

Constantin Floros. *Johannes Brahms: 'Free But Alone': A Life for a Poetic Music*, trans. Ernest Bernhard Kabisch (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 2010). x+291 pp. £ 37.00.

Constantin Floros's recent book *Johannes Brahms: 'Free But Alone': A Life for a Poetic Music* was first published in German in 1997. The present translation by Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch is one of a series of recent translations into English of Floros's works, with *Anton Bruckner: The Man and the Work* having also appeared from the publishing house Peter Lang in 2011.¹ In the preface, Floros outlines the genesis of his Brahms book, from his research in Brahms's aesthetics in the early 1980s, through many years of engagement with Brahms's music in his adopted city of Hamburg, where he had the good fortune and privilege to gain regular access to the extensive Brahms Archive of the Hamburg State and University Library.² Such gems as those he found there fill the pages of this book in the great many letters, illustrations and copies of autograph scores (many previously unpublished) that amount here to an embarrassment of riches for lovers of Brahms's music.³

It is clear throughout that this book stems from Floros's abundance of admiration and love for the music of Brahms, as well as the man. Citing Brahms's dissatisfaction with Wasielewski's *Robert Schumann* biography in 1854,⁴ Floros takes heed of Brahms's counsel (as articulated in a letter to Clara Schumann) that a biography should only be written by either a 'close friend or an admirer', that it must be governed by 'impartiality', but not to the extent that it becomes 'coldness', and that it must be open-minded.⁵

The research for this review was funded by a Marie Curie International Outgoing Fellowship under the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission.

¹ Constantin Floros, *Anton Bruckner: The Man and the Music*, trans. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011). See also *Alban Berg and Hanna Fuchs: The Story of a Love in Letters* trans. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007); and *Humanism, Love and Music*, trans. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011). Prior to this flurry of translations Floros's publications focussed primarily on hermeneutic approaches to the music of Mahler, Berg, Bruckner and Brahms. See for instance *Gustav Mahler: Visionär und Despot* (Zürich and Hamburg: Arche Verlag, 1997); *Alban Berg: Musik als Biographie* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1992); and *Brahms und Bruckner: Studien zur Musikalischen Exegetik* (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1980).

² The collection of autographs housed at the Brahms archives of the State and University Library Carl-von-Ossietzky in Hamburg is on permanent loan from the Johannes-Brahms-Gesellschaft Hamburg, founded in 1969. For an overview of the history and holdings of this archive, see *Johannes Brahms. Quellen, Text, Rezeption, Interpretation: Internationaler Brahms Kongress, Hamburg 1997*, ed. Friedhelm Krummacher, Michael Struck, Constantin Floros, and Peter Petersen (Munich: Henle, 1999) 279–88.

³ Highlights of the collection of illustrations and reproductions include a letter from Brahms to Joachim, dated 19 June 1854, containing a confession of Brahms's love for Clara Schumann (60–61); an autograph of Intermezzo No. 4 from Seven Fantasies for Piano, Op. 116 of 1892 entitled 'Notturmo' (117); and the letter from Brahms to Hermine Spies (undated, but before 1885) expressing the composer's wish to meet the singer (136).

⁴ Wilhelm Josef von Wasielewski, *Robert Schumann: Eine Biographie* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1854).

⁵ Berthold Litzmann, ed., *Clara Schumann–Johannes Brahms Briefe aus den Jahren 1853–1896*, 2 Vols (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1927), 1: 213.

There are five central themes that the author promotes as underpinning this book:

- 1) A belief that Joseph Joachim's motto *Frei aber Einsam* provides a key to unlocking Brahms's personality;
- 2) An understanding that both as an artist and a character, Brahms was Janus-faced;
- 3) A proposal that the study of Brahms's personality will lead to a deeper understanding of his music;
- 4) The conviction that Brahms's creative process was often triggered by personal experiences, so that his works must be viewed against this background;
- 5) The assertion that Brahms's music is intrinsically poetic.

Despite Floros's allusion to Brahms's thoughts on the merits of a well-written biography, this book is not a Brahms biography, although it certainly contains many biographical details and approaches. Neither is it a collection of essays in the conventional sense; whereas some of the 21 chapters take a scholarly approach, at times with astute music-analytical findings and a lively engagement with Brahms studies, more often they comprise a basic introduction to Brahms's music, aimed at giving its audience rudimentary points of access to the works of this great figure. As such, the book seems to be aimed at both *Kenner* and *Liebhaber*, with the attempt to serve both strands of this target audience leading to a number of weaknesses in the book.

Published at an interval of 13 years from the first edition of *Johannes Brahms: 'Frei aber Einsam'*, this newly expanded text has four new chapters.⁶ Not only this, but the preface states that the earlier material has 'been bibliographically updated'. (p. 3) Any such revision must necessarily be selective; yet much remains unacknowledged in the significant advances that have been made in Brahms research since the initial publication of this book. 'I am fully aware of the explosiveness of my thesis', (p. 1) Floros declares in his preface, referring to the five points enumerated above. A readership of musicologists (presumably one of the main target audiences for the book) will nonetheless often be met by the feeling of being thrown back in time in these pages to various periods over the last forty years.

For instance, in Chapter 3, entitled 'Between the Fronts', in a laudable effort to draw attention to the expressive as well as the structural elements of Brahms's music, Floros states that 'Brahms, now, is not only regarded as a master of absolute music, but beyond that is frequently said to be an opponent of program music. Much in this view, however, appears to be in need of revision'. (p. 71) Although Floros does not cite it, such revision regarding the programme/absolute music debate has been amply undertaken.⁷ In addition, since the late

⁶ The four new chapters are Chapter 12, 'Tradition and Innovation in the First Symphony', (141–8); Chapter 14, 'Mortality, Consolation and Hope as Semantic Fields in *A German Requiem*', (155–66); Chapter 15, '“Even the Beauteous Must Die”: *Nänie*', (167–79); and Chapter 16, 'Four Serious Songs', (180–85).

⁷ Floros's assertion is echoed on page 124: 'Brahms—the archetype of the “absolute musician”? It is time to do away with stereotypes of this sort'. Numerous scholars have. To name just some pertinent sources published before Floros's 1997 book, see Dillon Parmer, 'Brahms, Song Quotation, and Secret Programs', *19th Century Music*: (1994–5): 161–90; *Ibid.*, 'Brahms the Programmatic? A Critical Assessment', PhD. Diss., University of Rochester, New York, 1995; *Ibid.*, 'Brahms and the Poetic Motto: A Hermeneutic Aid?'

1980s – even before the initial publication of Floros’s book in German – there has been an increasing move toward hermeneutic approaches to Brahms’s music that combine investigations of the expressive motivations for his compositional process with structural analysis.⁸ Likewise, the claim in Chapter 8 that research into ‘[Brahms’s] Relation to Schumann’ is ‘still in its infancy’ p. (95) is decidedly behind the curve.⁹ Moving from the general to the particular, the discussion of the Sonata for Violin and Piano No. 2 in A major Op. 100 of Chapter 11 draws a thematic connection between the opening of the first movement of that work and Brahms’s ‘Komm bald’, Op. 97 No. 5, a ‘connection’, as Floros has it, that ‘has hitherto remained overlooked’. (p. 138) Yet again this is a misrepresentation of scholarship hitherto undertaken.¹⁰ Such claims to originality recur throughout the book with the tenacity of a cliché.

Regarding structure, there is much overlap of material in this book as a result of the organisation of the chapters. A number of themes of great interest to Brahms scholars might have been more constructively addressed in a less diffuse manner. An example is the newly written Chapter 12, ‘Tradition and Innovation in the First Symphony’ which is divided into a number of small sections. The first, ‘Genesis and Genre’ is entirely bound up with the Brahms/Wagner dichotomy and the mid-nineteenth century battles over so-called ‘absolute’ and ‘programme’ music. This somewhat overworked topic is given extensive and repeated coverage. The second and third sections, respectively called ‘Brahms’s constructive Beethoven/Schumann reception’ seem superfluous given that these issues are covered in Chapter 8, ‘The Second Beethoven’ and Chapter 9, ‘The Relation to Schumann’.¹¹ Chapter 5, ‘Relations: Biographical backgrounds in

Journal of Musicology 15 (1997): 353–89; Kenneth Ross Hull, ‘Brahms the Allusive: Extra-Compositional Reference in the Instrumental Music of Johannes Brahms’, PhD. Diss., Princeton University (1989); Susan McClary, ‘Narrative Agendas in “Absolute” Music: Identity and Difference in Brahms’s Third Symphony’, in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 326–44; George Bozarth, ‘Brahms’s “Lieder ohne Worte”: The “poetic” Andantes of the Piano Sonatas’, in *Brahms Studies: Analytical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. George Bozarth (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 345–78.

⁸ Examples can be found in Edward T. Cone, ‘Brahms: Songs with Words and Songs Without Words’, *Integral* 1 (1987): 31–56; David Brodbeck, *Brahms, Symphony No. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); David Brodbeck, ‘Medium and Meaning: New Aspects of the Chamber Music’, in the *Cambridge Companion to Brahms*, ed. Michael Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 98–132; Robert Fink, ‘Desire, Repression, and Brahms’s First Symphony’, *Repercussions* 2 (1993): 78–103. More recently, see also Peter H. Smith, *Expressive Forms in Brahms’s Instrumental Music: Structure and Meaning in His Werther Quartet* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

⁹ See, for instance, Siegfried Kross, ‘Brahms und Schumann’, *Brahms Studien* 4 (1981): 7–44.

¹⁰ As Peter Russell points out, this allusion is noted in both Gerd Sannemüller’s ‘Die Lieder Johannes Brahms auf Gedichte von Klaus Groth’, *Jahresgabe der Klaus-Groth-Gesellschaft* 16 (1972), 23–35, esp. 34, and Max Harrison’s *The Lieder of Brahms* (London: Cassell, 1978), 39–40. See Peter Russell, *Johannes Brahms and Klaus Groth: The Biography of a Friendship* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 131, note 43. In the years between the 1997 publication of Floros’s book and this recent translation, the connection between these two works is further discussed at length in Russell, *Brahms and Groth*, 130–45; and in Inge van Rij, *Brahms’s Song Collections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 134.

¹¹ The discussion of Brahms’s allusion to Schumann’s *Manfred* receives more comprehensive treatment in Brodbeck, *Brahms, Symphony No. 1*; and whereas in 1997

Brahms's music', is concerned primarily with the *German Requiem* and, as such, raises questions about the need for a new chapter on that work, rather than a comprehensive revision of the old one. This new chapter, moreover, is cursory and rudimentary, in the style of a programme note, again raising the question of the audience for whom the book is intended.

Matters of large-scale structure aside, fresh insights are to be found in a number of the individual chapters. Chapter 1, 'Frei aber einsam' gives an objective presentation of much evidence pertaining to Brahms's youth. Chapter 4, 'Tone ciphers' provides a useful introductory overview of this aspect of Brahms's creative oeuvre. The scale of what the author aims to cover Chapter 8, 'The Second Beethoven', is considerable: taking as its starting point a similarity between Beethoven and Brahms that was intuitively observed by the composer's contemporaries, Floros aims to 'determine with precision' the nature of this similarity (p. 80). This entails, he proposes, charting the relationship between the music of Brahms and Beethoven in a manner that not only looks 'at formal techniques' but also scrutinizes 'idiom and mode of expression', and 'the salient peculiarities of ... musical language'. (p. 91) Notwithstanding Floros's assessment that 'there are as yet hardly any investigations of musical idiom',¹² (p. 91) this chapter falls short of its aims. Despite the assertion that 'Brahms's orientation towards Beethoven is unmistakable', there is not a methodology systematic or consistent enough to show us how this is the case.

The strongest parts of the book are concerned with poetic elements in Brahms's music. Yet, here too, questionable assertions are found, such as '[a]ccording to widespread current assumption, the "poetic" element plays a much smaller role in Brahms's music than it does in Schumann's' (p. 112) and 'in comparing the various compositions, however, one is struck by the fact that whereas Schumann wrote short pieces as well as longer ones, Brahms exhibits a clear preference for longer compositions'. (p. 111) It is in spite of such assertions that Floros makes his insightful observations, such as the connection he draws between the last movement of the Horn Trio, Op. 40 and the E-flat minor Intermezzo, Op. 118 No. 6. (In addition to the shared tonality and expressive markings, Floros points to a further connection relating to the death of Brahms's mother in 1865, p. 121), or the discussion of the B minor Intermezzo, Op. 119 No. 1 in the context of Clara Schumann's correspondence with Brahms (p. 123). His observation that by giving 'the pieces of Op. 116 [the title] *Fantasies* Brahms may have had Schumann's *Kreisleriana* in mind' is well taken. However, it goes a step too far to attempt, as he does, to map the arrangement of the individual pieces in *Kreisleriana* onto Op. 116. (p. 110). Chapter 11, 'Violin Sonatas from Songs: Secret dedications to Clara Schumann and Hermine Spies' has an impressive frame of contemporary reference, and provides an in-depth exploration of the topic.

The new Chapter 15 on Brahms's *Nänie* offers a very useful annotated translation of Schiller's poem 'Auch das Schöne muß sterben!', and a thoughtful

Schumann's *Manfred* may have been 'relatively little analyzed', Laura Tunbridge has done an excellent job since then in her 'Schumann's "Manfred" in the Mental Theatre', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 15 (July 2003): 153–83.

¹² One thinks of Robert Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); and *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

exploration of Schiller's relationship to classical antiquity. The discussion of Brahms's musical setting is cursory. Much consideration is given to the artistic affinities between Brahms and the artist Anselm Feuerbach, on the occasion of the death of whom Brahms wrote this work. Floros's discussion of this relationship resonates with that of Eduard Hanslick, penned some 120 years earlier.

In that review, Hanslick drew attention to Feuerbach's love of music, as evidenced in his paintings *Orpheus*¹³ and *The Concert*.¹⁴ He alluded to Feuerbach's tendency to draw an analogy between his own art and that of music, noting that 'it is less this love of music, than the similarity in the whole *Kunstanschauung* that connected Feuerbach and Brahms in friendship and affinity'.¹⁵ They have in common an 'imperturbable direction toward the great, the exalted and the ideal', characteristics that for both artists lead to 'sharp severity and seclusion'.¹⁶

Although here and in many other places in the book there is a strong continuity between Hanslick's hermeneutic approach to Brahms's music and that of Floros, the latter not only fails to acknowledge the fact, but frequently reprimands the critic for missing the sense of Brahms's works, and for promoting him as a champion of 'absolute' music. In Chapter 10 on the 'Poetic elements in Brahms's music' he cites at length the now well-known passage on Opp. 118 and 119, where Hanslick considers Brahms's late piano pieces to be 'monologues at the piano', 'monologues as Brahms utters them to himself at a late evening hour, in defiant-pessimistic rebellion, in brooding reflection, in romantic reminiscences, and at times in dreamy wistfulness'.¹⁷ (p. 124) Floros deems Hanslick's opinion of these works as expressed here to be 'untenable as a generalization' because, as he sees it (apparently missing Hanslick's point) 'Brahms's piano pieces' present 'many and varied kinds of expression'. (p. 124) A further example is Floros's admission that Hanslick was strongly impressed by the Sonata for Violin and Piano in G major, Op. 78. By discussing this work not only in relation to Brahms's settings of two Groth poems ('Regenlied' and 'Nachklang' of Brahms's Op. 59), and Goethe's 'An den Mond', a central theme of which is lost love and lost youth, Hanslick made clear that he understood this sonata to be bound up with the difficult biographical circumstances under which Brahms wrote the piece, noting it was composed more for the intimacy of 'the private circle than produced for the effect of the concert hall,' as a 'secret piece requires a certain frame of mind from the players'.¹⁸

¹³ Currently housed at Upper Belvedere, Vienna.

¹⁴ Currently housed at the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

¹⁵ 'Doch war es weniger diese Musikliebe, als vielmehr die Ähnlichkeit in der ganzen Kunstanschauung, was Feuerbach mit Brahms in Freundschaft und Seelenverwandschaft verband'. Eduard Hanslick, 'Nänie', *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuosen*, 376 (my translation).

¹⁶ '...dieselbe unerschütterliche Richtung auf das Große, Erhabene und Ideale, die oft bis zur herben Strenge und Abgeschlossenheit führte'. Hanslick, 'Nänie', *Concerte, Componisten und Virtuosen*, 376.

¹⁷ The Hanslick review from which Floros cites is Hanslick, 'Neue Klavierstücke von Brahms', *Fünf Jahre Musik, 1891–1895: Kritiken* (Berlin: Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, 1896), 257–59.

¹⁸ For more on the biographical background to Op. 78 in relation to Hanslick's writings, see Nicole Grimes, 'Brahms's Poetic Allusions through Hanslick's Critical Lens', *American Brahms Society Newsletter* 24/2 (Fall 2011): 5–9. See also Michael Struck,

This is at odds with the 'rigorously autonomous' approach to Brahms's works for which Floros would have Hanslick remembered. Moreover, it is entirely out of step with his description of the critic as one who 'simply ignores the considerable share of the poetic and autobiographic in the work of this great composer'. (p. 202) One could make the case that Floros's hermeneutic approach to Brahms's music seems all the more striking and original when set against the background of Hanslick's alleged formalism.

A number of technical musical details have been lost in translation. Throughout the book, odd nomenclature is used for time signatures: 'two-fourths' time rather than $\frac{2}{4}$, for instance.¹⁹ More seriously, pieces such as Brahms's Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major are labelled as being in B Major (a mistranslation from B-Dur, here at page 25). Apart from such musical details, the book would have profited from one further round of proofreading.

The range of topics covered in this book is rich and impressive, spanning from biographical insights to formal observations, to explorations of the poetic in Brahms's music, and issues of reception. Newcomers to Brahms studies will find much of great interest in this volume, which is to be further valued for the abundance of illustrative material it contains. Those intimately familiar with Brahms's compositions will find the discussion of the music to be basic and cursory. And Brahms scholars, finally, will likely find some of the claims to originality to be out of touch with developments in the field in recent decades. Despite its many merits, this book betrays an identity crisis both in terms of the audience for whom it is intended, and the aims it sets out to achieve.

Nicole Grimes
 University of California, Irvine
 Nicole.e.grimes@gmail.com
 doi:10.1017/S1479409812000365

Charles Youmans, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). xxxvi+368 pp. £18.99.

Like no other composer of his generation, Richard Strauss invites stereotypes as much as he evades categorisation. While clichés of the plain Bavarian, the money-grabbing businessman, the egocentric promoter of his own works, the political opportunist, the scandalous modernist, turning into audience-pleasing conservative are legion, these masks were consciously adopted or accepted by a man who (yet another cliché: the passionate skat player) always kept his cards close to his chest. Uncovering the real face behind the multiple masks is as precarious a task as it is timely. His fall-out with musical modernism earned him

'Revisionsbedürftig: Zur gedruckten Korrespondenz von Johannes Brahms und Clara Schumann: Auswirkungen irrtümlicher oder lückenhafter Überlieferung auf werkgenetische Bestimmungen (mit einem unausgewerteten Brahms-Brief zur Violinsonate Op. 78', *Die Musikforschung* 41/3 (1988): 235–41, translated in part by Ben Kohn and George Bozarth as 'New Evidence of the Genesis of Brahms's G minor Violin Sonata, Op. 78', *American Brahms Society Newsletter* 9/1 (Spring 1991): 5–6.

¹⁹ For example, 'Through an eccentric rhythmic structure he transmutes the three-fourth beat repeatedly into a two-fourth one'. (85) See also 50, 105.