PART I

Stages of creative development and reception

1 Brahms the Hamburg musician 1833–1862

KURT HOFMANN

Family background

Brahms's family associations with North Germany were long and deep. His forebears on his mother's side came from Schleswig-Holstein. They can be traced to Itzehoe, Tondem, Leck and Flensburg, and included school teachers, pastors and aldermen, several of whom belonged to the Schleswig-Holstein minor nobility: one of the most famous of them, the engraver Melchior Lorch (1527–86, the creator of the so-called 'Elbekarte' which bears his name), was also a prominent portrait painter. Research on the mother's side reveals a line traceable to connections with the Swedish king Gustav Wasa (1496–1560). Brahms's maternal grandfather, Peter Radeloff Nissen, migrated from Itzehoe to Hamburg, where, on 4 July 1789, Brahms's mother, Johanna Henrica Christiane Brahms, was born. The forebears on the paternal side led from Heide in Holstein, the birthplace of Brahms's father, Johann Jacob, to Brunsbüttel and further over the Elbe back to Lower Saxony, to the area between the Elbe and the Weser. It was from there that Peter Brahms, Brahms's great-grandfather, migrated to Holstein around 1750. His son Johann came from Brunsbüttel via Meldorf to Wöhrden, a suburb of Heide. His first-born son, Peter Hinrich, Brahms's uncle, later occupied the house that still exists today as the Heide *Brahmshaus*, (now in the possession of the Schleswig-Holstein *Brahms Gesellschaft*). In another, strongly built house in the market place in Heide, Brahms's father, Johann Jacob, was born. The paternal forebears were chiefly craftsmen and minor tradesmen.

The family name Brahms or Brahmst is fairly well disseminated in North Germany. The variants Bramst, Braamst, Brahm, even Bramst and Brambst are to be found in the seventeenth century in church registers in the vicinity of Cuxhaven (Lower Saxony). These variants are dialect forms, reflecting the spelling given to the officiating minister at the time of a birth or death: personal documentation did not then exist. There is therefore no conclusive identity to the family name; it is a question of ancient versions copied down at the time of christening, a practice which has still not completely disappeared from North Germany and especially
[3] Ostfriesland: an interpretation of the name as derived from *Bram*, the

golden-yellow gorse bush of the area, as suggested by Max Kalbeck, is one possibility.[1] The name 'Brahmst' stood on Brahms's father's nameplate. The young Johannes often deleted the 't' at the end, explaining to Richard Heuberger as late as 1893 that 'gradually I got my father to give up the "t"'.[2] In Hamburg, Johann Jacob had had 'a description of the coat of arms and lineage of the name Brahms' drawn up by Kettnich's 'Wappen-Comptoir' ('Heraldic Depository') in Berlin.[3] The four-sided large-format documentation – which Brahms himself carefully preserved – relates the noble descent of the 'von Brahms' family to the middle of the seventeenth century, its origins supposedly in the 'Brahmins of India', who had travelled to Holland. The 'genealogical coat of arms' belonging to it hung in the living room of the Brahms family.[4]

Johann Jacob Brahms devoted five years to the study of music in Meldorf, Heide and Wesselburen. He mastered the violin, viola, cello, flute and flügelhorn, but later his main instrument was the double bass. Thus equipped, he came to Hamburg with his letter of apprenticeship at the beginning of 1826. He first played as a wind and string player in places of entertainment in the Hamburger Berg district, in what was known from 1833 as the 'Vorstadt St Pauli' (St Pauli Suburb), and as a street musician in the city's little alleys and courtyards. These offered the only possibilities for such music-making within the Hamburg city limits. After he had become acquainted with Johanna Henrica Christiane Nissen, later to be his wife, in 1829 and had found lodgings in her home, Ulricusstrasse 37, this solid, vigorous and industrious man looked out for his best prospects. Upon swearing the civic oath ('Bürgereid') in Low German on 21 May 1830, he was made a citizen of Hamburg. This was a requirement for marriage and any professional activity, and might even lead to the acquisition of landed property.

In order to categorise the social position of the Brahms family, it must be related to issues of cost and income in the so-called Hamburg 'lower class'. Rental costs for accommodation make a good starting point. The average annual rental for a 'modest' worker's dwelling – possessing a kitchen-cum-living room with a fireplace and a bedroom, the so-called 'alcove', in which a double bed was customary – amounted in 1842 (that is, before the great fire of Hamburg), to around 60 Hamburg marks; 'better' accommodation, with stoves and a living-room and two alcoves cost at that time around 84 marks annually. Half of the apartments of Hamburg in the Old and New Towns cost less than 100 marks annually. As a result of the Hamburg fire, which destroyed 1,749 houses, not only did the supply of accommodation for the lower classes decrease, but the cost of rent rose, especially for newly built houses, which now were mostly built with only four storeys. However, housing supply diminished not only because of the

Hamburg fire, but also owing to the steady increase in the existing population. A glance at the population statistics indicates this unequivocally. For example, though Hamburg already had 115,862 inhabitants in 1848, this number had risen in four years to 123,299, an increase of just under 6½ per cent that almost amounted to a population explosion.

In 1848, the annual income of a bricklayer was 498 marks for an eleven-hour day, six days a week, that of a carpenter (a joiner) 518 marks – to take only the highest earners among the lower classes. In 1848, a family of five had to pay 218 marks to cover the barest necessities of life, according to the calculations of the Hamburg poorhouse. If one adds to these essentials heating, lighting, clothing and schooling, at least 500 marks were required to cover the necessary commitments. And a quarter of the income had to be set aside for the rental. Rising rental costs meant less money for the essentials. This left child labour as the only possibility for improving income: the 13–14-year-olds earned 2–3 marks a week as drudges, that is, between 104 and 156 marks a year. If essential expenses exceeded income, cheaper accommodation had to be found; and this meant coming down in the world. The average family lived, therefore, from hand to mouth, and could be classed as the 'potentially poor'.

To return to the Hamburg Bürger Johann Jacob, however, one must distinguish between the lower middle class, which was qualified for the most general trades, and the middle class proper, whose members were required to have a considerable business. Since Brahms's father had applied to the Hamburg civil militia ('Bürgerwehr') as a 'musician' ('Musicus'), acquiring the rights of a free citizen was a costly affair. Johann Jacob had to show that he was in possession of uniform, weapon and movable property. On top of this, he had to pay at least 74 marks, a sum which approximated to a year's rent. It is already clear from this that Johann Jacob's social position at this time was on the borderline between the middle class and lower class, in the so-called 'Stand der kleinen Leute'.

On 26 May 1830 he became a 'Musicus' (musician) and a member of the 2nd Infantry Battalion of the Hamburg Bürgerwehr. Later, from 1837 until the Bürgerwehr's subsequent dissolution in 1867, he was a flügelhornist in the 2nd Jäger company. His monthly pay in 1867 amounted to 24 Hamburg marks. On his discharge he received the 'silver medal for good service' and a two-thirds pension as 'Oberjäger' (lit. 'leading hunter') for the rest of his life. The 'Instructions for the Members of the Music Corps of the *Bürger Militär*' dated 3 June 1839, which Johann Jacob was given, were carefully preserved by his son. On 9 June 1830, Johann Jacob married Johanna Henrica Christiane Nissen, seventeen years his senior. His social rise can be dated from this point. On 31 May

1831 he became one of the founder members of the Hamburger Musikverein by the 1840s he was considered to be one of the best double bass players in Hamburg). Beginning – from 1831 – as a deputy for the second violinist, he was from 1840 a regular member of the sextet of the Hamburg Alsterpavillon, which well-to-do Hamburgers liked to frequent. The earnings for each individual engagement were between 3 and 5 marks. His annual income in 1840 was somewhere between 804 and 1,002 marks. This total came jointly from his pay as a member of the civil militia and the earnings as double bassist of the Alsterpavillon sextet. Later we also have to add the income from his activity as a member of the Stadttheater, as a member of the orchestra of the Philharmonic concerts, and as organiser and active participant in chamber music evenings. Altogether, therefore, Johann Jacob had a very healthy annual income, as is indirectly to be confirmed from the last letter of Brahms's mother to her son (between 26 and 30 January 1865),[5] which reports quite astonishing outgoings and income: for example, that the father's income in 1864 was 1,800 marks. That the money sometimes did not suffice had less to do with the father's income than with his bursts of spending, in which he could only have indulged, however, if sufficient money were left over after the covering of all expenses. Accordingly, one cannot properly speak of poor circumstances in the parental home. If the statistics of the year 1867 testify that 20 per cent of Hamburgers lived in 'good' economic circumstances, we may conclude that Johann Jacob Brahms had already lived for around twenty years in this way. As for his social position, we can align it with that of Brahms's first teacher Otto Cossel.

One might compare him with the fathers of several other important composers, such as the father (and grandfather) of Beethoven, and the fathers of Carl Maria von Weber, Cherubini and Richard Strauss. Enterprising, calculating (except where his own finances were concerned), free-spirited and with an earthy sense of humour, this musician (who always spoke Low German) pursued no higher goal in life than to live it to the full and with the greatest enjoyment. He still enjoyed dancing in later years, and still played in the convivial *Lokals*, many of which later – though not, it should be noted, in the period of the son's youth – fell into disrepute. The achievement of his father, who had risen from the rank of rural petit bourgeois to that of a respected Bürger, a music teacher even, was always admired by the son: this was his role model.

The young married couple lived from Martinmas 1830 (11 November) in the Cordes Hof building, Bäckerbreitergang, where, on 11 February 1831, Brahms's elder sister Wilhelmine Louise Elisabeth (known as Elise) was born. In autumn 1831, again at Martinmas, the family of three took rooms on the first floor, left, in the back courtyard of

Schlüters Hof, Speckgang 24 (later Speckstrasse 60). Here, in a small room, Johannes Brahms was born on Tuesday 7 May 1833. Since the publication of Kalbeck's biography, the Brahms literature has made the seemingly ineradicable mistake of describing the living conditions of the Brahms family as poor and as determined by the worsening of their finances.[6] The portrayal of the birthplace as being in 'one of the most disreputable, narrow and darkest alleys in the notorious *Gängeviertel*', and as 'harbouring rabble of all kinds in its murkiest shadows' in the Brahms literature rests on the impressions first received by Kalbeck during his stay in Hamburg (though Alfred von Ehrmann still describes it so in 1933).[7] But this was the period around 1901. These were impressions of that time, which had nothing to do with Brahms's early years in the era of sailing ships. In Brahms's youth Hamburg was still a small city: parts of it belonged to Denmark or to the Kingdom of Hannover. Hamburg was still outside the German customs zone. At that time, in the epoch before the industrial revolution, the Hamburg *Neustadt* was not yet threatened by the extension of the harbour and the redevelopment of the city. The *Gängeviertel* arose through the disposition of smaller paths (*Gänge*) which had been laid out between the single small gardens inside the Hamburg city walls. In the seventeenth century, half-timbered houses were built on these little plots of land, which could only be reached through the prescribed *Gänge*. These houses were as a rule clean, indeed partly tended in the Dutch manner (with clean white curtains and flowering plants), and interspersed with trees and gardens. The inhabitants of the *Neustadt* ('New Town', so called since 1626) were predominantly middle-class people, minor tradesmen and respected artisans. Accommodation in the environs of the Stadttheater in the Dammthorstrasse and of the many other cultural establishments, was in great demand by musicians, singers, actors and other theatre people. The social classes were very mixed. Brahms's second teacher Eduard Marxsen, the most famous music pedagogue of his time in Hamburg, lived in the so-called 'Caffamacherreihe' near the Stadttheater, after the Hamburg fire of May 1842. He actually lived next to a widow who placed her rooms at the disposal of 'girls' in order to improve her income. This was also the case in the Dammthorwall, where, at No. 29, stood the house we can properly designate the 'Brahms House'. For it was here that young Johannes grew up and lived from his ninth until his seventeenth full year. From this house he went out for the first time into the public world of music, and it was here, as he later famously told Joseph Viktor Widmann, that 'the most beautiful *Lieder* came to me before dawn when I was cleaning my boots'.[8] The fact that the Brahms family changed their accommodation a total of eight times between 1830 and 1864 has nothing to do with their suppos-

edly poor circumstances. An examination of each separate address in the census report drawn up at that time by the Hamburg civil militia results in a quite different conclusion: the apartments became bigger and more expensive.

The following list of the Brahms family homes between 1830 and 1864 differs from that to be drawn from Kalbeck's account and underlines the social rise of the father and the family.[9]

Period	*Address*	*Annual rent*
M 1830 – M 1831	Bäckerbreitergang 78 II, Cordes Hof	70 Hamburg marks
M 1831 – M 1833	Speckgang 24, Schlüters Hof	72 Hamburg marks
M 1833 – M 1836	Ulricusstrasse 15	108 Hamburg marks
M 1836 – M 1838	1. Erichstrasse above No. 7 Hamburger Berg, St Pauli Vorstadt	not known
1838? (according to Brahms's mother)	Schaarmarkt (hitherto never noted)	
M 1838 – M 1841	Ulricussstrasse above No. 38	90 Hamburg marks
M 1841 – S 1850	Dammthorwall 29	250 Hamburg marks up to May 1842; 300 marks after the city fire
S 1850 – S 1852	Kurze Mühren 13 I (new building after the fire)	225 Hamburg marks
S 1852 – S 1857	Lilienstrasse 7 I (where Clara Schumann lived in April 1855 with the Brahms family)	156 Hamburg marks
S 1857 – June 1864	Neustädter Hohe Fuhlentwiete 74 II	400 Hamburg marks

(M = Martinmas/November; S = Spring)

Contrary to general custom, the father had published a birth announcement in the *Wöchentlichen Nachrichten* on 8 May, so overjoyed was he at the birth of a son. The baptism was celebrated on 26 May in the great St Michaeliskirche. The two godfathers were his grandfather Johann Brahms from Heide and his uncle Philip Detmering (whose marriage to Brahms's aunt Christina Friederica (née Nissen) produced two sons, Heinrich and Christian). The third godparent was a Katharina Margaretha Stäcker (of whom we know no more). The family lived in the house of Brahms's birth for only six months before they moved to a bigger apartment at Ulricusstrasse 15, where the third son Friedrich, called Fritz, was born on 26 March 1835. At that time and even beyond the turn of the century, it was customary in Hamburg to move house regularly, because the landlord had to cover the cost of renovation.

The little flaxen-haired, blue-eyed 'Jehann' or 'Hannes', as he was called, was a small, delicate, pallid, dreamy but also playful boy. Like his

sister, he suffered until puberty from nervous headaches. The father soon noticed that the child, whilst playing with his lead soldiers or with beans, immediately took notice when he practised his instrument. The genius manifested itself when the father realised that Brahms could effortlessly repeat correctly all the melodies that he heard: the child had absolute pitch. He discovered for himself a system of notation even before his father gave him music lessons. Brahms learnt to play the violin, was instructed in the fundamentals of cello playing, and the natural horn became one of his favourite instruments. At an early stage he received piano lessons from a colleague of his father. Kalbeck's assertion that there was no piano in the family home because of their meagre circumstances is not true. Elise Giesemann, a youthful friend from his time at Winsen (1847 and 1851), later wrote to Brahms, specifically recalling a piano 'which [stood] in your room' – obviously the family living room.[10] From 1839 Brahms went to an elementary school, and from 1842 to 1848 attended a good 'Bürgerschule'. Here he even learnt foreign languages. 'I read French quite well', he vouchsafed to his publisher Fritz Simrock as late as 1893.[11] There exists one Christmas greeting to his parents written in French, as well as an autograph two-sided letter composed in French to the French pianist Caroline de Serres of April 1889.[12] Nothing comparable is known of his skills in English. He could certainly read English but he never mastered the spoken language. School attendance was at that time voluntary and must obviously have been regarded as essential by the parents; the cost was in the region of 15 to 20 marks quarterly. That this expense was considered feasible for all three children is further indication of the secure social position of the Brahms family.

At the end of 1840 Brahms started piano lessons with Otto Friedrich Willibald Cossel (1813–65).

Cossel, taught by Eduard Marxsen, was considered an excellent teacher. Brahms placed great faith in him and continued to respect his memory in later years, commenting even in June 1896 to Richard Heuberger, 'you would hardly get a better grounding today than I received from my first teacher Cossel'.[13] Cossel had introduced Brahms to the essentials of the piano literature. His thesis that the pianist should be able to express through his fingers what he felt in his heart was absorbed by Brahms, as friends could see for themselves when he played for his intimate circle. Thus Joseph Joachim, in his first description of the young Brahms, wrote to his friend Gisela von Arnim on 20 October 1854 that he 'already makes music quite divinely, I have never heard piano playing (apart from that of Liszt) that satisfied me so completely.'[14] Among Cossel's papers (many of which were destroyed in the Second World War) are to be found several manuscripts and printed editions which bear

witness to the young musician's hours of study. These are (1) a page with a Study 'Allegro' written out by Cossel with the comment 'when passing the thumb under, the elbow must remain quite still'; (2) fugue No. 4 from J. S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* BWV 849 written out by Cossel, with fingerings in his hand and also that of Brahms; in addition, Cossel has written out another study, of sixteen bars in 3/4, on the empty verso (3) the 'Gavotte by J. C. von Gluck' (*sic*) in a single printed sheet by the Hamburg publisher Johann August Böhme (c. 1842); (4) 'Momens musicals' by Franz Schubert (D. 780, Nos. 4–6), published by the Vienna publisher Diabelli in a reprint of c. 1830; (5) 'Deutsche Tänze und Ecossaisen' by Franz Schubert in a reprint by Böhme.[15] The fugue by Bach provides the most certain indication of when Brahms first became involved with his music, though in a largely technical way, as the numerous fingerings confirm. The Schubert publication confirms that the young Brahms was already drawing near to the art of the Viennese masters, and the 'Gavotte of Gluck' certainly became one of his favourite pieces; this publication was doubtless the starting point for his own later arrangement of the piece 'for Frau Clara Schumann' (McCorkle, *Werkverzeichnis*, Anhang 1 N. 2), and the preoccupation with this dance form may also have contributed to the origins of his own Gavottes (McCorkle WoO 3). Though Cossel first gave instruction in finger exercises and studies, Brahms later took on works by Czerny, Clementi, Cramer, Hummel and Kalkbrenner. This and other piano music he also practised in the family house on the Dammthorwall. Brahms must have immediately made quick progress in piano playing, since one can reasonably conclude that regular practice was not possible in the family home owing to the cramped living conditions, and out of consideration for his mother and sister, who had to work there.[16]

Study with Marxsen and first public appearances

In 1843 the ten-year-old *Wunderkind* had his first public success before an invited audience. He played an Etude by Henri Herz and also the piano part in Beethoven's Wind Quintet Op. 16, and in a Mozart piano quartet. As a result of this appearance, an offer was made by an impresario to let the young Brahms appear in America. Otto Cossel could only restrain the eager father by ensuring that Brahms would study wholly with Eduard Marxsen, Hamburg's leading teacher, who had previously resisted taking sole responsibility. After a long period of reflection, Marxsen took over the instruction around 1845. Brahms 's brother Fritz was likewise taught by Cossel and later by Marxsen. Through Marxsen, Brahms came to know the works of Beethoven, and, thirsty for knowledge, studied in Marxsen's

extensive library. There still survives a copy of Schindler's Beethoven biography of 1840 with the autograph signature of Eduard Marxsen and the visible evidence of the young Brahms's extensive reading: numerous turned-down page corners and distinctive markings can be identified in the volume, which Brahms probably borrowed from the teacher.[17] Marxsen's instruction was devoted to the classics; Brahms did not get to know either Chopin or Schumann, let alone Liszt's transcriptions. Instruction in theory and composition only followed later when Marxsen recognised the youth's creative strength. Marxsen often spoke of this period on later occasions, as when he wrote to Hermann Levi in 1873:

> restless eagerness and application awakened my interest more and more, and the manifestly rapid progress strengthened my opinion that an extraordinary God-given talent was here to be developed. I even taught him without any financial return for the necessary period. From the beginning of the studies, a clear- and deep-thinking spirit was apparent, and yet later on original creation became difficult for him and required a real amount of encouragement on my side. We also busied ourselves with the study of form. None the less the talent quickly developed, in my opinion more beautifully and significantly, even though at that time he had not yet produced a great work. When Mendelssohn's death was announced [in 1847] I observed to a friend from the deepest conviction 'a master of art is departed, a greater blooms in Brahms.'[18] Consequently he progressed with even greater speed to create outstanding songs and instrumental music, which later appeared in print.

In placing Marxsen's comments in perspective, however, one should note that this letter was written at a time when Brahms's renown as a composer was already established.

Marxsen's piano lessons lasted until 1847, the composition and theory lessons until 1848. Otto Cossel had already complained of Brahms in 1842 that 'it is a pity about him, he could be such a good player, but he will not stop his never-ending composing'.[19] Brahms later elaborated on this himself to J. V. Widmann: 'I composed, but only in secret and very early in the morning. All day I arranged marches for wind music and at night I sat at the keyboard in pubs.'[20] The twelve-year-old played a piano sonata in G minor to his youthful friend Luise Japha (later Langhans-Japha). This lost work must be his first known composition. In addition, Kalbeck notes that Brahms had composed at Christmas 1845 some 'Zwischenaktmusik' for the 'Theater Pittoresque', now lost, at the instigation of a Hamburg puppeteer in the Deichstrasse. That Brahms in later years was extremely disdainful of Marxsen's instruction, which he had at first praised to Louise Japha, can be explained by the reservations of his mother which emerge in her letters from the years 1854 and 1855. The parental home

apparently had little faith in Brahms as a composer, thinking he would do better to give concerts and thereby ensure income for the essentials of life.[21] His mother was strengthened in her opinion by Marxsen, whom she had asked for advice concerning the matter. Marxsen too hardly believed Brahms to be capable of a freelance career as a composer, since he himself could not survive by composition. Brahms, who only a little earlier had been publicly promoted by Robert Schumann, no less, as the coming Messiah in his famous article 'New Paths', must have been severely affected by these attempts to make his own mind up for him. Moreover, his first works had already appeared in December 1853 from the leading Leipzig publisher Breitkopf & Härtel, establishing a degree of fame as a composer. Clara Schumann, who visited Brahms's parents' home in 1855, commented on this in her diary: 'It is so sad to me to see that they understand so little. The mother and sister can sense only that there is something extraordinary in him, but the father and brother cannot even do that.'[22] This remark certainly indicates the difficulty of the young Brahms's situation with his family. He depended entirely on his parents: they had enabled him to have a good education, but on the other hand they could not, or did not wish to, follow him into his world of the imagination. Marxsen's lessons had the goal of making him into an outstanding pianist. That was what the progressive studies and fundamental grounding in theory were for. Moreover, the development of Brahms the young pianist happened at a time when popular taste determined the content of programmes for anyone appearing in public. Salon pieces, fantasias and variations were popular, followed by folk music, especially music from the Scandinavian countries, and above all from Scandinavian artists such as Ole Bull and Jenny Lind, who performed in Hamburg. It was mainly this kind of music that the young Brahms came to know. This is reflected in the programme of his first appearance in a concert of the violinist Birgfeld on 20 November 1847: Brahms played the 'Norma Fantasy' of Sigismund Thalberg. The critics of the Hamburg paper *Freyschütz* of 27 November extolled the performance of the 'little virtuoso named J. Brahms', 'who not only displayed fine preparation, precision, clarity, strength and security, but has also acquired the spiritual, creative inclination and received excited and undivided applause on all sides'. On the day the criticism appeared, the little virtuoso was again to be heard. He played a duo for two pianos by Thalberg in a musical soiree together with the recitalist Therese Meyer. The Hamburg newspapers noted the young pianist 'Broms' or called him 'Bruhns' and attested to his exceptional talent and solid artistry. At the 'Memorial Celebration to honour the departed composer Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy' which was given by the Philharmonic Society on 22 November 1847, the young Brahms also

took part. He carefully preserved the programme with works of Beethoven, Cherubini, Mendelssohn and Graun.[23]

When Brahms commented to Widmann that 'at night he sat at the keyboard in pubs' it must not be assumed, as has been long believed, that these were 'notorious places'. Kalbeck's remark that 'to observe the picture of the unspoilt blondhaired, blue-eyed child and youth playing in unthinkably dreadful company has something deeply affecting about it' is simply false, and its facts have never been established.[24] Brahms never played in 'Tanzbordellen'. Unfortunately he portrayed himself in similar terms in his later years to Max Friedländer, as Robert Haven Schauffler has reported.[25] Of course, as a result of the location of his home in the Stadttheater district, he would have seen 'women of easy virtue' and their clients. He would have been shamed by these circumstances when he came to Düsseldorf and met Robert and Clara Schumann. But it is out of the question that he could have played for dancing in bordellos, for Paragraph 15 of the Hamburg statute of 1834, 'Regulation concerning Bordellos and Prostitution', specifies 'No landlords or girls should permit entry to young people under the age of twenty.' And under Paragraph 16 it even says that 'all dance music is forbidden in bordellos'. When Brahms commented on or alluded in later years to playing in sailors' taverns to Siegfried Ochs and Josef Victor Widmann (as well as Friedländer),[26] he was really appealing to the cult of the hero so prevalent in the nineteenth century: he could be certain that the people with whom he was in conversation would admire his rise as a genius from such a background all the more. In this endeavour, only Max Kalbeck exceeded him in portraying his youth, even having the presumption to assert that 'Brahms grasped every opportunity to strike up a tune for dancing with all ten fingers.'[27] Yet on the other hand, Kalbeck also quotes Luise Langhans-Japha as indicating that Brahms 'never recalled [to her] that he had to play dance music'.[28] Brahms's aversion to presenting himself openly remained with him throughout his life. By Brahms's time, the word *Kneipe* had acquired much better connotations than it had had in the eighteenth century, when it was still was used for all small and low-class taverns. Since the liberation wars of 1813, when the students took this word over for their collective meetings, it had already become a fashionable word for different kinds of *Gasthäuser* or inns, and the words *Wirtshaus* and *Schenke* were almost completely forced out of general usage. *Kneipe* now designated better eating places as well as simple *Wirtshäuser*.[29] The word does not indicate that Brahms played in sailors' taverns. The sailors generally ventured only into the suburb of St Pauli outside the city limits; Johann Jacob played there before 1830 and from 1836 to 1838 when Johannes was five years old, but never the son. A friend of Brahms's youth, the pianist Christian

Miller, saw him playing for a dance on one occasion in 1846. Adolf Steiner has described it thus: 'At that time Brahms played on Sundays in a summer inn in Bergedorf near Hamburg for a fee of two thalers for the whole afternoon. There the young Miller heard him for the first time and was so impressed with his playing that he took the opportunity to perform with him. On the next Sunday the young people walked together towards Bergedorf and regaled their unsuspecting guests with four-handed piano playing.'[30] The summer hostelry referred to must have been the Gasthof 'Zur schönen Aussicht' in Bergedorf bei Hamburg, or the Gasthof 'Stadt Hamburg', a late eighteenth-century half-timbered building opposite the church of St Peter and St Paul, which still exists today.

The well-known anecdote according to which Brahms played for 'Twee Daler und duhn' (*Plattdeutsch* for 'Zwei Thaler und zu trinken, so viel er will': 'Two thalers and as much to drink as you want')[31] has even been connected quite erroneously with the 'Kneipen' in the harbour; this completely overlooks the fact that it referred to only one event in the private house of the Hamburg piano maker Schröder in the Grosser Burstah. According to Miller's report, Brahms earned two thalers in an afternoon or evening for his performance. One can readily assess the value of the income, since the value of a thaler at that time was 2 marks 8 schillings in Hamburg currency. Brahms therefore earned 5 marks for an afternoon. In comparison, it is worth noting that a week's wages for a printer was 9 marks and 13⅓ schillings, and that of a lithographer between 12 and 15 marks.[32] If one takes the average annual rent of 1848, namely 84 marks, as a further comparison, it is clear that from his fourteenth year Brahms was well rewarded for his activity as a pianist. Christian Otterer, who was a violist colleague of Johann Jacob in the orchestra of the Hamburg Stadttheater and a member of the Sextet in the Alsterpavillon – he lived at Dammthorwall 35, thus only a few houses away from the Brahms family house at Dammthorwall 29 – tells of Brahms's youth: 'With the best will in the world, I cannot remember that Brahms played in *Lokals* when he was still a young child; I was with his father every day at that time and would have known if it had been the case. Jacob was a quiet and upright man and held Johannes arduously to his studies, removing him as far as possible from general notice.'[33] Most conclusive, however, is the fact that an authentic witness, the wife of Otto Cossel, energetically refutes Kalbeck's assertion: 'It cannot be true, my husband never said such a thing when speaking of Johannes's childhood; and if he had known of it he would never have let it happen.'[34] Brahms therefore played in modest venues, though sometimes at more exalted ones, and certainly in no case before the age of thirteen. His earnings were not for family essentials. The mother opened a bank account for her son. She reminded Johannes of it

in April 1854: 'When you had had work from Cranz [a Hamburg publisher] for a time, which brought you in a considerable sum, do you remember how I took care that the money went into the bank?'[35] From the age of fourteen, Brahms gave his teacher Bode free piano lessons. Henny Wiepking recalls: 'He was already at school at seven o'clock in the morning. So the fourteen-year-old pupil turned into a teacher, and the thirty-year-old teacher into a pupil. Johannes sat at the piano and invented pretty variations to Bode's first simple exercises.'[36] The works studied favoured the taste of the time. Brahms's younger brother also studied piano with him. The only surviving evidence of this is a copy of Henri Herz's *Variations Brillantes pour le Piano-Forte sur le dernière Valse de C. M. von Weber* Op. 51, on which Brahms marked at the beginning of the Finale (on page 12) the reminder 'Fritz, pay attention'.[37]

Outside Hamburg

Brahms was to be found outside Hamburg for the first time in May 1847 at the town of Winsen an der Luhe. Here he spent treasured weeks in (1847, 1848 and 1851) at the invitation of Adolf Giesemann, an acquaintance of Johann Jacob, in order to give piano lessons to his daughter Elise, known as Lieschen, and to enjoy the fresh country air. Brahms's first English biographer Florence May received a thorough account of these times from Lieschen Giesemann.[38] Whenever they met and went around together, Brahms always carried a dummy keyboard with him. He never played with boys of his own age around the village, but read romances of chivalry with Lieschen and other like-minded young people, such as 'Die Geschichte der schönen Magelone und des Ritters Peter' ('The Story of the Beautiful Magelone and the Knight Peter'), which he later set to music as Op. 33 and first read at this time. Not far from Winsen lay the tiny hamlet of Hoopte behind the Elbe dyke. Here a small group came together in order to spend the afternoons. In the village inn there would be dancing and singing, but music-making was the most popular. It was not long before Brahms was the darling of the Hoopte public. They enjoyed his lively dance tunes and enthusiastically listened out for the difficult concert pieces he occasionally inserted into the proceedings. He also conducted a song, and did it so well that he was elected to the directorship of the male voice choir during his stay. Brahms went about the task earnestly and with discipline; he 'attacked the beat with great animation and scrupulously controlled the *pianos* and *fortes*, and likewise the necessary gradation of *rallentandos*'.[39] He composed several four-part songs for this society. One was a 'Waltz for Male Voice Choir' on the 'A B C'. It consisted

of thirty-five bars in 2/4, with three bars' introduction for the letters A B C, then four eight-bar phrases for the remaining letters of the alphabet, first one after the other, then in syllables each made up of two letters, with the composed conclusion 'Winsen, eighteen-hundred and forty-seven', sung by full choir, slow and *fortissimo*. This and 'Des Postillons Morgenlied' to the words 'Vivat! und ins Horn ich stosse' by Hoffmann von Fallersleben number as the earliest works of Brahms with titles. When he stayed with the Giesemanns for the last time at Winsen in 1851, he wrote an 'Abschiedschor' together with two other works as a memento for Lieschen Giesemann, calligraphically decorating the title and adding a special dedication. The 'Abschiedschor für Männerquartett' carried the superscription 'Abschied von Winsen a.d. Luhe'. The text read:

> Farewell, farewell, ye friends honest and upright,
> Restlessly the artist is driven forward from joy to sorrow,
> And the heart's urgency is stilled by the sound of music,
> Farewell, farewell, remember me. Winsen a.d. Luhe 1851.

Brahms remembered these early works again in 1880, demanded them back from Elise and destroyed them. [40]

Brahms used the money which he earned from around 1847 through his teaching and playing almost entirely for his library. From 1850 onwards, he was very familiar with classical and romantic literature from around 1850. He read Cicero, Dante, Eichendorff, Klopstock, Lessing, Sophocles and Tasso. The works of Schiller and Goethe also naturally belonged to his reading material, which he obtained from a lending library. The youth's romantic enthusiasm found its nourishment in the works of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Heine, Novalis and Jean Paul. Following E. T. A. Hoffmann 's fantasy creation Kapellmeister Kreisler, the young Brahms named himself 'Johannes Kreisler jun.' or 'Kreisler II', a name which even graces his first published works. One can hardly doubt Kalbeck's suggestion that Brahms kept one or two volumes of classical literature open on the stand instead of the music when he was invited to play for dances, his fingers automatically playing the keys.[41] His mother's attempts to bank his income are understandable when one knows what he passionately declared to Hedwig von Salomon on 5 December 1853: 'I spend all my money on books, books are my greatest enjoyment. I read as much as I could from childhood and have explored everything from the worst to the best without any guidance. I gulped down numerous chivalric tales as a child until *Die Räuber* came into my hands; I didn't know that it was written by a great poet; but I longed for more by this same Schiller and improved myself in this way.'[42] And he wrote of this lifelong passion to Clara Schumann in a letter of 27 August 1854: 'When I [earn] the next 10

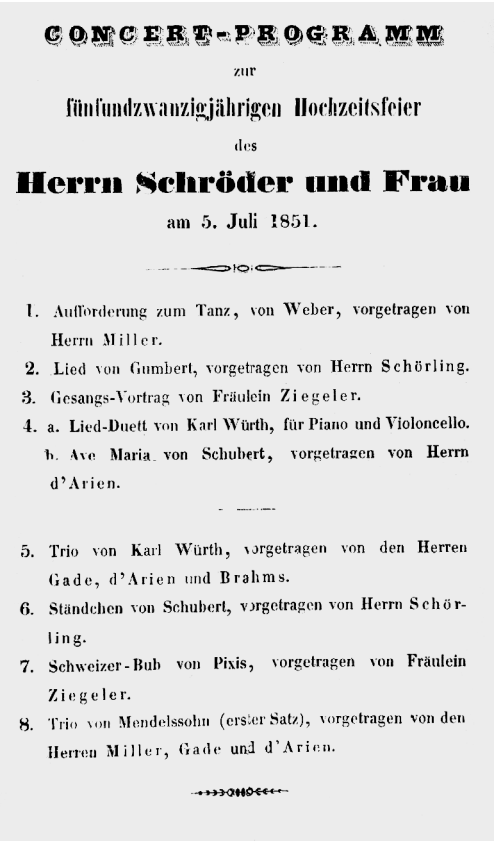
louis d'ors, it will remain a hard battle to keep away from a bookshop.'[43] Through an inner drive combined with literary knowledge, he acquired such a degree of cultivation that he became one of the best-educated and best-read personalities of his time, whose opinions on literary questions were valued by such figures as the writers, historians and critics Gottfried Keller, J. V. Widmann, Wilhelm Lübke, Jacob Baechtold and Michael Bernays.

On 13 April 1848 Brahms was confirmed in the St Michaeliskirche, Hamburg, and in the same year his schooling ended. He had in his library the little Hamburg catechism with numerous seventeenth-century woodcuts, apparently a gift from his mother, as well as several Bibles which he kept for bibliophile as well as religious reasons. He later gave the well-thumbed catechism as a present to the choral conductor Julius Spengel.[44] On 21 September 1848, Brahms gave his first solo concert. He played the Adagio and Rondo from a Piano Concerto in A by Jacob Rosenhain, the 'Fantasia on Motives from Rossini's *William Tell*' for piano by Theodor Döhler, a Fugue by J. S. Bach, a Serenade for the Left Hand Alone by Marxsen, and a Study by Henri Herz. The programming again signifies the taste of the time. Whether the Bach fugue is the same as the one from the *Well Tempered Clavier* which he practised for Cossel cannot be decided. In this context it was more of a pianistic 'crowd-puller', which none the less is likely to have been put into the programme by the young Brahms rather than Eduard Marxsen. As a result of the political circumstances, there was no review of the concert. Europe was in uproar, and the revolutionary events in Hungary had brought numerous refugees to Hamburg. Among them was the violinist Eduard Hoffmann, known as Reményi. It seems that it was at this time that Brahms first heard Hungarian melodies, when the émigré musicians assembled to form anything from duos up to entire ensembles, in order to earn enough money from performances to sail to America.

With his own second concert on 14 April 1849, Brahms had a publicised success. He played Beethoven's *Waldstein* Sonata, Sigismund Thalberg's 'Don Juan Fantasia', an 'Air italienne' of E. Mayer and a 'Fantasia on a Favourite Waltz', his own composition. On 17 April 1849, the Hamburg newspaper *Freyschütz* reported: 'in the concert by J. Brahms, the young virtuoso gave the most beautiful demonstration of his artistic progress. The performance of the Beethoven sonata showed that he has been able to venture successfully into the study of the classics and does him honour in every respect. The demonstration of his own composition ("Fantasie for Piano") also revealed unusual talent . . . The concert therefore had a rich programme, and the beautiful salon in the Jenisches' house was so full that a large part of the audience could only find a seat in the

anteroom.' The Hamburg *Correspondent* of 2 May gave a more comprehensive review, devoting more attention to Brahms's playing, as in the following extract: '[his playing] is easy and free, the attack generally clean and never overbearing at moments of strongest force, unlike so many present-day virtuosos with a mania for hammering the keys'. And of the Fantasia on an original composition, one reads: 'The wonderful gifts of creativity, idea and expression, appear to have been borrowed in full measure from Nature, and it will depend entirely on him and his diligence to bring them one day to outward perfection in the bright raiments of beauty.' One might therefore conclude from this reaction that Brahms could anticipate a great future as a pianist in Hamburg. Yet only a few concerts in which he participated are known to us: just three in 1849 and two in 1850. They show a continuing preference for Thalberg's variations and fantasias. His shyness about playing in public has been frequently attested. His nature, so resistant to contact, outwardly blunt, even coldly cynical, was probably the actual reason, however. That much has been indicated by many friends of his youth and later contemporaries.

Brahms began his first work for the Hamburg publisher Cranz in 1849. The only surviving arrangement from this time, the 'Souvenir de la Russie', which Cranz published under the collective pseudonym 'G. W. Marks' as Op. 151, was newly edited by me in 1971 with a lengthy foreword.[45] Research has long endeavoured to discover more about these arrangements, but has had to rely on pieces of circumstantial evidence. One such is the printed edition of 1847 of Carl Czerny's four-handed arrangement of Mozart's symphonies K. 173d A, 161d, 167a (Serenades, Finalmusik) and 186a. These symphonies still have their wrappers.[46] Two of these wrappers carry on the reverse side the publisher's advertising, as was customary at that time. These indicate the newest publications for piano duet, among which are editions by G. W. Marks. It is noteworthy that after the first listed G. W. Marks title, the 'Souvenir de la Russie' Op. 151, there follows directly a longer series of works: 'Op. 158. Trois Fantaisies for piano. No. 1, Robert le Diable, No. 2, Les Huguenots, No. 3, Le Prophète' and then 'Op. 160. Trois Fantasies pour piano. No 1 La Fille du Régiment; No. 2, Lucia di Lammermoor; No. 3, Maria di Rohan'. This kind of collective presentation is an indication that Brahms can be taken as the author, particularly since other subsequent G. W. Marks arrangements without opus number refer to the 'Musikalischer Kinderfreund am Pianoforte' and the collected title 'Collection des Potpourris de meilleurs Opéra', whose arrangements cannot be connected with Brahms. The fact that the Mozart arrangements are not indicated in the Köchel Catalogue (7th edition, 1965), suggests that these arrangements have not been noted before by scholars. If one considers the kind of titles of works by G. W.



CONCERT-PROGRAMM

zur

fünfundzwanzigjährigen Hochzeitsfeier

des

Herrn Schröder und Frau

am 5. Juli 1851.

1. Aufforderung zum Tanz, von Weber, vorgetragen von Herrn Miller.
2. Lied von Gumbert, vorgetragen von Herrn Schörling.
3. Gesangs-Vortrag von Fräulein Ziegeler.
4. a. Lied-Duett von Karl Würth, für Piano und Violoncello.
   b. Ave Maria von Schubert, vorgetragen von Herrn d'Arien.
5. Trio von Karl Würth, vorgetragen von den Herren Gade, d'Arien und Brahms.
6. Ständchen von Schubert, vorgetragen von Herrn Schörling.
7. Schweizer-Bub von Pixis, vorgetragen von Fräulein Ziegeler.
8. Trio von Mendelssohn (erster Satz), vorgetragen von den Herren Miller, Gade und d'Arien.

Plate 1.1 Concert programme for the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary of Herr and Frau Schröder, 5 July 1851, showing the names of Brahms and Karl Würth

Marks and the time of the appearance of the Mozart arrangements, which must have been issued around 1850, it seems reasonable to connect Brahms with the G. W. Marks Fantasies Op. 158 and Op. 160. This is conceivable even according to the most prudent supposition, because the Fantasies Op. 160 include one on the opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* – and Brahms played Thalberg's *Variations on Lucia di Lammermoor* at this time. Quite possibly he was then inspired to write an original Fantasie. If Brahms edited his own original arrangements and transcriptions under the pseudonym G. W. Marks for the publisher Cranz, this indicates exactly the same secretive character trait that he displayed when, on 5 July 1851, he performed a 'Lied-Duet' (McCorkle, Anhang 2A Nr. 10) and a Piano Trio (McCorkle, Anhang 2A Nr. 6) at the silver wedding of the piano manufacturer Schröder under the pseudonym Karl Würth. The programme (see Plate 1.1) from his own collection has faint connecting lines, in his own hand, under the names of Brahms and Karl Würth. [47]

Brahms was also regularly active as a piano or song accompanist behind the scenes and on the stage of the Hamburg Thalia-Theater. In his collection of programmes there are two announcements from the

9. September 1851. **THALIA-THEATER.**

(Mit aufgehobenem Abonnement.)

36ste Gastvorstellung der

48 jungen Tänzerinnen,

unter Leitung der Balletmeisterin

Madame Josephine Weiss.

1. Die Hochzeitsreise.

Lustspiel in 2 Aufzügen, von R. Benedix.

Personen:

Otto Lambert, Professor an einem Gymnasium	Herr Baumeister.	Edmund, sein Famulus	Herr v. Fielitz.
		Habnensporn, Stiefelputzer	Herr Bachmann.
Antonie, seine Frau	Dem. Steinau.	Guste, Kammerjungfer	Mad. Wilke.

2. Tarantella, ausgeführt von 24 Tänzerinnen.

3. Eigensinn.

Lustspiel in 1 Aufzuge, von Roderich Benedix.

Personen:

Alsdorf, ein reicher Privatmann	Herr Hungar.	Alfred, Emma's Gatte	Herr Baumeister.
Katharina, seine Frau	Mad. Baumeister.	Heinrich, in Alfreds Diensten	Herr von Gegb.
Emma, beider Tochter	Dem. Steinau.	Lisbeth, in Alfreds Diensten	Mad. Wilke.

4. Pas de Fleurs, ausgeführt von 48 Tänzerinnen.

5. 's Lorle, oder: Ein Berliner im Schwarzwalde.

Schwank mit Gesang in 1 Aufzuge, von J. Ch. Wages.

Personen:

Der Freiherr von Strutzow	Herr Caspar.	Lorle, eine Magd	Dem. Ant. Galliano.
Jacob Gengenbacher, Wirth zum „grünen Baum"	Herr Wilke.	Frieder, ein junger Müller	Herr von Fielitz.
		Landleute. Knechte	

Ort: Ein kleines Dorf im Schwarzwalde.

6. Fahnen-Tanz, ausgeführt von 40 Tänzerinnen.

Sämmtliche Tänze sind componirt von der Balletmeisterin Madame ***Josephine Weiss***.

(**Freie Entrées und Freibillets sind heute überall nicht gültig.**)

und Herr Starke: **beurlaubt.**

Preise der Plätze. Erster Rang, Balcon, Parquet und Parquetlogen 1 ℛ 8 ß. Zweiter Rang und Amphitheater 1 ℛ Parterre 10 ß. Gallerie 6 ß.

Casse-Oeffnung 6 Uhr. Anfang 6½ Uhr.

Schnellpressendruck von J. E. M. Kohler, Steintwiete No. 13

Plate 1.2 Extract from the programme at the Thalia-Theater, 9 September 1851, in which Brahms participated as accompanist

'Vereinigte Hamburger Theater'. One can conclude from this that on 30 May 1851 the young Brahms accompanied the 'Songs to be Performed' ('Vorkommende Gesänge') – Recitative and Aria from *Der Freischütz*, 'Österreichisches Lied' and a comic duet by Franz von Suppé – in the Thalia-Theater, and played the remaining music behind the scenes on the harmonium. Likewise on 9 September 1851 (see Plate 1.2), when the '36th Guest performance of 48 Young Dancers' took place in the Thalia-Theater: Brahms apparently undertook the off-stage accompaniment to the items 'Tarantella', 'Pas des Fleurs', and the 'Fahnen-Tanz'.[48]

At the beginning of the 1850s, Brahms apparently undertook his first tour, a fourteen-day concert tour with the so-called 'Konzertgesellschaft Molinario'. Brahms performed with two singers and a violinist all evening in Riegel's wine restaurant at the Klingenberg in Lübeck during the period of the Christmas market. No programme survives, yet if Brahms

accompanied his colleagues and also played some solo pieces, his repertory must surely have been that of the Hamburg concerts.

Brahms's principal activity around 1850 was piano tuition. Walter Hübbe, to whose older brother Brahms gave lessons from 1851, reports:

> On 22 May my father noted in his calendar: "Today B had . . . the first piano lessons with Herr Brahms." The last piano lesson came very soon. My brother didn't make progress even after the last lesson and soon gave it up. Mostly, while he botched his way through his fingering exercises sitting on the right, Brahms sat resignedly on the left and improvised wonderfully ingenious accompaniments. Once, since there was no practice material, he wrote down a wonderful improvised study: unfortunately it no longer exists.'[49]

It is from Hübbe that the first characterisation of the young Brahms originates:

> He was totally lacking in any outward impressiveness. There was something bashful, self-conscious and embarrassed about him. You might have compared him with a yet unfledged young eagle, which nevertheless you can see will eventually fly to the heights. His still noticeably high, bright and harsh voice contributed a lot to this external impression. It sounded like that of a prepubescent boy. I can still recall precisely how, after the first visit and the lesson, the lanky figure left the house with not-quite-firm steps, a rather ungainly posture and rather wobbly top hat, went out over the Wiese to the Stadtgraben along the Steintor. The malicious lads from the houses soon found a nickname for him. Using an expression from the 'Hamburger Ausruf' familiar to us through our grandfather, we usually called him 'Brahms-broom' ('Brahmbessen'). Despite that, we were silently inspired by some kind of reverent awe; for I, at least, realised that he had something about him quite different from the normal piano teacher.[50]

A lively impression of his piano teaching in Hamburg comes ten years later from Minna Völckers.

> At the beginning of February in the year 1861, Brahms came to us on a Friday afternoon and I had to play to him. There were études by Stephen Heller and pieces from Bach's Inventions. When I was ready he said that he knew of only three teachers for me, Avé Lallemant, Grädener or his humble self, whereupon my highly delighted parents immediately invited 'his humble self' to take over the instruction. On the coming Tuesday I should have had my first lesson. But Brahms immediately decided that instead of practising for ¾ hours a day, as before, I should have two periods of ¾ hours practice. Previously practising, just like the whole lesson, had given me little pleasure. That all changed. Between Friday and Tuesday I had to learn a study by Cramer, a prelude from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* and the first movement of a sonata by Beethoven. That seemed to me an insurmountable task. But it went much better than I imagined. In this first lesson I was given the fugue belonging to the prelude, another étude by Cramer and the second

> movement of the sonata. I also had to get the daily studies of Czerny to work on, of which he gave me new ones each time. I had to play him scales every time. He was very exact with everything and placed special emphasis on a loose wrist. I was beside myself with excitement, the whole teaching was the opposite of what I had had previously. Brahms could not be bettered as a teacher. He was gentle and kind, without praising much. I quickly made big strides with him. He let me play a lot of Clementi, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Bach and turned up quite regularly at the same time.
>
> The greatest reproach that I received from him during 1½ years of instruction was that he would occasionally say of a Bach fugue: 'you are playing that to me for the third time today', which shamed me deeply . . . My weak side in playing was always my trills. Brahms was such a gifted teacher that after several exercises with him I could do them. I really wanted to play some of his compositions, but hesitated to say so to him. My mother did it for me. 'Yes', he said, 'the things are still too difficult, but I will play duets with her', and we had to work on his B♭ Sextet, which we immediately got down to in the next lesson. I had to play primo, and we went through it very exactly, and my family were also delighted by the fine music. None of us could ever understand the stupid twaddle that one so often heard about him, that his music was confused. Sometimes, if I asked him, he played fugues after the lesson, which I already had to hand[51]

However, it must be stressed that Brahms taught piano only very reluctantly, although he gained a regular income from it. 'You always hated it, and it brings in only a little – I mean for you, who can do so much more', his mother reminded him in a letter of 20 March 1855.[52]

The relationships in the family home certainly impressed themselves conclusively on the character of the young Brahms. The great age difference of the parents released marital tensions which were not hidden from the son, and even affected him directly. This is indicated indirectly in the last letter, mentioned above, from Christiane Brahms to her son, written in January 1865, several days before her death. It is an important document. On the one hand it illuminates the sad relationship in the parental home, on the other it also reveals the patriarchal dimension, and shows how little understanding Johann Jacob had for his son. Amongst other things she wrote:

> it was very difficult for me in the house; in the last four years my good Elise stood by me faithfully, then we moved to the Kurze Mühren [in the period from early 1851 to early 1852, thus in Brahms's eighteenth and nineteenth years] [;] your education lasted much too long for your father, he was often grumpy and constantly found fault. We both always used to sit together in the evenings, it seems to me as though it were now, I was probably a bit silent, and then you said, 'Ah mother, father is so peculiar, now you are too'. Then I had to say to you that father wanted you to do something to get on in

> the world; he didn't want to feed you any longer. You became so upset, and we both cried and went to bed late. And Elise lay in bed fighting for air, and you called a doctor and she got an emetic. It was the middle of the night; when you came back again, I made you a lovely cup of coffee. – Once I had to write you an unpleasant letter to Düsseldorf. I always had to fight a great deal with father's unsatisfied moods and Elise often noticed it and wept a lot. How often he said: 'the children won't go anywhere, you'll see'. No matter how much I argued with him, it didn't help. I suffered everything with patience and always rejoiced over my good children, and thought that once you were both independent, he would rejoice with me'.[53]

The words of the father, that Brahms 'should do something to get on in the world' and 'the children [Johannes and Fritz] won't go anywhere, you'll see', affected the sensitive Johannes deeply. The trauma of having to prove to his father that he could achieve an elevated position in which the father could take pride – as a composer, and not as a pianist – never left Brahms, as can be seen from many remarks, even in the last period of his life. The understandable longing to lift himself out of his modest origins would certainly compensate for this, as did his wide reading, which set him apart from the milieu of the family home. Brahms knew and was convinced from the beginning that he was a composer, and consequently considered all other activities as routes that led him to this goal.

The decade 1850–60, especially the first part, was to be the most momentous in Brahms's life. From this period date his first published works, his first extended tours outside Hamburg and his first identification of professional goals involving an institutional position outside Hamburg. The Scherzo Op. 4 belongs with the song 'Heimkehr' Op. 7 No. 6 to 1851 as his earliest published works. The tour with Reményi in 1853, first to Winsen, then other towns in the area, led in turn to the meeting with the violinist Joseph Joachim in Hannover and with the Schumanns in Düsseldorf: within only weeks the establishment of the closest friendships in Brahms's life. Through Schumann Brahms's earliest works came into print as Opp. 1–6, and within weeks of their meeting, his article 'Neue Bahnen' broadcast Brahms's name to the musical world through the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. These friends had an incalculable effect on his development. Joachim's and Schumann's music opened up new style-worlds to him and set him new artistic goals and an awareness of what life could be like in a cultured and musically dedicated environment, though this was more of a hindrance than a help, since he was unknown to the larger public as either a composer or a pianist. After Schumann's death in 1856, Clara became his artistic ideal and companion. Through her he obtained a position for three winters' teaching and

conducting at the court of Detmold (near Hannover). By the time he gave up the post he had identified even clearer goals in relation to practical performance, both as a professional and as a composer seeking to broaden his base from the requirements of his own instrument. Clara and Joachim willingly played his works, using their influence to programme them, and counselled him in technical issues and the building of a career. By its end, the decade would see Brahms with Joachim and others of like mind issuing a Declaration asserting their artistic values against those proposed by the so called New German School (which had no significant impact at the time and was not even recorded in Brahms's biography until Kalbeck included it after his death). By this time also has become apparent the sensitivity and defensiveness of Brahms's personality, prone on the one side to detachment, on the other to domineering behaviour, sarcasm and rudeness which would colour his social life throughout. He was accustomed to dismiss anything that did not measure up to his personal values with the remark 'Yes, that is all just Pimpenkram' (apparently a word devised by himself, to express that which is unimportant and insignificant).[54] His attitude soon became widely known among musicians.

Professional ambitions in Hamburg

Brahms's activity as director of the Hamburg Frauenchor was, as in Detmold, intended to serve purely personal goals in the testing of his conducting and compositional capacities. The choir itself came into being rather by chance, as a result of the musical provision for a wedding at which Brahms played the organ as a favour to his Hamburg colleague Carl Grädener, who conducted the music. After this, on 6 June 1859, twenty-eight young women again found themselves singing together, now *Volkslieder* and women's choruses at the house of the auctioneer Hermann Wagner, under the direction of Brahms himself. From the beginning, there were regular rehearsals which took place on one morning a week. Brahms rehearsed his works Opp. 12, 22, 27, 37 Nos. 1 and 2, 44, and numerous folk-song arrangements for women's choir with his 'little vocal republic'. It must be stressed that these rehearsals took place completely away from the glare of publicity. In fact, the Frauenchor, which numbered up to forty members, appeared only three times publicly under Brahms's direction, and then only as members of the 'Damen Chor', not as the 'Hamburg Frauenchor', the name which appears as the society's insignia, and in the well-known 'Avertimento' devised by Brahms. Indeed, it was in a concert of Carl Grädener's Academy (founded

in 1851) on 2 December 1859 that Brahms conducted his *Ave Maria* for female voices and orchestra Op. 12 and the *Begräbnisgesang* for chorus and orchestra Op. 13 for the first time, also performing the Schumann Piano Concerto.[55]

Brahms's compositions were well spoken of in the press. Of special significance for the composer were the reviews in the *Hamburg Wochenblatt* of 10 December 1859 and the popular weekly *Der Nachbar* of 11 December 1859. It was these two papers – and not the great dailies – that took Brahms up. Copies are to be found among his papers and are here republished for the first time. The *Hamburger Wochenblatt* of 10 December even allowed two reviews of a performance to appear.[56] In the first, the reviewer asserted immediately of the *Ave Maria* that its 'simple clarity and inwardness recalled the old masters,' whilst the *Begräbnisgesang* 'was rendered with such simple beauty and impressive character that it was difficult for it to avoid making a strong impression on the listener'. In the review 'by another reporter', the *Begräbnisgesang* already appears to represent a vision of the much later *Deutsches Requiem*. The reviewer elaborates the view that the two compositions belong in 'character to a much earlier period than Handel's' and even

> give an indication of how richly our young, profoundly endowed countryman has been impressed by the deep and inward old German music without losing his individuality. The 'Song at the Graveside' belongs to the most gripping things that we have heard for a long time. Simple and without pretension, like a grieving dialogue, intoned from the deepest voices with the omission of the sopranos and without introducing the full instrumental accompaniment, comes the exhortation 'Now let us bury the dead one'; then the previously single voices gather themselves together with the rich accompaniment of woodwind, brass and timpani for the first burial song: 'He is from Earth and to earth will return.' Yet already the deep sorrow is mixed with more joyful expression, uplifted through the transition from minor to major: 'his work, sorrows and suffering have come to a good end'. And while the remaining voices continue with this, there suddenly enters a heavenly, consoling promise, the soprano's pledge taking away earthly sorrow: 'his soul lives eternally in God', to which the remaining voices consent while part of the instrumental accompaniment, going into triple rhythm, drives the funeral procession unstoppably towards its goal. Then the mourners part with the words 'Now we let him sleep and we go our ways' etc., at which point the single choir enters again in the minor. Herr Brahms has given much more in his unusually successful setting than might have been expected from the modest title of the felicitously chosen old German song: it is no mere 'Funeral *Song*', but rather a serious funeral *celebration*, composed with humanly elevated art and full of dramatic strength, truly dedicated to transfigure earthly sorrow into eternal joy and hope, and certainly unforgettable in retrospect to anyone who has heard or sung it. –

> Not less significant is Brahms's 'Ave Maria'. Here too female choir alone is employed, but certainly in a rich four-part setting, with a proper understanding of the poetry in the old German Marian service. Specially impressive in the design is the unison with which the women treat the actual prayer 'Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis'.

The (likewise unnamed) reporter of the *Nachbar* exalts the whole character of the concert and expresses the opinion that

> this time, however, something new and even truly gratifying arrived. This was the compositions of Herr Johannes Brahms, his 'Ave Maria', and above all his wonderfully beautiful *Begräbißgesang* to the old hymn 'Nun lasst uns den Leib begraben' to the original text by Michael Weisse, a priest of the Bohemian Brotherhood, who edited a songbook with German translations of songs by Huss and others in 1531. One could not avoid the impression, whether one was a connoisseur or not, that one of the great old masters had risen up to compose for all time and for all hearts. The simple power and mighty artlessness with which this death and resurrection song streams into a believing community cannot be described further but will just have be heard and experienced. That the young master belongs to our Hamburg is a source of further joy and hope.

The two critics confirm what Brahms meant when he said to Clara Schumann, 'Actually something of a cult is already developing with me in Hamburg; but that can hardly be a bad thing, I think. At least I always write happily, and the sounds inside me feel as if they must come out as something heavenly with time.'[57]

The Frauenchor appeared for a second time in Hamburg in a concert given by Clara Schumann on 15 January 1861. One notes that the programme only indicates 'with the valued participation of a DAMEN CHOR'. Brahms conducted first performances of the Songs for Womens' Voices with Two Horns and Harp Op. 17, complete, and the Songs for Women's Voices Op. 44 No. 1 'Minnelied' and Op. 44 No. 2 'Bräutigam' in this concert. It was repeated several days later in Altona, in the Bürger-Vereins-Saal. The *Hamburger Correspondent* noted concisely: 'A varied Andante by Schumann [he means the Op. 46 Variations for Two Pianos] provided opportunities for the talented local composer and exceptional pianist Herr Johannes Brahms . . . to compete laudably with Frau Schumann. Six, for the most part very enjoyable, songs of his, written for amateurs, filled the intervals between the instrumental pieces . . .'[58] The third and last concert of the Hamburg Frauenchor took place on 16 November 1861 – again arranged through Clara Schumann. At its centre stood the first performance of Brahms's Piano Quartet in G minor. Clara Schumann played the piano part. The *Hamburger Nachrichten* remarked on it only briefly, however: 'His new quartet for piano and string instruments in manuscript

and also six songs for women's choir [that is, some songs from Op. 44] further guaranteed through their content the high reputation of this esteemed artist.'[59]

During the period 1860–1 Brahms gave several concerts in Hamburg. On 10 February 1860, he played Schumann's Piano Concerto, and directed the first performance of his own second Serenade in A major Op. 16 at the 125th Philharmonic Concert.[60] Once again he had a great success, which found suitable expression in the press:

> Herr Johannes Brahms repeated the Schumann concerto in A minor with which he created a furore some time ago. On this occasion he did it on a piano from the exceptional firm of Baumgarten and Heins, and the beauties of Schumann's composition were illuminated for the listeners on renewed acquaintance even more clearly than earlier. Moreover, the first part of the evening brought a second Serenade for wind instruments from Brahms. Since we learnt to admire the young composer of the choral song 'Nun lasst uns den Leib begraben', his instrumental style has also become approachable to us. As a result, the newer serenade is much more concise and more skilfully prepared for the enjoyment of the moment than its predecessor, which we heard here. However, by his 'serenades' one must not imagine mere nocturnes, but rather whole scenes with changing moods, which this time come to a conclusion in an unruffled rondo that is not lacking in a popular quality. The reception that Herr Brahms was granted as both pianist and composer was a remarkably spirited one.[61]

The concert on 20 November 1860 deserves special note. In a soirée of chamber music Brahms played the piano part in works by Schumann, Bach, Schubert and Mozart. His fellow performers were intimates, young friends and colleagues, who have already been mentioned and, who partly through their reminiscences, have helped to illuminate Brahms's early years.[62] In the summer of 1860, Brahms completed his first String Sextet in B♭ Op. 18. He had already begun the composition in late autumn 1859 in Detmold. Kalbeck states that 'the sextet originally began at the eleventh bar'.[63] The instrumental parts, rediscovered in the year 1992, confirm this. The later-composed coda to the third movement also allows us to see the original conclusion to the scherzo. The parts give the first version complete and allow us a rare look into the composer's workshop.[64]

In April 1861, the baritone Julius Stockhausen, who had first appeared in a concert in Hamburg in March 1859, appeared with an innovation on the Hamburg concert podium. He sang complete song cycles for the first time: *Die Schöne Müllerin*, *An die ferne Geliebte* and *Dichterliebe*. Brahms accompanied him at the piano. Julius Stockhausen was equally known and loved in the concert salons of Paris, London, Leipzig, Vienna and Hamburg. This concert was also recalled by Walter Hübbe, who stressed the differing assessments of Stockhausen and Brahms by the public:

'Whoever can still recall how Stockhausen first began to perform entire song cycles in a concert here, beginning with Schubert's Müllerlieder, will surely also not have forgotten that Brahms was his accompanist – and truly with what mastery. Stockhausen himself naturally knew how to recognise Brahms's true worth, and it seemed to him unfair that he himself should take the lion's share of the applause. So he proved it: at the applause, he very obviously dragged the resisting Brahms along with him in front of the public to show how much he treasured him and wanted him to be celebrated as much as himself. However, Brahms looked really detached and ironical.'[65] Stockhausen sang Schumann's cycle *Dichterliebe* on 30 April 1861 and the happy Brahms noted to Clara Schumann on 2 May: 'Naturally we had a full hall and nothing passed without encore. The wonderful Schumann song cycle went tremendously, at least we felt really carried along by the enthusiasm of the listeners. Stockhausen and I have drunk in brotherhood in the songs.'[66] In May 1861 Brahms gave up the work with his Frauenchor and withdrew almost completely from the concert life of his native city. He took lodgings a short distance outside the city limits of Hamburg in the suburb of Hamm, at Schwarze Strasse 5. Here he composed or completed a series of early masterworks: the two piano quartets in G minor and A major; the *Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Handel*, the four-handed *Variations on a Theme of Schumann* and the first romances to Tieck's 'Magelone'. Brahms also began work here on his Piano Quintet, which was first composed as a string quintet. Brahms was also to work here in early 1862 on the first movement of his C minor symphony.

At the beginning of the 1860s the concerts of the Philharmonic Society in Hamburg began to decline in quality, in both artistic and material terms. Friedrich Wilhelm Grund, co-founder and director of the concerts, which had begun in 1828 jointly with the Hamburg Singakademie, was overtaxed after more than thirty years of activity. Attendance had declined noticeably, the standards of the concerts had fallen and new music was no longer given sufficient attention. So the members of the committee of the Philharmonic Society, who had guaranteed six annual concerts with their own money, sought a successor. In this, personality stood above everything. It was obvious that Hamburg could not afford to take risks: the long-term financial security of the concerts was at stake and artistic experiment was out of the question. Brahms's friend and supporter, Theodor Avé Lallemant, who was a member of the committee of the Philharmonic, planned at the beginning of 1862 to create the post of a second director of the Singakademie for Brahms. He confided this plan to Brahms in August 1862. It was obviously a private initiative which Avé must have communicated to the other members of the committee only

after first discussing it with Brahms. Brahms therefore knew that he was in line not for the post of conductor of the Philharmonic Society, but (in the planned two-way division) for that of choirmaster of the Singakademie, which also included the duties of a repetiteur. This was Avé's plan alone. That the committee could not agree to the plan of paying the wages of a new second conductor as described is hardly surprising. For the Society it was only important to secure the future of the Philharmonic concerts, and it therefore needed a personality who possessed a unifying force and charisma: both towards the public and towards the musicians of the Society. These qualities were embodied in Julius Stockhausen, not in Johannes Brahms. So it came about that on 26 November 1862, Julius Stockhausen took up the invitation of the Philharmonic Society, Hamburg, to become the director of their concerts for the next season. We have come to know only a little from Stockhausen's notes and letters concerning the deliberations which led to this decision and concerning the conditions of his acceptance, since, remarkably, all the deliberations of the Philharmonic Society from the year 1862 no longer exist.[67] When Avé informed Brahms, who since September 1862 had had great success in Vienna as both pianist and composer, that Stockhausen had become conductor of the Philharmonic concerts, Brahms felt deeply wounded and communicated it directly to Clara Schumann,[68] who on her side now felt sick for Brahms and reacted emotionally against Hamburg, although she, as emerges from an unpublished letter from Stockhausen to her, had recommended him and not Brahms as conductor of the Philharmonic Society there: 'How it has come to pass that I have found an orchestra in Germany and been appointed to conduct it is still a mystery to me, a dream, and I thank you most, dear lady, for the chance, and give you my speediest and warmest thanks. Had you not come to Guebwiller, had you not played there with our sorry orchestra and then recommended me as one who had the right predisposition, perhaps I would not be a concert-director in Hamburg now.'[69] Stockhausen came to know just after his acceptance that Avé would have created a supplementary post for Brahms.

Stockhausen was convinced that Brahms was not cut out to be a conductor. 'He is not practical enough, not friendly with the orchestral musicians, first holding a grudge, then too patient! On the other hand, although he is so gifted (as I am not), he cannot be bothered to point out mistakes and would not have the patience to make something out of nothing.'[70] Stockhausen's insight is confirmed by Christian Otterer. Kalbeck noted the following from Otterer's assertions in his notebook from the Hamburg period concerning Brahms. 'Brahms inflexible as conductor, went straight through relentlessly, also in the performance, was

not therefore so respected or liked. With Stockhausen the public and musicians were exceptionally contented. Justice requires it to be said that the Hamburgers had no reason to rue their decision to appoint him and not Brahms to the conductor's position.' We certainly look in vain for this passage in Kalbeck's biography: he never published it![71] Finally, the viewpoint from which alone the choice of the new conductor had been reached can be established from a letter from Avé Lallemant to Stockhausen on 6 September 1863. Stockhausen wanted to bring Theodor Kirchner to Hamburg to enable him to earn a living there. Avé writes: 'I fear his [Kirchner's] whole personality will be a problem in Hamburg. He is very quiet and uncommunicative, completely so, just as Schumann was. Schumann would never have been a suitable personality for Hamburg, however often he was here. One admires the great composers, but – . . . Do you think you would have such an enormously electrifying and stimulating effect if you didn't have this amazingly attractive personality? Brahms could not have created a domain for himself here, however much I begged him and helped him. Believe me, Brahms's personality was the real reason . . . why else do you think everything comes to you?'[72]

In his innermost being, Brahms had had hopes – no doubt strengthened through Avé's personal intervention for him – for the position, since it signified a bourgeois existence and would have strengthed his position in relation to his father. With this position above all, he could have shown him that he had 'made something out of himself' after all. He could have stood in front of the orchestra in which his own father played double bass and could have repeated a scene similar to that noted at a rehearsal of the A major Serenade under Brahms's direction in 1861: 'It was touching when Brahms, who had had to interrupt the rehearsal because one of the basses had made a mistake, discovered his own father to be the miscreant and put the parent right with a soft reproach.'[73] Yet outwardly Brahms had never let it be known that he hoped to become conductor of the Philharmonic concerts. No more did he reveal his motives for setting off on what was to be a short visit to Vienna in September 1862 even before he knew the outcome of the decision, the consequences of which were to be fundamental to his future.

Translated by Michael Musgrave