Style and Expression in Brahms' Violin Sonatas: Performance Practice in the 21st-Century

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Abstract

This artistic research explores tensions between historical and modern stylistic expectations for the violin sonatas of Johannes Brahms. Aspects of 19th-century performance style diverge from modern conventions, including the use of tempo flexibility and violinistic devices like vibrato and portamento, and this creates certain challenges for performance of Brahms' music today. Such challenges include considering and assimilating these ideas amidst conflicting norms and the practicalities of modern training.

In this investigation I prepared each of Brahms' violin sonatas for recital with some exploration of 'historically informed' practices. Artist-researchers in Brahms performance practice guided this task, along with other musicians. A summary was developed to describe the style concisely and clearly; it emphasises a connection between style and broader principles of expressive music-making.

The process formed an appreciation for the value of this historical style, particularly because of its strong connection to expressivity and the diverse creative possibilities it offers. Historical style offers tools to reach towards more expressive performance, which is a goal shared by musicians past and present. Awareness of this may alleviate tensions felt between styles and provide a way to incorporate aspects of the historical style in performance of Brahms' music, even where full stylistic assimilation is not practical.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed:

Elliott Plumpton
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Acknowledgments

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Acknowledgment is due to the five musicians who assisted this project, particularly my teacher Dr Robin Wilson. Alongside other aspects of my musical development, he has guided this project with his specific knowledge of the style and helped me to understand the importance of ‘felt’ expression. Professor Neal Peres Da Costa also supported my investigation with his broad-ranging expertise, and I am grateful for the time he gave to sharing his approach to Brahms performance practice and HIP. Glenn Christensen’s input provided an encouraging and useful consultation, and I so appreciate his willingness to help. And finally, my pianist chamber music partners, Peter De Jager and Oscar Wong, both added thoughtful and musical perspectives in word and in practice—across many hours of rehearsal time.

On a personal note, I am so grateful to my wonderful family, who have occupied various roles both in this project (from proof-reading to moral support) and outside it.

Key to Abbreviations

- “(*1a*)” or similar refers to recordings in Appendix A.
- “(R1A)” or similar refers to interview excerpts in Appendix B.

Introduction

It is a fascinating experience to listen to Joseph Joachim's recording of his *Romance in C* (1903). Joachim, heralded as a pre-eminent musician during his lifetime, was also a highly respected colleague and friend of Johannes Brahms, performing extensively alongside him and offering input for Brahms' compositions (Brown, 2003). It is likely that he would thus represent a reliable model for sound and interpretation of Brahms' works. Yet to modern classical musicians, this performance may elicit an initial experience of confusion rather than admiration: not only due to the primitive recording technology but also to an aesthetic with heavy position changes and much less vibrato than one is accustomed to in the 21st-century. Tempo changes are extreme—with forward momentum that some might consider 'rushing'—and Joachim takes liberties with the rhythmic values of notes.

Early recordings like this, with their confronting differences to modern practice, suggest these artists possessed a divergent conception of musical style. Since this was the sound in the ears of composers like Brahms, it is worth considering what such practices might tell modern musicians about historical expectations for "beautiful" music-making or "artistic" interpretation.

Differences between historical and modern practice have been the subject of discussion in recent practice-led studies, and some have experimented with this style of playing in detail. These committed and specialised projects, however, highlight the practical challenge of such a pursuit. Modern professional expectations, whether for performing solo or in an ensemble, affect the stylistic priorities of student musicians, and any drastic change in approach requires time to adopt convincingly. How can contemporary musicians learn from these challenging differences, with practical relevance? And related to this is the underlying concern: what can such a style offer today's music-making anyway?

I am a classical violinist training at the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM), and I undertook this artistic research project during my study there. Alongside other training opportunities, I performed Brahms' violin sonatas in recital and was fortunate to study with Dr. Robin Wilson, whose first-hand knowledge of 'historically informed Brahms' guided the exploration. The following research questions were explored:

How can I resolve tensions between nineteenth-century and modern expectations of performance styles in my learning and performing of Brahms' violin sonatas?
What is my response to historical performance practice of Brahms' music as a modern violinist?

Addressing these questions involved distinguishing specific tensions and how to practically resolve them—how might I be informed by available historical evidence but also consider modern tastes? I questioned whether 'reconciliations, dialogues, or compromises' between styles were justifiable, and for what reasons. I also wanted to consider creative and individual interpretation, including my 'subjective preference' and that of my chamber music partner. Lastly, an exploration emerged of how to communicate a concise yet comprehensive understanding of historical style, in a way that emphasised its connection to expression.

Chapter 1 follows the process of my learning, with some reflections from personal encounters exploring Brahms performance practice as a modern musician. Chapter 2 discusses the perspectives and contributions of other 'historically informed' musicians, and Chapter 3 is a commentary on a summary of the historical style that I developed during the project (Appendix C). In the Conclusions section, I summarise a possible response to the tensions between historical and modern styles and highlight further directions.

Note: In this dissertation, 'historical style' refers to the general performing practice that performers of Brahms' day (especially those in Brahms' circle) may have exhibited as they approached his music. Like all historically informed performance (HIP), any pursuit of such a style cannot claim to be definitive; however, in the case of Romantic performing practice, researchers are fortunate to have aural records from the late 19th- and early 20th-century that are valuable pointers to this style (Peres Da Costa, 2012).

'Modern style' indicates conventional performing practice of today. This is defined more broadly than 'modernist style', as characterised by writers like Haynes (2007); however, throughout the thesis I *do* portray modern style as having attributes of such an approach[1].

A multiplicity of approaches may be found within each category. Nonetheless I found that these loose groupings helped me to see general differences in a simple way and communicate this efficiently.

[1] One musician I interviewed for this project commented that the current musical environment is not 'modernist' per se: "we have moved I think, especially in Australia, really quite far from the sort of heyday of modernist ideals" (P1C; see clarification in Appendix B). I can see how a modernist label might be considered an unfair generalisation if applied across the board; nonetheless, I did find this characterisation helpful to understand parts of modern practice, including my own playing. As a developing musician, ideas about modernism seem to have affected my perspective on music, and the continued challenge of 'historically informed performance' practitioners against these ideas also seems to be relevant.

Literature Review

Modern research has helped to clarify "historically informed performance" (HIP) of Brahms' music. Scholars have discussed and theorised aspects of performance practice including violin style (Brown, 2003; Brown, 1999), tempo fluctuation and metronome markings (Pascall & Weller, 2003; Sherman, 2003), and Brahms' use of hairpins (Hyun-Su Kim, 2012). Practice-led studies, especially connected to the University of Leeds, explore how modern musicians may assimilate such a style, including for violin (Wilson, 2014; Cho, 2017) and cello (Bennett Wadsworth, 2017). As scholarly pianists, Peres Da Costa has demonstrated the importance of early recordings in conjunction with written sources (2012) and Scott's work has challenged present-day Brahms HIP not to overlook inconvenient details of early recordings (2014).

Primary source material is valuable to such investigations, especially recordings made by musicians associated with Brahms. Alongside Joachim's 1903 recordings, recordings of string players related to Brahms include Marie Soldat-Roeger, Hugo Heermann, Hugo Becker and Julius Klengel (cello), and the Klingler Quartet; in piano, Ilona Eibenschütz, Adelina De Lara, Fanny Davies, Etelka Freund, and the short acoustic disc recording of Brahms himself; other informative 19th-century recordings include of pianist Carl Reinecke and singer Adelina Patti. These recordings are important snapshots of the style, and research projects commonly involve emulation of these, sometimes to great levels of detail (Köpp, Gebauer, & Bausch, 2020; Milsom, 2009; Scott, 2014). Treatises are often used as resources; for example, Joachim and Andreas Moser's three-volume *Violinschule* (1905) includes helpful analyses of style from their perspective. Many other primary sources, like performance reviews or diary entries, are also informative.

A particular resource synthesising both primary and secondary perspectives are the Barenreiter editions of Brahms' chamber music (Brahms, Brown, & Peres Da Costa, 2015) and essays on performance practice (Brown, Peres Da Costa, & Bennett Wadsworth, 2016). These include general commentary on the style and detailed application to these works, explaining how 19th-century musicians might realise the score, and with reference to early editions, anecdotes, and other primary sources.

This body of information clarifies the very different aesthetic and style that musicians in Brahms' day valued. Regarding violin style, Joachim represented the German school, which saw itself as continuing a tradition of Italian "classical", vocal, *bel canto* style; this included heavy legato shifts and a restrained use of vibrato (Brown, 2003; Joachim & Moser, 1905). By contrast, the rising Franco-Belgian school—including more prominent, continuous vibrato and

criticised for demonstrating shallow virtuosity—was about to take prominence and become the predecessor of the modern violin aesthetic (Ibid). Brahms' circle also advocated restraint against the exaggerated tempo modification of contemporaries like Wagner (Brown, Peres Da Costa, & Bennett Wadsworth, 2015). Brahms performance practice thus has some distinctions from other styles of its time.

A more noticeable contrast, however, is with the aesthetic and performance practices of the present day. Compared to our perspective, even the purported 'restraint' of artists like Joachim in aspects like portamento and tempo flexibility may seem exaggerated to modern musicians. Most present-day recordings demonstrate 'modern style' (for example as characterized by Haynes, 2007): notes played fairly equally, stable tempo, violinists with frequent vibrato and clean shifts and pianists without un-notated arpeggiation. Several factors may have affected this transition, especially the advent of recording (Philip, 2004). Violinists associated with the Franco-Belgian school, such as Eugène Ysaÿe, also affected elements of string performance style, moving to a more continuous vibrato (Wilson, 2014). The German style diverges considerably from modern stylistic norms, especially because "aspects of the nineteenth-century style…challenge notions of competency that are now hallmarks of the accomplished musician" (Ibid, p. 7).

The difference of performance style makes Brahms performance practice a good candidate for inclusion in the HIP movement. Discussions about issues like authenticity and confronting modernist approaches can be applied (e.g. Haynes, 2007; Taruskin, 1995), though perhaps Brahms' context in the Romantic era (not before) should be acknowledged.

Information about 'HIP Brahms' pursuits seems to be spreading in this country, for example through the efforts of Ironwood Ensemble, one of the first chamber ensembles to experiment with application of the stylistic approach in performing situations. A reviewer described their recent ABC Classics release as "brilliant, questioning and engaging" whilst noting that he needed to "hear the recording several times…before coming to terms with it" (Barmby, 2017). This observation alludes to the gap that remains between conventional modern practice and the approach of earlier musicians.

Methods

Artistic research may be described as “research in and through art” (Wesseling, 2017, p. 211), a methodology that acknowledges the possibilities of artistic practice for contributing to knowledge. As artistic research, the project was not so much about reaching a definitive solution to the research questions, but exploring, reflecting on, and discussing the issues arising from them. Throughout the project, my own experiences have informed the research outcomes, including inspiring the research focus in the first place. Even from initial discussions with my teacher, the challenges of pursuing the historical style in its entirety amidst other training priorities at ANAM became apparent.

The main task for my artistic practice in this project was learning and performing the three Brahms violin sonatas, Op. 78, 100, and 108. A flexible three-part structure helped guide the investigation, preparing each sonata for performance with a specific focus. This process and timeline was adapted at various points over the two-year investigation.

1. Part A: Sonata Op. 100 in A major, contextual focus, 27/4/19-17/8/19. In this initial stage, I aimed to become more familiar with Brahms' music, through conventional preparation for a recital performance within the ANAM program. I also intended to discuss some preliminary characterisations of modern and historical style, but this discussion was mostly left in the background (see Ch. 1). The sonata was prepared with the guidance of Dr. Robin Wilson alongside other repertoire, and performed in recital with Peter De Jager on 7 June, 2019 (Appendix A, *1a*).

2. Part B: Sonata Op. 78 in G major, focus on historical style, 15/9/19-15/10/20. I aimed to focus on understanding the language of historical style in this section. This included two sub-stages and an additional period of extension.

First, the sonata was prepared for recital, with the aim of convincing performance within my priorities as a developing modern violinist, but with greater awareness of the historical style. Within the timeframe, the more provocative aspects of the style may have been impractical and difficult to integrate convincingly, especially when presenting to a modern audience with different stylistic expectations. I performed the sonata in recital alongside other repertoire with De Jager on 10 Oct, 2019 (Appendix A, *2a*).

After this recital, historical style was explored over a three-week period (21/10/19-9/11/19). This "intensive" stage allowed experimentation and the pursuit of more confronting elements of tempo modification and string sound, without the pressure of a public recital. It included three lessons and an interview with Wilson focused on historical style (Appendix B, R1), and a recording of two movements with De Jager on 9 Nov, 2019 (Appendix A, *2c, 2d*). Later this year, De Jager also participated in an interview (21/11/19; Appendix B, P1).

Part B was extended beyond the anticipated schedule; an understanding of historical style continued to develop during this time (12/19-10/20). The aim was to workshop the sonata with Professor Neal Peres Da Costa in-person in March 2020, but this was not possible due to illness. An online interview replaced this (17/3/20; Appendix B, N1) and I also relocated interstate due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas the previous year was conducted according to a typical roster of performance activities at ANAM, the rest of this year involved an adapted online program.

The in-person consultation was not feasible, so another online consultation with Peres Da Costa was conducted (6/10/20; Appendix B, N2), involving a practical component and demonstration on a Streicher piano. In the months between these consultations, I developed a summary of historical style based on literature and my personal experiences (Appendix C).

3. Part C: Sonata Op. 108 in D minor, focus on historical style in a modern context, 7/7/20-17/12/20. The aim of this third section was to consider the thoughtful combination or appropriate (and artistic) interaction of modern and historical styles in Brahms' Op. 108 sonata. The goal was that the recital performance might be a culmination of reflections on historically informed performance of Brahms for a modern context: applying my new knowledge of historical style, whilst permitting myself to consider what modern style itself could contribute. As it happened, I prepared this sonata over a much longer period than the previous sections.

Lessons were online (including another interview with Wilson, 6/11/20; Appendix B, R2) but I had numerous in-person rehearsals with Oscar Wong, and a recital with a small audience. I also had an online interview and lesson with Glenn Christensen to add the perspective of another modern violinist (11/11/20; Appendix B, G1), and performed the sonata alongside other repertoire, with Wong, on 23 Nov, 2020 (Appendix A, *3a*).

Note: Ethics approval was obtained from Griffith University – no. 2019/792.

A number of processes helped to develop my conclusions, and may be categorised:

- *Acknowledging and exploring* (awareness component):
    - review of literature and early recordings
    - individual artistic practice (lessons, rehearsals, run-up performances, etc.)
    - interviews/consultations
- *Writing and reflecting* (written component):
    - dissertation
    - reflective journal
- *Improving and presenting* (practice component):
    - individual artistic practice
    - reflective journal

During the research project, I worked with the following musicians:

- *Dr Robin Wilson:* Wilson's experience with Brahms performance practice includes practice-led doctoral study (Wilson, 2014), as well as through his involvement with Ironwood Ensemble. He is Head of Violin at ANAM, and as my instrumental teacher, he was a central part of developing my understanding of this topic—as well as mentoring many other aspects of my musical development.
- *Professor Neal Peres Da Costa*: Peres Da Costa is a leading scholar in Romantic piano performing practice. Along with research analysing many early recordings from this era (Peres Da Costa, 2012), he also edited and coauthored the extensive performance notes in the Barenreiter editions of Brahms' violin sonatas (Brown, Peres Da Costa, & Bennett Wadsworth, 2016; Brahms, Brown, & Peres Da Costa, 2015) and is a member of Ironwood Ensemble. His perspective was a central contribution to this project.
- I also worked with other musicians through this research project, including pianist chamber music partners *Peter De Jager* and *Oscar Wong,* and consulting professional violinist *Glenn Christensen*. Christensen, an experienced chamber musician and violinist, supportively commented on the project and shared from his own perspective as a skilled musician in the industry (having also performed these sonatas). De Jager's broad chamber music experience and thoughtful approach to music-making was a valuable source of musical inspiration; Wong's deeply-felt and virtuosic musical personality, along with his provision of significant rehearsal time, contributed to an engaging Part C. These participants presented valuable insights, helping me to relate my pursuit to aspects of the wider musical world.

CHAPTER 1: Narrative Summary

Note: This chapter comprises some reflections on learning about the historical style; refer to Appendix C for a more comprehensive description of the style itself.

Part A

The aim of Part A was to gain a basic practical understanding of learning a Brahms sonata, and some preliminary characterisation of modern and historical style. As my first time studying the violin sonatas, it was useful to engage with Brahms' compositional language in the Sonata Op. 100. This included recognising the importance of knowing the piano part, encountering examples of Brahms' much-loved hemiolas, and achieving a satisfactory balance within the duo.

The second part of this aim took less priority as I realised the practicalities of the upcoming recital. Amongst these considerations, I discovered my ensemble skills needed attention, including greater awareness of the piano part and a more active, less hesitant approach to leading phrases. Some decisions on the small scale (for example about fingering choices) were made for ease rather than artistic consideration, with the urgency of the impending recital. The focus was instead given to other concepts of facility and practical preparation.

A telling comment in my reflective journal from the start of Part A illustrates my relationship with historical style: "I don't feel hugely inspired by the period perf side of things at the moment. I just want to start learning [the piece]! Will it make much of a difference in the end?" (27/4/19). This perspective was to radically change (even through the following weeks of Part A), but here I questioned the relevance of historical style to the "real", exciting task of musical communication. At the start of the rehearsals with piano, I also recall feeling uncertain about how one might shape the music, especially in an ensemble setting.

Recital recording (1a)

A central reflection on the recital was the importance of 'really communicating': listening to the recital afterwards, I noted the difference between my perception and how it came across. Many ideas or internal feelings, especially of timing or dynamic variation, did not come across to the extent I had intended and recall perceiving in the moment.

The recording of this recital demonstrates the presence of some rhythmic flexibility, but equal, accurate note values were the norm (second subject, first mov; 1:50). Inequality of semiquavers in the second movement is barely noticeable, despite some awareness of possible variance (8:50). I recall struggling to give hairpins in the third movement the expressive impact they seem to deserve; an agogic lean at their peaks (in retrospect) may have assisted this. Some portamento is used in the second movement but is generally unobtrusive. Overall, a modern approach to sound includes frequent and sometimes wide vibrato, which felt uncomfortable under performance nerves (17:00). Despite its limitations, these introductory experiences made Part A valuable preparation for subsequent sections.

Thoughts on 'feeling it'

A frequent challenge for my own musicianship over some time has been to communicate the expressive immediacy and freedom of the music (to "sing", to "feel it"), rather than deliver a technically correct, emotionally neutral performance. At the end of the project, I can see how the danger of retreating into oneself is aptly represented by Haynes' concept of "strait style": a performance that plays the notes without communicating, as if 'strait-jacketed' (an analogy that Wilson also uses):

> Many [HIP] performers are so anxious to avoid Romantic style that they draw into their shells and cease to be visible at all. This is not difficult to do, because the same mechanism is normal among Modernist performers. (2007, p. 61)

Haynes explains that this approach has been a common struggle for musicians for centuries, but is especially pertinent to a 'modernist' approach, which prioritises precision and literal execution of the score, and reacts against Romantic "excesses" (N1A). I encountered these HIP discussions after Part A, but can see now that these arguments persuasively explain some of my tendencies towards restraint, felt in this performance and previously.

Part B

Early in Part B, my understanding of the historical style was still somewhat abstract; a description of the style from a journal entry observed that tempo changes would be "more extreme", but I was not certain where this could be applied (19/9/19). The seeds of later thoughts were developing, however: for example, I had earlier reflected that historical style might need to be practiced in a way that was connected to the musical expression, and had mused about tempo modification, "Perhaps...the expressive function is...that this is a living breathing song rather than a machine" (17/8/19).

I began by learning the sonata with help from Wilson's marked-up part (Ossip Schnirlin edition) and with a particular focus on stylistic notes in the Barenreiter edition. I tried to reflect on my decisions about many of the comments (on fingerings, commentary on Italian terms, etc.), but my very detailed approach was time-consuming and dry.

After these efforts to ponder 'historical' fingering choices, I found that fingerings were quite changeable in the first lesson, highlighting to me that my preparation had had misplaced priorities. Instead Wilson discussed wider principles of music making, whilst explaining how historical style could be applied. This led me to feel that considering more universal principles of learning this 'language' would have been more effective and engaging; such an approach was later to inform the development of the summary document[2].

Recital recording (2a)

This recital and preparation process were useful, with 'historically informed' ideas taking root and an awareness by this time of connections between style and their expressive motivation. Examples of stylistic influence include tempo flexibility in the flowing opening of the first movement (0:00), and the shifts and moderated use of vibrato in parts of the second (17:00). Tone and vibrato use had improved since Part A, sounding much more natural and 'pure'.

[2] There may be some benefits to this kind of mechanical task, as Neal later commented (N1D). I feel nonetheless that my approach at this specific moment—looking through the Barenreiter commentary with a fine-toothed comb—missed the broader expressive principles that might help the details of fingering, etc, to be musically understood. This may also have been assisted by better use of information in the Barenreiter editions: a short summary of stylistic guidelines prefaces the detailed commentary in each sonata, and this (I can see now) is more akin to the 'overarching' perspective I desired.

Wilson has a clear idea of how historical style may be used to enhance the musicality of the violin sonatas, and I was aware of his conception of this piece.

Despite these developments, I was as yet operating within a modern approach: the vibrato was still frequent and at times wide (e.g. 13:15, 21:30), the portamento not too pronounced (12:10), and the tempo modification could perhaps have been more dramatic.

Once again, it was evident to me that one reason for this was the difference between my subjective perception and what came across: efforts to communicate felt larger ‘on the inside’. I also noticed how my tentative approach (particularly due to nerves) caused less risks taken in the heaviness of shifts, a tendency to turn off vibrato, and less bow contact with the string. However, De Jager felt that we had reached a more effective sense of collaborative listening in this semester, commenting on this improvement after an earlier internal performance class; and the recording demonstrates many positive, expressive moments.

Historical style "intensive"

As mentioned above, I returned to the sonata for the three-week period focused on the historical style. Many of the ideas I had noted previously were now applied in what was intended to be a more extreme rendition—an experiment without the need for a polished public presentation. The intention was to push my concept of ‘beautiful’ string sound, favouring less vibrato and heavier shifts; I also experimented with more dramatic tempo modification and agogic accentuation.

Giving oneself permission to exaggerate was both enjoyable and informative. In the lessons, Wilson's expertise and practical experience was a sounding board that clarified practical aspects of style, especially in specific contexts of the sonata. His input throughout the entire project provided a clear application of the style to reality, helping to assuage confusions. De Jager's valuable expertise also contributed to the discussion, with prior experience in Romantic performing practice. Earlier discussions of ensemble listening skills and flexibility now occupied a role in practically applying the extremities of tempo fluctuation.

Though many discussions contributed to the recordings, one particular experience is memorable. This unexpected 'lightbulb moment' occurred in the third lesson when discussing flexibility of dotting in parts of the second movement (for example, mm. 35-44, Figure 1). This tradition has strong historical precedents, especially in this specific movement: a review comparing a 1933 performance to the earlier renditions of Marie Soldat-Roeger, a significant student of Joachim, remarked with light criticism that “Miss Menges and Mr Harold

Samuel…hewed out the notes at their exact face value till this admirer of theirs mentally trotted alongside saying *one*-two-three-*four, one*-two-three-*four*" (M. M. S., p. 548). Wilson had emphasised how artistic interpretation to musicians of this era was not about mathematical accuracy.

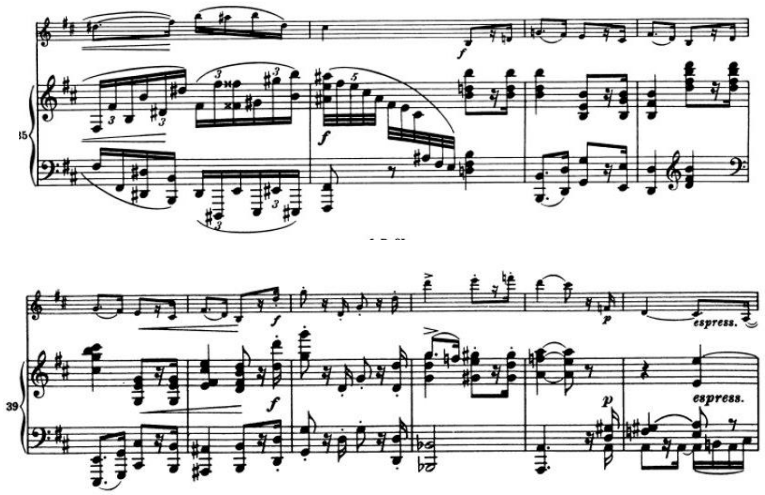

Figure 1: Op. 78, mov 2, mm. 35-44 (Brahms, 1880/1927)

De Jager had also commented about how, in other early recordings[3], the length of dots seemed to vary greatly (not just over-dotting but also under-dotting). He suggested in this lesson that we take a similar approach. Unsure how this would work, I asked De Jager how he decided about the length of the 'small note'; he replied that it could vary according to the harmony and gesture of that moment, and that he found it helpful to conceptualise the small note as belonging to the following one[4].

On a more philosophical level, Wilson liked this idea because the approach of uniformly double-dotting was still quite a 'modernist' perspective in its focus on precision. The heart of the more expressive dotting, conversely, was about replacing any 'precise' rendition with the idea of artistic feeling guiding the rhythm (see Ch. 3; this moment helped to distil the expressive principles in Appendix C).

[3] For example, Joachim's recording of Brahms' *Hungarian Dance no. 1* (1903).
[4] De Jager also noted here how he found it important to resist an urge to subdivide (that is, internally count out the fractions of each beat). Marion Ranken, a student at the institution where Joachim taught, illustrates a similar strategy: in a passage with upbeat semiquavers on the last beat of the bar, she suggests "counting two in the bar instead of four. As soon as [the half bar] has been counted, let yourself go and play the semiquavers with all the expression that you wanted…quite disregarding the fourth crotchet beat but coming absolutely in time on the first of the next bar" (1939; in Wadsworth Bennett, 2017, p. 129).

We experimented with this approach, and to my surprise, both Wilson and De Jager found it very convincing (See Appendix A, *2a*). We played through the passage again more strictly as a contrast—I noticed how it sounded more mechanical—and later the first movement, trying to replicate this experience. I seemed to have discovered a certain experience of greater freedom, with 'felt' expression as a guide; Wilson noted how having this range of possibility encouraged me to be more aware in the moment and actively look for interpretive options.

This experience, along with similar exaggerations of other expressive devices, related directly to my personal musical challenge of finding more expressive performance. I left that particular lesson excited about the power of historical style to offer tools to this end (that modern style might not).

The recording itself (Appendix A, *2c*, *2d*) felt less successful than the revelatory lesson the night before: once again, a pressured situation pushed me toward a more reserved approach. At the end of the session, however, I tried to have an enjoyable run of the first movement, and in this I felt more able to feel flow and inject real musical intention and ideas. Many aspects of historical style can be heard clearly in these recordings—notably an aesthetic with much less vibrato and more pronounced shifts, as well as tempo flexibility.

Part B extension

Several other experiences with historical style informed and clarified my understanding over the following months.

I increased my exposure to literature and developed a summary of historical style, which was one central, if unexpected, outcome of the research project. This document changed conception from a small 'homework' project with a personal focus (originally intended to be prior to the intensive period), to an extended collection of quotes and thoughts that I compiled (for example, from my own experiences, or literature), to eventually a more succinct form. In this process, I was excited to discover overarching 'expressive principles' that could be applied in many situations. (Appendix C is the final version of the summary, which I adapted at the end of the project, including adding an introduction.)

The process of developing the summary was internally motivated because I felt the result would be helpful for others. It was partly prompted by the earlier experience of approaching the style in a mechanical and dry way; the intention instead was to describe the overarching 'language' that would connect the elements of historical style to their expressive function, whilst simply outlining the practicalities of the style (see Ch. 3).

The other component was the consultation sessions with Peres Da Costa. I prepared for an in-person lesson on the Op. 78 sonata, including using gut strings for the first time. Though this practical component was postponed, the interview was beneficial and demonstrated Peres Da Costa's approach to HIP, including as pertinent to Brahms' music, and the use of gut strings allowed me to experience their different tone and feeling.

After some time and due to rescheduling difficulties, I had the final session with Peres Da Costa. The intention here was to gain an aural understanding of piano performance practice, in a sense to provide clarification and assurance I was on the 'right track'. Over a video call, we discussed selected passages from the sonata (with his demonstration on a Streicher model) as well as considering some more general questions (see N2D-F). I came away with a valuable aural understanding of pianistic devices (arpeggiation, dislocation) and aspects of timing (especially hairpins, which are averse to written description) relevant to performance of this music, including Peres Da Costa's explanation of how these might be applied. It was encouraging to see that my understanding of some aspects was congruent with his approach.

Thoughts on tempo and rhythmic flexibility

Throughout the investigation, I experienced (especially in the 'dotting' discussion) how tempo and rhythmic flexibility in the historical style stimulated a new understanding of the score and provided a host of powerful tools for expression (see Appendix C). Wilson and Peres Da Costa's enthusiasm about the style often reflected this feature (R1D, N1H).

Wilson notes the danger of ascribing relative worth to some features of the style over others (R2F). Indeed, isolating particular devices could risk losing the internal logic of the style; for instance, less vibrato makes sense of harmonic and open-string fingerings. But it does seem to me that elements of aesthetic (portamento and vibrato, in violin playing) are like the cladding on a house versus the structure itself. Tempo and rhythmic flexibility could be seen to affect the 'structure', in this analogy, and I think represent an especially positive diversion from modern style (see R1D).

This observation has implications for practical challenges faced by modern musicians. When not all elements may be adopted, the significant expressive potential of tempo modification and rhythmic flexibility is worth particular attention, in my opinion. This conviction played a role in the following section.

Part C

The aim of Part C was to come back to modern style with the fresh knowledge I had gained, but as I approached the transition I felt reluctant to leave the whole-hearted pursuit of the historical approach. I had simply 'dipped my toe' in these waters, and there was much more that could be explored; I particularly recognised a gap between my developed theoretical understanding and my limited amount of 'real-life' experience playing within the style.

Nonetheless, I observed many positive changes in my understanding as I began concluding Part B and approaching the Op. 108 sonata. Hairpins and Italian terms (such as *espressivo, dolce*, and so on) made sense as expressive markings; ideas for rhythmic inequality emerged; and I could imagine moments of arpeggiation in the piano part. I also tried to develop an understanding of the work's expressive 'meaning' through studying the score, as Wilson emphasises (see Ch. 2).

Starting to play the piece, I noticed useful habits of sound production from earlier (tighter, strategic vibrato, more pronounced shifts), for example in the second subject of the first movement. This period (7/20-8/20) was an exciting and encouraging time because I could see the interpretive skills I had gained: a relationship with the score that allowed creativity, and some expressive tools to realise it. A research journal entry reflected that "I think knowing about historical style helps me be more open to experimentation in a funny way…opening up a range of possibilities" (7/8/20). That observation was to constitute one of the main conclusions drawn from the project.

Now continuing the ANAM program interstate, I had contacted a fellow musician to join me for the Part C recital: Wong, a wonderful emerging artist who brought to the piece a bold, virtuosic approach. In the first rehearsal, I temporarily let go of my attempts at 'historical sound' to prioritise the more familiar, modern habits that I felt could match this heightened drama (especially fast, frequent vibrato for a brilliant sound). This sonata contains particularly dramatic content in the fourth movement.

Throughout the process, I think that Wong, and my awareness of this tendency, helped me push against my propensity to be reserved. Instead I wanted to connect with the expression of the music and play with conviction, and this was a focus in the first rehearsal (27/8/20). The recording of the second movement from the end of this session was, in my opinion, our most successful rendition of this movement; in retrospect, it seems like a moment where the

expression did 'come first' (see Ch. 3), and found its way out in a convincing manner (including with the inspiration of rhythmic flexibility in the melody line; Appendix A, *3b*).

Later (16/11/20) we had a 'mock performance' house concert with a small audience, and this was a step forward in performance skills. I found myself trying to tell a story to the audience and exaggerate communication[5]. In the final recital, I also experienced certain developments in performing with conviction. Additionally, these performances highlighted another moment where subjective perceptions were different to reality—this time I noticed that, with performance nerves, the tempos were much faster (and vibrato more electric) than I had experienced in the moment.

Communication and rehearsal strategy

Along with fiery virtuosity, Wong also displayed a modern approach to playing, with even quavers and a clean, synchronous approach to chords and melody/accompaniment. This provided a valuable opportunity to learn about communicating and rehearsing with the historical style in mind, and about rehearsal technique in general. Reflecting on the process, three practical improvements for the future could be:

- Communicating clearly about historical style and rehearsal decisions. This process highlighted the importance of learning to communicate my own opinion more effectively, including with clarity and efficiency.
- Communicating a balanced view. In this performance, I intentionally prioritised the exploration of timing, rather than other aspects of the style; however, despite the need to prioritise, giving an overarching and balanced understanding may be important. I may have given *too much* attention to hairpins; we discussed this so much in rehearsals that at the project's conclusion Wong wondered whether this was the only feature of the style! More consideration of other techniques, such as rhythmic inequality, could perhaps have balanced this.

  A more balanced view of technical control could also have been communicated, especially rhythmic discipline. At times throughout the process, I wondered if a lack of emphasis on rhythmic control was in fact 'historical', a way that imperfections might contribute to the

[5] Wong noted that he felt our performance here, overall, was more convincing and accurate than the final recital! This positive performance experience was largely due to certain factors from outside the discussion of historical style. Nonetheless, my understanding of 19th-century did likely play a role, for example recognizing that the analogy of 'story-telling' is certainly congruent with the approach of 19th-century musicians.

historical style. This included communicating in the first rehearsal that 'rushing' could be appropriate—but not emphasising 'space' as much. As later became clear, the reciprocal 'ebb', as well as rhythmic discipline, were two challenges we faced throughout the process (for example, not rushing in the fourth movement, choosing more moderate tempos, and lingering more at the top of hairpins or between phrases).

- A more directed rehearsal strategy. The rehearsals were spread out over a long time (with several gaps from practice). The meandering process had benefits but also some downsides, with some details from earlier rehearsals forgotten. A more streamlined approach would have been helpful.

  I often wanted to push toward a more dramatic result, but sensed Wong felt uneasy with my continued pleas for 'risky exaggeration'. This desire could perhaps have been balanced by a recognition of technical control, as above, and better sequencing—perhaps it would have helped to exaggerate earlier in the process with the general aspects of 'language', and then ensure enough time is allocated to consolidating and refining details for performance[6].

The process helped to bring these reflections to light. This was particularly assisted by the more self-directed posture of Part C (as opposed to the more passive, 'consuming-information' approaches during Part A and B), as I sought to develop a personal interpretation of this work.

Experiments towards a 'personal' style

Closer to the recital, the process was rushed. I realised that some musical and stylistic ideas might not be fully implemented. The priority was preparing for the upcoming performance, focusing on delivering a convincing result with the tools I had.

I experimented with some influences from outside the historical style in Part C, and this can be heard in the recital recording. In general I tried to adopt an approach that was dynamically vibrant and contrasting, and allowed myself to use less sustain and more wispy, *tasto* sounds at times. This was partly inspired by descriptions of another ensemble: a group that is somewhat historically informed but plays in a personal and dynamic way too.

[6] Refer to Bennett Wadsworth's strategy, below. Despite this refining process, I think an element of spontaneity should perhaps be retained in performance…Here the adage "from discipline comes freedom" is relevant (R2D).

At some point I also realised that my stylistic concept was leaning toward a kind of assumed, 'classical HIP' style—an idea of historically informed practice that one might imagine for the music of Mozart, with more release in the bow (from a baroque bow design), and less vibrato and portamento. One possible reason for this is that I may have correlated Wilson's characterisation of Brahms performance practice as 'light' (see Ch. 2) with the 'lightness' of such a style. I eventually realised that this was a misinformed link, but nearing the performance, in line with the goals of Part C, decided not to change this[7].

Recital recording (3a)

For the final recital, my intention was to deliver an expressively convincing performance, with the mix of historical and modern style that had resulted from the process. Overall, I felt that the performance and rehearsal process represented a step toward a 'reconciliation' of styles but that my synthesis was not yet entirely convincing.

Some aspects of historical style are evident in the recording. I had developed my understanding of hairpin treatment during this time, and some fluctuations of the moving part and a lean on hairpin peaks can be heard in the first movement (3:35). We play with a sense of flow and forward momentum (5:30), an especially positive improvement since Part A.

The performance also shows some experimentation navigating the spectrum of stylistic options according to practicalities or preference. The vibrato is not 'historical', but I had tried to be informed by narrower and more intentional use, with some moments of 'pure' non-vibrato tone; the effect is similar to the Part B recital[8]. I had set aside a focus on heavy portamento and pianistic devices of arpeggiation and dislocation, and prioritised elements of tempo flexibility. The sound of the piano is modern, with a large and mellow tone colour that filled the space and contrasted with the more penetrating, sweet tone of the violin. The very 'live' acoustic of the performance space, coupled with the tentativeness of performance nerves, made the use of airy (though, I believe, non-historical) tone 'colours' seem favourable.

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[7] Now I can see that the Brahms 'lightness' referred to by Wilson would be different to an HIP concept of Mozart 'lightness', achieving the Brahmsian sense from perhaps instrument design and elements of tempo and rhythmic flexibility but not necessarily bow-release. *Legato* was an important part of the German violin school's style. (It is also worthwhile to note that classical style is outside the scope of this investigation.)

[8] At points I was not convinced with the mix of vibrato and non-vibrato: perhaps it had something to do with the speed of the vibrato being very fast and thus intense, whereas it could have been narrow but slower.

Was the result convincing? I think the performance did differ from a conception of Brahms as heavy, vibrato-laden and stoic, and, anecdotally, others mentioned this to me afterwards. It felt reasonable to allow the use of some 'modern tools', for example the more frequent use of vibrato for modern tastes (whilst trying to retain the expressive intent) and using *tasto* colours to bring out the *sotto voce* feeling of the first movement. With the desire for vibrant dynamic contrast, the 'louder' end of the dynamic spectrum seemed less effective but the quieter dynamics seemed convincing.

One reflection is that some intentional divergence from a historical style may not have added to the expression: namely the misinformed link between lightness and lack of sustain. In an expressive sense, more sustain might have helped, for example, the singing quality of the melodic line in the second movement. Because this stylistic idea was *against* actual historical practice, it seems less justified in a conceptual sense as well.

In other situations, too, I imagine that moving further towards the historical style would have made the performance more expressive. In general, portamento could have been more pronounced, sounding polite rather than intentional. I especially feel we could have had more demonstrative, 'risky' lingering (for example at hairpin peaks) and rhythmic inequality (for example agogic accentuation). Christensen had noted earlier that, at that stage, the non-metronomic aspect of Brahms performance style could have been implemented more, and I think this comment applies to the recital as well (G1B).

Thoughts on technical control

A second reflection from the recital and preparation process is the value of technical control. A better understanding of this may make future performances more convincing, for example even to enable more risks in tempo flexibility. Some lack of rhythmic control (rushing in the fourth movement) and intonation slips distracted or detracted from the expression in this recital. Another challenge was feeling tight and disconnected from 'playing the music' at various points in the preparation, and this may be improved through fostering a higher default level of technical control.

Despite an emphasis on expressive 'imprecision' (see Ch. 2), a certain level of technical facility is, I believe, a useful factor to retain from modern style. Wilson often mentions the adage, "from discipline comes freedom". He observed that controlling the details of historical style actually requires greater facility and so is suited to more advanced students (R2D). Rhythmic control also enhances expressivity: for example, Wilson noted that refraining from

rushing gives the fourth movement a sense of excitement. This would seem to be aligned with the perspective of Brahms; pianist Fanny Davies writes that "a fussy or hurried Brahms in passages which must be presented with adamantine rhythm" would be "unthinkable" (1929).

Peres Da Costa similarly acknowledges how modern technique can have benefits:

> I don't see the adoption of 19th-century practices as diminishing technical and musical standards, more expanding them…Because actually you need even better technique to be able to be rhythmically free and not fall apart in it and not let that affect your tuning and other things. (N1G)

The challenge to keep in mind is avoiding the danger of a technically proficient but largely uninteresting performance:

> At the same time, what we seem to have ended up with is perfection without the storytelling and the fantasy and improvisation. "This is being made up on the spot" kind of feeling… (N1G)[9]

With this understanding, technical control becomes a means to an end, though not *the* end. Christensen noted that intonation, rhythm and tone could be seen as three core skills ('pillars'): "and then if you want to make the distinction and you want to depart from those three pillars, then it's a [deliberate] and really thought-out reason" (G1E). This perspective perhaps helps one not to confuse the expressive imprecision of historical style with a lack of technical control.

One feasible strategy might be to exaggerate initially, then give considerable focus to refining the technical details (and still 'let go' in the performance). Bennett Wadsworth (2017) demonstrated such an approach in her practice-led research on the performance editions of 19th-century cellist Friedrich Grützmacher. She experimented with aspects such as portamento and bow use before prioritising other aspects, such as intonation, that are more relevant to creating a polished performance. Her view was that Grützmacher, with an attention to precision, would have risen to the challenges of recording technology.

Having said this, some of the tension here is unresolved: I wonder whether my conceptualisation is ignoring certain aural evidence. For example, Saint-Saëns demonstrates considerable forward momentum in his recording of a movement entitled "Marche militaire

[9] See also Haynes, 2007. Haynes entitles one chapter, on the pitfalls of modernist style, "Chops, But No Soul"!

francaise" (from his *Suite algerienne,* Op. 60, arr. for piano), where we would intuitively deem strict rhythm necessary (1919). Anna Scott (2014) has criticised HIP pursuits for overlooking difficulties like this, and it causes me to wonder whether I am yielding to a modern bias. There do seem to be disadvantages for prioritising technical elements: for example, I can appreciate how a desire for technical perfection can work against musical communication in performance, fostering safety but a less expressive style of playing.

For me, these questions remain open-ended. Nonetheless, I can see that prioritising technical control is a way to personally move forward. Practically, this is likely to help facilitate the transfer of ideas, whether modern or historical, to reality.

Summary

At the end of this process, I have reached a new appreciation for the value of the historical style. I moved from a somewhat superficial and abstract interest to a more practical understanding that sees a connection between details of the style and their expressive intent. Part B particularly helped me to understand that rather than mere 'fashion', the historical style is connected to the task of expressive music-making.

Part C considered applying this knowledge in a modern context. I felt this section of the project made some headway toward a synthesis of historical and modern styles, with a context encouraging personal initiative; some initiatives to take this further could include development of rehearsal strategy, technical control, bow sustain, and more demonstrative tempo and rhythmic flexibility.

One overarching observation is the difference between ideas and reality: how the experience of playing differs significantly from the experience of imagining or theorising about playing! A greater amount of listening to early recordings and playing in historical style would have expanded my understanding through the process.

Having said this, a valuable paradigm toward Brahms performance practice has formed. Experimenting with the style, learning from the literature and talking to other musicians has offered me ways to confront certain challenges I had experienced in my development as a musician, reaching toward more vibrant and diverse expression. It has also transformed my interpretive skills, helping me understand the score in a new way and recognise what I can do as a performer to craft it. Though the quest for more demonstrative performance continues, stepping outside modern style helped me to counteract some of its less expressive tendencies. "It can be very enlightening to…take distance from one's normal artistic imperatives" (Haynes, 2007, p. 31).

CHAPTER 2: Interviews

Musicians exploring Brahms performance practice for the first time may be confronted with a mass of information and ideas. Where can one start, and how can this information be applied in a useful way—especially when our context is so different from that of the 19th-century? This chapter reflects on insights from two experienced Brahms performance practice artist-researchers, especially regarding various challenges that emerge from the pursuit of historical style. The perspectives of the other interviewees also contribute to this discussion.

Dr Robin Wilson

Wilson is informed by practice-led doctoral study and experimental performance with Ironwood Ensemble, alongside Peres Da Costa. He is well-placed to comment on the process of stylistic assimilation, with these pathways offering rich exposure to primary sources and practical application to artistic performance. Wilson is also informed by his experience as a teacher, and his perspective helps to address tensions between historical style and the practicalities of modern training.

Ideas and reality: the journey from contrived to natural

A common point of discussion with Wilson was his own journey to absorb information about Brahms performance practice in a convincing manner. This was a process of several years, especially because it involved reversing key aspects of modern training in favour of new habits. He describes these tensions between styles as pronounced and ingrained.

> …the elements of historical style are antithetical to modern sensibilities and to our modern training…And musicians are fearful of being judged in the wrong way: of being thought of as incompetent because they can't vibrate, or being thought of as lacking in taste because they shift too heavily, or being thought of as lacking in rhythm because they play with great flexibility. (R2A)

Reaching toward the historical style presents challenges to both technique and performing to a modern audience.

The process of assimilation involved moving away from deliberate, mechanical implementation of the style to a more intuitive 'fluency'. Commenting on my comparatively brief experiences with the style, Wilson noted:

> You're planning every kind of micro element of that to try to impose a style upon your modern playing…In order to truly sound natural and convincing, you need to live within that style for probably many years. Assimilate those expressive techniques so that then they become a reactive part of your musical sensibility… (R2B)

The challenge is to move from a 'contrived' application toward spontaneous, effective use of the devices[10].

The integration to a natural expressivity is related to an important principle of Wilson's approach: the historical style is not a replacement for interpretation. As he frequently emphasised to me, stylistic devices are "not there as arbitrary techniques that you superimpose upon the music to make it sound convincing" (R2B); they must be utilised in service of the score[11].

> We still have to interpret. We still have to hear and react to harmony…We still have to understand voicing and structure…
>
> If you like, [expressive devices are] the prism through which the music is communicated…But you still have to be the musician. (R2B)

This has a precedent, Wilson observes, in the superior knowledge of composition that great performers of Brahms' day exhibited, with analytical skills able to perceive meaning in the score from interpretation of harmonic and rhythmic features.

Expressive advantages of the historical style

To Wilson a convincing performance intelligently communicates the "emotional message of the music, and the rhetorical message of the music", and the performer's response to that—a task involving both mind and heart (R2G). This puts responsibility on *both* modern and historically informed performers to use what they have in the service of musical expression, for either 'camp' could deliver a heartfelt and communicative result.

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[10] See also Appendix C: non-contrived and spontaneous musicianship seems to have been important to historical artists as well.
[11] For example, see Peres Da Costa's analysis of hairpins in Op. 78 below.

However, this communication can be aided by the historical style. Tempo flexibility, for example, can clarify phrase structure and enhance expression:

> We hear clearly where the phrase is going, we hear when the phrase has reached its climax perhaps, and to me that's much more satisfying or powerful as a listener, because it makes the music come to life, it's like it really lifts the notes off the page and turns it into a rhetorical kind of language. (R1D)

Though rubato might be present in modern performance, Wilson notes (R1A), the difference here is the exaggerated delivery—like an orator communicating their text with heightened dramatic intent (R1D). Other aspects of the style are also connected to expressivity, with vibrato, portamento and rhythmic inequality all offering ways to add emphasis within the phrase.

I like Wilson's description of the combined effect of these expressive devices:

> I personally find that when you play Brahms in this way, the music sounds more human, it sounds like a very natural way of just taking the stricture of notation and the limitations of notation, erasing those, and just simply having sound, rhythm and the harmony exist in a temporal realm, in a very natural and emotional kind of way—in a way that you might feel, and in a way that your feelings might—ebb and flow or very quickly change...I hear phrases like I imagine Brahms might hear them if he was out on a walk; you know he's just strolling along and these tunes are going through his head... (R1D)

That emotional expressivity highlights the value of historical style, and indeed was crucial to my own appreciation of it.

The historical style also creates a different "sound world". "I find his music takes on a lightness, there's a transparency in his textures, there's a clarity in the structures and in harmonies, and in the emotional qualities," (R1D) with non-mechanical, "mellifluous...ebb and flow" (R2G). Along with the expressive devices above, this is particularly influenced by the instrument design: for violin, the use of gut strings, with the textures and variety of possibilities these offer; and the more lightweight period pianos, for example the Streichers, which implemented a straight-strung design and deer-hide hammers. There is greater clarity to basslines and harmony in general, which supports engagement with these expressive components of the score; and on a practical note, the violin can be less concerned with vibrating and projecting against an overpowering modern piano (R1A-B).

Teaching Brahms performance practice in a modern context

The connection to expression helps Wilson to navigate tensions between styles that emerge in teaching situations. At ANAM, he often teaches these sonatas, and stylistic conflicts can come to the fore for practical reasons. Modern training urges a constant vibrato, clean shifts and a control of pulse, and this facility is required in a developmental and a professional sense. A 'fully committed' historical approach can be at odds with time restrictions, performance contexts and the student's instrumental priorities—especially considering the time that it takes for this differing style to be assimilated convincingly. (R2D-E)

Wilson addresses this dilemma by moderating the extent of historical style according to the situation, whilst fostering awareness of the elements' expressive intent. He will often demonstrate in the historical style during lessons, but may then work towards a middle ground with slightly less obtrusive portamento or with slightly more frequent vibrato. In the case of vibrato, the underlying principle of strategic use remains, and such an awareness can aid the student's broader musical development too (R2E).

Another example is tempo modification, which should also be connected to an expressive intention (R2E). In lessons, Wilson often suggested singing a phrase to experiment with this, a technique that I found helpful for connecting to the expressive intent. This is especially relevant considering the emphasis of the German school on imitating vocal practice (Brown, 2003). With this device, Wilson may also encourage students to exaggerate: "push them to go further than they're comfortable with to really help them understand that actually they're not doing very much" (R2E).

This moderated approach also makes sense with the instrument setups available. The sound of metal strings is less complex than gut equivalents, and vibrato effects can compensate for this: "I think it's more difficult to find the variety of sound and colour using modern strings without vibrato as perhaps a more involved or...frequently employed expressive tool" (R1B). Wilson acknowledges that needing to match the volume of a modern piano can also prompt vibrato (R1B).

To my mind, such adaptions may differ from original performance practice, but are reasonable ways to adjust to context within practical limitations, whilst maintaining engagement with the expressivity of historical style. Wilson's perspective is encouraging because it suggests that information about Brahms performance practices can be utilised even by musicians facing these practical tensions. He guides students to connect with the sense of expressive intent underlying the historical style (and to exaggerate further than normal), even if students do not push to the extremities of full assimilation.

Professor Neal Peres Da Costa

Peres Da Costa's practical and pioneering approach to Romantic performing practice clarified my understanding from a pianist's viewpoint, and I found that his general perspective about HIP was also valuable for responding to tensions between stylistic approaches. In general, from my sessions with Peres Da Costa I came away with an encouragement towards adventurous, creative risk in applying the un-notated performing practices. These practices do not restrict, but expand the possibilities for performance today.

Early recordings and exaggeration

Peres Da Costa's book, *Off the Record: Performing Practices in Romantic Piano Playing* (2012), notes many instances where written information suggests a different result to what aural records demonstrate. His approach helps to resolve these tensions by clarifying the respective roles: aural records must be prioritised and written records can be contextualised. Early recordings give more concrete representations of stylistic practices than can be gained from written sources alone[12].

One example of how words in isolation can give the wrong impression is the case of *restraint*. This is often cited as an aesthetic ideal for performers in Brahms' circle, and 'just perceptible' may be stressed as a principle to avoid contrived exaggeration. Joachim and Moser, for example, advise that "a very fine sense of discrimination is necessary in order not to exaggerate the difference [between accentuated and unaccentuated notes] but rather to imply it in a scarcely perceptible manner" (1905; in Brown, 2003). Similar admonitions occur in other contexts. Yet recordings of these musicians demonstrate use of expressive devices that seem noticeable to the modern ear—in Joachim's *Romance in C* recording (1903), for example, his free approach to even 'simple' notated rhythms (see Fig 2) is such that one might have difficulty transcribing the performance accurately (Hyun-Su Kim, 2012).

Figure 2: Joachim, Romance for Violin and Piano, mm. 17-23 (Joachim, 1855)

[12] Refer to Introduction for names of musicians who made recordings, closer to Brahms' day. Many of these are accessible, for example through the Naxos Online Music Library.

Discussing this idea with Peres Da Costa (along with reading his book) helped me to understand how he approaches such information. Early recordings of pianists like Reinecke are significant because of their reputation as artists of great calibre: modern musicians must consider that recordings demonstrate this artistry and perhaps adjust their own approach accordingly. Peres Da Costa suggested that even HIP pursuits today can exhibit a literal interpretation of the score, for example with synchronous playing, that may be more akin to the approach expected of student musicians during Brahms' era:

> I think they would have just thought, "Well, that's a great student performance"…It's not artistically phrased. It hasn't got artistic impression…It's perceptibly 'correct', or yeah, it's what someone does at the beginning to learn how to play neatly, and nicely, and all the rest of it. (N2B)

Artists were expected to diverge from this basic conception. To reverse the equation, what we might consider imperceptible could at times constitute a 'perceptible' absence of artistry (N2B)!

Written texts provide other explanations from this perspective. One useful contextualisation may be the recognition of pedagogical bias, which may well have influenced treatises to be more conservative than actual practice (N2B). Arguably, musicians from Brahms' circle were also reacting against the more extreme tempo modification of the Wagner school (Brown, Peres Da Costa, & Bennett Wadsworth, 2015)—and these reactionary comments should be taken carefully.

"These musicians declaim"—writes Haynes, about Romantic performers generally—"and they are serious about it" (2007, p. 38). An important practical conclusion from comparing modern style to early recordings is that musicians today, if seeking to reach this result, may need to *go further* in many aspects. Whereas the challenge of earlier musicians may have been achieving restraint, ours seems to be the opposite extreme. Both Peres Da Costa (N1H) and Wilson (R1E, R2E) mentioned the importance of exaggeration, and my own experience also supports this. Subjective perceptions in performance, as noted in Ch. 1, can also make attempts at declamation seem larger on the 'inside'.

As one pushes to be more demonstrative, however, this is not to say restraint can be completely discarded. I have sometimes experimented with extreme, dramatic tempo or rhythmic changes, only to find in lessons that my results were unconvincing. In one such moment studying the second movement of the Op. 108 sonata, Wilson mentioned that 'natural

gesture' is a helpful guide for rhythmic inequality. It may be useful to remember that freedom and restraint is a balancing act (see Appendix C), and that expressive intent should guide the freedom[13].

Experimentation and the 'descriptive' score

I particularly appreciated Peres Da Costa's perspective on *experimentation.* One reason for this is that limited aural evidence cannot provide a comprehensive view of the style, and so the modern practice-led musician has a part to play:

> ...we've only got a certain number of recordings and they only tell us a certain amount. But I do think that that's really the important thing, that if we engage with all of that information and then use our artistic intuition—such as it is—to fill in gaps, we will actually not end up with exactly what Brahms would have expected, but certainly closer to [it], I think. But also, we'll end up with something really artistically interesting with artistic agency, and it'll have that flavor. (N1A)

The artistic agency Peres Da Costa emphasises is not only necessitated by gaps in our knowledge; it is also evident in the divergent, personal approaches of 19th-century musicians. Brahms expected tempos to change between performance (Sherman, 2003), and Florence May reports that Brahms' own "conception of many works of the great masters, together with his whole style of playing, differed *in toto* from Frau Schumann's" (1905, p. 417)[14]. In terms of performance style, Peres Da Costa suggested that "the thing that made all the players individual is that they were using the practices, but it was coming out in their own way" (N2C).

That breadth of possibility within the style is partly connected to a different perception of the score. Far from a pedantic legislative policy, I now see the score as a guide that can be realised well in many ways (though importantly, not by a strict, mathematical rendering). This attitude to the score considers, even expects, that rhythms may be played unequally according to the feeling of the performer, or that a pianist might roll in many places where not explicitly marked.

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[13] According to Andreas Moser in Joachim & Moser's 1905 *Violinschule*, freedom is "not caprice, but internally assimilated conformity to the law" (Brown, 2003, p. 88).
[14] It is important to note that this artistic agency was likely still within certain stylistic guidelines, however: "artistic agency within a particular type of language, if you like" (N1A).

This encourages greater creativity. Hyun-Su Kim's discussion of the 'Brahmsian hairpin' (2012) highlights this point, observing that though hairpins often indicated certain dynamic and temporal effects, they were likely intended to convey, primarily, an expressive feeling of 'becoming more/less'. The use of devices, such as tempo fluctuation, dynamic variation and arpeggiation were secondary—all different means to this end—and thus hairpins are "conceived…not as well-defined prescriptive sonic commands but rather as descriptive markings connoting expressive meanings" (p. 48)[15].

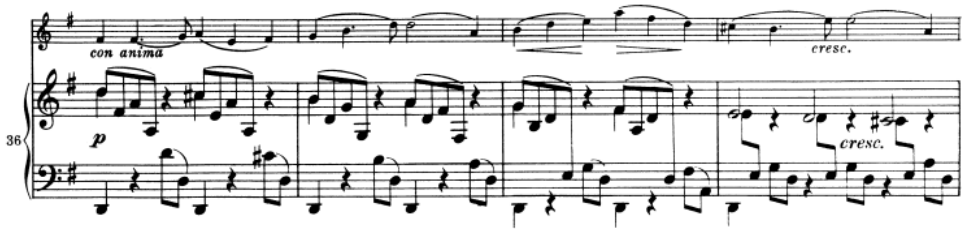

Figure 3: Op. 78, mov 1, mm. 36-39 (Brahms, 1880/1927)

Peres Da Costa demonstrated the diverse hairpin options available in our second consultation on the Op. 78 sonata (N2D). At m. 37 in the first movement, the violinist could push quickly to the peak of this hairpin so the A arrives early, lean on this note, and return to tempo (Fig 3). This instance also exemplifies the expressive possibilities created by a less precise attitude to 'togetherness', as it seems logical for the violin to be slightly out of sync with the piano here. With the piano's own hairpin markings at m. 45 and 47 (Fig 4), a similar approach could apply, and the different harmonies of each repetition could guide the amount of emphasis at these peaks. Other examples of hairpins and their possible iterations were also discussed.

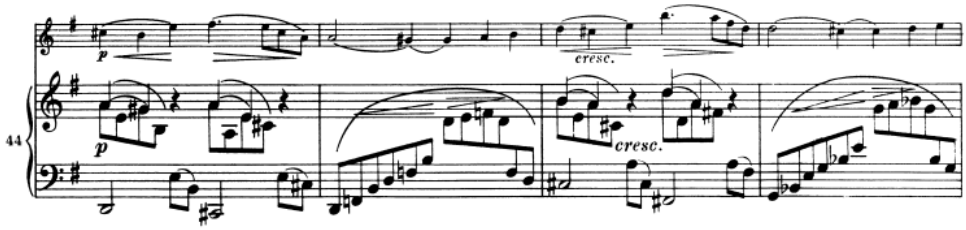

Figure 4: Op. 78, mov 1, mm. 44-47 (Brahms, 1880/1927)

In situations like this, the historical approach can spark more options, not less, and encourage creative individuality in service of the musical meaning. This artistic agency extends to our situation as modern musicians, even if moderated by the practicalities of our context.

[15] Haynes (2007) also utilises these terms in his discussion of the score.

Acknowledging that musicians may vary in their own tastes in so far as these performing practices are concerned, Peres Da Costa suggests:

> …if you piece together the written texts, and the recorded evidence, and then you as an artist, you have your artistic agency that has to be there…All of this work is a spur for your imagination, as an artist. I think, actually, what we're doing here in the end is taking the information, some of us will go really to one extreme, and put it in there, and then it'll still come out with our own artistic imagination about it…You could take a little bit of it, or you could do it a lot. (N2C)

Despite the tensions with modern style, this supportive attitude encourages musicians to start from where they are in implementing the information:

> I think taking it to any extent is fantastic. Even the slightest getting faster and getting slower is going to add so much to the music…I think anything that doesn't stick rigidly…to the score is going to be interesting and will make the music breathe. (N1H)

Having said this, Peres Da Costa is personally comfortable with an approach using widespread arpeggiation, dislocation and significant tempo fluctuation, and our discussions helped me to understand the historical precedents for this.

"Clean and tidy" chamber music

Such an approach includes resisting the modern preference for 'hands together' and other synchronous practices. Peres Da Costa noted how earlier "crisp and clean and neat and tidy" HIP pursuits had used period instruments but missed the "flavour" created by un-notated performing practices (N1A). By contrast, one memorable observation for me is how the complex aesthetic of a non-synchronous style of piano playing, though less 'precise' in the sense of verticality, can feel organic and emotionally complex (see opening of Op. 78 II, *2c*).

This more florid and expressive style is not only relevant to pianistic devices, but also ensemble 'togetherness' and tempo modification. Wilson observed about early recordings:

> an acceleration which to us might sound like we're sacrificing rhythmic integrity, maybe even notational accuracy—that was less of a consideration than the feeling that the sweep or the acceleration engendered within the phrase...the kind of impression one is left with after listening is very effective... (R1A)

This ‘artistic untidiness’ might also be from agogic accentuation and other rhythmic inequality, adapting the rhythmic values according to the expression (see Appendix C). Ironwood Ensemble consciously seeks to experiment with such possibilities (N1F).

Evidently, some apparent imprecision was actually an expressive communication, and in these cases I think the other side of the 'imprecision coin' may be *freedom*. I noticed this interesting relationship during the section of Part B focused on historical style (Ch. 1), where less requirement for precision gave me opportunity to experiment more freely.

Challenging modern mindsets through emulation

From my discussions with Peres Da Costa, I took away an encouragement to keep pushing further in the use of stylistic practices—"how far can we go?"—with an exciting element of risk. Along with experimentation and exaggeration, he emphasised emulation as a way to continue challenging assumptions of our present-day norms. In my own process I utilised experimentation but not emulation, and this may have aided my understanding.

In the pursuit of historically informed performance, it is easy to overlook aspects of performance style that are ‘inconvenient’. Scott has recently suggested that modern ‘historically informed Brahms’ demonstrates a “preoccupation with control”, for example upholding descriptions of Brahms as a serious, classical composer but overlooking the “improvisatory, sketchy, and ephemeral quality” of early recordings (2014, p. 248). She points to certain aspects of Adelina De Lara’s recordings, for example, that modern players might be tempted to discard (including forward momentum without coming back to tempo), emphasising that these are in fact important elements of the style.

If one wishes to push towards the historical approach in this way, a key strategy is detailed emulation. Peres Da Costa described his own process:

> My intention is to do some more recording emulation and listen really, really carefully to the bits where I just maybe think…even if I don’t like it…I’m going to make myself do it. I’m going to go that extra bit, see what that feels like, and try to understand what was going on in the music…what was the intention behind it. (N2A)

To my mind, emulation works 'outside-in', giving an understanding of expression by starting from the external details. This is not an end in itself; instead, it pushes toward more informed creative experimentation, for example highlighting the importance of exaggeration:

> What I've tried to do is…to see what it feels like when you try to emulate one of these sort of *crescendos* and *animatos* that you hear in the music…When you actually try to do it physically, it's a lot more than you think, often. It so goes against the grain to do it at first. But that's the important thing, is, "okay, when you're doing that in a performance or in a rehearsal or whatever, how far can you push it?" (N1H)

Scott's ideas are convincing and challenging; it is sobering that even HIP Brahms today may still have ground to cover to reach the result of early performers! This suggests that my own experience in this project may still have been significantly informed by 'modern' ideas; indeed, it calls us to treat our artistic intuitions with some skepticism. For example, if the less technically 'perfect' standards of the early recordings did contribute to a heightened expressive communication, it is possible that my practical conclusions about the value of technical control (pp. 19-21) could be misguided.

I found it interesting to observe how Peres Da Costa's pursuit of historically informed performance practice continues in greater detail. After many years analysing and applying the evidence, there is still more to experiment with, even for familiar works. In our consultation session on the Op. 78 sonata, he noted:

> …I came into the Con just to go through some of the passages…and I kept looking at it and going, "okay, I played this piece a hundred times, but now, is that really it? Is that what I want to do?"…It's a constant thinking and rethinking. (N2A)

In summary, experimentation with performing practices and emulation of early recordings help to address the challenges that face modern musicians pursuing historically informed performance. Peres Da Costa's response to such conflicts includes actively resisting a modernist mindset and empathising with artistic musicians of the past.

Further thoughts

My other consultant musicians, De Jager and Christensen, contributed two additional perspectives of HIP as modern performers, and some comments agree with points above.

Christensen has had considerable experience in high-level professional ensembles around Australia, though not in strictly 'HIP' settings. Nonetheless, he observes a growing awareness of HIP in Australia (G1A), with many musicians successfully operating in multiple stylistic arenas. He is aware of several Brahms performance practice ideas, mentioning temporal treatment of hairpins in our lesson on the Op. 108 sonata (G1B). De Jager similarly commented that he feels "open-mindedness" is a common quality of his Australian colleagues:

> …I think what I see around me is a group of musicians, of my age and slightly older, who are very willing to be open-minded, about ideas of the music—just in a general attitude sense… (P1E)

Their observations suggest to me that professional musicians may be interested in ideas about historical performance practice that this investigation explores.

From his perspective as a musician involved in the modern industry, Christensen observed some challenges I have noticed as well. He recognizes gaps between past and present practice, but finds the diversity of 'historically informed' options confronting: "that is the most jarring thing for me, is that you can have historically informed performance experts playing in such different ways" (G1E). Similarly, throughout the project I have desired clear and practical options for what the style involves, and this is one aim of the Appendix C summary.

Additionally, Christensen is concerned about HIP performances that try "so hard to show you something, how it should be played" (G1E), but miss the essence of convincing performance. This concern aligns with Wilson's emphasis on intuitive musicality. Christensen's experience, like my own, points to the importance of prioritising expressive performance.

De Jager already had considerable experience with Romantic performing practice, and I found his conception of the HIP pursuit helpful. For him, convincing performance is about imaginatively "embodying" the past. He has engaged with primary sources like early recordings, but his approach also looks past the external details, suggesting even "trying to understand the socio-political structures…behind the artistic gestures. Like, you know—what about rolled chords made them feel like they were a part of German society in the 1860s?"

This is an attitude of creative exploration: “we have to...use our imaginations to think what it would feel like to have been moved to create and play this sort of music” (P1F).

Many practical insights imparted in rehearsals bear the mark of personal experience, supporting the idea of experimentation. During the interview, De Jager imitated several early recordings and described his impressions, for example noting (in an imitation of Claude Debussy) how “everything around the beats…sort of has a gravity towards them” (P1D). He has thought deeply about 'playing together' in ensemble situations and developed a philosophy of 'active listening', involving members arriving on a note from a shared instinct of anticipation (P1B). Such comments are examples of how, as Peres Da Costa has emphasised, information about music can be applied and creatively explored through the lens of our individual practice.

He aptly described the challenge of HIP: “pushing ourselves closer to that time...But then also...bringing that style closer to us”: a “connecting of intuitions” between past and present (P1F). With this task, however, De Jager’s priority is to communicate the historical information, and modern preferences play a secondary role. He commented:

> I don't consciously try and add modern ideas...Except that like I said I still feel that one has to speak with one's own voice, and I suppose I let that happen on a more subliminal level: I am who I am and I am a modern person. (P1F)

I appreciate how De Jager conceptualised this, maintaining respect for the past whilst acknowledging the performer’s challenge of intuitive performance.

Summary:

The responses of other musicians to the mass of information about Brahms performance practice underline some ways to address tensions between these styles. They can clarify Brahms performance practice, who we are as modern musicians by comparison, and how we can process the information from our perspective. Fully assimilating the style includes battling against tendencies of precision and restraint, toward a natural and intuitive 'fluency'—this takes years, and even then, can present further challenges. Where such a comprehensive approach is not practical, awareness of the connection between style and expression, and a willingness to experiment (including against modern norms), may help modern musicians to explore these historical practices now[16].

What musicians of past and present share also allows such an exploration to occur. De Jager, noting how the psychological similarities between humans over time make the HIP pursuit possible, made this point: "if Brahms felt a completely alien emotion to us that we could never hope to understand or feel or recreate, then…it's, I mean…[a] futile exercise!" (P1F) On the contrary, shared internal characteristics and expressive goals allow and challenge us to find the emotion that 19th-century artists also sought to express. Communicating these intangible experiences is perhaps the underlying priority for any performance; and the historical style offers tools to this end.

[16] It is worth noting that many 'modern' musicians today are aware of differences between stylistic practices and do adjust accordingly (for example, using less vibrato when performing music of baroque and classical periods). The idea of one being either a 'modern' or 'historically informed' performer is somewhat simplified; it could be more realistic to acknowledge a spectrum of possible experiences.

CHAPTER 3: Commentary on Style Summary

Summarising the style

This chapter is a commentary on the summary of historical style (see Appendix C) that was developed during Part B of the research project. The conception of this summary changed over time, originally intended as a short preparatory activity for the intensive historical style period but then adjusted and extended to its present state: a synthesis of information about historical style, with a focus on connecting the style to broader principles of expression. It is divided into two sections, firstly addressing some general 19th-century conceptions of 'ideal' music-making that are relevant to a discussion of style, and then the more specific, practical details of a stylistic approach. One purpose was to describe both the 'internal' and 'external' experience of playing in this style, using primary quotes and relevant observations from my own experiences and those of the historically informed musicians I interacted with.

I imagined this document 'sitting on a music stand' as a quick reference resource. In line with this idea, the intention was to be concise, structured, comprehensive, and to prioritise what I considered to be rich quotes (and aural examples of the style, though this focus was later minimised for practical reasons). The formatting reflects this, distilling an understanding of the style into a few pages and drawing attention to primary source quotes. I also wanted to allow creativity for others to reflect and experiment on these ideas.

Challenges and limitations

In the summary I draw from my own experiences and those of other modern musicians—admittedly distanced from the 'raw evidence' of 19th-century records. Some elements of this could be investigated further; my perspective in this project could deepen from further practical engagement. There are also significant differences between verbal descriptions and the actual experience of playing. Without claiming to be complete or perfect, however, the summary gives an overview of the main components as I see them now, with the intention of an accurate representation that is helpful for other musicians.

As Peres Da Costa underlined, one should keep in mind the subjectivity of primary written sources. When considering the ideals on the first page, for example, it may be useful to also consider the aural records and modern tendencies towards restraint. In order to push one's experience toward the expressive freedom of the early artists, it may be important for an HIP pursuit to acknowledge the comments in Ch. 2 (briefly summarised in the introduction to Appendix C) alongside this information.

In aiming to highlight the connection between style and wider principles of musicianship, the summary has a slightly different focus to the Barenreiter editions. These include more detailed application to each sonata, whereas the intention here was to create a quick reference resource that might also be applicable across numerous situations[17]. In a sense the summary also includes discussions of a more 'personal' and subjective nature (though nonetheless important).

"Inside-to-outside"

The summary is designed with a central principle of music-making in mind: performance is most effective when the expressive content of the music is 'felt' and communicated. Peres Da Costa and Wilson both conceptualise the use of portamento, vibrato and tempo modification as "expressive devices" or "tools" (e.g. R2B); the analogy is pertinent because it highlights that they must be used with expressive intent, with a connection to 'feeling'. Wilson frequently underscored the expressive purpose of various techniques (Ch. 2) and understanding the style in this way has helped me to appreciate its value in my own playing (see Ch. 1).

A strong concept of expressivity is also central to the perspective of 19th-century musicians. Richard Specht's picturesque report of Brahms' musicianship, in 1928, describes the composer's highly expressive communication in performance, including "self-possessed manly emotion and self-forgetful romantic passion" (Pascall & Weller, 2003, p. 232). A negative characterisation is given by Clara Schumann in a criticism of conductor Hans von Bülow: "just because everything is artificial and nothing is felt, so everything is taken to extremes—all *stringendos* and *ritardandos* alike are done too much" (Pascall & Weller, 2003, p. 230). These musicians seem to suggest that the best artistry foregrounds a natural, emotional communication, felt by the performer and expressed to the audience—and avoiding, on the other hand, contrived caricature.

An interesting personal discovery was the quotation from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (see Appendix C). Brahms quotes Goethe's *Faust* in a letter to Otto Dessoff in 1878, discussing the inclusion of tempo markings in his second symphony:

[17] The Barenreiter editions also include a similar summary of stylistic guidelines prefacing the specific footnotes of each sonata.

> A *quasi ritard* in the first movement may be just as lacking as a *piu moto* at the 12/8 in the Adagio. But they are such superfluous indications. “If you don’t feel it, etc [vain will be your chase…]” (Avins, 2003, p. 25).

In their *Violinschule* of 1905, Joachim and Moser use the same quotation in the context of a difficult vibrato choice:

> It is a more difficult matter…In such a plight only insight into the nature of the composition, or the performer’s taste, matured in a good tradition, can decide the issue. Goethe’s words are applicable here: […]. (Brown, 2003, p. 68).

Avins notes that “every educated German” would have been familiar with this reference (2003, p. 25). These separate instances used the same short quote for different questions of interpretation, and it seemed to be an apt description of the summary’s central thought.

More broadly, I can see how that principle—"the expression must come first"—resonates with my experience performing music of many kinds. My teachers have encouraged me for years to foster an internal sense of expression and understanding of the music that I must then transmit through my physical facilities (the 'inside' works its way to the 'outside', as one of my past teachers said).

The summary also foregrounds the theme of acknowledging "a spectrum of possibilities" for the use of elements of historical style. This emerged from De Jager's comments on varying dotted figures (Ch. 1), and also fits well with Peres Da Costa’s focus on artistic agency (Ch. 2). Once again, the analogy of expressive "tools" is apt; in this case the image helps to explain how stylistic devices may be used in a variety of gradations and for a variety of purposes.

This principle, of considering a range of options, may be congruent with the practice of earlier musicians too. For example, Bennett Wadsworth has postulated that portamento may serve a range of expressive purposes (and manifest differently) according to the interval (2017). On a more overarching level, the variety of 19th-century musicianship suggests an array of valid options (see Ch. 2).

Other general aesthetic ideals are noted that seemed to be common themes in my reading and experiences. The book *Performing Brahms* (Musgrave & Sherman, 2003) was particularly helpful for this, and I appreciate Pascall and Weller's characterisation of artistry because it suggests some key criteria that 19th-century artists may have used to ascertain quality in

musical performance and style. To these ‘ingredients’ (see Appendix C), I also added 'good taste and style', which are two other common themes in 19th-century (and modern) discussions of style.

After a discussion of the score, the second section of the summary details specific elements of the style to complement more overarching concepts and to describe the 'actual result' of the style (as I see it now). Some personal descriptors of the experience and notes of a few aural examples are also included.

The two guiding expressive principles are emphasised throughout to demonstrate their relevance in many situations. Vibrato, for example, is closely linked with expression: Joachim and Moser note that “the performer must above all take into account the general character of the piece to be performed” (Brown, 2003, p. 66). Their instruction also allows a ‘spectrum of possibility’, with advice given for four speeds of vibrato effects depending on the dynamic marking.

Summary

In a sense the summary was intended as a brief but potent starting point—perhaps in a similar way to how the score is not an end-in-itself but an ignition point for creativity. Some quotes are not explained thoroughly in the text; apart from the concise format, these concentrated points of guidance often have numerous implications. Part of the excitement in the task of the musician is to discover their meaning, and I can attest to the fascinating task of engaging personally with primary material.

Interestingly, the very process of creating this became critical to my own appreciation and understanding of the style. In particular I discovered that the connection to expressivity that my training had emphasised was shared by these earlier artists. These musicians viewed their task as one of conveying emotion, poetry and beauty, just as musicians today also prioritise vibrant and effective musical communication. This conviction, as for us, needed to come from within and be worked outwards—affecting many aspects of performance, from their understanding of notation to use of timing and instrument-specific devices like portamento and vibrato.

Conclusions

Resolving tensions and finding resonance

The idea of playing Brahms' music in an 'historically informed' manner raises a number of valid questions, concerns and challenges. These can be grouped into two main areas: "Why is this important?" (that is, relating to questions of relevance and contextualisation) and "How do we get there?" (relating to questions of practical pursuit). These challenges may be felt by modern musicians because of the confronting differences between historical style and 'normal' ways of playing and listening to Brahms' music today.

Despite the challenges, the most fascinating personal discovery was not a tension but a *resonance* between past and present: a common focus on ideals of beauty, freedom, and expression. These experiences are mysterious, intangible and somewhat subjective, but they appear to underpin the perspective of 19th-century musicians to Brahms' music, just as they do ours. Though we do not necessarily share external details with musicians of the past, we share the pursuit of expressive performance: as Philip concludes *Performing Brahms* (2003), "If we cannot do that, we are mere archaeologists, not creative musicians" (p. 369).

"Why is this important?"

Understanding the historical style of performing Brahms can provide tools to achieve more expressive performance. Musicians in Brahms' time viewed style as being part of (and necessarily directed by) the wider quest to effectively communicate the work's emotional content. In the space between a similar 'inside' and a divergent 'outside', we find fresh, powerful expressive possibilities for crafting and communicating Brahms' music.

Modern advocates of historically informed Brahms suggest that this style offers an even more communicative result than modern conventions, especially due to more declamatory tempo and rhythmic flexibility. As well as heightening expression, a historical approach could also broaden it, with additional tools for bringing out musical meaning (portamento, vibrato, pianistic devices), and alternative understandings of the score and musical performance. The range of options from the historical style provides a path to creative and personal interpretation. The use of historical equipment also provides an aesthetic that is more transparent yet, with a lack of synchronicity, more complex.

For myself, appreciating the communicative value of this approach lessens some *conceptual* tensions. Now understanding more of the 'internal' expressive motivation, I view aspects of the 'external' historical style with admiration rather than as burdens. This interest encourages one to venture outside familiar modern norms. Many differences with modern style, far from irrelevant additions that detract from expressivity, may facilitate a performance where "the music actually is more emotional and becomes structurally much clearer" (R1D).

"How do we get there?"

This project affirms the worth of the historical style in a modern context, and also seeks to communicate it in an accessible way (see Appendix C). Appreciating the accessibility of the style lessens some *practical* tensions, because it is no longer an insurmountable obstacle but something that one can reach towards, even within limitations of the modern context.

A clear picture of the historical style is helpful here, including specific, practical understanding of the elements. Aural records are valuable for an understanding of stylistic expectations. Strategies for experiencing the historical style include experimentation with performance practice evidence and emulation of recordings. The connection between style and expression also seems helpful in this pursuit; the range of options (how and where to use devices, and to what extent) can be navigated with interpretation and 'feeling' ("expression must come first").

Practicalities of the modern context can be justifiable reasons for a moderated approach to historical style. In these cases, awareness of stylistic devices' expressive intent is helpful for creative experimentation, and tempo and rhythmic flexibility may be powerful techniques to prioritise (though technical control seems to be a useful element of modern training to retain). Nonetheless, my most interesting learning experiences were not with a view to moderation necessarily, but to pushing towards the style with an element of 'risk'. In this process of reaching toward the 'flavour' of Romantic performing practice, it is necessary to challenge modern assumptions and preferences, including the desire for precision and a literal view of the score.

My own exploration of Brahms performance practice has helped to develop my musicianship. Even without full assimilation of the style, I am more equipped, with new tools to realise the score (and awareness of their historical precedents), a recognition of shared ideals of beauty and expression, and progress in aspects like vibrato and ensemble awareness. I am more adventurous, an aspiration I had beforehand but now supported by practical options that fulfil this and that work against inexpressive precision and tentativeness.

Further thoughts

Some challenging tensions remain, however: particularly Scott's warning not to overlook aspects of historical style that are outside a modernist approach (2014). Where might I be yielding to modern style, or, as Taruskin criticised the earlier HIP movement, creating a style that reflects my own position rather than theirs (1995)? These philosophical thoughts may be useful to consider in any further HIP pursuits.

Another tension that remains is regarding the research question on reconciliation between styles for 'artistic reasons'. Despite the benefits of historical style, I have wondered if some aspects (for instance, of portamento or vibrato use) were indeed limited to a particular context and are less directly connected to expression. Another approach to this topic might be to consider what the *audience* will inevitably notice and how what is noticed might direct our stylistic priorities as communicators. I reflected on this thought at various times throughout the project, but it remains a puzzle for me.

Besides the more philosophical thoughts, a practical skill that may help ongoing explorations of style is learning to *listen* differently. Glenn Gould describes listening to early recordings:

> …we are struck not by the felicities or gaucheries of their artistry but by how very different the performing premise seems to have been from that to which we are now accustomed—how very high the level of whimsicality and caprice, how very flirtatious and extravagant the range of dynamics… (Haynes, 2007, p. 24)

Perhaps Gould is hearing the performance style but not so much the individual performer. Similarly, I am still confronted by the style of early recordings, suggesting my own practice maintains distance from theirs. Over some time I have also noticed myself analysing many performances (of various styles), but without connecting to their expressive 'communication'. These reflections suggest the value of further exploration of *listening*: listening not only to style but also to expression, just as the performer's priority is to communicate this.

These kinds of discussions are relevant for the modern profession, where musicians will likely experience a range of styles. More broadly than the music of Brahms, the common theme of expressivity, directing a wide range of possibilities, may be a useful link between varied aesthetics and stylistic approaches. For myself, the path toward expressive performance stretches on, but I hope the sentiment of Goethe's words (Avins, 2003, p. 25) will continue to guide this task.

Unless you feel it, vain will be your chase;
Unless it pour from the soul
And with powerful primeval joy
Compel the hearts of all who hearken.
– Goethe, *Faust*, 1808

Appendices

Appendix A: Recital and Supplementary Recordings

Recital and supplementary recordings

For all recordings, refer to: [redacted for publication]

Part A: Sonata for Violin and Piano in A major op. 100, Johannes Brahms

1a: Recital recording, 7/6/19

Recorded live in the South Melbourne Town Hall
at the Australian National Academy of Music

Elliott Plumpton, violin
Peter De Jager, piano

Part B: Sonata for Violin and Piano in G major op. 78, Johannes Brahms

2a: Recital recording, 10/10/19

Recorded live in the South Melbourne Town Hall
at the Australian National Academy of Music

Elliott Plumpton, violin
Peter De Jager, piano

2b: Rehearsal excerpt, dotting in 2nd mov, 8/11/19

2c: "Historical informed" recording, 2nd mov, 9/11/19 (second take)

2d: "Historical informed" recording, 1st mov, 9/11/19 (third take)

Part C: Sonata for Violin and Piano in D minor op. 108, Johannes Brahms

3a: Recital recording, 23/11/20

Recorded live in the Nickson Room
at the University of Queensland School of Music

Elliott Plumpton, violin
Oscar Wong, piano

3b: Rehearsal excerpt, 2nd mov, 27/8/20

Appendix B: Interview Transcripts

R1: Dr. Robin Wilson, 29 Oct 2019

R1A: Overview of stylistic differences between then and now

…today or in this session it would be great to just talk about your understanding of the historical style itself and the most important characteristics of that, and maybe also we could touch on how you find this process of making this style intuitive for yourself. But if you were to characterise historical and modern style, and sort of the most important differences between them, what would you say are the important distinctions?

So I would say the biggest difference between historical and modern style in this repertoire would be the incredibly flexible approach in a historical style to rhythm and pulse. So in the nineteenth century, the style of performance was highly flexible; there was much what we would consider now to be extreme ebbing and flowing within the music. This was guided by the harmony, the tension and release of that harmony; it was guided by signs such as hairpins, which often indicated an acceleration to the apex of the hairpin and then a return to tempo; it was also guided by aspects such as lingering at the top of a melodic phrase, etcetera.

...Artists were much more concerned with giving the impression of the sweep of the phrase and this might be at the expense of rhythmic accuracy, for example. So an acceleration which to us might sound like we're sacrificing rhythmic integrity, maybe even notational accuracy—that was less of a consideration than the feeling that the sweep or the acceleration engendered within the phrase. So if you listen to old recordings—I also reviewed a lot of string quartets as well—you'll hear passages which are not particularly accurate in our modern terms...in other words, the ensemble is not particularly aligned, the notes are not necessarily perfectly executed, but the sweep of the phrase is very very strong, the kind of impression one is left with after listening is very effective, or its very strong.

So there was a lot of rhythmic alteration where some notes would be shortened or lengthened according to agogic stress—so you might lengthen a note to highlight it or linger on that note and then shorten a note either before or after or several...You might change a group of even quavers, or a passage of even quavers you would play very unevenly, and again that unevenness comes from a sort of agogic accentuation of particular notes...

Modern performers do this today—modern performers use rubato, modern performers subtly alter rhythm. The difference was the degree to which this happened was simply much greater and much more extreme in the nineteenth century.

In string performance, another huge difference was the approach to vibrato. In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the vibrato was very narrow; it was a very different type of vibrato; it was used much more selectively than it is used today; it was at times used continuously in passages, that is with a connection of the vibrato from one note to the next, but that continuous approach to vibrato was only periodic at particular points in the piece. Often no vibrato was used or vibrato would only be used on particular notes in a phrase, and again the huge difference was that the width of the vibrato was just simply much much narrower and often faster. There were exceptions, you know certain individuals may have had a slightly wider slower vibrato just according to their personal way of playing—but on the whole the general vibrato that was used from the mid- to late-nineteenth century in the Germanic school was a narrower, faster type, and this is the vibrato that we hear Joachim and Joachim's student Marie Soldat employ.

... Another big difference was the use of portamento. It was very very heavy, very prominent in the melodic line, and it was used very very frequently. So much, much more frequently than it's used today. It was considered an integral part of the expressive vocal style that the German school was aspiring to.

The bowing was much more legato and on-the-string. The German school didn't employ bouncing strokes as much, they were much rarer—so strokes for example that we would today play off-the-string spiccato in the lower half of the bow would have been played on-the-string with a more martele kind of stroke, so a lot of quaver passages with dots for example in Beethoven quartets or Haydn, where we would play off the string now, that would have always been on the string. So the bouncing strokes and the ricochet and the spiccato and sautille, jete, all of these kind of strokes were much more closely aligned to the Franco-Belgian school, which was a school that was focused more on virtuosity and instrumental ability. The German school saw itself very much as being the school that was allied to the performance of the music of the great First Viennese School of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert...Mendelssohn.

So, those would be the major differences—of course they played on gut strings, and that also changed the timbre considerably; and the pianos that they played with, Brahms' favorite piano was actually the Streicher model. This was straight-strung with deer-hide hammers, giving a very clear, articulated sound. The straight-stringing also meant that the basslines in Brahms were very very clear, and so this totally changes the way that you approach a sonata, because balance is not an issue like it is with a modern piano, and you don't have to project, you can play with less vibrato, the textures are much clearer, and that allows for I think a greater degree of nuance. So those would be the main differences.

R1B: Aesthetic effect of gut strings and piano design

Yeah, great, that's really helpful, get a general overview. I was gonna ask, to what extent do you think gut strings and having you know original instruments are helpful or necessary when we are trying to achieve a historical performance style today?

Well, I think 'original instruments' is slightly misleading. The violins that were used during Brahms' lifetime had all been modernised—so they are exactly the same instruments that we use today. The necks had been replaced, they were using modern fingerboards; the bass bars and the bridges were not baroque or classical any longer. The only difference to the violins that Joachim would have played, and other members of Brahms' circle, the only difference are the strings. (Maybe the chin rest and shoulder rest, but people play without shoulder rests nowadays and some people you know play with a small chin rest, not really any difference there, just the strings.) Gut strings do make an enormous difference, they totally change the sound aesthetic—the sound is much warmer, it's much more textured and it's much more colored. So you can find a lot more nuance without vibrato. So when we play with modern strings they have a much greater sheen, more of a projection as well obviously, but they're simply not as complex in the sound. And because of this, I think it's more difficult to find the variety of sound and colour using modern strings without vibrato as perhaps a more involved or... frequently employed expressive tool.

So gut strings make a huge difference, the bows were exactly the same. (I didn't speak about what I found difficult in assimilating or what I found-did you want me-

Yeah maybe we can get to that if there's time, yep; maybe we could keep focusing on the style just for a sec... Yeah, OK, and in terms of pianos, that is more of a significant-?

That's of huge significance because when you play with a large Steinway piano that's very powerful and has a very thick, boomy bass, you have to project to be heard; and this really changes your approach to playing—you know you feel like you need to use a lot of vibrato to project through the texture, for example. ... When you play with a Streicher piano and you have gut strings, the sound world is completely different. And this encourages you to find different colours, it encourages you to be able to hear and react to the harmony actually even *more* because the harmony is clearer; and the basslines, which are very intricate in Brahms and very important, are also much clearer.

R1C: How much is too much tempo flexibility?

Now I had a couple of questions about tempo modification specifically, just like after reading through some of the Barenreiter edition and the quotes from people. One of them is... how do you sort of find the line between exaggerating and not doing enough tempo modification, like it seemed to be a value to like Joachim and Brahms to not be too, you know, extreme with tempo but we have sort of the opposite issue today. Yeah, and maybe could talk about how you sort of found a line.

Mm, well this was the sort of Holy Grail of, really the crux of trying to not only assimilate the style but gain clarity. *It's all a question of degree.* And that's what is so difficult to ascertain. You can't ascertain it from written evidence, really it's a matter of hearing what was done in the recordings, seeing perhaps the writings of that time, how they aligned with the recordings...so, you know people might talk about being cautious with the use of modifying tempo or with the degree of acceleration, and then you go and you listen to recordings and you find—actually, it was very extreme to our ears. So it's making sense of the way the written word was actually reflected in the practice.

But that is something, you know, we don't know for sure how much tempo modification Brahms actually would have liked in his sonatas. We don't know that without actually having a recording—we can only speculate. But it's quite clear from written accounts of Brahms' own playing, by students and performers—not only violin students but piano students of his who were exposed to his playing an awful lot as well as his teaching—it's quite clear that he actually employed a huge degree of tempo rubato, or of rubato in his playing. And there are wonderful descriptions of this, and there are more detailed annotated scores, for example, of some of his chamber music, where some of his students witnessed rehearsals of him, recorded tempo markings, recorded things that he said.

The reason why they, as you said, were cautious about not being too extreme, was they wanted to distinguish themselves from the other movement in music at the time, which was of that *excessive* rubato of Wagner, and particular conductors associated with that music, where they saw the type of rubato and the excessive degree of rubato employed destroyed the structure in their mind, because they were concerned with upholding the kind of classical elements of composition, one of which was sonata form and one of which was structure. And this is part of what had been... really done away with in that other school of composition, where we had you know Strauss and tone poems and Wagner and huge kind of very very sort of endless melos, endless melodies and sprawling long compositions which didn't necessarily fit into classical form.

So yes there was absolutely a degree to which they... would temper the rubato, so it wasn't just a free-for-all, as-extreme-as-possible, by all means. So it's a question of taking all the evidence, balancing all of that up and making a decision, and making an informed... interpretation based on how you see the evidence balancing. And to a degree that will always be subjective. There's no absolute or definitive answer to the question. And that is always going to be the question: *how much*. We know they employed these techniques, but the

question is simply 'how much did they employ them'. And we can only but surmise. But it's very difficult to know and I think what *is* clear is that generally the playing of these artists, in many ways—the elements that they did employ in many ways—do sound extreme to our modern ears and our modern sensibilities.

R1D

OK, we were just talking about tempo modification. I think one of the questions I wanted to ask was just... sort of what do you think the historical style contributes to the music of Brahms, and in terms of like it's not just like heavy shifting for the sake of heavy shifting, but it has an expressive purpose like you sort of touched on for each element...yeah, so would you have any thoughts on that? -

On tempo modification specifically?

Ah, no, all the elements, or if you wanted to pick out particular ones. I'm kind of wondering whether, if it was a language analogy, whether it's like a different language completely, you know, to play in this style, or its more like an accent or like a dialect, something.

I would say, with a language analogy, it's more like the difference between speaking in a less inflected, less expressive tone, and reading the same passage perhaps from a play or Shakespeare or something, with much much much more nuance and much more inflection and expression in the voice. That would be the analogy there. I think it's still the same language, it's still the same notes, it's still the same words (if you like), but they're just said very differently.

This is a really good question: what does this performance style add to the music? I would say, rather than thinking of it adding to the music, it simply gives the music a new way to be heard. It presents the music in a way that is different. I wouldn't want to say it adds or detracts...whenever we're talking about the way we perceive music from hearing, its always going to be subjective to a degree. But in my personal opinion, I feel that the tempo flexibility in Brahms' music helps us to feel the phrasing and hear the phrasing; it helps us to feel and hear the harmony, that is the expressive components of dissonance and consonance within the harmonic structure, much more strongly, because we tend to dwell on dissonances for longer, we tend to therefore highlight them, they become a stronger element within the phrase. When we move faster into a phrase, take time at the peak, for example, that sonically defines the phrase for our ears. We hear clearly where the phrase is going, we hear when the phrase has reached its climax perhaps, and to me that's much more satisfying or powerful as a listener, because it makes the music come to life, its like it really lifts the notes off the page and turns it into a rhetorical kind of language. It lends the music more meaning in that way.

And the details of vibrato and portamento, for example, which are you know major aspects of the performance practice, they are like the more subtle nuances within that structure, within that phrase... And any localised kind of rhythmic alteration, they're like, you know, just, I would say, adding to that possibility. People might think well vibrato is the way that we make sound very expressive, and if we're using less vibrato it's going to be less expressive. It's a different aesthetic entirely, and when you take vibrato out and you rely more on the colour of the bow, you actually end up creating a lot of different colours, that you wouldn't otherwise (that also happen because of the strings). When you do add vibrato, therefore, it can be more meaningful, and there can be a greater contrast between non-vibrato and vibrato. Whereas in modern performance there tends to be a blanket approach to vibrato, where its just a constant in the sound, and therefore we come not to notice it as much. We vary it, ideally—although some people don't enough, of course—but...

The portamento lends again a vocal expressive element. It's a different aesthetic, but it really changes I think the way you listen. It connects pictures, it highlights pictures. When you slide to a note, it highlights the arrival note. When you slide from a note, or to a note, it highlights the expressive quality of that interval. It might highlight the harmony underneath when you're sliding to a particular note, you slide to that note to highlight the arrival on a harmony.

I personally find that when you play Brahms in this way, the music sounds more human, it sounds like (—*natural*—) a very natural way of just taking the stricture of notation and the limitations of notation, erasing those, and just simply having sound, rhythm and the harmony exist in a temporal realm, in a very natural and emotional kind of way—in a way that you might feel, and in a way that your feelings might... ebb and flow or very quickly change. They're not—your feelings aren't measured in mathematical kind of constancy. You know, we, so—I hear phrases like I imagine Brahms might hear them if he was out on a walk; you know he's just strolling along and these tunes are going through his head, and, it's just very very natural and it speaks to the nature of... I think humanity, just taking feelings and transforming them into sounds, and harmonies and rhythms. So— it's not to say that at times the music is very rhythmic, it's not to say you're doing away with rhythm. You're just— I find the music actually is more emotional and becomes structurally much clearer. (*Yeah, yeah, that's a good point*).

And interestingly, when I've performed Brahms in this way, a lot of the comments that I've gotten and also have gotten with my colleagues in Ironwood when we've performed chamber music, is that the music seems to make much more sense to listeners. And that's been something which audiences in general, since you know Brahms' music was often not well-received, or it's often been a struggle for audiences to listen to his music over—his music's sometimes gotten a bad rap, and been criticised for being sort of heavy and turgid, and it's—his music doesn't sell out a concert hall like Beethoven's. I find his music takes on a lightness, there's a transparency in his textures, there's a clarity in the structures and in harmonies, and in the emotional qualities, that is very accessible for an audience.

R1E

OK, cool, if we have time, maybe we could just talk a bit about like how you came to make the style and take the written evidence and things and sort of put it into your own playing. What did you find were the most like challenging aspects of that, and—

So it was a process that took several years before I really started to feel like my playing wasn't contrived in this way. And it was gradual—I listened to a lot of recordings; there was some emulation of those old recordings to try and get a sense of the sound; I worked with Clive Brown quite a bit; and it was a process of gradually assimilating those techniques, changing the way I vibrated, changing the way I shifted, my approach with the bow... feeling the natural sweep and rubato of a phrase and forcing myself to do that in a more extreme way, but then maybe paring that back; and learning perhaps what some of the signs and symbols in the music actually meant during his time and experimenting with that. So it's a huge process of experimentation and exploration.

And it's very very challenging to our modern sensibilities as violinists, because the aspects of performing practice are generally what are considered to be qualities that a less able violinist might demonstrate: not a continuous use of vibrato; heavy shifting; playing less rhythmically perhaps or with a looser perhaps approach or approach to rhythmic values. So this was very very confronting; I was hesitant to perform in public at first, for fear of being judged as a lesser player and a lesser musician. And it's difficult to alter one's technique in those ways, because you've spent many years practicing shifting lightly and vibrating continuously. But it started to feel very natural and then I started to understand that actually it doesn't come across when you listen, as being elements—you know people are not listening thinking that you *can't* vibrate

and that you can't shift lightly, and judging you from a modern perspective in that way. It becomes a presentation of an entire aesthetic that's married to a way of playing, that's [that is, the aesthetic is] intrinsic to the music itself. And that became very natural the more I played, and then playing within the ensemble and exploring his chamber music...

And now, you know, I could play anything with Neal Peres Da Costa I think of that era, and immediately feel comfortable in the way that we approach rhythm and tempo modification—and immediately sort of feel natural. Now whether what I arrived at is true to the actual style of what Brahms' associates and you know contemporaries, how they would have been playing—I can't say. There's definitely an element of 'this is my personal take on it'. There is. But I do believe the way that I play—what I arrived at—is closer than modern style, and I would say I'm 100% certain that it's closer to the style of performers of the day than the way that Brahms is generally played today by modern performers, and I'd say that that's sort of without a doubt.

R1F

Yeah, that's a really useful thing. Do you think...what would you suggest for people who are sort of interested in exploring this style further, in terms of getting a grasp on something that's not... contrived?

I think, there's no sort of shortcut if you're going to explore the style wholeheartedly. You need to read and you need to listen to old recordings. But there's a wonderful summation of the style in the Performing Practice Preface to the Sonatas that's been written as you know by Clive Brown. That's an incredible distillation of all the evidence in a very concentrated form to give you an overview.

To translate that into playing in a practical sense, you need to also listen to Joachim's recordings and Marie Soldat's recordings (they're readily available now), and just to get a sort of sense of the soundworld. And then it's about really experimenting. At the end of the day, the reason why we might even consider this is because it might reveal something in the composition that perhaps doesn't come out as strongly or as convincingly in a modern style. It mustn't become a thing unto itself that supplants interpretation. ...You know, so we can't feel like we just play in the style and our performance is going to be convincing. You have to interpret the music, in the same way that we would want to interpret it as modern performers. It's all got to be in the service of the phrase, the harmony, the structure. So that remains first and foremost. The performing style is simply there as a *means* to enhance those elements, and as a means to rhetorically deliver them to an audience. That is the whole purpose of it.

So...you know, if you keep that at the forefront of your mind, and then you think about the way that tempo modification might help that, or that rhythmic alteration might help you bring out those important aspects of the phrase or the harmony or the score or the structure; or how being much more conscious of vibrato and the way you're doing it and where you're doing it, and the way that portamento might help highlight those things—you're *already* enhancing your intepretation.

The degree to which you go...you know that's something which you're free to explore: you're free to put gut strings on, try to find a more historically sort of accurate piano, and explore to that degree. But I think adopting any of these aspects and delving in will really shed light on the way to bring this music to life, and the way to bring you know the *clarity* of the emotional content, the clarity of the composition and expression. I see that as being—it's a very powerful way, and that's why I remain so interested and remain so convinced by this style. It comes back to the music itself.

Yeah, lovely.

It's not an exercise for the sake of it. It's not because I feel like, you know—

Reconstruct the—

—Well no, it's not because I believe that you should or we must *only* play music in the way that they played it at the times the composers were alive; that's a whole different argument.

—A rabbit hole!

Yes, and it's more about, well, for me it's about, well, what does playing it in that way bring to the music we're missing?

Yeah, exactly.

And that's interesting, and that's worth exploring.

R2: Dr Robin Wilson, 6 November 2020

R2A

Elliott:

…I guess my first question is: what do you see the greatest challenges for modern musicians wishing to take the information about historical style into the world today?

Robin:

The greatest challenge is a lack of understanding from colleagues and the public about what that style is. What's holding historically informed performance back in mid-to-late 19th century repertoire is a fear of being misunderstood.

Because the elements, as I've said to you before, the elements of historical style are antithetical to modern sensibilities and to our modern training. And musicians are fearful of being judged in the wrong way: of being thought of as incompetent because they can't vibrate, or being thought of as lacking in taste because they shift too heavily. Or being thought of as lacking in rhythm because they play with great flexibility.

Literally it's that. It's what causes groups that [inaudible 00:02:27] be very conservative. Groups who purport to play in this style, but in fact don't use portamento, don't use much tempo modification. A lack of vibrato now is quite universal. It's a kind of token gesture towards historical performance of any period.

And people aren't so afraid of that because that's understood, because that is the most obvious aspect of Baroque historical performance, which is well understood. But it is literally, I think, that fear, that confrontation of being judged in the wrong way, that is holding ensembles, conductors, and individuals back from exploring the style more fully. And that fear simply comes from a lack of understanding.

R2B

Robin:

…That I won't go into, but there are lots of examples of someone who writes one thing in their treatise, and is reported to play in a completely different way. So that's fraught and problematic. With the mid-to-late 19th century, when we have these recordings of artists who grew or were trained during that period and then recorded at the turn of the century, we have aural evidence, which we can then try to match with the written word to paint a clearer picture, and that does tell us a lot, an awful lot.

Robin:

So when you then take all of this evidence and you try to assimilate through imitation effectively, it's very difficult to assimilate to a point where it becomes natural, where it becomes actually just a style that is not contrived. A style that you don't have to plan every bar and every nuance of expressive techniques that we used in the time; you don't have to plan every bar of those expressive techniques in order to sound historically informed. And that's what you're doing at the moment. You're thinking, "I'm going to shift here, I'm going to do this here. I'm going to accelerate. I'm not, I'm going to do this. No vibrato, more vibrato." You're planning every kind of micro element of that to try to impose a style upon your modern playing, or to try and make yourself sound in this style. In order to truly sound natural and convincing, you need to live within that style for probably many years; assimilate those expressive techniques so that then they become a reactive part of your musical sensibility…or your musical intuition. In other words, they are what you do automatically in reaction to something in the music. And that's only *then* that I believe that those historically informed expressive techniques, or the style, then actually enhances the music. What we mustn't get confused about is that we still have to be good musicians.

Robin:

We still have to interpret. We still have to hear and react to harmony. We still have to be chamber musicians and hear and react to each other. We still have to understand voicing and structure. We can't just simply slide, vibrate less and play more flexibly, and be musically convincing. That's not going to work. It doesn't supplant good musicianship. You can't just do that and say, "That's a historically informed performance. That's valid. That's entirely what the composer intended." No. That's never going to work. That's the beginning. That's just simply the way that you communicate the music. If you like, it's the prism through which the music is communicated, or the parameters through which the music is communicated. But you still have to be the musician.

Robin:

The reason why Joachim was a great musician was not because he slid, vibrated selectively, and played flexibly. It was because he was trained in composition. It's because he knew inside out what he was playing, harmonically and structurally, and he could recognize that instantly. The reason why Brahms consulted him was that he deeply understood what Brahms had written. In the same way that Clara Schumann would get a piece of music of Brahms, play it through on the piano, and understand immediately, not just structurally, but harmonically, immediately understand the significance of what Brahms had done. How brilliant it actually was. How inventive the melodic and harmonic material was. How inventive the rhythm was. Truly how beautiful it was. She would understand to the point where she felt she could comment on its structure, and she could comment on the compositional aspects. I mean, could you imagine giving Brahms feedback?

Elliott:

Yeah. No, it's all right.

Robin:

I mean just think about that for a minute. So these guys were on another planet compared to most musicians of today with their understanding of composition. Everyone in the 19th century was trained in composition, that was the foundation of your musical training. Everybody. If you were a musician, you'd studied composition. Otherwise you weren't a musician.

Elliott:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Robin:

The biggest problem with being a musician today is that no one is trained in composition. No one understands harmony deeply enough. What I'm getting back to is you as a modern musician are coming from that end. Joachim and Clara Schuman and Brahms's circle are coming from the other end of history, the other side of history. They're coming from traditions previous to them.

And they're looking forward when they play Brahms. We're looking back from our modern training. That's a great challenge, to take all of what's been instilled in you as a modern musician. You've spent your life trying to vibrate, continuously shift cleanly, and play in time, for example. And now you try to undo that, but in a way that enhances music, when you've been told precisely the opposite. That takes time for it to become natural, but it also means you have to be a great musician to understand how to use those expressive parameters to enhance music, because that's all that they're there for.

They're not there as arbitrary techniques that you superimpose upon music to make it sound convincing. They're there to highlight what the composition intrinsically is all about, harmonically, rhythmically, structurally. They're simply there as expressive tools to highlight the bones, the DNA of the music.

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah.

Robin:

So there's another element that you need to have when you use those expressive techniques to inform the use of them.

R2C

Elliott:

Yeah. I think one of the most interesting things from the whole thing was reading some of the things that Joachim and people like that wrote back in the day. Even when they're talking about shifting and things, it's connected to expression and he says something like, "You can't teach it down to a," it's not a scientific thing or something, but, "if you do not feel it, vain will be your chase," or something. They were connecting it back to an internal sense of expression as well, and that was one of the most interesting things for me.

Robin:

Absolutely. It's all connected to nature. It's all connected to the human voice.

…

Robin:

So of course they were. They are saying that anything in music can't be contrived. It has to be natural, it has to be felt. We can't just superimpose these techniques artificially without feeling. We have to feel the music that way. We have to feel the shift, and only then will it begin to sound natural. Not contrived and not exaggerated, and not sort of just tacked on.

And that takes time. It took me three years before I started to hear music in that style.

I couldn't hear the phrase that I was going to play and feel it in that style, in feel that that was just how it went, and entirely convinced about that until I'd done it so much that it became just a language.That was learned through playing with my colleagues, not alone. That was learned because we played lots of repertoire. Trios, quintets, quartets, and feeling and hearing, it was very much like X, or X was saying last night. You start learning because of what you're hearing, and hearing back, and how you react, and how that language works with others, and that's what really helps you to assimilate it.

R2D

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah, good point. Okay. I also wanted to ask about then how you've found a way to approach this when you're teaching, and someone's learning a Brahms's sonata, and there are some decisions to make about just how far to go with communication all the information about historical style and things. Do you have any thoughts about that kind of process?

Robin:

Yeah, look, absolutely. As a teacher there are more considerations, and more, I guess, challenges that come into the mix. If a student is in the middle of their development, and they're developing their vibrato, and they're trying to learn how to vibrate continuously, they're trying to learn how to shift cleanly, they're trying to learn how to maintain a great sense of pulse, like you were…

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah.

Robin:

…like I talked to you about; then, trying to then explore another style which is completely the opposite to this is not so helpful.

Because the real world that they're going to be in, doing a job audition or the like with their Mozart concerto, and their excerpts, require them to be able to do those things. My responsibility as a teacher is to prepare them for that.

So I feel exploring this style, if I only have three years with a student at ANAM, I would go further the more advanced the student is technically.

Because I need to develop those other aspects of technique. You actually, in order to play really within this style effectively, you have to have control over those parameters. You have to be able to control when you use your vibrato. You have to have an incredible sense of pulse in order to manipulate it. The age old adage, "From discipline comes freedom." You have to absolutely be able to control your portamento, the speed, the weight, the style. You have to be able to really have a more advanced control of technique to manipulate it effectively.

So if someone can't shift, they can't really vibrate yet, well, I don't feel they're going to be able to play convincingly in this style anyway. Because those aspects of their technique are not under their conscious control. They are the mercy of those aspects, and they tend to be too random.

So, for me, exploring this style necessitates a more advanced control of those aspects. The student also needs to have the head space so that they don't just become completely confused if they're in the midst of this development.

Elliott:

Okay, yep.

R2E

Robin:

Now, say that you feel comfortable that this student can do all of those things, or enough, then it becomes sort of a question of how open they are to that, their willingness, and how I see that playing into their understanding of musical in general.

…

Robin:

If it's a case of someone learning a Brahms sonata and wanting to glean a lot of this knowledge, and I want to impart it, what I feel is essential is that they have a thorough understanding, so that they'll read, for example, Clive Brown's summary of the performing practice, like you did.

Elliott:

Yeah.

Robin:

They'll read all of that so they really are able to contextualize, or have a sense of the style, and those expressive techniques and how they were used, and maybe look into some of their recordings, and then they can contextualize, well, where are they at now in their playing, and how far back will we go.

For me, what's important is that they understand the way that vibrato needs to be applied selectively to enhance aspects of the composition. It needs to be used consciously to enhance melodic or harmonically important notes, or to beautify a passage, or to intensify a passage, or to show tessitura, or to show the difference between melody and a complement, or a primary or secondary voice, et cetera. And that's an intelligent aspect of musicianship that should be prevalent regardless.

I believe that vibrato should be used like that in modern playing. It just might be more prevalent in general. It might be a slightly more continuous application in general that is then varied—But must still be varied. So, I see that playing in very very much to their training in general. It just might be that we use it that much more selectively, and we might also consider using less of it. We might also consider that it doesn't always have to be wide, so wide as modern vibrato is. And so, sort of expressive or voluptuous sounding.

Then I really think that tempo modification is extremely important in modern performance, and I bemoan the lack of that whenever I hear Brahms. But again, not an arbitrary superimposing of just fast and slow, but something that is really absolutely connected to the phrasing, to the hairpin markings, to the harmony again, to the structure. And definitely we'll explore that, and I'll push them to go further than they're comfortable with to really help them understand that actually they're not doing very much. Then it's a case of doing that, working with a pianist in that way as well. And the pianist has to be open to that. And really helping them understand how you can manipulate the written rhythm slightly with agogic accentuation to make it sound a little more human, again, to bring out dissonance and consonance, stress and relief.

The portamento is probably the most difficult I think out of those three sort of expressive techniques, or expressive parameters of historical playing, which I'm just simplifying into those three. Very heavy German portamento is probably the most challenging aspect to incorporate. Because nobody does it, and nobody has heard it, and it sounds so exaggerated to modern ears. And that's where we'll kind of explore it, and then we might temper it a little.

Elliott:

Yeah, sure.

Robin:

I mean, it's also a case of all these practical considerations where the student is playing for an audience, perhaps they introduced that this is what they're exploring, or they're playing to a panel who might not understand. But, I will explain.

And then the fact that they're not necessarily able to play on gut strings in their recital because of the other repertoire [inaudible 00:27:17]. So then there's a slight difference in sonority and in compromise in general.

Elliott:

Yeah.

Robin:

So we kind of end up with something according to all of these different aspects: where the student's at, the situation they're playing for, et cetera, et cetera. But I hope by the end of it, even if they don't play Brahms in the way that I might, or go as far into the style as I might, they've got certainly an appreciation and an understanding of what that style is, and how far that style can be taken, and how far performers of the time used those expressive techniques. Which to them were entirely normal, they weren't exaggerated to them. They just sound exaggerated to us.

R2F

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah. That's good. I guess it starts to have a sort of list of priorities in a way of what's most… expressive, or important to preserve from the style. Do you think there's some elements that are more valuable than others for...

Robin:

I wouldn't like to say more valuable. I think you get into dangerous territory to start ranking expressive techniques in value. But…I would think of it as expressive techniques that are particular to the violin, or a stringed instrument, and then expressive techniques which are prevalent across any instrument.

So you can't portamento on a piano. But you can modify tempo. You can play with agogic accentuation. So that expressive technique [modifying tempo], in my mind, is intrinsic to the music itself, regardless of instrument.

Elliott:

Right.

Robin:

Regardless of context. Whether or not you're on a piano, a string quartet, or a solo instrument, on a wood wind instrument…So that, to me, is, yes, it's extremely important to how the music comes to life and is heard…

Vibrato, you can't do on a piano. Remember that Brahms was a pianist. We're talking about Brahms. But vibrato and portamento to me are expressive technique that were derived from singing, and are particular to a string instrument. And those expressive techniques need to really serve the music.And are they less important than tempo modification? I wouldn't say that, I'd just say that they are other expressive techniques. Did Brahms have in his ear portamento and vibrato when he was composing for a violin or a viola or a cello? Yes. How could he not have? He would have heard that. So yes, they're incredibly important.

Elliott:

Okay. Yeah.

Robin:

But I think if you're talking about introducing a young modern violinist who's in the middle of their training to be a modern orchestral player, for example, you have to contextualize the use of vibrato, contextualize the use of portamento for them, and they have to really, truly understand the parameters of this style. They have to understand the context of all of this, to make sense of it, to manipulate it, and not to get confused when they go back to their audition repertoire, shall we say.

Elliott:

Yeah, right, right. Yeah.

Robin:

And I hope with some orchestras, there's emerging awareness of this with some conductors. So it won't be forever that you have to play a Mozart concerto strictly in time I mean, really you need a sense of agogic in Mozart for any audition situation. But [redacted] if you play a noisy shift, or if the pulse fluctuates. That's the end in an audition for a Mozart concerto.

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah. It's interesting.

…

R2G

Elliott:

Another question I thought of was what do you think makes a convincing modern performance, if someone was, yeah, what do you think would make that convincing for you?

Robin:

The same in a sense of what makes any performance convincing. Simply an understanding, a true understanding of the composition. When I listen to a modern performance, I understand that person's going to vibrate more. I understand that person's going to shift less. Doesn't mean I can't be convinced about the performance.

Doesn't mean I think, "Oh, well they're not, they're using too much vibrato and they're not shifting, therefore they're not musical." No. They're playing in the style of the time.

What makes a good performance is the intelligence of the musician, and their ability to communicate through their intelligence the true message of the music, the true emotional message of the music, and the rhetorical message of the music. It's that marriage of intellect and emotional communication. Intellect to inform that person's intuition, and that person's emotional reaction to what they're hearing.

Elliott:

Okay.

Robin:

That's when you really get performances that are transcendent, because they speak to you so truly. They're clear, like the structure is clarified to the extent where the composition works, it can be understood. But they've gone beyond that, it's not just an academic reading, it's where that understanding has then been channeled and filtered through that person's personality, that person's reaction to the emotional message of the music. And that's been then conveyed in such a direct and convincing way to an audience. So there's that communicative element at the end of it that needs to happen as well.

Now, where I find modern performances are not so convincing is where I hear a lack of that understanding, but also where perhaps historically informed performers can really enhance that understanding is where you have something like tempo modification that helps delineate structure. That helps delineate phrasing. So it brings a composition into much more, I would say, vital relief. And that's why I think it's so important.

Because otherwise you could argue, "Well, why do we need to play in a historically informed way if I can play Brahms entirely convincingly without modifying tempo, sliding around, or using selective vibrato, then what's the point?"

Why are we recreating a different era, or attempting. Well, because I believe that those performance, that those expressive technique, when used by an intelligent musician, can take the music even further in its conviction.

Elliott:

Yeah. Right, yeah.

Robin:

And suddenly this music takes on a whole new dimension, and a whole new sound world, and a whole new lease of life. We really hear Brahms in a very different way. Brahms becomes lighter. It becomes more classical. It's not the thick, turgid, heavy Brahms that the world has come to know from performances and recordings from the mid-to-late 20th century.

And I think Brahms has got a bad rap in that way. But when you play Brahms on gut strings with a straight Streicher with a clear bass, which isn't muddy, doesn't overpower, then suddenly the string players don't have to use continuous vibrato and play fortissimo the whole time to be heard. And suddenly the texture is lighter, and then it's mellifluous with the ebb and flow of the rhythm and the harmony. It just suddenly, it's a different world.

R2H

Elliott:

…another kind of thing that I talked to Stephen about a little bit was the role of the audience, and as performers we can go down the route of…sort of really kind of go with our understanding of the music, but sometimes we need to acknowledge their reaction to it in a sense. Like some contexts, like you were saying, audiences wouldn't understand it at all. Yeah, do you have any thoughts about—

Robin:

Well, when we started performing in the style with Ironwood, we always gave an introduction.

And mostly, at many concerts, when we toured Brahms around the US at lots of institutions, playing in front of musicologists, playing in front of other musicians, and we gave a short lecture before these performances to explain what we were truly trying to do. We felt we needed to do that so that the audience, we wanted the audience to understand what we were doing, and that actually really enhanced their appreciation. Then the reaction was so incredibly positive, and we were very, I was very nervous about it.

Elliott:

Right. Yeah.

Robin:

We were all, "How are they going to react?"

…

Robin:

It was truly new —in the way that we were going that far into the style. And that was very confronting for us as well as others, but we were incredibly... and then we were wondering, "Well, have we assimilated this? Does it sound natural? Does it sound contrived? Is it actually convincing?"

We can't pretend that we sound like Joachim and his gang back then. Of course we don't. And we weren't really trying to, either. We were simply probably arriving at a new 21st century take on 19th century performance practice.

Elliott:

Right, yeah.

Robin:

So the notion of authenticity, that's why the notion of authenticity is fraught. Yeah. We won't get into that. I think as far as audiences are concerned, that was very very helpful.

Now, we're playing to audiences without that explanation.

We don't feel we need it, because we feel confident about our abilities to play in this style. We feel convinced by it. We know that an audience would too.

But back then, I think we were so fresh, we wanted them to understand what we were doing. In a sense, we wanted those sympathetic ears, and those informed ears before judgment was made, because we were presenting it very much as something that was new research.

…

Maybe it's a different context to an entirely public concert, which we've done since, and we won't necessarily introduce or lecture the audience or inform the audience.

I don't feel I need to anymore.

If I walk out and played Brahms, I don't feel I need to tell the audience that I'm not going to vibrate, I'm going to slide more heavily. They're going to hear that, and I hope they're not going to hear it as a contrived attempt to sound historically informed, but rather just an intrinsic part of the music making. And I want them now to react to that, to react to the music. Not to the style that I'm playing the music in.

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's a good challenge to come back to.

Robin:

It's a good challenge, but it takes a little while to get there.

N1A

Neal:

…So where I am with my thinking around this is that for a start, obviously, you know that during the early 20th century, the first sort of 50 years or so, modern style evolved. Basically for many reasons, but because there was a reaction, a so-called reaction, against what was seen as the excesses of late Romantic style. That's one idea, but the other idea is that for the first time sound recording became possible. And with that came an acceleration and proliferation of interpretations that were then being able to be heard by many, many people very quickly, particularly through radio medium, but also through recordings of wax cylinders and then eventually discs and all that sort of stuff.

Neal:

And then that sort of had this ossifying effect on performance, so. And the other factor in it is that there was this growing idea for some reason that what composers like Brahms, but also everyone else, wanted performers to do was somehow already in the score. [The performer] didn't really need to do much else for that. In fact, the idea was, if he did anything that wasn't in the scores, that would be going against what the composer wanted, right? So those are all the things that we ended up with let's just say by the 1950s. That encapsulates that, so.

Neal:

And then, of course, you get the rise of historical performance of early music and then becomes historically informed performance. And for whatever reasons that sort of came into vogue, we also had an issue there with this idea that if you used Urtexts basically, but you picked up historical instruments, then that would be the answer. But we're still left with this rather modernist way of doing things: which is, you're more or less following what the score says, and not really in touch with what I call the sort of un-notated practices of particular eras. And so we were having all these period performances, which were crisp and clean and neat and tidy and, of course, the sounds of gut-strung instruments and fortepianos and all that—that's all great. And certainly did a lot in terms of changing the way people thought about the music and the sounds that were coming out—that's all very exciting, that's what I grew up with in the '80s and '90s. But—did it actually come anywhere close to representing what someone like Brahms really was trying to get through in his music and expected?

Neal:

And the other important thing, what I'm getting to is, it's all really to do with artistic agency, so—but artistic agency within a particular type of language, if you like. A language of a particular period. And I think the answer ... Well, when I started my PhD, anyway, I found out that the answer to that was a resounding no. Mostly what was being done was literally cleaning up performance style by following the score, but hearing the sounds of period instruments. And that really wasn't incorporating the flavor of the time. Anyway, I was left with this dichotomy of what to do and the more I listened to historical recordings, particularly of the oldest generation to record, like, I mean, Joachim, Carl Reinecke and Adelina Patti, just to take three [inaudible 00:05:56], it just became clear that they were really performing within a completely different aesthetic language. So then ... If I'm going too fast tell me?

Elliott:

No. That's great. Yeah.

Neal:

-Just have to say this. But then when you, as I did in my own PhD, when you look at the pedagogical writings or any of the writings from say, the time from the second half of the 19th century, and then you compare it with Joachim or Reinecke, often, even if you compare what they talked about as an ideal of performance, what became clear was often what they did in practice and what they said was something quite different. So then you've got that tension between, "Oh, well they advise students and others that this is what they thought but actually they did much more or they did much less." Or, "Oh, the words that they used actually mean this not what I thought from a modernist viewpoint". So that's really where I now sit with all of this: is that from the point of view of a composer like Brahms, you've got the score and I see the score—it's very important, of course—and also you've got all the other bits like the Stickvorlagen and you've got editions edited by the Brahms school, you would have seen those in our commentary on those sorts of things. So you have a lot of information about the score, but, and that's great, what I think is not so easy to recover—but we can try if we want to—is the un-notated conventions and how you might apply those.

Neal:

And it's there, I think historically informed performance ought to be looking and going. And a lot of that's going to come through practice-led kind of experimentation, rather than, "Oh, we can be definitive about this is what happened." We can't really because we've only got a certain number of recordings and they only tell us a certain amount. But I do think that that's really the important thing, that if we engage with all of that information and then use our artistic intuition—such as it is—to fill in gaps, we will actually not end up with exactly what Brahms would have expected, but certainly closer to, I think. But also we'll end up with something really artistically interesting with artistic agency, and it'll have that flavor. It'll have more of the flavor of. Right?

Elliott:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Neal:

That's where I sit with it. We can never be exact about it, but the important thing is the score can't tell us everything. So if we only follow the score or if we only think, "Well, okay. I'm going to play with my modern style that I grew up with and that I've been taught." Or even in your case—"I'm working with a teacher who's really in there with this", and Robin and I, as you know, we worked together on this so I know that Robin is [inaudible 00:09:22]. Even that, even if you only did what Robin said that would not ... The sort of your artistic agency doesn't come into play then if you only follow what your teacher says, right?

Elliott:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Neal:

So as a researcher, as a practitioner researcher, I think the important thing is, of course, to take onboard your teacher, but you have to look at all the evidence yourself or ... That's important. Are you still there?

Elliott:

…

Neal:

The important thing is to look at and read as much as you can and listen to the recordings. And even where I come from now is trying to get students as a first stage in all of this to emulate the recording, right? As a means to embodying or feeling what it's like to do those practices. Using a recording such as Joachim's Romance, for example, as if Joachim was in the room with you teaching it to you. And then when you really feel comfortable that you're kind

of imitating ... You can't do it 100%, of course. It's impossible to imitate exactly, but if you just thought of yourself as Joachim's best student, and you then apply that physical and intellectual feeling around what you've done to other music that wasn't recorded, that's where I think it's really interesting. The results that come out of that.

Elliott:

Yeah. That's really interesting to think about emulating to get a sense of what's happening.

Neal:

Only as a first stage. Of course, it's not meant to be, "Oh, this is exactly how you do it." But it gets us at least somewhere closer to a pre-modern sort of aesthetic as opposed to coming from a modern aesthetic and then looking at the information from a modern point of view. So that's where I'm sitting at the moment. That I think this is a really interesting approach.

N1B

Elliott:

…it was really interesting to think more that it was 'the dot responds to the expression of the music' somehow.

Neal:

Yeah. To the character?

Elliott.

Yes. That's right. And that was fascinating, but one of my questions now is that I ... And I was reading some of the things you just said about inequality of notes, like if there's a string of even quavers, they treat them very flexibly. And I just find that it seems a bit arbitrary sometimes because I'm like, "Oh, I'll just be uneven." So yeah would you have any thoughts about just like connecting that sort of-

Neal:

Yeah. To character. Yeah. Absolutely. Because, of course, when one writes about these things, it's very easy for it to sound like, "Oh, yes. Just start bending the rhythms or just start playing in inegal style, or whatever". The fact of the matter is that sometimes when you listen—And, of course, all this is coming from a mixture of having heard it in historical recordings that are related, for example to Brahms, people from the Brahms school, if you like, the Clara Schumann's students, or something like that. It's also related to what one reads in 19th century. For example, Charles De Beriot writing in the middle of the 19th century talks about the fact that we never played things exactly equally. There's always a kind of inflection going on. And that was something that other people talked about.

—In terms of character, I would relate that always, well, to two things: Of course, the sort of type of movement that it is. If it's a slow movement and it's affettuoso or really, really expressive slow movement, most slow movements are fairly expressive, then for me to get a character often it's to do with kind of sighing even within a piece—you know when you have pairs or slurred pairs or whatever, that type of thing, then the inequality that you give to them, whatever it is that you want to, will bring out the sighing effect. It'll bring out a coquettish effect, it might bring out a language effect. You can find—depending on how you hear that music and how it speaks to you, you can use inequality very subtly, or actually quite extremely to bring out your point in playing. The one thing I find is that equal playing in that context or playing quite sort of militarily equally for me won't do it. It just sounds like—I've got this thing that I say to students: If I can write it down exactly then I think what you're doing is an 'Urtext performance'. Okay? But if I can't write it down, then great..

Elliott:

Yeah. No. That's so funny.

Neal:

[laughs] It's a subtle thing.

In faster movements, of course, maybe there are a few opportunities to be extreme with pulling, but I do think in faster movements then just single agogics can do things—slightly lengthening one note within a running pattern can often be very meaningful. It can make a particular note dramatic or a particular moment in a faster passage more dramatic. Or you might want to do more of those. Certainly things like the double hairpins as Robin—you'll have read about that and Robin would be hot on that. I'm endlessly fascinated about the use of double hairpins in 19th century music going back to Beethoven because they obviously had extraordinary range of meanings within the musical context. And they seem often just to be, "Okay. This note comes out of the texture by lengthening it, but also you might do vibrato, or it might be a portamento at that moment." Or in keyboard playing it might be an arpeggiation or a asynchrony between the hands. And sometimes it seems to move towards the apex as in momentum, elongate, then you go back into time afterwards. And in some context it will only have meant crescendo and diminuendo. And there are so many subtleties within that. Those are the main ideas, but then there could be—there must have been, I would think there must have been so many ways of interpreting that sign beyond just crescendo and diminuendo. So then when I'm looking at something even like the G major Sonata, every time I come across the hairpins, I keep going, "Okay. What could this mean now and how am I feeling about it actually at this moment? What's happening to me?" [laughs] You know what I mean? So I really think that the signs that are in the music itself and the way the music goes, and then most importantly this performer agency—your feeling at that moment—is going to be the best way to decide what to do.

Neal:

And it'll make what you do [inaudible] to being in the moment with the feeling, rather than, "Oh I practiced this like this a hundred million times beforehand and therefore, this is how I'm going to do it."

…

N1D

Elliott:

…Yeah. I think I found a similar thing when I started initially looking at things and just trying to look through some of the comments in the Barenreiter editions. I think I was going about it in a more mechanical way of like-

Neal:

I think you have to.

Elliott:

Yeah. I guess.

Neal:

That's the thing. Yeah. It starts mechanically because where else can you come from really? I'm butting in and I'm stopping you from talking but what I think is really important is you have where you're coming from; your tastes, whatever your experience has been. And then something's put in front of you, which is kind of a list of ingredients, right?

Elliott:

Sure.

Neal:

It's like, "Okay. Now, if you were baking a cake my way, you'd do this, this, this, and this." And then you have a different type of cake. And that's a necessary part of the process, but then you break away from it. And Elliot then puts in his own ingredients, his variation, his take on it, because, of course, you'll read what we've distilled in that Brahms score, but then you're going to also keep listening to the old recordings. And you're going to find something from an original text. And you're constantly digesting that. And you will have insights that come out of it because you're an artistic person and practitioner, right? And that will be slightly different to what Clive said or what Robin said or what I'm saying to you. That's a really amazing thing.

Elliott:

Yeah. It is. Yeah. No. That's true. Maybe it was a necessary part of it to go through that. I found it was quite dry at the start, but as you say, yeah, worth it in the end.

Neal:

I mean, one thing is that of course any form of writing, it's just going to be dry. The thing to grapple with is okay, if, for example, you do do an emulation process—someone I'd recommend by the way is Marie Soldat, if Robin hasn't—yeah, one of the things that she recorded, I think there's a slow movement of a Viotti Violin Concerto which is really great—but if you did that and then thought about what was written and how that might all come together, I think it makes it less dry. Yeah. And always going back to listening to the historical recordings because there, of course, it's like, "Okay-

Elliott:

Here's the real deal.

Neal:

"These are the people who did it." Yeah. That's the real deal in a way.

N1E

Neal:

So one of the things—I know that you are trying to investigate this—well, you're looking at kind of the nexus between how do you bring modern and all of this information together. One way of looking at things and probably Robin said this, but my way is to say: "Well, look, what we ended up with in modern style there's nothing actually wrong with that at all." It's part of the palette of expression that's available to everyone, right? It's somewhere in this painter's palette. And then the late 19th century recordings or the early 20th-century recordings give us a window into a different palette which we can start to imagine what that palette felt like and whatever. And if we want to, once we've developed that, we can bring that into our already formed palette so that we're just expanding the palette of expression.

Neal:

And that's I think where the excitement can lie. The question is, if we ended up with a modern style by the 1960s and 1970s, which is what we're mostly hearing still, although with lots of variations, it must be moving. Where are we moving to from here? Because it can't stay static.

Elliott:

Yeah. That's right. And yeah. Certainly just even looking at all these ideas has been so interesting and changed my way of listening a lot already. So yeah. Yeah, that's it.

Neal:

Yeah. So building your palette of expressive means I think is the main thing here.

N1F

Elliott:

Yeah. Absolutely. One specific question related to that is how do you think about the idea of togetherness as something that seems to be kind of a modern thing when you play in an ensemble like Ironwood?

Neal:

Yeah. That's a really good question and one that [laughs] we grapple with because, of course, we're caught in various worlds, right?

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

So in live performance, of course, we give ourselves permission if someone is trying to do something and, of course, if it doesn't quite coincide or the bar line doesn't quite line up and all that sort of stuff—no problem really. I think we've given ourselves permission for those sorts of things to happen.

…

Neal:

We've even set out to, not really 'not to be together', but basically to take risks and say, "well, yeah, I'm going to be a bit free-er here, or this part is espressivo and I'm going to bend the rhythms" and sometimes we may not line up and that's been fine. When it comes to making recordings there's always the pressure of that kind of acceptability to—or what we feel and worry about, which is, is everyone going to like this or not, and does it stand up to modern ideals and all that sort of stuff. So, it's really interesting. I think we're all on our own journeys with that one. I am less worried about criticism for not upholding these kind of standards, and other people find that they are still caught up in that. Well, and that's fine. We just do the best we can and experiment.

Neal:

…and then sometimes in recordings, of course, the producer, the editor will fix it all up. So it's [inaudible 00:02:02] yeah. When we were recording that disc, we had to tell our editor not to do that. We had to say we're going for something different. So please don't tell us it's not together. We don't want to hear that expression [laughs].

…

N1G

…

Elliott:

Do you think there's any aspects of our modern approach today that are positive for playing this kind of music?

Neal:

Yeah. Well, I think Brahms Sonatas, first of all, they're really difficult. So you have to have good technique and modern training does provide very, very good technique and very good tuning and all of these things, and I don't, now that we've had really high technical standards develop, obviously through the 20th century, we will always kind of want that. I don't see the

adoption of 19th century practices as diminishing technical and musical standards, more expanding them.

Elliott:

Yeah, and that's a great way.

Neal:

Because actually you need even better technique to be able to be rhythmically free and not fall apart in it and not let that affect your tuning and other things. So I think modern training is fantastic in that sense, because you've really been put through your paces. I imagine that in the 19th century, things didn't sound as beautifully in tune, and possibly technical things—it was less important.

Elliott:

Priorities.

Neal:

People wanted to bring it across, yeah, they want to bring across the feeling of the music and the story behind it. They were trying to tell a story through their playing. It didn't all have to sound perfect, and possibly we would have been shocked by some of the things we heard. At the same time, what we seem to have ended up with is perfection without the storytelling and the fantasy and the improvisation—just the, "this is being made up on the spot" kind of feeling, which I think they had in those days, always, because they didn't rehearse so much. Often the music was brand new, hot off the press, still in the composer's notation and they're were reading it for the first time at home. So you've got all that sort of improvised spirit going on. Yeah. So going back to your question, I think modern training and modern—what we've ended up with—is not a bad thing at all. It's the basis of something really good, but if it just stays there like that, if that is the only thing, then I think we run into the problem of blandness, of—what is it called? Well, similitude really, just everything sounding more or less the same: "This is how a Brahms Sonata goes. This is how the G Major Sonata goes". I always think why? Why does it go like that?

Elliott:

Right. Yeah.

Neal:

Like isn't it more interesting to hear Elliott's version of that Sonata?

Elliott:

Sure. Yes. Yeah, yeah. That's right. No, so interesting.

…

N1H

Elliott:

Yeah. Okay. Yeah. One sort of more practical question, I guess, is just how do you find the line? So with tempo modification, how do you just practically go about feeling what is appropriate?

Neal:

Yeah. So, gosh, well, the first thing obviously is if there's a tempo marking for any particular movement and it comes from the composer or whatever, then great, one can take that into account initially but then after that, it's working out from the score, what the different characters

are within any one movement. Remembering that Brahms, what he seemed to be saying in many, many times when he talked, was that he felt the tempo was fluid and was never metronomic, and the descriptions of him both in terms of tempo and rhythm are that he made decisive changes in both those areas to bring out the character of the music to delineate sections: “so this is the end of a big section and now we start the next one”. So there might be time taken off, there might be quite a rit at the end of a section.

Neal:

When the music got excited or there was a crescendo, building up the momentum was an important part of it. What I've tried to do is, and this again goes back to recording emulation, is to see what it feels like when you try to emulate one of these sort of crescendos and animatos that you hear in the music. It's in these recordings. When you actually try to do it physically, it's a lot more than you think, often. It so goes against the grain to do it, at first. But that's the important thing, is okay, when you're doing that in a performance or in a rehearsal or whatever, how far can you push it? You know what I mean?

Neal:

So that's been an experiment to do that and then when you're playing piano on your own, that's fine, you can do it; when you're with a group of people, is having the courage and conviction to say, "okay, for me the character is rushing now, I'm going to rush and I'm going to go to the extreme" and then sometimes it falls apart or you have a discussion about, someone will say, "I think that was too much". But you sort of 'said something' and then you see what happens out of that.

Neal:

But that's, going back to your question, I think you have to take each movement case by case. Look at the markings from the composer—is there a crescendo assigned? Is there an animato? Does suddenly the character change to dotted rhythms—all these types of things and then with those early recordings in mind, and bits that you know from reading the historical texts, you come to your own decision about how far you want to go with that.

Neal:

I think taking it to any extent is fantastic. Even the slightest getting faster and getting slower is going to add so much to the music. Neal might want to do an exaggerated version of that because I've got more used to doing that and so that's great. Some people won't like it, but Elliott might not be at that stage yet, but I think anything that doesn't stick rigidly, rigidly, rigidly, rigidly to the score is going to be interesting and will make the music breathe.

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah.

Neal:

I have one other thing Elliott to think about though, is: what is the space in which you're playing, right?

Elliott:

Right.

Neal:

If you're playing an overly resonant acoustic, and you know that, sometimes you can't quite do the things you might've done. If you're playing in a dry acoustic, it allows you to do a whole range of other things, and that would have been the case in all music making back in the 19th century as well, reacting to the space that you're playing in is essential.

Elliott:

Yeah, you mean in terms of things not getting too blurry or something, if it's pushing it too far.

Neal:

Pushing too fast or yeah. It's that kind of you're reacting because you're reacting to the sound in the room and yeah. Sometimes tempos have to be slightly slower, overall slightly slower because it's too wet an acoustic, or sometimes you have to go faster because it's too dry.

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah. Oh, that's something I hadn't thought about. Good point.

Neal:

Yeah. But that's an overall thing. As I say before, I think characterizing the music with both rhythmic and tempo flexibility is something almost more important than the whole vibrato and portamento thing.

Elliott:

Right, yeah.

Neal:

Yeah. That's been my latest conclusion is that we spend a lot of time worrying about the whole, you know 'is there too much for vibrato', 'are we playing in the German style vibrato where [inaudible 00:28:33]' that's all really important. But it seems that the phrasing and the structure of the music and all of those sorts of things come out—that's where the rhythmic changes and the tempo changes are really important and that's the hardest one to do...cause of our modern sensibilities about not overdoing, and 'can we depart from the score that much' and all those sorts of things.

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah. Also seems like those are the kinds of things that are the most possibly expressive or something like that.

Neal:

Yeah. So that's very interesting, is how can we loosen up about rhythm and tempo and how much we do, and how much we choose to do.

…

N2A

[discussing early recordings and Neal's own process]…

Neal:

The problem for us now is, as you know, that we're balancing between getting that, but then also the different situations in which we play, which are not always just in our lounge room to ourselves or to close friends. It's also the exigencies of modern recording, and where it's going, and all that sort of stuff. That's the thing.

Neal:

But, to answer your question, which I think I've tried to here [referring to other document], yeah. I think I need to go further in order to sound exactly like one of those pianists. On the other hand, we've only got a certain number of examples to emulate. We then don't know what would it have been like in chamber music, for example. How would that have done?

Neal:

At some point, I've got to use my own intuition around that. That's what I've tried to do, really. I do think of what Etelka Freund, I don't know if you've listened to her at all, Etelka Freund?

Elliott:

Yeah, I listened a little bit last night.

Neal:

Yeah, playing the Brahms, the Opus 5 Piano Sonata, the second movement, for example, all the inequality that she ... I don't know if you listened to that movement, but she uses a lot of inequality, a lot of asynchrony, and certain expressive words in that movement seem to elicit a particular type of response in her playing.

Elliott:

Right, yeah.

Neal:

Then, so I keep that in mind. Then, and I try. Even like yesterday, I came into the con just to go through some of those passages that you had emboldened, and I kept looking at it and going, "okay, I played this piece a hundred times, but now, is that really it? Is that what I want to do?" Yeah, so it's constant. It's a constant thinking and rethinking.

Elliott:

Yeah, right. Yeah. It's really interesting to hear how you see it now.

…

Neal:

"Are there any differences that you noticed, whether about general feeling-?" Yeah. I guess what I would like to try to do now, and that's my goal over the next few months before I do some recording of pieces and things like that as part of my grant, is that I would like ... My intention is to do some more recording emulation and listen really, really carefully to the bits where I just maybe think, gosh, even if I don't like it, even if I think, I don't want to do that, I'm going to make myself do it. I'm going to go that extra bit, see what that feels like, and try to understand what was going on in the music, I guess, what was the intention behind it. Yeah.

…

N2B

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah, okay. I just think of that quote of Brahms where he says, he's criticizing an even more sort of free interpretation. I wonder how they would have thought about ... It seems like they had a problem with restraint rather than ... We have the opposite problem, I guess.

Neal:

Yes. That's something to discuss about how we understand what they thought of as being tasteful, or as being flexible, but not overdone. It's a really hard one to pin down, actually. Even if they say, like I think when I read in your document, things like there was always respect for the score, and you didn't want to wander too much away from it, or the tempo was flexible, but not moving that far away from the initial tempo, and things like that, I just don't know what we can tell from those words.

Neal:

That's the thing that always strikes me is it doesn't matter how many times they say that, or how many quotes you can build up that say a similar thing. We don't really understand what that means, because whenever you can listen to the older generation playing, there are marked changes of tempo. Even the rhythmic nuances, there are differences from the scores. Even their own scores, and even their own arrangements can differ. They depart from it quite a lot of times.

Neal:

They must have thought that what they were doing was tasteful or within the language of the time. Yeah. I'm not sure if that's what you're getting at here. I think it's really important, though. So I suppose, speaking to that document you've got, it's great to have all that stuff, right. The question is, how do we interpret all of it? How do we interpret the work?

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah. I think [crosstalk 00:13:24]

…

Neal:

…What I mean by that is that when…Let's just say, I'm trying to think of a good example. There's the example that I used in my book of Malwine Brée, who was Leschetizky's teaching assistant. What she says of the use of asynchrony is that it should be imperceptible to the uninitiated, so someone who hasn't heard it before shouldn't notice that it's there.

Neal:

And so she's used the word ‘imperceptible’. But then, when we listen to Leschetizky playing that Chopin nocturne, Opus 27, no 2—so it's the same nocturne that she's used as an example of the use of asynchrony—when we listen to that, from our modern aesthetic viewpoint, we definitely hear his asynchronies. There's just no way we can not hear them. The gap between the right-hand playing the first melody note and the left-hand placement is just very noticeably ... It's a noticeable gap. It's late.

Neal:

But, we have to think that, for them, for Leschetizky, the great master, that was not a perceptible thing. It was just normal. They would have thought of that as just being that's how you play those notes to make them expressive. So when we read in these 19th-century written

texts the word, "This should happen imperceptibly," I don't think, it doesn't mean the same as what we think of as imperceptible.

Elliott:

Right, yeah, for sure.

…

Neal:

Well, that was my experience, anyway, on a number of occasions of where you could compare recordings where someone said, "Don't do it," and then ...

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

Yeah. Sometimes, it was more extreme. People just said, "Absolutely don't do it," and then they did it themselves in their own playing. It's more of a contradiction, but yeah. Warnings of that type, like "this should happen imperceptibly, this should be slightly", those sorts of caveats that are written into written texts, I think they're written when pedagogues teach, "do this, but don't overdo it", because they're trying to ... What are they trying to do? They're trying to build up some kind of tasteful way of doing it that's not too overdone, it doesn't go too extreme, I guess. I guess.

…

Neal:

…If Reinecke were to be alive today, and could listen to…an HIP performance, say, of his Larghetto—like a fortepianist just picking up his arrangement and playing it—I think he would go, "What on earth is that? Why are you just, why are you playing the score?"

Elliott:

Yeah, yep, and that would be [crosstalk 00:23:50]-

Neal:

So, he would have not thought that ... The vertical alignment in things that tend to exist in HIP performance, that's still very, very much an HIP thing. I think they would have just thought, "Oh, well, that's a great student performance."

Elliott:

Right, yeah.

Neal:

It's not artistically phrased. It hasn't got artistic expression. And certainly, they wouldn't have thought, [laughs] "oh yeah, that's a ..." It's not imperceptibly artistic. You see what I mean? It's not [crosstalk 00:24:32]-

Elliott:

Yeah, it's perceptibly student or something.

Neal:

[laughs] It's perceptibly student, yes.

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

It's perceptively correct, or yeah, it's what someone does at the beginning to learn how to play neatly, and nicely, and all the rest of it. Yeah.

…

N2C

Elliott:

I've been thinking about the imperceptible idea, actually, and wondering, on a slightly more controversial note, whether there is any room for taking the aesthetic ideas to our own subjective context, like in terms of portamento was just accepted, and as a result, it wasn't noticed.

Neal:

Yes.

Elliott:

So, is there any sort of room for taking the idea, but not the specific practice?

Neal:

Do you mean by taking the idea, but not using it with the volume that they used to?

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

Something along those lines? Yeah. Look, absolutely. I mean, the thing about all of this, it's very easy for someone like me who is very interested in how much they did, and how that feels, and all that, to give the impression that there's only one way of doing it. We've got to do it as much as they did, and then our aesthetic will change, and we'll ... I do think, actually, if you do do it as much as they did, you get used to it, and then it becomes your ...

Elliott:

Yeah, yeah.

Neal:

Yeah, but not everyone has to do that, for sure. I think one of the things about ... I'm sure we talked about this in the last time, but one of the most creative things to come out of all of this work, or the possibility of creativity, is if you piece together the written texts, and the recorded evidence, and then you as an artist, you have your artistic agency that has to be there, I mean, the artistic agency is a very important ingredient in all this, of course.

Neal:

All of this work is a spur for your imagination, as an artist. I think, actually, what we're doing here in the end is taking the information, some of us will go really to one extreme, and put it in there, and then it'll still come out with our own artistic imagination about it. It must have been a little bit like that in the time, too, that the thing that made all the players individual is that they were using the practices, but it was coming out in their own way.

Neal:

That's still the same now. You could take a little bit of it, or you could do it a lot, or you could do less of it, or whatever. I don't think there's anything wrong, per se, with that. If you're interested in working with the materials, this is what you can gain from it.

Elliott:

Yeah, for sure. I like what you said about opening up your imagination. It's like a whole range of different tools. Yeah.

Neal:

Yeah. I don't think that the aim of what we're doing here is simply to mimic what's going on, what's going on in the recordings, for example. Anyway, we can't from the written texts mimic, because they're scans, and most of it's quite vague. You can't really know how it sounded from what was written, but I only do the recording. I think the recordings are really important, and imitating them for a certain amount of time is also important, simply just to get a feeling for the styles.

Elliott:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Neal:

Then, of course, you go away and do your own thing with it, too.

Elliott:

Yeah, for sure. Yeah.

Neal:

As you already know, and I certainly would admit, there are circumstances in which—there are some times when you can really be free and use these things as much as you like, and then there are certain other circumstances where you just have to reign it back in again a little bit, or [laughs, inaudible 00:29:26] those types of things, yeah.

…

N2D On hairpins (Op. 78, mov. 1)

…

Neal:

And just to talk about the hairpins, because you've asked a couple of times about that, right?

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

So, in this case in 34 [m. 34-35, 1st mov, Op. 78]—

[demonstrates]

That's a perfect place to move towards, linger, and then go kind of back into time again. So I've used the David Hyun Su Kim article, is what led me to come up with that type of interpretation.

Elliott:

Oh, right okay, yeah. That's great.

Neal:

As well as a couple of examples that I heard in some of the old pianist playing, where they have hairpins, I've noticed that sort of moving towards and coming away from.

Elliott:

Right, yeah. I was always wondering about the descent from the peak, whether you—Do you always sort of fall-

Neal:

—back in time?

Elliott:

Yeah. Fall back to-

Neal:

I don't always and I think it's not always the right context for that, because this hairpin coincides with the section right? The end of the phrase.

Elliott:

Right.

Neal:

So it seems silly to...

[demonstrates]

You would, in any case, give way. So I think it does. My feeling is I speed up to the top, linger a bit, then go back more or less to the tempo from which I've speeded up. But at the same time here, think of a comma between that C sharp and the right hand and the next bar. If you see what I mean. So—

[demonstrates, with slight break after m. 35]

Elliott:

Yeah, yeah.

Neal:

So there's obviously a natural comma.

Elliott:

Yeah, yeah. Great. Thanks very much Neal.

Neal:

Robin and I talked about this a lot!

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

And in this situation, of course it's going to be a give and take, because I've got the moving part, and the violin is, you're just playing chords…

Elliott:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. [crosstalk 00:11:36].

Neal:

The violin has to go with piano at that point, but it's not always that way.

Elliott:

Yeah. Yeah, I mean there's another one at 38 in the violin.

Neal:

Exactly, exactly.

Elliott:

And I had wondered about like sort of swooping to the top a little bit, and taking a bit of time.

Neal:

So in this case, it should be possible for you to sweep up to the A, linger, and so you get...

[demonstrates violin part with this movement]

That sort of thing. And you might even get to your A before the piano actually gets to the harmony that's meant to be there.

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

I think that's perfectly fine.

Elliott:

Okay. Yeah that's-

Neal:

Cause pianistically—

[demonstrates piano part mm. 36-38]

—I mean I could get faster there to accommodate, but I think it would be a mistake to do that.

Elliott:

Okay.

Neal:

You know, cause obviously this is one of these stable accompaniment moments where it's just blocks of harmony.

[demonstrates with simple block chords]

It's so much better if I let you do the expression and I just stay.

Elliott:

Yeah, yeah.

Neal:

…And very interesting that he didn't mark the *portato* in the piano part. You know sometimes Brahms was haphazard, and just didn't do it, I think accidentally, it's just missed out. But I think in this case, he was quite clearly giving the violinist scope to be free.

Elliott:

Oh, yes right. Yeah, yeah. Okay. Yeah, that's good to know that you don't have to be exactly with the piano at something like that.

Neal:

Yeah. I mean just for interest's sake, you didn't point this out but have a look at bar 44 and 45. So there's another point, isn't there?

[sings violin part m. 44]

…And then, he doesn't put a hairpin in the violin part in the next bar, but I have—

[demonstrates m. 45]

—I might perhaps, rhapsodically move, you know.

[demonstrates m. 45-47]

—That sort of, there's a give and take going on, you do it with basically [sings violin part m. 44], and I have [sings piano part m. 45].

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

One after the other.

Elliott:

Right. So, in those cases you would normally…have the half bar sort of a bit early than...

Neal:

A bit early, and a bit linger-ey. [laughs]

Elliott:

Okay, yeah. Yeah, right.

Neal:

For want of any other sort of technical terms.

Elliott:

Yeah,

Neal:

I mean, how much? The question of how much? I don't know.

[demonstrates m. 45]

That might be enough, or...

[demonstrates m. 45-47, more exaggerated]

And each one, because there are three or four in a row here, it could be different depending on the harmonic implications. So, the first one is in [plays chord] B. It's kind of B diminished. The second one I do is in...[plays chord] It's more tense, it's in E flat. Then [plays m. 47], leading to that point. Yeah.

Elliott:

Yeah, okay.

Neal:

Talk about having to read the score carefully. In the next bar, just want to point out to you, bar 48, both violin and piano kind of have crescendo hairpin, but with sostenuto in the middle, more or less in the middle of the bar. So, I don't think this crescendo hairpin can mean momentum building, because the sostenuto's suggesting things are pulling back.

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

This one is dynamic. And then in bar 49, to complicate matters, you've got the piano with crescendo after the forte, but the sostenuto is still in effect.

Elliott:

Yeah, yeah.

Neal:

So that's *possibly* more dynamic. But then after that, once the sostenuto dotted line's finished, with the crescendo that's marked with both parts, probably I would think momentum building from that point onwards.

Elliott:

Yeah, yeah.

Neal:

But you see how it's so complicated, the picture of what he's trying to do. [cross-talk]

Elliott:

You can't take it one way or the other all the time.

Neal:

Yeah, yeah. It's not just dynamics, sometimes it's not a temporal thing. It's what Hyun Su Kim says in the article. It's the kind of picture, he's giving you these directions, but you have to read them, and maybe we would come up with a different reading and that might also be okay. This is the thing. It's an indication that *something's* got to happen.

…

N2E

Elliott:

Second movement—thank you for booming through these too—

Neal:

Yeah, that's fine. Oh, yeah. The opening?

Elliott:

Yeah, how would you think if you were coming to this for the first time?

Neal:

[laughs] From a pianistic point of view?

Elliott:

Yeah, yeah.

Neal:

Okay, so first of all, it's a slow movement. And from what I've read, you would definitely apply arpeggiation and/or asynchrony as a general style of playing. Then we have espressivo written there by Brahms, so that's another indication that it's highly expressive and needs to have these techniques, perhaps also with some sort of tempo fluctuations at times and even rhythmic things. So I have no problem with...

[demonstrates m. 1 with arpeggiation…]

—Maybe this one [last chord, semiquaver, of m. 1], not arpeggiated on the short note—

[continues demonstrating, mm. 2-10]

Yeah, so I don't know.

Elliott:

Yep, that's right.

Neal:

Yeah. Is that what you were thinking, or?

Elliott:

Yeah. I mean, that's really interesting to hear.

Neal:

One thing where the crescendo—So there's a couple of things you could think about. You have a crescendo hairpin in bar four, and the diminuendo—sorry, a crescendo ending hairpin in bar eight or so. And one thing that Hyun Su Kim talks about is that sometimes when they're like that, with space in-between, Brahms is trying to say that this material in the middle is the most important. This is—

Elliott:

Oh, okay.

Neal:

So if we think—

[demonstrates mm.1-3…]...

—this is all stable. Now from here *[demonstrates m. 5]*... Maybe this part in the middle is even more supercharged with expression. Yeah?

[demonstrates mm.4-5]

Elliott:

Right.

Neal:

So maybe my arpeggios would be even more [emphatic]—

[demonstrates mm. 5-7]

—and then a bit more back:

[demonstrates 7-9]

That's the closing.

Elliott:

Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. Would you take a bit of—would you always go forward a bit in the fourth bar?

Neal:

Bar four? That's a good question, I—

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

I guess one could approach it in two different ways maybe, so *not* going forward, ah—

[demonstrates mm. 3-5]

Then being very hyper expressive in the next bit. For some reason because of the way the writing goes, he adds in the syncopations in bar three; the rate of syncopation increases, if you like. Like it becomes more frequent, doesn't it? And that makes me want to push forward, I think. So just one more time:

[demonstrates mm. 1-7]

—I had a feeling of a slight wanting to go forward.

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

I think that would be a way of reading it.

Elliott:

Yeah, it feels natural.

Neal:

Mm. In the same way that the decrescendo hairpin in bar eight is a way of coming out of that somehow, that they would have a relationship with each other.

…

N2F

Elliott:

…Let's go to third movement really quickly, and I wondered whether you had any general thoughts; I know Robin says this is a really sort of difficult movement to—

Neal:

It is a difficult movement, in the sense that it sort of pitter-patters all the way through; but I always feel like this is one of those... It *is* meant to be this feeling of almost being inside, hearing raindrops, and it's a melancholy thing that happens, but then there are some happier moments in it. Most of the time it sort of—

[sings violin part m. 1, demonstrates piano part m. 1]

Elliott:

Yeah, yeah.

Neal:

—It's just terribly...

Elliott:

Moody or something.

Neal:

Yeah, it's a feeling of being enclosed, and not being able to go anywhere and melancholic and all that sort of stuff. So, that's what it is. It just does that, and this section comes back several times, but in between of course, you get the more lighthearted music, the leggiero section for example…

But that's really the overall impression, I think, of the movement. It's that, with some remembrance, for example where the first movement theme comes back at 83. It's very cleverly done—sorry the second movement theme comes back [sings]

…

Elliott:

Actually, I might just ask you with the limited time, is there anything in the theme that you would sort of vary each time, with the performing practices?

Neal:

…In your part, you mean?

Elliott:

Yeah.

Neal:

Well, one thing that strikes me, that, you know—I've got the pitter-patter, the piano part's got just the raindrops type of thing, right. And it's very hard for the pianist to do anything other than play, you know—

[demonstrates mm.1-4]

—That sort of rhythm going on with some nuancing where the hairpins are and all that. In your part though...

[demonstrates violin melody mm. 1-3]

—I think things like where you elongate one note, say, and rush on a little bit after that, is completely up to you, cause you've got static [harmony] pretty much [in the piano part]—

[demonstrates melody with block chords]

You could elongate at any point that you felt, and then you could change it the next time around. Ah, so—

[demonstrates start of violin melody m.1]

Even this, where that C comes could be different.

[demonstrates melody, varying placement of C]

I think you could be quite free, each time the theme goes comes back, depending on how you feel.

Elliott:

Mm. And would you feel that the down beats should be together with you?

Neal:

Not necessarily.

Elliott:
Okay, so-

Neal:
If I was playing it—
[demonstrates m. 1, dislocating violin melody from piano accomp]
—could be fine.

…

P1: Peter De Jager, 21 November 2019

P1A: Recap of the year

Nice. OK,....so how have you found the sort of process for this project as we've just sort of like played a sonata last semester, then we played the G major this semester and did a little bit of work on historical style again... do you think... How do you think my playing has changed — or, what we've sort of made, together, like over that time?

Um...[pause]...I mean, far be it from me to, like, authoritatively tell you how you've done *[laughs]*, but I feel like through working together generally, you know, we've developed, you know, ever more gradually a better rapport and, you know, learnt to be more sensitive and confident where it's required of us. And particularly you, cause you are such a sensitive person, there was the confidence aspect of it...is still developing, you know, we're always growing organisms. But, you know, what was so fascinating was how different it felt playing with you when you adopted that consciously historical style of —yeah, cause then somehow...Well, we sort of discussed this with Robin and you have that on record as well, but somehow the so-called flaws in what you were doing in the other style of playing, became more like your genuine expressive ideas, if that makes sense. So...that was very interesting to see. And that just happened instantly, basically—just flicked a switch in your brain.

[Laughs] No, I wish! Yeah well it sort of seemed quite...yeah, like, sudden I guess, when we had that one session with Robin, it was really good. yeah, how did you find those two first recital performances: like, A major, and G major, in recital before the historical— because I was sort of also thinking about historical style more for the G major...

Yes. [pause] I felt the A major was a less successful performance...perhaps for that reason, like, the more you go towards historical style, the more successful the performance becomes; it's somehow freeing you from...something.

Something, yeah,...yeah, it seemed to be not just about historical style, but, like—

No, we also worked on some of the less successful I think collaborative aspects of the A major performance, which were more to do with, you know, listening, and active listening, as we called it I think *[laughs]*—not a term I use all the time, but, yeah...

Yeah, that seemed to be a large part of it, like, talking about listening, and in general having more active approach rather than passive...

Yeah, well that's very much my approach to collaborative music—

In general—

—in general yeah. It's not everyone's approach, I'm aware, it's sometimes hard to find common ground if people have such different starting points, but, yeah, I try and keep that route.

P1B: Active listening for unanimous ensemble

What would you describe as like sort of the main differences between a more passive or active style of playing—like, if you were to characterise it?

Ah, the—well I think we're only talking— in terms of passive or active that's just within the one sort of listening paradigm. Passivity, probably— the, well, what we described as more passive sense of listening, I think comes from just... [pause]...you know you could describe it as being too sensitive as well, if you listen and—

React afterwards—

—you feel like you're waiting for something to happen before you make the move, or— Yeah, I mean the key is when two people (or more than two, of course—but two is the clearest distillation), when two people are playing music together, you're both aiming, you know, for a unanimity, a complete agreement about say, the simplest thing, where a note is going to be. You want it to be at a certain point, and you both have to put it at exactly that certain point. And so there's a sense in which you both have to do the same thing at the same time—And that's the really interesting thing to explore, because some people are very naturally good at that, and you don't have to say much to them at all. And it's actually a very hard thing to describe and teach when there isn't that intuitive sense of it.

Yeah...do you think it's something to do with then like somehow like communicating what you want to do beforehand rather than—

Yes, um—

Like, so that that note can only be placed, you know, makes sense in one place—

Absolutely— it's all about physical gesture. And to a certain extent, I think I've said this to you before, it's I think largely about breath. And musicians who use breath as part of their sound tend to have, you know singers and wind and brass players, they tend to have a more natural understanding of this I think in the first place.

…

I think that those aspects of, some aspects of historical style, like when we talked about freedom of dotting and like more tempo flexibility, like... were really, like, super useful in that session for a feeling of like, expression generally. Um... And I wonder if, like we were talking about...it, I think it maybe encourages like, or maybe helps *that sense of active listening in a way to be able to have the freedom in some of these things. Do you think so?*

Absolutely. No, I that's, I think...I sometimes try and phrase this sort of active listening that I'm trying to impart in terms of flexibility and freedom, because, yeah, if you have the sense that there is no...

Restriction on—

—yeah, that there is no answer at any point, like you're playing and you never have the, you

know, comfort of that, you know, external sense of rhythm, then obviously by necessity you're going to have to listen more, and then—But also I feel it's important to note that the end goal is not necessarily a sort of loose sense of spontaneity, because I think that's a legitimate concern people have when they hear that sort of reasoning; that, you know, this all just becomes too nebulous and we're going to fall apart, and, you know, it's not safe enough,—one can be too safe of course—But, I—yeah, it is finding that balance; so that the spontaneity and flexibility as a tool for unlocking that sensation {of togetherness} I think is very useful—and was clearly very useful for you.

But even in music, say, you know, I don't know, some piece of American minimalism or something with an extremely rigid motoric grid—you still have to be paying attention to the sounds lining up, and that still requires the same kind of listening, even if there's no freedom whatsoever, of rhythm.

P1C: Modernism

What do you see are the main differences between how we play today and sort of the nineteenth-century style of chamber music, maybe like particularly piano playing—if you were to describe...

Oh, particularly piano playing?

Yeah.

Um, I've...I mean, lots of people have discussed this of course, but...Well I'd first say that I think...[diversion]... that you know, now in 2019, almost 2020, we have moved I think, especially in Australia, really quite far from the sort of heyday of modernist ideals, of sort of...So in a sense, this kind of discussion is—and this is a thing I've felt a tiny bit about this project, not that you yourself are at fault in any way for pursuing it in this way, as an exploration, but—I think the framing of a sort of reaction against modernism, is sort of reacting against something that really has been dead for at least two decades, maybe, even maybe a lot more.

Mm-hm. Yeah.

...

… what we're comparing {in this research project} is the modernist style, basically to, perhaps, a style that's more informed by history. And the other thing is, as Bruce Haynes pointed out in his book, the early music movement in the 60s and 70s, as much as they were reading treatises and things like that, and picking up the instruments again, philosophically it seemed like it was ultimately just an excuse to still have modernist ideals....so yeah.

You're—you're saying that's another danger...

Yeah, well the danger is not thinking philosophically enough about it—in terms of, you can, yeah, as Robin said in slightly different context, you know, you don't want to exchange one modernist ideal for another, in different clothing. So yeah.

**Later clarification by interviewee emphasised that these comments applied particularly to mainstream performance style in Australia, which seems open-minded and not strictly modernist (see P1E). On the other hand, some HIP practice and training environments (in Australia and elsewhere) do seem to exhibit certain modernist influences, and so the discussion of these ideas is indeed still relevant to these situations.

P1D: Examples of practical experimentation

…I've just thought of the opening of the cello sonata:

[plays opening of Debussy cello sonata, contracting smaller rhythms slightly]

You know, that's not a literal performance of the rhythm on the page,...

OK! Is it—

—you know—

[plays more metronomically and counting along]

—but I think that's the sort of rubato he would have thought to use.

So in a sense, there's a kind of, I've always thought paradoxically there's a kind of strictness to that rubato, because in fact the beats have to be more rigidly in place, whereas everything around the beats—you know in relation to each other, the bigger beats—and then everything else sort of has a gravity towards them, like a ball bouncing.

Um, and the other thing is, I think, for piano particularly, there is a great sort of drastic reduction in the amount of keyboard colours you could produce, by various rolled chords and non-simultaneities. And one of my favourite, if not my favourite pianist Rachmaninoff, often, there are some recordings of his—not all—and it's interesting to think which ones he made the decision to do this for and which ones he didn't—but, there are some where you can hear him rolling chords in *such a* variety of colourful ways. And I think that's something I'm very keen to bring back to piano. Because you know, you have...It's a colour I'm starting to not be able to live without reallly, when you just simply,

[plays two notes]

—when you simply place a melody note after a bass note, you suddenly get the effect of the overtones creating this sort of ringing sound. Whereas if you just—

[plays the two notes together]

—it's...

[plays around with displacement of these two notes]

...you have to place it just right..., yeah, and then this extends to rolling, when you get this:

[rolls chord]

, rolling also creates sense of *softer* colour, I suppose, but a roll can also be like an energising feature of the rhythm:

[demonstrates quickly rolled chords and in a musical example—Chopin].

[Laughs] Nice!

Chopin didn't like rolls, but [laughs], that's another interesting thing to talk about.

…

P1E: Australian musicians' attitudes to music

…What do you think about— the style of playing in Australia today, as compared to the modern style? I'm kind of interested...[pause]...

—Um...

Or like philosophical approach?

I don't know...I mean, in a way I don't know enough about Australian cultural history to comment in a very broad sense. But...I think what I see around me is a group of musicians, of my age and slightly older, who are very willing to be open-minded, about ideas of the music—just in a general attitude sense. And this is something I genuinely—this is something I think is still different in Europe, where you know vast majority of people hew more to a sense of the tradition being a unified thing,...And, you know, I think this is indicative of what our country represents, in some sense, you know...Whether it's through a, you know, sense of freedom, or, or, comfort, or, you know, being nice; or perhaps through a certain sense of ignorance, possibly [short laugh], you know...many factors...

Sure, OK; it's just an interesting—thing

—I mean, ignorance is not necessarily a failing if it's—got—yeah.

Yeah. OK, cool—

Well ignorance is the bad side of, you know, open-mindedness and, being willing to not be so rigid, is the upside.

Nice.

The, I mean there's also, I think, a sense of, more specifically than that, being flexible with tempo, and using a far—being more courageous in terms of using a far greater range of colours, in every instrument, I think.

…

P1F: Playing music of the past in the present: what to do with differences of intuition (and instruments)

Do you...do you find anything about...[pause] mm...a full blown—like if you were to imitate Reinecke or something—do you find anything about that sort of counter-intuitive to your own instincts?

Um...[pause]...y-yes, one can't help but feel that I think, when that's not a culture that is around one. [pause]...Yeah, I mean this is the, I think the combination of things one has to find, that you have to push your own—cause we're dealing with music from a different era, which we have for whatever reason decided we still want to play —so it's a matter I think of pushing ourselves closer to that time on one hand, and challenging our intuitions and adopting things and trying to understand like the sort of socio-political structures, I suppose even *[small laugh]*, behind the artistic gestures. Like, you know—what about rolled chords made them feel like they were a part of German society in the 1860s? Because I don't think one can really decouple those things. Art is sort of ultimate refinement in a way of—politics, if you like *[short*

laugh],. So we have to get closer to that time in every sense, use our imaginations to think what it would feel like to have been moved to create and play this sort of music. But then also, simultaneously... bringing that style closer to us, so that we use what we have around us and what we feel more intuitively, as a kind of benchmark for—yeah—If we can link their intuitions which are not intuitive to us, with our different intuitions and find some common ground, then we can play naturally in something approaching a historical style.

Yeah, that's sort of the focus of my project, in a sense, I think. Like, yeah, what do you do with the tension between styles. Yeah, how do you approach these kind of things, in your own playing as a modern musician using...[pause]...Like on a practical level for playing Brahms, do you...how do you reconcile like...[pause]...[collecting thoughts] Well do you think there are practical tensions of just like needing to play with {I think that I'm trying to narrow down the discussion, to the 'practical reasons' part of RQ B}... you know, a Steinway, rather than—

Well, yes, the most pressing practical problem is that we have the wrong instruments. So in a sense, you're always forced to create according to what limitations you have, given what this instrument does naturally... [joking] I mean, this is a Yamaha, but same sort of *[short laugh]...* What this instrument does naturally is very much not what Brahms' instrument does naturally. And it's...a tricky one because I think you have to...

[new thought] I think, contrary to what I just said, in terms of the balance, I mean as a general principle, you know, one can't be stuck in the past; but actually, in terms of— for myself I feel like I always want to try and recreate— not recreate, embody —those sorts of different cultures as closely as I can. I don't consciously try and add modern ideas to say Brahms, or yeah Mozart or Bach or...[pause]...Except that like I said I still feel that one has to speak with one's own voice, and I suppose I let that happen on a more subliminal level: I am who I am and I am a modern person. And that *will* come through— through this, you know, connecting of intuitions, essentially, if you like...

So it's not a conscious decision to, yeah, introduce modern ideas, as you say, but—

No. But, it's an unlocking of the, you know, the emotions and the intentions...And I mean really, once you have [small laugh]—you know, we all have emotions, we all have the same emotions we had a hundred thousand years ago—I mean, in a sense, like we were saying with breathing together and that kind of psychological connection in terms of ensemble playing, in a way this sort of historical project only makes sense if we assume again that humans are psychologically similar over those time distances.

Cause like if Brahms felt a completely alien emotion to us that we could never hope to—we could never hope to understand or feel or recreate, then...[laughs, *laughs*] it's, I mean...futile exercise!

P1G: Interpretation and the role of the performer
[Laughs] Right. Do you think, now talking about, in terms of the composer and the spirit of the composer—sort of, feeling—getting—what do you think's the sort of...role of the performer? Is it to communicate the general spirit that the composer sort of felt, like the emotions that he...

Yes,, I think if we're talking about music post-Beethoven.

Oh!

I think any earlier than that and you're almost dealing with a different musical culture, one that is more focused on public emotion rather than the private emotion of the individual artist. I mean, this is, this is where Romanticism comes into it. And so when you are dealing with Brahms expressing his quite personal thoughts, I would say, through music, you have more of

a responsibility to go into his idiosyncratic psychology, I'd say... At least, I feel that; that's *my* justification for being interested in music. One could argue perhaps that, you know, Brahms is dead but he left us something which maybe could be interpreted through the lens of another person's psychology. And so you would, in that way, move away from Brahms and his intentions, but perhaps still create something compelling. I suppose for me, that's just not what fascinates me about the process.

Yeah, yeah.

And in part what's fascinating is what's *different* about Brahms. What was different about the world back then? Can we make people feel something they've never felt before because they haven't felt it for a hundred years?—except in these moments *[short laugh]* where we've managed to capture something during a performance.

Yeah, it's very interesting.

Mm. So yes, so the intentions of a composer like Brahms I would say are much more in a way fixed, than—When I play...baroque music, for example, particularly Bach

…

P1H: The quest of performance: communicating artistic intention and structure

How do you think historical style can be used as a tool for the music, or, expression?

For the music expression?

Ah, for, like—expression of the music. Not entirely sure what I'm asking—I think I've found for me like I said that some things helped me to connect maybe *with the intended spirit of the piece, you know. And get out of—*

Well, I suppose—this is actually another thing I touched upon with Robin, but which I mention now and I think is also very important: because like we can listen to old recordings and we can read documents about how people perceived things and what various people did and, how they thought of their style being realised, and all those things. And it's extremely fascinating, as history is, and also extremely ambiguous and you know susceptible to many different interpretations.

But, in a way all of those are merely useful shortcuts. Where I've emerged I think in terms of my grappling with...with any piece of music is that...Ultimately what we have is...perhaps two things. We have an intention, an artistic intention, and then we have a structure, which is the score. The intention perhaps we need to get from history, from knowledge—

Of the composer?—

Yes, yes. And just knowledge of what the composer is trying to get at, because that's...not always clear. And that's often left out of the score, of the artefact...Although, perhaps again philosophically, one might hope that in the best works of art, all of that is fully deducible just from the score. But [unclear?] you have the intention and the structure, and the structure is susceptible to analysis. And so ultimately, what I do when I'm looking at any score is analysing... finding out how the music works, what the structures are, every analytical tool I can throw at the structures to find out what they are and how they work and how they fit together. And then, working out what the structure is being used for...

Like what expressive purpose ["you mean"]?

Yes. And then, trying through whatever means possible, to convey that, performatively. And that's where the knowledge comes in, but the fundamental impetus is—And this is where, you know, the historical performance movement, as generally practiced in a scholarly way, I think, is incomplete, is almost backwards—because you are, you know, looking at what they did and saying "Oh we must do this thing; they rolled chords, oh, where can we roll chords, how can we roll chords." Whereas, what's the structure—I mean this is all very abstract—like Brahms, like, what's the structure of the music, what's the intention? There's,...there's [thinking] phrase which ends in harmony which is particularly expressive, which I know by harmonic analysis and by cultural analysis, and, you know, say this one—

[plays Gmin/E chord from Op. 78 sonata 1st mov, m. 150]

—at the end of the development of the G major,. So, it's not a matter of, "Oh, there's a chord—Oh, I can roll it...(because he says *dolce*, perhaps)". But, you know, [instead] "I want this to have a particular emotional flavour because of the chord, because of the moment in the music, because of the structure—and...A roll, which I know is something they did and a colour they had available to them—and a particular *kind* of roll—

[demonstrates same, rolled chord]

—is what I want to use to convey that point."

Yep, so you have an expressive purpose for *doing that, yeah.*

Yeah, that's the kind of thinking.

Mm—that's quite interesting.

So it's analysis and *then,* you know, knowledge.

Wow. Yeah, yeah. Very good, yeah. I think that's all we have time for.

Mm. Well that's a good—I'm glad I got that last point—that's—

Yeah, I think that was the really useful things that came out of this; actually doing these—Some yeah, like, learning about these things...and then try'na, do some of them at least with like expressive intent, like having the freedom of dotting more or less, and doing that with a sense that it's creating like better music or something.

Mm. Well in terms of dotting, I feel like that's again a matter of the big beats. And then the reason we think of big beats is because that's the structure, and that's the structure that Brahms would have assumed.

So you kinda have to jump back and forth from structural analysis and historical contingency..., yeah. Cause otherwise we could say, "well, if we can be just as expressive without the—that—doing it in that way, then what's the difference?"

[Question] You mean without having that approach to dotting, or—

Yeah...

[Pause] Sorry, I didn't quite understand.

Oh, I'm just pointing out that, like, the approach to dotting is not a matter of the dots, and like Robin said, exchanging one modernist paradigm for another—another one {i.e. interpreting all dotted figures as exactly double-dotted}—it's a matter of beats being strong and the things leading towards the beats...and I'm just saying, that's an idea, that's a paradigm, that's something we can adopt to express the music; but why should we adopt it? [pause]

You know, ultimately it's a choice, and the choice is based on: that's how Brahms was thinking of it, as far as I can tell.

Yeah. Mm.

So maybe it is about composer's intentions in some way.

…

G1: Glenn Christensen, 11 November 2020

G1A

… I'm definitely a modern player in that I'm not seeking to really, I guess, play fully historically informed-

Elliott:

Yeah.

Glenn:

But I think that people these days, it's interesting, because I think people these days are becoming more and more aware about historically informed playing, particularly with people like Brahms and Schumann, …

Glenn:

Having said that, I still think that I find that the struggle is finding probably what your whole project is about. How do we play this music, acknowledging the past and yet still remaining true to ourselves and to the composer's intention and modern day performance practice and in the part.

…

G1B: Non-metronomic comments

Glenn:

And I also wanted to say, I really, really enjoyed sometimes when you sort of played around with the sort of metric feeling, in that you didn't, I feel like, and I hope it was intentional, that you tried to not exactly play metronomically in time, and sort of had that bit of delay and drag and rushing with the piano, so it wasn't always exactly vertically correct.

…

Good, yeah because that was obviously one of the main points that I was going to bring out as well, the hairpins, what do they mean? And I think as we are no learning more and more about

Brahms, I have thought and have been told, I don't know by who, that can, probably by people like X and X. Have you read any-

Elliott:

[crosstalk 00:05:46] Yeah.

Glenn:

That the hairpins indicate not just maybe an increase in volume as such, but they also indicate direction of the phrase. And perhaps if it's a crescendo it actually means moving forward through that direct phrase. Or is that sort of what you had-

Elliott:

Yeah, absolutely. That's probably what he was going for.

Glenn:

Right. Well, then it came across really well, especially I think in bar 13 and 14.

Elliott:

Oh great, yup.

Glenn:

But I think you can actually, and I know this was a rehearsal with your pianist, but I think the two of ... Is the pianist that you're going to be playing with?

Elliott:

Yeah.

Glenn:

Cool. Then I think collectively you could probably push that a lot further actually.

…

G1C: Other comments—sound colour etc.

Glenn:

... Isn't it amazing that from bar 84, all the way to 130, the piano's just playing an A?

Elliott:

Crazy.

Glenn:

Isn't it? And all the weird sort of harmonic movement that he goes through and that sort of stuff is really, really weird. He's not really sticking in one tangible piece, until really, besides that pedal A.

Elliott:

Yeah, it's crazy.

Glenn:

And it might have been that the audio was sort of equalizing everything a little bit, so when I was listening to it, I was like, "Oh that's just ..." I don't know. What did you record it on? Was it on a-

Elliott:

It was an external mic. I think the dynamics should've been more accurate than with the camera, so.

Glenn:

Okay, well in that case, I was giving you the benefit of the doubt there.

Elliott:

[inaudible 00:14:04].

Glenn:

I wonder if that can be far softer?

Elliott:

Yeah.

Glenn:

Alto piano, and [sotobroccia simpro 00:14:12] in both parts. And obviously you want to hear that, the tension of that pedal A coming through in the piano, but that's a point where I think that you can really experiment with the different colour. The vapor in the wind, that sort of colour. And in fact, I think the coolest bit of this whole passage is when you get to 120.

Elliott:

Yeah, it's nice.

Glenn:

And you've got this falling line, this just cascading sort of waterfall. And then against the triplets on the piano as well. It's just [inaudible 00:15:01]. But I wonder there especially, I think you have total liberty there to fiddle around with really making sure that it's not in time. What you did, I think felt like it was ... And again, it's probably because you've got this heartbeat of the piano, but maybe the two of you can experiment with not playing that in time.

Elliott:

I know, yeah.

Glenn:

Or somehow even keeping that left hand steady in the piano, but you and his right hand just fiddling around with really not being metronomic.

Elliott:

Yeah, that's a great idea.

…

G1C: Lighter style

…

Glenn:

[commenting] And I think the way that this [ensemble] is playing Brahms and Schumann, it's actually a much lighter way of playing. And often people really, I think, overestimate. They think of Brahms as this guy ... Excuse me, with his big long beard, and big fat dude or whatever, and so therefore his music is really fat and heavy. But I'm just not convinced that is the case. I think it's quite lithe, lithe. How do you say that word L-I-T-H-E? Is that right?

Elliott:

[crosstalk 00:27:20] Yup, that's right.

Glenn:

And it can be quick on its feet and quite spontaneous. And yeah, I don't think it has to be this really, pa pa, pa pa. Even though I'm saying do a bit more of that, I'm also saying do less of that…

…

G1D: Second movement tempo

Glenn:

Okay, so the second movement, Adagio 3/8. I for starters, I liked your tempo, but I also questioned it as well, because I wonder how Adagio it actually was.

Elliott:

Yeah, a bit fast.

Glenn:

Possibly. But again, for me it felt like almost an Andante. …

…

G1E: Dangers

Glenn:

…And so I think it has been a bit like, that's a digression into just saying, in Australia I think that there has been an awakening of listening in that historically-informed performance practice is important. And I think that's basically all I'm trying to say is that…[redacted]…I just think that I try to do that as much as I can.

Elliott:

Yeah, no it's a good point. And have you ... Another question. It's just have you experienced anything about HIP that really jars against how you feel it should go or something like that? If nothing comes to mind that's fine, but-

Glenn:

Not so much. I think the thing that annoys me the most is when I try to, when someone plays something and my limited knowledge says, "No, that's incorrect, and that sounds stupid." The most jarring thing for me is that we're in a way that we're no closer to finding out truth. And maybe that's not the point. Or finding out the way that things should be played. And maybe that's not the point. But there are still so many different schools of thought and the camps of playing, and it's just like that is the most jarring thing for me, is that you can have historically-informed performance experts playing in such different ways. Like really polar opposites, and that's jarring for me, because I don't know which way to go.

Glenn:

But no, I think just anyone seeking to do things in the way that they should be done, or were intended to be done is a good thing.

Elliott:

Yeah, right. And at the same time, it's kind of hard because we have to show up on stage and deliver something that's convincing or whatever.

Glenn:

Yeah, and I think-

Elliott:

Not necessarily having all the information as well.

Glenn:

Yeah, totally. That is hard. And you don't want to also go up on stage and give ... I don't know. Actually, this is a jarring thing maybe, when people try to give an academic performance, and they're like, "Okay, I've done all this research, I know how this music should be played." And then they get up on stage and it just sounds academic, or it doesn't have that same ... It's like they're trying so hard to show you something, how it should be played, that it's not convincing, or it doesn't move you, or it just sounds like an academic exercise.

Elliott:

Yeah, it's so true.

Glenn:

I don't know how to define that, but-

Elliott:

Absolutely.

Glenn:

I don't know.

Elliott:

I've noticed, one thing for me, is that a lot of the historical style is about being more free with the rhythm and things like that. But for me, I can sometimes be like, I just notice myself, there's a temptation to making an excuse for coming off ties early, and that rhythmic discipline, but that's not the point either. You know?

Glenn:

Yeah, that's a good point as well. Yeah, and it does sometimes, it feels like sometimes ... You mean sometimes it can be used as an excuse for bad playing?

Elliott:

Well for me I know that I'm like, yeah I should be able to play in time as well.

Glenn:

Yeah, absolutely. I think that's a very, very, very good point. And I think that's what I mean about the departure from the metronome. In some ways I feel like we should always be able to play in tune, in time, with a good sound. They're like three pillars sort of. And then if you want to make the distinction and you want to depart from those three pillars, then it's a [deliberate] and really thought-out reason. You have this reason, this, this, this and this, this is why I'm doing that, and it's all very purposeful.

…

Appendix C: Summary of Historical Style

PTO.

Brahms Performance Practice for String Players: A Summary

INTRODUCTION

This is a collection of information about the nineteenth-century style of string playing as relevant to performing the violin sonatas of Brahms. Many thoughts here may be transferable to other similar German Romantic music (other works of Brahms, Schumann, etc). The document is structured in two sections, the first describing some *central ideals of nineteenth-century music-making* and the second some *specific, practical aspects of the style*. It particularly addresses musicians trained in a modern style but wishing to engage further with historical performing practice. The aim is to be concise, practical and provide 'food for thought'.

The style is connected to expression, and I particularly wanted to highlight this throughout the summary. Expression needs to be the guide and the goal of how we use stylistic devices like vibrato or portamento: they are "tools" (NPDC, 2020) to this effect. Playing 'in the style' is not just about adopting another aesthetic, but about a language that can be used to communicate expressive meaning.

The summary is a starting point. I have focused on some quotes that offer fascinating windows into the thoughts of nineteenth-century musicians. For me it was useful to reflect on such resources—often full of implications for their music-making, and ours. Sometimes several observations can be derived from the one quote; however, my purpose was not to explain the style here in detail but rather to collect this information in a concise, practical way. The summary is thus not the full picture (one could, for example, explore the context of the excerpts noted here). Additionally, no written description can capture the 'real-life' experience of playing—the summary is a starting point in this sense too.

This style differs considerably from today's expectations—in aesthetic and in *how much* of particular devices might be considered expressive (and tasteful). In general, 19th-century violinists expected much more tempo flexibility and portamento, and much less frequent vibrato; they also had a less precise and less literal perspective of the score. Modern tendencies are often worth resisting because they might cause one to overlook some expressive potential of the historical 'language.' Though this document focuses more on the result of an historical approach than the process of achieving this, some pointers are:

- Exaggeration: The historical style may seem extreme compared to conventional modern tendencies. Some practical conclusions from this:
    - Written sources must be interpreted in context—these 19th-century artists are writing within their subjective context, whereas we read it from ours. For example, Joachim and Moser present strong admonitions to restraint, but this was in the context of an even more extreme use of tempo fluctuation; they would also likely criticise a completely uniform tempo.
    - Exaggeration is often necessary, especially given our tendency to restraint and evenness. On the other hand, I think it is helpful to understand that this freedom is not 'doing anything we want'; there is a balance of freedom and restraint, which the expression can help to navigate.
- Experimentation: The historical approach does not restrict but *expands possibilities* for interpretation of the score. With this in mind, the task of the performer can be adventurous, and experimentation (using one's musical intuition) can help to creatively explore the wide range of options. I especially found that allowing oneself to exaggerate without the immediate need for a polished outcome can be useful.
- Emulation: Another helpful strategy is to imitate the early recordings to understand what it actually 'feels like' to play in this style. This is particularly useful for pushing against modern tendencies.

Full assimilation of the style is difficult. It may take years to reach an intuitive level, and such a task might seem formidable. However, I found that even experimenting with this style can have positive benefits to how we understand and play this music. Where a moderated approach is more appropriate, the same ideas can perhaps be applied on a smaller scale—that is, retain the connection to expression, but use slightly less heavy portamento, or slightly more moderate tempo flexibility. Having said this, I did find that I learnt the most when seeking to push toward the style; perhaps it is helpful to foster an attitude of adventurous risk, stepping outside normal practices with the possibility of greater expression.

Use aural evidence: Some musicians associated with Brahms made recordings of various works, and these are valuable examples of stylistic performing practice (despite the primitive recording technology). Note that nineteenth-century rubato and phrasing are elements of historical style common to all musicians (RW); early recordings of certain pianists (see end of summary for a brief list) are particularly valuable for listening to these features, and their recordings include of Brahms' works. In the summary, a few aural examples ("AE") are marked to indicate names of artists who recorded; many of these musicians' recordings can be accessed, for example, in the Naxos Online Music Library.

Use the Barenreiter commentary (BPW, 2016). I found it helpful to use the 'historically-informed' fingerings of others as a starting point, and Clive Brown's fingerings in these editions are one example. The commentary also shows how the style may be applied in detail to the sonatas; this resource is extremely useful and practical.

Despite this venture to collect the evidence in a structured manner, it is worthwhile noting that the summary is my personal view, from my own experiences with the information and style. It does rely heavily on written records, and this may be a limitation; interpret these thoughts (and diverge from them if necessary) with the understanding that aural recordings are the best index of how things 'actually came out'. It is nonetheless designed to be a useful starting point—perhaps similar to how the score is not an end-in-itself but stimulus for further thought and artistry.

Developments in Brahms HIP continue with the work of scholar-musicians like Anna Scott (2014). Detailed emulation is a component of cutting-edge Brahms HIP research, and particularly shows how easy it is to overlook aspects that conflict with our modern perspective. Scott challenges Brahms HIP to consider even the difficult aspects of early recordings that we might dismiss as flaws (e.g. 'rushing' that does not return to tempo). Resisting modern preferences for precision and consistency may help Brahms HIP to move closer to the experience of earlier artists.

Final thoughts: Achieving this style could be seen as using the information one has, or as much as one has at the time, in service of expression: information about the outside (how it objectively came across), information about the inside (the internal subjective experience, how it feels to play in this style), and information about aesthetic ideals (what was considered beautiful). This summary aims to describe those experiences. And ultimately, I think the end goal is perhaps to hear what the *music* is saying, not just the style used to achieve that— "the expression comes first".

Elliott Plumpton, 2021

Brahms Performance Practice for String Players: A Summary
THE GOAL: INSIDE-TO-OUTSIDE

This page outlines some overarching themes of a Brahmsian approach to music-making. As much as the historical style is about its specific characteristics—shift here, push the tempo there—it is also about the less tangible ideas and ideals that prompt such details. When reading accounts of Brahms and his contemporaries, one encounters these descriptors (of music-making, singing, freedom) that are far more than a scientific description of the 'outside'. Style seems to be connected to expression.

The central principle:
The expression must come first

"Unless you feel it, vain will be your chase"
—Goethe, 1808 (in Avins, 2003)

Musicians, in my experience, often aim toward an experience of connection between 'inside' and 'outside', and this principle applies to performance of Brahms' music too. The outside ideally comes from the inside: how one sounds (the elements of instrumental technique and of historical style) is most effective when it comes from a place of 'feeling it'—connecting to the expression of the music. The aspects of historical style become much more than arbitrary 'fashions'; they are ways to communicate the emotion, the colour, the drama of the moment.

One other principle:
A spectrum of possibility

Consider the huge range of human expression! The "tools" to communicate this (NPDC) should reflect that variety; the best music-making perhaps considers tools to have diverse and subtle manifestations (in the service of the inner feeling of the phrase/work). The best use of an expressive device is often about selecting from *a spectrum of expressive possibilities* rather than making binary "yes/no", "on/off", or "one-size-fits-all" decisions. The score, too, is *descriptive rather than prescriptive*, with a range of possible, expressive manifestations (using the words of Hyun-Su Kim on hairpins, see below).

What it is:
Natural, "felt", singing

This is the goal of the inside-to-outside playing: a certain feeling of expressing something 'from within'. Brahms is described in these terms of natural and 'felt' expression, of extremely communicative musicianship:

Richard Specht on Brahms' piano playing, 1928:
"The whole person was in this playing – and also the whole work: one seemed to possess it from that moment on, inalienably so. With all [Brahms's] control and restraint, there was in this playing a singing and surging, a flitting of lights and a scurrying of shadows, a glowing and a dying away, self-possessed manly emotion and self-forgetful romantic passion – playing of such immediacy and individuality as I have never heard from anyone else. He always played as if alone: he forgot the audience entirely, wholly immersed in his own world, and, experiencing his music afresh, was carried away in the act of recreation, lost to himself and to others. [...] In such recreative interpretation too the whole person was there. He was fully himself in everything he did, and lived every moment with the utmost intensity."
(in Pascall & Weller, 2003, p. 232)

Singing is a common analogy in discussions of the historical style (J&M; Brown, 2003); and I have found that maybe the most potent, practical tool for experimenting with many aspects of the historical style (especially tempo and rhythmic flexibility) is singing without the instrument (RW).

What it is not:
Contrived, caricature

The opposite, negative experience is described in terms of being contrived and inauthentic, or exaggerated to caricature, or mechanical and meaningless. Two possible negative extremes are unnatural over-exaggeration and unnatural underexaggeration.

Clara Schumann about conductor Hans von Bülow:
"just because everything is artificial and nothing is felt, so everything is taken to extremes – all *stringendos* and *ritardandos* alike are done too much"
(in Pascall & Weller, 2003, p. 230)

A similar view from conductor Felix Weingartner:
"If neither feeling nor intellect is strong enough, then we get, according to the prevailing fashion, either mere metronomic time-beating or a senseless mania for *nuance*"
(in Pascall & Weller, 2003, p. 237)

The ingredients

I appreciate the characterisation of artistry by Pascall and Weller (discussing tempo flexibility, including the conductors above): "...the middle way [of Brahms] eschews clearly and decisively both the dullness of straight performing and the artificiality of exaggeratedly nuanced 'mannerist' performing, replacing these with the artistry and intensity of felt and lived musicality: spontaneous, yet deeply appropriate to the work because based on familiarity with it, indeed on intimate, internalized knowledge of it. The intensity of focus and expressive energy this implies becomes all the more powerful because of its inbuilt restraint and control – liberating factors in the involvement of the whole human being in re-creation" (2003, p. 239)

1. It is about the balancing act of freedom and restraint. This is especially relevant to rubato: over-the-top tempo changes should be avoided, though a natural freedom is essential. The guiding intent for any freedom must be the 'spirit of the work' (Moser, 1905; see "The Score" below). Note: remember that our challenge as modern musicians is to achieve *more* freedom on this balance.

Pianist Fanny Davies, 1929:
"Brahms's manner of interpretation was free, very elastic and expansive; but the balance was always there – one felt the fundamental rhythms underlying the surface rhythms"
(in Bozarth, 2003, p. 172)

Andreas Moser, Violinschule, 1905:
"freedom is not caprice, but internally assimilated conformity to the law...much harm can be done to the character of a piece by the use of unjustifiable liberties"
(in Brown, 2003, p. 88)

2. It is about spontaneity and diligent study, about both heart and mind, about individuality yet also simply communicating "the work itself". It is about a real sense of making music 'in the moment', of improvisation, yet also acknowledging the markings of the composer (but not prescriptively, for Brahms saw a range of legitimate options!).

Ilona Eibenschütz (student of Clara Schumann) on spontaneity:
"[Brahms] played as if he were just improvising, with heart and soul, sometimes humming to himself, forgetting everything around him. His playing was altogether grand and noble, like his compositions"
(in Musgrave, 2003, p. 304).

Brahms, quoted by Fanny Davies (1929) in the context of tempo choice:
"do it how you like, but make it beautiful"

Richard Strauss, on straightforward conducting:
"After the hyper-refined, inventive and resourceful manner in which von Bulow had interpreted Brahms's music, Brahms's own simpler and more sober way of conducting these pieces made no particular impression. But one heard the work itself"
(in Pascall & Weller, 2003, p. 231)

3. It is about 'good taste and style'. "Taste and style" is a third common theme. To me, it seems to refer to a sense of each musician that is subjective and internal, but also seems to be governed by the expectations of a group. Aural recordings may give clues to the 'taste' of 19th-century artists.

Joachim and Moser, Violinschule, 1905:
"The main point is that the pupil should assimilate the counsel given above [regarding portamento], and that he should endeavour to train his taste and judgment by frequent comparisons of right and wrong, of what is natural with what is unhealthy"
(in Brown, 2003, p. 77)

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THE SCORE

The score is to be respected…

When considering historical style, the *expression must come first*; one must remember that understanding the score is still the priority (especially given the widespread compositional knowledge of performers in this time, RW). The score may be seen as a set of clues for understanding the work's expressive meaning, so analysis is relevant (PDJ): consider the harmony, the form, the phrase lengths and rhythms, the Italian markings, and so on. Metric and melodic accentuation within phrases was expected (Brown, 1999). The aim, as Clara Schumann taught, was:

"to be truthful to the composer's meaning, to emphasize every beauty in the composition"
Adelina De Lara, student of Clara Schumann
(in Musgrave, 2003, p. 316)

It is more important than ever to understand this musical language; in Brahms' case, one must treat his carefully chosen markings with respect and thoughtful attention (BPW).

…But is descriptive, not prescriptive

(Hyun-Su Kim, 2012)

The interpretive task, however, is far more complex and exploratory than 'rolling out the Urtext' as a computer processes a set of commands (NPDC). Written rhythms, for example, are not intended to be mathematically exact (see section on timing). The score is a starting point: not a legislative document but a set of clues to an expressive 'message'.

Andreas Moser, Violinschule, 1905:
"It is not enough to observe the letter; the spirit of the work of art must be brought to life if its performance is to make any impression"
(in Brown, 2003, p. 88)

Cellist Hugo Becker, on music as speech (also applicable to tempo modification):
"Already in everyday speech, the attentive observer will hear that no one actually speaks at all times with a completely neutral tone colour and dynamic. Fluctuations of pitch and volume occur even in the most ordinary speech; how much more, when the person wants to persuade, to convince, to advocate for himself, when he commands or objects, in a word, when he speaks in an *affect*"
(in Bennett Wadsworth, 2017, p. 117)

The performer's task is 'seeing beyond' the markings on the page to the expressive meaning they point to, and utilising various tools to realise this. These tools—like portamento, vibrato effects, and arpeggiation—are often expected even where not explicitly notated, and (considering the *spectrum of possibility* in their use) require the individual musician to make decisions about when and how much to use them (NPDC). An artistic performance delivers *more* than the score, and such an exploration allows individual agency (NPDC)!

Joseph Joachim criticising the Franco-Belgian school of violin playing:
[they] "adhered too strictly to the lifeless printed notes when playing classics, not understanding how to read between the lines"
(in Heike, 2018, p. 59).

TIMING

Tempo markings

Brahms, discussing metronome markings:
"I myself have never believed that my blood and a mechanical instrument go well together"
(in Sherman, 2003, p. 99)

Fanny Davies, 1929:
"...There remains for me only to emphasize perhaps the most important essential in starting to reproduce a work of Brahms – and that is the tempo...All Brahms's passages, if one can call them passages, are strings of gems, and that tempo which can best reveal these gems and help to characterize the detail at the same time as the outlines of a great work must be considered to be the right tempo"
(in Bozarth, 2003, p. 176)

The Italian tempo markings of Brahms were deliberate choices of the composer (sometimes adapted multiple times; BPW) and should be considered important markers of *expressive intent*. Davies suggests searching for a balance between showing overall structure (not too slow) and taking enough time to characterise the detail (not too fast).

In terms of how this equates to metronome markings: "information about absolute tempo in Brahms' music is mostly indirect and often contradictory" (BPW, p. 3). My investigation did not explore this aspect in depth. It seems to me, however, that any actual metronome marking is perhaps of secondary importance; perhaps most important is the way the chosen tempo communicates an expressive intent (*expression must come first*).

Unity of tempo

Andreas Moser, Violinschule, 1905:
"Anyone who does not want, ignorantly, to destroy the unity of a piece by breaking it up into a multitude of separate parts must avoid, even where a *tranquillo* occurs in the course of a movement, breaking into a tempo essentially different from the original one."
(in Brown, 2003, p. 88)

Despite what is said in following sections about the extent of tempo modification, it is relevant to note that 'unity of tempo' and 'imperceptible' tempo changes were upheld as an ideal within the German school (such as in this quote). Brahms also sometimes marked and then removed Italian tempo markings to avoid players exaggerating and causing "histrionics" (Ibid, p. 34).
The fact that these musicians were reacting against other, even more extreme approaches to tempo (BPW) helps contextualise some comments emphasising restraint. Remember for modern players that our challenge is mostly to do *enough*, not *too little*, tempo modification.

Nonetheless, the implications of this balance could include being wary of over-dramatic and abrupt tempo modification, e.g. between major sections.

The idea of an overarching unity of tempo is congruent with the following quote, describing a central skill of the "Joachim school":

"the all-important power of making the tempo FELT throughout a whole movement–not as a worrying condition which hinders, but as the guiding spirit which promotes all expressiveness"
Marion Ranken, student of Joachim, 1939
(in BPW, p. 5)

Flexibility of tempo and rhythm

But if major large-scale alterations between sections are to be avoided, there are innumerable smaller refinements: to me, this is a feeling of naturalness and that the music is alive (RW). From my experience with PDJ, there was a certain feeling of a constantly, subtly fluctuating tempo in the piano part, and being ready for this is useful. It may be helpful in these situations to cultivate 'active listening', anticipating the gesture of the phrase, as well as spontaneity, where both members feel they can act and respond in the moment (PDJ).

Hugo Riemann, 1884:
"Playing truly exactly in tempo (e.g. by the metronome) is without living expression, machine-like, unmusical"
(in Bennett Wadsworth, 2017, p. 116)

***What tempo modification is*:** the ""inspired freedom" of rhythm and tempo within a disciplined conception of the piece as a whole" (BPW, p. 5): a balance of freedom and restraint. It is a distinctive feature of Brahms' playing and this style generally. From my perspective it provides potent tools for helping the music achieve the ideals of natural, 'felt', and singing expression; and the "ingredients" noted above are particularly relevant to this tool.

The following quote is from pianist Fanny Davies, who observed Brahms' playing. This long description is worth pondering, relevant for many applications of tempo flexibility.

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Fanny Davies, 1929:
"Brahms's manner of interpretation was free, very elastic and expansive, but the balance was always there–one felt the fundamental rhythms underlying the surface rhythms. His phrasing was notable in lyric passages. In these a strictly metronomic Brahms is as unthinkable as a fussy or hurried Brahms in passages which must be presented with adamantine rhythm. Behind his often rugged, and almost sketchy playing, there never failed to appear that routine and definite school of technique without which he might sometimes have become almost a caricature of himself. When Brahms played, one knew exactly what he intended to convey to his listeners: aspiration, wild fantastic flights, majestic calm, deep tenderness without sentimentality, delicate, wayward humour, sincerity, noble passion. In his playing, as in his music and in his character, there was never a trace of sensuality...He belonged to that racial school of playing which begins its phrases well, ends them well, leaves plenty of space between the end of one and the beginning of another; and yet joins them without any hiatus."
(in Bozarth, 2003, p. 172)

***What it is not*:** The end goal is freedom and spontaneity as if simply speaking or telling a story (RW). This freedom is not impulsiveness or arbitrary exaggeration, not 'doing whatever you want' (RW). It is instead about expressing the heart of the work in the moment, a sense of oneness with the expressive 'heart' of the work: a directed, intentional task.

Brahms criticising a contrived manner of performing in a letter to Joachim, 1886:
"how often does not someone try to make an impression nowadays with this so-called free artistic rendition – and how easy this is, even with the poorest orchestra and but a single rehearsal!"
(in Philip, 2003, p. 354)

Tips for interpreting the score using expressive timing:

- *Expression must come first*: connect to the emotion of the music. What is the character and intensity of this passage? More intense or vibrant passages may be slightly faster, whereas passages of a subdued or melancholic character may be slower. Also consider the extent of tempo modification: whereas rubato is appropriate for lyrical passages, a more upright rhythm can sometimes be important (for example in a March!), and less rhythmic freedom might be appropriate in faster passages/movements; as Davies notes above, it all depends on the character (though see thesis, section on technical control, Ch. 1).

- Rubato in a phrase: can be described as an elastic band (RW); it is about taking time but then giving it back–a reciprocal relationship. Joachim's rubato was praised for this quality. (Interesting to note that Brahms, in the description below by Davies, perhaps did not always follow this though!)

J. A. F. Maitland, 1905, describing Joachim's rubato:
"a feeling of resilience, of rebound...a constant and perfect restoration of balance between pressure and resistance taking place..."
(in BPW, p. 4)

- Micro-level tempo modification: 'The notes are gesture'. On the small scale, exact, literal rhythms are not the point. Some examples (hairpin treatment below is a further example):

  - *Passages of equal-value notes:* likely not played exactly equal (BPW)! Possibilities include agogic emphasis (slight pause on first of a group, or notes of harmonic interest–then hurrying the remainder), a gestural rendering (RW), or slightly anticipated/delayed melody notes. This slight inequality is about naturalness, and freedom; and remember, it must be connected to a sense of expression (e.g. phrasing or gesture), not arbitrary (RW).
  - *Dotted rhythms* are an approximate expressive tool: the dot is not an exact quantity but can be varied–a *spectrum of possibility*–according to the character: over-dotting can highlight incisive rhythm; under-dotting can demarcate rhythm. (RW, PDJ)
  - *Slurred pairs* can be played "stylishly" with more time on the first note and slight articulation after the second, especially if needing to match a piano articulation (RW)
  - *Ensemble partners* do not necessarily have to be exactly together: for example, some entries could be a touch earlier than marked, anticipating the beat to give a sense of urgency (NPDC).
    | AE: Joachim Bach Adagio (slurred pairs), Hungarian Dances, Romance in C

- Markings such as Italian terms: 'The words are character'. Pascall and Weller describe Brahms' Italian markings as "marks of feeling and expressive quality" (2003, p. 229).
Consider the rubato implications of all markings, for example: *espressivo* (could indicate more free inequality of note values, RW), *grazioso* (seems likely to be quicker), *sostenuto* (slower tempo), *con anima* (livelier tempo), etc.
Consider the rubato implications of dynamics, due to their connection with expression. *Forte* may have a slightly more energetic feeling, *piano* may be slightly more restrained in tempo (though not always!).
| AE: Joachim Romance in C

- One particular, useful example: the hairpin. < > is a distinctive feature of Brahms' music and often indicates temporal modification, not just dynamic change: for example, rushing to the top, emphasising the peak (temporally and tonally e.g. vibrato, portamento etc) and perhaps then regaining tempo if appropriate. < = "becoming more", > = "becoming less" (Hyun-Su Kim, 2012). Treating the hairpin as offering a *spectrum of possibilities* opens a range of expressive options, which should be navigated according to context (NPDC).
| AE: pianists (see below)

Fanny Davies, 1929, on hairpin treatment:
"Like Beethoven, he [Brahms] was most particular that his marks of expression (always as few as possible) should be the means of conveying the inner musical meaning. The sign < >, as used by Brahms, often occurs when he wishes to express great sincerity and warmth, allied not only to the tone but to rhythm also. He would linger not on one note alone, but on a whole idea, as if unable to tear himself away from its beauty. He would prefer to lengthen a measure or phrase rather than spoil it by making up the time into a metronomic bar"
(in Bozarth, 2003, p. 172).

STRING PLAYING TECHNIQUES

A particularly distinctive (and potentially confronting) feature of this style is the use of portamento and vibrato. I refer particularly to Joachim and Moser's Violinschule *(1905; abbreviated "J&M").*

Vibrato

Joachim and Moser, 1905, describing vibrato:
"the factor in tone production by which the original rigidity of the objectively beautiful tone may be softened to the extent that the resulting enlivened tone can generate a sense of beneficial warmth in the listener"
(in Brown, 2003, p. 66)

Joachim and Moser, on appropriate use:
"A tasteful violinist with healthy sensitivity will always recognise the steady tone as the normal one, and will only use vibrato where the requirements of the expression compellingly suggest it"
(in Brown, 2003, p. 66)

***What it is*:** vibrato is used for expressive peaks or important notes in a phrase, for example at *messa di voce* hairpins (J&M). Compared to modern violin playing, the historical style employed a vibrato that was always very narrow and infrequent (RW). Despite this, there is a *spectrum of possibility*: consider the variable speed of the narrow vibrato, for example. J&M describe four types: fast, slow, slow to fast, and fast to slow (Brown, 2003, p. 65).
The expression must come first: consider especially how vibrato can be affected by emotional intensity; also consider how the markings on the score may affect its use: *piano espressivo* might have hardly any (Ranken, 1939, in BPW); *forte appassionato*, by contrast, might have more (J&M).
| AE: Joachim, Romance in C

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***What it is not*:** Never constant and continuous; never habitually applied without regard to the expression. The German school warned strongly against this, particularly reacting against the Franco-Belgian school that was to dominate the violin style of the 20th-century (Wilson, 2014).

Joachim and Moser, 1905:

"a superfluity of this expressive device, especially in the wrong place, calls forth a feeling of extreme discomfort in the listener"...
(in Brown, 2003, p. 66)

Expressive effect (my experience): a more 'pure' and perhaps sweeter sound. Allows one to hear the pitch in the piano's harmony and blend with the piano sound (also RW). Creates less intense expression, and less tension in the left hand (HIP writer Bruce Haynes describes vibrato as "MSG" (2007)!). I find it may also encourage greater attention to using the bow to shape phrasing.
| AE: Modern emulation of Joachim Romance: https://youtu.be/19_bwbDZAhU

Portamento

What it is: Joachim and Moser considered portamento "a connecting bridge of sound" that imitates singing; it is like the connection of sounds within a word (in Brown, 2003, p. 72). One of the most distinctive features of the German violin school, their portamento use would have been very prominent and heavy to modern ears; almost all shifts were audible, and especially major expressive intervals (RW). Always shift with 'drag and drop' method, in the old bow (RW)–but with the illusion of a complete connection (Spohr, 1832 in J&M; in Brown, 2003, p. 73).

Joachim and Moser on portamento:

Speed of the shift depends "entirely on the character of the passage in question whether the portamento is to be executed slowly or quickly, with tenderness or with passion"
(in Brown, 2003, p. 73)

Consider the *spectrum of possibility*: this is not a binary on/off decision; variables like shifting speed offer a range of options. There is a range of possible expressive functions: considering that *the expression must come first*, ask, what is the character here?
The expressive possibilities include much more than "sentimentality" (Bennett Wadsworth, 2017, p. 66)! Could be "sighing", could be "intensifying" (Brahms, Brown, & Peres Da Costa, 2015, p. XXI). Consider the particular interval: some use of portamento, particular of smaller intervals, may not be emotional as such, but instead used for more rhetorical purposes to end a phrase (Bennett Wadsworth, 2017, p. 74)
| AE: Marie Soldat, Adelina Patti

What it is not: even though we are more restrained now, there were limits to appropriateness of portamento frequency and prominence; the balance of freedom and restraint applies, and the desire to avoid caricature (J&M). However, remember that our challenge is avoiding the opposite extreme of very clean shifts!

Joachim and Moser, 1905:

"By the constant use of obtrusive and wrongly executed portamentos it can become disfigured to the point of caricature"
(in Brown, 2003, p. 77)

Expressive effect (my experience): I find that 'vocal' portamento fits well with the sound of less vibrato and the complex tone of gut strings. As with many other aspects, singing a phrase is a useful exercise for experimenting with portamento as an expressive tool.

Bowing and tone

Bowstrokes: Subtle use of the bow, imitating singing, is important to the German violin school, which criticised the lack of attention to bow control in the Franco-Belgian school (J&M). In general, bow use is connected to the string and heavy (RW); legato, with fewer off-strokes (BPW). This can be helpful to know for articulation.
Quavers with dots will not be off, only separated, and likely *martele* in the upper half; quavers with dots under a slur indicate *portato* to Brahms (RW). I find it useful to know that Brahms' staccato notation was not usually intended to denote an incisive or aggressive shortness; conversely, notes with dots can be approached with a round sound, depending on the context, and may not be off-the-string. *Leggiero*, however, would indicate an off-stroke.
In choice of bow strokes, *expression must come first*: for example, Moser recommends the use of *martele* for passages of "energy and taut rhythm", whereas spiccato is more light in character and thus could be used where "musical thoughts require a light, graceful accent"; *Spiccato* has also been described by Joachim as "snow, rain, or hail"—exhibiting a *spectrum of possibility*. (In Brown, 2003, p. 81)

Tone: Violinists of this era seem to have favoured a direct tone with a generally heavy bow (RW) (perhaps less 'airy' *tasto* sounds, though Wilhelmj does consider *tasto* integral for *dolce* colours; in BPW, p. 14).
One particular effect that Joachim is said to have used frequently is a particularly "intense, concentrated tone", used for certain "deep and intense passages"; this was created at any dynamic through the use of slow bow, little if any vibrato, and string contact where "hairs grip firmly though delicately" (Ranken, in BPW, p. 14).
Another description of Joachim's tone described it as a horn or a clarinet (especially showing the different approach to vibrato) (Davies, 1929, in Bennett Wadsworth, 2017, p. 148).

Fingering and instrument setup

Fingering: Nineteenth-century fingering choices are important and are related to this style's sound. Harmonics and open strings were used more frequently, in accordance with the preference for less vibrato (BPW). Using same-string fingerings may be appropriate "in order to obtain a certain unity of colouring", connected by portamento (J&M; in Brown, 2003, p. 76).
For Brahms' violin sonatas, the Barenreiter editions are a useful starting point for fingerings!

Instrument setup: Nineteenth-century violinists used the same instrument setup as us (including modern bow), the main difference being the use of gut strings (RW). These are quieter than steel strings and have a more complex/sweet/natural tone. I feel that the 'narrow-vibrato, heavy-shifting' sound of the historical style somehow makes more aesthetic sense and is less confronting with gut strings.

Aspects to consider for chamber music with piano

It is worthwhile for string players to acknowledge piano performance practice as well; this contributes significantly to the overall aesthetic experience. Throughout this section, I draw especially from Peres Da Costa (2012) and his contributions to the Barenreiter editions (BPW). I have also been assisted by Peter De Jager.

Arpeggiation and dislocation: Just as string players used portamento and vibrato as expressive tools, pianists of the nineteenth century made use of certain expressive devices pertinent to their instrument. Arpeggiation, or rolling chords, was expected and was a central feature of the style. Dislocation between melody notes and accompaniment was also widely employed, providing "emphasis and relief to melody notes" (Peres Da Costa, 2012, p. 72) and giving a lyrical singing quality.
In the use of these tools, the *expression must come first*: Both techniques can be used to energise or soften attack, for example.
There is once again a *spectrum of possibility* in their use: for example, for determining the speed of arpeggiation and distance of dislocation.
Note: Be aware that Brahms' markings for rolling may be considered indicators of where it was essential–but other arpeggiation was also expected (the score is descriptive, not prescriptive). I find that, similar to the use of tempo modification, these techniques can give the music a less mechanical, more 'human' feeling.
Note: Tempo modification is also important to consider in ensemble settings, especially the part with the moving line (RW). Experiment with not needing to be precisely together and risk exaggeration (NPDC).

Instrument setup: The sound of piano in Brahms' ear would have been different to the modern steel-frame piano. With a much smaller, straight-strung design, the piano would have been quieter and had a more subtle sound. This would have had implications for the projection of the violin (complementing the subtle, natural sound of gut strings) as well as the clarity of the texture (for example, clarity of Brahms' often very low and intricate basslines). (RW)

| AE: Eibenschütz, De Lara, Davies, Etelka Freund

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Throughout this document, I used the following acronyms:

- AE: Aural examples.
- RW: Dr Robin Wilson. Comments gained from my personal consultations with Wilson.
- NPDC: Professor Neal Peres Da Costa. Comments gained from my personal consultations with Peres Da Costa.
- PDJ: Peter De Jager. Comments gained from my personal experiences with Peter De Jager.
- BPW: Brown, C., Peres Da Costa, N., & Bennett Wadsworth, K. (2016). *Performing practices in Johannes Brahms' chamber music.* Kassel, Germany: Barenreiter Verlag.
- J&M: Joachim, J., & Moser, A. (1905). *Violinschule* (Vol. 1-3) (A. Moffat, Trans.). London, United Kingdom: N. Simrock. (most quotes above in Brown, 2003).

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Appendix D: Ethics Documentation

[redacted for publication]

The Griffith University ethics protocol for this project is 2019/792.

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