2

BRAHMS THE PROGRESSIVE

1947

I

It has been said that Brahms' social manners were often characterized by a certain dryness. This was not the 'Unknown' Brahms.[1] Vienna knew his method of surrounding himself with a protective wall of stiffness as a defence against certain types of people, against the obtrusiveness of oily bombast, moist flattery, or honeyed impertinence. It is not unknown that those annoying bores, those sensationalists who were out for a good anecdote and those tactless intruders into private lives got little better than dryness. When the sluices of their eloquence were open and the flood threatened to engulf him, dryness was no protection. This is why he was often forced to resort to rudeness. Even so, his victims may have tacitly agreed to nickname what had befallen them 'Brahmsian dryness'; and it may be assumed that each one rejoiced at the other's misfortune, but thought that he himself had been done wrong.

Dryness or rudeness, one thing is certain: Brahms did not want to express high esteem in this manner.

Contemporaries found various ways to annoy him. A musician or a music lover might intend to display his own great understanding, good judgement of music, and acquaintance with 'some' of Brahms' music. Hence he dared say he had observed that Brahms' *First Piano Sonata* was very similar to Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata. No wonder that Brahms, in his straightforward manner, spoke out: 'Das bemerkt ja schon jeder Esel.' ('Every jackass notices that!')

A visitor meant to be complimentary when he said: 'You are one of the greatest living composers.' How Brahms hated this 'one of'. Who does not see that it means, 'There are a few greater than you, and several of equivalent rank?'

But doubtless the most annoying were those visitors (like one composer from Berlin) who told him: 'I am an admirer of Wagner, the progressive, the innovator, *and* of Brahms, the academician, the classicist.' I do not remember what kind of dryness or rudeness he applied in this case, but I know there was a great

story in Vienna about the manner in which Brahms presented his esteem for this flattery.

But after all, it was the attitude of the time; those who disliked Wagner clung to Brahms, and vice versa. There were many who disliked both. They were, perhaps, the only non-partisans. Only a small number were able to disregard the polarity of these two contrasting figures while enjoying the beauties of both of them.

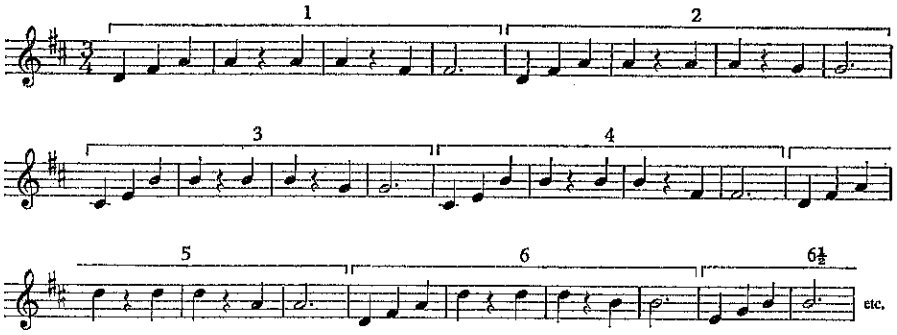
What in 1883 seemed an impassable gulf was in 1897 no longer a problem. The greatest musicians of that time, Mahler, Strauss, Reger, and many others had grown up under the influence of both these masters. They all reflected the spiritual, emotional, stylistic and technical achievements of the preceding period. What then had been an object of dispute had been reduced into the difference between two personalities, between two styles of expression, not contradictory enough to prevent the inclusion of qualities of both in one work.

II

Form in Music serves to bring about comprehensibility through memorability. Evenness, regularity, symmetry, subdivision, repetition, unity, relationship in rhythm and harmony and even logic—none of these elements produces or even contributes to beauty. But all of them contribute to an organization which makes the presentation of the musical idea intelligible. The language in which musical ideas are expressed in tones parallels the language which expresses feelings or thoughts in words, in that its vocabulary must be proportionate to the intellect which it addresses, and in that the aforementioned elements of its organization function like the rhyme, the rhythm, the metre, and the subdivision into strophes, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, etc. in poetry or prose.

The more or less complete exploitation of the potency of these components determines the aesthetic value and the classification of the style in respect to its popularity or profundity. Science must explore and examine all facts; art is only concerned with the presentation of characteristic facts. Even Antony, when addressing the Roman people, realizes that he must repeat his '. . . and Brutus is an honourable man' over and over, if this contrast is to penetrate into the minds of simple citizens. Repetitions in Mother Goose songs are of course on a different level and so is the organization of popular music. Here one finds numerous slightly varied repetitions, as in the otherwise very beautiful *Blue Danube Waltz*.

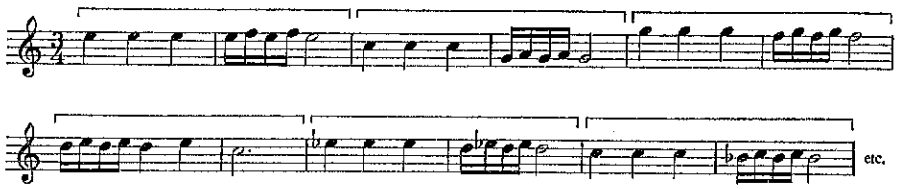
Ex. 1



Here are six repetitions, and almost all are based on the alternation of tonic and dominant.

Though richer in harmony, the example from Verdi's *Il Trovatore* is of no higher order:

Ex. 2



An artist or an author need not be aware that he accommodates his style to the listener's capacity of comprehension. An artist need not think very much, if only he thinks correctly and straightforwardly. He feels that he obeys the urge of a spring within himself, the urge to express himself, just like a clock, which indicates twenty-four hours every day, without questioning whether it means 'this' day, this month, this year, or this century. Everyone knows this, except the clock. The artist's response to the urge of his motor occurs automatically without delay, like that of every well-lubricated mechanism.

It is obvious that one would not discuss the splitting of atoms with a person who does not know what an atom is. On the other hand, one cannot talk to a trained mind in Mother Goose fashion or in the style of what Hollywoodians call 'lyrics'. In the sphere of art-music, the author respects his audience. He is

afraid to offend it by repeating over and over what can be understood at one single hearing, even if it is new, and let alone if it is stale old trash. A diagram may tell the whole story of a game to a chess expert; a chemist recognizes all he wants to know by glancing at a few symbols; but in a mathematical formula are combined the distant past, the actual present, and the most remote future.

Repeatedly hearing things which one likes is pleasant and need not be ridiculed. There is a subconscious desire to understand better and realize more details of the beauty. But an alert and well-trained mind will demand to be told the more remote matters, the more remote consequences of the simple matters that he has already comprehended. An alert and well-trained mind refuses to listen to baby-talk and requests strongly to be spoken to in a brief and straightforward language.

III

Progress in music consists in the development of methods of presentation which correspond to the conditions just discussed. It is the purpose of this essay to prove that Brahms, the classicist, the academician, was a great innovator in the realm of musical language, that, in fact, he was a great progressive.

This may seem contestable to an incarnate 'old-Wagnerian,' who has grown old, or simply an 'old-Wagnerian' by birth. There were still fireproof 'old-Wagnerians' born at the time of my own generation and even ten years later. Pioneers of musical progress on the one hand, and keepers of the Holy Grail of true art on the other, they considered themselves entitled to look with contempt at Brahms the classicist, the academician.

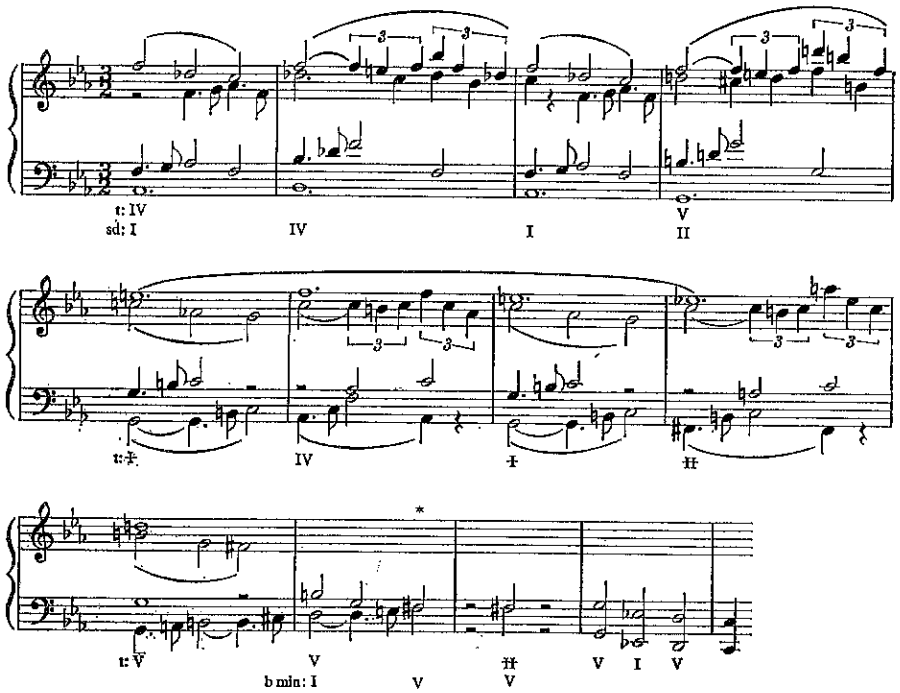
Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss had been the first to clarify these concepts. They had both been educated in the traditional as well as in the progressive, in the Brahmsian as well as in the Wagnerian philosophy of art (*Weltanschauung*). Their example helped us to realize that there was as much organizational order, if not pedantry in Wagner as there was daring courage, if not even bizarre fantasy in Brahms. Does not the mystic correspondence of the numbers of their dates suggest some mysterious relationship between them? Brahms' one-hundredth birthday anniversary in 1933 was the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Wagner. And now, as this essay is being rewritten, we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Brahms' death.

Mysteries conceal a truth, but direct curiosity to unveil it.

IV

How great an innovator Brahms was in respect to harmony can be seen in this example from his String Quartet in C minor, Op. 51, No. 1. (ms. 11–23).

Ex. 3



This is the contrasting middle section of a ternary form whose a-section is already rich enough harmonically in comparison with the I–V or I–IV–V harmony, intermixed occasionally with a VI or III and sometimes a Neapolitan triad, of Brahms' predecessors. To base a main theme on such a rich harmony seemed a daring enterprise to the ears of the time.

But the harmony of this middle section competes successfully with that of many a Wagnerian passage. Even the most progressive composers after Brahms were carefully avoiding remote deviation from the tonic region in the beginning of a piece. But this modulation to the dominant of a minor region on B (at *), and

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succession of three major triads on E flat, D flat
of the first movement of the *Eroica* (ms. 551–5
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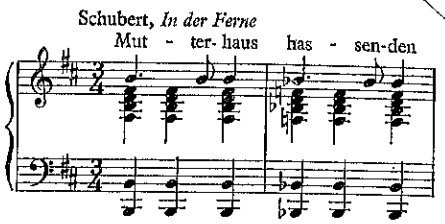
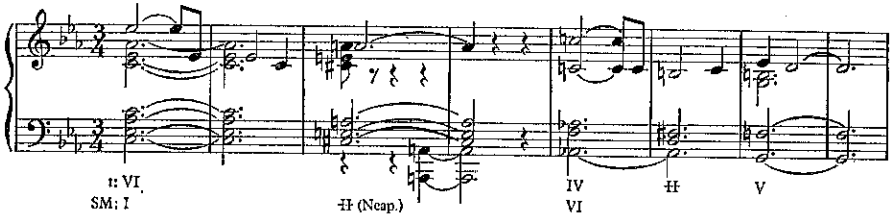


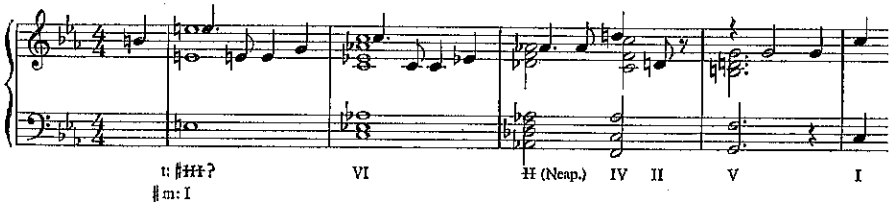
Examples from Wagner in which similar progressions occur are often not easily analysed, but they prove less complicated than one might have expected. For instance, the motive of the *Todestrank*, from *Tristan und Isolde*,

Ex. 5



unmasks itself as remaining within the closer relations of the tonality. Also not very distant is the harmonic deviation in Isolde's order to Tristan: 'Befehlen liess dem Eigenholde . . .'

Ex. 6



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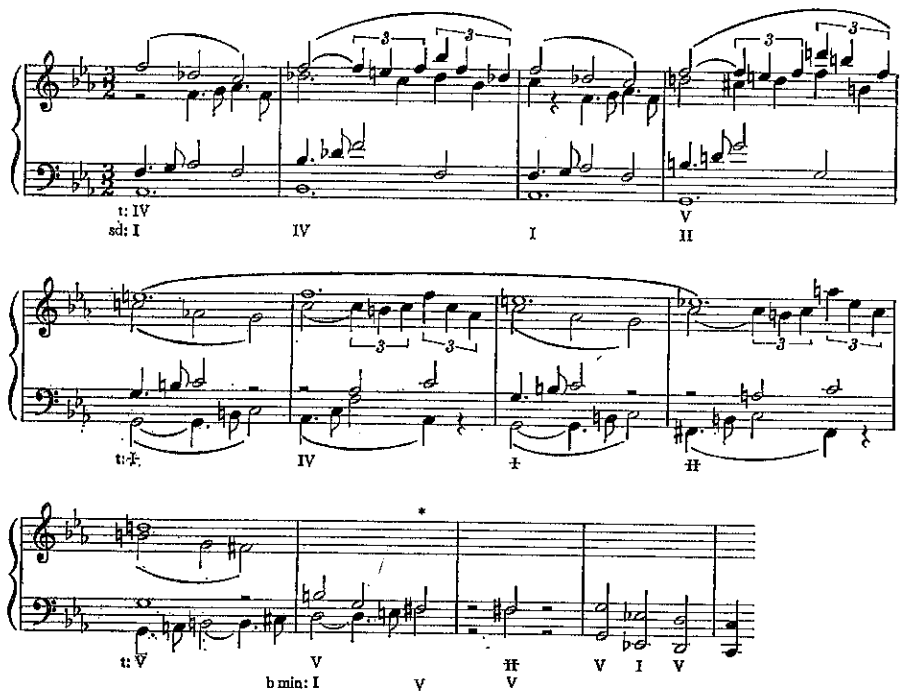

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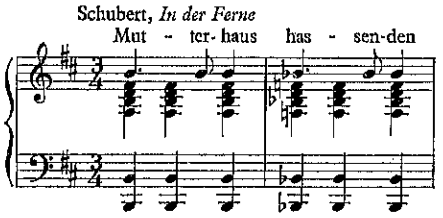
the sudden, unceremonious and precipitate return to the tonic, is a rare case. The succession of three major triads on E flat, D flat and C respectively in the coda of the first movement of the *Eroica* (ms. 551–561) and the juxtaposition of two unrelated triads (on B and B♭) in the following example from Schubert are cases of a similar procedure.

Ex. 4



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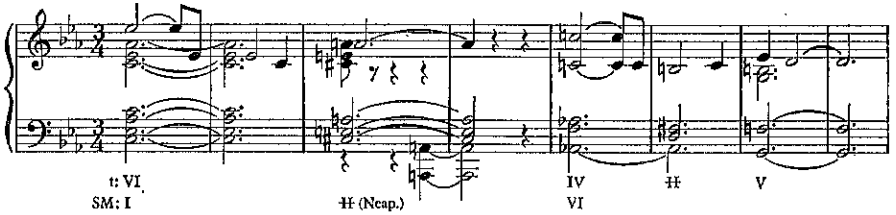

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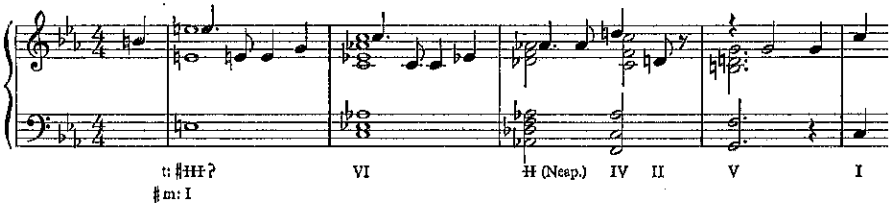
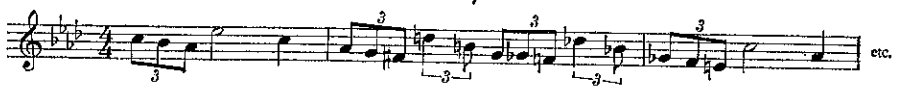


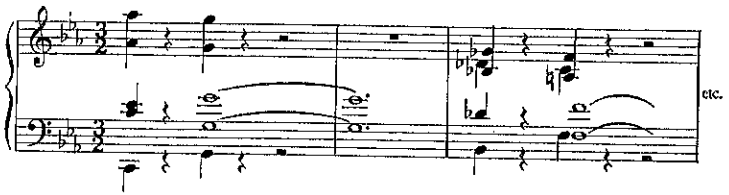
But the 'Traurige Weise', the English Horn solo of Act III,

Ex. 7



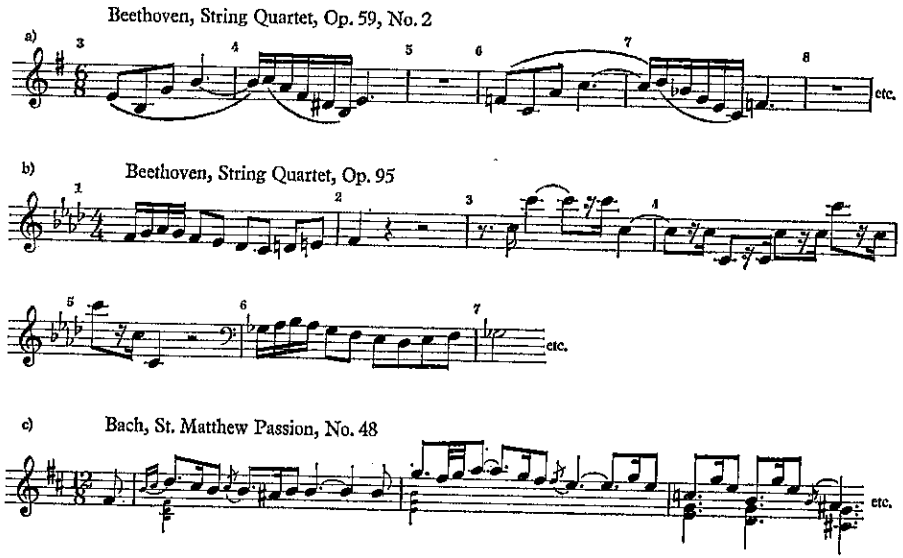
shows in its modulatory section no more remote modulation than the end of the a-section of the aforementioned C minor string quartet of Brahms:

Ex. 8



These are in essence chromatically descending triads, most of them inversions; their treatment is similar to that of Neapolitan triads. Some examples of their appearance in classic music are illustrated in Example 9 a, b, c.

Ex. 9



If there is no decisive difference between Brahms and Wagner as regards extension of the relationship within a tonality, it must not be overlooked that Wagner's harmony is richer in substitute harmonies and vagrants, and in a freer use of dissonances, especially of unprepared ones. On the other hand, in strophic, songlike forms and other structures, such as represent the Wagnerian version of arias, the harmony moves rather less expansively and more slowly than in similar forms of Brahms. Compare, for instance, the 'Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond', the 'Als zullendes Kind, zog ich dich auf' or the song of the Rhine Daughters to Brahms' song 'Meine Liebe ist grün,' or the main theme of the String Quintet in G, Op. 111, which starts roving in its third measure, or the Rhapsody, Op. 79, No. 2, which almost avoids establishing a tonality.

V

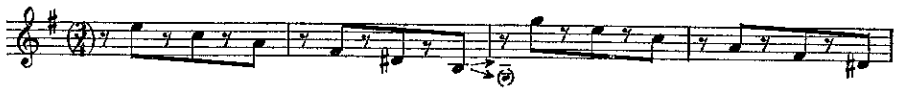
Ternary, rondo, and other rounded forms appear in dramatic music only occasionally, as episodes, mostly at lyrical resting-points where the action stops or at least slows down—in places where a composer can proceed along formal concepts and can repeat and develop without the pressure of the progress of an action, without being forced to mirror moods or events not included in the character of his material.

Dramatic music resembles in its modulatory character the modulatory elaboration (*Durchführung*) of a symphony, sonata, or other rounded form. Wagner's *Leitmotiven* usually contain some germinating harmonies in which the urge for modulatory changes is inherent. But simultaneously they fulfil another task, an organizational task, which shows the formalistic side of Wagner's genius.

The recitative in pre-Wagnerian operas was also modulatory. But it was unorganized, if not incoherent, with respect to thematic and even motivic requirements. The 'Leitmotiv' technique represents the grandiose intention of unification of the thematic material of an entire opera, and even of an entire tetralogy. An organization as far-reaching as this deserves an aesthetic rating of the highest order. But if foresight in organization is called formalistic in the case of Brahms, then this organization is also formalistic, because it stems from the same state of mind, from one which conceives an entire work in one single creative moment and acts correspondingly.

When Brahms, towards the end of the last movement of his Fourth Symphony, carries out some of the variations by a succession of thirds,

Ex. 10

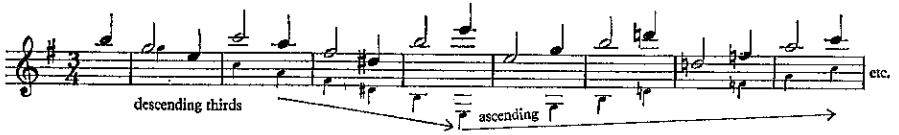


he unveils the relationship of the theme of the Passacaglia to the first movement. Transposed a fifth up,

Ex. 11

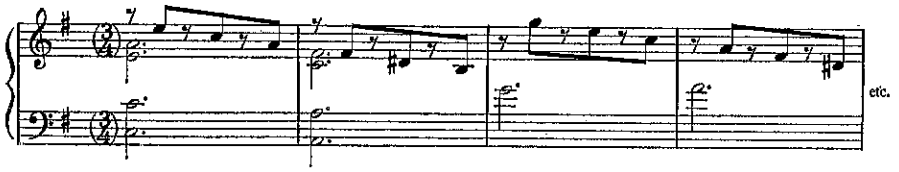
it is identical with the first eight notes of the main theme,

Ex. 12



and the theme of the passacaglia in its first half admits the contrapuntal combination with the descending thirds.

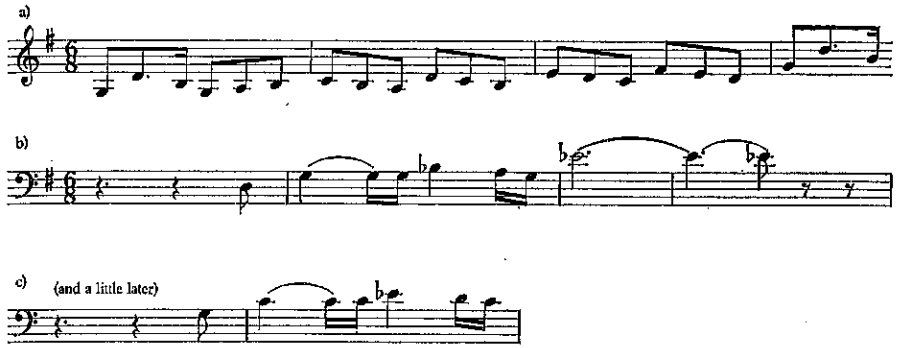
Ex. 13



People generally do not know that luck is a heavenly gift, equivalent to, and of the same kind as, talent, beauty, strength, etc. It is not given for nothing—on the contrary, one must deserve it. Sceptics might attempt belittling this as a mere 'lucky chance'. Such people have a wrong evaluation of both luck and inspiration and are not capable of imagining what both can achieve.

It would look like a high accomplishment of intellectual gymnastics if all this had been 'constructed' prior to inspired composing. But men who know the power of inspiration, and how it can produce combinations no one can foresee, also know that Wagner's application of the Leitmotiv was, in the great majority of cases, of an inspired spontaneity. As often as Siegfried came to his mind, his mind's eye and ear saw and heard him just as his motive depicts him:

Ex. 14



VI

I assume that I have been the first to lay down a principle which, about four decades ago, began directing and regulating my musical thinking and the formulation of my ideas, and which played a decisive role in my self-criticism.

I wish to join ideas with ideas. No matter what the purpose or meaning of an idea in the aggregate may be, no matter whether its function be introductory, establishing, varying, preparing, elaborating, deviating, developing, concluding, subdividing, subordinate, or basic, it must be an idea which had to take this place even if it were not to serve for this purpose or meaning or function; and this idea must look in construction and in thematic content as if it were not there to fulfil a structural task. In other words, a transition, a codetta, an elaboration, etc., should not be considered as a thing in its own end. It should not appear at all if it does not develop, modify, intensify, clarify, or throw light or colour on the idea of the piece.

This does not mean that functions of these types can be absent in a composition. But it means that no space should be devoted to mere formal purposes. And it means that those segments or sections which fulfil structural requirements should do so without being mere trash.

This is no critique of classic music—it merely presents my personal artistic code of honour which everybody else may disregard. But it seems to me that the progress in which Brahms was operative should have stimulated composers to write music for adults. Mature people think in complexes, and the higher their intelligence the greater is the number of units with which they are familiar. It is inconceivable that composers should call 'serious music' what they write in an obsolete style, with a prolixity not conforming to the contents—repeating three to seven times what is understandable at once. Why should it not be possible in music to say in whole complexes in a condensed form what, in the preceding epochs, had at first to be said several times with slight variations before it could be elaborated? Is it not as if a writer who wanted to tell of 'somebody who lives in a house near the river' should have to explain what a house is, what it is made for, and of what material, and, after that, explain the river in the same way?

Some people speak of the 'dying romanticism' of music. Do they really believe that making music, playing with tones, is something realistic, or what? Or is it that romanticism has to resign in favour of senseless prolixity?

VII

In order to grasp thoroughly the development of musical construction during the epoch from Bach to Brahms it is necessary to go back to the period when the style of contrapuntal construction was abandoned and the aesthetic of the homophonic-melodic style was formulated. Comparing the compositions manufactured in response to this aesthetic with those of J. S. Bach on the one hand and of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert on the other, one understands why such ruthless propaganda had to be applied to eliminate J. S. Bach, but one is astonished that such fruits can be derived from so scanty a soil.

Under the leadership of Keiser, Telemann and Mattheson, composers were asked to let alone 'great art'; to strive with effort to write light (that is effortless) music; to see that a theme is provided with 'a certain something' (*ein gewisses Etwas*) which seems to be familiar to everybody; to write in the light manner of

the French. To Mattheson, counterpoint was a mere mental exercise without emotional power. As it has happened frequently, these men were highly esteemed in their lifetime, while Bach was little known. But one must doubt that men were inspired geniuses who composed according to such advice, like cooks obeying a cookbook, or some of their music would have survived. This was not a natural development; it was not evolution, but man-made revolution. One can only express what one possesses inwardly. A style cannot make one richer. Thus these musicians live only because of the musicologists' interest in dead, decayed matter.

It is known that Mozart and Beethoven looked on some of their predecessors with great admiration. Fortunately, however, the versatility, inventiveness and power of emotion kept these masters free from the shackles of an aesthetic of popular complaisance.

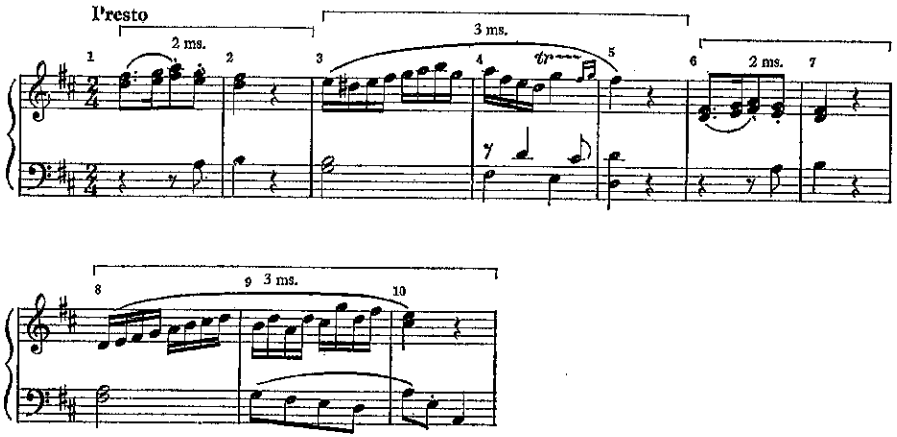
VIII

True, much of the organization of classic music reveals, by its regularity, symmetry and simple harmony, its relation with, if not derivation from, popular and dance music. Construction by phrases of the same length, especially if their number of measures is two, four or eight times two, and if subdivision into two equally long segments adds a certain kind of symmetry, contributes much to memorability; knowing the first half, it is almost possible to conjecture the second half. Deviation from regularity and symmetry does not necessarily endanger comprehensibility. One might accordingly wonder why in Haydn's and Mozart's forms irregularity is more frequently present than in Beethoven's. Is it perhaps that formal finesses have diverted a listener's attention, which should concentrate upon the tremendous power of emotional expression? There are not too many cases like that of the String Quartet Op. 95 in F minor (see Example 9b).

Construction by phrases of unequal length accounts for many of the irregularities in Haydn's and Mozart's music. These differences are produced by extension of a segment, by internal repetitions or by reductions and condensations. Such is the case in many of Haydn's and Mozart's Menuets, according to which one might be inclined to consider menuets as a song-like form, rather than as a derivative of dance music.

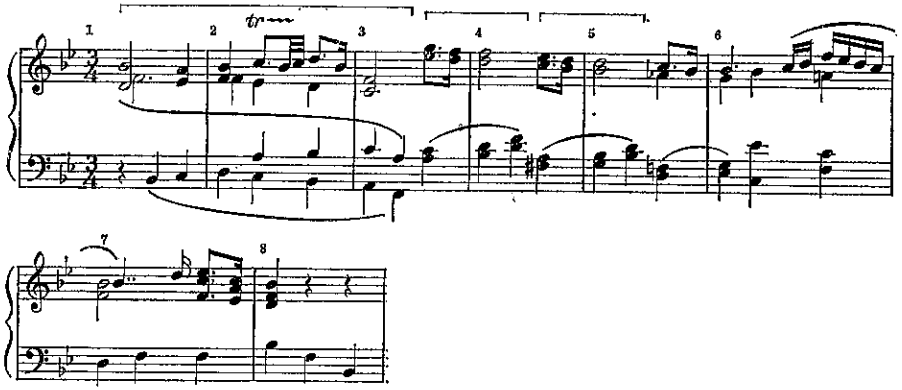
Example 15, from a piano Sonata by Haydn, consists of two segments of two measures and two of three measures: $2+3$ and $2+3$.

Ex. 15



Example 16 from the String Quartet in B♭ major by Mozart is richer in organization: 3 + 1 + 1 + 3 (the latter is perhaps a unit of 2 + 1).

Ex. 16



The whole theme comprises eight measures; thus the irregularity is, so to speak, subcutaneous (i.e. it does not show up on the surface).

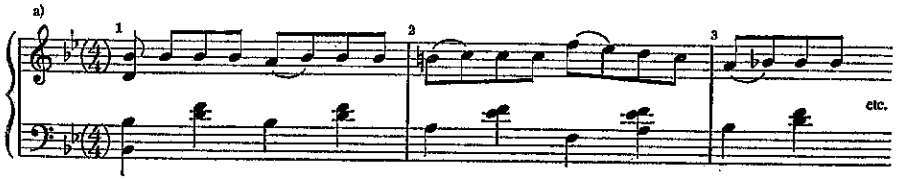
While Haydn's example is still symmetrical, this is entirely unsymmetrical and thereby renounces one of the most efficient aids to comprehension. But it is not yet what deserves to be called 'musical prose'. One might rather be inclined to ascribe such irregularity to a baroque sense of form, that is, to a desire to combine unequal, if not heterogeneous, elements into a formal unit. Though such a hypothesis is not without foundation, it seems that there is another, more artistic and psychological explanation.

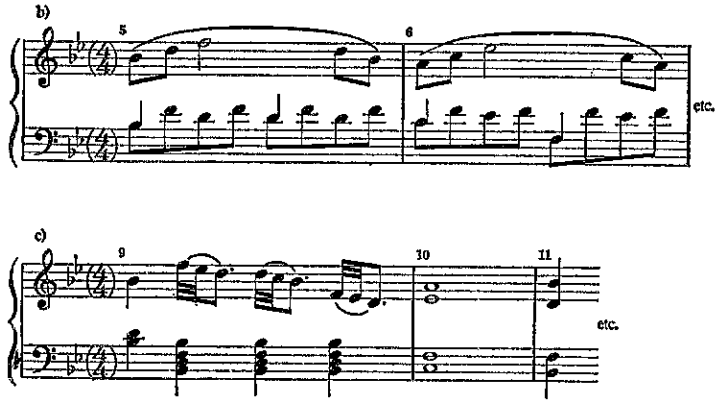
Mozart has to be considered above all as a dramatic composer.

Accommodation of the music to every change of mood and action, materially or psychologically, is the most essential problem an opera composer has to master. Inability in this respect might produce incoherence—or worse, boredom. The technique of the recitative escapes this danger by avoiding motival and harmonic obligations and their consequences. The 'Arioso' liquidates rapidly and ruthlessly that minimum of obligations in which it might have engaged. But the 'Finales' and many 'Ensembles' and even 'Arias' contain heterogeneous elements to which the technique of lyric condensation is not applicable. In pieces of this type a composer must be capable of turning within the smallest space. Mozart, anticipating this necessity, begins such a piece with a melody consisting of a number of phrases of various lengths and characters, each of them pertaining to a different phase of the action and the mood. They are, in their first formulation, loosely joined together, and after simply juxtaposed, thus admitting to be broken asunder and used independently as motival material for small formal segments.

A striking example of this procedure can be seen in the Finale (No. 15) of Act 2 of *The Marriage of Figaro*. The third section of this Finale, an Allegro, starts after Susanna's line 'Guardate, guardate qui ascoso sarà' with a theme in B flat, consisting of the three phrases *a*, *b*, *c*, in Example 17.

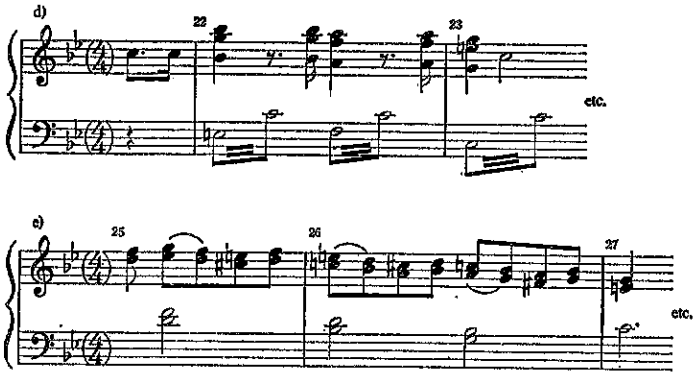
Ex. 17





To this are added later *d* in ms. 22–23 and *e* in ms. 25–29.

Ex. 18

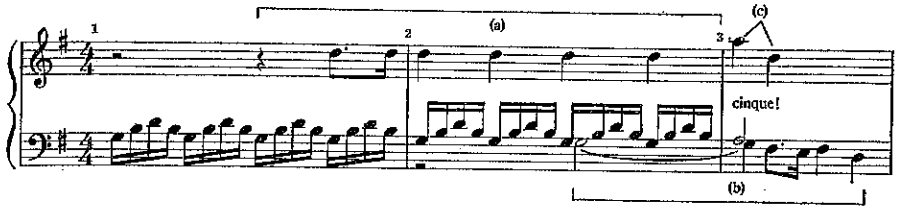


This Allegro-section comprises 160 measures and contains an astonishingly great number of segments, all of which are built, almost exclusively, out of variations of these five little phrases in a constantly changing order.

Similar construction can be found in many of the ensembles, of which the Terzet (No. 7) and the Sextet (No. 18) are outstanding specimens. But even duets, though one might expect here not so loose a formulation, derive all of it from illustrating segments, whose features show little external relationship. It is admirable how closely the action and the mood of the actors is portrayed in the

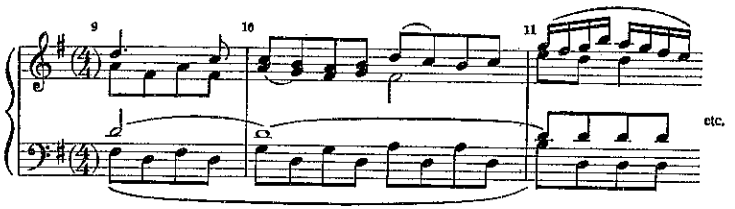
opening Duet (No. 1). Both Figaro and Susanna are deeply concerned about affairs of their own. Figaro is measuring the walls of their future apartment, Susanna trying on a new hat, admiring her looks—neither of them has an ear or an eye for the other person. Thus, while Figaro lays out his measuring tape (Ex. 19, phrase *a*), extends it (phrase *b*, the syncopation in the bass), and counts the number of lengths ('cinque', phrase *c*),

Ex. 19



Susanna tries in vain to attract his interest to her attire.

Ex. 20



Wagner or Strauss could not do this better.

Organization based on different and differently shaped elements proves to be a vision of the future. A composer of operas, of oratorios (as Schweitzer shows in analysing Bach's music to words) or even of songs, who does not prepare for far remote necessities acts as silly and brainless as a pedantic performer who insists on playing classic music with metronomically measured equal beats—as if it were dance music. Of course, in the stiff confinement of a Procrustean bed, no modification can fit, and even those ritardandi and accelerandi (Schumann's 'immer schneller werdend') which the composer himself demands will never turn out satisfactorily.

A wise performer, one who is indeed a 'servant to the work', one who possesses the mental elasticity of a rank equal to that of a musical thinker—such a man will proceed like Mozart or Schubert or others. He will systematize irregularity, making it a component principle of the organization.

IX

Analysts of my music will have to realize how much I personally owe to Mozart. People who looked unbelievingly at me, thinking I made a poor joke will now understand why I called myself a 'pupil of Mozart', must now understand my reasons. This will not help them to appreciate my music, but to understand Mozart. And it will teach young composers what are the essentials that one has to learn from masters and the way one can apply these lessons without loss of personality.

Mozart himself had learned from Italian and French composers. He had probably learned also from Ph. E. Bach. But certainly it was his own musical thinking that enabled him to produce constructions like the above-mentioned ones.

The preceding analysis may have suggested the idea that irregular and unsymmetrical construction is an absolute and inescapable result of dramatic composing. If this were true one ought to find more of it in Wagner's music. However, Wagner, who in his first period was strongly influenced by contemporary Italians, has seldom abandoned a two-by-two-measure construction, but has made great progress in the direction of musical prose—that is, toward the goal which Brahms also strove for, but on a different road. The difference between these two men is not what their contemporaries thought; it is not the difference between Dionysian and Apollonian art, as Nietzsche might have called it. Besides, it is not as simple as that between Dionysus and Apollo: that the one, in intoxication, smashes the glasses which the other has produced in an intoxication of imagination. Things happen thus only (if this is not too pompous a word for what is so little and so late) in the imagination of a biographer or a musicologist. Intoxication, whether Dionysian or Apollonian, of an artist's fantasy increases the clarity of his vision.

Great art must proceed to precision and brevity. It presupposes the alert mind of an educated listener who, in a single act of thinking, includes with every concept all associations pertaining to the complex. This enables a musician to

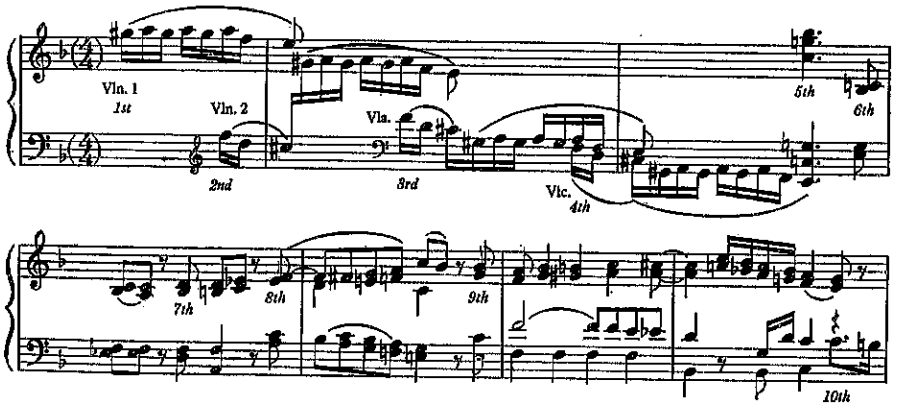
write for upper-class minds, not only doing what grammar and idiom require, but, in other respects lending to every sentence the full pregnancy of meaning of a maxim, of a proverb, of an aphorism. This is what musical prose should be—a direct and straightforward presentation of ideas, without any patchwork, without mere padding and empty repetitions.

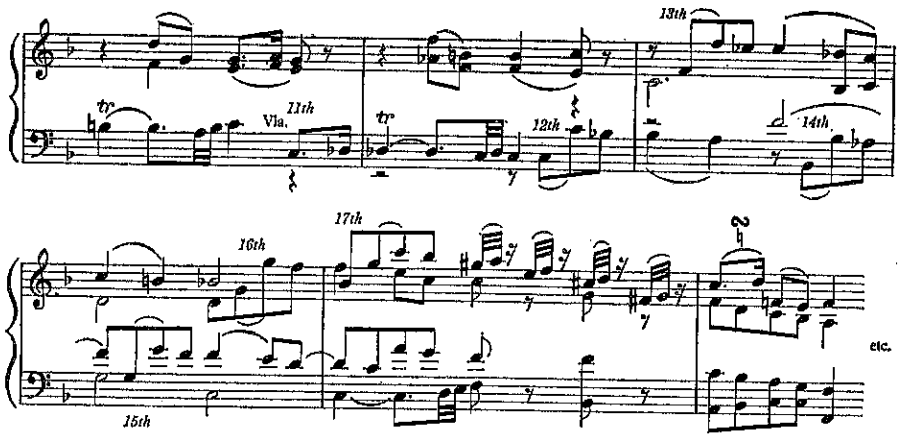
Density of texture is certainly an obstacle to popularity; but prolixity alone cannot guarantee general favour. Real popularity, lasting popularity, is only attained in those rare cases where power of expression is granted to men who dwell intensely in the sphere of basic human sentiments. There are a few cases in Schubert and Verdi, but many in Johann Strauss. Even Mozart, when, in *The Magic Flute*, he temporarily abandoned his own highly refined and artistic style of presentation in favour of the semi-popular characters he had to portray musically, did not fully succeed; the popular parts of this opera never attained the success of the serious parts. His stand was on the side of Sarastro and his priests.

In the epoch between Mozart and Wagner one does not find many themes of an irregular construction. But the following example, a transition from the end of the main theme to the subordinate theme in the first movement of Mozart's String Quartet in D minor, certainly deserves the qualification of musical prose.

Even if one ignores the first four little phrases which conclude the main theme, and also the imitations (marked 14th and 17th) by which the modulation is finished, there remain nine little phrases varying in size and character within no more than eight measures. The smallest (the 5th, 6th and 7th) are only three

Ex. 21



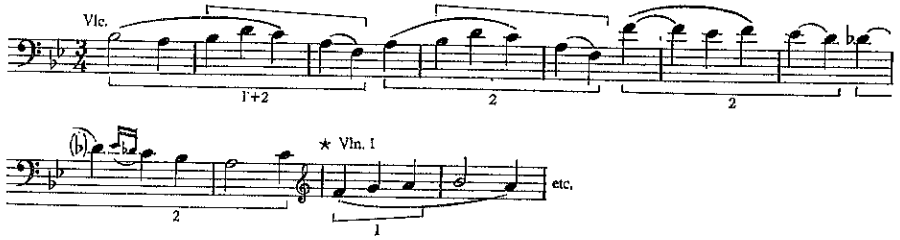


eighth notes long—in spite of which they are so expressive that one is almost tempted to put words underneath. One regrets not possessing the power of a poet to render in words what these phrases tell. However, poetry and lyrics would not deprive it of the quality of being prose-like in the unexcelled freedom of its rhythm and the perfect independence from formal symmetry.

X

Asymmetry, combinations of phrases of differing lengths, numbers of measures not divisible by eight, four or even two, i.e. imparity of the number of measures, and other irregularities already appear in the earliest works of Brahms. The main theme of the first Sextet in B flat, Op. 18, consists of nine measures (or, rather, 10, because of the upbeat-like measure which introduces the repetition of this theme in the first violin at *).

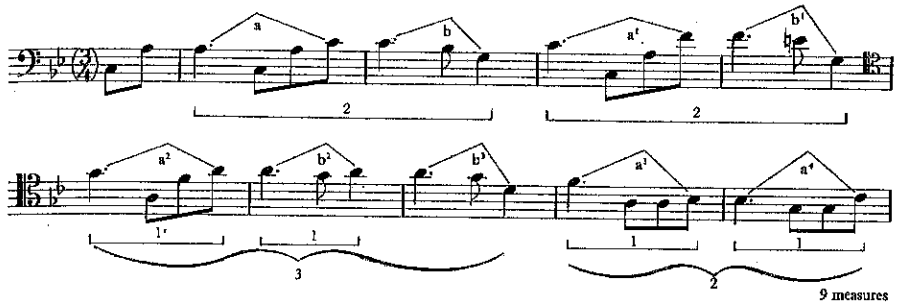
Ex. 22



The construction then appears as 3 (or 1 + 2) + 2 + 2 + 2 + 1 = 10.

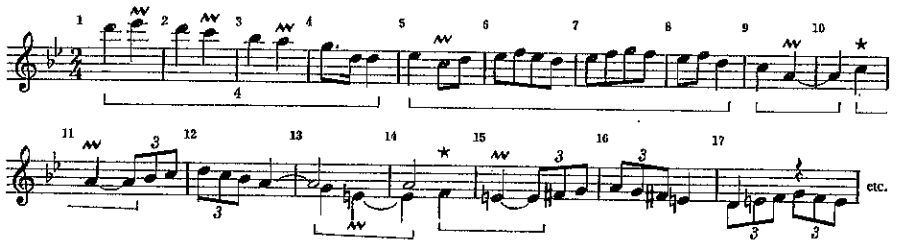
The subordinate theme of the same movement connects its two motive forms a and b, first to build two two-measure phrases followed by a three-measure and a two-measure phrase, totalling nine measures.

Ex. 23



The Scherzo from the second Sextet, Op. 36, starts with a theme which comprises seventeen measures, though in the seventeenth measure another phrase begins overlappingly.

Ex. 24



There are two rhythmical shifts (at *), but the most interesting feature is presented by the ambiguity of the ending of the second phrase. One wonders whether measures 9ff. do not belong to this phrase.

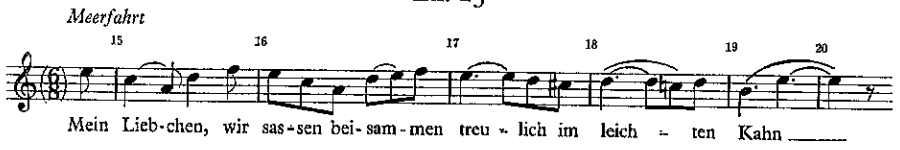
Though these irregularities do not measure up to the artfulness of the Mozart examples, they still present a more advanced phase of the development toward liberation from formal restrictions of musical thoughts, because they do

not derive from a baroque feeling, or from necessities of illustration, as is the case in dramatic music.

Other asymmetrical structures occur in songs of Brahms. They derive probably in part from the rhythmic peculiarities of the poems upon which they are based. It is well known that Brahms' aesthetic canon demanded that the melody of a song must reflect, in one way or another, the number of metrical feet in the poem. Accordingly, if there were three, four, or five metrical feet, the melody should consist of the same number of measures or half-measures. For instance, the first-half of 'Meerfahrt' (H. Heine) consists exclusively of three-measure phrases, on account of the poem's metre of three metrical feet.

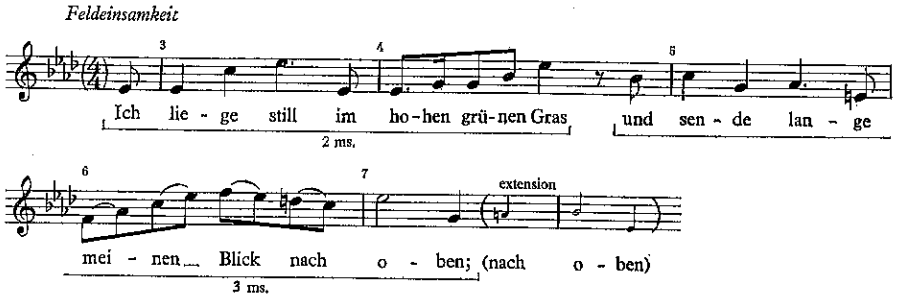
Mein Líebchen wir sássen beisámmen
tréulich im léichten Káhn

Ex. 25



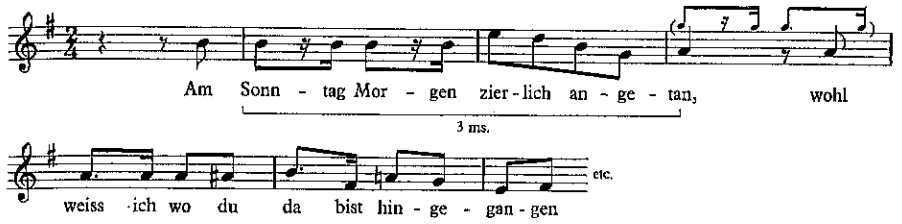
The *Lied* 'Feldeinsamkeit' is based on verses of five metrical feet; accordingly, one might expect that the corresponding first two phrases would be five measures of five half-measures long. But the first phrase is condensed to two measures, to which the second phrase adds three measures, thus reflecting the metre of the verses.

Ex. 26



The poem 'Am Sonntag Morgen zierlich angetan' has *five* metrical feet, but the melody consists of phrases three measures long, that is, six half-measures —the result of the prolongation of the pause between the phrases, which could be a sixteenth-rest only.

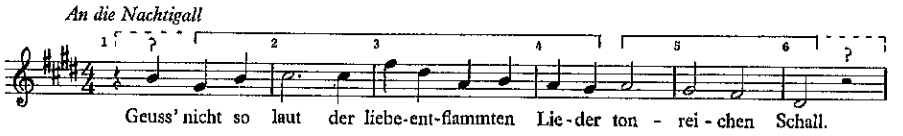
Ex. 27



Geuss nícht so láut der líebentflámmten Líeder
Tónréichen Scháll
Vom Blútenást des Ápfelbáums hernieder
Ó Náchtigáll

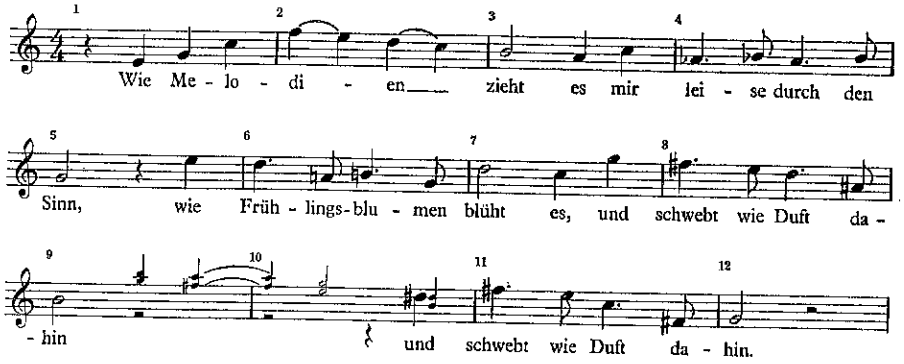
This poem has an interesting metre: 5 + 3 + 5 + 3 metrical feet. Note also the spondaic metre of every second line. The dotted half note in measure 2 causes the extension of the first phrase to six, or rather seven half-measures. The second line, if treated proportionally, should comprise about four half-measures, but occupies, inclusive of the half-rest, five half-measures.

Ex. 28



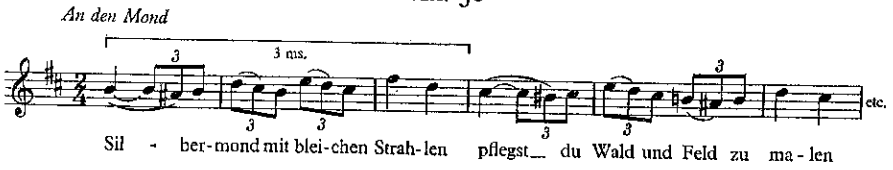
These irregularities are more than the metre of the poem demands. In many other examples the length of the phrase differs from the number of metrical feet; for instance, in Example 29, the two times three metrical feet of the first two lines could fit well in the space of seven or eight half-measures, instead of the seventeen half-measures apportioned to them.

Ex. 29



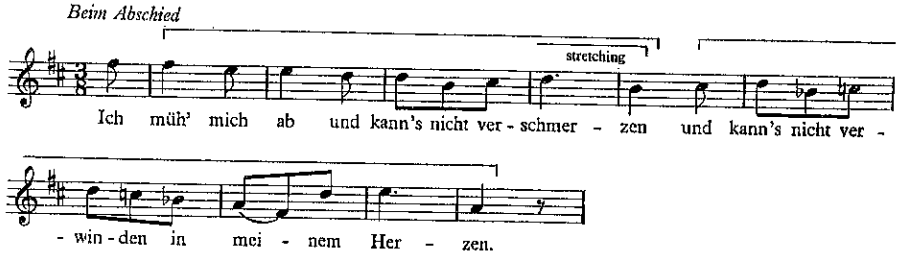
Similarly, the poem 'An den Mond', with its regular rhythm of four metrical feet, does not require the three-measure construction.

Ex. 30



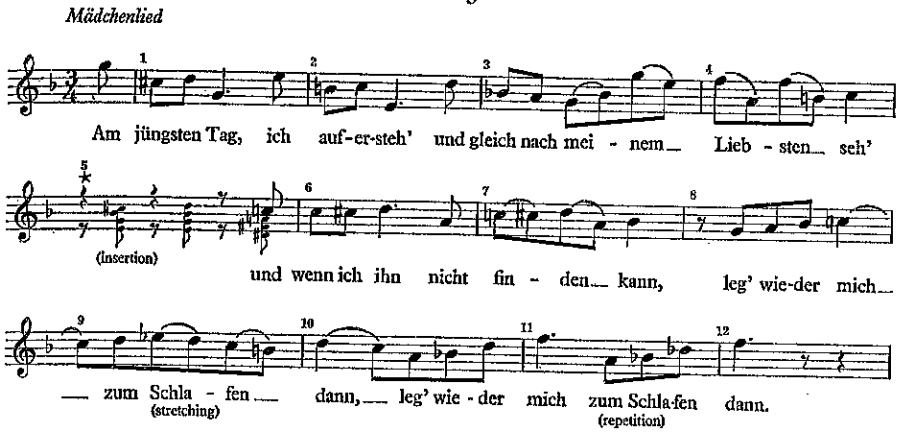
'Beim Abschied' has lines of four rhythmical feet, but the phrases are stretched to occupy five measures.

Ex. 31



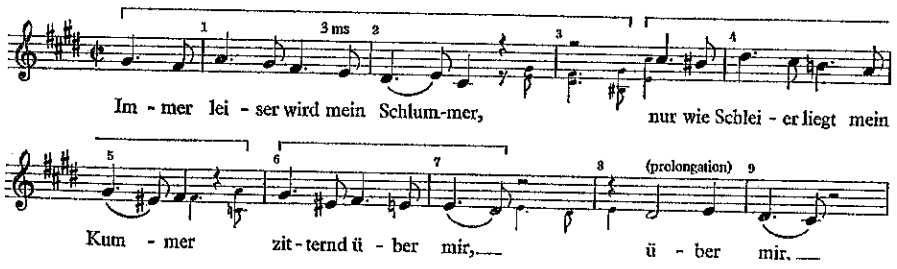
The irregularity is also not required by the metre (four metrical feet) of the poem in 'Mädchenlied'. It is the inserted fifth measure, the stretching in measures 8 and 9 and the addition of two one-measure phrases that bring up to ten and twelve measures respectively what could be put into eight measures.

Ex. 32



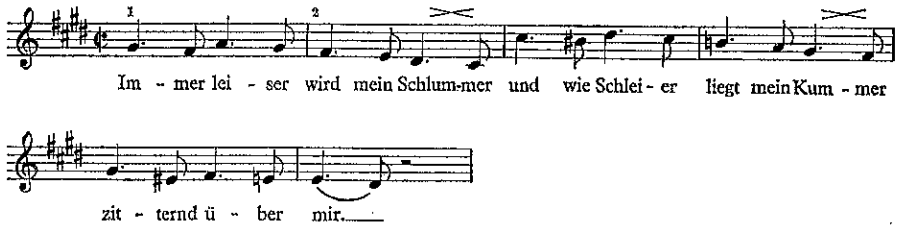
The irregularities of 'Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer' are partly caused by the changing metre of the poem.

Ex. 33



But an attempt to condense these phrases

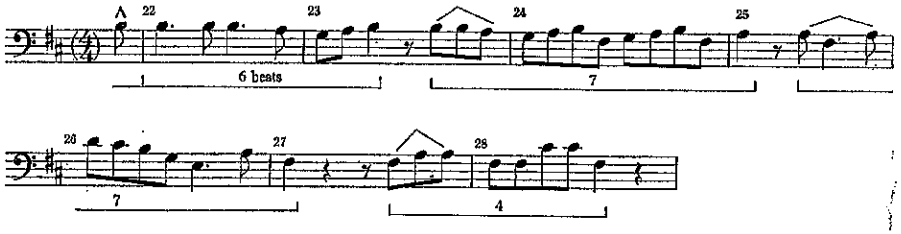
Ex. 34



illustrates at once that the little piano interludes which separate and prolong the phrases are suggested by the mood of the poem. This looser construction prepares for an even richer freedom of phrasing which occurs in this continuation.

The same foresight may be the cause of the extensions in 'Verrat' (Example 35). There is no metrical feature demanding the fifth and the tenth measures, both of which are again piano interludes. In later parts of the poem deviations from this metre occur, and this is the place where deviations from even-numbered structures increase. The length of the phrases is different, and the upbeats with which they begin (marked Λ) fluctuate between one, three, and five eighths.

Ex. 35



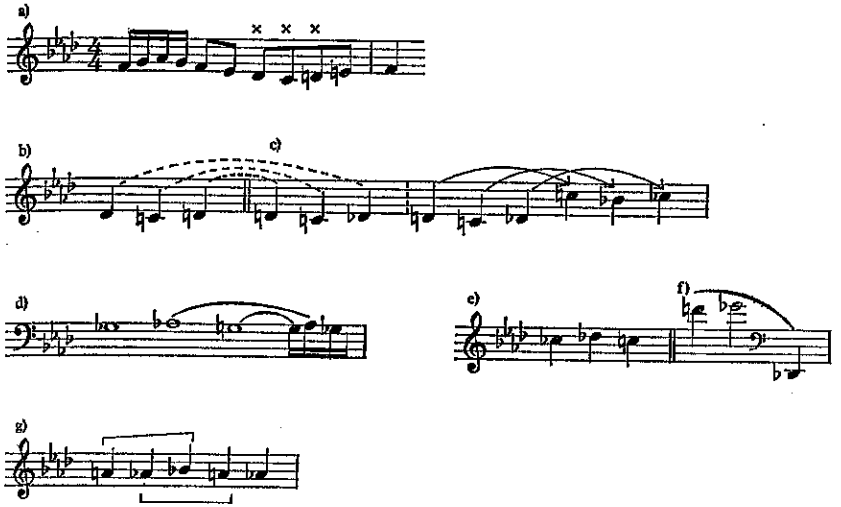
The most important capacity of a composer is to cast a glance into the most remote future of his themes or motives. He has to be able to know beforehand the consequences which derive from the problems existing in his material, and to organize everything accordingly. Whether he does this consciously or subconsciously is a subordinate matter. It suffices if the result proves it.

Thus one must not be astonished by an act of genius when a composer, feeling that irregularity will occur later, already deviates in the beginning from simple regularity. An unprepared and sudden change of structural principles would endanger balance.

XI

I cannot renounce the opportunity to illustrate the remoteness of a genius's foresight. In Example 36a (Beethoven's String Quartet Op. 95) there appear in the first measure the three notes D♭, C♮ and D♮ (36a and b).

Ex. 36

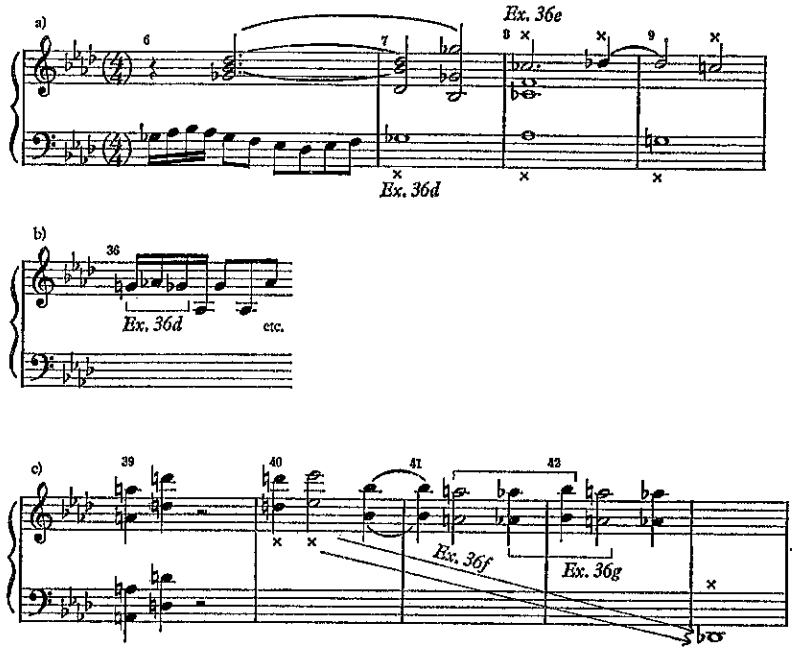


In Example 36c this succession is retrograded to D♮, C♮, D♭ and transposed a seventh up.

A comparison of Example 37a, b, and c with Example 36d, e, f, and g unveils the origin of the enigmatic procedures in the upper and lower voices of measures 7–9 and simultaneously shows how the strange figure in measure 36 (example 37b) is related to the basic idea.

Moreover, the relation of the still more enigmatic segment in measures 38–43 (and later in 49–54) with the main theme is thus revealed. The same succession of tones, direct and reversed, appears also several times in the following movements. It would be presumptuous to say that it is 'the' basic feature of the structure, or that it had a great influence on the organization of this string quartet; perhaps its function is only that of a 'connective'. I believe its reappearances, its reincarnation in other themes can just as well be caused subconsciously; the

Ex. 37



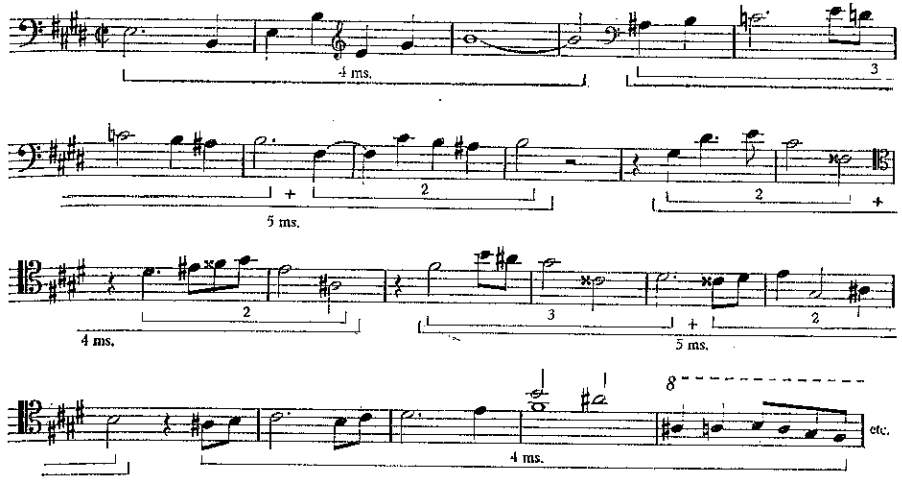
mind of a composer is dominated by every detail of his idea, the consequences of which accordingly will show up involuntarily and unexpectedly. Of course, only a master who is sure of himself, of his sense of form and balance, can renounce conscious control in favour of the dictates of his imagination.

XII

Illustrations of the tendency toward asymmetrical construction among post-Wagnerian composers are very numerous. Though the natural inclination to build two- or four-measure phrases is still present, deviation from multiples of two is achieved in many fashions.

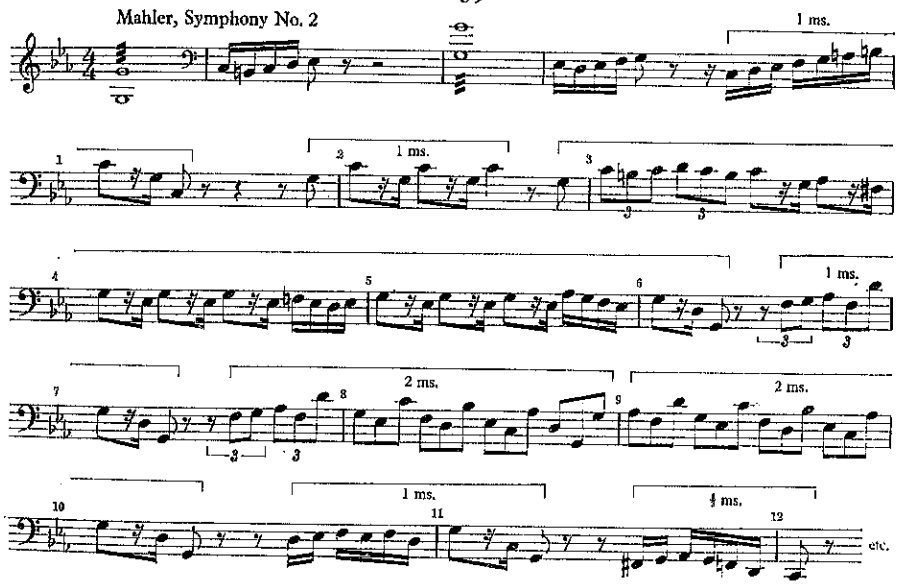
The main theme of Anton Bruckner's Seventh Symphony, for instance, contains one segment of five (3 + 2) measures and another of three measures. Neither three-measure unit can be classified as an extension of two measures or a condensation of four measures. They are both 'natural'.

Ex. 38



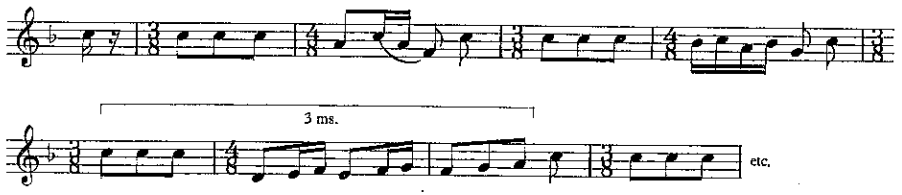
The asymmetry in the main theme of Gustav Mahler's Second Symphony is due to the irregular appearance of one-measure units.

Ex. 39



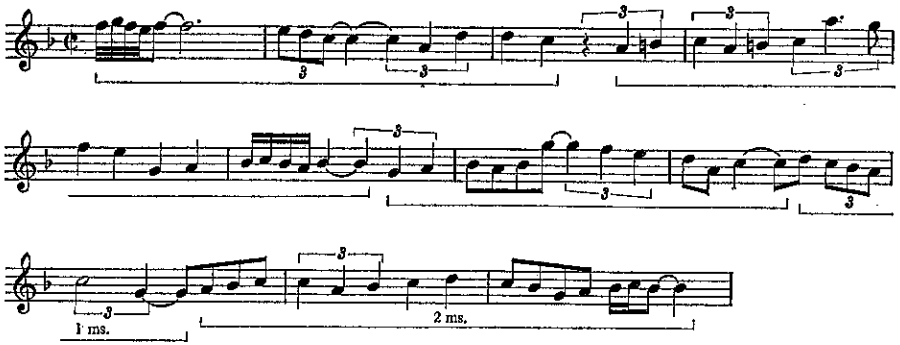
The irregularities in the subordinate theme of the Scherzo in Mahler's Sixth Symphony are only partly caused by its composition of 3/8, 4/8, and 3/4 metre. The units are also different in length. The first two comprise seven eighth-notes, the third comprises ten eighth-notes and in the continuation even greater differences appear. Also these irregularities could scarcely be traced back to even numbers.

Ex. 40



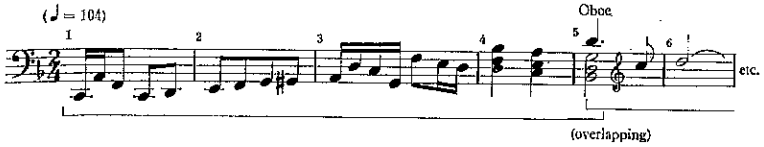
An extraordinary case, even among contemporary composers, is the melody from 'Abschied', the last movement of Mahler's *Lied von der Erde*. All the units vary greatly in shape, size and content, as if they were not motival parts of a melodic unit, but words, each of which has a purpose of its own in the sentence.

Ex. 41



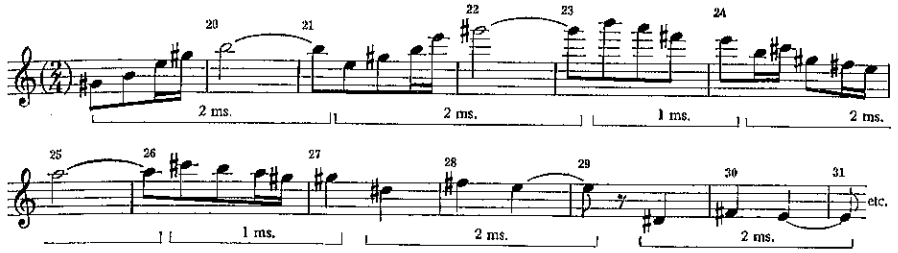
The main theme from Richard Strauss' *Symphonia Domestica* is distinctly an indivisible unit of five measures. It ends overlapping the entrance of the oboe.

Ex. 42



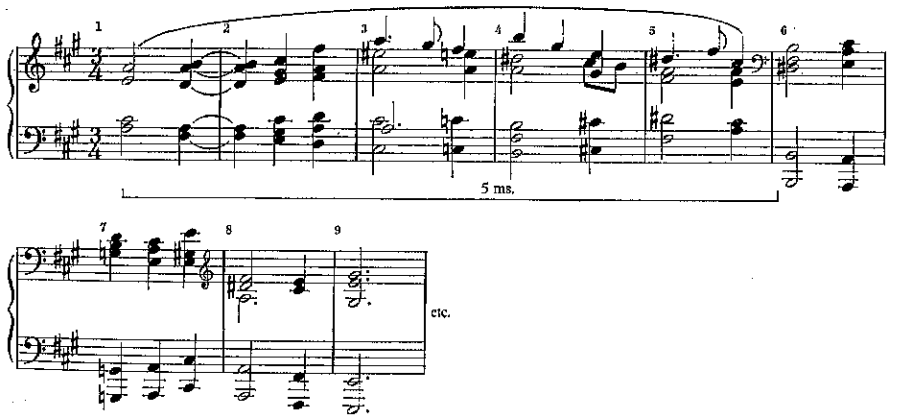
Another theme of the same work consists of two- and one-measure units.

Ex. 43



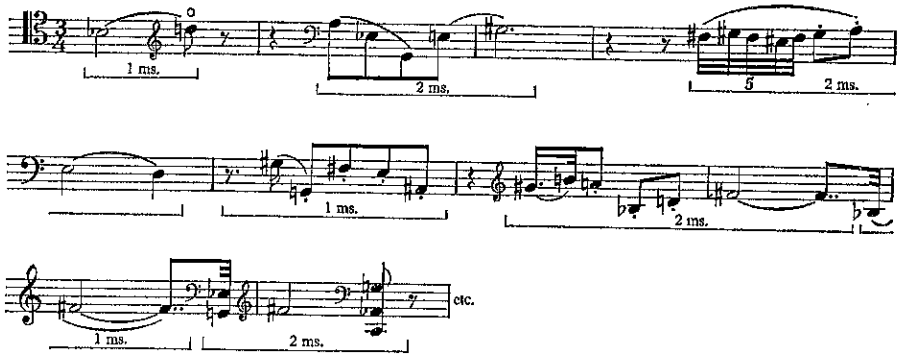
Also, an indivisible five-measure unit is the first phrase of Max Reger's Violin Concerto. A three-measure phrase completes this part of the sentence.

Ex. 44



The 'cello solo from 'Serenade' (Schoenberg, *Pierrot Lunaire*, Op. 21) consists of an irregular change of one- and two-measure units.

Ex. 45



XIII

One might interpret some of the irregularities in the examples from Haydn, Mozart and Brahms as caused by special purposes, as, for instance, the desire to satisfy a baroque sense of form; or to accomplish a more definite separation of the phrases by 'punctuation'; or to assist in the dramatic characterization of various actors in an opera; or to comply with the metrical peculiarities of the poem of a song—as has been shown in previous discussions.

But none of these reasons will explain irregularities such as have been mentioned in the music of post-Wagnerian composers. Evidently their deviations from simple construction no longer derive from exclusively technical conditions, nor do they serve to provide a stylistic appearance. They have become incorporated into the syntax and grammar of perhaps all subsequent musical structures. Accordingly, they have ceased to be recorded as merits of a composition—though unfortunately many illiterate composers still write two plus two, four plus four, eight plus eight unchangingly.

XIV

Again: it does not matter whether an artist attains his highest achievements con-

sciously, according to a preconceived plan, or subconsciously, by stepping blindfolded from one feature to the next. Has the Lord granted to a thinker a brain of unusual power? Or did the Lord silently assist him now and then with a bit of His own thinking? Our Lord is an extremely good chess player. He usually plans billions of moves ahead, and that is why it is not easy to understand Him. It seems, however, that He likes helping in their spiritual problems those He has selected—though not enough in their more material ones.

Again: asymmetry and imparity of structural elements are no miracle in contemporary music, nor do they constitute a merit. A contemporary composer connects phrases irrespective of their size and shape, only vigilant of harmonic progression, of rhythmic and motival contents, fluency and logic. But otherwise he chooses his way like a tourist, freely and nonchalantly if he feels he has time, strictly and carefully if he feels he is under pressure. If only he never loses sight of his goal!

Merits of contemporary compositions may consist of formal finesses of a different kind. It may be the variety and the multitude of the ideas, the manner in which they develop and grow out of germinating units, how they are contrasted and how they complement one another; it may also be their emotional quality, romantic or unromantic, subjective or objective, their expression of moods and characters and illustration.

Contemporary compositorial technique has not yet arrived at a freedom of construction comparable to that of a language. Evidently, however, parity and symmetry play a lesser role today than they did in earlier techniques; and the aspiration for a strictness resembling that of the hexameter or pentameter, or that of the structures of the sonnet or the stanza in poetry is rare. There are even composers who preserve little of the features of the theme in their variations—a queer case: why should one use a form of such strictness, if one aims for the contrary? Is it not as if one would string a violin E-string on a double bass? One is ready to ignore discrepancies of this kind and degree in favour of overwhelming merits in other respects. But the aesthetic background for a just and general judgement has become very questionable at present.

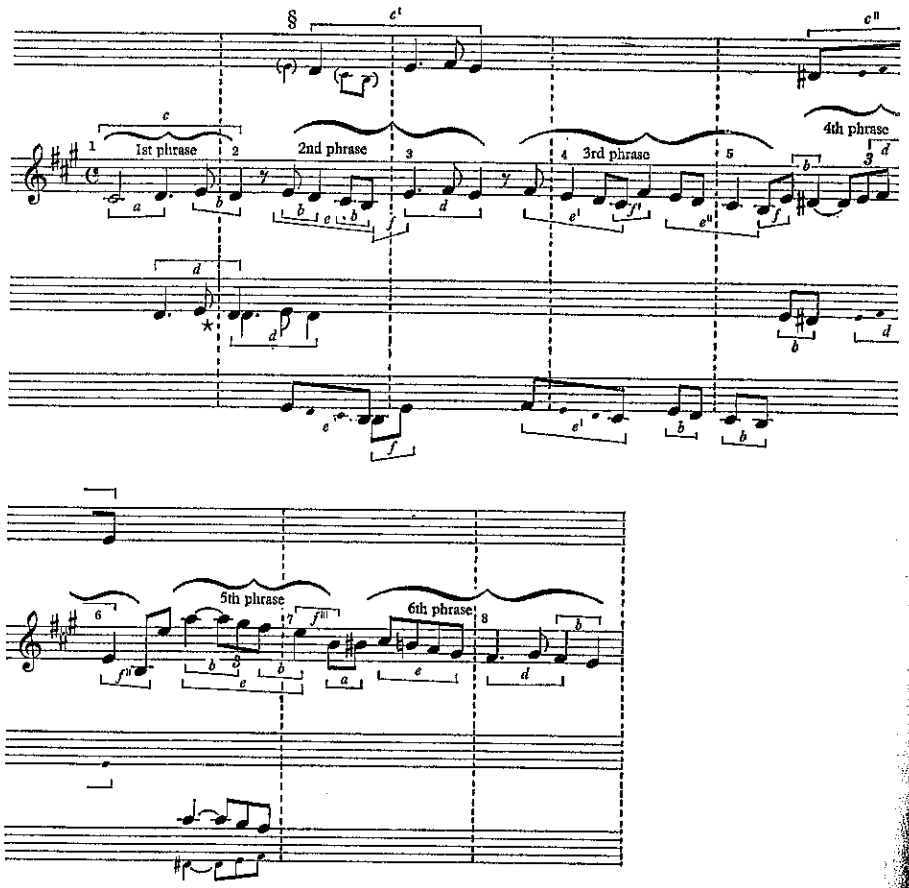
XV

This discussion will be concluded by two illustrations of Brahms' contribution

toward the development of the musical language: the main theme of the Andante from the A minor String Quartet, Op. 51, No. 2, and the third of the 'Vier Ernste Gesänge', Op. 121, 'O Tod, O Tod, wie bitter bist du!'.

Both these themes are specimens of a perhaps unique artistic quality, as regards their motival elaboration and internal organization.

Ex. 46



As the analysis unveils, the A major Andante contains exclusively motive forms which can be explained as derivatives of the interval of a second, marked by brackets *a*:

b then is the inversion upward of *a*;

c is *a*+*b*;

d is part of *c*;

e is *b*+*b*, descending seconds, comprising a fourth;

f is the interval of a fourth, abstracted from *e*, in inversion.

The first phrase—*c*—thus consists of *a* plus *b*. It also contains *d* (see bracket below), which also functions as a connective between the first and the second phrase (at *).

The second phrase consists of *e* and *d*; with the exception of its upbeat (the eighth note *e*) and the two notes c♯ and b, it presents itself as a transposition of the first phrase (see above at §), one step higher. It also furnishes the interval of a fourth, *f*.

The third phrase contains *e* twice, the second time transposed one step higher.

The fourth phrase is distinctly a transformed transposition of *c*.

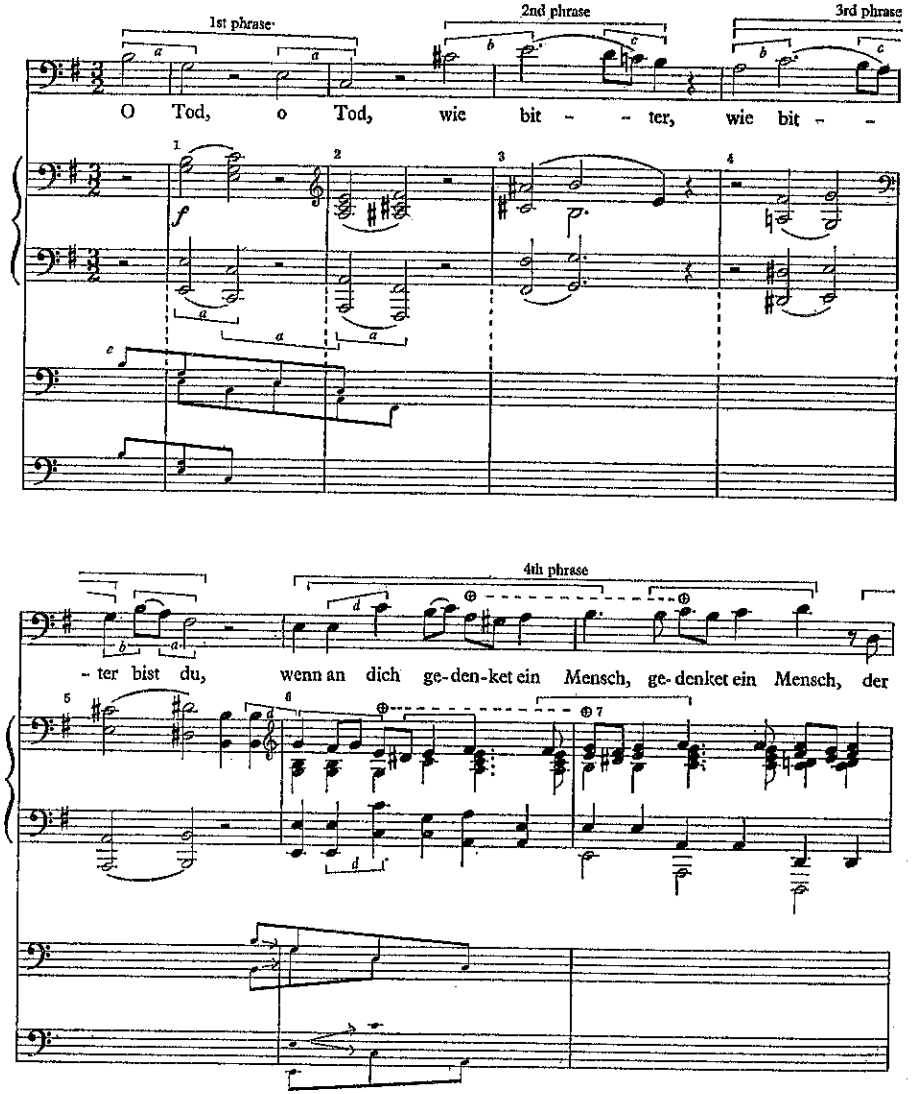
The fifth phrase, though it looks like a variant of the preceding phrase, merely contains *c*, connected with the preceding by *f*.

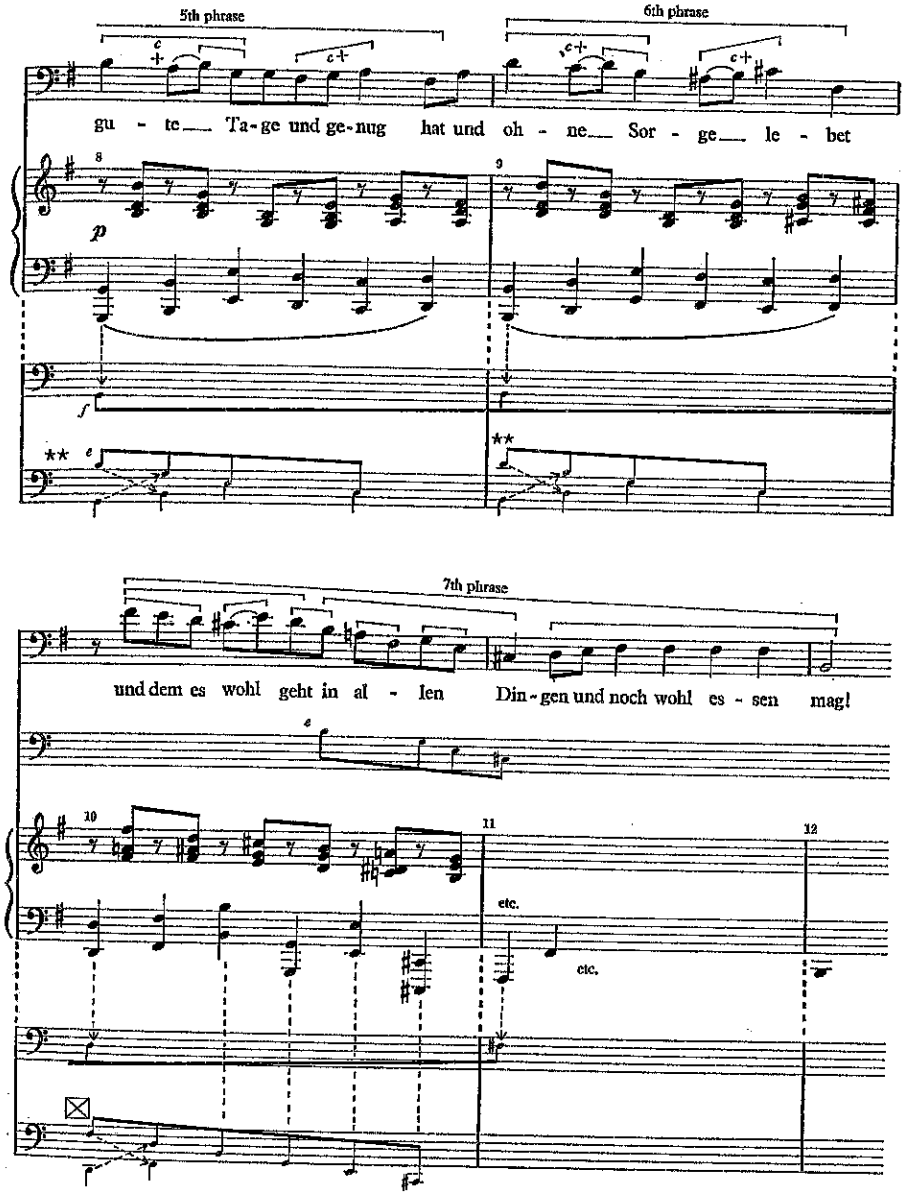
The sixth phrase, consisting of *e*, *d*, and *b*, contains a chromatic connective b♯, which could be considered as the second note of a form of *a*. This b♯ is the only note in the whole theme whose derivation can be contested.

Sceptics, however, might reason that steps of a second or even fractions of a scale are present in every theme without constituting the thematic material. There exists an enormous multitude of methods and principles of construction, few of which have yet been explored. I deem it probable that many musicians are acquainted with these two analyses which I broadcast in 1933 on celebrating Brahms' 100th birthday anniversary. But one who objects to my conclusions must not forget that the second example exhibits a similar secret, this time dealing with thirds (see Ex. 47, pages 432 and 433).

This example has a certain resemblance to the main theme of Brahms' Fourth Symphony—in both the structural unit is the interval of a third. The first phrase in the voice part consists of a succession of three thirds b–g, g–e and e–c, marked *a*.

Ex. 47


1st phrase
2nd phrase
3rd phrase
O Tod, o Tod, wie bit - - ter, wie bit - -
4th phrase
- ter bist du, wenn an dich ge-den-ket ein Mensch, ge-denket ein Mensch, der


5th phrase
6th phrase
gu - te Ta-ge und ge-nug hat und oh - ne Sor - ge le - bet
7th phrase
und dem es wohl geht in al - len Din-gen und noch wohl es - sen mag!
etc.
etc.

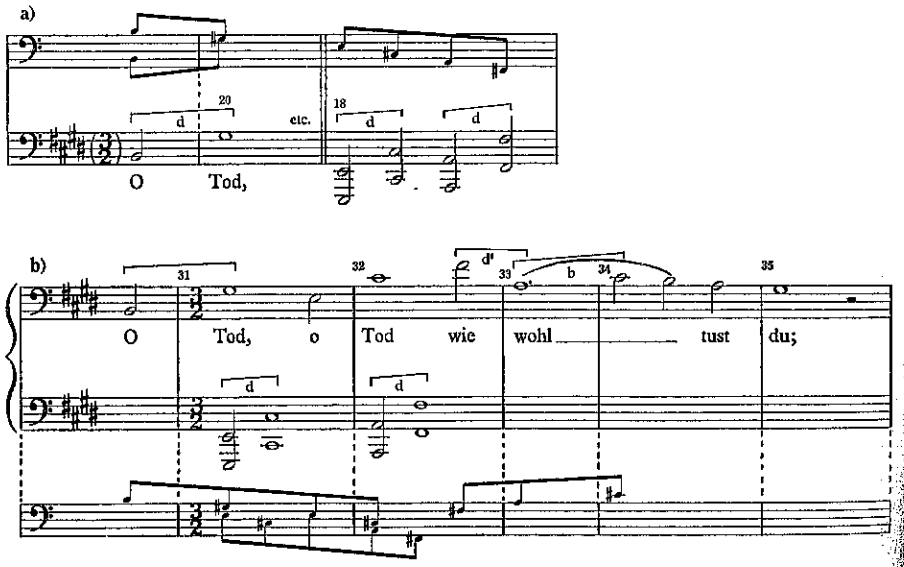
The second phrase is built from the inversion of *a*, c♯–e, marked *b*, and *c*, which is *a* with an inserted passing note c.

The third phrase is a sequence of the second phrase and is (characteristically!) a third lower.

The fourth phrase, in which the voice follows the piano with a small canonic imitation, inverts the interval of a third (b–g and e–c respectively) into a sixth *d*. Observe also the relation of a third between the two points ⊕–⊕ in measures 6–7 in voice and piano.

The fifth and sixth phrases, with part of the seventh, are founded upon the notes marked *f*, g–b–d–f♯, which are an inversion of the descending thirds of the first phrase. Besides, the left hand in measures 8 and 9 contains the succession of thirds, though the first two notes have changed their places (see **). Furthermore, the left hand in measure 10 contains six tones building a chain of thirds *e* (⊠). The voice part consists mainly of thirds, some of them including passing notes. Besides, here where the climactic concentration approaches a cadence, the interval of a third appears abundantly, and *e* also occurs in successions.

Ex. 48

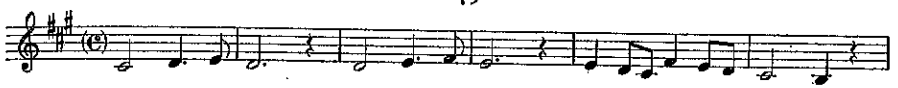


See also Example 48a and b. Here again the third is reversed as a sixth (48a) in the voice and imitated in the bass (48b).

The sense of logic and economy and the power of inventiveness which build melodies of so much natural fluency deserve the admiration of every music lover who expects more than sweetness and beauty from music. But though I know offhand only one example of such complexity of construction by a pre-Brahmsian composer—by Mozart, of course (see Example 51 from the Piano Quartet in G minor)—I must state that structural analysis reveals even greater merits.

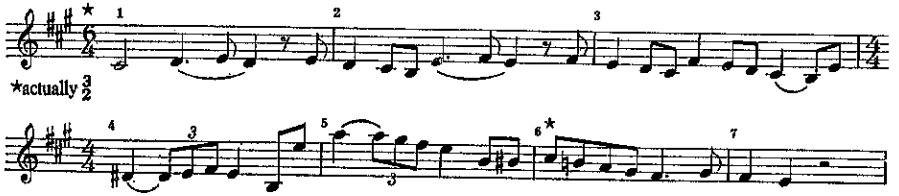
The Andante from the A minor String Quartet (Example 46) contains six phrases in eight measures. The length of these phrases is 6+6+6+4+4+6 quarter notes. The first three phrases occupy five and three-eighths (or five and one-half) measures. The first phrase ends practically on the first beat of measure 2. In order to appreciate fully the artistic value of the second phrase's metrical shift, one must realize that even some of the great composers, Brahms' predecessors, might have continued as in Example 49, placing the second phrase in the third measure.

Ex. 49



Brahms might have tried to place the first three phrases into three 6/4 measures.

Ex. 50



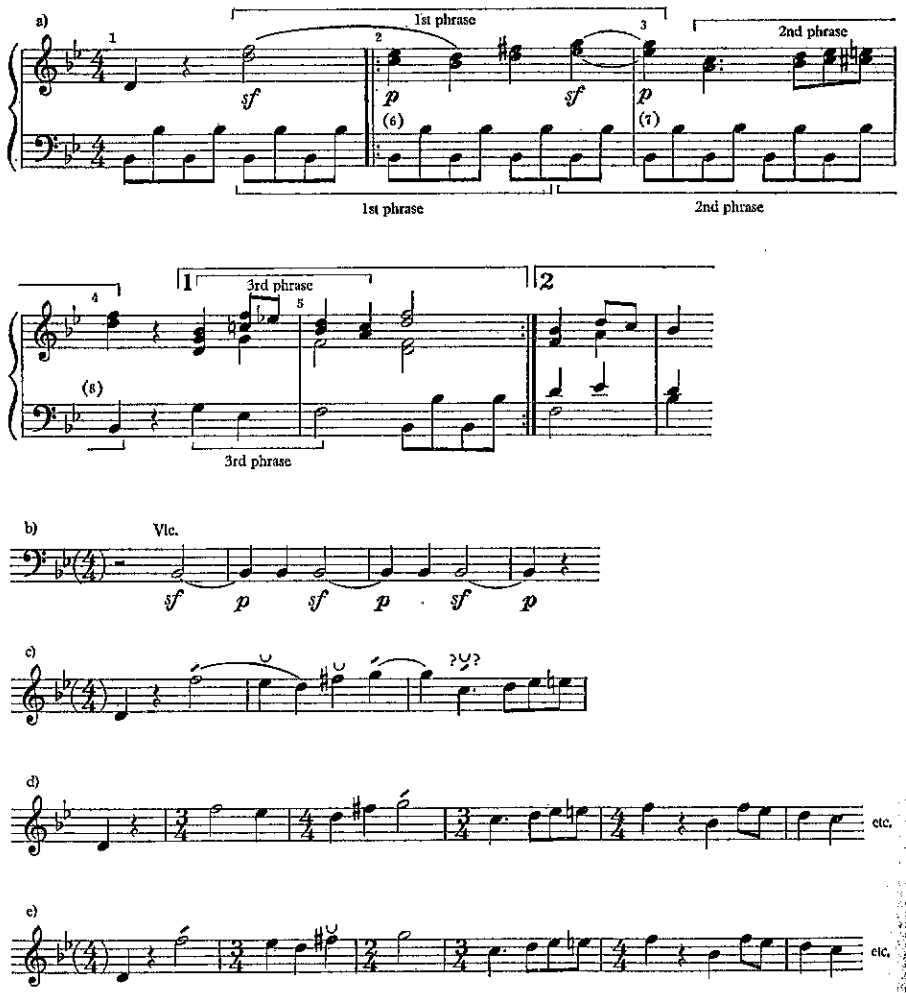
If, then, the next two phrases would fit into two 4/4 measures, it might be doubtful whether the accentuation of the last phrase (at *) is adequate, if all the preceding phrases had their main accents placed on first beats. But, besides, this notation would reveal the imparity of the construction even more, because the theme then becomes seven measures.

In Brahms' notation these subcutaneous beauties are accommodated within

eight measures; and if eight measures constitute an aesthetic principle, it is preserved here in spite of the great freedom of construction.

The example from Mozart (Example 51) is an enigma—not to the performer, but to the analyst who is interested in the grammar, syntax, and linguistics of music.

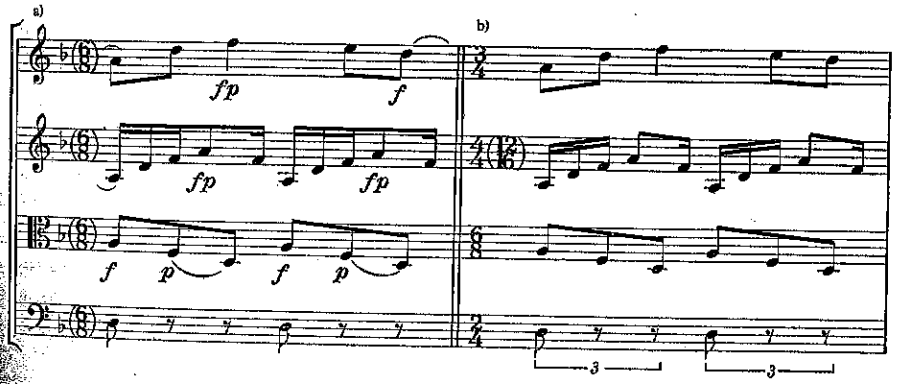
Ex. 51

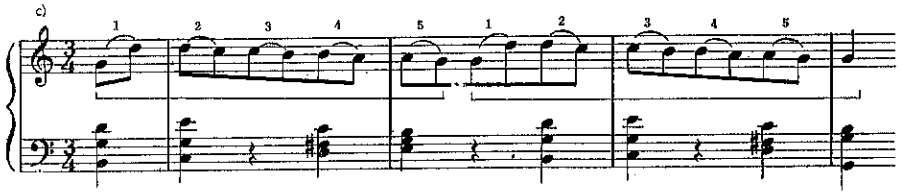


It consists of three little segments, or phrases, whose metrical position is intricate. The beginning of the first phrase on a third beat is marked *sf*, demanding a stronger accent than the third beat usually carries. The following first beat is marked *p* and if this means 'cancellation of the accent',[2] one might assume that it means a change of time, as indicated in Example 51d and 51e, where the changes of the metre are carried out. But in measure 2, the fourth beat is also marked *sf* and accentuation of the following beat is also cancelled, or at least reduced. For this reason one might suppose that the second phrase does not begin, as the brackets above indicate, at the second beat of measure 3, but at the fourth beat of measure 2, with the *sf*, as indicated below the left hand. It is also possible that the note on the third beat (the f♯) should retain its accent, thus producing a spondee.

In addition to all these problems, the 'cello, when this little segment is repeated, contributes a problem of its own, by *sf*-accents which partly contradict those of the main voice (Example 51b). The structural intricacy of this example is paralleled by the polyrhythmic construction of the second variation in the Finale of the String Quartet in D minor (Example 52a). Today one will write this as in Example 52b. An example from the Menuet of the C major String Quartet (52c) may serve as a further justification for entering into an examination of such subtle problems. This example is one which suggests a phrasing contrary to the metre. Here a unit of five quarter-notes is repeated on different beats, while the accompaniment remains unchanged.

Ex. 52





Beethoven is a great innovator as regards rhythm. Remember, for instance, the last movement of the Piano Concerto in E♭, or the Menuet of the String Quartet, Op. 18, No. 6, etc. But structurally, as previously stated, he is generally rather simple. Though, however, the lucidity of presentation balances satisfactorily the heavy load of emotions his ideas carry with them, it is needless to say that abandonment of Mozart's unequal and unsymmetric foundations would have been an extremely regrettable loss. The idea cannot be rejected that the mental pleasure caused by structural beauty can be tantamount to the pleasure deriving from emotional qualities. In this sense Brahms' merit would be immense, even if he had preserved this way of thinking only in the manner of a technical device. But—and this characterizes his high rank—he has surpassed it.

If a man who knows that he will die soon makes his account with earth and with heaven, prepares his soul for the departure, and balances what he leaves with what he will receive, he might desire to incorporate a word—a part of the wisdom he has acquired—into the knowledge of mankind, if he is one of the Great. One might doubt about the sense of life if it then would be a mere accident that such a work, a life-terminating work, would not represent more than just another opus. Or is one entitled to assume that a message from a man who is already half on the other side progresses to the uttermost limit of the still-expressible? Is one not entitled to expect therefrom perfection of an extraordinary degree, because mastership, a heavenly gift, which cannot be acquired by the most painstaking assiduity and exercise, manifests itself only once, only one single time in its full entirety, when a message of such importance has to be formulated?

I imagine that at this point Brahms' protective wall of dryness might enter the picture, and that he might stop me: 'Now it's enough poetry. If you have to say something, say it briefly and technically without so much sentimental fuss.'

Before obeying this order, I am pressed to say that this third of the *Vier Ernste Gesänge*, 'O Tod, O Tod, wie bitter bist du', seems to me the most touching of the whole cycle—in spite of its perfection, if not *because* of it. Intuition, inspiration and spontaneity in creation are generally characteristically combined with speed. But 'was glaubt er, dass ich an seine elende Geige denke, wenn der Geist mich packt?' (Do you really suppose I think of your miserable violin, if the spirit gets hold of me?)—this is how the artist himself feels whether he creates in hard labour or only by a kind of toying.

There is no doubt that Brahms believed in working out the ideas which he called 'gifts of grace'. Hard labour is, to a trained mind, no torture, but rather a pleasure. As I have stated on another occasion: if a mathematician's or a chess player's mind can perform such miracles of the brain, why should a musician's mind not be able to do it? After all, an improviser must anticipate before playing, and composing is a slowed-down improvisation; often one cannot write fast enough to keep up with the stream of ideas. But a craftsman likes to be conscious of what he produces; he is proud of the ability of his hands, of the flexibility of his mind, of his subtle sense of balance, of his never-failing logic, of the multitude of variations, and last but not least of the profundity of his idea and his capacity of penetrating to the most remote consequences of an idea. One cannot do this with a shallow idea, but one can, and one can *only*, with a profound idea —and there one *must*.

It is important to realize that at a time when all believed in 'expression', Brahms, without renouncing beauty and emotion, proved to be a progressive in a field which had not been cultivated for half a century. He would have been a pioneer if he had simply returned to Mozart. But he did not live on inherited fortune; he made one of his own. True, Wagner has contributed to the development of structural formulations through his technique of repetitions, varied or unvaried, because they freed him from the obligation of elaborating longer than necessary upon subjects which he had already clearly determined. Thus this language admitted turning to other subjects, when the action on the stage demanded it.

Brahms never wrote dramatic music—and it was rumoured in Vienna that he had said he would rather write in the style of Mozart than in the 'Neudeutsche Stil'. One can be sure it would not have been Mozart's style, but pure Brahms, and though he might have repeated whole sentences, and even single

words in the text, in the manner of pre-Wagnerian opera, he could not have entirely disregarded the contemporary feeling for dramatic presentation; he would not let an actor die during a da capo aria, and repeat the beginning after death. On the other hand, it would be highly enlightening to see all the dramatico-musical requirements carried out over Brahms' immensely advanced harmony.

It might be doubtful whether Brahms could have found a libretto fitting to what he liked and to the emotion he was capable of expressing. Would it have been a comic opera, a comedy, a lyric drama or a tragedy? He is many-sided, and one can easily find in his music expressions of all sorts, with the possible exception of violent dramatic outbursts such as one finds in Wagner and Verdi. Who knows? If one considers Beethoven's *Fidelio*, which is distinctly symphonic in its organization, remembers the tremendous outburst at the end of the second act, 'O namenlose Freude!' (Oh inexpressible joy!) and compares that with the strictly symphonic style of the greater part of the third act, one may get an impression of what a genius is capable 'wenn der Geist ihn packt'.

'O Tod, O Tod, wie bitter bist du' has been analysed as regards its eminent motival logic. In Example 47 are also marked the beauties of its phrasing. It seems superfluous to discuss these features here in detail; a few remarks should suffice to illustrate what has been contended in the course of this research.

The whole first part of this song contains in twelve measures thirty-six half notes. The phrasing (in the voice) apportions six half notes to the first phrase, four to the second, five to the third, five and a half to the fourth, three and a half to the fifth (counting only one upbeat eighth-note), three to the sixth, four and a half to the seventh, and five and a half to the ending phrase. One may appreciate the rhythmic shift of the third phrase to another beat and a further shift produced through the beginning of the little canon in measures 6 and 7.

Brahms' domain as a composer of songs, chamber music and symphonies has to be qualified as epic-lyric. The freedom of his language would be less surprising were he a dramatist. His influence has already produced a further development of the musical language toward an unrestricted, though well-balanced presentation of musical ideas. But, curiously, the merits of his achievements will shine brighter when more and more are incorporated into the dramatic technique. The opera composer will then become able to renounce a makeshift technique which is a shortcoming not only in the operas of the great pre-Wagnerians. As the contribution of the singer-actor to the dramatic expression

is only a part of the drama, the orchestra, at first only an accompanying factor, has developed into a dominant one. It not only illustrates mood, character and action, but also determines the tempo of the action, and, through its own formal conditions, extends or limits all that happens. In order to realize the consequences of the orchestra's predominance, one must remember the frequent repetitions of text in pre-Wagnerian operas. They serve to correspond to the trend towards expansion of the form originated in the orchestra. Then there are those occasions when a melody does not accommodate to the text. These are the places where the singer dwells on the dominant of the chord while the orchestra continues to build up the formal and thematic elaborations of his part. These are the places in more recent works where the orchestra plays like a symphony, showing little regard for the requirements of the singer, and—an ultramodern pseudo-progressive accomplishment—complete disregard for what is to be expressed by the stage, word and voice, sometimes even counteracting them.

Applying here Brahms' contributions to an unrestricted musical language will enable the opera composer to overcome the metrical handicaps of his libretto's prose; the production of melodies and other structural elements will not depend on the versification, on the metre, or on the absence of possibilities for repetitions. There will be no expansion necessary for mere formal reasons and changes of mood or character will not endanger the organization. The singer will be granted the opportunity to sing and to be heard; he will not be forced to recite on a single note, but will be offered melodic lines of interest; in a word, he will not be merely the one who pronounces the words in order to make the action understandable. He will be a singing instrument of the performance.

It seems—if this is not wishful thinking—that some progress has already been made in this direction, some progress in the direction toward an unrestricted musical language which was inaugurated by Brahms the Progressive.