through the material that follows, causing tempo to accumulate. The ever-earlier falling right-hand figures of the opening seven measures that can sound so wistful in modern performances assume an impatient quality, while the rising left-hand figures tend to dominate and propel what otherwise tends to be a contemplative back and forth dialogue between the hands. As I rush further, this "certain intensity, verging sometimes on impatience" then begins to unravel the rhythmic, melodic and harmonic complexities of Brahms's notation, and while heading into the climax of the section I sense the "capricious shifting of meters and textures...suggest[ing] the allusive and episodic nature of a recounted story"⁵¹⁸ of both Brahms's early Kreislerian notational practices, and his lifelong experience of inner and outer turmoil.

Far from the floating anticipatory quality one hears today, the transitional material between the A and B sections continues to plead and shout, and I indeed feel as though I am "buzzing wildly around in vague, endless spaces" as I rush to the snarling chordal material in which one hears the ageing composer who muses, "I may already have lost what scant reputation I had as a "kind and obliging person."⁵¹⁹ With the extrovertedly arpeggiated right-hand chords of the B section however, I was inspired by the levity and

⁵¹⁸ "Borwick," *The Musical Times* (October 1, 1925): 942 - 43; Bellman, "Aus alten Märchen," 117 - 35, in Moseley, "Reforming Johannes," 263.

⁵¹⁹ Hoffman, *Kater Murr*, 216, in Kross, "Brahms," 199; Von Balassa, *Brahmsfreundin*, in Avins, *BLL*, 426.

passions of Brahms's "glorious, jolly day[s]...making music, drinking [and] reading" at Clara Schumann's Düsseldorf home, with the lady "dancing around the room for joy"⁵²⁰ while he played games with her rambunctious children. When this material briefly returns at the end of the work however, I now hear echoes of Brahms's reminiscences of the more intimate "twilight hours at Clara's," and the qualities of light and shadow, nearness and remoteness, and domesticity and fraternal bliss, implied by scenes like that of "J[oa]chim and Gr[imm] lying on the sofa at dusk, and [Brahms] playing in the next room."⁵²¹ Thus while there are indeed nostalgic qualities in my performance of this work, like Brahms's memories of his poetic and tragic youth they are shifting, restless, fragmentary, impassioned and unfolding. I also sought to capture those other less controlled qualities of Brahmsian lateness, including the composer's propensity for irritability, moodiness and jealousy, and his continued affinity for the inner and outer torment of love and loss.

In my experiments with the *Intermezzo in E Minor* Op. 116 no. 5, based on Brahms's reference to the "peculiar appeal which is always connected with a difficulty,"⁵²² and both the awkward *pas de poudres* written into its fabric and Carl Friedberg's assertion of its depiction of the composer's later despair and disease, I sought to create a performance that captured my hypothesis that unsound states of body and mind lie at the heart of what this work 'tells of.' As such, in the A sections of this work as demonstrated in Sound Ex. 5.2.2b, I applied tonal and temporal emphasis where the thumbs are forced to overlap; and I imitated De Lara's and Eibenschütz's tendencies to shape musical materials by rushing towards their middles, thereby rendering the awkward

⁵²⁰ Grimm, *Briefwechsel 4*, and Joachim, *Briefwechsel 5 - 6*, in Avins, *BLL*, 102, 49.

⁵²¹ Joachim, *Briefwechsel 5 - 6*, and *Clara Schumann - Brahms Briefe*, in *Ibid.*, 83, 64.

⁵²² *Clara Schumann: ein Künstlerleben*, III: 562 - 63, in *Ibid.*, 698.

leaps and thumb-crossings of the sections' middle measures all the more treacherous. These perils were then compounded by my imitation of De Lara's use of dislocation over the slower outer measures of phrase groups and arpeggiation over their faster middles: devices that force the hand to release where it would otherwise linger in slower material, and linger where it would normally release in faster material.

To my ears, the tonal instability of the dislocations in the slower outer measures of the A sections of this work result in an eerily stilted, searching and questioning quality that conjures the "fragmentary, bizarre character" of Kreisler's internal states in *Kater Murr*, and Brahms's youthful experience of that internal quarrel between himself and Kreisler, where "both were quite confused, neither knew what he wanted."⁵²³ Over the faster middle measures of the A sections on the other hand, arpeggiation further undercuts tonal and temporal predictability while significantly increasing one's feeling of technical fallibility; thereby translating into an aesthetic experience reminiscent of Kreisler's "fixed notion that insanity was lurking near him, like a wild beast thirsting for its prey, and that it would sometime suddenly tear him to pieces."⁵²⁴

Throughout, one also hears Friedberg's allusion to the "despair and snatching for air and for freedom" as Brahms tries to escape the "horrible shell which begins through cancer to decline." Indeed, far from being a respite from the internal and external peril of the A sections, the middle section of this work is again resplendent with dislocation and extreme tempo modification; making the wide left-hand leaps over its faster middle all the more fraught with danger. As these leaps become wider, as tempo increases, and as the upper right-hand melody notes ascend while heading towards the section's climax, I

⁵²³ Hoffman, *Kater Murr*, 233, in Kross, "Brahms," 199; *Clara Schumann-Brahms Briefe*, I, 9, in Avins, *BLL*, 51.

⁵²⁴ Hoffman, *Kater Murr*, 114, 133, in Kross, "Brahms," 197.

recall Friedberg's depiction of how Brahms "tried to break the chains and get rid of himself," and how when "he consoles himself after the excitement," one hears "no, no, no, keep quiet, also in gasps."⁵²⁵ While modern pianists struggle to maintain control in this work, hoping that its ineffable qualities will emerge on their own, by encouraging the unravelling of my own mind and body I tried to capture another facet of Brahmsian lateness: that of "impaired bodies or minds and their failure to function in a normal way."⁵²⁶

Finally, in my experiments with the *Intermezzo in B Minor* Op. 119 no. 1 as heard in Sound Ex. 5.2.3b, I drew inspiration from the most extreme stylistic elements of that most 'unBrahmsian' of pianists, Ilona Eibenschütz. By dislocating throughout the A sections and in ways reminiscent of reports of Brahms's tendency to always play with the hands apart, I was able to achieve an independence of the hands whereby the upper right-hand melodic line floats freely over that of the left, lending it an impressionistic quality of "deep feeling and poetic dreaminess" that recalls Satie rather than Beethoven. My tendency to rush over each phrase group, and to take time after the next phrase has already begun before again allowing tempo to accumulate, begins to disintegrate the internal structure of this section and conjures Clara's assertion that she doesn't think "Ilona understands the pieces as they need to be understood" because "she goes too quickly over everything."⁵²⁷

My 'swinging' of sixteenth notes at the opening of the B section was intended to recall reports that Brahms "was simple as a child, and played games," and observations of

⁵²⁵ DiClemente, "Brahms Performance Practice," 59 - 60, from Transcript 368 - 70.

⁵²⁶ Straus, "Disability," 12.

⁵²⁷ Ophüls, *Erinnerungen*, 19 (123), in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 123; Clara Schumann - Brahms *Briefe* II: 540 - 42, in Musgrave, *Performing Brahms*, 316.

a “a jazz-like nonchalance” in Eibenschütz’s approach. As I begin to rush towards the first climax of the section however, my dislocations and the resulting disjoining of the hands seem to mimic the latter’s “high-strung intensity that pushes relentlessly,” and reports of the “undercurrent of breathless agitation” in the playing of the former.⁵²⁸

While rushing towards the final climax of the section, by imitating Eibenschütz’s tendency to truncate and elide materials I succeed in obscuring the pulse and divisions of the measures, while initiating a great sweep of tone and time that is carried right through the end of the B section and into the reprise of the A. This tonal and temporal flourish, and its resulting feeling of emotional and technical eruption, sounds to my ears like accounts of how in the climaxes of Brahms’s music “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.”⁵²⁹ This carefree extroversion however, is just one of the qualities I had long sensed was being suppressed by the mores of modern Brahms style: norms that demand the careful elucidation of the detail and outline of these ‘heavy boulders’ above all else.

Indeed, by imitating the more extreme facets of Ilona Eibenschütz’s early-recorded Brahms style, my approach to this work highlights tensions of sound and score that have been explored throughout this volume. The clear-eyed notational coherence of this work is nowhere to be found in my a-literal, and tonally, temporally, expressively and technically *uncontrolled* playing of its detail and structure. While I’m not consciously negating detail and structure *per se*, what I am doing (and what I suspect Eibenschütz was doing as well) is using these notational features as a means to some other end. Though it

⁵²⁸ Fromm, “Some Reminiscences,” 615; Evans, *Behind the Notes*, 26; Davies, “Some Personal Recollections,” 182 - 84, in Bozarth, *Performing Brahms*, 174.

⁵²⁹ Graf, *Legend of a Musical City*, 105, in Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 134.

is admittedly disconcerting to face Brahms's scores with the intention of playing something other than their detail and structure, if the 'sketches' of those pianists furthest from the Clara ideal indeed sought to capture the spirit rather than the letter of the work being performed, then perhaps for nascent RIP pianists this 'something other' can be the impression left by their recordings. In truth, it was ultimately the spirit of De Lara's and Eibenschütz's recordings that informed how the elements of their approaches came together in my experiments, and not the notational features of Brahms's hale and hearty scores. The daunting freedom and responsibility of being moved by restless Romantic spirits rather than by the cool logic of Classical notation perhaps recalls Kreisler's lament in Hoffman's *In Callots Manier*:

I so assiduously searched out at the piano melodies and chords, which often had much expression and coherence. But I often wanted to weep bitterly...for whenever I touched the keyboard...unknown songs that I had never heard before flowed through my soul, and they seemed to me not my father's song, but rather those songs which sounded around me like ghostly voices.⁵³⁰

My final conclusions are therefore that despite their often tacit subscription to ethical principles as related to the historical validity of modern Brahms performance norms, modern pianists' performances remain worlds apart from the composer's. These gaps between what pianists believe, know and do are occupied by a pervasive aesthetic ideology of control that underlies relativist understandings of Brahms's Classicist canonic identity as compared to those of his Romantic contemporaries. This ideology arose out of nineteenth-century cultural, political, philosophical, religious, nationalistic and even

⁵³⁰ Hoffman, "Johannes Kreislers Lehrbrief," *In Callots Manier*, I, 274, in Kross, "Brahms," 196.

medical polemics in which Brahms's controlled mental and physical apparatus was posited as Classical; while the excesses, weaknesses, diseases and insanities of those like Wagner, Berlioz, Liszt and Schumann were seen as quintessentially Romantic. These dialectics pervade the historical documentary record, thereby reaffirming the historical validity of an aesthetic ideology that continues to mediate scholarly and performative spheres: with historical evidence that does not reinforce notions of Brahms's controlled Classicist identity being dismissed or ignored; and with literal, detailed, structural, and temporally-, tonally-, expressively- and technically-restrained performances being understood to result in a style that reflects Brahms's intentions.

When evidence of Brahms's musical contexts is reappraised with the intention of problematizing rather than buttressing the aesthetic ideology of control however, Brahms's letters reveal him to have experienced unstable mental and physical states that bear a striking resemblance to those associated with his contemporaries; descriptions of Brahms's performance style and those of the pianists in his inner circle evidence an approach inclusive of the inhibitions and fallibilities typically associated with Romantic pianism; analyses of these pianists' recordings reveal their use of expressive and technical resources that also signify as Romantic, especially as related to what can sound to modern ears like their negligence of detail and structure; and experimentation with these resources results in an approach that is as reflective of Brahms's musical context in its entirety as it is closer to a style typically posited as Romantic. Because this shift in Brahmsian sound, score and identity proposes a rethink of what it is pianists are ethically bound to do when playing Brahms's music, once armed with this knowledge their acts will speak volumes about just how historically-informed they are prepared to be.

This kind of identity work therefore is not only centred around Brahms, but the identities of the pianists who play his music as well. Indeed, performances informed by the early recordings of the Schumann-Brahms pianists raise serious questions regarding how we judge parameters like competence. My recorded style experiments for example, are not perfect by the standards to which I typically hold myself when heading into the studio. This is because their manipulations of tone and time tend to unfurl sound and score in ways that resist my habits of control, so rather than being able to carefully rehearse how a succession of rushed and arpeggiated chords will go, I instead find myself merely hoping for the best. Like many of the early recordings surveyed in this volume, even when things go ‘well’ a performance can still sound messy and ill rehearsed by modern standards. Throughout the recording process I was thus painfully aware of the pressures of making a polished ‘product’ while inhabiting such a seemingly imperfect performance style: when looking to correct a wrong note for example, the recording engineer and I found that no two takes were nearly similar enough for even the most basic of editing practices, and were forced to abandon the notion altogether as a result. Indeed, it is the resistance of this style to being fixed that makes even my style copies sound unlike their models. As such, it is imperative that modern RIP Brahms style, live or recorded, be judged along similar lines as early-recorded Brahms style: as one that is quintessentially ‘live,’ casual, unpredictable and very nearly improvisatory.

Tensions between RIP style and modern expectations of competence also come into play in advanced artistic research spheres where, in the context of conferences for example, performers face pressures to perform in ways widely perceived as competent while demonstrating and disseminating their research outcomes, thereby confirming their

authority as both expert performers and scholars. I have seen these pressures stifle the experimental and thus epistemic value of many promising artistic research projects, with performer-scholars being quite happy to deconstruct tacit ways of knowing and doing in very old or very recent repertoires, while choosing to perform in mainstream ways in research that focuses on standard repertoires with narrowly-defined performance norms. When presenting my own artistic research however, I have found it therapeutic (both for myself and for audiences) to point out how the imperfections of RIP Brahms style are themselves research outcomes, and that our reactions to them tend to prove my point regarding the pervasiveness of the Brahmsian aesthetic ideology of control.

In conservatories on the other hand, while modern performance norms continue to be reinforced in the judging of final recitals, I have recently witnessed a heartening expansion in the judging of competence as related to the performance of standard repertoires. Within the context of my own MMus students' artistic research projects for example, I see the seeds of a promising view of both performance style and composer identity as malleable and context-specific. These young performers are able to achieve perfection within very narrow definitions of mastery as imposed by their teachers, while experimenting openly and freely with style and identity within the context of their research. I have yet to encounter a student where what was stylistically inhabited and embodied in the latter context didn't seep into the former, with positive results. Indeed, when asking young pianists to rush over Brahms's *crescendi* in masterclasses for example, shyness turns to awe when I present them with historical evidence confirming those practices in Brahms's own playing. After having tried it out, many later report that even when playing according to the precepts of modern Brahms style, they feel the

residual traces of having once rushed: a tension that cannot be unfelt, and one that further underlines the importance of these students' access to experimental spaces.

Audiences too are faced with the malleability of Brahmsian identity and its associated performance norms when performers begin to assert themselves creatively, and in ways that Brahms would have expected. Suddenly, performer, audience, work and composer are thrown into a new relationship whose ground rules must be worked out in real-time. Imagine going to an all-Brahms piano recital and not knowing what to expect. This thesis thus also illustrates the importance of including extreme pieces of historical evidence when provoking issues of composer identity and performance style in public, as only those traces that shake performers' and audiences' belief systems to their core seem to have the power to reveal our unseen and unspoken ways of doing, thinking, listening and judging: ways that, once elucidated, can then be further problematized.

This thesis indeed raises a number of issues that would benefit from further research. When faced with evidence that Brahms didn't expect pianists to play detail and structure in the ways dictated by modern Brahms performance norms, what then are we supposed to do in performances of his piano music? To answer this question it could be illuminating to examine pedagogical texts like those one might have found in nineteenth-century conservatories with a view to uncovering what piano teachers and examination boards thought was essential to the performance of Brahms's piano music. Given Brahms's extensive revisionist practices, while it doesn't seem particularly necessary to go back to his earlier piano works in order to elucidate some 'early' style of performance as opposed to the 'late' one discussed throughout this volume, these earlier works nonetheless warrant the same style copying and experimentation carried out here. And

while I have already begun to test this RIP Brahms style in lied and chamber music settings, this too is an area for further work, especially as related to how singers, wind players and string players manage things like breath and bow control and note placement when dealing with pianists who are rushing, truncating and eliding materials. While it is possible that the Schumann-Brahms pianists curbed these tendencies in ensemble situations, imitating their chamber and lied recordings would certainly elucidate the rehearsal strategies, aural and visual cues, and power relationships involved in ensemble RIP Brahms style.

While I kept the number of recordings analysed and copied here extremely small in order to avoid the generalizations and thus omissions of outlying performance approaches that can come from establishing general trends, it would be helpful to continue this work for the rest of the pianists in the Schumann-Brahms circle: from many of those briefly examined here, like Nathalie Janotha for example; to those like Etelka Freund, whose recordings had to be passed over in the interests of time. This thesis also raises the tricky question that if Brahms's music was performed in ways associated today with 'Romantic' playing, what does 'Romantic' actually sound like, and what was a Schumann-Brahms circle pianist's version of Romantic as compared to those in the Liszt circle for example? This would mean comparing the described and recorded performance styles of pianists considered to be moderate and extreme within the Schumann-Brahms circle, with those considered to be moderate and extreme beyond that circle. It would also be revealing to see whether the Schumann-Brahms pianists played Brahms's music differently as compared to Robert Schumann's, given late-Romantic efforts to distance the former's mind and body from that of the latter. As many of these polemics invoked

issues of race and gender, in our continued efforts to problematize how what we think about composers affects how we wish their music to sound, it seems pertinent to investigate how understandings of the race, gender and sexual orientation of canonic composers affects performance norms, both during their own time as well as our own.

In general, it also seems important to expand this work to other canonic composers for whom early recordings of their works are suggestive of identities that radically oppose those currently protected by performance norms for their music. Here I'm thinking in particular of composers like Claude Debussy for example, and even those of the Second Viennese School. Around this same time period, it would also be fascinating to investigate links between late-Romantic classical and early-twentieth-century jazz pianism. Jazz pianist Erroll Garner's 1945 improvisation on Debussy's *Clair de Lune* certainly argues that there are compelling connections to be made here. Finally, this work also poses some serious questions for those engaged in nineteenth-century form and analysis. All too often I find myself attending lectures wherein a theorist discusses Brahms's formal, harmonic, rhythmic and melodic procedures as if it is a given that everything would have been played exactly as it appears on the score, and in the ways we expect today. It would thus be fascinating to propose a performance-based theory of Brahmsian form and analysis. Exactly what this might look like is unclear at this juncture, though in light of Ilona Eibenschütz's Brahms style, perhaps acknowledging the near impossibility of such an undertaking is itself one of research outcomes of this thesis.

Clearly, there remains much to do. For the moment however, I will never again look at Brahms's notated detail as prescriptive but rather as a possibility-laden field of potential that can be added to, rewritten, omitted and embellished as the spirit moves me;

I will see formal structures as media upon which other shifting, fleeting, impassioned and tumultuous shapes can be freely imposed; I will see time as elusive, perpetually leaning forward, asymmetrical and irregular; and I will see tone, expression and technique as the tools with which Brahms's lifelong inner and outer turmoil can be extrovertedly, sentimentally and virtuosically writ large across the deceptive coherence of his scores. I will also continue to chase after ghostly spirits so that I may further problematize my need to protect Brahms's hale and hearty identity in order to convince others of my own. At the moment this is admittedly a rather lonely mission, as few are ready to relinquish the romanticized Brahms of our imaginations. I remain positive however that in time others will also be inspired to Romanticize him: after all, "time changes everything for better or for worse, no, not changes, but shapes and unfolds."⁵³¹

⁵³¹ *Clara Schumann-Brahms Briefe*, in Avins, *BLL*, 319.