

The Resonance of the Romantic Horn Call in the Reception of Brahms's Trio, Op. 40

REUBEN PHILLIPS

As a composition that has enjoyed a fairly constant presence in the concert hall over the past 150 years, Brahms's Trio for Piano, Violin, and Waldhorn (1865) has sounded at several junctures of symbolic significance for the dissemination of the classical canon of chamber music. In January 1870 the Horn Trio featured in a performance given by Clara Schumann in the *kleiner Saal* of the *Musikverein* in Vienna, becoming the first piece of music to be publicly performed in this new purpose-built space for solo recitals and chamber concerts.¹ The smaller hall of Theophil Hansen's neoclassical building, which came to be closely associated with Brahms's lieder and chamber works, was renamed the *Brahms-Saal* in 1937 and is now

graced with a bust of the composer.² Similarly, in October 2020, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, the Horn Trio featured in a series of streamed concerts from London's Wigmore Hall. This freely available performance by Ben Goldscheider, Benjamin Baker, and Tom Poster afforded home audiences worldwide the opportunity of hearing the trio while gazing upon the elegant surroundings of the distinguished London chamber-music venue. Whereas Clara Schumann's concert in 1870 was a unique, irrecoverable event, the 2020 streamed performance could be revisited for a limited period of time through the Wigmore Hall Video Library.

Other key moments in the Horn Trio's rich reception history relate to developments in

¹The horn and violin parts were played by Jakob Grün and Wilhelm Kleinecke respectively. See plate 3 for the full program of the concert.

²Otto Biba and Ingrid Fuchs, "Die Emporbringung der Musik": *Höhepunkte aus der Geschichte und aus dem Archiv der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien* (Vienna: Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, 2012), 96–97.

sound recording and historical performance practice. The distinctive timbral profile of the work has been tended by a succession of performers, sound engineers and instrumental technicians. One notable recording was made by the UK-based Gramophone Company in London in 1933, featuring the British horn player Aubrey Brain together with the German violinist Adolf Busch and the young Rudolf Serkin. The latter two musicians had recently abandoned the German concert stage in response to the rise of National Socialism. This performance of the trio, captured in the early days of electrical recording and subsequently reissued on LP and CD, has come to be celebrated as one of the classic chamber music recordings of the first half of the twentieth century. Brahms's stipulation that the horn player use a natural horn (*Waldhorn*) rather than the newer valved version played by Brain and many others is probably easier to follow today than it was in the 1930s, thanks to the interest in early instruments occasioned by historically informed performance practice. A much-praised recent recording of the trio by the violinist Isabelle Faust, horn player Teunis van der Zwart and pianist Alexander Melnikov makes use of a full suite of historical instruments. Van der Zwart plays a natural horn from around 1845 while the other musicians employ a violin strung with gut strings and an 1875 Bösendorfer piano.³

Focusing on the reception of the Horn Trio through the Brahms centenary in 1933, this article considers the role of different performance settings, media, and listening practices in shaping how Brahms's canonic chamber work has been heard and interpreted. The earliest lengthy discussion of the Horn Trio to appear in print was by the critic Selmar Bagge in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1867 and included a complaint about Brahms's tendency to begin multi-movement works with soft and dreamy opening movements.⁴

³Isabelle Faust, Teunis van der Zwart, and Alexander Melnikov, *Brahms, Horn Trio, op. 40, Violin Sonata, op. 78, Fantasien, op. 116*, Harmonia Mundi, CD, HMC901981, 2008.

⁴S.[elmar] B.[agge], "Recensionen. Neue Kammermusik-Werke von Johannes Brahms," *Leipziger Allgemeine*

Arguably the most notable feature of Bagge's comments, however, was the attention drawn to the significance of the Waldhorn: "No one could deny that the sounds heard are of truly poetic origin. . . . The Waldhorn, as it is used by Brahms, indeed offers much of the poetic element, and it also brings something completely unusual into the otherwise familiar substance of chamber music."⁵

Similar ideas are to be found in other early German-language assessments of the Horn Trio. For a reviewer in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* that same year the "Romantic sonority of the horn" brought to mind the "woodland lyricism" of the poets Eichendorff and Lenau.⁶ In his memoirs of the composer Albert Dietrich recalled the deep impression made by Brahms's Horn Trio, describing the effect of the work as "beautiful, romantic, and peculiar."⁷ Max Kalbeck quoted from a poem by Eichendorff in his account of the work, lauding the composition in exultant tones and noting that Brahms's trio of instruments "creates timbral combinations of such an inward poetic effect that any other arrangement would destroy the work's indescribable acoustic allure."⁸

musikalische Zeitung (9 January 1867): 15–17. The review of Brahms's op. 40 was spread over two issues, the concluding part appearing on 16 January.

⁵"Niemand konnte ableugnen, dass die gehörten Klänge von ächter poetischer Abstammung sind. . . . Das Waldhorn, wie es von Brahms benutzt wurde, bietet zwar des poetischen Elements viel, es bringt auch etwas ganz apartes in das sonst wohlbekannte Wesen der Kammermusik." S.[elmar] B.[agge], "Neue Kammermusik-Werke von Johannes Brahms," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (1867): 16.

⁶"An die Stelle des sonst im Trio üblichen Violoncells tritt der romantische Hornklang. Derselbe intendirt—oder vielmehr imitirt—mit glücklicher Handhabung der engen Grenzen des Horns die Waldeslyrik. . . . wie sie uns z. B. in Eichendorff's oder Lenau's betreffenden Gedichten entgegentritt." "Correspondenz," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (4 January 1867): 12.

⁷"Das Horn-Trio machte überall tiefen Eindruck und war von schöner, romantischer und eigenthümlicher Wirkung." Albert Dietrich, *Erinnerungen an Johannes Brahms in Briefen besonders aus seiner Jugendzeit* (Leipzig: Otto Wigand, 1898), 45.

⁸"Aber gerade die von Brahms getroffene Wahl schafft Klangkombinationen von einer so innerlichen poetischen Wirkung, daß jede andere Bearbeitung des Werkes dessen unbeschreiblichen akustischen Zauber zerstören würde." Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms* (Severus, 2013 [reprint of the revised edition originally published in 1921]), 2: 213. The Eichendorff poem, "Die Heimat," is discussed below.

Taking these critical assessments as a point of departure, this investigation begins by exploring the Romantic qualities that early writers located in Brahms's Horn Trio through a consideration of the symbolism of the Waldhorn and the ways in which Brahms engages the contrasting affects and temporalities associated with this instrument in his multi-movement composition. The later sections of the article home in on the resonance of the horn's sounding presence by thinking about performances of the trio in relation to two important contexts: the developing institutional norms for public chamber music performance in Vienna during the 1860s, and the domestic reception of classical chamber music through gramophone recordings in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s. These episodes are suggestive of the capacity that particular contexts and media have had in throwing into relief different aspects of the Horn Trio's singular compositional design. Taken together the episodes also highlight the relatively fragile aesthetic at the heart of Brahms's work—a quality all the more noteworthy in light of the longstanding and widely acknowledged canonicity of the composer's music.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE WALDHORN AND ITS ROLE IN BRAHMS'S TRIO

By the 1860s, for urban audiences in German-speaking lands who encountered Brahms's chamber music, the Waldhorn, named on the Horn Trio's title page (plate 1), is likely to have been more familiar from Romantic literature than from its traditional role in the hunt. In Ludwig Tieck's popular novel *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* (1798) the call of the Waldhorn was deployed to great effect as a recurring poetic motif. The title character, Franz, whom the reader follows on his quest for worldly experience and artistic education, is haunted by the sound of a horn heard during his childhood. At the age of six he encounters a blonde girl who passes through his village by carriage in the company of an older lady and manservant. The young Franz gives the girl a bunch of flowers he had been collecting, after which the servant blows noisily on a Waldhorn and the group of travelers drives away. This

event becomes a defining episode in Franz's life. The sight of the girl's face remains lodged in his memory together with the sound of the instrument: "In the interim the melodious tones of the horn always permeated his being and standing before him, glowing and blooming, was the fair face of the child to whom he had given his flowers, for which he often reached out his hands in his sleep, because it seemed to him as if the girl were bending over him to return them."⁹

Later in Franz's journey of apprenticeship he meets the girl again and receives back the flowers he had presented to her, which have been dried and lovingly preserved. But at this juncture he again fails to discover the girl's identity. The quest to find her determines much of his subsequent journey, the horn ringing in his ears as a mysterious memory: "He kissed the flowers and cried violently: resonating inwardly was the song of the horn that he had heard in childhood."¹⁰ Freed from any obvious functional role, this imagined horn call sparks Franz's thoughts and ideas—a powerful symbol of Romantic longing.

Tieck's use of the horn call as a literary motif had a number of imitators. These included both Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano in their influential three-volume edition of folk poetry *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805–08), and later Romantics such as Nikolaus Lenau and Joseph Eichendorff—the two writers mentioned by critics in relation to the Horn Trio. In poems by both Lenau and Eichendorff, the allure of the mysterious horn call and its associations with memory and childhood experience remain firmly in place, even if there is now a degree of flexibility about what type of horn was being heard. The protagonist of one of Nikolaus Lenau's poems is unsettled by the higher pitched post horn, which he hears from

⁹"Dazwischen klangen immer die holden Waldhornstöne in seine Existenz hinein und vor ihm stand glühend und blühend das holde Angesicht des Kindes, dem er seine Blumen geschenkt hatte, nach denen er in Schlummer oft die Hände ausstreckte, weil ihn dünkete, das Mädchen neige sich über ihn, sie ihm zurück zu geben." Ludwig Tieck, *Franz Sternbald's Wanderungen: Eine altdeutsche Geschichte* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1843), 39.

¹⁰"Er küßte die Blumen und weinte heftig: innerlich ertönte der Gesang des Waldhorns, den er in der Kindheit gehört hatte." Tieck, *Franz Sternbald's Wanderungen*, 69.

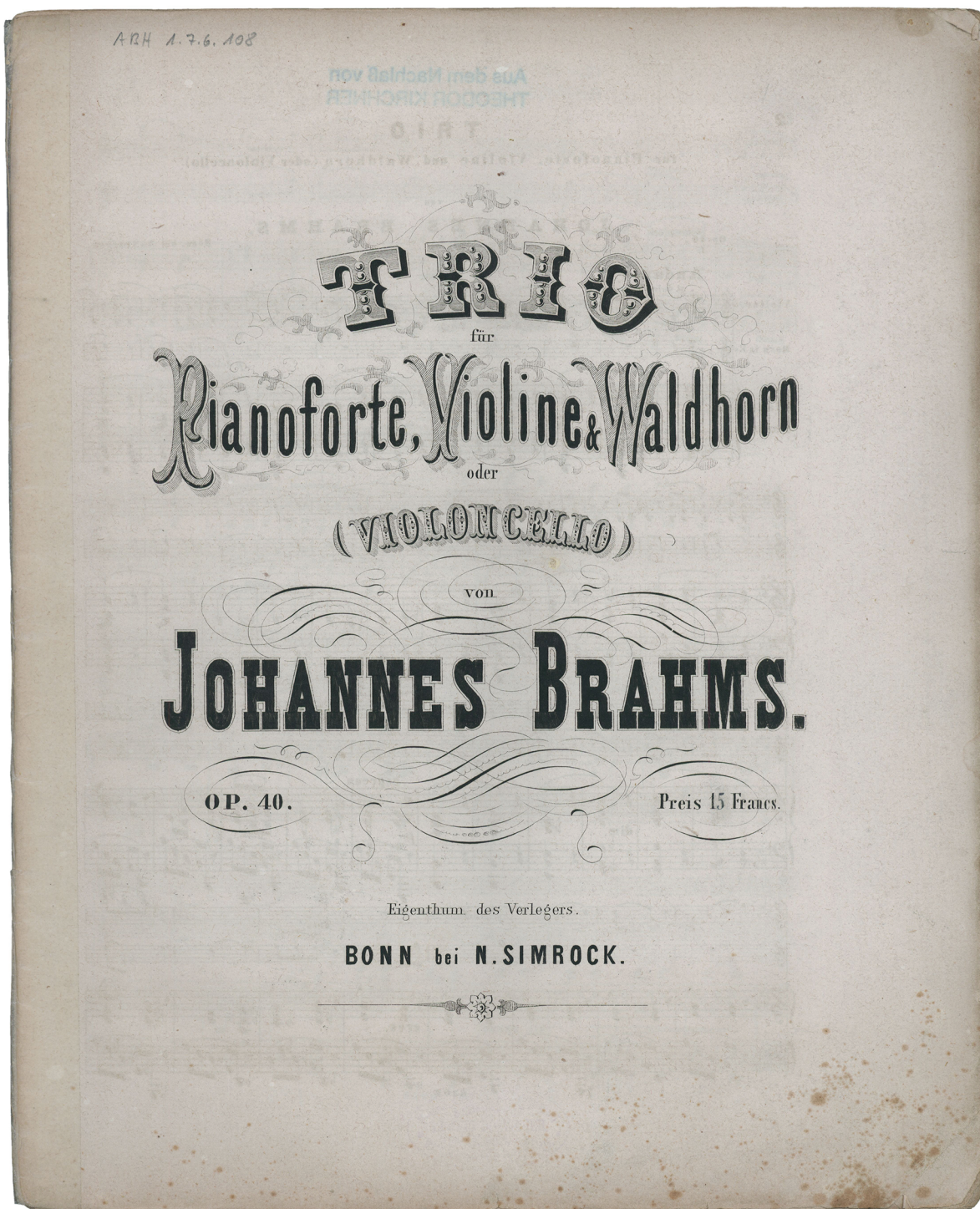


Plate 1: Title page for the first edition of the Horn Trio published by N. Simrock in 1866, Brahms-Institut an der Musikhochschule Lübeck.

afar during a moonlit night against the sonic backdrop of a quietly rippling stream:

Ferne, leise hör' ich dort
Eines Posthorns Klänge,
Plötzlich wird mir um das Herz
Nun noch eins so enge.

Töne, Wandermelodei,
Durch die öden Straßen;
Wie so leicht einander doch
Menschen sich verlassen!¹¹

Faraway, softly I hear there
A post horn's sounds,
Suddenly there is a
Tightness around my heart.

Chime, melody of travel,
Through the deserted streets;
Oh how easily human beings
Abandon one another!

The sense of unease present in these verses derives not from the thought of mail being delivered but from the function of the post coach as a transporter of human beings to and from far-flung places. For Lenau's protagonist the horn call is the music of travel. The post horn rings out through the deserted streets as a melancholy reminder of how easily human beings take leave of one another. In the later verses the post coach will disappear into the distance and the echo of its horn die away, prompting the protagonist to contemplate his distant home, his loneliness, and the transience of earthly life.

The Eichendorff poem cited by Kalbeck was titled "Die Heimat" [Homeland] in published collections of the poet's works. The specific type of horn that features in this text is hard to pin down, but the horn call functions strategically, with the sound described in the first verse serving as a trigger for the recollections that will follow:

Denkst du des Schlosses noch auf stiller Höh?
Das Horn lockt nächtlich dort, als ob's dich rief,
Am Abgrund grast das Reh,
Es rauscht der Wald verwirrend aus der Tiefe—
O stille! wecke nicht! es war, als schlief
Da drunten ein unnennbares Weh.¹²

¹¹Nikolaus Lenau, "Das Posthorn," *Gedichte* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1832), 59.

¹²Joseph von Eichendorff, *Werke*, ed. Hartwig Schulz (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987), I, 299–300.

Do you still think about the castle on the quiet mountain top?
The horn beckons there at night, as if it were calling you,
The deer grazes by the abyss,
Out of the depths the woods rustle mysteriously—
Oh be still! Don't wake! It was as if down below
Were sleeping an unnamable woe.

In the later stanzas it emerges that the horn may ring out from both a distant land and a distant time. Eichendorff dedicated this poem to his brother. It stages a remembrance of their childhood home and ponders the restless attempts of adults to recapture that lost paradise. The power of this particular horn call lies partly in its ambiguity; we cannot infer its source and we don't know whether it is present in the real world or merely in the consciousness of the lyric protagonist.

Of all the German Romantics, Eichendorff was perhaps the one most frequently attracted to the Waldhorn as a symbol. In addition to appearing in his poetry, its tones feature prominently in two of his longer works of prose fiction, *Ahnung und Gegenwart* [*Premonition and Presence*] (1815) and *Dichter und ihre Gesellen* [*Poets and their Companions*] (1834). In one episode of the latter a horn call serves to trigger memory, but Eichendorff uses the Waldhorn more commonly in these texts in relation to the hunt, where it has a very different type of affective signification. As a hunting instrument, the Waldhorn fulfilled two separate functions: to signal the different stages of the pursuit and to stimulate the accompanying hounds.¹³ Suggesting a definite purpose (the kill), the tones of the horn were thus freighted with the expectation of imminent gratification. Eichendorff's delight in the blaring hunting horn is of a piece with the literary escapism that shapes his works of prose fiction more generally. Many of the characters in *Ahnung und Gegenwart* and *Dichter und ihre Gesellen* are of noble birth and reside in large castles with ample estates. In such settings hunting is a favored communal pastime, providing opportunity for a thrilling chase, bursts of high energy, and flashes

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¹³As noted by Raymond Monelle in *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 35–58.

a. Adagio mesto, thematic foreshadowing of the finale.

58

Vn. *molto p*

Elb Hn. *molto p*

Pno. *p* *pp*

63 *pp* *pp* *pp* *poco accel.* *poco accel.* *cresc.*

68 *passionata* *f* *passionata* *f*

Example 1

b. Allegro con brio, opening.

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The musical score is for the opening of the Allegro con brio movement of Brahms's Horn Trio, Op. 40. It features three staves: Violin (Vn.), E-flat Horn (Eb Hn.), and Piano (Pno.). The tempo is 'Allegro con brio'. The key signature is two flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor). The time signature is 3/4. The Violin part starts with a piano (p) dynamic and a crescendo (cresc.) marking. The Piano part starts with a piano (p) dynamic and a staccato (stacc.) marking. The E-flat Horn part is silent in this section. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 7.

Example 1 (*continued*)

of manly heroism. These two novels extol the pleasures of the countryside. The blowing of the hunting horn, together with the crash of branches and the beating of hooves, implies an unmediated relationship with the natural world. As an elemental activity that takes place in a timeless, unchanging habitat, hunting can be seen as the antithesis of the bureaucratic jobs of the modern city. In both of these novels the swashbuckling splendor and goal-oriented temporality of the hunting episodes provide interruptions to the often rambling and digressive narrative form.

An appreciation of these varied uses of the Waldhorn in the soundscape of German Romantic literature helps to enrich the context for hearing Brahms's Horn Trio. While the work makes use of certain standard subgenres of late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century instrumental music, Brahms deploys the contrasting

affects and temporalities associated with the Waldhorn in such a way as to forge a distinctive movement-to-movement progression. The opening Andante, lively Scherzo, melancholy slow movement, and upbeat finale do not merely succeed one another but comprise a larger narrative arc. The emotional journey of this multi-movement composition ends by restoring the Waldhorn to its outdoor "home" in the hunt, and it does so by tracing and repeating a progression from introversion to exuberance.

The polarity between melancholy remembrance and the resolute, forward-looking energy of the hunt that underlies Eichendorff's deployment of the Waldhorn is particularly pronounced in the second half of Brahms's trio. Toward the end of the Adagio mesto, in a passage that has occasioned much critical commentary, Brahms foreshadows the thematic material that will dominate the finale (see ex. 1 a and b). In the context

of the extremely somber, minor-key slow movement, this new major-key theme appears at m. 59 over a dominant pedal and figures as an interruption to both the Adagio's affect and its form. Kalbeck heard the passage as the stirring of a lost memory from distant times.¹⁴ The new theme is answered by the piano with fugal subject material. The dialogue that follows eventually gives rise to an impassioned statement of the Adagio's main thematic material at m. 69. This outburst functions as a high point in the trajectory of the movement, after which the music returns to the somber gait with which the Adagio had begun. The presence of this theme effectively binds the latter two movements of the horn trio together, ensuring that the Allegro con brio finale is heard as overcoming the mournful slow movement that has preceded it.¹⁵

In terms of the Horn Trio's large-scale musical design, the sharp contrast both between these two movements and between the rhapsodic opening Andante and second-movement Scherzo may be helpfully understood in terms of Brahms's use of harmony and form to construct different types of musical temporality. Because it is a monotonal work, each movement of the trio explores a different aspect of the E \flat tonic. The outer sections of the Scherzo and the Allegro con brio finale draw much of their decisive energy from the use of the conventional tonic-dominant opposition of sonata form and large-scale confirmatory patterns. By contrast, the opening Andante and the Adagio mesto slow movement attenuate or cloud the major tonic. The Adagio is in E \flat minor, and the Andante withholds statements of the root position tonic chord for long periods, instead articulating E \flat as a home key by dwelling on its dominant seventh. Akin to the Romantic horn

call that serves as a trigger of memory, these slow movements focus attention on the immediate lyric moment to the exclusion of the logic of the larger formal whole.

The distinctive character of the opening Andante derives in large part from Brahms's treatment of the conventions of classical phrasing. In his discussion of the work in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* Bagge dwelt at length on the quality of the opening theme—its suggestion of “unassuaged longing” and the sense of “dreaming and being suspended in ‘love and suffering.’”¹⁶ The yearning melody that begins the movement employs both diatonic and chromatic neighbor and passing notes within a gentle belaboring of the pitches of the dominant chord. It is sung out first by the violin and then by the horn against a restrained piano accompaniment (ex. 2). Peter Revers observes that while Brahms organizes this melodic material in eight-measure phrases (mm. 1–8, 9–16, 21–28) he departs from earlier phrasing conventions in significant ways. The clarity of the phrases is undercut by the placement of the piano's accompanying chords so that they emphasize the weak beat of every measure.¹⁷ And where a succession of eight-measure phrases might typically suggest the use of symmetrical tonic-dominant harmonies, Brahms continuously prolongs the dominant. This prolongation continues through the melodic variation provided by the four-measure turn figure (mm. 17–20) and is not resolved until the imperfect authentic cadence of mm. 28–29. Notably, even this longed-for moment of arrival is attenuated: first by the minor mode coloration of the tonic in mm. 25–26 and then through the lingering resolution of the dominant seventh. The horn brings its melodic line down to the third of the tonic triad only in the second half of m. 29 (after the tonic arrival in the bass), thus gently blurring the first moment of cadential arrival.

¹⁴“Wie ein [sic] aus der Ferne der Zeiten heraufwinkende verlorene Erinnerung.” Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms*, II, 211. For a close reading of this movement in the context of Brahms's wider approach to writing Adagios, see Margaret Notley, “Late-Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music and the Cult of the Classical Adagio,” this journal 23, no. 1 (1999): 53–56.

¹⁵Following Kalbeck, it has been speculated that Brahms took the theme of the finale from a German folksong. See, for example, John Walter Hill, “Thematic Transformation, Folksong and Nostalgia in Brahms's Horn Trio Op. 40,” *Musical Times* 153, no. 1914 (2011): 20–24. Hill's attempt to derive all of the main thematic material present in the Horn Trio from this single source however seems overstrained.

¹⁶“Die Melodie des Hauptsatzes ist von sehr eigenthümlicher Haltung dadurch, dass sie mehr die Dominante als die Tonika zum Mittelpunkt macht; sie erhält durch dieses schwebende Wesen den Ausdruck ungestillter Sehnsucht, eines Träumens und Hangens ‘in Liebe und Leid’.” Bagge, “Neue Kammermusik-Werke von Johannes Brahms,” 16.

¹⁷Peter Revers, “Tradition und Innovation im Trio für Violine, Horn und Klavier in Es-Dur op. 40 von Johannes Brahms,” in *Die Kammermusik von Johannes Brahms: Tradition und Innovation*, ed. Gernot Gruber (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 2001), 195–212.

Andante

Vn. *p dolce espress.*

E♭ Hn.

Andante

Pno. *p dolce*

7 *p dolce espress.*

15 *p*

23 *dim.* *p espress.*

Example 2: Andante, opening.

Table 1: Andante Formal Overview

FORMAL SECTION	A	B	A'	B'	A''
Tonal Center	E♭ major	→ G minor	E♭ major	→ B♭ minor	G♭ major → E♭ major
Time Signature	$\frac{2}{4}$	$\frac{9}{8}$	$\frac{2}{4}$	$\frac{9}{8}$	$\frac{2}{4}$
Measures	1–76	77–130	131–66	167–99	200–66

While the dreamy quality of this music certainly accords with the literary associations of the Waldhorn, as Bagge noted, it results in a rather unusual opening for a multi-movement chamber work. Brahms's *Andante* is not driven by the ordered development of motivic material or the overarching tonal progression of sonata form. The movement instead comes as a series of sighs and surges—one section yielding to the next, seemingly without concern for large-scale structure or long-term goal. Taking a schematic perspective, the *Andante* can be parsed as a rondo (see Table 1). But what is not apparent from such an overview is the way that Brahms softens the formal junctures so that the A and B sections don't so much alternate as grow from one another as though part of an organic process. In both cases the impetus for the more animated B section appears to derive from something going awry with otherwise static tonic chords. In m. 75, for example, the agent of change is a jarring dissonance in the bass: a D occurring within a passing motion between E♭ and C in the piano's left hand (mm. 74–77), which makes a dissonant minor ninth with the bare E♭ octaves in the upper register.¹⁸

Both because of the yearning quality of the *Andante*'s opening material and the way that thematic returns are set up, the two reprises of A-section material later in the movement have a singular effect. Because of the strong emphasis on dominant sevenths in the primary thematic material, these returns seem to register

not so much as a return to home as a return to some previously experienced (or recalled) sense of longing. Brahms smooths the first of the returns in mm. 126–31 by the deft modulation of texture and meter, incrementally converting 9/8 to 2/4 (ex. 3). Unlike in a classical rondo, both thematic reprises occur without dominant preparation; the harmony that facilitates these returns is the result of an economical shift in voice-leading. In m. 127, for example, the strongly established dominant of G minor is transformed into a B♭ dominant seventh, enabling the music to slip straight into a reprise of the opening thematic material without any statement of the movement's E♭ tonic chord.

The dreamy and rhapsodic character of this *Andante* is countered by the *Scherzo* that immediately follows, but in terms of the balance of the Horn Trio as a whole, it is the finale—the most strident and forcefully goal-oriented of all of the movements in the work—that provides full resolution of the Horn Trio's unusual opening. Whereas the *Andante* advances in sighs and surges, in the *Allegro con brio* Brahms enlists the rhetoric of sonata form. In contrast to the slippage between sections observed in the *Andante*, in the finale Brahms dramatizes the movement's formal junctures. Operative throughout this final movement is the temporality of the hunt: the vigorous beating of hooves and the speedy dashes and dives necessary for the pursuit of prey. Brahms conveys this energy through the exhilarating tonic-dominant opposition, in the animated pulse of the accompanying figuration, and in the movement's almost unceasing rhythmic drive.

For all its forward thrust, though, this movement relies strongly on eighteenth-century

¹⁸At the analogous place in m. 165 the tonal transformation is effected by the horn: above a stable E♭ in the bass the horn brings the third of the tonic chord down by a semitone, deriving a minor triad from a major chord (mm. 163–67).

117 [Poco più animato]

Vn. *p sf p sf*

Hn. *p sf p sf*

Pno. *p sf p sf*

123 *poco a poco rit.*

p dim. p dim. p dim. p dim.

129 *Tempo I*

p dolce

5 6
3 5
3 5
3 5

Example 3: Andante, return of opening theme.

models. Important here are the expectant pauses of the medial caesurae in the exposition and recapitulation, the energy whipped up by the anticipatory horn calls of the retransition (mm. 143–68), and the crisp and decisive return of the opening tonic (m. 169). Peter Smith has drawn attention to specific features derived from earlier

sonata style.¹⁹ Notable, for example, is the use of a bifocal close on the dominant as a means

¹⁹Peter Smith, *Expressive Forms in Brahms's Instrumental Music: Structure and Meaning in His Werther Quartet* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 151–61.

of introducing second subject material, allowing the first half of the exposition to be exactly reproduced in the recapitulation.²⁰ As Smith notes, the Horn Trio's finale is not only concerned with high-spirited frolicking; after the medial caesura the second subject group starts up, surprisingly, not in the dominant but with its flattened submediant (G \flat) over a B \flat pedal. The diminished-seventh harmony in the ensuing measures suggests the establishment of B \flat minor, but Brahms instead intensifies the sense of unease through the use of double mixture: G \flat major is superseded by G \flat minor (spelled enharmonically as F \sharp , m. 55). The eventual arrival on the major dominant in m. 83 throws this passage into relief as a momentary blemish on the ebullient mood of the finale.²¹ The use of a pedal point to consolidate the major dominant as Brahms does in this closing section was also a strategy favored by Mozart and Haydn.²²

The rambunctious spirit of the movement reaches a climax in the final measures, as shown in ex. 4. Here Brahms pits the horn and violin against the piano and the dynamic continues to grow through ascending arpeggios that effect rapid expansions of register. The cadence into m. 277 acts as a kind of shock absorber for this tonal arrival through a tilt toward the subdominant. The elements of this play can be traced to eighteenth-century techniques of closure. An initial thwarted attempt to regain the tonic—an interrupted cadence onto \flat VI in m. 271—serves to intensify the eventual arrival on a root position E \flat chord in m. 277. In the post-cadential material that follows, I \flat ⁷ directs motion to the A \flat pre-dominant. The conclusive dominant and tonic chords that round out the movement provide a sudden speeding up of the harmonic rhythm, shifting at m. 289 from two harmonic changes per measure to four.

²⁰Compare mm. 1–43 with mm. 169–211 of Brahms's movement.

²¹As a point of comparison Smith suggests Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata, where the second subject group also begins in the minor mode. Other examples in Beethoven's oeuvre that might provide better models (because they also include a bifocal close) are the first movements of the String Quartet op. 18, no. 5 and the Piano Sonata op. 2, no. 3.

²²For two examples see the close of the expositions in the opening movements to Mozart's String Quintets, K. 515 and K. 593.

The effect of this breathless ending, achieved through the adept handling of register, cadential energy, and harmonic rhythm, is one of an exciting gallop toward a just attainable goal. In more general terms, the pleasure offered by this music might be viewed as analogous to the escapist pleasure afforded by hunting episodes in Eichendorff's novels. For Eichendorff's predominantly urban middle-class readers, living in the midst of the Industrial Revolution, the allure of his literary representations of the hunt probably lay in the glimpses they provided of a world that was both socially and geographically remote.²³ Through adept manipulation of late eighteenth-century sonata strategies in conjunction with the use of the old-fashioned Waldhorn, Brahms's finale serves up an enticing historical fiction.

IN THE CONCERT HALL

The degree to which the symbolism of the Waldhorn and the distinctive timbral profile of Brahms's trio was appreciated by musicians and listeners clearly varied depending on context. In London the Horn Trio was introduced to a British audience in February 1890 through a performance at the Popular Concerts at St. James's Hall by Wilma Neruda (violin), Charles Hallé (piano), and Franz Friedrich Paersch (horn). The analytical program booklet that accompanied the concert suggested a degree of bafflement in response to the unusual instrumentation, with the author of the note on the Horn Trio commenting that "to the present time Brahms has shown no partiality for the use of 'wind' in chamber music."²⁴ The trio would be repeated the following year and again in May 1895, in the context of a Brahms birthday

²³Eichendorff offered some reflections on social change in his autobiographical writings. For the poet's striking description of travel by railway, see Günther Schiwy, *Eichendorff: Der Dichter in seiner Zeit: Eine Biographie* (Munich: Beck, 2000), 51–53.

²⁴St. James's Hall, *Saturday Popular Concerts: Thirty-second Season: Programme and Analytical Remarks for Saturday Afternoon, February 8, 1890*, 21. Brahms's other chamber works featuring wind instruments, the clarinet trio, quintet and sonatas, were written in the 1890s.

263 [Allegro con brio]

Vn. *cresc.* *f* *f* *f*

E♭ Hn. *cresc.*

Pno. [Allegro con brio] *f*

269

276

8	7	
V 6	5	♭VI
4	3	

1 *b7*

Example 4: Allegro con brio, ending.

283

ff

f

IV V⁷ I

290

Example 4 (*continued*)

concert, but acknowledgment of the poetic associations of the Waldhorn seems largely to be missing from the early English-language reception, as evidenced by the first biographical studies.²⁵ In the German-speaking lands, even where critics were enthusiastic about the idea of the horn in a piano trio, critical reaction to the sounding effect of the three instruments was not always entirely positive. The report in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* quoted earlier followed a performance by Ferdinand David, Friedrich Gumpert, and Clara Schumann at the Leipzig Gewandhaus and included a complaint about balance. In the large Leipzig concert hall David's violin had apparently sounded

"strained and neglected."²⁶ It was probably this same performance that Selmar Bagge had in mind when conducting his analysis for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. While Bagge was generally appreciative of Brahms's unusual scoring, he cautioned that "the more unusual a timbre is, all the more sparing its use must be if it is not to become wearisome."²⁷

²⁶"An der Pianofortepartie findet das Horn eine volltönende und rührig gehaltene Unterlage. Die Violine dagegen erscheint neben ihm gedrückt und vernachlässigt." "Correspondenz," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 12. It is possible that the balance issues might have been caused by the use of a valved rather than a natural horn.

²⁷"Je besonderer eine Klangfarbe ist, desto sparsamer muss ihr Gebrauch sein, wenn sie bei längeren Stücken nicht ermüden soll" S[elmar] B[agge], "Neue Kammermusik-Werke von Johannes Brahms," 16. Bagge makes a brief mention of the Leipzig performance at the start of his review.

²⁵J. A. Fuller-Maitland, *Brahms* (London: Methuen, 1911), 115–16; and Florence May, *The Life of Johannes Brahms* (London: E. Arnold: 1905), II, 38–39.

Admittedly, public performances of the Horn Trio in venues such as the Leipzig Gewandhaus or London's St. James's Hall (which accommodated audiences of 1,000 and 2,000 respectively) represent only one strand of the work's late nineteenth-century reception. During Brahms's lifetime his new chamber compositions were performed both in concert halls and in domestic settings; in the 1860s the Horn Trio would have had more than one well-established home.²⁸ The composer's decision to issue the work with the option of alternative parts for cello, and later viola, in place of the horn probably signals his concern to remain open to the market for chamber music for domestic consumption.²⁹ The establishment of a canon of classical chamber works through regular concert hall performances nevertheless represents a crucial background for Brahms's chamber music composition from the 1860s onwards. A consideration of the developing institutional norms around chamber music performance, specifically in Vienna, is valuable for understanding the calculated effect of his variation on the piano trio genre.

One of the most important early performance settings for the Horn Trio was the long-running series of subscription concerts in Vienna given by the Hellmesberger Quartet. It was in one such concert, in December 1867, that the Horn Trio was heard in public in Vienna for the first time. This performance, which took place in the concert hall of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, featured the composer himself at the piano and horn player Wilhelm Kleinecke.³⁰ Brahms had made his own first public appearance as a composer and

pianist in Vienna in one of the Hellmesberger concerts some five years earlier, collaborating with the group in a performance of his Piano Quartet in G Minor, op. 25.³¹ In December 1863 and February 1867 the group gave the Viennese premieres of the String Sextets ops. 18 and 36; in later decades they would introduce other Brahms works to the Viennese public, including the op. 51 String Quartets in December 1873 and 1874.³² Despite the designation as "Quartett-Produktionen," these events showcased a wide range of chamber music and were arranged according to a fairly constant and successful formula. A typical concert presented two string quartets on either side of a chamber work involving piano such as a violin sonata or piano trio; sometimes the final work on the program would be a string quintet or sextet rather than a quartet. The unusual scoring of Brahms's Horn Trio would have presented no difficulties for one of these programs—in fact in February 1867, writing in the *Neue freie Presse*, Eduard Hanslick had recommended the newly published trio for the Hellmesberger series.³³

In his history of Viennese concert life Hanslick provided an account of the early decades of this influential and long-running concert series that sheds further light on the significance of the setting for Brahms's composition.³⁴ While this was ostensibly a public concert series, the regularity of its performances

³¹This concert took place in November 1862. For a recent scholarly overview of the concert series in the context of Viennese musical life, see Ingrid Fuchs, "Zur Wiener Kammermusiktradition zwischen Schubert und Brahms: Vom privaten Musizieren zum öffentlichen Konzert," in *Brahms' Schubert-Rezeption im Wiener Kontext*, ed. Otto Biba et al. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2017), 33–49.

³²*Quartett Hellmesberger: Sämtliche Programme von 1. Quartett am 4. November 1849 bis zum 300. Quartett am 19 Dezember 1889* (Vienna: J. B. Wallishausser, 1890). Brahms also appeared in the Hellmesberger concerts as a performer in his own right: in December 1863 he accompanied Josef Hellmesberger in a C. P. E. Bach Sonata in C Minor.

³³Ed.[uard] H.[anslick], "Feuilleton. Concerte," *Neue freie Presse*, 5 February 1867, 2. Hanslick mentions the trio in the context of three of Brahms's recent chamber compositions, the others being the Piano Quartet, op. 26 and the Cello Sonata, op. 38.

³⁴Eduard Hanslick, *Geschichte des Concertwesens in Wien* (Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller, 1869), 400–04. On the Viennese reception of Brahms's music in the final decades of the nineteenth century, see Margaret Notley, *Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight*

²⁸See Styra Avins, "Brahms in the Wittgenstein Homes: A Memoir and Letters," in *Brahms in the Home and the Concert Hall: Between Private and Public Performance*, ed. Katy Hamilton and Natasha Loges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 221–55.

²⁹The original edition of the piano specified the cello as a potential replacement to the horn. In the 1880s Brahms decided that a viola would be a more appropriate substitute. See *Johannes Brahms Briefwechsel*, vol. 11: *Johannes Brahms: Briefe an P. J. Simrock und Fritz Simrock* (Berlin: Deutsche Brahms-Gesellschaft, 1919), 53.

³⁰From programs and newspaper reviews it is hard to establish with certainty that Kleinecke used a Waldhorn, but given Brahms's strong preference for the instrument and involvement in the performance this seems likely.

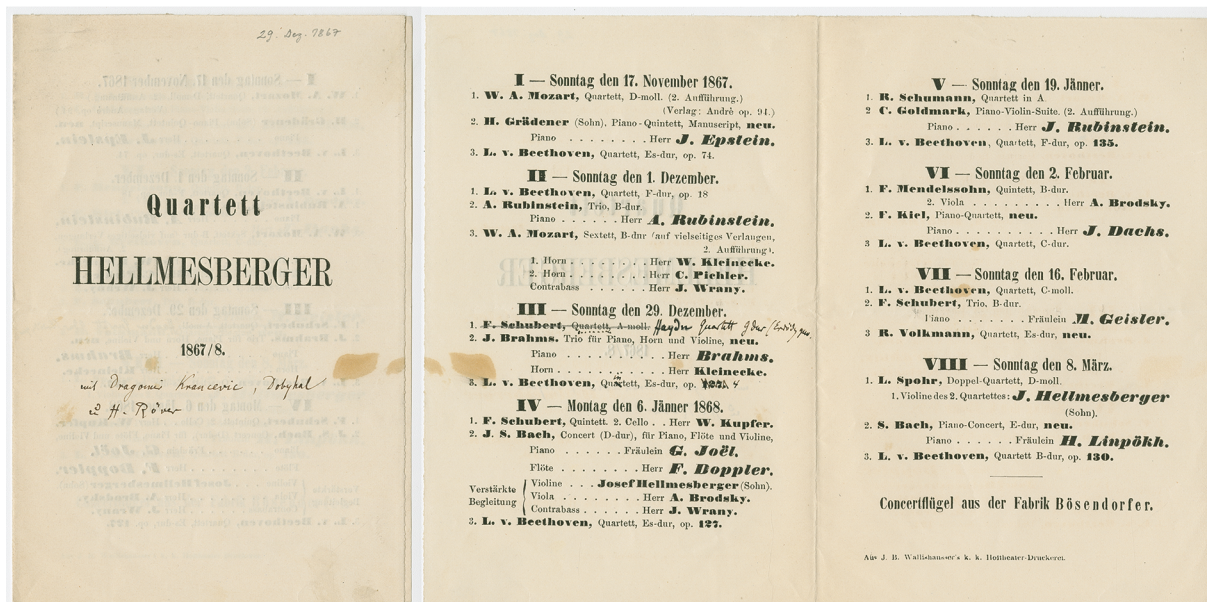


Plate 2: Program for the Hellmesberger Quartet Concerts, 1867–68. Annotations on the first page provide the names of Hellmesberger's colleagues: Dragomir Krancevic, [Franz] Dobyhal and H.[einrich] Röver. Archiv der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien.

on Sundays at 5 p.m. apparently attracted a loyal and stable audience akin to a “family circle.” Most notable in Hanslick’s account was the Hellmesbergers’ role in cultivating a canon of chamber music through frequent repetition of a select body of works. Hanslick credits the group with having familiarized Viennese audiences with Beethoven’s late quartets and, as Ingrid Fuchs has observed, the ensemble also acted as advocates for Schubert’s chamber compositions, many of which were unknown in the 1850s.³⁵ Hanslick’s analysis of the first 150 concert programs from the start of the series in 1849 through 1865 makes clear the dominance of Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn. Works by Beethoven had in fact featured 139 times to date.

of *Viennese Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12–21.

³⁵ Schubert’s works that featured in the series up until the mid-1860s included the String Quartets in D Minor and G Major and A Minor, the String Quintet in C Major, the Piano Trios in B♭ and E♭ and the Octet. See Fuchs, “Zur Wiener Kammermusiktradition zwischen Schubert und Brahms: Vom privaten Musizieren zum öffentlichen Konzert,” 46.

A general emphasis on classical chamber music repertoire is also evident in the season that featured Brahms’s trio (see plate 2). Every one of the eight concerts in the 1867–68 season included a work by Beethoven. Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Spohr, and Robert Schumann were also represented, as were a number of other living composers besides Brahms, and, as was common in the Hellmesberger concerts in the 1860s, two concertos by J. S. Bach also featured in the series. On 29 December 1867 Brahms’s Horn Trio was performed in the 167th program, sandwiched between a Haydn Quartet (op. 76, no.1) and Beethoven’s Quintet in E♭, op. 4.³⁶

As a context for hearing and interpreting Brahms’s Horn Trio, the Hellmesberger Quartet concerts throw into relief issues of genre and instrumentation. Audiences at the concerts would have been used to encountering chamber compositions for different

³⁶ The advertised programs for the Hellmesberger concerts did not always coincide with the works that were actually played. The annotations to the program in plate 2 are confirmed by the listing printed in *Quartett Hellmesberger: Sämtliche Programme*, 67.

287 **Molto meno Allegro**

Vn. *p espress.*

Hn. *p espress.*

Pno. *p*

295

col. Ped.

Example 5: Scherzo, opening of trio section.

instrumental groupings, including some that contained wind instruments, since works such as Schubert's Octet were part of the canon that the Hellmesbergers helped to establish and stabilize. Brahms's Horn Trio, however, stands out as a new departure by the way it varies a standard chamber genre. While the horn ostensibly takes the place of a cello, the two instruments are hardly equivalent to one another in terms of register, and they play different roles within a piano trio ensemble. In the *Allegro con brio* finale Brahms briefly treated the horn as a bass voice, having the horn player strike up a pedal point at the bottom of the trio texture in energetically pulsating eighth notes (mm. 45ff.).³⁷ The effectiveness of these passages (which

require the piano to relinquish the lower bass register) stems from their being atypical, both in the context of this movement and in that of the trio as a whole. In the rest of the work Brahms consistently treated the horn as a melodic protagonist. His most common approach to writing for the instrument was to deploy it as a melodic partner to the violin—either through the antiphonal exchange of phrases (as in the trio's memorable opening) or by setting the two instruments together at the sonorous interval of a third or sixth.

The treatment of the horn as a melodic counterpart to the violin emphasizes the element of timbre. The doubling of a main melodic voice at the third to fill out the texture is something of a Brahmsian trademark, and in other works roughly contemporaneous with the Horn Trio, such as the First String Sextet and the Waltzes, op. 39, this device typically lends a *gemütlich*

³⁷ Similarly, at the end of the second subject group, where the dominant appears in its major form, a Bb pedal point is sustained at the lower octave (mm. 83ff.)

character to the composer's generous melodic writing. But the pairing of the timbrally distinct horn and violin has a subtly different effect from such cozy consonances, serving instead to throw into relief the contrasting sonorities of the two instruments. Nowhere is this more apparent than in central trio section of the Scherzo—a portion of the Horn Trio that survives in an earlier version for solo piano (see ex. 5).³⁸ The sound of the horn and violin heard in tandem complicates what had previously been a straightforward piano texture, enhancing the expressive ambivalence of the Ab-minor melody. With its relatively simple musical materials, the trio section affords space for listeners to be confronted with the timbral particularity of the horn sound; in performance it often emerges as a kind of strange wordless song.

This elevation of timbre is notable in relation to the chamber works typically heard in the Hellmesberger concerts. Brahms's scoring in the Horn Trio threw a somewhat unusual emphasis onto the *sound* of this chamber work in addition to its form, tonal content, and motivic development. While detailed considerations of timbre are generally lacking in modern considerations of Brahms's works, its significance in the Horn Trio was not lost on nineteenth-century commentators such as the musicologist Philipp Spitta.³⁹ In an 1892 essay on Brahms, Spitta cited the Horn Trio as a counterexample when discussing Brahms's reticence to "poeticize" in the sphere of instrumental music, suggesting that Brahms here created poetic effects through the distinctive choice of musical instruments.⁴⁰ An aphorism by Novalis described Romantic poetics as

"the art of making foreign in a pleasing manner—of rendering an object strange yet familiar and attractive."⁴¹ This statement (which Brahms knew) offers an especially helpful way of thinking about the effect of Brahms's reconfiguration of the piano trio genre. While in performances of the Horn Trio the three instruments resounded in the same physical space, for listeners the horn was likely to retain some sense of apartness—a quality that would have been even more pronounced for audiences confronted with the unusual Waldhorn. Adapting a phrase of Berthold Hoeckner's, one might say that the instrumental forces in Brahms's Horn Trio have a built-in Romantic distance.⁴²

Although the reviewers in 1867 wrote appreciatively about the quality of its performance, the response to the Horn Trio itself was decidedly mixed. Despite warm applause from some quarters, there was apparently hissing from an anti-Brahms faction at the concert. The rousing finale was the most popular movement, but the inner movements seem to have befuddled some critics. An anonymous reviewer described the Adagio negatively—though with unwitting insight—as "a long and fruitless searching around after ideas."⁴³ Eduard Schelle was more cautious, though far from positive: "It is certainly a composition that needs to be heard several times before one can accustom oneself to the character of the animating tone that prevails in it."⁴⁴

Just over two years later, when the Horn Trio was heard again in Vienna in the newly

³⁸For a detailed account of the relationship between the Horn Trio and the earlier version of this material, see Katharina Loose-Einfalt, *Melancholie, Natur, Musik: zum Horntrio von Johannes Brahms* (Mainz: Schott, 2017), 65–80.

³⁹The relative lack of attention to timbre by musicologists has recently been noted by Emily Dolan and Alexander Rehding. See their "Timbre Alternative Histories and Possible Futures for the Study of Music," in *The Oxford Handbook of Timbre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3–20.

⁴⁰"Dagegen erzielt er dergleichen Wirkungen manchmal durch die aparte Wahl der musikalischen Organe (Horn-Trio, Clarinetten-Quintett), durch gedämpfte Geigen, durch Tongänge, die irgend eine Vorstellung zu wecken geeignet sind. Alles dies verhältnißmäßig

selten." Philipp Spitta, "Johannes Brahms," in *Zur Musik: Sechzehn Aufsätze* (Berlin: Gebrüder Paetel, 1892), 416.

⁴¹"Die Kunst, auf eine angenehme Art zu befremden, einen Gegenstand fremd zu machen und doch bekannt und anziehend, das ist die romantische Poetik." Quoted in Katharina Loose-Einfalt, *Melancholie, Natur, Musik*, 9. This sentence was included in a collection of quotations, aphorisms, and poems assembled by Brahms in the mid-1850s known as *Des jungen Kreislers Schatzkästlein*.

⁴²Berthold Hoeckner, "Schumann and Romantic Distance," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50, no. 1 (1997): 55–132.

⁴³"Am schwächsten ist das Adagio, ein langes resultatloses Herumsuchen nach Ideen." "Lokales. Theater und Kunst," *Die Debatte*, 31 December 1867 (pages unnumbered).

⁴⁴"Es ist freilich eine Composition, die mehrmals gehört sein will, bevor man sich an den Charakter des in ihm waltenden Tonlebens gewöhnen kann." E. Schelle, "Kleine Chronik. Concerte," *Die Presse* (Abendblatt), 31 December 1867 (pages unnumbered).

Auf Verlangen:
Abschieds-Concert
Clara Schumann

k. k. Kammervirtuosin,
unter gütiger Mitwirkung des Fräuleins **Anna Boße**, k. k. Hof-Opernsängerin,
des Herrn **J. M. Grün**, k. k. Concertmeister, und des Herrn Professor
Kleinecke, Mitglied der k. k. Hof-Operkapelle,
Mittwoch den 19. Jänner 1870,
Abends halb 8 Uhr,
im kleinen Saale der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde
am Künstlerplatze.

PROGRAMM:

1. **Trio** für Pianoforte, Violine und Waldhorn, op. 40 **J. Brahms.**
Andante — Scherzo — Adagio — Finale.
2. „**Die junge Nonne**“ **Schubert.**
3. **Variations sérieuses**, op. 54 **Mendelssohn.**
4. a) „**Liebestreu**“ a. op. 1 } **J. Brahms.**
b) „**Sehnsucht**“ a. op. 49 }
5. a) **Fantasiestück** Nr. 1^a, op. 10 **E. Rudorff.**
b) **Notturmo**, C-moll { **Chopin.**
c) **Impromptu**, As-dur }
6. a) „**Dein Angesicht so lieb und schön**“, a. op. 127 } **Schumann.**
b) „**Er, der Herrlichste**“, a. op. 42 }
7. **Fantasiestücke**, op. 12 **Schumann.**
Des Abends — In der Nacht — Grillen — Warum — Aufschwung.

~~~~~  
*Die hohe General-Intendanz der k. k. Hoftheater hat die Mitwirkung  
obgenannter Künstlerin gütigst genehmigt.*  
~~~~~

Clavier: **Streicher.**
~~~~~

Circlesitze à 3 fl., Parterresitze à 2 fl., Galleriesitze à 1 fl. 50 kr.,  
Eintrittskarten à 1 fl.  
sind in der k. k. Hof-Kunst- und Musikalienhandlung C. A. SPINA,  
am Graben, zu haben.  
**Die Programme werden am Saaleingange unentgeltlich verabfolgt.**

~~~~~

Aus J. B. Wallishausser's k. k. Hoftheater-Druckerei. Z. N. St. G.

Plate 3: Program for the first concert held in the *kleiner Saal* of the Musikverein in Vienna. Archiv der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien.

opened *Musikverein*, critical reaction was still not especially warm. In her concert on 19 January 1870 Clara Schumann performed the trio with Wilhelm Kleinecke and the violinist Jakob Grün. The mixed program included solo piano music and lieder sung by the court opera singer Anna Bosse (see plate 3). By this point Schelle seemed firmly to have made his mind up against the work, noting that the “austere music” (*asketische Musik*) did not meet with approval from the audience.⁴⁵ In a feuilleton for the *Neue freie Presse* Eduard Hanslick wrote appreciatively about the new building. Comparing the small hall to the more opulent *großer Saal* of Theophil Hansen’s *Musikverein*, he suggested that the former made a “more musically homely impression than its proud, palatial neighbor.”⁴⁶ Although Hanslick went on to describe the concert in exultant tones as a “consecration” of the new hall by a “true priestess of art, a worthy beginning and a favorable omen,”⁴⁷ he could not find much to say in favor of the Horn Trio, noting that “among the chamber compositions of Brahms,” the trio “is the least congenial to us.”⁴⁸

THE HORN TRIO ON RECORD IN THE 1920S AND 1930S

By the first decades of the twentieth century assessments had changed to the extent that the Horn Trio was the subject of three recording projects in the 1920s and 1930s. The first, a recording of just the second and fourth movements in the version for ordinary piano trio,

was made by Arthur Catterall (violin), W. H. Squire (cello), and William Murdoch (piano) for the Columbia label in June 1923. Both of the movements were cut so as to fit within the four-minute limit for the single side of a 78 r.p.m. record, but the performances are lively and interesting for their extensive expressive use of portamento. In the later recordings the trio was presented in full and in its original instrumentation, with each of the four movements split across the two sides of a disc. The first of these complete recordings, made under the aegis of the National Gramophonic Society, featured Spencer Dyke (violin), York Bowen (piano), and Aubrey Brain (horn); it was released in 1927.⁴⁹ In the second version, captured in Abbey Road Studios in November 1933, Brain could be heard again alongside Adolf Busch and the young Rudolf Serkin.⁵⁰

Thanks to transfers and digital remastering, the 1933 recording has remained readily available throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, but in a modern form that is potentially an impediment to the understanding of its technological significance in the 1930s. For subsequent reissues, beginning with LP transfers, each of the four movements was stitched together, eliminating the breaks between the sides of the original 78s. The faint crackle of acoustic noise that survives, even with the most carefully edited digital remastering, has proved harder to remove and serves to accentuate the recording’s historical distance. The authority of this performance of Brahms’s Horn Trio probably derives both from this sonic patina—the aurally apparent sense of its age—and from the modern listener’s sense that these

⁴⁵E. Schelle, *Die Presse*, 25 Jan. 1870, 1.

⁴⁶“Reich verziert und vergoldet macht er doch einen ruhigeren, musikalisch wohnlicheren Eindruck, als sein stolzer, prunkvoller Nachbar.” E.[duard] H.[anslick], “Feuilleton. Musik.” *Neue freie Presse*, 25 January 1870, 2. The Hellmesberger Quartet transferred its series to the new Musikverein building midway through the 1869–1870 season.

⁴⁷“Eine Einweihung also durch eine wahrhafte Priesterin der Kunst, ein würdiger Anfang und günstiges Omen.” E.[duard] H.[anslick], *Neue freie Presse*, 2.

⁴⁸“Unter den Kammermusiken von Brahms ist uns sein Trio für Clavier, Violine und Waldhorn (op. 40) am wenigsten sympathisch.” E.[duard] H.[anslick], *Neue freie Presse*, 2.

⁴⁹See Nick Morgan, *The National Gramophonic Society* (Ph.D. diss., Sheffield University, 2013), 347. Transfers of the eight sides of the recording can be downloaded from website of the AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music: <https://charm.rhul.ac.uk/ind ex.html>. (Last accessed 1 November 2022.)

⁵⁰As Tully Potter notes, Busch, Serkin, and Brain made an earlier recording of the trio in May 1933. Due to irreparable damage to the metal master discs that had been made from the wax “positives” the work had to be re-recorded. The surviving portions of the earlier recording have now been released on CD. See the liner notes to *The Busch-Serkin Duo Unpublished Recordings*, Appian Recordings, CD, APR5528, 2007. I am grateful to Tully Potter for supplying me with a copy of this recording.

musicians emerged from musical traditions more closely related to Brahms's century than our own. It is certainly hard to escape a sense of poignancy in hearing these long-dead performers commune in a Brahms chamber work in 1933—the centenary of Brahms's birth, and the year in which Busch and Serkin parted decisively from their cultural homeland of Germany.⁵¹

In the context of the 1920s and 1930s, however, the early complete recordings of the Horn Trio are best understood in relation to a growing interest in the use of the gramophone as a means of encountering chamber music. Both the 1927 and 1933 recordings of the trio were issued in the context of series dedicated to chamber works, predominantly by Austro-German composers, of the late eighteenth through the nineteenth centuries. Nick Morgan has noted that from its foundation in 1923, the National Gramophonic Society (N.G.S.) adopted a subscription model to finance its recordings of complete musical works—a type of recording project then likely to be deemed of limited commercial value by the major recording companies.⁵² N.G.S. subscribers were provided with analytical commentaries to accompany the discs, and a certain amount of music-analytical discussion was also to be found in reviews that appeared in the society's journal, *The Gramophone*. Some of the work-oriented listening practices associated with the N.G.S. can be traced back to nineteenth-century concert life. However, in the material preservation of a musical canon in the form of shellac discs and in the sociability that was fostered by gramophone societies and journals, Sophie Maisonneuve has traced the emergence of a new gramophone-based musical culture during the interwar years.⁵³

The innovative recording projects of the N.G.S. continued for little more than a decade, but in the 1930s the UK-based His Master's Voice Gramophone Company adopted aspects of its approach. Although their Busch-Serkin-Brain recording of the Horn Trio was not financed by a subscription model, the system was used by Walter Legge to facilitate some of the Gramophone Company's more ambitious projects, such as Arthur Schnabel's complete set of Beethoven Piano Sonatas (the "Beethoven Sonata Society") and the Pro Arte Quartet recordings of Haydn's Quartets (the "Haydn Quartet Society"). The Horn Trio recording numbered among the Gramophone Company's "Album Series of Complete Works," which featured some vocal works and a large amount of instrumental music. Recordings of lieder and operatic repertoire in this series included printed texts, while chamber works, orchestral repertoire and piano music were issued with accompanying leaflets of analytical notes that contained details about the composer and composition, as well as a short description of what was to be heard on each side of the individual records.⁵⁴ In one of the very first leaflets of the series—to accompany a recording of Brahms's Piano Quintet op. 34 by the Flonzaley Quartet with Harold Bauer—it was acknowledged that the "necessity" for such commentary was a "debatable point" and conceded that the printed musical examples would not be of use to all listeners.⁵⁵ The format, however, appears to have been successful. Expectations about listeners' musical literacy seem, if anything, to have increased; the leaflets accompanying later releases in the series occasionally contain references to the miniature score of the featured work.

Both the 1927 and 1933 recordings gave listeners the opportunity to savor the sound of Brahms's composition with an impressive level of timbral definition. Although Aubrey Brain used a valved instrument rather than the

⁵¹For an account of this important juncture in Busch's career, see Tully Potter, *Adolf Busch: The Life of an Honest Musician* (London: Toccata, 2010), I, 511–15.

⁵²Nick Morgan, "'A New Pleasure': Listening to National Gramophonic Society Records, 1924–1931," *Musicae Scientiae* 19, no. 2 (2010): 139–64.

⁵³Sophie Maisonneuve, "La constitution d'une culture et d'une écoute musicale nouvelles: Le disque et ses sociabilités comme agents de changement culturel dans les années 1920 et 1930 en Grande-Bretagne," *Revue de Musicologie* 88, no. 1 (2002): 43–66.

⁵⁴*Analytical Notes to Album Series No. 201: Brahms Op. 40, Trio in E Flat Major* (London: The Gramophone Company, [1934]).

⁵⁵"His Master's Voice" *Album Series of Complete Works: Brahms' Quintet in F Minor, Op. 34* (London: The Gramophone Company, [1926]).

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ANALYTICAL NOTE to 201
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BRAHMS

Op. 40

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ON "HIS MASTER'S VOICE" RECORDS Nos. DB2105 TO DB2108. ALSO AVAILABLE COUPLED IN SEQUENCE (Nos. DB7610 TO DB7613) FOR USE WITH
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THE horn was an instrument for which Brahms had a particular affection. In his youth he had been a horn player of no mean ability, and throughout his life he not only cherished a fondness for it, but he wrote for it with a greater sympathy and understanding than almost any instrument of the orchestra. Instances of his particularly lovely writing for the horn spring unbidden to the memory: the opening of the B flat Concerto, the beginning of the C major section of the finale of the C minor Symphony, the early Serenade in D major for Orchestra, the Second Symphony and in nearly all his Choral works—to mention but a few. This love of the horn was born perhaps of Brahms' love of the open air and of the German countryside in particular. The very theme of the first movement, we know from Dietrich, came to Brahms in the fir woods of the Black Forest near Baden-Baden: the composer himself showed his friend the place "on the wooded heights among the fir trees" where he first thought of the theme.

This work was written at Baden-Baden in the spring and summer of 1865. That popular resort was a great favourite of Brahms, and almost every year from 1862 to 1872 he visited Clara Schumann there. His demands of life and his rooms in Baden-Baden were extremely modest: here he had a little blue papered, uncarpeted attic and a bedroom, and he spent his days walking through the woods and composing, and his evenings, sitting in cafés or listening to the performances that the Karlsruhe Opera Company gave in the Baden theatre.

It was in Karlsruhe that the Horn Trio had its first performance. Brahms played the pianoforte part, the others being taken by the Konzertmeister and first hornist of the Karlsruhe Court Orchestra. The work was an immediate success, and it is not only the finest of the chamber works that employ the horn, but one of Brahms' loveliest and most characteristic creations.

When in June, 1866, Brahms offered the work to his publisher Simrock of Bonn, he wrote of it as a "Trio for Pianoforte, Violin and Horn or Violoncello"—"The piece" he continued "is to be played in the natural horn and it is not difficult for either of the two others. My fee would be sixteen Friedrichsdors." Simrock accepted, but when Brahms returned the proofs of the music he stipulated that the word "Waldhorn" should be printed on the title page. Eighteen years later Brahms wrote to Simrock:—

"My Horn-Trio should be provided with a Viola part instead of the 'Cello! With 'Cello it sounds dreadful, but splendid with the Viola! The title should read: Horn or Viola!" The publisher was agreeable and Brahms wrote to him on April 3rd:—

"The Viola part must be issued separately. Herr Keller can easily see to that. I mean that the 'Cello part can be suppressed altogether."

This, however, was not observed and the work remains published with either 'Cello or Viola suggested as alternatives for the horn. In the light of modern horn technique, particularly in the degree to which it has been perfected by Aubrey Brain, Brahms' stressing of the importance of the Waldhorn has no more than historical interest (for further illumination of the subject see the article on this work in Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music and Wagner's Preface to the score of Tristan).

the second subject in C minor (*pü animato*) occurs. This is a passionate melody of a more restless character in which the pianoforte has a more active part.

Side 2. The E flat subject (No. 1) is taken up again, and this time by the horn, and joined later by the violin. It is in a much shorter form, and soon No. 1 (*a*) appears in E flat minor, also shortened, only to return once more to No. 1, presented this time in G flat. The movement concludes in the quiet way it began, with the horn echoing the first subject in the last few bars.

Side 3. Scherzo—Allegro. In sharp contrast to the first movement comes a very typical Brahms' Scherzo, the main subject of which

No.1 Andante
p dolce et aress.

is announced by the violin, and taken up a few bars later by the horn. It is a quiet, peaceful melody, which flows along gently until

No.1a Poco più animato

No.2 Allegro

19331/G/F (Printed in England)

THE GRAMOPHONE COMPANY, LTD., LONDON, E.C. 1

Plate 4: First page of the analytical note that accompanied the 1933 recording of the Horn Trio.
British Library.

Waldhorn, he favored a narrow bore horn with a lighter tone, which comes across as a good match for the violin.⁵⁶ Significantly, both of the recordings capitalized upon recent technological advances, though a comparison of the two suggests notable improvements in electrical recording in the space of less than a decade.

⁵⁶Martin Prowse, "Aubrey Brain's Horn," *The Horn Magazine* 2, no. 3 (1994): 22–23.

Although the Dyke-Bowen-Brain version captured distinctions of instrumental timbre more readily than the preceding acoustic recording, the Busch-Serkin-Brain version is extremely impressive in showcasing the beauty of Brain's horn sound and for the excellent balance among the three instruments. A review of the later recording in *The Gramophone* expressed limited enthusiasm for Brahms's music but high regard for the technical qualities of the recording: "The horn used to be reckoned one of the

hardest instruments to record. These records warrant any amount of pride at St. John's Wood [the location of the Abbey Road Studios]. They are worth getting for the sheer joy of the horn tone alone.⁵⁷

Unmentioned in this review of the 1933 recording, though particularly striking when the Busch-Serkin-Brain performance is heard alongside the earlier version, is the artistry and technical assurance of the three musicians. In the fast second and fourth movements of the 1927 recording, York Bowen misfires in some of the tricky piano passagework and Spencer Dyke's intonation on violin is somewhat inconsistent. Also apparent in the 1927 version of the Scherzo is a more extreme and not entirely successful approach to tempo modification. In both recordings of the outer sections of this movement the musicians slow down for the quiet B-major passage beginning at m. 121. Whereas Busch, Serkin, and Brain relax the speed in a fairly subtle manner, giving the effect of modifying an underling tempo, the equivalent deceleration in the first statement of this passage by Dyke, Bowen, and Brain creates a sudden cessation in the musical energy and leads to a somewhat chaotic accelerando during the subsequent retransition. This type of unwritten tempo modification might be understood as the remnant of nineteenth-century performance conventions, though the tendency for performers to adopt a different tempo at this point in the Scherzo was sharply criticized by both Donald Tovey and the pianist William Murdoch.⁵⁸ In the finale to the Horn Trio the contrast between the two recordings is yet more noticeable. Dyke, Bowen, and Brain present the *Allegro con brio* in a lively skip (♩. = 116), while

Busch, Serkin, and Brain deliver abundant virtuosity—the result of a performance that is considerably more accurate and of a starting tempo that is much brisker (♩. = 134).

Probably the most significant attraction of the later recording, however, is the distinctive expressivity of Adolf Busch's violin playing. Hearing both complete recordings side by side highlights the extent to which the balance in the later version favors the violin. As in the famous Busch Quartet recordings that were made at Abbey Road Studios, the expressive nuances of Adolf Busch's solid and rich violin tone can be heard with considerable clarity on this 1933 recording, especially in the lyrical first and third movements. In his recordings of the slow movements of Beethoven's late quartets Busch was renowned for his legendary legato and subtle portamento.⁵⁹ These qualities are much in evidence at the start of Horn Trio's opening *Andante*. The choice of a fairly slow tempo gives this opening a spacious feel, but what is perhaps most impressive here and in the remainder of the movement is the intensity in the projection of musical line. Busch's extraordinary bow control makes it seem as if he were singing out his phrases in a single long breath.

Establishing how listeners in the 1930s heard this recording is no easy task, but some of the listening practices associated with chamber music during this period are illuminated by surviving source materials. It is likely, for example, that some of the first listeners to the Busch-Serkin-Brain recording would have allowed themselves to be guided by the accompanying notes. Leaflet No. 201 in H.M.V.'s "Analytical Notes to Album Series of Complete Works" (see plate 4) speculates that the appeal of the horn as an instrument "was born perhaps of Brahms's love of the open air and of the German countryside in particular."⁶⁰ While the notes mention Brahms's stipulation to his publisher that

⁵⁷C. M. C., "Rudolf Serkin (piano), Adolf Busch (violin), and Aubrey Brain (horn): Trio in E flat, Op. 40 (Brahms). DB2105–8 (four 12in., in album, with notes, 24s.)," *The Gramophone*, May 1934, 478.

⁵⁸William Murdoch, *Brahms* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1933), 344; Donald Francis Tovey, "Brahms," in *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, ed. Walter Willson Cobbett, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 121. By way of authority Tovey cites his experience performing the work with Joachim and horn player Hugo Rüdell in Berlin in 1902. In Murdoch's own recording of the Scherzo the B-major passage is part of the material that was cut so that the movement could be fitted onto one side of a record.

⁵⁹On Busch's performance style in recordings by the Busch Quartet, see Robert Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 60–95.

⁶⁰*Analytical Notes to Album Series No. 201: Brahms Op. 40, Trio in E Flat Major*.



Plate 5: Album cover of the 1933 recording of the Horn Trio showing the "His Master's Voice" logo.

the word "Waldhorn" should be printed on the title page, the composer's preference is here glossed purely in terms of the physical properties of the instrument. The notes suggest that because of developments in modern horn technique, "particularly in the degree to which it has been perfected by Aubrey Brain," the composer's interest in the Waldhorn "has no more than historical interest." The analytical overview that follows includes the quotation of important musical themes, a few brief

comments on the character of the individual movements, and a basic account of Brahms's handling of form. The analytical observations are fairly simplistic, but the presence of such a commentary in conjunction with the printed musical examples implies a fairly concentrated approach to musical listening.

Although a number of listeners might have heard gramophone recordings in settings somewhat akin to a public concert, the capacity of the gramophone to resituate the Horn Trio

within a domestic setting—the traditional home of chamber music—emerges as the most salient aspect of the technological reception of Brahms's music. The new opportunities afforded by the gramophone for personal aesthetic encounters with musical works captured the imagination of several writers in the 1920s and 1930s. In Thomas Mann's 1924 novel *Der Zauberberg* the protagonist Hans Castorp is enthralled by the arrival of a gramophone at the sanatorium at which he is staying and embarks on a series of night-time concerts featuring vivid renditions of his favorite pieces of music.⁶¹ For Compton Mackenzie, novelist and editor of *The Gramophone*, the novelty and wonderment that was bound up with encountering chamber works through sound recordings derived from the potential for independent listening and the ability to choose the setting in which music might now be heard.⁶² In an essay for Cobbett's *Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* Mackenzie extolled the benefits of being able to experience the intimate delights of chamber compositions without having to endure the discomfort of the concert hall, and went on to outline some of his preferred listening scenarios: "It is easy to believe that he who has not heard a Mozart quartet played in the freshness of dawn has never enjoyed his music to the full, and since it might puzzle even a millionaire to rouse his private quartet at such an hour and make the players sit in the dews beneath his bedroom window, the gramophone becomes indispensable for such an occasion."⁶³ Elsewhere he admitted to enjoying recordings of Schubert's music at twilight and noted that Haydn's Quartet in Eb, op. 64, no. 6, "played to the accompaniment of Siamese cats and kittens at their sport" is especially effective in confounding sorrow.⁶⁴

⁶¹Thomas Mann, *Gesammelte Werke in zehn Bänden* (Berlin: Fischer, 1925), 7: 495–525.

⁶²Compton Mackenzie, "The Gramophone and Chamber Music," in *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, ed. Walter Willson Cobbett (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), I, 488–95. Mackenzie's essay was written for the first edition of this publication in 1929.

⁶³Mackenzie, "The Gramophone and Chamber Music," 489.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 494.

While it is easy to dismiss such reveries—and one can imagine that some readers of the otherwise sober entries in Cobbett's encyclopedia did just that—it is worth dwelling on the ways that the presentation of Brahms's Horn Trio on record re-engaged the symbolic associations of the Romantic horn call that are so artfully explored in the composition. Newly manufactured gramophones from the late 1920s and 1930s no longer featured a protruding horn as a means of amplification, but purchasers of the Busch-Serkin-Brain recording in the 1930s would still have been confronted with the logo of His Master's Voice Gramophone Company—the iconic image of the attentive dog seated next to an old-fashioned gramophone (see plate 5). More significantly, it might also be observed that through the advanced technology of the early twentieth century these disembodied soundings of Brahms's Horn Trio provided an echo of those mysterious horn calls heard and imagined in works of German Romantic literature. In a critique of recording culture, Theodor Adorno famously drew attention to the repeatability of gramophone records and their unmooring of music from both time and place.⁶⁵ In the case of the Horn Trio this situation meant that, somewhat like the horn calls that haunt Franz Sternbald, Brahms's work was freed from its original sounding source. As with the archetypal Romantic horn call that serves as a trigger of memory, the Horn Trio, when encountered in the 1930s in this new technologically mediated form, might address itself directly to a solitary listener's inner self.


CONCLUSION

Brahms's Horn Trio has continued to be reframed and recontextualized by creative and technological innovations since the centenary of the composer's birth in 1933. One obvious strand in the Trio's recent reception history is the array of the new compositions in the same genre written in its wake, most notably György Ligeti's Trio for Violin, Horn, and Piano (1982). Styled as an homage to Brahms, Ligeti's work connects with the affect of the earlier Horn

⁶⁵Theodor W. Adorno, "The Form of the Phonograph Record," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *October* 55 (1990): 58.

Trio through a lamenting finale and offers an even more extensive investigation of the timbral possibilities of the three instruments, including exploration of registral extremes, muted sonorities in the violin, and the use of natural harmonics in the horn.⁶⁶ While this later work might help listeners toward a fresh hearing of Brahms's singular essay in chamber music, arguably no less effective are historical recordings. The version of the trio by Busch, Serkin, and Brain captured in 1933, but still readily accessible today, might help to re-sensitize listeners to the original aesthetic of Brahms's work. With its multi-layered nostalgia, the sense of distance that attends this recording and the heightened awareness of timbre it seems to foster might even serve as a surrogate for the salient Romantic qualities of the composition that familiarity with the Horn Trio and its instrumentation otherwise dilutes.

Detailed consideration of the roles specific listening contexts and performance settings might play in affecting perceptions of Brahms's music are particularly valuable given the high level of canonicity the composer's works have enjoyed since the late decades of the nineteenth century. In an account of the Joachim Quartet concerts in the Berlin *Singakademie*, Beatrix Borchard has suggested that Brahms's chamber works for strings were already presented in this notable quartet series as part of a classical canon during the composer's lifetime.⁶⁷ The public performance of Brahms's chamber works in the concert hall in Vienna and the recording of this music in the early days of electrical recording represent important chapters in the long process of canonization. However, the abiding presence of a work such as the Horn Trio in the chamber music repertoire perhaps also all too easily obscures the very different ways in

which this piece has been encountered—live and technologically mediated, in the concert hall and the home—over the past century and a half. Tracing the rich and varied ways in which the “resonance” of the Romantic horn call might be heard and interpreted, both in terms of its symbolic associations and its sounding presence, is one way of charting the subtle and sometimes surprising shifts in the physiognomy of this enduring work of chamber music. 

Abstract

The high level of canonicity enjoyed by Brahms's chamber music since the final decades of the nineteenth century easily obscures the roles different performance settings, media, and listening practices have played in shaping how individual works are heard and interpreted. In the case of the Trio for Piano, Violin, and Waldhorn (1865), perhaps Brahms's most singular essay in chamber music, the issue seems particularly acute given the culturally specific associations of the Waldhorn and the unusually important role accorded to timbre in this mid-nineteenth-century chamber work.

This article considers the “resonance” of the Waldhorn in the Horn Trio in terms of its symbolic associations and sounding presence. Drawing on early critical assessments of the trio in German-language music periodicals, the investigation explores the Romantic qualities of the work noted by early writers, elucidating the symbolism of the Waldhorn and Brahms's deployment of the contrasting affects and temporalities associated with this instrument in his multi-movement composition. The later sections of the article discuss performances of the trio in relation to two important contexts: the developing institutional norms for public chamber music performance in Vienna during the 1860s, and the domestic reception of the classical chamber canon through gramophone recordings in Britain in the 1920s and 1930s. These episodes illustrate how particular contexts and media might throw into relief different aspects of the Horn Trio's compositional design, while suggesting ways in which the relatively fragile aesthetic at the heart of this work has been reengaged in the technological reception of Brahms's music. Keywords: chamber music, Waldhorn, German Romantic literature, timbre, early recordings

⁶⁶As one scholar has persuasively suggested, Ligeti's horn trio in effect “picks up certain previously disregarded threads” of Brahms's original. See Amy Marie Bauer, *Ligeti's Laments: Nostalgia, Exoticism, and the Absolute* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 161.

⁶⁷Beatrix Borchard, *Stimme und Geige* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), 535–37.