

Original Paper

On the Emotional Colors and Performance Techniques in Brahms' Interlude Op.118 No.2

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Abstract

Johannes Brahms was the last German Austrian classical master of the romantic period. In this era of significant changes in music style, Brahms' early creative style still retained some traces of classical style. However, in his later years, he became more passionate about small genre lyrical works. I believe that these works must be the gentlest and most monologue works of Brahms' life. The interlude Op118 No.2, created in the late period of Brahms, possesses extremely clever creative techniques and extremely beautiful melodies, and is later known as the "Love Letter to Clara". The emotions and performance techniques involved are worth further exploration.

Keywords

Brahms Interlude, Emotional Colors, Performance Techniques

1. Personal Life and Historical Background

1.1 Personal Life

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was a 19th-century German Romantic composer who, along with Bach and Beethoven is widely known as the "German Classical 3B". In the history of Western music and art, Brahms holds an extremely important position. He was born in a slum in Hamburg, Germany. He was short, slender, and introverted from a young age, so he was bullied by many other children. It is necessary to mention Brahms' family here. Brahms' father was an ordinary musician who played the flute, horn, and various string instruments. His mother was a middle-aged woman with an average appearance engaged in tailoring work. In 1830, Brahms' father became a neighbor to her, and half a month later they quickly got married. At this time, Brahms' mother was 41 years old, while his father was only 24 years old.

Apart from learning basic music theory and composition knowledge from his father, Brahms has hardly received any other formal music education. His music knowledge mainly comes from his continuous

self-learning, thinking, and practice. So he developed a good habit of learning from previous people from a young age, which also laid a solid foundation for his later creations and provided guidance for the path he was about to take.

1.2 Era Background

Beethoven's music not only created the pinnacle of classical music, but also pioneered romantic music. From 1790 to 1910, the Romantic style was prevalent in mainstream Western music, which formed a strong contrast with the rigorous, elegant, and dignified style of classical music with its unique strong, free, and unrestrained style. Brahms was an independent composer who was influenced by the times but did not become a vassal of the times. At the same time, people's evaluations of Brahms music can be described as mixed. Some people praise Brahms for his unique composition style, which combines the creative techniques of many masters such as Bach and Beethoven. Some people mercilessly criticized him as a conservative during the Romantic period. For example, the famous music critic Bernard Shaw of the time said, "Brahms is the most unscrupulous composer who likes to pretend to be Handel and Beethoven. In terms of time concept, Brahms can be called the son of the 19th century, but looking at the long river of romantic music in the 19th century, he followed two completely different paths from other romantic composers of the same period, such as Liszt and Wagner. Therefore, it is evaluated as the "final monument of German Austrian classicism".

2. The Creative Background in Op.118 No.2

We all know that Brahms is a skilled artist in creating large-scale works, such as "Symphony No. 1 in C minor", "Symphony No. 4 in E minor", and even the "German Requiem" that propelled him to the pinnacle of his career. Brahms' works in the early and middle stages are mostly in traditional genres, which stems from his learning of predecessors, especially Bach and Beethoven. So in his works, he often reveals the strict and meticulous atmosphere of the classical period. In Bach and Beethoven, Brahms inherited their unique ideological, philosophical, and logical qualities, and their shadows often appeared in their works. This has also been criticized by some people, but in my opinion, it is not just a simple imitation, but a deliberate tribute.

In his later years, Brahms returned to the piano solo genre, mainly focusing on piano sketches. Among them, the genre of interludes is as many as 14 out of his four twenty works. The reason why Brahms is so fond of the interlude genre is due to the strong admiration of his mentor Schumann during his lifetime, which gradually made the interlude an independent piano genre. The speed of this genre is generally maintained between 60 beats per minute and 80 beats per minute, which is basically consistent with people's heart rate, making people more able to relax and calm down and integrate into their inner emotions when appreciating the interlude. The "interlude" has a prelude and a sequel, in which case each performer and audience must rely on their own imagination to complete. Perhaps these exquisite interludes are not only Brahms' emotional memoirs, but also reflect Brahms' own melancholic and lonely inner emotions during this period, as well as his infinite attachment and memories of the

past time, and also his contemplation of his future life.

From 1889 to 1896, he went to Badyishur every summer for summer vacation and devoted himself to creating. In his later years, he lived in abundance, had no worries about food, clothing, and had a high social status. However, during this period, Brahms' family members and close friends passed away one after another, bringing him an extremely painful blow. At this moment, his heart was lonely, lonely, and disheartened, and his only hope was Clara, who was far away from home. The work op118No.2 was also completed during this period.

3. The Emotional Colors of Op.118 No.2

During the creation of Op118, Brahms learned that Clara's son Ferdinand had passed away. In his reply, he wrote, "Our world is becoming increasingly empty day by day. From this, it can be seen that in work op.118 no. 2, Brahms also deeply expresses his feelings for the short duration of life, and the various sorrows revealed in the music are sublimated in the warmth and sanctity. This interlude is like a reply letter to Clara, in which they lament the various misfortunes of the two in their tragic old age, their discouragement towards the world, mixed with the sadness of losing loved ones, and their emotions in the face of death. But no matter where you are, you are still the warmest refuge in my heart.

After the death of his mentor Schumann, Brahms left and embarked on a journey alone. In the later days, Brahms became increasingly famous, and the fees for performances, manuscripts, and copyrights also increased. But he never forgot Clara, who was alone with seven children, and he would send monthly living expenses to Clara on time to help the family that had given him all the help. In countless nights, Brahms wrote countless love letters for Clara, but never sent one because he chose to continue burying his deepest emotions in his heart, in all his beautiful melodies. As he said, "All my beautiful melodies come from Clara.

Returning to this work itself, Brahms first employs a highly symmetrical classical period style - ABA's tripartite structure - in the form of the music; The overall tonality is a warm A major, with multiple transitions, each expressing the author's different emotions. In section A, the weak starting bar enters the main chord, laying the foundation for the personality traits of the entire major. In the subsequent five imitations of the theme motivation, it underwent multiple major transitions to minor. Continuously imitating around the theme, and emotions constantly fluctuate in the changing tone. Here, it seems that Brahms, who is telling the story of his aging and vicissitudes, stands alone by the burning fireplace, holding an old photo that has already turned yellow in his hand, but his eyes are wrapped in tears that are about to roll down. At this moment, the warm body can no longer resist the waves of desolation from the bottom of my heart. The tonal style of the first half of section B mainly shifts from minor to major, showing that the composer seems to see the dawn in the valley of sorrow, which is a warmth and redemption from heaven. Later, we will enter the wandering and contemplation of rising f minor. It's like a dreamlike dream about to burst. Following closely is the transition from F minor to F major with the same name, where the unique structure of the hymn allows the audience to detach from the

previously fluctuating emotions and enter a brief calm and tranquility. At this moment, the composer seems to have closed his most devout hands and prayed with all his heart.

4. Performance Techniques of Op118No.2

Looking at the entire song, what we see is a term for speed and expression in *Andante tene*. The speed of *andante*, playing at a speed of 60-80 per minute, is a gentle and friendly expression term. But upon closer inspection, it can be seen that what we commonly see is *tenero*, but here it is *teneramente*. This is a derivative of 'teno', meaning gentle, warm, and with an added touch of sadness. From here, it is not difficult to see an emotional tone in the entire piece, with gentle and sad emotions that are worth savoring by the performer.

Example 1:

2. Intermezzo

Andante teneramente

As shown in Example 1:

1. I compared the recordings of many pianists and some of my feelings when I combined them with my own practice. I think we should try our best to avoid making inappropriate 'Rubato' when playing this section. For example, in the middle part of the red slash in the music score, it has a tendency. If "Rubato" is forcibly added here, it will make the sentences loose and not compact.

2. Further down, in the yellow circle, there are two groups of small and medium-sized characters with an A sound. It should be like the sound coming from the sky. When playing, try to avoid excessive arm weight. Here, use a joint of your fingertips to light it up and then release it, popping up a wide range of tones.

The G sound in the blue part of the score example has changed from a rising G to a restoring G, which adds a hint of coolness here. When playing, attention should be paid to the changes in color, and more

attention should be paid to the details of this color change in the subsequent score reading.

In the entire score example 1, the composer made up to four changes using the same materials, each with different colors and emotions, and there were also many variations in the melody of the voice. The most obvious is a dialogue between the high and middle voices in the green part of the score, as if it were a communication between Clara and Brahms. The most easily overlooked point here is the blurring of the middle voice due to highlighting the high voice part. So, when playing a sentence with dialogue between parts in this piece of music, try to maintain the balance between the parts. It is not required that both parts have the same volume, but at least the middle part should be clear. It was as if Clara was calling from afar, and Brahms could only respond to her from the bottom of his heart.

Example 2:

As shown in Example 2:

1. In this paragraph, the four small lines in the red and green parts and the gradual strengthening and weakening treatment must be treated as a whole for breathing in the performance. Don't do too much about 'Rubato', keep these sentences in a coherent and uplifting mood as a whole. If the connection is too obvious or there are too many 'Rubatos', it will appear slightly loose, and the overall mood will not be able to push up.
2. The left bass part of the blue part must not be blurry, and the duration should be maintained sufficiently. Especially in the middle part of the second row of the score, the upward movement of the rising G-A-B, and the downward melody of the right hand high part provide a perfect outlet for the entangled and anxious emotions here.

Example 3:

The image shows a musical score for Example 3, consisting of two systems of piano and bass staves. The first system features a red oval around the word 'espress.' in the piano staff and 'p dim.' at the end. The second system features a red oval around 'calando' and a blue shaded area around the piano staff with the word 'dolce' written below it. Green circles highlight specific notes in the bass line of both systems.

As shown in Example 3:

1. The emoticon term 'espress' in the red part means expressive; Expressive. So after the previous orgasmic emotions have been pushed up, we must not suddenly fall down here. This is also the intention of the composer to add this emoticon term here. At 'calando', it is gradually weakening; Gradually quiet.

The motivation for the bass part of the green part to continue repeating the theme gradually weakens after four repetitions. When playing here, be sure to pop up the melody and gradually drift away until you can't hear it.

The blue part here, in my opinion, is one of the most exquisite parts of the entire song. When I first played here, I felt a sense of a sudden backtracking of time. Here, the composer cleverly employs the technique of reflection in writing to invert the melody of the theme motivation. Amidst immense heartbreak and grief ahead, suddenly, it was as if seeing the redemption of dawn in the darkness, as if grasping the only hope. And the Canon technique in the middle voice is also incredibly clever, just like in the dim light of dawn, that person is also responding to you.

Example 4:

The image shows a musical score for Example 4, consisting of three systems of piano and bass staves. The first system has 'rit.' and 'più lento' markings above the piano staff, with red circles around notes. The second system has 'in tempo' above the piano staff and purple circles around notes. The third system has 'rit.' above the piano staff. The piano staff of the second and third systems is highlighted with a blue background.

As shown in Example 4:

1. The ending of the red part must find the main melody under the premise of the emoticon terms "rit" to "piu lento". (liter C-B-D, liter C-B-A)
2. Long sentences in blue should be accompanied by deep breathing during performance. Because it has shifted to a rising f minor here, it is also difficult to grasp the sudden emotional changes. Try to use your breath to follow the direction of the melody to "sing".
3. The middle part of the purple part is also singing along with the high part, and the duration must be maintained enough, and it cannot be played too "dead". Especially for the jump notes in the second and third lines, it is important to ensure a relaxed tone when playing.
4. When we notice these two C notes in the gray section, the first is a quarter note and the second is an eighth note. The shortened duration of the notes also reflects a detail in emotional control here. When playing the second iteration of the rising C, the emotions should be more anxious and anxious, constantly searching for a way out in pain, but unable to find a sense of liberation.

Example 5:

The image shows a musical score for Example 5, consisting of five systems of music. The top system is for piano, with a red circle around a specific chord. The second system is for violin, with a blue highlight under a long phrase and a purple highlight under a middle phrase. The third system continues the violin part. The fourth system has a yellow highlight under a phrase, with a red circle around a note. The fifth system also has a yellow highlight under a phrase, with a red circle around a note. Various performance instructions are written above and below the staves, including "piu lento (更慢)", "una corda (弱音踏板)", "Tempo I (原速)", "espress. (有表现力的)", "cresc. (渐强)", "rit.", "pp", "legato", "tre corde (停止使用弱音踏板)", "Rit. (Rinforzando 加强, 突强)", and "dolce pp".

As shown in Example 5:

1. In the first row of Example 5, the music once again enters the major, where the composer adopts the Bach era hymn writing method and annotates the music terms "piu lento" - slower, "una corda" - weak pedal. In the previous period of extremely anxious and heartbreaking emotions, I suddenly withdrew from the feeling of "church, heaven". The speed was slower and the volume was weaker, as if the composer was praying alone in his heart. And there were disharmonious chords in the red section, which suddenly resolved. It should be noted that this disharmonious chord should evoke a sense of

tension, and the subsequent chord resolution and gradual processing should also have a sense of release.

2. As the score continues, after entering the reproduction section, the main melody in the green section reappears and interweaves with the second melody in the blue section in a low octave form. When playing this section, it is important to distinguish the two melodies that are constantly alternating between the left and right hands. In the part where there is a blank or long melody, the other melody part must be added. Emotionally, this segment is the strongest explosive point of the entire song. When we are driving emotions: firstly, we should be careful not to suddenly give too much, as all full and true emotions are not sudden bursts of all emotions. When promoting all emotions, one must leave room in their hearts, so that emotions can have more tension, especially when playing Brahms' works. The second is to pay attention to the issues with touch keys. All the notes here should be fuller, more concentrated, and deeper, so it is important to learn to make good use of the weight of our body and arms when touching the keys, playing with the keys to make the sound sink. Only then can one better move one's heart and audience.

In the first yellow part of the sentence, the notes continuously stretch emotionally in the ascending triplet, and add the first two red circles with two quarter notes that look more like "sighs", ultimately transitioning into a freely extended emotion. Subsequently, there is a reappearance of the theme's motivation and a resurgence of the second yellow part. The final emotions and speed gradually stabilize and enter the final complete reproduction. When playing this passage, it is necessary to find the ups and downs of emotions in the sentence, in order to better grasp the audience's heart and perfectly transition to the final fully reproduced part.

5. Conclusion

Brahms' Interlude OP.118 NO.2 is an outstanding work that best reflects Brahms' late creative style and inner monologue. He perfectly integrated the popular elements of romanticism at the time while not breaking traditional music creation techniques. In his later years, Brahms placed his unspeakable emotions in this piece, hiding his indescribable emotions between notes and sentences. After long-term performance and practice, as well as careful reading of the score, I have become more fond of Brahms as a composer and am more willing to understand his character's forbearance and boldness, as well as feel the rigor and delicacy in his music. This may be the charm of this great composer.

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