2 Years of transition: Brahms and Vienna 1862–1875

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Brahms's first visit to Vienna towards the end of September 1862 is often taken as inaugurating the major professional change of his life: the move from provincial Hamburg, with its hard upbringing and limited opportunities, to the city of the classic masters, and his subsequent dominance of its musical life as their greatest successor. Yet the reality is otherwise. Brahms settled into Vienna only very slowly and it could not really be called his home for upwards of a decade. These years spanned a difficult transition in both professional and personal life as he sought a career path and a domestic identity. The fight to realise his artistic aims and ambitions, begun in Hamburg was to continue for long years. It was only when he finally became established as a financially independent composer in Vienna, by the mid-1870s, that he really found stability and routine for his composition; prior to this, a pattern emerged rather by default.

It is difficult to know what Brahms first expected of Vienna. He had several contacts in Hamburg who would have encouraged him to make what was still a long journey – for example the composer Carl Peter Grädener (1812–83) and Bertha Porubszky, a Viennese girl who had been a member of his choir – in addition to the wider circle of musicians who performed in Vienna, beginning with his intimates Clara Schumann and Joseph Joachim.[1] His first comments leave the issue open. He wrote shortly before leaving to his fellow composer Albert Dietrich, 'I am leaving on Monday for Vienna! I look forward to it as a child. Of course I do not know how long I shall stay. We will leave it open and I hope to meet you some time during the winter. Pray do not leave me quite without letters',[2] leaving Dietrich some business addresses rather than a private one or hotel. Doubtless he himself did not fully know the reasons for the journey, beyond a natural desire to know the city which had become the increasing focus of his musical values and commitments (he had apparently planned a trip earlier in the year).[3] Clear in retrospect, Brahms's destiny there was undoubtedly hidden from his full perception for years. For this reason it is appropriate to assess the situation he faced in 1862 from both points of view: on the one hand, the restraining claims of Hamburg – the assumptions of his upbringing, issues of family, friends and professional expectation; on the other, the attractions of Vienna – the opportunities for personal creative development, wider

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artistic contact and the promotion of his music which the Austrian capital offered.

The claims of Hamburg

Two connecting factors underpinned Brahms's attraction to Hamburg: his relationship with his family and his desire for a secure professional position and institutional status; to them can be added more generally a need to be close to his supporting circle of colleagues from the Schumann days still resident in the north and the Rhineland. He writes to Clara from Vienna in November 1862: 'you see, I am rather old-fashioned in most respects and in this among others: that I am not at all cosmopolitan, but cling to my native city as to a mother . . . Now here, where I have so much reason for gratification, I feel, and always shall feel, that I am an outsider.'[4] His attachment was not only emotional. In 1862 the family income was still variable and, as in youth, Brahms's economic self-sufficiency through his professional earnings remained – at the very least – essential. He could not rely on his parents – indeed, he always felt the need to make additional contributions. When in the same month he wrote to tell his parents of first successes in Vienna, he was clearly homesick, immediately remembering family events and asking for a letter,[5] though his mother responded in her letter of 6 December that, given the many activities he had described, he was 'probably not homesick any longer'. [6] He returned to Hamburg on 5 May 1863 after about seven months in Vienna to share his thirtieth birthday with his parents at home; in the summer, in order to work on the cantata *Rinaldo*, he took lodgings in nearby Blankenese on the Elbe, where he soon met up with former members of his Frauenchor. He would probably have stayed in the city or the north in the next year to continue work, as he had no special reason to make the journey back to Vienna. He had already commented to his mother that, despite the interest from publishers in Vienna after his first concerts, 'much pleases me better in North Germany than Vienna and particularly the publishers', and that he would rather take a smaller fee to be published by them.[7] However, in June he received the invitation to conduct the choir of the Vienna Singakademie, the result of support from an influential group of musicians and friends he had made in the city. Brahms held the post from October 1863 to April 1864, and had returned to Vienna by the last week of August 1863 to prepare for it.

After the season, in the spring of 1864, Brahms again had no pressing reason to remain in Vienna. Indeed, circumstances were quickly to prevent it, for his support in Hamburg was soon to be required as a result

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of the worsening relations of his parents. The summer of 1863 had seen increased tensions between them as his mother, Christiane, had begun rapidly to age, their seventeen-year age difference now telling badly; Johann Jacob was still a vital and active fifty-seven and unminded to constrain his professional activities, especially since he had been invited that year by Stockhausen to play in the Philharmonic Orchestra and needed to practise undisturbed. The mother was deeply hurt by his robust attitude and Brahms sought to resolve their differences. But by the summer of 1864 it had become quite clear that separation was the only solution. Showing obvious professional sympathy for his father, though deeply devoted to his mother, Brahms took rooms for him in the Grosse Bleichen; his mother and sister, Elise, remained at home in the Fuhlentwiete before moving in November to a comfortable apartment with a garden in the Lange Reihe when the family home was given up. The younger brother, Fritz, took separate lodgings in the Theaterstrasse. The commitment to two homes naturally increased Brahms's family obligations, and he assumed financial responsibility for his mother and sister. He did not want to regard the break as permanent, and was still writing to his father in October 1864 in the hope that he would perhaps occupy the spare room kept in the Lange Reihe home for Brahms, in company with Brahms's books; he asked about all the practical arrangements, and for assurance that his mother was receiving an adequate part of what he gave his father.[8] Brahms was generous throughout. Indeed, Geiringer notes that Clara Schumann was even constrained to write to the father to point out the slender nature of Brahms's finances,[9] which throws an interesting light on what the father expected of his son. Even after Johann Jacob had remarried, and after his retirement in 1869, Brahms contributed to his support. On 2 February 1865, Christiane died. This loss, which affected Brahms deeply, did not lessen his family commitments, however: he continued to contribute to Elise's upkeep, even after she had married (Fritz became independent as a successful piano teacher).

His mother's death inaugurated a new phase of Brahms's life, one with no sure sense of professional context or direction, including a period of eighteen months without visiting Vienna. In the autumn of 1865 he undertook recitals in Switzerland and Germany, including performances in Detmold, Düsseldorf, Oldenburg and Hamburg. He spent an extensive part of 1866 in Karlsruhe, in various towns in Switzerland and in Baden Baden to complete *Ein deutsches Requiem*, not returning to Vienna until November 1866. In 1868 he embarked again on wide-ranging travels, including recitals with Stockhausen in North Germany and Denmark. He had taken a new interest in his father after his remarriage and accompanied him enthusiastically on a tour of Upper Austria in the summer of

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1867, for a walking trip near Bonn in 1868 and to Switzerland in the same year. Yet whilst he travelled widely, either to give recitals or to find peace for extended composition (as in his summers at Baden Baden during 1864–72, where he took lodgings close to Clara's summer residence, shared meals with her family and became part of her rich cultural circle there), Brahms kept a room at his father's homes (he moved on his remarriage in 1866) until 1869, and regularly returned. In 1868, for example, he spent almost the whole of May in Hamburg after the Bremen premiere of the *Requiem*, and his tours drew him to the region in February, March and November of that year: every visit to the north involved a visit home. Not until 30 April 1869 did he ask his father to stop reserving his room.[10]

On the professional front, the conductorship of the Philharmonic Orchestra of his native city had been Brahms's great goal long before he went to Vienna and remained so long after. Though of humble background, the proud son of the city and of a solid Hamburg musician had complete belief in his suitability for the post, soon to be vacant on the retirement of its co-founder F. W. Grund. His interests were being promoted by his friend the teacher and musical antiquarian Theodor Avé Lallemant, who was on the committee. It appears, however, that a decision had already been taken, but not announced, in favour of Julius Stockhausen, one of the greatest baritone singers of the period, and already Brahms's close recital partner. Brahms obviously had his suspicions that this appointment would be made and Avé probably gave him some inkling. He asks his parents in his letter of November 1862, 'Does Avé often go to see you? Has he told you anything in particular about Stockhausen?'[11] Stockhausen's appointment was, if not a total surprise, a shock none the less. Brahms never forgave Hamburg for passing him over, though he bore Stockhausen no lasting grudge for it. [12] Joachim was clearly disappointed, writing to Avé (who had been a member of the committee) of Brahms's sterling qualities for the position, 'It is precisely as a man upon whom one can rely that I regard Johannes so highly, with his gifts and his will! There is nothing that he cannot undertake and, with his earnestness, overcome!', though he also alluded to Brahms's 'asperity of nature', which Joachim had hoped the position would help to alleviate.[13] And Brahms had to grit his teeth again as soon as 1867, when the situation repeated itself on Stockhausen's resignation: the society appointed the Berlin musician Julius von Bernuth (who would then remain for years, presiding over declining standards, and become outpaced by younger conductors).[14]

So, when offered the position in 1894, Brahms's coolly eloquent reply scarcely obscures the bitterness he had felt in facing up to the professional wrench consequent on these early disappointments: 'it was long before I

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got used to the idea of going along other paths. If things had gone according to my wishes I would perhaps celebrate an anniversary with you today; but in that case you would still have to look around for a younger, capable talent. May you find him now, and may he serve you as faithfully as would have . . . your respectful and obedient servant, J. Brahms.'[15] His ambitions were entirely natural and reasonable. As first a practical musician – a pianist, organist and conductor, who earned little from his extended compositions until the great success of *Ein deutsches Requiem* in the late 1860s – his models in professional life were those of his contemporaries and seniors who performed as well as composed. Joachim was court music director at Hannover from 1853 to 1868; Albert Dietrich was Hofkapellmeister at Oldenburg from 1861; Otto Julius Grimm was conductor of the Cäcilienverein in Münster, Westphalia from 1857 and later director of the Music Academy from 1878; even Robert Schumann spent his last years from 1850 as city music director in Düsseldorf, where Brahms first met him.

If Brahms was angered over the Hamburg situation, nor was he happy with many aspects of Viennese musical life when he first arrived and for some time after, as has been intimated. In December 1864 he observed: 'it is really hardly pleasant here. Hellmesberger and [Ferdinand] Laub [a famous violinist and quartet leader, and Hellmesberger's chief rival] are at each other's throats. Herbeck drowns himself and the public in music; and then there is Dessoff! Though one may be, as I am, quite unconcerned with all this music-making, one is obliged to breathe the atmosphere and unable to escape it; for all that it does not always smell sweet.'[16] Brahms continued to entertain hopes in the north throughout the decade. The letter asking his father to stop reserving his room, shows how events had finally drawn their own conclusions for him, yet there is still a sad resignation regarding his hoped-for career in Hamburg: 'after all, I cannot wish to settle in Hamburg, even if I visit you for shorter or longer periods, we can hardly for that reason keep two rooms empty all the year round . . . besides what should I do in Hamburg? Apart from you there is no one I want to see. You know well enough how little, if any, respect I get out of the place. In short, I realise at last that I must have some sort of home somewhere, so that I think that I shall try to make myself more comfortable in Vienna next autumn.'[17] His leading local supporters, his teacher Marxsen and the great Handel scholar Chrysander (who lived nearby at Bergedorf), had both made clear to him earlier their reserve about the city's attitude to him. Chrysander wrote in 1869 in hope of his visit: 'of course, I know only too well that no particular musical treat awaits you, but rather the hidden enmity of small-minded men, who, alas, are influential enough to see that nothing of importance can happen in

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Hamburg'. And Marxsen, after a performance of the *Requiem* in the city, comments that 'the artists of Hamburg, your so-called intimate friends, were one and all conspicuous by their absence!!!' [18]

A peripatetic musician

Without a professional position, it made little difference to Brahms's income whether he lived in Vienna or Hamburg. He was insufficiently committed to piano teaching to find any great advantage in Viennese pupils over Hamburg ones, though he could certainly have developed a large and fashionable practice with his early contacts and reputation. And his recitals as soloist and as chamber musician, involving extended tours, took place of necessity over a much wider terrain, though his favourite partners, Joachim and Stockhausen, were still in the north. Brahms took little pleasure in piano teaching. None the less he was always a conscientious and responsible teacher with clear ideas on technique and practising. His playing was altogether a different matter: here he was very variable. Though a pianist with a prodigious technique and a mastery of the classical and much romantic literature as well as of the great demands of his own music (his skills in the execution of which had been recognised unreservedly by Schumann and were agreed by all who heard him), Brahms was rarely at ease as a public soloist and needed the response of a warm audience, or of his colleagues in chamber music. He was invariably well received and quickly gained a major reputation, though he was never considered as polished as his great contemporaries, his importance lying rather in interpretation.

From the perspective of Brahms's frequently peripatetic life, one can see the vital importance of the position with the Vienna Singakademie in 1863–4. It gave him a high public profile and provided a professional platform for his ground-breaking performances of early repertory. What he had begun to do in the obscurity of Detmold, and largely privately with his own choir in Hamburg, was now given a stage in a major musical city, and with it much of what he imagined he wanted professionally. Even though the Singakademie was in the shadow of the larger and very much more prestigious Singverein of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, his programmes aroused interest and curiosity (and a little antagonism by some). The Vienna Singakademie had been founded as recently as 1858 to focus on early church music and unaccompanied singing. It gave three or four concerts annually and one oratorio. But Brahms might never have put down these roots after his first year 1862–3: the appointment was only narrowly approved. Despite Brahms's tight circle of supporters, there was

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severe competition between those who championed the Viennese Franz Krenn, who had taken over during the illness of the conductor F. Stegmayer (whose death then caused the vacancy), and those who wanted a younger man such as Brahms to revive the society's flagging fortunes. Chief of these were Josef Gänsbacher, a prominent singer, with a surgeon, Dr Scholz, a merchant, Herr Adolf Schulz, and a Viennese insurance official, Herr Flatz. Gänsbacher won over Krenn's supporters, headed by Prince Constantin Czartoryski, by a majority of one.[19] Brahms made a great impression. Though technical faults were revealed in his conducting and there were some performance problems (and though his pioneering programmes, including unknown works of the Baroque and Renaissance, were not always widely enjoyed or well received by critics), his commitment to thorough rehearsals and his deeply musical performances were widely appreciated and he was offered a three-year contract. Though he first intended to accept it, by the end of the summer his resolution failed and he resigned; he could not face the administration, the commitment and the needless exposure to unsympathetic critics. Indeed, in a letter to the critic Eduard Hanslick (with whom he had quickly established a rapport) he intimated how easily for these reasons he might have refused the position in the first place. Yet it served his creative needs at the time.

As a result of circumstances personal and professional, therefore, Brahms was wont to describe himself for much of the period as a 'vagabond'.[20] Having lived at home until he was almost thirty and destined to live in the same lodgings for the last twenty-five years of his life, Brahms lived in seven or more residences during the much shorter period 1862–71. They were as follows:

Autumn 1862: Leopoldstadt: Novaragasse 39; Novaragasse 55
Winter 1862 – 3: Czerningasse 7
Autumn 1863 – 1865: Deutsches Haus 1, Singerstrasse 7
December 1867 – early 1868: Postgasse 6
1869: Hotel Zum Kronprinzen at the Aspern Brücke
1870: Ungarngasse 2.
1871: Hotel Zum Kronprinzen at the Aspern Brücke

On 27 December 1871 he took the lodgings at Haus Wien, 4, Karlsgasse, which he would then keep; first two rooms, then later three.[21]

The attractions of Vienna

For all Brahms's links to Northern Germany and personal contacts with Hamburg, every year that passed after 1862 weakened them in some crucial way. In domestic terms, the death of his mother and the remarriage

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of his father soon after took off much of the emotional pressure. His father now had a happy marriage and moved to new lodgings in the Anscharplatz in the Valentinskamp district. Brahms got on well with his stepmother, Karoline Schnack, and continued to do so after his father's death (only five years later, in 1872), contributing to her upkeep until her death in 1892, and to that of her son. Brahms now had an increasingly superficial relationship with his sister, and none with his brother. In addition to the blows to his institutional ambitions in Hamburg in 1862 and 1867, this period also saw changes in the personal and professional lives of his contemporaries, who became married, began families, and sought new jobs and promotion. Joachim, for example had married in 1863 and become a father in 1864; in 1867 he resigned from the Hannover position on the abdication of the King of Hannover, and moved to Berlin to head the new Hochschule für Musik. Clara Schumann, having moved to Berlin from Düsseldorf in 1857, now took a home in Baden Baden from 1863 to 1873. Brahms's letters show how much these changes affected him. But he too was steadily growing in success, if not as he had imagined it: he had also to look to his own professional interests and move on with his life.

The success in Vienna in 1862–4 had given him confidence and contacts. Despite the problems already noted, he had made a major impression in a major city and had entered into mainstream institutional life. When he had first arrived he had found a very welcome response from fellow musicians: all the channels had been quickly made open to him, and he had taken advantage as pianist and composer. In addition to the Court Opera, Vienna's chief institutions were first the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, founded in 1812, with its Singverein (founded by Johann Herbeck in 1858) and its Conservatoire; and secondly the Philharmonic Society, founded in 1842, which used the orchestra of the Court Opera. When Brahms first arrived in Vienna, the artistic director of the Gesellschaft was Herbeck, who in 1859 had created an independent orchestra for the organisation (which had been formerly reliant, like the Philharmonic Orchestra, on that of the Opera); he was thus one of the most influential figures in Viennese music. At this time, the Gesellschaft and the Philharmonic Society had came to represent the liberal and conservative spirits of classical music respectively, though Otto Dessoff, as conductor of the Philharmonic (and of the Opera) since 1860, did seek to perform new works, for example the Schumann symphonies. The staff of the Conservatoire included its Director and head of violin, Joseph Hellmesberger, the pianist Julius Epstein as head of piano, the scholar and composer Gustav Nottebohm as professor of counterpoint, the organist Rudolf Bibl, organist of the Cathedral and later of the Imperial Chapel, and also Dessoff, who taught conducting. Hellmesberger, son of the great

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violinist and conductor Georg Hellmesberger (the contemporary of Schubert), dominated Viennese music. He was concert-master of the Opera (and therefore leader of the Philharmonic Orchestra), a former artistic director of the Gesellschaft (1851–9), leader of the only resident and celebrated professional quartet in Vienna, and an accomplished virtuoso player.

Immediately upon his arrival, Brahms made contact with the Conservatoire, calling on Julius Epstein, who already knew his published works. Epstein immediately went to Hellmesberger and a rehearsal of Brahms's piano quartets Opp. 25 and 26 was arranged, Hellmesberger expressing unreserved enthusiasm for the music and declaring of Brahms 'this is Beethoven's heir'. Epstein recalls that Brahms played the quartets 'with members of the Hellmesberger Quartet (Hellmesberger, Döbyal, Röver) at my house in the Schülerstrasse in the first place . . . We were all delighted and carried away.'[22] Hellmesberger immediately put the works into his coming season. On 16 November 1862, Op. 25 was given with Beethoven's Op. 131 and the Mendelssohn E♭ Quartet in the Vereinsaal of the Gesellschaft, a major event arousing the interest of publishers and critics. The event immediately focused attention on Brahms and a circle of admirers began to form, persuading him to embark on a concert of his own, which took place in the Vereinsaal on 29 November and included the Op. 26 Quartet and solos by Brahms: the Handel Variations Op. 24, Schumann's Fantasie in C and Bach's F major organ Toccata in Brahms's arrangement. Brahms's music cannot be said to have been warmly received, but his playing went down very well indeed, and projected a much better sense of his musicianship to his audience. Though the reviews were not entirely without reservation, Hanslick especially noting his reticence in expression (a feature long known in his circle), the positive aspects were so great that Brahms immediately gained a favourable reputation. Selmar Bagge commented in the *Deutsche Musikzeitung* that 'we have to bestow high praise not only on the enormous technical attainment, but also on a performance instinct with musical genius, on a treatment of the instrument as fascinating as it was original'.[23] Later the Vienna correspondent of the *Leipziger Signale* was equally impressed: 'Brahms's playing is always attractive and convincing. His rendering of Bach's Chromatic Fantasia and of Beethoven's Variations was of the highest interest.'[24] The interest remained, as can be seen in the review by Karl Eduard Schelle of *Die Presse* of his concert of 17 March 1867: 'At last a pianist who entirely takes hold of one . . . one only needs to hear the first few chords to be convinced that Herr Brahms is a player of quite extraordinary stamp.'[25] On 7 December 1862, Herbeck gave Vienna its first performance of the D major Serenade at the second Gesellschaft concert.

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Thus within three weeks Brahms had appeared as a chamber, piano and orchestral composer, as solo pianist in his own music and that of others, and had become the focus of interest and support. This core support was to be crucial when his music experienced the inevitable resistance from less sympathetic orchestral players, as happened in the following year, when Dessoff prepared the Second Serenade for performance with the Philharmonic on 8 March 1863. During the rehearsals there was dissension among the players, some of whom refused to continue. At this point, Dessoff threatened to resign, as did Hellmesberger as leader, and the first flute, Doppler. This quelled the rebellion and obviously represented an important moment in the establishment of his music in Vienna.[26] Apart from the immediate circle of performing musicians concerned with his work, Vienna offered many other contacts. He soon met Karl Goldmark, the city's most notable composer, resident since the age of eighteen, and now thirty and rising in fame. Brahms would retain a frequent, if not always relaxed relationship with him over many years. The composer Peter Cornelius (now resident) and the leading pianist Carl Tausig, both devotees of Liszt and Wagner, were soon in his company and through them he came into Wagner's circle when the composer visited Vienna in late 1862 and early 1863 to rehearse his works. During this time he laid the foundations of many later relationships with the artistic community.[27]

Yet for all the openings that Vienna offered in the fields of performance and composition, it is likely that the strongest attraction lay in its less public musical resources. The other things he could ultimately do without, but unique library resources, enabling him to study early scores and even the manuscripts of his esteemed composers, as well as books in all fields, could not be duplicated to the same extent elsewhere. The attraction seems implicit in his first reactions, as when he wrote to Schubring 'we have in particular the sacred memory of the great musicians, whose lives and works are brought daily to our minds'.[28] He quickly made a close friendship with Gustav Nottebohm, the senior resident scholar, whose knowledge of Beethoven and Schubert was unparalleled and who possessed many priceless items, with the theorist Simon Sechter, who wrote a canon for him,[29] and with Carl Ferdinand Pohl, librarian of the Gesellschaft archives. His friendship with the publisher J. P. Gotthard brought him into contact with a different aspect of historical study: the rediscovery of the unpublished music of Schubert and the plans for its publication. Spina, who had taken over the business of Diabelli, also took over unknown works which he was able to publish for the first time, including the Octet, the C major Quintet, and the B minor symphony.

With these contacts, and with his impact the following year as conductor of the Singakademie, Brahms had in a mere eighteen months laid very

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firm foundations in Vienna as an outstanding pianist, a historically pioneering conductor and an idealistic composer of striking historical orientation. He was now steadily to build on these in the ensuing years of intermittent residence in the city. One signal moment was the renewed contact in 1867 with the great surgeon Theodor Billroth, whom he had met in the musical circle of Zurich the previous year, and who had now been called to the professorship of medicine in the University. With Eduard Hanslick, Billroth would become Brahms's closest musical and cultural companion over the following years and his house the location of numerous early private performances of Brahms's new works, in which he participated as amateur violist. With the appearance of *Ein deutsches Requiem*, enthusiastically reviewed in Bremen, if not in Vienna, Brahms gained a reputation as a composer which began to match his fame as a pianist. His many influential supporters saw him duly appointed as artistic director of the Gesellschaft itself in 1872, in succession to Anton Rubinstein: an extraordinary transition in status over the ten years since his narrowly achieved appointment to the far less prestigious Singakademie. He again emphasised early music in programme planning, performing many Baroque works, yet also included modern works by his contemporaries, and by himself. He completely reformed the rehearsal methods and his period as conductor, though brief (1872–5), is an admired one in the annals of the Society. But his old reservations remained as to the practicalities of the job (which included the hiring of performers and choice of programme) and he decided to resign in 1875, to be succeeded by Herbeck, who had been lobbying to return. Brahms's relations with the Society remained cordial, and he was given honorary membership and invitations to sit on its committees, symbolising the vast influence he now commanded. This was to be his last institutional position and signals the beginning of his mature period as an independent composer, playing only his own music. The First Symphony appeared in the following year. Brahms still got offers of musical directorships, but was less and less inclined to bother with them, claiming his desire to stay in Vienna as his excuse. The 'stranger' of 1862 was now fully at home.

With all the professional advantages it offered, Vienna also provided Brahms with an entirely different personal environment. Initially he found living in Vienna intimidating, remarking that 'a big city is a desert to one dangling in the air as I do'.[30] But he also took keen enjoyment in aspects of its life. Before returning to Hamburg in May 1863, he had delayed in order to go on a trip in the surrounding area, and he quickly developed an enthusiasm for the amusement park, the Prater, where he could hear performances of the Hungarian *Csárdás*.[31] In personal terms, he was also free of family scrutiny in relationships with women, though

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the patterns he had already set in avoiding commitment were quickly reinforced. After his brief engagement to Agathe von Siebold in 1859, he had many infatuations and was doubtless specially attracted by Viennese women, as Geiringer suggests, but he entered into no significant relationships that rivalled the permanent emotional attachment to Clara Schumann.[32] Even when she advised him in a motherly way to seek a wife and make a family life,[33] he never seems seriously to have taken her advice.

The creative reality

Brahms's failure to settle either professionally or personally during the period up to the Gesellschaft appointment and his tendency to remain on the edge of things finds its real context only in the realm of his compositional ambition. Had he possessed less talent he would doubtless have come to terms with practical issues more readily. But institutions took his energies and demanded more of him than he was able to give. The indecision and desperate need for privacy for much of the time betoken his great preoccupations: that he kept his plans and progress from even his closest circle reflects the size of the task he had set himself. His ambition went far beyond theirs, even that of Joachim, who was a gifted composer when Brahms first met him and whose works he greatly admired. The first symphonies of notable contemporaries such as Bruckner, Bruch and Dvořák, were first attempts that were regarded by them as such; their mature styles formed slowly and came to fruition in later works. Brahms's willingness to wait until middle age to complete a first symphony worthy of Beethoven (as well as the greatest symphonists since) gives, despite its routine familiarity in the history of nineteenth-century music, an extraordinary insight into his ambitions. Moreover, this commitment to producing complex and original first works in traditional genres dominates the earlier phase of our period equally. The years 1858–65, especially, were of enormous struggle and self-challenge.

The protracted birth of the First Symphony Op. 68 exactly spans the period of this chapter. Begun when Brahms was known to a very small public – its origins were vouchsafed only to Dietrich and Clara (not even directly to Joachim) – it was completed when he had risen to the very top of Vienna's musical life. Its style reflects these momentous years of change. Beginning, after the slow introduction, with an Allegro in Beethoven scherzo rhythm (the last of a series of C minor scherzi, and completed by 1862), it progresses through two inner movements of very individual character to a finale which is entirely different, and strikingly original in form; it is possible that the finale was under serious considera-

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tion only from 1868. The struggle to conceive and execute such a seminal work hardly melded with a conventional professional life. The Piano Quartet Op. 60 shows the reverse side of this struggle. It was not destined to be a comparable success or lead anywhere: rather, it was completed over nineteen years (1855–74) after its companions Opp. 25 and 26, begun later, had been long known. It took a change of key from C♯ minor to C minor and the addition of two later movements as movements 3 and 4 to complete a work of very different emotional character, almost autobiographical in its dynamic profile from tragic struggle to relieved acquiescence. Though the third of the C minor works, the String Quartet Op. 51 No. 1, is known only from the period 1865–73, the idiom of its first movement, at least, places it with the first movement of Op. 68, and the very original form of the outer movements suggests years of thought. The three chamber works composed in the first phase of this period (1860–5) were also slow to reach completion. The great Piano Quintet Op. 34 completed in 1864 began life in 1862 at Hamm bei Hamburg as a string quintet, being reworked later as a two-piano sonata before assuming its ideal form for piano and strings. Though the problem was with medium (a late example of the problem which afflicted the evolution of Op. 11 and Op. 15), it seems unlikely that the reworking did not involve recomposition. With the String Sextet Op. 36 and the Cello Sonata Op. 38 the issues were again formal. Three movements of Op. 38 were completed in 1862 at Munster-am-Stein and Hamm, and the finale not until 1865 at Lichtenthal. The failure to complete the work as first begun (Brahms omitted the original slow movement from the published version) may relate to the problems of matching the planned movements 1–3 to the predominantly fugal finale; the resulting scheme, with a neo-classical minuet and an atmospheric trio as the middle movement, is highly original. Though the delay with Op. 36 was less – movements 1–3 completed in 1864, the finale the following year – the fact that the theme of the slow movement was composed in 1855 again suggests a decade or so of interaction with the material.[34]

Similar observations can be made of the major choral works. The largest-scale of them, *Ein deutsches Requiem*, gives every evidence of a long gestation. We know that the material of the funeral march derived from the two-piano sonata/symphony of 1854: indeed, it seems very likely that movements 1–3 all significantly predated the final working period of 1865–6. Nos. 1–2 are linked by chorale prelude style and thematic substance, while the orchestral material of the first part of No. 3, in D minor, could easily come from the symphonic source. Movements 4, 6 and 7 are – like No. 5, which we know was completed last – rather different in idiom and must date from later. The next most complex works, the Motets

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Op. 29 and 74, are also deeply embedded in the earlier period; published in 1864, Op. 29 No. 1 dates from c. 1860 and Op. 29 No. 2 from 1856, both steeped in contrapuntal device. Yet even the Motets Op. 74, published in 1876, go back earlier. The second (from the same school of strict Bachian working as Op. 29 No. 1), appears to have predated 1870 and is probably from much earlier; the first – the jewel of the group, Op. 74 No. 1, draws much of its material from the so-called 'Canonic Mass' of 1856. Again, the earlier material is crucially transformed formally to make the mature masterpiece, with its new opening question 'Warum [?]'. Quite apart from other works in these genres which may have been discarded, there was another whole sphere of creative interest with which Brahms was pre-occupied, namely dramatic music. Throughout the 1860s he considered operatic composition and continued to do so for years thereafter intermittently. Only the dramatic cantata *Rinaldo* tells us what such a work might have been like. By the time Brahms had added the final chorus in 1868, having completed most of the music in 1863, he had found a new dramatic style in the baritone solo writing of the *Requiem*. The first two sections of the *Alto Rhapsody* show even more strikingly the individuality of the dramatic style Brahms had developed by the end of the decade, and it continued to be reflected in the smaller confines of his *Lieder* for years after.

The period following the completion of the *Requiem* and *Rinaldo* in 1868 and of much chamber music a few years earlier represented a release for Brahms. A number of large-scale works suggest a new relaxation and ease in these media. In the choral sphere, the *Alto Rhapsody* has a flexibility and fluidity that seems more spontaneous than the *Requiem*, less hard-won, and the work was completed much more quickly. If the *Triumphlied* is an occasional work for national celebration with obvious imitation of Handelian oratorio style, it still possesses a very spontaneous quality, and was much more popular than the *Requiem* when first performed; and the *Schicksalslied* explores a sustained and individual mood which also seems more spontaneous in conception. In the orchestral sphere, the *Variations on a Theme of Haydn* reflect Viennese influence and associations: the theme was given to Brahms by C. F. Pohl in 1870 and Brahms completed the distinctly neo-classical composition in 1873. Closely tied to it in key and structure is the String Quartet Op. 67 in B♭. It follows the same structural principle of recalling the opening of the work at the end of a final variation movement, and the outer movements are again very neo-classical in idiom, breathing an entirely different air from that of the weighty and lengthy earlier chamber and orchestral compositions. Two other works belong between these two phases. The Horn Trio Op. 40 of 1865 lives largely in a musical world dictated by the romantic

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associations of the *Waldhorn* (requiring traditional hand-horn technique) which Brahms specified for its performance: especially the hunting-horn idiom of the scherzo and finale, the opening theme, and the introspective chorale-like figure of the slow movement. Though credited with the same period of working as its companion in C minor (begun in the 1860s), the A minor String Quartet Op. 51 No. 2 seems to belong to a later stylistic phase, with its dance-like qualities in the third and fourth movements (compare the finale with the *Neue Liebeslieder* waltz No.14) and the lyricism and flexibility of phrasing of movements 1 and 2.

It is only in Brahms's smaller-scale works, more easily written, more conveniently performed, that some sense of the outer life, not least of the association with Vienna, becomes tangible. His own instrument, the piano, shows this first. Soon after his arrival he wrote the *Variations on a Theme of Paganini (Studies)*, adapting his strict variation methods to the needs of a virtuoso. If the form and principles are similar, the manner is without precedent, with modern keyboard figuration drawn from Liszt and Schumann standing in stark contrast to the studied transformation of Baroque idioms and extraordinary rigour and thoroughness of the Handel Variations. The inspiration was the technique of Carl Tausig. More specific to Vienna were the Waltzes for piano duo Op. 39 of 1865. They have many stylistic sources, but express a new lightness of mood and pleasure in harmonic resource within the narrowest confines that shows a new interest in small forms. Indeed Eduard Hanslick (the work's dedicatee) immediately noted the change of style in reviewing it. Though the themes of the first set of Hungarian Dances of 1865 were apparently derived from Brahms's first contacts with Eduard Reményi in 1852 and 1853, the contact with the outdoor performances of the *Csárdás* in Vienna from 1862 must have had some effect on the composition, and the second set, to original themes by Brahms, parallels the waltzes in its harmonic and formal richness within the prescribed dance form. An intimate relation exists between the convivial idiom of the Waltzes for piano duo op. 39 (only subsequently arranged by Brahms as solos) and the vocal music: Op. 39 No. 10 also appears in a version for vocal quartet. Brahms's waltz style received greater exposure through the two sets of *Liebeslieder* Waltzes Op. 52 to texts by Daumer, later followed owing to popular demand by a set of *Neue Liebeslieder* Op. 65, ending with a coda to text by Goethe. Here the Viennese association is unmistakable in No. 6 with its text 'Am Donaustrande da steht ein Haus'. A popular idiom with Viennese associations also appears in the solo songs. Brahms wrote the famous 'Wiegenlied' Op. 49 No. 4 as a counterpoint or variation on the Viennese popular song by Alexander Baumann concealed in his accompaniment and dedicated it to the Fabers, including in the published score the

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dedication 'An B. F. in Wien . . .'[35] Extra-musical aspects are not only Viennese, however. Thoughts of Hamburg appear in the wistful vocal quartet 'An die Heimat' Op. 64 No. 1, which was begun in December 1863, his second Christmas in Vienna (which he spent with the Fabers), and which is an emotional expression of his homeward sentiments. The work was not published until 1874, with two other quartets. It is also possible that the group of three songs titled 'Heimweh' Op. 63 Nos. 7–9 to texts by the North German poet Klaus Groth are, in their longing for home and childhood, autobiographical.

The mirror image of Brahms's struggles as a composer is to be found in the reaction of critics. They showed him just what he had denied himself in pursuing his lofty artistic goals in the avoidance of easily absorbed music, and in offering constant challenge to the listener. This is nowhere clearer than in Vienna with its wide range of critical reactions and polemical atmosphere. At the extremes stood Eduard Hanslick, music critic of the new liberal daily the *Neue Freie Presse* since its foundation in 1856, and Rudolf Hirsch, of the conservative *Wiener Zeitung*, with others in between and changing their views according to the work concerned. Although Hanslick, had followed Brahms's career with interest since meeting him in 1856, he was not at first enthusiastic about the first performance in Vienna of the Piano Quartet Op. 26. By comparison with the Handel Variations, the impression made was 'by no means as favourable. For us the themes are insignificant. Brahms has a tendency to favour themes whose contrapuntal viability is far greater than their essential inner content. The themes of the Quartet sound dry and prosaic.'[36] The conservative Beethoven and Schumann follower Selmar Bagge, writing in the *Deutsche Musikzeitung*, was more enthusiastic and continued after leaving Vienna and writing for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in Leipzig. He found the Intermezzo of Op. 25 in the earlier concert 'charming', but, like Hanslick, found the 'melodic invention not significant, the character of the whole monotonous. The four instruments are constantly occupied, not in the nature of chamber music with individual voices, but only serving the *Klangwirkung*.'[37]

Another contributor to the *DMZ*, Hermann Deiters (later to be a close friend of Brahms and his first biographer), embraced the earnestness as an important feature, considering that in the Op. 25 Quartet, after a period of lengthy study, Brahms had come 'to the full expression of his artistic individuality'.[38] In the Vienna dailies, Brahms also found a keen supporter in Ludwig Speidel, a colleague of Hanslick on the *Neue Freie Presse* (though he soon became an enemy for personal reasons). He responded to Herbeck's performance of Op. 11 in December 1862 alluding to its reception: 'the serenade, a fine, interesting and intellectual work,

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deserved warmer acknowledgement'.[39] The Vienna correspondent of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* was equally enthusiastic. 'It is fresh and rich in themes of which nearly every one is pervaded by a rare grace and a brightness of tone which are becoming every day more unusual. The score convincingly exhibits, moreover, one of the most prominent sides of Brahms's musical individuality. I would call this a power of refashioning, in the best spirit of the present day, the contrapuntal forms of canon and fugue. . . . Brahms succeeds in . . . reconsecrating and carrying on the spiritual treasure inherited from Bach, Beethoven and Schumann, in the light of modernity.'[40]

Although Brahms continued generally to beget varied reactions, with reservations from Schelle and hostility from Hirsch, Hanslick grew warmer to Brahms's music, finding the Serenade more accessible than the tough piano quartets. 'If any of the young composers has the right not to be ignored, it is Brahms. He has shown himself in each of his lately performed works as an independent, original individuality, a finely organised, true, musical nature, as an artist ripening towards mastership by means of unwearied conscious endeavour.'[41] As a major work for chorus and orchestra, *Ein deutsches Requiem* was a test of developing Viennese reactions to Brahms. Herbeck was probably wise to restrict it to only three movements when it was first given in Vienna on 1 December 1867: the botched performance of movement 3 on this occasion gave the opportunity for easy criticism by Schelle and Hirsch. Hanslick alone recognised the level of the achievement, 'one of the ripest fruits in the domain of sacred music', reacting sharply to the disturbances made by an opposing group as 'a requiem for the good manners of our concert rooms'. [42]

Elsewhere, in many major cities, reviews long remained negative. In Cologne, despite the Gürzenich conductor Ferdinand Hiller's support, the serenade was found to be 'too lengthy and its themes too "naive" for his elaborate treatment of them'.[43] In Leipzig, he remained unwelcome to the highly conservative critic of the *Signale* Eduard Bernsdorff; even when the First Symphony was recognized on all sides in 1876, the latter wrote disparagingly of the support of Brahms's faction in underpinning its success when first done at the Gewandhaus.[44] The enthusiastic responses to the first performance of the *Requiem* in Bremen, which made Brahms's international name, were very unusual – clearly a tribute to a local composer and the attention brought to the city and the region. In smaller centres where his colleagues held sway Brahms could expect a warmer response from critics and audience. Albert Dietrich's enthusiasm for the First Serenade in Oldenburg resulted in good reviews for his performance.[45] In Karslruhe in 1865 when Brahms played the First Piano concerto under the court director Hermann Levi at the first subscription

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concert, the work was given for the first time with every sign of approval, Brahms commenting ironically 'the public, it seemed, had hardly any ill-humour'.[46]

In addition, considerable interest was shown in his technical processes. For example, Adolf Schubring wrote extensive early analyses of Brahms as a Schumann follower in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, identifying the thematic dimension that was to be of such interest to later composers.[47] Thus there were effectively two audiences for his music: on the one hand, the specialist musical one that recognised its quality and what it represented in terms of new modes of expression and technical mastery of traditional means; on the other, many critics and the general audience, who needed longer to grasp it – or to come to believe that they should.

Critical responses had a natural effect on Brahms's instincts in promoting his music. He came to lean on trusted supporters and to relate closely to those interested in his work, rather than offering it to prestigious strangers. The circumstances which gave Vienna the first performances of the piano quartets Opp. 25 and 26 when he had only just arrived may be partly ascribed to coincidence; subsequently, however, his friends and contacts in Vienna served him well and there were more early performances there than anywhere else: the first performance of the String Quartet Op. 51 No. 1 (with the Hellmesberger Quartet), early performances of the Serenade Op. 16 (Dessoff and the Philharmonic), and the String Quartet Op. 67 (the Hellmesberger Quartet), the third of the Serenade Op. 11 (Herbeck, Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde), as well as first performances with Brahms himself at the piano – of Op. 34B (the Piano Quintet in its two-piano version) with Tausig, of the Piano Quartet Op. 60 (with the Hellmesberger Quartet). An early performance of the *Triumphlied* Op. 55 under Brahms at the Gesellschaft in 1872 gives a rare example of his using an institutional position to present an extensive new work (he had only performed his folksong arrangements at the Singakademie); the choices anticipate the reception he could expect, thanks to patriotic sentiment in the first case and musical accessibility in the second. In fact, he could have had a first performance of the First Symphony itself in Vienna had he wished. Herbeck, on hearing of its completion from Dessoff, immediately asked Brahms if the world premiere could be given in Vienna. Yet, as Otto Biba comments, 'Brahms, cautious as ever, thought it too risky to have his long awaited first symphony played for the first time to a Viennese audience; he wanted to have it tried out in smaller cities before presenting it in Vienna.'[48] Brahms's reaction shows the continuing importance of the kind of early support that Dessoff had given with the difficult rehearsals of the Op. 16 Serenade in 1863, and he wrote warmly to Dessoff in exactly the same terms later: 'it

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was always my cherished and secret wish to have the thing done in a small city by a good friend, a good conductor and a good orchestra'.[49]

Other performances also relate to his circle of supporters. Dessoff's predecessor at Karlsruhe, Hermann Levi, gave the first complete performance of the *Triumphlied* Op. 55, Brahms having previously given the *Schicksalslied*; Brahms and Dessoff gave the first complete performance of the *Neue Liebeslieder* Waltzes Op. 65 in Karlsruhe. Friends at Zurich gave the first performance of the Trio Op. 40 (Hegar and Gläss), and also a second performance of the *Alto Rhapsody* Op. 53, and Brahms also gave the first performance of the Paganini variations Op. 35 there. Joachim's presence in Berlin from Autumn 1868 accounted for the first performance of the String Quartets Op. 51 No. 2 and Op. 67, an early performance of the string quartet Op. 51 No. 1 and also several early performances of the Sextet Op. 18. In Oldenburg, Dietrich gave the Op. 11 Serenade its second and later performances. In Bremen, close to Oldenburg and Hamburg, the sympathetic C. M. Reinthaler, organist of the Cathedral and conductor of the Singverein since 1858, helped with the preparation of the first complete performance of the *Requiem* (in six movements), conducted by Brahms, and conducted the second performance himself, as well as early performances of Opp. 53 and 54. In Hamburg itself, Joachim had earlier given the first performance of the Op. 11 Serenade in 1859 and Brahms of the Op. 16 Serenade in 1860. Brahms's friendship with Pauline Viardot Garcia, a close friend of Clara Schumann, whom he met in her Baden circle in 1864, partly accounts for her giving the first performance of the *Alto Rhapsody*, conducted by the music director Ernst Nauman in Jena in March 1870; however, it had previously been done privately by Levi at Karlsruhe. Though Leipzig was not sympathetic to Brahms till the 1870s, and he long remained sensitive to its hostile reception of the First Piano Concerto in 1859, later supporters helped him here too. The personnel of the first performance of the Piano Quintet Op. 34 are not known, but the Cello Sonata Op. 38 was given its Leipzig premiere by Karl Reinecke and Hegar in 1871. Reinecke had previously given the first performance of the seven-movement *Requiem* in February 1869.

Brahms knew that the essence of his art was understood by some of the best musicians. But what they could not provide was the enthusiasm of a wider audience and a frequency of performance that would satisfy his self-image as an independent professional composer. What satisfaction he did gain would not have been possible without the support of sympathetic publishers. Though the young Brahms had quickly been provided with a publisher on Schumann's recommendation in 1853, the subsequent development of his music after Schumann's death had made publishers wary. Breitkopf & Härtel were slow to respond to the two

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orchestral serenades, eventually taking only the D major, and refused to take the controversial Piano Concerto in D minor Op. 15. It was the interest of the Winterthur publisher Melchior Rieter Biedermann that saw many of the works of the period into print, notably the Piano Quintet Op. 34, *Ein deutsches Requiem* and the smaller choral works. But the interest of the young Fritz Simrock, soon to take over his father's firm, would be the longer-lasting. With the exception of Op. 34, he took all the chamber music and orchestral music from the Second Serenade on. Brahms worked easily with him, and his new and difficult music soon got into the public domain. It is unlikely that any other publisher would have given him better investment or support.

With this backing, Brahms could afford to wait until he felt artistically ready to release his major works in orchestral form – and did so, settling after the appearance of the First Symphony in 1876 into a life of financial independence such as few great composers of his tradition had known before. How real was his image of a bourgeois professional and personal existence, which emerges from his repeated interest in music directorships, and in the attractions of family life based around a regular post, for much of the period, we can never really know. But by the time his greatest compositional successes arrived, a pattern of independent personal life had been established. And his fame had taken him well beyond an institutional context into an arena of musical and social politics in which he would now be a central figure.

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