

toward the development of the musical language: the main theme of the Andante from the A minor String Quartet, Op. 51, No. 2, and the third of the 'Vier Ernste Gesänge', Op. 121, 'O Tod, O Tod, wie bitter bist du!'.

Both these themes are specimens of a perhaps unique artistic quality, as regards their motival elaboration and internal organization.

Ex. 46

As the analysis unveils, the A major Andante contains exclusively motive forms which can be explained as derivatives of the interval of a second, marked by brackets *a*:

b then is the inversion upward of *a*;

c is $a + b$;

d is part of *c*;

e is $b + b$, descending seconds, comprising a fourth;

f is the interval of a fourth, abstracted from *e*, in inversion.

The first phrase—*c*—thus consists of *a* plus *b*. It also contains *d* (see bracket below), which also functions as a connective between the first and the second phrase (at *).

The second phrase consists of *e* and *d*; with the exception of its upbeat (the eighth note *e*) and the two notes *c*# and *b*, it presents itself as a transposition of the first phrase (see above at §), one step higher. It also furnishes the interval of a fourth, *f*.

The third phrase contains *e* twice, the second time transposed one step higher.

The fourth phrase is distinctly a transformed transposition of *c*.

The fifth phrase, though it looks like a variant of the preceding phrase, merely contains *c*, connected with the preceding by *f*.

The sixth phrase, consisting of *e*, *d*, and *b*, contains a chromatic connective *b*#, which could be considered as the second note of a form of *a*. This *b*# is the only note in the whole theme whose derivation can be contested.

Sceptics, however, might reason that steps of a second or even fractions of a scale are present in every theme without constituting the thematic material. There exists an enormous multitude of methods and principles of construction, few of which have yet been explored. I deem it probable that many musicians are acquainted with these two analyses which I broadcast in 1933 on celebrating Brahms' 100th birthday anniversary. But one who objects to my conclusions must not forget that the second example exhibits a similar secret, this time dealing with thirds (see Ex. 47, pages 432 and 433).

This example has a certain resemblance to the main theme of Brahms' Fourth Symphony—in both the structural unit is the interval of a third. The first phrase in the voice part consists of a succession of three thirds *b*-*g*, *g*-*e* and *e*-*c*, marked *a*.

Ex. 47

1st phrase 2nd phrase 3rd phrase

O Tod, o Tod, wie bit - - ter, wie bit - -

4th phrase

- ter bist du, wenn an dich ge-den-ke ein Mensch, ge-denket ein Mensch, der

5th phrase 6th phrase

gu - te Ta - ge und ge - nug hat und oh - ne Sor - ge le - bet

7th phrase

und dem es wohl geht in al - len Din - gen und noch wohl es - sen mag!

The second phrase is built from the inversion of *a*, *c*♯–*e*, marked *b*, and *c*, which is *a* with an inserted passing note *c*.

The third phrase is a sequence of the second phrase and is (characteristically!) a third lower.

The fourth phrase, in which the voice follows the piano with a small canonic imitation, inverts the interval of a third (*b*–*g* and *e*–*c* respectively) into a sixth *d*. Observe also the relation of a third between the two points ⊕–⊕ in measures 6–7 in voice and piano.

The fifth and sixth phrases, with part of the seventh, are founded upon the notes marked *f*, *g*–*b*–*d*–*f*♯, which are an inversion of the descending thirds of the first phrase. Besides, the left hand in measures 8 and 9 contains the succession of thirds, though the first two notes have changed their places (see **). Furthermore, the left hand in measure 10 contains six tones building a chain of thirds *e* (⊠). The voice part consists mainly of thirds, some of them including passing notes. Besides, here where the climactic concentration approaches a cadence, the interval of a third appears abundantly, and *e* also occurs in successions.

Ex. 48

a)

b)

See also Example 48a and b. Here again the third is reversed as a sixth (48a) in the voice and imitated in the bass (48b).

The sense of logic and economy and the power of inventiveness which build melodies of so much natural fluency deserve the admiration of every music lover who expects more than sweetness and beauty from music. But though I know offhand only one example of such complexity of construction by a pre-Brahmsian composer—by Mozart, of course (see Example 51 from the Piano Quartet in G minor)—I must state that structural analysis reveals even greater merits.

If a man who knows that he will die soon makes his account with earth and with heaven, prepares his soul for the departure, and balances what he leaves with what he will receive, he might desire to incorporate a word—a part of the wisdom he has acquired—into the knowledge of mankind, if he is one of the Great. One might doubt about the sense of life if it then would be a mere accident that such a work, a life-terminating work, would not represent more than just another opus. Or is one entitled to assume that a message from a man who is already half on the other side progresses to the uttermost limit of the still-expressible? Is one not entitled to expect therefrom perfection of an extraordinary degree, because mastership, a heavenly gift, which cannot be acquired by the most painstaking assiduity and exercise, manifests itself only once, only one single time in its full entirety, when a message of such importance has to be formulated?

I imagine that at this point Brahms' protective wall of dryness might enter the picture, and that he might stop me: 'Now it's enough poetry. If you have to say something, say it briefly and technically without so much sentimental fuss.'

Before obeying this order, I am pressed to say that this third of the *Vier Ernste Gesänge*, 'O Tod, O Tod, wie bitter bist du', seems to me the most touching of the whole cycle—in spite of its perfection, if not *because* of it. Intuition, inspiration and spontaneity in creation are generally characteristically combined with speed. But 'was glaubt er, dass ich an seine elende Geige denke, wenn der Geist mich packt?' (Do you really suppose I think of your miserable violin, if the spirit gets hold of me?)—this is how the artist himself feels whether he creates in hard labour or only by a kind of toying.

There is no doubt that Brahms believed in working out the ideas which he called 'gifts of grace'. Hard labour is, to a trained mind, no torture, but rather a pleasure. As I have stated on another occasion: if a mathematician's or a chess player's mind can perform such miracles of the brain, why should a musician's mind not be able to do it? After all, an improviser must anticipate before playing, and composing is a slowed-down improvisation; often one cannot write fast enough to keep up with the stream of ideas. But a craftsman likes to be conscious of what he produces; he is proud of the ability of his hands, of the flexibility of his mind, of his subtle sense of balance, of his never-failing logic, of the multitude of variations, and last but not least of the profundity of his idea and his capacity of penetrating to the most remote consequences of an idea. One cannot do this with a shallow idea, but one can, and one can *only*, with a profound idea—and there one *must*.

It is important to realize that at a time when all believed in 'expression', Brahms, without renouncing beauty and emotion, proved to be a progressive in a field which had not been cultivated for half a century. He would have been a pioneer if he had simply returned to Mozart. But he did not live on inherited fortune; he made one of his own. True, Wagner has contributed to the development of structural formulations through his technique of repetitions, varied or unvaried, because they freed him from the obligation of elaborating longer than necessary upon subjects which he had already clearly determined. Thus this language admitted turning to other subjects, when the action on the stage demanded it.

Brahms never wrote dramatic music—and it was rumoured in Vienna that he had said he would rather write in the style of Mozart than in the 'Neudeutsche Stil'. One can be sure it would not have been Mozart's style, but pure Brahms, and though he might have repeated whole sentences, and even single

words in the text, in the manner of pre-Wagnerian opera, he could not have entirely disregarded the contemporary feeling for dramatic presentation; he would not let an actor die during a da capo aria, and repeat the beginning after death. On the other hand, it would be highly enlightening to see all the dramatico-musical requirements carried out over Brahms' immensely advanced harmony.

It might be doubtful whether Brahms could have found a libretto fitting to what he liked and to the emotion he was capable of expressing. Would it have been a comic opera, a comedy, a lyric drama or a tragedy? He is many-sided, and one can easily find in his music expressions of all sorts, with the possible exception of violent dramatic outbursts such as one finds in Wagner and Verdi. Who knows? If one considers Beethoven's *Fidelio*, which is distinctly symphonic in its organization, remembers the tremendous outburst at the end of the second act, 'O namenlose Freude!' (Oh inexpressible joy!) and compares that with the strictly symphonic style of the greater part of the third act, one may get an impression of what a genius is capable 'wenn der Geist ihn packt'.

'O Tod, O Tod, wie bitter bist du' has been analysed as regards its eminent motival logic. In Example 47 are also marked the beauties of its phrasing. It seems superfluous to discuss these features here in detail; a few remarks should suffice to illustrate what has been contended in the course of this research.

The whole first part of this song contains in twelve measures thirty-six half notes. The phrasing (in the voice) apportions six half notes to the first phrase, four to the second, five to the third, five and a half to the fourth, three and a half to the fifth (counting only one upbeat eighth-note), three to the sixth, four and a half to the seventh, and five and a half to the ending phrase. One may appreciate the rhythmic shift of the third phrase to another beat and a further shift produced through the beginning of the little canon in measures 6 and 7.

Brahms' domain as a composer of songs, chamber music and symphonies has to be qualified as epic-lyric. The freedom of his language would be less surprising were he a dramatist. His influence has already produced a further development of the musical language toward an unrestricted, though well-balanced presentation of musical ideas. But, curiously, the merits of his achievements will shine brighter when more and more are incorporated into the dramatic technique. The opera composer will then become able to renounce a makeshift technique which is a shortcoming not only in the operas of the great pre-Wagnerians. As the contribution of the singer-actor to the dramatic expression

is only a part of the drama, the orchestra, at first only an accompanying factor, has developed into a dominant one. It not only illustrates mood, character and action, but also determines the tempo of the action, and, through its own formal conditions, extends or limits all that happens. In order to realize the consequences of the orchestra's predominance, one must remember the frequent repetitions of text in pre-Wagnerian operas. They serve to correspond to the trend towards expansion of the form originated in the orchestra. Then there are those occasions when a melody does not accommodate to the text. These are the places where the singer dwells on the dominant of the chord while the orchestra continues to build up the formal and thematic elaborations of his part. These are the places in more recent works where the orchestra plays like a symphony, showing little regard for the requirements of the singer, and—an ultramodern pseudo-progressive accomplishment—complete disregard for what is to be expressed by the stage, word and voice, sometimes even counteracting them.

Applying here Brahms' contributions to an unrestricted musical language will enable the opera composer to overcome the metrical handicaps of his libretto's prose; the production of melodies and other structural elements will not depend on the versification, on the metre, or on the absence of possibilities for repetitions. There will be no expansion necessary for mere formal reasons and changes of mood or character will not endanger the organization. The singer will be granted the opportunity to sing and to be heard; he will not be forced to recite on a single note, but will be offered melodic lines of interest; in a word, he will not be merely the one who pronounces the words in order to make the action understandable. He will be a singing instrument of the performance.

It seems—if this is not wishful thinking—that some progress has already been made in this direction, some progress in the direction toward an unrestricted musical language which was inaugurated by Brahms the Progressive.