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Performing Practice in the Late Nineteenth Century, with Special Reference to the Music of Brahms

JON W. FINSON

WHEN we read the annals of twentieth-century performing practice, it is difficult not to be impressed by the aura of rational progress which surrounds our present-day playing. For instance, George Szell says of the changes wrought by Toscanini:

Whatever you may think about his interpretation of a specific work, that he changed the whole concept of conducting and that he rectified many, many arbitrary procedures of a generation of conductors before him, is now authentic history. . . . He did away with the meretricious tricks and the thick encrustation of the interpretive nuances that had been piling up for decades.¹

The message here is clear and familiar: like the heroic philologist, the twentieth-century performer seeks the authentic note text, attended by the belief that it is to be faithfully rendered with as few "arbitrary" additions as possible to sully the composer's intention. This message applies particularly to the standard repertory of the modern concert hall, in which nineteenth-century (not twentieth-century) music is most frequently heard. In this setting the performer's ability to play the "notes" accurately and completely is prized above almost all other virtues. And so having dispensed with the slovenly traditions that marked performances around the turn of the century, the continuous history of playing nineteenth-century music becomes one of steady improvement in technical standards and fidelity to the printed text.

There is nothing wrong, of course, with modern performing practice in and of itself, and changes in the style of playing are inevitable from time to time. The desire of many early twentieth-century composers like Stravinsky to discourage a certain style of interpretation certainly contributed much to the modern point of view. But we should be suspicious that modern progress is only change, not improvement. It would be foolish for a historian to take seriously the point of view expressed in Szell's remarks: he must wonder whether the performing practice of the late nineteenth century is just a bit more rational than Szell suggests. Recently I collaborated with Kenneth Slowik, Linda Quan, and Lambert Orkis in a historically accurate concert of Brahms's music for piano and strings at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Upon close investigation, the performing practice of Brahms's time is neither arbitrary, slovenly, nor irrational, and not surprisingly Brahms's music benefits when it is rendered in an authentic style. My research also yielded an opportunity to deal with some of the general problems associated with historically "authentic" performances; the questions surrounding such historicism are made more poignant by our tendency to regard Brahms's music as part of a cultural heritage transmitted in an unbroken tradition.

I

The performer's responsibility to historical music is largely determined by our assumptions about the nature of note texts, though curiously our concept of musical text is seldom discussed in debates about performing practice. Many twentieth-century performers and musicologists have assumed that note texts constitute the abstract essence of a given musical piece. In other words, the composer recorded on paper everything absolutely essential to the piece as a work of art. This point of view has produced renditions

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2 The concert took place on Mar. 21, 1983, at the Hall of Musical Instruments in the National Museum of American History. The program included the Sonata in E minor, Op. 38, for cello and piano, the Sonata in G Major, Op. 78, for violin and piano, and the Trio in C Major, Op. 87. My thanks to Kenneth Slowik and Cynthia Hoover of the Smithsonian for inviting me to participate in this project. This essay grows out of a lecture delivered before the concert and also out of my master's thesis, "The Performance Practice of Four String Quartets Active in the First Twenty-Five Years of the Twentieth Century as Documented on Direct-cut Macrogroove Discs" (University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1975).
Performing Practice

like those suggested by Szell in which the score is played according to modern understanding as selflessly as possible. Such performances concentrate on the accuracy of relative pitch and duration, for these are the musical features recorded most completely by Western notation. We may use modern instruments to play a score from any period, and though the instruments will be recognized as historically appropriate or inappropriate as the case may be, the essence of the piece—relative pitch and duration—is preserved. In a limited sense, this view of note texts seems to be based on our experience with literary texts. For instance, nobody would suggest that we miss the essential meaning of Elizabethan poetry if we do not pronounce English as it was spoken during that period. And we do not need to speak like an Australian to read a novel by an Australian. In both cases, the literary text represents both a phonetic system and a series of objects or phenomena. In written languages these two functions have been detached, and while it is very important to possess a glossary connecting unfamiliar words to objects or phenomena in the world as we perceive it, we do not need to know how the words are actually pronounced. Modern performers have come to detach the surface sonority from relative pitch and duration in a score, viewing the first as inessential and the latter as essential.

The problem with the comparison of note texts and literary texts lies in the difference between music and language. While words serve an important denotational function, music denotes very little: literary texts serve to represent sounds which in turn denote perceivable objects or phenomena, but musical texts represent only sounds. It is appropriate to read a novel in silence, but no performer and few musicologists would suggest that reading a score constitutes sufficient realization of a piece. The score must be performed and the piece judged on its sound.

It seems more reasonable to understand note texts in a uniform way. Notation should be regarded as a system of symbols representing a whole context of sound; it is a shorthand for the entire practice of pitch relationships, durations, ornamentation, and timbre. If we adopt this point of view, the note text of a given work does not record so much what is essential to that piece as what is peculiar to it. What the composer knew as generic in the performing practice of his day he could leave to the rules governing interpretation. If the composer disliked some feature of normal performing practice,
he would need to forbid it specifically in his score, or if he wished to include some uncommon feature, he would need to make his desires explicit (as Berlioz often does). Otherwise, note texts have meaning only in a context familiar to the composer in the system of practice for which he intends his score.

All musical notation assumes a context, and both performers and musicologists must be responsible for establishing the proper context for a given piece. Variability is a feature of every context, and no reasonable composer dealing with musical notation can expect that a piece will be performed only one way. Some contexts will be wider than others, of course. For the music of Mozart published in many countries and partaking of an international style, the range of acceptable performing practice is great and should not be unreasonably restricted. On the other hand, some of Bach’s cantatas were written for the more limited context of early eighteenth-century Leipzig and should be interpreted within the range of practice available in that place and time. Establishing a range of practice will be a matter of some debate, but all performing styles know some bounds, and for music written in past centuries those bounds must be historically determined. To interpret music outside of its proper historical context is quite simply to misunderstand the notation.

There have been many objections to an openly historicist view of performing. Charles Rosen, for instance, has remonstrated against the ontological difficulties posed by historical performance, and it is true that we will never know how music sounded in the days before recordings. But the value of performing older music lies in the effort to reconstitute the sound of the period, just as the value of history lies in trying to understand the events of a particular time. An informed approximation of historical performing practice is always better than reducing music from all periods to a standard style and instrumentation.

The distinctive qualities of Brahms’s music are enhanced by viewing his note texts as representing an entire context of performing practice. The range of that practice was wide, for Brahms’s scores were published wherever Western European culture prevailed. We should examine not only the playing of performers known to Brahms but also other representative practitioners who were successful

in the style. We should study the construction of their instruments, their writings on the interpretation of music, and any actual recordings they made. The particular fascination of studying the performing practice of Brahms's time lies in the wealth of written and recorded sources for this style. The recordings permit us to gauge whether the treatises accurately reflect the actual sound of the style.

II

Perhaps the most obvious and least controversial feature of the movement toward historically accurate performances has been the employment of period instruments or accurate copies. The original impetus for the Smithsonian concert, aside from the commemoration of Brahms's 150th birthday, was the display of historical instruments from the museum collection, including an 1892 Steinway concert grand used by Paderewski and a violin and cello built by Stradivari. These last were fitted with the long, thick bass bar, high, long fingerboard, thin neck, and high bridge which became customary in the early nineteenth century and have remained to the present day. It is true that these instruments are little changed from their present-day counterparts, but there are a few limited differences between the features of late nineteenth-century and modern instruments which result in significant disparities in tone.

The difference between a Steinway built at the end of the nineteenth century and a modern Steinway is subtle and quite difficult to document. Most mechanical features of the piano have changed very little since Brahms's time, but the impression left at the Smithsonian concert by Paderewski's Steinway included great clarity of tone, penetration, and a soft overall sound. Paderewski's piano seemed more acoustically efficient, emphasizing the fundamental tone of each note, with less pronounced overtones than a modern Steinway. As a result, the pianist was able to produce sound with a lighter touch, and the sound was not so massive as that of a modern instrument. There may be several reasons for the peculiar tone of Paderewski's concert grand, but the most prominent single cause is probably voicing. The technique of voicing has certainly changed since the late nineteenth century, and a good way to understand this change is to compare modern descriptions of the technique with earlier ones. Michael Lenehan has recently described the modern factory procedure for voicing a Steinway:
Physically, the mysterious part of the job, called “voicing,” is a fairly simple matter of hardening and softening the felt of the hammers—hardening by impregnating it with a “juice” made of lacquer and lacquer thinner, softening by picking it with needles to separate the fibers.4

Lenehan tells us that voicing begins after the regulation of the action. The felt is first filed to the proper height and then soaked with lacquer before the final process of voicing. He records the object of the process in the technician’s words: “The felt that actually strikes the string . . . should remain soft and springy; the hardening should take place below the surface.”5

Accounts of voicing from around the turn of the century suggest a different process with a different end result. In his standard manual of piano tuning published in 1917, William Braid White tells us that after the initial filing of felt for regulation, the tuner

. . . must attempt to produce an uniform texture in the interior. The object of so doing is to furnish a cushion for the immediate contact with the string, which shall be relatively resilient and uniformly yielding, against the harder under felt and still harder moulding. This upper cushion, however, must not be mushy at the crown or actual place of contact . . . .6

White’s object was to create a soft interior in the felt while leaving a harder striking surface on the crown, just the opposite of the modern method which leaves the surface “soft and springy” while hardening the interior with lacquer. In fact, White makes no mention at all of applying lacquer to piano felt, suggesting the possibility that heavier felt was used in earlier construction. In any event, the difference in goals and methods of voicing may account for some of the difference between the clear, piercing sound of Paderewski’s Steinway and the more massive but less distinct sound of the modern instrument.

If changes in the tone of the piano since Brahms’s time are difficult to explain, alterations in the sound of the bowed strings are quite straightforward and result from the material in the strings themselves. While steel wire is frequently used for the uppermost

5 Ibid., p. 58.
string on the violin and the upper strings of the cello today, such strings were not generally used during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Instead, both the violin and cello were strung with unwound gut on the upper two strings and wound gut (also common today) on the bottom strings. The change from gut to steel occurred largely in the twentieth century, and as late as 1924 Carl Flesch writes that while steel is more reliable and speaks more quickly, gut has a more vivid tone color.7 Use of unwound gut strings in the upper reaches of the violin and cello at the Smithsonian concert also revealed that they produce more articulate attacks because of the almost inaudible chiff as the bow begins its motion. And just as Flesch suggests, the tone of gut strings is richer in strong upper overtones, more complex and full than that of steel strings.

By virtue of minor technical differences, instruments in use during the latter part of the nineteenth century were just slightly more articulate than modern ones. The increased richness of unwound gut strings on the violin and cello and the clarity and penetration of the piano supported an interpretive practice which promoted distinctness, not uniformity, as its highest goal. This performing style is documented in instrumental tutors and also in recordings of players trained during this period.

III

For the Smithsonian concert we were concerned with two kinds of repertory. Two sonatas for solo strings and piano had been programmed as well as a trio for piano, violin, and cello. It seemed logical to study the recordings and tutors of players known to Brahms and, considering his international reputation, the playing and writing of other European contemporaries as well. There proved to be some peculiar lacunae in this evidence, however. It is easy enough to find tutors by violinists from this time, and the most familiar to Brahms, Joseph Joachim, contributed a lengthy treatise,8 though only a few brief recordings.9 Cello tutors by prominent players are nonexistent, nor are there many recordings of well-known

8 Joseph Joachim and Andreas Moser, Violinschule, 3 vols. (Berlin, 1905).
9 Joachim recorded two short Hungarian Dances in transcription; see James Creighton, Discopedia of the Violin (Toronto, 1974), p. 352.
cellists. Recordings of piano trios proved even more problematic. String ensembles recorded poorly on acoustic discs, and as a result there are few recordings. On the other hand, we found that several string quartets from Brahms’s time (though no trios, alas) made a substantial number of records with the advent of electric recording in 1925. Since we were particularly interested in the use of late nineteenth-century practices in ensembles, we used recordings of Arnold Rosé’s quartet\textsuperscript{10} (playing Beethoven, not Brahms),\textsuperscript{11} and we also selected as relatively germane to the period recordings by the Bohemian and Flonzaley Quartets. Much of this documentation, both written and recorded, dates from the first quarter of the twentieth century. In the case of string tutors, such writings usually reflect a summation of teaching by a nineteenth-century master at the end of his career. In the recordings of ensembles, the selection includes only groups formed before or just around the turn of the century. Players in these ensembles were trained during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and their recordings are often the last fruits of long and successful careers. All of the sources reflect a standard practice with only minor deviations, and in any event this sampling is appropriate for a composer of international standing like Brahms.

The most immediately striking feature of late nineteenth-century performing style is string ornamentation, which accounts for many of the accusations concerning “thick encrustations” applied to nineteenth-century playing. String players from the period regularly employed gliding ornaments which are either used very seldom or completely prohibited today. There is no reason that Brahms would have found them anything but normal, and in fact their use is essential to the clear presentation of Brahms’s music.

The best summary of gliding ornamentation is found in Flesch’s \textit{The Art of Violin Playing}. Flesch divides gliding ornaments into two distinct types, the glissando and the portamento.\textsuperscript{12} A glissando is necessary, he tells us, for changing positions and involves a continuous glide up or down the fingerboard. He warns that glissandos are to be as inaudible as possible during performance. The glissando

\textsuperscript{10} The recording of the Rosé Quartet used for this study is Beethoven’s Op. 18, No. 4, on Gramola, ES388-390 (matrix CK2822-2826).

\textsuperscript{11} Rosé, like Joachim, also recorded two transcriptions of Hungarian Dances; see Creighton, \textit{Discopedia}, p. 642.

\textsuperscript{12} I, 28.
is only an incidental melodic addition, then, which is rarely heard. The portamento, on the other hand, is an ornament employed intentionally as an "emotional connection of two tones."\textsuperscript{13} He divides portamenti into two different types, the "B" (Ex. 1a) and the "L" (Ex. 1b), depending on whether the player slides into position and then leaps to the finger required for the subsequent note or leaps to the finger required and then slides to the pitch. Flesch is quite concerned with the type of portamento used in a given situation, but recordings reveal no regular practice in this regard. It is more important to note the type of melodic situation to which portamenti are applied. He gives an example, for instance, from the solo line of the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in which the violinist accentuates the high note of the phrase by gliding up to the appoggiatura-like first note of the second measure (Ex. 2). In his recording of Brahms's Hungarian Dance, No. 1, in transcription, Joachim employs a portamento in this same way, to accentuate the high note in the opening melodic line (Ex. 3). Portamenti served to shape the melody by calling attention to selected pitches, with ascending portamenti placed before important notes and descending portamenti sometimes placed after the important notes. The placement of the ornament is not at all arbitrary, but involves a conscious effort on the part of the string player to shape the melodic line and accentuate structurally important pitches.

Ex. 1a. Illustration of B-portamento from Carl Flesch, \textit{The Art of Violin Playing}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{B-Port.png}
\end{center}

Ex. 1b. Illustration of L-portamento from Carl Flesch, \textit{The Art of Violin Playing}

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{L-Port.png}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 29.
Ex. 2. Illustration of the use of portamento in the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto (gliding indicated by horizontal bracket) from Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing*

Ex. 3. Portamento employed by Joseph Joachim in his recording of his transcription of Brahms's Hungarian Dance, No. 1.

Use of the portamento in ensemble required a high degree of coordination and, possibly, prearrangement between players. In the Rosé Quartet's recording of the fourth movement from Beethoven's Opus 18, No. 4, the second violin calls attention to a Db in measure 27 which is then imitated by the first violin in measure 31 (Ex. 4). The violist and cellist employ a portamento in tandem in measure 35, calling attention to the upcoming dissonance in measure 36, and the first violinist employs two descending portamenti in measure 39 to prepare the arrival at the cadence in measure 40. The violist and the cellist must have agreed on the use of the ornament in tandem just as the two violinists on the earlier imitation, though we cannot say whether such agreement was reached explicitly by discussion or implicitly as part of repeated playing. In any case, the effect of the portamento is more than expressive: the ornament outlines the shape of the melody and signals important structural events. In a sense, the performer provides the listener with an analysis of the melody by using the ornament to accentuate high notes and herald suspensions and cadences. Far from being an example of slovenliness in execution, the portamento shows the care and thoughtfulness applied to the musical text by nineteenth-century string players.
Ex. 4. Portamenti employed by the Rosé Quartet in their recording of Beethoven's Quartet, Op. 18, No. 4, mvt. 4.

The recording by the Rosé Quartet also reminds us that the portamento was used very seldom by good musicians. If the ornament was to be effective in articulating melodic shape to the listener, it could not be employed often. Leopold Auer, a German acquaintance of Joachim’s and instructor of violin at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, writes in this regard:
The connecting of two tones distant from one another, whether produced on
the same or different strings, is, when used in moderation and with good taste,
one of the great violin effects, which lends animation and expression to singing
phrases.

But the *portamento* becomes objectionable and inartistic—resembling more
than anything else, it seems to me, the mewing of a cat—when it is executed
in a languishing manner, and used continually.¹⁴

Joachim, like Flesch and Auer, suggests many of the same technical
and aesthetic guidelines for the portamento,¹⁵ citing Spohr to lend authority to the commentary. The portamento must have
been established as an embellishment fairly early in the nineteenth
century, and it would have been used by all the string players known
to Brahms.

Vibrato is the second melodic ornament discussed with gliding
ornaments in string tutors of the latter nineteenth century. Non-
vibrato was the normal mode of string playing until just after
Brahms’s death, and vibrating was used only to accentuate certain
pitches or as a special effect applied to certain kinds of passages.
Joachim, for instance, cites Spohr on the basic principles of vibrato:

> If a singer sings with passionate emotion or raises his voice to its highest level,
a shaking of the voice will be noticeable, which is similar to the oscillations
of a bell struck forcefully. A violinist is capable of deceptively imitating this
shaking, as well as much else that is peculiar to the human voice.¹⁶

As a melodic ornament, vibrato is used on heavily accentuated
notes and on pitches held for longer durations, especially at
cadences, in the performance by the Flonzaley Quartet of the
Brahms Quintet in F minor seen below in transcription (Ex. 5). Vibrato was also used continually in cantabile passages. For instance,
in a recording of Smetana’s First Quartet by the Bohemian Quartet
founded around 1892, the cantabile slow movement features vibrato
on almost every pitch, though the normal mode of playing is non-
vibrato in other movements.¹⁷ Similarly, recordings of players

¹⁵ *Violinschule*, II, 92.
¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96; all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
¹⁷ The Bohemian’s recording of Smetana’s Quartet No. 1 in E minor can be found
on Brunswick 90425-90428 (matrix 779bm-786bm).
trained during the nineteenth century often feature continual vibrato for the “singing” theme (often the second theme) in a sonata-allegro movement.

Ex. 5. Vibrato used by the Flonzaley Quartet in their recording with Harold Bauer of Brahms’s Quintet, Op. 34, mvt. 1 (vibrato indicated by wavy horizontal line).
The modern practice of continual vibrato in string playing was instituted, according to Carl Flesch, by Kreisler at the turn of the century, and for this reason commercial recording begun ca. 1900 gives a somewhat clouded picture of the extent to which vibrato was actually used during Brahms’s time. In general, older players or groups—Joachim, the Rosé Quartet, the Bohemian Quartet—use very little vibrato, even ornamentally. Slightly younger players, like the Flonzaley Quartet formed in 1904, use vibrato more often, though still in an ornamental way. Most tutors of the period warn against employing vibrato too frequently, just as they warn against overuse of the portamento. Joachim, for instance, states quite plainly:

One cannot warn too forcefully against habitual application [of vibrato]—above all in the wrong passages. A tasteful, healthy, sensitive violinist will always regard unvarying tone production as regular, and will only apply vibrato where it is indicated by the inner necessity of expression.

Auer is even more colorful in his warning against the frequent employment of vibrato:

18 Violin Playing, 2nd ed. (New York, 1939), I, 40.
19 Violinschule, II, 96.
Resorting to the *vibrato* in an ostrich-like endeavor to conceal bad tone production and intonation from oneself and from others not only halts progress in the improvement of one's fault, but is out and out dishonest artistically. . . . No, the *vibrato* is an effect, an embellishment; it can lend a touch of divine pathos to the climax of a phrase or the course of a passage, but only if the player has cultivated a delicate sense of the proportion in the use of it.  

Like the portamento, then, *vibrato* was an ornament in nineteenth-century playing used to accentuate certain pitches, to give shape to a melodic passage, or to call attention to a particular style of writing (cantabile). In all cases, the performer was called upon to use discretion and judgment in the employment of *vibrato* to differentiate certain notes or passages in a given piece. Far from being irrational, the ornamentation used by players in the nineteenth century actually required an analytical point of view which enabled more expressive communication of musical content and structure to the audience.

While the portamento and *vibrato* were effective ornaments at the Smithsonian concert of Brahms's music, they were not available to the pianist, nor to many other instrumentalists, aside from string players, in the nineteenth century. But for all players there was a complete lexicon of rhythmic devices which served somewhat similar ends and were typically incorporated into all performances. Musical time in performances during the last part of the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth century was considerably more flexible than it is today, and fluctuations in the surface rhythm of individual passages as well as in basic tempo for longer passages were common. This rhythmic freedom served structural functions.

Fluctuation in musical time at a melodic level usually involved the robbing of time from certain parts of a phrase and a return of that time elsewhere within the confines of a steady beat. For the sake of discussion I will call this practice rubato. A good example can be found in the Flonzaley Quartet's recording of Brahms's F-minor Quintet, Opus 34, with Harold Bauer at the piano. Example 6 shows a first violin line from the third movement where the melodic *rubato* is mirrored by the rest of the ensemble from measures 1 through 29. There is a slight acceleration of the eighth
notes in measures 6 and 8 as well as a similar acceleration of the sixteenth notes at the end of measures 14 and 16, the missing time being supplied respectively by a previous tied note or a rest. Beginning with the pickup to measure 23, the quarter note and succeeding dotted quarter notes are all lengthened slightly and the groups of eighth notes are shortened. The effect is repeated in each successive use of the passage. The performers in this 1925 recording were simply articulating the melodic structure by means of a rhythmic eccentricity. The recurring rhythmic motive of three or four short note values grouped before a sequence of longer notes separates subphrases from one another throughout this passage. And in the theme beginning at measure 22 acceleration of the eighth notes emphasizes the construction of a phrase from an idea which is then repeated once and further divided into smaller fragments, lending the whole segment a sense of urgent forward propulsion. The rubato used by the Flonzaleys is not only an expressive device meant to intensify the drive of this pressing scherzo but also an articulatory strategy which highlights the repetition of motivic ideas. The modern performer’s stereotype of Brahms’s music, that it consists of long uninterrupted phrases, runs totally contrary to the practice of performers trained during his lifetime. In the surviving recordings these contemporary musicians use every expressive means at their command to separate melodic and motivic units from one another in Brahms’s music, revealing his penchant for composing continually
developing variations ("immer entwickelte Variationen").21 When discussing phrasing, Joseph Bloch of the Budapest Conservatory commented in 1903:

The main point of phrasing is to make the work more understandable to the listeners. Phrasing results in the separation of individual parts, from which one can clearly recognize and distinguish the melodic members which have developed out of a preexistent motive from those which are totally new.22

Rubato was a device applied to the motivic and melodic structure of a piece in order to outline that structure for the audience. It was not merely a sentimental device applied haphazardly.

The same principle behind rhythmic fluctuation at the level of the phrase was also applied on a much grander scale to articulate the structure of whole movements. This practice was called "tempo modification," the term taken from Wagner's discussion "On Conducting" (Ueber das Dirigen).23 In theory, every thematic idea had its proper tempo. We find in recordings of chamber music made by performers from this period that the main theme of a sonata form has one consistent tempo, while the second theme has yet another, and the closing theme, if it is substantially different from the other two, yet a third steady rate of pulse. When the various themes return in the recapitulation, they are differentiated by the return of the individual tempos, and the transitional passages between them arrive gradually at the correct rate of pulse. In this way differing stable tempos were matched to stable thematic and harmonic areas in a movement, while tonally unstable areas were marked by changing tempos. Large unstable areas, like the development and coda, often featured accelerating tempos to heighten tension and drama when appropriate. Tempo modification required a great deal of thought, discussion, and coordination between various members of an ensemble. To assign various tempos, performers needed to analyze what was transitional and what was tightly knit material. Only after the performers had agreed on the boundaries of each could they transmit this analysis to the audience by means of tempo alterations.

22 Methodik des Violinspiels und Violinunterrichts (Strassburg, [1903]), p. 347.
Finally, tempos in older recordings of all the nineteenth-century music we heard tend to be just slightly faster in general than they are in modern performances. This is particularly true of Brahms's music, for it seems to be played exceptionally slowly today by comparison. In particular, andante seemed to connote a rather brisk tempo to late nineteenth-century musicians, and they also played allegro and presto tempos with noticeable verve. It is the wealth of harmonic detail which leads us to perform Brahms more deliberately today, but at the loss of a great deal of excitement in his instrumental compositions. In fact, Brahms's chamber music often takes on a kind of spontaneity, a lightness, and even a shade of good humor when played more quickly, using the contrasts of pronounced tempo modification for the sake of variety.

The application of authentic performing practice to Brahms's chamber music at the Smithsonian Institution was truly enlightening, because it brought this repertory to life in a most spectacular way. Orkis' playing on an appropriately voiced piano, Quan's and Slowik's adoption of unwound gut strings in the upper reaches of the violin and cello, and the removal of continual vibrato combined to produce a clarity of line and texture which were truly revealing of the contrapuntal intricacies in Brahms's writing. This clarity was then further augmented by appropriate use of ornamental gliding and vibrato as well as rubato, all of which served to expose the subtle and complex motivic relationships which are the essence of Brahms's music. Moreover, use of short phrasing units, rubato, and tempo modification lent rhetorical variety to individual themes and heightened dramatic contrasts to whole movements which realized the expressive potential in Brahms's music and revealed the presence of emotional qualities seldom heard in the rather mechanical performances we normally hear.

It is the last revelation that so enlightens us about the performing practice of late nineteenth-century musicians, for we are accustomed to believe that they attained vivid results by employing irrational means. But all the devices displayed above were used by means of the most sober calculation and rational analysis. The most intense appeal to the sentiments and emotions was made through the intellect. Nineteenth-century performers did not "feel" the music, they crafted its performance, and though their practice was neither arbitrary nor irrational the result was anything but sterile. This approach should be attractive to modern players, for the devices
of nineteenth-century performing practice promote great intellectual individuality. The practice consists not so much of rigid requirements as of flexible strategies manipulated to express the view of a particular artist. In a music such as Brahms's, intended for multiple performances over an extended period of time, this performing practice could only be a virtue.