To change one's skin according to the music at hand: locating the transformative power of recordings-informed performance

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Anna Scott

Introduction

Making music in the nineteenth century was a magical affair, from onstage shape shifting, conjuring and disappearing tricks, to intimate acts of spiritual communion and transubstantiation. Part circus act, part séance; music could astonish, intoxicate—even terrify. Whether elicited by the extroverted antics of larger-than-life personalities, or by the introspective self-abnegation of those channelling absent composers, these transformative experiences relied on a performer's right to deviate from scores, resulting in the stunning interpretative variety, between and within performances, captured by early recordings. Seeking inspiration from these traces promises a tantalizing escape from the text-centrism, compliance, and uniformity of modern classical performance. This chapter asks whether this is necessarily the case. After contrasting nineteenth-century accounts of musical magicking with the constraints faced by performers today, I propose two criteria for transformative recordings-informed performance. These criteria are explored via a case study, wherein five early-recorded styles were obsessively imitated and liberally extrapolated in a performance of Johannes Brahms's Intermezzo in A Major, op. 118, no. 2. Ultimately, I suggest that the revolutionary power of recordings-informed performance relies on our willingness to handle our source materials, and history itself, with fidelity and defiance: an approach where everything, and nothing, is sacrosanct.

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Matadors of the Salon

Amongst the extroverts we find pianist Sigismund Thalberg (1812–1871) who, according to his twenty-fingered statuette by sculptural caricaturist Jean-Pierre Dantan (1800–1869), sprouted extra hands whilst performing.[1] Audiences fell into a stupefied trance in anticipation of these 'phantasmic' appendages: an effect aided by dislocation, where notes are played one after the other rather than simultaneously as notated. As these ghost members often emerged when least expected, such as during a torrent of chords or arpeggios, audiences began 'listening with their eyes' in the hopes of catching the precise moment they materialized. Thalberg amplified this dissonance between what was seen and heard by gazing at his hands, as if 'not wholly responsible for them'.[2] One critic reported that the eminent professors who crowded around his piano likewise 'appeared scarcely to believe their eyes'; another protested that this wall of onlookers made it 'impossible for ladies who are seated at any distance' to observe 'how the different passages are fingered'.[3] As arguably the father of such hand gazing, Friedrich Kalkbrenner (1785–1849) was a leading exponent of chirognomy, which 'claimed that the character of men was mirrored in the form of their hands and fingers'.[4] His piano students practiced twelve hours a day before a mirror so that they, too, could observe their hands, and he exhaustively promoted his infamous chiroplast, or hand-guide: a wooden contraption, accompanied by a best-selling manual, designed to reshape the hand into a more efficient tool. Like Thalberg, his virtuosity had to be seen to be believed: 'watch [him] as he touches the piano', one critic wrote, adding, 'it is not without reason that I say "watch"'.[5]

Franz Liszt (1811–1886) traded in onstage *dis*memberment, 'his fingers seem[ing] to grow longer, like springs being released, as if at times freeing themselves from his hands': effects enhanced by grimacing, hair tossing, and props.[6] He once announced, after first demonstrating how to play a work as its creator intended, followed by how he himself felt it, '[and] here is the way I would play it for the public—to astonish, as a charlatan'. He then proceeded to light a cigar, 'which passed at moments between his lips to his fingers' as he executed pianistic feats of the highest difficulty.[7] While such antics certainly filled seats, they were emblematic of a time when performance was a necessarily embodied act. Pianists paradoxically underlined their physical presence by extending 'expressiveness to parts of the body that literally do not "do" anything', or by summoning bodies that weren't there.[8] Theodor

Leschetizky (1830–1915) remarked that Julius Schulhoff's (1825–1898) legato was like 'a human voice arising above the sustaining harmonies! I could hear the shepherd sing, and see him.'[9] Carl Tausig's (1841–1871) use of blind octaves in Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor, op. 11, where two-handed unison passages were played as double alternating octaves, produced such an almighty din that audiences became convinced that multiple pianists were onstage. Critic George Bernard Shaw was less enthused about the unwritten techniques upon which such effects relied: 'I am now more than ever convinced that Tausig's early death was . . . the result of supernatural interposition for the extermination of a sacrilegious meddler.'[10]

Officious performers aside, the fabric of music itself could be dangerous—especially for women. Physician Eduard Reich linked musical overstimulation to premature menstruation, as well as 'suicide, vice, crime, madness, melancholy, [and] hysteria'.[11] Tales circulated of 'women fainting, being unable to breathe and having giggling fits' when exposed to particular harmonies, while 'the superb change of tone in the prayer of the Hebrews' in Gioachino Antonio Rossini's opera *Moise* reportedly caused 'forty cases of brain fever or violent convulsions' in young women.[12] Richard Wagner's (1813–1883) performances were perilous no matter who you were. Eduard Hanslick likened the combination of his hyper-flexible conducting style and Bayreuth's hidden orchestra and eerie audio-visual stage tricks to a 'mild opium jag'.[13] Psychologist Christian von Ehrenfels claimed he could predict which bars would induce orgasm in women, while Friedrich Nietzsche said that 'Wagnerized' women 'lack children or, in the most bearable cases, men'.[14] King Ludwig II of Bavaria, however, collapsed during a performance of the opera *Tristan,* before later going insane and drowning under suspicious circumstances. Two of the first singers to perform the titular role of Tristan also succumbed to madness and early deaths. To one of these Heldentenors, Wagner wrote: 'I drove you to the abyss'.[15]

Pearl Divers

For those of a more interior mindset, all of this gawking and dying was antithetical to music's true spiritual dimension. Citing loftier ideals concerning the soul's transformative flight between creator, player, and listener, they prized fidelity to composers' intentions and viewed the hijinks described above (even the mere fact of a performer's body) as 'more often a hindrance

than a help to the detailed comprehension of great works'.[16] The magic trick expected of the introspective performer was invisibility; only via self-effacement could one become a transparent conduit for the musical work, the stage upon which this communion of souls played out. Though unlikely to induce menstruation, the effects of such experiences upon listeners were no less opiate-tinged. In Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder's *The Remarkable Life of the Musician Joseph Berglinger* (1797), Joseph 'felt himself raised above the barren earth, the dark cloud-curtain shutting out the mortal eye was drawn, and he soared up into the radiant sky'.[17]

Though invisible to the work, these players were still visible to audiences: a simultaneous absence and presence facilitated by their self-abnegation, on one hand, and by their deviations from the score, on the other—only now in order to clarify composers' intentions rather than to titillate crowds. They seemed 'to play as if from the soul of the composer' by interpreting music as intended rather than as notated, thereby conjuring and becoming absent creators.[18] Violinist Pierre Baillot (1771–1842), for example, was said to possess 'the genius of performance because he strips away his ego to become, by turn, Haydn, Boccherini, Mozart and Beethoven'.[19] This theme of doubleness between invisible performer and 'miraculously absent yet reanimated' composer echoes throughout E. T. A. Hoffmann's writings: 'The proper performance of Beethoven's works demands nothing less than that one understands him, and that in the knowledge of one's own state of grace one ventures boldly into the circle of magical beings that his irresistible spell summons forth.'[20]

Proponents of this ideology often implied that they understood music better than everyone else. Robert Schumann (1810–1856) called Thalberg a 'matador of the drawing room', and compared his 'finger-music' to instrument-maker Friedrich Kaufmann's (1785–1866) early mechanical android The Trumpet Player. Just as the trumpeter's leather bellows imitated the sound of a trumpet, so too was Thalberg's art 'blown through the air, not through the soul'.[21] Schumann scoffed that Kalkbrenner's four-voice fugue for the left hand reminded him of a London concert where 'a polite Lady Somebody' actually 'stood on tiptoe to stare at the artist's hands'. This disdain for spectacle may also lie behind Schumann's comment that, his 'demon's power' aside, 'if Liszt played behind the scenes, a great deal of the poetry of his playing would be lost'.[22] Schumann's contempt for Kalkbrenner's 'hobbyhorse . . . the famous Hand-Guide' was perhaps also fuelled by his own run-in with a similar device. Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847), however,

loathed Kalkbrenner, and called him a 'little fish patty' and an 'indigestible sausage'.[23] For these pianists, Kalkbrenner and his ilk were 'a race of freaks . . . with one finger too many on each hand', whose theatrics appealed to the *Liebhaber*—not the *Kenner*.[24] Referring to Kalkbrenner's widely admired *jeu-perlé,* Schumann quipped: 'The pearl never floats on the surface; it must be sought in the depths. . . . Clara is a diver.'[25]

Liszt disparagingly called Clara Schumann's (1819–1896) pianism 'Leipzigerisch' after the so-called Leipzig School, of which Mendelssohn was a notable representative. An early admirer of her playing, Liszt later referred to her as 'Die Göttliche Clara' and instructed a pianist to play his "Mephisto Polka" as if they'd been trained at the Leipzig Conservatory: 'only paying attention to yourself, and not at all brilliantly'.[26] Clara Schumann's more steadfast devotees, however, noted that her 'whole being turn[ed] to music' as she played; that she brought listeners 'as near to the composer as lay in her power', seeming 'to create anew'.[27] This magical absence-presence was underlined by Schumann's textual departures. As one critic described her performance of Beethoven's Sonata in D minor, op. 31, no. 2:

> The alternation of *adagio* and *allegro* in the first movement . . .can be readily played precisely as Beethoven has written them; but the power of sympathizing with the composer so as to reproduce his varied phrases of thought as he spoke and felt in the language he has chosen, belongs only to that order of genius of which Mendelssohn was the brightest example, and to which Madame Schumann . . . may fairly lay claim.[28]

We cannot know the extent of Schumann's textual departures. But recordings of other 'Leipzigerisch' pianists, like Carl Reinecke (1824–1910), are bursting with unnotated techniques, as are the recordings of pianists who studied with Schumann and Brahms. As we shall see, these techniques are rarely used in ways predictable by scores and verbal accounts, and are often implicated in major alterations to the detail, structure, and time of musical works.

Whether framed as self-abnegating or self-aggrandizing, pearl divers and matadors did things not indicated by scores, resulting in incredible variety between and within their performances. Even amongst students of Schumann and Brahms we find highly idiosyncratic and mutable understandings of the intentions of composers they knew intimately. As one of these pupils, Carl Friedberg, once remarked on the proper performance

of Brahms's works: '*Don't be afraid. . . . Do it as the music requires. We must change our skin according to the music at hand.*'[29]

Changing Our Skin

Bound by norms designed to limit such agency and variety, modern performances are remarkably alike. Deviations from scores are *verboten*, and their detail, structure, and time must be executed with precision, coherence, and consistency. No two performances are ever exactly alike, but the pressure to conform to the same set of scores and norms confines players to the subtlest of tonal and temporal manoeuvrings. There is a third constraint at work here, however, as evidenced by the slightly greater variability tolerated in period performance spheres. To this end, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson's comparison of Steinway and fortepiano iterations of Beethoven's *Moonlight* Sonata is instructive. Due to differences in construction, he argues, 'no two Steinway performances will ever sound or feel as different as a typical Steinway and almost any fortepiano performance feel from each other'. Fortepiano *Moonlights* themselves also vary, because no two instruments are alike, and because players 'are still experimenting . . . with ways of getting these favourite, near-sacred scores to work with such a different mechanism and sound'. But this variety is only permitted because fortepiano *Moonlights* tend to adhere to modern norms and Beethoven's score as judiciously as their Steinway counterparts do, and because the former are seen as even more historically sanctioned than the latter. In an industry where the artist's primary job is 'to do history in sound', regardless of instrument, historicity is the ultimate get-out-of-jail-free card. These *Moonlights* may inhabit different sound worlds, but their relationship with scores, norms, and history is essentially the same.[30]

Mainstream and period performance's discontents are often drawn to recordings-informed performance, where they are encouraged to experiment with the unwritten techniques captured by early recordings. The subversive thrill one feels when rolling a chord where not explicitly indicated perhaps explains why recordings-informed endeavours are often said to reimagine, reinvigorate, and even transform classical performance. Like instrument choice, however, there are signs that these techniques are no magical panacea where our relationship with scores, norms, and history is concerned. They certainly make these near-sacred works sound and feel

different, but whether they challenge the central pillars of our art or just give players more things to do within the same narrow margins is difficult to assess without concrete criteria. The case study described below explores two criteria drawn from the constraints outlined above: are transformative recordings-informed performances at least as far from scores and modern norms as their models, and do they interrogate how performers 'do' history in sound?

'Distance from scores' precludes any approach whereby scores are understood to contain all possibilities for their realization. This includes assuming that they contain hidden clues for how and where to apply early recorded unwritten techniques. To rush and slow in response to a hairpin (< >), for example, is no less text-adherent than only getting louder and softer; it assumes that past performers responded to notation as we do today; and it erases the kaleidoscope of unpredictable and textually transgressive things they actually did in the vicinity of hairpins. 'Distance from modern norms' means resisting the urge to apply these techniques in order to highlight notated detail, structure, and time with precision, consistency, and coherence. Instead, this criterion dares us to obfuscate and negate the topography of scores and to treat the expressive exaggerations, technical blunders, and memory slips that pervade our source materials as rich creative resources rather than unhappy relics of pre-modern standards of recording and performance.

'Interrogating how performers do history in sound' means refusing to triangulate and vet early recorded practices with multiple corroborating proofs of historical (and preferably textual) provenance—a validation process that reinforces the notion that performers cannot make unilateral, historically unjustifiable decisions. An apposite question, then, is why use historical evidence at all. First, early recordings are imbued with an easily leveraged aura of ultra-historicity and proximity to the intentions of dead composers: the same qualities that legitimize the variability of fortepiano *Moonlights* relative to their Steinway counterparts. It is remarkable how far I can stray from scores and modern norms without raising alarm bells simply by producing performances that sound 'old'. Second, historical recordings are less interpretatively malleable than historical scores, descriptions, and even instruments; my recordings-informed performances can easily be compared to their models, making the latter useful, and at times maddening, gauges for the transformative nature of the former. Third, I've found that the more closely I imitate early recordings, including everything that makes them so irreconcilable with scores, norms, and the historical process, the less beholden I feel

to the sonic evidence itself. Fourth, inhabiting this paradoxical yet transformative space between fidelity and sacrilege opens a portal to the magic of both inner and outer modes of nineteenth-century pianism, and the agency and variety relished by our predecessors.

The following case study unfolds in two stages. To ensure that my performances were at least as far from scores and modern norms as my models, I imitated five early recordings by pupils of Brahms and Schumann. Here I became a pearl diver, placing myself entirely at the service of communing with absent musicians. To interrogate how modern performers do history in sound, I then extrapolated all five early recorded styles in Brahms's Intermezzo in A Major, op. 118, no. 2. Here I became a charlatan, executing a parlour trick that pushed both performer and history to their breaking points.

Séance

The imitation process began by playing along with each of the five early recorded performances. I then used the software Sonic Visualiser to work out every audible detail, including tempo and rhythmic modifications, the dislocation, alteration, addition and omission of notes, how chords are rolled, dynamic nuances—even pedal changes. After months of trial-and-error, the resulting performances were as far from scores and modern norms as their models, and they were as unlike each other, as they were unlike mainstream and period performances of the same works. This process tapped into that doubleness so prized amongst interior-minded nineteenth-century pianists: by relinquishing my agency I entered their magical circle, learned to speak as they spoke, and both conjured and became them. While this solitary, obsessive pursuit is in many ways that of the *Kenner*, accusations of pedantry and excessive inwardness are probably also apt. My goal, however, was to inhabit these five styles so fully that they could be summoned in any music, for any reason, even if the result transcended anything these players might have plausibly done. Like wearing a disguise, the magic of imitation lies in its transformation of an initial condition of maximum constraint into something wilful, even immoral.

I created a stylistic profile for Fanny Davies (1861–1934) by imitating her 1930 recording of 'Zart und singend' from Robert Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze* op. 6 (see Example 7.1, Score 7.1 on the companion web

resource ⓟ).[31] Davies rolls chords and dislocates throughout this performance, with early bass notes often coinciding with the right-hand materials of preceding bars. While some forcefully dislocated right-hand notes reveal inner melodic lines, Davies just as often applies this emphasis for no discernible reason at all, like the lone right-hand C sharp at 22.3 (bar 22, beat 3), or in ways that disrupt inner lines, like how she brings out the right-hand F and E flat but not the D in bars 49–54. Davies adds, alters, and omits notes throughout; in bars 20-1, for example, she plays an F sharp and C with her left hand at 20.1, begins the ascending tenor line on a G sharp, and repeats the tied C at 21.1 (see Figure 7.1). She tends to rush upbeats and broaden first and second beats, and her slowest playing occurs into the minor structural seam at bar 25, while her fastest playing occurs at the middle-to-ends of sections and into the major structural seam at bar 17. Davies further softens this major seam by slowing before and after it, in bars 15 and 18, by rushing between these points of emphasis and by replacing the right-hand E flat at 16.1 with the D of 16.3, which is replaced by the A flat of 17.1—an elision that creates a sense of rush and hurry at a juncture heavily emphasized by modern pianists.

The second profile was created by imitating Carl Friedberg's (1872–1955) 1953 recording of Robert Schumann's 'Fast zu ernst' from *Kinderszenen* op. 15 (see Example 7.2, Score 7.2 on the companion web resource ⓟ).[32] The fragile, stilted quality of this performance stems partly from Friedberg's unpredictable approach to dislocation. Because he delays most right-hand notes, the ear is drawn to five delayed left-hand notes in bars 4, 32, 36, 45,

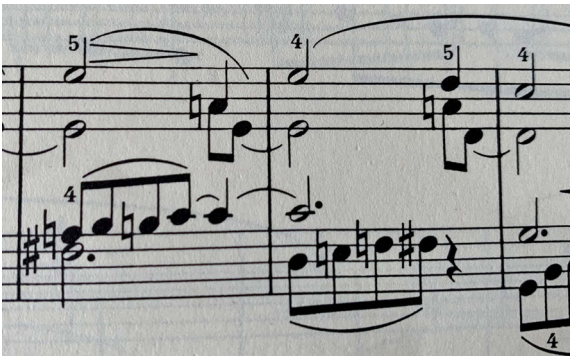

Figure 7.1 Bars 20–21 of Schumann's 'Zart und singend' from *Davidsbündlertänze*, op. 6.

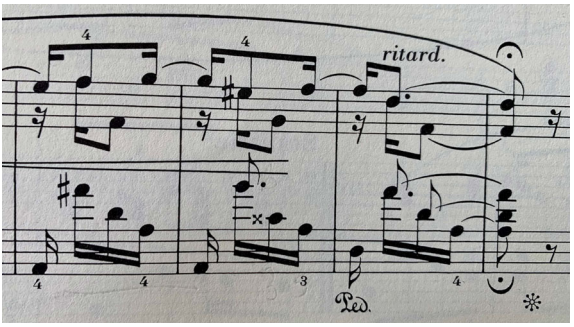

Figure 7.2 Bars 13–15 of Schumann's 'Fast zu ernst' from *Kinderszenen*, op. 15.

and 46. These lone points of emphasis, however, occur at different positions within their respective bars, in a variety of temporal and harmonic contexts, and are never implicated in voice-leading. Even where voice-leading could be a motivating factor, like the left-hand thumb line of bars 13–15, Friedberg plays the A sharps early but plays the B precisely with the right hand; upon repetition he omits the second A sharp altogether (see Figure 7.2). Friedberg's rhythmic alterations are also erratic. In a performance of just fifty-seven bars he broadens twenty-one downbeats and rushes twenty-three; he broadens twenty second beats and rushes twenty-four. Consecutive bars are rarely rhythmically altered in the same way; repeated passages are never rhythmically altered or dislocated in the same way. Though Friedberg cuts or modifies pitches throughout, he confuses the left-hand material beginning at bar 30 with that of bar 49, resulting in major alterations to both passages. His treatment of bars containing fermatas is also peculiar: bars 8, 21, and 34 are shortened, bars 16 and 42 are neither lengthened nor shortened, and only bar 47 is lengthened. This softening of the piece's internal structural seams reinforces his bipartite conception of its performance, the slowest point of which occurs at bar 27, exactly halfway between bar 1 and his marked slowing at bar 54. Each half begins slowly, before he rushes over its middle and slows at its end, creating a temporal double-arch shape.

Ilona Eibenschütz's (1872–1967) profile is based on my imitation of her 1952 recording of Brahms's Intermezzo in E minor, op. 119, no. 2 (see Example 7.3, Score 7.3 on the companion web resource ▶).[33] This performance is characterized by breakneck tempi and its tenuous relationship with Brahms's score. Eibenschütz exaggerates some tempo, dynamic, and articulation markings while ignoring or disobeying most others. She rolls

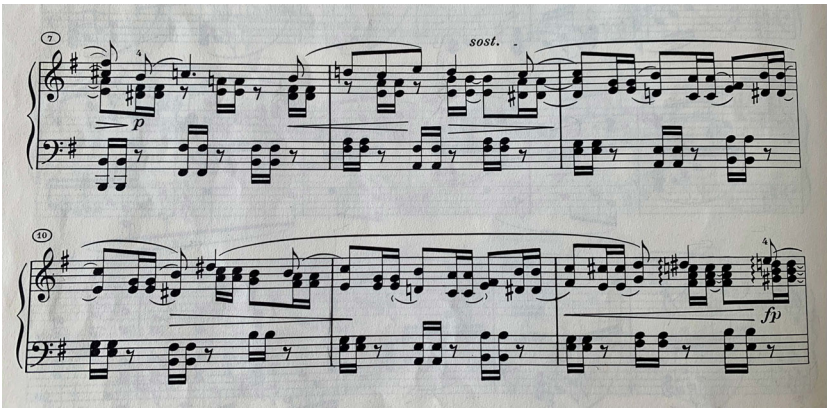

Figure 7.3 Bars 7–12 of Brahms's Intermezzo in E minor, op. 119, no. 2.

and dislocates materials more sparingly than her peers, but her hands are remarkably independent in bars 29–31, where the right surges nearly half a bar ahead of the left. She also frequently rearranges the rhythmic relationship of the hands: in bars 13–17, for example, the last note of each right-hand triplet group coincides with the second note of each left-hand group; in bars 18–21 she places right-hand chords on rather than off strong beats. Eibenschütz omits most repeated materials in bars 7–12 and 23–26—alterations reproduced almost exactly when these passages return, despite Brahms's elaboration of bars 91–92 (see Figure 7.3). She also tends to rush through internal structural seams, placing emphasis before and after them (if at all). Listen to her precipitous run-up to the second half of the lyrical B section, in bar 52, the downbeat of which is barely detectable. At nearly two-and-a-half times faster than the opening, Eibenschütz's tempo peaks in this section, which can be understood as the midway point of her arch-shaped temporal conception of this performance. Remarkably, this arch shape also characterizes her performance of the A and B sections individually.

For the fourth profile I imitated Etelka Freund's (1879–1977) 1953 recording of Brahms's Intermezzo in B-flat minor, op. 117, no. 2 (see Example 7.4, Score 7.4 on the companion web resource ▶).[34] This performance features more continuous arpeggiation and dislocation, with early basses often forcefully coinciding with materials from preceding bars. As Freund rushes over the demisemiquaver passage in bars 49–50, however, her right hand briefly surges ahead of the left. She plays many tied notes, and often omits, adds, and alters materials in ways ostensibly motivated by voice-leading. Playing a right-hand B flat instead of a C at 11.1, for example,

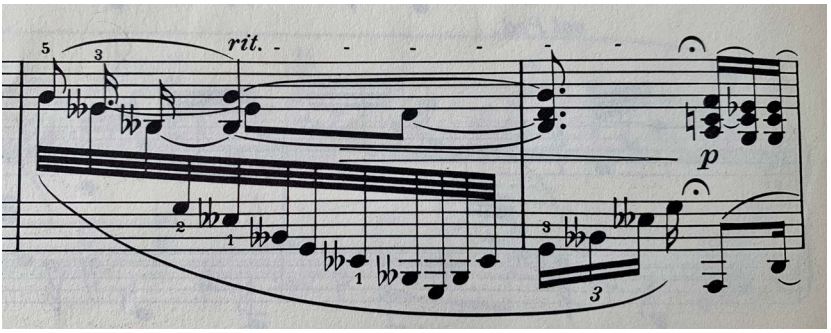

Figure 7.4 Bars 21–22 of Brahms's Intermezzo in B flat minor, op. 117, no. 2.

lends melodic import to a note that would otherwise be a harmonic filler. These decisions, however, are sometimes melodically disruptive, like how omitting the right-hand D flat in bar 21 breaks a descending inner chromatic line between the E-double flat at 21.1 and the C-natural at 22.2 (see Figure 7.4). Freund's pedalling is notably heavy: in bars 43–46 she changes the pedal only on downbeats, allowing the dissonances to accumulate. Her rhythmic alterations are also idiosyncratic: in bars 27–30 and 35–38, for example, she alternates between exactly-, over-, and under-dotted materials in highly unpredictable and asymmetrical ways. Over-dotted notes are often shortened to the point of omission, as is likely the case with the right-hand D in bar 73. Freund also tends to suddenly linger on upper melodic notes, rushing between these points of emphasis, and she slows pronouncedly into all major structural seams. At the return of the A section, however, this emphasis comes, not at the *dolce* in bar 51, nor into the downbeat of bar 52, but rather much earlier and later, over the chords in bars 47–48 and into the downbeat of bar 57—a strategy she uses in order to soften all minor structural seams in this piece.

I created the final profile by imitating Adelina De Lara's (1872–1961) 1951 recording of Brahms's Intermezzo in E-Flat Major, op. 117, no. 1 (see Example 7.5, Score 7.5 on the companion web resource ▶).[35] From the outset De Lara tends to arpeggiate over the rushed middle-to-ends of phrases, while dislocating at their slower outer edges. Her left hand is generally early, but her right frequently surges ahead in her remarkably restless performance of the work's B section. In bars 50–51, she omits upper melodic notes whilst forcefully bringing out an inner right-hand line (see Figure 7.5). And while she allows tempo to accumulate or dissipate across entire sections, within these over-arching gestures her beat-to-beat time-feel is notably

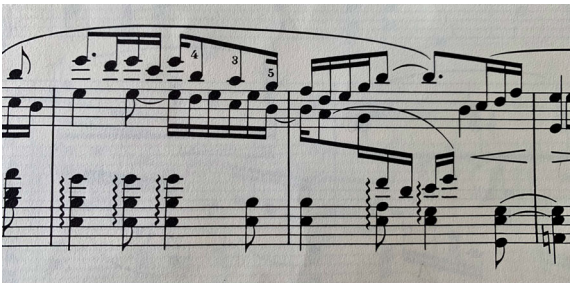

Figure 7.5 Bars 50-51 of Brahms's Intermezzo in E Flat Major, op. 117, no. 1.

vertical and stilted, due largely to her impatience with longer note values and her tendency, particularly in the A section, to dot upbeat semiquavers by lengthening the first of a pair and shortening the second, while at the same time either lengthening or shortening crotchets and downbeats. She softens all minor structural seams by slowing before and after rather than into them, and by subtly rushing between these points of emphasis. She handles the major seam between the A^1 and B sections of this piece in a similar way: after slowing into the downbeat of bar 20, she ignores the fermatas and plunges into and through bar 21, relaxing tempo well afterwards.

Circus Act

Despite not being interested in reifying how these players may have performed works they did not record or the authorial intentions of their teachers, in past projects I extrapolated each profile to a similar work by the same composer—undoubtedly out of some concern for the proper way to 'do history in sound'. In so doing, however, I flattened one of the most compelling (and foreign) qualities of those recordings they did make: that sense of multiple voices shifting, overlapping, and interrupting in single performances, in ways seemingly indifferent to the score. To recapture this internal variability, I explored a more pluralist, post-historical approach to extrapolation by unleashing all five profiles in Brahms's Intermezzo in A Major, op. 118, no. 2, in ways that pull this performance even further away from the score, from modern norms, and from the sonic evidence itself.

Constructing this performance was a peculiar experience. At times I felt fully in control, like a puppet master; at other times I felt eerily *un*involved, like a puppet. It was I, after all, who divided the intermezzo mathematically

rather than structurally: three sections were established on either side of its halfway point at bar 58, and each section was 16–23 bars in length (for an average of around 19 bars, which is about a third of 58). I assigned one pianist to each of the first five sections, and after further dividing up the sixth and final section, I assigned one pianist to each of its five sub-sections. I'd thus 'become' each pianist twice. I also deliberately caricatured each pianist's style, like Thalberg's twenty-fingered statue, by magnifying their most idiosyncratic features. To determine who I'd become in which section, I played the full intermezzo 'as' each pianist in turn. As I did so, however, certain pianists began claiming, and refusing to relinquish, certain sections; their personalities began determining the nature of transitions between sections; they even began overriding some of my own decisions, like my desire not to have similar materials played by the same pianist twice. In these moments, their voices *were* 'the music at hand'; it was up to me to change my skin accordingly. The result is in many ways a self-aggrandizing parlour trick of the highest difficulty, as I multiply, disjoint, and reshape my hands in real time. It extends expressivity to bodies that aren't there, leading me to feel not solely in control. It could also be dismissed as a superficial, dilettantish exercise: one that trades in sacrilegious meddling and the supernatural interposition of variety. I certainly continue to feel its effects, and more than once I've felt driven to the abyss whilst performing it (see Example 7.6, Score 7.6 on the companion web resource ▶).[36]

Throughout Fanny Davies's opening statement, between bars 1 and 16, rolled or dislocated notes coincide with the materials of preceding bars. While some forcefully dislocated right-hand notes reveal inner melodic lines, I just as often apply this emphasis in ways that disrupt voice-leading, like how I alternate between bringing out inner and upper right-hand notes in bars 2-4, or for no reason at all, like the lone D sharp at 8.1. I add, alter, and omit notes throughout; in bars 14–15, for example, I cut one of the right-hand B sharps, and I fill out left-materials with F-sharp-minor and G-sharp-minor arpeggios (see Figure 7.6). I rush upbeats and broaden first and second beats, and my slowest playing occurs into the minor structural seams at bars 4 and 12, while my fastest playing occurs at the middle-to-ends of phrases and into the major structural seams in bars 8 and 16. I further soften the major seam at bar 8 by slowing well before and after it, by rushing between these points of emphasis, and by eliding materials via arpeggiation into the downbeat of bar 9. The seam at bar 16 is treated similarly, only I roll the early right-hand chord at 16.3 'as' Carl Friedberg—while playing left-hand materials as Davies.

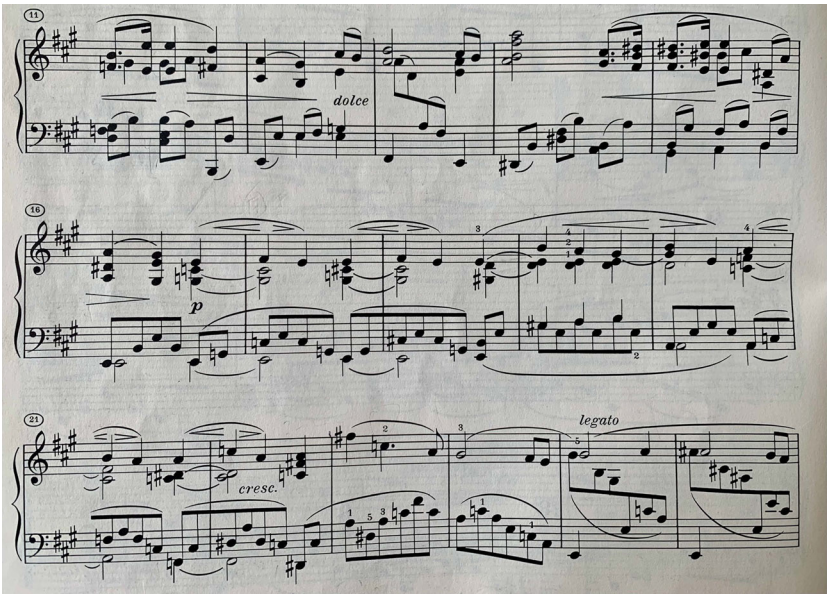

Figure 7.6 Bars 11–26 of Brahms's Intermezzo in A Flat Major, op. 118, no. 2.

The fragile, stilted quality of Carl Friedberg's statement in bars 16–38 stems from my erratic approach to dislocation and rhythmic alteration. At the outset I play my right hand early at 16.3, followed by an early left hand at 17.1 and 17.2. This pattern is repeated at 17.3, 18.1, and 18.2, but then I play the hands simultaneously at 18.3, my left hand is early throughout bar 19, and my hands alternate on a beat-to-beat basis until bar 25 (see Figure 7.6). Similarly, I rush into first beats and broaden second beats in bars 17–20, but then I slow into 21.1 and rush 21.2, before accelerating more steadily; elsewhere, my rhythmic alteration strategies shift from one moment to the next. While some early right-hand notes reveal inner melodic lines, like the descending A–G sharp–F sharp in bars 28–30, others are more haphazard, like how I forcefully bring out the C natural and C sharp at 16.3 and 17.3 before omitting the D at 18.3 altogether. I pretend to confuse the passages that begin in bars 30 and 32, playing naturals in the former and sharps in the latter. And I give this statement a temporal arch shape by playing fastest over its middle, and by softening its internal structural seams at bars 30 and 34 via rushed second beats and early third beats.

Ilona Eibenschütz wrests the tenor line away from Friedberg in the middle of bar 38, after which I begin to rush precipitously, my right hand pulling

well ahead of the left by bar 42. I exaggeratedly follow some markings, like the *crescendo un poco animato* in bar 39, while ignoring or disobeying many others, like the *ritardando* in bar 45. In bars 49–53 I ignore the hairpins, emphasizing upper melodic notes instead, and I alter the rhythmic arrangement of the hands so that right-hand quavers fall with or after left-hand triplets. My tempo peaks in bar 49: the halfway point of Eibenschütz's arch-shaped statement and the structural seam between this piece's A and B sections. I erase this seam by extreme rushing, placing emphasis before and after it, but also by revision. After fashioning quaver pairs out of right-hand materials beginning at 44.3, a domino effect ensues: my hands become displaced by a full beat, the left-hand F sharp and D at 45.3 are omitted, and all accompanimental materials are played as arpeggiated flourishes (see Figure 7.7). After briefly slowing into bar 47, I again begin to rush, arpeggiate, reduce, and elide materials into and through the downbeat of bar 49, slowing well afterwards. The structural seam at bar 57 is treated similarly until Freund interrupts at 58.2.

Etelka Freund's entrance is heralded by a return to her continuous arpeggiation and dislocation. My pedalling is heavy from the outset, with no changes until the downbeat of bar 60, and infrequent changes thereafter until bar 64. Although my left hand is generally early in the passage starting in bar 65, my right briefly surges ahead as I rush towards the downbeat of bar 69. An early right-hand B at 73.1 also forcefully coincides with the left-hand C sharp at 72.3. In bars 69–76 I linger on upper melodic notes whilst rushing between them; I even use a series of arpeggiated flourishes to further hasten and elide interstitial materials in bars 73–75 (see Figure 7.8). I play a handful

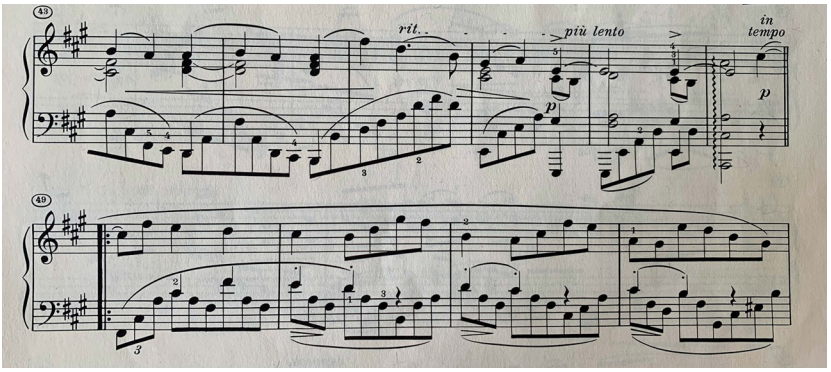

Figure 7.7 Bars 43–52 of Brahms's Intermezzo in A Flat Major, op. 118, no. 2.

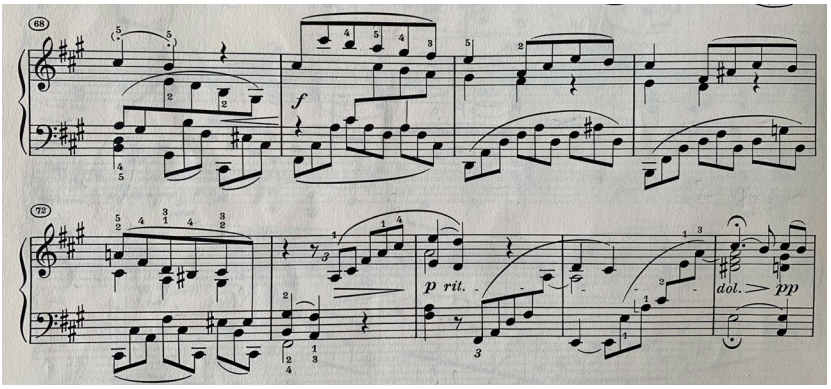

Figure 7.8 Bars 68–76 of Brahms's Intermezzo in A Flat Major, op. 118, no. 2.

of tied notes in bars 60 and 76, and recreate Freund's idiosyncratic rhythmic alterations where possible. In bar 60, for example, right-hand quavers are exactly dotted, whilst those in bars 66–67 and 72 are over- and under-dotted—with the right-hand E sharp at 72.3 being shortened to the point of omission. And while I soften the minor structural seams at bars 61 and 69 by rushing through them, slowing well before and after, I slow dramatically into the major seams in bars 64 and 76.

With Adelina De Lara's entrance at 76.3 we hear her tendency to arpeggiate over the rushed middles-to-ends of phrases, while dislocating at their slower outer edges. My left hand is generally early, but a series of early chords beginning in bar 84 helps my right hand surge ahead of the left until the downbeat of bar 93. I omit upper melodic notes in bars 79–80 whilst forcefully bringing out an inner right-hand line, and impatiently shorten crotchets whilst rushing in order to soften the internal structural seam in bar 80, taking time before and after it (see Figure 7.9). This shortening of note values during moments of intense rushing also occurs in bar 78, in the passage beginning at bar 84, and in bars 91–92. I let tempo accumulate across De Lara's entire statement, aided by my softening of its internal seams. And as I approach the last of these demarcations, I take time quite early, around 91.2, before plunging into and through the downbeat of bar 93, leaving it to Davies to slow afterwards.

Davies's short statement begins in a subdued fashion. But as I gather speed, I emulate her consistent dislocation, her forceful voicing of inner right-hand notes, and her rushed upbeats and broadened first and second beats. In Friedberg's statement beginning at 98.3 I recreate the stilted fragility of his erratic approach to dislocation and rhythmic alteration. After De Lara's

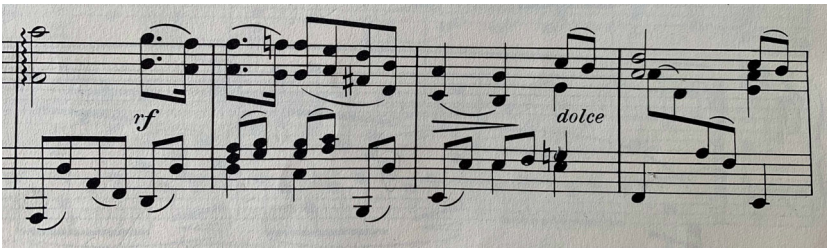

Figure 7.9 Bars 78–81 of Brahms's Intermezzo in A Flat Major, op. 118, no. 2.

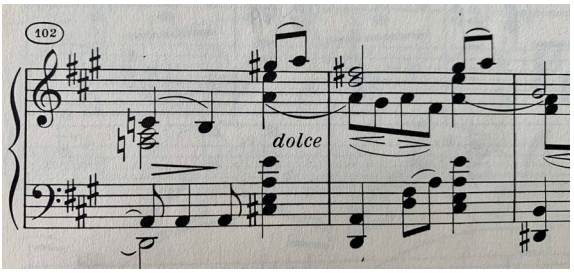

Figure 7.10 Bars 102–3 of Brahms's Intermezzo in A Flat Major, op. 118, no. 2.

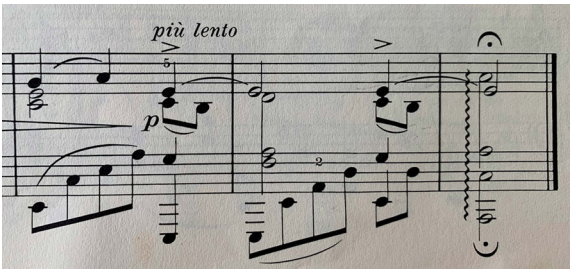

Figure 7.11 Bars 114–16 of Brahms's Intermezzo in A Flat Major, op. 118, no. 2.

dramatic rolled chord at 102.3, despite the *dolce*, I recreate her impatient shortening of longer note values as I rush towards the internal structural seam at 106.3. Eibenschütz again seizes control of the tenor line in bar 106, only now I slow and soften at the *crescendo un poco animato*. With Freund's entry at 110.3 I recreate her heavy pedalling, her broadening of upper melodic notes, and her playing of tied notes. Emboldened by her more licentious peers, however, I evoke the melodic gesture of bars 102–3 by adding a right-hand F sharp and D just after the A at 114.2, in a magical reincarnation of the same notes cut by Eibenschütz in bar 45 (see Figures 7.10 and 7.11).

Further Reflections

While this performance is certainly as far from the score and modern norms as its early recorded models, only the final section, with its quicker stylistic shifts, transcends anything *any* nineteenth-century pianist might have plausibly done, making it most in keeping with my second criterion for the transformative. In hindsight, perhaps the entire performance should have unfolded in this way. But this is what changing our skin does: the more liberated we become from scores and norms, the more the historical evidence, too, starts to feel like a substitute rather than a springboard for imagination—at which point we must let it go. Until then, early recordings still have much to teach us. They are a reminder that things were once (and still can be) done very differently, and their aura of ultra-historicity can function as a kind of Trojan horse. What happens when the city walls are breached, however, and these recordings-informed performances are revealed to be deviously anti-historical, remains to be seen. Perhaps we'll simply have to remind gatekeepers that performances in the fetishized past could once (and still can) astonish, intoxicate, and even terrify listeners.

I have argued that without criteria it is difficult to assess just how transformative recordings-informed performance really is. And I have suggested that diving into the past for pearls of wisdom can only take us so far. We need charlatans: those prepared to make listeners squirm; those more interested in contravening the core pillars of our art than in using the right techniques, in the right places, for the right reasons. Early recordings can still be a means to this end provided we are brave enough (*don't be afraid*) to keep asking whether we are really doing what we say we are doing (*do it as the music requires*), even if this means jettisoning the historical evidence the moment it becomes yet another constraint (*we must change our skin according to the music at hand*). When recordings-informed performance's reckoning inevitably comes, let's hope the verdict is something other than 'different sound world, same relationship with scores, norms and history'.

Notes

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24. Schumann, R., *On Music and Musicians*, p. 60, in Davies, *Romantic Anatomies,* p. 101. Contemporaneous understandings of the categories *Kenner* and *Liebhaber* included expert versus amateur, intellectual versus sensual, and edification versus entertainment.
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30. Leech-Wilkinson, D., 2020: *Challenging Performance: Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them*, chapter 1, paragraphs 1, 4–6, accessed 14 July 2022, https://challengingperformance.com/the-book-1/.
31. All sound examples are performed by the author. The imitations of Adelina De Lara and Ilona Eibenschütz were recorded in 2014 using modern 'hi-fi' microphones. The imitations of Fanny Davies, Carl Friedberg, and Etelka Freund, and the extrapolated performance of Brahms's Intermezzo op. 118, no. 2, were recorded in 2021 using a 1930s-era 'lo-fi' microphone. See Scott, A., 2024: 'Creative processes in recreating early recordings', in *Recorded Music in Creative Practices: Mediation, Performance, Education*, G. Volioti and D. Barolsky, eds. (New York: Routledge). For Fanny Davies's 1930 recording of Schumann's 'Zart und singend', see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3bhVC83GMw&t=999s (beginning at 00:15:19).
32. For Carl Friedberg's 1953 recording of Schumann's 'Fast zu ernst', see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNCSaFyIwWU.
33. For Ilona Eibenschütz's 1952 recording of Brahms's Intermezzo op. 119, no. 2, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XV6ji84-8IA (beginning at 00:03:18).
34. For Etelka Freund's 1953 recording of Brahms's Intermezzo op. 117, no. 2, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_HLTUUoP3A.
35. For Adelina De Lara's 1951 recording of Brahms's Intermezzo op. 117, no. 1, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiiFNDR68a4.
36. For a beautiful mainstream performance of Brahms's Intermezzo op. 118, no. 2, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSf2veLfC-w (beginning at 00:01:50).

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