

THE JUILLIARD SCHOOL

BRAHMS' HORN TRIO:  
BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS FOR PERFORMERS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper contains comprehensive historical information about, and a substantial analysis of, Brahms' Horn Trio in Eb, opus 40. The information herein is intended for performers, and therefore contains many specific performance suggestions.

The first two chapters after the introduction are historical in content. Chapter two describes the composition of the piece, giving detailed historical information. The third chapter examines why Brahms chose to write the piece for natural horn instead of valve horn, providing relevant information on the history of the instrument. Both chapters two and three contain little original research. They are, rather, comprehensive assemblages of information that has previously been spread out over many different sources.

Chapters four through seven contain the analysis of the piece. Each movement has its own chapter and a table that shows important formal structures, key areas, themes and harmonies. The analysis is almost completely original, with footnotes indicating borrowed ideas. The aim of the analysis is to help inform a performance of the Horn Trio.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Joshua Garrett was born in 1969 in New York City. He received his B.A. in 1990 from Amherst College, *summa cum laude* and *phi beta kappa*. At Amherst, Joshua studied composition with Lewis Spratlan and Roger Reynolds, and had a secondary focus in ancient Greek. He earned an M.A. in music theory at SUNY at Stony Brook, working with Sarah Fuller and Robert Gjerdingen, and also completed the requirements for an M.M. in horn, working with William Purvis.

As a scholarship doctoral student at the Juilliard School, Joshua continued his studies with William Purvis, and held a Jacob K. Javits Fellowship through the U.S. Department of Education. A fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center in 1995-1996, he won the Harry Shapiro award for outstanding brass player. He has also attended the Aspen and Norfolk music festivals, and has studied with Thomas Haunton, Michael Hatfield, Douglas Hill, David Jolley and Carolyn Panasevich.

Joshua is currently third horn in the San Jose Symphony. He has played with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and toured with the Israel Philharmonic under Zubin Mehta. He has been an instructor of music at Amherst College and SUNY at Stony Brook, and maintains a private horn studio.

To William Purvis

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper represents the last step in my "formal" education. There have been many along the way who have had guided my thinking about music and my development as a musician. They have, therefore, influenced this paper, and I must gratefully thank these wonderful people.

My first horn teacher, Carolyn Panasevich, guided my initial, magical encounter with Brahms' Horn Trio. I cannot express how much she influenced me, both in music and in life. A wonderful human being and teacher, she is much of the reason why I am today a musician.

There have been other horn teachers as well who contributed to my horn playing and musicianship. Michael Hatfield, Thomas Haunton, Douglas Hill and David Jolley all influenced me greatly.

While at Amherst College, I was tremendously fortunate to have two mentors who formed the core of my college education. Lewis Spratlan is a truly brilliant composer, conductor, musician and teacher. His great mind, sense of humor, and true understanding of music have influenced me in more ways than I can comprehend. I am deeply, deeply grateful for his friendship and all he has given me. Frederick

Griffiths of the Greek department taught me a tremendous amount about aesthetics and critical thinking and writing, and his support meant more to me than he could have realized.

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On a personal level I thank my family for all their love and support. And, as ever, I thank Candace for everything. Without her, this would all mean nothing.

Finally, I thank William Purvis, to whom this paper is dedicated. Bill was my last horn teacher, and he supervised my transition from student to self-teacher. His ultimate goal was to teach me not to need him, and in doing so he provided me with tools that I shall use and value for the rest of my life. Bill has been a constant inspiration. He is a true role model, a musician who always thinks about what he is doing, always experiments, and always continues to learn. If I have absorbed even a fraction of what he has to offer, I consider myself a very, very lucky man.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	iii
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTE .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	ix
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. BRAHMS TAKES A WALK .....	4
3. "THE HORN'S TRUE CHARACTERISTICS" .....	15
4. ANDANTE .....	37
5. SCHERZO: ALLEGRO .....	60
6. ADAGIO MESTO .....	78
7. FINALE: ALLEGRO CON BRIO .....	93
8. CONCLUSION .....	109
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	112



## LIST OF TABLES

### Table

1. Form of First Movement .....	39
2. Form of Second Movement .....	61
3. Form of Third Movement .....	80
4. Form of Fourth Movement .....	94

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Brahms' Horn Trio is, in many ways, a special piece of music. For horn players, it represents one of the all too few pieces in our repertoire that is not "good horn music," but simply good music. It is, furthermore, the most important, substantial piece of chamber music written for horn in all of the nineteenth century.

The instrumentation of the piece is also special. The combination of horn, violin and piano, was almost unheard of before Brahms wrote for it, and evidence of his success can be seen in the many horn trios written since. These later trios, however, differ from Brahms' in an extremely important way. Brahms, writing at a time when the valve horn was broadly accepted throughout Germany and Austria, specified that his trio was for the *Waldhorn*, or natural horn, and not for the valve horn.

This decision has generally been seen as a minor affair, an issue of preference that restrained Brahms' choices in writing for the instrument. This unfortunate interpretation is way off target. In choosing the natural horn over the valve horn, Brahms directed the very content of the piece. As we shall see, the natural horn helped determine musical

materials on all levels, from themes to local colors to the audibility of large formal structures. The piece, in its very essence and not just in its instrumentation, is a piece for natural horn.

In reality, however, most performances of the trio occur on valve horn. It is a testament to the strength of the music that these performances can be stunning successes. What is most important, as always, are the abilities and understanding of the artists, and not what instruments they are playing.

"Understanding" is the key word. While an ignorant musician can give a great performance based on his/her intuitive feelings, that same musician can only improve the more (s)he knows about the music on a cognitive level. When we analyze and study a score, we provide ourselves with choices. This makes performing a more engaged, aware activity, providing the music with a life that directly affects an audience. Even if the performer simply confirms, and does not change, his/her choices, the process of thinking about the music is essential to an informed, alive performance.

In the Horn Trio, there are all sorts of things to learn and understand. There are issues of basic analysis, from formal structures to key areas to thematic relationships. There is historical information, the knowledge of which relates directly to the emotional content of the music. And

there are issues of natural horn technique, which can directly affect and improve a performance on a modern instrument.

This paper will examine all these issues and more. The analysis is designed, primarily, for performers, and points frequently to specific performance suggestions. These suggestions are based, as much as possible, on a study of the music and its historical context, and not merely on my own arbitrary preferences. There will surely be places where you disagree with my interpretation of the musical text. This can only be for the good, however, if I have made you think about the issues at hand.

This paper is, to my knowledge, the first work accessible to the public that attempts anything beyond the most superficial analysis of Brahms' Horn Trio. I am absolutely certain that there remains much in the piece to be discovered, and hopefully another musician or musicologist will provide greater insight into this wonderful piece of art. Whether you are that person, or, like me, a musician who wants to understand more about a great piece of music, I hope that this is a good starting place.

## CHAPTER 2

### BRAHMS TAKES A WALK

Early one morning in the summer of 1865, Johannes Brahms went for a walk in the woods of the Black Forest and conceived the opening theme of his Horn Trio in E flat, op. 40. He later showed his friend Albert Dietrich the spot "on the wooded heights among the fir-trees"<sup>1</sup> where the theme first came to him. As he told Dietrich, "I was walking along one morning and as I came to this spot the sun shone out and the subject immediately suggested itself."<sup>2</sup>

Walking was a central part of Brahms' life, and he frequently used his walks to think through his musical ideas. For Brahms, walking became a metaphor for the compositional process itself – working through an idea was "[taking] it out walking."<sup>3</sup> Brahms' daily schedule usually contained a morning stroll after coffee, and he especially cherished walks in natural settings. As a younger man, he had long looked

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Niemann, *Brahms*, new ed. (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1937), 271.

<sup>2</sup>Florence May, *The Life of Johannes Brahms* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), 2:39.

<sup>3</sup>Karl Geiringer, *Brahms: His Life and Work*, 3d ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), 337.

forward to a walking tour along the Rhine, which he realized in 1853, and he enjoyed several similar walking tours over the course of his lifetime. He was known for a very healthy walking pace. Brahms would regularly spend his summers in rustic spots, where he could enjoy brisk jaunts surrounded by the natural world.

For several summers in the 1860's, the spot Brahms chose to visit was Lichtenthal,<sup>4</sup> in the Black Forest near the spa town Baden-Baden.<sup>5</sup> He first visited in 1862 with his dear friend Clara Schumann, who went to purchase a cottage there, and Brahms stayed with his friend Anton Rubinstein. Brahms was very happy with what he found in Lichtenthal, and returned repeatedly.

The summer of 1864 was a particularly productive time. Brahms, who found lodging at the Hotel Bären, was pleased to find himself in the company of many prominent musicians and artists, such as Turgenev, Anton Rubinstein, Johann Strauss, and two men who were to become dear friends – Hermann Levi and Julius Allgeyer. The combination of a beautiful natural environment and great company proved to be extremely conducive to Brahms' compositional process – the summer of

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<sup>4</sup>Alternatively spelled "Lichtental."

<sup>5</sup>For an excellent collection of essays on Brahms' life in Baden-Baden, see Joachim Draheim et al., eds., *Johannes Brahms in Baden-Baden und Karlsruhe* (Karlsruhe: Baden Landesbibliothek, 1983).

1864 saw the completion of the Piano Quintet in F minor, op. 34,<sup>6</sup> as well as substantial work on the second String Sextet and the 9 Songs on Texts of Platen and Daumer, op. 32.

When Brahms returned the following summer, he found accommodations that thrilled him. He rented an attic apartment from the widow Clara Becker, in a house he described quite alliteratively as "Das hübsche Haus auf dem Hügel"<sup>7</sup> ("the pretty house on the hill"). In a letter to Bertha Faber, Brahms described his lodgings, writing that

the house known as Lichtental No. 316 – more correctly, 136 – lies on an eminence (the Cäcilienberg), and from my rooms I look out on three sides at the dark, wooded mountains, the roads winding up and down them, and the pleasant houses.<sup>8</sup>

Brahms expressed his happiness with his choice in a letter to Levi when he wrote "I came, saw and immediately took the first, best lodgings...It lies on a hill, and I look over all the mountains and paths from Lichtental to Baden."<sup>9</sup> The apartment was also cheap, which put Brahms' practical mind at rest. As he wrote to his father "I have found here a most wonderful dwelling and it is unbelievably inexpensive, so

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<sup>6</sup>The Piano Quintet is a reworking of Brahms' Sonata for two pianos, op. 34b, which was, in turn, a revision of his suppressed Cello Quintet of 1862.

<sup>7</sup>Jeannot Heinen, "Das Brahmshaus in Baden-Lichtental," *Johannes Brahms in Baden-Baden und Karlsruhe*, Joachim Draheim et al. eds. (Karlsruhe: Baden Landesbibliothek, 1983), 10.

<sup>8</sup>Niemann, *Brahms*, 91.

<sup>9</sup>Heinen, "Das Brahmshaus in Baden-Lichtental," 10.

that I can enjoy the beautiful view without pangs of conscience."<sup>10</sup> His lodgings consisted of a bedroom and another room whose blue wallpaper earned it the name "the Blue Room."<sup>11</sup>

Although Brahms was very happy with his lodgings in the summer of 1865, something had occurred earlier in the year that gave him great sadness. In early February, 1865, he experienced for the first time a death in his immediate family with the passing of his mother, Christiane. A telegram from his brother Fritz brought him the news that she had suffered a stroke, informing him that "if you want to see our mother once again, come immediately."<sup>12</sup> By the time Brahms arrived at Hamburg, Christiane was dead.

By all accounts, Christiane Brahms was a wonderful, kind woman and a great homemaker. Clara Schumann and Joachim raved about her cooking. She rarely said a bad word about anyone, and was always thinking of ways to help others. She was immensely proud of her son Johannes, and had a very special relationship with him.

As a child, Johannes had spent much of his free time alone with his mother, developing a particularly close bond with her. Even as an adult, Christiane always included him in

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Geiringer, *Brahms: His Life and Work*, 92.



her prayers, and she wrote to him that "you are always my first thought [in the morning]." <sup>13</sup> She was known to break into tears when reading newspaper accounts of his successes.

The last few years of Christiane's life were difficult. She was seventeen years older than her husband, Jakob, and as she aged tension developed. Brahms had done his best to keep his parents together, but when he visited in June of 1864 he had to agree that it was best for them to be apart, and he paid for his father to move into his own lodgings. The separation was difficult for Brahms, and the following letter, written in October 1864, shows how he tried to nurture his parents' relationship.

My Dearest Father,

I do indeed miss news of you, although I cannot hope to hear anything pleasant. That Mother and Elise have reserved a room for me would please me indeed if I could think that you would occupy it frequently! I hope that this will be the case. You can often take your afternoon nap in the company of my books. Don't stint Mother as regards my money; it is not important that it should last until the New Year, and money can bring a smile to many a face which would otherwise frown. Do your best, even if things should be unpleasant at times. Help them with the moving, and don't let yourself be driven away; the time will come when she and all of us will thank you...Where do you have your meals? You do still go to Mother's? Could you settle a few small expenses for me with Mother? For example, the cost of sending some music to Vienna.

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

Please make a note of this item; I will send the necessary amount at the first opportunity.

Yours most affectionately,

Johannes<sup>14</sup>

Brahms was deeply affected by his mother's death. For the most part he retained his composure, taking care of the funeral arrangements and other business. His pain did show through on occasion, however. For example, a cellist named Josef Gänsbacher dropped by on Brahms unexpectedly and found a weeping Brahms practicing Bach on the piano. Continuing to play, Brahms told him about his mother's death.

Brahms also expressed some of his grief to Clara Schumann, one of his oldest, dearest friends. On February 6th, he wrote to her that

We buried her yesterday at one o'clock. She had not changed at all and looked as sweet and kind as when she was alive. Everything that could possibly be done to comfort one for such a loss was done, particularly for my sister.<sup>15</sup>

Brahms wrote to Schumann again about his loss two weeks later, on February 20th.

Time changes for better or worse. It does not so much change as it builds up and develops, and thus when once this sad year is over I shall begin to miss my dear mother ever more and more...The one comforting feature about our loss is that it ended a relationship which really could only have become sadder with the years.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>15</sup>Paul Holmes, *Brahms* (London: Omnibus Press, 1987), 97.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

Most of Brahms' grief came out through his music. It was only a couple of months after Christiane's death that Brahms sent Clara two movements for chorus and orchestra that he described as part of a "German requiem." Although the death of Robert Schumann in 1856 was probably an influence in Brahms' decision to write a requiem, and although he had started some of the music before Christiane's death, Clara Schumann told Florence May that "we all think he wrote it in her memory, though he has never expressly said so."<sup>17</sup>

In the year after his mother's death, the only other piece Brahms worked on besides the Requiem was the Horn Trio. As we shall see, his mother's presence can be found in several places in the trio, from the slow movement marked "mesto" ("sorrowful"), to the possibility that a theme that appears in the last two movements is based on a folk tune that Christiane taught Brahms as a child. It is possible that the loss of his mother, and Brahms' subsequent thoughts about his childhood, even helped determine the unusual instrumentation of the piece – horn, violin and piano are all instruments Brahms studied as a boy.

The first performance of the trio took place on November 28th, 1865 in Zürich with Brahms on piano, a violinist named Hegar and a hornist named Gläss. Brahms again

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<sup>17</sup>Malcolm MacDonald, *Brahms* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1990), 195.

performed it on December 7th of the same year in the foyer of the "Hoftheater" in Karlsruhe, in a private concert with the Ducal Orchestra members Mr. Strauss on violin and Mr. Segisser on horn. Brahms was very fond of the piece and performed it many more times. He also recommended it for performance by others, writing to Dietrich that "for a quartet evening I can with a good conscience recommend my horn trio."<sup>18</sup> Clara Schumann also played the piece, and one of the more interesting early performances took place on March 26, 1867 with Hans von Bülow on piano, Leopold Abel on violin and the conductor Hans Richter on horn.

In the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*'s first two issues of 1867, Selmar Bagge, the journal's editor since 1863, published his review of the trio. It was less than enthusiastic. George Gelles provides a good summary of the lengthy review.

After allowing that the work "deeply grips the heart and fantasy," Bagge articulated its major faults. He disliked its "gloominess" ("Düsterheit"), perceived a rhythmic weakness ("Einen wirklich fühlbaren Mangel...in der Rhythmik"), and felt a dissatisfaction with the very sound of the work ("...Unbefriedigung...in der Klangfarbe des Werks, in der Zusammenstellung der Instrumente"). To create a better sounding work, mused Bagge, Brahms should perhaps have used a clarinet rather than a horn ("Vielleicht würde besser eine Clarinette verwendet worden sein.").

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<sup>18</sup>Edwin Evans, *Handbook to the Chamber and Orchestral Music of Johannes Brahms* (London: W. Reeves, Ltd., 1912), 185.

Bagge heard both Schubert and Schumann echoed in the work and compared it unfavourably to Beethoven, his idol. Unconditional enthusiasm was given to one section only, to the second movement's trio – "Das ist ächt Brahms'sches süßes Singen!" ("This is truly lyrical Brahms!").<sup>19</sup>

Some evidence of differing public reactions to the piece can be found in descriptions of performances written by Brahms' friends. In 1866 Clara Schumann wrote to Brahms that

I had meant to write to you from Leipzig the day after the quartet-evening at which I played your horn trio...We had studied your trio (I had begged it from Simrock) very well, and the horn-player was excellent...The scherzo was applauded most energetically and next to that the last movement which went as if fired from a pistol, and we were recalled...<sup>20</sup>

On January 19, 1870 Schumann wrote in her diary that

I played Johannes's horn trio – it went very well, but was not at all favorably received – and that pained us greatly on his account. The people did not understand this truly spirited and thoroughly interesting work, in spite of the fact that the first movement, for example, is full of the most ingratiating melodies, and the last movement, teeming with fresh life. The Adagio, too, is wonderful, but indeed hard to understand on first hearing.<sup>21</sup>

On January 5, 1879, Theodor Billroth wrote to Brahms that

Incidentally, your Horn Trio had an enormous success recently. I might scarcely have expected it with this very deeply felt music, especially since before that, the

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<sup>19</sup>George Gelles, liner notes, *Horn Trio, Op. 40*, by Johannes Brahms (Harmonia Mundi, 1991), 4.

<sup>20</sup>Berthold Litzmann, *Clara Schumann* (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1923), 3:198.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:234.

public didn't feel like listening attentively. How curious those changes in the audiences are.<sup>22</sup>

The trio was published in November of 1866 by Fritz Simrock,<sup>23</sup> a horn player with whom Brahms performed the work in the same year. Simrock insisted that Brahms include a cello part as a substitute for the horn part, and Brahms conceded, although he was unhappy with how it sounded. He later became interested in the idea of using a viola in place of the horn, and a viola part was published in 1884. Brahms published a second edition of the trio in 1891.

The trio occupies a special place in Brahms' output. Not only was it the first piece Brahms wrote after his mother's death, but it was the last piece of chamber music Brahms was to write for eight years. It was also the last piece Brahms wrote before the *German Requiem* was to take him to a new level of fame and recognition. This puts the Horn Trio as the final piece Brahms wrote in what Geiringer considers Brahms' second period.<sup>24</sup>

The trio is undoubtedly one of the best pieces of tonal chamber music for horn. One of the more interesting aspects of the piece is that Brahms did not write it for the modern

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<sup>22</sup>Hans Barkan, ed. and trans., *Johannes Brahms and Theodor Billroth: Letters from a Musical Friendship* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 77.

<sup>23</sup>Simrock's catalog mistakenly lists the publication date as 1868.

<sup>24</sup>Geiringer, *Brahms: His Life and Work*, 202.

valve horn on which it is usually performed. Brahms wrote the trio for violin, piano and *Waldhorn* – natural horn. In the next chapter, we shall examine why Brahms made this decision.

## CHAPTER 3

### "THE HORN'S TRUE CHARACTERISTICS"

Brahms wrote his Horn Trio for the natural horn, not for the valve horn. This was a striking choice, as Brahms composed the piece at a time when the valve horn had been broadly accepted throughout Germany and Austria. In order to understand this decision and its implications, we need to investigate the history of the valve and its struggle for acceptance. We will then examine Brahms' relationship to the horn, and his reasons for choosing the valveless instrument for the Horn Trio.

The invention of the valve at the beginning of the nineteenth century was to revolutionize brass playing.<sup>1</sup> The first extant mention of the valve occurs in a letter dated

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<sup>1</sup>The valve works essentially as follows. When the valve is engaged, the airstream is diverted through a previously unused length of tubing, extending the overall length of the horn. In effect this is like an instantaneous crook change (see note 4 for an explanation of crooks). On early two-valve instruments, the first valve would lower the key of the horn by a whole step, the second valve would lower it by a half step, and the two combined would lower the instrument by a step and a half. The different combinations would thus allow for harmonic series in four different keys. The addition of a third valve, which lowered the instrument a tone and a half, increased this to seven different keys. The standard modern double horn allows for all twelve keys.



December 6, 1814. Heinrich Stölzel, one of the two early inventors of the valve, wrote to King Frederick William III of Prussia, and asked him to try using the valve in the King's bands.

On May 3, 1815, the following announcement, heralding the new invention, was published in the Leipzig periodical *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*. It was written by Gottlob Benedict Bierrey, the music director of the theater at Breslauthat.

#### A New Invention

Heinrich Stölzel, the chamber musician from Pless in Upper Silesia, in order to perfect the Waldhorn, has succeeded in attaching a simple mechanism to the instrument, thanks to which he has obtained all the notes of the chromatic scale in a range of almost three octaves, with a good, strong and pure tone. All the artificial notes – which, as is well known, were previously produced by stopping the bell with the right hand,<sup>2</sup> and can now be produced merely with two levers, controlled by two fingers of the right hand – are identical in sound to the natural notes and thus preserve the character of the Waldhorn. Any Waldhorn-player will, with practice, be able to play on it. So that his invention may become more widely known and used, Herr Stölzel has laid his invention at the feet of His Majesty the King of Prussia and now awaits a favourable outcome.

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<sup>2</sup>The only pure tones one could play on the natural horn were the notes of the harmonic series. Around 1770, a hornist named Anton Joseph Hampel found that by closing off the bell of the horn with the right hand the pitch could be altered. This new technique, known as hand horn technique, allowed the hornist to obtain many of the pitches that lie in between the notes of the harmonic series. The technique necessitated an uneven tone quality between the open and stopped tones. The hornist also remained unable to play certain pitches, particularly those in the lower register of the instrument where the notes of the harmonic series lie far apart from each other.

I have become convinced of this mechanism and its usability and declare, as a matter of both my insight and the truth, that its use imparts to the Waldhorn a perfection not hitherto attained, and produces an effect in full-voiced music not previously known.

Although I have heard this invention being used only on the Waldhorn, I believe that I can easily be convinced that, because of its simplicity, it can also be used on trumpets and signal horns, and with similar success. What a new realm of beautiful effects this has opened up to composers!<sup>3</sup>

On November 26, 1817, there appeared in the same publication the following review of the valve, written by the music director and organist Friedrich Schneider.

#### Important Improvement in the Waldhorn.

Because of its full and strong, yet soft and attractive tone, the Waldhorn is an extremely beautiful instrument; but, as is well known, it has until now been far behind almost all other wind instruments in its development, being very restricted to its natural notes...

Herr Stölzel of Breslau has now completely removed these shortcomings thanks to his long reflection upon the obstacle and his unremitting labour; moreover, like many inventors of mechanical things, the correct, suitable solution lay far closer at hand than where it had been sought and was far simpler than had been imagined. He has simply provided his horn with two airtight valves, which are depressed with little effort by two fingers of the right hand, like the keys of the pianoforte, and restored to their previous position by the same two fingers with the help of attached springs; with these it is not only possible but also easy to produce a pure and completely chromatic scale from the lowest to the highest notes with a perfectly even tone. On this horn, therefore, there is no need to change from one key to another,<sup>4</sup> and the same

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<sup>3</sup>Kurt Janetzky and Bernhard Brüchle, *The Horn*, trans. James Chater (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1988), 73.

<sup>4</sup>This is a reference to crooks. A crook was a removable piece of tubing whose length determined which harmonic series the horn would produce, and therefore, the key of the instrument. To change the key of the horn, one crook would have to be removed and replaced with another one of different

passage can be repeated immediately in a different key; even passages which previously were absolutely impossible to play on the normal horn can now be performed without difficulty.

How solo horn-playing will benefit from this invention is easy to imagine: one only has to think of the eternal monotony of passages played on the horn in concert music up to the present.

Now it is particularly striking and effective to hear low notes with the full, even strength of the horn's tone.

It is to be hoped that Herr Stölzel receives numerous orders to compensate him for his efforts and expense; and indeed every musical administration, every concert society of military music and every orchestra should acquire a pair of such horns, thereby enjoying the advantages for their art that can be obtained from such a significant improvement and enhancing considerably the enjoyment of all attentive listeners. For this is bound to happen; and indeed this invention will have even greater ramifications if the mechanism is applied to trumpets and trombones, as seems likely; and any connoisseur of art can see that an entirely new province has been opened up to the composer, as concerns both his ideas and their more efficacious, surer and more beautiful execution.

Moreover, this discovery of Herr Stölzel's has been tested by others, that is, by highly competent judges, and has been distinguished with decisive approval; Herr Stölzel has also received a letter of praise from His Royal Majesty.<sup>5</sup>

Five months after this review, on April 6, 1818, Heinrich Stölzel and Friedrich Blühmel, the other early valve pioneer, applied in Berlin for a joint patent for the valve. They received it six days later.<sup>6</sup>

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length. This necessitated rests between key changes so the hornist would have time to change crooks. It also frequently required the horn player to carry around a heavy, awkward box filled with crooks.

<sup>5</sup>Janetzky and Brüche, *The Horn*, 74-75.

<sup>6</sup>The question of whether Stölzel or Blühmel first invented the valve is one that has not definitively been answered. The issue, although interesting, is unimportant for our discussion.

The valve caused quite a controversy, and in this controversy are the roots of Brahms' decision to write the Horn Trio for natural horn. In order better to understand this, we shall examine what the valve was intended to do, what the valve actually did, and how musicians felt about it. We shall then turn to how various composers, including Brahms, reacted to the valve.

The valve was initially intended to enable the hornist merely to change the key of the horn instantaneously, without his needing to change crooks. The horn player would depress a valve combination in order to choose a key for the instrument, and would use hand horn technique as he always had. The horn player would no longer need time between key changes, and perhaps more importantly, he would no longer have to carry around a heavy, awkward box filled with crooks.

As the above announcements show, it soon became clear that the valve made it possible to forego hand horn technique entirely. Different valve combinations could choose different harmonic series, and the overlapping of these series allowed for a complete chromatic scale without any hand stopping. By using valves in this manner, a horn player could eliminate the unevenness of tone that was inherent to hand horn technique and that many felt to be a severe impediment.

Despite the excitement about the new invention, it took nearly a century for the valve to become completely accepted. There were several reasons for this. For one thing, horn

players were naturally reluctant to give up a tradition they had spent their lives learning in order to start over with a completely new technique. In addition, there were serious mechanical problems with the early valves. They leaked air, and compressed and bent the air flow in ways that caused poor intonation and poor tone quality. By the 1830's, however, these mechanical problems had essentially been solved.

The largest and longest lasting obstacle to the valve's acceptance was the feeling among many musicians that the new mechanism had compromised the true sound of the horn.<sup>7</sup> These musicians felt that the sound that had resulted from hand horn technique was not merely sufferable, but actually desirable. Hand horn players, in order to minimize the difference between stopped and open notes on the natural horn, had kept the open tones quite covered. This resulted in a very dark, mysterious sound, which, combined with the even darker color of the stopped tones, was what many considered to be the true sound of the instrument. With the use of valves, the horn lost the stopped notes and the need for a covered sound. Some early valve horn players went so far as to completely remove their right hand from the bell, drastically changing the tone color of the horn.

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<sup>7</sup>For a more detailed study of this resistance, see Stephen Lyons Seiffert, "Johannes Brahms and the French horn" (D.M.A. Diss., Eastman School of Music, 1969) and Reginald Morley-Pegge, *The French Horn*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973).

Another way that the valve changed the horn's sound had to do with crooks. Different crooks have different tone qualities, with the higher (shorter) crooks having a much brighter, more brilliant sound than the lower (longer) crooks. The natural horn was thus able to impart to each key its own color.<sup>8</sup> The valve horn rendered unnecessary the different crooks with their different colors, and many felt this to be a change for the worse.<sup>9</sup>

The conductor and composer Karl Gottlieb Reissiger voiced the opposition to the new instrument particularly well. In 1837, more than twenty years after the valve's invention, he wrote an article for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in which he expressed his distaste for the valve horn. His greatest concern was with the change in the sound of the instrument. He wrote

I hear such a beautiful, sustained solo performed in a colorless monotone on a valve horn, and it seems to me as if the instrument is moaning: 'My love, I am a horn. Don't you recognize me any more? I admit that I am too severely constricted, I am somewhat uncentered and

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<sup>8</sup>This is probably part of the reason many composers, Beethoven among them, frequently used the horns to announce the arrival of a new key.

<sup>9</sup>Valve horns continued to use crooks until the 1890's. On early valve horns, however, the hornist could only practically use valves with the middle crooks of G, F, E, E flat and D. If the hornist used valves with the lower crooks, the length of tubing added by the valve would no longer be sufficient to lower the pitch the correct amount. Similarly, using a valve with the higher crooks would lower the pitch too much. Of the middle crooks, F, E, and E flat worked the best with valves.

hoarse, my sweetness is gone, my tone sounds as if it has to go through a filter sack in which its power gets stuck.<sup>10</sup>

Composers reacted to the change in horn technique in a variety of ways. Some, like Weber, flatly rejected the valve-horn. He referred to the new instruments disparagingly as the "neuen Maschinenhörner" – the "new machine-horns."<sup>11</sup> Most composers, however, were not so completely dismissive. Before turning to Brahms' relationship to the horn, we shall briefly examine the crucial influences of Schubert, Schumann, and Wagner on the acceptance of the valve horn.

The first piece that was written by a major composer specifically for the valve horn was probably Franz Schubert's 1828 composition *Auf dem Strom* for piano, voice, and valve horn. Schubert wrote the horn part for Joseph Rudolphe Lewy, one of the first important valve horn players, with whom Schubert premiered the piece. Although Schubert did take advantage of the valve instrument by writing some pitches that were very difficult if not impossible on natural horn, the horn part remains in the hand horn idiom, relying heavily on the harmonic series and nearby pitches.

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<sup>10</sup>John Q. Ericson, "Joseph Rudolphe Lewy and Valved Horn Technique in Germany, 1837-1851," *The Horn Call Annual* 9 (1997): 24.

<sup>11</sup>Kurt Janetzky, "Vom Signal bis zum Konzertstück: Zur Geschichte des Horns," *Das Orchester* 45, no. 2 (Feb. 1997): 21.

It was Robert Schumann who was the first major composer to make a substantial break with hand horn tradition, writing chromatically for the instrument throughout its range. In 1849 he wrote two wonderful pieces for the valve horn. In February he composed in three days the *Adagio and Allegro* for horn and piano, which he described to Clara in a letter, writing "the piece is splendid, fresh and passionate, so that I like it!"<sup>12</sup> On April 10 he wrote to Ferdinand Hiller that "...recently I've written a Concertpiece for four horns with orchestral accompaniment that strikes me as one of my best pieces."<sup>13</sup> These two pieces were breakthroughs for valve horn writing. The valve horn now came into its own as an instrument that was more than just a technically advanced natural horn. It was a different instrument with a different technique for which one could write in a completely different style.

Richard Wagner approached the valve horn in a variety of ways. At first, Wagner appreciated the technical advances of the valve horn, but felt that the new instrument compromised the true horn sound. In his early operas *Rienzi* (1840) and *Flying Dutchman* (1841), Wagner wrote for two valve

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.



horns and two natural horns, in an attempt to have the best of both worlds.<sup>14</sup>

In 1848, Wagner tried a new approach in *Lohengrin*. While composing this work, Wagner probably worked in close conjunction with the valve hornist Lewy (the same one for whom Schubert wrote *Auf dem Strom*) who played at the Dresden Opera. Wagner wrote his horn parts using the same technique that Lewy had used for twelve studies he had written for valve horn. Wagner would indicate a key, and thus a valve combination, for a passage, and have the hornist use hand horn technique. Sometimes he would go so far as to indicate a different key every few measures, as in the introduction to the third act. This technique caused all sorts of confusion for the horn player, and was abandoned.

In 1859, with *Tristan und Isolde*, Wagner decided to leave more up to the hornist. In the introduction to the opera, he wrote about his decision, and about what he thought of the difference between natural and valve horn.

The composer desires to draw special attention to the treatment of the horns. This instrument has undoubtedly gained so greatly by the introduction of valves as to render it difficult to disregard this extension of its scope, although the horn has thereby indisputably lost some of its beauty of tone and power of producing a smooth *legato*. On account of these grave defects, the composer (who attaches importance to the retention of the horn's true characteristics) would have

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<sup>14</sup>This was a common practice. The first orchestral piece to call for valve horn was Halevy's *La Juive* of 1835, which asked for two valve horns and two natural horns.

felt himself compelled to renounce the use of the valve-horn, if experience had not taught him that capable artists can, by specially careful management, render them almost unnoticeable, so that little difference can be detected either in tone or smoothness.

Pending the inevitable improvement in the valve-horn that is to be desired, the horn-players are strongly recommended most carefully to study their respective parts in this score, in order to ascertain the crooks and valves appropriate to all the requirements of its execution. The composer relies implicitly on the use of the E (as well as F) crook; whether the other changes which frequently occur in the score, for the easier notation of low notes, or obtaining the requisite tone of high notes, are effected by means of the appropriate crooks or not, is left to the decision of the players themselves; the composer accepts the principle that the low notes, at all events, will usually be obtained by transposition.

Single notes marked + indicate stopped sounds; if they have to be produced in a key in which they are naturally open, the pitch of the horn must be altered by the valves, so that the sound may be heard as a stopped note.<sup>15</sup>

Brahms was even more emphatic than Wagner about retaining what he felt were the "true characteristics" of the horn. Brahms referred to the valve horn disparagingly as the "Blechbratsche" – the "brass viola."<sup>16</sup> Although Brahms probably conceived most or all of his orchestral horn parts for the natural horn, he knew that they would often, if not always, be played on valve horn.<sup>17</sup> In his first symphony and

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<sup>15</sup>Morley-Pegge, *The French Horn*, 107-108.

<sup>16</sup>Janetzky, "Vom Signal bis zum Konzertstück," 21.

<sup>17</sup>It is clear that Brahms wrote the Horn Trio for natural horn, but there has been much speculation about which of Brahms' other pieces were intended for natural horn and which, if any, were written for valve horn. Stephen Lyons Seiffert's dissertation "Johannes Brahms and the French Horn" attempts to answer this question. Although interesting and highly informative, I find its basic assumption – that one

in the *Academic Festival Overture*, Brahms, like Wagner, indicated certain notes which he insisted be stopped, even if the parts were played on valve horns.

Part of the reason why Brahms felt so strongly about retaining the "true characteristics" of the horn was probably that, as a child, he had studied the instrument with his father. In addition to working as a double bass player, Jakob Brahms was a professional horn player with the Hamburg *Bürgerwehr* (town militia) for 36 years, from 1831 to 1867. The young Johannes thus grew up in the presence of the *Waldhorn* and probably strongly associated it with his childhood. This might explain why the first piece he wrote after his mother's death was one for *Waldhorn* – just as, after his father's death in 1872, Brahms wrote ten etudes for *Waldhorn* that he dedicated "to the memory of my father."<sup>18</sup>

Brahms' appreciation of the natural horn was reinforced by his work as a performer. When Brahms was working in the

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can tell what instrument Brahms was writing for based on the number and usage of stopped notes – deeply problematic. What is more important than answering this question (and lacking new evidence it will probably never be definitively answered) is to know that Brahms always, with perhaps one exception (a single pitch in the *Academic Festival Overture*), wrote parts that were playable on natural horn. This is not true of any other important late 19th century composer. Wagner and Dvorak, who continued to write horn music in a style that was reminiscent of the hand horn, wrote parts that were technically impossible on that instrument. It therefore seems that Brahms always had the natural horn and hand horn tradition strongly in mind, even if he knew that a part would actually be performed on valve horn.

<sup>18</sup>David G. Elliott, "The Brahms Horn Trio and Hand Horn Idiom," *The Horn Call* 10, no. 1 (Oct. 1979): 64.

court at Detmold as pianist and choir director in the late 1850's, he had the opportunity to work with the excellent natural horn player August Cordes, "whose rich, mellow tone drew from Brahms enthusiastic expressions of admiration."<sup>19</sup> Together, they played the piano and wind quintets of Beethoven and Mozart, and Beethoven's Horn Sonata.

There is no question that Brahms intended the Horn Trio to be played on natural horn, despite the fact that the valve horn had been widely accepted in Germany and Austria by 1865.<sup>20</sup> In both the 1866 and 1891 editions of the piece, Brahms specified "Waldhorn." In addition, every time Brahms performed the piece he did so with a natural horn player.<sup>21</sup>

In one case in particular, Brahms' choice of a horn player for a performance of the Horn Trio demonstrates his

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<sup>19</sup>May, *The Life of Johannes Brahms*, 1:215.

<sup>20</sup>In France, hand horn tradition continued into the first years of the twentieth century. A valve horn class was taught by Meifred at the Paris Conservatory from 1833 to 1864. From 1864 until 1897, the valve horn was barred from the Conservatory. Both valve and hand horn were taught from 1897 until 1902, and from 1903 on valve horn was taught exclusively. As late as 1910, in what was perhaps the last important use of natural horn as part of the continuing tradition, Ravel called for *cor simple* in his orchestration of *Pavane pour une infante défunte*.

<sup>21</sup>These performances and their horn players include: in Zürich on November 28th, 1865, with Gläss; in Karlsruhe on December 7, 1865, with Segisser; in December, 1865, with August Cordes; in Oldenburg on January 10, 1866 with Westermann; in Karlsruhe in 1867 with Steinbrügger; in Basel on March 26, 1867, with Hans Richter; and in Vienna on December 29, 1867 with Wilhelm Kleinecke.

insistence on using the natural horn. When Brahms performed the piece in Vienna on December 29, 1867, he played it with Wilhelm Kleinecke, a natural horn player who was second horn in the Vienna Opera and a teacher at the Vienna Conservatory. The principal horn player in the Opera, whom Brahms did not choose for the performance, was Richard Lewy (the nephew of Joseph Rudolph Lewy, the hornist of *Auf dem Strom* and *Lohengrin*). Lewy, although more famous and esteemed than Kleinecke, played only the valve horn. It seems that the ability to play the piece on natural horn was more important to Brahms than the general reputation of the player.

Brahms also urged the use of the natural horn for performances in which he himself was not involved. In a letter to Albert Dietrich he wrote that

for a quartet evening I can with a good conscience recommend my horn trio, and your horn player would do me a great favour if he would do like the Karlsruhe man and practice the French horn [*Waldhorn* – natural horn] for some weeks beforehand so as to be able to play it on that.<sup>22</sup>

Brahms' dear friend Clara Schumann recognized the importance of the instrument to Brahms. When she wrote to him about a performance she played of the Horn Trio, she explained the use of valve horn almost apologetically, writing that

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<sup>22</sup>Evans, *Handbook to the Chamber and Orchestral Music of Johannes Brahms*, 185.

the horn-player was excellent. I do not think he spluttered once, and that says a great deal, though it is true that he played on a *Ventilhorn* [valve horn] as he would not be induced to try a *Waldhorn* [natural horn].<sup>23</sup>

Brahms expressed one of his reasons for choosing the natural horn in a letter published in the *Beilage zur Allgemeine Music-Zeitung* in 1899. He wrote that "if the performer is not obliged by the stopped notes to play softly the piano and violin are not obliged to adapt themselves to him, and the tone is rough from the beginning."<sup>24</sup> Brahms was thus not only concerned about the horn player sounding too loud and rough, but about the effect that this would have on the whole ensemble. Bessaraboff, in his *Ancient and European Musical Instruments* points out that

It should be taken into consideration that the piano of Brahms' period was not so loud as the modern instrument. Even then the pianist and violinist had to subdue themselves so as not to overpower the hornist. This gives an idea of the softness of the hand-horn tone and suggests a proper dynamic level for performing Brahms' Horn Trio.<sup>25</sup>

As someone who has performed the trio on hand horn with a period piano<sup>26</sup> and a violinist using gut strings, I can wholeheartedly confirm Bessaraboff's astute observation. The issue of general dynamic level, and the corresponding tone

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<sup>23</sup>Litzmann, *Clara Schumann*, 3:198.

<sup>24</sup>May, *The Life of Johannes Brahms*, 2:41.

<sup>25</sup>N. Bessaraboff, *Ancient and European Musical Instruments*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1941), 144.

<sup>26</sup>An 1880 New York Steinway, thanks to Albert Fuller.

quality, is exactly what Brahms was referring to in the above quotation. Here, then, is our first opportunity to apply our knowledge to a performance of the Horn Trio. If a valve hornist wants to play the trio in a manner in keeping with what Brahms conceived and desired, (s)he will be very careful about keeping his/her dynamic level generally lower than (s)he is used to, and using a soft, not "rough" tone "from the beginning."<sup>27</sup> Using a more closed hand position in the bell is an excellent way to accomplish this, since, as we have seen, this was an essential part of the hand horn's color, and it is this color that Brahms clearly preferred. The performer, obviously, must play with a sound that is in keeping with his/her taste, but one should, at the very least, experiment. The hornist is on the right track if (s)he must reprimand the violinist and pianist for playing too loud, especially in softer passages. In the following chapters, we shall examine specific examples of how Brahms used the closed tones of hand horn technique for dynamic control, as well as other ways in which hand horn technique affects a performance of the piece.

The fact that Brahms wrote the piece expressly for natural horn has caused some confusion for certain writers. There are principally three related misconceptions that one

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<sup>27</sup>There are, obviously, exceptions, and we shall discuss these in the next chapters.

finds in the literature, and it is worth taking a moment to dispel these. Michael Musgrave, in *The Music of Brahms*, has the dubious distinction of voicing all three misconceptions in a single paragraph. He writes that

the work's most notable quality – its sheer sound – is never heard in modern performance as Brahms intended it, since he insisted on the use of the natural, or Waldhorn, an instrument already growing obsolete by this time: not only Wagner but Schumann had long opted for the modern valve instrument which facilitated the use of the total chromatic. Brahms limits his 'natural' notes to those of the harmonic series; thus (E flat)<sup>1</sup>–E flat<sup>2</sup>–B flat<sup>3</sup>–E flat<sup>4</sup>–G<sup>5</sup>–B flat<sup>6</sup>–D flat<sup>7</sup>–E flat<sup>8</sup>–F<sup>9</sup>–G<sup>10</sup>, etc. up to E flat<sup>16</sup>...Such a limitation explains the unique use in four movements of a tonic E flat and the formal restriction of these, the normal tonal range being unavailable, most notably in the first – his only first movement not in sonata form in the instrumental compositions.<sup>28</sup>

The first misconception, that Brahms somehow limits his pitches to the notes of the harmonic series, is particularly glaring and misleading. Malcolm MacDonald, in his study *Brahms*, echoes this mistake when he writes that Brahms' "choice of a natural horn...caused him to limit his notes to those of the harmonic series obtainable on that instrument, whose strong natural sonority he clearly preferred."<sup>29</sup>

A simple look at the score makes it clear that Brahms absolutely did not limit himself to the notes of the harmonic series – in the first movement, almost half the notes are stopped. More importantly, the reason Brahms so clearly

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<sup>28</sup>Michael Musgrave, *The Music of Brahms*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 110.

<sup>29</sup>MacDonald, *Brahms*, 175.



preferred the natural horn was not because of its "strong natural sonority," but because of the effect that hand horn technique had on its sound. What is interesting about the use of hand horn in the Horn Trio is, with few exceptions, the use of the *stopped* notes and not the use of the open notes. A piece with no stopped tones, as MacDonald and Musgrave mistakenly suggests the trio is, would thus lack exactly the quality that Brahms sought out. In addition, in such a piece there would be little difference between a performance on hand horn and one on valve horn, as the main difference between the two is the use of stopped tones with the former.

The second misconception that we see at the end of the Musgrave quotation is that somehow the hand horn caused Brahms to limit his tonal variety with the specific result being that the first movement is not in sonata form. MacDonald echoes this mistake when he writes that "the need to evolve themes suitable for [the horn's] participation on equal terms with the other instruments probably influenced him in the direction of simpler forms."<sup>30</sup> David Elliott writes that "with a rather limited possibility for modulation Brahms forgoes his usual first movement 'sonata form'..."<sup>31</sup> Peter Latham, in his book *Brahms*, writes that

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Elliott, "The Brahms Horn Trio and Hand Horn Idiom," 65.

it is to humour this rigid instrument that he retains the same tonic for all four movements and forsakes in the first movement his customary sonata form for an episodic shape similar (as Schauffler has noticed) to that of the first movement of Beethoven's piano Sonata, Op. 54. Even so he sets the performer some problems. There is nothing that is impossible, but it is not often that the natural horn is asked to play in a key signature of four flats, as in the trio to the scherzo.<sup>32</sup>

What is particularly interesting about this last quote is that Latham himself, after conveying the misconception that the limitations of the natural horn are the reason behind the first movement's unique form, immediately contradicts himself. Brahms does indeed call for the horn to play in the minor subdominant in the trio of the scherzo movement, with a very large proportion of its notes stopped. This shows that Brahms, if he had desired, could certainly have managed a sonata form movement complete with tonal variety, even if that required many stopped notes.<sup>33</sup> As it is, the first movement visits the keys of G flat major, g minor, Cb major, b flat minor, A major, and Ab major, to name a few. This hardly justifies a feeling of "the normal tonal range being unavailable," as Musgrave wrote above. Brahms' reasons for forsaking first movement sonata form for this one piece

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<sup>32</sup>Peter Latham, *Brahms*, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1966), 124.

<sup>33</sup>And, as we shall see, the second and fourth movements are both in modified sonata forms, proving that Brahms could write a sonata form for natural horn.

in his instrumental output must lie elsewhere, and we shall investigate them in the next chapter.

The final misconception, which is related to the previous one, we have seen in the Musgrave and Latham quotes. This is the idea that the natural horn somehow required all four movements to be in E flat.<sup>34</sup> Elliott is simply wrong when he describes Brahms' choice of E flat as the key for all the movements as an example of "typical hand horn technique and practice."<sup>35</sup> Certainly there were reasons that Brahms chose E flat for all four movements, and those reasons at least partially relate to the use of the natural horn, but it is wrong to suppose that Brahms had no other options or was keeping with tradition.

It is true that it would have been very difficult for Brahms to have used different crooks for different movements. Using one crook for an entire piece was standard practice for solo and chamber music for the hand horn, for the following reason. The best crooks for solo playing, due to where their harmonic series lie on the horn, are the middle crooks of F, E, E-flat and D. These were the standard crooks for solos and chamber music. One can see that it is impossible to choose

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<sup>34</sup>To avoid confusion in this discussion, it is essential to keep in mind the difference between the key of the horn, determined by the crook, and the key of the music. The horn can be crooked in one key while playing in another.

<sup>35</sup>Elliott, "The Brahms Horn Trio and Hand Horn Idiom," 65.

two of these solo crooks that bear a close key relationship to each other. If a composer wanted to use different crooks for different movements, he would have had to rely on high or low crooks. It is also possible that it was considered unseemly for a hornist to change crooks in the middle of a solo or chamber work.<sup>36</sup>

Although crook changes were unrealistic, Brahms did have another, viable alternative. He could have written different movements in different keys, while keeping the same crook on the horn. This was standard procedure, and Brahms certainly knew about it – Mozart and Beethoven both did this in their piano and wind quintets, which Brahms knew and played. In both of these pieces, the second movements are in B flat, even though the horn remains crooked in E flat.

Why then did Brahms write all four movements in E flat? For one thing, we shall see in our discussions of the movements that in many ways, on many levels, the harmonic structure of the piece is about the key of E $\flat$ , major and minor. Brahms' keeping all four movements in E $\flat$  is, then, the largest scale manifestation of the harmonic life of the piece.

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<sup>36</sup>Even if Brahms could have used different crooks, it is entirely possible that he simply did not want to. As we have seen, different crooks have different tone colors, and Brahms very well might have wanted the particular color of the E flat crook to be maintained throughout the work.

Another possible reason for the retention of Eb throughout is that Brahms wanted to intensify the feeling of harmonic departure and return. As written, the tonic in each movement is reinforced by the open tones of the horn. The farther away the music gets from the tonic, the more chord tones are stopped, and the closer the music is to the tonic, the more chord tones are open. By keeping the same tonic for each movement, and by consistently reinforcing this tonic with the open tones of the horn, the key structure and form are particularly highlighted, and the sense of harmonic return to the home key is particularly strong.

Feelings of return are very important in the trio. We already have a sense of this from our knowledge of the piece's genesis. Brahms' mother had passed away, and he chose to write a piece for an instrument he strongly associated with his childhood home – a sort of return to his early youth. This sense of return to childhood will be further examined when we investigate the possibility that a theme in the last two movements is derived from a folksong that the young Brahms learned from his mother. And the feeling of return can help explain the unique form of the first movement, to which we now turn our attention.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANDANTE

Let us begin our examination of the first movement of the Horn Trio with a look at its unique form. It is the only first movement in Brahms' instrumental output not in sonata form, and the only one not in a fast tempo. Instead of sonata form, Brahms opted for a version of expanded ternary form (A B A B A), a form frequently used for slow movements in nineteenth century symphonies.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned in the previous chapter, feelings of return are important to the trio. The form of the first movement was, I believe, chosen in this spirit. In sonata form, the two main theme groups are presented in the exposition, developed, and then returned to for one last statement in the recapitulation. In expanded ternary form, the opening section returns not once, but twice, doubling the number of departures and returns in the highest structural level. In addition, the departure in sonata form (the development) usually concerns related, developmental material, while in expanded ternary form the departure (the

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<sup>1</sup>*Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2d ed., s.v. "Binary and Ternary form."

"B" section) is usually music that is markedly different. As a result, the feeling of departure is intensified, and this in turn heightens the feeling of return.

Table 1 gives an overview of the first movement in the important areas of form, theme, harmony and key, and it is important to refer to this table and a score in the following discussion.<sup>2</sup> Let us begin with the most general description of form and then move on to smaller scale details.

Immediately under the measure numbers are the sections of the large scale form, separated by double lines. We can see that both the A (andante) and B (poco più animato) sections hold within them smaller scale departures and returns.

The first A section (mm. 1-76) contains within it a smaller scale ternary form (theme groups 1-2-1). The first part of that ternary form is itself composed of an aaba' form, which again is a departure and return.

The first B section (m. 77) contains a departure and return of a different sort. Here we have theme groups 3-(4)-3. The four is in parentheses because it is not so much a completely new theme group as a developmental departure.

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<sup>2</sup>Keys in parentheses indicate keys that are passed through without being firmly established, frequently in sequences. Themes combined with a "+" indicate two themes that occur simultaneously.

Table 1  
Form of First Movement

Measure	1	9	17	21	25	27	29	41	47	57	61	69	73	77	83	85	93	105
Section	<b>A</b>														<b>B</b>			
Thm. group	1						2				1			3		(4)		3
Theme	a	a	b	a'			c				b	a''		d				d
Important Harmony	V <sup>7</sup> /I <sup>6</sup>	V <sup>7</sup> /I <sup>6</sup>	V	V <sup>7</sup> /I <sup>6</sup>	I	V <sup>7</sup> /I	I			V	V <sup>7</sup> /I <sup>6</sup>	I	I/I					
Key	E <sub>b</sub>							G <sub>b</sub>	e <sub>b</sub>	E <sub>b</sub>	E <sub>b</sub>			g(f)E <sub>b</sub>	g		(f-c-g-c-f-g-c-g)	g(E <sub>b</sub> -c)

Measure	110	115	123	127	131	139	147	151	159	163	167	173	175	179	184	192	196
Section	<b>(B)</b>				<b>A'</b>				<b>B'</b>								
Thm. group	(3)				1						3					(b1)	
Theme	d		(b1)		a	a+a'	b		a''		d						V <sup>7</sup>
Important Harmony				V <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup> /I <sup>6</sup>	V <sup>7</sup> /I <sup>6</sup>	V		V <sup>7</sup> /I <sup>6</sup>	I	I/I						
Key	g(E <sub>b</sub> -e <sub>b</sub> -b)	g		E <sub>b</sub>	E <sub>b</sub>						D <sub>b</sub> (a <sub>b</sub> )	D <sub>b</sub>	G <sub>b</sub>	D <sub>b</sub> (G <sub>b</sub> -f#-d)	D <sub>b</sub>		G <sub>b</sub>

Measure	200	208	220	224	228	232	233	234	238	242	246	254	256
Section	<b>A''</b>												
Thm. group	1												
Theme	a	b ext.			a ext.						b+a		(a)
Important Harmony	V <sup>7</sup> /I <sup>6</sup>						#i <sup>4</sup> <sub>3</sub> french	V <sup>7</sup>	V <sup>7</sup>	I-i	V		V <sup>7</sup> -I
Key	G <sub>b</sub>	(D <sub>b</sub> -E <sub>b</sub> -F-E <sub>b</sub> -D <sub>b</sub> )	G <sub>b</sub>	C <sub>b</sub> /B	E	A	A <sub>b</sub>	E <sub>b</sub>	A <sub>b</sub>			E <sub>b</sub>	



When the opening A section returns in measure 131 (A'), we can see that it has been abbreviated. The shaded part of the first A section (mm. 21-60) is eliminated, and with it disappears the ternary structure of the theme groups - 1-2-1 becomes just 1. Brahms manages to retain all three versions of theme a (a, a' and a'') by a wonderful manipulation - aaba' becomes a(a+a')ba''.

The return of the B section in measure 167 (B') contains a similar abbreviation. Here the shaded part of the first B section (mm. 85-109) gets replaced with four measures confirming Gb (mm. 175-178). As with the return of the A section, this abbreviation eliminates the ternary structure of the theme groups - 3-(4)-3 becomes just 3. Another important change is that the music occurs up a minor third, in bb minor.

The final A section (A'', m. 200) similarly begins up a minor third, in Gb major. Now the sense of departure, which was mitigated by the aforementioned abbreviations, returns with a vengeance. Here, theme b takes over, expanding from its normal four measure existence to an eleven measure sequence (mm. 208-219). When theme a returns in measure 220, it likewise expands with an enormous development of its material that lasts to the end of the movement.

I have briefly mentioned that the last statements of the B and A sections appear up a minor third. The return of material up a minor third occurs on a smaller scale as well.

Note that theme a'' (m. 21) moves theme a up a minor third, while retaining the same key. As a result, when theme a returns in Gb in measure 200, it occurs on the same pitches that theme a'' did in Eb in measure 21.<sup>3</sup>

The use of minor third modulations has a tremendously interesting result. The major key areas of the movement, because of these modulations, are Eb, Gb, g, and bb. The key structure of the movement, then, spells out the Eb triad in both of its manifestations, major and minor. These keys will return as important areas in all four movements of the trio.

The interplay of Eb major and minor can also be found on a smaller scale. At the end of section A, for example, beginning in measure 69, we move momentarily from Eb major to minor, then back to major. In the last two measures of the section (mm. 75-76), the third of the chord drops out, leaving an ambiguity as to the mode. When the violin enters with its pick ups to the next section, it plays F# and G, alternating between the minor third (F#=Gb) and major third of Eb.

When the same music appears at the end of section A', beginning in measure 163, the alternation of Eb major and minor is made more explicit. Here, the horn plays the major third for two measures, and then simply drops to the minor

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<sup>3</sup>The only difference is the use of Db at the end instead of D natural.

third for two measures. This is a key moment in the harmonic life of the movement – an easily audible manifestation of the large scale harmonic structure – and the horn player should give a very special warmth to the Gb.<sup>4</sup> In a natural horn performance, this change is highlighted by the change from an open note (G) to a stopped note (Gb).

The movement's concern with Eb major and minor lends a new insight into Brahms' decision to keep all four movements of the piece in Eb. Just as the first movement is harmonically about the key of Eb (major and minor), so the keys of the four movements are about the same thing.

One final observation about the large scale harmonic relationships is in order. It is important to note that in the B sections, the important key areas (g-Eb in section B and bb-Gb in section B') have a relationship of i-bVI. Throughout the trio, the half step above the dominant returns as an important key area as well as an important scale degree. As we shall see, this is directly related to theme b, in which dark half steps wind around scale degree 5.

Let us now turn to a more detailed look at the music. The piece opens with a theme that presents an immediate question – where is the downbeat? To most ears, the second

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<sup>4</sup>Horn pitches are described in concert pitch, unless prefaced by the word "written."

beat of the measure sounds like the downbeat.<sup>5</sup> The placement of the piano chords on the second beats strongly implies this, as does the violin part. For the first two and a half measures of the piece, the violin plays quarter note consonances on the first beat<sup>6</sup> of each measure, followed by eighth note appoggiaturas on the second. Appoggiaturas tend to convey a stress, and these appoggiaturas, over the piano chords, strongly imply a displaced bar line.

Further evidence of a displaced barline occurs in the horn statement of the theme (mm. 9-16). Here the violin plays an accompanimental rhythm that has a rest on the second beat. This same rhythm occurs later in the movement, shifted so that the rest is on the first beat, which is, there, unambiguously the sounding downbeat. The second theme group (mm. 29-60), for example, is simply stuffed with this rhythm, and it always occurs with the rest on the first beat, which is clearly the downbeat.

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<sup>5</sup>We can take as evidence of this the fact that violinists learning the piece almost inevitably enter incorrectly in measure 76. They are, clearly, hearing the second beat as the downbeat, and explaining this to them can save a lot of rehearsal time. In my personal experience, the only people who do not hear the second beat as the downbeat in the opening are those whose first encounter with the piece was playing it, and whose hearing therefore was probably influenced by how the music looks on paper.

<sup>6</sup>The term "first beat" refers to the written first beat, while "downbeat" refers to what sounds like and structurally serves as the downbeat.

Similarly, a variation of this rhythmic figure appears in the piano in measure 61 as accompaniment to theme a'', but shifted so that the rest is on the first beat instead of the second beat. As a result, the piano suggests the first beat as downbeat while the other instruments suggest the second beat as downbeat.

When theme a returns in measure 131, the piano again has the accompanimental rhythm of measures 9-16, shifted onto the first beat. These shifts add a wonderful tension to the rhythmic life of the music. They also suggest that the violinist should play his/her figure in measure 9 as it will occur later, with the rest as the sounding downbeat. By playing the figure as an afterbeat to the eighth note rest, the violin strengthens the second beat and reinforces the feeling of a displaced barline.

There is evidence within theme a itself, however, that contradicts the idea of a displaced barline. In the second half of the theme (mm. 4-7), the dissonance and consonance in the melody get switched. Here the dissonance occurs on the first beat over an implied piano harmony,<sup>7</sup> and is resolved on the second beat over the piano chord. The last eighth note of each measure is now a dissonant anticipation of the following

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<sup>7</sup>Pianists frequently hold or pedal their chords through the rests, perhaps to help them connect the harmonies as Brahms' articulations indicate. To my mind this is inappropriate, and robs the music of its wonderful, simple texture.

downbeat. The result is that the appoggiatura has been turned around. At the beginning of the theme there was an eighth note appoggiatura on the second beat, and here there is a quarter note appoggiatura on the first beat.

As I have mentioned, appoggiaturas tend to convey a stress. Halfway through theme a, therefore, there is a subtle shift in the feeling of where the downbeat is. This is especially true in the horn statement of the theme (mm. 9-16) where the quarter note appoggiaturas are no longer against an implied harmony, but against the actual sounding harmony of the violin part.

The change in dissonance placement is particularly audible in a performance on natural horn. The shift in dissonance placement in measure 12 is the first time that a stopped note occurs on the first beat of a measure. The resultant tone color makes the dissonance especially striking, and adds to the implication of a shift in downbeat.

Theme a is, then, quite ambiguous. As tempting as it can be, it would be inappropriate to play the theme simply as if the barline were displaced, constantly stressing the second beat as a downbeat. The change of dissonance placement in the second half of the theme, and the fact that Brahms later undermines the strength of the second beat by shifting the accompanimental figure of measures 9-16 onto the first beat, make this approach misguided. In addition, such a performance can easily make the theme sound pedantic and

uninteresting, more like a beer-hall song than the elegant music it is.

A performance that strives simply to make the written barlines audible would, for the same reasons, be uninformed. It would also sound terrible. In order to overcome all the weight that Brahms composed into the second beats, the violinist and horn player would have to give strong accents on the first beats. The first beats only contain two different pitches throughout the theme, and the stress on the recurring F and C would sound quite unmusical.

What then can one do? I suggest letting the theme be what it is – ambiguous. This ambiguity means that different instruments should play their parts in different ways. The pianist should play his/her chords as afterbeats, not as downbeats. This is, I feel, at least partly what Brahms was getting at with his articulation marks of slurs over dots. By playing afterbeats the pianist can avoid making the theme sound too heavy and let the contradictions of the melody work themselves out.

Those playing the melody can serve it best by being sensitive to the dissonance placement. By savoring the appoggiaturas (but not too much!), both on the eighth note level and on the quarter note level, the musician will express exactly what Brahms wrote – a subtle shift in implication half way through the theme. And, as we have seen, those with the accompanimental figure that is first heard in

measures 9-16 should play the eighth note rest as the downbeat.

It is, of course, essential to play the opening theme with the proper character. With all the appoggiaturas, it is tempting to overplay the dissonances in an attempt to be expressive. If we remember that Brahms conceived this music during an early morning stroll in the woods, we can see that too much heart-on-the-sleeve expression is inappropriate. The opening music suggests quiet contemplation, not romantic yearning. This approach has the added benefit of creating more room for contrast with the more passionate section B.

We have already seen examples of the conflict between the first and second beats throughout the movement. In one instance, Brahms explicitly writes out this conflict. In measures 139-146, Brahms has written slur marks which make the right hand of the piano change articulations on the first beats of measures, while the left hand changes on the second beats. This is wonderful evidence of Brahms' intentional ambiguity.

The conflict between the first and second beats seems to be finally eliminated at the climax of the movement in measure 234. Here, all the instruments so strongly emphasize the barlines that there is no question that the first beat is the downbeat. This is not the end of it, however. At the very end of the movement, the ambiguity returns in the extreme. In measure 258, the piano part gets shifted a beat with the



insertion of a quarter note rest, and suggests once again the second beat as the downbeat. This displacement continues to the end of the piece. While the piano is emphasizing the second beats, however, the violin and horn continue to emphasize the first beats. Even the crescendos and decrescendos of the instruments are a beat apart from each other (mm. 261-263). This alternation of downbeats quite obscures the sense of meter, and the movement ends even more ambiguously than it began.

With this glimpse of the end of the movement, let us return now back to the beginning. After two statements of theme a, we hear a completely different music, beginning with the pickup to measure 17. Theme b is a brooding, dark music that is built upon winding semitones in the bass. These half steps wind around scale degree 5, and they will return throughout the trio, affecting form, key, and melody. In many ways, the Horn Trio is about these half steps and the conflict they bring to the music — a conflict that only gets resolved in the closing bars of the finale. The half steps always have dark associations, and theme b therefore needs to be played in a way that is threatening and ominous. One thing that can help with this is to make a slight hesitation before and after the theme. This sets theme b off from the music around it, and adds to the sense of foreboding.

As can be seen in table 1, theme b returns several times throughout the movement, and some of these returns are

worthy of mention. At the end of section B, in measure 123, and section B', in measure 192, the winding half steps of theme b appear in the right hand of the piano. Pianists frequently overlook the importance of this, but it is important to bring these lines out of the texture.

When theme b returns in section A'', in measure 208, its ominous warning becomes fulfilled. Theme b takes over, expanding from four measures to thirteen through a rising and falling stepwise sequence. It is important not to let this sequence sound like it is a natural development, as that mitigates the feeling that theme b is fulfilling its earlier threats. It is better to hesitate after the first four measures, as if the next measure would again bring us back to a statement of theme a. When we hear, instead, theme b again, up a step, played more intensely, we know that something special is happening. Indeed, this takeover by theme b initiates the huge extension of theme a that is to follow, as well as the plunge down the circle of fifths from Gb to A. All of this activity is, however, not enough to exorcise theme b. It returns in the piano in measure 246, played for the first time simultaneously with music from theme a.<sup>8</sup> The pianist should really brood with this music, relaxing and lightening

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<sup>8</sup>Notice that it is played concurrently with the only *half step* from theme a. This reveals to us that the original source of the dark half steps that return throughout the trio is not theme b, but the opening theme itself.

up only with the end of theme b and the beginning of the final cadences in Eb in measure 256.

Section A contains one last theme that we need to examine. Theme c begins in measure 29, and is the second theme group of the first A section. It takes as its starting point the very end of the first theme group – the descending Bb Ab G in the horn in measures 27-29 – but is actually a quite different music.

Theme c (the second theme group) begins on the first perfect authentic cadence in the piece. This is particularly interesting as we expect a second theme group to appear in some key *other* than the tonic.<sup>9</sup> Here, the second theme group appears more strongly in the tonic than even the first theme group did.

Theme c is, then, an enormous arrival, and needs to be played as such.<sup>10</sup> In some ways, theme c sounds as if it is really the main theme of the movement, with the first twenty-eight measures acting as an introduction. This does not make sense, however, as theme c never returns. Looking at table 1, we can see that it appears once, and only once. What exactly is this unique theme about? What does it accomplish?

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<sup>9</sup>A first time listener would expect the first movement to be in sonata form.

<sup>10</sup>I like to think that theme c, not theme a, is the moment during Brahms' morning walk (see page 4) when "the sun shone out."

Theme c provides an important sense of normalcy that helps define the music around it. It strongly defines the tonic for the first time with the perfect authentic cadence, but more importantly, it defines the meter. As we have seen, the whole first theme group is ambiguous with regard to where the downbeat is. In theme c, finally, there is little question.

Yet even here, the strength of the downbeats is undermined by the frequent presence of eighth note rests. There is a frequent tendency in performance to play over these rests, letting the sound carry through them and mitigating their effect. On the contrary, the rests are essential to the character of the music. This is a rhapsodic music that is full of motion, pulling back and surging forward in overlapping entrances, and it is in direct contrast to the more regular, simpler texture of theme a. The rests are best played like breaths, quick retakes that add to the intensity of the music.

This whole passage serves as a large departure from the first theme group, but this departure infects the following music. We can see that the pattern of a rest followed by cascading triplets that saturates the second theme group carries over into the following statements of theme b (m. 57) and theme a (m. 61). And, as we have seen, this pattern in its triplet and duple versions now serves as further information in the question of where the downbeat is.

Theme c is related to the poco più animato in an interesting way. Theme c was a music about falling through the registers. Over its course, the instruments all moved from the higher parts of their registers down to the lower parts, beginning with the descending B $\flat$  A $\flat$  G that the piano took from the horn line. The music of section B, the poco più animato (m. 77), begins with a concerted effort to *rise* registrally. This time, the violin again takes the descending B $\flat$  A $\flat$  G from the end of the horn line, but turns it on its head, moving from an F $\sharp$  anticipation to G (m. 76), then to A $\flat$  and B $\flat$  and even up to C and D.

Despite its attempt to push upwards, the music of section B consistently falls back downwards. The result is waves of music, waves that occur on many different levels. In some places, these surges occur every measure, as in the piano part in measures 85-88 and the violin part in measures 89-91. In other places they last longer, as in the one wave that moves up from measure 109 to measure 112 and then falls back down to measure 117. The performers must be aware of all these rises and falls and play them accordingly.

In only one place does the attempt to rise seem momentarily to really succeed. After the horn and violin play a wonderful game of tag (mm. 95-101), in which they get closer and closer to each other until they finally meet, the violin pushes from A flat to A natural, moving by half step to the highest note it plays in the whole of section B. This

should be a triumphant moment. It is especially powerful because this music is eliminated in section B', as can be seen in table 1. Despite its importance, the violin's escape from gravity does not last long. The piano begins a reprise of the beginning of section B, and the waves begin again, ending with a final long descent to measure 126.

One of the more important things to notice about section B is the intrusion of the dark half steps that characterized theme b (m. 17). Notice, for example, the half step pickup that begins section B in measures 76-77,<sup>11</sup> the driving half steps in the left hand of the piano that are given their own stems in measures 85-87, the trading of half steps between the violin and horn in measures 95-101, and the aforementioned violin climax in measures 101-103. A quick scan of the section will reveal many more instances of prominent half steps. The source of all these semitones is revealed when, at the very end of the section, the piano plays an explicit statement of theme b (mm. 123-126).

After the storminess of the B section and its half steps, the return to the opening music and its rising perfect fifth is especially sweet (mm. 128-131). Similarly, at the

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<sup>11</sup>When these pickups return in measures 166-167, they occur up a minor third. As a result, the pitches are A, B $\flat$ , and C $\flat$  – scale degrees #4, 5, and  $\flat$ 6 of E $\flat$ . These are the pitches of theme b – the dark half steps around scale degree 5 – that will return in different guises throughout the piece.

very end of the movement, the overload of half steps (mm. 245-255) is beautifully resolved into the falling perfect fifths of measures 258, 260, and 264.<sup>12</sup> Despite this resolution, the intrusion of the dark half steps will continue throughout the trio on many levels. They will be released in the third movement, and finally banished only in the closing measures of the finale.

Now that we have looked at the music of the first movement, let us discuss some things to consider in choosing tempi. It is tempting to overindulge in the opening music, setting a fairly slow tempo for section A. More often than not, this gives a stodgy, heavy feeling to the music that should be avoided. For Brahms, "andante" indicated motion more than slowness.<sup>13</sup> Remember too that Brahms conceived the theme during a morning walk. Even if one wants to choose a slower tempo, it must retain the feeling of motion, a literal feeling of "andante" ("going"). One must make sure that the tempo one chooses for the opening works for the second theme group as well (m. 29), not inhibiting the motion of the

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<sup>12</sup>Notice how the piece began with a rising perfect fifth followed by a descending semitone, and it closes with a rising semitone followed by a falling perfect fifth. This reversal of the opening motive provides a wonderful sense of closure to the movement.

<sup>13</sup>*Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2d ed., s.v. "Andante." At the end of the andante of Brahms' Piano Sonata op. 5, for example, Brahms uses *andante molto* to indicate a faster, not a slower, tempo.

falling gestures. Also note that in the very beginning, Brahms has the piano playing in two measure groupings. Thinking of the music in these groups will suggest a tempo that is not too indulgent.

The *poco più animato* should be just that – a little more lively. This suggests a slightly faster tempo, of course, but what Brahms' marking indicates even more is a change in character. The operative word here is "*poco*." One good test of the tempo is to make sure that all the rushing eighth notes do not get glossed over, as they can in a tempo that is too fast.

The last tempo indications to consider occur at the end of the movement. In measure 223 Brahms writes "*un poco animato poi a poi*." It is extremely tempting to begin the acceleration earlier than it is marked, with the return of theme a material in measure 217, and this must be avoided. In fact, in Brahms' autograph manuscript, he originally indicated the *poco animato* beginning in measure 230. Brahms thus already moved the *animato* back earlier than he initially conceived it, and we should not move it further for him. There are, of course, musical reasons for not speeding up earlier. The passage from measure 217 to measure 223 really wants to move faster. If performers do not give into this temptation, they can imbue the music with the wonderful tension of a repressed motion. Then, when they finally do



begin to accelerate in measure 223, the release of this tension helps drive the music forward.

But forward to where? Brahms does not write another tempo indication until measure 247, where he marks "sempre dim. e ritard. poco a poco." It is standard performance practice *not* to accelerate all the way to this marking. Rather, most performances peak at the key change in measure 234, and this works very well, due to the structural importance of this moment. Not only is this the return of the tonic (for the first time since measure 166), but it is also the only statement of theme a material in which the question of where the downbeat is has been completely eliminated. The performers need to get up to a fairly rapid tempo so that this music and the piano arpeggios can passionately fly.

The final ritardando that begins in measure 247 is controlled by the pianist. The timing of it takes practice, and one word of caution is in order. Be careful not to get too slow at the end, for you risk losing the sense of motion that you have strived so hard to attain. The movement should end in a relaxed peace, not a quiet death.

We have already touched on some specific ways that a performance on natural horn affects the first movement. Let us now finish our discussion of the andante with a few other points about natural horn performance. Obviously, the best

way for a horn player to really feel the effects of hand horn technique is to play through the part without using valves.<sup>14</sup>

When discussing natural horn performance, it is best to look at specifics and avoid generalizations. It is tempting to think, for example, that the stopped color always adds emphasis to a note, as it seems to in the appoggiaturas in theme a. In actuality, stopped color is a tool that has many possible uses – it can add emphasis or take it away, depending on the will of the performer. In measures 95-101, for example, there is an alternation of written C-B and F-E suspensions. In the C-B suspensions, the B resolution is stopped, while in the F-E suspension, the F dissonance is stopped. In this case, then, the performer can use the stopped color to de-emphasize the resolution or to emphasize the dissonance, depending on where the stopped note occurs. Here, the stopped color is merely another tool for expressing what the music suggests.

Similarly, the use of stopped notes on fortepianos or sforzandos is inconsistent. In measure 104 Brahms writes a fortepiano on a written Eb, a stopped note, and in measure 187 he writes a sforzando on the same pitch. In these cases, the stopped color gives a real sting to the tone quality. There are, however, three other times when sforzandos or

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<sup>14</sup>On a modern F horn, holding down the first valve throughout will approximate a natural horn in Eb, albeit a poor one.

fortepianos occur on open notes (mm. 118, 122 and 191), so clearly no generalization can be made.

There are, however, passages where the use of stopped notes is consistent, and adds a special, notable color to the music. In the statement of theme b in measures 57-60, for example, each downbeat in the horn is a stopped note, which moves to an open note on the second beat. This can add to the dark, haunting quality of the music.

Hand horn technique can be used to give different themes markedly different colors. The first theme group (mm. 1-29), for example, has 48 notes in the horn, of which 18, or 37.5 percent are stopped. The second theme group (mm. 29-56) has 42 notes, of which 28, or 66 percent are stopped. On natural horn, the color of the second theme group is thus much darker than that of the first theme group. This is entirely appropriate, given the different characters of the two themes. The constant falling of the second theme group thus takes on a particularly dark color when performed on natural horn. A modern horn player can use a darker sound to try to give the music some of the color that Brahms wrote into the natural horn part.

Finally, the use of hand horn technique can really help with the control of volume and tone color. When theme a returns in G $\flat$  in measure 200, the modulation has caused a reversal in the use of stopped notes. Here, the consonant quarter notes in the first half of the theme (written F's)

and at the very end (written F's and Eb's) are stopped, while the dissonant quarter notes in the second half of the theme are open (written C's). As a result, it is now the highest pitches that are stopped. This is a tremendous help for the horn player, who must now, with some fatigue, play the softest dynamic in the movement. It also helps the hornist achieve a new, tender color that is entirely appropriate for this final, somewhat melancholy return of the opening texture.

## CHAPTER 5

### SCHERZO: ALLEGRO

Brahms' decision to begin the Horn Trio with a slow movement effected a departure from the traditional placement of the middle movements of a four movement work. Clearly, it would be problematic for Brahms to have followed the first movement with another slow movement. Instead, Brahms moved the scherzo from its usual position as the third movement to the second movement, and made the third movement the slow movement. The tempi of the movements are thus slow-fast-slow-fast — a structure reminiscent of the sonata da chiesa.

Let us begin our study of the scherzo with a rather technical look at the structures of the music. We will then discuss the movement in less formal, more musical terms.

Table 2 shows the important thematic, formal and harmonic characteristics of the second movement. The largest scale form of the movement is an A-B-A form, scherzo-trio-scherzo. Each of these sections is itself made up of another A-B-A form. While the trio's A-B-A is unremarkable, that of the scherzo deserves special attention.

Table 2  
Form of Second Movement

Measure	1	13	17	25	41	49	61	81=	89=	97=	101=	105
Section	A (Exposition)							B (Development) (recap?)				
Group	1	2										
Theme	1	x	A	1'	B	bridge y	2 y	closing y	1'	B+x	x+B	A piano
Important Harmony					i-bVII-Fr6-V x4	V7	I	I-ger6-V6-V7	I	I-bVII-07/bIII-bIII		
Key	Eb(g)	G(C-F-Bb)	Eb	eb-db	(Bb)	Bb	Bb	Bb -(Eb)	Eb	Eb-F#-F#-A	A-C# cf. Eb-g	C#(F#-g#-C#)

Measure	109	113	118	121=	137=	153	163=	167=	171=	179=	191=	199=	207=
Section	(B) (Development)							A(Recapitulation)					
Group							1	2					
Theme	(A) ext. alt.	(A) ext. pf.	(A) cadence	1 dbld	B dbld	(B) ext.	x	A	1 alt!	B	bridge	2 abbr.	2 Y
Important Harmony			2x harm rthm		i-bVII-Fr6-Vx2					i-bVII-Fr6-V x2	V7	V/1	V/Eb
Key	(F#-B-E/D#-g#-C#)	(F#-B-E-g#-d#-g#-C#-E-B-E)	(F#-C#-F#)	B	B =	Cb-Ab-C	C1 (not Eb!)	G(C-F-Bb)	Eb	eb-Bb	(Eb)	Eb!1	Bb-Eb-Ab

Measure	227	235=	243=	251	278	287	300	311	323	327	347	359
Section	cf.42	61	227									
Group	Fine				Trans	Trio						
Theme	211	closing 1x	y	211	closing ext. 3x	y	4	4	4 ext. 4+4+2+2	cadence	4	cadence
Important Harmony	i	I-ger6-V6-V7			V7					V7---tonic ger6-V7		V6-V7-i
Key	ab-Fb	Cb	eb-Cb	Gb-Cb-Fb-Eb (f)-Eb	ab	ab (eb)	ab (eb)	Ab-db A-d Bb-Eb Cb-fb	Bbb-Eb	ab-Ab (db)	ab	Eb

A-B-A is a common form for a scherzo, but Brahms here creates a sonata-scherzo.<sup>1</sup> The first movement of the trio, remember, was Brahms' only instrumental first movement not in sonata form. Sonata form was not, however, completely abandoned. It shows up here in the second movement, where Brahms has laid a sonata form over the A-B-A of the scherzo, and it will return again in the finale.

The presence of sonata form here is not completely explicit and obvious. Rather, it lies under the surface. A listener is more likely to hear the form as A-B-A, if only because (s)he will certainly not be expecting sonata form. The implied sonata form is, however, precisely what makes this scherzo formally so interesting. We will, therefore, examine the movement using the terms of sonata form in order better to understand the underlying structure.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Malcolm MacDonald, to his credit, observes that this movement is in sonata-scherzo form. He does not, however, go into any detail about the form or how it works in this movement. See MacDonald, *Brahms*, 176.

<sup>2</sup>It is important to recognize, too, that the use of sonata form here is not perfectly neat. For example, the very first measures of the piece, which I label theme 1, are in many ways an introduction to theme A and the following statement of theme 1 (m. 13). Further, the "development" opens with music of theme 1 in the tonic, which is not standard practice for sonata form. The reason for these divergences from "standard" sonata form, is that this movement is not simply a sonata form. It is, rather, a scherzo that has a sonata form laid over it, and therein lies part of its brilliance.

In Table 2 we can see how many common sonata form characteristics are present in the scherzo. Let us take a quick tour of these features. The exposition begins with the first theme group in the tonic. In measure 41 there begins a bridge to the dominant and the contrasting, lyrical second theme (m. 49). This is followed by a closing theme (m. 61) that moves us, at the end, back to the tonic (m. 77). The exposition ends after measure 80, where we can imagine a repeat sign would be if this were a first movement sonata form.

The development begins in measure 81 with first theme material that modulates to distant keys. In the "measure" heading of table 2, one can see that measure 81 develops music heard earlier in measure 17, measure 89 develops music from measure 25, and so forth. There occurs a brief false recapitulation in the wrong key (m. 97, which is music from m. 9), after which there follow developments of various thematic materials. These developments use common techniques, such as fragmentation (mm. 101-120) and augmentation (mm. 121-153), over sequences that fall through the circle of fifths. At the end of the development the music modulates back towards the tonic for the recapitulation.

The recapitulation (m. 163) presents the themes from the exposition in order, with the second theme occurring this time in the tonic, as is customary (m. 199). Again, the "measure" heading of table 2 shows how the music of measures



9, 13, 17, and so forth, are restated in the recapitulation. After a slight, final departure and development (mm. 207-250), which is not uncommon in sonata form, the closing theme is extended for a final cadence.

Now that we have seen the large scale features of sonata form, let us take a more detailed look at the themes, and then examine the music in less formal terms. The first theme group (mm. 1-48) contains three important thematic ideas. The first is labeled theme 1, and this is the music that opens the movement. In measure 13, theme 1 is interrupted by what I have labeled theme A. Theme A is notable for how it contrasts with theme 1. It begins in G (III), and is in duples instead of the triples of theme 1. Its appearance in G is noteworthy – the key areas of the exposition spell out the E $\flat$  triad, as did the key areas of the first movement.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to notice that theme A's interruption occurs immediately after the piano begins to head into minor territory that features half steps. In measures 9-12, the piano suggests g minor, and plays a series of semitones (d-e $\flat$ , a-b $\flat$ ). These semitones and the minor mode are reminders of the dark half steps from the first movement. It seems that the

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<sup>3</sup>Notice that the first new key area in the development is F $\sharp$ , which, when spelled as G $\flat$ , completes the spelling out of the e $\flat$  minor triad. It also points to B, the most important key area of the middle section.

violin and horn will not tolerate the semitones, stopping the momentum of the quarter notes in an attempt to banish them.

This interruption is brief. Theme 1 resumes in a slightly altered form in measure 17. Here it is played in parallel thirds, and takes a detour to what I have labeled theme B. Theme B (m. 25) is a variation of the music of measures 9-12. As with measures 9-12, half steps and the minor mode appear here, but much more strongly. The half steps that were previously somewhat nested are here made explicit, and the minor mode is confirmed.<sup>4</sup> Each time theme B returns, including in the development (mm. 89-96 and 137-162), it reminds us of the dark half steps that are lurking in the background, and that they will not go away without a fight.

After theme B moves to  $b\flat$ , it is followed by the bridge (m. 41), which brings us to the major dominant for the second theme. The bridge closes with what I have called theme  $\gamma$  (mm. 47-48), a falling arpeggio that returns throughout the movement as closing and transitory material.

The second theme (m. 49) is composed of music we have heard before. It is a combination of a version of theme A in the violin over theme 1 in the piano. Both themes occur here

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<sup>4</sup>Notice that this music features prominent augmented sixth chords (mm. 27, 31, 35, and 39-40). These harmonies contain augmented sixths that, importantly, resolve outward by half step. The choice of local harmony is, then, influenced by the motivic necessity of the half steps.

on scale degree 5, instead of 1, and this changes the harmonic context. The character of the music, however, is really what defines it as a new theme group – the excitement of themes 1 and A have been transformed into a legato lyricism. The technique of using first theme group material for the second theme group of a sonata form is hardly new – Haydn, for example, used it quite frequently.

The jaunty closing material (m. 61) is, to my mind, a bit reminiscent of a beer-hall song. It is helpful to be aware of its formal role as *closing* material, and really drive to the cadence in measure 77. In that way, one can help the listeners feel the overlaid sonata form, and not hear the closing music as only a new theme in, say, a rondo-type form. It is valuable for the performers to try playing the movement with an inserted repeat at the end of measure 80, in order better to feel the implied sonata form.

Furthermore, if the performers are aware of the sonata form, they will play the beginning of the development (m. 81) differently than they otherwise would have. The *piano* dynamic will suddenly be much more important, and the hairpins over the modulations will be more meaningful. The performers will feel this music as *exploration*, not transition, and feel that the point of arrival must be found and is not prescribed. This is a subtle difference, perhaps, but an important one.

This exploration opens with minor third modulations, which were extremely important in the first movement. We move

from Eb through F# to A (mm. 89-97). Thematically, the music of theme B becomes the music of theme x (the music of mm. 9-12), and this leads us back to theme A in c# minor (m. 101) – a false recapitulation. Theme A becomes the source of development through fragmentation, over a falling circle of fifths. I call this theme A, and not theme 2, because the music begins on scale degree 1 instead of 5, and because of the music's somewhat driven character. Notice that each fall through the circle of fifths begins on D#, a respelling of the tonic Eb. What is more important, however, is that each section (measures 109, 113, and 118) begins in F#. As we learned in section B' of the first movement, F# (Gb) is bVI of the dominant. bVI, remember, is an important background manifestation of the dark half steps around scale degree 5 that originated in theme b of the first movement.

The falls through the circle of fifths finally arrive in measure 121 at the key of B, which is the most distant important key area we have heard in the piece thus far. This key appeared momentarily in measure 224 of the first movement, right after the use of Gb as bVI of the dominant. The key of B is bVI of the tonic. In this development, then, we reach out to bVI of both the tonic and dominant, just as we did in section B' of the first movement. Also related to the dark half steps from the first movement was the use of #IV (A) – the half step below scale degree 5 – which initiated theme x and the false recapitulation in measure 97. These will all

be important key areas and relationships to follow throughout the piece.

The development of themes 1 and B that begins in measure 121 is achieved through an interesting kind of augmentation. Each measure of each theme is extended by holding the last note for an extra three beats.<sup>5</sup> The effect, which can be highlighted by aware performers, is at first quite playful, particularly with the rapid arpeggios in the piano. When the development of theme B starts in measure 137, its half steps are also at first quite jovial. Beginning in measure 153, however, the music turns quite dark as the recapitulation approaches, the minor mode enters, and the same eb-d half step gets repeated over and over.

This darkness is coincidental with a unique metric event. The entire movement is constructed of four measure groups, with the sole exception of measures 153-158. Here there is a six measure group, which serves to build intensity to the recapitulation. The performers must be aware of and communicate this large scale triple (three groups of two measures), while respecting that the crescendo does not begin until measure 159.

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<sup>5</sup>According to Tovey, this is the first time Brahms uses this technique. He also notes that Joachim performed this passage in tempo, without pulling back. Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Chamber Music of Brahms* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933).

When the recapitulation begins with theme x in measure 163, it is with a special twist. Theme x is now heard in c minor, and not in E $\flat$  as it was in the exposition, due to the use of c minor in measures 160-163. The pitches of theme x, however, are identical – it is the preceding measures that make us hear them in the different key. This result is that the suggested minor of theme x in measures 9-12 is here made explicit.

The recapitulation proceeds with slight variations. The second theme, after appearing in the tonic in measure 199, is repeated in the dominant and moves towards the subdominant. This instigates the appearance of a new, very important theme, marked theme z. Theme z (m. 227) is based on the first measure of the piece, with one crucial exception. The opening whole step is here converted into a half step. Once again the dark half steps from the first movement are intruding on the music of the second movement. Theme z brings us to a statement of the closing music in C $\flat$ , a respelling of B (m. 235). And, as we have seen, the key of B, as  $\flat$ VI, is directly related to the half steps of the first movement's theme b.

After the closing music brings us back to the tonic in measures 238-242, theme z interrupts one last time (m. 243). This time, however, it has been moved to the tonic minor. With the conflict of keys resolved, the scherzo can end solidly in the tonic.

The scherzo closes on the third measure of a four measure group, and the transition (m. 278) begins with the fourth measure of this group. In other words, the transition begins with a measure that is metrically an upbeat. It is essential for the violinist to be aware of this in order to properly communicate the correct feeling of strong and weak measures. Similarly, the entrance of the horn in the last measure of the transition functions as a measure long upbeat to the trio.

The structure of the trio is quite straightforward, but a few things are worth mentioning. The overall key is  $ab$  minor.  $Ab$  was used as a closing key area in the first movement, as IV often is. It will return with a similar function in the last two movements, serving to heighten closure and the confirmation of the tonic. Here in the scherzo,  $ab$  was the key of theme z. Like theme z, the trio uses the dark half steps from the first movement. Here they appear in the key areas. The B section of the trio (mm. 311-326) contains sequences that move up by half steps from  $Ab$  until they reach our familiar key of  $Cb$  (B). A descent through the circle of fifths brings us to an augmented sixth chord (m. 324) that, reinterpreted, takes us back to  $ab$ . A closing exploration of iv (mm. 342-346) is followed by a modulation back to  $Eb$ , and a written out ritardando in the left hand of the piano leads us to the da capo.

The theme of the trio is strikingly similar to theme 1 of the scherzo. The following observations are true for both themes, and show their common structure. There are three statements of a four measure idea. The idea is one that attempts to push upward, only to fall back down. The second statement of the idea is up a step from the first, and the third statement succeeds in pushing up to a climax, after which it sinks back down.

Let us now look at the music in less formal, theoretical terms. It is essential to keep in mind that scherzo means "joke," and that the joke has to do with play, and not necessarily humor. In the Horn Trio, as in many scherzi, the "joke" is about stark contrasts.

The first example of such contrast is the entrance of theme A in measure 13, whose duples interrupt the momentum of theme 1. The brakes have been applied, and the performers must strongly feel the weight of the duples. It is common, and to my mind appropriate, to pull back a bit in the cadence before theme 1 resumes. This serves to heighten the contrast between the two themes – between the perpetual motion of theme 1 and the stodgy grandeur of theme A.

The next moment of great contrast comes in measure 41. After sixteen measures of intense, dark, minor music that reminds us of the half steps from the first movement, we arrive at a huge cadence. The bridge that ensues is of completely different character. Suddenly everything is quiet,



transparent, and, most importantly, suspended. For the first time in the movement the same harmony is held for eight measures. The harmonic progression stops, and we have a moment to catch our breath. This feeling is helped if the horn and violin play their three note motives lightly and without too much shape, really feeling the suspension of the third quarter note into the next measure. The pianist, too, must feel this stoppage of time, moving his/her phrases to the third quarter, and not away from the first quarter. In measure 47, the motion of the music begins to return with a luxuriant hemiola, and time can be taken here. This is a truly gorgeous pair of measures, so enjoy them.

The feeling of suspension continues somewhat into the second theme (m. 49). To my mind, there is an element of mock lyricism to this music, and the musicians can emphasize this, playing with extra sentimentality. Not only is this appropriate to the music, but it helps heighten the contrast with the closing theme.

The closing theme (m. 61) brings to my mind an image of Brahms having had one too many steins at the beer hall and breaking into his favorite drinking song. Brahms grew up playing piano in a local pub/brothel, so perhaps this image is not too inappropriate. This is jolly music, so let it swing.

Theme 1 takes on some new characters in the development. In measure 81 it appears in thirds over a

galloping rhythm in the piano. It is here a sneaky, excited music. It is essential that the musicians keep a true *piano* throughout, not swelling until it is indicated. Otherwise, they will lose the hushed quality that is essential to its character.

We have already discussed the sense of exploration that is necessary to this development, but it is important to note that almost all the music of the development is essentially *playful*. The statement of theme 1 in measure 81, the fragmentation of theme A beginning in measure 101, and the augmentation of theme 1 in measure 121, are all fun, light music. This development is not one of passionate soul-searching and examination — it is, rather, one of playful exploration. In measure 153, however, intensity begins to return, with the six measure group and minor mode that were mentioned previously.

The last theme that remains to be discussed in the scherzo is theme z (m. 227). This is the one theme that is in no way a joke. The dark half steps here are a painful reminder of the foreboding of the first movement. This music must be as intense and serious as is possible.

By keeping in mind the playfulness that abounds in the scherzo, the musicians further emphasize the largest contrast of the movement, the contrast between the scherzo and the trio. The trio is a lament, or perhaps a dark, sad lullaby. It certainly has an element of folk song to it. The sweet

sadness of this music is in direct contrast to the scherzo, and the more the musicians can feel the pain, the better.

With these characters in mind, let us turn to issues of tempo. The scherzo must be quick enough to be playful rather than heavy. If it is too fast, however, the weight of the duples of theme A, as well as the stodginess of the closing music, will be lost. There is an ideal middle ground that allows the musicians to make the music weighty or light, as is appropriate.

The trio is marked "molto meno allegro," and this marking can easily lead performers to a tempo that is, to my mind, too slow. The music should remain in one, and can easily do this while still being "much less fast" than the scherzo. It is helpful for the pianist to think of his/her eighth notes as a response to the main pulse of the dotted half notes. If the music begins to feel less like a lament, and more like a dirge, it is too slow.

Let us now examine some of the ways that a performance on natural horn affects the second movement. The scherzo is notable for how extreme the difference is in the usage of stopped notes in the tonic versus other keys. While it is true that a move away from the tonic will generally necessitate more stopped tones in the horn, in this movement the differences are particularly marked.

In the exposition, the first theme group and bridge are almost entirely composed of open notes, with only five out of

fifty four pitches stopped, or nine percent. The second theme group and closing music, on the other hand, have twelve out of thirty one notes stopped, or thirty nine percent.

As the music gets further from the tonic, the stopped color becomes increasingly prevalent. The statement of the first theme group in B (mm. 121-136), for example, has nineteen out of twenty six notes stopped, or seventy three percent.

With the return of the tonic at the end, Brahms again writes open notes almost exclusively. Of the last fifty one notes for the horn, only five, or ten percent, are stopped.

The result of these differences is a strong reinforcement of the key areas, and thereby, the form of the scherzo. In particular, the development section is strongly set off from the outer sections by a darker, more closed sound. A performance on natural horn, then, aides in the aural comprehension of the form of the movement. A performance on valve horn does not have this advantage, so performers must be especially aware of the key areas and formal structures in order to better communicate them to the audience.

The use of stopped tones in the closing music of the exposition (mm. 61-77) is worthy of notice. In this passage, the notes (written) Eb, C#, and A are stopped. The result is that open tones and stopped tones alternate throughout the theme, with few exceptions. This alternation can be used to

add an extra element of humor and an extra swing to the music.

The molto meno allegro is one of the most difficult sections in the piece to play on natural horn, due to many quick alternations between completely closed and completely open tones. While a performance on valve horn is much easier, it loses the wonderful color of the stopped notes. The trio, in *a<sub>b</sub>* minor, has forty two out of eighty two notes stopped, or fifty one percent. This is the most extended passage in the movement with so many stopped tones. As a result, the difference in the characters of the scherzo and trio is strengthened. The beautiful, dark, soft color of the stopped tones is particularly appropriate here given the melancholic mood of the passage. A valve horn player can capture some of this by using a darker sound in the trio.

Let us close our discussion of natural horn performance with an interesting observation about the theme 1. This theme seems to have been written with natural horn in mind. The horn's statement of the first half of theme 1 in the tonic (mm. 81-88) is entirely open with the exception of the two written F's. This is just one small example of how the natural horn was essential to the very creation of the music.

Throughout the first two movements, half steps manifest themselves in many ways, always with a darkness to them. It remains for the third movement to reveal to us the source of this darkness, and let it have its say. We shall then better

understand how the Horn Trio is intimately related to the death of Brahms' mother.

## CHAPTER 6

### ADAGIO MESTO

We arrive now at the core of the Horn Trio. The emotional power of the adagio mesto is tremendous. The listener learns rapidly that the first two movements have served as introduction to this moment, and that the last movement will serve as resolution. If the piece as a whole is "about" anything, it is about this movement.

I have already mentioned the death of Brahms' mother as an influence in the composition of the Horn Trio, and one feels her presence nowhere as much as in the slow movement. It must be said that there is no absolute proof that Brahms was thinking of his mother while writing the adagio. The evidence is circumstantial, yet I believe it is very strong.

Perhaps most compelling is the fact that Brahms marked the slow movement "adagio mesto" - "sorrowful adagio." This marking is extremely rare. This was, however, a unique time in Brahms' life, as this was the first piece that Brahms completed after his mother's death.

The movement is suffused with sorrow, as the tempo marking suggests. As we shall see, it is also filled with a sense of remembrance, of looking back. We have already seen some evidence of this feeling in Brahms' decision to write a

piece for horn, an instrument strongly associated with his childhood.

Let us begin by working our way through the fairly straightforward form of the movement. In table 3, we can see that the movement is in our rather familiar A B A form, with an important departure (marked "X") near the end.

The A section is composed of two basic ideas – theme x and theme 1. Theme x (m. 1) is a soft, brooding, ostinato-like music. Brahms marks this music "una corda," giving the piano a particularly soft color. The rocking motion of the music makes it feel like a slow, dark lullaby. If we think of the movement in terms of the death of Brahms' mother, a "sorrowful" lullaby is particularly touching, and implies a look back to memories of childhood. It is essential that the pianist not let the sense of swaying motion get lost in the piano rolls – the rolls should add color, not obscure the swing. The pianist must also be careful to play the phrasings as marked – (s)he must feel each measure as a unit and not get bogged down by half-measure groups.

There is an important characteristic of theme x that we shall see throughout the movement – the constant presence of half steps in the melody. The half steps that we have seen brooding in the background in the first two movements become manifest here. They occur continuously in the foreground, in the most immediate, audible ways.



Table 3  
Form of Third Movement

Measure	1	5	9	11	15	19	27	32	43	47	51	53	59	69	77
Section	<b>A</b>				<b>B</b>				<b>A</b>				<b>X</b>		<b>(A)</b>
Theme	x	1	(x)	1	x	2	2	2	x+2	1	(x)	1	3/2	(1)	x
Important Harmony				bII <sup>6</sup>		plagal	phrygian color	bII <sup>6</sup>				bII <sup>6</sup>		bII <sup>6</sup>	plagal
Key	eb	eb(Ab-db)	eb	Gb(Cb-Fb)	eb	bb-eb-bb-Db-f	db-A-f#-D-d	eb-bb-eb-bb-eb	eb	eb(Ab-db)	eb	Gb(Cb-Fb)	Eb!-C-F-d	Eb-Cb-eb-Cb-Bb-Eb-eb	eb-B-eb-ab-eb

Theme 1 (m. 5) makes the most of the half steps, using them for the highest expressivity. Look, for example, at the second half of measure 5 and measure 6, where half step appoggiaturas over an ostinato bass create a tremendous yearning. The musicians must be aware that these moments are the core of the music, both emotionally and thematically. Moving to the second half of each measure to emphasize these appoggiaturas helps maintain the measure long groups that were established by the piano in theme x. In addition, the climax of the phrase occurs in the second half of measure 7, creating a consistently strong, expressive second beat.

Theme 1 closes in measure 9 with more half steps, which overlap with a restatement of the last half of theme x. Theme 1 is then restated in G $\flat$  major in measure 11. This minor third modulation, whose importance we have seen in the previous movements, is a tremendously moving change of color that lasts only shortly. We return to e $\flat$  via a reinterpretation of F $\flat$  as Neapolitan ( $\flat$ II) of e $\flat$  (mm. 14-15).

The Neapolitan harmony returns throughout the movement, as can be seen in table 3. The importance of the Neapolitan is due to its emphasis on half steps – the harmony uses scale degrees  $\flat$ 2 and  $\flat$ 6, the half steps above the tonic and dominant. In this movement, Brahms consistently resolves the Neapolitan to a V $\flat$ <sub>4</sub> harmony, which allows him to resolve the  $\flat$ 2 and  $\flat$ 6 down by half steps. This is, then, another example of the dark half steps manifesting themselves in very local,

audible ways. The Neapolitan is also intimately related to the Phrygian mode, due to the use of  $b2$  and  $b6$ , and we shall soon see how that mode appears and affects the music.

The return to  $eb$  minor in measure 15 initiates a complete statement of theme  $x$ . We can see, then, that theme  $x$  functions as a frame – it surrounds and supports theme 1. Each return of theme  $x$  should feel like a continuation, not like a fresh start.

Section B begins in measure 19 with a complete change of texture. The piano and violin fall silent and the horn begins a fugue subject. The subject (mm. 19–20) has several noteworthy characteristics. The first four notes of theme 2 are a variation of the opening theme of the first movement. There, a rise of a fifth was followed by a half step lower neighbor tone. Here, a rise of a fifth is followed by a half step *upper* neighbor. If we remember the importance of the half steps around scale degree 5, both in theme  $b$  of the first movement as well as in the key areas of the piece thus far, this variation makes perfect sense.

Another important characteristic of theme 2 is its metric ambiguity. The subject appears in  $6/8$  time, barred in groups of three eighth notes. There is also a strong implication of hemiola – one can hear the subject as three measures of  $2/4$  instead of two measures of  $6/8$ . This implication becomes stronger and stronger throughout the

section. The duple version first appears unambiguously in diminution when the horn plays sixteenths in measures 23-24.

In measure 26, the conflict of twos and threes is elevated to a higher metric level. Here we get the only 9/8 measure of the movement. The 9/8 is an extension of a two (6/8) into a three (9/8). The 9/8 brings the motion to a pause, preparing a further escalation of the metric conflict. When the music continues, in measure 27, the sense of duples becomes stronger as the piano plays explicit hemiolas under theme 2. Things get even more confused when the horn and violin begin trading off four note groups in measure 30. In measure 32 the piano takes the duples to a lower metric level, with its sixteenth note configuration that implies groups of two sixteenth notes.

This section, then, contains all sorts of metric conflicts on all sorts of levels. With this information in mind, how should the performers play theme 2? Should they play two groups of three, three groups of two, or change from one to the other? To my mind, the metric interest of this passage lies in the conflict of the groupings and metric implications, and not in any resolution. This conflict can best be emphasized if the hornist and violinist play their music in 6/8 (two groups of three), while letting the piano's hemiolas and sixteenths give a conflicting interpretation. The one exception is when the horn has its duple sixteenths in measures 23-24, and here the horn player can let the

duples shine through. This overall strategy highlights the metric play.

Brahms' choice of a fugal texture implies a look back in time. Since the Baroque period, the fugue has generally been considered an old form, and its use has generally had a somewhat archaic connotation. This association is strengthened by the repeated use of plagal cadences (measures 24, 25, and 26, for example) and the color of the phrygian mode (b2 and b6 in measures 30-31).<sup>1</sup> The plagal cadence and phrygian mode, even more than the fugue, have archaic implications. There is here a very strong sense of memory and age. The plagal and phrygian colors also have strong associations with religious music. This is particularly interesting given the possibility that the movement might have served Brahms as a miniature requiem for his mother.

Throughout the B section, we can see the continued importance of half steps. A quick look at the violin and horn parts will reveal how important half step dissonances are to the texture. The musicians must savor these expressive dissonances, as they are the key to the grief that lies behind the music. The passage closes in measures 40-42 with a repeated half step dissonance in the horn, which finally

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<sup>1</sup>Remember the importance of the Neapolitan harmony throughout the movement, and its relation to the phrygian mode. The Neapolitan is sometimes referred to as Phrygian II, due to its use of scale degrees b2 and b6.

resolves and leads us to the return of section A. Just as section B opens with the horn playing scale degree 5 colored by  $\flat 6$ , it ends with the horn resolving  $\flat 6$  to 5.

The return of the A section in measure 43 begins with an interesting twist. The violin plays theme 2, *ppp quasi niente*, over the piano's theme x. The softer the violin can play, the better. This should be a hushed whisper, a ghostly echo, a faint memory.

The return of the A section continues essentially unchanged until the very end. In measure 57, the piano repeats the violin music of measure 56, strongly confirming  $F\flat$ , which was only a passing key in the first A section.  $F\flat$  is reinterpreted as the Neapolitan of the tonic, to which we return in measure 59.

The tonic here appears in major, for the first time in the movement. It is a stunning moment that initiates what I have called section X. Section X begins with a new theme (theme 3, m. 59), which, although related to the earlier theme 1, is a strikingly different music. I call this passage section X, and not C, because the music feels like a visit from another place, or perhaps an elevation to another place.<sup>2</sup> It is a music of revelation, of realization, as if a long closed door has been opened. We have descended through

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<sup>2</sup>Theme 3 is literally a visit from the last movement. As we shall see, theme 3 is the opening music of the finale.

all the pain and grieving and are finally awarded a moment of clarity and peace. The feeling of suspension is largely due to the incredibly slow harmonic rhythm – each harmony lasts for two slow measures.

This is also a music of remembrance. It is now generally accepted that the melody is a variation of the lower Rhenish folk song *In den Weiden steht ein Haus*, which Brahms learned from his mother as a child.<sup>3</sup> If true, this is fairly conclusive evidence that Brahms was thinking of his mother while writing the third movement. Whether or not one can prove with absolute certainty that this was Brahms' conscious intention is, to my mind, not crucial. What is important is recognizing the feeling behind it. The music *feels* like a sudden remembrance of a long forgotten song, a song that you learned as a child from the beloved mother you just lost. We have discussed the importance of departures and returns in the piece, and this is the ultimate return, the return to childhood memory. For the performers, conveying this feeling is of the utmost importance. This moment is the centerpiece of the movement, which is in turn the core of the entire piece.

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<sup>3</sup>Although I have not seen conclusive, positive proof that Brahms intended this reference, people seem to want to believe it. It has appeared as fact, without documentation, in as standard a source as *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1980 ed., s.v. "Johannes Brahms," by Heinz Becker.

Section X begins with an alternation between theme 3 in the horn and violin and the familiar theme 2 in the piano. Theme 3 is played in horn fifths, which, like the plagal cadence and phrygian mode, have a somewhat archaic connotation and emphasize the feeling of looking back. The second statement of theme 3, in measure 63, is an echo – the memory is moving away. Theme 2 then takes over (m. 65), getting louder and faster. The opening fifth and half step get repeated four times in the piano (mm. 67-68), strongly emphasizing the half step of scale degrees 5-b6. Further, this build up occurs in the key of d, a half step below the tonic. The half steps, then, are the driving force that banishes theme 3 and pushes us, intensely, to the passionata climax.

The climax (m. 69) is based on theme 1. It is intense and forceful, and the performers should play with abandon. The music contains multiple Neapolitan harmonies, the most important of which moves the music to the *fortissimo* climax in the second half of measure 73. The half steps, then, are present both melodically and harmonically, driving the climax as they drove the build up. And half steps return us, in the cool down of measure 76, back to theme x and the closing music of the movement.

The rocking of theme x continues throughout the close. Half steps are everywhere. There is a slight harmonic exploration, with double half step appoggiaturas alternating between the instruments. The half steps also appear



repeatedly in the left hand of the piano, where they shift down by half steps. There is one last push to a miniature climax in measure 83 and the return of the tonic via a final, plagal cadence (a quite literal, closing "amen", as is familiar from church music). The last motion, which ends the piece, is the oscillating half step in the left hand of the piano. The dark half steps seem finally to have spent themselves and come to rest.

Let us now take a look at the key areas of the movement. The adagio is notable for the keys that are *not* important. Unlike the first two movements, there is no important use of B (Cb) or A here, the keys a half step above and below scale degree 5. These keys, remember, functioned as a background manifestation of the dark half steps of theme b from the first movement. Why then, are they absent here?

The answer is that what was in the background has come to the foreground. In the first two movements, the dark half steps appeared in the foreground to a certain extent, but were more important in their background manifestations. The third movement concerns the release of these dark elements, with the result that they are no longer hanging out behind the action. They come forward and become the action. In terms of key, they are manifested in the foreground relation of one key area to the next, not in the rather abstract background relation of key areas to the tonic. For example, notice the shifts from Fb to eb in measure 15, from d to eb in measure

32, from F $\flat$  to E $\flat$  in measure 59, and from d to E $\flat$  in measure 69.

Another notable key area that is not present is the key of G. In this movement, unlike the previous ones, the important key areas spell out only the e $\flat$  minor triad, and not the E $\flat$  major triad. It seems that the sorrow of the movement has banished the background spelling out of E $\flat$  major. The appearance of E $\flat$  major in measure 59 is all the more powerful, as it has not been prepared by a background manifestation. This major tonic at section X, then, really is a memory of another world that has not existed in the third movement, a memory back to the earlier movements. It is also a foreshadowing of the last movement, in terms of key as well as theme – as we shall soon see, theme 3 becomes the main theme of the finale.

Let us turn now to questions of tempi. The movement is marked adagio, which means "at ease." The most important question is whether the 6/8 should be felt in 6 or in 2. To my mind, the answer lies in the idea that this is a sort of lullaby. If the music feels like it is in six, the rocking motion that is so important will be lost. Performances that are in six easily feel too heavy and dirge-like. There is a sweetness behind the pain of this music that is essential, and that can get sacrificed if the tempo is too slow. The musicians should, then, feel the music in two, albeit a slow two.

Another hint that the music should not be too slow lies in Brahms' phrase marks. Remember that the first four measures of the piece have measure long phrase marks. It is tremendously difficult to feel these groups in a very slow tempo. Similarly, the subject of the fugue (mm. 19-21) and theme 3 (mm. 59-60) are both marked as two measure units. This is virtually impossible to communicate if the movement is in a slow six.

There are two important tempo changes that are worth discussing. The first is the poco stringendo that begins in measure 32. "Poco" is the operative word, of course. A good strategy for making the stringendo work is for the horn and violin to feel like they are pushing each other. Each four note group initiates a responding four note group, and each answer can push a little more, escalating the tempo and intensity. It is almost as if the instruments are interrupting each other, vying to have their say.

The other tempo change occurs in measure 67, with the poco accelerando that leads to the climax in measure 69. Again, the word "poco" is very important. Here, the driving force of the accelerando is the repeated three note figure in the left hand of the piano. Each repetition is an escalation, and can push the tempo and intensity forward. With the last repetition there is a change in the figure — the last two pitches are a half step higher. There can be a slight pulling back here, before the passionata music is released with all

its force. Similarly, the last three sixteenths of measure 73 can pull back slightly, in order to prepare measure 74, the moment of highest climax.

Let us close by examining the effect of a natural horn performance on the music. The movement as a whole contains many stopped notes, which give it a dark color appropriate to the emotion of the music. There are, however, some important uses of open horn that are noteworthy. The fugue subject (mm. 19-20) has only one stopped note (written  $e_b$ ). The open color, unaccompanied, is striking and powerful. The fact that the  $e_b$  is stopped highlights the relationship of theme 2 to the opening of the first movement. In both cases, the open fifth is presented with open tones, and the half step neighbor note is a stopped tone.

Theme 3 (m. 59) is, similarly, mostly open tones, with only the last two pitches stopped (written  $b$  and  $a$ ). This open color contributes to the feeling of the music coming from another world. When the horn plays theme 3's accompaniment in measure 63, the written  $f\#$ 's and  $a$ 's are all stopped, adding substantially to the feeling of echo.

The climax of the movement in measure 74 is entirely open for the first two measures. This has, primarily, a utilitarian function. It allows the horn player to play as loudly as (s)he needs to for an effective, intense climax. It also foreshadows the importance of open tones in the finale,

where the open notes of the harmonic series will become a battle cry against the dark half steps.

There is one more interesting use of hand horn technique that we should examine. We have seen how, in measures 40-42, the horn plays scale degree  $\flat 6$  resolving to 5. The written  $\flat 6$  is very difficult to play on natural horn (which accounts for the written option of playing it an octave higher). The hornist must lip the  $\flat 6$  up a half step, and the result is a strained tone. When the  $\flat 6$  resolves to the 5, the tension is released, both physically and tonally. This strongly highlights the importance of this resolution. It is worthwhile for a valve horn player to play this passage as if (s)he were playing natural horn, in order to hear and feel the intense tension of the  $\flat 6$ , and how beautifully it relaxes into the 5.

The resolution of the half step is, in a sense, what the whole movement and piece are concerned with. In the final measures of the adagio mesto, it feels as if our pain, like the half steps, has been resolved through catharsis. As we shall see, however, the sorrow of the third movement will remain an immediate memory that cannot be completely forgotten in the joy of the finale. The half steps will return for a final battle, and their presence will affect every area of the last movement.

## CHAPTER 7

### FINALE: ALLEGRO CON BRIO

As the last movement begins, it seems that the clouds have parted and the darkness has been resolved. This will, it seems, be a hunting rondo in the classical horn tradition – the type of movement that ends all the Mozart Horn Concerti, for example. It will be simple, full of joy and playfulness and perhaps some mild lyricism. The dark half steps are dead and gone, and now we can just sit back and have some fun. We can recover.

Happily, it is not quite so easy.

As we shall discover, the half steps are merely lying dormant. As the movement progresses, they will influence every level of the music, from the most passing melodic gestures to the underlying key structure. The half steps do have an opponent, however, that eventually succeeds in driving them away. Appropriately enough, the opponent of the chromaticism is natural horn music, which appears in various guises, such as the opening two measures of theme 1 (all open tones) and the rising fourth and fifth horn calls.

Let us track this conflict. It affects the form on the largest scale, as can be seen in table 4. Instead of the

Table 4  
Form of Fourth Movement

Measure	1	9	17	45	53	61	68	83	91	99	103	113	121	131
Section	Exposition										Development			
Thm. group	1			2										
Theme	1	1	trans a	2	2	X	trans b	closing	trans	trans	(1)	3	3	(3)ext
Important Harmony	I-vi-ii-iii-v	I-vi-ii-IV-iii-v		VI (cb)					iv (ab)					
Key	Eb		g-Eb-g-F-Eb	Db	bb-f#	bb	F-(F#)-b-(F)-Bb	Bb	Bb	Bb-g	D	e-(f)	F#-(g)	ab-a-bb-b-c-db-d-eb-fb-F-Bb
Measure	145	153	163	169	177	185	213	221	229	235	251	259	263	277
Section	Recapitulation													
Thm. group				1			2							
Theme	(1+2)	(1+2)	(1+2)	1	1	trans a	2	2	X	trans b	closing	tr.	(1)	(1)
Important Harmony							VI (cb)					iv (ab)		
Key	Bb (Gb-Eb) Bb	Bb-Gb-D-g-D	g-eb-(e)-F-Bb	Eb		g-Eb-g-F-Eb	eb	eb-b	eb	Bb-(B) e-(Bb) Eb			Eb-Cb-Eb-Cb-Ab-Eb	

rondo form that one might expect, Brahms chooses a sonata structure, complete with repeated exposition. This makes sense for two reasons. First, the lack of sonata form in the first movement can be seen to affect the form of both the scherzo and finale. Second, and perhaps more important, sonata form is metaphorically about conflict and resolution. The choice of sonata form is entirely appropriate to a movement that is, in many ways, the climax of the conflict that runs through the entire trio.

The exposition, familiarly, uses keys that spell out the E $\flat$  major and minor triads. In this case, f $\sharp$ (g $\flat$ ) serves a slightly different role than it has usually. With the sole exception of section B' in the first movement, g $\flat$ /G $\flat$  has always been heard, locally, in terms of the tonic, as biii/bIII. Here, as in the first movement, it is heard as bvi/bVI of the dominant, first as a local color (m. 46) and then as a confirmed key area (m. 55). If we remember the importance of the key B/b as bVI/bvi of the tonic, this makes perfect sense (and in fact, the key of b makes a brief appearance in the exposition of the last movement). This is another manifestation of the semitone above scale degree 5, which originated all the way back in theme b of the first movement, and which is here affecting the dominant.

The exposition contains many local manifestations of the half steps. The first theme itself, however, is void of any prominent semitones. As we hear theme 1, we realize that



we have heard it before. It is the haunting theme 3 of the third movement. It has now, of course, a completely different character, a galloping playfulness. Yet underneath the surface, there is a suggestion of something darker. The middle of the theme, measures 3-6, consists solely of minor harmonies, including a tonicization of iii (g). It is only at the end, with the rising fifth horn calls of measures 7-8, that we return to the major mode and joy.

The horn calls get extended in the first transition (m. 17), which confirms the key of g that was suggested in theme 1. The calls alternate with a winding melody in the violin over a hemiola in the piano (m. 19). At first, this music is very playful, but in measure 25 it turns dark. The winding figure that appeared in the violin in measure 19 gets taken up by the piano. Now, however, it is pure half steps winding around scale degree 5. This is an exact inversion of the dark half steps from theme b of the first movement. They have returned, and they continue into measures 27-28 and 31-32, where they surround the rising D major triad in the piano. They are particularly highlighted by the change from staccato to legato music in the piano in measure 25.

It is important to note that the half steps appear in this passage as accompaniment to the horn calls. It is precisely how these two ideas play off each other that

defines the conflict of the last movement.<sup>1</sup> In the end of this passage, the horn calls win out and a final statement of theme 1 music (mm. 37-43) closes off the first theme group.

In the second theme group (m. 45), the half step becomes part of the main melodic idea. Theme 2 closes in measures 48-51 with a repeated statement of the half step 1-7. What is particularly noteworthy is that this half step, which is accompanied in thirds, is responded to by the 5-b6 half step in the piano. Remember, there has been a consistently strong use of b6 in both key area and melody throughout the Horn Trio, and it returns here. In measures 55-60, the alternation is turned on its head, with the piano playing 7-1 followed by b6-5. The 7-1 gets repeated dramatically, taking over the texture in measures 59-60. This time, unlike the first transition, it is the half steps that win out.

With theme x (m. 61), the half steps really jump out and assert themselves. The 7-1 that ended theme 2 gets reinterpreted here as 5-b6 in bb. The 5-b6 alternation is repeated several times, after which there is a descent

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<sup>1</sup>Let us remember now the opening pitches of the entire piece as well as the fugue subject of the third movement - a rising fifth (the horn calls) followed by a semitone (the dark half steps). The first measure of the piece, then, contains the seeds of much that is to follow. Part of Brahms' compositional brilliance lies in his much discussed ability to turn small scale musical ideas into large scale musical events.

stepwise from  $\flat 6$  down through 1 to 5, with each scale degree being colored by its lower half step neighbor. It is a somewhat ironic moment —  $\flat 6$  gets resolved, in a sense, down to 1, but only in the midst of an overload of half steps. The half steps are especially emphasized because, with each one, the horn plays one open and one stopped tone. The intense syncopations add to the insistence of the music.

After this victory, the half steps seem to be momentarily released. The music of measures 67-82 is simply stuffed with melodic half steps, much as the adagio was. The violin melody is half step after half step, and is echoed by the half steps in the horn. It is accompanied by descending half steps in the right hand of the piano, and, towards the end (m. 75), by an oscillating half step in the left hand of the piano that is reminiscent of the last measures of the adagio. Here, however, the oscillation is between scale degrees 5 and  $\flat 6$ , which should not surprise us. When  $\flat 6$  resolves to 5 in measure 81, it is strongly reminiscent of the resolution of  $\flat 6$  to 5 in the horn in measures 40-42 of the third movement.

After such intensity, the closing music of the exposition is especially sweet (m. 83).  $B\flat$  is confirmed with some of the most gentle music of the piece. A floating hemiola glides over a purely diatonic descent, and the absence of chromaticism is touching. With the first ending (m. 91), however, the hemiola gets intense as darkness begins

to return with shades of eb minor. Bb becomes V<sup>7</sup> of the tonic, and we start the exposition again.

In the development, the conflict between the half steps and the horn calls comes to the fore. Underneath a new theme (theme 3, m. 113), there occurs a giant chromatic climb in key areas, moving up a minor ninth from e (m. 113) to F (m. 142), half step by half step. This climb in key areas affects, of course, local melodic motions. Look, for example, at the left hand of the piano (mm. 129-141) and at the horn part (mm. 132-138). Also note the use of the important 5-b6 in the accompanimental figure that begins in the piano in measure 111 and passes to the violin in measure 121.

The horn calls that follow (mm. 145-168) are a serious attempt to defeat the nefarious influence of the semitone. The calls begin with pure natural horn music, with no stopped tones for the first four measures. It is a battle cry of natural horn and its open intervals against those pesky chromaticisms. The horn continues to insist on the rising fourth horn call, which is also the interval that began the movement. Underneath, in the piano, is the rising arpeggio of theme 2, which first introduced Gb in measure 46. Here again it moves from Bb to Gb (m. 153), reinforcing the importance of Gb as bVI of the dominant, and reminding us that the half steps are still waiting in the background.

The arpeggios and the horn calls, completely devoid of foreground half steps, finally succeed in forcing the mad

frenzy of semitones to take a break. The music literally grinds to a stop after a gradual ritardando (mm. 153-160). The key at this moment (m. 161) betrays that the semitones are still present in the background – D is, obviously, the leading tone to the tonic. The air *seems* clear, however, so things can resume, and the recapitulation ensues in measure 169.

The recapitulation is straightforward. The second theme group appears here in the tonic (m. 213), with a noteworthy result. The alternation between i/I and  $\flat vi/\flat VI$  that occurred in the exposition in the dominant, occurs now in the tonic. Similarly, the melodic descent from  $\flat 6$  to 1 that occurs in theme x is now in the tonic (mm. 229-235). The importance of  $\flat 6$  in its harmonic and melodic manifestations is thus brought back home to the tonic key, where it awaits a final resolution.

This resolution occurs in the coda. There is a direct juxtaposition of  $E\flat$  (I) and  $C\flat$  ( $\flat VI$ ) that repeats (mm. 263-276). The music is the same rising arpeggio that introduced  $\flat VI$  of  $b\flat$  in measure 46, and that accompanied the horn calls in the development (mm. 145-160). This is the final appearance of the dark half steps – their final, failing attempt to affect the key area. After a strong resolution in  $E\flat$  (m. 277), they are banished for good. Theme 1 returns to finish things off, with a brief excursion to our familiar closing key of  $A\flat$ .

This whole final section is firmly in the realm of the natural horn. From measure 248 to the end, there are only eight stopped tones out of one hundred fourteen, or seven percent. In the larger scheme of things, the whole movement is much more open than any of the previous movements. The finale, then, confirms the world of natural horn and the defeat of the half step.

With all the preceding in mind, let us now start afresh and examine the music in a less formal manner, focusing particularly on specific performance suggestions. The first theme group has several distinct musics and moods, and it is essential for the performers to be aware of these and emphasize their differences.

Theme 1 is a transition from one type of music to a contrasting type. At the beginning, everything is light and fun. The galloping rhythm in a piano staccato, with accented offbeats, makes for an almost sneaky sense of playfulness. With the crescendo through the minor harmonies, we move to a very different type of music – the horn calls. The rising fifths and fourths are always noble and strong, and must be played boldly. The calls, throughout the movement, can generally increase in intensity to the third call. It is important to remember that this music will take center stage in the development, where it is a battle cry against the half steps.

The transition (mm. 17-44) begins with a direct alternation between the horn calls (mm. 17-18) and the sneaky, fun music (mm. 19-20). This contrast is highlighted by the use of hemiola in the latter music as well as the change in articulation and instrumentation. The horn player can help by playing his/her calls with an earnest seriousness, and the violinist and pianist should really feel the swing and fun of the hemiola. There is also an acoustic drop in dynamic when the horn stops playing, and it is not inappropriate for the pianist and violinist to emphasize this change by dropping a little themselves.

In measure 25, of course, things get darker with the aforementioned entrance of the half steps. The horn calls should be particularly intense here, but must allow the piano part to really come through. The second set of calls, in measures 29-30, presents a slight problem. The violin part drops an octave into a register that is difficult to hear clearly in this texture. It is very helpful for the hornist and pianist to play this second set of calls as somewhat of an echo, while the violinist belts out his/her part as best (s)he can. Brahms perhaps expected this, as he rewrites a *forte* marking in the pickup to measure 33.

The sense of play begins to return in measure 33, with the return of the falling arpeggios in the piano and the playful alternation of the horn and violin in measures 35-36.

These closing measures of the first theme group should be triumphantly joyous.

In the second theme group (m. 45), remember, the half steps pretty much take over, and the playfulness is banished. There should be a serious change in color, and Brahms supplies several tools for achieving this. There is, for example, a drastic change in articulation in the piano part, and the hornist and violinist can gather some hints from this. The rising arpeggio in the violin in measure 47 is an answer to that in the piano in the previous measure. The violin part is not slurred, as was the piano part, but the notes should definitely be on the legato side of things in order to effectively respond to the piano, and the repeated horn eighth notes must match those of the other instruments. The musicians should be very aware of this change in the length of eighth notes from the first to second theme groups.

Another tool is, of course, the half steps themselves. If the musicians are aware of how they take over the texture, and add a little extra darkness and intensity to them, it will help tremendously in achieving an appropriate contrast between the theme groups.

Theme x (m. 61) presents special problems for ensemble playing. This music is difficult to get together, but there exist some helpful techniques. Pianists have a tendency to wait for the other instruments, but they must not – they must strictly keep time. The musicians should try rehearsing the



passage with all the ties broken, so that the music is a steady flow of eighth notes. Also try thinking of the articulated eighth notes as upbeats to, and not afterbeats from, the piano chords, as this helps push the music forward. And, as always, slow practice with a loud metronome is essential.

It is very important that the larger shape of theme x not get lost in the difficulties of performance. The musicians should be aware of the large scale descent from  $\flat 6$  through 1 down to 5. Do not merely play a string of rhythms – play the larger phrase.

After theme x (m. 67), the music and half steps begin to take on a tender, lyrical color. Feel the presence of the half steps, but really sing this music. The piano pedal should float under the texture, and the horn half steps should be the sweetest commentary. In measure 75, with the half step in the bass and the move toward b minor, there is a definite shade of darkness that should be emphasized. The resolution of the half step and the return toward  $B\flat$  in measure 81 can then feel extra relaxed and resolved.

The closing section (mm. 83-91) speaks for itself. It is a tremendously special music. Just make sure to really feel the hemiolas, and above all, float.

In the development (m. 103), darkness and intensity return. The hemiolas from the previous closing music are maintained in the piano (mm. 103-106), under a statement of

theme 1 that leads to a climax in m. 109. The following music returns to a sneakiness reminiscent of the opening, only much darker. There is here again a contrast between staccato and legato musics, and the musicians must emphasize this. Those who have the slurred melody (horn and violin in mm. 112-119, piano in mm. 122-129) should really sing *espressivo* as Brahms indicates. The music always moves to the dotted half notes, particularly the second and third ones. The accompaniment should be a very light staccato. Although the violin part in measures 121-131 is not marked thus, it should certainly match the piano accompaniment of measures 111-121.

It is very important not to crescendo in this section. This should feel like the calm before the storm. The more repressed and hushed it feels, the better. In measure 132, where the crescendo is written, all the pent up energy can begin to be released. The giant chromatic rise must be felt as a huge escalation, which leads to the dramatic statement of the horn calls.

The beginning of the horn calls (mm. 145-151) can be good and raucous. The modern horn player should try holding down the first valve and practicing these measures on natural horn, in order to hear the somewhat edgy tone quality that results (only the written F and E $\flat$  are stopped). The music is four groups of two measures, with each pair of calls increasing in intensity to the cadence in measure 151. Remember, this is a battle cry.

One thing that is particularly interesting about these measures, and that rarely comes through in performance, is that the piano begins *piano* in measure 145, with a crescendo to measure 151. The pianist should not worry about being too soft under the *forte* horn solo. The accompaniment should grow out of the texture, pushing, like the horn, to the cadence in measure 151.

The following ritardando works well if it is rather extreme. It is effective if the music literally comes to a stop, and this also makes sense given the conflict between the half steps and horn calls – the calls halt the music in order to clear the air. When the music starts back up again in measure 161, it is like clockwork gradually being wound up. It is a return to pure joy that initiates the recapitulation.

After the recapitulation takes us through familiar territory, the coda (m. 263) brings us toward a resolution. Over piano hemiolas in measures 263-267, the horn and violin reach a giant climax, with the horn hitting the highest note of its tessitura (heard only once before, in the climax of the third movement). This music cannot be too grand.

The following alternation of C $\flat$  and E $\flat$  (mm. 267-277) pushes forward to its final resolution in measure 277. It is customary and appropriate to pull back somewhat in measure 276, in order better to emphasize the importance of this moment and initiate the close of the piece.

From here to the end it is pure, unmitigated joy. Note that the offbeat accents from theme 1 have found their place as onbeats in measures 279-284. It is common practice to drop in dynamic in measure 289, to help create a final, exciting crescendo. The movement, and the piece, closes with an incredible, joyous energy.

With these observations behind us, let us examine the issue of tempo. It is tempting to play the movement as quickly as possible, due to the marking "allegro con brio," in order to add excitement, and as a personal challenge. This is, to my mind, inappropriate. "Con brio" means, of course, "with life," and is thus a marking that concerns character more than speed. A tempo that is too quick usually feels scattered, and robs the music of all the wonderful play – the hemiolas, the offbeat accents, and the like. This is also tremendously difficult piano writing, and it is essential that the pianist not sound as if (s)he were losing control. Choose a tempo that allows you to have fun, and not one that you can barely hold on to.

In the end, the Horn Trio is a piece about contrasts. In particular, we have seen the great importance of the contrast between the open intervals of the harmonic series and the dark half steps that arise from the chromaticism of Brahms' harmony. What is most important, however, is the related contrast of emotional worlds. The contrasts between joy and sorrow, play and pain, and light and darkness, run

throughout the piece and are resolved only in the closing measures of the finale. The resolution is one of such wondrous joy that a successful performance of the Horn Trio can create an emotional response far surpassing most music written for the horn. And the more we know about the music, the better chance we have to begin to understand and convey faithfully the deepest art that lies within the notes on the page.

## CONCLUSION

In the introduction, I mentioned a couple of ways in which the Horn Trio is a special piece. Since then, we have seen many others. The unique form of the first movement, the archaic qualities of the slow movement, the ways in which the dark half steps permeate the music – these are all parts of what makes the Horn Trio the piece that it is, different from all others.

There is, however, one thing that seems to be the source of many of the different qualities that make the trio so special – the death of Brahms' mother. As we have seen, this loss certainly set the mood of the slow movement. It helped determine the folk-song theme of the finale that appears so hauntingly in the adagio, as well as the departures and returns of the first movement's unique form.

Brahms' loss, we have seen, also helped determine the special instrumentation of the piece. All three instruments Brahms chose, remember, were studied by Brahms when he was a child. This decision, and particularly the choice of natural horn, helped in turn to determine all sorts of musical factors. We have examined how the use of stopped notes affects many things, from local colors to large scale formal perception. We have seen themes that seem to have been

created specifically for the natural horn. The use of half steps to represent an intruding darkness is particularly appropriate to an instrument that cannot play half steps without a notable change in tone color. The use of horn calls and rising perfect intervals throughout the piece, and particularly in the last movement, is similarly a direct result of Brahms' choice of natural horn, which is in turn a direct result of Brahms' loss.

On a larger scale, the whole piece reflects a journey through grief and loss to the celebration of life that lies on the other side – the journey of mourning. This is, precisely, the departure and return we have talked so much about. The quiet reflection of the opening is immediately contrasted with dark half steps. As the piece progresses, the darkness creeps in more and more, taking over in many ways. The adagio allows the darkness to have its say, with the result being a true, deep time of grieving. After this descent into sadness, the finale struggles to return to joy and celebration, and finally succeeds. For many who have lost a loved one, this journey is familiar.

What Brahms has done, then, is extraordinary. Beginning with an idea, an emotional world, he has constructed a piece that reflects that world on every level, from instrumentation to form to thematic content to key area to everything else. The Horn Trio has complete integrity. This is precisely one of the things that makes Brahms a truly great composer.

And what does this knowledge do for the performer? What, indeed, does this whole paper do for the performer?

There are many perfectly valid ways to play the Horn Trio. We can get together and read for fun, enjoying each other's company and reveling in great music. We can go in completely blind and learn from the technical challenge. We can simply enjoy the sport-like aspect of performance, seeing just how fast we can play the last movement and not collapse.

What Brahms has given us, however, is a great work of art. If we are even to approach living up to this tremendous responsibility, we must understand as much as possible what Brahms wanted, what he was trying to convey. The more we study the music and the more we accept or reject various concepts, the more we can pass on to an audience. In the end, it comes down to giving ourselves intelligent choices, and choosing.

Hopefully, this paper has helped give you some choices. Absorb them, rehearse them, bring them in, kick them out, and then, when you are on stage, stop thinking so much and let your bodies create the music anew.



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