

CERTAIN PHILOSOPHICAL IMPLICATIONS
IN THE LIFE AND WORK OF JOHANNES BRAHMS

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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared
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PREFACE

Recalling the many hours of animated discussions so helpful to a student, it is with a deep sense of gratitude that I acknowledge the counsel and criticism of my friends who have inspired this work, and, more especially, Miss Vere MacNeal, my friend and teacher.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The life of Johannes Brahms, from the days of poverty in his native Hamburg to the days of glorious triumph in Vienna, is rich in sources for philosophic speculation. Every influence, every experience helps to strengthen and ramify the convictions of the revered master's depth and sound, sane approach to living. The contradictions and seeming paradoxes add beauty and drama to the knowledge of an inherently intellectual and artistic genius.

In speculating upon this great man's philosophy of living and creating, the writer of this thesis will not try to prove a point; rather, an attempt will be made to further substantiate the theory that Brahms' music, as influenced by his everyday living, was a gigantic consummation, a spiritual unification, of music prior to 1833. In such a broad statement there must not enter the erroneous conception that Brahms' music encompassed the techniques and efforts of such composers as the polyphonists, Bach and Handel, the pure classicists, Mozart and Haydn, of that unique classicist-romanticist, Beethoven. What Brahms expressly achieved in music was not the styles or

"isms" of any specific predecessors, but a triumphant unity of important trends and structural or architectural achievements. To attempt to prove that Brahms gave anything new to art, to say that he began or ended a period in music, even to hint that he strove for distinction or originality misses the essence of his importance to music history. The man's greatness does not lie in any uniqueness of style or development; he will not live indefinitely to thrill his hearers with a freshness of thought and construction. Johannes Brahms is not great because he established a new vogue or a new idea; he could never have been so trite. Johannes Brahms is great because he did what seemed impossible. He comprehended and brought together the greatest and most complicated in structure and form, blending these elements to form a unique texture, and he commanded his knowledge with the utmost grace and facility. He brought East and West together, as it were, and proved their kinship; he took opposites and made them composites; he brought loose ends together and evolved a pattern of unbelievable symmetry. The two men with whose names he is most closely linked, Bach and Beethoven, gave to the world very distinct musical contributions. Brahms, alone, perhaps, understood the essence of their compositions. "He has gathered up the threads of their dissimilar styles,

and knitted them into one solid fabric."¹ It is not sufficient to say, however, that Brahms' greatness rests in his mastery of the use of musical forms. Indeed, his true greatness lies in his complete freedom of thought, feeling and musical idea within the limits of strictest boundaries. Through free, yet disciplined, creation of thematic developments within the most intricate structures, Brahms liberated, as it were, the future of music.

Glover believes that Brahms' death closed a musical epoch.² But it would not be altogether inconceivable to consider Brahms as having opened, not a new period in music, but wider horizons. He gave to future musicians a goal-- a goal never before dreamed of nor attempted. Music had become under the fervor of the romanticists emotional, passionate, sentimental, and totally without attention to classical form. The classic perfection of the sonata form, the art song, and contrapuntal forms were losing their places in the music of the nineteenth century. But through his noble and dignified determination "he restored to music its feeling for form."³

¹Daniel Gregory Mason, From Grieg to Brahms (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1912), p. 197.

²Gedric Howard Glover, The Term's Music (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1925), pp. 89-90.

³James Hunecker, Mezzotints in Modern Music (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), p. 5.

This thesis, then, will attempt to reveal some of the qualities in the man that were evidenced in his music and life and which resulted in one of the greatest achievements in music history.

CHAPTER II
A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

It is not the purpose of this chapter to relate in detail the ordinary facts of the life of Brahms. Because this thesis will speculate upon the "inner man" --his thoughts and feelings--the events and experiences which will be reviewed will not follow closely the details of his life as such. Rather, the writer of this thesis will attempt to relate certain incidents and experiences to the music which was a product of the man.

Born in the North-German town of Hamburg in 1833, Johannes Brahms knew nothing but poverty during his childhood. "A poor tenement in the red-light district of the old Hanseatic port of Hamburg became the birthplace of Johannes Brahms."¹ In such an atmosphere, the young Brahms might have developed into a man of far less importance, had it not been for a very wise mother and a warmly affectionate home-life.² Notwithstanding his mother's care, it was necessary for the young pianist--who had

¹Robert Haven Schauffler, The Unknown Brahms (New York: Crown Publishers, 1933), p. 33.

²Florence May, The Life of Johannes Brahms (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), Vol. I, p. 53.

shown evidence of his talent at a very early age--to help with the family income. He was awakened at all hours of the night and morning and taken to the most infamous dives of the harbour. There the boy would sit for hours playing, often reading at the same time. It was here that the famous musician was wickedly tantalized and aroused by the Singing Girls; and it was here, during his early adolescence, that his first impressions of women, outside his mother and sister, were formed.¹ The effects that this may possibly have had on the musician's life will be noted elsewhere. Due, also, to the financial straits of his family, Brahms' education was very limited. "He is frequently objectionably rough to his friends, as was Beethoven, and is as unable as was Beethoven to emancipate himself from the defects of a neglected education."²

Some mention should be made to the lineage from which Johannes Brahms sprang. His paternal forebears came from "the North Sea country of moor and fen and dune, from whose characteristic plant, the yellow-flowering broom, or Bram (planta genista), that sturdy family took its name."³ Johann Jacob Brahms, the father of Johannes,

¹Schauffler, op. cit., p. 258.

²E. Markham Lee, Brahms, The Man and His Music (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, no date given), p. 58.

³Schauffler, op. cit., p. 4.

came to Hamburg as an itinerant musician in quest of fame and fortune. He appears to have been a man of "thoroughly upright character, of limited intellect, but great good nature," according to Eduard Marxen, venerable teacher of the young Brahms.¹ Johann Jacob married Christiane Nissen of Hamburg, who was seventeen years his senior and of poor, honest ancestry. According to Marxen, she was "also of an upright character; of no education, it is true, but, as the saying goes, with more mother wit than her husband."² He received from them a rural conservatism and never pretended to be anything but homespun.

At the age of seven, Johannes began his studies with Otto F. W. Gössel, an excellent teacher. For about five years the young Brahms studied earnestly and with an unquenchable thirst with the wise and enthusiastic Gössel. He was then turned over to Eduard Marxen, eminent pianist, composer, and teacher. It is to these two very able teachers that much of the credit goes for the solid foundation of Brahms' musical knowledge. It was through the brilliant Marxen that Brahms came into intimate contact with the works of the classical and early

¹Walter Niemann, Brahms (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1937), p. 5.

²Ibid., p. 6.

romantic schools. At this age Marxen observed in the child an "acute and profoundly thoughtful mind,"¹ and already Johannes would go to his mother with spiritual problems "which continually filled his thoughts."² The importance of this period of study in the musical life of the great man cannot be over estimated. It was at this time that his musical individuality began to flower into productivity. That great industry and devotion which characterises his works received then nourishment and foundation. As Florence May has said of him, "The mistress of Brahms' absorbing passion . . . was from first to last his creative art, to which all else remained secondary."³ Also, at this time was begun "that extreme self-criticism--so rare among composers--which prevented him from giving the world anything unworthy or meretricious."⁴

In 1852, when Brahms was twenty years old and an accomplished though unknown pianist, he made the acquaintance

¹Karl Geiringer, Brahms (Boston: The Houghton Mifflin Co., 1936), p. 33.

²Ibid., p. 39.

³May, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 200. Miss May, an Englishwoman, went to Germany in 1871 to become the pupil of Clara Schumann. She had several lessons from Brahms and cultivated his friendship, which lasted until his death in 1897.

⁴Glover, op. cit., p. 92.

of the Hungarian violinist, Eduard Reményi, and began a concert tour with him. It was while thus engaged that Brahms met Joseph Joachim, the famous young violinist, who was destined to become one of the master's closest friends. Joachim, immediately recognizing the young pianist's genius, gave him letters of introduction to numerous musicians in the country, the most important one being a letter to the great Clara and Robert Schumann. Brahms' compositions and his playing of them so impressed the Schumanns that Robert took up his long-since idle literary pen and wrote an article, "Neue Bahnen," for the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, a leading magazine of the day. Florence May quotes Mason as saying,

It is doubtful if, up to that time, any article had made such a sensation through musical Germany. I remember how utterly the Liszt circle in Weimar were astounded at it. It was at first, no doubt, an obstacle in Brahms' way, but as it resulted in stirring up great rivalry between two opposing parties, it eventually contributed much to his final success.

Schumann had heralded Brahms as the "young eagle" who had come down from the North to lead music into new paths. This sudden success might have completely destroyed the equilibrium of a less intelligent man. Brahms, however,

¹May, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 128. The author does not state the given name of the Mason whom she is quoting.

did not falter in his ambition to attain perfection in composition. The sudden fame which was his made him all the more determined not to disappoint the great man who had so unselfishly and enthusiastically given his blessing. With great wisdom and rare courage for a boy of twenty-one, Johannes Brahms commenced upon a strange and amazing period of his life. For the next four or five years he almost buried himself in the study of Bach and Beethoven and, perhaps also, Haydn and Mozart. When Brahms, the composer, emerged from this period of his artistic development, he gave evidence of a maturity worthy of the "young eagle."

In the fall of 1862 Brahms left Germany and went to the beautiful capital of Austria. He had not intended living in Vienna when he went there in his twenty-ninth year; but the charming city with its ghosts of Schubert, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven enchanted him. At home, the position as conductor of the Hamburg Philharmonic Orchestra, which he so coveted, had been given to someone else. Again in 1868 he was slighted in the selection for the same position, and

it is fairly certain that the mortification caused him by this repeated slight from the musical officialdom of his native city sufficed to lead him to the determination at which he soon afterwards arrived, to settle permanently in Vienna.¹

¹Ibid., Vol. II, p. 70.

However, he had been well-received in Vienna and had made many friends there. It was to be many years before Brahms' true greatness would be recognized by the Viennese musical circles, but his life there was sufficiently rich and warm to influence him greatly. Not until 1866, after his mother's death, did Brahms actually take up permanent residence in Vienna, the city that became his workshop. It was Vienna that heard the premières of some of his greatest works: Variations for Orchestra on a Theme by Haydn in 1873, Second Symphony in 1878, Third Symphony in 1883, many songs, and less-known works.

Brahms' music and character thrived and grew in Vienna. It gradually became his custom to spend his summers touring Italy or vacationing in the south of Germany in quaint, lovely little villages. The great artist worked and played and gave to the world some of the finest music ever composed during his years in Vienna. In 1896 it became apparent that the man was very ill, and in 1897 he died in his modest rooms in Vienna. His health had been perfect until cancer set in. Florence May describes him thus: "his exceptional energy of body and mind made it exhausting work to keep up with him."¹ He was always extremely fond of walking and would rise very early in the mornings.

¹Ibid., p. 221.

Brahms' habits throughout life were simple ones. Always a very early riser, he would have his cup of coffee and then saunter forth into woods or fields before the world was awake. Then to his desk and a whole day's work done by lunch-time, leaving him otherwise free for social or professional duties. Exercise occupied all disengaged afternoons, and he was a great walker, being especially fond of ascending hills and the lower mountains. Many of his meals were taken at restaurants, not necessarily the expensive ones, especially in the earlier years! His lodgings were good but unpretentious He was able to do with little sleep, and would always rise early, whatever hour he had gone to bed.¹

The American History of Music quotes a biographer as saying,

It is not a little refreshing to contemplate a genius who, with all the astonishing amount that he accomplished, yet found time to enjoy his dinner, to bear his part in the company of his friends, and to become the sworn ally of all the children in the neighborhood.²

The physical make-up of Brahms is worthy of short mention. As a child he was small, frail, and fair. As he matured and passed into his twenties he is said to have had the profile of Schiller.³ Albert Dietrich, a close friend of the composer's, describes him as an

interesting and unusual-looking young musician seeming hardly more than a boy in his short gray summer coat, with his high voice and long fair hair Especially fine were his energetic, characteristic mouth, and earnest, deep gaze in which his gifted nature was clearly revealed.⁴

¹Lee, op. cit., p. 55.

²Johannes Brahms, "The American History of Music," ed. W. L. Hubbard (New York: Irving Squire, 1908), Vol. I, p. 97.

³May, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 166.

⁴Ibid., p. 120.

After his fortieth year, the master grew a great beard and his close friend, J. V. Widman, gives an account of his appearance at that time of life.

It may seem absurd when I confess that the splendid, already slightly grizzled beard in which I saw him for the first time, and scarcely recognized him, seemed to me a symbol of the great composer's present personality, now entirely self-adequate and perfectly defined and assured within its own limits. I was so completely dumbfounded, however, by the surprise of seeing the Jupiter head that a question burst from me as to the reason of alteration. "One is taken for an actor or a priest if one is clean shaven," answered Brahms, complacently stroking the glowing beard. He now had a naive satisfaction in his own appearance, and smilingly mentioned that his photograph with beard had been used in the Velhagen and Glasing school book edition to illustrate the Caucasian type. . . .¹

He was very short of stature and extremely self-conscious because of it. In the later years he became stout, though he remained agile. His voice was quite high-pitched until he was in his twenties, at which time Brahms continually practiced vocal exercises to lower his voice and was eventually successful.² There are many interesting pictures of the "Jupiter head" in later life and many quaint silhouettes of the small, dynamic man.

One of Brahms' greatest eccentricities was his manner of dress. The peasant-type attire may have been

¹Ibid., Vol. II, p. 194.

²Ibid., Vol. I, p. 215.

the outcropping of the peasant in his lineage. Schauffler states that his clothes had a homely and rural quality, and that

he wore the same clothes year after year, that he loathed to dress up, and that in both town and country, he often wore a large old greyish-brown plaid shawl, fastened in front by a gigantic safety-pin--an eye-filling phenomenon for the astonished passer-by.¹

He was apparently serenely unconscious of the figure he cut. He came from simple, unaffected folk, and he took no undue recognition of social manners and graces. He was often harsh and even cruelly sarcastic to strangers as well as friends and associates. He had a quick, alert and active mind and a rich wit. If he was impatient with slow thinkers or pseudo-types, it is easily excusable in one of his fire and verve. We certainly would not have him less so.

Thus Brahms' life was a quiet, relatively uneventful one. The glory lies in the magnitude of his creative efforts. Outwardly he was a simple, brusque little old man; inwardly he possessed one of the greatest artistic natures ever revealed. The man understood the artist. The artist needed the man.

¹Schauffler, op. cit., p. 82.

CHAPTER III
FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

To attempt an estimate of the value Brahms derived from the friends he made would be an impossible task. One who speculates on the subject can only hope to reach an approximation, but the investigation should prove significant in an understanding of the man.

His friends entered his life at propitious moments. First, Edward Reményi met the composer in 1852 before the lad of twenty had had any recognition whatever. The Hungarian violinist immediately recognized talent in the pianist and invited him to go on a concert tour with him as his accompanist. Now, Reményi was "eccentric and boastful,"¹ but he could teach the young musician many things. Moreover, it seems that Brahms always held his own during the concerts. There is the incident when the two musicians were confronted in a concert hall one evening with a piano a half-tone flat. The temperamental Reményi refused to tune his violin down, so Brahms unhesitatingly transposed the Beethoven sonata up a half-step and played without music. It was during this performance that Joseph

¹May, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 92.

Joachim, the famous young violinist, first heard Brahms and became interested in him. With the growing friendship for Joachim, the association with Reményi came to an end. The importance of Brahms' tour with Reményi rests on the wealth of Hungarian folk music with which Brahms became thoroughly familiar. These Hungarian tunes and rhythms, appearing later in the famous Hungarian Dances, help constitute some of the most cogent music ever written by the German composer.

Joseph Joachim was born two years earlier than Brahms and was acclaimed by music circles in all of Europe at the age of twelve. When he met the young Johannes, he was an accomplished and veteran musician. Joachim was also a Hungarian, and no doubt added to Brahms' knowledge of Hungarian music. The friendship which began in 1852 was to last with few interruptions till the end of Brahms' life. Leichtentritt says Joachim

. . . . was an incomparably great artist, a personality of the highest type. . . . Though at that time he was already old and had lost a part of his magnificent virtuosity, his spiritual powers were sublime; never since have I met such a combination of manly vigor, culture of taste, purity of style, and demoniac power of expression as he revealed.¹

That a man of such powerful intellect and genius should

¹Hugo Leichtentritt, Music, History and Ideas (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), p. 238.

become intensely interested in Brahms may indicate the things that these two had in common. And that such a relationship should last throughout a lifetime points even more definitely toward an intellectual and artistically mature Brahms.

It was through Joachim that Brahms made the acquaintance of the two people who were to do more in shaping his destiny than, perhaps, all his other friends. These two persons were none other than Robert and Clara Schumann. From his first entrance into their home in 1853 until the end of both their lives, Clara out-living her husband forty years, Brahms continued to learn--to enrich and be enriched--through this great pair of musicians. Not only did this couple individually possess truly great genius, but their courtship and marriage, their home and family reveal one of the most beautiful love stories in history. The example in devotion, grace of mind, and artistic integrity which the Schumann family set before Brahms surely could not have failed to impress him. The love which the young Johannes soon came to feel for Robert and Clara was to be put to test and proven before many years had passed, when Robert lost his sanity.

It is said that Robert Schumann had a ". . . . pure, lofty, and unenvious artist-nature" ¹ and that his ". . . . amiable temper, his tender heart and his conspicuous talents . . ." ² make him one of the greatest of all composers. His deeply passionate and romantic nature must have struck sympathy in the young North-German who came to him in need of guidance and understanding.

The generally accepted judgment of Schumann shows that he was not only a great composer but a brilliant literary writer. In 1833 he had founded a music magazine, Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, and had written numerous critical articles. The tributes paid to his literary works on music and the philosophy of the times are only overshadowed by those tributes accorded to his musical compositions. His criticisms were always kind and never malicious, and he had heralded many a young musician into fame. After many years of literary inactivity, his pen was once more taken up in favor of Brahms. This brilliant and generous genius foresaw the greatness in the young man. The effects resulting from Schumann's help in starting Brahms on his professional career cannot be over-estimated. His greatness would eventually have been

¹"Robert Schumann," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1911), p. 365.

²Ibid., p. 368.

recognized, but the inspiration and pride which the "young eagle" experienced from this honor hastened his progress and gave him the necessary self-confidence.

Great as is the influence of Robert Schumann on the life of Johannes Brahms, it cannot equal in beauty and love the friendship which the North-German master cherished for Clara. The depth and intensity of this friendship may almost be said to have no parallel. Except for one misunderstanding which threatened to disrupt it, the relationship of Clara and Johannes continued until her death in 1896. Throughout their correspondence one is constantly impressed with the genuine sincerity and intimacy with which they confide in each other.¹ Their letters are filled with warmth, devotion, mutual admiration, and frankness; they seem to flow naturally and richly from the depths of both their souls. A great love is revealed.

Many writers have taken issue as to the possibility of a romantic love between these great artists. Karl Geiringer is of the belief that Brahms felt unending romantic love for Clara and ". . ." that the romantic young man devoted the first and greatest love of his life

¹Dr. Berthold Litzmann (ed.), Letters of Clara Schumann and Johannes Brahms (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927).

to this exquisite woman."¹ However, it may be noted elsewhere,

What a compensative friendship his was! This young man, sincere, brusque, loving a joke, ashamed to show tenderness and sentiment, must have found in the mature, richly endowed pianist, an ideal that became a dynamic incentive. Women came and women went, but Clara Schumann remained his friend to the end of her life. The boy lost his heart and loved the woman, but the experience ripened into a platonic affair which was as much a part of his better self as was his devotion to his mother.²

Yet another approach to the love between Brahms and Madame Schumann is that during the period of Schumann's madness, at which time Brahms stood devotedly by her, the love was changed from filial to romantic,

. . . and the passion was mutual. (Clara, after all, was only fourteen years older than Brahms; and Brahms was in many ways a very old young man.) But after the death of Schumann [in 1856] marriage was as impracticable as an affair, before his death, had been unthinkable. "He took leave of the beloved; she kept the friend." But something had been drained from that friend's soul, so that the only other impulse toward marriage which he ever felt . . . subsided and died unspoken.³

The very recent and pertinent biographer of Brahms, Robert Haven Schauffler, believes that ". . . he felt towards her . . . more as a son than as a

¹Geiringer, op. cit., p. 330.

²Marion Bauer and Ethel Peyser, Music through the Ages (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932), p. 319.

³Donald N. Ferguson, A History of Musical Thought (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1939), pp. 418-419.

lover."¹ Schauffler also seems to believe that due partly to Brahms' unhappy experiences as a player in the harbour dives of Hamburg and partly to a possible case of mother fixation, the composer was emotionally too unstable for marriage. That we know Brahms indulged in prostitutes may be ascertained in a remark to Clara Schumann: "Since you have gone I have not been in a single pub, so you can set your mind at rest on that score. My passion is not nearly so great as you imagine."² It is difficult to imagine a man of such great intellect and restraint injuring his emotional balance through over-indulgence.

Brahms himself has said, "I believe that I esteem and revere her really more than I love her. . . . I believe I can never love a girl again; at any rate, I've quite forgotten them all. They merely promise us the heaven which Clara opens."³ However much he loved her, Brahms may have had reasons for never wishing to marry her.

The thought of sacrificing his personal liberty, his freedom from restraint, of adapting himself and surrendering part of his own being for the value of a new and higher unity, was entirely abhorrent to Brahms. Dimly he felt that he would be acting in defiance of his aim in life if he, who had dedicated himself wholly to art, were to belong to another.⁴

¹Schauffler, op. cit., p. 263.

²Litzmann, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 16.

³Schauffler, op. cit., p. 263.

⁴Geiringer, op. cit., pp. 329-330.

Concerning one of Brahms' many courtships after Clara, Florence May makes a very shrewd observation:

Now and afterwards he liked the society of charming girls, and perhaps thought it no harm to enjoy the pleasure of a special friendship without going beyond the consideration of the hour; but it may safely be assumed that he would not, at the outset of his career, have risked the sacrifice of his artistic aims by accepting binding responsibilities, even had his worldly prospects been much more certain than they were. He resolutely put away the visions of happiness with which he had dalled for a time, and turned to the Art that was to maintain supreme sway over his affections to the end of his life.¹

Just as it is a mixture of fears, prejudices, attitudes, and sentiments which prevent one from marrying, so it apparently was with Brahms. It is most generally a series of events or ideas which set up barriers within us, and seldom is it one specific thing. Even though we surmise that Brahms' emotions had been stunted somewhat by a fixation, and that his strongest love was for Clara, it is not possible to deduce that it was any one of these factors that prevented his marrying. It would seem more logical to say that the aforementioned reasons, coupled with his intense devotion to his Art, to which he was truly wedded, were all more or less responsible for the man's final decisions. That he dearly loved home-life and children is to be found in every account of his life. "That one obstacle which prevented him from marrying was

¹May, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 224.

his own fear of the interruption that such a change might cause to his own almost too orderly and methodical habits is fairly certain."¹ When Dr. Eduard Hanslick, noted critic and biographer of Brahms, once suggested marriage to the master, he received this answer, "No, . . . it is as hard to marry as to write an opera. Perhaps--in both--a first success might embolden one to try again; but it wants more courage than mine to make a start."²

Whatever the reasons Brahms had for never taking the final step, his love for Clara Schumann never dimmed. His respect and admiration for her seemed to grow with the years. Their basis of understanding was so completely honest and frank that Clara, concerned about Brahms' unhappiness and loneliness during a period of his life, felt free to write, "I should like to see you more cheerful and contented, for I notice that you so frequently ascribe to others what you should partially at least lay at your own door."³ The master, appreciating such frankness, never became angry nor misunderstood her motives. In fact, as their friendship matured and mellowed, their frankness and personal sacrifice for each other increased.

¹Ibid., Vol. II, p. 172.

²W. H. Hadow, Studies in Modern Music (London: Seeley and Co., 1900), p. 254.

³Litzmann, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 214.

In one of his letters to Clara, Brahms insists that the inspiration for his music could not come from himself alone and that it is to her that he owes many of his beautiful compositions.¹ The mutual benefit which Clara and Johannes received from their relationship can never be summed up in words. That Brahms became a finer and wiser man through the intellectual and artistic Madame Schumann is an understatement. And the young widow certainly found a source of solace and youthful vigor in Brahms. She took pride in helping to fulfill the prophecy of her husband; that Brahms was the most refreshing young artist on the horizon. Her concert programs included many of his works, and she virtually won the English public to his music.

Among the other friends of which the composer had many, was a distinguished professor of surgery, Dr. Theodor Billroth. Dr. Billroth was an ardent lover of music and came to be a devoted disciple of Brahms'. In all accounts of the life of the North-German composer, mention is made of the great intellect and constructive criticism of this surgeon. Brahms came to respect and

¹Ibid., Vol. II, p. 200.

admire him and even asked his advice on matters musical as well as medical.

Another friend was Johann Strauss, the Waltz King. In the refreshing music of this Viennese, Brahms saw much to admire and perhaps envy. He visited often in the Strauss home.

We know what an eccentric Brahms was, how he shut his inmost thoughts away from everybody, and that this increased as he grew older. If he was almost affectionate to Strauss it was certainly due to Adele [Strauss's wife] and the home she conducted.¹

Besides enjoying the pleasant home-life of the Waltz King, Brahms must certainly have reveled in the music heard there, for his own waltzes, in Opus. 39, catch the very spirit of the Viennese.

The significant factor in Brahms' friendships, however, is not the quantity but the quality. Almost without exception his friends seemed either to have been people of rare artistic ability with unusual recognition in their separate professions or unassuming, humble, solidly sane individuals. It is refreshing to observe a man of such indubitable genius gathering about him a host of mentally and morally healthy friends. Florence May says that throughout his life ". . . may be perceived one of the qualities of his personality which

¹H. E. Jacob, Johann Strauss (Richmond: The Greystone Press, 1940), p. 334.

he, perhaps, but little understood--the power of attracting the abiding love of loyal friends."¹ Toward the latter part of the master's life, when his eccentricities were increasing, his friends graciously disregarded his little whims and lovingly spoiled him. They loved the artist; they also loved the man.

But as all of one's acquaintances do not become one's friends, so it was with Brahms. He had many enemies, most of whom he had never seen nor spoken to. The great majority of people who decried him were contemporary musicians who hated him for his position in the music world. The curious factor in all this is that Brahms never voiced his opinions or offered any defense of himself to the public. The seeds of hatred and prejudice against him were sown when Robert Schumann published his article, "Neue Bahnen." Immediately, the music circles took up the cry. The followers of Schumann accepted Brahms with open arms, knowing nothing of his music; the Liszt-Wagner disciples rejected him before they ever became acquainted with his works or heard him play. Before the young musician had an opportunity to make a name for himself, it was already made. The door to fame opened upon him suddenly, revealing all the admiration as well

¹May, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 147.

as all the acid criticism. However, one of the most dominant characteristics of Brahms, as a child and as a man, was complete mastery of himself and a very conservative restraint. Never in the course of his brilliant career did he strike back at his enemies.

One of the greatest, if not the most important, enemy of Brahms' was Richard Wagner. Though they met only once, and though only Wagner was ever out-spoken regarding his opinions, a veritable war raged over the differences in their music during the last half of the nineteenth century. There was no logical reason why the music of these two men should have been opposed. The one used the opera as his medium; the other wrote absolute music. True, the aesthetic and spiritual qualities of their music were vastly different, but that was not the basis for the Brahms-Wagner feud. It was begun and carried on by "party" musicians and was never entered into by Brahms. However, one author has said,

It was a very clever bit of strategy thus to pit Brahms against Wagner, for it gave to him [Brahms] a prominence which otherwise he would never have had. From any other point of view it was palpably absurd to oppose these two men to each other; for there was absolutely no occasion for rivalry between them. They worked in entirely different fields"¹

¹Henry T. Finck, Songs and Song Writers (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 156.

It is of interest to note the reactions that Brahms and Clara Schumann had toward the music of Wagner. Clara, for instance, says,

I heard Lohengrin in Vienna once, and can see only too well how such an opera succeeds in imposing on people. The whole thing is full of romanticism and thrilling situations, so much so indeed that even the musician himself at times forgets the horrible music. Nevertheless, on the whole, I like Lohengrin better than I do Tannhäuser, in which Wagner goes through the whole gamut of abominations. They told me in Prague about the music of Tristan und Isolde. Apparently it is even worse than what has gone before it, if that were possible.¹

Madame Schumann only criticized from an intellectual and artistic viewpoint. After hearing a performance of the Meistersinger, Brahms wrote Clara, "I am not enthusiastic either about this work, or about Wagner in general, but I listen as attentively as possible,--that is to say, as often as I can stand it. I confess that it provokes one to discussion."² This is perhaps as far as the composer went in voicing his opinions. A sound analogy has been drawn: "His relation toward Wagner was as contradictory as his attitude toward innocent, lovely creatures of the fair sex, by whom he was inwardly attracted and outwardly repelled."³ The foregoing statement may be

¹Litzmann, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 100-101.

²Ibid., p. 241.

³Guido Adler, "Johannes Brahms," Musical Quarterly, April, 1933, p. 138.

true in the light of the emphasis upon the sexual element in Wagner's music and the fact that Brahms seemed to fear any emotion that would tend to usurp his tremendous creative drive.

At this point it may prove interesting to review some of the pertinent remarks by James Huneker on the music of Brahms and Wagner.

Wagner was a great fresco painter, handling his brush with furious energy, magnificence and dramatic intensity. Besides his vast, his tremendous scenery, the music of Brahms is all brown, all gray, all darkness, and often small. It is not imposing in the operatic sense, and it reaches results in a vast, slow, even cold blooded manner, compared with the reckless haste of Richard of the Footlights. One is all showy externalization, a seeker after immediate and sensuous effects; the other, one of those reserved, self-contained men who feels deeply and watches and waits. In a word, Wagner is a composer for the theatre, with all that the theatre implies, and sought to divert--and nearly succeeded--the tide of music into theatrical channels.¹

Brahms is a profound thinker; his chilliness is in manner, not matter; he is a thinker, but he also feels sincerely, deeply, and maybe, as Ehlert says, feels with his head and thinks with his heart. He is hardly likely to become popular in this generation, yet he is a very great artist and a great composer.²

Among the other musicians of Brahms' time who opposed his works were Peter Ilyitch Tschaiowsky,

¹James Huneker, Mezzotints in Modern Music (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), pp. 9-10.

²Ibid., p. 11. The author is referring to Louis Ehlert, music-critic and writer.

Edvard Grieg, and Hugo Wolf. Tschaikowsky thought Brahms

. . . . a great musician, even a great master, but cold, nebulous, repellent, pitiably pretentious, coquetting with profundity rather than profound, without poetry, charm, and warmth of feeling, without melodic invention, inspiration and any creative power whatever.¹

Edvard Grieg was another great contemporary of Brahms'. Although the Norwegian could not be counted as an enemy of the Viennese master, yet he could not be considered a devoted listener. He has said,

For me there is, as regards Brahms, no doubt whatever. A landscape, torn asunder by clouds and mists, where I can perceive towns with ruins of old churches and also of Greek temples--that is Brahms! But this placing him absolutely by the side of Bach and Beethoven is for me as un-understandable as the tendency to reduce him to the absurd. The great must be allowed to be great, and a comparison with other great ones is not and never will be permissible.²

Hugo Wolf more openly voiced his dislike of much of Brahms' music because, no doubt, of his alignment with Wagner.

It was not that he [Wolf] disliked or had any prejudice against Brahms; he took a delight in some of his works, especially his chamber music, but he found fault with his symphonies and was shocked by the carelessness of the declamation in his Lieder and, in general, could not bear his want of originality and power, and found him lacking in joy and fullness of life. Above all, he struck at him as being

¹Frederick Niecks, Programme Music (London: Novello and Company, 1906), p. 428.

²David Monrad-Johansen, Edvard Grieg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938), p. 363.

the head of a party that was spitefully opposed to Wagner and Bruckner and all innovators. For all that was retrograde in music in Vienna, and all that was the enemy of liberty and progress in art and criticism, was giving Brahms its detestable support by gathering itself about him and spreading his fame abroad; and though Brahms was really far above his party as an artist and, a man, he had not the courage to break away from it.¹

And so it went--men and parties railed against him, but the reserved, humble little man preferred to remain quietly busy with his art.

¹Romain Rolland, Musicians of Today (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1915), pp. 177-178.

CHAPTER IV

VIENNA: ITS EFFECT ON BRAHMS AND HIS INFLUENCE ON IT

Vienna has been called the "musical headquarters of the world"¹ and justly so, for it has been the home of and the inspiration for many of the world's greatest musicians and music-critics. It is significant that so many of the great children for which Vienna claims a maternal affection came to her through choice and not chance.

The musician and music-lover who came into its orbit felt that here the ground was particularly rich, and the air particularly gracious, for musical development; that here music was not an ornament but the very essence of life itself.²

It is generally agreed that the musical advantages to be found in Vienna prior to 1938 could not be exaggerated. Not only were there to be found excellent teachers, a continuous cycle of concerts and operas, but an atmosphere of friendly, sympathetic reception accorded to new works and new artists. Young, aspiring musicians could be assured of an intelligent judgment of their works. "They probably make their money in other cities, but

¹J. Alexander Mahan, Vienna Yesterday and Today (Vienna: Halm and Goldman, no date given), p. 210.

²Max Graf, "The Death of a Music City," Musical Quarterly, January, 1940.

they win their reputations in Vienna."¹ The musical taste of the Viennese, though not always of the highest type, was developed and highly sensitive. If they were apt to accept and give undue praise to performances of inferior quality, the fact may be attributed more to their easy-going manner of living than to any insincerity in motivation. They were, essentially, "easy-going, pleasing, graceful, communicative, now impudent and impassioned, now tender."² The mild and generally sunny climate no doubt had some influence on the nature of the Viennese. Because of the predominantly warm weather, the people of Vienna loved to take long walks around the parks and into the mountains surrounding the city. As Brahms himself wrote to Clara Schumann, "Nowhere can the amiable and cheerful character of the Viennese be so fully enjoyed as on a stroll through the Prater."³ Too, there were the cafes and restaurants of which Vienna boasted many. In these places an atmosphere of geniality and warmth prevailed. But real distinction was merited through the number of universities, museums, operas, and concerts--the pride of the dilettante Viennese.

¹Mahan, op. cit., p. 114.

²Guido Adler, "Haydn and the Viennese Classical School," Musical Quarterly, April, 1932, p. 191.

³Litzmann, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 45.

Vienna's devotion to music is nothing new, and may be traced back to the time of Moderatus and the Gregorian Chants.¹ Then followed the Minnesingers, the accession of the royal house of Hapsburg, whose patronage of music was destined to be generous and influential, and the gradual infiltration of Celts and Croats. Walther von der Vogelweide, 1165-1230, was, perhaps, the first great lyric poet of the German language who worked and studied in Vienna. He added dignity and beauty to the minnesong, thus becoming the first great son of the Austrian capital. It is difficult to trace with any accuracy the actual events or influences that have made Vienna the great city that it is. Max Graf sums it up thus:

Vienna as a musical capital grew up under a constellation of circumstances that will never be duplicated. It became the great city of music and the center of European culture not simply because the population is musical, or because music is in the earth and in the air, in the rustling of the trees or the surrounding woodlands and in the murmur of the river as it flows past the city to the East. These are at most elements of the natural background for the musical greatness of Vienna. What grew up out of these natural surroundings is the product of history, and what history created in this capital of music was something which, like the splendor and beauty of Venice, could occur only once, just as a great human personality, formed by its own unique train of events, experiences, activities, sufferings and loves, is unique and irreplaceable. There will be music in

¹Mahan, op. cit., p. 215.

Vienna again, but it can never be quite the music that the world loved--the music for which Vienna became the great city of music.¹

The cosmopolitan atmosphere of Vienna has not been paralleled even by her rival sister-city, Paris. This fact may be true largely because of the geographical location of Vienna. The city, standing where the trade route from the Baltic to the Adriatic crosses the Danube, has become the logical center of commerce and shipping. It is a veritable nerve-center, seven railroads converging and connecting Vienna with all central Europe. Situated, thus, in the very heart of Europe, Vienna has the flavor of many countries, but the air of Austria--the one common element. The Italians, the Hungarians, the Croats, the Prussians, the French, and others have contributed their cultures. The folk tunes of these peoples have become blended into songs which we now call Viennese; no country, perhaps, can claim such rich and colorful folk music, as the city of Vienna. And it has found its way into the classics.

The fundamental note of true Viennese classical music is a metaphysical blend of the serious and the gay. Its real starting-point, its native soil, as it were, is Austrian folk-song, or, in its purest form, the music of the Viennese people, a mixture of the original German stock with foreign neighbors.²

¹Graf, op. cit., p. 9.

²Adler, op. cit., p. 194.

A son of one of these foreign neighbors was a young North German, Johannes Brahms, whom Robert Schumann had proclaimed the Messiah of music. He came to Vienna when he was twenty-nine years old, an age that marked the flowering of his maturity. His first concert there on November 16, 1862, was gratifying.

. . . . artist and public found themselves en-rapport. The performer had the infallible instinct of having with him the sympathy of his hearers, and played his best, giving out what was really in him as he had probably never been able to do before his indifferent or sceptical audiences in Germany.¹

The composer and performer in Brahms were in need of such a public and such an atmosphere. Here were romantic inspiration and intellectual stimuli. "The romantic fervour, the romantic tenderness which had filled Brahms in his youth drew ever fresh nourishment from the city on the 'Blue Danube,' and all that was tender and enthusiastic in his art found an echo in the imperial city."² It may have been, also, that the simplicity and the care-free atmosphere appealed to the unconventional in Brahms. Although his romantic ideas were beginning to be shaped by formalism and classicism, he, perhaps, sensed a need for lighter moods and less serious environment. Though his classic nature was yet in need of further development, it was also in danger of becoming morbid, a

¹May, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 7-8.

²Geiringer, op. cit., p. 336.

characteristic of youthful seriousness. Brahms may have realized this, even unconsciously, and therefore chose to remain in the great music city. For in Vienna, as nowhere else, existed a rich source of classic power with a balance of opportunities to learn the "Volkslied." And with his great intellect and sensitivity Brahms hit his musical stride from the inspiration he found in Vienna. "It is in his finest works that heart and mind, inspiration and elaboration, freedom and restraint are most perfectly balanced. That even the ageing master was able to achieve this balance may partly be due to the influence of his adopted home, Vienna."¹

Whatever the reasons for Brahms' settling in Vienna, there was one attraction, the importance of which we cannot deny. The wealth of folk melodies to be found in Vienna must have intrigued and delighted the master. His works are filled with the richness of folk songs. His love for them was natural and innate. Brahms, the man, was plebian through and through. He never pretended otherwise and we are content that it was so. When we recognize the fact we may understand "his preference for Vienna as a permanent residence, that being perhaps the spot in all Europe most favourable for study of 'Volkslied.'"²

¹Ibid., pp. 335-336.

²Evans, Johannes Brahms, Handbook to the Vocal Works, p. 13.

Along with the folk songs, Brahms became familiar with the waltzes of Johann Strauss and others. It is not surprising, then, to find some of his compositions, those waltzes written in 1865, for instance, conforming closely to Viennese taste.¹

But who could deny the influence that such a man might have on a city such as Vienna? His effect upon it was serious yet happy, restrained yet free, dignified yet sympathetic. In 1871, after nine years of life in Vienna, Brahms' more serious and gigantic works still were not accepted there without reserve.

He had hoped to purge Viennese taste of its love for trumpery and dross, and again he had been defeated. But now he would have to resign himself. They had not broken his strength. Of that he was sure. That strength, he knew, they would have to recognize, even if it took years.²

It is not necessary to know certainly whether the master went to Vienna, or remained there, to educate the Viennese in classical taste. If that was his purpose, and his works were composed with that in mind (as it seems quite improbable), then it is well that he had such a motivation, judging from the fruits of his labors. What Brahms may have done artistically had he not lived in Vienna is a

¹Jacob, op. cit., p. 334.

²David Ewen and Frederic Ewen, Musical Vienna (New York: Whittlesey House, 1939), p. 230.

matter of speculation. But it can readily be assumed that the flavor which the great city gave to his music, the changes it made in his life, aided in giving to the world some of the most superb creations ever conceived in the valley of the Danube.

CHAPTER V

CONDITIONS SURROUNDING BRAHMS

The nineteenth century was pregnant with changes and growth. The world was witnessing a gigantic swing of the philosophic and artistic pendulum. Science was gushing forth in geysers of discoveries; religion was fighting nobly to retain her position; the arts were disrupting their former standards; philosophy was screaming for the liberation of the individual; everywhere the old was giving place to the new. And of literature:

After classicism, romanticism; after romanticism, realism; after realism, symbolism; after symbolism, all the isms in the world; . . . each of these movements in the history of literature had causes in the events and character of the time; each was due not to a reaction against the one before, but to the reflection of changes in the social and intellectual background of the age. Classicism was part of aristocracy, romanticism was the compensation of the rising bourgeoisie, and realism was the literary expression of triumphant science, the effort of literature to see the world with the objectivity of physics and chemistry.¹

Robert Browning has summed up the spirit of the romantic movement in a stanza of his poem, "Old Pictures in Florence":

On which I concluded, that the early painters,
To cries of "Greek art and what more wish you?"
Replied, "To become now self-acquainters,
And paint man, man, whatever the issue!

¹Will Durant, Great Men of Literature (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1931), p. 227.

Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
 New fears aggrandize the rags and tatters;
 To bring the invisible full into play!
 Let the visible go to the dogs--what matters?1

The music of the nineteenth century followed with ardent enthusiasm the revolution and evolution taking place in her sister arts and science. The idea of evolution expressed itself in music through the sonata form as Beethoven conceived it. With Beethoven came the birth of the romantic movement in music. The restlessness and searching that characterized the nineteenth century were evident in music. "Its very essence is dynamic. In it are constant flux, progression, change from one idea or mood to another."² As the pursuit of logic and science became more intensified, music became more emotional and sensual.

Some of the men who contributed conspicuously to the flow of ideas in the nineteenth century were Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Santayana, Bergson, Kant, Hegel, Herbert Spencer, Darwin, Helmholtz, Spitta, Ambros, Goethe, Schiller, Tagore, E. T. A. Hoffman, Heine, Jean Paul among many. Such a man as Hoffman was beginning to see the mystical in music.

¹Mason, op. cit., p. 191.

²Leichtentritt, op. cit., p. 218.

There are moments--especially when I have read much in the scores of the great Sebastian Bach --when the musical proportions of numbers, nay, even the mystic rules of counterpoint evoke an interior horror. Music!--with a mysterious awe, even fear I call you! Thou in sound expressed Sanskritta of nature!¹

Kant defined music as the ". . . art of the beautiful play of emotions."² To Kant music was purely an aesthetic experience with nothing of the intellectual or contemplative in it. Jean Paul, who was the great leader of German Romanticism, has said,

I have never been able to discover more than three ways of becoming, if not happy, at least happier. The first way of reaching the heights is to penetrate so far beyond the clouds of life that you see the wolves' dens, the charnel-houses and the lightning conductors far below you, diminished to the proportions of a miniature Dutch garden. The second is to fall right down into this garden, and there to nestle so cosily into a furrow that when you peer out of your warm lark's nest you see nothing of the dens, charnel-houses, and lightning conductors, but only the ears of corn, each of which forms a tree for the nesting-bird, a shelter from the sun and rain. Finally, the third, which I think both the hardest and the wisest, is to practice the two methods alternately.³

Another great man in Germany at this time was Heine, who

. . . sought, even consciously, to mould the modern emotional spirit into classic forms. He wrought his art simply and lucidly, the aspirations

¹Ibid., p. 220.

²Ibid., p. 200.

³Dr. Karl Storck, The Letters of Robert Schumann (London: John Murray, 1907), p. 4 (Introduction).

that pervade it are everywhere sensuous, and yet it recalls oftener the turbulent temper of Catullus than any serenest ancient spirit.¹

Into such a world of emotional and intellectual conflict was born Johannes Brahms, the man who was to restore music to order after chaos. What must have been the inner struggle in the mind of such a classic thinker? How did he manage to survive the frustration about him? Or was he necessarily influenced by the conditions of his day? We can only turn to a man's works, that highest expression of individualism, for possible influences. First of all, we note that all of Brahms' works, though they are based upon a symmetrical and organic development, abound in depth of emotion and character. All the fire and passion, all the languor and melancholy, all the ecstatic joy and youthful vigor of the romanticists are to be found in the music of this great composer. The conflicts, the triumphs, the defeats--all are there. But they are distinguished from the romanticists' music in that they express all that and yet adhere to the strictest rules of structure. In fact, it is impossible to say that although Brahms experienced the same intense emotions of the romanticists, yet he had

¹Havelock Ellis, The New Spirit (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), p. 68.

nothing of the romanticist in him. For his feelings were restrained and directed into channels, whereas theirs were left to soar wildly and without reason, "But the non-sensual and supersensual found its fulfillment in Brahms through a conjunction of the counterweight of the large form inherited from Bach and Beethoven with the romantic element."¹

At this point it may be well to examine briefly the literary tastes of the great composer. That he was a diligent reader is noted in all his biographies. Everywhere, mention is made of his pride in the collection of books and manuscripts.

But although he had a passion, deep-rooted and perhaps inherited from a paternal relative, for acquiring musical and literary works, ancient and modern, collecting was for him always a means, never an end.²

Upon Brahms' death, his entire library of which he was so proud, was turned over to the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, the logical home for his famous works. Mention is also often made of the intensity of Brahms' reading. He could spend days of almost continual reading

¹Adolff Weissmann, "Richard Wagner: Constructive and Destructive," Musical Quarterly, January, 1925, p. 147.

²Karl Geiringer, "Brahms as a Reader and Collector," Musical Quarterly, April, 1933, p. 159.

and study without showing the slightest mental or physical fatigue. "Brahms was a fanatic of learning."¹

His choice in books and reading matter was not restricted to music. In fact, it may be possible to surmise that the majority of material Brahms read was in other fields about which he was eager to learn. The lack of formal education that Brahms felt and suffered was certainly compensated by the enormous quantity of reading throughout his life. "The history of civilization, and more especially art, were his pet subjects, and in these fields he possessed the best works of his time . . .

² After Robert Schumann's death, it became Brahms' express duty to sort and arrange the library of the great romantic composer. For many months the young Brahms immured himself in the great library, spending more time reading than sorting. Schumann, who was one of the first scholarly and erudite composers, and, whose father had owned a bookstore, had collected an enormous library of very valuable books. Brahms did not wait long to acquire a library of his own. After reviewing the types of books which were left at his death, Walter Niemann says,

¹Ibid., p. 168.

²Ibid., p. 160.

We can see that in the sphere of literature, too, Brahms did not belie his nature, which was conservative to the core. What he asked of all his books was that which is positive, intellectual, beautiful in form, clear, and plastic. Even in literature of a primarily entertaining and humorous order he demanded as strong, instructive, intellectual substratum. At the same time Brahms was thoroughly acquainted with the modern literature of his day

. . . ¹

¹Nieman, op. cit., p. 165.

CHAPTER VI

PHILOSOPHICAL AND AESTHETIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED WORKS

Analysis, according to Webster, may be a "synopsis." Or it may be "a resolution of a compound into its constituent parts." This chapter will only attempt a "synopsis" of the aesthetic and philosophic elements in some of the more important works of Johannes Brahms. A purely technical analysis would be insufficient and unrelated to the purpose. Since such broad terms as aesthetic, philosophic, beautiful, emotional, graceful, and charming, are based upon subjective criterion, nothing in this chapter is intended as absolute or even complete. Reactions and criticisms of some of the greatest music critics and musicians will be referred to as an authoritative source for implications.

"Brahms reminds one of those mediaeval architects whose life was a prayer in marble" ¹ "He was a living reproach to the haste of a superficial generation. Whatever he wrought he wrought in bronze and for time, not for the hour. He restored to music its feeling for form." ² In every work of the master, whether it be

¹Huneker, op. cit., p. 5.

²Ibid.

for voice or instrument, there is evidence of a methodological development of themes and musical ideas. His works "grow in importance, beauty, and profundity."¹ But it has often been asserted, that the orchestral music of Brahms is muddy and too complicated for clarity. It may be suggested that the music is more subtle than muddy; that the countless little weavings and interweavings are too intricate and artful to be easily comprehended. The sobriety of Brahms' music has often been attacked as excessive and without contrast. Daniel Gregory Mason clarifies the matter somewhat by suggesting that, "Austere and sombre as Brahms' scoring generally is, it may be held that so it should be to be in keeping with the musical conception."² It is this very austerity and sombreness, which is so spacious to the imagination, that makes all the works of the composer difficult to comprehend. Nothing that is worthwhile comes easily and without study. And so it is with Brahms' music.

One of the greatest subjects of controversy regarding the music of Brahms is the question centering around programme music and programme ideas. It is obvious

¹John Foulds, Music Today (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1934), p. 282.

²Mason, op. cit., p. 199.

that the great master used no programme titles nor notes in the publication of his works. However, it is entirely possible that a composer may write absolute music conceived with programme ideas. Frederick Niecks asserts that Brahms used definite and concrete ideas when composing, thus allowing, in a measure, the term programme with reference to his works.¹ Such a theory, however, does not carry much weight when one reads, "The ideas which a composer expresses are mainly and primarily of a musical nature."² It is neither possible to recreate a feeling nor the subject involved, but merely the power or intensity contained within the feeling. Nowhere in the music of Brahms is it possible to find imitation of nature or life.

Some of the pieces have certainly grown up around the fancies of a legend or a poem. In these we may hear the weird footsteps of the spirit world, the dread strike of the bell of fate, the catastrophe of human lives. In no case, however, except in the one mentioned, [the thirty short pianoforte pieces of Op. 76] are the several works to be taken as having been associated with this or that in the mind of the composer.³

Any sort of analysis, as the one just quoted, can only be a subjective and personal opinion unless verified by the

¹Frederick Niecks, Programme Music (London: Novello and Company, 1906), p. 458.

²Eduard Hanslick, The Beautiful in Music (London: Novello and Company, 1891), p. 36.

³May, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 257.

composer himself. It seems to resolve, then that, without programme notes attached to music, there may be no positive association between the music and the composer's life. There is, of course, a definite association between an artist's work and his philosophical or spiritual nature. But the reactions of individuals to certain pieces of music is personal, based upon personal experiences; the music becomes what he wills it. Therefore, the conclusion reached by the writer of this thesis is that the music of Johannes Brahms is absolute music. Even in the music with words, there is the element of detached, though more personal, creative inspiration.

The vocal music of Brahms is not as important in an analysis of this type as the instrumental music. The very fact that vocal music must bend its will to that of the words is evidence in itself. But aside from the fact that vocal music cannot express completely the composer himself, there are many interesting points to be noted. The selection of texts, the type of settings used, the artistic interpretations give an intimate glimpse of the man in his more romantic moments. Again and again the poems of the songs reveal a longing for love, a sadness of heart, a terrible loneliness. The music heightens the intensity of those feelings. In the songs of Brahms, as in none of his other works, there is a romantic element--

the use of strophic form, romantic subjects, and more poetic tendencies. Even in the songs of jovial nature, there is never a definite departure from the serious and introspective. When the master turned to the Scriptures for texts there is even then a fatalistic choice of words. The great "Ein Deutsches Requiem" is perhaps Brahms' finest vocal work, secular or sacred. Much speculation has been made as to the genuine religious quality in this and other works. Of his religious beliefs much will be mentioned later. But it may be well to note what Florence May has to say concerning the "Requiem":

Whoever has studied Brahms' life and works with sympathetic insight will be aware that the suggestion of love triumphant runs through both like a continuous silver thread, and it is open to those who choose, to accept this as indicative of a faith dwelling within him, which was none the less fruitful for good because it knew nothing of the dogma of the Churches.¹

The work, as compared with the Requiems of Mozart and Verdi, seems to have as much or more real religious feeling; but it is immature, unformed, unschooled. One critic believes that, "we can hardly exaggerate the completeness and intensity of his poetic insight into the words he has chosen, and the depth of the musical symbolism of his setting."² It may be possible that in a religious sense

¹Ibid., p. 64.

²Donald Francis Tovey, Essays in Musical Analysis, Vol. V, Vocal Works. (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 212.

Brahms used a certain amount of musical symbolism in his "Requiem." Many critics are convinced of the deep religious philosophy contained in the "Requiem," and W. H. Hadow considers it entirely too religious and noble for analysis.¹

Another great vocal work of Brahms' is the "Schicksalslied." This work has been accused, along with others, of showing evidence of the composer's morbid outlook. But it may be found elsewhere that "if it be the function of the artist to be faithful to loveliness, then here, at least, is a loyalty that has kept its faith unsullied."²

The saner judgment of such works which now prevails enables us to see that the character formerly ascribed to them is incorrect, for they are really devoted, as Hadow again says, to "that most tremendous of all contrasts--the pure, untroubled serenity of Heaven, the agonies and failures of a baffled humanity and the message of peace, tender, pitying, consolatory, which returns at last to veil the wreck of man's broken aspirations." The more we study them the more we find that their theme, far from being morbid, is one in every way calculated to draw into requisition the very highest attributes of art.³

The thoughts of the dignity of man, his eternal destiny, and the pitiful struggles of humanity expressed in the

¹W. H. Hadow, Studies in Modern Music (London: Seeley and Company, 1900), p. 260.

²Evans, Handbook to the Vocal Works, op. cit., p. 239. The author is quoting W. H. Hadow.

³Ibid., p. 240.

poetry are conscientiously given their proper setting in music. The postlude, however, which is purely orchestral, seems to intone faith and charity and eternal peace. "He regarded it as not merely accessory, but as being, in a sense, the most important part of his composition."¹

Brahms was a fervently patriotic German, his hero being Bismarck. So the war of 1870 in which the German army made such brilliant triumphs was a natural source of inspiration for the great German master. He composed and dedicated to the fallen soldiers of the war of 1870 a "Triumphlied," choosing a text from the Bible, which "at once raised the scope of his work to a level above that of an ordinary Te Deum for victory in war . . ."² There is a magnificence and a strength about this work that ranks it amongst his finest compositions.

Brahms wrote almost two hundred songs, nearly all of which are based upon folk-songs or an imitation of them. They are not easily sung, nor are they easily understood by the hasty student of Lieder. The accompaniments, the words, and the vocal lines are always in perfect balance. An outstanding example, which will no doubt live indefinitely as one of the greatest in all

¹May, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 105.

²Ibid., p. 99.

art-song literature, is "Von Ewiger Liebe." But to cite one song in preference to many others is unjust. Brahms insisted that there be melody and form in every measure he wrote, the result being some of the finest songs ever composed.

The energy of imagination dwelling within Brahms' songs is often the more striking from its concentration within the short form preferred by the composer in the majority of instances. In it, as time went on, he gave vivid expression to thoughts wistful or bright, playful or sombre, naive or deeply pondered; and whilst his lyrics are especially characterized by the clear shaping of the song-melody, and the distinctness of the harmonious foundations upon which it rests, many of them derive an added distinction from a quiet significance in the accompaniment, which, whilst helping the musical representation of a poetic idea, never embarrasses the voice.¹

Brahms, then, followed in the paths of his two great predecessors, Schubert and Schumann.

The chamber music of Brahms is far more significant and beautiful than many persons have heretofore believed. There is a wealth of it, and it is not heard often. It is the most intimate expression of the man. He loved to play his chamber music more than his compositions in other fields, probably because whenever he did so he was playing with a group of intimate and sympathetic friends. The accounts of evenings filled to over-flowing with soirées of chamber music among close

¹Ibid., Vol. I, p. 145.

friends are entirely refreshing. It is chamber music which "offers the widest field for the idealist and the composer whose emotions are controlled by intellect . . .

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There is not one piece of chamber music in all of Brahms' works that is mediocre or unworthy of his name. He carefully edited his compositions and destroyed countless numbers of partially completed works. His scrupulous censorship has resulted in a wealth of publications, all of which are finished products of a great mind. His chamber music, though spontaneous and intimate, bears the mark of careful workmanship.

These works are conspicuous for the completeness of their musical organism, the originality, profundity, and artistic reticence of their style, the deep learning with which they treat modern thoughts in a revised polyphony, and the breadth of their intellectual earnestness.²

The purity of music from a few instruments, such as the number used in a string quartet or quintet, has a singular aesthetic value. Not only is chamber music most difficult to write, but it is the richest in sheer beauty of color and emotional content, in the realm of the abstract
". . . . Brahms, the whole trend of whose ideas lay

¹Thomas F. Dunhill, Chamber Music - A Treatise for Students (London: Macmillan and Company, 1913), p. 299.

²W. J. Henderson, How Music Developed (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1898), p. 197.

in the direction of the thoughtful and intellectual phase of art, was one of the greatest writers of chamber music the world has ever seen."¹

Among the many compositions for orchestra and solo instruments are the violin concerto and double concerto for violin and violincello. Florence May quotes A. Dörfel's remarks concerning the violin concerto:

The originality of the spirit which inspires the whole, the firm organic structure in which it is displayed, the warmth which streams from it, animating the work with joy and light--it cannot be otherwise--the concerto must be the fruit of the composer's latest and, as we believe, happiest experiences.²

The concerto seems to abound in hearty good cheer, in glorious peace, in manly affection, and tender grace. It is, throughout, an expression of deepest wisdom and gladness. The charm of this concerto may be likened to that of the second symphony, which was first performed only a little more than a year before the appearance of the Violin Concerto in D Major. It was not until eight years later that the great composer was to give to the world his gigantic double concerto, which reveals so clearly the power of construction, the logical unity, and the brilliant thematic developments. The only

¹Dunhill, op. cit., p. 297.

²May, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 178.

criticism of this concerto, like the criticism against the other concertos, is that it does not allow the solo instruments enough ascension over the orchestra. However, it may have been Brahms' express purpose to create a perfect blend and balance rather than a spectacle of virtuosity.

Brahms was a skilled pianist. The instrument for which he felt the greatest affinity, perhaps, was the piano. In the piano works, as in all his works, Brahms was careful in letting nothing go out to the public that was not carefully edited and refined. The "anti-Brahmins" have had much to say concerning the pianistic qualities of the piano works. Many noted critics have taken stand against the music and railed against it. But the compositions still occupy a prominent place in the concerts of the world's greatest artists. And the pieces are growing in popularity, paradoxical as it may seem. There is still much, however, to be found and exploited in them. There are still "new worlds" to be explored in all of Brahms' music, more especially in the piano music. For in them he created a new and captivating style. They seem unpianistic to those who are unable to meet the technical demands and to those who cannot fathom the depths of their intellectuality.

Brahms wrote all types of piano music, from the strictest contrapuntal to the freest rhapsodic. In the Rhapsodies, the Ballads, the Capriccios, and the Intermezzi there is abandon with dignity, powerful emotion, and a sweet longing. In them is hidden fire that the composer was wont to express, though profundity, also, is nonetheless present in them. But in the many variations there is the captain of his soul, the intellectual giant of music, the master builder and creator. After an intelligent performance of the Handel Theme and Twenty-Five Variations, there are no words that would not be superlative. Somehow in those particular variations is the ideal balance of emotion, intellect, and musicianship. But, again, to cite one composition in preference to others is unjust. The piano music of Brahms will continue its triumphal march through the years and will imprint itself indelibly on the hearts of all intelligent listeners.

The last works to be mentioned in this thesis are the four symphonies of Brahms. It is with no little difficulty that the symphonic music is approached, for the content and implications are tremendous and beyond accurate aggregation. The master worked with his first symphony for more than ten years before he allowed it to be published. Brahms was forty-three years old when the

work was finally completed. Haydn wrote his first symphony when he was twenty-three. Mozart composed his first symphony when he was eight. The great Beethoven had written his first symphony before he was thirty. And Schubert's first symphony was written before he was seventeen. But the sure-footed Brahms did not wish his first symphony to be an experiment in the form. He would produce something satisfying to his taste or nothing at all. As a result the world was modestly presented one of the greatest masterpieces of all time. In workmanship, power, and beauty it is unsurpassed. If we can agree that, "Technic is in the musician what character is in the man,"¹ then in this one symphony alone there is enough to tell us about the man Brahms.

Few who listen with quickened ears to an adequate performance of the C Minor Symphony can be in doubt that whilst in outward form and manner of construction it may be regarded as at once the epitome and the latest result of the past history of classical instrumental art, it is in spirit representative of its own time and even anticipatory of the future; that is not only reflects the soul of the musician, poet, and philosopher, but is suggestive of the higher vision of the prophet.²

From the first wrenching chords to the last full-throated notes there is the conflict of a man's life; there is all

¹Mason, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

²May, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 148.

the longing and loneliness and pathos of humanity. But before the work is done, before we are allowed to carry away with us the terrible truth, there falls upon our ears the strains of a chorale--a chorale so deeply imbued with inner peace, serenity, and faith, that nothing is left wanting. When the music has stopped and there is left only the ringing in our ears, we realize that we have just heard the intimate story of a great man's soul. We do not question; we do not wish to. We are humble; we are grateful; we are exalted. To label this work "Beethoven's Tenth" is an injustice to both Beethoven and Brahms. It is too personal to belong to another. Beethoven did not have the same thoughts nor the same feelings. Brahms alone could have written it. If we are wise, we do not question the voice of God, nor the creations of His gifted children.

Whereas the first symphony of Brahms may be called "epic" in its grandeur, the Second Symphony in D Major may be called an idyll because of the sincere feeling of happiness and tender grace.¹ The profound influence that Brahms felt all his life from Nature is evident in this work.

It may be taken as a kind of pastoral symphony--without the literalness of Beethoven's in

¹Ibid., p. 165.

the representation of country scenes, but with a similar vividness in its suggestion of the well-being that comes from true contact with nature.¹

The peasant in Brahms, the lonely little bachelor who loved to take early morning walks, the jovial little man who gave goodies to the poor children is the man in this symphony. There is relaxed contentment and a triumphant peace that logically follows the purging elements of the first symphony.

The third symphony of Brahms is in F Major and is a living testament to his exultant spirit.

Nothing of the quiescent autumn mood which we have observed in the master's chamber music of this period is to be traced in either of his symphonies, and the third, like its companions, represents him in the zenith of his energies, working happily in the consciousness of his absolute command over the resources of his art. Whether it be judged by its effect as an entire work or studied movement by movement, whether each movement be listened to as a whole or analyzed into its component parts, all is found to be without halt of inspiration or flaw in workmanship. Each theme is striking and pregnant, and, though contrasting with what precedes it, seems to belong inevitably to the movement and place in which it occurs, whilst the development of the thematic material is so masterly that to speak of admiring it seems almost ridiculous.²

The fourth and last symphony by Brahms is closely akin to the first symphony. It is architectonic and impassioned. The reception of the fourth was unanimous.

¹Ferguson, op. cit., p. 423.

²May, op. cit., pp. 208-209.

At its first performance in Meiningen, the hall rocked with applause and appreciation. For the first time the world had listened for the hidden meanings; and they were rewarded. This work has often been referred to as the greatest of Brahms' four massive symphonies, and one writer speaks of it as ". . . the wonderful E minor symphony, under whose quiet exterior the hearer at length comes to find more suggestion of mature feeling than is perhaps to be found in any other symphony."¹

It should be clearly understood that the contents of this chapter have not been intended to state anything "new." The purpose has been to emphasize certain characteristics of the man and his music that would be pertinent to the objectives of this thesis. Brahms is, perhaps, one of the most difficult men to study, not only because of the great profundity and intellectuality of his music, but also because of his reticent and shy nature. He did not write nor conduct himself for the benefit of an adoring public. He had a natural antipathy for publicity, fame, and fortune. His life was secluded and relatively uneventful. It is fortunate that he never knew the speed and superficiality of the mechanical age. He still had time for reflection.

¹Ferguson, op. cit., p. 424.

Examining the symphonic works for fraternal characteristics, we note a distinctly structural unity. He followed the key "plan [of movements] developed by Haydn, varied but little by Mozart and carried several stages further by Beethoven, Schubert, and Mendelssohn."¹ The aesthetic reaction inspired by the choice of keys is one of emotional unity. Harmonically, Brahms is not trite; he did not consistently use concordant harmonies. His transference of themes is another rich source of color peculiar to the four symphonies as well as all his works. The scherzo has been almost discarded by Brahms. In its place is a movement of more serious nature.

"There are some of us who prefer his lean to other composer's fat."² No other expression could so aptly sum up the merits of Brahms in so few words. Brahms is Pythagorean; we cannot hear all of the message.

¹Julius Harrison, Brahms and His Four Symphonies (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1939), p. 18.

²Philip H. Goepf, Symphonies and Their Meaning (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1902), p. 323.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS: THE MAN AND THE ARTIST

"The example of a noble man tends to make others noble, and the picture of a noble mind such as is presented in his work helps so to raise others towards his level that the influence of his music is of the very highest value to art."¹ No art is of any value unless it has the tendency to lift Man above mere earthly joys and to give him a greater appreciation of the beauties that God has bestowed upon Man. Thus, music that arouses men to wickedness and base behavior has no art value and appeals only to the lowest in men. Music that springs from the depths of a great soul and a healthy mind is important in the shaping of Man's destiny. The music of Brahms is both simple and profound in its sincerity. There is a universal appeal to goodness in his every work.

In art, as in every other phase of life, there has come to be a preponderance of means over end. Often, men lose sight of the end by the blinding effort to grasp the means. There is no end in music--social, philosophic,

¹Evans, Handbook to the Pianoforte Music of Brahms, op. cit., p. 3. The author is quoting Sir Hubert H. Parry.

religious, nor purely artistic--save one: that something within the composer which drives him onward toward the true, the good, and the beautiful. It is his master, his fate. The musician answers its relentless urgings. It gives him no peace, but he is happy in his work. It becomes everything to him, and the man becomes almost self-sufficient. Thus, the Platonist Brahms found his life almost completely filled with music. His life was lonely, however, for he missed the normal relationships of marriage and children. But he could not swerve from his complete devotion to his art. Brahms himself has said that the muse of music is a jealous patroness,¹ perhaps, meaning that she would not permit another love in his heart. It was necessary that he live within himself so that he might understand the workings of his soul. Anyone living within himself becomes something of an egoist. And all great creative artists are, by virtue of their own faith in their powers, egoistical. So it was with Brahms. But even the greatest egoist will admit confusion and loneliness at times. Brahms only admitted it in his music.

It would seem, then, that music is an outward expression of an inward feeling. It springs from the

¹Schauffler, op. cit., p. 178.

eternal and is offered back to it. It becomes an offering, whether conscious or sub-conscious, to the Supreme Creator of all beauty. It is the response in a man's soul to the Force in the universe which endowed him with his gift. Only a few men have been aware of this spark. Brahms was one of them.

But let us review briefly the details of his life and work. It may be recalled that his early life was one of direst poverty and that his parents were humble and honest. He began a rigid study of counterpoint and the classic masters which continued extensively throughout his life. The classical vein in him was continually inoculated. His life was enriched by the intimate friendships with Robert and Clara Schumann, with Joseph Joachim, and with Dr. Theodore Billroth. He never married, no doubt because the artist in him was stronger than the man in him. His reserve and reticence were a shield to protect something inside him which was too delicate for words. One result of his reserve was an increasing number of eccentricities which were acquired, in the psychological sense of the word, but were not intentional. Vienna, his home for the last thirty-five years of his life, allowed him the utmost personal and artistic freedom; life in Vienna was quiet, though full, stimulating, and inspirational. The changes going on about him every

day may have influenced him, but he never gave voice to his sentiments.

Brahms was well-versed in the Scriptures and knew something of the Lutheran Church. But his doctrinal associations end there. It is not clear just how much the young Johannes attended church or that he ever did. If he was a Churchman during his youth, it is not known when he first broke away from his beliefs. What is important is that he never found it in his heart to ally himself with any Church. The few works which he wrote that may be called religious, in any sense of the word, have a decidedly secular flavor. His religion, which was obviously personal, was immature and abstract, although he was spiritually aristocratic. He worshipped Nature and never missed an opportunity to get closer to it. Much that he wrote was inspired by scenic beauty around him. He probably considered himself a child of Nature, worshipping at her shrine and obeying her call. Thus, we may call him a Nature Mystic or a Deist. Certainly, his life was filled with kindly and benevolent deeds. Was he not, also, something of a humanitarian?

The sensuous quality of Brahms' music is unmistakable. Feeling in him was strong because it was suppressed. Like most sensitive souls, he found the world hard and distasteful and created his own reality through

his music. It was while composing that he was happiest. Also, much of his time was spent in reading, idly fingering the keyboard, and entering into intellectual and artistic discussions during which he held his own. He was a thinker--in the abstract. Profundity, seriousness, and mellowness are the qualities of his music and his thinking. But he also created idealistically. His was the heart of a child; his was the wisdom of the naive. Perhaps Brahms was something of a Victorian, priding himself somewhat on his intellect, yet taking refuge from thinking in romantic sentiment and feeling. His songs seem to indicate such refuge. He lived in the time of "escapists," who manifest a sort of super-imposed optimism. Although Brahms faced facts, he naturally wished to shrink from them. He had his music, his books, and his select friends. He had his long walks, the little children who loved him. These were a solace and a comfort for a lonely man.

This much one may say with reasonable certainty: Brahms' music is honest. He spoke honestly and candidly in the only means at his command--his music. He was a democrat in his art, just as the Greeks were democrats. Brahms attempted to make Man aspire to something higher; he did not seek Man at convenient levels. Thus, his music wears well and will always be fresh.

To be of the earth and yet to strike the note of sublimity Such music is far beyond that which is merely sensuous, brilliantly descriptive, or even dramatically characteristic. Much of present day music excites and thrills but does not exalt. Brahms, in his great moments, lifts us high above the earth.¹

¹Spalding, op. cit., p. 237.

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