

Preface

The *Zigeunerlieder* [Gypsy Songs] op. 103 by Johannes Brahms enjoy a great deal of attention today, especially among choir and lieder singers. However, they were originally composed and published as solo quartets *für vier Singstimmen (Sopran, Alt, Tenor und Bass) mit Begleitung des Pianoforte* [for four solo voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) and piano accompaniment], and it was this original instrumentation in which the *Zigeunerlieder* became one of the composer's most successful and popular works during his lifetime.

In summer 1887, the music publisher Rózsavölgyi (Budapest) published an edition titled *Ungarische Liebeslieder* [Hungarian Love Songs] – 25 Hungarian folk songs in German arranged for voice and piano. The Viennese merchant Hugo Conrat had written the German folk song texts drawing on the preparatory work of two of his daughters' nannies. With this publication, Conrat established personal contact with Brahms and aroused his interest to such an extent that the composer made a selection of 15 poems with the aim of setting them to music: eleven in the cycle of the *Zigeunerlieder* op. 103 and, later on, the remaining four (under the same name) in the *Six Quartets* op. 112.¹

According to letters Brahms wrote to Hugo Conrat,² the main compositional work on the *Zigeunerlieder* op. 103 was carried out in February 1888. Shortly after its completion, two performances were given in Brahms' presence at the so-called "Kipfeljausen", a kind of coffee circle with music, held in turn in various town houses in Vienna. It was at Marie and Ignaz Brüll's house that the work was probably heard for the first time, performed by an ad hoc quartet from the circle of participants. For Marie Brüll, this first performance of the *Zigeunerlieder* was "the most glorious of all the glorious"; Brahms, as she recalled, "stood blue-eyed and gorgeous in front of the quartet and was delighted with the singers and with himself."³

Another private performance, this time in front of a larger audience, followed on March 24 also in Vienna at a music evening in the house of Brahms' friend Theodor Billroth. The preceding rehearsal already seemed to promise a special treat as Maria Fellingner indicated to cellist Robert Hausmann on March 17: "Brahms has composed a kind of Hungarian Liederspiel for quartet and is currently rehearsing it [...]. The composition is said to be beautiful beyond all words...".⁴ Brahms was so pleased with the performance itself that he wrote to Clara Schumann about a "very lovely evening".⁵ Still under the impression of what he had experienced, host

Billroth reported to Brahms' publisher Fritz Simrock in early April 1888:

"I can only congratulate you on the new Hungarian love songs of our friend Brahms; they have been composed in very good hours and were recently beautifully performed at my place with the master at the piano; it went splendidly, and yet it gave the impression that it was just created by everyone involved. There is no greater joy for me than this enjoyment of Brahms' compositions *avant la lettre*, or as Hanslick says, the *jus primae noctis* of Brahms' muse. But it takes Viennese blood, and even better, some Hungarian blood as well, if the songs are to have an immediate effect."⁶

While Simrock usually insisted on a quick publication of his main composer's works, this was all the more true for this latest creation, which almost certainly was expected to attract great public interest. Brahms wrote to Clara Schumann from Vienna on May 5 about the *Zigeunerlieder*: "Simrock is here, and I have let them wheedled from me. I would have wished again and as usual for you to see them beforehand – but perhaps it's for the better."⁷ Although Simrock immediately took possession of the manuscripts of score and parts, the engraving work did not begin until mid-June 1888. Part of the agreements for the new publication was to publish not only the *Zigeunerlieder* quartets but also an arrangement for *one voice and piano* to be made by the composer. A total fee of 6000 marks was paid for the original and the arrangement.⁸

When Brahms received the galley proof of the score a month later, he took offence at certain arbitrary changes in the engraving that contradicted his instructions in the engraving template. As the score autograph already shows, it had been his concern to keep the music text of the mostly two-stanza *Zigeunerlieder* as compact as possible by using repetition signs instead of unnecessarily lengthening it by writing it out twice. But now the engraved galley proofs for some songs showed the exact opposite, and Brahms complained in a letter to Simrock dated 16 July 1888, "about the Hungarians and the stretch bed they have been put on. [...]. It looks really silly when small four-measure periods start four times."⁹ Nevertheless, things remained as they were after Brahms had returned on July 21 to what he thought was a dead-end matter anyway: "Then I ask you once again not to spoil the Hungarians and their engraving by subsequent alterations and re-engraving, casting out one devil with another."¹⁰

The first two print editions – the latter with an additional English text underlay – were published in quick

succession at the beginning of October 1888. Julius Stockhausen performed the *Zigeunerlieder* already on October 15 in Frankfurt am Main at a private house concert to mark Clara Schumann's 60th stage anniversary. The participating soprano Marie Fillunger wrote enthusiastically to Eugenie Schumann on October 8 after the first ensemble rehearsal: "[...] it was marvelous, we were all very excited and nobody was able to sleep. The songs fume and glow [...]".¹¹ Elisabeth von Herzogenberg expressed herself similarly in her letter to Brahms on October 28: "There is a wonderful draught in the songs: they rustle and throb and stamp and then again flow sweetly and flatteringly."¹²

Almost simultaneously with the publication of the first edition, the public reception of the *Zigeunerlieder* commenced as well. The first concert performance took place on 31 October 1888 in the Berlin Singakademie as the start of a tour by the alto Amalie Joachim. The critic of *Signale für die musikalische Welt* [Signals for the Musical World] welcomed the novelty with great joy: "They are eleven magnificent, in invention and characteristics quite unique pieces, among which the humorous ones in particular had a stirring effect. The success must be striking everywhere [...]".¹³ Less than five months later, on 18 March 1889 in Bonn, Amalie Joachim looked back on her 50th performance of the work already.¹⁴ On 4 November 1888, three weeks after his house concert with Clara Schumann, Julius Stockhausen gave a second, now public concert in Frankfurt, at which the pianist heard the *Zigeunerlieder* again. She shared her impressions with Brahms the next day: "I am quite enchanted with the songs, how so very original, such freshness, grace, passion, how wonderful the voice leading, so fine and ingenious, how so different in moods that despite the constant 2/4 time, you feel no monotony!"¹⁵

Reactions from Brahms' circle of friends and the official press coverage leave no doubt that the *Zigeunerlieder* were widely acclaimed right from the start. The Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick found a both simple and plausible explanation for the immediately captivating and, thanks to its love theme, apparently timeless effect of this composition: "The 'Zigeunerlieder' are a little novel whose events are not told to us, whose characters are not named to us, but which we nevertheless understand perfectly and never forget."¹⁶

The present practical edition of the *Zigeunerlieder* op. 103 faithfully follows the critically edited music text of the new Brahms Complete Edition.¹⁷ The main source of the edition is the first print of the score (E₁), but the reading of the score has been corrected for the

repeated parts of songs nos. 3, 4, 9 and 10 according to Brahms' intention. Reference sources are the score autograph (A), a preprint of the 1st edition of the score (E_{V0}), first-print copies of the four parts (E-St₁), Brahms' hand copy of the 2nd edition of the score (E_{2H}) as well as printed copies of two later editions of the score (E₃, E₄). The above-mentioned volume of the Complete Edition includes the Critical Report as well as comprehensive information on genesis, publication and reception of the *Zigeunerlieder*.

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- 1 The *Six Quartets* op. 112 (1891) have been published as Urtext based on the new Brahms Complete Edition in Breitkopf & Härtel's Choir Library (ChB 16000).
- 2 A privately owned miscellany of 30 letters from Brahms to Hugo and Ida Conrat has been evaluated for the first time for the edition of the *Zigeunerlieder* op. 103 within the new Brahms Complete Edition.
- 3 Letter from Marie Brüll to Julie Kalbeck, quoted after Max Kalbeck: *Johannes Brahms*, vol. IV, 1st half-volume, Berlin, 21915 (reprint Tutzing, 1976), pp. 94f.
- 4 Quote after Richard Fellingner: *Klänge um Brahms. Erinnerungen. Neuausgabe mit Momentaufnahmen von Maria Fellingner*, ed. by Imogen Fellingner, Mürzzuschlag, 1997, p. 58, note 227.
- 5 *Clara Schumann – Johannes Brahms. Briefe aus den Jahren 1853–1896*, ed. by Berthold Litzmann, vol. 2, Leipzig, 1927 (reprint Hildesheim, 1989) [= Schumann-Brahms Briefe II], p. 341 (date of letter before 12 April 1888).
- 6 Unpublished letter privately owned by Dr. Jeffrey T. Cooper (Boston, MA/USA), who kindly provided a photocopy.
- 7 Schumann-Brahms Briefe II, p. 343.
- 8 Brahms' version for solo voice and piano, published half a year after the original edition, took into account only eight of the eleven lieder. Furthermore, Simrock published two arrangements for piano for two and for four hands, prepared by Theodor Kirchner.
- 9 *Johannes Brahms. Briefe an Fritz Simrock*, ed. by Max Kalbeck, vol. 3, Berlin, 1919 [= Briefwechsel XI], pp. (190–)191.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 193.
- 11 *Mit 1000 Küssen Deine Fillu. Briefe der Sängerin Marie Fillunger an Eugenie Schumann 1875–93*, ed. by Eva Rieger with the collaboration of Rosemary Hilmar, Cologne, 2002, p. 170.
- 12 *Johannes Brahms im Briefwechsel mit Heinrich und Elisabeth von Herzogenberg*, ed. by Max Kalbeck, vol. 2, Berlin, 41921 [= Briefwechsel II], p. 208.
- 13 *Signale für die musikalische Welt*, vol. 46, no. 57 (November 1888), p. 905.
- 14 Note in *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*, vol. 20, no. 14 (28 March 1889), p. 177.
- 15 Schumann-Brahms Briefe II, p. 365.
- 16 Eduard Hanslick: *Musikalisches und Litterarisches. (Der „Modernen Oper“ V. Theil.) Kritiken und Schilderungen*, Berlin, 31890, pp. (146–)148.
- 17 See *Johannes Brahms. Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, series VI, vol. 2, *Chorwerke und Vokalquartette mit Klavier oder Orgel*, ed. by Bernd Wiechert, Munich, 2008, pp. 59–85 (music text).