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Re-inventing the nineteenth-century tools of unprescribed modifications of rhythm and tempo in performances of Brahms's symphonies and concertos

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Chapter 1, Some historical sources regarding modifications of rhythm and tempo, the application of modifications in the style of Bülow, Steinbach and Brahms, and my emerging approach

As failures go, attempting to recall the past is like trying to grasp the meaning of existence. Both make one feel like a baby clutching at a basketball: one's palms keep sliding off.[5]

Joseph Brodsky, opening line of *Less Than One* (1986)

On his (Brahms's) 100th birthday […] He is now regarded as "historical", he is categorised and classified; diligent people are capturing everything except for what is lively, vivid and eternally moving.[6]

Music critic and writer Alexander Berrsche (1883-1940), *Trösterin Musika* (1933)

1.1 Modifications of Rhythm and Tempo in the Nineteenth Century; Theory and Practice.

The modifications of tempo that I will discuss in this chapter are intentional deviations from the fundamental tempo that are not marked in the score by the composer.[7] Modifications of tempo can be divided into gradual ones,

[5] Brodsky, J. *Less than one, selected essays.* Penguin books, London, 1987, p. 3.
[6] Berrsche, A. *Musik und Betrachtung, Trösterin Musika.* Ellermann Verlag, München, 1964 (reprint) p. 239. (Translation by Viola Scheffel). *Zum 100. Geburtstag […] Man sieht ihn jetzt 'historisch,' man klassifiziert und rubriziert ihn, die fleißigen Leute erfassen alles, nur nicht das Lebendige und unaufhörlich Wirkende.*
[7] To be more precise: some of these deviations from the fundamental tempo are indeed unmarked by the composer, while others are based on an interpretation of the markings in the score, such as crescendo, diminuendo, and hairpins. More on this subject in Chapter 1.7.

such as accelerando and ritardando, and sudden ones, that are introduced without transition. Similarly, modifications of rhythm constitute deviations from a strict reading of the noted rhythm. In his 2020 edition of the Beethoven *Violin Sonatas*, Clive Brown notes three types of such deviations that relate to slurred figures, successive notes of the same length, and dotted figures.[8] The execution of all these figures and patterns was less literal than what was to become the norm in the twentieth century, and Brown argues that deviations from the notated rhythm in the score would have been expected from performers in the nineteenth century. Included in my discussion of modifications is the tempo rubato applied in hairpins, which can be understood as a kind of modification in which the stolen time is given back within a phrase or figure. In his dissertation on tempo rubato in the eighteenth century, Carl LeRoy Blake makes a distinction between tempo rubato and modification of tempo:

> In musical parlance, tempo rubato is a curious and fugitive expression, having caused a good deal of discussion and confusion throughout generations of music-making. Literally meaning "stolen time," tempo rubato is a performance practice which derived from the art of ornamentation of the Italian vocal tradition dominant in Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Tempo rubato has both a general and a specific meaning. The general meaning of tempo rubato is inextricably tied to general ornamentation, that is, all ornamentation is to be realised within the strict time of the bass, or in the absence of the bass, within the strict time of the prescribed note that is being embellished. The specific meaning is that which eighteenth-century treatise writers advocated as one of the extraordinary means that singers and instrumentalists employed for the purpose of heightening expression of musical passages of a pathetic, cantabile, tender, languishing or melancholy nature. […] In addition to tempo rubato, eighteenth-century writers advocated another means of heightening expression by tempo modification (i.e., speeding or slowing the general tempo of the piece). This device required the acceleration or retardation of the entire fabric of a musical passage in order to reflect the meaning of the sung text or to highlight changing affect within a given musical section.[9]

Regarding the intentionality of the deviations, I would like to point out that I am referring to the intention of the performer to shape the music as they understand it, the intention is not necessarily to deviate from the notation.

[8] Brown, C. *Beethoven Sonatas for Pianoforte and Violin, Reading between the lines of Beethoven's notation.* Bärenreiter Verlag, Kassel, 2020, pp. XIV-XV.

[9] Blake, C. L. "Tempo Rubato in the Eighteenth Century", PhD diss., Cornell University, 1988.

Blake goes on to write that composers as early as in the sixteenth century encouraged performers to manipulate the tempo, giving numerous sources and examples, ranging from Luis de Milan (1535) to François Couperin (1716). Some eighteenth-century historical evidence in methods and treatises also clearly shows that modification constituted an integral part of high-level musical performance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Several eighteenth-century composers, theorists, and teachers, such as Johann Mattheson (1681-1764), Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714-1788), Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773), Leopold Mozart (1719-1787), and Daniël Gottlob Türk (1750-1813), stressed the importance of such modifications for successful musical performance.

I have assembled a few examples of sources related to the theory and practice of modifications of rhythm and tempo to sketch the background against which modifications in orchestral settings were implemented, notably by Hans von Bülow and the Meiningen Orchestra.

In his 1759 *Versuch über die wahre Art das Klavier zu spielen*, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach wrote about modifications in ensemble playing. He discussed some of the situations in which a soloist plays alone or is accompanied by an ensemble:

> Although, in order not to become unclear, one has to keep the appropriate lengths of all silences and notes within the confinement of a chosen tempo, with the exception of fermatas and cadenzas, one can often commit the most beautiful errors against it diligently, but with the clear distinction that, if one plays alone or with few accomplished players, this can be done in such a way that the whole of the flow of movement is somewhat violated; instead of getting lost, the accompanists will be all the more alert and able to join in our intentions; but if one plays with a larger accompanying ensemble, especially if it consists of unequally qualified persons, one can realise only in one's own part some alterations of rhythm, as the general flow of tempo should remain unchanged.[10]

[10] Bach, C. Ph. E. *Versuch über die wahre Art das Klavier zu spielen*, kritisch revidierter Neudruck der unveränderten, jedoch verbesserten zweiten Auflage des Originals, Berlin 1759 und 1762, C. P. Kahnt, Leipzig, 1965) vol. 1, part 3, §8, p. 84. (All translations by author unless otherwise specified). *Wiewohl man, um nicht undeutlich zu werden, alle Pausen sowohl als Noten nach der Stränge der erwehlten Bewegung halten muß, ausgenommen in Fermaten und Cadenzen: so kann man doch öfters die schönsten Fehler wider den Tackt mit Fleiß begehen,*

Bach identified deviations from the notated rhythm and tempo as contributions to expressive performance. The extent to which modifications could successfully be realised in performance, according to him, depended on the size of the ensemble and on the quality of the players involved. Bach's remark concerning the need to maintain the general flow of tempo in performances with larger ensembles and with groups consisting of unequally qualified persons represents not necessarily an artistic ideal but rather a necessary precaution. In other words, Bach's advice not to attempt modifications that would affect the general flow of the tempo when working with ensembles that did not have the qualities required to execute them successfully, does not mean that he would have eschewed the application of these modifications with larger ensembles of sufficient quality.

The art of modification has more often been discussed in solo playing than in the context of ensemble or orchestral performance. That is why the composer Carl Ludwig Junker (1748-1797), who pointed to the need for flexibility of tempo in orchestral performances and the role of the conductor/director in his book *Einige Der Vornehmsten Pflichten Eines Kapellmeisters Oder Musikdirektors*, constitutes a particularly valuable source:

> Now another interesting question arises. How? Is every piece, altogether, every Allegro, every Adagio, tied to a completely uniform tempo? Must every piece be performed in the same tempo right until the end, that never approaches a greater speed or a slowness? Or may this tempo even in the middle of the piece be modified somewhat, may it be accelerated or held back? To simply say yes to the first would mean as much as robbing music of often its most powerful means of emotion, and to think of it as not having any relation to all the various modifications of the current of passions. To say yes to the latter, would make the river flood its banks, create thousands of disruptions, and would take the veracity away from the music. But as soon as

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doch mit diesem Unterschied, daß, wenn man alleine oder mit wenigen und zwar verständigen Personen spielt, solches dergestalt geschehen kann, daß man der ganzen Bewegung zuweilen einige Gewalt anthut; die Begleitenden werden darüber, anstatt sich irren zu lassen, vielmehr aufmercksam werden, und in unsere Absichten einschlagen; daß aber, wenn man mit starcker Begleitung, und zwar wenn selbige aus vermischten Personen von ungleicher Stärcke besteht, man bloß in seiner Stimme allein wider die Eintheilung des Tackts eine Aenderung vornehmen kann, indem die Hauptbewegung desselben genau gehalten werden muß.

> the last sentence is somewhat restricted, we can say yes to it; the performer, the solo singer will limit it. There is no passion whose tempo should be so calibrated as to be absolutely regular; it constantly moves through various modifications of tempo. It may be true that the composer himself can express these modifications better and more fully through his setting and the various artful ways of colouring than the director, but it remains equally true that both composer and performer [director] need to work hand in hand, and that the modifications of tempo as a re-creative art remain necessary.[11]

Junker's concept of the composer and the director working hand in hand to realise effective modifications, characterised as "often its most powerful means of emotion" in music, is highly significant as it specifically points to the importance of the conductor's/director's role in this process. The Italian composer, violinist and author Francesco Galeazzi (1758-1819) gives a rule for orchestral musicians to follow that includes fluctuation of tempo:

> Rule IV. 320 May any orchestra player always use their ears to unify the performance, to play legato, if others do, to separate notes if the others separate, to speed up, or slow down the tempo if others (and especially the First Violin) do so.[12]

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[11] Junker, C. J. *Einige Der Vornehmsten Pflichten Eines Kapellmeisters Oder Musikdirektors…* H. Steiner und comp., Winterthur, 1782, pp. 36-37. *Nun entsteht noch eine interessante Frage? "Wie? Ist jedes Stück durchaus, jedes Allegro, jedes Adagio, an eine völlig gleichförmige Bewegung gebunden? Muss jedes Stück, ganz bis zu Ende, in der nehmlichen Bewegung, die sich niemahls, weder einer grössern Geschwindigkeit noch Langsamkeit nähert, vorgetragen werden? Oder darf diese Bewegung, selbst in der Mitte des Tonstücks, etwas abgeändert werden, darf sie beschleunigt, darf sie zurückgehalten werden?" Das Erste überhaupt bejahen, würde eben so viel heißen, als der Tonkunst, oft das kräftigste Mittel der Rührung benehmen, und sie, ausser aller Beziehung, auf die verschiedenen Modifikationen, der leidenschaftliche Bewegung gedenken. Das letzte überhaupt bejahen, würde den Strom aus seinen Ufern reißen, tausend Unordnungen verursachen, und der Tonkunst, ihre Wahrheit, benehmen heißen. Sobald der letzte Satz eingeschränkt wird, so lässt er sich bejahen; der Konzertist, der Solo-Sänger schränken ihn ein. Es gibt keine Leidenschaft, deren Bewegung, sich selbst immer gleichartig, abgezirkelt seyn sollte; Sie wälzt sich durch verschiedene Modifikationen der Bewegung hindurch. Das diese Modifikationen, der Komponist, durch seinen Satz selbst, durch die verschiedenen Arten der Kolorierung, besser und vollständiger ausdrücken könne, als der Direktor, durch die Veränderung der musikalischen Zeitfolge, bleibt richtig; aber ebenso richtig bleibt es, das beyde, Sezer und Ausführer, einander in die Hände arbeiten müssen, und dass die Veränderungen der Zeitfolge, als unterordnete Kunst, nothwendig bleibe.*

[12] Galeazzi, F. *Elementi teoretico-practici di musica.* Second edition, Presso Francesco Cardi, Ascoli, 1817, p. 143. Regola IV. 320 *Abbia qualunque Suonator d'orchestra sempre l'orecchio teso all'unione per legare, se gli altri legano, sciogliere se gli altri sciolgono, stringere, o rallentare il tempo; se gli altri (e specialmente il Primo Violino), cosi fanno.*

Though Galeazzi is not writing here about artistic motivation for the speeding up and slowing down of the tempo, one can safely conclude that he expected these fluctuations to be part of orchestral performance.

It may be clear that the importance of modifications is emphasised in multiple sources, but it is less clear how widespread this high art of performance practice was, and to what extent it was part of orchestral performance practices before pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow (1830-1894) changed the landscape profoundly by setting a new standard regarding orchestral discipline in general, and tempo flexibility in particular, with his Meiningen Orchestra (see chapter 1.4).

A description of modifications of tempo in orchestral performance can be found in an account of Beethoven's *Große musikalische Akademie* of 13 December 1813, in which a writer in the *Wiener allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* expressed admiration for the way in which the orchestral musicians collaborated with Beethoven to bring out all the accelerandi and rallentandi.

> The performance of both compositions [*The Seventh Symphony* and *Wellington's Victory*] was realised by the best musicians in Vienna (almost 100 of them) under the general direction of Mr. Beethoven, and with Mr. Schuppanzigh leading as concertmaster with such expression, power and precision, that the first mentioned, profoundly moved, confessed that it represented the summit of the arts, and he knew of no challenge to the orchestra in his compositions that had not been met to his complete satisfaction. Really the greatest praise ever received by any orchestra! If we consider the great difficulties – motivated by tremendous effects – that Beethoven's compositions present, and the equally high standards the great master demands in the execution thereof. But it was remarkable to see how everyone, inspired by the importance of the task at hand and filled with love for the highly esteemed composer, diligently worked together, how in a state of pure delight he led the performances of his works, how every nuance in piano and forte, in accelerando and ritardando, was transmitted from him to every individual participating artist, in eager concentration, so that the ideal of Beethoven's creation was, as it were, expressed through and by them.[13]

[13] "Beethoven's Große musikalische Akademie 13 Dezember 1813" in *Wiener allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, (WamZ 1813, No. 48, pp. 749-50). *Die Ausführung beider Compositionen geschah von Wiens ausgezeichnetsten Tonkünstlern (beiläufig 100 an der Zahl) unter Herrn v.*

With Carl Philip Emanuel Bach's remarks in mind, perhaps one can consider this description as evidence of what can be achieved in the field of tempo modification with a large ensemble of highly qualified musicians, led by an inspired composer. Particularly interesting, of course, is the critic's description of the orchestra following Beethoven's accelerandi and ritardandi. This is even more relevant since – apart from one small ritardando over three bars in *Wellington's Victory* – neither the score of that piece nor the score of the *Seventh Symphony* contain any printed accelerando or ritardando instructions. In other words, the critic was referring to unprescribed tempo modifications. At the same time, I think this description of a momentous occasion under the direction of a towering figure can hardly be used as evidence of anything more than what it is, namely an account of an exceptional event. Indeed, the fact that the review mentioned the successful modification of tempo as a remarkable feature of the performance can be interpreted to suggest two things: the modifications took place in this performance and this was not a feature of general orchestral performance practice at the time.

There are reasons enough to believe that modifications were indeed part of Beethoven's performance style. Musicologist Marten Noorduin, who conducted extensive research into Beethoven's metronome markings, proclaimed, in a review of a recording of the *Ninth Symphony*, that a substantial amount of circumstantial evidence suggests that Beethoven had a

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Beethovens Leitung des Ganzen, und Herrn Schuppanzighs Direktion an der ersten Violine, mit solchem Ausdruck, Kraft und Präzision, das Ersterer mit der innigsten Rührung gestand, es sey das Non plus ultra *der Kunst, und wisse keine Forderung an ein Orchester bei der Ausübung seiner Compositionen zu machen, welche dieses nicht vollkommen befriedigt hätte. Wahrlich der größte Lobspruch, den sich je ein Orchester erwarb! wenn man die – gewiß durch ungeheure Effekte motivierten – Schwierigkeiten eines Beethoven'schen Satzes, und die ebenso strengen Forderungen dieses großen Meisters in Absicht auf Execution berücksichtigt. Es war aber auch merkwürdig zu sehen, wie, im Gefühle der Wichtigkeit des übernommenen Geschäftes, Alles mit Eifer und Liebe für den hochgeschätzten Componisten zusammenwirkte, wie dieser in verklärter Entzückung die Aufführung seiner Werke leitete, wie jeder Ausdruck im Piano und Forte, im Accelerando und Ritardando von diesem auf jeden einzelner, mit gespannter Aufmerksamkeit mitwirkenden, Künstler überging, und so das Ideal von Beethovens Schöpfung gleichsam aus ihm hervorging).*

flexible conception of time, particularly in slow movements.[14] Brown, in his aforementioned edition of Beethoven's *Sonatas for Pianoforte and Violin*, goes further:

> Documentary sources from Beethoven's lifetime provide incontrovertible evidence that certain kinds of tempo flexibility, including modification of the notated rhythms and agogic accentuation, were not only an occasional expressive resource, but a pervasive element of beautiful performance.[15]

An often-cited comment by the Austrian pianist and composer Joseph Fischhof (1804-1857) provides corroboration of the fact that Beethoven would have expected modifications of tempo from those performing his music:

> Mr. Artaria (head of the renowned art dealer in Vienna) asked me to put in order his rich treasure of Beethoven manuscripts (this is by the way the most important collection that can be found in the possession of any individual, containing multiple unknown works by Beethoven). On the autograph of the song *'Nord oder Süd'* (also known as: *'So oder so')* Op. 103, F major, it says clearly in his hand: "100 after Mälzl, but this can go only for the first bars, as emotions have their own tempo, this cannot be expressed in this number (of 100)".[16]

Of course, Beethoven's preferences regarding flexibility of tempo are not the subject of this dissertation. I am merely trying to give a general characterisation of his assumed preference as part of the nineteenth-century landscape of approaches to tempo modification, from which I believe he

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[14] Noorduin, M. "Why Do We Need Another Recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony? - Symphony No. 9" *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 18, no. 3 (2021), pp. 601–9.

[15] Brown, C. "*Beethoven Sonatas for Pianoforte and Violin",* p. XIV.

[16] Fischhof, J. "Einige Gedanken über die Auffassung von Instrumentalcompositionen in Hinsicht des Zeitmaaßes, namentlich bei Beethoven'schen Werken," *Cäcilia,* 1847, pp. 84-97. https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_C9MqAAAAYAAJ/page/n5/mode/2up. (Last accessed June 2020). *Herr Artaria (Chef der bekannten Kunsthandlung in Wien) ersuchte mich im Herbst 1844, seinen reichen Schatz von Manuskripten Beethoven's, der, beiläufig gesagt, der Bedeutendste ist, der bei einem Einzelnen vorzufinden, und auch mehre unbekannte Werke von Beethoven enthält, zu ordnen. Auf dem Autographe des Liedes „Nord oder Süd" (auch unter dem Titel: „So oder so") Op. 103, F-Dur, steht von ihm deutlich zu lesen: „100 nach Mälzl, doch kann diess nur von den ersten Täkten gelten, denn die Empfindung hat auch ihren Takt, dieses ist aber doch nicht ganz in diesem Grade (100 nämlich) auszudrücken."*

cannot be left out. It is important to note that Fischhof's testimony confirms that Beethoven connected emotion and tempo in a manner that is consistent with other earlier sources regarding musical performance in Vienna.

In an anonymously published account of his journey to Vienna, aristocrat and music lover Carl Ernst Philipp von Reitzenstein gave a description of tempo modification in opera performance in Vienna. Reitzenstein claimed that he travelled extensively and compared performances from opera houses in Vienna, London, Naples, Munich, and Paris. He felt fortunate to have heard the same works performed in different opera houses, as comparing performances showed him how important the quality of the performance was for his experience as a listener. He concluded that, "performance is everything," before making a statement about the preferred style of performance in Vienna:

> It characterises the local taste that beautiful performance is vastly more appreciated than flawlessness, and likewise the orchestra in question.

I find this a truly remarkable statement because it gives us information about the artistic priorities of the Viennese, and even specifies that they preferred expression over flawlessness in orchestral performance. Reitzenstein continued to describe a performance of Salieri's opera *Axur* that impressed him:

> I was particularly surprised by the new and refined way the opera Axur by Salieri was performed. Words, stage action and music were constantly so intimately intertwined that they seemed to be one entity. The instruments came up with strength and emphasis, as if driven by one spirit when the tension rose; everything sounded sweet and melting when softer passions spoke. At this occasion I noticed a manner to express the falling affect hitherto unknown to me. When the excitement of the passions gradually calmed down to exhaustion, and the fiercest clusters made way for milder feelings, so too did the orchestra, in closest agreement with the singers, gradually relax the tempo, and slow down the flow of the melodies by and by, as the expression needed to become softer and softer. If the excitement rose again, when it became more bustling and emphatic, so too did they drive the

> tempo and the flow of the melodies forward again, extraordinarily unified in their intentions. This manner of performing arouses pure delight.[17]

A few conclusions can be drawn from Reitzenstein's observations. First of all, it is clear that what he was writing about was modification of tempo in performances of opera, and in all likelihood of the unprescribed kind, as he described the ebb and flow of tempo in relation to the emotions in the music and the dynamic range of the ensemble. Secondly, it is equally clear that he considered this to be a new way of performing, as he wrote that he, who claimed to have seen and heard many performances all over Europe, had not come across it before and was surprised by it. Finally, I find his characterisation of the musical taste in Vienna fascinating: beautiful performance being preferred over flawlessness.

The distinction between flawless and beautiful performance, which Reitzenstein makes, is reminiscent of the distinction between a correct and a beautiful performance, perhaps most eloquently described by the German composer, violinist, and conductor Louis Spohr in his *Violinschule* of 1833:

> Performance means the manner in which the singer or performer produces what the composer conceived and wrote down for the listener to hear. If this is limited to a faithful reproduction of what is prescribed by notes, symbols, and (art) words, it is called a *correct performance*; but if the performer adds something of his own and is able to spiritually enliven what is presented, so that the listener can recognise and experience the composer's intentions, then

[17] Reitzenstein, C. E. Ph. von. *Reise nach Wien*. Vienna: Hof, 1795, pp. 255-7. *Es characterisirt den hießigen Geschmack, dass man unendlich mehr einen schönen Vortrag, als große Fertigkeit schätzt, und so auch das Orchester von dem die Rede ist. (…) In der Vorstellung der Oper Auxur ward ich besonders überrascht durch die Neuheit und Feinheit dieses Vortrags. Worte, Spiel und Musik waren stehts auf das innigste in einander verwebt, und schienen nur einen Wesen zu sein. Mit Stärcke und Nachdrück, wie von einem Geiste getrieben, erhoben sich die Instrumente, wenn der Affect stieg; Süß und hinschmelzend ertönte alles, wenn leisere Regungen sprachen. Bei dieser Gelegenheit merkte ich eine mir noch unbekannte Art und Weise, den fallenden Affect auszudrücken. Wenn das Toben gespannter Leidenschaft nach und nach zur Erschöpfung heruntersank, und die heftigsten Ballungen milderen Gefühlen platzmachten, so ließ auch das Orchester, im genauesten Einverständnis mit den Sängern, den Takt nach und nach sinken, und die Melodien langsamer und immer langsamer fortwallen, je nach dem der Ausdruck sanfter und immer sanfter werden sollte. Stieg nun der Affect wieder, ward er rauschender und nachdrucksvoller, so beschleunigten sie auch wieder mit seltener Übereinstimmung den Gang der Melodie. Diese Art des Vortrags erregt Entzücken.*

> this is called a *beautiful performance*, which then combines correctness, feeling and elegance. The beautiful performance must of course be considered superior to the correct one.[18]

Leaving aside the issue of the composer's intentions, which Spohr mentioned so casually here, but which in the twentieth century became such a hotly contested issue, this quotation makes it clear that Spohr expected the performer to add something of his own in order to spiritually enliven the performance so that the listener could experience the emotions embedded in the music. In search of an answer to the question whether Spohr would agree that modifications were among the traits a performer or a conductor might add to the performance of orchestral repertoire, one needs to examine a few other sources. He appears to have a strict opinion about tempo rubato in orchestral playing in his *Violinschule*:

> The division of the rhythms according to their time value must be the strictest in orchestral playing, because otherwise no precise togetherness of the players would be possible. All lingering on single or multiple notes *(the Tempo Rubato)*, which can often be of great effect in the solo playing, must therefore not take place here.[19]

Unfortunately, Spohr does not specifically write about unprescribed accelerando and ritenuto in orchestral performances, which leaves room for these remarks about tempo rubato to be read as instructions to avoid them. But I believe that would be a mistake.

Spohr instructed violinists who were to play in orchestras that they could not play in the same free manner in which they might play a solo or a

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[18] Spohr, L. *Violinschule*. Haslinger, Vienna, 1833, p. 195. *Vortrag heisst die Art und Weise, wie der Sänger oder Spieler das, was der Komponist ersann und niederschrieb, zu hören giebt. Beschränkt sich dies auf ein treues Wiedergeben dessen, was durch Noten, Zeichen und Kunstwörter vorgeschrieben ist, so nennt man es richtigen Vortrag; tut der Ausübende aber von dem Seinigen hizu und vermag er das Vorgetragene geistig zu beleben, so dass vom Hörer die Intensionen des Komponisten erkannt und mitempfunden werden können, so heist dies schöner Vortrag, der dann Korrektheit, Gefühl und Eleganz in sich vereinigt. Dem schönen Vortrag muss der richtige natürlich vorausgehen.*

[19] Ibid. p. 248. *Die Eintheilung der Taktglieder nach ihrem Zeitwerth, muss beym Orchesterspiel die allerstrengste seyn, weil sonst kein genaues Zusammentreffen der Spieler möglich wäre. Alles Verweilen auf einzelnen oder mehreren Tönen, (das Tempo Rubato) welches beim Solospiel oft von großer Wirkung ist, darf also hier nicht stattfinden.*

quartet, because it would cause chaos if individual members of string sections were to modify the rhythm according to their own liking. This is not to say that he necessarily disapproved of unified modifications of tempo (or of rhythm for that matter) in orchestral performance. In fact, in a letter to Moritz Hauptmann dated 6 Oct. 1843 about a performance that Spohr conducted in London, one can learn the opposite:

> The biggest sensation, however, was caused by the Overture from *Freischütz*. It had hitherto been performed somewhat sluggishly and strictly in tempo. I took it, as you know from our theatre, sometimes faster, sometimes slower and the orchestra followed excellently. This caused such an impression that the next day all newspapers wrote about it extensively.[20]

There are many things we can conclude from this letter. First of all, it confirms the fact that Spohr applied tempo modification in his performances with orchestras. Secondly, one can learn that this was customary practice in his theatre in Germany and it was not in England. Lastly, one can conclude that it was possible for Spohr as a conductor to convey his intentions successfully to an orchestra that was not his own and that was not in the habit of playing this particular overture using tempo modification. It is of course important to keep in mind that one cannot with any degree of certainty establish a baseline of steady tempo as an objective point of reference against which this and the previously mentioned modifications could be measured.

If one simply thinks of the fact that all measurements of tempo had to be made in real time, because there were no recordings available, I think it is safe to say that the nineteenth-century baseline of a steady tempo was more flexible than today's metronomically or mathematically grounded idea of steady tempo. The idea of flexibility in the fundamental tempo can also be found in an article in the *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung* of 1841:

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[20] Spohr, L. *"Letter to Moritz Hauptmann,"* October 1843, http://www.spohr-briefe.de/briefe-einzelansicht?m=1843100603. (Last accessed, August 2022) *Die größeste Sensation machte aber die Ouverture des Freischütz. Diese war bisher etwas pomadig und im strengen Takt exekutiert worden, - ich nahm sie, wie Sie es von unserm Theater aus kennen, bald schnell, bald langsam und das Orchester folgte vortrefflich. Dies imponierte so, daß am andern Morgen alle Zeitungen davon voll waren.*

> In the performance of quartets, quintets and even orchestral pieces to which the players have become accustomed together, one can hardly imagine any expressive passage in piano, or crescendo up to fortissimo in the more excited powerful affect, in which the prevailing tempo will not – sometimes imperceptibly – be modified, and a temporary hurrying or hesitating would take place; this is the character of the expression of what is vividly felt and vivaciously represented, because otherwise the representation would remain purely mechanical as with a music box.[21]

All this clearly shows that modification of tempo was an element of a beautiful performance of chamber music, orchestral music, and opera.

CONCLUSION

By assembling these sources and presenting my understanding of their meaning, I have aimed to sketch the background against which the work of Hans von Bülow and the Meiningen Orchestra took place, not to give a full account of the theory and practice as related to the modifications of rhythm and tempo in the nineteenth century. With these quotations from methods and treatises, particularly in combination with the accounts from "ear witnesses", I do think one can draw some conclusions about the situation regarding modifications in the nineteenth century in orchestral performances. These modifications belonged to the domain of “beautiful performance” and enabled listeners to experience the emotions embedded in the score. Writers such as C. Ph. E. Bach and Spohr considered the application of such modifications to be more achievable in solo performances, chamber music, and solo playing accompanied by a small ensemble of high-quality

[21] Smidt, A. (red.) “Beiträge zur Philosophie des Schönen in der Musik“ *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung* 7. September 1841. https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=awm&datum=18410907&seite=1&zoom=33 (Last accessed August 2022). *Es lässt sich im Vortrage von Quartetten, Quintetten, und selbst Orchesterstücken, bei welchen die Spieler zusammen eingewöhnt sind, kaum irgendeine ausdrucksvolle Stelle im piano, crescendo bis zum fortissimo gleichsam im erregteren heftigeren Affekt denken, bei welchen sich nicht auch unmerklich das herrschende Tempo abänderte und ein temporäres Eilen oder Zögern einträfe; es ist dies der Charakter der Äußerung des lebhaft Gefühlten und lebendig Dargestellten, denn sonst bliebe die Darstellung rein mechanisch wie allenfalls bei einer Spieluhr.*

players, than in larger ensembles or orchestras. This by no means implies that these modifications were not applied in orchestral settings. In fact, numerous accounts confirm that they were. Factors that limited the possibilities of effectively applying modifications in orchestral settings related to the size of the ensemble, the quality of the players and conductors, and the amount of rehearsal time available. As I will discuss in the next chapter, rehearsal time was a factor that is specifically mentioned in relation to the refined level of ensemble playing by the Meiningen Orchestra.
Speaking from personal experience as a conductor, I can confirm that one of the first things that tends to get lost in performances that are being put on without sufficient rehearsal time is modification of rhythm and tempo, as the musicians under those conditions feel that they need to revert to steady and even handling of tempo to avoid disorder and lack of togetherness in the performance.

1.2 Bülow's Revolution

Hans von Bülow, arguably the most influential conductor of the nineteenth century, studied the piano with Friedrich Wieck (1785-1873), father of Clara Schumann-Wieck, in his native city of Dresden. After meeting Franz Liszt (1811-1886) and hearing some compositions by Richard Wagner (1813-1883), particularly the premiere of his opera *Lohengrin* conducted in 1850 by Liszt in Weimar, Bülow decided to abandon his law studies in Leipzig and dedicate himself to a future in music instead, against the wishes of his parents. In 1857, he married Liszt's daughter Cosima. He built a reputation as a virtuoso pianist and as an excellent conductor, specialising in Wagner (he conducted the premieres of two of Wagner's operas, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) but also works by other major composers such as Brahms and Tchaikovsky.

Many considered Bülow to be a difficult man, who did not always operate tactfully and lost positions in Zurich and Hannover because of his brusque manner. He divorced his wife Cosima, who had left him for Wagner in 1870, although this did not stop him from conducting Wagner's works. In 1880, Bülow was appointed chief conductor in Meiningen after resigning from his post in Hannover in the aftermath of a scandal, which involved a fight with a tenor who did not meet his standards in rehearsals for *Lohengrin*. Duke Georg II of Meiningen acted swiftly and offered Bülow the post in Meiningen within ten days of his resignation in Hannover. In his book *On Conducting,* Austrian composer, pianist, and conductor Felix Weingartner (1863-1942) described the impact of Bülow's work with the Meiningen Orchestra, particularly through his tours with the orchestra. He also provided a sobering assessment of the quality of the bigger orchestras of the time:

> Bülow's star first shone brilliantly again when in 1880 he became chief of the Meiningen Orchestra. A year later the Duke, whose scenic art had already effectively influenced the dramatic theatre, sent him off with the orchestra on a grand concert tour through Germany, Austria and Russia. Seldom has such a victory of mind over matter been seen. A rather poorly appointed orchestra, by no means absolutely excellent in its proportions, conquered everywhere the large orchestras, famous the whole world over as possessing the best

> artists; this was the work of the eminent conductor, who – a second Leonidas – had the courage to defy, with a small troop of admirably schooled players, the big musical armies that were mostly led by ordinary time beaters. By dint of diligent, indefatigable practice he had so infused into the orchestra his own conception of the works as to get a perfection of *ensemble* at that time unknown […] These concert-tours by the Meiningen Orchestra were of inestimable significance. Those whom it concerned recognised that it would not do to go on simply beating time and playing away with the old reprehensible carelessness and thoughtlessness, for that would certainly lower them in the eyes of the public, which after once having nibbled dainties at the table of the great, would no longer be content with canteen fare. So, these people first took pains to cultivate the orchestra better on the technical side, held more rehearsals, followed more consciously the dynamic indications, and in general gave more attention to accurate *ensemble.* The capacity of orchestras has since then greatly increased, and composers today can set problems that even a few years ago would have seemed insoluble, while at the same time a better rendering of the works of the old masters has been made possible. These things represent the *gain* from Bülow's work and make his name an ineradicable landmark in the evolution of the art of conducting; to him alone after those great composers who themselves were notable conductors, we owe the diffusion and the strengthening of the consciousness that conducting is an art and not a handicraft.[22]

Weingartner also described other features of Bülow's conducting style, which he considered as being harmful, which I will examine in Chapter 1.3 when discussing Brahms's relationship with Bülow.

For now though, I want to highlight Weingartner's characterisation of the modus operandi of the large orchestras as being mostly led by "ordinary time beaters." This assessment leaves little room for the idea that modifications might have become part of the general performance practices of these large orchestras. He drew parallels between some great composer/conductors and Bülow by writing that "after those great composers who themselves were notable conductors to him alone do we owe the strengthening of the consciousness that conducting is an art." Weingartner's words confirm the fact that the examples of the great composer/conductors of the past had not found their way into in the mainstream orchestral performance practices of the nineteenth century.

[22] Weingartner, F. *On Conducting,* transl. and ed. Ernest Newman. Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1906, pp. 12-13.

According to Weingartner, it was only through Bülow's work that this refined style was finally more broadly adopted in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Bülow himself wrote about the fact that the work of one of the great composer-conductors of the past, Felix Mendelssohn, had not been carried further by others. In an 1872 article, published in *Signale für die Musikalische Welt,* Bülow shared his memories of Mendelssohn's conducting:

> By the way, one cannot express enough regret over the fact that Mendelssohn, principally in his capacity as a conductor, did not 'make a school' which could have been and should have been the case. The master himself was not to blame for this, but the youngsters who, with the exception of the kapellmeister Dr. Rietz and Eckert, failed to profit from the excellent example. I remember as if it were yesterday, although at the time I was younger than Mehul's Joseph in his *Romanze*, that I experienced the most overpowering impression I ever had of Schubert's C major Symphony, under the direction of Mendelssohn. At the time, Schubert was not yet considered one of the great inhabitants of the Olympus; people loved, admired, and savoured him as a *minorum gentium,* but lamented his lack of compact form, and his repetitive rhythms. But under Mendelssohn's baton, one was not aware of these shortcomings. The brilliant leader, without making any cuts, understood the art of completely obscuring the mentioned shortcomings, using only his refined sense of elasticity in rhythm and the magnetic eloquence of his conducting gestures. What wonderful colours, what spirited modifications of movement and tempo he applied, how he led the listener away from the endless 'steppes' of the *Allegretto,* so that the listener, in the end, had no idea of the time passed during the acoustical representation. One had simply spent some time in the eternal spaces of a timeless world.[23]

[23] Bülow, H. von, "Lohengrin in Bologna. Kein Leitartikel, sondern ein vertrauliches Gespräch (im australischen Style), durch diplomatische Indiskretion in die Öffentlichkeit gebracht," in *Signale für die Musikalische Welt* (1872), pp. 24-25. *Daß Mendelssohn übrigens […] in seiner Eigenschaft als Dirigent nicht Schule gemacht, was hätte sein können und sollen, ist gar nicht genug zu beklagen. Am Meister lag die Schuld nicht, sondern an den Jüngern, die mit Ausnahme von den Hofcapellmeistern Dr. Rietz und Eckert nichts von dem glänzenden Beispiele profitiert haben. Ich erinnere mich noch, als ob es heute wäre, wiewohl ich damals viel knabenhafter war als Mehul's Joseph in seiner Romanze, des nie wieder so mächtig mir zu theilgewordenen Eindrucks, den ich von der Schubert'schen C-dur-Symphonie unter Mendelssohn's Leitung empfing. Damals war es noch nicht Mode, Schubert in den höchsten Olymp einzulogiren, man liebte, bewunderte, goutirte ihn als einen minorum gentium, lamentierte jedoch über die Breitspurigkeit seiner Formen, über die Eintönigkeit seiner Rhythmen. Aber unter Mendelssohn's Tactirstab ward man [sich] dieser Mängel nicht bewußt. Der geniale Führer verstand es, ohne Rothstift, lediglich mit Hülfe seiner elastischen Feinfühligkeit und der magnetischen Eloquenz seiner Zeichensprache, die genannten Mängel vollständig zu verhüllen. Welche wunderbaren Coloritnüancen, welche geistreichen Bewegungsschattirungen wendete er nur an, wie*

Bülow shared the importance of Mendelssohn's work to him as a conductor, which I believe can be understood as corroboration of the fact that his style was indeed – as Weingartner suggests – connected to the tradition of the great composer/conductors of the past. It is noteworthy that Bülow's appreciation of Mendelssohn's style seems at odds with what Wagner wrote about his conducting in *Über das Dirigieren* in 1869. Wagner claimed to have learnt about the nature of Mendelssohn's style in his work with the London Philharmonic Society. As the orchestra offered little rehearsal time, he had to accept their way of playing more or less as offered by them. In it, Wagner claimed to have recognised Mendelssohn's style (Mendelssohn had worked with the orchestra extensively), characterising it as lacking in tempo modifications:

> It flowed like water from a city well; stopping was out of the question, and every allegro ended as an undeniable presto. The trouble to intervene was embarrassing enough; because only at the correct and well-modified tempo did the other damage to the performance, hidden under the general flow of water, become apparent. The orchestra never played anything other than *'mezzo-forte;'* there was no real *forte* and no real *piano*.[24]

As one can see, Wagner and Bülow perceived Mendelssohn's style very differently. Bülow lamented the fact that Mendelssohn did not pass on his approach in the sense that he had pupils or followers to disseminate his style of working. Given his negative assessment of Mendelssohn's conducting style, it seems unlikely that Wagner, who like Liszt had no appreciation for

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ermöglichte er's nur, über die diversen Steppen des „endlosen" Allegretto hinwegzugleiten, daß der Zuhörer am Schlusse von der Zeitdauer der akustischen Erscheinung keine Ahnung hatte? Man hatte eben in ewigen Räumen, in einer zeitlosen Welt geweilt.

[24] Wagner, R. *Über das Dirigieren.* (Entstanden 1869) Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1911, p. 17. *Das floss denn wie das Wasser aus einem Stadtbrunnen; an ein Aufhalten war gar nicht zu denken, und jedes Allegro endete als unläugbares Presto. Die Mühe hiergegen einzuschreiten war peinlich genug; denn erst beim richtigen und wohl modifizierten Tempo deckten sich nun die unter dem allgemeinen Wasserfluss verborgenen anderweitigen Schäden des Vortrages auf. Das Orchester spielte nämlich nie anderes als „mezzoforte"; es kam zu keinem wirklichen forte wie zu keinem wirklichen piano.*

the Leipzig school, of which Mendelssohn was a notable member, would have regretted this lack of lineage.[25]

Even without students or conductors other than Bülow following his example, there were other ways in which Mendelssohn's style of performing may have been carried on. The German musicologist Andreas Moser (1859-1925), who seems to agree more with Bülow's characterisation than with Wagner's, wrote about the influence of Mendelssohn on the young violinist Joseph Joachim (1831-1907):

> Joachim's inimitable *'rubato'* may be traced to the example of Mendelssohn, who understood perfectly how to blend one subject with another without forcing the passage in the smallest degree. He also freed him from certain prejudices and habits to which violinist are prone, for example, that the use of the springing bow is not permissible in classical compositions. 'Always use it, my boy, where it is suitable or where it sounds well,' was Mendelssohn's opinion. But he did not stop here: he also often accompanied the boy on the pianoforte when he played in private and almost always when he played in public.[26]

If Mendelssohn's style of playing was as hurried and unsophisticated as Wagner described his conducting, it could hardly have served as a source of inspiration for Joachim's "inimitable rubato," as Moser suggested. Whatever the precise nature of Mendelssohn's tempo modifications may have been, "his refined sense of elasticity in rhythm and the magnetic eloquence of his conducting gestures" served as a shining example for Bülow, thus suggesting a link between Bülow's style and Mendelssohn's example. The other lineage of tradition lies, of course, in Bülow's collaboration with Wagner.

I find Weingartner's praise of Bülow as the man who single-handedly managed to build on what the great composer/conductors had done in the past and caused an irreversible transformation of the art of conducting, all the more credible because he was not afraid to criticise Bülow relentlessly in

[25] It is perhaps not surprising that Wagner objected to Mendelssohn's style in this way, if one considers the fact that the critic Henry Chorley described Wagner's performance of a Beethoven Symphony as "a fatiguing piece of exaggeration, full of fierce sforzandi and ill-measured rallentandi." in a review in The Athenaeum, 28 (1855), p. 329.

[26] Moser, A. *Joseph Joachim, A Biography.* Philip Wellby, London, 1901, p. 46.

other parts of his book, as can be seen later in this chapter. His observation that the tours Bülow made with the Meiningen Orchestra were of crucial importance is also credible, given the confirmation of the impact their performances had on the audiences and the critics in the cities they visited in other sources such as those quoted below. In a letter to the concert agent, Hermann Wolff, who was responsible for organising the concert tour of 1882, Bülow stated what he wanted to achieve with the concert tours:

> My goal […] was and still is to present our achievements in two musical capitals, Leipzig and Berlin, to a larger and more competent circle of connoisseurs and music lovers, and to expose them for comparison and judgement.[27]

Bülow did not fear comparison with the orchestras in these two musical capitals and it is reasonable to assume that this was the case because he knew that he had something to offer which they did not. In his letters, one can find evidence of the fact that Bülow thought of his concert tour in military terms. He described, for instance, the visit to Berlin with his orchestra as an attack ("Angriff"). Bülow did not hold the Leipzig style of performance in high regard, as we can see in this quotation from a letter to his wife in 1882:

> Today is the day of the decisive musical battle in the capital of pigtails and wigs, who understand nothing of the romantic Beethoven.[28]

The reviews of the concerts in Berlin provide corroboration of the fact that Bülow and the Meiningen Orchestra surpassed the quality of the orchestras in the capital. One critic for the *Berliner Zeitung* commented that the

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[27] Bülow, H. von, "Letter to Hermann Wolff," Meiningen, 4 September, 1881, in *Briefe und Schriften,* VII, ed. Marie Bülow, Breitkopf und Härtel, Leipzig, 1907, p. 86. *Meine Absicht […] war und ist immer noch, in zwei Musikmetropolen, Leipzig und Berlin, unsere Leistungen einem grösseren competenteren Kreise von 'Kennern und Liebhabern' vorzuführen, resp. zu vergleichender Beurteilung zu exponiren.*

[28] Bülow, H. von, "Letter to Marie Schanzer," 20 January, 1882, in *Briefe und Schriften,* p. 133. *Heute ist nämlich die musikalische Entscheidungsschlacht in der Metropole der Zöpfe, Perrücken, die vom Romantiker Beethoven nichts wissen.*

musicians (and actors on an earlier occasion) from the small town of Meiningen had put the capital – where the standard of orchestral concerts was, in his opinion, quite poor – to shame. Other critics wrote about "a miracle" and a "phenomenal effect." Ticket sales constituted another indicator of the success in Berlin; the capacity of the hall of the *Sing Akademie* with 1200 seats was insufficient for the demand. The concerts were repeated three times in the much bigger Central Skating Rink (the site that later became the *Philharmonie*) but the demand for tickets still could not be met. It is reasonable to assume that the public was drawn to these concerts because they found in them something that they did not find elsewhere, namely excellent quality of expression and ensemble.

For Bülow, the visit to Leipzig not only meant an opportunity to prove the value (and superiority) of his work in comparison to Carl Reinecke and the Gewandhaus Orchestra, but also a chance to take revenge for the lack of appreciation and respect that had befallen Brahms, whom he admired, on earlier occasions in Leipzig, particularly regarding the reception of his *First Piano Concerto*. On 18 March 1882, the critic of the *Musikalische Zeitung* commented on the performance of the evening before:

> Last night's concert proved that nobody, not even Brahms himself, is more qualified to perform his works than Bülow, whether at the piano or conducting his Meiningen Court Orchestra.[29]

As one can see, Bülow succeeded in demonstrating the superiority of his style of performing Brahms, but not necessarily in increasing the critic's level of respect for the qualities of Brahms himself as a composer and pianist. In a letter to his mother, dated 26 January 1882, Bülow reflected on how he had triumphed everywhere he went with his orchestra:

[29] An anonymous review quoted by Kern. V. and Müller, H. in "*Die Meininger Kommen!* " *Der gestrige Abend hat es bewiesen, dass Niemand, auch Brahms selber nicht, zur Ausführung seiner Werke berufener ist als Bülow am Klavier oder an der Spitze der Meininger Hofkapelle. („Nach Smendek, MT, vom 23.8.1997").*

> The triumphs I have celebrated elude any description. Victory everywhere I went with my 50 people, instead of in the past just with my 10 fingers.[30]

The enormous success of the Meiningen Orchestra under Bülow was possible partly because the standards of other orchestral playing were not very high, allowing him to stand out significantly. Apart from the inadequate quality of the competition, Bülow's work was very impressive by many accounts. An important element of his style was modification of tempo. By his example, Bülow revolutionised the way orchestras functioned in relation to this important expressive tool. But Bülow did not invent these modifications. As discussed in Chapter 1.1, they had been part of the high art of beautiful musical performance since at least the eighteenth century. Bülow does, however, deserve credit for finding a unique way of realising them with his Meiningen Orchestra.

As discussed in the previous chapter, factors such as size of ensemble, quality of players and rehearsal time, seem to have been crucial for his success. The size of the orchestra in Meiningen was modest. When Bülow took over the orchestra, it consisted of merely thirty-six players. He considered it one of his first tasks to persuade Duke Georg II (the orchestra belonged to his Meiningen court) to hire eight more players. During his five-year tenure, the orchestra never exceeded forty-eight players. Styra Avins puts these numbers in perspective in her article "The 'Excellent People' of the Meiningen Court Orchestra", writing that orchestras in Berlin and Frankfurt had eighty members at the time.[31] As discussed in Chapter 1.1, the size of an ensemble matters when it comes to the application of modifications; the larger the ensemble, the more difficult it becomes.

Regarding the second factor - the quality of the players - Bülow went to great lengths to further improve the quality of the orchestra, which already

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[30] Bülow, H. von, "Letter to his mother" January 26, 1882, in *Briefe und Schriften*, VII, p. 137. *Die Triumphe, die ich gefeiert habe, entziehen sich jeder Schilderung. Sieg überall, wo ich mit meinen 50 Leuten, statt früher nur mit meiner 10 Finger hingekommen.*

[31] Avins, S. "The excellent people of the Meiningen Court Orchestra and the Third Symphony of Johannes Brahms," in *Spätphase(n)?, Johannes Brahms' Werke der 1880er und 1890er Jahre Internationales musikwissenschaftliches Symposium Meiningen 2008,* ed. Maren Goltz, Wolfgang Sandberger and Christiane Wiesenfeldt. Henle Verlag, München, 2010, p. 36.

included some excellent players such as clarinettist Richard Mühlfeld (1856-1907), for whom Brahms would later write his *Clarinet Quintet* and his two *Clarinet Sonatas*, and concertmaster Friedrich Fleischhauer (1834-1896), a former student of Joseph Joachim with whom Bülow often played chamber music and who was one of the most highly respected concertmasters and string quartet players in Germany. Bülow did manage to attract some new musicians of excellent quality, despite the limited financial means of the orchestra. For example, he recruited the outstanding horn player Gustav Leinhos (1835-1906), a renowned Waldhorn player who played for Wagner at the premiere of *Der Ring des Niebelungen* in Bayreuth in 1876, and who premiered Richard Strauss's *First Horn Concerto* with Bülow and the Meiningen Orchestra in 1885. Another important addition was Friedrich Hilpert (1841-1896), who became first cellist in 1876; he had already held the same position in the Vienna Court Orchestra, doubling at the Vienna Philharmonic, and went on to hold the title *Kammervirtuoso* in Meiningen from 1876-1885. In 1882, Bülow brought Alexander Ritter, a former student of Ferdinand David in Leipzig, to Meiningen as an assistant concertmaster. When he decided to replace an oboist with a better one, Bülow personally contributed 300 marks to make the replacement possible, as his wife reported:

> 'The material means are modest,' he said. So modest that, in order to lure a good oboist, for example, he offers him a bonus of 300 marks from his pocket in addition to the thousand and fifty marks of annual salary [...][32]

Clearly, Bülow made every effort to build an orchestra that would be able to perform at the highest possible level. We can surmise that Bülow deliberated upon the flexibility of the musicians he brought to Meiningen, making sure that they would be able to execute the kind of modifications he required of the orchestra.

[32] Bülow, M. von, *Hans von Bülow Leben und Wort,* ed. A. Spemann and H. Holle, F. Engelhorns Nachf., Stuttgart, 1925, p. 136. *Die materiellen Mittel sind bescheiden, ' sagte er. 'So bescheiden, dass er, um zum Beispiel einen guten Oboisten zu locken, ihm zu den tausendfünfzig Mark Jahrgehalt dreihundert Mark Zuschuss aus seiner Tasche anbietet […].*

The third factor related to rehearsal time. Since Duke Georg II had decided to close the Meiningen Opera and transfer its resources to the theatre a few years prior to Bülow's appointment, the orchestra concentrated purely on instrumental music. Many orchestras in musical capitals were forced to divide their time between operatic and symphonic duties. This meant that, unlike their colleagues in Meiningen, they would always be pressed for time when it came to planning rehearsals. The absence of operatic duties gave the Meiningen Orchestra a considerable advantage. Pianist, composer and conductor Ferdinand Hiller (1811-1885), for instance, described how the orchestra in Meiningen was financed by someone who did not care for opera and that, therefore, the conductor had ample time to rehearse instrumental music. He added:

> That the rest of us can't hold a half dozen rehearsals is bad enough – still, it's better that we make good music with two or three rehearsals than not at all.[33]

Hiller's words make it clear that Bülow's situation was very favourable compared to other conductors and orchestras.

Yet it was not just having sufficient rehearsal time that made the difference; the way Bülow made use of that time was also important. In an interview with the *Weimarer Zeitung* in December 1880, Bülow explained that his method was based on the so-called "Meiningen principles,' an idea he had borrowed from the theatre company:

> I am working according to the Meiningen principles: separate rehearsals for winds and strings – the latter being divided into 1st and 2nd violins, violas, cellos, and basses (i.e., five sectional rehearsals for strings alone). Every dynamic nuance is studied; every stroke of the bow; every staccato prepared until it is exactly together; musical phrasing and punctuation rehearsed in every detail. 'In art there are no trivial things' is my maxim. This system, which has been in effect since October 1, seems to work well. In any case, I hope to obtain better artistic results than have hitherto been obtained anywhere in Germany. The concentration on Beethoven's music (from October 1 until December 20 not a note by any other composer will be played) seems

[33] Avins, S. "The excellent people" p. 34, quoting Reinhold Sietz; *Aus Ferdinand Hillers Briefwechsel* Bd. IV, Arno, Köln, 1967, p. 174.

> to me to be a necessary condition for this experiment, which seeks to found a 'style' to form the proper taste in both playing and listening.[34]

In his book on Bülow, Alan Walker offers a wonderful contextualisation of this interview:

> The polished stage productions of the Meininger troupe, admired all over Europe, were the result of the rigorous discipline that Georg II had imposed on his actors. However sumptuous the production, it never overwhelmed the integrity of the play itself. And however talented the individual actors, they subordinated themselves even to minor roles for the sake of the whole. 'There are no minor roles, all roles are major,' was one of Georg's maxims, and it is clear that Bülow had it in mind when he paraphrased it during the interview, he gave to the *Weimarer Zeitung*, saying: 'In art there are no trivial things.' The Meininger troupe was famous for its crowd scenes and its lighting effects, yet they were not the usual diversions meant to distract from the plot but were subsumed to it. This is the context in which Bülow's appropriation of the term 'Meininger principles' should be understood: (1) Integrity to the musical text; (2) each orchestral player a soloist, but none more important than the others: (3) the virtuosity of the team placed in the service of the composer to such a degree that it simply disappeared during performance and became part of the composition itself.[35]

Bülow's method made it possible for the musicians to play by heart and for conductor and orchestra to look each other in the eye, allowing for a new level of intensity in the communication between them. No wonder the orchestra's ensemble playing was deemed a miracle by the critic of the *Berliner Volkszeitung*.

Weingartner considered the success of the Meiningen Orchestra and Bülow to have led to improvements in other orchestras. People now felt obliged to make substantial improvements. Within a few decades, the standard of orchestral playing had been raised to such a level that it hardly compared to the general level of performance before Bülow's revolution had taken place. As Walker points out:

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[34] Walker, A. *Hans von Bülow, A Life and Times*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, p. 282. quoting an interview with Hans von Bülow in the *Weimarer Zeitung*, issue of 16 December 1880.

[35] Ibid, p. 281.

> Bülow found in Meiningen an opportunity to realise a long-cherished dream to make his conducting an extension of his piano playing. He had sometimes talked of the piano as 'a 10 fingered orchestra.' He now came to regard the orchestra as a multi fingered piano which through rigorous rehearsals would learn to respond to his every musical impulse.[36]

Perhaps it is this ideal of absolute control, combined with a tendency towards a pedagogic element in his music making (by his own admission; see the quotation above about his intention to found a new "style" to form proper taste in both playing and listening), which, as Weingartner claimed, caused Bülow to exaggerate his modifications increasingly. He felt that Bülow "often went too far" in his efforts "to be excessively clear." As Weingartner described:

> His quondam hearers and admirers will recollect that often when he had worked out a passage in an especially plastic form, he turned round to the public, perhaps expecting to see some astonished faces, chiefly, however, to say 'see, that's how it should be done!' But if the Venus of Melos, for example, were suddenly to begin to speak, and to give us a lecture on the laws of her conformation, we should be a good deal sobered down. Art-works and art-performances exist only for the sake of themselves and their own beauty. If they pursue a 'tendentious' aim, even though this should be instructive in the best sense, the bloom goes off them. From 'tendencies' of this kind Bülow's interpretations were seldom quite free.[37]

There are reasons for being cautious when it comes to evaluating the qualities of Bülow's style on the basis of critical observations of his contemporaries such as this one. Personal feelings may have played a role in some observations and, even if one accepts these comments at face value, it remains very difficult to draw firm conclusions regarding his possible exaggerations in the absence of a clearly defined baseline to compare his modifications against.

In his diatribe against Bülow, and particularly Bülow's admirers who followed him blindly, Weingartner lists a number of examples that offer a

[36] Ibid, p. 282.
[37] Weingartner, *On Conducting,* pp. 16-17.

picture of Bülow's transgressions of the rules of subtle modification. Fundamentally, three kinds of exaggerations can be distinguished in Weingartner's account of Bülow's style: (1) choosing a basic tempo that he considered to go against the nature of the work or movement in question; (2) deviations from a fundamental tempo that are so substantial that they tend to negate the previous tempo and destroy the feeling of unity within a movement; (3) exaggerated phrasings ("breath-pauses") that interrupt the flow of the music in such a way that they become musical events in their own right that overshadow the narrative of the piece.[38] Although, as I will show in the next chapter on Brahms and Bülow, this criticism partly coincided with a critical opinion of Bülow's style as expressed by Brahms himself, I think it is important to see Weingartner's critique of Bülow, at least in part, as stemming from his profoundly different tastes and aesthetics in relation to orchestral performance in general and modification of tempo in particular.[39]

Tension between the two men may also have played a role in the critical assessment of Bülow's work by Weingartner. David Wooldridge in *Conductor's World* reflected on both the substance of Weingartner's critique of Bülow, which he found unjustified in some cases, and the possible origins of his ire.[40] He pointed to the history between the two men, particularly around the fact that Weingartner had gone to Meiningen at Liszt's recommendation, seeking the post of assistant conductor to Bülow, but – claiming an independent spirit - had been unwilling to subjugate himself to Bülow's every wish. Bülow advised Weingartner to seek any position (elsewhere) in which he might be able to exercise his independence freely and appointed Richard Strauss (1864-1949) in his stead. Wooldridge assumed that it must have come as a bitter blow to Weingartner to see Strauss replace him at the Berlin Opera thirteen years later, and to find himself without an operatic post for the next eleven years.

[38] Ibid, pp. 13-25.
[39] Listening to Weingartner's recordings of the Brahms Symphonies confirm that he adhered to his chosen tempos rather strictly.
[40] Wooldridge, D. *Conductor's World*. Barrie and Rockliff, London: The Cresset Press, 1970, p. 76.

Whilst Weingartner's personal feelings towards Bülow's continue to remain a subject of speculation, it is worth comparing the first published edition (1895) of Weingartner's *On Conducting* with the revised edition he published in 1905. Wooldridge concluded that the first edition championed Bülow, whilst the revised edition constituted a vitriolic attack on his former colleague. Bülow had died in 1894 before the publication of the first edition, meaning that Weingartner's changed tone and judgement in the revised edition of 1905 could not have originated from an evaluation of any new accomplishments by Bülow as a conductor. It may have been prompted by a re-evaluation of his previous accomplishments, or Weingartner may have felt freer to express his true feelings eleven years after Bülow's death than one year after it.

Conclusion

The importance of Bülow and his work with the Meiningen Orchestra can hardly be overstated. He had singlehandedly changed the notion of what could be achieved with a well-rehearsed orchestra and, by example, had initiated a transformation of orchestral performance practice which led to a new standard for beautiful orchestral performance in the nineteenth century. This transformation included introducing the modifications into the wider realm of orchestral performance, which, as I have shown in the previous chapter (1.1), had hitherto mostly featured in the world of solo performance, chamber music and larger ensembles of exceptional quality. As I shall show in the next section, however, there are good reasons for not choosing Bülow's performance style as a model for the performance of Brahms's orchestral music today.

1.3 Bülow and Brahms

Bülow had been in charge of the orchestra for a year when Brahms first visited Meiningen to rehearse his *Second Piano Concerto* in October 1881. His rehearsal method, as described above, had already resulted in a very high level of ensemble playing that made it the ideal orchestra for Brahms with which to try out, rehearse, and revise his music. In his biography of Brahms, the Austrian-American musicologist Karl Geiringer (1899-1989) describes the origins of the cooperation between Bülow and Brahms:

> When, in the spring of 1881, on the occasion of his Viennese concerts, Bülow told Brahms of his innovations, the composer was deeply interested, and the impulsive conductor was accordingly impelled to place his orchestra at Brahms's disposal for rehearsals of his new compositions. It was not long before Brahms profited from this offer. In the summer of 1881, he announced his intention of bringing the concerto [the second concerto opus 83] to Bülow in October. Bülow was completely carried away by this new composition, and by Brahms's playing of it, and with passionate enthusiasm he placed himself at his new friend's disposal.[41]

When Brahms's friends expressed concern about his intended close collaboration with Bülow - who, in the words of Avins, had a reputation as a man with a neurotic, quarrelsome, and high-strung nature - Brahms explained his reasoning. In a letter to Ferdinand Hiller, he was clear about how he saw the opportunity and the role of Bülow:

> But you and others probably aren't interpreting my 'Bülow journeys' simply enough. I was in Meiningen above all in order to be able to play and rehearse a new piano concerto in peace and without the discomforting anticipation of a concert. That's something I can do nowhere else. Nowhere else would this have been considered strange, either, even if I had selected the biggest fool of a conductor. Why then here and with regard to B[ülow], who is, certainly, a very peculiar, a very testy, but nevertheless an intelligent, serious, and competent man? You must also be able to imagine for yourself how outstandingly his people have been rehearsed; and so, when someone like me

[41] Geiringer, K. *Brahms: his Life and Work*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1936, p. 157.

> comes along and makes music with them, so straight from the heart, I really don't know where he could do any better.[42]

This is a telling quotation, particularly in light of later developments in their relationship. Brahms clearly cherished the opportunity to try out and revise his work in Meiningen, and he appreciated the excellent preparatory work of Bülow. I find it significant that he not only suggested bringing his scores to Meiningen, but that he also wanted to make music "straight from the heart." Brahms later criticised Bülow's style as being "always calculated for effect," which could be understood as the exact opposite of "straight from the heart."

However critical his judgement of Bülow's style may have been at the time, Brahms did return to Meiningen to work on his third and fourth symphonies. In an entry on 14 November 1884 in his *Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms,* Richard Heuberger (1850-1914) reflected on the unique nature of the collaboration between Brahms and Bülow:

> The conversation turned to Hans von Bülow, whose concerts in Vienna with Brahms were about to take place. (Hans von Bülow gave concerts on 20 and 25 November as well as 2 December 1884 with the Meininger Hofkapelle in Vienna). While the programme of the first evening consisted exclusively of works by Beethoven, on the second evening Bülow played the D minor concerto with Brahms as a conductor. In the 3rd concert, Brahms played his B flat major concerto whilst Bülow conducted. Brahms believed Bülow made too many changes in the concert programmes, and during the concert always enjoyed a cause for excitement. Thus, Bülow once proposed to Brahms that they would not decide before the concert who would play and who would conduct. This should only be decided on stage. This was also said to be the origin of his idea to play the B flat major concerto without a conductor. Excitement before the audience is a welcome thing, or even a prerequisite for Bülow, whereas Brahms in such cases loves – and claims to possess – calmness.[43]

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[42] Brahms, J. letter to Ferdinand Hiller, October 1881 in Avins, S. *Johannes Brahms, Life and Letters.* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1997, pp. 581-582.

[43] Heuberger, R. *Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms – Tagebuchnotizen 1875-1897.* Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1971, p. 25. *Das Gespräch kam auf Hans von Bülow, dessen Wiener Konzerte mit Brahms damals bevorstanden. (Hans von Bülow konzertierte am 20. und 25. November, sowie am 2. Dezember 1884 mit der Meininger Hofkapelle in Wien. Während der erste Abend ein reines Beethoven-Programm beinhaltete, spielte Bülow am zweiten Abend das d-Moll-Konzert, während Brahms dirigierte. Im dritten Konzert spielte Brahms sein B-Dur-Konzert und Bülow dirigierte). Brahms meinte, Bülow ändere zu viel an den Programmen und habe dann im Konzert immer noch einen Grund zur Aufregung gerne. So schlug Bülow Brahms einmal vor,*

Bülow's proposal to decide on the spot who would play and who would conduct in such demanding and complex compositions as Brahms's piano concertos is testimony to the unique nature of their collaboration. It is hard to imagine any two other people both possessing the required capacities in each discipline. At the same time, this quotation makes clear that Brahms and Bülow had quite different personalities and consequently quite different priorities as performing musicians; Bülow looking for adventure and excitement, Brahms looking for calmness. Given the unique mix of exceptional musical capabilities and their contrasting personalities here, it is not surprising that their relationship had its difficulties.

During an extensive tour of Germany and the Netherlands with the *Fourth Symphony* in 1885, their friendship reached breaking point. Brahms had agreed to conduct a semi-private performance of the *Fourth Symphony* with the Frankfurt Museum Orchestra during the tour. What made matters worse was the fact that the performance with the much larger Museum Orchestra took place just a few weeks before Bülow and the Meiningen Orchestra were to visit Frankfurt with the same work. When Bülow learned about Brahms's concert, he removed the symphony from his programme, replacing it with Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*. On resigning his post in Meiningen soon afterwards, Bülow ended his collaboration with Brahms there.

Before this dramatic turn of events, it is noteworthy that Brahms had repeatedly – and often at very short notice – insisted on conducting the *Fourth Symphony* himself during the tour of the Meiningen Orchestra. One cannot say with any degree of certainty why he did so, but I would argue that it is not unlikely that it had something to do with his misgivings about

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sie mögen vor dem Konzert nicht bestimmen, welcher von ihnen ein Klavierkonzert von Brahms spielen und welcher es dirigieren werde. Erst auf dem Podium sollte dies ausgemacht werden. So sei auch seine Idee aufzufassen, das B-Dur Konzert ohne Dirigenten zu spielen. Aufregung vor dem Publikum ist Bülow angenehm, ja fast ein Bedürfnis, während Brahms in solchen Fällen Ruhe liebt und diese auch besitzt, wie er sagt.

Bülow's style.[44] In his praise for the exceptional conductor that Bülow was, Liszt's pupil Frederic Lamond (1868-1948) included something Brahms supposedly had said to the Meiningen Orchestra:

> He [Bülow] was the greatest conductor who ever lived, not even Toscanini approaching him. I have seen and heard them all. No one, Nikisch, Richter, Mahler, Weingartner, could compare with him in true warmth and expression. Brahms was a good conductor, but did not compare with Bülow, who could galvanise the most villainous, struggling band of musicians into an array of heaven-sent archangels. Brahms (in the rehearsals for the premiere of the Fourth Symphony in Meiningen in October 1885), repeatedly said to the orchestra: 'Wait, gentlemen, until you hear this work conducted by Bülow.'[45]

Brahms had a peculiar sense of humour and I think that Lamond, who sees his remark to the orchestra purely as praise for Bülow, may have misunderstood him. Why would Brahms, who had every reason to want his *Fourth Symphony* to be presented to the public as beautifully and as convincingly as possible, have insisted on conducting the performances himself, with Bülow available to conduct, if he truly felt that Bülow's rendering was superior to his own? In his letter to Hiller, quoted above, one could already see that what Brahms valued most highly was the opportunity to work with the orchestra himself, and that he expressed appreciation for Bülow specifically in the role of preparing the orchestra.

Composer/conductor Richard Strauss provides further corroborations of the quality of Bülow's rehearsals, and he also comments on the difference between Brahms's attitude and that of Bülow. In reference to Bülow's rehearsals of the *Fourth Symphony* in *Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen* he wrote:

> Bülow rehearsed magnificently and his zeal and his moving conscientiousness were often strangely at odds with the indifference which

[44] In light of Bülow's proposal to Brahms to decide on stage who would conduct and who would play a concerto, this decision about who would conduct the symphony, just before the actual performance, is perhaps a little less extreme than one might have thought.
[45] Lamond, F. *The Memoires of Frederic Lamond*, Glasgow: William MacLellan, 1949, pp. 40 and 49.

> Brahms displayed quite publicly over matters of dynamics and interpretation of his work.[46]

At the very least, this report is an indication that Bülow and Brahms did not always have the same artistic priorities when it came to rehearsing the *Fourth Symphony*. Musicologist Konrad Huschke (1875-1956) pointed out that Brahms could not fully develop his ability as a conductor because for him, as a creative genius, conducting his works would always be of lesser importance than creating them. He goes on to quote witnesses saying that Brahms was known to have often preferred listening to his music over conducting it, and that he did not always have the time or the patience to bring out all the delightful details in his music:

> This explains the verdict of Teichmüller and others that the true greatness and beauty of his works, especially in the very demanding *4th Symphony*, and the subtleties of its instrumentation, only came to full expression under Bülow and Nikisch (although perhaps here and there in too sophisticated a manner).[47]

It is also possible that Brahms gradually came to a more critical assessment of Bülow's conducting style. Critic and writer Max Kalbeck (1850-1921), for instance, claimed Brahms said this in 1887:

> Bülow's conducting is always calculated for effect. At the moment when a phrase begins, he gets (the players) to leave a tiny gap, and he also likes to change the tempo ever so slightly. In my symphonies I have strenuously sought to avoid all this kind of thing. If I had wanted it, I would have written it in.[48]

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[46] Strauß, R. *Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*. Atlantis Verlag, Zürich, 1949. Reprint Schott, Mainz, 2014, p. 191. *Bülow hatte fabelhaft probiert und sein Eifer und seine rührende Gewissenhaftigkeit hatten oft in seltsamem Gegensatz gestanden zu der Gleichgültigkeit die Brahms selbst bezüglich der Dynamik und des Vortrags seiner Werke ganz offen zur Schau trug.*

[47] Huschke, K. *Johannes Brahms als Pianist, Dirigent und Lehrer*, Friedrich Gutsch Verlag, Karlsruhe, 1935, p. 47. *Daraus erklärt sich das Urteil Teichmüllers und anderer, dass die ganze Größe und Schönheit seiner Werke, vor allem der in dieser Beziehung so anspruchsvollen vierten Sinfonie, und die Feinheiten ihrer Instrumentation erst unter Bülow und Nikisch zur Rechten Geltung gekommen seien (vielleicht allerdings da und dort mehr erklügelt alles gut war).*

[48] Kalbeck, M. *Johannes Brahms,* vol. 3. Deutsche Brahms Gesellschaft, Berlin, 1912, p. 495. *Bülows Dirigieren ist immer auf Effekt berechnet. Sobald eine neue Musikalische Phrase einsetzt, lässt er eine kleine Pause machen und wechselt auch gern ein wenig das Tempo. Ich habe mir*

Literalists have sometimes misused the last part of this quotation to argue against tempo modification in Brahms, claiming that one should not do anything that is not written in the score when performing his music. I shall return to this in Chapter 1.5 on Brahms's assumed preference for a "middle way." The remark that Bülow's conducting was always calculated for effect is highly relevant for the purpose of examining the relationship between Bülow and Brahms.

My conclusion is that, in light of these later critical observations, the fact that Brahms insisted on conducting many of the performances of the *Fourth Symphony* himself, taking Bülow's place, gives me sufficient grounds to think that his remark "Wait, gentlemen, until you hear this work conducted by Bülow" should be understood as exactly the mixture of sarcasm and self-depreciation that Brahms was known for. It should not be taken as a confession by Brahms that Bülow's rendering of the *Fourth Symphony* was superior to his own.

It is entirely possible that Brahms preferred to hear his symphony conducted by himself (straight from the heart) rather than Bülow (calculated for effect). As composer-conductor Richard Strauss noted:

> After the hyper-refined inventive and resourceful manner in which Bülow had interpreted Brahms's music, Brahms's own simpler and more sober way of conducting these pieces made no particular impression. But one heard the work itself.[49]

I believe that it is quite possible that Brahms conducted the symphony himself because he wanted to hear the work itself.

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das in meinen Symphonien ernstlich verbeten; wenn ich es haben wollte, würde ich es hinschreiben.

[49] Huschke, *Johannes Brahms,* p. 49. *Nach der überfeinen, geistreichen Art, wie Bülow die Brahms-Werke dargestellt hatte, konnte die einfache Sitte mit der Brahms die Stücke selbst dirigierte, keinen sonderlichen Eindrück machen. Aber man hat das Werk gehört*!

Conclusion

Bülow's ground-breaking work with the Meiningen Orchestra makes him one of the most important conductors of the nineteenth century and possibly of all time. The critical opinions that Brahms, Weingartner, and others expressed about some aspects of his highly personal interpretations, which often seem to have included exaggerations, are reason for me to try and avoid those characteristics in my own performances. At the same time, it is quite clear, given the success of his tours, that his efforts with the Meiningen Orchestra led to an exceptional level of orchestral discipline, expression, and ensemble playing, which made the orchestra a shining example for many musicians in the nineteenth century. It is also important to acknowledge the fact that Brahms was a loyal attendee at Bülow's later concerts in Berlin, so whatever criticism he may have had of him should not be mistaken for a total rejection of his art.

1.4 Fritz Steinbach and the Meiningen Orchestra

After a brief period (from December 1885 to April 1886) in which Richard Strauss took over as chief conductor following the sudden departure of Bülow, German conductor and composer Fritz Steinbach (1855-1916) became Bülow's true successor. Brahms had recommended Steinbach to Duke Georg II. Steinbach held the post from 1886 to 1903. It was not easy for him to follow in Bülow's footsteps, but his relationship with Brahms offered him a path forward that would eventually lead to worldwide recognition of his qualities as a conductor. Luckily, most of the excellent players stayed in the Meiningen Orchestra after Bülow's departure. The first attempt to continue the tradition of taking the Meiningen Orchestra on tour, which Steinbach undertook as early as 1887, made it clear that without Bülow's name on the programme, the public showed little interest in hearing the orchestra. The tour turned out to be a financial debacle, which led to Duke Georg's decision to put further plans for concerts outside Meiningen on hold. Steinbach subsequently decided to dedicate a substantial amount of his time to collaborating with a choir, extending the repertoire of the orchestra to works that required it. In the years 1887-1890, he organised performances of works such as Haydn's *Seasons*, Händel's *Judas Maccabaeus,* Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony,* and, in 1890, Johann Sebastian Bach's *Matthew Passion* with 300 musicians in the church in Meiningen. The success of these productions led to renewed interest in the concerts of the Meiningen Orchestra and its new conductor.

After the debacle of his tour in 1887, Steinbach also focused on Brahms's orchestral music. Steinbach's relationship with Brahms did not start in Meiningen. Geiringer reported that Steinbach had tried to persuade Brahms to accept him as a student in 1875. Brahms, famous for his dislike of teaching, did not accept him as a student but, according to Geiringer, "put his refusal so nicely that he quite won the young man's heart."[50] Steinbach went on to follow Brahms's recommendations and studied with people like

[50] Geiringer, *Brahms*, p. 130.

the Viennese pianist, teacher and Beethoven scholar Gustav Nottebohm (1817-1882), and with conductor and composer Otto Dessoff (1835-1892). Having been trained and schooled by peers whom Brahms trusted and respected, he was in an excellent position to make the best possible use of Brahms's visits to Meiningen to learn to understand the symphonies under his guidance. By studying the composer's own rehearsals and performances and through his frequent interactions with Brahms, Steinbach had exhaustive opportunities to absorb the composer's approach to music-making as well as Brahms's preferences for the performance of his own music.[51] In his biography *Johannes Brahms*, Max Kalbeck elaborated on Brahms's appreciation of the young conductor:

> Often enough he gratefully showed Steinbach his full satisfaction when he noticed how attentively he observed his slightest hints, how cleverly and resourcefully he traced his most hidden intentions, with what devotion, bordering on self-sacrifice, he drove the orchestra to the highest and strongest utterances of concentrated power. Equally far removed from the shallow rostrum virtuoso as from the pedantic time beater, Steinbach was the conscientious, devoted friend serving the good cause. As a conductor too, he found his role model in Brahms, who with the baton could fire up and drive forward like the best, when in front of an orchestra that was devoted to him and an audience that was sympathetic to him. Bülow the conqueror, had been succeeded by Steinbach the consolidator. He [Steinbach] kept in his mind and in his heart the impression of Brahms, as he conducted the Haydn Variations, the Piano Concerto in B flat Major, with d'Albert as a soloist, and the F Major Symphony, for an electrified audience on Christmas day 1887, and he became Brahms's faithful guardian, his trusted adviser, dedicated follower and expert interpreter of his art.[52]

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[51] Pasternack, J. R. "Brahms in der Meininger Tradition – His Symphonies and Haydn Variations According to the Markings of Fritz Steinbach", Edited by Walter Blume: A Complete Translation with Background and Commentary" D.M.A. Diss., University of Washington, 2004, p. xi.

[52] Kalbeck, M. *Johannes Brahms*. Deutsche Brahms Gesellschaft, Berlin, 1914, Book. IV/1, p. 81. *Oft genug gab er […] Steinbach dankbar seine volle Zufriedenheit zu erkennen, wenn er wahrnahm, wie aufmerksam jener seine leisesten Winke beachtete, wie klug und findig er seinen verborgensten Intentionen nachspürte, mit welcher an Selbstaufopferung grenzender Hingebung er das Orchester zu den höchsten und stärksten Äußerungen gebändigter Kraft antrieb. Vom gefallsüchtigen Pultvirtuosen wie vom pedantischen Tackschläger gleichweit entfernt, war Steinbach der gewissenhafte, der Person in der Sache dienende ergebene Freund. Auch als Dirigent erkannte er sein Vorbild in Brahms, der, mit dem Tackstock anfeuern und fortreißen konnte wie irgendeiner, wenn er ein ihm ergebens Orchester und ein ihm sympathisches Publikum vor sich hatte. Auf Bülow der Eroberer war Steinbach, der Befestiger, gefolgt. Brahms, wie er am Weihnachtstage 1887 die Haydn-Variationen, das von d'Albert*

Kalbeck, with his colourful language and his very personal style, can perhaps not always be considered to be the most reliable source. Yet what I find striking in his description of the collaboration between Brahms and Steinbach is the closeness of the two men and the selfless devotion of Steinbach to Brahms's music. These qualities, as also confirmed in other sources, distinguished this new relationship between composer and conductor from the one Brahms had had with Bülow. Brahms sometimes honoured Steinbach, for instance, by sharing the podium with him and taking turns leading the orchestra at concerts. This kind of shared responsibility had also been an element in the relationship between Bülow and Brahms, but as noted above, not without some tension. On the occasion of their reconciliation, Bülow gave Brahms a postcard on which he had written "Executive. Legislative." under their images, meaning that Brahms composed the music and Bülow conducted it. In light of Kalbeck's description of their relationship, I think he would have accepted this division of responsibilities much more readily from Steinbach. Kalbeck also referred to this when he wrote that Steinbach re-adjusted (*neu reguliert*) the arrangement.

gespielte B-Dur Konzert und die F-Dur Symphonie dem elektrisierten Auditorium vorführte, blieb ihm vor Augen und im Herzen stehen, und er wurde der treue Hüter und Berater, der begeisterte Bekenner und kundige Deuter seiner Kunst.

Figure 1.1: A Postcard from Bülow to Brahms.[53]

After nine years of study and work, and one year after Bülow's death, Steinbach proved himself to the world as a great conductor, a worthy successor to Bülow, and above all, as the preeminent Brahms conductor of his time at a festival in September 1895 (*Sachsen-Meiningschen Landesfest*) dedicated to the 3 B's (Bach, Beethoven and Brahms). In the many concerts and tours with the Meiningen Orchestra that followed, he established himself as the ideal interpreter of Brahms's orchestral works. Steinbach maintained a close relationship with Brahms until the composer's death in 1897. After his last tour with the Meiningen Orchestra had ended in 1903, he took over the Gürzenich Orchestra in Cologne. Steinbach's tenure in Cologne consolidated

[53] Photograph shown by Allan Walker, *Hans von Bülow, A Life and Times*, p. 327. Beneath the picture Bülow has written a further inscription 'Hans von Bülow zu freundlichen Erinnern an Mainz, 16 Nov' ('In friendly remembrance of Mainz, November 16').

his position and opened opportunities for him to conduct all over Europe and in New York.[54]

Although his international successes are impressive, when it comes to choosing a style of applying modifications in a manner that Brahms might have known and appreciated, I believe the focus must remain on Steinbach's work with the Meiningen Orchestra. Sources such as the reviews by Alexander Berrsche and John Alexander Fuller Maitland suggest that no conductor came closer to Brahms's ideal way of applying these modifications than Steinbach in his collaboration with that particular orchestra. The fact that his style of interpreting the Brahms symphonies involved much that was not found in the printed score but rather was added of his own accord, as Spohr might have put it, is confirmed by a critic for the *Musical Times*, who wrote in 1902 that he had the impression that the conductor (Steinbach) seemed to be recreating the music rather than giving a rendering of it.[55] An extended feature article in *The Times* of 16 April 1910, almost certainly by Fuller Maitland, provides another description of Steinbach's way of performing Brahms with the Meiningen Orchestra which underpinned the unique quality of their collaboration:

> The Meiningen Orchestra under Herr Steinbach was *hors concours*; their Brahms playing, absolutely non-metric and absolutely unified, was a unique revelation.[56]

The fact that the writer calls the playing "absolutely non-metric" is striking to me. He might have chosen words such as "very free'' or "elastic'', but he wrote "absolutely non-metric'', which suggests to me another level of

[54] In his book *Conducting the Brahms Symphonies*, Christopher Dyment gives a wonderful overview of Steinbach's career during and after his Meiningen years, quoting many important witnesses of his Brahms performances with orchestras in London, New York, and elsewhere. These are very helpful and important when it comes to understanding how Steinbach's style may have developed over time.

[55] "The Meiningen Orchestra." *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 43, no. 718 (1902): 819–819. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3369511. (Last accessed August 2022)

[56] Dyment, C. *Conducting the Brahms Symphonies from Brahms to Boult*. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2016, p. 156.

freedom and a different concept of tempo. I will discuss my understanding of this concept of tempo in Chapter 1.7.

The style of playing of the Meiningen Orchestra under Steinbach may have been a unique revelation in the world of orchestral performance, but in chamber music and solo playing, such non-metric playing was also practised by others. Maitland's description of Steinbach's style is reminiscent of a description of the elasticity of Joachim's playing in his biography of the German violinist and composer, which the author attributed to the British musicologist Donald Tovey. It contains a more detailed description of non-metrical music making:

> The moulding of his phrases, as it may be called, is inimitable, for it consists of slight modifications of the strict metronomic value of the notes, together with slight variations of power such as no marks of expression could convey. 'Elasticity' is the word which best expresses the effect of his delivery of some characteristic themes; as in a perfect *rubato* there is a feeling of resilience, of rebound, in the sequence of the notes, a constant and perfect restoration of balance between pressure and resistance taking place, as an india rubber ball resumes its original shape after being pressed. Compared with this kind of subtle modification, the phrasing of many players who lack a keen sense of rhythm, but who wish to play in a free style, suggests the same pressure when applied to a lump of dough; the slackening of pace is here made up by no acceleration in another place as it is with the great artists. It is, perhaps, this subjection to the real laws of rhythm that makes Joachim an extraordinarily easy player to accompany; one seems to know what he is going to do before he does it, and the notes of his phrases seem to follow a natural curve which, once started, must pursue an inevitable course.[57]

Tovey wrote about the relation between elasticity and the real laws of rhythm, stressing the importance of a balanced handling of rubato. Fuller Maitland's description of the playing as "absolutely non-metric" means that Steinbach's modifications must have been substantial. His qualification that the Meiningen Orchestra's playing was "absolutely unified," I think, goes beyond the togetherness of the ensemble playing. It suggests not only that Steinbach's modifications never undermined the sense of unity in a

[57] Fuller Maitland, J. A. *Joseph Joachim.* Ballantyne, Hanson & Co., Edinburgh, 1905, p. 28.

movement or composition, but also that they served to create a sense of necessity and wholeness of the work.

Conclusion

With Brahms's help, Steinbach developed an unsurpassed level of flexibility in his performances of the composer's music with the highly accomplished orchestra that Bülow had left behind in Meiningen. While plentiful, the descriptions of his style quoted above suggest that his modifications of rhythm and tempo never threatened or undermined the music's sense of unity. In that respect, in striking a balance between modification and unity, Steinbach's style seems to have been superior to Bülow's. Taking a step back, we may even say that as Bülow prepared the orchestra for the arrival of Brahms, allowing him to make music "straight from the heart," he also – for the entirety of his tenure – prepared the orchestra for Steinbach, who could develop his highly refined style of modification with an orchestra that had already been trained to follow the conductor's every whim.[58]

Though, as I have shown above, there are significant differences between Bülow's and Steinbach's style of performing Brahms, I think that there is also a continuum through their work with the Meiningen Orchestra. I am confirmed in this belief by a choice of words by Alexander Berrsche in a 1937 review of a performance of Brahms's *Fourth Symphony* under the direction of the Austrian conductor Oswald Kabasta (1896-1946). In it, Berrsche refers to Kabasta's style as more closely related to the style of Arthur Nikisch (1855-1922) than to the "somewhat snappy austerity" (*zackigen Herbheiten*) of the Bülow-Steinbach tradition.[59] Berrsche, who praised Steinbach lavishly on other occasions, thus presented a very brief but fascinating qualification of the Meiningen style. What I find relevant for the point I am trying to make here is his reference to the Bülow-Steinbach-

[58] See the quotation earlier in this chapter in which Kalbeck calls Bülow a conqueror and Steinbach a consolidator.
[59] Berrsche, *Musik und Betrachtung, Trösterin Musika*, p. 249.

Meiningen style as a single thing, stressing the connection between Bülow's work and Steinbach's,

Regardless of how Steinbach's performance style in Brahms's music may have evolved after his tenure in Meiningen, I am most interested in his style of performance with the Meiningen Orchestra, particularly because of Brahms's direct involvement in the development of that style.

Reviews and other descriptions by contemporary writers and ear witnesses can help one understand the unique qualities of this style. Berrsche, for instance, commented on Steinbach's significance as a Brahms conductor on the occasion of Steinbach's death in 1916:

> When Brahms died, many people might have comforted themselves with the thought that Steinbach was still alive. How can we find consolation now that Steinbach is dead? Anyone who has once experienced what a Brahms performance under this conductor meant and has taken in how the other – even the best – orchestral conductors are used to performing Brahms's symphonies, knows that with Steinbach's passing Brahms has died for the second time. A real and truthful tradition perished before it could take root, and with it at the same time a culture of making music with the orchestra, without which the content of this tradition cannot be expressed. People got used to praising Steinbach only as the effective master of external structure and powerful climaxes. Certainly, he was that too, but such praise, in its one-sidedness, muddled the image of this man and has also been used often enough as indirect criticism. But that so few had the ears to hear from Steinbach's Brahms interpretations the great width of expressions of the cantilena, the measured dynamics, the absolutely plastic phrasing and the ever so rare, natural rubato, is both embarrassing and ridiculous at the same time. I have often tried to demonstrate the nature of Steinbach's agogic in detail and will keep doing so on other occasions. But all discussions of individual examples are just a stammer in relation to the overall conception of Steinbach's music-making. It lives indescribably and unforgettably in the memory of everyone who has got to know it. I think he knew well that he had few learning listeners among the conductors, and it was clear to him that his work, which had made many happy, was at the same time a silent demonstration against widespread lack of understanding.[60]

[60] Ibid, pp. 580-581. *Als Brahms starb, mochte sich wohl mancher mit dem Gedanken getröstet haben, daß Steinbach noch lebe. Was soll uns über den Tod Steinbachs trösten? Wer nun einmal erlebt hat, was eine Brahms-Aufführung unter diesem Dirigenten bedeutete, und sich vergegenwärtigt, wie die anderen – auch die besten – Orchesterleiter Brahmssche Symphonien wiederzugeben gewohnt sind, der weiß, daß mit Steinbachs Hinscheiden Brahms zum zweitenmal gestorben ist. Eine echte und richtige Tradition ist zugrunde gegangen, noch ehe sie Wurzel fassen konnte, und mit ihr zugleich eine Kultur des Musizierens mit dem Orchester,*

Berrsche's obituary is important on various levels. First of all, it confirms once again the closeness between Brahms and Steinbach and the uniquely Brahmsian style of performing Brahms's orchestral works that Steinbach had developed. But what Berrsche also makes clear is that this style was lost on Steinbach's death, as it had not yet taken root. He pointed to how it lived on in the memories of those who got to know it – "indescribably and unforgettably" – and how any attempt to describe certain traits of Steinbach's style in detail was, in fact, futile when compared to the totality of his way of music making. Berrsche's words make it clear to me that I should not leave any stone unturned in my efforts to understand Steinbach's style, but also that I should avoid any claim that my research would enable me to perform in his style today. If his contemporaries felt that Steinbach's style could not be recreated immediately after his death, who am I to claim that I would be able to do so more than 100 years later?

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ohne die der Inhalt dieser Tradition nicht ausgedrückt werden kann. Mann hatte sich daran gewöhnt, Steinbach nur als den wirkungsvollen Meister des äußeren Aufbaus und der großen Steigerung zu loben. Gewiß, er ist auch das gewesen, aber solches Lob verwirrte in seiner Einseitigkeit das Bild dieses Mannes und ist auch oft genug dazu benutzt worden, einen Tadel dahinter zu verbergen. Daß aber so wenige die Ohren hatten, aus den Steinbachschen Brahms-Interpretationen die große Ausdrucksgewalt der Kantilene, die abgetönte Dynamik, die absolut plastische Phrasierung und das so seltene, natürliche Rubato herauszuhören, das ist beschämend und lächerlich zugleich. Ich habe öfters an Einzelheiten gerade die Art des Steinbachschen Agogik zu demonstrieren versucht und werde dies auch bei anderen Gelegenheiten noch tun. Aber alle Besprechungen einzelner Züge sind nur ein Gestammel gegenüber dem wahren Gesamtbild des Steinbachschen Musizierens. Unbeschreiblich und unvergesslich lebt es jedem in der Erinnerung, der es kennengelernt hat. – Ich glaube, er hat es wohl gewußt, daß er unter den Dirigenten wenig lernende Hörer gehabt hat, und er war sich klar darüber, daß sein Wirken, das viele beglückt hat, zugleich eine stumme Demonstration gegen weitverbreitetes Unverständnis war.

Figure 1.2: A portrait of Fritz Steinbach, signed by him in 1907.[61]

[61] Signed copy of photograph in possession of author.

1.5 Walter Blume's Brahms in der Meininger Tradition on Modifications of Rhythm and Tempo

In his printed manuscript *Brahms in der Meininger Tradition*, German conductor and Brahms scholar Walter Blume (1883-1933) provided a detailed account of Fritz Steinbach's style of performing Brahms.[62] I came across this document some fifteen years ago after Walter Frisch at Columbia University gave me a photocopy of his copy of the text. Blume's text is now readily available, but that was not the case at the time. An edition of the original German text (Olms, Hildesheim 2018) came on the market in 2018, and Jonathan Robert Pasternack provided a full English translation in his 2004 dissertation.[63]

Over the past ten years, I have been fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to realise most of what Blume suggests in performances, if not all of it. These experiences have shown me that however detailed and comprehensive Blume's text may be, it only offers answers to a limited number of the many performance questions that a conductor looking for a historically informed approach to Brahms's orchestral music needs to consider. This holds true for the many issues Blume does not discuss in his text as well as for those he does discuss. To illustrate this last point, I will give one example of a passage at the end of this chapter in which I have implemented Blume's suggestion for modification of tempo as part of a more substantive modification of my own design.

As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation, I worked with Blume's suggestions well before I started my evaluation and re-evaluation of the historical evidence of nineteenth-century orchestral practices as part of my PhD research. Looking back on that experience, I recognise the possibility of incorporating much of what Blume wrote into a wide range of approaches to the performance of this repertoire, including ones that ignore the bulk of

[62] Blume, W. *Brahms in der Meiniger Tradition.*
[63] Pasternack, J. R. "Brahms in der Meininger Tradition – His Symphonies and Haydn Variations According to the Markings of Fritz Steinbach"

historical evidence concerning nineteenth-century orchestral performance practices (like my own approach until the start of my PhD research in 2018).

If one wants to use Blume's text as a guide for developing a style of performance, it is important to have a closer look at the question of what it can and cannot tell us. Christopher Dyment, who gives a valuable assessment of the way one can view Blume's text in his book *Conducting the Brahms Symphonies*, pointed out that there are many important questions surrounding Blume's work to which one does not have – and in most cases can no longer expect to find – answers. These are questions that concern a wide range of issues, including the frequency with which Blume may or may not have heard Steinbach perform Brahms, the evident errors in the text, the exact source of Blume's annotations, and the matter of how many of his own ideas Blume may have inserted into his text. Given all the questions surrounding it, I agree with Dyment's conclusion that Blume's text, which he calls "a tertiary source" in relation to Brahms's work (as does Pasternack), should be treated as an aid towards reconstructing the Meiningen style, but certainly not as an infallible guide.[64]

I will proceed to discuss Blume's remarks concerning modifications in the introduction of his text and in his remarks concerning the first movement of the *Fourth Symphony*. The remarks on this movement can be considered as being representative of the whole of Blume's text. It is not always possible to isolate the issue of tempo modification from the issue of tempo and other issues, so I have sometimes broadened the scope of my selection of Blume's suggestions a little to provide necessary context. I provide my own relatively free translation of Blume's text. When Blume makes references to specific pages and lines in his score (which is in a format that does not correspond with modern editions), I have replaced these with bar numbers.

[64] Dyment, C. *Conducting the Brahms Symphonies.* pp. 150-155.

In his introduction, Blume wrote that the element of rhythm, and the precision in its execution, had become more important in musical performance compared to earlier times (his text is from the year of the centenary of Brahms's birth, 1933).[65] Blume conceded that rhythmic precision need not, in itself, be a defect, but that it should not become mechanical 'as it is in jazz'.[66] Blume also assumed that the general tendency to take faster tempos in classical music at the time could be related to the preference for strict tempo and rhythm.[67] He goes on to argue that a successful performance requires a flexible tempo, with moments of speeding up and slowing down. As Blume mentioned, one can find at least tendencies towards such moments in almost every theme. In his words, "it is important not to lose the electroscopic fine feeling for the slightest tempo modifications, and rather cultivate and develop it as a counterweight to a rhythm with a motor-like precision."[68] (Underlined by Blume). Blume

[65] The year 1933, in which Hitler came to power, is of course a pivotal year in German politics. The Nazis started a campaign against what they called 'unemotional', 'mechanical' and 'soul-less' foreign influences in music - namely Jewish and African-American influences. In this context, the term jazz was an easy placeholder for music and musicians that fell into these categories. Close reading of Blume's text, however, does not reveal anything to suggest that he may have shared the feelings of the Nazis towards jazz music, or any other opinions about jazz music that he might have had beyond its rhythmic features. In fact he specifically states on the first page of his introduction that he aims neither to judge nor to fully comprehend the influence of jazz in (classical) music-making. *Es ist jedoch nicht der Zweck dieser Zeilen, über diese Erscheinungen Werturteile zu fälllen oder sie zu ergründen.*

[66] What Blume calls 'jazz music' is not necessarily what we understand it to be today. It is not unlikely that he refers to what Arnold Schoenberg called 'primitive dance music' in *Style and Idea* (reprint of the original edition; Faber, London, 1975 ed. Leonard Stein, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984), p. 320: 'Today's manner of performing classical music of the so-called 'romantic' type, suppressing all emotional qualities and all un-notated changes of tempo and expression, derives from the style of playing primitive dance music […] Thus almost everywhere in Europe music is played in a stiff inflexible metre – not in tempo, i.e. according to a yardstick of freely measured quantities.' Consideration of the complex interactions between 'classical' and 'popular' music-making during first half of the 20th-century, however, is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

[67] Philip, in *Early Recordings*, points out that in the 1930's musicians began to turn away from the early twentieth-century trend towards higher maximum speeds.

[68] Blume: *Es gilt also, das elektroskopisch feine Gefühl für geringste Tempo-Modifikationen nicht verloren zu lassen, sondern es zu pflegen und zu bilden als Gegengewicht zu einer nur motorenhaft präzisen Rhythmik.* (underlined by Blume)

emphasised that tempo modifications should not be exaggerated and stressed that one needs to strike a careful balance between the poles of rhythm and melody. Tempo modifications, according to Blume, bring rhythm and melody to life.

Blume's suggestions concerning modifications illustrate the intricate connections between modifications of rhythm and modifications of tempo, in the sense that the one requires or causes the other. If one wants to elongate individual notes, such as Blume suggests in some of the examples given below, there are often consequences for the flow of tempo. Theoretically, one might argue that it is possible to maintain the same tempo in the accompaniment and to disconnect the layer of the music within which the modifications of rhythm are to take place from the steady flow of tempo, resulting in vertical asynchrony as discussed in Chapter 1.1. But on closer inspection one can see that the suggestions Blume makes often do not allow for such a solution. In the list below, I specify which modifications of rhythm have consequences for modifications of tempo. I have left those modifications of rhythm that do not require a modification of tempo in the domain of modification of rhythm, such as is the case in my first two suggestions.

FOURTH SYMPHONY, FIRST MOVEMENT, ALLEGRO NON TROPPO

1) Blume's remarks concerning the phrasing of the movement's opening statement of the main theme can be seen as a form of modification of rhythm, certainly when considered in combination with his remarks on the upbeats in bars 13-16 as they seem to involve a delicate lengthening of notes:

> The upbeat should always be emphasised and the downbeat less so. If one imagines the bar line to be moved forward by a quarter-note, one achieves the proper phrasing, and it is a good thing to imagine the theme like that. In Steinbach's marking, this is what the theme looks like:

Bars 1-6:
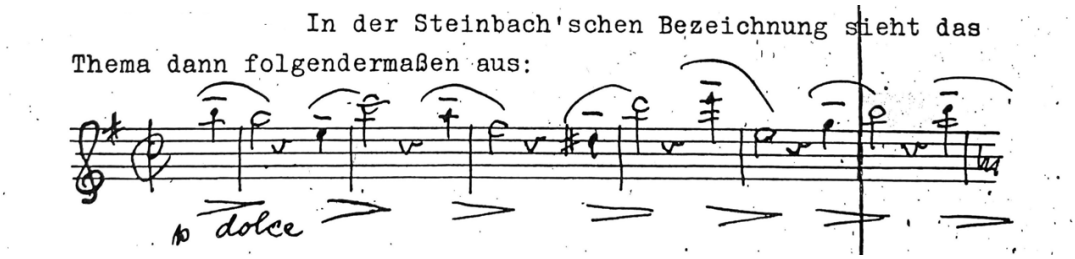
Figure 1.3: Blume *Brahms in der Meininger Tradition* page 66.

In bars 11 to 14 Blume proposes "long" upbeats, meaning that the eighth notes should not be swallowed up. Brahms expressed this only through his diminuendo signs. The eighth note upbeats, however, need also support in timing by applying a "tenuto."[69]

Bars 13-16:

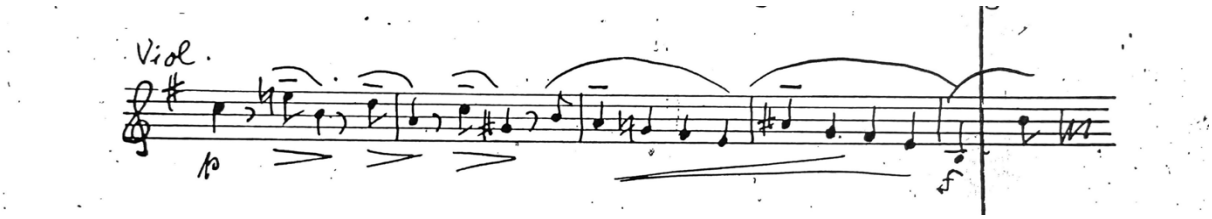

Figure 1.4: Blume page 67.

2) At letter A, Blume's remarks concerning the phrasing again involve a form of modification of rhythm of the subtlest kind, as the suggestions for emphasis have delicate consequences for the execution of the rhythm of the notes marked with tenuto and in hairpin markings:

At letter A, the theme is distributed between first and second violins and dissolved in eighth note octaves. One should observe the various nuances. In contrast to the beginning, here, in the 4 bars after letter A, through a hairpin <> into the one, the one is emphasised, but in the 4th bar again, as before the last quarter-note is emphasised. The emphasis on the one happens here as a counterweight to the fourth beat quarter-note suspensions in the woodwinds.

Bars 19-27 (letter A and following):

[69] Blume first explains what he means by tenuto signs in his suggestions for the first movement of the *First Symphony* on page 13 of his document. His text is somewhat at odds with his suggestion of lengthening the upbeats here: 'In no case should the impression be given that the notes here should become lengthened by the tenuto sign. More to the point these notes just receive special emphasis. Should the tenuto sign ever represent lengthening of the note value, this is to be indicated by the word *rubato*').
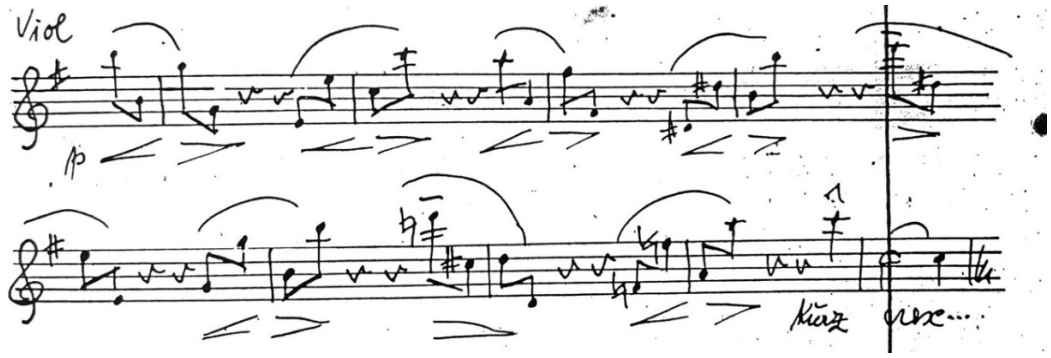
Figure 1.5: Blume page 67.

3) The accented bar is lifted out of the general flow of the tempo through the emphasised accents. This is a more substantial form of modification of rhythm that results in an explicit modification of tempo:

> In the flowing 'Alla breve stream', bar 76 stands firmly, as a 4/4, with broad bow strokes, the strings should emphasise each quarter note equally.

Bar 76-78:

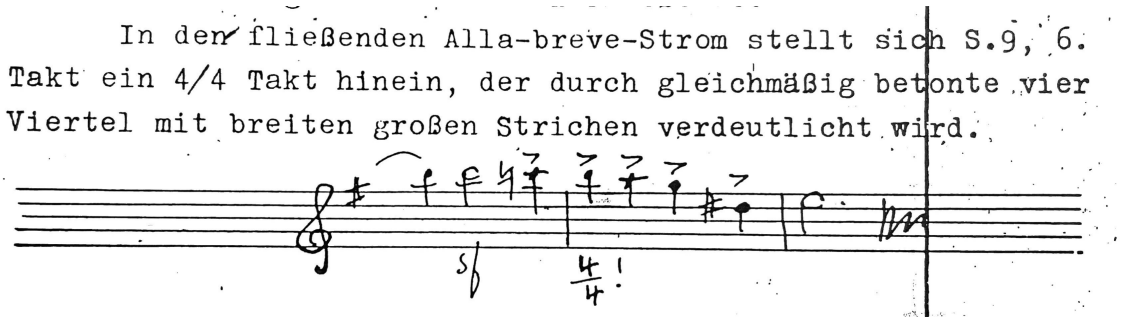

Figure 1.6: Blume page 68.

Many examples of this can be found elsewhere in Blume's text in which the pattern of beats from the conductor is connected to these kinds of tempo modifications. In this case, beating four beats in bar 76, as opposed to two beats per bar in the surrounding bars (alla breve) would suggest to the orchestra to temporarily slow the flow of the tempo.

4) Blume links his suggestion to lengthen the upbeat of the phrase four bars after letter D to the broad character of the phrase:

> The D sharp upbeat in the fourth bar of letter D is a long upbeat and must give the violin phrase the necessary broadness.

Bar 91-95:

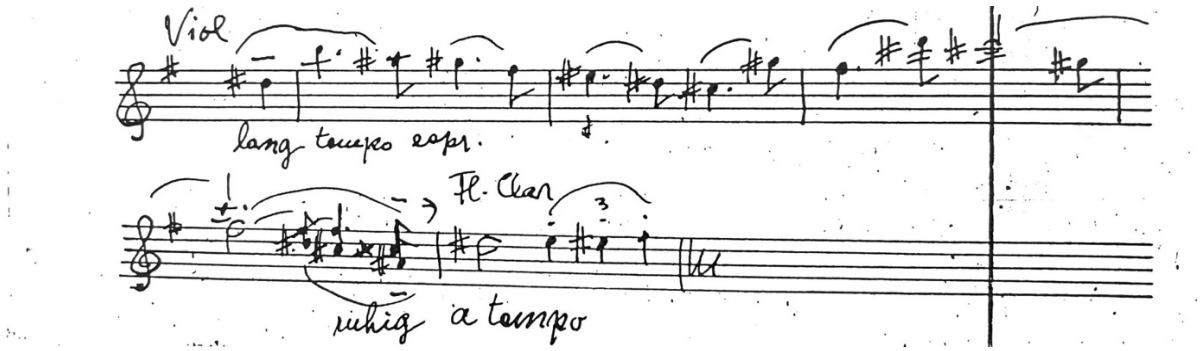

Figure 1.7: Blume page 68.

On the second line of the example given by Blume and shown here above, one can see “ruhig” followed by “a tempo” in his hand. As he notes:

> The C double sharp/A sharp (before the entry of the theme in flute, clarinet, and horns [sic], in bar 94/95, must be clearly heard. To achieve this, one must play them not too short and play a small ‘breath pause.’

This remark qualifies as modification of tempo, as the marking in the music example suggests a return to a tempo in bar 95.

5) This suggestion clearly exemplifies a modification of tempo:

> At letter F, two four-bar phrases start as transition periods to the main theme; these should be separated from each other by a short fermata or, even better, by a ritardando. Thus, one should make a ritardando in the bar before letter F, as well as the fourth and eighth bars in F. Then one takes up the original tempo again.

Blume misplaces his ritardandi by one bar; they probably are more linked to the hairpins in the third and seventh bar after letter F than to the fourth and eighth. There are plenty of instances of mistakes regarding the exact placement of things in the score in his text. I would suggest that this is one of those mistakes. Even if one does not accept this suggestion, I think that it

is hard to imagine a ritardando that would take place exclusively in the fourth and eighth bar of letter F, with no modification in the previous bars.

Bars 134-147 (from my score, not from Blume's text)
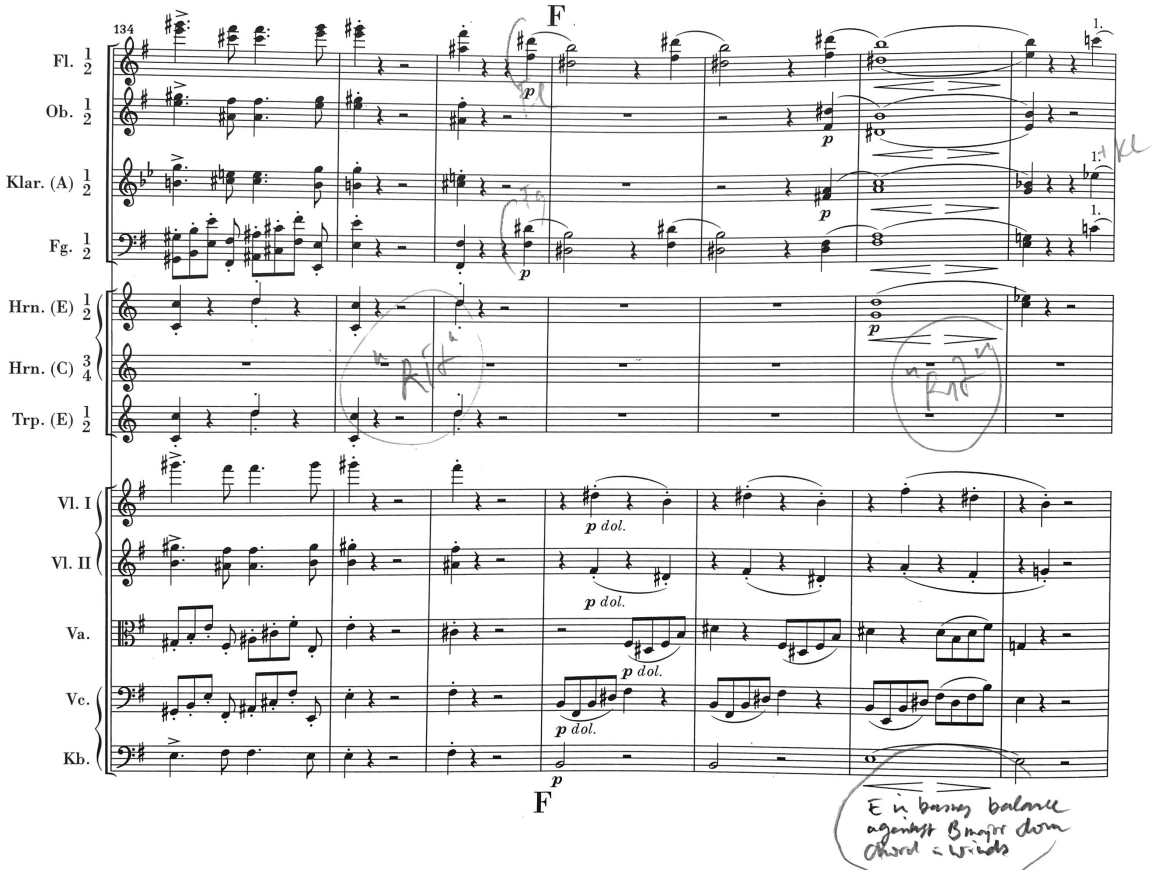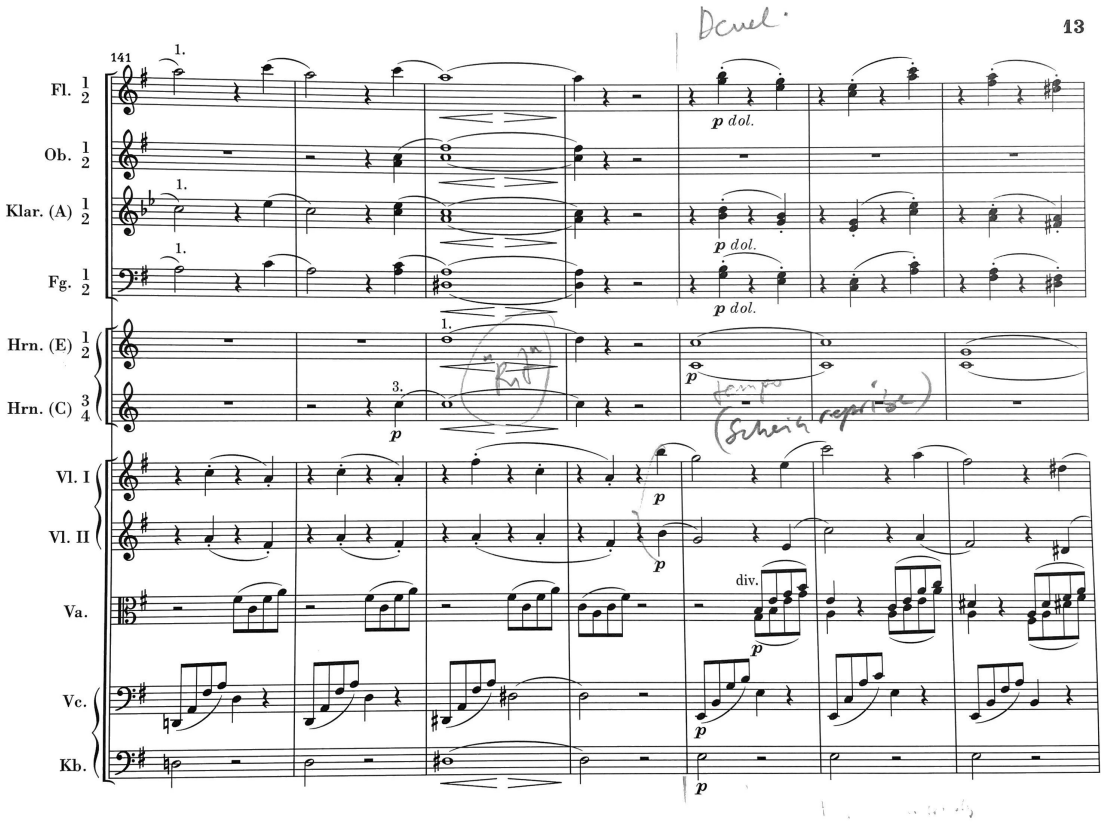
Figure 1.8: Breitkopf & Härtel Urtext Edition Fourth Symphony (Score) pages 12-13.

6) This is an example of the implications for modification of rhythm connected to hairpins, with very subtle potential consequences for the tempo. It concerns a fairly detailed description of rubato in which the time that was "stolen" in the first half of the bar is given back in the second:

> The episode at letter K should be shaped very freely, and must altogether diminish until the 'ppp' before letter L. The first halves of the bar should each time expand a little, so that the half notes with crescendo may be beautifully 'spun.' The eighth notes of the second half of the bar follow more or less in tempo.

Bars 227-228 (letter K)

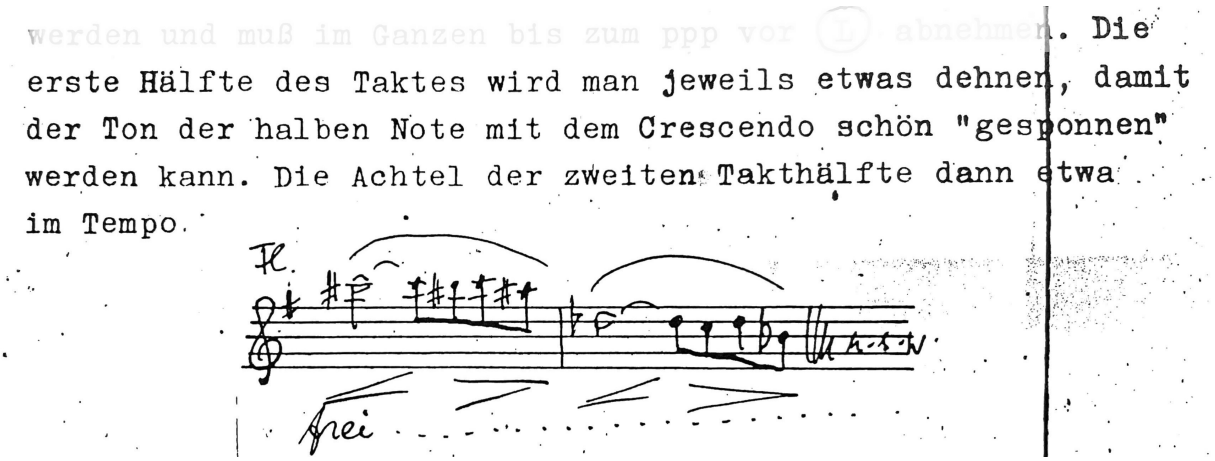

Figure 1.9: Blume page 71.

Blume gives many examples of this technique, sometimes describing the required modification even more specifically than he does here, as can be seen in this example from the end of the first movement of the *Second Symphony*, in which he instructs the flute and oboe to rush and fall back in tempo:

Bars 502-503 of the first movement of the *Second Symphony*

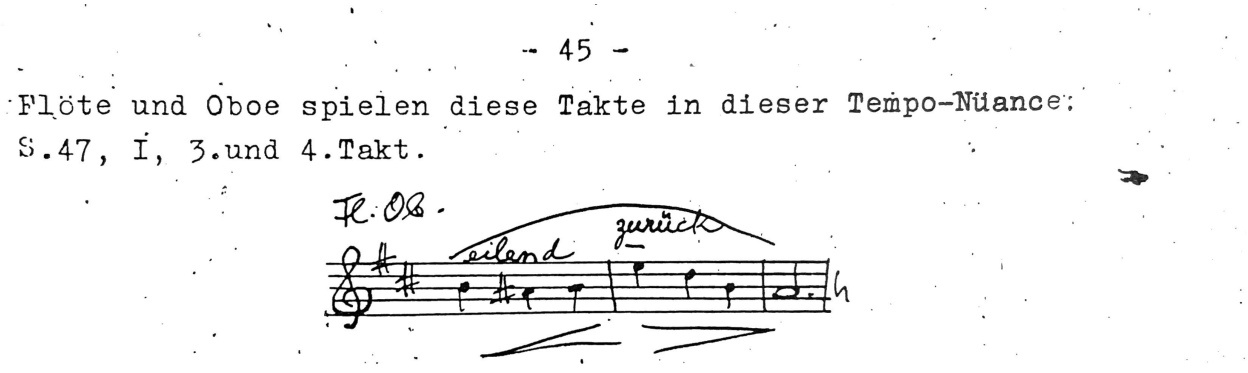

Figure 1.10: Blume page 45.

Each of Blume's examples confirms what one can learn from other sources: the hairpins are to be read and understood as signs indicating expression involving tempo flexibility, and not merely dynamics, as they are often understood today.

There is an abundance of evidence dealing with this way of understanding the hairpins. In their *Violinschule,* Joachim and Moser, for example, make an explicit connection between hairpins, vibrato, and agogic inflection:

> Here the vibrato requires not only a brief lingering on the notes marked with <>, but the bow must also support the trembling with a light pressure on the string. The time lost on the vibrated note must be regained from the notes that follow, so that the proceeding takes place without in any way interrupting the rhythmic flow of the passage.[70]

Applying Joachim and Moser's words to this particular suggestion by Blume, one may assume that the technique of beautifully spinning the half note in the first half of the bar requires some added bow pressure. In his article *The Brahmsian Hairpin*, scholar and pianist David Hyun-Su Kim gives examples of the fact that this way of looking at hairpins can be found in many other sources. Authors such as Hugo Riemann and Arnold Schoenberg confirmed that the hairpins relating to more than one note must be understood as being not so much dynamic markings, but rather as expressive indications frequently associated with rhythmic inflection.[71] In his book *Classical and Romantic Performance Practice*, Brown notes that in Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms, the hairpin, when it relates to one note, seemed to generally require a warm but not too powerful accent, perhaps with an agogic element in some instances, and vibrato where appropriate.[72] Brown also writes that the sign generally implied vibrato. I will return to this subject in the section on vibrato in Chapter 3.

Concerning the necessity to regain the time lost in the first half of the hairpins by speeding up in the second half, it is noteworthy that Brahms

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[70] Joachim, J. and Moser, A. *Violinschule.* Simrock, Berlin, 1905, pp. III -7. *Das vibrato erfordert hierbei nicht nur ein kurzes Verweilen auf der mit dem Zeichen <> versehenen Note; auch der Bogen unterstützt die Bebung durch einen leisen Nachdruck auf die Saite. Die auf dem vibrierten Ton verlorene Zeit ist mit den folgenden Noten so geschickt wieder einzubringen.*

[71] Kim, D. H. "The Brahmsian Hairpin" in *19th-Century Music* 36, no. 1 (2012) pp. 46-57. https://doi.org/10.1525/ncm.2012.36.1.046. (Last accessed August 2019).

[72] Brown, C. *Classical and Romantic Performing Practice: 1750–1900.* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, pp. 126-127.

himself – at least by one account – did not always feel obliged to do so. In 1929, the pianist Fanny Davies (1861-1934), a student of Carl Reinecke and Clara Schumann, who had performed with Joachim and who had heard Brahms perform, wrote the following in her contribution to *Cobbett's Cyclopaedic Survey of Chamber Music:*

> The sign <>, 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 idea, as if unable to tear himself away from its beauty. He would prefer to lengthen a bar or phrase rather than spoil it by making up the time into a metronomic bar.[73]

I take this quote as an encouragement not to worry about making up for all the time I may have used in bringing out expressive effects in hairpins within the bar or phrase, as Brahms himself was - at least by this account - not overly concerned with it.

7) This suggestion contrasts two modifications of the tempo in an episode in which Brahms himself has not given any markings. In his text, Blume writes "utter calm" (*eitel Ruhe!*) with a broadening in the third bar. In his music example, one can see even more clearly that he juxtaposes calm *(ruhig)* with *a tempo*:

> At letter L, the widened main theme represents utter calm! The third bar is to be broadened a little, and the following bars (249-251) should be a little separated and each time should be played in tempo. This is done also in the second passage (bars 252-258).

[73] Bozarth, G. "Fanny Davies and Brahms's late chamber music" in *Performing Brahms Early evidence of Performance Style,* edited by Musgrave, M. and Sherman, B. D. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 172.

Bars 246-258 (letter L and following)

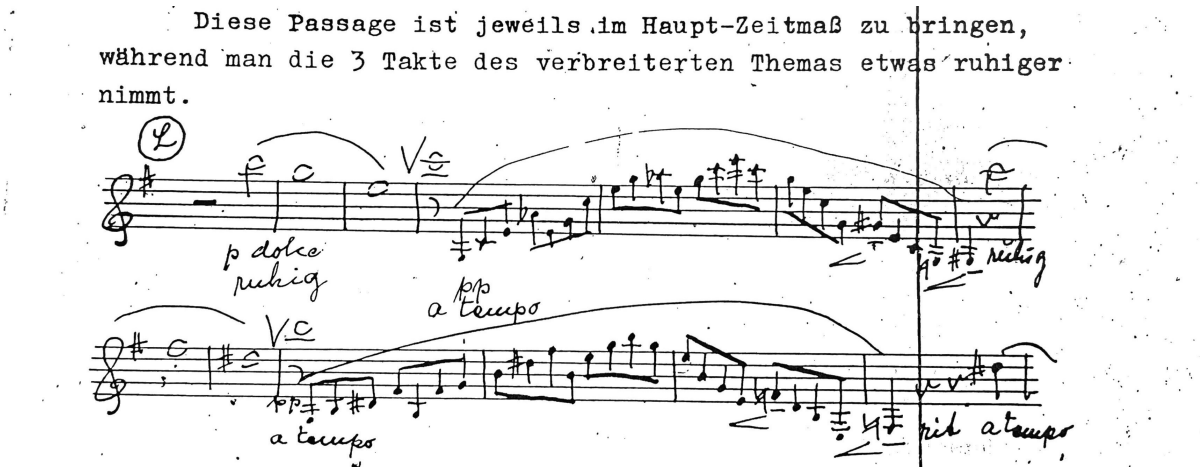

Figure 1.11: Blume page 72.

8) This suggestion concerns a clear link between crescendo (though strictly speaking not marked by Brahms other than by his *sempre più forte* in bar 381) and an increase in tempo.

> With the strong crescendo to fortissimo from bar 387 on, one also increases the tempo. By restoring the initial tempo at letter Q, and by playing the theme broadly and massively, with help of the upbeat in character, a very good effect is created. The strings should race through their passage two bars before Q in tempo, unconcerned by the broadened upbeat to Q.

Bars 392-399 (from my score, not from Blume's text). For a complete view of the *sempre più forte* and the increase of tempo in bars 287-390, see my music example in the conclusion section of this chapter.

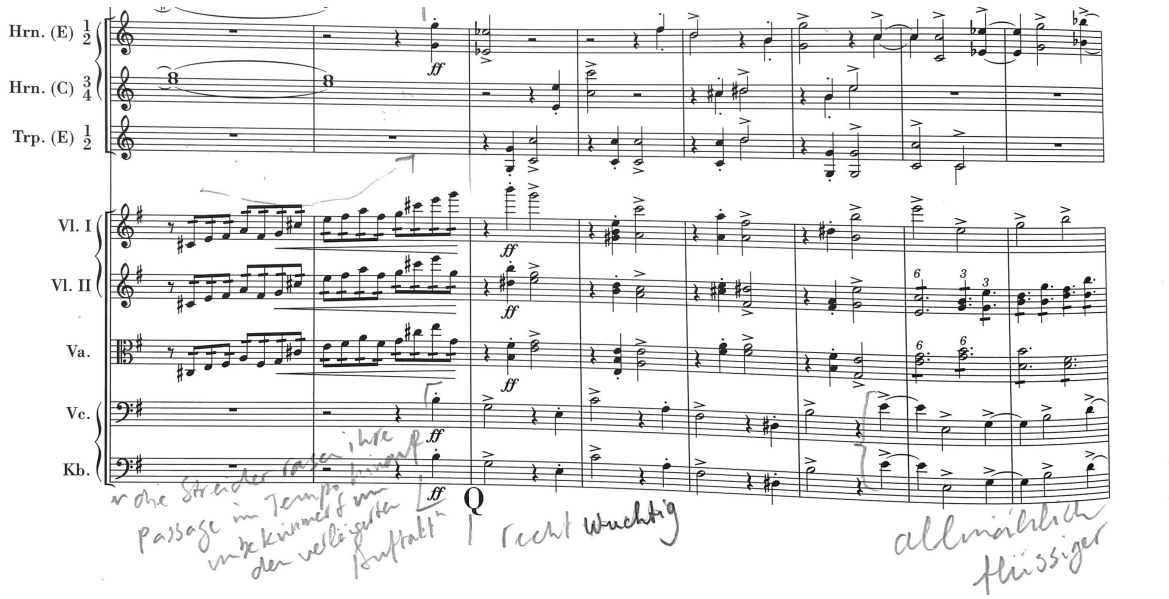

Figure 1.12: Breitkopf & Härtel Urtext Edition Fourth Symphony (Score) page 32 (partially shown).

9) Blume's last suggestion for tempo modification is also his last remark on the first movement. It contains the suggestion to beat the penultimate bar in four, a characteristic example of a change in beating pattern designed to show a tempo modification to the orchestra:

> From the fifth bar in Q, the massive and broad character becomes more flowing. From bar 402, with the appearance of the eighth notes in the violins one moves into a livelier tempo, which one keeps until the end. Only the penultimate bar, with the four quarter notes in the timpani, should be beaten out in four and broadened.

CONCLUSION

Blume gives about thirty-five suggestions for the first movement of the *Fourth Symphony*.[74] In addition to modifications of rhythm and tempo, he also addresses subjects like expression, dynamics, orchestral balance and phrasing (often in the form of suggested commas or breaks). As such

[74] The exact number could be a topic of discussion, as some interconnected remarks can be counted as one suggestion, and it is sometimes debatable if suggestions should be counted separately or taken together as one.

subjects are intricately connected, categorising them into separate points is not always helpful. The subject of modifying rhythm and tempo is amongst the most frequently discussed issues in his text, which can be interpreted as corroborating the idea that modification of tempo was an essential aspect of Steinbach's style.

Modifications of rhythm or tempo can be very subtle and very brief. But as a result of their use, the tempo can become less even, less regular and consequently somewhat less predictable. This can certainly have a profound effect on its perception by musicians and audiences alike. The kind of flexibility that is needed for these modifications requires a particular diligence and a general alertness that benefits the quality of the music making. I believe that Fuller Maitland described this kind of flexibility in his article in the *London Times* (quoted in Chapter 1.4) when he called the playing of the Meiningen Orchestra under Steinbach "absolutely non-metrical and absolutely unified."[75]

Finally, I would like to use point 8, which represents a clear-cut example of moving forwards in tempo, as an example of how I work with Blume's suggestions. After carefully reading and thinking through his remarks, I believe that they only specify a part of what I think effective tempo modification would entail in the episode from bars 381-394. In many instances in the Brahms symphonies, I have noted that accents can serve to hold back a tempo more often than move it forward.

Looking at this episode with that idea in mind, I propose the following modifications: following Blume's suggestion to play an accented upbeat to bar 381, I use this and the following accents to achieve a *quasi-crescendo* intensification in accordance with Brahms's *sempre piu forte* in bars 381 and 382 without moving forward, but rather holding back almost imperceptibly. In bar 383, I use the absence of accents to move forwards towards the downbeat of bar 384. In bars 385 and 386, I hold back again, as I have done in the almost identical bars 381 and 382. In bars 387-390, I use the absence of accents again (as I did in bar 383) to move forwards into bar 390. In these

[75] Dyment, *Conducting the Brahms Symphonies,* p. 156.

three bars without accents, the driving forwards of the tempo will be clearly noticeable, with the modification not being “almost imperceptible” as it was in bar 383. Having arrived in bar 390, I again use the thick texture of parallel thirds and the accents in woodwinds and horns in the second half of that bar as a slowing factor. I ensure that the accent is not repeated in the second half of bar 391, as Brahms did not put it there. The absence of accents makes bar 391 a suitable departure point for the last thrust forwards by the upper strings (“race on,” as Blume writes). My interpretation of the hairpin opening in bar 392 and 393 is that it relates to tempo as much as it does to volume. At the last quarter note before letter Q, the entry of horns, cellos, and basses is in the massive and broad character described by Blume. The upper strings do not have to broaden their sixteenths on the fourth beat of bar 393 to fill out the quarter-notes in horns, cellos, and basses that will be played in the new broad tempo. All this is marked in my score as follows:

Bars 378-399 (from my score, not from Blume's text):
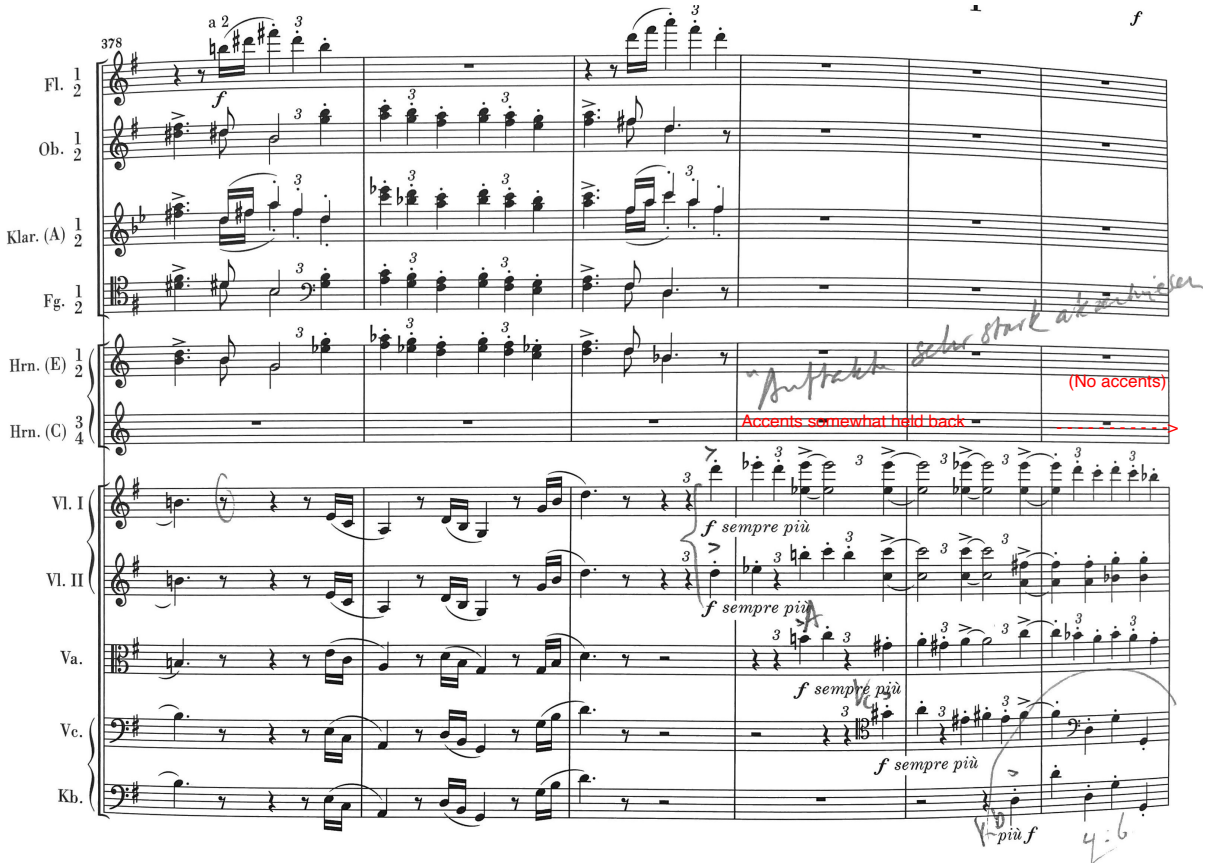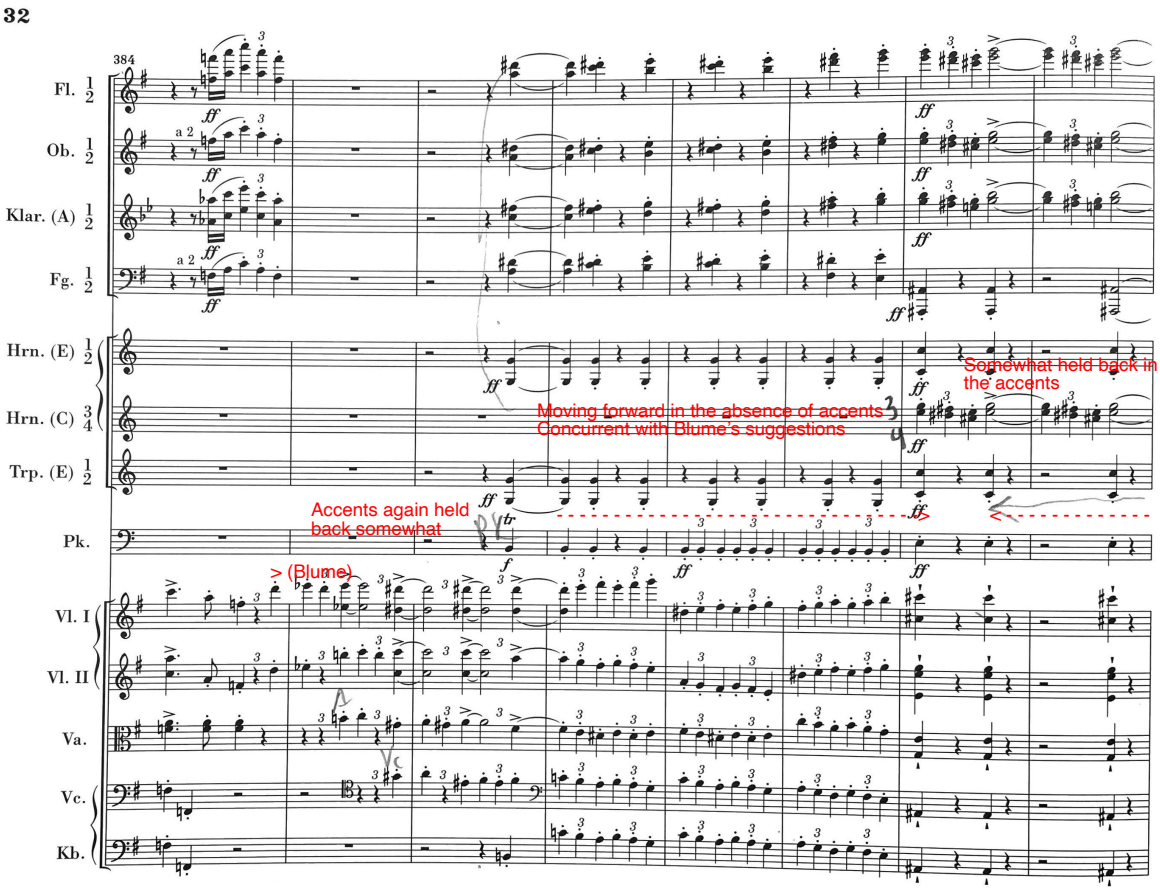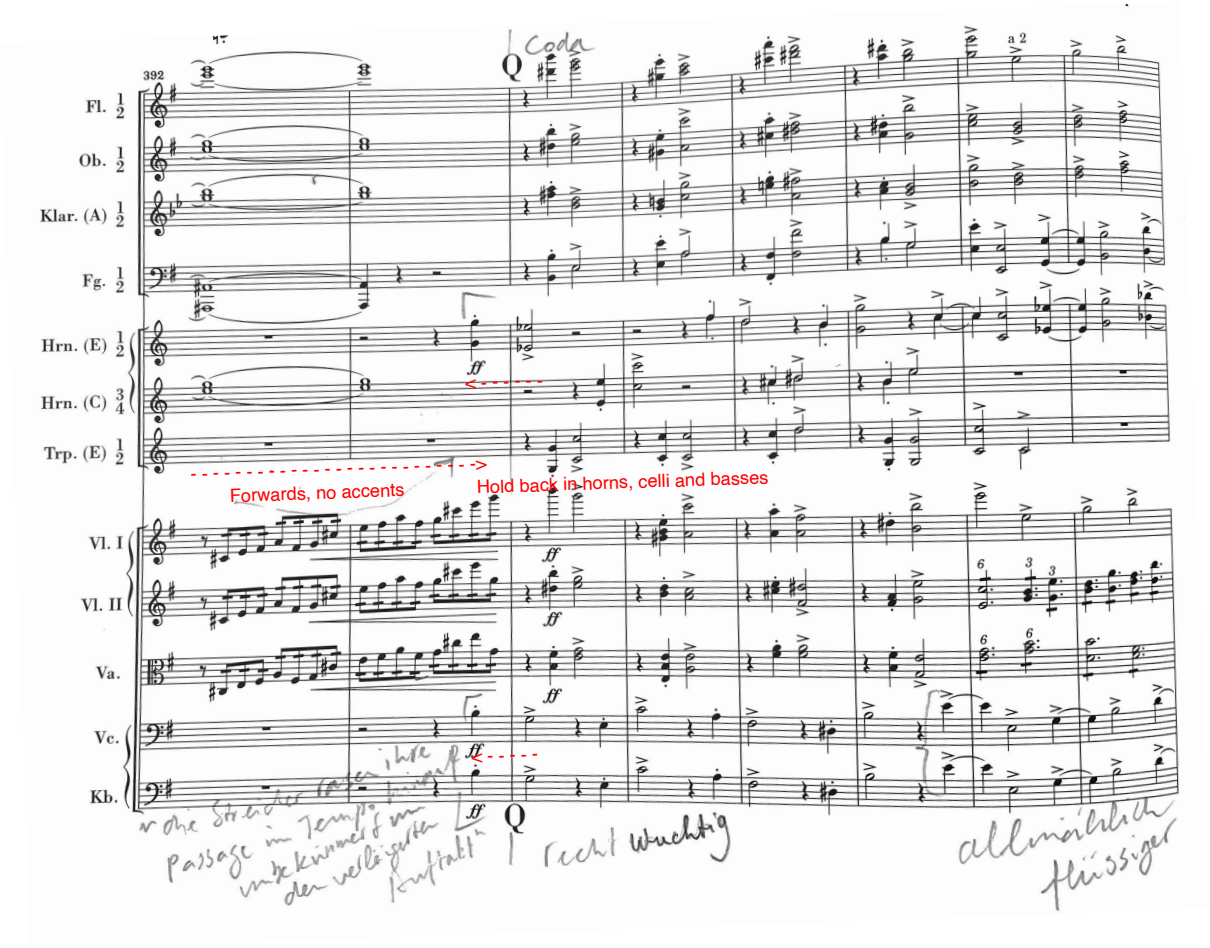
Figure 1.13: Breitkopf & Härtel Urtext Edition Fourth Symphony (Score) pages 31-32.

While I concur with Blume's suggestion to move the tempo forward in the crescendo (an ongoing *sempre piu forte*) in bars 387-390, I also apply other substantial modifications about which he does not write. Working with Blume's suggestions as I have demonstrated here, I use them as a starting point and not as a final verdict on the execution of Brahms's music.

Apart from a purely aesthetic motivation that might prompt me to follow his suggestions, there are two factors that I apply as guiding principles when I consider Blume's suggestions. The first is whether I can fully understand the rational motivation behind them. I would not want to follow his suggestions without being able to comprehend fully why he suggested them in the first place. This is a prerequisite in my experience, particularly when it comes to exploring those suggestions by Blume that are counterintuitive to me. I find it important to engage with those suggestions,

particularly because I realise that my intuition – in part – is still shaped by, or based on, old beliefs.

For me, this brings to mind the words of Alexander Berrsche in his book *Trösterin Musika*:

> I am not saying it is right to do it like that because Steinbach did it, but that Steinbach did it like that because it is right.[76]

Building from this, I would say that I can only consider implementing Blume's suggestions if I can follow his reasoning and make it my own.

The second guiding principle concerns feeling, or emotional understanding. As will be discussed in the next section, on Brahms's assumed preference for a middle way in tempo modification, he often used a quotation from Goethe's *Faust*: "if you cannot feel it, you will never grasp it." Indeed, that is something I would recommend to anyone who intends to use Blume's suggestions for performing Brahms in the Meiningen Tradition: if you cannot feel it, leave it out, and feel free to come up with your own heartfelt solution.

[76] Berrsche, *Musik und Betrachtung,* p. 244.

1.6 Brahms's Assumed Preference for a Middle Way and His Concept of Tempo

In *Performing Brahms*, Robert Pascall and Philip Weller argue that Brahms's preferred style of orchestral performance and the application of modifications can be described as a "middle way." They make a strong case for their assumption about Brahms's preferred performance style, positioning him in-between the conductors Hans Richter (1843-1916), who adhered rather strictly to a given tempo, and Hans von Bülow (1830-1894) who, as I have already described, applied extensive modifications.[77] Brahms's objections to Bülow's style have been sufficiently examined in Chapter 1.3. The conductor Adrian Boult, in his paper "Some notes on performance", given at a November 1909 meeting of the Oriana Society in Oxford, provides a description of Richter's style:

> No one who has ever heard Richter can forget the magnificent breadth, dignity and power of his performances and his steady beat which produces an absolutely even tempo unbroken sometimes from beginning to end of the longest symphonic movement. But this is all he does at performance. All the expression he wishes for – usually exactly what is indicated and nothing more – is arranged in rehearsal.[78]

Pascal and Weller summarised Brahms's opinion of this style as follows:

> Limited and unfocused rehearsal, coupled with lack of understanding, superficiality, unrelenting metricality, and general dullness in performance seem consistently to be Brahms's chief complaints against Richter.[79]

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[77] Adrian Boult quoted by Pascall, R. and Weller, P. in "Flexible tempo and nuancing in orchestral music: understanding Brahms's view of interpretation in his Second Piano Concerto and Fourth Symphony," in *Performing Brahms,* p. 237.

[78] Dyment, *Conducting Brahms,* p. 11; Dyment refers to: Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.*), Music and Friends: Letters to Adrian Boult* (Hamish Hamilton, London 1979) which contains the paper "Some Notes on Performance," by Boult, given at a meeting of the Oriana Society, Oxford, in November 1909.

[79] Pascall and Weller, "Flexible tempo," in *Performing Brahms,* p. 234.

Their assumption of Brahms's preference for a "middle way" is based on a thorough investigation of various sources describing nineteenth-century practices; they do not include twentieth-century performances as a point of reference.

For me, as a musician of the twenty-first century, it is important to be able to relate Brahms's presumably preferred style of using tempo modifications in orchestral performance to later performance practices of the twentieth century right up to today. In his book *Early Recordings and Musical Style*, Robert Philip mentions how flexibility of tempo gradually disappeared from orchestral performance practice over the course of the twentieth century.[80] I believe that if one takes into account the increasing evenness of tempo (and sound) that has been the result of this development, one cannot choose to describe Brahms's preferred style of orchestral performance as a "middle way" today. In other words, it may be perfectly appropriate to classify Brahms's presumably preferred style of tempo modification in orchestral performance as a "middle way" in the context of the nineteenth-century evidence and at the same time perceive it as "radical" or "extreme" in the context of later twentieth-century practices.[81]

I agree with musicologist and Brahms expert Walter Frisch, who wrote that there never was one authorised or authentic manner of performing the Brahms symphonies, as there is plenty of evidence, highlighted by Frisch and others for example in *Performing Brahms*, suggesting that he approved of

[80] Philip, R. *Early Recordings and Musical Style; Changing tastes in instrumental performance 1900-1950.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 229-240.

[81] In his article *"Authentischer Brahms?"* (1996) conductor Hartmut Haenchen draws two conclusions: (1) Modifications of tempo (which are not included in the printed score) belong to the fundamental idea of the composition; (2) these modifications should be executed almost imperceptibly ("unmerklich" as Mahler would have put it). Whilst I completely agree with his first conclusion, I find the second conclusion problematic. Not only because in the absence of a nineteenth-century yardstick, one has no way of telling what Brahms and his contemporaries might have considered to be '(almost) imperceptible', but also because I think that almost imperceptible handling modifications of tempo and rhythm does not correspond with contemporaneous descriptions of Brahms's own playing. Haenchen, H. *Werktreue und Interpretation, Erfahrungen eines Dirigenten, Band 2: Von Brahms über Wagner bis Riemann-Persönliches* PFAU-Verlag, Saarbrücken, 2013 p.9.

many different styles.[82] Portraying Brahms as an advocate of a middle way, or as a radical, can be equally deceptive. For example, this well-known drawing of Brahms by Willy von Beckerath (1868-1938) might serve as a perfect illustration of the composer's preference for the middle of any road, as it depicts him in what appears to be a very relaxed, almost casual posture whilst conducting:

Figure 1.14: Willy von Beckerath, drawing of Brahms conducting.[83]

[82] Frisch, W. "In search of Brahms's First Symphony," in *Performing Brahms,* p. 279.
[83] Brahms conducting, 1894. Engraving after a drawing by Willy von Beckerath (Royal College of Music, London) copyright Willy von Beckerath Erben.

Those who wish to portray him as a moderate may also quote Brahms himself, who wrote to his friend the singer, pianist and conductor Georg Henschel (1850-1934), in 1880 that "the so-called elastic tempo moreover is not a new invention, and to it, as to many other things, one should add *con discrezione*."[84] On the other hand, this passage from Konrad Huschke's *Johannes Brahms als Pianist, Dirigent und Lehrer* might serve to paint him as a radical:

> However, Brahms could be overcome by fiery passion when conducting […] This is how Rehberg once witnessed him in Leipzig's old Gewandhaus. At this conservative site where Reinecke conducted with all too much genteel restraint, this enthralling and spirited Brahms stood out all the more, especially in a rehearsal for the premiere of his Fourth Symphony. When the sensational Scherzo movement was practised, he went completely out of control. Everything was not phrased sharply enough for him, not vivid enough. Everyone in the orchestra had to give their best, and it was plain to see that the Gewandhaus musicians were completely unfamiliar with demands like that. At one time he even screamed into the orchestra: Gentlemen, are you all married? Another time he jumped up from the rostrum to the kettledrum and hit it so hard that the poor timpanist was very worried about his instrument. And in the performance that evening, as Teichmüller remembered, when conducting, he made such lively and big movements that a cellist fell backwards when dodging him and dragged another one with him. Here we find an almost 'wild' Brahms, whose glowing temperament drove the fieriest outburst of temper, as it was once reported from Meiningen that he had literally electrified the orchestra with his fire' (Dr. J. Grosser to the Berliner Börsen-Courier dated 1 December 1885).[85]

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[84] Henschel, G. *Personal Recollections of Brahms, some of his letters to and pages from a journal kept by Georg Henschel.* The Gorham Press, Boston, 1907, p. 79.

[85] Huschke, *Johannes Brahms,* pp. 43-44. *Auch feurige Leidenschaft konnte Brahms beim Dirigieren übermannen. (…) So hat ihn einst Rehberg im Leipziger alten Gewandhaus erlebt. An der konservativen Stätte, wo Reinecke nur allzu vornehm zurückhaltend dirigierte, fiel dieser packend-temperamentvoller Brahms besonders auf, namentlich in einer Probe zur Uraufführung seiner vierten Sinfonie. Als der hanebüchene Scherzo Satz geübt wurde, geriet er ganz außer Rand und Band. Alles war ihm nicht scharf genug phrasiert und nicht plastisch genug. Jeder im Orchester musste sein Letztes hergeben, und man sah deutlich, dass den Gewandhausmusikern so etwas ganz ungewohnt und fremd war. Einmal schrie er sogar im Orchester hinein: "Meine Herren, sind Sie denn alle verheiratet?" Ein andermal sprang er vom Pult zur Pauke hinauf und schlug derart darauf, dass der arme Pauker in größte Sorge um sein Instrument geriet. Und in der Aufführung am Abend geriet er, wie sich Teichmüller erinnert, sogar beim Dirigieren in so lebhafte Schwing-bewegungen, das ein Cellist beim Ausweichen nach rückwärtsfiel und noch einen mit sich riss. Hier hatte man einen beinahe "wilden" Brahms vor sich, den sein glühendes Innere zu feurigstem Temperamentsausbruch trieb, wie auch einst*

As one can see, the evidence presented hardly points in a single direction; it is almost as if the conductor making such wild gestures that cellists in the orchestra fell over and the conductor in Beckerath's drawing are not the same person. When it comes to characterising Brahms in order to justify a certain style of performance, there are many avenues to explore and many pitfalls to be avoided. It is perhaps enough to say that, just as there is no simple characterisation which might do justice to the complex nature of Brahms's personality, neither is there a simple characterisation that could fully define the right style of performing his music. The evidence shows that he was a musician who was able to appreciate a broad range of different performing styles. In *Performing Brahms*, Bernard D. Sherman suggests that Brahms, like many composers, may have been more concerned with a performer's ability to convey musical content than with adherence to a specific performance practice.[86]

Brahms's attitude regarding performance and his ability to appreciate different perspectives on his work also relates to how he marked his scores for performers. Avins, in her chapter 'Performing Brahms's music: clues from his letters' in *Performing Brahms*, includes a quote from a letter Brahms wrote to the conductor Otto Dessoff, who had asked him about some specific tempo modifications that Brahms had not marked in the score, but that he felt would be helpful in performing the *Second Symphony*. Brahms answered him as follows:

> A *quasi ritard* in the first movement may be just as lacking as a *più moto* at the 12/8 in the Adagio. But they are such superfluous indications. 'If you don't feel it, etc.'[87]

aus Meiningen berichtet wurde, er habe durch sein Feuer das Orchester förmlich elektrisiert (Dr. J. Grosser an den Berliner Börsen-Courier vom 1.12.1885).

[86] Musgrave and Sherman, *Performing Brahms*, p. 3.

[87] Avins, S. "Performing Brahms's Music," in *Performing Brahms*, pp. 24-25 (Original German as follows) *Quasi Rit.* im 1-ten Satz dürfte ebenso gut fehlen wie ein *piu moto* beim 12/8 Adagio stehen dürfte. Das sind aber so überflüssige Bezeichnungen. "Wenn ihr's nicht fühlt" etc.

As Avins explains, this last part ("If you don't feel it, you will not grasp it etc.") is a quote from Goethe's *Faust*: "Wenn ihr's nicht fühlt, ihr werdet's nicht erjagen." I agree with Avins that this answer is crucial for understanding Brahms's way of making music and notating it, and the relationship between notation and performance generally. It shows how important it was to him that modifications of tempo and the expressive reasons for applying them should be felt, or "emotionally understood", by those who wished to perform his music.

Berrsche provides corroboration of the view that Brahms did expect modifications that are not marked in the score from musicians who performed his music in *Trösterin Musika*, where he writes about tempo modifications in performances by Fritz Steinbach of Brahms's *First Symphony*:

> No one should want to argue that Brahms didn't mark these in his score. Every writer will be cautious when it comes to marking the most refined subtleties down explicitly. They would instantly be exaggerated, and it is surely better not to attempt a subtlety than to coarsen it.[88]

The fact that Berrsche, in 1929, felt obliged to address the objection that the modifications he felt Steinbach had applied appropriately and effectively had not been prescribed by the composer can be seen as an indication that in the first half of the twentieth century there was (mounting) pressure on performers to adhere strictly to what could be found in the score. While an advocate of unprescribed modifications, Berrsche warned against exaggerations. This quote is an example of a historical source that can be used both by people advocating modifications and by people warning against (excessive) use of them. Some might see it as confirmation of the need to apply modifications, others might take it as warning against exaggerations. As I have previously stated, the absence of an objective norm, or base line, against which one might be able to measure modifications, is a serious

[88] Berrsche, *Musik und Betrachtung,* p. 244. *Mann soll nun nicht einwenden wollen, Brahms habe doch dererlei nicht vorgeschrieben. Die ganz feinen Dinge wird jeder Autor sich hütten, ausdrücklich vorzuschreiben. Sie würden nämlich dann sofort übertrieben werden, und es ist gewiss besser, eine Feinheit gar nicht zu machen, als sie zu vergröbern.*

obstacle when it comes to drawing specific conclusions from sources such as this.

Brahms thought of tempo as a living and constantly, subtly changing thing, as can be surmised from a famous remark in a letter to his friend, Henschel, already quoted from. Brahms writes in response to Henschel's request for metronome marks: "for I myself have never believed that my blood and a mechanical instrument go well together."[89] A few years later, Brahms wrote to amateur violist Alwin von Beckerath that "for normal people, metronome markings could not remain valid for over a week."[90] This idea of flexible tempo seems to align with that of conductor/composer Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), as violist and close friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner (1858-1921), recalls about his concept of tempo and tempo modification in relation to the printed score:[91]

> Everything is expressed in the greatest detail through note values and silences. This clearly concerns everything that can be represented in writing. About the much more important things such as tempo, the total conception and the construction of a work, frustratingly little can be pinned down, as these are living and flowing things that can never be exactly repeated twice even in direct succession. This is why metronome markings are inadequate and almost useless because, if the work is not to be senselessly ground out in barrel organ style, the tempo will already have changed by the end of the second bar. Therefore, the right proportions between the various sections are more important than the initial tempo. Whether a tempo is a degree faster or slower often depends on the mood of the conductor and may vary somewhat accordingly without any detrimental effect on the quality of the work. As long as the whole [performance] is alive and is built up within the bounds of this freedom with irrefutable coherence.[92]

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[89] Henschel, *Personal Recollections of Brahms* p. 79 (for the full quotation see below).

[90] Avins, "Performing Brahms's Music," in *Performing Brahms* p. 21, quoting an undated letter, dated by her on internal evidence as January 1884.

[91] Natalie Bauer was also the violist of the all-female string quartet in which Marie Soldat-Roeger (1863-1955) was the first violin. Marie Soldat was the first and for a long time also only woman to play Brahms's violin concerto as a soloist. Brahms highly respected her playing.

[92] Bauer-Lechner, N. *Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler.* Leipzig, E.P.Tal & Co. Verlag, 1923, 25. *Alles wird durch Notenwerte und Pausen bis ins Kleinste ausgedrückt. Das gilt nun freilich von dem, was sich darstellen lässt. Über das weitaus Wichtigere: über das Tempo, und vollends die Gesamtauffassung, und den Aufbau eines Werkes, lässt sich so nur verzweifelt Wenig feststellen, denn hier handelt es sich um etwas Lebendiges, Fliessendes, das nie, auch nur zweimal hintereinander, sich völlig gleichbleiben kann. Deshalb ist ja auch das Metronomisieren unzulänglich, und fast wertlos, weil schon nach dem zweiten Takte das Tempo ein anderes*

While there are no irrefutable arguments or truths in artistic matters, the idea that all deviations from a fundamental tempo must serve to build a narrative that – at least for the duration of the performance – appears to have complete coherence is very persuasive. In fact, I think that the need to build a coherent and convincing narrative should always be the first aim of a performer. Different modifications can be applied to build such a narrative. This view allows for the possibility that one performer may apply a rallentando in the same bar in which another may apply an accelerando, whilst both create an equally convincing narrative.

Conclusion

Brahms would have been used to hearing his works performed with tempo modifications, and he seemed to particularly appreciate it when the expressive device was motivated by the musician's own intuition and emotional understanding of the music, even when that differed from his own. I believe that many of the modifications Brahms would have expected and appreciated are not marked in the score, partly because of his dread of performances that would include these modifications without the proper feeling motivating their use. Brahms's reference to Goethe, for instance, inspires me to always feel an emotional motivation for my tempo modifications. Brahms also welcomed the idea that a musician's emotional understanding of his music could lead to a style of performance that he personally might not have foreseen. The pianist and scholar Charles Rosen (1927-2012), mentions how his teacher Moritz Rosenthal (1862-1946), who

geworden sein muss, wenn das Werk nicht drehorgelmässig, niederträchtig, heruntergespielt wird. Weit mehr als die Anfangsgeschwindigkeit kommt es daher auf das richtige Verhältnis aller Teile untereinander an. Ob das Tempo im Gesamten um einen Grad geschwinder oder langsamer ist, mag oft von der Stimmung des Dirigenten abhängen und, ohne Nachteil für das Ganze Werk, um ein Geringes variieren. Wenn das Ganze nur ein Lebendiges, und innerhalb dieser Freiheit mit unumstößlicher Notwendigkeit aufgebaut ist. (sic)

sometimes played Brahms's piano music for the composer, recalled how Brahms had commented on his playing:

> You know, Brahms let me play [his music] however I wanted […] He never told me I was wrong or that what I had done was incorrect. 'I have a different idea of the piece,' he would say, and he would play it for me. It was a wonderful experience.[93]

Rosenthal's account provides another indication that Brahms could accept and even welcome performers' modifications of rhythm and tempo that would help them shape the narratives that they themselves found in the music. What the historical evidence further suggests to me is that conductors should carefully consider their default position in relation to rhythm and tempo. Based on the evidence presented here and in the previous sections and on my experiments with the orchestra, I believe that considering evenness of tempo a special effect in Brahms can result in artistically satisfying results. As a consequence, my default position has become a constantly subtly changing tempo, not a stable tempo to which one occasionally or frequently applies modifications. In my opinion the twentieth-century concept of a metronomically maintained tempo with occasional modifications, is simply not supported by the evidence that suggests that Brahms and other nineteenth-century composers and musicians had a much more flexible idea of the fundamental tempo, within which modifications could be integrated. Taking this one step further, I would suggest that one can also think of the fundamental tempo as the grand total of all the modifications applied in a piece or movement, rather than as something that exists independent of these modifications.

[93] Rosen, C and Temerson, C. *The Joy of Playing, the Joy of Thinking: Conversations about Art and Performance.* Paris, 2016, p. 8.

1.7 Tools for Modifying Rhythm and Tempo

In the previous sections, I have demonstrated that modification of rhythm and tempo has been an element of beautiful musical performances for centuries. I have shown how, through the work of two eminent conductors, Hans von Bülow and Fritz Steinbach, and their work with the Meiningen Orchestra, these modifications became part of a style of performance of Brahms's orchestral music that the composer himself highly appreciated. Moreover, by using information from historical sources, by drawing lines between various sources, and by contextualising them, I have illustrated how this particular style largely disappeared soon after the composer's death, or soon after Steinbach left the Meiningen Orchestra.

The approach to modifications in orchestral performance that I have derived from all of this is based on the idea that tempo is a living and constantly subtly changing thing. Marion Ranken (1884-1966) writes about her time as a violin student at the Joachim School in Berlin and gives a detailed account of many of the qualities of the German style that Brahms was so familiar with through his connection with Joachim. She gives a description of tempo as something present only in the background as a "pulse-beat." Her description also contains an idea about the relationship between the details and the total conception of a piece:

> But the tempo too, and this is what I especially wish to emphasise here, is now no longer the rigid taskmaster, but is found to be merely the 'beat' […], as it is extended throughout the whole movement, and just as, within the phrase itself, one note is subordinate to others so, as the scale widens, one bar becomes subordinate to another bar, one phrase to another phrase, and finally one section to another section and there must be a sense of passing over the one without emphasis and of dwelling restfully on the other. If, in making this clear, fluctuation in speed does occur, as is often the case, this is something entirely different from any set change of tempo for the very good reason that the tempo is always in the background, whether audibly or inaudibly, keeping up the idea of an average pace, a normal pulse-beat, and

> so playing the most important role of all – that which welds everything into a sensible and balanced whole.[94]

Ranken touches on many relevant points here. I find her remarks about the subordinate character of one beat, bar, or phrase to another helpful when it comes to understanding the connection between modifications on different micro/macro levels. In particular, her suggestion that one can widen the scale and look at the relationship between whole sections of a composition as an expansion of the modifications in a particular bar or phrase made me realise how consequential small modifications can be and how they can be related to the larger structure of a movement or a whole work. Her text also reads as a manifesto against evenness in expression, sound, and tempo. The concept of tempo being a living and constantly changing thing, as suggested by Brahms and described by Mahler, and the idea that it should be present in the background as described by Ranken, form the backbone of my (newly found) approach to tempo. It is with this concept in mind that I apply my modifications of rhythm and tempo.

Because, as argued by Berrsche for example, the tradition of applying such modifications in the style of Steinbach has been lost, the expressive tools that were part of this tradition cannot simply be re-implemented; they must be re-invented. Austrian conductor Nicolaus Harnoncourt, for instance, commented on the need to "translate" the way one pronounces musical language in *Musik als Klangrede*:

> The music of the past has become a foreign language through the course of history, through the distance of the past from the present, through the detachment from one's own time in its entirety. Separate aspects may be universal and timeless, but the pronunciation as such is bound to time and can only be found again if it is brought into the present time through a kind of translation.[95]

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[94] Ranken, M. *Some Points of Violin Playing and Musical Performance as learnt in the Hochschule für Musik (Joachim School) in Berlin during the time I was a student there, 1902-1909.* Privately printed, Edinburgh, 1939, p. 120.

[95] Harnoncourt, N. *Musik als Klangrede, Wege zu einem neuen Musikverständnis.* Residenz Verlag, Salzburg, 1982, p. 25. *Die Musik der Vergangenheit ist durch den Lauf der Geschichte, durch die Entfernung von den Gegenwart, durch das Losgerissensein von der eigenen Zeit in ihrer Gesamtheit zu einer Fremdsprache geworden einzelne Aspekte mögen allgemeingültig*

The expressive potential of historical tools, such as modification of rhythm and tempo, unevenness of sound, portamento and vibrato used only as an ornament can only be revealed, in my experience, by working with them. One could argue that what I am talking about here is a re-invention of the impact of the use of historical tools on the listener, not a re-invention of the tools themselves.

My understanding of what these tools are, however, has profoundly changed through working with them. My concept of modification of tempo, for instance, changed as a direct result of the practical experience of working with it as an expressive tool. I can say the same about my conceptions of portamento and vibrato, and about the way these various tools can be connected to create an expressive result. Reinventing modifications of rhythm and tempo requires experimentation with an orchestra, and that experimentation lies at the core of my research project. The process of re-invention and implementation with my project orchestra will be described in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Firstly, I will present my toolset. My research shows that the modifications are in part unprescribed by Brahms, and in part implied by his marking of the score. My research has taught me to read the markings in the score in a different way. I now identify many of the markings as having implications for modification.

TOOLS OF MODIFICATION

1) Verbal crescendo and diminuendo (cresc. / dim.) indications.

In contrast to what I was taught and what I have been teaching over the past half century (to diligently keep a steady tempo at crescendos and diminuendos), I will now, as a rule, move the tempo forward in response to

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und zeitlos sein, die Aussage, als solche aber ist zeitgebunden und kann nur wiedergefunden, werden wenn man sie in einer Art von Übersetzung in die heutige Zeit hinein bringt.

crescendo and move it backward in response to diminuendo. In my opinion, the historical evidence, some of which has been presented in the previous sections, shows that this was considered to be an integral part of beautiful musical performance of the highest quality in the nineteenth century. I think of this type of modification as being a more sensitive way to handle the relationship between the emotional current of the music and the tempo than the rather rigid timekeeping I have previously applied.[96] The fact that the vast majority of MPP and HIPP orchestral performances today stick to the rule that tempo should remain steady in crescendo/diminuendo shows how widespread this rejection of nineteenth-century practices has become over the course of the twentieth century.

2) Single opening hairpin (<) and closing hairpin (>) indications.

Crescendos and diminuendos are sometimes marked with opening and closing (single) hairpins. Brahms often combines these markings with the words crescendo and diminuendo. The positioning of these markings also sometimes seems somewhat arbitrary. Music scholar Camilla Cai, for instance, writes about Brahms as an editor, particularly of his piano pieces. She argues that one must reconsider and ultimately revise the notion that Brahms was both a very careful editor of his music, and a good nineteenth-century role model for the modern scholar.[97] Based on her detailed analysis of editing issues in some of his late piano works, she concludes that Brahms "looks to have been an inconsistent, even an impatient editor." Cai notes that in the corrections of some proofs of the manuscript of Op. 116, "he paid little attention to the differing crescendo and diminuendo symbols, although in the autograph he had made careful adjustments of this very element of

[96] For the idea of emotional current see for example Reitzenstein's review of the performance of Salieri's opera *Axur*, in Vienna, quoted in Chapter 1.1, where he claims to have heard a performance of the piece in which there was a direct connection between the level of excitement and the tempo.

[97] Cai, C. "Was Brahms a Reliable Editor? Changes Made in Opuses 116, 117, 118 and 119," *Acta Musicologica* 61, no. 1 (1989): 83–101. https://www.jstor.org/stable/932975. (Last accessed September 2021).

expression."[98] One example of such careful adjustment can also be found in the second movement of the *First Symphony*, notably in bar 5 of the example below in the second violin part, where Brahms took great care to show where to start the hairpin (see the crossed-out section just before the bar line):

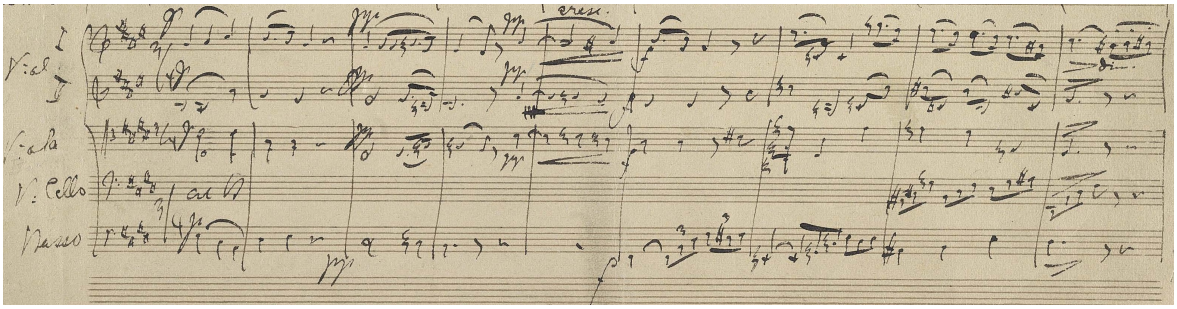


Figure 1.15: Brahms manuscript of First Symphony.

Though many variations of the positioning of these markings exist in different editions and some argue that Brahms was not always very precise in his placing of markings, the order in his symphonies usually seem to be this: cresc., followed by an opening hairpin. There are occasions where Brahms writes cresc. and a hairpin < at the same time and others where he writes cresc. alone (also the reverse with dim.).

So far, I have not been able to distil a uniform way to understand these instructions, nor have I found any such recipe in the writings of others. Whilst Cai in her work demonstrates that Brahms occasionally was sloppy in his marking and in his revisions, I see no alternative to closely reading of the scores and his markings as they have been handed down. Given Brahms's ability to appreciate different styles of performance of his music, differences in marking could also be understood as representing different options that he would have found acceptable or would even have welcomed. Whether or not one accepts this idea, I think it is important to look carefully at every individual instance and decide about the possible meaning of the marking or – perhaps more to the point – to formulate an understanding of the markings that does justice to the detailed marking and serves one's personal musical

[98] Ibid, p. 93.

narrative. A good example of such an effort can be found in the Meno Allegro section of the first movement of the *First Symphony*, in which one can find multiple hairpins as well as verbal *cresc.* and *cresc. molto* markings:

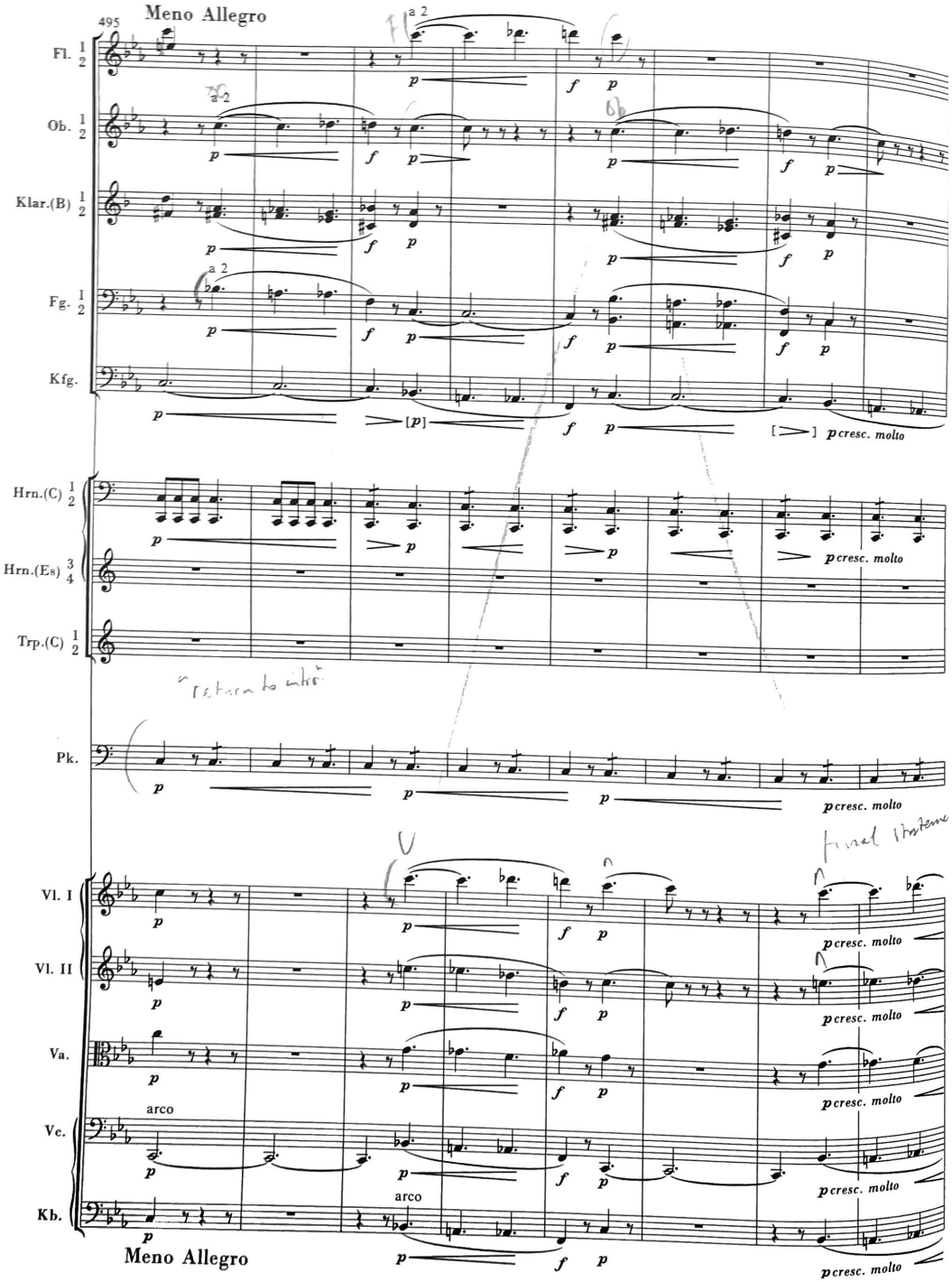
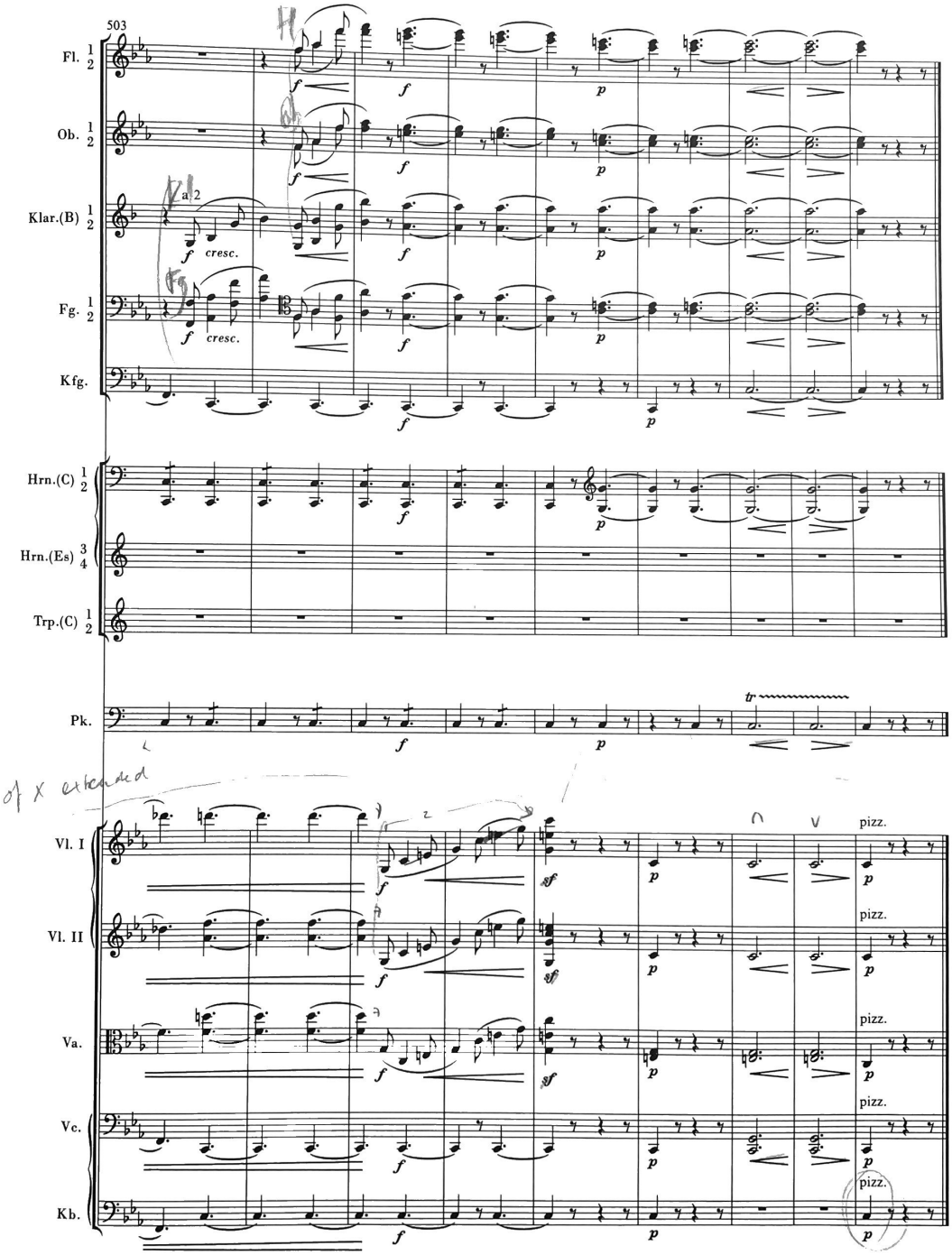



Figure 1.16: Breitkopf & Härtel Urtext Edition First Symphony (Score) pages 66-67.

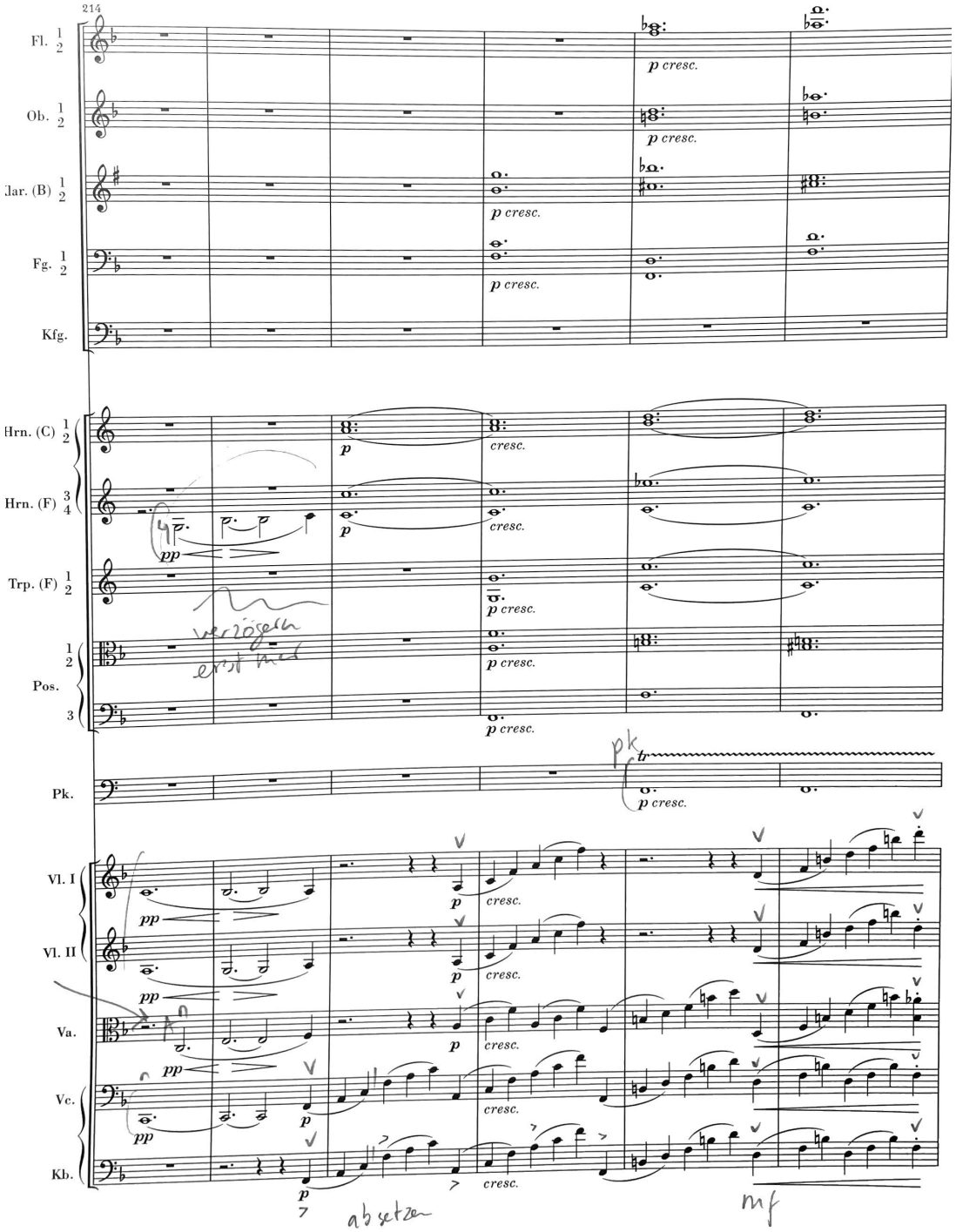
There is, of course, the possible explanation that the added < markings, particularly the ones in bars 502 and 504, are intended as a reminder not to reach the desired dynamic level early, but to keep sufficient room to continue the crescendo towards the end of the line. But I find it unlikely that Brahms would have made the effort to include so many markings (here and

in many other instances in the scores of the symphonies) only to warn against possible miscalculations of crescendos.

My newly found way of reading these hairpins means that I interpret them as signs referring to expression, particularly as a way of signalling direction; a desire to reach a goal (be it a dynamic level such as *forte* or *fortissimo*, or a goal note, sometimes marked by a *sforzato*). Examples of both can be found in the two pages from the *First Symphony* given above. Whether the goal note or the dynamic level is reached with difficulty or with ease determines whether I speed up or slow down in the opening hairpin (see also the discussion of sets of hairpins below). As a rule, I suggest moving forward in <, and relaxing the tempo in >. However, sometimes the opposite works well. In his *Notizen über Beethoven*, German composer Ferdinand Ries (1784-1838) mentions this exact effect:

> Sometimes he [Beethoven] held back the tempo in his crescendo with a ritardando, this created a very beautiful and highly striking effect.[99]

A good example of a place where I tried to achieve this type of expression can be found at the end of the first movement of the *Third Symphony*. Expanding the tempo slightly in the hairpin in bar 219 can serve the purpose of making the listener feel that reaching the top of the mountain in bar 220 requires, in fact, an effort:

[99] Wegeler, F. G. and Ries, F. *Biographische Notizen über Beethoven*. Bädeker, Koblenz, 1838, p. 106. *Mitunter hielt er in seinem **crescendo** mit **ritardando** das Tempo zurück, welches einen sehr schönen und höchst auffallenden Effekt machte.*

214
Fl. 1 2
Ob. 1 2
Clar. (B) 1 2
Fg. 1 2
Kfg.
Hrn. (C) 1 2
Hrn. (F) 3 4
Trp. (F) 1 2
Pos. 1 2 3
Pk.
Vl. I
Vl. II
Va.
Vc.
Kb.
p cresc.
pp
cresc.
verzögern
erst tief
pk
tr
abs etzen
mf

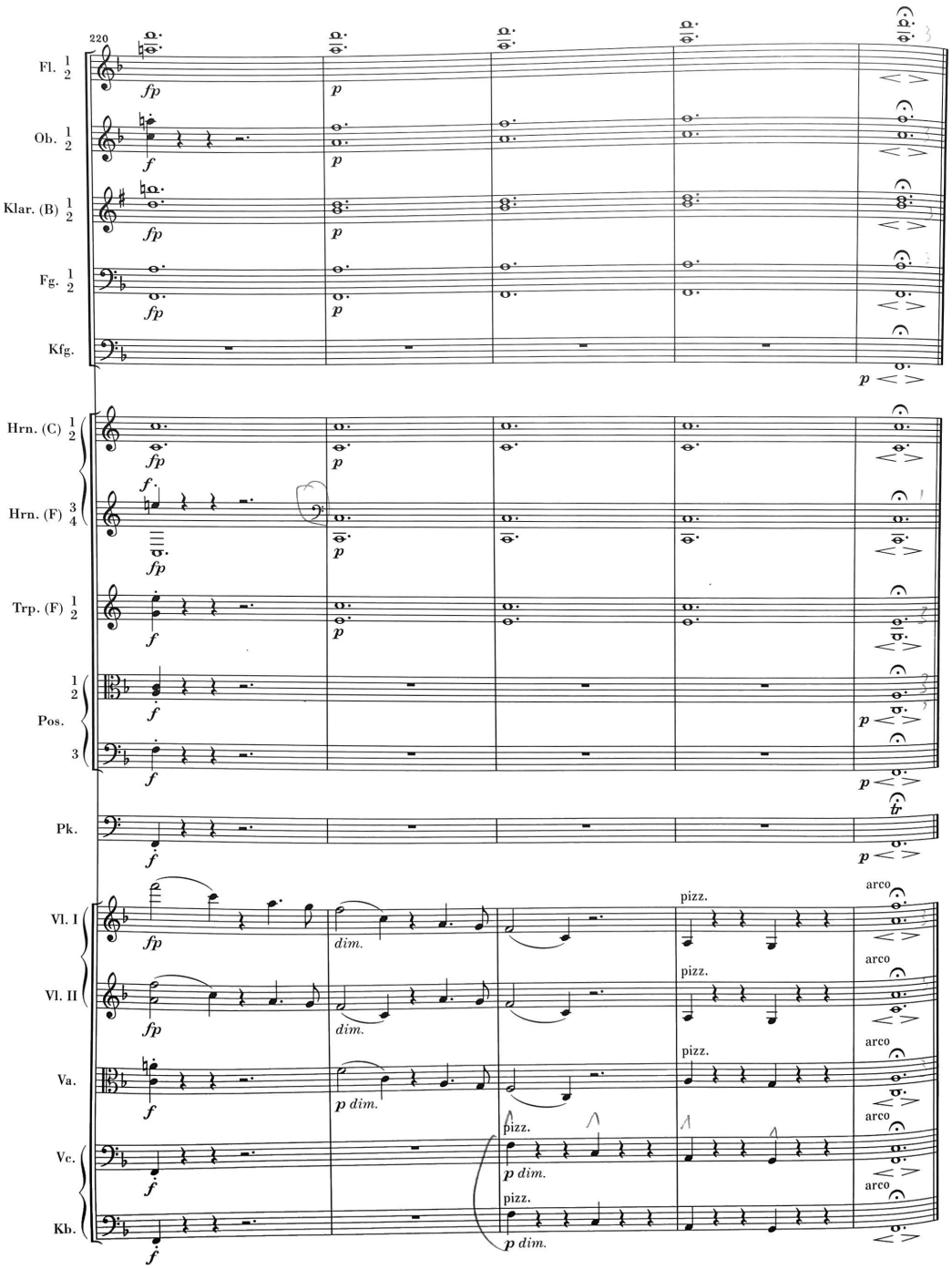



Figure 1.17: Breitkopf & Härtel Urtext Edition Third Symphony (Score) pages 55-54.

3) Hairpins (<>) markings.

As already discussed in Chapter 1.5, in which some of Blume's remarks on Brahms's *First Symphony* in the Steinbach style are discussed, this sign

suggests expression. It can also imply movement in the same way as the separate hairpins discussed above, as well as agogic accentuation, and sometimes vibrato or portamento to and from the centre of the hairpins. Though moving forward in < and backward in > is in line with most of the historical evidence and works well in practice, I have found that the opposite works better in some cases, as described in the previous section. There is some evidence suggesting that this too is a legitimate way of understanding the historical meaning of hairpins. Blume, for example, describes this technique in the second subject of the first movement of the *First Symphony*, where he adds "breit" to the hairpins in the oboe part and explains that the tempo needs to be broadened in the hairpins.[100]

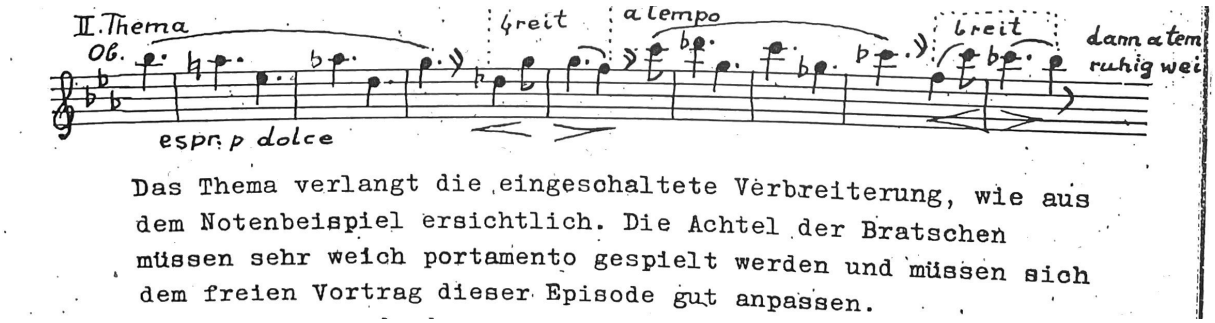


Figure 1.18: Blume page 15.

I see this as further confirmation of the fact that hairpins are indeed principally signs suggesting expression. If this expression requires movement, one can decide which type is most suitable. At the heart of the hairpins, one can usually identify a goal note, which one can highlight using different techniques such as vibrato, lengthening, or extra warmth in the sound.[101] As the sign in itself suggests a certain flow and lacks a vertical orientation point, I think an accent in the style of a sf, or sfz, or > should be avoided in hairpins unless it is specifically notated. Regarding the goal note,

[100] Blume, p. 15. The tempo requires application of a broadening as can be seen in the example. The eighth notes in the violas must be played with weak portamento and should accommodate the free performance of this episode.
[101] This subject is discussed in the section on single hairpins in relation to crescendo markings under section 2 in this chapter.

it is always important to ask whether this note is to be reached easily or with a degree of difficulty. Blume gives a beautiful example for the flute and oboe line, with an easily reached goal note, at the end of the first movement of the *Second Symphony*, as quoted in Chapter 1.5.

In my opinion, one factor relating to the understanding of sets of hairpins has been neglected so far. If one compares the visual impression of hairpins in manuscripts to hairpins in print, the difference is absolutely striking. In the autographs of Beethoven and Brahms, the hairpins jump out and cannot escape the attention of the reader. In print, however, they are often represented so modestly in proportion to the notes that one must make a sincere effort to see them, let alone to feel their importance. In this way, I think the printed editions have made it quite easy for musicians to underestimate the importance of the sets of hairpins as signs suggesting expression. Consider, for example, this passage of Beethoven's *String Quartet* Opus 130 (first movement, bars 122-126) from the autograph:

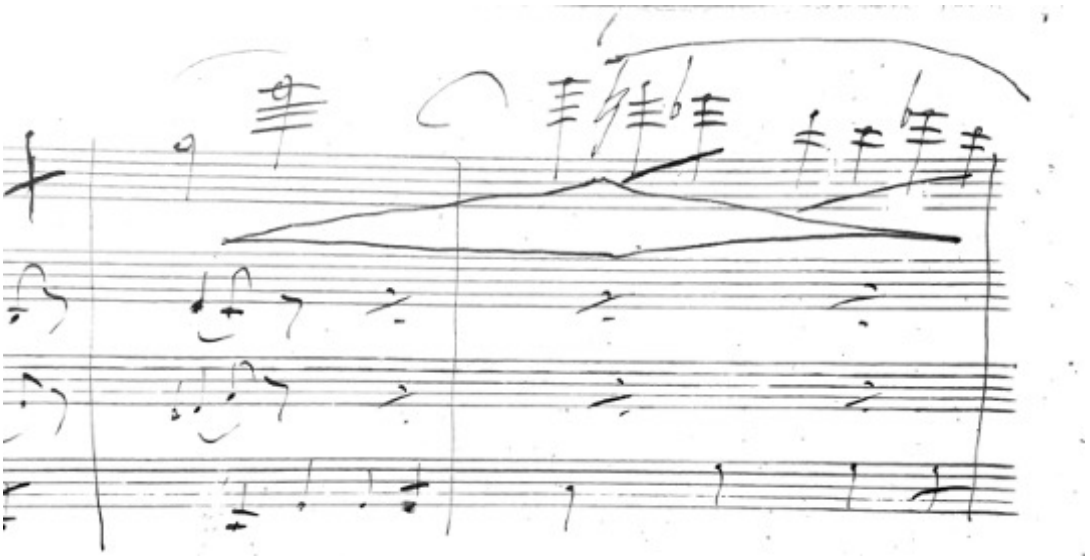



Figure 1.19: Beethoven String quartet op. 130 Bärenreiter facsimile page 19.

And the violin part in the Henle edition of 2007: [102]

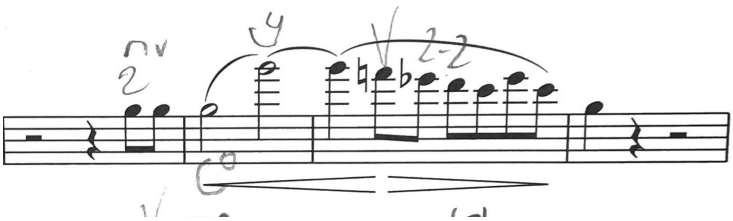
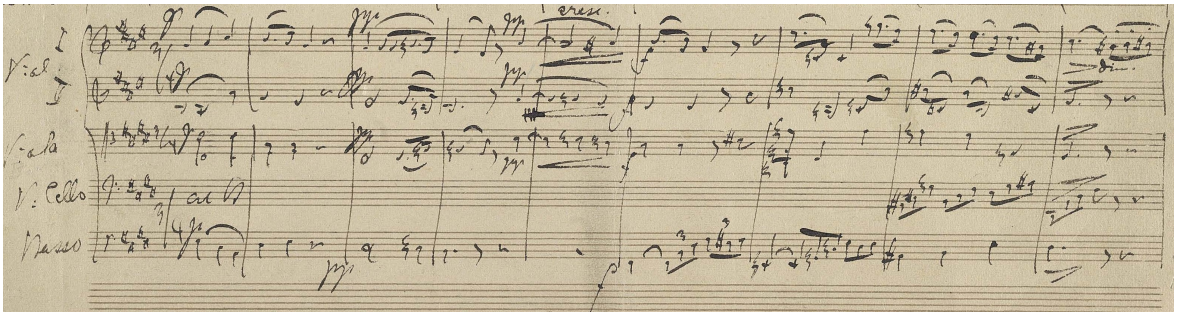



Figure 1.20: Beethoven String quartet op. 130 Henle urtext edition violin part page 4.

Like Beethoven, Brahms also wrote hairpin signs in his scores with rather thick lines that can hardly be overlooked, as this example from the second movement of the *First Symphony* shows (only the lines of the string orchestra). The lines in his hairpins are thicker than the vertical lines in his notes. Their thickness seems to be similar to the horizontal lines Brahms uses to connect the notes in the dotted rhythm on the first beat of bar two for example, or the notes on the second and third beat of bar three in the first violin part. One can also see that the legato slurs are thicker than the vertical lines that are part of the notes:[103]



[102] I think it is noteworthy that Beethoven made an effort to 'close' the hairpins, by linking them together in the middle. In print they are 'opened up' by a slight separation between < and >, as appears to be customary in Urtext editions. Beethoven's notation, which presents the set of hairpins as a single marking instead of two separate ones, suggests a roundness and a wholeness that is lost in the printed translation. In my personal opinion, this unified marking is more suitable to suggest an expressive meaning than the separate hairpins that can more readily be understood as indications of beginnings and endings of a crescendo and a diminuendo.

[103] This example also contains simultaneous use of a (verbal) cresc. and < indication, in the first violins in bar 5.

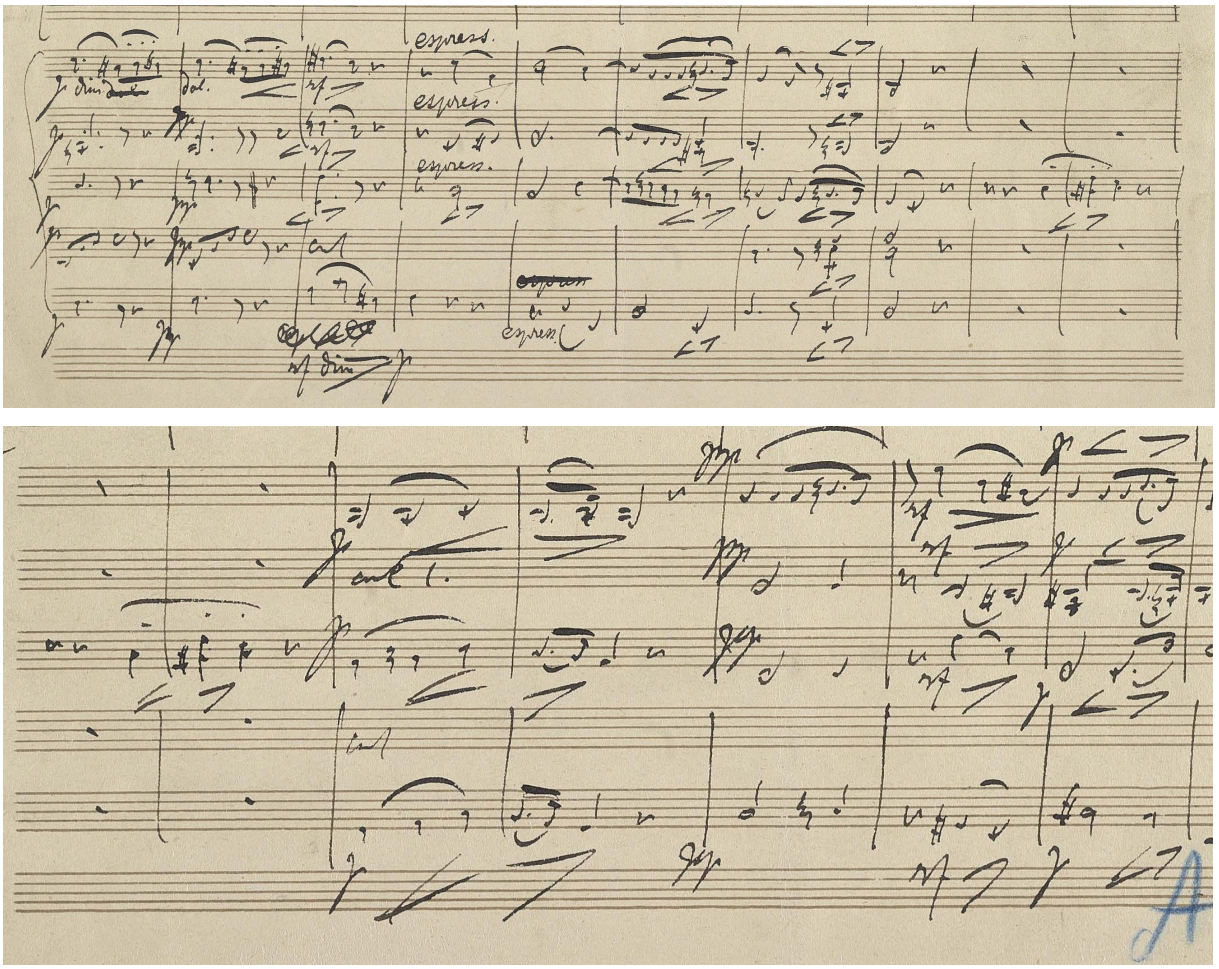


Figure 1.21: Brahms manuscript First Symphony.

These nuances in thickness tend to get lost in print. Thought and effort has been made to reflect the shape of the legato slurs (somewhat thicker in the middle, thinning out at start and finish). The hairpins appear to be printed with thinner lines in the score, as can be seen in this rendition of the third line of the example from the autograph (bars 22-27) in the Henle Urtext score:

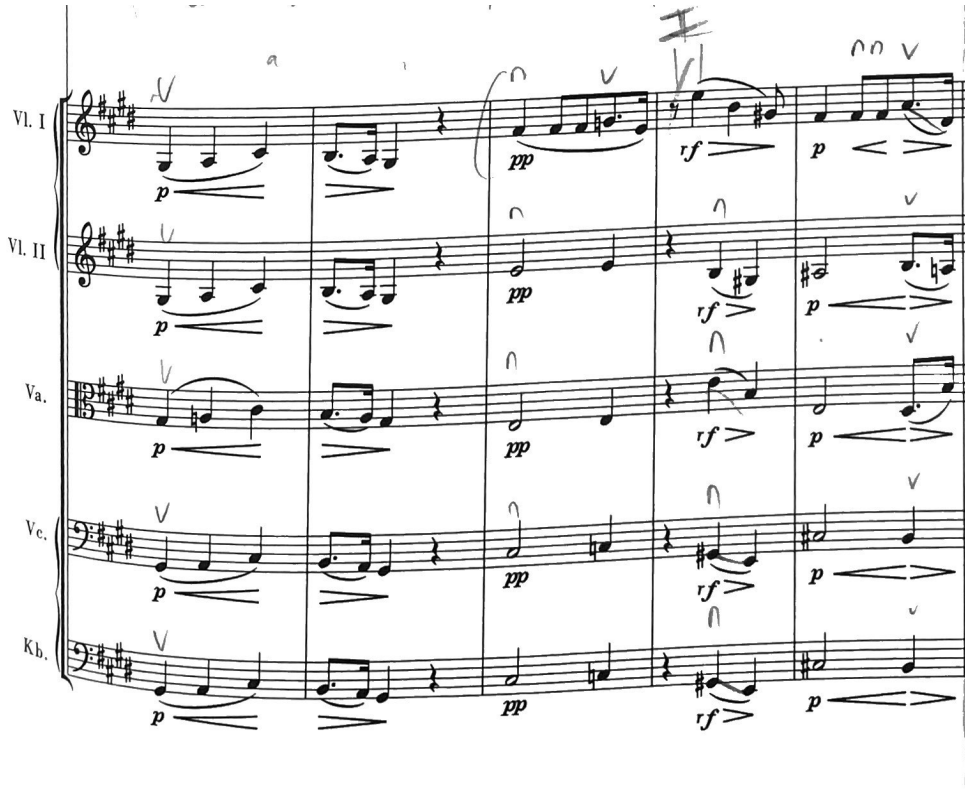



Figure 1.22: Breitkopf & Härtel Urtext Edition First Symphony (Score) page 68. (partially shown)

If in the score one might still think that the lines in the hairpins are perhaps a fraction thicker than the ones used as vertical lines in the notes, this does not seem to be the case in the parts on the stands in the orchestra, as the following example from the first violin part of the Henle edition makes clear. The lines in the hairpins appear much thinner in proportion to the notes:

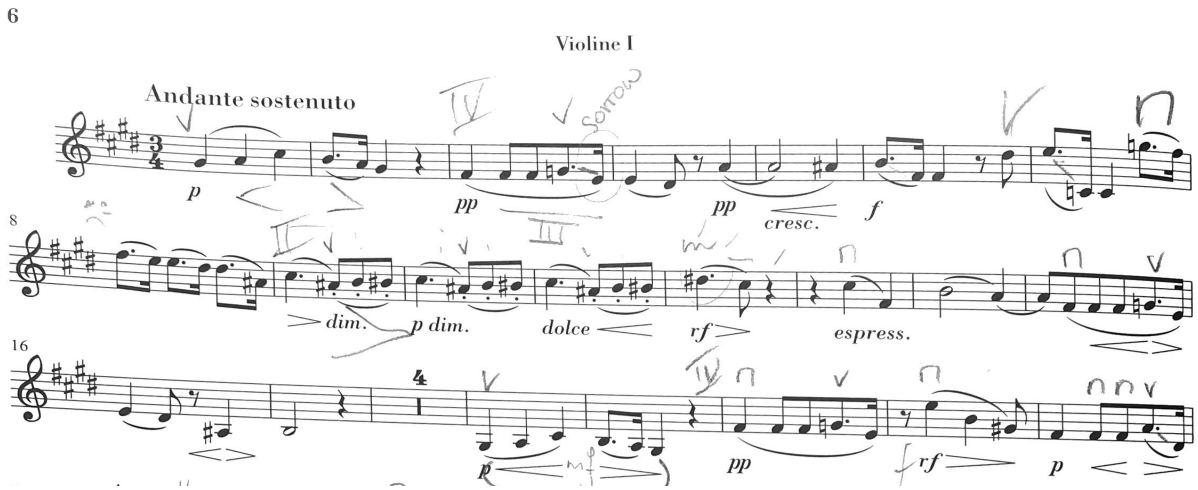


Figure 1.23: Breitkopf & Härtel Urtext Edition violin 1 page 6.

I deliberately show an annotated part as used by the players in my orchestra in order to illustrate that even the modest personal markings of the players are visually more present than the printed hairpins. Yet the main point I want to make relates to the limited presence of the printed hairpins in proportion to the notes and other printed information. One can clearly see thinner lines in the hairpins, in each step from manuscript to printed score and part. I would argue that the way they are printed in the parts suggests that they appear to be the least visually impactful of all the markings for dynamics and expression for the musicians. I have prepared each part for the project in September 2022 with handwritten thicker lines for the hairpins.

4) Verbal markings regarding the character of a tempo, a passage, or a theme/melody.

Brahms took great care to suggest the tempo for a movement in words rather than in numbers. To demonstrate this, I want to return one more time to Brahms's answer to Georg Henschel, when he asked him about metronome markings and tempo in *Ein Deutsches Requiem*:

> I think here as well as with all other music the metronome is of no value. As far at least as my experience goes, everybody has sooner or later withdrawn his metronome marks. Those which can be found in my works - good friends talked me into putting them there, for I myself have never believed that my blood and a mechanical instrument go well together. The so-called 'elastic tempo' is moreover not a new invention. *'Con discrezione'* should be added to that as to many other things. Is this an answer? I know of no better one; but what I do know is that I indicate my tempi (without numbers) modestly, to be sure, but with the greatest care and clearness.[104]

The first part of this quotation about the metronome and the "con discrezione" is often referenced for obvious reasons (as already discussed in Chapter 1.6 on Brahms's assumed preference for a "middle way"), but the last sentence makes clear that Brahms made very serious efforts to find the best possible wording for the tempo characterisation of each movement in

[104] Henschel, *Personal Recollections,* pp. 78-79.

the score. One can surmise, for example from the fact that he changed the markings of the finale of the *First Symphony,* that he sometimes kept searching for the best tempo indication for a long time. When Dessoff premiered the piece, it was marked as "Allegro con brio." Brahms later changed it to "Allegro moderato con brio" and finally to "Allegro non troppo ma con brio." Brahms's titles of the movements of his symphonies are remarkably nuanced: he seldom provides a tempo indication without qualifying it: "Allegro ma non troppo," etc. I will return to the subject of tempo in Chapter 3.6, which contains a list of Brahms's tempo indications for all movement of the symphonies.

It makes sense that the other verbal markings by Brahms in the score must have been equally carefully chosen and, therefore, should be considered very seriously. For me, the most productive way to interpret these nuanced indications has been to ask myself some questions about the markings. What would I have done differently if these nuances had not been added by Brahms, for instance if the movement had simply been called "Presto" rather than "Presto ma non assai"? Another question that I have asked myself relates to how I would want a passage to be played without the indications "animato", "tranquillo", "espressivo" or "ben marcato."

From asking these questions, I have learnt that the nuances implied in these indications fall into two categories: warnings and encouragements. For example, a marking "ma non assai" after Presto is a warning against playing the Presto too fast, whereas indications such as "con anima", "cantando", "tranquillo", or "agitato" suggest doing something extra that is considered necessary for bringing out those qualities or characteristics. This would have naturally included tempo modification for the nineteenth-century musician. Looking at the changed markings of the finale of the *First Symphony*, I would assume that the marking "Allegro moderato" could be read as a suggestion to look specifically for a moderate tempo, whereas the marking Brahms finally chose simply warned against taking the Allegro tempo too fast. A very subtle difference, but one that has clear consequences for the understanding of the tempo and the way one modifies it. As mentioned before, one must keep in mind that there is no way of establishing a baseline, particularly

because Brahms gave very few metronome markings. Although these metronome markings might have been helpful to understand what may have felt "tranquillo", "agitato", or "non troppo" to Brahms, they would not necessarily lead to tempos that would have the same effect on musicians and listeners today. I think one may conclude from Brahms's refusal to provide metronome markings on the one hand, in combination with the great care he took to find the best wordings for his tempo indications on the other, that it was more important to him how a tempo felt than how it could be defined in metrical terms. The verbal tempo and character markings in the symphonies, other than the names of the movements, are:

First Symphony
I, Meno Allegro in bar 495 in the first movement; III, *poco a poco tranquillo* in bar 152 in the third movement; IV, *stringendo poco a poco – a tempo* in bars 8-12; *stringendo molto - in tempo* in bars 18-20; *Più Andante* in bar 30; *f sempre e passionato* in horn and flute solos in bars 30 and 38; *animato* bar 94; *animato* in bar 118; *largamente* in bar 186 with upbeat; *animato* in bar 220; *calando- animato* in bars 297-301; *string.* in bar 383; *Più Allegro* in bar 391 in the Fourth movement.

Second Symphony
I, *cantando* in bar 82; *(quasi ritenente)* in bar 118; *cantando* in bar 350; *cresc. ed un poco stringendo* in bars 461-468; *ritard.* in bars 469-476; *in tempo, ma tranquillo* in bar 477; *poco rit.* – in bars 494-496; *in tempo, sempre tranquillo* in bar 497; *espress. cresc.* in bar 509 in the first movement; II, *(l'istesso tempo ma grazioso)* in bar 33; III, *Presto ma non assai* in bar 33; *Presto ma non assai* in bar 126; *Poco a poco Tempo primo* in bars *190-194* in the third movement; IV, *largamente* in bar 78; *ben marcato*[105] in bar 114; *Tranquillo* in bar 206; *Sempre più tranquillo* in bar 221; *in tempo* in bar 244; *largamente* in bar 281 in the fourth movement.

[105] I have included this marking because in my opinion the marking *ben marcato* can have consequences for the tempo, depending on the circumstances.

Third Symphony
I, *f passionato* in bar 3; *grazioso* in bar 36; *f agitato* in bar 77; *ben marc.* in bar 81; *f agitato* in bar 83; *poco rit.* in bars 109-111; *Un poco sostenuto* in bar 112; *Tempo I* in bar 120; *grazioso* in bar 149 in the first movement; II, *poco rit.* in bar 131 in the second movement; IV, *ben marc.* in bar 93; *ben marc.* in bar 149; *Un poco sostenuto* in bar 267 in the fourth movement.

Fourth Symphony
II, *rit. – in tempo* in bars 109-110; *poco rit.* in bar 112 in the second movement; III, *p grazioso* in bar 52 with upbeat; *pp ma ben marc.* in bar 168; *Poco meno presto* in bar 181; *Tempo I* in bar 199; *ben marc.* in bar 262 in the third movement; IV, *f ben marc.* in bar 25; *ben marc. largamente* in bar 33; *espress. cresc.* in bar 49; *espressivo* in flute in bar 97*; pp. espress.* in trombones in bar 113; *rit.* in bar 128; *poco ritard.* in bars 249-252; *Più Allegro* in bar 253 in the fourth movement.

5) Zones of calm and moving forward (implied not prescribed)

I first came across the German terms *ruhig* and *weiter* when I studied Mengelberg's scores in the context of preparing performances of Mahler's *Fourth Symphony* in 2017. When I looked for Mengelberg's score of the Mahler symphony in the library of the National Music Institute, I saw that the collection also contained his personal scores for all the major orchestral works by Brahms and I ordered copies of all of them. I used Mengelberg's annotations in his Mahler score for performances of that symphony with my orchestra in September 2017. With that experience in mind, I carefully studied his Brahms scores to find out how they might reflect nineteenth-century performances practices and how the annotations related to Mengelberg's recordings of the Brahms Symphonies. In Chapter 1.10 on Mengelberg's Brahms scores, I will look at his Brahms interpretations in more detail. For now, I intend to look at his application of tempo modifications in terms of tempo zones of calm and moving forward, which are unprescribed

by the composer. Mengelberg often includes a capital R or W in his scores.[106] He uses these terms to indicate tempo modifications, with *ruhig* suggesting calm or slowing down and *weiter* moving ahead. *Ruhig* is used in two separate ways, either to suggest a calm tempo for a particular theme or passage, or to suggest relaxing the tempo over the course of a section. Both types can be found in the example below: a moving forward with W and backward with R on page 30, in the 9th and 10th bar after letter A (second and third bars):

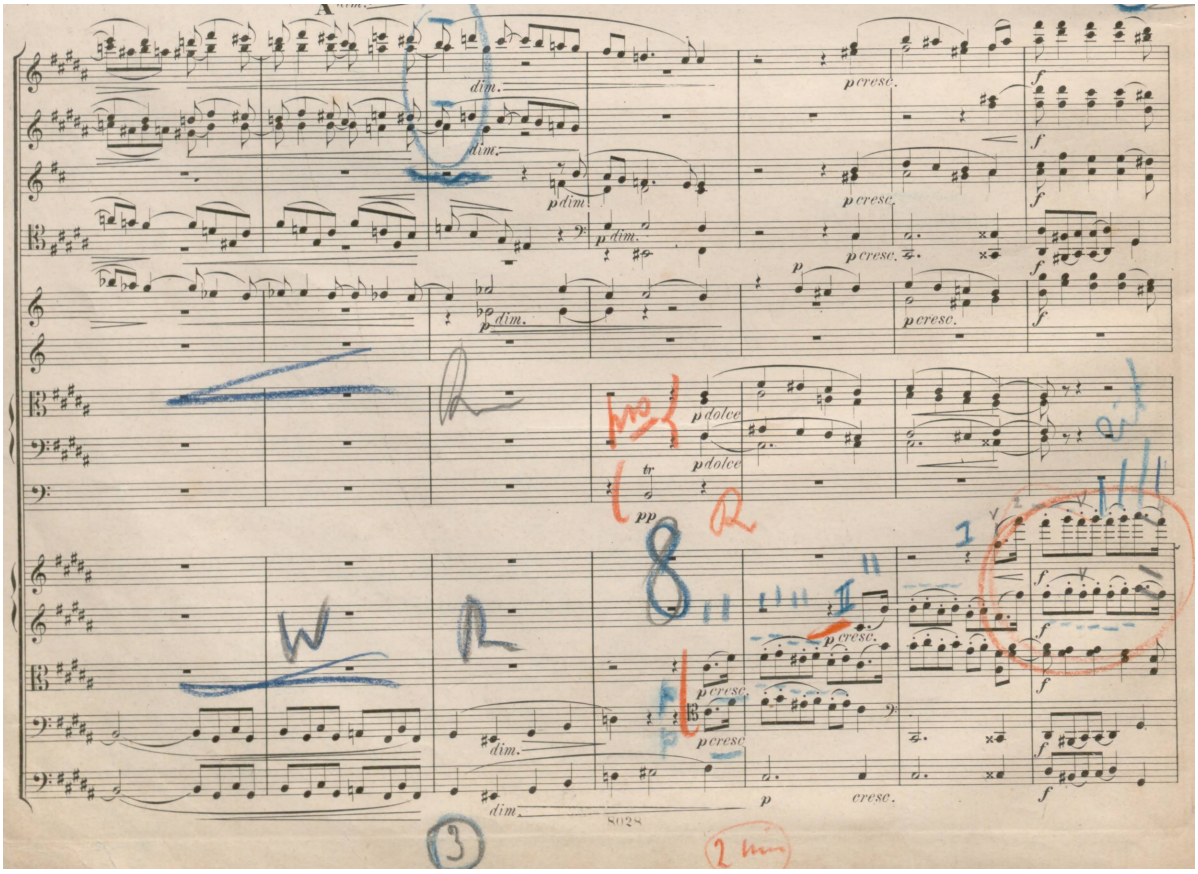



Figure 1.24: Mengelberg's score of the Second Symphony page 30.

And the character indication R appears on the next page at letter B (R "fließend", calm but flowingly):

[106] Mengelberg's full score of the Adagio of the *Second Symphony* can be found on my website: https://brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl/wp-content/uploads/Mengelbergs-score-of-the-Adagio-from-Brahmss-Second-Symphony.pdf.

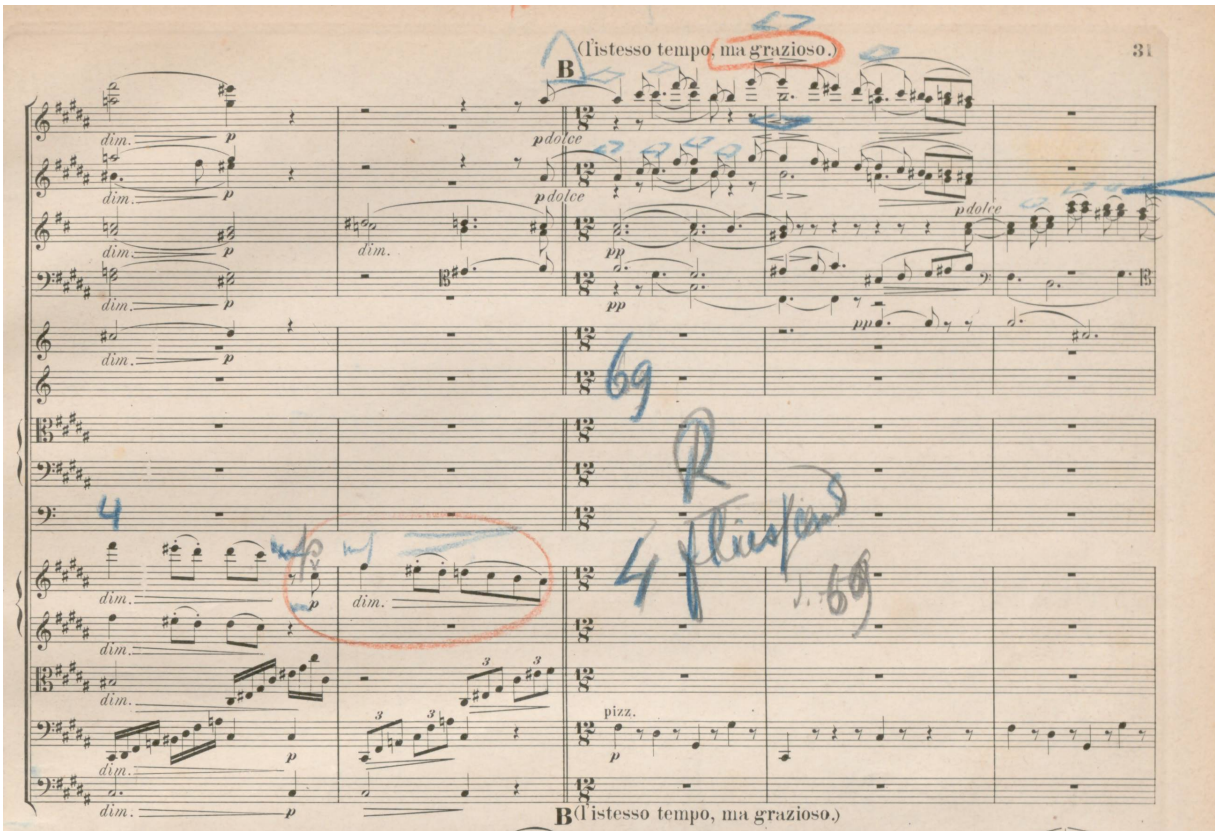



Figure 1.25: Mengelberg's score of the Second Symphony page 33.

These different ways of using R and W as indications of movement correspond with the impression one has when listening to Mengelberg's recordings. He seems always to be moving towards a goal, or to relax after having reached it. This creates a constantly changing tempo and a sense of unpredictability in his performances.

Given the subtle and nuanced descriptions of tempo modification presented in the previous sections, I think that Mengelberg often seemed to use the most obvious tools of clearly noticeable crescendos and diminuendos, accelerandos, and ritardandos in a very outspoken style. Listening to his recordings one can hardly be in doubt about what he does when, and how. Comparing Mengelberg's recordings of orchestral repertoire to the five short pieces Joachim recorded in his seventies in 1903, is arguably of limited relevance, but the Joachim's recordings do provide examples of a subtle style of modification of rhythm and tempo. Ranken writes about the nuanced meaning and use of the terms "ruhig" und "weiter" in the context of her description of the Joachim School and style:

> Besides, not even a novice could fail to hear that 'hurry and drag' did not at all describe the ebb and flow or the dramatic and breathless moments of any Joachim performance any more than they do the still larger movements of nature even when these are wild and convulsive. For behind these, one feels that there is a law of which balance is an essential part. 'Hurry and drag,' on the other hand (as used by musicians), denote a loss of balance. The next thing that began to be apparent was that the words 'vorwärts' (forward) and 'ruhig' (quietly, calmly) did not necessarily apply very much to the actual pace but were primarily descriptive of the mood and character of the section. Thus, although it is unreasonable to make your dwelling-place in paths and passages in whatever sphere these may occur, because they are there only for the purpose of leading you from one point to another, this does not, therefore, make it necessary for you to hurry along them unduly. So, of certain musical 'passages' you were told to go 'forward,' through them, or in other words, simply to keep moving, and this sense of purposeful 'moving' was the essential thing, not the actual pace at which you moved. Conversely, when you came to a section of essential importance where a statement of the subject-matter of the piece occurred, you had to convey the impression of dwelling on it, of resting there for a time – this being one of the goals of your journey. The word 'ruhig' conveyed this impression, as also the lyric mood of a great many second subjects to which it was generally applied. Since these second subjects always come after a transition section, the contrast between the 'vorwärts' movement which is concerned in getting from one place to another, and the movement which is a purpose in itself as it is, for instance, in a dance, was more easy to demonstrate here than elsewhere.[107]

Ranken proposes that understanding *ruhig* and *weiter* involves much more than just tempo and relates principally to the mood and character of the music. She goes on to explain a key factor in the way one can experience tempo, which could be described as the frequency of moments of vertical orientation in relation to the beat/pulse of the music. I find Ranken's explanation of the way in which the frequency of accents relates to the sense of either movement and direction or dwelling particularly important, as it opens up a way of experiencing the same tempo as faster or slower, depending on the number of accents within it:

> Whether these opposite impressions can be conveyed entirely without change of speed will have to be decided by each player on each occasion, but in any case, a great deal can be done by the treatment of accent alone. Thus, one

[107] Ranken, *Some Points of Violin Playing,* p. 117.

> single impulse, like the push to a wheeled vehicle, can convey you along a straight passage or path, but on the threshold of a dwelling-place, purpose, and movement at once become less straight ahead, and for each turn and twist there is needed another push and another impulse. So, in the transition section the fewer the accents the more you get the impression of passing on to something important, and the greater number of bars that can be passed over without emphasis, the more you are prepared for the final climax which does not occur until the appearance of the new subject. If by undue emphasis a climax is made before this point and the impetus is thus checked, the subject, when it does appear, enters lamely and without clear purpose. When, however, ushered in dramatically by a great player the impression given is that a new personality, whose appearance first makes one pause and on whom one's attention then settles down and dwells restfully, has come onto the stage.[108]

I use the idea of *ruhig* and *weiter* for tempo modification but, inspired by Ranken's remarks, I now always investigate whether the sense of calm or moving on is best created by modifying the number of accents (moments of vertical orientation) or by a change of tempo. This can be applied both in situations with local consequences, specifically around sets of hairpins and accents, but also on a larger scale involving deviations from the basic tempo over a number of bars or a longer passage. It is noteworthy that Ranken connected the use of tempo modification to the structure of a piece, particularly in light of criticisms of so-called structuralist performance practice. I will return to this subject in Chapter 1.8 on the work of Dr. Otto Klauwell (1851-1917). Ranken also describes the use of *ruhig* in connection with the characterisations of second subjects, which I will address below under point 6, the last kind of modification of tempo I will discuss.

6) Characterisation of particular themes or subjects

In the context of an approach that allows for much greater fluctuation of tempi, which is the natural result of using all the tools mentioned thus far, it is entirely consistent with the sources to modify the tempo of particular themes and subjects. Introducing modifications of tempo by, for example,

[108] Ibid p. 118.

taking second subjects with a lyrical character a little slower, as suggested by Ranken, creates a need for flexible tempo elsewhere if one wants to avoid sudden changes in tempo that might be experienced as undermining the sense of unity that was so important to people like Steinbach.

When it comes to applying the ideas of *ruhig* and *weiter* in terms of modifying of tempo connected with crescendo and diminuendo indications, and to tempo modification as a tool for characterising particular themes and subjects, there is some evidence that one's intuition will not necessarily guide one in the right direction. In his chapter on metronome markings and tempo in *Performing Brahms*, Bernard D. Sherman provides a list of measured tempi and timings in 23 different pre- and post-World War II recordings of the first movement of Brahms's *Second Symphony.* [109] He does so to show how tempi and durations developed over the course of the twentieth century. By comparing tempi at various moments in recordings of the movement, Sherman concludes that the conductors accelerated the tempo in the pre-1946 recordings more than their colleagues in the post-war recordings. This is a particularly important conclusion, as it suggests that the tradition of speeding up beyond and above the basic tempo all but vanished in contemporary orchestral performance practices while the tradition of slowing down survived. This prompted me to actively search for opportunities for acceleration. Sherman's conclusion reminded me of something Bernard Haitink (1929-2021) shared about the difference between conducting Brahms symphonies with the great international symphony orchestras he used to work with and with the much smaller Chamber Orchestra of Europe, with whom he recorded some live performances in the Royal Albert Hall.[110] He mentioned how "conducting Brahms symphonies with the great orchestras can be like walking a dog that wants to stop at every tree." Speaking from my much lower level of personal experience as a conductor, I can confirm that slowing down an orchestra in Brahms is much

[109] Sherman, B. D. "Metronome marks, timings, and other period evidence regarding tempo in Brahms" in *Performing Brahm*s, p. 119.
[110] Bernard Haitink and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe performing Brahms's *Fourth Symphony* live recording Proms 2011: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7QLuYj2jxoc. (Last accessed November 2022).

easier than accelerating the tempo. Orchestras seem much more able react in a unified manner to gestures suggesting slowing down than to those suggesting speeding up. When it comes to evaluating the results of my own recordings, I cannot help but notice that my ear welcomed moments of relaxation much more readily than moments of forward movement, certainly at the beginning of my project. My perceptions have changed, however, through exploring opportunities to accelerate the tempo during the past few years. I now often feel impatient when I listen to performances where a tempo does not move forward for extended periods of time. At the same time, I must confess that even with this new perspective, I still find it harder to connect emotionally with the effect of moving forward than with that of relaxing the tempo. I feel that I have to compensate for my late-twentieth-century training that has taught me to distrust the excitement and unrest that result from acceleration and to appreciate moments of calm more readily. Thus, applying modifications of tempo in a style that Brahms may have been familiar with may require an effort to embrace accelerandi as much as rallentandi, even if this initially seems counterintuitive.

The other main category of modifications is the modification of rhythm. As discussed in Chapter 1.5, modifications of rhythm are often closely related to those of tempo. In Chapter 1.1, I quoted Brown, who, in his 2020 edition of the *Beethoven Violin Sonatas,* discussed three types of rhythms that were presumably performed differently than the strict reading of the music would suggest to a modern musician. Such deviations from the text relate to slurred figures, successive notes of the same length, and dotted figures.[111] In their publication on *Performing Practices in Johannes Brahms's Chamber Music*, Clive Brown, Neal Peres Da Costa and Kate Bennett Wadsworth do not address the subject of modification of rhythm in any separate chapter or section of their contributions. But they agree that the historical evidence suggests that Brahms would have expected performers to perform rhythms in his music in a flexible manner.[112]

[111] Brown, *Beethoven Sonatas for Pianoforte and Violin.* pp. XIV-XV.
[112] Brown, C., Peres Da Costa, N., Bennett Wadsworth, K. *Performance Practices in Johannes Brahms' Chamber Music.* Bärenreiter, Kassel, 2015.

Listening carefully to my project orchestra, I was struck by the thought that the unevenness in sound of the nineteenth-century instruments can be used to stimulate a freer interpretation of the printed rhythms. The most obvious effect, to my ear, is in the natural horns, where the difference between stopped and open notes, which Brahms used so imaginatively, can serve as an example of how some notes of equal value in print can sound quite different in performance. On the period woodwind instruments too, some notes sound much more open than others. Experimenting with ways of using these types of unevenness in sound, in combination with unevenness of rhythm, to create expressive shapes and sounds that serve the chosen musical narrative is much more in line with the historical evidence on modification of rhythm than efforts to produce an equal sound on every note. On string instruments, the use of portamento and incidental (as opposed to continuous) vibrato are also sources of unevenness in sound that have a clear relationship to the issue of rhythmical unevenness of notes which, on paper, would appear to have the same value or length.

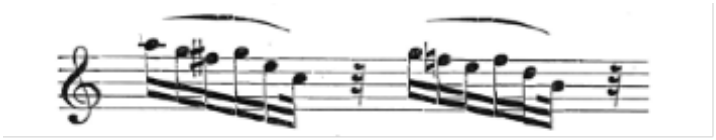
Considering all these factors and looking at the practical experience of applying modifications of rhythm with the project orchestra, I have come to the following list of opportunities for its use, beginning with the three types described by Brown in his introduction to the *Beethoven Violin Sonatas*:

Five types of modification of rhythm

1) Slurred figures

Brown writes that Brahms and his German contemporaries would almost certainly have expected some inequality in rhythm when it came to the execution of paired eighth notes, lengthening the first at the expense of the second. As I showed in Chapter 1.5, Blume often adds short rests in between groups of slurred notes, suggesting a shortening of the last note under the slur. This seems perfectly in line with what Brahms wrote to Joachim in a letter about the *Violin Concerto*, namely that slurred pairs of eighth notes required a short articulation after the second note and that a similar style might be applied to final notes of longer groups. Brahms's choice of words is

remarkably nuanced, and leaves room for the free interpretation of notes under a legato slur:

> By the way, I think that the slur over multiple notes does not take anything away from the duration of any of them. It means legato and one applies it by group, period or mood. Only when the slur is over two notes does it take from the second:
>
>
>
> In case of larger groups of notes:
>
>
>
> This would be a freedom and a subtlety in the performance, which would mostly be appropriate. Such considerations are of no use for me, but you have the broom in your hand, and we have a lot to sweep.[113]
>
> Figure 1.26: Moser *Johannes Brahms in Briefwechsel mit Joseph Joachim* page 153.

Brahms makes clear that unequal note value is a given in paired eighth notes as far as he is concerned. But he prefers to leave the decision to shorten the last note of larger groups of notes to the performer, and he does remark that it would be appropriate to shorten them in most cases. Brahms's remark, in my opinion, opens the door to a less literal reading of slurred notes of equal length in general. The fact that he preferred to leave the choice for such a reading to the performer, in combination with the suggestions by Blume to emphasise certain (same length) notes under a slur, encourages me to look

[113] Moser, A. *Johannes Brahms im Briefwechsel mit Joseph Joachim.* Deutschen Brahms-Verlag, Berlin, 1908. Zweiter Band, p. 153. *Nebenbei noch meine ich, dass der Bogen über mehreren Noten keiner derselben etwas an Wert nimmt. Es bedeutet legato, und man zieht ihn nach Gruppe, Periode oder Laune. Nur über zwei Noten nimmt er der letzten: (see example in English text) Bei größeren Notengruppen: (see example in the English text) Wäre das eine Freiheit und Feinheit im Vortrag, die allerdings meistens am Platz ist.*

for opportunities to shape notes under a single legato slur unequally. In concurrence with Blume's suggestion under point 4 below, I do not limit my efforts to paired eighth notes, or even to the last note of a slur over more than two notes. For example, if groups of eighth notes are to be played in the context of an accelerando, playing each consecutive eighth note under the slur a bit shorter than its predecessor, will help create a flow.

2) Successive notes of equal length

Brown writes that successive notes of equal length were almost never played equally, and that these notes would have been varied depending on harmonic tension, their place in the bar (weak or strong beat), and agogic emphasis. Blume does not write at length about this but, as discussed in Chapter 1.5, he often writes that in passages of notes of equal length some notes are to be played longer, or with more emphasis, than others, effectively creating unevenness between them. Also, in the third example from his remarks on the *Fourth Symphony* in Chapter 1.5, Blume states clearly that each of the accented notes (5 consecutive quarter notes) should get the same emphasis *(gleichmäßig betonte Viertel).* The fact that he mentions it as a special effect makes it clear that musicians tended not to apply equal emphasis on consecutive notes of equal value without specific instructions to do so.

3) Dotted rhythms

Musicians applied a wide range of interpretative freedom to the execution of dotted rhythms, depending on the character or structure of a piece or passage. The characterisation can be enhanced by exaggerating the printed rhythm, for example by shortening the short notes in dotted rhythms to avoid softening the rhythm by turning the pattern into triplets. In his suggestions for the third movement of the *First Symphony*, Blume writes about a rhythmic exaggeration:

> The woodwind players should treat their 16th notes as 32nds rather than sloppily play them as triplets.[114]

In Brahms, I believe that it is important to make a clear distinction between the dotted rhythms that can be somewhat freely interpreted, and those that appear simultaneously with eighth notes or triplets in an accompaniment or other layers of the music. In the first case, these considerations can purely revolve around characterisation of the melody or line in question. But in rhythmically multi-layered situations, one needs to consider the effect of the rhythmical patterns in the other voices. A good example of this may be found at letter D in the second movement of the *Second Symphony*, where Brahms mixes eighth notes in 12/8 with dotted rhythms in common time. The example below shows the passage in Mengelberg's score:[115]

[114] Blume, p. 25. *Die Holzbläser behandeln ihre Sechzehntel lieber als 32stel, als dass sie nach der Triolen-Seite hin schlampen.*

[115] Mengelberg's grey pencil markings above the first violin line at letter D seem to suggest that he intended to beat eighth notes in common time, or at least thought of the rhythm here in binary terms.

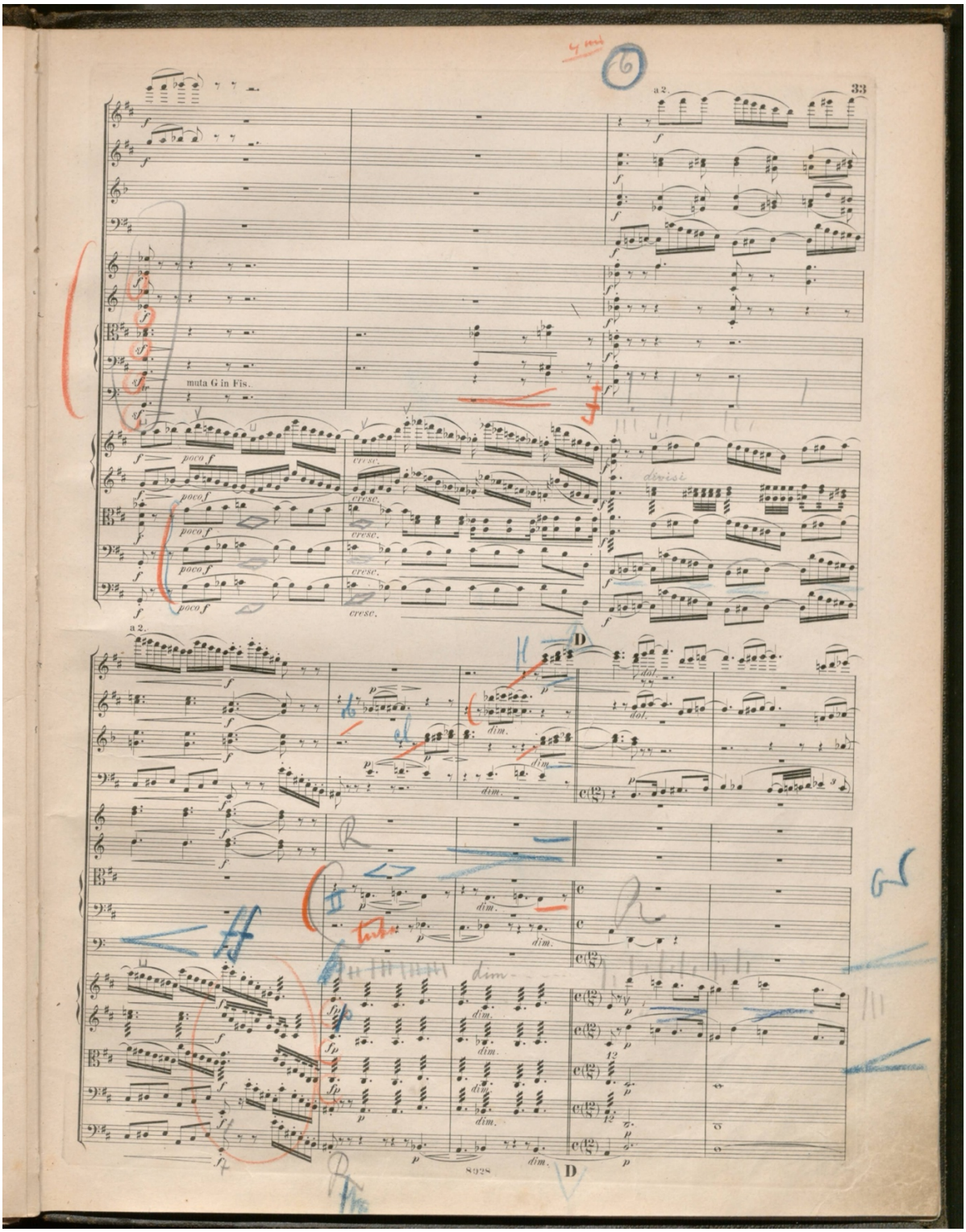



Figure 1.27: Mengelberg's score of the Second Symphony page 33.

It makes sense that Brahms, who often used simultaneous 2 against 3 or 3 against 4 rhythms, expected them to be played in such a way as to ensure that the multi-layered effect would be realised. This works best if one exaggerates the individual rhythms (very even triplets against (slightly) over-

dotted rhythms). In situations where there are no multi-layered effects to consider, performers can choose all sorts of subtle modifications of dotted rhythms, depending on their understanding of the character of the melody or figure in question. Shortening the short note in the dotted rhythm (veering towards double dotting) can result in extra liveliness and lengthening the short note (towards triplets) can bring smoothness or relaxation of the character. Klauwell pointed to a possible difference between dotted rhythms of melodic and rhythmic nature – this is something I will discuss in Chapter 1.8. on Klauwell's rules for modification.

4) Agogic emphasis of individual notes

As discussed in Chapter 1.5, Blume wrote extensively about the agogic accentuation of individual notes, especially those that are connected to other notes through a slur. The technique of applying these agogic accents, for example on the top notes in a melody, can involve lengthening of them, though one often also sees warnings against using that tool, emphasising the importance of other means of highlighting individual notes through added warmth of sound instead (see also Chapter 1.8).

5) Hairpins

I have already discussed hairpins in Chapter 1.5 and in this Chapter under point 3 of the tempo modifications. I return to them here to emphasise the fact that the technique of speeding up in the < part of hairpins and slowing down in the > part (or, as discussed above, sometimes the opposite) involves modifying the rhythm as it affects the lengths of the notes in question. It constitutes another example of the intricate connection between modifications of rhythm and tempo, especially if one considers various opinions on the need to make up for the lost time within the bar or the phrase.

Conclusion

The concept of tempo as a constantly changing, living thing that can be present in the background of a performance must guide the use of these tools for modifying rhythm and tempo. There is a danger in presenting these tools item by item because it can create the impression that they can be used separately or that one can pick and choose. By their very nature, however, these tools must be considered and felt or experienced in conjunction with each other, so that the listener experiences each movement or even each symphony as a whole. In applying these tools, it is important to look for opportunities to counter the effects of one's training and conditioning as a twenty-first century musician, particularly when it comes to accelerating the tempo, which musicians trained in the second half of the twentieth century have learned to mistrust more than slowing down the tempo.

My default position as a performer has shifted over the course of my research. In the first year, I thought of a fundamental tempo that would be rather present in the foreground. Within the framework of this fundamental tempo, I applied what I felt were necessary modifications. In the second year, I prepared my scores and orchestral parts in such a way that I marked all the modifications I wanted to implement in the performances. I soon realised that they were so plentiful that there were not many places in which I intended to leave the tempo alone. In my preparations for the project week of the third year, it also became obvious that I was not making a serious enough effort to apply modification of rhythm. I began to discover the connection between modifications of rhythm and of tempo, as explained in Chapter 1.5 on Blume's writings, and I changed my default position to one in which any idea of a fundamental tempo would only exist in the background. In the fourth year I have striven to weave a web of micro and macro modifications, unrestrained by measurements against a fixed tempo.

This entire process has altered my understanding of the way my intuition guides me as a performing musician. In Chapter 2.1, concerning my role as a conductor, I will write about the connection between my changing artistic principles and my intuition. For now, I would simply like to point out

that in practice it is not possible (for me) to process a complete rationalisation of each separate consideration regarding modifications of rhythm and tempo in performance or even in rehearsal. Instead, I try to familiarise myself with the new concepts concerning this expressive tool and others in a way that permits me to work with them in an intuitive manner. This familiarisation is much more a process of moulding melodies and phrases in my mind than of actual (instrumental) practice or theoretical consideration. How far my intuitive way of working with these newly re-invented expressive tools and changing perspectives is actually reflected in the recordings will be investigated in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

1.8 Klauwell's Rules, Further Contextualisation of My Approach

My work with the project orchestra in 2019, 2020 and 2021 has been based on an approach in which I apply modifications based on historical evidence in an intuitive way. After Clive Brown first introduced me to Otto Adolf Klauwell's book *On Musical Execution* in October 2021, I initially felt somewhat disappointed at encountering such a rich and specific source only after finishing the first three programmes of my project.[116] Yet I soon realised that this also offered a unique opportunity, as it enabled me to see whether or not my research and intuition had led me in a direction that would correspond with Klauwell's very specific instructions in his book. Klauwell, a pianist, music writer and composer, studied with Carl Reinecke (1824-1910) and Ernst Friedrich Richter (1803-1879) at the Leipzig Conservatory. He became a teacher at the Cologne Conservatory in 1871 and its deputy director in 1905. In 1883, Klauwell published a book on musical performance in which he provided an extensive list of suggestions as to when to use modifications of tempo. While most examples in his book are taken from the piano repertoire, I consider that much of what he writes also applies to orchestral performances. Klauwell's teacher Carl Reinecke, after all, was not only one of the most important pianists of the nineteenth century, but also the conductor of the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig from 1860 to 1895. It is plausible that the aesthetics concerning modification of tempo in piano playing and orchestral performance are closely related. Someone like Hans von Bülow, for instance, also considered his work as a conductor to be, in large part, an extension of his work as a pianist.

Anna Scott, Neal Peres Da Costa and others have conducted extensive research into the use of modifications of rhythm and tempo by pianists whom Brahms directly influenced or whom he regarded highly. Their work not only shows modifications in line with Klauwell's suggestions from his writings, but also types of modifications that differed from Klauwell's rules.

[116] Klauwell, O. *Der Vortrag in der Musik. Versuch einer systematischen Begründung desselben zunächst rücksichtlich des Klavierspiels*. Verlag von J. Guttenberg (D. Collin), Berlin, 1883. English translation: *On Musical Execution.* Schirmer, New York, 1980, p. 9.

Peres Da Costa concludes, for instance, that the written sources provide copious evidence of keyboard dislocation and arpeggiation throughout the nineteenth century, which would lead one to assume they were implicated in tempo modification.[117] While Klauwell discussed these subjects elsewhere in his book, however, they are not included in his list of modifications. One might assume from this that dislocation and arpeggiation do not necessarily belong to the domain of tempo modification. At the same time, though, one might also argue that these tools were such a natural part of the Reinecke/Klauwell way of playing that Klauwell simply saw no need to include them in a list of tools specifically intended for modification.

In her dissertation *Romanticizing Brahms*, Anna Scott offers a detailed analysis of different performance styles in contemporaneous Brahms playing through the work of pianists like Adelina de Lara (1872-1961) and Ilona Eibenschütz (1871-1967). She studies the styles of playing of pianists Brahms knew and highly valued by playing in their style herself, and even copying them in detail. In doing so, she illustrates, among other things, that each contemporaneous style of playing Brahms contained a multitude of details that are difficult to express in words. Her findings show a different style of playing, very free and dynamic in nature, yet closely related to the recorded playing of the historical examples.[118] Comparing other nineteenth-century pianistic performance styles to Klauwell's rules can help one understand that these rules, though presented as a comprehensive list, cannot serve to lay down a complete roadmap to nineteenth-century pianistic performance, and certainly are not a comprehensive guide to a Brahmsian style of piano playing, if such a thing could even exist.

Klauwell's rules and the formal way in which he presents his ideas remind me of Bülow's characterisation of the Leipzig style of performance. As discussed in Chapter 1.2, he deemed Leipzig to be "the capital of pigtails and wigs that know nothing of the romantic Beethoven." Since Reinecke was

[117] Peres Da Costa, N. "Performing Practice in Piano Playing" in *Performance Practice in Johannes Brahms's Chamber Music.* Bärenreiter-Verlag, Karlsruhe, 2015.
[118] Scott, A. "Romanticizing Brahms." PhD diss., Leiden University, 2014.

such an influential musician in Leipzig and given the fact that Klauwell was his pupil, I think one can assume that Klauwell's rules are at least somewhat representative of the Leipzig style of performance. If Bülow's characterisation of that style is even remotely accurate, it is clear that it was not necessarily close to Brahms's free and elastic style, as described earlier. Yet Klauwell's list remains a unique late nineteenth-century source of information about the application of modification before the age of audio recording. On the title page of his book, Klauwell uses the same quote from Goethe's *Faust* that Brahms used in his letter to Otto Dessoff, which translates as "if you don't feel it, you will never grasp it." This not only gives a welcome hint as to how to understand Klauwell's systematic writing style, but it also suggests that he had the element of valuing "emotional understanding" in common with Brahms. I have looked at Klauwell's list, point by point, to see if and how these rules might correspond to my recordings of the first three projects. Except for a few rules that seem designed specifically for pianists, most of his rules can be applied directly to orchestral performance as well. For each of these, I have briefly referred to my application of the rule. These are intended only to indicate briefly how my style of applying modifications relates to Klauwell's writing, not to give a full account of my modifications. I present my discussion of examples of modifications in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, in the form of 14 films with musical examples.

KLAUWELL'S RULES ON MODIFICATION. [119]

> *1) The beginning of a composition should always be performed with marked clearness, and consequently at times with greater breadth.*

In my recording, the tempo of the opening of the first movement of the *Second Symphony* is, for instance, slower than the main tempo of the overall movement. I found this approach in all of the six historical recordings that I

[119] The following 21 rules appear on pages 9-57 of Klauwell's book. The English may sometimes appear to be somewhat awkward, but it is directly quoted from the book.

studied in my essay "In Search of Traces of Steinbach," and in all of the recordings examined by Sherman as discussed in Chapter 1.7.[120]

> *2) The so-called second theme, in all sonatas and pieces of similar construction, is to be taken somewhat slower wherever it expresses a more tranquil contrast to a first theme of lively rhythm.*

In my recordings of the first movements of the *First*, *Second*, and *Third Symphonies*, I have indeed taken the second subject somewhat more calmly than the first. Ranken also mentions this type of modification as something commonly applied at the time.

> *3) The long passages, frequently introduced between the second theme and the close, must move, in contradistinction to the preceding portions, in a somewhat more lively tempo.*

I also applied this rule in my recordings of the first movements of the first three symphonies.

> *4) The closing periods of the several parts must, in nearly every case, be rendered with modified tempo, either retarding or accelerating the same.*

In my recording and in most of the historical recordings I studied, the first movement of the *First Symphony* contains a faster closing period. The closing period of the first movement of the *Second Symphony* constitutes an example of a calmer tempo.

> *5) Variations must modify their tempo according to their character, even where the composer gives no special directions.*

There are no examples of variation movements so far in my recordings. Brahms does give a new tempo indication for each of the variations in his

[120] Leertouwer "In search of sounding evidence of traces of Fritz Steinbach's approach to Brahms's Second Symphony", June 2021, https://brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl/wp-content/uploads/In-search-of-sounding-evidence-of-traces-of-Fritz-Steinbachs-approach-to-Brahmss-Second-Symphony-31-05-2020-revised-15-06-2021.pdf.

Haydn Variations though, and Blume also suggests some further characterisations and tempo indications.

> *6) The immediate repetition of a section must be rendered with a change of tempo, as a rule somewhat broader (more expressive).*

The same 4 bars are repeated in the agitato section in the close of the exposition in the first movement of the *First Symphony*. I have intensified the agitato in the repeated bars, not by broadening them, but by pushing them forward. Playing a repeated phrase more emphatically could certainly involve broadening, and I have done so in other places. I would argue that playing a repeated group of bars more lightly, stressing that it contains no new information, is equally valid as repeating it with greater emphasis, stressing that it needs to be said one more time in order to be fully understood. I decide how to shape a repeated section based on my understanding of the rhetorical build-up. Klauwell chose the words to describe this rule so that it allows for modifications other than broadening. In my own way, I address the same issue of repeated sections by looking for an expression in relation to the first statement of the section that suits the narrative I want to build.

> *7) Every ascending movement is, like every crescendo, generally to be slightly accelerated; every descending movement and every decrescendo to be slightly retarded.*

There are plenty of examples of this technique in my recordings, some of which can be seen and heard in Chapter 2.4 with examples of modifications I applied. Yet if a top goal-note at the summit of an ascending line can be understood as "hard won" as opposed to easily reached, and/or if there are accents in the ascending line, I have sometimes done the opposite of what Klauwell suggests here.[121] As discussed in the presentation of my tools of expression in Chapter 1.7, Ferdinand Ries claimed that Beethoven sometimes applied this technique with great effect as well.

[121] See e.g., the two samples given under point 2 in the list of tempo modifications in Chapter 1.7.

8) Strongly or quickly modulated passages require, for their thorough comprehension, a somewhat broader tempo.

In general, my modifications are related to the harmonic structure of the piece; if the harmony changes rapidly, I tend to take more time, but sometimes I like to speed up to create a somewhat dazzling effect, particularly in development sections. This is not in line with the suggestion by Klauwell, who seems to prioritise thorough comprehension at all times.

9) The more fully a polyphonic passage is treated, and the lower the pitch in which it is set, the broader the tempo it will bear.

This appears to be a rule designed to keep clarity in polyphonic passages set in low registers (or played by ensembles tuning to a lower A?) by moderating the tempo. It does not apply in Brahms's orchestral works.

10) Unexpected modulations, deceptive cadences, and the like, should be prepared, in order to increase the suspense, by a poco ritardando.

I feel that preparing deceptive cadences by a poco ritardando tends to take away the element of surprise crucial to them. Playing straight into them also often seems to undermine this effect. I have strived to prepare unexpected modulations and deceptive cadences but not – as Klauwell seems to suggest – only by a poco ritardando. This suggestion and the previous one regarding the thorough comprehension of polyphonic passages remind me of Bülow's description of Reinecke and the Gewandhaus Orchestra's playing. Rules such as this one and numbers 8, 12, 13 and 15 are perhaps indications of a hyper-correct performance style that prompted the critical observations by Bülow and by Huschke quoted earlier.

11) Unimportant intermediate passages, little introductory and closing phrases and the like are, in keeping with their character, not to be rendered with the full breadth of the prescribed tempo.

I move through such passages swiftly in my work. Ranken's description of structure-related modifications aligns with this rule.

> *12) Before beginning the repetition in sonatas and other pieces composed in three divisions, a ritardando should set in.*

Klauwell has phrased this rule so that it can be understood as referring to the repeat of the exposition or to the recapitulation after the development section in a sonata form movement. Blume claimed that Steinbach did not observe the first repeat in the first movements of the *First* and *Second Symphonies*, but if one does, connecting a modified tempo of a closing group to the tempo of the opening requires some careful planning, as does the connection to the development section. The transition from development to recapitulation constitutes an important moment in pieces in sonata form. In the first movements of the *First* and *Second Symphony*, I have applied a ritardando in those places. It is prescribed by Brahms in the *Third*.

> *13) All cadences are to be retarded a trifle.*

I have often applied this type of slight ritardando. According to Klauwell's rule 11 though, adding weight to such moments in the score should be avoided, especially ones that do not contain new musical information. I find that slowing down in simple cadences can often be considered a hallmark of late twentieth-century performances and recordings of Brahms's orchestral music, as this seems to be the only type of tempo modification that has weathered the test of time.[122] Anna Scott found, for instance, that Brahms's pianists tend to plunge straight into and through cadences of all types, slowing well afterwards, if at all.

> *14) The duration of the fermata is very often not indefinite but can be precisely measured according to the periodisation of what precedes.*

[122] This assumption fits in with Bernard Haitink's description of conducting Brahms Symphonies with large symphony orchestras as being like 'walking a dog that wants to stop at every tree', which we saw in the previous chapter.

See below.

> *15) Most 'fermate' should be prepared by ritardando (not always noted by the composer) and divided by a trifling pause from what succeeds.*

I have often applied modifications that correspond with these two rules. One example of the application of these two rules (14 and 15) can be found in the third movement, Poco Allegretto, of the *Third Symphony.* In my performance, I slow down the fermata considerably, so that the last phrase of the woodwinds, in which the dotted rhythm is already a doubling in note value of the preceding two utterances of the winds, gets plenty of space and expressivity (as is also suggested by the hairpin markings in the score). As a result of this ritardando, the beats in which the length of the fermata might be perceived are already slower than the basic tempo. I think of the length of the fermata *(lunga)* as roughly two bars plus one beat, followed by a beat rest and then by the calm upbeat in the solo horn. This produces a result in which indeed the periodisation from bar 94 on is two bars-two bars-four bars. I feel that this idea should be executed in such a way that a natural feeling of timing can be guaranteed. As with so many of these cleverly calculated effects, all is lost if, in the immortal words of the cellist Wieland Kuijken, "one can smell the pencil."

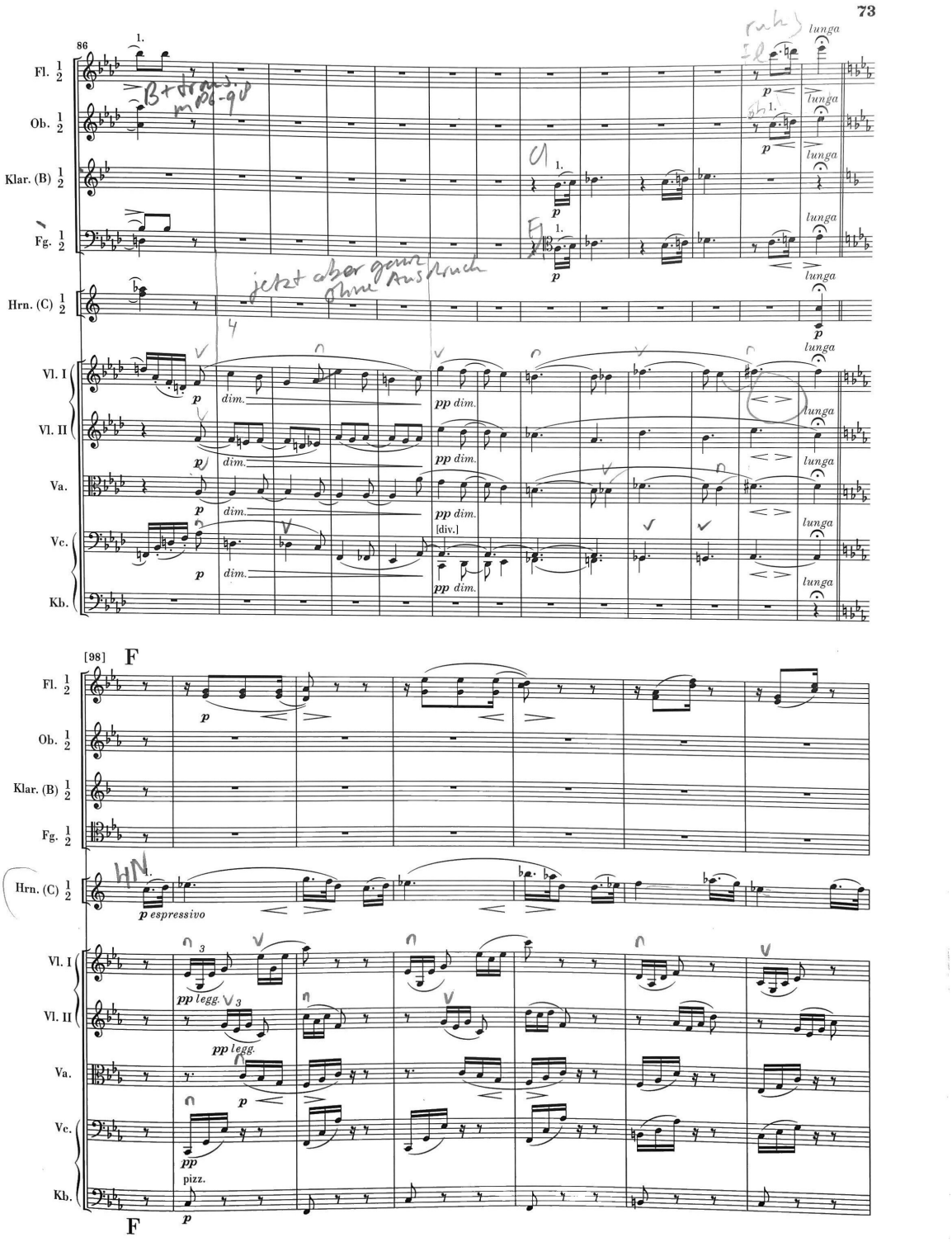



Figure 1.28: Breitkopf & Härtel Urtext Edition Third Symphony (Score) page 73.

16) Suspensions and changing notes on the accented part of the measure must be very slightly prolonged at the expense of the next-following tone.

> *17) The highest tone of a musical phrase or melisma should as a rule be somewhat prolonged.*

See below.

> *18) Notes of lesser value, coming after dotted notes, are to retain their full breadth in melodic passages; but should be shortened a trifle in such of a purely rhythmical character in favour of the dot.*

Points 16, 17, and 18 are examples of modification of rhythm that I have often applied with my orchestra. These are also discussed in Chapter 1.5 in the section dealing with Blume's suggestions, and in my list of tools for modification of rhythm in Chapter 1.7. This is the first time I have come across the distinction of dotted patterns in melody and accompaniment. I intend to look for opportunities to experiment with this in the future.

> *19) In broken chords are often comprised tones of melodic significance, which should be marked, less by forcible stress than by prolongation through being held down longer than the succeeding harmonic tones.*

As indicated by Blume and discussed in Chapter 1.5., the way in which the notes of melodic significance are highlighted clearly depends on the instrument on which the line is played. Klauwell's suggestion for pianists is to prolong the note. Earlier we saw suggestions by Blume and by Joachim/Moser for adding bow pressure on stringed instruments and vibrato or extra warmth on both stringed and wind instruments. Whichever means is chosen, it contributes to less evenness in these passages.
In Blume's description of the consequences for the duration of notes with tenuto signs, he makes a distinction between tenuto in the context of a rubato and elsewhere, stating that:

> the high notes of the oboe-theme should each be given tenuto signs – as shown in this extract[123]:

[123] See reference 120.

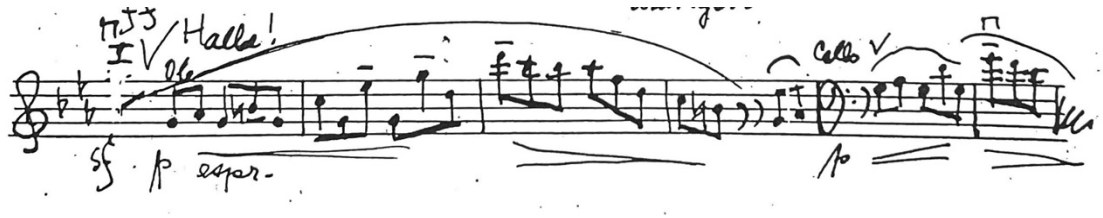



Figure 1.29: Blume page 11.

Nevertheless, like all such markings these are to be taken with a grain of salt. *Tenuto* means literally that the notes should be slightly held. But in fact, that is already saying too much. In no case should the impression be given that the note values have become lengthened by the tenuto sign. Instead, these notes just receive a special emphasis. Should the tenuto sign ever represent the lengthening of a note value, this is indicated by the word *rubato*, as in the two bars before letter A:[124]

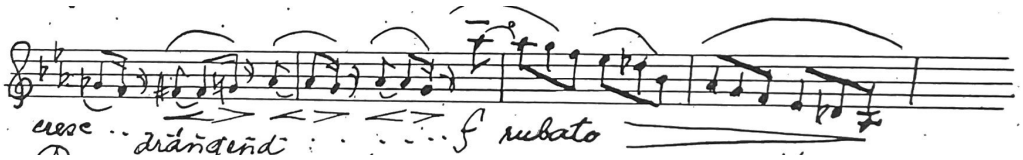


Figure 1.30: Blume page 11.

Here the A-flat should be held a bit longer and then the 'stolen' time should be compensated for (*rubato* literally means "stolen.") The time value of one note is robbed in favour of another note, but then is compensated during a measure so that no delay or acceleration occurs in the overall progression of the tempo. The actual tenuto sign is superfluous if one keeps in mind the musical principle that the high notes of a musical phrase demand a pronounced, emphatic expression.[125]

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[124] It is important to note that the rubato has been added by Blume. It is not to be found in the score.

[125] Blume, *Brahms in der Meininger Tradition* p. 12. Die hohen Noten dieses Oboe-Thema haben jeweils tenuto-Zeichnen (vergl. Beispiel). *Wie alle derartigen Bezeichnungen sind sie jedoch cum grano salis zu nehmen. Ausgesprochen heißt das „tenuto", dass die Töne etwas gehalten werden sollen. Das ist aber eigentlich schon zu viel gesagt. Auf keinen Fall darf hier der Eindruck entstehen das mit dem Tenuto-Zeichen der Notenwert verlängert wird. Vielmehr sollen diese Noten nur besonders prononciert werden. Soll durch das Tenuto-Zeichen auch der Notenwert verlängert werden, wird das angezeigt durch „rubato" wie z.B. zwei Takte vor A. Das as wird man etwas länger aushalten und das" gestohlene" Tempo wieder einholen. (Rubato heißt wörtlich: gestohlen. Mann stiehlt zugunsten einer Note von den Zeitwerten anderer Noten, macht dies aber im Verlaufe des Taktes wieder gut, so dass im Gesamtverlauf des Tempos keine Verzögerung oder Beschleunigung eintritt). Das denn Tenuto-Zeichen wird entbehrlich, wenn man als musikalischen Grundsatz im Bewusstsein hat dass die hohen Töne einer musikalischen Phrase ein prononciertes betontes Aussprechen verlangen.*

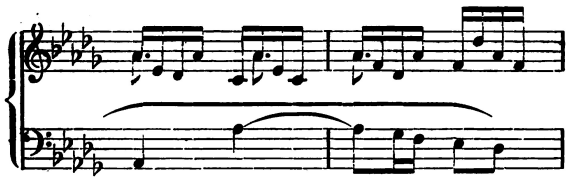
One can see that Klauwell's instruction "to hold down longer" than the marked notes would suggest is the kind of lengthening that Blume tried to avoid outside of what he calls "rubato." One of Klauwell's music examples illustrates the way he talked about creating an "overlap" between tenuto notes and following notes, which can already be played "underneath" the held ones. The German edition of Klauwell's text describes this much more clearly than the English edition. The German edition reads: "[Die Töne] sollen über die Dauer der nachfolgenden harmonischen Töne hinweg festgehalten werden". The English edition does not quite catch this nuance, as it says that the tones of melodic significance "should be marked […] by prolongation through being held down longer than the succeeding note." Similarly, the text under the music example also seems more subtle in the German than in the English edition. The wording in German, for instance, does not suggest as strongly as the English does that the beginning of the succeeding notes means the end of the marked ones, as can be seen here:

The notes in the right hand, provided (not by the composer) with stems and hooks, sketch the melody of the theme, and must consequently be held down as long as the succeeding notes allow. —

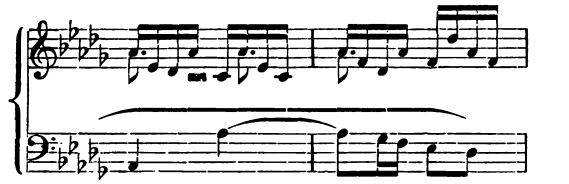
Figure 1.31: Klauwell English version page 55.

Die (nicht vom Componisten) nach unten gestrichenen Noten der rechten Hand skizziren die Melodie des Thema's und müssen deshalb so lange, als es der nachfolgenden Töne wegen angeht, festgehalten werden. —

Figure 1.32: Klauwell German version page 49.

In both cases, however, Klauwell's suggestion involves a lengthening of the marked note. On melody instruments, such as the violins and oboe who are responsible for producing the notes in the example Blume gives about lengthening notes with a tenuto sign in rubato, playing the next note does of course mean ending the previous one, except for certain double-stopping possibilities on string instruments that do not apply here.

> *20) In order to mark very distinctly the attack of an important part or chord, it is often necessary to minutely curtail the note immediately preceding.*

Many examples of this rule concerning timing and articulation can be found in my recordings. Working with period instruments has made me much more aware of the importance of timing in establishing impactful accents or chords. The instruments have a smaller capacity for dynamic contrast as their range of dynamics is generally speaking more limited than that of modern instruments. Hitting the keys harder on my 1845 Rosenberger Viennese grand piano, for example, tends to cause a sound implosion rather than an explosive accent. This is also the case with my 1619 Amati violin; it does not respond well to weight or pressure. Only by working with timing (playing the notes in question early or late in relation to the metronomically exact moment of occurrence in the score) can the attack of an important part or chord be brought out, not by sheer volume. Bringing out the accent or accented chord effectively often requires shortening the notes immediately preceding it. This represents a way to create space for the accent to be heard clearly and not be (partly) swallowed up by the resonance of the previous chord.

One example of this technique can also be found in Blume, who states that the B flat major chord on the downbeat of bar 70 of the finale of the *Third Symphony* should be played noticeably short. By doing so, the quarter-note rest that follows it can have the effect of a definite break before the whole orchestra comes in with the new fortissimo chord in the second half of the bar, as can be seen here in the passage from my score:

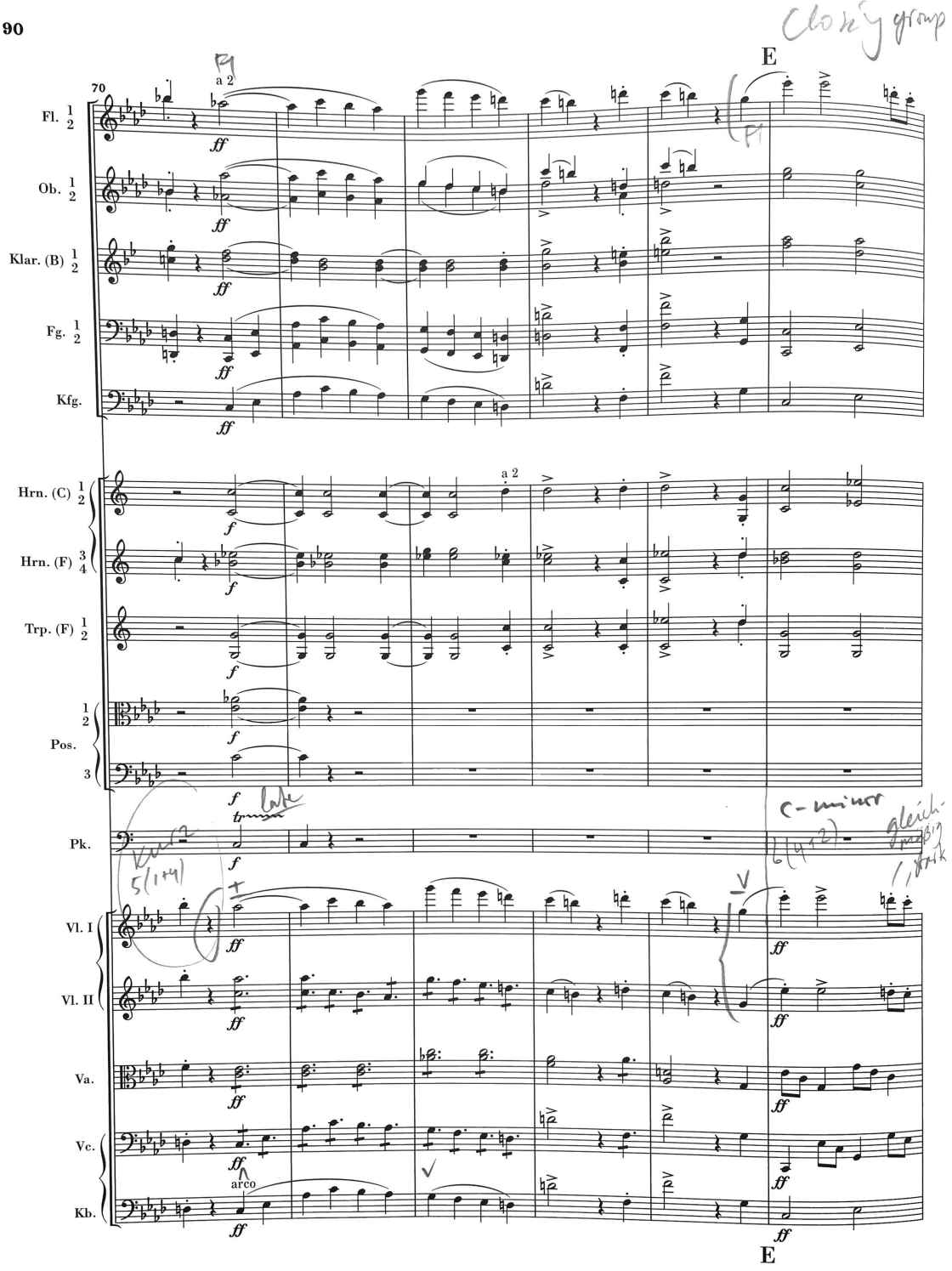



Figure 1.33: Breitkopf & Härtel Urtext Edition Third Symphony (Score) page 90.

(To add to the effect described by Blume, I bring in the orchestra late on the second half of bar 70).

> *21) Long trills, or embellishments of like nature, are as a rule (particularly in slow tempo or when preceded by a ritardando) to be begun quietly, and then gradually carried up to the highest degree of rapidity.*

This constitutes a rule for pianists that does not necessarily apply to orchestral practices, with the exception of solo passages for wind or string instruments. At the very least, one can say that the desired expressive unevenness previously discussed extends to the domain of the trill, something that risks – if performed absolutely regularly – being confused with the sound of a doorbell.

Modification and Compositional Structure

I find it noteworthy that Klauwell's instructions, in line with Ranken's writings, suggest a close connection between compositional structure, particularly sonata form, and considerations regarding tempo modification. As such, they may be seen as belonging to a structuralist performance practice. This is a subject that scholar George Barth writes about in his article "Effacing Modernism":

> Perhaps the most deeply seated conviction of the modernist performer is of the obligation to clarify structure, which is too often conflated with unimaginative notions of form.[126]

Barth goes on to quote Cook, who writes:

> The idea that structure should as a matter of course be brought out, disclosed to listeners, reflects the aesthetics of Bauhaus or international modernism, as embodied in the slogan 'form follows function' and seen in the modernist architecture of the interwar and post-war periods.[127]

[126] Barth, G." Effacing Modernism, or How to Perform Less Accurately Through Listening", *Historical Performance*, Indiana University Press, 1(2018), pp. 148-189.
[127] Cook, N. *Beyond the Score, Music as Performance.* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, p. 38.

Barth also mentions that structuralist performance can lead to details being obscured:

> When the modernist demands that structure subsume detail, the romantic perceives a failure of imagination – for which there is an obvious remedy: attention to the unique possibilities of the moment. That is an 'obligation.'[128]

These remarks by Barth and Cook are of a general nature and do not seem intended to address the fact that the very structure of the sonata form brings with it a certain order in the presentation of a composer's ideas. From the division of ideas across a composition, one can draw conclusions as to what the importance of these ideas might have been in the mind of the composer. More substantial or consequential ideas tend to be positioned as first, second, or third subject rather than as transitional phrases or bridges, codas, and codettas.

Klauwell's suggestions clearly reflect that hierarchy, as he proposes to take time when bringing out the main ideas, and to move on ahead in transitional phrases. It is, of course, entirely possible that Brahms considered structural considerations to be important, but at the same time welcomed people playing against that structure in performance. Behind this lies perhaps the question about how one might communicate the structure of a piece through performance; does one intentionally mark transitions or – in the style of Klauwell – bring out main ideas at the expense of transitional phrases to enhance the sense of structure? Or does the structure simply emerge as the sum of the momentary choices? I can see that my approach, which appears to be quite similar to what Klauwell describes, and as such might be considered to be of a structuralist nature, could prompt me to neglect details, particularly in transitional phrases, where the tempo is relatively fast.

This might be particularly detrimental to the quality of the performance of Brahms's music, because form, function and content are intricately connected in his symphonies. Frisch, for instance, reflects on how

[128] Barth, *Effacing Modernism* p. 161.

Brahms "forcefully reshape[d] Classic-Romantic models," and he describes Brahms's use of "motivic-thematic complexes rather than more straight forward themes or melodies.[129] Frisch's description of Brahms's handling of motivic-thematic coherence is reminiscent of Berrsche, who described how Brahms's symphonic style of writing depends not so much on contrasting ideas but rather on an organic blossoming of the Melos itself (*das organische Wachsen des Melos selbst*). [130]

In Brahms, the main ideas not only contain the seeds of organic development, but this development is often already under way during the first presentation of the idea.[131] Brahms's transitional phrases are seldom just that; they often contain details with great structural or expressive importance. As Austrian-American composer and theorist Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) argues:

> Music of the homophonic-melodic style of composition, that is music with a main theme, accompanied by and based on harmony, produces its material by, as I call it, *developing variation*. This means that variation of the features of a basic unit produce all the thematic formulations which provide for fluency, contrasts, variety, logic and unity on the one hand and character, mood, expression, and every needed differentiation on the other hand – thus elaborating the *idea* of the piece.[132]

Frisch uses this quote in the prologue of his book *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation*, in which he "attempt[s] to show that a careful clarification, refinement and enlargement of Schoenberg's concept of developing variation can yield a valuable tool for examining not just brief themes by Brahms, but larger portions or movements and even entire works."[133] To me these observations regarding the intricate structure of Brahms's writing make it clear that musical events are often connected to, or

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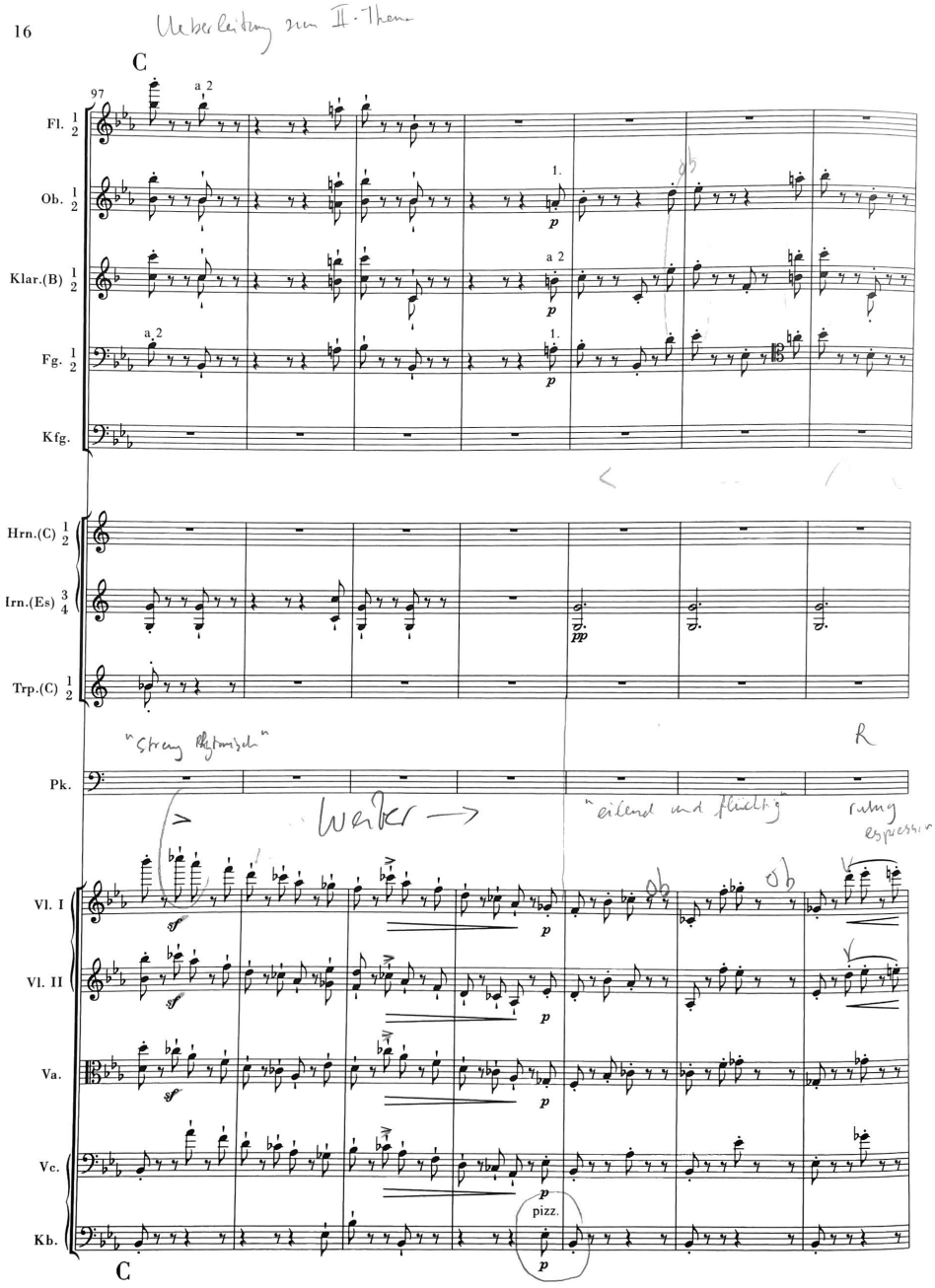
[129] Frisch, W. *Brahms The Four Symphonies*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 2003, pp. 46-49.
[130] Berrsche, *Musik und Betrachtung,* p. 243.
[131] As Frisch points out in the case of the first subject of the allegro section of the first movement of the First Symphony
[132] Schoenberg, A. *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, California, 1984. Reprint of the original edition. London: Faber, 1975, p. 397.
[133] Frisch, W. *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1990.

presented as part of, a narrative built as an ongoing developing variation. Given this intimate connection between form and narrative, I find it is hard to take the objections of writers such as Barth, who argue against structuralist performance, into account when considering my approach to Brahms.

It seems clear to me that the sources, particularly the material quoted in Chapter 1.6, support the idea that building a musical narrative constitutes the most important task of the performer. Indeed, I consider musical performance to be a form of storytelling. Moreover, the subject of the musical narrative should be the dramatic content of the music itself, not the form in which it is presented. In other words, whilst getting a grip on the structure of a piece can be an important part of a performer's understanding of a musical composition as a whole, considerations regarding structure have no place in the dramatic musical narrative.

Klauwell's rules are deceptively straightforward and simple, and their strict application could easily lead to neglect of expressive details, possibly of the kind that Barth and Cook seem to condemn as modernistic. Close reading and attention to Brahms's technique of constantly developing ideas can help avoid such a loss of expressive opportunities. One example of an expressive detail that could be overlooked if one follows Klauwells's rule on transitional phrases can be found in the transition to the second subject in the first movement of the *First Symphony*:

Ueberleitung zum II. Thema
C
97
a 2
Fl. 1 2
Ob. 1 2
Klar.(B) 1 2
Fg. 1 2
Kfg.
1.
p
a 2
Hrn.(C) 1 2
Irn.(Es) 3 4
Trp.(C) 1 2
pp
"Streng Rhythmisch"
R
Pk.
weiter
"eilend und flüchtig"
ruhig
espressivo
Vl. I
Vl. II
Va.
Vc.
Kb.
pizz.
C

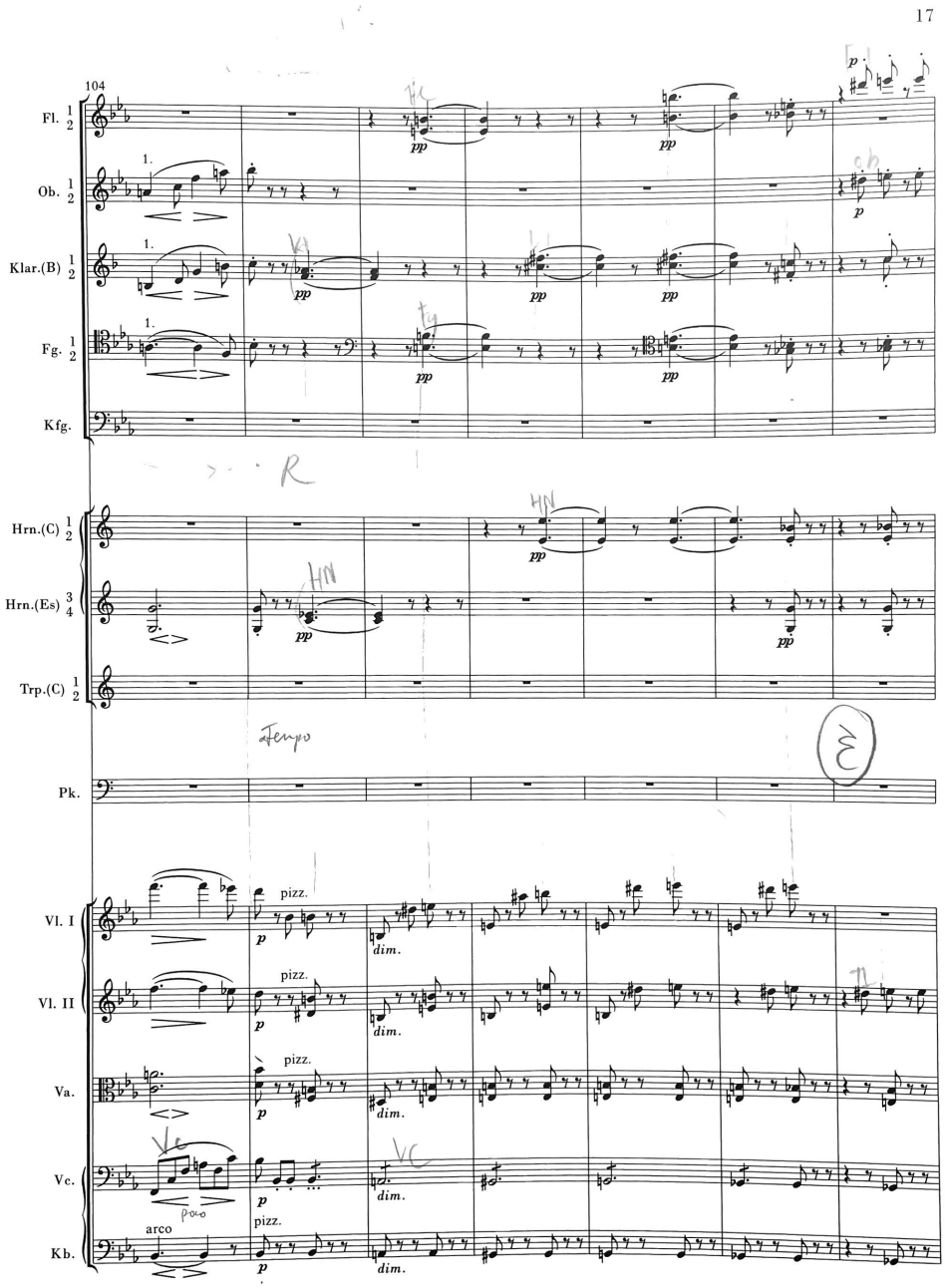



Figure 1.34: Breitkopf & Härtel Urtext Edition First Symphony (Score) pages 16-17.

The transition to the second subject begins at letter C, bar 97 (the first bar of this example). According to Klauwell, one should move ahead in this type of transitional phrase. The instructions “streng rhythmisch” and “eilend” as marked in my score in bars 97 and 101 originate from Blume’s suggestions, as do the “ruhig, espressivo” connected to the hairpins in bars 103-104 and

the “a tempo” in bar 104.[134] Interpreting the hairpins in the violins and in the answer in the lower strings and woodwinds in bars 103-104 as signs for expression and shaping them in such a way that this can be brought out, requires some lingering on these phrases. This can help to counteract rushing this expressive detail, which is part of a transitional phrase that, according to Klauwell, one is supposed to move through relatively quickly. Blume’s suggestion “ruhig, espressivo” also stresses the importance of taking some time to bring out this detail.

Conclusion

There are indications that the kind of nuanced modifications Klauwell wrote about can hardly be put into words. Considerations regarding the difference between theory and practice, as discussed for example in Chapter 1.2 regarding the discrepancy between Spohr’s writing and performing styles, can all be understood as reasons for being extra careful when drawing firm conclusions from Klauwell’s writings. Based on Scott’s and Peres Da Costa’s work, it can be said that Klauwell’s rules, systematic and comprehensive as they may appear to be, do not tell the whole story about nineteenth-century (pianistic) performance practice. The pianist and conductor Max Fiedler (1859-1939), for instance, mentions how “in his own works, Brahms used a rubato that could not be written down.”[135] In *Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth Century Violin Performance*, the violinist and researcher David Milsom writes about the gap he finds between the writings and the recordings of nineteenth-century performers, concluding that “common sense would suggest that theory is rarely carried out strictly in practice.”[136] It is certainly a possibility that what Klauwell preached was not necessarily what he practised.

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[134] Blume, *Brahms in der Meininger Tradition,* p. 15.
[135] Dejmek, G. *Max Fiedler Werden und Wirken.* Vulkan Verlag, Essen, 1940, p. 29. *Ein Rubato […] das man nicht hinschreiben kann.*
[136] Milsom, D. *Theory and Practice in Late Nineteenth Century Violin Performance*. Farnham, Ashgate, 2003, p. 105.

Notwithstanding these legitimate remarks concerning the value and significance of this type of written source, I find it striking that my way of applying modifications of rhythm and tempo resembles Klauwell's rules so closely. Many of the modifications I have applied with the project orchestra can be seen as being in line with his rules. In the few instances where I do the opposite of what he suggests, I think that my approach addresses the same issues as mentioned by Klauwell, but just in a different manner. None of his rules mention situations for which I had not designed my own strategy based on the historical information I had assembled before learning about his writings. This is not to say that Klauwell's rules provide a fool-proof and comprehensive roadmap to modifications in Brahms's symphonies.

By objecting to the neglect of expressive details in structuralist performances, Barth raised an interesting point about the relationship between form and function (or content) in nineteenth-century music, and its significance in performance. This subject stretches far beyond the boundaries of my project but I think it deserves further research, particularly in light of Brahms's intricate and complex compositional technique as regards structure and content, characterised by Frisch as Developing Variation.

1.9 Traces of Nineteenth-Century Practices in Early Twentieth-Century Recordings of Brahms's Orchestral Music

In a study titled "In Search of Sounding Evidence of Traces of Fritz Steinbach's Approach to Brahms's Second Symphony", published on my website and shared with the musicians of my project orchestra, I compared the tempo modifications in six historical recordings of the first movement of Brahms's *Second Symphony* with the suggestions that can be found in Walter Blume's *Brahms in der Meininger Tradition.*[137] I think that some of my findings may be relevant in the context of this dissertation, that is why I will summarise them here. The recordings I selected were: Walter Damrosch, New York Symphony Orchestra, 1928; Leopold Stokowski, Philadelphia Orchestra,1929; Max Fiedler, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, 1930; Fritz Busch, Staatskapelle Dresden, 1931; Hermann Abendroth, Breslau RSO, 1939; and Felix Weingartner, London Symphony Orchestra, 1940. I went through the first movement of the symphony not so much bar by bar, but rather point by point through Walter Blume's writings. I aimed to analyse how the various orchestras and conductors had addressed the issues listed by Blume. I intended to compare how they handled these issues in the recordings with Blume's suggested solutions, without making any assumption that any concurrence might be regarded as proof that the conductors followed these suggestions.[138] It was not my intention to prove any lineage of tradition.

As perhaps the most complete written document on performance issues in the Brahms symphonies during the pre-war period, Blume's manuscript constitutes a unique source of information. This is one reason why I wanted to look at these recordings through the lens of Blume, focusing in particular on the performance issues he had selected for his writings. By

[137] Leertouwer, "*In Search of Sounding Evidence of Traces of Fritz Steinbach's Approach to Brahms's Second Symphony",* June 2021, https://brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl/wp-content/uploads/In-search-of-sounding-evidence-of-traces-of-Fritz-Steinbachs-approach-to-Brahmss-Second-Symphony-31-05-2020-revised-15-06-2021.pdf

[138] Blume published his text in 1933. Four of the six recordings I studied had already been released before 1933.

doing so, I found that this process was a two-way street, in the sense that it allowed me to review Blume's writings in the context of other people's solutions for the same issues he listed, and indeed also to consider the things he does not address. I found many tempo modifications in the recordings - often subtle and sometimes radical - that Blume does not suggest or discuss in his writings.

In relation to contemporary performance practices and recordings, the six recordings contained significant, extensive and substantial tempo modifications. By analysing these, I reconsidered how to calibrate my own compass for such modifications. As a result, I prepared the scores for my performances in such a way that I committed to orchestral tempo modifications as a general rule in each symphony, and not solely as a special effect in some places. I aimed to make a distinction between micro-modifications, often as related to smaller and medium-sized hairpins which could imply tempo rubato, and tempo modifications relating to longer stretches, pushing forward or relaxing the tempo. I even went as far as to mark up a score with all intended modifications, which I provided to the musicians of my orchestra as an attachment to the study.[139] In addition, I marked the modifications in the orchestral parts for the project in 2021, using the same arrows, hairpins and verbal instructions that can be found in my annotated score.

In my study, I found that the players and conductors in the six recordings addressed many of the same performance issues that Blume had. While there is certainly some concurrence between the recordings and Blume's suggestions, none of the recordings fully aligns with his writings. My analysis of these recordings and of Mengelberg's recordings in Chapter 1.10 illustrates that even when recordings do coincide with Blume's suggestions, one should not read too much into this, as these instances also happen in recordings by musicians demonstrably far removed from the Steinbach tradition. Assuming that Blume's writing is an honest effort at a

[139] Leertouwer: Annotated score of Brahms's *Third Symphony*: https://brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl/wp-content/uploads/Brahms-3-full-score-scan-marked-26-8-2021.pdf.

comprehensive description of the key features of Steinbach's performance of Brahms's orchestral works, the absence of any recording that reflects his writing can be taken as confirmation that Steinbach's style had indeed disappeared, as suggested by Berrsche, who wrote that with Steinbach, Brahms had died a second time.

Conclusions

My analysis of these historical recordings revealed that the six recordings represent (or show traces of) a style of performing Brahms with flexible tempo, one that orchestras and conductors moved away from during the twentieth century. Admittedly, my conclusion is based on a detailed investigation of a selection of historical recordings on the one hand, and a rather general characterisation of later MPP recordings on the other. I have listened to many post-war recordings, including some that are classed as HIPP, in which I found the kind of evenness that I attributed to them in my earlier generalisation. I was struck by the level of detail in the historical recordings, which demanded further investigation. This was much less apparent in the more even recordings from the second half of the twentieth century. The greater evenness of the later recordings made them less eventful when it came to tempo modifications. In comparison with the earlier recordings, they were certainly more flawless and the quality of the recording made it possible to hear more details, but they provided far fewer points to discuss.

I did, however, find two live recordings of Brahms's *Third Symphony* that showed considerable modifications of rhythm and tempo: a performance on 18 December 1949 by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra at RIAS Berlin, under the direction of Wilhelm Furtwängler, and a performance by the Australian Chamber Orchestra, released on 14 August 2020 under the direction of Richard Tognetti. Both of these recordings challenged my general characterisation of the MPP in Brahms's orchestral music. I highlighted some of the tempo modifications in these two recordings that stand out against the general evenness of almost all other recordings

currently available. In my review, I concluded that they contained many instances of tempo modification that could be classed as exaggerations, as described by Weingartner.[140] As such, these recordings represent a style of tempo modification that I more readily associate with the exaggerations attributed to Bülow than with Steinbach's more refined style. That being said, I would like to add that I feel grateful for the fact that the two live recordings provided me with an opportunity to contextualise the historical recordings of the first decades of the twentieth century, not only in relation to more even recordings, but also these more capricious ones.

[140] Leertouwer, "A critical review of some tempo modifications in two recordings of the last movement of Brahms's Third Symphony" 08-2021, https://brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl/wp-content/uploads/A-critical-review-of-some-tempo-modifications-in-two-recordings-of-the-last-movement-of-Brahmss-Third-Symphony-August-19th.pdf.

1.10 Annotated parts and Willem Mengelberg's Brahms Scores

Annotated parts from Meiningen and Brussels

Orchestral parts or scores with nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century performance markings are rare, certainly for Brahms's works. In January 2019, at the outset of my project, I travelled to Meiningen to study the material of the Court Orchestra that is kept there in the library of the Meiningen Museums. This material contains markings that in part date back to the nineteenth century. Some markings in brass parts list performances dating from Steinbach's time, indicating that the material was used as early as 1881 and 1883 (as marked in the second trombone part). Even though these parts were unfortunately used until the 1960s and contain a mix of markings from musicians over a period of some 90 years, it is clear that they contain valuable information. In my opinion, these parts provide an important topic for possible future research, particularly if one would have the technical means to separate the layers of annotations philologically. At the same time, however, I had to conclude that, with the time and resources available to me, the material was of limited value for my project. To illustrate the difficulty of drawing helpful conclusions from the markings in the Meiningen parts, I point to the bowings in the following examples. The markings in blue in the first example, taken from the Meiningen parts, initially correspond to Blume's suggested bowing, as shown in the second example, taken from Blume's text. In bar 5, however, this is no longer the case, as the blue slur ends with the d, whereas Blume suggests including the following g in the slur. In bar 7, too, the blue lines do not correspond with Blume's suggestions. Furthermore, the bowings in blue appear to be used in combination with those in grey, as for instance in the first two bars, but in bar 3 they represent opposite solutions. I have no means of identifying which markings are the oldest and which are more recent in a scientifically verifiable way. But even if I would be able to say with absolute certainty that the blue markings are from the days of Brahms and Steinbach, and the grey markings from later days, I would still be unable to draw conclusions from this material that would have significantly influenced or enhanced my project.
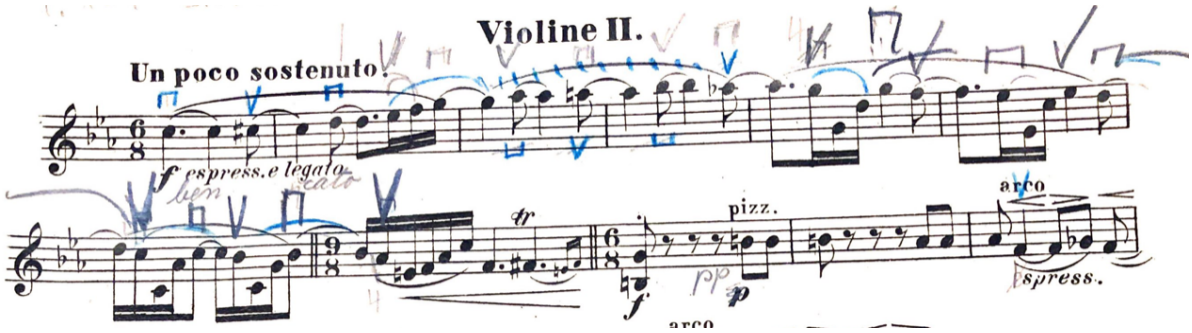
Figure 1.35: First Symphony, first two lines of an annotated second violin part from the Meiningen library.
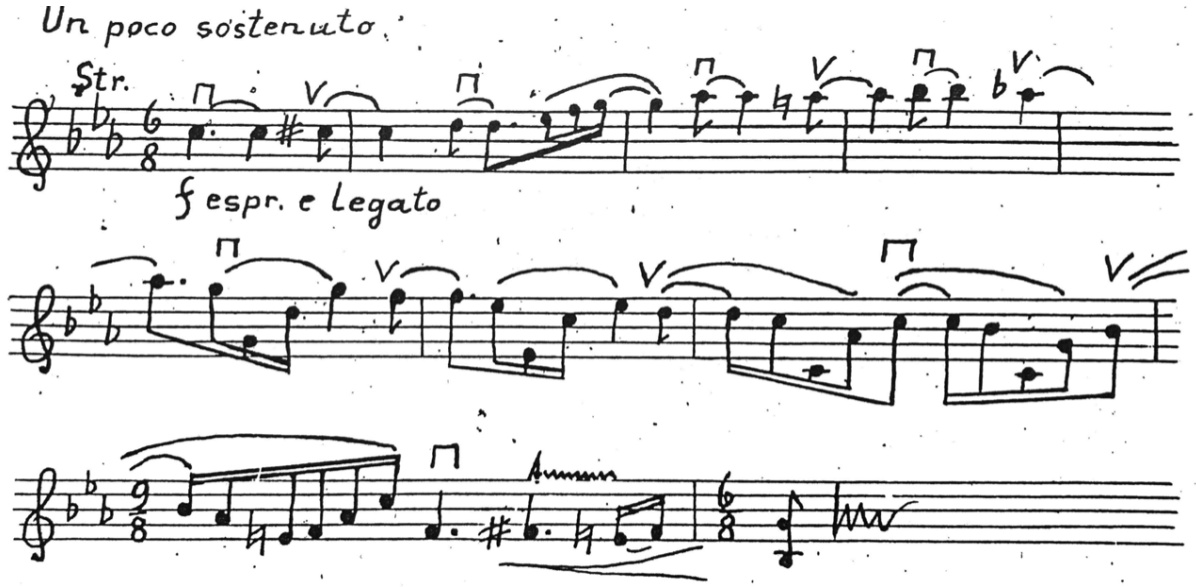
Figure 1.36: Blume page 9.

In the library of the Koninklijk Conservatorium Brussels, I found material (parts and scores) that had been used by organist, musicologist and composer François-August Gevaert (1828-1908). Gevaert, who became director of the conservatory in 1871, presumably conducted the conservatory orchestra in that capacity. The material contains some interesting markings (particularly some bowings and occasional fingerings), but in this case, too, I had to conclude that it was of limited relevance for my project as Gevaert, who worked mainly in Paris and Belgium, in all likelihood worked in a style that was heavily influenced by the Franco-Belgian tradition.

MENGELBERG'S BRAHMS SCORES

A third source of information I looked at was the annotated scores of Willem Mengelberg. I studied Mengelberg's Brahms scores and his recordings with the Concertgebouw Orchestra (1930-1931 and 1940-1941) to find out how his style of performing Brahms related to Blume's description of Steinbach's style. I also wanted to compare his approach to the different styles of performance I had heard in the six early recordings of the *Second Symphony*. Mengelberg started as the second chief conductor of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1895, at the age of twenty-four. Under his leadership, described by the orchestra itself as perfectionist, wilful and authoritarian, it quickly gained an international reputation. Many admired Mengelberg for his significant role in the development of musical life in the Netherlands in general, and for his contribution to the quality and reputation of the orchestra in particular. Yet he lost his post in 1945 as a result of his apparent sympathy for the German forces that occupied the Netherlands during the Second World War.

Mengelberg has no special reputation as a Brahms conductor. As Christopher Dyment notes,

> On the whole, it is probable that Mengelberg's approach was fashioned only by his own study and inclinations […]. Ultimately, the conclusion […] must be that whatever may have been the lines of authority that Mengelberg might have sought to invoke in order to explain his idiosyncratic interpretative style in much of Brahms, he alone was responsible for it.[141]

I agree that there is no demonstrable connection between Mengelberg's style of conducting Brahms and the style of those conductors to whom the composer gave his approval, let alone Steinbach's style with the Meiningen Orchestra. Dyment decided not to include Mengelberg's recordings in his study of recorded evidence of a performance style reflecting Brahms's own, arguing that his style was too idiosyncratic to warrant a place among the

[141] Dyment, *Conducting Brahms,* p. 120.

conductors closely related to Brahms.[142] Given the nature of Mengelberg's recordings and scores, I can see why Dyment took this decision. At the same time, though, I find that Mengelberg's annotated scores can give a unique and important insight into his style of working with the orchestra. These scores include a lot of markings and contain detailed information of a style that – even if one accepts the verdict that it is highly idiosyncratic – had its roots in the nineteenth century.

I studied all of Mengelberg's scores of Brahms's orchestral music, and I have written two studies about them. I looked at his score of the *Double Concerto* and examined the soloists he performed the piece with. I also compared the markings in his score of the second movement of the *Second Symphony* to his recording with the Concertgebouw Orchestra of 1940. These studies, with links to audio examples, can be found on my website.[143] A few of my conclusions are also relevant to my search for traces of nineteenth-century performance styles in early twentieth-century recordings. Some examples include:

- Mengelberg's instructions and markings in the score do not always correspond with the results in his recordings. Some of the things he writes about, particularly relating the metronome markings, are quite different from what one can hear in the recordings.
- Though his scores are extensively marked, in my studies I was able to point to many things that happen in the recordings but are not marked

[142] There are also historical voices criticising Mengelberg's Brahms. Paul Hindemith (1895-1963), for example, wrote about a Mengelberg performance of the *Second Symphony*. Geoffrey Skelton in Paul Hindemith: *The Man behind the Music, a biography* (Gollancz, London, 1975), p. 42, quotes a "Letter from Hindemith to Emmy Ronnefeldt" from May 1917, which reads: "I am no great Brahms admirer – but anything more un-Brahms-like is hard to imagine: first movement brutal or sentimental, without feeling, second movement distorted and robbed of all its swing, the third just empty notes and the coda of the finale a timpani concerto with orchestral accompaniment. Horrible!"

[143] Leertouwer, "From Score to Recording. Analysing Mengelberg's markings of the Second Movement of Brahms's Second Symphony opus 73"
https://brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl/wp-content/uploads/From-score-to-recording.-Analyzing-Mengelbergs-score-and-recording-of-the-second-movement-of-Brahmss-Second-Symphony-opus-73-28-08-2020-revised-15-06-2021.pdf.

in the scores. The markings in his scores do not reflect all his decisions in performance.

- The recordings provide ample corroboration of the fact that the hairpins printed in the score and those added by Mengelberg were meant to have consequences for expression and timing, and not merely dynamics. In most cases, Mengelberg realises the rubato by moving the tempo forward in the crescendo part of the hairpin and backward in the diminuendo part, without substantially changing the basic tempo. This is also the case for the short hairpins on individual notes and for the long ones related to phrases or bars.
- Variations in the pattern of beating into larger or smaller units of quarter note, dotted quarter note or eighth note serve as a tool to show tempo modifications; smaller units are suggested to slow down or show a slow tempo.
- The use of the letter W for *weiter* and R for *ruhig* corresponds to the speeding up and slowing down over periods of a bar or more. The letter R also indicates the tempo or character of a single bar or a passage.
- In my study of Mengelberg's recording of the second movement of the *Second Symphony*, I found a few instances of concurrence between what Blume describes as Steinbach's tradition and Mengelberg's performance. While I am not trying to depict Mengelberg as a follower of Steinbach's Meininger tradition, I do find it interesting that even just a few of his choices coincide with Blume's description of the latter's style. But finding coincidences with Blume in a recording by a conductor who is clearly so far removed from Steinbach's style and tradition can and perhaps should be taken as warning against reading too much into any such coincidences. After all, they can be considered as indications of a general understanding of the music, engendered by the musical traditions of the time.
- Mengelberg's tempo for the second movement of the *Second Symphony* conforms to most of the oldest available recordings of the symphony. None of the oldest recordings of the Adagio, for instance, have a tempo

that would allow the players to play Brahms's legato slurs in the opening bars of the movement. In other words, none honour Brahms's Adagio *non troppo* tempo indication. Brahms rarely includes bowing slurs that are impracticable for the strings. A tempo at which such slurs are not practicable is in all likelihood distinctly slower than he would have expected.

Conclusion

Though the annotated historical orchestral material I found in libraries in Meiningen and Brussels contains interesting information and, in my opinion, deserves further research, I had to conclude that it was of limited relevance for my project. Mengelberg's Brahms recordings with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, fascinating as they are, cannot serve as a model for a style of performance that might, as Dyment puts it, approximate that of any of the most eminent Brahms conductors to whom the composer gave his approval, Steinbach in particular.[144] His annotated scores, however, offer a unique insight into a way of thinking about music and working with an orchestra that has its roots in the nineteenth century. Like the recordings by Furtwängler and Tognetti discussed in Chapter 1.9, Mengelberg's recordings helped me develop a concept of what an exaggerated style of modification, as described by Weingartner and as attributed to Bülow by him and others, might actually have sounded like.

[144] Dyment, *Conducting Brahms,* p.119.

1.11 Changing Styles in Orchestral Performances in the Late Nineteenth- and Twentieth Centuries

To better understand how the present-day approaches to Brahms in MPP and HIPP relate to nineteenth-century practices, it is worth having a closer look at the general changes in orchestral performance styles since the late nineteenth century. In the twentieth century these changes are documented in recordings. These recordings became increasingly available (and quickly grew in fidelity, by which I mean high-fidelity audio as well as fidelity to the printed score) from the second decade of the century onwards. Philip, in *Early recordings and musical style, changing tastes in instrumental performance 1900-1950*, gives a clear summary of the changing performance practice in the first decades of the twentieth century:

> By the 1930s there were clear trends away from these early twentieth-century characteristics: the spread of continuous vibrato on stringed instruments, its increasing prominence among singers, and its adaptation by many woodwind players, including a movement towards slower vibrato than the fast tremor sometimes heard earlier in the century; the decreasing prominence and frequency of portamento on both strings and voice; a trend towards stricter control of tempo and slower maximum speeds; more emphatic clarity of rhythmic detail, more literal interpretation of note values, and the avoidance of rhythmic irregularity and dislocation; the adoption of steel on the upper strings of stringed instruments, the increasing use of the metal flute, the German bassoon, and wider-bore brass instruments. It is possible to summarize all these elements as a trend towards greater power, firmness, clarity, control, literalness, and evenness of expression, and away from informality, looseness, and unpredictability.[145]

Of course, the change towards a greater evenness of tempo, which constituted only one of many changes in performance practices, did not start suddenly at the beginning of the new century. After Bülow's revolution of the early 1880s, the application of modifications in orchestral performance had changed irreversibly and, as Weingartner wrote in his book on conducting,

[145] Philip, R. *Early recordings and musical style, changing tastes in instrumental performance 1900-1950.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 229-230.

substantial and numerous modifications became much more common in orchestral performance. Weingartner's diatribe against conductors blindly following what he considered to be Bülow's exaggerated style of tempo modification shows that tempo modification became a fiercely debated subject.[146] It is worth acknowledging that this was controversial throughout the nineteenth century, as one can see for example in this quotation from 1833:

> Ritardando and accelerando alternate all the time. This manner has already become so fixed in the minds of the musical public that they firmly believe a diminuendo must be slowed down and a crescendo speeded up; a tender phrase (e.g., in an allegro) will be performed more slowly, a powerful one faster. At times this kind of treatment may well be applicable; but how to determine where requires very deep insight into the composition and very correct feeling.[147]

In 1869, Wagner had vehemently attacked conductors who did not see the need to deviate from a steady tempo, whilst expressing subtle and nuanced views about tempo modifications in his book *Über das Dirigieren*. Bülow, as his most famous protégé, may have been guilty of many exaggerations of tempo but to claim that these were representative of the Wagner school of freedom of tempo, would not necessarily be accurate. Conductor Bruno Walter elaborates on this in *Von der Musik und vom Musizieren*:

> The next generation of conductors followed Wagner's authoritative word so diligently that he could hardly have criticised their achievements for the undifferentiated handling of tempo against which his work essentially turns. Unfortunately, however, under the influence of his teaching and in the misunderstanding and exaggerated application of it, a considerable number of the musical interpreters have fallen into the opposite error: while the conductors against whom Wagner's Philippika (sic) is directed did not realise the need for modifications of the tempo and often sacrificed the living richness of the great works to a senseless evenness of tempi, since then it has seemed more necessary to counteract a no less senseless restlessness and

[146] The musician and author Gunther Schuller, for instance, also points out that Wagner advocated subtle modification and forcefully opposed excessive alterations of tempo. See Schuller. G. *The Complete Conductor*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, 1997. p. 85.
[147] Feski, J. (pseudonym of Johann Friedrich Eduard Sobolewski): *Caecilia, eine Zeitschrift für die musikalische Welt*, Bd.15, Schott und Söhnen, Mainz, 1833, p. 270.

> arbitrariness in the tempo and an exaggeration of the modifications. The Philistine type, whose heart could not be moved by the lively, creative interpretation of the work, was followed by that of the virtuoso, who was not satisfied with the vitality of the musical flow and who sought to increase it by over-differentiating tempo and performance. Too little was followed by too much, and it seems to me today that it is precisely in line with Wagner's teachings to warn against too much, just as he had opposed too little.[148]

Walter wrote this warning in 1957.[149] As Philip describes, the general tendency towards greater evenness had already set in by this point. Indeed, this tendency resulted in the evenness that characterised most recordings from the second half of the twentieth century. I wonder if Walter had Furtwängler in mind when he wrote these words? Given the animosity between them described by Dyment, who writes that according to Walter, Furtwängler's "supreme egotism had deleterious effects on his performances," I would suggest that this is quite likely.[150] Of course, this is merely speculation. What one can say with certainty is that, in spite of the

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[148] Walter, B. *Von der Musik und vom Musizieren.* Fischer Verlag, Tübingen, 1957, p. 34. *Die nächste Generation der Dirigenten folgte Wagners autorativem Wort mit solchem Bemühen, dass er an ihren Leistungen kaum noch jene undifferenzierte Tempoführung zu rügen gehabt hätte, gegen die sich seine Schrift im Wesentlichen wendet. Doch ist leider unter dem Einfluss seiner Lehre und im missverstehender und übertriebener Anwendung derselben ein beträchtlicher Teil der musikalischen Interpreten in den entgegengesetzten Fehler verfallen: während den Dirigenten gegen die sich Wagners Philippika richtet, die Notwendigkeit der Modifikationen des Tempos nicht aufgegangen war und der lebendige Reichtum der großen Werke oft einer sinnlosen Gleichmäßigkeit der Tempi zum Opfer fiel, schien es seither eher geboten, einer nicht minder sinnlosen Unruhe und Willkür der Tempoführung, einer Übertreibung in den Modifikationen entgegenzutreten. Dem Typus des Philisters, dessen Herz von der lebendig-schöpferischen Interpretation im Werke nicht mitbewegt werden konnte, ist der des Virtuosen gefolgt, dem die Eigenlebendigkeit des musikalischen Verlaufs nicht genügte und der sie durch Überdifferenzierung von Tempo und Vortrag zu steigern suchte. Dem Zuwenig folgte das Zuviel, und es scheint mir heute gerade im Sinn der Wagnerschen Lehre geboten, ebenso vor dem Zuviel zu warnen, wie er sich gegen das Zuwenig gewendet hatte.*

[149] Clive Brown points out that that Wagner may not always have practised what he preached, quoting for example the conductor Henry Smart (1813-1879), who objected to Wagner's tempos in a piece in the *Sunday Times* (17 June 1855): "Firstly he takes all quick movements faster than anybody else; secondly he takes all slow movements slower than anybody else; thirdly he prefaces the entry of an important point, or the return of a theme—especially in a slow movement—by an exaggerated ritardando; and fourthly, he reduces the speed of an allegro—say in an overture or the first movement—fully one-third, immediately on the entrance of its cantabile phrases." Brown, C. *Classical & Romantic Performing Practice: 1750–1900.* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 394.

[150] Dyment, *Conducting Brahms*, p.136.

general tendency towards greater evenness in performance that spread in the first half of the twentieth century, a distinction between conductors who adhered to a rather strict beat and tempo and those who took greater freedoms can be drawn well into that century. Conductors such as Weingartner, Toscanini (1867-1957) and Bruno Walter (1875-1962) belonged to the former group, while Hermann Abendroth (1883-1956) and Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886-1954) were among the latter.

In the heated debate about tempo modifications, there seems to have been little room for nuance. Toscanini, for example, was pitted against Furtwängler, and though both conductors represented quite different approaches to tempo modification, it is clear from their recordings that Furtwängler was not as erratic, nor was Toscanini as rigid, as their opponents claimed in the debate. After the Second World War, the tendency towards greater evenness - described by Philip as having had a significant impact on the style of performing in the 1930s - increasingly led to an even style in performing Brahms's orchestral music, in which there was little room for modifications of tempo or rhythm.

Some of the recordings from the early decades of the twentieth century discussed in Chapter 1.9 show considerable levels of tempo modification, while others seem to adhere to a more constant tempo. When compared to Blume's suggestions in *Brahms in der Meininger Tradition*, it can be said that no recording reflects the totality of Steinbach's style, as it is described by Blume.[151] Blume describes, for instance, that by the time it became technically possible to record orchestral performances, the high art of modification of rhythm and tempo in the style of Steinbach and the Meiningen Orchestra already had become a thing of the past. As I have argued in earlier sections, various sources point in the same direction, including Fuller Maitland's description of the uniqueness of the style of Steinbach and the Meiningen Orchestra and Berrsche's lament over the fact that with Steinbach Brahms had died a second time.

[151] Leertouwer, "In search of traces" June 2021, https://brahms.johannesleertouwer.nl/wp-content/uploads/In-search-of-sounding-evidence-of-traces-of-Fritz-Steinbachs-approach-to-Brahmss-Second-Symphony-31-05-2020-revised-15-06-2021.pdf.

When writing about the recording industry in the introduction of his text, Blume expresses regret about the fact that there were no available recordings of Steinbach's performances:

> It is regrettable that the recording industry was at the time not at the level of today for the truthful reproduction of orchestral performances. That would have allowed us to understand and feel, through comparison of for example a 'Tristan' under Felix Mottl or a Brahms Symphony under Fritz Steinbach, with a performance of today under equally important conductors, what is meant when people say that the music making in these cases stems from two entirely different states of mind. It is impossible to explain this difference as the rational in this matter cannot grasp the irrational, if I may put it that way.[152]

I find this one of the most wonderful passages in Blume's text. First of all, it is striking that he refrained from passing a negative judgement on the quality of the performances of his contemporary conductors as compared to the giants of the past, this not being the voice of a reactionary deploring a decline in art and society. I feel that the subtlety of this view contributes to the credibility of his writings as a whole. Blume speaks of changing "states of mind" rather than the superior standards of the past. It would be a mistake to think about changes in performance style only in terms of loss of tradition. As the musicologist Daniel Leech-Wilkinson indicates:

> [W]hat we think is proper to a composer or a score is already slightly different from what our teachers' generation thought. And over a century, as recordings show, these differences accumulate to such an extent that musicianship becomes in some respects unrecognisable […] Performance, in other words, inevitably changes in order for scores to continue to make sense to new generations.[153]

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[152] Blume p. 4. *Zu bedauern ist, dass die Schalplattenindustrie früher noch nicht so auf der Höhe und im Schwange was für Orchester-Reproduktionen wie heute. Man würde dann durch den Vergleich etwa eines "Tristan" unter Felix Mottl oder einer Brahms-Sinfonie unter Fritz Steinbach mit einer heutigen Aufführung unter ebenso bedeutenden Dirigenten, wie die genannten, nachfühlen und verstehen können, wenn man sagt, dass hier aus zwei gänzlich verschiedenen Bewusstseinshaltungen heraus musiziert wird. Diese Verschiedenheit begrifflich auseinanderzusetzen ist eine Unmöglichkeit, weil das Rationale in diesem Fall nicht an das Irrationale herankommt, wenn ich es so sagen darf*. (Last accessed July 2022).

[153] Leech-Wilkinson, D, 'Performance changes over time,' in *Challenging Performance* https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-3/. (Last accessed July 2022).

To me, Blume's remark about one's way of experiencing reality (*Bewustseinshaltungen)* is more than a welcome adjunct to his list of instructions and suggestions for performance. I find it quite enlightening that Blume includes extra-musical influences in his views on the style of music making and how it changes. Ironically, the recording industry, to which Blume pointed as a means which might have allowed for a better understanding of Steinbach's style, likely contributed to the rapid disappearance of the performance style of Steinbach and other nineteenth-century performers.

The state of mind of the musicians, as well as the techniques and expressive tools they applied, had already changed by the beginning of the twentieth century, and would continue to do so. As soon as musicians were able to listen to recordings of their performances, their artistic priorities rapidly changed, leading to many improvements in the technical quality of their performances. Yet it is abundantly clear that something important was lost as a result of this new perspective on the art of musical performance– a certain informality, looseness, unpredictability and - most certainly in the case of orchestral performance - a great deal of flexibility. The clinical perfection that gradually became the standard in the twentieth century, particularly in recording studios, had never been part of the world of nineteenth-century musical performance.[154] I consider the rise of the recording industry not as the reason behind flexible and free performances gradually giving way to ones that demonstrated power, smoothness and evenness of expression, but rather as a major factor in promoting, disseminating and stimulating this change. When it came to recording, conductors also advocating a rather strict handling of tempo, in my opinion, provided an easier model for later conductors to follow than did the

[154] For a discussion on how conditions in recording processes influence and change artistic priorities, and particularly how musicians experience the recording process, see the work of Amy Blier-Carruthers, and especially her article "The Performer's Place in the Process and Product of Recording" https://www.cmpcp.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/PSN2013_Blier-Carruthers.pdf. (Last accessed June 2022)

advocates of a freer style. Such factors contributed to the evenness of sound, expression and tempo that characterised the vast majority of performances in the second half of the twentieth century.

Over the past two decades, the increased interest in nineteenth-century performance practices by researchers and musicians worldwide has resulted in many fascinating projects and, particularly in chamber music, in significantly different sounding results.[155] In the field of orchestral performance, too, a few attempts have been made to move away from the modernistic style that has characterised both HIPP and MPP. As Dyment, for instance, remarks:

> Now, at the time of writing [2016], the Weingartner influence has been absorbed into the blood stream of the modern Symphony Orchestra, as witness by the performances in 2012, live and recorded, of all Brahms symphonic works by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under their conductor Ricardo Chailly. As Chailly himself has put it, Weingartner's Brahms recordings are nothing less than 'the essence of these works: pure, devoid of extremes, firmly rooted in a tradition that seems buried today […] the freshness, the clarity of his interpretations still have the power to convince.' Once again, the Weingartner influence is directed towards the flowing tempos, the extreme clarity of parts and the modest expansion and contraction of tempos for expressive purposes.[156]

One can see that the qualities Dyment lists here are not exactly at odds with the trend towards greater evenness that dominates the performance practice of the late twentieth century, as described by Philip in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. Regrettably, Chailly does not specify what in his opinion defines the Weingartner tradition that he claims is buried today. He merely characterises it using the rather vague concept of purity and highlights the avoidance of extremes. It is fair to say that Weingartner was one of the most restrained conductors in his modifications of tempo. In that

[155] See for example: Anna Scott's 'Romanticizing Brahms" PhD Diss., Leiden University, 2014; Kate Bennett Wadsworth's "Precisely marked in the tradition of the composer, the performing editions of Friedrich Grützmacher" PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2017 and Sigurd Slåttebrekk and Tony Harrsion's "*Chasing the butterfly*" project on Grieg, 2008, http://www.chasingthebutterfly.no. (Last accessed August 2022)
[156] Dyment, *Conducting Brahms,* p. 230.

sense, his tradition was not buried as Chailly claims, but seems to have survived well into the twentieth century. Dyment goes on to write that "Chailly's interpretations are sometimes far from closely modelled on those to be heard in Weingartner's recordings". I would add that although Weingartner's relatively steady recordings are easier models than those of Abendroth and Furtwängler, with their extensive tempo modifications, I personally hear little relationship between Chailly's recordings and Weingartner's.

Where Chailly has chosen Weingartner as an example, others have tried to follow in Steinbach's footsteps. Dyment also writes about those who try to recreate his style:

> Thus far, contemporary practitioners, intent on following in Steinbach's footsteps have sometimes espoused an extreme approach that appears to be based on insufficiently detailed scholarship: misconceptions concerning the nature of that conductor's general approach with a too literal attempt to implement the precepts of Walter Blume's work – too literal in the sense that some of his hints have been magnified into the obvious and the unjustifiably extravagant.[157]

Dyment goes on to name Sir Charles Mackerras and Sir John Eliot Gardiner as examples of conductors who, in his opinion, failed in their attempts to interpret Brahms in Steinbach's style. He claims that their efforts are sometimes reminiscent of Abendroth's. Because he considers Abendroth's Brahms to be characterised by extreme emphasis and changes of tempo, Dyment concludes that Abendroth, and both Mackerras and Gardiner in so far as they coincide with him, must be considered as being remote from Steinbach's practice. At the same time, one can read Frisch, who claimed that Abendroth can be seen as a conductor who continued (parts of) the Steinbach tradition.[158] These conflicting views can be seen as further corroboration of the idea that Steinbach's style was and indeed remains a very elusive one. My personal impression of the recordings criticised by Dyment concerns their fundamental concept of tempo which, in my opinion, is not sufficiently

[157] Ibid, p. 235-236.
[158] Frisch, "In search of Brahms's First Symphony," in *Performing, Brahms,* p. 286.

flexible. As a result, one can easily get the impression that there is a lack in modification of rhythm and tempo, or that the modifications that are applied are too abrupt. But I must stress that to a large extent the way one perceives the tempo and its modifications is subjective. Much depends on the listener. Nonetheless, Dyment writes that in his view "the task of reconstructing the Meiningen way's approach to the performance of the four symphonies requires a more thoughtful and discriminating approach than has been adopted so far in contemporary attempts in performance practice."[159]

At the very least, one can say that, thanks to recordings such as those by Mackerras, Gardiner and a few others, the old debate about strict tempo versus freedom is being continued in the twenty-first century. This is a very welcome development considering that both HIPP and MPP, at least in the orchestral domain, had become so dominated by those who kept a strict tempo, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century.

My research has led me to a specific understanding of how to approach this music and how to use those expressive tools that I feel have been neglected in the past decades. In my experience, this process, in which my own artistic ambitions have become increasingly outspoken and specific, creates a state of mind that makes it more difficult to appreciate different approaches and outcomes. When I say that I welcome approaches to Brahms's music that are different from my own approach, particularly those that stem from a different understanding of the historical evidence or a different selection of evidence, I am making a conscious effort not to join the ranks of those people whom Leech-Wilkinson refers to as gatekeepers. I genuinely believe that a wide variety of approaches to the performance of Western Classical Music is to the advantage of all those who recognise its relevance for future generations. If more people are allowed and encouraged to form their own perspective on the music and develop their own personal understanding of it, they can learn more about the nature of the music and the paths by which it can be carried into the future can multiply.

[159] Dyment, *Conducting Brahms,* p. 236.

I share Leech-Wilkinson's criticism of gatekeepers (critics, teachers, and others who condemn certain performances as being unsuited to the intentions of the composer) and I too consider them a danger to the development of diverse creative approaches, but I am perhaps somewhat less worried about their influence. I am confident that the crumbling of pillars of the old musical power structures, such as record labels, management bureaus and newspaper critics, will ultimately lead to a situation where one will have to re-invent everything anyway. Whatever the outcome may be, I try to do what I can by advocating an open mind towards unfamiliar styles of performance, both old and new, in the places where I teach, such as the CvA and the National University of Seoul.

It is perhaps not surprising that conductors such as Sir John Eliot Gardiner and Richard Tognetti, who have their own orchestras to work with, have attempted to regain a certain amount of modification of rhythm and tempo in their work. The fact that chief conductors in MPP are now only on the rostrum for about twelve weeks per year or season makes it more difficult to develop a distinct style, let alone re-invent modifications of rhythm and tempo in a substantial and consequential way. I would further assume that the generally preferred role of the conductor in the world of HIPP, and the fact that this work usually takes place in relatively short projects, are factors that hinder the development of a style of playing that would include substantial modifications, which requires prolonged and intensive experimentation and practice.

There is also, perhaps, a mental aspect in HIPP working processes to consider here. The idea that so much power over artistic decisions should lie in the hands of just one person, for instance, seems somewhat at odds with the anti-authoritarian side of the period instrument movement. It seems to me that the default position of HIPP musicians is to be more inclined to trust Urtext editions and the accumulated instincts of a collective of like-minded musicians rather than those of a single conductor. They tend to appreciate the conductor as an inspirational figure, rather than as someone who moulds performances through individual decisions and non-verbal communication skills. Orchestral musicians from, for instance, the Orchestra of the

Eighteenth Century have repeatedly indicated to me that they much prefer an inspiring conductor to a technically skilled one. The more technically skilled a conductor is, the more they are capable of – in the words of Bülow – playing the orchestra like a piano. The idea of being played like a piano is not something musicians with an anti-authoritarian preference would welcome.

That brings me to the last factor that I think has limited the spread of tempo modification in HIPP orchestras. Many of the leading conductors in this field are inspired musicians, but few of them (often by their own admission) have any degree of conducting technique. I am no exception to this. In the introduction, I wrote about how I felt grateful for the advice given to me as a teenager not to pursue a career as a conductor early on, but rather to focus on my broad musical development. While I have made a considerable effort to develop my technique as a conductor over the years, certain aspects in my style of conducting reveal that I am, in fact, a late starter. I vividly remember how conductor Nicolaus Harnoncourt (1929-2016), one of the most inspiring people I have ever worked with, screamed at the Concertgebouw Orchestra: "After all these years that we have worked together, you still think you can get me to go 1-2-3? I cannot do it, I do not want to do it, and I will not do it!" [*Ich kann es nicht, Ich will es nicht, Ich tu es nicht!*]. On another occasion, Philippe Herreweghe, also in a rehearsal with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, told the musicians: "I know that you are used to working with conductors who are much better with their hands than I am, but if you will indulge me, I think I have something to say about this music."

Through experience I know that conductors require a good deal of technique in order to make their intentions regarding modifications of tempo clear to an orchestra. At the same time, though, I think it is important to acknowledge that every form of non-verbal understanding between a conductor and an orchestra is based upon an agreement between them, more than upon any particular technique or skill set of the conductor.[160] Few conductors, if any, will have had the same opportunity as Bülow in Meiningen to craft such an agreement with an orchestra, with both the orchestra and

[160] See Chapter 2.1 about how I see my role as a conductor in this project.

the conductor knowing the music by heart and having months to work together on a limited amount of repertoire chosen by the conductor alone.

Without claiming that such extreme conditions are required to arrive at a convincing style of modifications in orchestral performances, I think it is safe to say that the present system of putting a different conductor in front of an orchestra every week, as is customary with mainstream symphony orchestras, makes it unlikely that major steps in re-inventing tempo modification and other nineteenth-century expressive tools can be expected from that side of the spectrum. Moreover, HIPP ensembles and orchestras, often working in short intensive projects with musicians hired only for a brief period of time, seem principally tasked with efficiently creating results that fit a unified and internationally interchangeable standard of performance. I would argue that both the week-to-week production process of the mainstream orchestras and the project-based organisation of period instrument orchestras make it difficult to achieve the significant changes that are required if one wants to take into account the evidence of the historical practices of the nineteenth century in performance, because that would require substantial and prolonged experimentation. As I feel at the end of each project week with my orchestra that I am just beginning to get a glimpse of what might be possible in this field, I am strengthened in my belief that much more time is needed.

Finally, I would also like to try considering the implications of Blume's idea that states of mind are a factor in changing styles of performance. Perhaps it is important to acknowledge a few extra-musical factors that contribute to greater evenness of expression in the present-day way of making music. This touches on what one expects from music as musicians and as listeners. Musicians tend to honour the great canon of the music of the past by polishing it. Perhaps there is also an element of nostalgia involved here: they want to show their admiration by making every detail golden. In doing so, they sterilise the music and reduce it to something smooth and even. The pressure to do so is ubiquitous in the world of HIPP and MPP alike. What one does must sound polished or it risks being considered insufficient in quality. This pressure is also boosted by the fact

that people now hear more recorded music than music in live performance. If one were to consider only the sonic dimension of music-making, one would be neglecting both the fact that a concert is in some ways a ritual in which the public takes an active part, and that the palpable physical and mental effort that musicians make to produce the music is part of that ritual. I believe that the pressure to make everything sound "polished" may well be increased by a demand for music to comfort or distract people in a rapidly changing world. I suspect that there are numerous extra-musical factors contributing to the demand for smoothness and evenness in performance, including not only the state of mind of both musicians and listeners, but also the way classical music is marketed and consumed.

Conclusion

The tendency towards greater evenness of expression and tempo led to a rather uniform handling of tempo and sound in both HIPP and MPP orchestral performances over the course of the twentieth century. This tendency certainly also affected the performance style of Brahms's music. Attempts to interpret Brahms in the style of Steinbach have been limited in number and, according to experts such as Dyment, rather unsuccessful. The way that orchestral production processes developed in the twentieth century has made it difficult to develop a style of performance based on historical research in a way that also includes substantial amounts of modification. While extra-musical factors contributing to the demand for smoothness and evenness in performance fall outside the scope of this research project, these do merit further research.