

A PERFORMER'S COMPANION TO JOHANNES BRAHMS'S
PIANO CONCERTO IN D MINOR, OP. 15

by

JOAN LYNETTE SZE ERN TAY

A LECTURE-DOCUMENT

Presented to the School of Music and Dance
of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

May 2023

“A PERFORMER’S COMPANION TO JOHANNES BRAHMS’S PIANO CONCERTO IN D MINOR, OP. 15” a lecture-document prepared by Joan Lynette Sze Ern Tay in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in the School of Music and Dance.

This lecture-document has been approved and accepted by:

Dr. Claire Wachter, Chair of the Examining Committee

05/09/2023

Committee in Charge: Dr. Claire Wachter, Chair
 Dr. Alexandre Dossin
 Dr. Abigail Fine

Accepted by:

Leslie Straka, D.M.A.
Director of Graduate Studies, School of Music and Dance

© 2023 JOAN LYNETTE SZE ERN TAY

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Joan Lynette Sze Ern Tay

EDUCATION

2023	Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano Performance University of Oregon
2019	Masters in Piano Performance University of Oregon
2016	Bachelor of Music (Honors) Yong Siew Toh Conservatory, Singapore.
2011-2013	University of Canterbury, New Zealand.

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Piano Performance
Piano Pedagogy
Collaborative Piano
Chamber Music
Piano Music of Johannes Brahms

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2017-2023	Graduate Employee in Piano Pedagogy and Collaborative Piano University of Oregon
-----------	---

GRANTS, AWARDS AND HONORS:

- 2023 SOMD Outstanding Graduate Performer in Collaborative Piano, University of Oregon.
- 2022 Brookings Harbor Friends of Music Scholarship, Oregon.
Third prize, MTNA Stecher and Horowitz Two Piano Competition, U.S.A.
SOMD Travel Grant: MTNA Stecher and Horowitz Two Piano Competition, University of Oregon.
- 2020 Second prize, Eugene Symphony Guild Young Artist Competition, U.S.A.
- 2019 SOMD Outstanding Graduate Performer in Keyboard, University of Oregon.
SOMD Concerto Accompanist Award, University of Oregon.
- 2018 First prize, MTNA Oregon State Young Artist Performance Competition, U.S.A.
George P. Hopkins Scholarship, Eugene Kiwanis Club, Oregon.
- 2015 National finalist, National Piano and Violin Competition, Singapore.
- 2013-2016 Full scholarship, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory, Singapore.
- 2012 Undergraduate Entrance Scholarship, University of Canterbury, New Zealand.
- 2011 National finalist, NZCT Chamber Music Contest, New Zealand.

To my mum and strongest supporter, Doreen Joo Lan Lim (1958-2015).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Claire Wachter, for all her guidance and time in the writing of this document. I truly appreciate the support she has given me throughout my doctoral program. This lecture-document would not be possible without her.

I wish to sincerely thank Dr. Dean Kramer for his continuous support behind the scenes; without him, I would not have rediscovered my love of the piano. Thank you for always encouraging me to try new things and widen my interests, and for pushing me to learn Brahms.

I would also like to thank Dr. Alexandre Dossin and Dr. Abigail Fine for serving on my lecture-document committee. Thank you for your time and patience during this process.

I wish to extend my gratitude to Dr. Grace Ho, who has been an exceptional mentor during my time at the University of Oregon. I have truly enjoyed our chats over coffee and working with you.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my family, of whom there are too many to name. All of this would have been impossible without your love and support. Additionally, I would like to thank my friends —Michelle, Ga-In, Dasol, Lizzy, Hengyue, Grant, Yunhan, and Jack (the cat)— for helping to keep me sane and motivated.

Finally, I would like to thank Matthew for always being there for me. Thank you for putting up with my practicing in the background, for the countless hours of working silently together, and for always showing more excitement than me when explaining what a music student does.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF EXAMPLES.....	xi
INTRODUCTION.....	2
Statement of Purpose.....	2
Scope of Research.....	3
Literature Review.....	5
I. JOHANNES BRAHMS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW.....	10
Brahms, pianist.....	10
Brahms, teacher.....	11
Brahms's Pianos.....	15
Conclusion.....	17
II. APPLICATION OF SELECTIONS FROM THE 51 EXERCISES, WoO 6 TO THE FIRST PIANO CONCERTO.....	18
Overview.....	18
Exercise 1a-f.....	19
Exercise 2a.....	20
Exercise 4.....	21
Exercise 5.....	22
Exercise 7.....	23
Exercise 9a.....	24
Exercise 9b.....	25
Exercise 11b.....	26
Exercise 15.....	27
Exercise 17.....	28
Exercise 23a.....	29
Exercise 25c.....	30
Conclusion.....	31

III.	AN ANALYSIS OF BRAHMS’S PIANO CONCERTO IN D MINOR, OP. 15	32
	The Origins of Brahms’s First Piano Concerto.....	32
	Movement I: <i>Maestoso</i>	34
	Movement II: <i>Adagio</i>	40
	Movement III: Rondo— <i>Allegro non troppo</i>	46
	Conclusion.....	54
IV.	PERFORMANCE GUIDE TO BRAHMS’S PIANO CONCERTO IN D MINOR, OP. 15	55
	Movement I: <i>Maestoso</i>	55
	Movement II: <i>Adagio</i>	72
	Movement III: Rondo— <i>Allegro non troppo</i>	79
	Conclusion.....	95
V.	CONCLUSION.....	96
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	98

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
3-1 Formal scheme, Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., Maestoso.....	34
3-2 Formal scheme, Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., Adagio.....	40
3-3 Formal scheme, Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., Rondo — Allegro non troppo.....	46
3-4 Formal scheme, Beethoven, <i>Piano Concerto No. 3</i> , III., Rondo — Allegro.....	47

LIST OF EXAMPLES

Example	Page
2-1 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 1a, mm. 1-4.....	19
2-2 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 317-319.....	19
2-3 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 2a, mm. 1-2.....	20
2-4 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 193-194.....	20
2-5 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 4, mm. 1-2.....	21
2-6 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 91-93.....	21
2-7 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 5, mm. 1-3.....	22
2-8 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 165-167.....	22
2-9 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 7, mm. 1-2.....	23
2-10 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 137-140.....	23
2-11 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 9a, mm. 1-3.....	24
2-12 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 9b, mm. 1-2.....	25
2-13 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 186-188.....	25
2-14 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 11, mm. 1-2.....	26
2-15 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 94-96.....	26
2-16 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 15, mm. 1-2.....	27
2-17 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 142-143.....	28
2-18 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 17, mm. 1-2.....	28
2-19 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 215-221.....	29
2-20 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 23a, mm. 1-4.....	29

2-21 Brahms, <i>51 Exercises</i> , Exercise 25c, mm. 7-8.....	30
2-22 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 122-125.....	30
3-1 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 1-12.....	36
3-2 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 22-25.....	36
3-3 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 87-90.....	37
3-4 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I. mm. 91-93.....	37
3-5 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 157-167.....	38
3-6 Harmonic analysis of Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 244-255.....	39
3-7 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 1-10.....	41
3-8 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 11-18.....	42
3-9 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 27-29.....	43
3-10 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 26-28.....	43
3-11 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 36-38.....	43
3-12 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 42- 46.....	44
3-13 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 95-97.....	45
3-14 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 1-8.....	47
3-15 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 157-158.....	48
3-16 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 66-73.....	49
3-17 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 181-195.....	50
3-18 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 275-279.....	51
3-19 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 297-299.....	51
3-20 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 348-351.....	52

3-21 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 376-378.....	52
3-22 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 442-446.....	53
3-23 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 463-467.....	53
4-1 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 91-96.....	55
4-2 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 97-99.....	56
4-3 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm.100-104.....	58
4-4 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., redistribution of m. 109.....	58
4-5 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., an alternative to the trill in m. 110.....	59
4-6 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 112-113.....	59
4-7 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 123-125.....	60
4-8 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 142-143.....	60
4-9 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 154-156.....	61
4-10 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 157-164.....	62
4-11 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 165- 171.....	63
4-12 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm.193-194.....	64
4-13 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 199-205.....	65
4-14 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm.210-211.....	66
4-15 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 226-233.....	67
4-16 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 245-247.....	68
4-17 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., redistribution of mm. 280-281.....	68
4-18 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 287-288.....	69
4-19 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 345-349.....	69

4-20 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 444-450.....	71
4-21 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , I., mm. 474-475.....	72
4-22 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 11-18.....	73
4-23 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 29-30.....	74
4-24 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 36-41.....	74
4-25 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 45-46.....	75
4-26 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., m. 80.....	76
4-27 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 85-91.....	77
4-28 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , II., mm. 95-97.....	78
4-29 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 1-8.....	79
4-30 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 9-12.....	80
4-31 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 17-20.....	80
4-32 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 46-50.....	81
4-33 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 66-73.....	82
4-34 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 122-128.....	83
4-35 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 189-202.....	84
4-36 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 203-208.....	84
4-37 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., redistribution of mm. 206-209.....	85
4-38 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 209-214.....	85
4-39 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 227-237.....	86
4-40 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 275-279.....	87
4-41 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 287-289.....	87

4-42 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 376-385.....	88
4-43 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 390-393.....	88
4-44 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 404-409.....	89
4-45 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 418-423.....	90
4-46 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 447-454.....	91
4-47 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 459-462.....	92
4-48 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 463-467.....	92
4-49 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 496-509.....	93
4-50 Brahms, <i>Piano Concerto in D minor</i> , III., mm. 518- 529.....	94

**A Performer's Companion to Johannes Brahms's
Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 15**

Statement of Purpose

My research project focuses on Brahms's Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 15. In this document, I will analyze the concerto to determine its musical and technical challenges. I will explore musical aspects including form, articulation, tempo, and melody to offer stylistically informed solutions to technically challenging passages. Suggestions for artistic interpretation will also be given in the performance guide.

For pianists, concertos typically appear much later in the course of our study, and we often study Classical concertos before those from the Romantic period. When we do progress to the larger Romantic concertos, pianists seem more inclined to tackle the Rachmaninov concertos, for example, rather than the Brahms concertos. In my opinion, this is because Brahms's concertos are more difficult for pianists to interpret and "sell" to the audience. Another possible explanation could be that Brahms's concertos are lengthy and tend to avoid overt displays of virtuosity. Furthermore, Brahms's early piano works generally seem to be underrepresented on the concert stage when compared to his later compositions.

The purpose of my research is to offer a guide to the performance of the First Piano Concerto. To provide physical descriptions of solutions to technically challenging passages, I will also explore Brahms's 51 Exercises, WoO 6. Selected exercises will be analyzed in correlation with passages from the First Piano Concerto. It is apparent that many passages of the concerto utilize techniques developed in the exercises. Placing the two scores next to each other allows us to see a visual representation of such instances. The technique of a specific passage from the concerto can be practiced using a related exercise. The process of connecting the 51 Exercises to the technique in passages from the First Piano Concerto is essential in constructing descriptions of techniques, touches, and sonorities used.

Following a more in-depth identification of musical concepts and materials within the concerto, I will then create a performance guide for the Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 15. Ultimately, my research intends to make the concerto more accessible — technically and artistically — to advanced piano students.

Scope of Research

Standard repertoire from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for professional pianists includes the études of Chopin, Liszt, Rachmaninov, and Debussy. Most pianists will play an étude by Chopin and/or Liszt at some point during their training. In comparison, less is known about the 51 Exercises, which were written by Brahms over several decades and used by his students. Brahms retained a lifelong interest in piano exercises.¹ The Brahms exercises were clearly not meant for performance and are similar, in this way, to some exercises by Czerny and Hanon. Pianists tend to overlook monotonous exercises in favor of technical études that can also be programmed in recitals. However, the 51 Exercises are extremely useful, pedagogically. They develop techniques and touches that result in various sonorities at the piano.

When discussing the issue of touch at the piano, it is also important to consider *which* pianos Brahms had at his disposal. I will also consider whether the differences between the nineteenth-century and modern pianos are relevant to my performance guide. Some accounts state that throughout his life, Brahms worked with various instruments and favored the Streicher; however, letters written by Brahms also show his preference for the Bechstein and Steinway

¹ Johannes Brahms, Preface to *51 Exercises for Piano*, ed. Camilla Cai (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2008), vi-vii.

instruments because of their reliability in concert.² According to Bozarth and Brady, the qualities that Brahms valued in a piano was that of a responsive action and a beautiful singing tone.³ In addition, the 51 Exercises were written over more than forty years. One must assume that Brahms could not have written them with only one instrument in mind. Now, pianists need to adjust their performance to the available instrument. The concept of a “Brahms sound” needs to be clear for the pianist to decide how to adjust their touch and balance textures.

The last area that my research topic will explore is piano pedagogy as it applies to Brahms’s music. I will also discuss the mechanisms in the human body that are fundamental to piano playing. From my personal experience playing the Piano Concerto in D minor and selections of the 51 Exercises as well as information drawn from the pedagogical literature, I will provide an informed explanation and performance guide for the techniques and ideal sound production in Brahms’s First Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 15. The ideal performance will capture Brahms’s unique sonority and character.

² George S. Bozarth and Stephen H. Brady, “The Pianos of Johannes Brahms,” in *Brahms and His World*, ed. Walter Frisch (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 93.

³ *Ibid.*, 88.

Literature Review

The literature most relevant to my study examines sources that discuss Brahms's preference for pianos, Brahms's performance style, and piano pedagogy. My research will explore the Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 15 to understand the technical challenges and their solutions within the piece. In my performance guide, I will integrate the teaching of piano pedagogues and make suggestions for performance on a modern piano. The research ultimately should help to gain a better understanding of the concerto and Brahms's other earlier piano works.

Brahms's 51 Exercises, WoO 6 were developed by the composer for a few reasons – for his personal use and to solve students' technical problems.⁴ The exercises develop piano technique and touch; the cultivation of touch also results in the control of various sonorities.

This literature review will first evaluate sources that discuss Brahms's preference for pianos, followed by sources on Brahms's technique and performance style. Finally, I will evaluate sources from the discipline of piano pedagogy that discuss the development and facilitation of efficient technique at the instrument.

Augustus Arnone's article "The Aesthetics of Textural Ambiguity: Brahms and the Changing Piano" argues against a common presumption that Brahms's music was written for a lighter piano. Performance practice scholars argue that the presence of "low-lying melodic lines, thickly-written accompaniments and often dense saturation of the lower register"⁵ implies that the music was intended for a piano with less power and sustain; balance and clarity is otherwise

⁴ Brahms, Preface to *51 Exercises for Piano*, ed. Camilla Cai (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2008), vi-vii.

⁵ Augustus Arnone, "The Aesthetics of Textural Ambiguity: Brahms and the Changing Piano," *Current Musicology*, no. 82 (September 2006): 7-8.

destroyed. In response to this, Arnone states that these ideals of piano-playing were born near the end of Brahms's life, in treatises by Schmitt, Bukhovtsev, and Christiani. He argues that textural ambiguity is a fundamental part of Brahms's musical aesthetic, opposing Camilla Cai's article.

In her article, "Brahms's Pianos and the Performance of His Late Piano Works," Cai supports the "lighter instrument theory." She states that Brahms's favorite piano was the 1868 Streicher grand piano, gifted to him by the company; this piano would remain in his apartment until his death. Brahms's Streicher is assumed to be straight-strung, with a lighter action and an "open" sound in the bass.⁶ Frisch, in a study of Brahms's pianos, supports the statement that Brahms preferred his personal Streicher, and he adds that the other instrument often associated with Brahms is the Graf that Clara Schumann gifted to him in 1856. Frisch offers greater insights into the pianos that Brahms encountered throughout his lifetime and the years in which he preferred certain instruments over others. Much of the existing conversation on Brahms's piano music identifies problems that occur in performance but does not offer practical solutions. I aim to develop a pedagogically informed guide for pianists to successfully develop the technical ability, touch, and tone color required for Brahms's First Concerto.

Related to the issue of instrumental performance practice is the conversation about nineteenth-century piano performance practice and Brahms's playing style. In *Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performance Style*, Bernard Sherman states that accounts of Brahms's playing contradict each other. For example, Florence May's account states that Brahms disliked it when chords were spread (i.e., arpeggiated) unless marked for the sake of a special effect; yet, in his later years, Brahms was reported to roll chords in his performance. Brahms also

⁶ Camilla Cai, "Brahms's Pianos and the Performance of His Late Works," *Performance Practice Review* Vol. 2: No. 1 (1989), 60-61.

played at a slower tempo than indicated in a performance of his Third Piano Trio.⁷ Sherman's opinion is that Brahms cared more about a performer's ability to communicate through the music, rather than a strict observation of performance practices.⁸ He suggests the possibility that Brahms may not have practiced what he preached, and that the way a composer plays his music might not reflect how he would like others to perform it.⁹ In the chapter, the idea of a change in the performance context is also raised. The essential idea is that the performer's environment also changes their habits. For example, the performance context was fundamentally altered with the establishment of the recording process; the existence of recordings meant that the performance was no longer a unique experience that "remained in the mind."¹⁰ Accuracy in performance became *the* standard since recordings last forever.

In Mark Livshits's study of Brahms's First Piano Concerto, he takes the idea of performance practice in the concerto further, surveying several editions of the work. He comes to the conclusion that the Edition Eulenberg and the new Peters edition published in 2010 are the most reliable due to meticulous revision.¹¹ He identifies general discrepancies or issues in tempo, meter, articulation, pedaling, and trills that arise in the performance of the concerto.¹² Livshits's dissertation takes a more general approach to the study of the musical aspects of the First Piano Concerto. My research differs from Livshits's in that I study the concerto in more detail and add

⁷ Bernard D. Sherman, "How different was Brahms's playing style from our own?" in *Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performance Style*, ed. Michael Musgrave and Bernard D. Sherman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹ Mark Livshits, "The First Piano Concerto of Johannes Brahms: Its History and Performance Practice" (D.M.A. Diss., Temple University, 2017), 18.

¹² *Ibid.*, 51-81.

a performance guide. The transcriptions of Bruce Hungerford's lessons with Carl Friedberg in Ann Riesbeck DiClemente's dissertation offer insights into Brahms's playing style in the concerto and other works; Friedberg had studied with Brahms and witnessed the composer performing both of his piano concertos.¹³

While discussions of Brahms's technique exist in the literature, the 51 Exercises seem to be rarely discussed in a pedagogical setting. Unlike his contemporaries, Brahms did not write any pedagogical works or compositions intended for children, such as Robert Schumann's *Album for the Young*, Op. 68.

Claire Wachter's presentation notes on Brahms's teaching style provide an overview of the playing qualities and technique that Brahms emphasized. Wachter remarks that Brahms created an individual practice regime for each student based on technical abilities. In Florence May's experience, Brahms created technical exercises taken from her repertoire instead of using "ordinary five-finger exercises" to strengthen and equalize her fingers.¹⁴ The intricacies of Brahms's earlier piano compositions are often too challenging for the intermediate pianist. Joan Purswell suggests that the "Brahms school of piano-playing" exists in his piano compositions, rather than in pedagogical material.¹⁵ I believe that understanding the exercises will help to initially establish some of the technical foundations of Brahms's piano works.

¹³ Ann Riesbeck DiClemente, "Brahms Performance Practice in a New Context: The Bruce Hungerford Recorded Lessons with Carl Friedberg" (PhD Diss., University of Maryland, 2009), 75-80.

¹⁴ Claire Wachter, "The Unique Piano Teaching of Johannes Brahms," Presentation at the MTNA National Conference, Dallas, TX, 1997.

¹⁵ Joan Purswell, "Johannes Brahms: Pianist and Pedagogue," *The American Music Teacher* 33, no. 5 (1984): 14-16.

The discipline of piano pedagogy is growing in the twenty-first century. Injury prevention has been more openly discussed; hence, today we have increased literature on technique, sound production, and healthy pianism. However, in the sphere of Brahms's music, we lack an application of this knowledge. Piano students are less likely to encounter Brahms's exercises than a Chopin *étude*. Brahms's piano compositions are often extended in duration and frequently feature passages with large chords, which require advanced technique as well as stamina. The application of healthy practices can help to facilitate the endurance required of the pianist without resulting in injury and/or fatigue.

In my research, I hope to provide my readers with a better understanding of the Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 15 and a better grasp of technical and stylistic requirements in Brahms's piano music. I aim to share my experience and opinions on the development of a healthy Brahms technique and sound in the performance guide for the concerto.

CHAPTER ONE

Johannes Brahms: A Brief Overview

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was born in Hamburg, Germany. As a boy, he received instruction in piano, cello, and horn. He studied piano with Otto Friedrich Willibald Cossel and later with Eduard Marxsen after Cossel declared that he could “take his pupil no further.”¹⁶ At the time, Marxsen was one of the leading teachers in Hamburg; Brahms also studied counterpoint and the repertoire of Bach and Beethoven with him.¹⁷

Brahms, pianist

Brahms began performing as a teenager.¹⁸ He was known for his almost-too-subtle performance style, to the point where a critic reviewing his performance in 1855 commented that he wanted more virtuosic display.¹⁹ However, Brahms garnered praise as a pianist from Robert and Clara Schumann and the public paid more attention to Brahms as a composer after Robert Schumann’s proclamation that the young Brahms was “to be the messiah of music” in an article.²⁰ Schumann also described Brahms as a player who could make the piano sound like an orchestra in his music journal, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*.²¹

¹⁶ William Drabkin, "Marxsen, Eduard," *Grove Music Online*, 2001. Accessed 10 Aug, 2022. <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000017959>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Roger W. Jamison, “Johannes Brahms as a Pianist and Teacher” (M.A. Thesis, Ohio State University, 1961), 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, iii.

²¹ Michael Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), 121.

Brahms was said to have an excellent technical facility at the piano but would almost disregard technique for the sake of artistic expression.²² After hearing Brahms's playing, his one-time student Florence May, wrote that "It was not the playing of a virtuoso, though he had a large amount of virtuosity (to put it moderately) at his command. He never aimed at mere effect, but seemed to plunge into the innermost meaning of whatever music he happened to be interpreting, exhibiting all its details and expressing its very depths."²³

In the biography, *The Life of Johannes Brahms*, May revealed that Brahms had an "extraordinary dislike to speaking about himself";²⁴ his introverted nature also expressed itself in a reluctance to play at the bequest of others and when not in the right emotional state.²⁵

Brahms, teacher

Brahms started giving piano lessons after finishing schooling to help his family financially.²⁶ The lessons he gave as a boy were met with minimal success but as an adult, Brahms's efforts in teaching were more fruitful. This is evident in the memoirs of Eugenie Schumann (1851-1938), Florence May (1845-1923), and Gustav Jenner (1865-1920), three known students of the mature Brahms.

²² Jamison, "Johannes Brahms as a Pianist and Teacher," 6.

²³ Florence May, *The Life of Johannes Brahms*, Volume 1 (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), 20, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/40643/40643-h/40643-h.htm>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶ George S. Bozarth and Walter Frisch, "Brahms, Johannes," *Grove Music Online*, 2001. Accessed 12 Nov, 2020.

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051879>.

Jenner studied composition with Brahms and his account differs slightly from May and Schumann's. His recollection states that Brahms was pleasant and friendly upon their first meeting but became quite strict during their lessons;²⁷ Jenner felt that Brahms had implied that he (Jenner) was too advanced in age for a composition student and lacked talent in the discipline.²⁸ Perhaps Brahms's attitude towards Jenner was due to his (Jenner's) being a student in composition rather than piano, although Jamison suggests that Jenner's gender and the period of time in which he met Brahms may also have played a part.²⁹

Schumann and May's accounts of Brahms's teaching present an insight into Brahms as a teacher of the piano during his prime. May came to meet Brahms through Clara Schumann. To correct what she referred to as "deficiencies in her mechanism," May journeyed from London, England to Germany to study with Clara Schumann. She did so for some time and was advised to continue her study with Brahms upon Schumann's departure for a concert tour.³⁰

May described Brahms as the "ideal teacher":

He was strict and absolute; he was gentle and patient and encouraging; he was not only clear, he was light itself; he knew exhaustively, and could teach, and did teach, by the shortest possible methods, every detail of technical study; he was unwearied in his efforts to make his pupil grasp the full musical meaning of whatever work might be in hand; he was even punctual.³¹

²⁷ Gustav Jenner, "Johannes Brahms as Man, Teacher and Artist," in *Brahms and His World*, ed. Walter Frisch and Kevin C. Karnes (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 398.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 407.

²⁹ Jamison, "Johannes Brahms as a Pianist and Teacher," 26.

³⁰ May, *The Life of Johannes Brahms*, Volume 1, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

After she informed Brahms of her mechanical difficulties, he agreed that fixing them should take priority. In May's lessons, Brahms emphasized the equalization and loosening of her fingers; he instructed her in methods of practicing scales, arpeggios, trills, double notes, and octaves to fix her technique. Brahms would form exercises from May's repertoire instead of using existing studies, even adding various accents and rhythms to particularly difficult passages.³²

Brahms was an inspirational teacher to May, who felt as if she should practice all day and night after their lessons. She noted that Brahms was extremely particular about fingering choices so that no finger was favored over another.³³ There were exceptions to this rule. The first was when a composer provided fingerings, such as in Muzio Clementi's *Gradus ad Parnassum*, Op. 44. The second exception was Czerny's fingering of J.S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier; May was instructed to ignore all other indications in the Czerny edition.

Brahms was encouraging and would even assure her that certain techniques would come in time when she ruminated on her deficiencies. That was not to say he was not demanding; if necessary, May would be instructed to repeat a passage until Brahms felt that she had begun to grasp the desired musical effect.³⁴

Eugenie Schumann, daughter of Robert and Clara Schumann, began studying piano with Brahms in the summer of 1872 after her mother had requested it of him. Like May, she noted Brahms's punctuality, kindness, and patience when he came to give lessons twice a week.³⁵

³² May, *The Life of Johannes Brahms*, Volume 1, 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁵ Eugenie Schumann, *The Schumanns and Johannes Brahms: The Memoirs of Eugenie Schumann* (New York: The Dial Press, 1927), 141.

Brahms believed it valuable to play easier studies at a rapid tempo.³⁶ Thus, Schumann was assigned numerous exercises, scales, and arpeggios to train her fingers with emphasis on the training of the thumb. She also worked on some of the difficult exercises that were later published in the 51 Exercises. Other musical aspects that were emphasized during her studies included rhythm and syncopation — specifically, any dissonances produced as the result of a syncopation.

Schumann made this conclusion about Brahms's teaching:

“Brahms as well as my mother was of [the] opinion that technique, more especially fingering, must be learnt through exercises, so that in the study of pieces attention may be concentrated unhampered upon the spirit of the music.”³⁷

³⁶ Schumann, *The Schumanns and Johannes Brahms: The Memoirs of Eugenie Schumann*, 144.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

Brahms's Pianos

Brahms lived in a time of technological innovation. The rise of piano factories saw a simultaneous growth in production alongside a decrease in cost —the piano became more obtainable for the common household.³⁸ Increased demand for pianos thus led to more advancements in the instrument.

The pianos used to write his final compositions would be very similar to the piano we use today. The two pianos that are most commonly associated with Brahms are the 1839 Graf and the 1868 Streicher. However, documented programs and correspondence show that Brahms contacted and performed on a wide variety of instruments; these include but are not limited to Baumgarden & Heins, Bösendorfer, Erard, Blüthner, Bechstein and Steinway.³⁹

Clara Schumann gave Brahms her Graf piano in 1856 during the time in which he composed the First Piano Concerto. Graf pianos were known for their variety in tone color of different registers; I surmise that this quality allowed for the simulation of orchestral colors. However, while Brahms's early years were "traditionally associated"⁴⁰ with the Graf, he also admired the specific qualities of other pianos. In a letter to Clara dated 1854, Brahms praised the "songful tone" of the Baumgarden & Heins square piano; he later gave the Hamburg premiere of the First Piano Concerto on one of their grand pianos.⁴¹

³⁸ Edwin M. Ripin, et al. "Pianoforte," *Grove Music Online*, 2001. Accessed 12 Nov, 2020. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000021631>.

³⁹ Cai, "Brahms's Pianos and the Performance of His Late Works," 59.

⁴⁰ Bozarth and Brady, "The Pianos of Johannes Brahms," 88.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

In Vienna during 1865-1875, Brahms favored the Streicher piano. He chose an 1868 Streicher for his apartment; while this piano no longer exists, pictures of Brahms's living room suggest it was a smaller instrument.⁴² Brahms considered his instrument to be "good and reliable," preferring it over the larger Viennese concert grands. Through his correspondence with Adolf Schubring, we see that Brahms did not like larger instruments with the Viennese action.⁴³ After the mid-1870s, Brahms's performances in Vienna used Bösendorfer pianos, partly due to the decline of the Streicher company, which couldn't compete with the bigger firms.⁴⁴ Towards the end of his life Brahms had a strong preference for Bechstein and Steinway instruments.

In my summary, I observe that Brahms admired and played many instruments of his time. He valued specific qualities in an instrument, for example, a song-like tone and varying timbres. Throughout his life, there was a constant pattern of a preference for more technologically-advanced instruments;⁴⁵ it did not matter whether the action was Viennese or English so long as the action was responsive.

⁴² Bozarth and Brady, "The Pianos of Johannes Brahms," 93.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

Conclusion

I propose that a pianist playing Brahms should adapt to the modern instrument and keep in mind that the piano near the end of Brahms's life was like the modern-day piano in many ways. Performance practice in Brahms's music should be more individualized to Brahms's musical style rather than the musical style of the Romantic period.

There can be a tendency to treat all music from one period similarly. For music from the Romantic era, this can often be over-pedaling, over-voicing of the melody, and a universal treatment of all articulation. By interpreting the score with consideration of Brahms's stylistic tendencies, the performer will be able to convey the sound and character of Brahms's music to the listener.

CHAPTER TWO

Application of selections from the 51 Exercises, WoO 6 to the First Piano Concerto

Overview

The 51 Exercises were written over approximately four decades, from the 1850s until its publication in 1893. Brahms wrote them for his use, but the exercises doubled as teaching material when students encountered technical challenges. Brahms notated some of these exercises with the help of Clara Schumann in the 1850s.⁴⁶ The earliest account of written-out exercises by Brahms date back to an 1853 letter, in which Brahms's brother thanks him for sending music.⁴⁷

Three decades after he wrote the first of the 51 Exercises, Brahms sent the first manuscript to Robert Keller, an editor at Simrock Verlag. In 1882, Brahms sent a revision with additional exercises but the manuscript was not sent for publication until late in 1893.⁴⁸ The 51 Exercises are a purely pedagogical resource, in comparison to études such as Liszt's Paganini Etudes, which were intended for performance. The 51 Exercises help us understand Brahms's style of playing and also help us master some of the techniques required in his piano compositions. The only other technical exercises that Brahms wrote were five études based on compositions by J.S. Bach, Chopin, Carl Maria von Weber, and Paganini.

The following chapter presents selections from the 51 Exercises that can be applied to certain passages of Brahms's First Piano Concerto, and my suggestions for practice. In certain passages of the concerto, the pianist can benefit from the study of a specific exercise. Multiple

⁴⁶ Brahms, Preface to *51 Exercises for Piano*, ed. Camilla Cai (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2008), vi.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vi.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vi.

exercises can be employed to master the technique required. I have curated selections of the 51 Exercises based on what will best help the concerto and will introduce these exercises in ascending numerical order, along with descriptions of the corresponding passage(s) and selected excerpts for clarity.

Exercise 1a-f



Example 2-1: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 1a, mm. 1-4

Exercises 1a-1f train the pianist in polyrhythms — three against four, four against five, and six against seven. These are generally beneficial for the study of Brahms's music, which often features complex rhythms, polyrhythms, and rhythmic devices such as *hemiola*. One passage that requires control of the inner rhythm is in the third movement of the concerto in mm. 311-320. The downbeat of the two-against-three rhythm in m. 312 is further obscured by the phrasing. At m. 318, this anchor-less rhythm suddenly shifts into unison sextuplets, septuplets, and thirty-second notes (Ex. 2-2). Another passage with constantly changing polyrhythms is in the third movement at mm. 459-462. The right-hand shifts between groups of nine to twelve over a simple dotted rhythm in the left hand.



Example 2-2: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 317-319

Exercise 2a



Example 2-3: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 2a, mm. 1-2

Exercise 2a is a study in ascending double thirds with entrances that alternate between the hands. The double-thirds technique is used in the first movement at mm. 192-195 and its corresponding passage in the recapitulation (Ex. 2-4). To create the illusion of *legato* thirds, practice connecting only the upper pitch of the interval using the indicated fingering. The inner notes can be released just before the next third. Keeping the thumb and second finger light also helps to create *legato* and clearer voicing, a technical aspect that is also developed in Exercise 4. Once the balance within the interval is achieved, create the phrasing by executing the note groupings as one big movement and remove all tension of the arm and wrists in the rests.



Example 2-4: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 193-194

Exercise 4

The image shows a musical score for Exercise 4 by Brahms. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Andante' and the articulation is 'molto legato'. The top staff has a series of sixths with fingering numbers (4, 5, 4, 5, 4, 5) above the notes. The bottom staff has a series of sixths with fingering numbers (1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2) below the notes. The dynamics are marked 'f' and 'molto stacc.'.

Example 2-5: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 4, mm. 1-2

This exercise develops the ability to voice the top note and play *legato* in sixths. Like the practice method for Exercise 2a, I suggest practicing the upper note of the interval using the given fingering and avoiding pressing into the keys as this might create a harsh tone and tighten the arm. The lower note of the interval is marked *molto staccato*. To produce a short touch, the lower pitch should be played very lightly, releasing instantly at the rests to allow the hand to move to the next position. The pianist must remember to let the body move freely, which allows the torso to line up with the arms. Although this exercise studies the broken sixth interval, it can be applied to passages with doubled intervals regardless of articulation. The lighter thumb is especially valuable in the opening of the piano solo at mm. 91-108 (Ex. 2-6), the rapid octaves and chords at mm. 278-285 in the first movement, and at mm. 448-450 in the third.

The image shows a musical score for Example 2-6 by Brahms. It consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The dynamics are marked 'p' and 'espress.'. The top staff has a series of chords with fingering numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) above the notes. The bottom staff has a series of chords with fingering numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) below the notes.

Example 2-6: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 91-93

Exercise 5

The image shows the first three measures of Exercise 5 from Brahms' 51 Exercises. The music is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The right hand part features a melodic line with slurs and a fermata over the first measure. The left hand part features a bass line with slurs and a fermata over the first measure. The tempo is marked 'p/legg.' and there is an asterisk in the first measure. The notes in the right hand are G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4. The notes in the left hand are G3, F3, E3, D3, C3, B2, A2, G2.

Example 2-7: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 5, mm. 1-3

Exercise 5 requires the pianist to play consecutive octaves. Brahms uses the technique of octave displacement where each interval is set in a different register of the keyboard. If we look at the pitches only, regardless of register, we discover a two-measure pattern throughout the exercise. The first measure of each group ascends stepwise — C, D, E-flat, F, G — and descends in the same fashion. The second measure ascends stepwise but at the peak, before and on the downbeat of the third beat, the interval widens to a third. The initial pitch of each pattern group changes. For optimum accuracy, the physical movement should be a lateral “sliding” of the hand across the keyboard with minimal vertical lifting. More simply, stay in contact with the keyboard as much as possible. The hand should maintain its open position instead of closing for the octaves and lightly touch each note to honor the *leggiero* directive before moving. The Leschetizky method of mentally or speaking aloud the name of the pitch before shifting is also beneficial.

The image shows the first three measures of Example 2-8 from Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, I. The music is in D minor (two flats) and 2/4 time. The right hand part features a melodic line with slurs and a fermata over the first measure. The left hand part features a bass line with slurs and a fermata over the first measure. The tempo is marked 'p dolce' and there are fingerings 6 and 9 indicated in the second measure. The notes in the right hand are D4, E4, F4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The notes in the left hand are D3, C3, B2, A2, G2, F2, E2, D2.

Example 2-8: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 165-167

Exercise 5 can be applied to the left hand in mm. 166-167 in Ex. 2-8 above. The bass note changes every half measure, and the figuration requires *legato* shifting within a two-octave range.

Exercise 7



Example 2-9: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 7, mm. 1-2

The hand stays in the closed position in this exercise to execute the rapid chromatic patterns. Notice that the exercise uses all fingers and requires the hand to open and close very slightly, never exceeding the five-finger position. Avoid lifting the fingers for accuracy, speed, and evenness. This exercise is useful for the chromaticism of the concerto where the hand opens and closes quickly, as in Ex. 2-10.



Example 2-10: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 137-140

Exercise 9a

Example 2-11: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 9a, mm. 1-3

In Exercise 9a, the outer voices are arpeggiated and marked with a slur while the inner voices repeat a pitch with the first finger. Practice the *legato* outer voices with the indicated fingering. To achieve the phrase-off staccato, use one arm movement per slur and lift slightly upwards on the staccato. Play the last note of the group with a light staccato touch. The repeated note in the inner voices needs to be quiet and blended in as part of the harmony. Try to play as quietly as possible with the thumbs by sinking slowly into the key; one can also try to fully depress the key without it sounding. The thumbs should remain light at a faster tempo. The treble part of Ex. 2-8 presents similar challenges and can be practiced as described.

Exercise 9b



Example 2-12: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 9b, mm. 1-2

Exercise 9b trains the reverse technique from 9a. The fifth finger repeats a single pitch per measure while the four other fingers outline the descending C major arpeggio. The interval between the repeated pitch and the descending line widens — the largest interval is a tenth. Note that the exercise is now marked *leggiero* instead of *legato*. The pianist should avoid using too much arm weight and play as lightly as necessary, without creating a *staccato* touch.



Example 2-13: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 186-188

The practice method remains much the same as Exercise 9a and can be applied to passages such as m. 187 in the first movement (Ex. 2-13). Employ lateral movement of the arm and wrist to stay as close to the keys as possible, which increases accuracy and control of tone.

Exercise 11b



The image shows a musical score for Exercise 11b by Brahms. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, in common time. The tempo/mood is marked 'p leggiero'. The first staff has a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes, with fingering numbers 1, 5, 3, 4, 2, 3, 5, 3, 4, 2 above it. The second staff has a bass line with eighth notes and quarter notes, with fingering numbers 1, 5, 3, 4, 2, 3, 5, 3, 4, 2 below it. A second measure starts with a '2' above the treble staff, indicating a second ending or a specific fingering.

Example 2-14: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 11, mm. 1-2

This exercise develops the independence of the thumbs and flexibility of the hand. It is important to follow his fingering markings as they serve specific purposes —developing equality of fingers and flexibility of the hand. Although both of my hands can comfortably reach a ninth, Exercise 11b is challenging due to the held thumbs. It requires the third and fifth fingers to stretch to an interval of a sixth, which can be achieved if wrists are free to pivot left and right; the thumbs should hold the whole note for its full value without pressing into the key. By playing with light fingers in a non-legato articulation to honor the fingering and dynamics, the *leggiero* touch is achieved naturally. This technique appears in the opening piano solo of the first movement — see mm. 95-96 in Ex. 2-15.



The image shows a musical score for Example 2-15, Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, I., mm. 94-96. It features a piano solo with two staves, treble and bass clef. The first staff has a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes, with a first ending bracket labeled 'I' above it. The second staff has a bass line with eighth notes and quarter notes. The tempo/mood is marked 'p'.

Example 2-15: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 94-96

The right thumb restrikes the same pitch while the rest of the hand moves; the thumb holds down the key until just before it needs to re-sound the A. To facilitate the two-note grouping of the di-chords, the wrist should be free to move as needed.

Exercise 15



Example 2-16: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 15, mm. 1-2

At the very beginning of Exercise 15, there is a whole note in brackets marked with a fermata. At the bottom of this page in the score of the *51 Exercises*, instruction is given in German. This commentary instructs the player that the bracketed note is not intended to be struck, only sustained or held down during practice. By following this direction, the pianist is obliged to use the fingerings given by Brahms.

Exercise 15 requires the wrist to pivot freely while keeping the hand “flat” and “open”, contrary to everything that pianists are often taught in their initial years of study. The flat hand means that the fleshy part of the finger — the finger pad— makes contact with the keys. The result is a softer and rounder tone than if the fingertips were to be used; this singing tone is often employed in 19th-century piano music. It also means that although there is no finger-legato — no overlapping of fingers— the *leggiero* touch will sound less articulated.

If the notes do not sound even, practice smaller sections in different rhythmic combinations, as Brahms would often suggest to his students. Practice the different rhythms using the fingertips and increased arm weight to balance the fingers, before removing the weight and switching to the use of the flat hand.



Example 2-17: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 142-143

The wrists help to facilitate speed and accuracy by pivoting from side to side to line up behind the finger that is playing. In a slower tempo, the pianist can add a smaller counter-clockwise motion that helps to release tension. The passage above (Ex. 2-17) benefits from the practice of Exercise 15 — the hand moves up and sideways in minute circular motions, playing with the finger pads.

Exercise 17



Example 2-18: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 17, mm. 1-2

The exercise above develops control of the measured trill using different combinations of fingers, with three notes of the trill for each eighth note. Small rotations of the wrist — like the motion of turning a doorknob — help to keep it relaxed. During practice, the first note of each trill group can be accented to help emphasize where the beat falls. A faster version of the measured trill is used in the third movement at mm. 212-221 (Ex. 2-19).



Example 2-19: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 215-221

Exercise 23a



Example 2-20: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 23a, mm. 1-4

In Exercise 23a the thumbs hold down one tone per measure while upper voices move in groups of two di-chords. The held thumb dictates the 5-3 to 4-2 fingering for the di-chords, which should be played as one movement with instantaneous relaxation between each group. There may be a tendency to press the thumbs at the key bottom to continue holding the key down. One practice method is to reiterate the held note every quarter beat, then every two beats; once comfortable with this method, play the exercise as written.

Exercise 25c



Example 2-21: Brahms, *51 Exercises*, Exercise 25c, mm. 7-8

The second half of Exercise 25c combines a held octave with a moving chromatic line; this pattern is passed between the two hands. Play the inner chromatic line lightly with minimal pressure, sliding the fingers to the next position while holding the octaves. Release the octaves just before the next octave.



Example 2-22: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 122-125

Ex. 2-22 is almost identical to the writing in the exercise. As the register shifts down an octave, the thumb must be released early enough for the hand to open again to octave A.

Conclusion

I argue that the pedagogical nature of the 51 Exercises offers more creative freedom. The pianist may feel more inclined to experiment with rhythm or add transpositions because the exercises feel more like technical studies than recital repertoire. Additionally, there are not as many recordings of the 51 Exercises as there are of concert études. Therefore, pianists can develop their concept of a Brahms sonority by going first to the score instead of listening to recordings.

CHAPTER THREE

An Analysis of Brahms's Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 15

The Origins of Brahms's First Piano Concerto

Brahms's First Piano Concerto is a large-scale concerto, with a long first movement. It is considered a "symphonic concerto," where the orchestra and soloist are truly equal partners. In his dissertation, Livshits states that "the orchestral writing never overshadows the solo part, due in large part to Brahms's meticulous approach to texture and balance."⁴⁹ However, this was not always the case. The Piano Concerto in D minor, Op. 15 was originally written as a sonata for two pianos in June 1854. Referring to the work as Sonata in D minor in a letter to Joseph Joachim in June 1854, Brahms wrote that the instrumentation — two pianos — was not enough.⁵⁰

Brahms eventually reworked the first movement for orchestra and piano, adding two more movements. The changing of the instrumentation was not unique to the Piano Concerto; Brahms would later change the instrumentation of his Piano Quintet, Op. 34. The piano quintet would be transformed from a string quintet to a sonata for two pianos before being transcribed for a piano quintet.⁵¹ Perhaps because this was Brahms's first attempt at composing orchestral music, he turned to the works of Beethoven for inspiration or guidance. The concerto is in conventional three-movement form; it has a sonata-form first movement, a slow second movement, and a faster

⁴⁹ Livshits, "The First Piano Concerto of Johannes Brahms: Its History and Performance Practice," 47.

⁵⁰ Musgrave, *A Brahms Reader*, 121.

⁵¹ Brahms, Preface to *Piano Quintet in f minor*, ed. Carmen Debryn and Michael Struck (Munich: G Henle Verlag, 2001), iv.

third movement that is modeled on Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto — Brahms replicated the structure of Beethoven's rondo in his rondo movement.⁵²

⁵² Livshits, "The First Piano Concerto of Johannes Brahms: Its History and Performance Practice," 9.

Movement I: *Maestoso*

Section	Theme/Features	Measures	
Orchestral Exposition	First subject (D minor) <i>Maestoso</i>	1-24	
	Transition Based on broken chords	25-66	
	First subject	67-81	
	Transition Based on the interval of a fourth Foreshadowing of the Third subject	82- 90	
	Piano Exposition	Second subject (D minor) Piano's first entrance	91-109
	First subject	110-122	
	Transition Based on broken chords	123-156	
	Third subject (F major) Piano solo <i>Poco più moderato</i>	157-225	
	Development	<i>Tempo I</i> Consecutive octaves Cross-hand passages In the style of a "Hungarian Rhapsody"	226-309
	Recapitulation	First subject (D minor)	310-334
Transition Based on the First subject		335-340	
Second subject (D minor) Modulates to E minor and F-sharp minor		341-365	
Transition Based on broken chords		366-380	
Third subject (D major) Piano solo <i>Poco più moderato</i>		381-443	
Coda		D minor <i>Tempo I: poco più animato</i>	444-484

Table 3-1: Formal scheme, Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., *Maestoso*

Brahms indicated a metronome marking of fifty-eight for the dotted half at the beginning of the first movement. This tempo indication sounds a little hurried and contradicts the *Maestoso* — “majestically” — performance direction. Livshits suggests that the metronome mark is not indicative of the performance tempo that Brahms wanted; it is the composer's precautionary method against tempi that is too slow or drags.⁵³ I suggest a prevailing pace of forty to forty-six for the dotted half note.

I have analyzed the first movement in sonata form with a double exposition. In my analysis, I identify three themes — one more than usual. However, this method of analysis is more useful to the performer as all three subjects are used extensively throughout the movement. The first subject — mm. 1-36 — is too significant, in my opinion, to label as “introductory”.

The orchestral exposition opens strongly with an unharmonized D unison, a powerful statement by the timpani and horns that convey the movement's majestic character. However, there is a lack of confirmation of the home key. The primary theme is introduced by the strings (in B-flat major) and supported by the timpani. Its distinctive characteristics include broken chords and trills. The first subject is ten measures long in a quasi-sentence — short-short-long — structure (Ex. 3-1). The opening phrase of the subject is roughly four measures long, followed by a two-measure “echo” and closing with a four-measure phrase.

⁵³ Livshits, “The First Piano Concerto of Johannes Brahms: Its History and Performance Practice,” 54.

Maestoso
Tutti
Piano Solo

Maestoso
ff
dim.
tr
tr
Piano II (Orchestra)

Example 3-1: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 1-12

The D minor tonality is eluded until the transition in m. 25. We arrive briefly on a tonic chord— the second-inversion voicing weakens this arrival (Ex. 3-2).

22
Piano II

Example 3-2: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 22-25

The transition, based on the broken-chord idea seen in the left hand of Ex. 3-2, wanders through various key areas before modulating to E-flat minor at m. 46 — a variation. The orchestra revisits the primary theme for a second time before we arrive in D major, the parallel

major key, at m. 82; here, a second transitional idea based on the interval of a fourth foreshadows material that is to come later in the third subject (piano solo) at m. 166.



Example 3-3: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 87-90

Leading into the piano exposition, Brahms plays with the tonal ambiguity of the D-A open fifth (Ex. 3-3)— is the tonality major or minor? Throughout the first exposition, the listener has not been given a root-position tonic chord; this changes with the introduction of the second subject in the first piano entrance at m. 91 (Ex. 3-4).

The piano's first entrance introduces the second subject before the first, in reverse order. The theme's main characteristic is homophonic chords and consecutive sixths with constant quarter notes in the bass. The quiet, subdued character is unexpected after the forceful orchestral exposition and contrasts strongly with the first subject.



Example 3-4: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 91-93

In the recapitulation, the second subject behaves unusually, in that it modulates and is not centered strongly in the tonic key. In sonata form, we usually expect to hear the secondary theme in a closely related key in the exposition and in the tonic key when it returns. In the recapitulation,

this subject begins assertively in D minor but modulates — to E minor, F-sharp minor, and C-sharp major.

I labeled the piano solo as the third subject because the thematic material is not confined to the piano — it is repeated and developed in the orchestra as well. The key area also behaves as one would expect of a secondary theme in sonata form; it is in F major (III) in the exposition and D major (I, parallel major) in the recapitulation. The first phrase of the melody is a four-measure phrase (Ex. 3-5). The chords in the right-hand soar upwards and the left hand continues this trajectory in imitative octaves. The hands converge in suspensions and resolutions. The second phrase behaves similarly but is five measures long.

157 *Poco più moderato*
espress.
I *p legato*

161

165 *Horn melody*
p dolce

Example 3-5: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 157-167

The highlighted melody (Ex. 3-5) suggests a horn melody. Brahms gives this melody to the horns some thirty measures later. The sound is now divided into layers — melody, bass, and harmony shared between both hands.

The development, Tempo I, begins with stormy cascading consecutive octaves in both hands, moving in parallel motion. The relentless octaves turn into broken chords, moving in a circle-of-fifths harmony with the orchestra in call-and-response. Ex. 3-6 shows a simplified harmonic analysis of the passage from m. 244 to m. 255, after which the same transitional material from the first movement is recalled.

The image displays a harmonic analysis of a passage from Brahms's Piano Concerto in D minor, I., measures 244-255. It consists of two staves of music. The first staff shows the following chord symbols above the notes: B, a, d, G⁷, Cmaj⁷, Fmaj⁷, Bhalf-dim⁷, e⁷. The second staff shows: a⁷, d⁷, g#half-dim⁷, followed by a series of broken chords in a circle-of-fifths progression, indicated by horizontal lines connecting the notes across measures.

Example 3-6: Harmonic analysis of Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 244-255

At the key change in m. 278, the piano introduces a melody that suggests a “Hungarian Rhapsody.” The writing is not overtly virtuosic, but the imitative writing in octaves requires advanced technical abilities.

The recapitulation begins with a strong V-I resolution; the piano and orchestra land on unison octave D's, much like the opening of the movement. Once again, the key area is alluded to but not supported or confirmed — the third of the tonic chord is missing at m. 310. Mirroring the exposition, the first subject is not in D minor — the piano has a third-inversion E-minor seventh chord over a third-inversion G-sharp diminished chord and a D pedal tone.

The return of the second subject is initially only given to the orchestra. In contrast to the exposition, the theme is now *fortissimo*, gradually decreasing in volume and relaxing in tempo. Brahms transplants the writing of the “Hungarian Rhapsody” into the coda, in D minor. It first appears quietly in the piano part, growing agitated and louder, and is joined by the orchestra for a triumphant ending in the tonic key.

Movement II: *Adagio*

Section	Theme/Features	Measures
A	D major <i>Adagio</i> Chorale-like, homophonic texture	1-36
B	B minor Syncopation	37-58
A	D major	58-94
Coda	D major Solo cadenza	95-103

Table 3-2: Formal scheme, Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., *Adagio*

After the drama and turmoil of the first movement, Brahms uses the second movement as a vehicle to shift moods. The second movement is smaller-scale in length and orchestration — the horn section is reduced to two players and the trumpets do not play in this movement. The movement is hymn-like, spiritual, and reflective.

The second movement is described as a "gentle portrait of Clara Schumann."⁵⁴ It is in D major, parallel to the opening movement, and shares the uncommon (for Brahms's time) time

⁵⁴ Bozarth and Frisch, "Brahms, Johannes," *Grove Music Online*, 2001. Accessed 12 Nov, 2020. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051879>.

signature of six-four. It is in ABA ternary form with a short cadenza — there was no cadenza in the first movement.

The A section, mm. 1-36, begins with an orchestral introduction (Ex. 3-7). This entrance is scored for upper strings with mute, woodwinds, and horn; the instruments move in stately quarter notes to create a homophonic texture.

The image shows a musical score for the second movement of Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor. The score is for the piano part, marked 'II' at the beginning. The tempo is 'Adagio', the dynamics are 'Tutti' and 'espress.'. The key signature is D minor (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The score consists of two systems of music. The first system shows the piano solo entrance with a steady quarter-note rhythm in the bass and a melodic line in the treble. The second system continues the same texture. The score is marked with 'II' at the beginning and end of the system, and a double bar line with repeat dots at the end of the second system.

Example 3-7: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 1-10

The piano solo entrance continues the steady quarter-note rhythm underneath a melodic line full of suspensions. The suspensions and resolutions contribute to a sense of seeking a higher spiritual truth and peace (Ex. 3-8). The unaccompanied solo line descends slowly over two measures before rising rapidly over two beats in m. 16. This gives the feeling of hope during the search for inner peace.

The image shows a musical score for Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, II., measures 11-18. The score is in D minor and 2/1 time. It features two piano parts (I and II) and a soloist part. The soloist part begins at m. 11 with a 'Solo' marking and 'p molto dolce espress.' dynamics. The piano parts are marked 'Text' and 'Tutti'. The score includes various musical notations such as 'descending melodic line', 'suspensions', 'cresc.', and 'dim.'. There are blue arrows pointing to specific notes in the soloist part and grey shaded areas highlighting certain passages.

Example 3-8: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 11-18

At m. 27, the music borrows the broken-chord transition idea from the first movement (Ex. 3-9 and 3-10). The theme in the soloist's entrance is not easily recognized at first; the once-sparse musical material is now filled in with decorative broken octaves, polyrhythm, and a winding descending chromatic line.

Example 3-9: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 27-29

Example 3-10: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 26-28

The B section, mm. 37-58, is in the relative minor of B minor. This theme is presented only by the soloist. The rise and fall of the melodic contour suggest an action of reaching upwards, though with an increased sense of urgency due to the chromaticism and syncopation (Ex. 3-11).

Example 3-11: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 36-38

The theme dissolves into pure harmonic function — a string of arpeggios — as the orchestra enters with a counter-melody at the end of m. 44 (Ex. 3-12). The piano continues in its supporting role in a call-and-response with the orchestra.

Example 3-12: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 42- 46

The A theme returns at m. 71 with renewed fervor. It retains the syncopation and greater rhythmic activity of the B theme. After the transition using the borrowed theme, a short cadenza is presented by the soloist (Ex. 3-13). It is the first cadenza in the concerto thus far. The pianist passes a written-out trill-and-arpeggio combination and a trill between the hands to create a

seamless yet improvisatory sonority. The hands meet on a synchronized trill followed by descending fauxbourdon chords, an outline of the opening theme. An extended trill over an A pedal tone brings the orchestra in for the closing of the movement.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the second piano part of Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, II., measures 95-97. The first system (mm. 95-96) is marked *pp* and *Cadenza ad lib.*, showing a trill in the right hand and descending fauxbourdon chords in the left hand. The second system (mm. 96-97) shows the hands meeting on a synchronized trill, followed by descending fauxbourdon chords. The third system (mm. 97-98) is marked *molto Adagio* and features a 'pedal tone' in the bass and an 'opening theme' in the treble. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *p*, and *espress.*, and performance instructions like *Tutti* and *dim.*.

Example 3-13: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 95-97

Movement III: Rondo — *Allegro non troppo*

Section	Theme/Features	Measures
A	D minor (i) <i>Allegro non troppo</i>	1-45
	Transition	45-65
B	F major (III)	66-97
	Transition	98-143
A²	D minor (i)	144-180
C	B-flat major (VI)	181-237
	Transition	238-274
	Tutti-only Fugato	
	Transition Piano and orchestra	275-296
A³	D minor (i)	297-327
	Transition	328-347
B²	D minor (i)	348-358
	Transition to <i>Cadenza quasi Fantasia</i> D minor	359-375
	Transition to coda	376-441
Coda	D major (I) <i>Meno mosso</i>	442-536

Table 3-3: Formal scheme, Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., Rondo — *Allegro non troppo*

Section	Key area
A	C minor (i)
B	E-flat major (III)
A	C minor (i)
C	A-flat major (VI)
A	C minor (i)
B	C major (I) Cadenza
Coda	C major (I)

Table 3-4: Formal scheme, Beethoven, *Piano Concerto No. 3*, III., Rondo — Allegro

The orchestra returns to full strength in the third movement; the brass section had been reduced for the second movement. The rondo theme is, like Beethoven's, in the tonic — here, D minor. The movement opens with the rondo (A) theme in the piano, a spirited and unaccompanied solo (Ex. 3-14).

The image shows a musical score for the beginning of the Rondo in Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, III. The score is in 4/4 time and features a piano solo. The tempo is marked 'Allegro non troppo' and the performance style is 'Solo'. The key signature is D minor (i). The score includes markings for 'non-legato LH' and 'Solo'. A blue bracket above the first system indicates the Rondo theme. A blue bracket below the second system indicates the first section (A). The key signature changes to A major (V) in the second system. The score is labeled 'Rondo III' and 'Allegro non troppo Solo'.

Example 3-14: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 1-8

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, specifically measures 157-158. The score is written for piano (I) and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The tempo is marked 'Poco più moderato' and the dynamics are 'espress.' and 'p legato'. The melodic contour of the theme is highlighted with green circles in the first four notes of the first phrase. The score shows a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The first phrase is four measures long, ending in the dominant key of A major. The second phrase is also four measures long, responding to the first phrase and ending in the tonic key of D minor.

Example 3-15: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 157-158

The melodic contour of the theme begins with the same four notes as the third subject of the first movement (Ex. 3-15). The melody is eight measures long in period structure — two smaller phrases of four. The first phrase seems to ask a question, ending in the dominant key of A major; the second phrase responds, and the orchestra enters in the tonic key at its closing.

The B theme is in the relative major, F major (Ex. 3-16). In contrast to the rondo theme, the melody is lyrical, but the non-*legato* articulation continues in the left hand. The accompaniment is sparse, just *pizzicato* quarter notes in the cello section. It begins with a four-measure phrase that ends in C major, then continues in phrases of eight measures. The phrase ending functions as the beginning of the next phrase—phrase elision — and the whole passage from mm. 70-98 sounds improvisatory. The piano hands off to the orchestra in C major (V/III). At the next entrance in the transition, the piano has an improvisatory passage full of chromatic scales and arpeggios that lead back into the first return of the rondo theme.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, III., mm. 66-73. The first system (mm. 66-70) has a piano part (I) with a melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The piano part is marked 'espress' and 'mf sempre cresc.'. The left hand is marked 'F major (V)' and 'C major (V/III)'. The second system (mm. 70-73) has a piano part (I) with a melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The piano part is marked 'cresc.' and 'pizzicato'. The left hand is marked 'p'.

Example 3-16: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 66-73

The C theme begins in B-flat major, the submediant key. Unlike the previous two themes, the orchestra introduces the C theme (Ex. 3-17). The other big contrast is the *legato* articulation in the piano. The two previous themes have a non-*legato* left hand but this new C theme is *legato* in both hands while the strings maintain the *pizzicato* articulation. The gently lilting melody —eight measures long— is syncopated. On the second phrase at m. 197, the melody is no longer syncopated, but still on the "weaker" beat of the measure.

The image shows a musical score for Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, III., measures 181-195. The score is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a 'Solo' section for the first horn (I) starting at measure 181. The piano accompaniment (II) is marked 'espress.' and includes a section of 'legato and syncopation in both hands' starting at measure 189. The piano part ends with a 'pizzicato' section marked 'p'.

Example 3-17: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 181-195

When the orchestra takes over, the piano accompanies with chromatic two-note slurs that eventually become trills. At the end of this passagework, the orchestra has a fugato section, showing off Brahms's contrapuntal writing. There is a false return of the rondo theme in the piano at m. 275, but in the "wrong" key of F major over a pedal tone on F. The accompaniment pattern is also different (Ex. 3-18). The real rondo theme returns in the tonic key in the tutti at m. 297 (Ex. 3-19).

Solo
 false return of melody
 I *p* F major
 275 "wrong" accompaniment figure
 II *pp*
 F pedal tone

Example 3-18: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 275-279

I *ff*
 297 rondo theme
 II *sf*
 D minor(i)

Example 3-19: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 297-299

The B theme comes back at m. 348 in D minor. It is louder, marked *forte* and *con passione* — “with passion” (Ex. 3-20). This passion continues through the octaves of the transition to the

cadenza. The *Cadenza quasi Fantasia* (Ex. 3-21) sounds improvisatory, as suggested by the term "fantasia".

Solo
con passione

I

348

f

cresc.

II

mf

D minor

Example 3-20: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 348-351

Solo
Cadenza quasi Fantasia

I

376

f

Example 3-21: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 376-378

The coda (Ex. 3-22), like Beethoven's rondo movement, is in the parallel major key and its melody is reminiscent of the C theme. The orchestra has most of the melodic material while the piano part is a display of technical prowess. A fragment of the rondo theme is recalled at m. 442 and the left-hand accompaniment of the rondo theme is recalled in D major later at *Più animato* – m. 463 (Ex. 3-23).

Meno mosso
Tutti

I

II

442

Meno mosso
p dolce

Example 3-22: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 442-446

Più animato

I

II

463

Più animato
f
cresc.

Example 3-23: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 463-467

Surprisingly, Brahms adds a second cadenza to the movement near the end of the concerto; there was no cadenza in the first movement. At the end of the cadenza, the orchestra re-enters and closes the movement in a tonic-dominant prolongation together with the piano, ending in D major.

Conclusion

Brahms's First Piano Concerto is an understated piece compared to other concertos written during the Romantic era. However, it is no less virtuosic, although this may not be immediately obvious to the audience. Instead of writing a cadenza in the first movement, Brahms chose to weave the virtuosic writing into the thematic material and structure.

The lack of cadenza does not come as a surprise when we recall Brahms's introverted nature and subtle performance style. I argue that the emotional demand and sensitivity also contribute to the virtuosity of the First Piano Concerto. In this concerto, the virtuosic display is not the goal. It is the result of combining technicality and sensitivity.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Performance Guide to Brahms's First Piano Concerto

Movement I: *Maestoso*

The piano enters in m. 91 with the second subject. This secondary theme is ten measures long in two asymmetrical phrases; its first phrase consists of four measures and the second is six measures long. Each measure of the first phrase, mm. 91-94, is written in two big beats with agogic accents falling on the first beat (Ex. 4-1). This accent pattern changes at the end of the phrase in m. 94, in which the agogic accents occur on beats four and five.

Example 4-1: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 91-96

Bring out the unusual phrase length at mm. 94-101 by continuing through measure lines —especially at mm. 97-99. The melodic line will also flow naturally if downbeats are played without emphasis. Minimize unnecessary pressing into the keys and think about the direction of the bigger phrase for a smooth melodic line. The mood is wistful —play with feelings of regret.

Melody and harmony should be treated with equal importance. This also applies to the voicing within the chords of the right hand. Despite the *piano* dynamic, arm weight should be used for a full-bodied tone and both hands should prioritize lateral motion over vertical motion in the wrists and forearms — remove all pressure and tension from the wrists immediately after a chord. Play chords from the keys, not from above the keys, for a warmer and rounder tone quality. To execute the leaps down to the low bass notes, the left hand should maintain an "open position," staying as close to the keys as possible. Additionally, the Leschetizky method of naming the note that one is leaping to can also improve accuracy in the bass (Ex. 4-2).

The lyrical nature of the secondary theme might tempt the soloist to play more freely but the soloist must remember that they are still accompanied and thus cannot use too much rubato, except at the end of phrases and on agogic accents. I suggest 38-42 for the dotted half note, a tempo that range allows space for push-and-pull within the phrase.

The image shows a musical score for Example 4-2, which is a piano concerto in D minor, I., mm. 97-99. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The right hand part is highly complex, featuring a series of chords and melodic lines that are often beamed together. The left hand part is simpler, consisting of a series of notes and chords, including a prominent dotted half note. A green circle highlights the low bass note in the left hand at the end of the phrase, which is the note that the text refers to as the note one is leaping to.

Example 4-2: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 97-99

When the chords widen to the octave in m. 98, release the note in the thumb slightly earlier while the body moves to the right to center bodyweight behind the arm. This movement

of the body improves accuracy and sound quality. I use the fifth finger for all the top notes of octave-wide chords in the treble clef due to my hand size and dexterity but a 5-4 finger combination is also possible. However, regardless of fingering this passage is best executed with a minimal bounce of the forearm — employ a sliding motion where possible. Avoid an early *diminuendo* as the melody descends in the latter half of m. 98; the *diminuendo* begins halfway through m. 100. If referencing the Peters (2010) edition, be aware that the note on beat three of m. 98 is a misprint— it should be an F as in the Singer edition (Ex. 4-2).

The mood shifts to one of cautious optimism at m. 101, with the introduction of lighter articulation on the last two eighth notes of the measure. However, it is important to remember that the staccatos should be played lightly but should not be short and clipped. Although the direction of the melody moves towards the downbeat of the next measure, the slurs do not go across the bar line, as if to prevent excessive forward motion.

There is also a curious lack of slurs across the last beat of m. 102, 104, and 106, while m. 101 and 103 have slurs on the last beat (Ex. 4-3). I think that this is explained by the accompaniment pattern. The strings play on the downbeats of m. 102, 104, and 106, which means that the preceding beats must be rhythmically clear for the sake of the ensemble. Musical direction must be created and shown dynamically, rather than with time. The soloist is allowed some rhythmic freedom on measures where the accompaniment is held. Ex. 4-4 shows how I redistribute m. 109.

Example 4-3: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm.100-104

Example 4-4: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., redistribution of m. 109

The trills that begin at m. 110 — the first subject — are challenging to play because of the octaves; the pianist must find a solution that works for their hand and create the sound of octave trills. In Ex. 4-5, I offer one solution that works for hands that can comfortably reach an octave. For clarity, I have notated my method as a measured sixteenth-note trill but keep in mind that the aural effect may be faster and/or unmeasured. Focus instead on creating a smooth trill in the alternating thumbs while using plenty of arm weight for a strong *fortissimo* sound. The result will be a rapid, brilliant trill that is more successful (aurally) and much easier than octave trills.



Example 4-5: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, an alternative to the trill in I., m. 110

Brahms's piano music is often symphonically-inspired; the thick textures and orchestral sonority are even more apparent in a concerto. Therefore, the soloist needs to be aware of the instrumentation, working to match timbres and articulation, especially for musical material in both orchestral and solo parts. One example is at mm. 112-113 — Ex. 4-6 below. The material in these two measures is also played by the strings. Notice that there are staccatos marked over each note, with a slur for the entire measure.



Example 4-6: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 112-113

For stringed instruments, this articulation requires the *portato* bowing. On the piano, this touch is achieved by two motions: playing with downward pressure but lifting hands off the keyboard from the wrists, and adding a light touch of the pedal for each note. As with any octave passage, I redistribute notes to eliminate big leaps where possible, for accuracy.



Example 4-7: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 123-125

The stormy atmosphere subsides into a tranquil mood in the transition to the third subject. The chromatic bass line in mm. 123-128 presents a challenge in pedaling because the half-steps blur into each other (Ex. 4-7). I suggest that the left hand be played with finger legato by physically overlapping fingers, combined with shallow and frequent changes of the pedal. The top voice in the arpeggios that start at m. 142 outlines the transitional theme, while the inner notes fill in the harmony (Ex. 4-8). To execute this passage at the *pianissimo* dynamic the hands should stay open — intervals range from sixths to tenths— and move in an up-and-sideways motion as if wrists are drawing a counter-clockwise circle. The murmurs of the piano give a veiled feeling, like a rain cloud that obscures the sunlight.



Example 4-8: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 142-143

The passage that follows is like a musical image — rays of sunshine shining through on a cloudy day. The trills, which I play as notated, sneak in at a softer dynamic level. Treat the trills melodically, play to the bottom of the keys, and allow the dynamic to grow to a robust *forte* at m. 154. Bear in mind that although the three measures at mm. 154-156 (Ex. 4-9) seem like a cadenza, the performer cannot play too freely when accompanied. The tempo can relax halfway through m. 155, after the *diminuendo*.

Example 4-9: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 154-156

The third subject— also the piano solo — at m. 157 is in the relative major of F major (Ex. 4-10). To me, the *Poco più moderato* tempo indication means that the solo is to be taken at a slightly slower tempo, continuing at the relaxed tempo of the previous measure. Brahms employs imitative writing in the hands, with agogic accents on the half notes of the right hand. The harmony dictates where more emphasis and time can be taken. The unexpected harmonies highlighted in beat four of m. 159 and m. 163 (Ex. 4-10) should be brought out and enjoyed; however, the sentiment should always be sincere and noble, never trivial. Even at the *piano* dynamic, the sound should be deep. Use arm weight to avoid a superficial tone.

Example 4-10: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 157-164

The music changes to a more intimate, reflective character at m. 166. I employ the *una corda* here for a muted tone (Ex. 4-11). Start at a conservative tempo and allow the "horn melody" in the top voice of the right hand to dictate the tempo and dynamics. The accents in the "horn melody" — the interval of a fourth — are agogic. The first note of the fourth is marked *staccato*; play lightly and let the arm weight drop into the key for the second note. Bring out the low bass notes in the left hand and remain in contact with the keys at all times. Unnecessary lifting of the hand is detrimental to accuracy and control of tone.

Dynamics grow as the intervals in the melody widen. Release the left pedal at the *crescendo* in m. 168. After the climactic point at m. 171, the energy subsides, leading back to the orchestral entrance in m. 176. At the *diminuendo* in m. 172, gently relax the tempo. This also lets the pianist listen to the harmonic resolutions. The pianist should be in tempo and internally subdivide to cue the woodwinds on beat six of m. 174.

Use arm weight on accented notes

165
I
p dolce
blend inner notes

168
I
cresc.
U.C.
T.C.

170
I
Climactic point
f
Rea.

Example 4-11: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 165-171

The orchestra has the third subject at m. 182 and the soloist takes on a background role. Part of its supportive role means that the chromatic piano part maintains its softer dynamic level and a steady tempo even when it shifts from duplets to triplets in m. 187. Keep the fingers close to the keys and use finger legato where possible. In this passage, create one gesture per slur by swiveling the wrists to stay behind the fingers and shifting the body so that the arms are never held far from the torso. Maintain an open hand position to accommodate the shifts to different chord spacings. It is even more important to keep the hand open when the intervals become wider than a comfortable reach, as in m. 187.

The double thirds in Ex. 4-12 are technically challenging. Refer to Exercise 2a in Chapter Three for mastery of this passage. Practice a slight over-voicing of the top of the third and release the inner note of the third early for the illusion of *legato*.

One arm gesture per slur

Example 4-12: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 193-194

Play the notes under a slur as one big gesture of the arm for the *crescendo*. Start the gesture a little softer than indicated and lift the arm slightly at the end of the slur as directed for the phrase-off *staccato*. Stay close to the keys and minimize bouncing of the forearms on *staccatos* for improved accuracy. Throughout the double thirds and fourths passage, the pianist should play in *tempo giusto* —strict tempo— until mm. 197-198 when the orchestra fades out.

Play the melody at m. 200 in time, but with the feeling of expansiveness (Ex. 4-13). Create interest using dynamics and balancing the voices. Some *rubato* can be used within the phrase when unaccompanied. For example, the first two measures of the phrase can be played more freely but the end of the phrase at m. 203 must be in time to match the horns. Place the first note of m. 204 by pressing the key down slower with arm weight, allowing the music a breath to change color from F major to F minor. The horns will naturally require some time for the octave leap. Listen to the suspensions and resolutions—something Brahms would ask of students— and play with finger legato.

The image shows a musical score for Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, I, mm. 199-205. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (mm. 199-201) features a Solo violin part with a breath mark and a piano (p) dynamic, and a piano accompaniment with piano (p) and pianissimo (pp) dynamics. The second system (mm. 202-203) features a violin part with a 'più f' dynamic and a piano accompaniment. The third system (mm. 204-205) features a violin part with a 'cresc.' dynamic and a piano accompaniment. Key changes are indicated: F major in the first system and F minor in the third system. Performance instructions include 'Tutti' and 'Solo'.

Example 4-13: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 199-205

Brahms employs arpeggios again at m. 210 (Ex. 4-14). The physical motion required to play this passage remains the same despite the now-ascending arpeggio figure. This small configuration change dramatically changes the mood, conveying a brighter and more hopeful sentiment that will be continued in the development.



Example 4-14: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 210-211

In the development, the consecutive octaves in the piano give the pianist the ability to produce enough sound to compete with the timpani rolls and horn call in the tutti. Brahms uses *hemiola*, grouping the eighth notes in fours — two beats. Play in time as much as possible and in practice and know where the fourth beat falls in the measure. By m. 229, the piano must be in tempo. The Leschetizky method of naming the notes mentally is an excellent practice technique that can be used to improve accuracy in the double octaves (Ex. 4-15).

I also suggest practicing the lower notes of the octaves separately with the desired fingering and vice versa with the top notes; decide whether the thumb or the fifth finger leads the leap. Another helpful practice technique, especially in m. 230, is hearing the chord or interval — in this case, the B-flat major chord. Balance the voicing of the hands just enough so that the left-hand offers support and grounding to the right.

Example 4-15: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 226-233

Play the eighth notes of the circle-of-fifths progression starting at m. 245, (Ex. 4-16) with firm fingertips and do not hold any notes. However, even with staccato marks, let the shifting chord positions dictate the length of the note because intentionally using a quicker strike of the key creates tension. The hands stay in an open position during shifts, moving to the next position as quickly as possible; utilize all opportunities to relax between octaves.



Example 4-16: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 245-247

The key signature changes — two sharps — and with the prevalence of the F-sharp major and B minor chords, it is safe to assume we are in the key of B minor although the tonal center remains unstable. In the “Hungarian Rhapsody” section, observe accents as they are anchor notes to the hands in this imitative writing. Redistribute the octaves between the hands if possible to reduce the distance between jumps and for a small respite from the technically-challenging writing (Ex. 4-17).



Example 4-17: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., redistribution of mm. 280-281

Use arm weight to produce a rounded, warm sound for the chords. Release the notes instead of attempting to play short staccatos; the sound effect will translate to short notes in tempo.

The *leggiero* direction at m. 287 (Ex. 4-18) instructs the pianist to use a shallow touch and play on the surface of the keys. Play lightly, removing all arm weight for this cross-hand scherzando passage, and use one gesture for the ascending octaves. The piano functions as an

accompaniment to the orchestra in this ten-measure phrase; there are two smaller phrases of four measures each, followed by two measures of prolongation of A major.

Example 4-18: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 287-288

Example 4-19: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 345-349

The piano responds to the return of the second subject with chromatic triplets (Ex. 4-19), establishing a strange mood that reflects the instability of the key areas. Play the triplets with plenty of finger legato — I also use the *una corda* on the first iteration at mm. 345-347. The second subject moves from D minor to E minor, and finally to F-sharp minor in the piano at m. 355; begin softly to show that this key area comes as a surprise, especially in the recapitulation.

The third subject, again marked *poco più moderato*, is set in D major at m. 381. Similar to the exposition, this theme is first presented as a piano solo. The lower register, resulting from the new key, adds warmth and depth to the sound. The character of this melody is dignified and never superficial. The technique for this section remains the same as it was in the exposition.

The coda, Tempo I, at m. 444 reverts back to D minor (Ex. 4-20). The piano recalls the Hungarian rhapsody theme from the development, starting softly and quickly growing in force at *piu agitato*. Push the tempo a little when unaccompanied and use arm weight on accented notes, holding notes for their full rhythmic value.

Example 4-20: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 444-450

Thunderous double octaves and cascading arpeggios are employed to match the volume of the orchestra in a final prolongation and confirmation of the tonic chord (Ex. 4-21). Bring out the accents in the arpeggios starting at m. 474. These accents mark the interval of a fourth, used in the horn melody and piano solo in the first movement. The interval of a fourth is also used in the second and third movements and unifies the work.

The image shows a musical score for Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, I, mm. 474-475. The score is in D minor and 2/4 time. It features two piano parts, I and II. Part I is marked 'ff' and consists of a melodic line with slurs and accents. Part II is marked 'mf' and consists of a harmonic accompaniment with slurs and accents. The score is numbered 474 at the beginning of the second system.

Example 4-21: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, I., mm. 474-475

Movement II: *Adagio*

The challenge of the A theme is creating a smooth, continuous phrase. Lean on the agogic accents and listen to the suspensions and resolutions highlighted in Ex. 4-22. Because there are so many suspensions in succession, the pianist should vary the resolutions using different dynamics nuances. I create an overall decrescendo with the chain of suspensions so that there is heightened contrast when the dynamics grow. Use finger legato and frequent pedal changes for clarity. Although this theme begins softly, play with arm weight for a rich tone.

Example 4-22: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 11-18

When the melody sweeps upwards quickly in m. 16, move towards the high G — keep the body free to move and keep the arms close to the torso. Choose dynamics over rubato to show expressiveness, especially when accompanied, such as in m. 24. A small slowdown to accommodate the end of the phrase at m. 26 can be taken, but remember to give a cue for the downbeat of m. 27.

The transition borrows the broken-chord idea from the transition of the first movement. the piano elaborates on this simple broken chord idea using polyrhythms (Ex. 4-23). The top voice in the treble clef is highly chromatic, slowly descending an octave. Keep both hands open;

the leaps in the left-hand range from an octave to over two octaves. Play these solos more or less in time until m. 35, because too much rubato will skew the polyrhythm. The rhythmic interest has already been composed in the music.

The image shows a musical score for Example 4-23, Brahms Piano Concerto in D minor, II., mm. 29-30. The score is in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The right hand (RH) features a solo with a melody that moves down an octave, marked with a blue arc. The left hand (LH) plays a 2 against 3 polyrhythm, marked 'dolce legato' and 'open hand'. A red circle highlights the first measure of the solo. A green circle highlights a large interval of a 17th in the LH. The score is marked with a 'I' in the left margin.

Example 4-23: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 29-30

In the B theme (Ex. 4-24), maintain a steady rhythm and tempo — the syncopations naturally suggest a forward motion. Create legato octaves of the left hand, especially in mm. 39-40, to feel the tension between chromatic intervals. Use finger substitution where necessary by switching fingers while the lower note of the octave remains pressed down.

The image shows a musical score for Example 4-24, Brahms Piano Concerto in D minor, II., mm. 36-41. The score is in D minor (two flats) and 2/4 time. The right hand (RH) features a solo with a syncopated rhythm, marked 'poco f'. The left hand (LH) plays a syncopated rhythm that gives forward drive, marked 'legato'. A red circle highlights the first measure of the solo. A green circle highlights a large interval of a 17th in the LH. The score is marked with a 'I' in the left margin.

Example 4-24: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 36-41

Listen to the change in color in the chords (highlighted) of the arpeggios starting at m. 44, which are pure accompaniment and harmony (Ex. 4-25). Blend the sounds and use arm weight, playing to the bottom of the key for a rich, warm tone.

The image displays a musical score for Example 4-25, Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, II., mm. 45-46. The score is presented in two systems, I and II. System I shows the right hand (RH) with a blue slur over the first six measures, labeled "blend notes". The RH arpeggios are highlighted in alternating pink and green. The left hand (LH) plays a counter-melody. System II shows the continuation of the counter-melody in both hands.

Example 4-25: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 45-46

The highly chromatic return of the A section calls for more emotional drama. The once-calm melody is now more turbulent with more rhythmical activity. A tinge of bitterness and pain seeps through, and at times the music sounds like it is pleading. The drama continues through the big arpeggio flourishes starting at m. 80 (Ex. 4-26). Treat each arpeggio as one big gesture of the arm, fingers starting on the keys — do not lift.

The image shows a musical score for Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, II., m. 80. The score is in D minor and 2/2 time. It features two piano parts, I and II. Part I has a melodic line with a trill at the end of the phrase. Part II provides harmonic support. Annotations include 'one gesture' and 'propel from the trill'.

Example 4-26: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., m. 80

At the transition at m. 87, all forward motion should cease (Ex. 4-27). The music is floating, suspended in the air. This is physically translated in the way the arms are held far from the torso. I add the *una corda* on the solo at m. 91 to create a covered, distant-sounding sonority and for dynamic contrast within the long phrase.

The image shows a musical score for Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, II., mm. 85-91. The score is in two systems. The first system (mm. 85-88) features a 'Tutti' section with a 'Solo' section starting at m. 86. The right hand (RH) has a 'pp espress.' marking and a 'legato' instruction. The left hand (LH) has a 'pp' marking and a 'legato' instruction. The RH part is marked 'almost 4 octaves wide'. The second system (mm. 89-91) features a 'Tutti' section with a 'Solo' section starting at m. 89. The RH has a 'pp molto espress. e legato' marking and a 'legato' instruction. The LH has a 'pp' marking and a 'legato' instruction. The RH part is marked 'U.C.'.

Example 4-27: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 85-91

The cadenza (Ex. 4-28) should sound seamless though the thirty-second notes and trills are passed between the hands in alternation. I suggest practicing the coordination of the thirty-second notes and the first note of the trill. For the fauxbourdon chords, marked *portato*, play to the bottom of the key by dropping the wrists using arm weight, adding a touch of the damper

pedal. Keep wrists flexible. After dropping wrists downward, release immediately upward and move sideways to the next chord.

The image displays musical notation for the second piano of Brahms's Piano Concerto in D minor, measures 95-97. It is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 95-97) is for piano I, showing a 'Cadenza ad lib.' with 'pp' dynamics and a 'seamless alternation of hands' between the two staves. The second system (measures 95-97) continues for piano I, featuring a 'fauxbourdon' section with a 'tr' (trill) and 'p' dynamics. The third system (measures 95-97) is for piano II, marked 'molto Adagio', with dynamics 'pp', 'p', and 'espress.', and a 'Tutti' section. A shaded area under the piano II part is labeled 'A (dominant) pedal tone'.

Example 4-28: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, II., mm. 95-97

Movement III: Rondo — *Allegro non troppo*

The pianist should introduce the rondo theme (Ex. 4-29) in strict tempo giusto, not allowing the spirited theme to get faster. I suggest a tempo of eighty-eight to ninety-four for the quarter note. Use a firm finger stroke in both hands. The non-*legato* left hand should be detached, not *staccato*, to match the accompaniment. The lower strings have the rondo theme. In the right hand, release downward pressure on the keys immediately after the tones are sounded.

The musical score for Example 4-29 is presented in two systems. The first system shows the right hand (RH) with a melodic line starting with a quarter-note D, followed by a trill, and then slurred sixths. The left hand (LH) has a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system continues the RH melody with a triplet in the eighth measure. Performance instructions include 'strict tempo giusto', 'agogic accent', and 'release staccato from the wrist'.

Example 4-29: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 1-8

Give the quarter-note D in the first measure as an agogic accent, taking time to place the note; treat all the accents in the rondo theme similarly. I treat the trill in m. 1 as a five-note turn, starting on the principal note “E” on the beat. Voice the top note of each sixth, playing lightly on the staccatos, throwing the wrist —I use the word “throw” with caution. The “throwing” movement should be small and close to the keys. For the slurred sixths, release the keys with the wrist. Refer to Exercise 4 to practice double sixths.

Pass the thematic material to the orchestra by playing the sixteenth-note triplet in m. 8 in strict time. The piano doubles the accompaniment pattern in the right hand (Ex. 4-30). When the

hands are doubled, play the right hand slightly louder. The aural effect will have better clarity and projection.

Example 4-30: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 9-12

Give the accented E in m. 18 (Ex. 4-31) strong emphasis so that there is more dynamic contrast with the three E's in the measures following. Make sure that the E in m. 19 is not accented; there is an opportunity for a change of color on the third E — m. 20. A softer tone color can be achieved by pressing the key down slower using a flatter finger and more of the fingerpad; the *una corda* can also be used.

Example 4-31: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 17-20

At the transition in m. 46, avoid emphasizing the downbeat to give this passage an anchorless, floating feeling (Ex. 4-32). Slide from one octave to another where possible so there are no audible gaps between octaves. Take every opportunity to give the changing notes in the treble different shades of color.

Example 4-32: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 46-50

The clear beats return with the introduction of the B theme (Ex. 4-33). The first phrase — mm. 66-69 — should be played with very little rubato, if any. Direct the phrase toward the suspension and resolution in the fourth measure. Support the warm melody with the bass. The first sixteenth of each quarter-note beat should be played lightly, imitating *pizzicato* strings. The long phrase that begins at m. 70, where the accompaniment comes in, should be played with no rubato. Play through the bar lines for the phrase, listening to the sound between notes and matching dynamics to the decay of sound.

little rubato
espress.
mf sempre cresc.
66
like pizzicato
no rubato
cresc.
70
play through measure lines
p

Example 4-33: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 66-73

The next piano entrance at m. 122 seems like a cadenza, with its rapid descending chromatic scales and arpeggios (Ex. 4-34). However, the pianist should play these triplets and sextuplets evenly in time. Refer to Exercise 25c of the 51 Exercises for practice methods. Give the downbeat of m. 128 a small accent and follow the melodic contour of the arpeggios for dynamics. Crescendo dramatically in the two measures before the return of the A theme, placing the downbeat of m. 144.

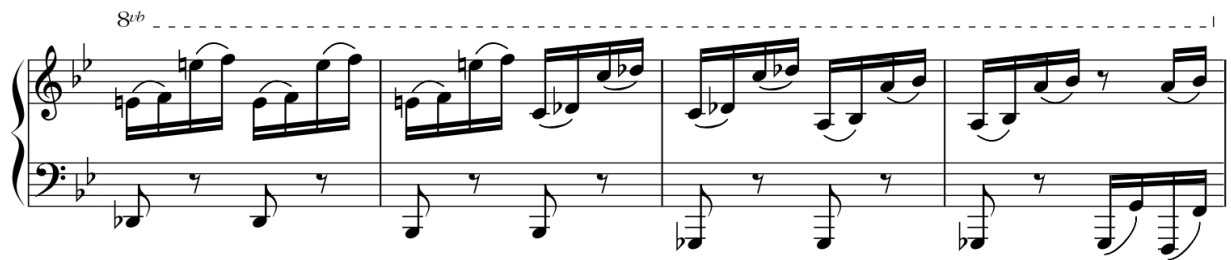
Example 4-34: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 122-128

After the orchestra introduces the C theme at m. 181. The piano picks up and continues the melody seamlessly at the last measure of the second phrase (Ex. 4-35). Blend the sound of the piano with the orchestra by imitating the string timbre. Due to the syncopated rhythm of the C theme, play strictly in time. When the accompaniment drops out after m. 196, the piano part can be played a little more freely if desired. Use finger-legato to play the notes in the right hand. Hold the bass notes as long as possible, with small pedal changes in mm. 197-198 as it is

physically impossible to hold the octave F (Ex. 4-35). Hold the tied quarter-note octaves that follow but change pedal with every quarter beat because of the moving inner treble voice.

Example 4-35: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 189-202

Example 4-36: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 203-208



Example 4-37: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., redistribution of mm. 206-209

Ex. 4-37 shows how I redistribute the left hand in mm. 206-209 (see Ex. 4-36 for “original” notation). Use a light touch and play in tempo, accompanying and providing a rhythmic pulse. The two-note slurs become a trill — I play this as a measured trill— while the left hand and the orchestra playfully interact in call-and-response (Ex. 4-38). Change fingering for each trill so as not to become fatigued; possible finger combinations are 1-3, 2-3, 2-4, and 3-5.



Example 4-38: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 209-214

The passagework following the trills cease calls for a marked tone produced by a firm stroke of the finger. Play softly with no bouncing of the arm (Ex. 4-39). When the left hand enters at m. 226, the two-note slurs that become one slur per measure. Play the measure as one big ascending gesture, peaking at m. 231. Fade away with the *perdendosi* direction at m. 236.

one gesture per slur

I

II

227

ped. *

I

II

232

perdendosi

fade away

mp

Example 4-39: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 227-237

After the fugato, the piano has a false entrance of the rondo theme. Play *piano* as marked, but with the same, scherzo-like character of the rondo; use a *leggiero* touch to imitate the sparkling, delicate timbre of a flute (Ex. 4-40).



Example 4-40: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 275-279

Build intensity with the long *crescendo* and tremolos, bringing out every accent in the alternating thirty-second note groups at mm. 287-291 (Ex. 4-41). The Peters (2010) edition misprints mm. 290- 296 as piano reduction (II).



Example 4-41: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 287-289

When the piano is finally given the rondo melody at m. 324, the pianist might be tempted to play heavily because of the *fortissimo* dynamic. However, I suggest the exact opposite for speed and accuracy since the thick chords and octave texture already produces more sound.

For the *Cadenza quasi Fantasia*, imagine three "starting points" in m. 376, m. 379 and m. 382 (Ex. 4-42), as if trying out new improvisation. Restart at a lesser dynamic level and tempo for the first two iterations. Hold the supporting bass notes for their full duration.

Solo
Cadenza quasi Fantasia

376
I
f

379
I

382
I
legato *sempre f*

Example 4-42: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 376-385

390
I
dim.

6 8

Example 4-43: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 390-393

Show the rhythmic relationship of the sextuplets and the thirty-second notes at m. 392 (Ex. 4-43), taking no liberties with the rhythm until it dissolves into an unmeasured trill. While the right-hand trills, the left hand can play more freely. The pianist is afforded a small *ritardando* going into m. 410 (Ex. 4-44) but there is no need for much *rubato* since the

expanding rhythms have already been composed by Brahms. The pianist should breathe before placing the downbeat of m. 410.

Example 4-44: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 404-409

The thirty-second note figures that start at m. 418, set off the beat, embellish the melody of the coda. Give the downbeat a small accent as these match with the orchestra (Ex. 4-45). As long as the downbeats line up, the figure can be thought of as an unmeasured arpeggio gesture. The alternating-hand phrase at mm. 422-426 uses the same technique as the cross-hand passage in the first movement. Lean the torso to shift the body weight toward the higher register of the piano, moving back toward the center of the keyboard as the notes descend.

Example 4-45: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 418-423

I recommend starting the *Meno mosso* at m. 441 at a metronome mark of 78 to 82 for the quarter note. Since the sixths are doubled in both hands at Ex. 4-46, voice the top notes and the right hand a little more. Do not bounce the arm vertically on *staccatos*. Instead, use a gentle release as the hand moves laterally. Avoid any forward motion because of the trills and fast scales that follow. I play the trill as unmeasured and the thirty-second notes as a turn; playing the first two notes of the trill almost simultaneously will give the illusion that it is faster.

The image shows a musical score for Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, III., measures 447-454. The score is written for two systems of staves. The first system (mm. 447-450) is marked 'Solo' and 'p dolce'. The second system (mm. 451-454) includes trills, triplets, and a 'dim.' marking. The right hand (I) and left hand (II) are clearly delineated.

Example 4-46: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 447-454

To practice the scales at m. 459, divide the right-hand figure into two smaller groups — for each eighth note— with the left hand (Ex. 4-47). Remove these groups in performance for continuous ascending and descending scales. Accuracy in the left hand can be improved by noticing that each sixteenth note falls on an A or octave A, mentally reciting the pitch name before leaps.

Example 4-47: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 459-462

At the *Più animato*, keep fingers firm and curved for the articulation of the right hand. This sixteenth-note accompaniment set in the parallel major (D major) should be rhythmic and perfectly even (Ex. 4-48).

Example 4-48: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 463-467

The final cadenza emphasizes the dominant key area, A major (Ex. 4-49). Like the *Cadenza quasi Fantasia, rubato* can be used at the beginning of arpeggios in mm. 499-502. I suggest that the pianist take some time before the change of harmony.

The image shows a musical score for Example 4-49, Brahms' Piano Concerto in D minor, III., mm. 496-509. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (mm. 496-502) shows the right hand (I) playing a cadenza with 'Cadenza ad lib.' and 'accel.' markings, and the left hand (II) playing chords. The second system (mm. 503-509) shows the right hand (I) playing a trill with 'slide between chords' marking, and the left hand (I) playing arpeggios. Blue annotations highlight specific passages in the right hand.

Example 4-49: Brahms, *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 496-509

Hold the chords in the right hand for as long as possible, sliding to the next chord to avoid gaps in the sound. Sweep upwards in one single gesture at m. 517. This gesture does not need to be strictly rhythmic provided a clear downbeat is given at the start of the trill at Tempo I (Ex. 4-50). I trill only the upper note of the trill and suggest redistributing notes in the di-chords if it means that the distance between leaps decreases. Smaller leaps may improve accuracy.

Tempo I

518 give clear downbeat

Tempo I

526 Trill chord and upper note

Example 4-50: *Piano Concerto in D minor*, III., mm. 518- 529

Conclusion

Throughout this performance guide, I have shown numerous examples of the way Brahms creates orchestral colors on the keyboard. These examples include string techniques such as *portato*, *pizzicato*, and the horn sonority.

The assimilation of the piano into the orchestra makes Brahms's concerto different from other composers' works. Rather than highlighting the piano as a solo instrument, he exploits the sound capabilities of the piano and makes the orchestra an equal partner in this symphonic concerto.

CONCLUSION

Brahms's piano music requires the pianist to use a variety of touches and colors. The pianist is even required to imitate orchestral sonorities. Brahms encountered many different pianos in his lifetime, including the Erard piano, which had an action that is very similar to the modern piano. The pianist must adjust their touch and pedaling for the modern instrument; they should also prioritize the production of a singing tone and variation of color and sonorities. Arm weight is always required to produce a warm, lyrical tone except where marked *leggiero*. Additionally, although Brahms looked to composers from previous eras for inspiration while continuing to compose in the same forms as Bach and Beethoven, his sound-world and its resulting touches belong to a late nineteenth-century aesthetic.

The 51 Exercises, WoO 6 are invaluable to a pianist studying Brahms's music. While it is not completely necessary to study the exercises before the First Piano Concerto in D minor, the exercises are a great resource in the development of the pianist's internal rhythm. The pianist's ability to feel the subdivisions of the beat or meter — internal rhythm — is very important for rhythmic accuracy, especially because Brahms often uses polyrhythms, cross-rhythms, and *hemiola* in his piano works. The 51 Exercises also help to develop touch, sonorities, and technique.

The 51 Exercises, WoO 6 prepares the pianist, technically and musically, for the study of the First Piano Concerto in D minor. In addition, the exercises may reduce the learning curve for the concerto; they are also applicable to all of Brahms's compositions for piano. When studying the concerto, the pianist becomes aware of its symphonic character. The concerto's symphonic character and the "Brahms sonority" — a full-bodied sonority — can be produced by using body and arm weight, which also helps to prevent injury at the piano.

Lastly, I never thought that I would play this piano concerto until later in life because the music requires a high level of emotional maturity. I hope that my performance guide will help and encourage others to play Brahms's First Piano Concerto.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books/Chapters

- Anderson, Richard Paul. *The Pianist's Craft: Mastering the Works of Great Composers*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011. Accessed November 15, 2020. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Bozarth, George S., and Stephen H. Brady. "The Pianos of Johannes Brahms." In *Brahms and His World*, edited by Walter Frisch, 87-110. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Brée, Malwine. *The Leschetizky Method: A Guide to Fine and Correct Piano Playing*. New York: Dover, 1997.
- Gerig, Reginald R. *Famous Pianists & Their Technique*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.
- Gordon, Stewart. *A History of Keyboard Literature: Music for the Piano and Its Forerunners*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996.
- Hamilton, Katy and Natasha Loges. *Brahms in the Home and the Concert Hall: Between Private and Public Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Jenner, Gustav. "Johannes Brahms as Man, Teacher and Artist." In *Brahms and His World*, edited by Walter Frisch and Kevin C. Karnes, translated by Susan Gillespie and Elisabeth Kaestner, 395-436. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Loges, Natasha and Katy Hamilton. *Brahms in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- May, Florence. *The Life of Johannes Brahms*. Volume 1. London: Edward Arnold, 1905.
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/40643/40643-h/40643-h.htm>
- Musgrave, Michael. *A Brahms Reader*. Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000.
- — — *The Cambridge Companion to Brahms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Bernard D. Sherman. "How different was Brahms's playing style from our own?" In *Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performance Style*, edited by Michael Musgrave and Bernard D. Sherman, 1-10. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Schumann, Eugenie. *The Schumanns and Johannes Brahms: The Memoirs of Eugenie Schumann*. New York: The Dial Press, 1927.

Wolff, Konrad. *Masters of the Keyboard: Individual Style Elements in the Piano Music of Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, and Brahms*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

— — — *Schnabel's Interpretation of Piano Music*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.

Musical Scores

Beethoven, Ludwig van. *Piano Concerto No. 3 in C minor, Op. 37*. Edited by Adolf Ruthardt. Leipzig: C.F. Peters, 1895.

Brahms, Johannes. *51 Exercises, WoO 6*. Edited by . Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1927.

— — — *51 Exercises for Piano*. Edited by Camilla Cai. Munich: G. Henle, 2007.

— — — *Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15*. Edited by Paul Badura-Skoda and Johannes Gerdes. Leipzig: C.F. Peters, 2010.

— — — *Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15*. Edited by Hans Gál. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1927.

— — — *Piano Concerto No. 1 in D minor, Op. 15*. Edited by Otto Singer. Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1927.

— — — *Piano Quintet in f minor, Op. 34*. Edited by Carmen Debryn and Michael Struck. Munich: G. Henle, 2001.

Journal Articles

Arnone, Augustus. "The Aesthetics of Textural Ambiguity: Brahms and the Changing Piano." *Current Musicology*, 2006, 7-32.

Bozarth, George S., and Walter Frisch. "Brahms, Johannes." *Grove Music Online*, 2001. Accessed 12 Nov, 2020.
<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000051879>.

Cai, Camilla. "Brahms's Pianos and the Performance of His Late Works." *Performance Practice Review* Vol. 2: No. 1 (1989): 58-72. <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol2/iss1/3>

Drabkin, William. "Marxsen, Eduard." *Grove Music Online*, 2001. Accessed 10 Aug, 2022.
<https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000017959>.

Hutchings, Arthur, et al. "Concerto." *Grove Music Online*, 2001. Accessed 27 Dec. 2022.
<https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.libproxy.uoregon.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040737>.

Ota, Mineo. "Bartók's Wrists and 19th- Century Performance Practice: An Essay on the Historicity of Piano Technique." *Studia Musicologica* 53, no. 1/3 (2012): 161-70. Accessed October 8, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23488449>.

Purswell, Joan. "Johannes Brahms: Pianist and Pedagogue." *The American Music Teacher* 33, no. 5 (1984): 14-16.

Ripin, Edwin M., et al. "Pianoforte." *Grove Music Online*, 2001. Accessed 12 Nov, 2020.
<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000021631>.

Wachter, Claire. "The Unique Piano Teaching of Johannes Brahms." Presentation at the MTNA National Conference, Dallas, TX, 1997.

Dissertations/Thesis

Au, Hang-Fong. "Johannes Brahms' '51 Übungen Für Das Pianoforte': An Analytical Study of Pianistic Techniques in Brahms' Pedagogical Piano Literature." D.M.A. Diss., Univ. of Houston, 2003.

DiClemente, Ann Riesbeck. "Brahms Performance Practice in a New Context: The Bruce Hungerford Recorded Lessons with Carl Friedberg." PhD Diss., University of Maryland, 2009.

Jamison, Roger W. "Johannes Brahms as a Pianist and Teacher." M.A. Thesis, Ohio State University, 1961.

Livshits, Mark. "The First Piano Concerto of Johannes Brahms: Its History and Performance Practice." D.M.A. Diss., Temple University, 2017.

Vallis, Richard. "A Study of Late Baroque Instrumental Style in the Piano Concertos of Brahms." PhD Diss., New York University, 1978.