




The Songs of Brahms ~ 10

hyperion

SOPHIE RENNERT
GRAHAM JOHNSON



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THIS ALBUM IS THE TENTH AND LAST of a series that presents the entire piano-accompanied songs of Johannes Brahms. As such it is a companion to the series undertaken by Hyperion for the songs of Schubert, Schumann, Fauré and Strauss.

Brahms, like Schumann, but unlike Schubert with his much greater output, issued the majority of his songs in opus number groupings. There is a tendency in modern scholarship to suggest that he envisaged, or at least hoped for, performances of his songs in their original opus number groupings. Of course, one cannot deny that some planning (though of a rather variable kind) went into the arrangement of these song bouquets (the composer's own expression) for publication. Good order and cohesion in printed form (as in an anthology where poems are arranged to be discovered by the reader in a certain sequence) do not automatically transfer to the world of the recital platform where one encounters a host of different practical problems, casting (male or female singer) and key-sequences (high or low voice) among them.

Printed poetry collections are as lovingly assembled as an opus of a composer's varied settings, but this does not mean the poems therein are designed to be read aloud from cover to cover: the compiler of these volumes, whether or not the poet himself, would expect items to be selected by the reader according to taste or need. The anthology (or indeed opus number) might be likened to a well-ordered jewel case from which precious items may be extracted for use, depending on the occasion: the wearing in public of every item therein on a single occasion would be both impractical and vulgar. There is little evidence, especially from concert practice of the time (where items from the Schubert and Schumann cycles were often ruthlessly excerpted), that Brahms's publications were conceived within a spirit of cyclic unity that called for an integral performance of the entire group.

Each disc of the Hyperion edition takes a journey through the career of Johannes Brahms. The songs are not quite sung in strict chronological sequence (Brahms had a way of including earlier songs in later opus numbers) but they do appear here more or less in the order that the songs were presented to the world. Each recital represents a different journey through the repertoire (and thus through Brahms's life).

We can imagine certain (but by no means all) of these groups of songs grouped and published together for various reasons, but it is quite unclear whether Brahms was making a point thereby. Far from dreaming of complete evenings of his songs in public performance, he preferred to hear no more than three of his own songs in any one concert. This astonishing information comes from an invaluable book of essays: K Hamilton and N Loges, eds: *Brahms in the Home and the Concert Hall. Between Private and Public Performance* (Cambridge: CUP). The conventions of music in the home, where so many songs were first heard and discussed in an environment of lively and cultivated enthusiasm, did not include listeners buckling down in respectful silence to a substantial sequence of songs, as if they were at a public concert. Brahms seems to have been happiest hearing his songs as *Hausmusik* and surrounded by supportive informality—and I dare say Schubert would have said the same about the Schubertiads. The present-day hunger for cycles—hidden, implicit, unknown or concealed—seeks to feed the appetite for a kind of recital format that is favoured, perhaps over-favoured, in the twenty-first century, but was almost unknown in the nineteenth.



It is clear, however, that certain opus numbers have long been more usually presented in their entirety, and this album has two such examples: excerpts from *Zigeunerlieder*, Op 103, are more rare in recital than performances of the whole work, and once a singer has found a violist skilled enough to rehearse and play one of the two songs of Op 91, it would be a foolish waste of resources in a concert not to perform both pieces. These are rare examples of Brahms songs that were clearly meant to be heard in the totality of their original groupings.

* * *

1 Liebestreu

Op 3 No 1, composed in Hamburg in January 1853, published in December 1853. The song's autograph is in the Bibliothèque Inguimbertine, Carpentras, France. B minor (original key E flat minor), *Sehr langsam*

„O versenk, o versenk dein Leid, mein Kind,
In die See, in die tiefe See!“
Ein Stein wohl bleibt auf des Meeres Grund,
Mein Leid kommt stets in die Höh’.

„Und die Lieb’, die du im Herzen trägst,
Brich sie ab, brich sie ab, mein Kind!“
Ob die Blum’ auch stirbt, wenn man sie bricht:
Treue Lieb’ nicht so geschwind.

„Und die Treu’, und die Treu’, ’s war nur ein Wort,
In den Wind damit hinaus!“
O Mutter und splittert der Fels auch im Wind,
Meine Treue, die hält ihn aus.

ROBERT REINICK (1805–1852)

True love

*‘Oh drown, oh drown your grief, my child,
in the sea, the fathomless sea!’*

*A stone may stay on the ocean bed,
my grief will always surface.*

*‘And the love you bear in your heart,
pluck it out, pluck it out, my child!’
Though a flower will die when it is plucked:
faithful love will not fade so fast.*

*‘Faithful, faithful—is but a word,
away with it to the winds!’
Though a rock, O mother, will split in the wind,
my faithful love will withstand it.*



ROBERT REINICK

This is Brahms’s debut as a composer of lieder, and what an extraordinary beginning it is! This song astounded Joachim and Schumann, and a fine performance astonishes us even today. Putting all his cards on the table, the young composer, already lionized, indicates that he has begun as he intends to continue. A great deal that is familiar about Brahms is already present: an introspective mood in a dark, minor-key tonality; a scenario that encompasses depths of the ocean; triplets clashing with duplets. It is impossible to imagine this work as having been composed by anyone else: the song owes nothing to Mendelssohn, Schumann or Franz, and little to Loewe apart from its exploration of a lower tessitura in both voice and piano. Even in a short work like this, we can hear the rhetoric and drama of Brahms’s barnstorming early piano sonatas, when the imposing first piano concerto was already in the bud.

First we hear the push and pull between the piano’s left-hand quavers, supporting those of the anxious mother, then the dreamy (‘träumerisch’ is the marking) replies of the daughter, higher in tessitura, and with a smooth and untrammelled accompaniment. Fragments of a



canon between voice and piano—indications of the young composer’s strict schooling—immediately set up the idea of a finger-wagging lecture. The younger woman is a faithful paragon, her idealism a foil for parental negativity. The song begins very slowly, but as the two characters gradually get into their respective strides—the daughter radiant and then exultant, the mother increasingly infuriated at being contradicted and consumed by bitterness—there is a wind-up of tension via faster tempi. This is more in the style of a Russian romance than a lied, and a Russian translation of the song would sound very convincing; it is little wonder that Brahms would later feel so at home with a great deal of Slavic poetry (see also the next song on this recording). Robert Reinick’s lyrics are more often sunny and somewhat banal, but the mood of *Liebestreu* is as far as can be imagined from most settings of this poet (Schumann’s genial Op 36 set, for example, extolling Rhineland virtues, is the poet’s best claim to musical durability). Long after Brahms had left Reinick behind him, the musical mood of *Liebestreu* became typical of the enigmatic commentaries on failed love (often encompassing conversations between mothers and daughters) to which the composer would return for the rest of his life. An assertive depth of feeling and an unashamed fondness for the epic and larger-than-life are already evident in this very first song. In short, here are quite a number of the things that have long made listeners either love Brahms, or hate him.

2 Lied aus dem Gedicht ‘Ivan’

Op 3 No 4, composed in Göttingen in July 1853, published in December 1853. The song’s autograph is in private hands.
C minor (original key E flat minor), *♩ Mit feurigem Schwung*

Weit über das Feld durch die Lüfte hoch
Nach Beute ein mächtiger Geier flog.
Am Stromesrande im frischen Gras
Eine junge weißflügelige Taube saß;
O verstecke dich, Täubchen, im grünen Wald!
Sonst verschlingt dich der lüsterne Geier bald!
Eine Möwe hoch über der Wolga fliegt,
Und Beute spähend im Kreise sich wiegt.
O halte dich, Fischlein, im Wasser versteckt,
Daß dich nicht die spähende Möwe entdeckt!
Und steigst du hinauf, so steigt sie herab
Und macht dich zur Beute und führt dich zum Grab.
Ach, du grünende feuchte Erde du!
Tu dich auf, leg mein stürmisches Herz zur Ruh’!
Blaues Himmelstuch mit der Sternlein Zier,
O trockne vom Auge die Träne mir!
Hilf, Himmel, der armen, der duldenden Maid!
Es bricht mir das Herz vor Weh und Leid!
FRIEDRICH BODENSTEDT (1819–1892)

Song from ‘Ivan’

*Far over the hills, high through the air,
a mighty vulture searched for its prey.
By the river bank in the fresh grass,
a young dove with white wings sat;
Ah hide yourself, little dove, in the green forest!
Else the lecherous vulture will soon devour you!
A seagull flies high over the Volga,
hovering in circles, in search of prey.
Ah, little fish, stay hidden in the water,
so that the sharp-eyed gull cannot find you!
If you surface, it will swoop down
and seize you as prey and bring you to the grave.
Ah, you verdant soft earth!
Open up, and lay my tempestuous heart to rest!
O blue cloth of heaven, studded with little stars,
ah, dry the tears from my eyes!
Help, O heaven, the poor suffering maiden!
My heart is breaking with grief and pain!*



In this seldom-performed song, praised for its originality by Robert Schumann from the asylum in Eendenich, we have a Loewe-like ballad with a Russian twist (mention of the Volga) together with hints of sexual obsession and revenge. It is interesting to return to the *Gedichte* of Bodenstedt, once a famous poet and now almost completely forgotten, to fathom the full plot of the story. Brahms sets two sections from a long narrative poem: *Ivan, Son of the Starost—poetic colour sketches from Russia*. It is a *Marriage of Figaro* triangle with a cast shorn of courtly charm: a peasant couple, Ivan and Masha, are in love, but Count Büstrow has a gimlet eye for Masha's beauty. Unlike Susanna in Mozart's opera, Masha finds the Count irresistible, and Ivan vows a terrible revenge. The Count thinks he has tricked Ivan into going away so he can have his way with the girl, but the younger man lies in wait and kills them both with an axe; their bodies are found floating in the river. (There is another Brahms song, composed over thirty years later, with a similar background of jealousy and murder: *Verrat*, Op 105 No 5.) The first twelve lines of the poem are the thoughts of the vengeful Ivan who thinks of his Masha as a vulnerable dove or a little fish, and damns the Count as a lustful vulture and a gull hunting for prey in the river. What is not obvious is that the final six lines of the song are the thoughts of the guilt-ridden Masha as she lies dead in the river. The text telescoped by the composer's editing is thus a mishmash, but it need not cause unnecessary confusion as long as the listener grasps the broad-brush scenario of sex, betrayal, guilt and death, all taking place somewhere in the barren expanses of the Russian steppes.

The music is strong on gesture and excitement, weaker on melodic inspiration, but that is regularly the way with such narratives and, as is often the case with German ballads, the vocal line is largely shadowed and doubled by the piano. The main image is that of the chase, a bird of prey (the Count) swooping with ascending arpeggios on the vulnerable Masha, and the revengeful Ivan swooping in turn on the guilty couple, with all that doubling and shadowing of voice and piano a metaphor for the hunt as he keeps them fixed in his sight. The sheer physical energy of the young Brahms is on display here, and the result is excitement for performer and listener alike. The desperately sad final two bars—Masha's last gasp as it were—are not at all the way we might have expected such a song of vengeance to end. Such a dying fall in defiance of the listeners' more blood-curdling expectations is already a Brahmsian signature.

3 Murrays Ermordung

Op 14 No 3, composed in Hamburg in January 1858, published in January 1861. The song's autograph is in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin. D minor (original key E minor), $\frac{2}{4}$ *Con moto*

O Hochland und o Südland!
Was ist auf euch geschehn!
Erschlagen der edle Murray,
Werd' nie ihn wiedersehn.

O weh dir! weh dir, Huntley!
So untreu, falsch und kühn,
Sollst ihn zurück uns bringen,
Ermordet hast du ihn.

The assassination of Moray

*Ye highlands and ye lowlands,
what have you suffered!
The Earl of Moray is slain,
I shall not see him again.*

*Woe, O woe be to thee, Huntly!
So faithless, false and audacious,
you were to bring him back to us,
but you have murdered him.*



Ein schöner Ritter war er,
In Wett- und Ringelauf;
Allzeit war unsres Murray
Die Krone obendrauf.

Ein schöner Ritter war er
Bei Waffenspiel und Ball;
Es war der edle Murray
Die Blume überall.

Ein schöner Ritter war er
In Tanz und Saitenspiel;
Ach, daß der edle Murray
Der Königin gefiel.

O Königin, wirst lange
Sehn über Schlosses Wall,
Eh' du den schönen Murray
Siehst reiten in dem Tal.

*He was a bonny knight,
racing his steed at the ring;
the crown was ever ready
to be placed upon his head.*

*He was a bonny knight,
in armed combat and playing at ball;
the noble Moray was in every way
the flower of all our knights.*

*He was a bonny knight
who danced and played the lute;
but alas, he was
the Queen's lover.*

*O Queen, you will look a long time
over the castle rampart,
before you see the bonny Moray
ride along the valley.*

JOHANN GOTTFRIED HERDER (1744–1803) *translated from a traditional Scottish folk song*

Eric Sams remarks that this song has an ‘operatic scope’, bearing in mind Brahms never composed an opera. The barnstorming confidence heard in this music is characteristic of some of the earlier songs culminating in the great *Schöne Magelone* cycle of the early 1860s—like Peter of Provence in that cycle, the composer, a young minstrel from Hamburg, sets forth into the outside world determined to win fame and fortune. The text is Scottish, one of the many lyrics from that famous collection of British folk poetry, Percy’s *Reliques* (1765), that were translated and published by Herder in his *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, a collection owned and treasured by Brahms. The lyric of the *The bonnie Earl o’ Moray*, well known as one of Benjamin Britten’s most effective folk-song arrangements (1943), is often taken to have something to do with Mary, Queen of Scots, and Herder mistakenly steers his readers in that direction. In fact, Moray’s murder by the Earl of Huntly took place in 1592, five years after Mary’s execution, and involved the duplicity of Mary’s son, the slithery James VI (later King of England and Ireland as James I). The angry reaction attributed to the same king in this lyric is reminiscent of the hypocritical anger of Henry II after the murder of Thomas Becket. In any case, we need not look too far into the past to find executions of rivals and critics by proxy means, followed by full-scale denial and the sanctimonious labelling of the crimes as an unsolicited outrage. The dotted rhythms huff and puff impressively (without quite achieving a Scotch snap), and the whole thing has a touch of the modal and archaic, just enough to suggest the sixteenth century. Robert Franz, in his Op 23, had already published six settings of folk texts, but Brahms’s intention in this Op 14 compendium of eight songs with folk-song texts is bolder and more wide-ranging. The message seems to be: ‘Here is a young man of the people finding inspiration for his lieder in decidedly more down-to-earth places than his highfalutin predecessors.’



4 Von ewiger Liebe

Eternal love

Op 43 No 1, composed in Vienna in 1864, published in December 1868. The song's autograph is in the Library of Congress, Washington.
B minor (original key), $\frac{3}{4}$ *Mässig*

Dunkel, wie dunkel in Wald und in Feld!
Abend schon ist es, nun schweiget die Welt.

*Dark, how dark in forest and field!
Evening already, now the world is silent.*

Nirgend noch Licht und nirgend noch Rauch,
Ja, und die Lerche sie schweiget nun auch.

*Nowhere a light and nowhere smoke,
and even the lark is silent now too.*

Kommt aus dem Dorfe der Bursche heraus,
Gibt das Geleit der Geliebten nach Haus,

*Out of the village there comes a lad,
escorting his sweetheart home,*

Führt sie am Weidengebüsche vorbei,
Redet so viel und so mancherlei:

*He leads her past the willow-copse,
talking so much and of so many things:*

„Leidest du Schmach und betrübest du dich,
Leidest du Schmach von andern um mich,

*'If you suffer sorrow and suffer shame,
shame for what others think of me,*

Werde die Liebe getrennt so geschwind,
Schnell wie wir früher vereinigt sind.

*Then let our love be severed as swiftly,
as swiftly as once we two were plighted.*

Scheide mit Regen und scheide mit Wind,
Schnell wie wir früher vereinigt sind.“

*Let us depart in rain and depart in wind,
as swiftly as once we two were plighted.'*

Spricht das Mägdelein, Mägdelein spricht:
„Unsere Liebe sie trennet sich nicht!

*The girl speaks, the girl says:
'Our love cannot be severed!*

Fest ist der Stahl und das Eisen gar sehr,
Unsere Liebe ist fester noch mehr.

*Steel is strong, and so is iron,
our love is even stronger still.*

Eisen und Stahl, man schmiedet sie um,
Unsere Liebe, wer wandelt sie um?

*Iron and steel can both be reforged,
but our love, who shall change it?*

Eisen und Stahl, sie können zergehn,
Unsere Liebe muß ewig bestehn!“

*Iron and steel can be melted down,
our love must endure for ever!*

AUGUST HEINRICH HOFFMANN VON FALLERSLEBEN (1798–1874) *translated from traditional Wendish*

The locale is Upper Lusatia (Lausitz), a Slavic region—now partly German, partly Polish—inhabited by the Sorbs (or Wends) where a population of about 60,000 with a dying language still struggles for autonomy to this day.

The scenario is almost cinematic in its pacing. We begin with a distant shot of a bleak landscape at twilight (bars 1–21), as barren as the lives of those peasants who inhabit it, a place of fear and superstition where even the birds are silent. From bar 25 we see two figures: those of a young man and woman walking together. At bar 34 they pass a meadow with bushes, scene of the whirlwind birth and clandestine continuation of their passionate relationship. They are so deep in conversation that they walk right past this place of former erotic trysts. At bar 45, the fifth verse in this poem of two-line strophes, the young man launches into a diatribe: he is concerned that his girl is being taunted by others as a result of their relationship. Money is clearly an issue, but perhaps they have also transgressed ethnic and religious boundaries in a part of the world notorious for sectarian divisions. He wants to do the right thing by her, he says bitterly: their parting



would be as quick and tempestuous as their first coming-together. In the piano interlude that follows this outburst (bars 68–78), triplets clatter in the right hand as the left conducts a dialogue between its bass and alto registers—booming octaves for the man’s protestations, sixths higher up in the stave for the girl’s soothing replies in a higher tessitura. This argument, conducted in pianistic terms, dies down in such a way that we can almost see the young man breaking down in tears as he falls to his knees and is cradled in the girl’s comforting arms.

At bar 79 the tempo changes to ‘Ziemlich langsam’; the time signature is now a gently rocking $\frac{6}{8}$ (a berceuse reminding us that every man in trouble needs a mother), and B minor cedes to a visionary B major. The girl sings, initially softly, then strongly and determined; any man from the wrong side of the tracks (including the composer himself) might dream of receiving such fervent assurances of loyalty. She is calmly determined to love him despite his perceived unworthiness; she will stay with him through thick and thin. Much of this affirmation of devotion is sung in the velvety regions of the mezzo-soprano voice, to which Brahms was always drawn. To make her point, she insists that whatever blows fate may have in store for them, the couple are welded together for life, unlike the ordinary iron and steel reshaped or melted down in a village smithy. An evocation of a hammer striking metal is distantly audible in the off-beat octave F sharps from bar 98, but here it is indicative of the girl’s willpower and her determination to forge a new future. The richness of harmony and texture, the grandness of utterance (here aided by an exciting accelerando as she works herself up to a pitch of bright-eyed determination), and the pervasive twos-against-threes mark this out as textbook Brahms. The development of the story with its straightforward quasi-operatic narration is unusually easy to grasp, and the only question mark concerns the final outcome: the song ends with four bars of a postlude with ritardando and diminuendo—a major-key ending certainly, but hardly triumphant. Having allowed us to glimpse the girl’s passion and determination, the composer’s pessimism seems to get the upper hand, and the result is an ending in a kind of major-key mournfulness. She may be determined to fight the fight, but how long will this last? Brahms seems to indicate that in the long run the boy will prove not to be worth all her efforts, and that this love affair will inevitably fade (just like the song) into history: an incident of the kind of romantic failure in which he felt himself forever destined to be involved.

Brahms ascribed this poem to the Bohemian poet Josef Wenzig (1807–1876), which accounts for the fact that it continues to appear with this misattribution in the Edition Peters score, and thence in printed concert programmes around the world. But ‘Dunkel, wie dunkel’ had first appeared in Hoffmann von Fallersleben’s *Gedichte* (1837). There it is the third of five *Wendische Lieder aus der Oberlausitz* (the original and more literal translator from the Wendish or Sorbian language having been one Leopold Haupt), and it is Hoffmann von Fallersleben, alongside Brahms of course, who should get the credit in concert programmes.

5 Die Mainacht

Op 43 No 2, composed in Karlsruhe in April 1866, published in December 1868. The song’s autograph is in private hands in Basel.
E flat major (original key), ♩ *Sehr langsam und ausdrucksvoll*

Wann der silberne Mond durch die Gesträuche blinkt,
Und sein schlummerndes Licht über den Rasen streut,
Und die Nachtigall flötet,
Wandl’ ich traurig von Busch zu Busch.

May night

*When the silvery moon gleams through the bushes,
and sheds its slumbering light on the grass,
and the nightingale is fluting,
I wander sadly from bush to bush.*



Überhüllet vom Laub, girret ein Taubenpaar
Sein Entzücken mir vor; aber ich wende mich,
Suche dunklere Schatten,
Und die einsame Träne rinnt.

Wann, o lächelndes Bild, welches wie Morgenrot
Durch die Seele mir strahlt, find' ich auf Erden dich?
Und die einsame Träne
Bebt mir heißer die Wang herab.

LUDWIG HÖLTY (1748–1776) edited by JOHANN HEINRICH VOSS (1751–1826)

*Covered by leaves, a pair of doves
coo to me their ecstasy; but I turn away,
seek darker shadows,
and the lonely tear flows down.*

*When, O smiling vision that shines through my soul
like the red of dawn, shall I find you here on earth?
And the lonely tear
quivers more ardently down my cheek.*

This famous song finds the thirty-two-year-old composer at the expressive height of his powers and at the midway point of his career. The choice of poetry is from the eighteenth century (the poem was also set by Schubert and Fanny Mendelssohn); having adopted Vienna as his base, Brahms is already speaking up for classicism and conservative choices in the midst of the Wagnerian maelstrom. A preference for the mezzo voice in terms of selecting songs' tonalities, particularly songs in this mood, is also already evident. *Die Mainacht* unashamedly explores loneliness, demonstrating Brahms's increasing tendency to use lieder as a kind of diary, a safety valve of the emotions; in the middle of writing a great deal of 'absolute' music, it is in the intimate confessional of his songs that he increasingly allows his selection of texts to be influenced by subjective preoccupations.

The opening melody, beautifully tranquil and just right for a moonlit stroll, is supported by an unobtrusive ambulatory accompaniment, quavers in the right hand offset by softly glowing minim chords in the left. The gentle beauties of nature reflected in the silvery light are enough to merit the major key, more gently resigned than ecstatic. In literature the fluting of the nightingale ('Und die Nachtigall flötet') famously betokens doomed or unreciprocated love, and it is after this phrase that the tonic-minor key establishes itself in an interlude. For the poem's second strophe there is a brief change of key signature where G flat, the third of the E flat minor triad, pivots enharmonically onto F sharp, the fifth of the new key of B major. The unconcerned cooing of a pair of doves is skilfully suggested in the accompaniment: a combination of crotchets in the right hand phrased in yearning intervals with quavers, mezzo-staccato, in the left hand—music that is delightful but repetitive; the workings of nature. The sound of this conjugal happiness, denied to him, but ubiquitous in the natural world, is too much for the singer to bear. Sharps yield to three flats in the key signature, and passionate chords and rising left-hand arpeggios depict a surge of emotion; he turns away to confront the darker shadows of his own past. Just as this turbulence is briefly mastered (the cadence on 'dunklere Schatten' includes the most atmospheric setting of the word 'Schatten'), the first of the two celebrated five-bar phrases in this song takes wing—'Und die einsame Träne rinnt'. In giving 'Und' the value of a dotted minim, Brahms breaks the rules of prosody, but he superbly suggests tearing up—weeping that starts from deep inside the body. A brilliantly engineered harmonic build-up finds its release in a single tear: a tear as lonely as the protagonist himself. The singing of this phrase in one breath has always been taken as a test of a lieder singer's breath control.



The third verse is a shortened repeat of the first; this time the accompaniment is in triplets to illustrate better the sweetness of the idealized picture of the beloved—the woman of his dreams. The phrase of a single rising tear is repeated, this time accompanied by turbulent triplets rather than quavers. The descending vocal arpeggio on ‘heißer die Wang herab’ traces the progress of this single and lonely teardrop (as it happens, ‘einsame’ covers both meanings) as it runs down the cheek, lingers there (an extraordinary six-and-a-half beats are allocated to the single syllable ‘Wang’), and drops to the ground with the final vocal cadence. The four-bar postlude, returning to the quavers of the opening, is one of the most soulfully bereft in all the Brahms songs, all the more so because it is in the major key.

6 Von waldbekränzter Höhe

From forest-wreathed heights

Op 57 No 1, composed before the autumn of 1871, published in December 1871. The song’s autograph is in the Library of Congress, Washington.

E flat major (original key G major), *♩ Lebhaft*

Von waldbekränzter Höhe
Werf ich den heißen Blick
Der liebefeuchten Sehe
Zur Flur, die dich umgrünt, zurück.

*From forest-wreathed heights
I turn the passionate gaze
of my love-moistened eyes
to the green fields about you.*

Ich senk ihn auf die Quelle,
Vermöcht ich, ach, mit ihr
Zu fließen eine Welle,
Zurück, o Freund, zu dir, zu dir!

*I lower my gaze to the stream,
ah! if only I could flow
with it, as a wave,
back, O friend, to you, to you!*

Ich richt’ ihn auf die Züge
Der Wolken über mir,
Ach, flög’ ich ihre Flüge,
Zurück, o Freund, zu dir, zu dir!

*I lift my gaze to the scudding
clouds above me,
ah! if only I could follow their flight
back, O friend, to you, to you!*

Wie wollt ich dich umstricken,
Mein Heil und meine Pein,
Mit Lippen und mit Blicken,
Mit Busen, Herz und Seele dein!

*How I would ensnare you,
my anguish and salvation,
with my lips and my glances,
with my bosom, heart and soul all yours!*

GEORG FRIEDRICH DAUMER (1800–1875)

For those who think of Brahms lieder as tending to be slow, introspective and somewhat tortured, this song, written in almost a single surge of sound and feeling, is a bracing corrective. The erotic poetry of Daumer (*Frauenbilder und Huldigungen*), now more or less forgotten but once considered controversially risqué, inspired the composer, not yet forty after all, to create a song to sweep the listener off his feet. The model for this Siren is clearly not a Clara Schumann figure, but someone to match Goethe’s oriental Suleika. We know that Brahms revered Schubert’s first *Suleika* song (D720) perhaps above all others and, as in Goethe’s *West-östlicher Divan*, Daumer’s heroine is achingly separated from her lover by geographical distance. Where exactly these ‘forest-wreathed heights’ are we never discover, but an exotic locale is implied by the whole mise-en-scène, perhaps even somewhere otherworldly if we imagine that the bristling semiquavers of Schubert’s *Auflösung*—a Mayrhofer masterpiece—might also have been an inspiration. Even more important than Schubert in up-to-date terms was Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. Brahms had heard the



opera in Vienna in 1862 and had studied the sketches at the home of Mathilde Wesendonck in the late 1860s; his reactions to this music veered between shattered admiration and strong disapproval. In this song, nothing comes anywhere near the harmonic world of the *Liebestod*, but the idea of Isolde is to be heard in the seamlessness of music written for an enraptured female singer, a soprano afire with the transports of love (Brahms's choice of key shows that he had a soprano ideally in mind, not his usually favoured mezzo). In any case, Brahms temporarily felt the need to move beyond the niceties of *Frauenlieder* and into the realms of a new kind of expression that had nothing to do with domesticity and German good manners.

The challenging accompaniment depends on the little finger of the right hand pricking out melody notes, while the thumb and first finger fleetingly oscillate between adjacent semitones. In this way the whirring of trill-like alternations is incorporated into piano figurations that play both foreground and background roles—the kind of ingenious writing for the instrument that never would have occurred to Wagner in his few piano-accompanied lieder. Water music for the second verse of the poem is marked 'Ruhiger'; semiquavers cede to triplets, but these triplets finally morph into 'Sehr lebhaft' semiquavers that propel this impassioned paean to its impetuous conclusion. The effect of this final verse comes as near to achieving vertiginous lift-off as this composer manages in any of his songs. The singer dreams of 'enmeshment' with her lover—the kind of reckless do-or-die commitment that has the listener involuntarily thinking of Isolde. This music is anything but Wagnerian, but it has nevertheless been profoundly influenced by that master's daring, whether or not Brahms would have liked to admit it.

7 Unbewegte laue Luft

Op 57 No 8, composed before the autumn of 1871, published in December 1871. The song's autograph is in the Library of Congress, Washington.
C major (original key E major), $\frac{3}{8}$ *Langsam*

Unbewegte laue Luft,
Tiefe Ruhe der Natur;
Durch die stille Gartennacht
Plätschert die Fontäne nur;
Aber im Gemüte schwillt
Heißere Begierde mir;
Aber in der Ader quillt
Leben und verlangt nach Leben.
Sollten nicht auch deine Brust
Sehnlichere Wünsche heben?
Sollte meiner Seele Ruf
Nicht die deine tief durchbeben?
Leise mit dem Ätherfuß
Säume nicht, daher zu schweben!
Komm, o komm, damit wir uns
Himmlische Genüge geben!

GEORG FRIEDRICH DAUMER (1800–1875)

Motionless mild air

*Motionless mild air;
nature deep at rest;
through the still garden night
only the fountain plashes;
but my soul swells
with a more ardent desire;
life surges in my veins
and yearns for life.
Should not your breast too
heave with more passionate longing?
Should not the cry of my soul
quiver deeply through your own?
Softly on ethereal feet
glide to me, do not delay!
Come, ah! come, that we might
give each other heavenly satisfaction!*



This song, also somewhat Wagnerian (*Tristan und Isolde*) in its sensuality, if not its harmonic language or length, is frequently heard on the recital platform. The opening word ‘Unbewegte’ (‘Motionless’) has led many performers to attempt an almost motionless tempo: this ‘Langsam’ passage, when taken at a funereal pace brings the flow of the music to an unstylistic standstill. Despite being split into two parts by the composer, the phrase ‘Tiefe Ruhe der Natur’ must be heard, and understood, as a single line of poetry; if further elongated, the four slow beats on the last ‘der’ (bars 11–12, an eccentric setting in any tempo), render the phrase incomprehensible. Performers are then forced to adopt an unmarked faster tempo (the correct tempo for the whole, in fact) at bar 13 for the sheer reason of breath. This is worth examining because the challenge of this remarkable song in three sections is that it has to coalesce into a single increasingly passionate utterance. Making passages with different speeds ‘hang together’ convincingly is one of the subtle challenges faced by conductors of Wagner’s operas.

A woman finds herself, as if in a dream, in a warm place at night; only the sound of plashing fountains breaks the deep silence, in a Daumer equivalent of Baudelaire’s ‘Luxe, calme et volupté’ from *L’invitation au voyage*; she then feels an overpowering need for the physical expression of love, and calls for her lover, casting her appeal to the heavens. The awakening—the process of being ‘turned on’ in quickening stages—is unashamedly described and was a source of some embarrassment to the composer’s admirers. The introductory twelve bars discussed above are remarkable for their erotic lassitude, the depth of the basses, the see-saw and almost impressionistic suspensions—some of the most extraordinary music in all the composer’s lieder. This leads into a triplet-accompanied passage reminiscent of a neglected Brahms song written at the same time—the Schack *Serenade*, Op 58 No 8—where the evocation is undoubtedly Spanish and suggests the gardens of the Alhambra. This in turn leads to an exciting ‘Lebhaft’ section: a setting of words considered by the composer’s friends (for instance the high-minded Elisabeth von Herzogenberg) to have been the most controversial that he had ever set in terms of sexual openness. The woman’s passionate invitation to her lover is pretty unambiguous: she opens herself to his coming, but there is nothing coy or salacious about it. The ongoing momentum of this shimmering, difficult-to-sing music is Wagnerian in effect rather than in substance. We are borne aloft by relentlessly rustling sextuplets in the piano, and the singer comes across as a sibyl without a trace of the sly lubricity we encounter, for example, ‘in the shadow of my tresses’ (*In dem Schatten meiner Locken*) in Wolf’s *Spanisches Liederbuch*. *Unbewegte laue Luft* is a passionate, frankly sexual outpouring, brilliantly if somewhat awkwardly staged in song terms, and hardly personal—a larger-than-life utterance; a slimmed-down Brahmsian *Isolde*.

8 Sommerabend

Summer evening

Op 84 No 1, composed probably in Pressbaum bei Wien in the autumn of 1881, published in July 1882. The song’s autograph is in the Library of Congress, Washington. E minor (original key D minor), $\frac{3}{4}$ *Andante con moto*

Geh’ schlafen, Tochter, schlafen!
Schon fällt der Tau aufs Gras,
Und wen die Tropfen trafен,
Weint bald die Augen naß!

Go to bed, daughter, sleep!
The dew is falling on the grass,
and those that dewdrops touch
will soon weep their eyes wet!



Laß weinen, Mutter, weinen!
Das Mondlicht leuchtet hell,
Und wem die Strahlen scheinen,
Dem trocknen Tränen schnell!

Geh' schlafen, Tochter, schlafen!
Schon ruft der Kauz im Wald,
Und wen die Töne trafen,
Muß mit ihm klagen bald!

Laß klagen, Mutter, klagen!
Die Nachtigall singt hell,
Und wem die Lieder schlagen,
Dem schwindet Trauer schnell!

HANS SCHMIDT (1854–1923)

*Enough of crying, mother, of crying!
The moon is shining bright,
and those the moonlight shines on,
their tears will quickly dry!*

*Go to bed, daughter, sleep!
The screech-owl is calling in the wood,
and those that hear the sound
must wail with it ere long!*

*Enough of weeping, mother, of weeping!
The nightingale sings so clearly,
and those its songs touch
will soon forget their sorrow!*

The little-known poet Hans Schmidt—a Latvian who moved to Vienna to study music—became something of a friend and protégé of Brahms in the 1870s. He was a composer and a pianist, perhaps one of the very first to have made his living as an accompanist, and the regular performance partner of the contralto Amalie Joachim and the famous lieder-singing tenor Raimund von zur-Mühlen. When Schmidt sent a copy of his crudely printed *Gedichte und Übersetzungen* to Brahms in 1881, the response was immediate and enthusiastic, despite the fact that Schmidt was an amateur poet with no established reputation. This seems not to have mattered to Brahms who immediately fell for three poems sung by mothers and daughters, set to music as part of his Op 84. Was it a coincidence that the composer had alighted on poems on one of his favourite themes? It appears more than likely that Schmidt was already aware of this aspect of his composer's enthusiasm and intentionally provided these dialogues as a hook to land a Brahmsian catch. After all it was an honour for anyone to be set to music by this master, and the immortality of Schmidt has indeed been assured by the fact that he provided the text of the famous *Sapphische Ode*, Op 94 No 4.

The scenario of *Sommerabend* is a slightly lighter-hearted and far more charming version of *Liebestreu* (track [1](#)). The mother has no specific warnings regarding the dangers of love, but she is negative, world-weary and minor-keyed. She hears the warning hoot of the owl, and all her daughter seems to care about is the song of the nightingale. Alarmed at the liveliness of her unbidable offspring, she begs her daughter to go to sleep. The accompaniment here might betoken the rocking of a cradle: chords tied across the bar lines move back and forth pendulously on the stave, gently alternating between the hands. The trouble with this theory is that the daughter's answers in the major key and a faster tempo, she with a spring in her step, are far too sophisticated for anyone still in need of a cradle. Her piano-writing is also more adventurous than her mother's, as demonstrated by the roving hands of the accompanist; we can confidently predict for her a lively future. The fact that the song seems related to the style of the *Zigeunerlieder* can probably be ascribed to Brahms's awareness of Hans Schmidt's Baltic background, hardly Hungarian, but nevertheless folk-like and exotic, just as the composer liked a great deal of his poetry to be.



9 Der Kranz

The wreath

Op 84 No 2, composed probably in Pressbaum bei Wien in the autumn of 1881, published in July 1882. The song's autograph is in the Library of Congress, Washington. E minor (original key G minor), ♩ *Allegro grazioso*

Mutter, hilf mir armen Tochter,
Sieh' nur, was ein Knabe tat:
Einen Kranz von Rosen flocht er,
Den er mich zu tragen bat!

*Mother, help your poor daughter,
just see what a boy has done;
he wove a wreath of roses
and asked me to wear it!*

Ei, sei deshalb unerschrocken,
Helfen läßt sich dir gewiß!
Nimm den Kranz nur aus den Locken,
Und den Knaben, den vergiß!

*Hah! Don't let that scare you,
of course I can help you!
Unfasten the wreath from your tresses,
and forget the boy!*

Dornen hat der Kranz, o Mutter,
Und die halten fest das Haar!
Worte sprach der Knabe, Mutter,
An die denk' ich immerdar!

*The wreath has thorns, O mother,
and they've caught on my hair!
And what the boy said, mother,
I think of all the time!*

HANS SCHMIDT (1854–1923)

As simple as it might look on paper, this is one of the trickiest of the Brahms songs to play—devilishly difficult in fact, as well as devilishly clever. The idea of entanglement—a wreath caught in a girl's hair—is connected to the idea of weaving, and that in turn suggests counterpoint, one layer of notes woven into another. The accompaniment is thus a two-part invention for agile, intertwined digits, as ingenious as Bach under the fingers, and with something of the sinister atmosphere of Mahler's mother-and-child song, *Das irdische Leben*. Brahms's work is another of Schmidt's mother-daughter dialogues, this time beginning with the daughter complaining in the minor key about her wreath of roses, thorns and all, specially woven for her by a young man who has been wooing her. The mother has the central panel of the song. Her vocal tessitura is lower in order to distinguish her words from those of the younger woman; beautifully crafted pianistic figurations with a hint of the major key underpin her rather brusque maternal reassurance. 'Unfasten the wreath from your tresses, and forget the boy', the older woman says confidently, but that may be easier said than done. The girl's music returns in the minor and bristles once again with uncomfortable quasi-contrapuntal complexity. She tells her mother that it is impossible to remove the wreath on account of the thorns. And then the music is suddenly marked 'animato', and the key signature changes from minor to major. The text is enigmatic: the girl speaks of 'words' spoken to her by the boy, as if they have entered her bloodstream and become part of her. She seems to be mesmerized by something he has said, like that magical stream of Faust's words ('seiner Rede Zauberfluss') that bewitch and seduce poor Gretchen. But Schmidt's words also could have been something far cruder, like 'I'm going to do something to you that will make you mine for ever', weaving and splicing here bearing similar results. It is not clear from the music whether she is enthralled or horrified—probably rather more of the former. In any event, and whether she is pregnant or not, the girl has become awakened: she is no longer a maiden, and that in itself is a kind of triumph, or so the postlude implies. The ongoing enmeshment of left hand with right occasions a race up the stave to a forte conclusion, defiant bravado perhaps.



10 In den Beeren

Among the berries

Op 84 No 3, composed probably in Pressbaum bei Wien in the autumn of 1881, published in July 1882. The song's autograph is in the Library of Congress, Washington. B flat major (original key E flat major), $\frac{2}{4}$ *Sehr lebhaft*

Singe, Mädchen, hell und klar,
Sing' aus voller Kehle,
Daß uns nicht die Spatzenschar
Alle Beeren stehle!

*Sing, girl, bright and clear,
sing full-throatedly,
that the flock of sparrows
doesn't steal all our berries!*

Mutter, mag auch weit der Spatz
Flieh'n vor meinem Singen,
Fürcht' ich doch, es wird den Schatz
Um so näher bringen.

*The sparrows, mother, might well fly far
to escape my singing,
but I'm afraid my sweetheart
will be drawn closer by it!*

Freilich, für so dreisten Gauch
Braucht es einer Scheuche,
Warte nur, ich komme auch
In die Beerensträuche!

*It's true, we'll need some way
of scaring off that bold stripling,
just wait, and I'll come as well
into the berry bushes!*

Mutter, nein, das hat nicht Not:
Beeren, schau, sind teuer,
Doch der Küsse, reif und rot,
Gibt es viele heuer!

*Mother, no, that's not needed:
berries, you see, are dear,
but kisses, ripe and red,
are plentiful this year!*

HANS SCHMIDT (1854–1923)

Elisabeth von Herzogenberg was much taken with these three Schmidt settings of Op 84, referring to them as 'jolly little rascals' and rejoicing in their economy of expression: 'The marvellous beauties of the quickest movements, as in the flight of a lovely deer, pass almost unnoticed while the unathletic person, trying to keep pace, wheezes and pants behind.' This song is undoubtedly one of the sauciest of the Brahms lieder, a feast of punning and innuendo. The mortal enemies of those who grow berries for a living are the sparrows who peck the fruit to pieces; this pecking accounts for the staccato chords in the piece. But the girl who is charged with singing in order to frighten the birds away has a lover whom she entertains in the berry fields without the mother's knowledge; her subterfuge is written into the writhing quavers of the *sub rosa* (or rather sub-berry) accompaniment, left and right hand—like boy and girl—on top of each other and slyly doubling each other's activities in the lower regions of the stave. Of course the lover ('Schatz') kisses or pecks quite differently from the sparrow ('Spatz'—the poet intends for the words to sound very similar). When the girl is busy canoodling in the bushes with her secret visitor, she is clearly too busy kissing to discharge her vocal duties (but the irony is that in telling the story, she is singing all the while). Disturbed by her daughter's silence, the mother commands her to resume her role as a *bel canto* scarecrow; the girl makes the excuse that she had better not do so, as this might encourage her boyfriend to pay a visit. 'I'm coming right down to help', the mother then replies; 'no, you don't need to do that', says the girl who, as if caught in the act, comes clean regarding her priority (kissing, of course), although it is not clear whether her closing phrases, triumphant and unashamed, are addressed to a proprietary parent or to the audience—almost certainly the latter. The merriness of the music and the jovial accompaniment, chords prancing



between the hands, suggest that the consequences may not be all that dire. The mother's music in this performance is in B flat major, the pivotal B flat tonic turning into A sharp, which is the leading note of the girl's retaliatory music in B major. Herzogenberg tells Brahms that this sudden enharmonic change is 'horrible for the reader', while understanding the point of it—a wonderful way of musically demonstrating the different priorities (and pecking orders) of the two women: the mother doing anything to protect her property, the girl willing to sacrifice all her berries for love. 'Oh, the freedom and the mastery!', Herzogenberg writes admiringly to Brahms almost despite herself, and we have to agree.

Zwei Gesänge für eine Altstimme, Viola und Klavier Op 91

These two songs are, in the words of Natasha Loges, 'the musical embodiment of the composer's relationship to Amalie and Joseph Joachim'. Singer and violinist (as well as violist), wife and husband, they were both Catholics, and *Geistliches Wiegenlied* was a wedding present to the couple from the Protestant Brahms in 1863. A little later the ever-conscientious composer asked for the manuscript back so he could revise it; the couple then asked for the music to be returned to them in 1864 to perform at the baptism of their first son Johannes, named after the composer and also his godchild. The Joachim marriage produced six children, but it was a stormy one, and it is said the second of these songs (the first in the order of the set) was composed twenty years later as a means of encouraging the couple towards a reconciliation (the Joachims divorced anyway, the jealous violinist accusing his wife of adultery with, among others, her accompanist Hans Schmidt, the poet of tracks [8] to [10] on this recording).

[11] Gestillte Sehnsucht

Op 91 No 1, probably composed in the summer of 1884 in Müzzzuschlag, published in December 1884. The song's autograph is lost.
D major (original key), $\frac{2}{4}$ *Adagio espressivo*

In goldnen Abendschein getaucht,
Wie feierlich die Wälder stehn!
In leise Stimmen der Vöglein hauchet
Des Abendwindes leises Wehn.
Was lispeln die Winde, die Vögelein?
Sie lispeln die Welt in Schlummer ein.
Ihr Wünsche, die ihr stets euch reget
Im Herzen sonder Rast und Ruh!
Du Sehnen, das die Brust beweget,
Wann ruhest du, wann schlumerst du?
Beim Lispeln der Winde, der Vögelein,
Ihr sehnenenden Wünsche, wann schlaft ihr ein?

Assuaged longing

*Bathed in golden evening light,
how solemnly the forests stand!
The evening winds mingle softly
with the soft voices of the birds.
What do the winds, the birds whisper?
They whisper the world to sleep.
But you, my desires, ever stirring
in my heart without respite!
You, my longing, that agitates my breast:
when will you rest, when will you sleep?
The winds and the birds whisper,
but when will you, yearning desires, slumber?*

Ach, wenn nicht mehr in goldne Fernen
Mein Geist auf Traumgefieder eilt,
Nicht mehr an ewig fernen Sternen
Mit sehndem Blick mein Auge weilt;
Dann lispeln die Winde, die Vögelein
Mit meinem Sehnen mein Leben ein.

FRIEDRICH RÜCKERT (1788–1866)

*Ah! when my spirit no longer hastens
on wings of dreams into golden distances,
when my eyes no longer dwell yearningly
on eternally remote stars;
then shall the winds, the birds whisper
my life—and my longing—to sleep.*



In the 1843 edition of his works, Rückert places this among his *Jugendlieder*, poems written in his late teens, although the words that inspired Brahms to a masterful composition have the ring of enormous maturity and experience about them; paradoxically, it is the copiousness of the poetry that betrays the writer's youth—the older Rückert is much leaner in expression. Nevertheless it is a well-chosen lyric for what Brahms wanted to do, which was to create a general picture rather than tell a story making different illustrative points. 'Overarching' would be a word to describe the mood: a distillation of an entire lifetime lived in gentle autumnal colours, and a life equally assured of a golden sunset. The genius of this music is in the combination of mezzo voice (Amalie Joachim officially designated herself a contralto) with viola—something rich and opulent, a texture and mood of dark velvet plush that could not be more typical of the master. For once the piano takes a back seat, content to provide a rippling harmonic background, gently facilitating this love-in between vibrating strings and vocal chords, conjuring a great piece of chamber music rather than a lied per se. Of course, Brahms is too great a setter of words to ignore the challenge of depicting gentle winds and the whispering of birds, but here it is the viola, rather than the usually illustrative piano, whose sextuplets provide a responsive quickening of activity. There is a middle section in D minor, and in these minor reflections the piano temporarily abandons rolling sextuplets in favour of some anguished demi-semiquavers, while the viola is equally briefly virtuosic in its passionate shudderings. This ebb and flow, the soul's search for respite and peace, is short-lived and quickly leads to a satisfying return to the security of D major at the beginning of the third verse. True to the song's title, longing is assuaged; the composer's favourite kind of voice combines with the poignant viola descant in seamless fashion; Brahms permits himself simply to be Brahms and weaves his mellow, fin-de-siècle magic. We find ourselves held in a comforting cat's cradle of sound and time: this music encapsulates an age of happiness and safety typified by domestic music-making in Vienna in the twilight of the century—a way of life that occasioned infinite nostalgia in later years, but at the time was taken completely for granted by the better-off middle class. It seems entirely unsurprising that Brahms might have believed that the warring Joachims, in performing this music together, would have been reminded of the comfortable stability they would lose as artists, and as people, should they part company. A darker side, and a pathway to the composer's later *Vier ernste Gesänge*, is also discernible: this poem, by the same author as Mahler's *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*, looks forward to a release from the cares of the world, doubtless another reason the composer, long preoccupied with his own mortality, was drawn to it.



12 Geistliches Wiegenlied

A sacred cradle-song

Op 91 No 2, probably composed between 1863 and 1864 in Vienna, published in December 1884. The song's autograph is in a private collection in New York. F major (original key), ♩ *Andante con moto*

Die ihr schwebet
Um diese Palmen
In Nacht und Wind,
Ihr heil'gen Engel,
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein Kind.

*You who hover
around these palms
in night and wind,
you holy angels,
silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.*

Ihr Palmen von Bethlehem
Im Windesbrausen,
Wie mögt ihr heute
So zornig sausen!
O rauscht nicht also!
Schweiget, neiget
Euch leis' und lind;
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein Kind.

*You palms of Bethlehem
in the raging wind,
why do you bluster
so angrily today!
O roar not so!
Be still, lean
calmly and gently over us;
silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.*

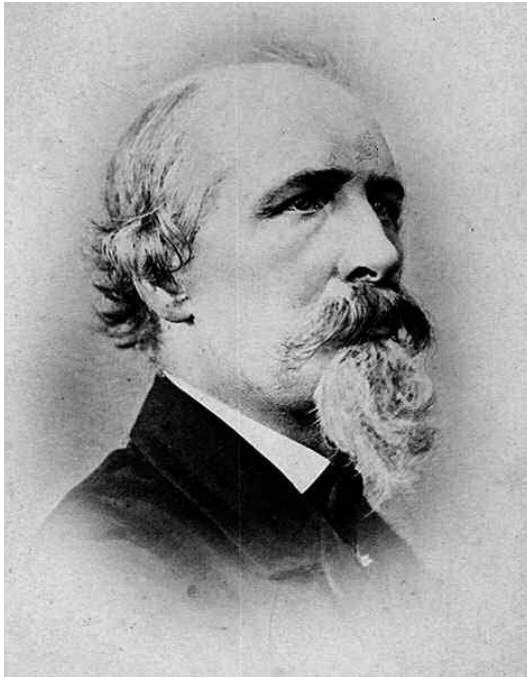
Der Himmelsknabe
Duldet Beschwerde,
Ach, wie so müd' er ward
Vom Leid der Erde.
Ach, nun im Schlaf ihm
Leise gesänftigt
Die Qual zerrinnt,
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein Kind.

*The heavenly babe
suffers distress,
oh, how weary he has grown
with the sorrows of this world.
Ah, now that in sleep
his pains
are gently eased,
silence the treetops!
My child is sleeping.*

Grimmige Kälte
Sauset hernieder,
Womit nur deck' ich
Des Kindleins Glieder!
O all ihr Engel,
Die ihr geflügelt
Wandelt im Wind,
Stillet die Wipfel!
Es schlummert mein Kind.

*Fierce cold
blows down on us,
with what shall I cover
my little child's limbs?
O all you angels,
who wing your way
on the winds,
silence the tree-tops!
My child is sleeping.*

EMANUEL GEIBEL (1815–1884) *translated from Spanish of Lope de Vega (1562–1635)*



Luigi Nono
Ghibel.

The old Catholic melody that opens this piece with an unaccompanied viola solo for two bars, then discreetly joined by piano, was taken from K S Meister's *Das katholische deutsche Kirchenlied*. The original words of this carol are printed in the score, but never sung. They begin: 'Joseph, my good Joseph / Help me to rock my darling child.' As such they made an ideal implicit dedication to Brahms's lifelong friend Joseph Joachim on the occasion of his marriage. As it happens the name of his bride, Amalie Schneeweiss ('snow-white'), also conjures up images of child-like purity and innocence, just right for the heavenly babe who is cradled at the centre of this song. This is *Hausmusik* at its best, a very exalted category of *Hausmusik* certainly, but a composition that was made to be part of family celebrations, christenings and Yuletide gatherings, and gifted accordingly. It also seems somewhat domestic that a great violinist in the warmth of the family circle would choose to play the homely viola rather than that prima donna of instruments, the violin. Throughout the piece, fragments of this old beloved melody surface in the viola's descant to the setting of *Die ihr schwebet*, Geibel's translation of Lope de Vega's poem beginning 'Pues andáis en las palmas, / Ángeles santos, / Que se duerme mi niño, / Tened los ramos'. This translation was published in the poet's *Spanisches Liederbuch* and set to music by Hugo Wolf twenty-five years later in an entirely different way. Wolf in $\frac{7}{4}$ (as opposed to Brahms's $\frac{6}{8}$) is preternaturally alive to every nuance in the poem, and makes much of the

storm music and the contrasts of mood. Brahms also acknowledges the storm with a certain amount of agitato vocal vehemence but, on account of the viola and its range, was unable to change registers as dramatically as the younger composer; as a result, everything is contained within the boundaries of a gentle rocking $\frac{6}{8}$ (barring a sixteen-bar minor middle section where the time signature changes to $\frac{3}{4}$ without us noticing). The mood of a lullaby is maintained throughout, even if that lullaby is somewhat disturbed by the illusion of bad weather occasioned by the excited flapping of a host of angels' wings. The song ends as it began, with a gently accompanied viola solo.



13 **Dort in den Weiden steht ein Haus**

Op 97 No 4, composed before May 1885, published in March 1886. The song's autograph is in the Stiftelsen Musikkulturens Främjande, Stockholm. B flat major (original key D major), $\frac{2}{4}$ *Lebhaft und anmutig*

Dort in den Weiden steht ein Haus,
Da schaut die Magd zum Fenster 'naus!
Sie schaut stromauf, sie schaut stromab:
Ist noch nicht da mein Herzensknab'?

Der schönste Bursch am ganzen Rhein,
Den nenn' ich mein!
Des Morgens fährt er auf dem Fluß,
Und singt herüber seinen Gruß.
Des Abends, wenn's Glühwürmchen fliegt,
Sein Nachen an das Ufer wiegt,
Da kann ich mit dem Burschen mein
Beisammen sein!

Die Nachtigall im Fliederstrauch,
Was sie da singt, versteh' ich auch;
Sie saget: übers Jahr ist Fest,
Hab' ich, mein Lieber, auch ein Nest,
Wo ich dann mit dem Burschen mein
Die Froh'st' am Rhein!

TRADITIONAL

There among the willows stands a house

*There among the willows stands a house,
a young girl looks out of the window.
She looks upstream, she looks downstream:
Has my beloved boy not come?
The handsomest boy along the whole Rhine,
it's him I call my own!*

*Each morning he sails on the river,
and sings his greeting across it.
Each evening when the glow-worm flies,
his small boat moves gently ashore.
Then I and my boy
can be together!*

*What the nightingale sings in the lilac bush,
I can understand;
it says: A year hence you will celebrate;
I too have a nest, my dear,
where I and my boy
are the happiest pair on the Rhine!*

The text is supposedly a folk song from the Lower Rhine. Brahms found it in the volume of folk-song melodies published by Zuccalmaglio in 1840 where it had its own supposedly age-old original melody (although it was actually composed by Zuccalmaglio himself). He later made an arrangement of that folk song as No 31 of his forty-nine folk-song arrangements, but for his song-composing purposes he takes the text and provides a much better tune of his own. It is an irresistible success with its memorable little melody; teasing changes of metre between $\frac{2}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$, and a prancing accompaniment defined by offbeat chords in the left hand add an unmistakable swagger to an already saucy production. The only thing to dispute is whether this sounds sufficiently like a German folk song, or more like something from the Spanish or gypsy worlds. At the end of both verses the accompaniment, with its leaps in the bass, implied hand-claps and a typically southern joie de vivre, makes us imagine that one of the Op 103 *Zigeunerlieder* (all of them also in $\frac{2}{4}$) may have come adrift from that set. This could easily pass for a study in Romany vivacity were it not for the fact that the girl tells us that if she were given the chance to live in a love nest with her chosen boyfriend, she would be the happiest girl on all the Rhine. Gypsy encampments somewhere on the Rhine might have been grudgingly permitted in the nineteenth century, but it is not perhaps the picture-postcard German scenario that Zuccalmaglio would have had in mind.



Zigeunerlieder Op 103

Composed in Vienna during the winter of 1887–88, the solo version published in April/May 1889. The songs' autograph (original quartet version) is in the British Library (Stefan Zweig Collection), London.

Hugo Conrat, a member of a well-to-do Jewish family in Vienna (and later a close friend of Brahms), had made translations of these Magyar texts with the help of two of his children's Hungarian nannies; he sent to Brahms a volume of twenty-five *Ungarische Liebeslieder*, supposedly original gypsy folk melodies with piano accompaniments by one Zoltán Nagy, published in Budapest with Conrat's polished German translations (and, strangely enough, without the original Hungarian). Brahms, already a veteran of the Hungarian dances for piano and for orchestra, was enchanted; as the composer of the famous *Liebeslieder-Walzer* for vocal quartet, he first composed eleven of these poems for SATB (although some of the songs have solo passages for tenor). These settings owed almost nothing to the original melodies

with accompaniments by Nagy, and the work enjoyed immediate success. A year later, Brahms made solo versions of eight songs—selecting Nos 1–7, and ending with No 11—of the multi-voiced version; these represent the texts of Nos 2, 3, 6–9, 13 and 21 of the Nagy arrangements. Despite the erotic nature of the songs, they found unexpected approval from the two critics of the composer who were most inclined to be prudish: Elisabeth von Herzogenberg and Clara Schumann. It was Clara who first praised Brahms's achievement in having written a cycle where all the songs were in $\frac{2}{4}$ (a metre required by the pervasive trochees and spondees of the text) but which nevertheless succeeded in holding the listener's attention throughout. She might have added that, with the exception of the first, all these songs are printed on two pages and are composed with an economy and unpretentiousness that belie the extravagant emotions given musical voice in this vibrant cycle.



FRONTISPIECE OF THE ZIGEUNERLIEDER SCORE

**14 He, Zigeuner, greife in die Saiten ein!**

Op 103 No 1, originally 'Hej te cigány, huzd el az én nótámat'.
F minor (original key A minor), $\frac{3}{4}$ *Allegro agitato*

He, Zigeuner, greife in die Saiten ein!
Spiel das Lied vom ungetreuen Mägdelein!
Laß die Saiten weinen, klagen, traurig bange,
Bis die heiße Träne netzet diese Wange!

Hey, gypsy, sound your strings!

*Hey, gypsy, sound your strings!
Play the song of the faithless girl!
Make the strings weep and moan in sad despair
till hot tears moisten these cheeks!*

The rolling-triplet accompaniment, encompassing thrumming right-hand thirds, fourths and fifths pitted against strong left-hand downbeats, is awkward to play, but it generates a great deal of excitement. The superb vocal line, nothing like the original melody set by Nagy, manages to convey rage and hurt pride, as well as a determination that the singer's experience with a faithless girl should be immortalized in music—the subject of an eloquent fiddler's lament made-to-order. When performed truly 'agitato' as the composer commands, this is a superbly tempestuous invocation with which to begin the set; major-key harmony mixed with the prevailing minor key conveys a bittersweet edge of rejected love—a masochism familiar to Brahms.

15 Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du so trüb

Op 103 No 2, originally 'Mély a Rima, zavaros ha megárad'.
B flat minor (original key D minor), $\frac{3}{4}$ *Allegro molto*

Hochgetürmte Rimaflut, wie bist du so trüb;
An dem Ufer klag ich laut nach dir, mein Lieb!
Wellen fliehen, Wellen strömen,
Rauschen an dem Strand heran zu mir;
An dem Rimaufer laßt mich ewig weinen nach ihr!

Rima, how troubled your towering waters are

*Rima, how troubled your towering waters are;
I'll lament for you loudly on its banks, my love!
Waters rush by, waves stream past,
roaring towards me on the shore;
on the banks of the Rima let me weep for her eternally!*

Once again the original bears no relation to Brahms's greatly superior pastiche. The sheer energy of this music, 'rattling and pounding along', as Elisabeth von Herzogenberg put it, is astounding; Brahms has completely thought himself into the reckless devil-may-care mindset of the gypsy. This music is a real 'stomp'—in the jazz world still the definition for a number in a fast tempo with a heavy beat. As in the first song it is clear that a gypsy does not take unluckiness in love lying down—desperate sadness has a demonic energy all its own.

16 Wisst ihr, wann mein Kindchen

Op 103 No 3, originally 'Akkor szép a kislány'.
B flat major (original key D major), $\frac{3}{4}$ *Allegretto*

Wisst ihr, wann mein Kindchen
Am allerschönsten ist?
Wenn ihr süßes Mündchen
Scherzt und lacht und küßt.

Do you know when my little girl

*Do you know when my little girl
is at her loveliest?
When her sweet little mouth
jokes and laughs and kisses.*



Mägdelein,
Du bist mein,
Inniglich
Küß ich dich,
Dich erschuf der liebe Himmel
Einzig nur für mich!

Wisst ihr, wann mein Liebster
Am besten mir gefällt?
Wenn in seinen Armen
Er mich umschlungen hält.

Schätzelein,
Du bist mein,
Inniglich
Küß ich dich,
Dich erschuf der liebe Himmel
Einzig nur für mich!

*Sweetheart,
you are mine,
tenderly
I kiss you,
dear heaven made you
for me alone!*

*Do you know when my beloved
pleases me most?
When he holds me
in his arms' embrace.*

*Sweetheart,
you are mine,
tenderly
I kiss you,
dear heaven made you
for me alone!*

This song is cast in *csárdás* style where a slow section ('lassú') alternates with a fast one ('friska'). The mysteries of the roots of the Hungarian language seem less formidable if equated here to 'lassitude' and 'friskiness'. The first section, accompanied by staccato right-hand quavers, is flirtatious, as if toying with the girl's affections; the left hand echoes his melody in imitation, this feedback suggesting her almost docile reciprocation. And then the time has come for out-and-out declarations of joyful amatory ownership. With an active left hand teeming with semiquavers ('quasi-dulcimer' according to Sams), it seems as if a whole gypsy band has joined in the celebrations. After a coquettish little interlude it's back to the 'lassú' which is in turn followed by another prancing 'friska'.

17 Lieber Gott, du weißt, wie oft bereut ich hab

Op 103 No 4, originally 'Isten tudja hányszor meg nem bánám'.
D major (original key F major), $\frac{2}{4}$ *Vivace grazioso*

Lieber Gott, du weißt, wie oft bereut ich hab,
Daß ich meinem Liebsten einst ein Küßchen gab.
Herz gebot, daß ich ihn küssen muß,
Denk so lang ich leb an diesen ersten Kuß.

Lieber Gott, du weißt, wie oft in stiller Nacht
Ich in Lust und Leid an meinen Schatz gedacht.
Lieb ist süß, wenn bitter auch die Reu,
Armes Herze bleibt ihm ewig, ewig treu.

Dear God, you know how often I've regretted

*Dear God, you know how often I've regretted
that little kiss I once gave my dearest.
My heart decreed I had to kiss him,
as long as I live I'll think of that first kiss.*

*Dear God, you know how often in silent nights
I've thought of my love in joy and pain.
Love is sweet, however bitter the regret,
my poor heart will ever be faithful to him.*

The two contrasting sections of this song are not marked with different tempi, but in practice this is another song in 'lassú' and 'friska' form—a perfect way of reflecting a binary choice: 'should I, or shouldn't I have?' The delicate opening has to display at least an attempt at rueful penance, the emphasis very much on the 'grazioso' part of the marking. (The words of the second verse dwell on similarly ambivalent thoughts of the boyfriend, even if the middle of the night is best given



over to prayers). The urge to kiss unashamedly, however, is too strong to resist, whatever the attendant guilt. It is from bar 9 that the music becomes truly ‘Vivace’, spread tenths in the left hand jubilantly propelling the music forward. On this occasion at least, piety is relatively easily defeated in its ongoing battle with sexual attraction.

18 Brauner Bursche führt zum Tanze

Op 103 No 5, originally ‘Barna legény tánczra viszi kökény szemü babáját’.

B major (original key D major), $\frac{2}{4}$ *Allegro giocoso*

Brauner Bursche führt zum Tanze
 Sein blauäugig schönes Kind,
 Schlägt die Sporen keck zusammen,
 Csardas-Melodie beginnt,
 Küßt und herzt sein süßes Täubchen,
 Dreht sie, führt sie, jauchzt und springt;
 Wirft drei blanke Silbergulden
 Auf das Cymbal, daß es klingt.

A swarthy lad leads his lass

*A swarthy lad leads his lovely
 blue-eyed lass to the dance,
 boldly clashes his spurs together,
 a csárdás melody begins,
 he kisses and hugs his sweet little dove,
 turns her, leads her, exults and leaps;
 throws three shining silver florins
 that make the cimbalom ring.*

In performing a song like this, one should take to heart words from Conrat’s preface to the Nagy arrangements: ‘Hungarian song is mostly performed less strictly in time and with greater rhythmical freedom than German folk music.’ This powerful and beautiful song is about relish, both disciplined (the ceremonial clashing of spurs) and wildly unbuttoned (the exulting and leaping). The text feasts on the sight of a swarthy gypsy youth and his blue-eyed sweetheart, a flagrant display of sexual power offering something to anyone and everyone. As the singer reaches for her chest register, and the pianist hones a capacity for suggestively swaggering triplets, a little exploratory stretching of the rhythm is needed to hit the mark. And then there is the gypsy orchestra, commenting on this sight with a rubato that is indefinable, easy to exaggerate (bearing in mind that Brahms is not a real gypsy), but sometimes requiring the kind of daring that makes one go out on a limb. There are many different ways of shaping this marvellous music; one spends a lifetime of doing it faster or slower, bending it this way or that. The arrogance of youth imagines silver coins thrown disdainfully onto the cimbalom (‘take that!’) with sufficient force to break the strings; older performers are more judicious and in sympathy with the street musician whose instrument, safely intact, is his only means of making a living.

19 Röslein dreie in der Reihe blühn so rot

Op 103 No 6, originally ‘Három rózsza egy sorjában mind piros’.

E flat major (original key G major), $\frac{2}{4}$ *Vivace grazioso*

Röslein dreie in der Reihe blühn so rot,
 Daß der Bursch zum Mädél geht, ist kein Verbot!
 Lieber Gott, wenn das verboten wär,
 Ständ die schöne weite Welt schon längst nicht mehr,
 Ledig bleiben Sünde wär!

Three little red roses bloom side by side

*Three little red roses bloom side by side,
 it’s no crime for a lad to visit his lass!
 Dear God, if that were a crime,
 this fair wide world would long ago have ceased to exist,
 staying single would be a sin!*



Schönstes Städtchen in Alföld ist Kecschemet,
 Dort gibt es gar viele Mädchen schmuck und nett!
 Freunde, sucht euch dort ein Bräutchen aus,
 Freit um ihre Hand und gründet euer Haus,
 Freudenbecher leeret aus!

*The loveliest town in Alföld is Kecskemét,
 where many smart and nice girls live!
 Friends, find yourselves a young bride there,
 win her hand and set up house,
 drain beakers of joy!*

This is little more than a delightful little patter song, although English-speaking singers have a tendency to attempt it at a breakneck tempo where the text is entirely incomprehensible. Quavers swiftly and deftly alternate between the pianist's hands in the earlier, more feminine part of the song, somewhat pointillistic in effect, before the musical texture becomes more masculine and hearty with broader note values underpinned by left-hand octaves and rippling arpeggios. The idea of courting leading to populating the planet (and the planet's obvious demise without that activity) raises the possibility of it being a sin, or even against the law, to remain unmarried. This idea must have amused Brahms, whose favourite aphorism was 'I'm sorry I've never married, and have had to remain a bachelor, thank God!'

20 Kommt dir manchmal in den Sinn

Op 103 No 7, originally 'Jut-e néha, jut-e rózsám eszedbe'.
 C major (original key E flat major), $\frac{2}{4}$ *Andantino grazioso*

Kommt dir manchmal in den Sinn,
 Mein süßes Lieb,
 Was du einst mit heil'gem Eide
 Mir gelobt?
 Täusch mich nicht, verlaß mich nicht,
 Du weißt nicht wie lieb ich dich hab,
 Lieb du mich, wie ich dich,
 Dann strömt Gottes Huld auf dich herab!

Do you sometimes recall?

*Do you sometimes recall,
 my sweetest,
 what you once pledged to me
 with a sacred oath?
 Do not deceive me, do not leave me,
 you do not know how much I love you;
 love me as I love you,
 and God's grace will pour down on you!*

This beautiful song brought tears to the eyes of the normally difficult-to-please Elisabeth von Herzogenberg. It is the single instance in the whole group where Brahms has allowed himself to be influenced by the melody of the tune presented in the Hungarian edition, and harmonized by Nagy, not only in his adopting the shape of the first phrase, but also where it matters most—the descending sequences of 'Täusch mich nicht, verlaß mich nicht', where the composer makes changes that sprinkle them with Brahmsian stardust. The gentle reminders of promises and oaths (which we must here presume to be broken promises) illustrate the powerlessness of the abandoned woman, not only in gypsy culture or in nineteenth-century terms, but as a perennial trope in music and life to the present day. There is nothing in the text itself that actually confirms abandonment, but this is clearly music for a woman good and steadfast to the bitter end, and with that comes a sense of an unequal relationship with the gypsy lad not deserving this kind of devotion. The words of Conrat regarding the use of rubato in Hungarian music apply very much in this case, but performers have to beware: too much over-indulgent rubato robs the woman of her dignified stoicism.

**21 Rote Abendwolken ziehn**

Op 103 No 8, originally 'Esti hajnal az ég alján meghasad'.
B flat major (original key G flat major), $\frac{2}{4}$ *Allegro*

Rote Abendwolken ziehn
Am Firmament,
Sehnsuchtsvoll nach dir, mein Lieb,
Das Herze brennt;
Himmel strahlt in glühnder Pracht
Und ich träum bei Tag und Nacht
Nur allein von dem süßen Liebchen mein.

HUGO CONRAT (1845–1906) *translated from traditional Hungarian*

Red evening clouds drift

*Red evening clouds drift
across the sky,
my heart burns longingly
for you, my love;
the sky's ablaze in glowing glory
and night and day I dream
solely of my sweet love.*

This is a grand finale for the open road, a gathering of the clans, and a stirring and exciting one. The eternally travelling gypsy (one wonders whether Brahms knew anything about *Lavengro*, the famous Romany of George Borrow) is confident that ever more impressive and dramatic sights will reveal themselves on every horizon. As always, passion for distant destinations is combined with love for an indeterminate and constantly changing 'Liebchen'. For the only time in the set, Brahms uses a dramatic change of tonality (after eight bars the screw is tightened with a key signature a minor third higher), as if the singer has triumphantly climbed to a higher vantage point on a mountain in order to view an even broader and more beautiful vista. After eight bars at this height, the music returns to the home key. From there, Brahms engineers an exciting coda where inexorably rising sequences lead to an ending of almost thundering grandeur.

22 Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer

Op 105 No 2, composed in Thun in August 1886, published in October 1888. The song's autograph is lost.
D minor (original key C sharp minor), ♩ *Langsam und leise*

Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer,
Nur wie Schleier liegt mein Kummer
Zitternd über mir.
Oft im Traume hör' ich dich
Rufen drauß vor meiner Tür:
Niemand wacht und öffnet dir,
Ich erwach' und weine bitterlich.

Ja, ich werde sterben müssen,
Eine Andre wirst du küssen,
Wenn ich bleich und kalt.
Eh' die Maienlüfte wehn,
Eh' die Drossel singt im Wald:
Willst du mich noch einmal sehn,
Komm, o komme bald!

HERMANN LINGG (1820–1905)

My sleep grows ever quieter

*My sleep grows ever quieter,
only my grief, like a veil,
lies trembling over me.
I often hear you in my dreams
calling outside my door:
no one keeps watch and lets you in,
I awake and weep bitterly.
Yes, I shall have to die,
you will kiss another
when I am pale and cold.
Before May breezes blow,
before the thrush sings in the wood:
if you would see me once again,
come soon, come soon!*



This is one of a handful of famous deathbed songs in the repertoire. In Schubert's *Der Tod und das Mädchen* and his equally famous *Die junge Nonne*, young women face their ends with considerable anguish, although in both cases their final moments are more peaceful than they had feared. Brahms's slightly earlier Heine setting, *Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht*, from 1884, and his later *O Tod, wie bitter bist du* from the *Vier ernste Gesänge* treat death as a welcome guest, a solution to the harrying cares of life. *Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer* is unique in that instead of attempting to depict the actual moment of death, the song illustrates the process of dying, a fading away rather than a definitive departure. The woman is almost certainly suffering from tuberculosis, and she is clearly not expected to live beyond the early spring, a season fast approaching if the request to 'come soon' is to be taken seriously. What seems certain is that there will be no visit; the scenario—that of an abandoned woman—is a familiar one in Brahms's songs, and this lieder-singer Violetta will have no last-minute reconciliation with her Alfredo.

From the beginning, the music hovers—as if floating and feverish—several feet off the ground, unanchored. The listener, like the suffering patient, is disorientated. (Pfitzner in his Op 2 setting of a decade later achieves something similarly unworldly.) The tonic chord in root position is fleetingly reached at the end of bar 3, but it has been far more important that the music has begun out of nowhere on the second inversion of that minor triad. A slow cortège of dotted crotchets and quavers in sixths might be interpreted as the gliding footfall of death, an eerie presentiment of the stricken world of Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*. The unusually extended gaps in the vocal line (as between 'Niemand wacht' and 'und öffnet dir') cannily denote a consumptive's shortness of breath. Slowly drifting arpeggios in second inversion—rising from the fifth step of four different and carefully chosen chords—are at the heart of the song's musical architecture. The use of this harmonic device was bitterly criticized by Elisabeth von Herzogenberg as ungrammatical, but in the interests of drama, Brahms breaks such old rules and conventions and is here an unlikely partner in crime with Richard Strauss, already a famous name. The composer builds an astonishing forte climax, culminating, after several cleverly engineered key shifts, at 'o komme bald!' in the second inversion of the tonic major. It is only much later, with the singer's final word in fact, that we reach the root position of the chord. It is as if the desperately ill woman has summoned every last ounce of strength to make this impassioned plea, before sinking back into the pillows while murmuring again 'o komme bald!'. Her almost epic weariness and at the last minute her tragic grandeur make this song one of the most theatrical that Brahms ever composed. No histrionics are required in performance: the singer has simply to obey the requirements of the score for the drama of this scenario to come across most powerfully.

23 Klage

Op 105 No 3, probably composed in 1888, published in October 1888. The song's autograph is in the Bibliothek im Rathaus, Vienna. F major (original key), $\frac{3}{4}$ *Einfach und ausdrucksvoll*

Feins Liebchen, trau du nicht,
Daß er dein Herz nicht bricht!
Schön Worte will er geben,
Es kostet dein jung Leben,
Glaubs sicherlich!

Lament

*Dearest, do not trust him,
then he won't break your heart!
He'll speak fine words,
they'll cost you your young life,
believe me!*



Ich werde nimmer froh,
Denn mir ging es also:
Die Blätter vom Baum gefallen
Mit den schönen Worten allen,
Ist Winterzeit!

Es ist jetzt Winterzeit,
Die Vögelein sind weit,
Die mir im Lenz gesungen,
Mein Herz ist mir gesprungen
Vor Liebesleid.

TRADITIONAL

*I'll never be happy again,
for that is what happened:
the leaves have fallen from the tree
with all those fine words,
it's winter!*

*Now it's winter,
the little birds are far distant,
they that sang to me in spring,
my heart is broken
with the sorrow of love.*

Here is yet another song from a deserted girl, this time sung to a friend, a sister perhaps, another woman who is sure to find herself in the same boat should she not heed this warning. Brahms found these words in Zuccalmaglio, but the melody, one of his most touching, is entirely different from the one to be found in that source. Although this is not a mother-daughter poem, it is similarly a word of crestfallen advice given from one woman to another. The accompaniment, as in most of Brahms's folk-song-like lieder, is disarmingly simple, and the two pages of the printed score are exactly the same, apart from the words—two strophes on the first side, one on the second. There is not much to say about this song apart from the fact that only Brahms could have written it, and that its simplicity masks a lifetime's mastery, as well as a lifetime's loneliness.

24 Ständchen

Op 106 No 1, composed in Thun, probably in the summer of 1888, published in October 1888. The song's autograph is lost.
E flat major (original key G major), *C Allegretto grazioso*

Der Mond steht über dem Berge,
So recht für verliebte Leut;
Im Garten rieselt ein Brunnen,
Sonst Stille weit und breit.

Neben der Mauer im Schatten,
Da stehn der Studenten drei
Mit Flöt' und Geig' und Zither,
Und singen und spielen dabei.

Die Klänge schleichen der Schönsten
Sacht in den Traum hinein,
Sie schaut den blonden Geliebten
Und lispelt: „Vergiß nicht mein.“

FRANZ THEODOR KUGLER (1808–1858)

Serenade

*The moon shines over the mountain,
just right for people in love;
a fountain purls in the garden—
otherwise silence far and wide.*

*By the wall in the shadows,
three students stand
with flute and fiddle and zither,
and there they sing and play.*

*The sounds steal softly into the dreams
of the loveliest of girls,
she sees her fair-headed lover
and whispers: 'Remember me.'*



FRANZ KUGLER

It is curious to imagine Brahms writing a bagatelle like this at the same time that Wolf was working on his Mörike, Eichendorff and Goethe songbooks—the art of the lied as profound as it was ever destined to be. This *Ständchen* would almost be at home in Sigmund Romberg's Heidelberg-inspired operetta *The Student Prince*, although that work has a famous *Serenade* of its own. The Brahms song has been compared to the charming and amusing paintings of the Biedermeier artist Carl Spitzweg: it has charm, grace and compositional skill, but it lacks the deep personal touch to which we have become accustomed in the composer's great lieder. Brahms found the anodyne poem in the art-historian Franz Kugler's *Gedichte* (1840), although the poem had already appeared in that Renaissance man's *Skizzenbuch* (1830), wherein every drawing, poem and piece of music (including the first-ever setting of Chamisso's *Frauenliebe und -leben*) is Kugler's own work. Flute, fiddle and zither are mentioned in the poem's second verse (and occasion a famous interlude where these instruments are allowed to let rip under the pianist's rippling fingers), but the opening music suggests

a strummed guitar. All is prancing delight between the hands, an energy moderated by dream-like longing. The joining-in of the voice at the end of the fourth bar produces a contrapuntal weave as delicate as moonbeams or water gently plashing in the garden's fountain. The minor-key shading of 'Stille' (denoting some kind of exciting conspiracy), the implied parenthesis of 'im Schatten', the way the three serenaders gradually become bold enough to sing their hearts out (an upbeat repeat of 'singen und spielen dabei')—these details add immeasurably to the pleasing shape of the whole. The third verse is a musical repeat of the first where the same music serves the words equally well—Brahms can be a master of strophic songs when he chooses to be. But there is a new level of intimacy at the end as the message 'Vergiß nicht mein' is whispered in the ear of a particular blonde. As often is the way with this composer, the differentiation of expression, via rubato and colour change, is left entirely to the performers' discretion. Some singers (like Elisabeth Schumann) have taken outrageous liberties here to great poetical effect: unlike the meticulous and ever-controlling Hugo Wolf, Brahms often leaves such choices to the instincts of his interpreters.

Six songs from the *Deutsche Volkslieder* Wo033

Assembled as a collection in Vienna in the winter of 1893–94, although most of the settings were composed earlier, published in 1894.

25 Da unten im Tale

Wo033 No 6. E major (original key), $\frac{3}{4}$ *Sanft bewegt*

Da unten im Tale
Läufst Wasser so trüb,
Und i kann dirs nit sagen,
I hab di so lieb.

Down there in the valley

*Down there in the valley
the water runs so murkily,
and I cannot tell you
how much I love you.*



Sprichst allweil von Lieb',
 Sprichst allweil von Treu,
 Und a bissele Falschheit
 Is au wohl dabei.

Und wenn i dirs zehnmal sag,
 Daß i di lieb,
 Und du willst nit verstehen, muß i
 Halt weiter gehn.

Für die Zeit, wo du g'liebt mi hast,
 Dank i dir schön,
 Und i wünsch daß dirs anderswo
 Besser mag gehn.

*You speak only of love,
 speak only of constancy,
 and a bit of falsehood
 goes with it too.*

*And if I tell you ten times
 that I love you,
 and you don't understand, I shall
 have to go on my way.*

*For the time that you loved me,
 I give you thanks,
 and wish that elsewhere
 you might fare better.*

A real favourite of the recital platform, this is a genuine folk song from Swabia which Brahms found on page 383 of the second Zuccalmaglio volume (both words and music) where the title is *Trennung*. He had already used these words in 1886 for a lied setting with his own melody (*Trennung*, Op 97 No 6). For that song, Brahms had invented a folk-song-style tune of his own, but this is a case when the age-old melody as heard here is more memorable. In *Trennung* we encounter some of the same piano-writing, in the postlude particularly, that was recycled eight years later in *Da unten im Tale*. Brahms adopts a gently mournful approach to the scenario (in some performances this song can be heart-breaking), but the song was apparently collected from a pair of country maidens who had known the melody from childhood and performed it with a merry lilt.

[26] Es war eine schöne Jüdin

WoO33 No 9. D major (original key E major), $\frac{3}{4}$ *Herzlich und warm erzählend*

Es war eine schöne Jüdin,
 Ein wunderschönes Weib,
 Die hatt eine schöne Tochter,
 Das Haar war ihr geflochten,
 Zum Tanz war sie bereit.

„Ach, Mutter, liebste Mutter,
 Mein Herz tut mir so weh:
 Laß mich eine kleine Weile
 Spazieren auf grüner Heide,
 Bis daß mir besser wird.“

Die Mutter wandt den Rücken,
 Die Tochter sprang in die Gaß,
 Wo alle Schreiber saßen:
 „Ach, liebster, liebster Schreiber,
 Mir tut mein Herz so weh.“

There was a beautiful Jewess

*There was a beautiful Jewess,
 a wondrously beautiful woman,
 she had a beautiful daughter,
 her hair was braided,
 she was ready for the dance.*

*‘Ah, mother, dearest mother,
 my heart is hurting so:
 let me for a little while
 walk on the green meadow
 until I feel better.’*

*The mother turned her back,
 the daughter hurried onto the street
 where all the scribes were sitting:
 ‘Ah, dearest, dearest scribe,
 my heart is hurting so.’*



„Wenn du dich lassest taufen,
Mein Weibchen sollst du sein.“
„Eh ich mich lasse taufen,
Lieber will ich mich versaufen
Ins tiefe, tiefe Meer.“

„Gut Nacht, mein Vater und Mutter,
Wie auch mein stolzer Bruder,
Ihr seht mich nimmermehr!
Die Sonne ist untergegangen
Im tiefen, tiefen Meer.“

*'If you will be baptized,
then you shall be my wife.'
'Before I be baptized,
I'd sooner drown myself
in the deep, deep sea.'*

*'Goodnight, father and mother,
and my haughty brother too,
you shall never see me again!
The sun has set
in the deep, deep sea.'*

The song briefly revisits an important theme already experienced on this album: dialogues of mothers and daughters. The scene of a mother weaving the braids of her daughter's hair is also reminiscent of *Der Kranz* (track [9]). At a time when many Jews were baptized in order to get on in life (Mendelssohn and Heine were famous examples, although both later complained that they would rather it had not happened), this is the story of a girl who would rather die than convert, and all for losing the chance of marrying. The scribe plays a passing role in the story; is he the intended bridegroom? And if the girl is understandably keen to escape her mother's control and see the outside world, it seems strange that she should die for a religion which at that time forbade women this very kind of freedom. This has the signs of a much longer story shortened for the sake of convenience. There is a Scottish version of the tale in Herder, and two versions in Zuccalmaglio (who claims the text is from the Harz mountains) where Brahms found the text and melody (Volume I, page 126). The accompaniment, more complex in the third and fourth verses, is beautifully worked out, even if the final farewell and suicide remain steadfastly in the major key.

[27] **Der Reiter spreitet seinen Mantel aus**

WoO33 No 23. G sharp minor (original key B minor), © *Heimlich und in rubigem Zeitmass*

Der Reiter spreitet seinen Mantel aus,
Wohl in das grüne Gras:
Da leg dich, du wackres Braunmägdelein,
Mach dir dein Haupt nicht naß,
Wohl in dem grünen Gras!

„Was soll ich bei dir sitzen,
Ich hab gar gringes Gut!
Hab zwei schwarzbraune Augen,
Ist all mein Hab und Gut,
Ist all mein Hab und Gut.“

The horseman spreads out his cloak

*The horseman spreads out his cloak
on the green grass:
lie there, you fine swarthy girl,
take care not to wet your hair
on the green grass!*

*'Why should I sit beside you,
I have so little to offer!
Two dark-brown eyes
are all that I possess,
are all that I possess.'*



„Mein Liebster ist hereingestiegen
Wohl durchs Kammerfensterlein,
Ich hatt ihn nicht gerufen,
Konnt ihn nicht halten ein,
Konnt ihn nicht halten ein.“

*'My lover climbed in
through the bedroom window;
I had not invited him,
I could not stop him,
could not stop him.'*

This is another strange song, a further example of suspiciously sourced Zuccalmaglio, with a story that does not make conventional sense. The first two strophes are clear enough and it looks like the sort of narrative that will lead to a dark story of rape. And then suddenly the girl is telling the story (to whom?) of her lover visiting her unbidden in her bedroom. Is he the rapist? What is the connection between the rider and the boyfriend? Or is the rider, after all, the same as 'Mein Liebster'? Both men seem to be after the same thing. Brahms's accompaniment is the same for all three of these rather mysterious verses. The quavers of the accompaniment, rather Schubertian yet strangely modal, may have been intended to represent someone prancing along on a horse.

28 Es war ein Markgraf überm Rhein

WoO33 No 29. G minor (original key A minor), © Rubig, in erzählendem Ton

Es war ein Markgraf überm Rhein,
Der hatt drei schöne Töchterlein.
Zwei Töchter früh heiraten weg,
Die dritt hat ihn ins Grab gelegt;
Dann ging sie sing'n vor Schwesters Tür:
„Ach braucht ihr keine Dienstmagd hier?“
„Ei Mädchen, du bist viel zu fein,
Du gehst gern mit den Herrelein.“
„Ach nein, ach nein, das tu ich nicht,
Mein Ehre mir viel lieber ist.“
Sie dingt das Mägdlein auf ein Jahr,
Das Mägdlein dient ihr sieben Jahr.
Und als die sieben Jahr warn um,
Da ward das Mägdlein schwach und krank.
„Ach Mägdlein, wenn du krank sollst sein,
So sag, wer deine Eltern sein?“
„Mein Vater war Markgraf am Rhein,
Ich bin sein jüngstes Töchterlein.“
„Ach nein, ach nein, das glaub ich nicht,
Daß du mein jüngste Schwester bist.“
„Und wenn du mir nicht glauben willst,
So geh an meine Kiste her,
Daran tut es geschrieben stehn,
Da kannst du's mit dein'n Augen sehn.“

There was a margrave who lived across the Rhine

*There was a margrave who lived across the Rhine,
he had three beautiful daughters.
Two of the daughters married young,
the third, she laid him in his grave;
then she went to sing at her sister's door:
'Ah, don't you need a serving-maid here?'*
*'What, my girl, you are much too grand,
you like to mix with the gentry.'*
*'Ah no, that is not true,
my honour means much more to me.'*
*She hires the girl for one year,
the girl serves her for seven.*
*And when the seven years were past,
the girl became sick and weak.*
*'Ah, my girl, if you are going to be ill,
tell me who your parents are?'*
*'My father was margrave by the Rhine,
I am his youngest daughter.'*
*'Ah no, ah no, I do not believe
that you are my youngest sister.'*
*'If you will not believe me,
then go to my coffer there,
on which my name is written—
you can see it with your own eyes.'*



Und als sie an die Kiste kam,
 Da rannen ihr die Tränen ab:
 „Ach, bringt mir Weck, ach, bringt mir Wein,
 Das ist mein jüngstes Schwesterlein!“
 „Ich will kein Weck, ich will kein Wein,
 Will nur ein kleines Särgelein!“

*And when she came to the coffer,
 the tears ran down her cheeks:
 'Ah, bring me bread, ah, bring me wine,
 that is my youngest sister!'
 'I want no bread, I want no wine,
 I want nothing but a small coffin!'*

The melody of this song is at least as old as the *Wiener Gesangbuch* of 1775, and the words go back to *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1810). It appears on page 7 of the first Zuccalmaglio volume. In the absence of the much-loved mother-and-daughter scenario, this song is about siblings. We are told that the sister who ends up penniless and looking for work after the death of her father seeks out one of the two siblings who left home early to marry, but how young must she have been that her own sister does not recognize her as an adult? The melody is a beautiful one with a touching conclusion, and Brahms, ever discreet in terms of his respect for the genre, does not get in the way. The accompaniment for the third and fourth verses—the conversation between sisters before they are revealed to be such—moves into flowing quavers, suggesting affectionate dialogue.

[29] Du mein einzig Licht

You my only light

WoO33 No 37. G major (original key A major), *C Kräftig und ziemlich lebhaft*

Du mein einzig Licht,
 Die Lilj und Ros hat nicht,
 Was an Farb und Schein
 Dir möcht ähnlich sein;
 Nur daß dein stolzer Mut
 Der Schönheit unrecht tut.

*You my only light,
 the lily and the rose have no
 colour or radiance
 to compare with yours;
 only your proud spirit
 does injustice to your beauty.*

Meine Heimat du,
 Von welcher Lust und Ruh
 Ist der Himmel gar
 Wie die Erde bar.
 Nur daß dein strenges Wort
 Mich weht vom süßen Port.

*You are my homeland,
 whose delight and peace
 cannot be found even in heaven
 nor on earth;
 only your stern words
 blow me away from the sweet haven.*

HEINRICH ALBERT (1604–1651)

This is a wonderful melody that one feels Brahms might have been capable of composing in one of his moments of inspired pastiche; but it is in fact very old—one of the 170 songs of Heinrich Albert (1604–1651), a cousin of Heinrich Schütz who lived and worked in Königsberg. The accompaniment, with its stentorian octave basses, portentous cadences and piquant harmonic clashes, is entirely Brahmsian, with flowing quavers animating the second verse of the song like an organ improvisation. As in many instances in this collection—and Brahms would nod vociferously in agreement: the whole point of doing it, he would say—the composer is not responsible for the song's best features, its amazing tune and beautiful text. These seem to represent perfectly the depth and honesty of German music more than a hundred years before the emergence of the piano-accompanied lied.

**30 Es steht ein Lind**WoO33 No 41. A flat major (original key C major), *C Zart und ausdrucksvoll*

Es steht ein Lind in jenem Tal,
 Ach Gott, was tut sie da?
 Sie will mir helfen trauren, trauren,
 Daß ich mein' Lieb' verloren hab'.

Es sitzt ein Vöglein auf dem Zaun,
 Ach Gott, was tut es da?
 Es will mir helfen klagen, klagen,
 Daß ich mein' Lieb' verloren hab'.

Es quillt ein Brunnlein auf dem Plan,
 Ach Gott, was tut es da?
 Es will mir helfen weinen, weinen,
 Daß ich mein' Lieb' verloren hab'.

WILHELM TAPPERT (1830–1907)

A lime tree stands

*A lime tree stands in that valley;
 ah, God, what is it doing there?
 It will help me to mourn, to mourn
 that I have lost my love.*

*A little bird sits on the fence;
 ah, God, what is it doing there?
 It will help me to grieve, to grieve,
 that I have lost my love.*

*A little stream flows over the plain;
 ah, God, what is it doing there?
 It will help me to weep, to weep,
 that I have lost my love.*

It seems rather disappointing that the words of this very famous (and justly so) song are by Brahms's contemporary Wilhelm Tappert (1830–1907); the composer was never one to allow scholarship—much less concerns about anachronism—to ruin what was otherwise a good artistic product. The melody is old, from the fifty-eight *Deutsche Lieder*, a collection of 1550. Brahms added a prelude and an accompaniment with just enough chromaticism to make it interesting, not quite enough to occasion a flagrant breach of style—again one is reminded of organ improvisation. This is one of the songs in the collection (and this is also the case with *Du mein einzig Licht* and the concluding song in the collection, *In stiller Nacht, zur ersten Wacht*) that have found a permanent and beloved place in the recital repertoire, often as encores on the concert platform.

Notes by GRAHAM JOHNSON © 2020

English translations by RICHARD STOKES, author of *The Book of Lieder* (Faber & Faber, 2005)
 with thanks to George Bird, co-author of *The Fischer-Dieskau Book of Lieder* (Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1976)

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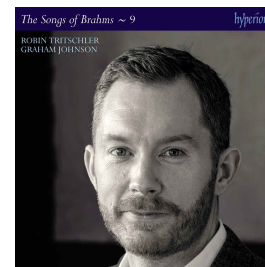
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SOPHIE RENNERT

Described by David Nice in *The Arts Desk* as ‘a mezzo of many colours, subtlety, dramatic intelligence and a crucially brilliant top’, Austrian mezzo-soprano Sophie Rennert was a member of the Young Singers Project at the 2013 Salzburg Festival, and a prizewinner of both the 2014 International Mozart Competition Salzburg and the 2016 Cesti Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik.

First taught by her mother, Sigrid Rennert, before studying with Karlheinz Hanser and Charles Spencer at Vienna’s University of Music and Performing Arts (MDW), Sophie was a member of the Konzert Theater Bern from 2014 to 2016, and has since been a freelance musician. Sophie’s operatic repertoire ranges from Baroque works by Purcell, Rameau, Handel and Vivaldi, through Mozart and operetta to contemporary works. She has enjoyed great success playing Idamante in *Idomeneo*, the title role in Handel’s *Lotario*, Angelina in Rossini’s *La Cenerentola*, and Harper Pitt in Peter Eötvös’s *Angels in America*.

A versatile artist, Sophie has established herself as a concert singer, working with renowned orchestras such as the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Mozarteum Orchestra Salzburg, the Orquesta Nacional de España and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra at the Salzburg, Bayreuth, and Göttingen International Handel festivals, among others. The list of conductors with whom she has worked is extensive, and includes David Afkham, Ivor Bolton, Semyon Bychkov, Laurence Cummings, Ádám Fischer, Hartmut Haenchen, Philippe Jordan, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Marc Piollet and Andreas Spering.

With distinguished accompanists such as Graham Johnson, Joseph Middleton, Helmut Deutsch and Julius Drake, Sophie has been invited to give recitals at the Schubertiade, Vienna Musikverein, Vienna Konzerthaus, Wigmore Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam and Elbphilharmonie Hamburg.



GRAHAM JOHNSON

Graham Johnson is recognized as one of the world's leading vocal accompanists. Born in Rhodesia, he came to London to study in 1967. After leaving the Royal Academy of Music, his teachers included Gerald Moore and Geoffrey Parsons. In 1972 he was the official pianist at Peter Pears's first masterclasses at Snape Maltings, which brought him into contact with Benjamin Britten—a link that strengthened his determination to accompany. In 1976 he formed *The Songmakers' Almanac* to explore neglected areas of piano-accompanied vocal music, and throughout his career he has maintained long and fruitful collaborations with many distinguished singers.

Graham Johnson's relationship with Wigmore Hall in London is a special one. He devised and accompanied concerts in the hall's re-opening series in 1992, and in its centenary celebrations in 2001. He is Senior Professor of Accompaniment at the Guildhall School of Music and has led a biennial scheme for Young Songmakers since 1985. He has had a lasting and rewarding link with Hyperion, for whom he has conceived and accompanied sets of the complete songs of Schubert and Schumann, as well as a substantial proportion of the wider Hyperion French song edition. He is author of *The Songmakers' Almanac: Twenty years of recitals in London*, *The French Song Companion* (OUP, 2000), *Britten: Voice and Piano* (Ashgate, 2003), *Gabriel Fauré: the Songs and their Poets* (Ashgate, 2009) and *Franz Schubert: the Complete Songs* (Yale, 2014). Awards include four *Gramophone* awards (three for albums in the Schubert and Schumann series) and the Royal Philharmonic Society's Instrumentalist of the Year in 1998; he is a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, and an Honorary Member of the Royal Philharmonic Society. He was made an OBE in the 1994 Queen's Birthday Honours list, and in 2002 he was created Chevalier in the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government. He is a Doctor of Music honoris causa on three continents: at Durham in the UK, Boston's New England Conservatory in the USA, and Perth in Western Australia.

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