

A Historical and Structural Analysis of
Cello Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38, by Johannes Brahms

Jodi Goble

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music (M.M.)

December 2010

A Historical and Structural Analysis of
Cello Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38, by Johannes Brahms

Chapter One: 1856-1865: Schumann's Death and the Move to Vienna

“Dearest Clara,” wrote Brahms in this letter to Clara Schumann (presented here in translation) on April 24, 1865 from a small village outside Vienna,

It is all very annoying that you really are in England now, that the loveliest springtime has to manage without you, that I am still causing you useless vexation with sheet music, and whatnot! . . . Yesterday I was in Schünbrunn and its beautiful palmhouses. Spring has already breathed a lovely green onto everything. Although I don't go out into the countryside, springtime has none the less made my life twice as distracted. The spring is magnificent here and the ladies make it even more beautiful, so that one often doesn't know where to turn one's eyes.

You'll soon hear from Karlsruhe or Baden. I'll probably ramble around again for a bit in Karlsruhe first, but then it's off to look for lodgings in Lichtenthal and to wait for you. (Brahms 321-322)

It is impossible to tell from the breezy, casual tone of this letter that the decade preceding it was a period of intense personal turbulence for Brahms; nor does it hint at the complicated history he shared with its intended recipient. At its writing, Robert Schumann – Clara's husband and Brahms' friend and mentor – had been dead for nine years, following a botched suicide attempt and two years' incarceration in a Bonn sanatorium. During the troubled months leading up to Schumann's death, the 21-year-old Brahms lived in the Schumann household, caring for its six children during Clara's frequent concert tours and growing emotionally enmeshed with Clara herself, while battling persistent writer's block caused by what he perceived to be a plateau in his

creativity. With the exception of the piano ballades and the *Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann*, he published nothing between 1856 and 1862. (Brahms 37)

His correspondence during this period, both with Clara and with other close friends, implies at the very least a deepening mutual affection, if not burgeoning romantic love. Brahms wrote in 1854 to his longtime friend, the violinist Josef Joachim, about Clara:

I believe I admire and honour her no more highly than I love and am in love with her. I often have to restrain myself forcibly just from quietly embracing her and even – : I don't know, it seems to me so natural, as though she could not take it at all amiss.

I think I can't love a young girl at all any more, at least I have entirely forgotten them; after all, they merely promise the Heaven which Clara shows us unlocked. (48)

Clara, generally more circumspect in correspondence, would fully articulate her feelings for Brahms only in afterthought, writing to her children in 1856: “I have never loved a friend as I love him; it is the most beautiful mutual understanding of two souls ... Believe all that I, your mother, have told you, and do not heed those small and envious souls who make light of my love and friendship, trying to bring up for question our beautiful relationship, which they neither fully understand or ever could.” (Swafford 164)

Whatever expectations either Brahms or Clara may have had for the possible escalation of their relationship following Schumann's passing, however, were destined to remain unmet. Brahms left the Schumann household only a few months after the funeral and returned to his birthplace of Hamburg in October of 1856. He and Clara continued their friendship in visits, frequent artistic collaborations, and a steady stream of

written correspondence. Both eventually moved on to other romantic interests, Clara to a failed affair with minor composer Theodor Kirchner, and Brahms to an intense two-year courtship of 23-year-old soprano Agathe von Siebold, which inspired dozens of *Lieder* but ultimately ended in a broken engagement in January 1859. (Brahms 39)

In June 1862, living with fellow composer Albert Dietrich near where Clara was staying for the summer at Münster-am-Stein, Brahms began work on the *Cello Sonata in E minor*, Op. 38, the first of seven duo sonatas to survive his penchant for ruthless self-censorship long enough to reach publication. (Mason 67) He was 29 years old. Of that summer, Brahms wrote to his lifelong friend, violinist Josef Joachim: “Now I am sitting in a tavern under the Ebensburg ... Dietrich is in the next room belaboring his bride. The bride in question being a ballade for choir and orchestra.” (Swafford 235)

The *Cello Sonata* was not Brahms’ only compositional focus that summer; he was writing quickly and juggling several projects, most notably the String Quintet in F minor and some symphonic sketches. By autumn, he had finished three movements of the quintet and sent Clara the first movement of the *Symphony in C minor*. The first movement was a promising beginning that provoked some excitement within their musical circle – Clara sent it on to Josef Joachim with the comment, “The movement is full of wonderful beauties, and the themes are treated with a mastery which is becoming more and more characteristic of him”. The symphony, however, would not be completed for another twelve years. (Swafford 236)

Brahms’ attention was further distracted from the *Cello Sonata* by the announcement that Friedrich Wilhelm Grund, the aging conductor of the Hamburg Philharmonic, was retiring from his post and needed a successor. Brahms discreetly

expressed his interest in the position to Theodor Avé-Lallenant, an influential Hamburgian musicologist friendly to the Schumanns and their circle who had gifted Brahms with many scores over the years. Swafford writes, “Brahms felt he could depend on his old friend, who knew him so well, to promote his cause.” (237) He then left Hamburg for a long-anticipated first visit to Vienna, expecting to return in a matter of months to take up his new post.

In fact, Brahms was in Vienna for nearly a year before receiving news from Avé-Lallenant that his hopes would not be realized. The Philharmonic position had been offered not to Brahms, but to his colleague, baritone and singing-master Julius Stockhausen. Brahms, smarting at the perceived snub – Stockhausen was internationally known as a singer but had never held an orchestra position – never returned to Hamburg to live, but remained in Vienna for the rest of his life. He finally finished the third movement of the *Cello Sonata* in 1865, three years after its inception, while living in the summer cottage at Lichtenthal.

Chapter Two: The Absolutists and the New German School

“The differences between Brahms and his contemporaries,” writes Stewart Gordon, “seemingly so striking in the opinions expressed at the time, appear less extreme in retrospect.” (331) This may seem apparent in hindsight, but to the musicians of the middle 1800s, immersed in the question of how best to honor the giant, game-changing musical legacy of Beethoven, the battle lines in the War of the Romantics were clearly drawn. On one side were the Absolutists, with Robert and Clara Schumann as their champions, looking back to Schubert, Beethoven, Mozart and even Bach for the classic, codified musical forms – fugue, theme and variations, and Viennese sonata-allegro – that would lend structure to their modern compositions. On the other were Liszt and Wagner, the figureheads of the New German School, taking Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony* and Berlioz’ *Symphonie fantastique* as their models and forming through-composed music around philosophical or poetic programs, in a quest to unify all venues of artistic expression – literature, music, visual art, theater – into a single organism. (Swafford 233-234) Wagner referred to this ideal as *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or ‘total work of art’; (Columbia) Brahms, in private, called it ‘swindle’. (Gal 33)

Initially, Brahms made positive impressions on both Liszt and Wagner – Liszt admired the 18-year-old Brahms’ *Scherzo in E flat minor*, and Wagner, hearing Brahms play the *Handel Variations* in 1864, commented afterwards, “One sees what may still be

done in the old forms when someone comes along who knows how to use them.”

(Swafford 267) But Brahms had been trained since childhood to write in classical forms; he studied piano and composition first with family friend Otto Cossel and then, at Cossel's insistence, with Hamburg's most prominent musician, pianist and composer Eduard Marxsen. Even if this had not been the case, Robert Schumann's article about him in an 1853 issue of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* would make it clear what side of the argument Brahms occupied:

I have thought, watching the path of these chosen ones with the greatest sympathy, that after such a preparation someone must and would suddenly appear, destined to give ideal presentation to the highest expression of the time, who would bring us his mastership not in process of development, but springing forth like Minerva fully armed from the head of Jove. And he is come, a young blood by whose cradle graces and heroes kept watch. He is called Johannes Brahms ... (Swafford 85-86)

Brahms himself made only one experimental foray into the world of musical politics, and it ended disastrously enough that he was never tempted to try it again. In 1860, he and Josef Joachim attempted to circulate a petition denouncing Liszt and the 'Musicians of the Future'. (Brahms 211) The petition was to be published once it amassed a quorum of signatures; Brahms and Joachim had collected promises for more than twenty names. Unfortunately, the petition was leaked to the Leipzig press prematurely and ran in the newspaper with only four names attached. After this embarrassment, Brahms continued to oppose the New German School, but only in private correspondence.

Chapter Three: *Cello Sonata in E minor*, Op. 38: Old Forms in New Language

Few of Brahms' sketches survive, as he destroyed much of his juvenilia and most of his rough drafts, but those that remain illuminate his tendency to sketch only a melody and bass line as a starting point, even in music that would eventually be highly contrapuntal; when critiquing the work of other composers, he would often cover the middle parts with his hand in order to look only at the outer contours. (Swafford 262) This predisposition to begin with strong two-part writing, almost always in contrary motion, seems apparent in the opening bars of the *Cello Sonata*, a clear illustration of "Brahms' relation to the past and capacity to achieve a modern relation to it," and, as such, a perfect example of the Romantic Absolutist musical ideal. (Musgrave 106)

The exposition of the first movement is lyric and understated, with a subtle but far-flung sweep. Mason writes: "We need look no further than the first theme of the first movement to realize that a sound instinct led (Brahms) to adopt melodic imitation between the two instruments, based often on the double counterpoint in which he had attained such skill, as the norm of an appropriate style." (67)

For melodic inspiration, it seems likely that Brahms looked to the third Contrapunctus in Bach's *The Art of Fugue* (Musgrave 107) (Fig. A):

Fig. A. J.S. Bach, *Art of the Fugue*, Contrapunctus 3



Brahms was Classicist enough to recognize the motivic potential of the accented neighboring tone between scale degrees 5 and 6 in the third bar, and Romantic enough to extrapolate that tiny motif – and the melody generated from multiple transpositions and inversions of it – into the long singing phrase that is the opening statement of the sonata’s first movement, scored for cello over a chordal piano accompaniment (Fig. B):

Fig. B. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 1, mm. 1-9 (neighbor-tone motif highlighted)

Allegro non troppo
p espress. legato

b-c-b a-b-a f#-g-f#
b-a-b a-g-a

The melody is passed to the piano in bar 21, where Brahms restates the material in a tonal answer and modulates it almost immediately to C Major (VI). The rising arpeggio figure from m.5 becomes the vehicle that drives this modulation; Brahms shifts the figure back and forth from cello to piano, changing it slightly as it passes between the voices. Later in the exposition, it provides the raw musical material for the twin Brahmsian calling cards of dovetailed entrances and hemiola, as seen in Fig. C:

Fig. C. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 1, mm.58-61 (hemiolic entrances highlighted)

f

continuing staggered entrances

The cadence following this excerpt sets up the entrance of a pair of secondary themes in the exposition. The first, in B minor (v), is a seesawing series of seconds clearly generated from the neighbor-tones of the main theme. The second is a tranquil, mostly stepwise melody in B Major (V), appearing first in the piano and accompanied by fifths in the cello. Even in this moment of relative repose, the repeated descending fifths in the cello and the left hand of the piano are phrased in opposition to one another (Fig. D):

Fig. D. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 1, mm.79-82 (second theme of exposition)

79

Viennese sonata-allegro form dictates that the exposition should be repeated, a convention Brahms sometimes chose to flout but adheres to in this piece. In the development, he chooses two short sections of material to expand: the Bachian neighbor-tone motif from the opening theme, and the descending fifth from the final theme of the exposition. These two snippets of melody – one stepwise with a built-in dissonance, the other an outline of an open chord – are layered and juxtaposed throughout the texture with increasing volume and intensity until they reach the first climax of the development in bar 114.

By this point, Brahms has fused both of these ideas into a single dramatic gesture: arpeggiated two-octave jumps in the cello line against repeated *fortissimo* accented suspensions approached by contrary-motion leaps in both hands of the piano. The result he achieves is an extraordinary example of Romantic absolutism: a rigorous, Baroque-inspired approach to motivic development is paired to an idealized Classical form, but the sound is purely his own – clashing accented seconds and ninths in increasingly chromatic and dissonant progressions, with each of the two performers sprinting repeatedly from one extreme of their instrument's range to the next at top volume in tightly regimented rhythms designed to interlock but not meet (Fig. E).

Fig. E. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 1, mm. 114-119 (climax of development)

Theorist Christopher Wintle attributes the emotional extremes present in this movement to its underlying harmonic structure: “The idea that a complex of harmonies may form the substance of a movement is not, of course, a new one in nineteenth- and twentieth-century studies ... Drama, lyricism, formal anomalies, motivic evolution: all these disparate observations may be brought together under the aegis of the Neapolitan complex.” (202) In this piece, Brahms develops the harmonic progression out of the original neighboring-tone motif; when the minor-second interval is transplanted from the melodic line into the chordal structure, the F Major left-hand piano octaves in bar 114 become a logical point of arrival both dramatically and harmonically – in Wintle’s words, “the goal, from every point of view, of the development section.” (207)

In order to be classified as a Neapolitan chord within the E-minor tonality of the sonata’s first movement, the F must function as a subdominant, passing from V and then to i. The development meets this requirement by progressing through one more impetuous, arpeggio-decorated episode – in B Major, or V^7 – before finally returning to the recapitulation and tonic.

The recapitulation statement is regular and, except for broken chords in place of

block in the right hand of the piano, rigorously and Classically exact (see Fig. F):

Fig. F. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 1, mm. 162-165 (recapitulation)

The musical score for Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 1, mm. 162-165 (recapitulation) is presented in a three-staff format. The top staff is the bass clef, the middle is the treble clef, and the bottom is the bass clef. The key signature is one flat (F major), and the time signature is 3/4. The score begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *p espress.* marking. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line with slurs, while the left hand (bass clef) provides harmonic support with chords and single notes. The score is numbered 162 at the beginning of the first measure.

Though the recapitulation of the movement heralds a return to the lyric, singing lines of the exposition and the overall mood is one of repose, Brahms has one more harmonic innovation to employ. The transition keys in the exposition were C Major (VI) to B minor (v) to B Major (V), which he alters in the recapitulation to F Major (flat II), E minor (i), and finally to E Major (I) for the coda. The coda is a deliberate exploration of the second expository theme that ends the movement in major at a pianissimo dynamic and sets up a V-i relationship into the second movement. (Notley 140)

In a traditional sonata, the first movement in sonata-allegro form is followed by a slow movement, most often an *adagio*. Brahms' notes indicate that the E-minor sonata originally contained four movements, three written in 1862 and the fourth – the fugal finale – in 1865, but the published work contains only three. It has been speculated that the missing movement eventually surfaced more than twenty years later as the *Adagio affetuoso* of Brahms' second cello sonata in F Major. (Notley 139)

By excluding the *adagio* movement from Op. 38, Brahms breaks with the Classical model while directly referencing an even earlier influence: the minuet-trio, a linked set of Baroque dances in triple time originally known as *galanteries*, and a staple of the keyboard suite from Froberger to Bach. (Ferguson 30) Brahms chooses to begin the movement with a stepwise gesture in the piano containing the same accented neighboring tone used to build the opening theme of the first movement. The theme starts on F, the flatted 2nd scale degree which throughout the *Allegro non troppo* implied a Neapolitan relationship. Here, used melodically, it functions as a V-i cadence from the first movement to the second, and also gives a slightly Phrygian sound to the Minuet (Fig. G):

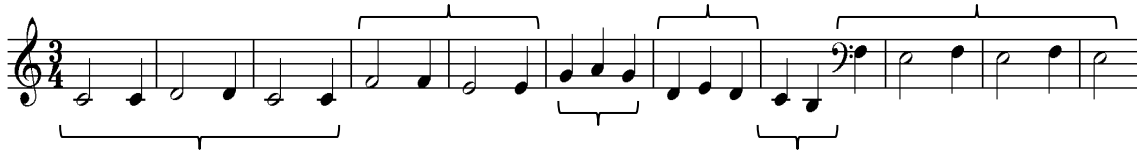
Fig. G. Brahms Op.38, Mvmt. 2, mm. 1-4



Musgrave praises this movement for its “love of harmonic effect, of the creation of a language with archaic qualities yet personal enrichments ... its 'Phrygian cadences' and disarming mobility of root-based progressions. So natural are these effects that the sheer adventure of the harmony passes almost unnoticed.” (106) Brahms is, in fact,

extrapolating his harmonic progression from further transposition and inversion of the neighbor-tone motif, as seen here in the left hand of the piano (Fig. H):

Fig. H. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 2, mm. 3-15 (bass line only, neighbor tones highlighted)



Mason notices and remarks on the qualities of this motif, attributing it not to Bach, but to Brahms' other, more recent influences:

The figuration is here in the best Schumann tradition, with its whimsical dips in the right hand against the steady support of the left. Its use of dissonant notes on the accents (neighbors instead of members of the harmonies) gives its melody the same plangency of sound and delicate urgency of movement as that of "Des Abends"; its pauses and hesitations are as poetic as Schumann's, its rhythms even subtler than his. (71-72)

Brahms repeats his six-note anacrusis in the piano at bar 28, but substitutes C sharp for C natural in anticipation of the cadence into A major (I). What follows is an eight-bar developmental episode leading into C minor (iii) and the statement of an unusual element within a minuet, a secondary theme (Fig. I):

Fig. I. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 2, mm. 38-45 (second theme)

The first theme returns in bar 60, heralded by repeated neighboring tones in the piano that reference the material at the beginning of the movement and in bar 28, while emphasizing even more strongly Brahms' attachment to the interval of the 2nd in this piece (Fig. J):

Fig. J. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 2, mm. 58-60 (return of the first theme)

This motif is referenced once again at the beginning of the trio – with the chromatic neighboring tone of B# replacing the diatonic B – in a four-note piano anacrusis to the theme which is then picked up by the cello to become the theme itself. By decreasing the number of notes from six to four and repeating the motif twice, Brahms creates the illusion of three short bars of 2/4 within the triple time signature, hinting at the hemiola that will reappear later in the movement. (Mason 74-76) It is common for linked sections of *galanteries* to be connected by key relationships, and Brahms follows that tradition by writing the trio in F# minor (vi).

The minuet and trio may be connected both by key relationship and thematic material, but their textures are contrasting: the minuet is lilting and dancelike, referencing its Baroque roots with a strong emphasis on the first beat of the bar and two-note slurs set off by staccato in the cello, whereas the trio is legato and unapologetically Romantic, the cello pitched in its high-middle ‘singing’ range and accompanied by an arpeggiated figure in the piano. The trio of this movement is also the only extended section of the entire sonata in which piano and cello double a single melody together (Fig. K):

Fig. K. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 2, mm. 76-81 (trio section, neighbor motif highlighted)

The image shows a musical score for Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 2, mm. 76-81. The score is in 3/4 time and F# minor. It features three staves: Violin I (top), Violin II (middle), and Piano (bottom). The Piano part starts at measure 76. The Violin I part is marked 'arco' and 'espress.'. The Violin II part is marked 'p' and 'espress. legato'. The Piano part is marked 'col Ped.'. A blue bracket under the first four notes of the Piano part is labeled 'motif'. A blue bracket above the Violin I part, spanning measures 78-81, is labeled 'theme generated from the motif'.

Brahms uses the four-note motif (indicated in Fig. J in mm.76-77) to generate a melody first over F# minor, then – at bar 90 – to create a second related melody in the key of A Major. It is in this second section of the trio that the beat displacement and hemiola, so characteristic of Brahms’ writing, reappear (Fig. L). They persist until the F# minor cadence in bar 108 returns the movement to rhythmic stability, first to the repeat of the B section and then to an extended coda leading back into the Minuet.

Fig. L. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 2, mm. 93-96 (hemiola highlighted)

The third movement of Op. 38 is often referred to as a fugue, but it actually borrows musical elements from both fugue and sonata form. In this case, Brahms is probably referencing Beethoven's D Major Cello Sonata, Op. 102, which also closes with a fugal final movement. Op. 102, Beethoven's final work for cello and piano, was the logical score for Brahms to study when creating his own first cello sonata. It is a massive four-movement piece that exhibits all the motivic and harmonic links for which Brahms was striving and takes its fugue subject, with its jagged leaps and driving rhythms, from a Baroque model. Along with the Bach solo cello suites, the Beethoven work is regarded to this day as "the most technically and spiritually taxing major work for cello before the twentieth century." (Classical Archives) Fugue-sonata fusion, though uncommon, was nevertheless not a new device even in Beethoven. Haydn used it, as did Mozart, most notably in the G Major String Quartet and *Jupiter* Symphony. (Musgrave 107)

As in the first movement of the sonata, Brahms uses a Classical model of form but looks to Bach for melodic inspiration; he also returns to the key of E minor. The opening statement of the subject in the piano shows striking similarities to Contrapunctus 13 from *The Art of Fugue* (Fig. M):

Fig. M. Comparison of Contrapunctus 13 from *Art of Fugue*, J.S. Bach, with Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 3, mm.1-4



This is a triple fugue, in which the cello and the right and left hands of the piano function as three independent voices. The cello is the second voice to enter, followed by the piano's right hand. Brahms chooses a series of duple eighth notes as his countersubject (Fig. N), so that the subtle tension of two-against-three maintains itself throughout the movement:

Fig. N. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 3, mm.5-8 (countersubject)



The strict fugal treatment of these two themes gives way in bar 20 to two-part imitative writing between the piano and cello that – while still employing motivic material from the subject and countersubject of the fugue – becomes gradually more homophonic and begins to look and function more like a traditional sonata-allegro structure than like a fugue. After a brief two-part stretto at the quarter-note between the cello and the right hand of the piano at m. 44, Brahms engineers an expansive three-bar cadence and introduces the movement's second theme in G Major (III) at m. 53 (Fig. O):

Fig. O. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 3, mm. 53-56 (second theme of exposition)

The musical score for Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 3, mm. 53-56, is presented in three staves. The top staff (right hand of the piano) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *tranquillo* tempo. It features a melodic line with a perfect fifth interval and is marked with *f* (forte) in the second measure. The middle staff (left hand of the piano) also begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *tranquillo* tempo, featuring a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff (cello) provides a harmonic accompaniment with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

This material, while contrasting – gentler, slightly more relaxed in tempo, in a major key, showcasing the cello in its most lyrical, vocal range – is still clearly related to the first set of subjects at the beginning of the movement. The melody (seen in Fig. O in the left hand of the piano) is mostly stepwise while incorporating one perfect fifth, and Brahms continues the use of duple eighths against triplets, though the effect is softened by the legato phrasing and *tranquillo* indication.

In introducing a major second theme, Brahms appears to break with traditional fugue form and ally himself completely with sonata-allegro. This assumption is not entirely inaccurate; as stated earlier, this movement contains as many elements of sonata form as of fugue. It should be noted, however, that Brahms – an avid amateur musicologist and student of early music dating back to Schütz and Palestrina (Geiringer 463) – would have been aware of the ways in which fugal structures led to the development of the Viennese sonata, and eager to explore the formal and expressive possibilities of those crossover elements in his own work.

As early as 1670 – fifteen years before the birth of Bach – Baroque composers were writing double-subject fugues. “Double,” in this case, refers not to the concurrent statements of subject and countersubject that exist in all fugues, but to two distinct contrasting themes, “not continually treated together, but also separately, one after the other, then at times together and against each other” – a direct musical forerunner to sonata-allegro form. (Mann 40-43) Brahms’ treatment of the development in this movement (mm. 76-131) demonstrates awareness of this link between the Baroque and the Classical. The vigorous triplet-figure A theme based on Contrapuntus 13, its duple-eighth countersubject, and the more lyrical B theme all appear, both alone and in combination, linked by the Baroque developmental tools of stretto and inversion and the late Classical-Romantic convention of increasingly chromatic bass-line movement. Rather than merge the two themes into a single texture, however, Brahms presents them episodically, so that the energy of the A theme is continually juxtaposed against the more relaxed material of the B. Musgrave remarks:

The second group is reprised partially thematically in the development, to which it makes only minor though telling, contributions, through the element of contrast to the prevailing contrapuntal working. This contrast element is extremely important, and the way in which Brahms creates his second subject in the exposition is a fine example of his integration of contrasts of style and period. For he draws from the original, forceful first subject an entirely characteristic melody, including motivic repositioning, the first-phrase proper repeated in a different accentual position which is hardly noticeable to the ear, a phrase most subtly drawn from the 'neutral' figuration which liquidates the transition from the fugue subject. Moreover, the following, animated idea is a variant of the same phrase establishing a contrast – for this has a 'chiaroscuro' quality – with the main material. (107-108)

The recapitulation in bar 132 is marked by a recurrence of the A theme in the piano, with the countersubject appearing immediately in the cello line. Brahms began the movement in E minor moving four bars later to B Major; now, he begins the same gesture in B Major (following an extended pedal-point in B for the last 18 bars of the development, from m.115 on) and moves to E minor (Fig. P):

Fig. P. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 3, mm. 132-135 (recapitulation)

Rather than restate the second theme, Brahms proceeds directly from the first theme into a fiery *pizz presto* codetta based on A-theme material and consistently driven by triple-against-duple eighth notes. The piece ends with one final fleeting reference to

the Neapolitan chord; the last descending passage into the cadence outlines a full bar in F Major, or flat II (Fig. Q):

Fig. Q. Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 3, mm. 195-198 (progression leading to final cadence)

The image displays a musical score for Brahms Op. 38, Mvmt. 3, measures 195-198. The score is written for three staves: a single bass staff at the top, and a grand staff (treble and bass) below. The music features a descending melodic line in the bass staff and a complex harmonic texture in the grand staff. The progression leads to a final cadence, characterized by a Neapolitan chord (F major) in the final measure. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings, culminating in a double bar line.

Chapter Four: The Op. 38 Sonata in Performance

The Op. 38 sonata is generally regarded as less difficult for the cellist than Brahms' second sonata for the same pairing, Op. 99 in F Major. This is probably due to the two very different cellists for whom Brahms wrote these sonatas: Op. 38 is dedicated to Joseph Gansbacher, an amateur cellist and professor of voice at the Vienna *Akademie* (Mason 67), while Op. 99 was premiered by Brahms' longtime friend and arguably the best cellist of his generation, Robert Hausmann. (Swafford 533)

The Op. 38 sonata is the first of Brahms' seven duo sonatas to reach publication, and is sometimes criticized for a perceived imbalance between the parts. Cellists, in particular, are quick to bemoan the density of the piano writing. Mason is especially eloquent on this subject:

Yet the piano and the violoncello are not, after all, truly well-balanced running mates; the cello, despite the nobility of its singing voice, is even less capable of holding its own with the piano in *fortes* and *fortissimos* than the violin; and beautiful as are its basses in this sonata, Brahms puts it at an unnecessary disadvantage by keeping it in its lower register almost continually ... When you set a single cello to competing like this with the two hands of an able-bodied pianist, giving him no handicaps, the odds are certainly on the pianist. (67-70)

Perhaps this issue of balance is the greatest difficulty of the sonata for both performers. The cellist must project fullness of tone in the lower register without crossing over into stridency, and the pianist must cultivate a transparency of touch that belies the thick and often contrapuntal texture in many parts of the piece. Brahms

himself suffered from the tendency to play the piece too loudly, according to an account of this first outing of Op. 38 for friends, with Gansbacher as the cellist: “In the course of this performance Brahms played so loud that the worthy Josef complained that he could not hear his cello at all—‘Lucky for you, too’, growled Brahms, and let the piano rage on.” (Drinker 81)

Op. 38 poses the same interpretative and expressive challenges inherent in all of Brahms’ music – to achieve the delicate balance between rigorous Baroque and Classical-inspired structure and Romantic sweep that his compositional style represents. Certainly this piece in particular, with the microelements of its melodic makeup and formal figurations based in Bach, should avoid any hint of sentimentality. At the same time, an overly stiff approach, which makes no allowances for the agogically accented harmonies or barline-displacement rubato so characteristic of Brahms, robs the piece of its fluidity and charm. Ultimately, the goal of the performers should be the ideal to which Brahms himself aspired as a composer: juxtaposing two markedly historical characters and building a style that “mediates between them, establishing a mode of expression to which they can both relate.” (Musgrave 107)

SOURCES CITED

- Bach, Johann Sebastian. Die Kunst der Fuge. 1750. BWV 1080. Ed. Wolfgang Graeser. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1895.
- Brahms, Johannes. Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters. Ed. Styra Avins. Trans. Josef Eisinger. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.
- Sonata for Violoncello and Piano in E minor, Op. 38. 1862-1865. Ed. Hans Gál. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1926-27.
- Drinker, Henry S, Jr. The Chamber Music of Johannes Brahms. Philadelphia: Elkan-Vogel, 1932.
- Ferguson, Howard. Keyboard Interpretation from the 14th to the 19th Century. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975.
- Gál, Hans. Johannes Brahms: His Work and Personality. Trans. Joseph Stein. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963. Reprint. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977.
- Geiringer, Karl. "Brahms as a musicologist." From The Musical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 4. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983.
- Gordon, Stewart. A History of Keyboard Literature. New York: Schirmer, 1996.
- "Ludwig van Beethoven: Cello Sonata in D, Op. 102, No. 2." Web page. Classical Archives. 2008. <<http://www.classicalarchives.com>>
- Mann, Alfred. The Study of Fugue. 1958. New York: Dover, 1987.
- Mason, Daniel Gregory. The Chamber Music of Brahms. New York: MacMillan, 1933.
- Musgrave, Michael. The Music of Brahms. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Notley, Margaret. "Brahms' Cello Sonata in F Major and its genesis: a study in half-step relations." From Brahms Studies, Vol. I. Ed. David Brodbeck. Lincoln: London: U of Nebraska Press, 1994.
- "Romanticism," The Columbia Encyclopedia, 6th ed., Questia, Web, <www.questia.com> Retrieved March 28, 2010.
- Swafford, Jan. Johannes Brahms: A Biography. New York: Vintage Books, Random

House, 1997.

Wintle, Christopher. "The sceptred pall: Brahms' progressive harmony". From Brahms 2: Biographical, Documentary and Analytical Studies, Vol. 2. Ed. Michael Musgrave. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.