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At the Intersection of Public and Private Musical Life: Brahms's Op. 51 String Quartets[1]

Marie Sumner Lott (Georgia State University)

ABSTRACT:

Brahms's dedication of his Op. 51 string quartets (1873) to surgeon Theodor Billroth provides a window into Brahms's music-political views in the 1870s that has heretofore been unexplored by music scholars. Analysis of correspondence, performance traditions, and the scores of these two quartets demonstrates that Brahms chose to align himself and his works with the learned connoisseurs of the domestic chamber-music making tradition, represented by Billroth and his frequent musical soirées. Brahms's music also shows the influence of Joseph Joachim, his oldest and dearest friend and Europe's premiere chamber musician. Brahms's compositional choices in these two works combine public and private musical styles, to offer a touching memorial to earlier composers and friends, and to provide a teachable moment for the musical public.

Keywords: Brahms, string quartet, Billroth, Joachim, A minor, historicism

In 1873 Johannes Brahms published his first set of string quartets, dedicated not to his long-time friend and champion Joseph Joachim, Europe's most famous violinist and quartet leader, but rather to a Viennese surgeon named Theodor Billroth. A while later, he wrote to Joachim in a somewhat apologetic tone:

> I have just heard from Simrock that on Saturday you are playing my A-minor Quartet—in just two words I'd like to say how especially that pleases me. Actually, I didn't mean either of the two for your violin, but waiting for something better eventually seemed useless—you must also have thought something of the sort?[2]

Can we take Brahms seriously when he says he was 'waiting for something better' to dedicate to Joachim, or that he somehow did not intend for Joachim to perform these quartets? Or should we focus more astutely on Brahms's comment that Joachim's performance of the A-minor quartet

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[2] Brahms to Joachim, October 1873, translated by Styra Avins and Josef Eisinger in *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 458.

especially pleased him? In this article, I suggest that Brahms's dedication of his first published quartets to Billroth provides an introductory clue regarding the composer's intended audience for these works, and that it offers us the opportunity to reassess the quartets in the context of Brahms's self-image and what we know of his role in Viennese life during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At the same time, several musical features of the quartets point towards Joachim's integral role in Brahms's conception of these works, especially in the A-minor quartet, which Brahms may have been hinting in his brief note. By reflecting on these quartets and their relationship to previous and contemporaneous developments in the world of string chamber music, we arrive at a new interpretation of them and of the complicated relationship between private and public musical life, not just in terms of Brahms's personal and professional development, but also in terms of the rapid changes occurring in musical culture as the *fin de siècle* approached.

The renowned surgeon Theodor Billroth (1829-1894) was a close friend of Brahms and a skilled amateur musician.[3] He was apparently an accomplished pianist in addition to being an able violinist and violist with a sophisticated knowledge of music history and theory. He hosted evenings of chamber music in his home in Zurich during the 1860s and later in Vienna throughout his adult life, and these private soirées usually included a sampling of Vienna's most respected musicians, including performers, composers, critics, and patrons. Brahms's letter of dedication emphasizes his appreciation of Billroth's participation in these chamber-music evenings and conveys his positive assessment of Billroth's skills as well as the close friendship that had developed between them.

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[3] For a detailed account of Billroth's life, see Karel Absolon, *The Surgeon's Surgeon, Theodor Billroth, 1829-1894*, 4 vols. (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1979-89). For a chronicle of his friendship with Brahms, see Hans Barkan (translator and editor), *Johannes Brahms and Theodor Billroth: Letters from a Musical Friendship* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1957). Barkan's collection includes all the letters originally published by Otto Gottlieb-Billroth in *Billroth und Brahms im Briefwechsel* (Berlin & Vienna: Urban & Schwartzenberg, 1935) with additional letters not available to Gottlieb-Billroth at the time of his publication.

> Dear friend!
>
> I am about to publish my string quartets—not the first, but for the first time.
>
> It is not merely the affectionate thought of you and your friendship that prompts me to put your name at the head of the first one; I just like to think of you, and with such special *plaisir*, as violinist and 'sextet-player.' You would doubtless accept a volume of enormously difficult piano variations more kindly and would find it more befitting your attainments? There's no help for it, you just have to put up with the dedication even with the droll little ulterior motive.[4]

Even more than his activities as a chamber-music connoisseur, though, Billroth's standing as an educated member of upper middle-class society must have struck a chord with Brahms. The surgeon made several technical advances and scientific discoveries in the course of his career, and is sometimes credited with ushering in the modern age of medicine. The dedication, then, was not simply a gesture of kindness from one friend to another. By dedicating the quartets to Billroth, Brahms associated them—these works and the genre itself, not to mention his own personality—with the height of learning and intellectual achievement that Billroth represented. It also signalled Brahms's appreciation of the type of musical setting that Billroth's soirées provided: small, intimate gatherings of intellectually inclined amateur music lovers.

Joachim, on the other hand, was certainly one of the outstanding professional violinists of his day and a famous chamber musician. His performances and organizational activities, whether as soloist, orchestral leader, or chamber-music participant, contributed to the rising prestige of public concerts in the cities where he worked and visited. Like fellow violinist (and Brahms enthusiast) Joseph Hellmesberger, Joachim represented the new public face of chamber-music consumption with performances in larger halls by trained professionals playing before a listening audience, not gatherings in small parlours by middle-class and bourgeois amateur musicians playing for their own pleasure. Joachim's predilection for serious, contemplative readings of musical works set him apart from other violinists of his day, however. One of Joachim's objectives in public concerts was to educate the public about music and musical style by programming works chronologically. For instance, he frequently performed all-Beethoven concerts that contained a work from Op. 18, one from the middle period, such as Op. 59, and a late work, in order to demonstrate the composer's three periods of stylistic development. He also performed and repeated new and unfamiliar works by his friends and mentors to allow audiences multiple opportunities to learn the new style.[5] In Hanover, Berlin, and London, where Joachim held regular quartet evenings and made public concert appearances, the string quartet lived a double-life as private entertainment and public spectacle.

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[4] Letter from Brahms to Billroth, dated by Billroth 'July 1873', as quoted in Avins, *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, 455-6. Except where indicated, italics in quotations throughout this essay are in the original. As Avins explains, Brahms's 'droll little ulterior motive' and use of quotations marks around the words 'sextet-player' make a playful joke at Billroth's expense. Early in their friendship, Billroth planned to perform the second viola part in a private reading of Brahms's G-major string sextet in the presence of the composer. He became so nervous during the first movement that he required a replacement, which amused Brahms greatly. Billroth explained the embarrassing incident in a letter to his friend Prof. Lübke, reproduced in full in Barkan (ed.), *Johannes Brahms and Theodor Billroth*, 6.

Brahms combined public and private musical styles in the quartets of Op. 51, experimenting with a new compositional approach that would become identified with his mature works of the 1870s and beyond. He embraced the connoisseurs of Billroth's circle and those among his own friends with a highly intellectual style built on the models of revered works by previous composers in the Classical and Romantic traditions, but he also addressed the larger circle of Joachim's and Hellmesberger's public audiences. That collision of public and private meanings resulted in works that have had a troubled history to this day. The two string quartets fascinate analysts and composers, whose intricate studies of Brahms's compositional techniques have illuminated the new paths that the composer opened to later generations, notably Arnold Schoenberg. Previous studies of the quartets have generally focused on the works as ground-breaking instances of Brahms's 'absolute' or 'abstract' musical art, frequently divorcing the works from both their contemporaneous performance settings and the lineage of quartet writing to which they clearly respond.[6] Thus, to date, scholars have treated Brahms's quartets and the musical style they represent primarily as the starting point for a new line of modernist developments in motivic and harmonic writing, rather than as a counter-point, even an endpoint, to the previous generation's Romanticism and to their methods of addressing the musical public.

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[5] For more information on Joachim's role in the development of public chamber-music events, see Tully Potter, 'From Chamber to Concert Hall', in *Cambridge Companion to the String Quartet*, ed. Robin Stowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 41-59. Beatrix Borchard has recently suggested that Joachim intended, with his subscription concerts and other activities as director of the Berlin Hochschule für ausübende Tonkunst, to educate the public and promote imperial nation-building by enriching the musical establishment of the capital city. As such, his programming practices differed in significant ways from those of his contemporary Joseph Hellesberger in Vienna. See Borchard, 'Quartettspiel und Kulturpolitik im Berlin der Keiserzeit: Das Joachim-Quartett', in *Der 'männliche' und der 'weibliche' Beethoven*, ed. Cornelia Bartsch et al. (Bonn: Verlag Beethoven-Haus, 2003), 369-98.

The quartets, meanwhile, have baffled listeners, in part because they lack the melodic and harmonic clarity of more familiar Classical and early Romantic chamber works, especially Brahms's own works in other genres. Unlike the piano quintet and quartets or the string sextets and serenades, Brahms's string quartets strike an uneasy balance between works designed for a public purpose—to demonstrate the possibilities of composition in conventional genres and the importance of musical traditions by alluding to his artistic forefathers—and works designed to communicate intimately with small groups of invited listeners. Whereas his earlier works were accessible to amateur performers and their friends, the quartets demand professionalism from the performers and increased sophistication from listeners. The tension between public and private communication in the quartets reflects concurrent tensions in the musical world at large, tensions that Brahms faced as he committed himself to participating in (and possibly improving or directing) Vienna's musical life in the 1870s.

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[6] A representative sample of previous studies of Brahms's quartets includes Walter Frisch's account in *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984); Rainer Wilke, *Brahms, Reger, Schoenberg. Streichquartette. Motivisches-thematisches Prozesse und formale Gestalt,* Schriftenreihe zur Musik vol. 18 (Hamburg: Wagner, 1980); and three articles in *Brahms 2: Biograpical, Documentary, and Analytical Studies*, ed. Michael Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): Michael Musgrave and Robert Pascall, 'The String Quartets Op. 51 no. 1 in C Minor and No. 2 in A Minor: A Preface', 137-44; Arnold Whittall, 'Two of a Kind? Brahms's Op. 51 Finales', 145-64; and Allen Forte, 'Motivic Design and Structural Levels in the First Movement of Brahms's String Quartet in C Minor', 165-96. David Huron responded to Allen Forte's analysis of Op. 51 no. 1 with a refined form of motivic analysis; see Huron, 'What is a Feature? Forte's Analysis of Op. 51 No. 1 Revisited', *Music Theory Online* 7/4 (July 2001) http://mto.societymusictheory.org.

I. Chamber Music's Semi-Public, Semi-Private Life

As Leon Botstein has demonstrated, Brahms's move to Vienna in 1871 prompted the composer to reevaluate his role in musical life and to reconsider the genres and styles of music that he must compose and promote.[7] Prior to the 1870s, Brahms's published music consisted primarily of private musical genres such as chamber music and song, with a number of choral works designed for performance by able amateurs. These works were the foundation of his critical success well into the 1880s.[8] His most clearly 'public' work from the pre-Vienna years is the German Requiem of 1868-69; public performances and the publication of this work brought him fame throughout Europe, but especially in German-speaking lands. Despite its large performance forces and public presentation, however, the Requiem also belongs at the intersection of private and public musical life in the nineteenth century. Its success was due in large part to its accessibility for mixed groups of amateurs and professionals—just the sort of performance organizations that were gradually being phased out in the later nineteenth century.[9] At the same time that the Requiem garnered accolades from listeners, performers, and critics, Brahms composed one of his most financially successful works, the Liebeslieder Waltzes for vocal quartet and four-hand piano accompaniment, a prime example of his accessible domestic style.

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[7] Leon Botstein, 'Brahms and His Audience: The Later Viennese Years, 1875-1897', in *Cambridge Companion to Brahms*, ed. Michael Musgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 51-75.

[8] For more information on Brahms's early reputation as a composer of song and chamber music, see Adolf Schubring's 1862 assessment. Schubring [trans. Walter Frisch] 'Five Early Works by Brahms', in *Brahms and His World*, 2nd rev. edn, ed. Walter Frisch and Kevin Karnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 165-215. Frisch contextualizes Schubring's insightful study of Brahms's works in relation to contemporaneous musical politics in Frisch, 'Brahms and Schubring: Musical Politics at Mid-Century', *19th-Century Music* 7/3 (1984), 271-81. Schubring situated Brahms as the stellar genius of a 'Schumann School' alongside talented contemporaries Joachim, Bargiel, Ritter, and Kirchner. This group of composers worked in the middle ground between two poles then developing in musical life: 'those who place the emphasis on the old form' (that is, true conservatives) and those who emphasized 'the new content' (the New German School). In writing this analytical critique of the young composer's first eighteen publications, Schubring offered a counterweight to the *Neue Zeitschrift*'s polemical writings in favour of the New German School gathered around Liszt and Wagner. As Frisch notes, Schubring's analysis represents, 'The best kind of musical criticism: [Schubring's writings] are based on careful analysis of the musical techniques
[. . .] yet go beyond mere structural analysis to assess the success or failure of those techniques.' (p. 276)

Not coincidentally, Brahms's composition and publication activities shifted to works for orchestra at the same time that he settled finally in Vienna; in 1871 he moved into what would be his permanent home (No. 4 Karlsgasse), and in 1877 he moved his library there from Hamburg. Though Botstein focuses on Brahms's decision to compose in the very public genres of symphony and concert overture at this point in his career and the social and cultural reasons behind the composer doing so, the string quartet clearly also played a role in this reassessment of his musical priorities.[10] In addition to the obvious engagement with a Beethovenian legacy and the string quartet's growing aura of profundity, based in large part on Beethoven's sixteen contributions, the quartets demonstrate Brahms's attempts to wrestle with the changing role of music in social life. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, music became an increasingly 'public' endeavour through professionalization and concert promotion as well as through the politicization of genres and writing about music. In the high-stakes genres of opera and music drama, tone poem, and symphony, competing schools of composition fought for the hearts and minds of the public, seeking to win over audiences.[11] At the same time, and partly as a consequence of the ideological debates occurring around public music making, private musics such as popular song, piano works for domestic use, and some forms of chamber music became encoded as 'trivial', tainted by consumerism and perceived as pandering to ephemeral bourgeois fashion.[12] The term 'Hausmusik' tellingly came into regular usage in the middle decades of the nineteenth century to describe easy, simple works accessible to the middle-class amateur, as opposed to more complex "art-music" styles associated with the latest developments in the concert hall.

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[9] Biographer Jan Swafford discusses the work's success immediately following the April 1868 premiere in Bremen: 'Reinthaler [music director for the Bremen cathedral and a strong advocate of Brahms's music] repeated the work in Bremen a few weeks later, and during the next year it was done twenty times across Germany. From there it spread to Russia and England and Paris and to choral groups around the West, in an age when there were able and enthusiastic amateur groups everywhere.' Swafford, *Johannes Brahms: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 331. Brahms himself noted, in a letter to publisher Rieter-Biedermann that the work was practical because 'every movement can be done alone.' See Margit McCorkle, *Johannes Brahms: Thematisch-Bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis* (Munich: Henle, 1984), 171.

[10] Brahms had been working on symphonic movements and sketches that would become the first symphony since at least 1862, possibly earlier, and he reworked some materials into various non-symphonic compositions throughout the late 1850s and 1860s. See, for example, David Brodbeck's discussion of this long compositional process in his Cambridge Handbook for the First Symphony. Brodbeck, *Brahms, Symphony No. 1, op. 67* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), especially chapter 1 ('Frustrated Efforts'), pp. 1-15..

The string quartet does not easily fall on either side of the public-private dividing line. Since at least the eighteenth century, chamber music was performed in both private settings with no listeners and in public concerts with a full audience, as well as in all manner of spaces and situations in between. By the mid-nineteenth century, string chamber music, in particular, belonged in a variety of semi-private, semi-public settings populated by bourgeois and upper middle-class patrons and performers, almost exclusively men until the 1870s or later, after which women began to play stringed instruments in larger numbers. Unlike domestic performances of piano works for two, four, and eight hands and solo song, which frequently occurred as private, familial entertainments, performances of chamber music for strings often took place in semi-private quarters during the nineteenth century with a small gathering of invited guests, which might sometimes have included women as listeners, but rarely as performers.[13] In the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, amateur string players gathered in the back or upper rooms of taverns and clubs, in specially built music halls for societies and associations (like the Vienna Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde and Leipzig Gewandhaus), and in civic buildings, schools, and parsonages.[14] Professional performers like Louis Spohr and Pierre Baillot in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century and Joseph Joachim in the later ones hosted "private" chamber-music evenings for patrons and hosts as well as truly private collegial evenings for their own friends and families. Spohr's quartet parties, for instance, gathered weekly between 1824 and 1858 in the music room of his country house outside Kassel; they included the families of his co-quartettists and concluded with a 'frugal supper', according to the account in his autobiography.[15]

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[11] This 'War of the Romantics', to use Alan Walker's term pitted self-styled 'progressives', who supported Liszt and Wagner early in the century and/or Bruckner later in the century, against composers and performers they deemed 'conservative', musicians like Brahms and Joachim, backed by critics such as Eduard Hanslick. See volume two, 'The Weimar Years', of Walker, *Franz Liszt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), especially pp. 338-67. In 1870s Vienna, the younger generation of Bruckner-supporters (for example, Wolf and Mahler) saw Brahms and his circle as a roadblock to the musical progress they hoped to foster.

[12] Botstein, 'Brahms and His Audience', 55. On the development of 'serious' music in German aesthetics and criticism, see David Gramit, 'Selling the Serious: The Commodification of Music and Resistance to it in Germany, circa 1800', in William Weber (ed.), *The Musician as Entrepreneur, 1700-1914: Managers, Charlatans, and Idealists* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004). On the aesthetics of 'trivialmusik', see Carl Dahlhaus (ed.), *Studien zur Trivialmusik des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Regensburg: Bosse, 1967) and Dahlhaus, 'Trivial Music and Aesthetic Judgement', trans. Uli Sailer, in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, ed. Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno (New York: Routledge, 2004), 333-62.

Throughout the nineteenth century, these private and semi-private performances continued alongside a growing number of public concert performances of chamber music. The division between amateur or private and professional or public performances sharpened in these decades, resulting in a widening gulf between 'trivial' and 'serious' music.[16] Though public chamber-music concerts had long been a part of musical life in some cities, they proliferated after about 1850 in most metropolitan centres.[17] London and Paris led the charge, with series of public subscription concerts that featured a variety of genres from the last decade of the eighteenth century and specifically chamber-music-centric series from 1814 in Paris and in the 1830s in London.[18] Smaller cities in German-speaking areas, such as Hamburg and Berlin, also hosted concert series that included chamber music, but Vienna did not establish a regular chamber-music concert scene until fairly late in the nineteenth century.[19] Thus, chamber music in the Imperial city remained a largely private affair well into the 1860s and 1870s.

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[13] Subscription concerts featuring chamber music, however, frequently included women listeners, and these exclusive affairs also occurred in the semi-public or semi-private sphere. They were advertised and reviewed in newspapers and journals, but accessible only to a select group of patrons who held season or, in some cases, lifelong memberships. See Christina Bashford, *The Pursuit of High Culture: John Ella and Chamber Music in Victorian London* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell, 2007) and Bashford, "Learning to Listen: Audiences for Chamber Music in Early-Victorian London" *Journal of Victorian Culture* 4/1 (1999), 25-51.

[14] The geographical location (outside the home, in public-private spaces) also ensured that chamber-music playing remained a 'manly' activity for much of the nineteenth century. As the private domestic sphere became increasingly associated with women and femininity in the nineteenth century, men sought out spaces to interact with their social and cultural peers without appearing idle or emasculated. In German-speaking realms, the need for semi-private male sociability in associations and clubs resulted in an increase in Masonnic and other lodge cultures and 'secret societies'. See Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, 'Civility, Male Friendship, and Masonic Sociability in Nineteenth-Century Germany', *Gender & History* 13/2 (2001), 224-48. Music's association with femininity further complicates this perception. On the effects of these social mores on chamber-music performance and vice versa in Britain, see Christina Bashford, 'Historiography and Invisible Musics: Domestic Chamber Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain., *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 63/2 (2010), 291-360.

[15] Louis Spohr, *Louis Spohr's Autobiography, translated from the German* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865) [reprint New York: Da Capo Press, 1969], 150.

Two interrelated factors account for the greater number of chamber concert series and performances in the second half of the century throughout Europe: the increased professionalization of music making, and a heightened reverence for the musical past, especially the music of Beethoven. With the rise of professionalism and conservatory training, public musical styles and forms of presentation became ever more exclusive, requiring skills that were beyond the reach of the average amateur player, and rendering the non-professional a mere bystander rather than an active participant. Most musicians and critics saw this professionalization as an improvement. For example, Mendelssohn spent his tenure as city music director in Düsseldorf recruiting professional performers for that city’s orchestral and choral performances, replacing the mostly ‘dilettante’ performances with more polished ones.[20] In response to these trends, perhaps, private forms of participation became more ‘amateur’, and the genres associated with the domestic sphere required less technical proficiency and employed a ‘lighter’ style of rhetoric.[21]

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[16] The division between 'serious' or 'high' music and 'lighter' styles is also apparent in concert programming and the development of special concert series for popular works (primarily for voice and/or orchestra). See William Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste: Concert Programming from Haydn to Brahms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially the Introduction, pp. 1-9, and Chapters 8 and 9 ('Classical Music Achieves Hegemony', pp. 235-72, and 'Vocal Music for the General Public', 273-300).

[17] Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste*, 122-140.

[18] William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris, and Vienna Between 1830 and 1848*, 2nd edn. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). On Paris specifically, see Jeffrey Cooper, *The Rise of Instrumental Music and Concert Series in Paris, 1828-1871* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983) and Joël-Marie Fauquet, *Les Sociétés de musique de chambre à Paris de la Restauration à 1870* (Paris: Amateurs de Livres, 1986).

[19] The Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde sponsored a regular series of orchestral and vocal concerts in the imperial palace and smaller Abendunterhaltungen (evening entertainments) that featured chamber music in private homes and other small venues. The Viennese Concerts Spirituels were modeled after their Parisian counterpart and sponsored by an amateur organization. Alice Hanson notes that they 'specialized in the performance of sacred choral music and symphonies'. Hanson, *Musical Life in Biedermeier Vienna* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 97.

In conjunction with the increased professionalism of public musical life throughout the nineteenth century (and the related decrease in amateur involvement), the organizers of such public music making sought to change the quality of music presented by actively promoting the works of accepted master composers, by reviving works by composers from the past, and/or by promoting the innovations of living composers and musicians. Organizers of festivals and concert series promoted Bach, Schütz, and other Baroque figures as well as Renaissance composers such as Palestrina.[22] The main beneficiary of such efforts, though, was Beethoven. In the 1830s and ’40s in London, John Ella’s Musical Union and Thomas Massa Alsager’s Beethoven Quartet Society brought a new solemnity to the performance of chamber music and insisted on listeners’ undivided attention.[23] In Paris, François-Antoine Habeneck led the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire from its founding in 1828 until just before his death in 1849. His concerts regularly featured a Beethoven symphony or a quartet played by orchestral strings, and Habeneck is credited with establishing Beethoven's reputation in France.[24] In 1835, cellist Pierre Chevillard founded a Societe des Derniers Quatuors de Beethoven in Paris to foster appreciation of the late quartets and contemporaneous works first in private performances, then in public ones after 1849.[25] In Vienna, professional public concerts came later than in other cities, but by the 1860s, the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde had transformed itself, as Botstein notes,

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[20] See Cecelia Hopkins Porter, ‘The Reign of the *Dilettanti*: Düsseldorf from Mendelssohn to Schumann’, *Musical Quarterly* 73/4 (1989), 476-512.

[21] On the apparent decline in musical literacy during this time, see Leon Botstein, ‘Listening through Reading: Musical Literacy and the Concert Audience’, *19th-Century Music* 16/2 (1992), 129-45. Botstein describes a trajectory from the expectation that trained amateurs could sing from notation and do a little composing, to an emphasis on reproducing music at the piano, and later to reading about music in newspapers at the turn of the twentieth century. Bashford (‘Historiography and Invisible Musics’, see note 14) notes that this trajectory does not take into account the possibility of stringed-music performances occurring in private quarters; some evidence indicates that public concerts of chamber music promoted more and better performances in the home. This discrepancy points to the need for greater nuance in our understanding of nineteenth-century musical culture—certainly it is possible that chamber music and piano music represent opposing trends in musical life.

[22] On the reevaluation of Renaissance figures during the Romantic era, see James Garrett, ‘Prophets Looking Backwards: German Romantic Historicism and the Representation of Renaissance Music’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 125/2 (2000), 164-204, Garratt, *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination: Interpreting Historicism in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Paula Higgins, ‘The Apotheosis of Josquin des Prez and Other Mythologies of Musical Genius’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57/3 (2004), 443-510. On nineteenth-century historicism in relation to Brahms and his contemporaries, see Christoph Wolff, ‘Brahms, Wagner, and the Problem of Historicism in Nineteenth-Century Music’, in *Brahms Studies: Analytical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. George Bozarth (Oxford and New York: Clarendon, 1990), 7-11.

> from being a semi-private club, devoted to amateur music-making and governed by aristocratic amateurs [. . .] to a public institution dedicated to the dissemination of musical culture led by professionals in whose public concerts professional musicians would predominate.[26]

In addition to the Gesellschaft concerts, individual performers like Hellmesberger established concert series in Vienna, including chamber-music concerts that regularly featured works by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven alongside a work or two of more recent vintage.[27]

The association between the trivial and the domestic sphere on the one hand and between the serious and the public sphere on the other left chamber music in a delicate position. In order to maintain its connection to the venerated masters of the musical past, chamber music must move into the public sphere alongside other great works, thereby removing itself from the atmosphere of commercial popularity, musical pandering, and dilettantism that the domestic environment had begun to connote. The Classical legacy of the genre, though, impeded this move. The high esteem accorded genres like the string quartet had been built in part on the exclusivity of its musical style. Unlike works designed for public consumption in concert halls, the string quartets of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven were supposed to contain these composers' most profound and compositionally virtuosic creations. Mozart's great homage to his mentor in the Op. 10 quartets dedicated to Haydn contributed to the genre's aura of complexity and importance.[28] Beethoven's late quartets continued this trend with their acclaimed inscrutability, a point to which I will return below.[29] Concert organizers and promoters offered a variety of new approaches to the concert experience, including the distribution of program notes and analytical essays before the performance and encouraging or requiring behaviours that we now deem standard at 'Classical' concerts (silent, attentive listening; a very still posture; no eating, drinking, or socializing during the performance). These changes in concert etiquette occurred in all sorts of performances featuring a wide range of repertoire, but they appear earliest, it seems, in chamber-music concerts—both public and private ones. Notably, one way to combat the aesthetic dilemma that public chamber music prompted was to give 'house concerts' much like the casual gatherings of Onslow and Spohr, with an invited audience of subscription-ticket holders.[30]

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[23] The foremost scholar of London's chamber-music concerts is Christina Bashford; see especially *The Pursuit of High Culture* and 'Learning to Listen: Audiences for Chamber Music in Early-Victorian London' (see note 13)..

[24] In 1852, the Société des Jeunes Artistes du Conservatoire established a similar series devoted to the performance of accepted masterworks as well as new compositions, leading to greater familiarity with the Viennese Classicists and early Romantics among musicians and audiences in Paris. Gordon A. Anderson, et al., 'Paris', in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40089pg6 (accessed January 24, 2012), and Cooper, *The Rise of Instrumental Music and Concert Series in Paris*, 42-46.

[25] Other societies also cropped up in Paris at this time, with the specific goal of promoting Beethoven's works. See Fauquet chapter 2 'L'apostolat Beethovenien', pp. 115-145.

[26] Botstein, 'Brahms and His Audience', 61.

[27] Elizabeth Way Sullivan has documented the development of public chamber-music concerts and programming practices, as well as the political overtones of these developments, in late-nineteenth-century Vienna: *Conversing in Public: Chamber Music in Vienna, 1890-1910* (PhD dissertation: University of Pittsburgh, 2001).

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[28] Mark Evan Bonds has proposed that Mozart's Op. 10 quartets, with their famous dedication, were designed specifically to position the genre as the outlet for the highest form of musical discourse and communication among like-minded composers and performers. His dedication and the quartets themselves serve to exemplify the type of work that should be promoted, in contrast to the more popular style of his contemporary Ignaz Pleyel. Mark Evan Bonds, 'Replacing Haydn: Mozart's "Pleyel" Quartets', *Music & Letters* 88/2 (2007), 201-25. Thus, in effect, Mozart's efforts with this set of six quartets attempt to solve the same problem plaguing Brahms almost a century later; Brahms's solution bears striking similarities to Mozart's, using both musical style and the dedication to combat prevailing trends in musical performance.

[29] On Beethoven's late quartets and their changing reception in the nineteenth century, see K. M. Knittel, *From Chaos to History: The Reception of Beethoven's Late Quartets* (Ph.D. dissertation: Princeton University, 1992), '"Late", Last, and Least: On Being Beethoven's Quartet in F Major, op. 135', *Music & Letters* 87/1 (2006), 16-51, and 'Wagner, Deafness, and the Reception of Beethoven's Late Style', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 51/1 (Spring 1998), 49-82.

Brahms's chamber works reflect these trends in musical life. His early works of the 1850s and '60s share many features with domestic music by his predecessors and contemporaries—composers whose music quickly fell out of fashion in the early twentieth century with the decline of domestic performance. The string sextets, in particular, echo the style of string chamber music by Spohr and by Frenchman George Onslow, including a predilection for long, lyrical melodies and large-scale repetitions.[31] His piano chamber works served a similar purpose in a different setting. They allowed the young composer-pianist to dazzle listeners in public and semi-public concerts when he visited Vienna, and they caught the attention and respect of professional musicians like Joseph Hellmesberger, whose group premiered several of Brahms's chamber works in the early 1860s. Brahms's inclusion of exotic elements in these pieces, such as the piano quartet Op. 25's 'Rondo alla Zingarese', surely increased their appeal and accessibility for listeners. By the 1870s, though, Brahms's goals had changed and his tone in the chamber music demonstrates a new approach and a different intended audience. The focus on compositional intricacy in Op. 51 represents a retreat from the sensual pleasures of amateur performance or casual concert listening into a more pointedly intellectual realm of musical logic and progressive composition.[32] In making this shift, Brahms responded to the changing situation of the string quartet (and chamber music

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[30] Bashford, 'Learning to Listen', 29-31. Elizabeth Way Sullivan (see note 27) also addresses the public/private split and its influence on performance and reception of string chamber music later in the century in Vienna.

[31] For a discussion of the domestic string style favoured by popular composers such as Kuhlau, Onslow, and Spohr, see Marie Sumner Lott, 'Changing Audiences, Changing Styles: String Chamber Music and the Industrial Revolution', in *Instrumental Music and the Industrial Revolution*, ed. Roberto Illiano and Luca Sala (Bologna: Ut Orpheus, 2010), 175-239.

[32] Walter Frisch has described the new tone of these works in similar terms: 'The luxuriance of opp. 25, 26, and 34 and the spaciousness of their thematic-harmonic-formal processes become reduced to a style of extreme concentration.' Frisch, *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation*, 111. On 'musical logic', see Margaret Notley, *Lateness and Brahms: Music and Culture in the Twilight of Viennese Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and 'Discourse and Allusion: The Chamber Music of Brahms', in *Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music*, ed. by Stephen E. Hefling (New York: Schirmer, 1998), 255-62.

generally) in the later decades of the century and to his personal need to cement his alliance with a certain segment of the musical population of Vienna.

The change in Brahms’s style between his ‘First Maturity’ and the later Viennese period of his ‘Second Maturity’ becomes audible in a comparison of two opening theme groups. The opening theme of the B-flat string sextet (Op. 18, published 1862) demonstrates Brahms’s more accessible style (see Ex. 1). Like many a domestic work from the 1840s and ‘50s, Brahms’s thematic construction emphasizes long melodies made up of repeated phrases that are passed around the ensemble, creating a leisurely and calm conversational texture, contrary to typical Haydnesque or Beethovenian practices. The primary theme is a remarkable forty-two bars long, with continual forward momentum created by overlapping phrases. The first cello exposes the lyrical opening theme (a) to an Alberti-like accompaniment from the first viola and a sure-footed bass line; the nine-bar (!) theme is repeated by the first violin (a’) coupled with the first viola in octaves. Bars 20-30 present an answer (b) in the violin and viola, now playing in parallel sixths and thirds, whose euphonious sound increases the pleasurable leisure of this passage. In bars 31-42, the final phrase of the first theme prolongs the dominant (F major), suspending musical time as the performers repeat small one- and two-measure phrases, toying with a variety of chromatic harmonizations. The theme finally reaches its conclusion on the downbeat of bar 43, with a perfect authentic cadence onto tonic (B flat). Although colourful harmonies such as an emphasized flat mediant (D flat, mm. 23-27) give the theme an enjoyable variety, the true tonic is never in doubt.

[INSERT EXX 1 and 2 NEAR HERE]

Half the length of the sextet’s opening group, the C-minor string quartet’s 22-bar first theme demonstrates the new style Brahms developed for his self-consciously serious works of the 1870s (see Ex. 2). In place of the song-like melody of Op. 18, the quartet’s opening theme comprises two short motives, the rising dotted crotchet and quaver and the falling leap, a seventh in its first iteration, narrowed to a fifth or a sixth in later phrases. A contrasting melodic idea (bb. 11-14) introduces a three-note motive over an accompaniment based on the first theme's dotted motive; this passage (repeated by the second violin in bb. 15-19) moves the harmony abruptly to F minor, through the dominant of B minor (vii) to finally land again on C minor (i) at bar 23, where the primary motive returns in a modulatory transitional passage. Awestruck, Schoenberg described the harmonic uncertainty of this opening group in terms of compositional daring: 'Even the most progressive composers after Brahms were carefully avoiding remote deviation from the tonic region at the beginning of a piece'.[33] Walter Frisch rightly adds the perspective of the listener to this observation, noting:

> Especially rare is the sheer terror—I can think of no better term—this passage can evoke in a listener. [. . .] Brahms leads us to the edge of an abyss, and, indeed makes us lean far over. Then he pulls us suddenly back onto the *terra firma* of C minor.[34]

Frisch compares the second theme group of this movement to Brahms's piano quintet in F minor (Op. 34, published in 1865), noting that although both use a 'paired-theme' design, '[t]he earlier work seems positively bloated by comparison with the streamlined second group of Op. 51.'[35] The stark change in compositional approach and priorities in the string quartets—Frisch calls it Brahms's 'Op. 51 style'—seems calculated to create an extreme response in listeners and to effect a clear break with the composer's own earlier practice.

Brahms's quartets encourage multiple levels of participation including listening, reading, and playing—he demands active listening and intense engagement in order to approach the musical work, and he makes no concessions for casual listeners or performers.[36] As we shall see, references and allusions in the music to works by friends and colleagues, gestures that suggest a connection to previous works in the string quartet and other genres, and private mottos indicate that these quartets address a small circle of connoisseurs like the gatherings of friends at Billroth's home. Yet, the overall style of the works indicates a departure from the performance situation of the average amateur musician. Unlike the high-ranking or aristocratic dilettante performers to whom earlier works were dedicated and directed musically, the quartets engage an intellectually inclined, critical listener or player.

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[33] Schoenberg, 'Brahms the Progressive', in *Style and Idea*, ed. Dika Newlin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 58.

[34] Frisch, *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation*, 114. Frisch notes in a beautifully effective analysis, that the placement of the three-note motive on scale degrees 8—flat 6—5 in bars 11, 13, 15, and 17 creates the impression of B minor in bar 20, when we hear the same motive on what would be 3—1—sharp 7 in G major.

[35] Ibid.

The manner in which the quartets were published provides another clue to Brahms's intended audience and the uses or reception that he hoped to foster for these works. The quartets were printed and disseminated in both score and parts simultaneously in 1876. Though this publication practice is standard today, it only became common in the later nineteenth century, and then it ordinarily required a special understanding or request between the composer and publisher.[37] Just thirty years earlier, Robert Schumann practically begged his publisher to print a score of his Op. 41 quartets, and it only appeared three years after the publication of the parts.[38] Publication of chamber-music scores in the nineteenth century tended to favour works by 'Classical' composers, however the publisher construed that notion. For example, Pleyel's series of pocket scores (his *Bibliotheque Musicale*, begun in 1802) included quartets by Haydn alongside the composer's symphonies, and works by Mozart, Beethoven, Hummel, and Onslow. A similar series of small-ish format scores issued by Kistner in the early 1840s included quartets and quintets by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Onslow.[39] The major publishers of chamber music in the later nineteenth century continued to issue music in parts rather than in score form except in rare circumstances, as archival documents from C. F. Peters, Breitkopf und Härtel, and Schlesinger attest.[40]

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[36] In this regard, the listener or score reader becomes a participant in the musical event, actively 'musicking', to use Christopher Small's term. See Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998). The history of this change in European art-music culture has been the subject of much debate since James H. Johnson published *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995). William Weber has approached the question from the perspective of programming; see *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste* (note 16). Bashford, on the other hand, has favoured evidence from concert society organizers and attendees, where that is available for London.

[37] Simrock, an especially sympathetic publisher, printed nearly all of Brahms's works in score and parts simultaneously. Publishers such as Hofmeister, Peters, and Schlesinger frequently lost money on chamber-music publications unless or until the work proved popular enough to sell at least three subsequent reprintings, according to archival documents in Leipzig and Frankfurt am Main. I have examined the Druckbücher (print logs) and Plattenverzeichnis (listing of printing plates) for Berlin-based Schlesinger, currently housed at the Robert Lienau publishing firm in Frankfurt am Main, and for Leipzig-based Peters and Breitkopf & Härtel at the Sachsisches Staatsarchiv in Leipzig.

[38] John Daverio discusses Schumann's insistence on publishing the full score in terms of the difficulty of performing these works, particularly in comparison with contemporary works (such as Mendelssohn's

The impact of Brahms's having finally published a set of string quartets nearly twenty years after Schumann's famous pronouncement of greatness (the 'Neue Bahnen' article published in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in 1854[41]), which included references to symphonies and string quartets that

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Op. 44 quartets). See Daverio, *Robert Schumann: Herald of a 'New Poetic Age'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 254-55.

[39] On the history of the miniature score, see Cecil Hopkinson, 'The Earliest Miniature Scores' *Music Review* 32 (1972), 138-44; Rita Benton, 'Pleyel's *Bibliothèque musicale*' *Music Review* 35 (1975), 1-4; and Hans Lenneberg, 'Revising the History of the Miniature Score' *Notes* 45 (1988-89), 258-61. French composer George Onslow (1784-1853) composed over seventy chamber works for strings (quartets and quintets), which were very popular in the nineteenth century among both performers and critics. Robert Schumann, for instance, singled them out for high praise alongside those of Felix Mendelssohn; see Schumann, 'Preisquartett von Julius Schapler', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 16 (1842), 142-43, as quoted in Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 187. The most recent study of Onslow's life and works is Baudime Jam's *George Onslow* (Clermont-Ferrand: Les Éditions du Mélophile, 2003), but Viviane Niaux's *George Onslow: Gentleman Compositeur* (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2003) delves more significantly into matters of musical style. For analysis of the chamber music specifically, see Christiana Nobach, *Untersuchungen zu George Onslows Kammermusik* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1985).

[40] The Hofmeister-Whistling catalogues also document newly printed works throughout much of the nineteenth century where Austro-Germany is concerned. They are available in their entirety as a searchable database and as PDFs at http://www.hofmeister.rhul.ac.uk/2008/index.html [accessed 20 January 2012].

[41] Schumann describes Brahms sitting at the piano and playing, 'sonatas, rather disguised symphonies, songs [. . .] then sonatas for violin and piano, string quartets—and each so different from the others that they each appeared to gush from a different sources.' Reprinted in Robert Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker*, ed. Martin Kreisig (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1914), II, 301-302; as translated by Piero Weiss in *Music in the Western World*, 2nd edn. (Belmont, CA: Thomson, 2008), 307. Schumann's article laid the foundation for critical reception of Brahms's works in the second half of the nineteenth century, and twentieth-century scholars have discussed its messianic language at length. See Malcolm MacDonald, *Brahms* (New York: Schirmer, 1990), 18-19; Bonds, 141-3; Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms, A*

Brahms had until now withheld, is significant.[42] Brahms once said that he had destroyed over twenty quartets before publishing these, and references to works in the genre pepper his correspondence from at least the 1860s, when he composed and published seven major chamber works for strings or strings and piano.[43] Brahms intended this comment, made to his friend Alwin Cranz (a publisher based in Hamburg), to illustrate the importance of restraint and revision. He went on to say, 'it is not difficult to compose; but it is incredibly difficult to let the superfluous notes drop under the table'.[44] For a composer as self-critical as Brahms, the final step of entering into the printed-music arena with string quartets amounts to a declaration of musical maturity. The full score of the quartets not only helped performers put together a meaningful interpretation, but also allowed listening audiences, critics, and collectors to engage the music outside of live performance as a text in the privacy of their own homes.[45] The full score added weight and import to an already long-awaited publication.

Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 83-8; and Mark Evan Bonds, *After Beethoven: The Imperative of Originality in the Symphony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. 138-74 ('The Ideology of Genre: Brahms's First Symphony').

[42] It is not clear whether these symphonies and quartets truly existed in 1853-4 or whether Schumann was imagining them from the style of the piano sonatas and other works Brahms had discussed with him. Certainly for the musical world it seemed as though Brahms lost his nerve, as the early published works included nothing in the "noble" genres of symphony and quartet. See Adolf Schubring, 'Schumanniana No. 4: The Present Musical Epoch and Robert Schumann's Position in Music History', trans. John Michael Cooper in *Schumann and His World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 362-74. Walter Frisch discusses the nature and effect of this critique in 'Brahms and Schubring' (see note 8).

[43] Michael Musgrave and Robert Pascall provide an excellent account of this history in "The String Quartets Op. 51 No. 1 in C minor and No. 2 in A minor: A Preface" in *Brahms 2: Biographical, Documentary, and Analytical Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 137-43. The authors also note that the opus number for these quartets places is alongside works from the autumn of 1869, suggesting that Brahms had the quartets in mind for publication at that point and reserved the opus number for them. Brahms noted in his own catalogue that the quartets were written 'for the second time' in the summer of 1873.

[44] Max Kalbeck, *Johannes Brahms* (Tutzing : H. Schneider, 1976), vol. 2, 439. As quoted in Musgrave and Pascall, 138.

[45] See Leon Botstein's work on changing attitudes toward musical literacy across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, especially 'Listening Through Reading' (see note 21).

II. Brahms's "Beethovenian" Keys as Public Testament

Brahms's choice of C minor and A minor for the first and second quartets respectively marks this opus as a public commitment to the legacy and tradition of the string quartet as he inherited it, daring critical eyes and ears to connect these works with earlier examples, and with Beethoven especially. Meanwhile, several smaller gestures within the quartets—especially in the first movements—connect these works to Joseph Joachim and his performance career. As Europe's leading interpreter and editor of Beethoven's violin music, including the quartets, Joachim played a vital role in crafting the public image of Beethoven and his chamber music in Brahms's lifetime.

In the context of nineteenth-century musicians' concerns about continuing the legacy of Beethoven, Brahms's choice of C minor for the first quartet is especially self-conscious. The composer referred to the key's significance obliquely in his dedication letter to Billroth, quoted above. The letter continues (after some questions about which of Billroth's accolades to include on the dedication page),

> Actually, I really ought not to disclose to you that the quartet in question derives from the famous C minor, for now when of an evening you think about it and fantasize in it, you will all too readily over-fantasize, and thereafter—you will like the second one better.[46]

'The famous C minor' most likely refers to the key itself, not to a particular work; it alludes to the familiar perception that Beethoven's most profound and affecting works were composed in this key, including the Coriolan overture, the Fifth Symphony, the Third Piano Concerto, the Choral Fantasy, and the piano sonatas Op. 10 no. 1, Op. 13 ('Pathétique'), and Op. 111.[47] (Beethoven's only C-minor string quartet, Op. 18 no. 4, is not usually included in this grouping of intense works, though it certainly stands out from its fellow quartets in that opus; it is the only minor-mode work of the set, and it finishes with a Gypsy rondo finale.) Brahms's letter points out the special aura that this key held for composers and other later musicians as a harbinger of musical greatness. By publishing his first quartet in this key, he invites comparison with that legacy, an invitation he would extend again in 1877 with his first symphony.

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[46] Brahms to Billroth, letter from July 1873, Avins, *Johannes Brahms: Life and Letters*, 456.

[47] Michael Tusa has eloquently discussed Beethoven's obsession with this key in his early period and has posited that it held special meaning extending even to the composer's structural conception of C-minor works. For Beethoven, this key seems to have been specifically linked to Mozart and his works. See Michael Tusa, 'Beethoven's C-minor Mood', in *Beethoven Forum 2*, ed. Christopher Reynolds (Lincoln, NE and London, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 1-27.

More subtle, and generally unremarked-upon in the musicological literature to date, is the constellation of associations that surround the key of Brahms's second string quartet, A minor. This key held a similar significance for composers of string quartets in the nineteenth century as C minor held for other genres. In using this key, Brahms connects his second quartet to Beethoven's late style and to the quartet ideals of earlier post-Beethovenian quartets by composers Brahms admired, including Mendelssohn and Schumann. A brief discussion of these composers' A-minor quartets will provide the context in which we can better understand Brahms's work.

Although it is not a 'bad' or difficult key for strings, A minor remained oddly absent as a string quartet tonality until the 1820s. The four most influential and prolific quartet composers of the Classical era—Haydn, Pleyel, Richter, and Mozart—did not publish a single A-minor quartet, and Beethoven published only one, but nearly every composer of string quartets active after the 1820s composed a work in this key. Oftentimes, a young composer set his first string quartet in this key, as in the cases of Mendelssohn and Schumann. In other instances, a composer's return to the quartet genre after a long hiatus is marked by an A-minor work, as in the case of Dvořák's first published quartet, his Quartet No. 7, Op. 16.[48] Many of these A-minor works display a preoccupation with Beethoven's A-minor quartet, Op. 132, of 1825, a work intimately connected to the maestro's aura of individual genius.

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[48] See also works by North German composer Norbert Burgmüller (1810-1836), a friend and colleague of Mendelssohn whose music was much admired by Schumann, and Swedish iconoclast Franz Berwald (1796-1868). See my *Audience and Style in Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music, c. 1830 to 1880* (Ph.D. dissertation: Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, 2008), 210-288.

Op. 132 offers a wealth of irregularities that have fascinated musicians and scholars since its first performances and that elicited a continual stream of commentary throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[49] The sensational third movement labelled 'Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an die Gottheit, in der lydischen Tonart' (Holy Song of Thanksgiving of a Convalescent to the Deity, in the Lydian Mode) alternates reprises of reverent, chorale-like music in a modally inflected style with D-major sections that express a renewed sense of vigor marked 'Neue Kraft fühlend' (Feeling New Strength). The other movements of this five-movement work contain formal innovations and disruptions as well as melodic and harmonic ambiguities. Beethoven's use of the submediant (F major, VI) as the main challenger to the tonic throughout the quartet especially caused a stir for young composers, who replicated this harmonic trick in their later works. Composers also responded specifically to the effect of an 'organic', unified work (including the use of a four-note motto) and the extramusical basis of the work made explicit with an incipit (that is, the 'Heiliger Dankgesang').[50]

As K. M. Knittel has shown, Op. 132 made a phenomenal impression on listeners and critics in its first decade. It received more reviews than any of Beethoven's other five late quartets in the first ten years after its publication, but most reviewers found themselves at a loss for words when it came to describing the music's features. One anonymous reviewer noted,

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[49] Early critical responses to Beethoven's works are chronicled in *The Critical Reception of Beethoven's Compositions by His German Contemporaries*, ed. Wayne M. Senner, Robin Wallace, and William Meredith (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) and in Stefan Kunze, *Ludwig van Beethoven: die Werke im Spiegel seiner Zeit: gesammelte Konzertberichte und Rezensionen bis 1830* (Laaber: Laaber, 1996). For modern commentary and analysis, see Leonard Ratner, *The Beethoven String Quartets: Compositional Strategies and Rhetoric* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Bookstore, 1995); Joseph Kerman, *The Beethoven Quartets* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982 [1966]); Robin Wallace, 'Background and Expression in the First Movement of Beethoven's Op. 132', *Journal of Musicology* 7/1 (1989), 3-20.

[50] For an extended discussion of Beethoven's Op. 132 quartet and four nineteenth-century responses to it, see Marie Sumner Lott, *Audience and Style in Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music,* 219-88.

> He who hears it for the first time cannot usually find his way around, much less pass judgement. Therefore, one must necessarily hear it many times and examine it closely. For that purpose, however, it is extremely inviting and one returns again gladly to it.[51]

Writers consistently directed readers to seek out further performances and to study the score or play the four-hand piano arrangements in order to come to grips with the works. In fact, because the works were so difficult to perform and to understand, many reviewers and musicians came to know the late quartets first (or only) in the four-hand arrangements that were published almost simultaneously. As Knittel has suggested, this tendency to rely on piano versions of the quartets obscured some ingenious elements of their design that respond to the unique timbres and techniques of stringed instruments, while emphasizing or creating unwanted effects, such as the 'pesky motif' that plagues the Scherzo of Op. 135, according to early commentators.[52] For Beethoven's late works, as for the string quartets and quintets of other early nineteenth-century composers, the translation of gestures designed for string players to a pianistic idiom results in music that is often difficult, ugly, or tedious. Idiomatic passages for the violin evoke fiddling and other rustic styles when played by four sustaining instruments with great capacity for dynamic variation, but they feel awkward and out-of-place at the keyboard when crunched into a single player's two hands.[53] For Beethoven's music, the practice of learning the quartets through reading the score or arrangements without playing them as written reinforced or 'proved' preconceptions about the influence of his deafness and illness on these works in earlier decades and notions of a genius defying conventions about beauty and accessibility in later ones. The early focus on the necessity of intense and repeated study of the music in order to understand it became an integral part of

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[51] Quoted in Knittel, *From Chaos to History*, 72 (see note 29).

[52] Knittel, '"Late", Last, and Least: On Being Beethoven's Quartet in F Major, Op. 135' (see note 29).

[53] Knittel discusses an especially strings-oriented passage from Op. 135's Scherzo movement in '"Late", Last, and Least': 'The piano reduction emphasizes the fact that the entire passage depends on string technique, of the repetition of that open *a′*—the ease with which the first violin can simply tip down to that next string. The three lower instruments can play their motif in octaves with ease (no change of string is required) and, with their similar timbres, would blend together and form a background impossible to achieve (let alone play) on the piano. Like so much within the 'late' quartets, this is string music.' (p. 23)

Beethoven reception. It also became a defining feature of chamber-music aesthetics in the post-Beethoven era.

When Brahms chose to set his second quartet of Op. 51 in the key of A minor, he embraced this legacy of compositional complexity, intellectual and musical rigour, and studiousness in a conscious turn away from the accessible style of his own earlier works and of contemporaneous 'light' works for the parlour, such as arrangements for string quartet or piano trio and works designed to be 'amateur-friendly' in addition to the more common four- and two-hand piano arrangements and popular songs.[54] In doing so, Brahms purposefully placed himself within the ranks of his esteemed predecessors: Beethoven, of course, but also Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann.[55] Mendelssohn's first completed string quartet in A minor (Op. 13, 1827) engages many of the anomalies of Beethoven's late style, as Charles Rosen and others have noted.[56] Likewise,

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[54] Many string chamber pieces of the earlier nineteenth century appear to have consciously catered to amateur audiences in works overtly marketed as 'light' (leicht) or 'easy' and, in some cases, as 'brilliant but not difficult'. In other cases, the musical style embraces repetitions and accessible techniques for amateur players without drawing attention to these features in their titles or advertisements. For more information about these works, see Marie Sumner Lott, *Audience and Style in Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music, c. 1830 to 1880*, chapters 1 and 2.

[55] Brahms might also have known the A-minor string quartet of Norbert Burgmüller. Both Schumann and Brahms's libraries contained works by him, though not copies of this quartet, and Schumann's moving paean to the composer on learning of his tragic death at the age of twenty-six indicates that he, like Mendelssohn, valued Burgmüller's music enough to perform and promote it. Brahms certainly knew some music by Louis Spohr and other popular mid-century composers. He appears to have respected the achievement of such composers while seeking to turn in a different direction in his own work. In 1859, Brahms wrote to Auguste Brandt and Bertha Poubsky (members of his Hamburg women's chorus and lifelong friends) relating the news that he had just learned of Spohr's death. Brahms notes, 'He may well be the last one who still belonged to a more beautiful era of art than the one we are now suffering through.' Styra Avins, *Johannes Brahms, Life and Letters*, 203-4.

[56] Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 581. In chapter 10 ('Mendelssohn and the Invention of Religious Kitsch'), Rosen discusses Mendelssohn's relationship to Beethoven's works and his borrowing of several Beethovenian features in the two string quartets opp. 12 and 13 (pp. 574-82). Also see Thomas Schmidt-Beste, 'Mendelssohn's Chamber Music', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, ed. Peter Mercer-Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 130-48; R. Larry Todd, 'The Chamber Music of Mendelssohn', in *Nineteenth-Century Chamber Music*, ed. Stephen E. Hefling (New York: Schirmer, 1998), 170-207; and Greg Bitercik, *The Early Works of Felix Mendelssohn: A Study in the Romantic Sonata Style* (Philadelphia, PA: Gordon & Breach, 1992), especially pp. 227-91. Even more recently, Benedict Taylor has proposed a Proustian reading of Mendelssohn's Op. 13 quartet; see his 'Cyclic Form, Time, and Memory in Mendelssohn's A-Minor Quartet, Op. 13', *Musical Quarterly* 93/1 (2010), 45-89.

Robert Schumann's set of three string quartets (published as his Op. 41) replicates the A minor—F major—A major trajectory of Beethoven's Op. 132 in the opus at large and within individual quartets.[57] The A-minor quartet's first movement, for instance, begins with a thirty-three-bar Introduzione in A minor (i), while its main body is a sonata-allegro form in F major (VI) that never engages A minor. The dichotomy between A and F returns in the finale of the third quartet, which some scholars have described as a finale to the entire opus, creating one large unified work rather than a collection of three discrete quartets and underscoring the connection to Beethoven's thematically linked 'Galitzin' quartets.[58]

In creating a new style for his string quartets, Brahms borrowed techniques from these models to emphasize the studious, sophisticated nature of the genre. His A-minor quartet embraces the intimacy of a shared musical language built on nuanced references to earlier works, and he uses that language to present a public argument for the continued development of the genre. As in the first movements of Beethoven's Op. 132 and Mendelssohn's Op. 13, Brahms's *Allegro non troppo* utilizes a musical gesture with extra-musical meaning to unify the work.[59] The first movement begins with a four-note motto that returns at significant formal junctures in the movement. The initial motive A–F–A–E contains Joachim's doleful motto 'Frei aber einsam' (Free but lonely), which Schumann, Brahms, and Albert Dietrich also used in their collaborative 'FAE' sonata in 1853 (see Ex. 3a).

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[57] The most recent study of Schumann's chamber music is Roesner, 'The Chamber Music', in *The Cambridge Companion to Schumann*, ed. Beate Perrey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 123-147, in which Roesner points out the works' interrelationships and suggests that Schumann approached Classical formal and tonal principles 'as gesture and rhetoric [. . .] or as subterfuge' (p. 123). Her discussion focuses on the ways that these works demonstrate Schumann's respect for the genre and the 'unique conception of musical form' that they evince. She does not address Schumann's motives behind such innovative choices of key or formal structure.

[58] See ibid., and Brown, '*A Higher Echo of the Past': Schumann's 1842 Chamber Music and the Rethinking of Classical Form* (Ph.D. dissertation: Yale University, 2000), especially pp. 229-48.

[59] Beethoven's Op. 132 opens with an imitative treatment of a four-note motive that returns throughout the work and (in Daniel Chua's reading) connects it to the other Galitzin quartets. Daniel Chua, *The 'Galitzin' Quartets of Beethoven: Opp. 127, 132, 130* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). Mendelssohn's Op. 13 used the melody, particularly the opening motif, of his own song 'Ist es wahr?' in an introduction and final coda to provide a cyclical form in the work overall.

[INSERT Exx.3a and b NEAR HERE]

After its first appearance at the head of the movement, the motto is frequently treated in imitation, demonstrating Brahms's contrapuntal prowess. At the end of the exposition, for instance, he employs an intricate polyphonic style, as each of the three lower voices enters with the theme in turn (see Ex. 3b). The motto reappears at the end of the development section or beginning of the recapitulation, where Brahms elides the two sections, creating a seamless form (Ex. 4). In this compositionally virtuosic passage, Brahms combines the motto in the first violin with its inversion in the viola. When the second violin joins the first in parallel thirds in bb. 188-191, the recapitulatory function of this passage becomes clear, and the arrival on an A6 chord at the downbeat of b. 195 provides a definitive close to the development section.[60]

[INSERT Ex4 NEAR HERE]

The finale engages earlier A-minor quartet traditions, including the dual-key conundrum between A minor and F major. Like Beethoven's Op. 132 and Schumann's Op. 41 no. 3, Brahms's A-minor quartet ends with a rondo, and as these predecessors did, he presents the waltz-like B section first in C major (III) then in F major (VI) before the developmental middle episode. The rondo closes with a gesture that points, again, to Beethoven and to Joachim. Just before the coda (marked *Più vivace*), Brahms introduces fourteen measures of texturally out-of-place music (bb. 320-33, see Ex. 5) after a suspenseful bar-long pause. Marked *pp* and notated with ties across bar-lines, the passage brings to an abrupt halt the headlong, dance-like style of the earlier sections and evokes an altogether unrelated musical topic with block chords over a chromatic bass line. It suspends musical time in a manner similar to the style of Beethoven's third-movement 'Heiliger Dankgesang', and ends with a dissonant triad containing the three pitches F, A, and E. This vertical sonority may refer back to the motto of the first movement and to the public persona of the virtuoso and quartet leader.

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[60] A final instance of the motto occurs in the closing fourteen measures of the movement, as the learned style returns to end the work in a sombre, solemn manner.

[INSERT Ex.5 NEAR HERE]

The chosen keys for the quartets and Brahms's treatment of tonal relationships within movements in these works demonstrate his public, unequivocal alliance with the 'conservative' or learned compositional practice represented by Beethoven—perhaps as mediated by Mendelssohn and Schumann. In this way, Brahms's tonal allusions serve as commentary on generic and musical politics; they represent a call to arms for composers and performers interested in the traditions of chamber music. The A-minor quartet, in particular, preserves a tradition of intricate compositional innovation directed at connoisseurs who knew the repertoire well—listeners and amateurs of the highest rank like Billroth, and professionals with a keen ear and intimate knowledge of the repertoire like Joachim. Here as elsewhere in Op. 51, Brahms's public and private motives intertwine, as he promotes the domestic, private performance and understanding of the quartet at the same time that he recognizes the contributions of his friend and colleague to the genre's sustained role in public musical life.

III. Private Meditations on Public Histories

Several topical or melodic gestures in the quartets point towards a private meditation on musical history and its relationship to the present, or to Brahms's present. The composer's use of allusive gestures or reminiscences allowed a dual reception for the quartets in Brahms's lifetime and thereafter, similar to the private meanings that Dillon Parmer has explored in several of Brahms's instrumental works.[61] In the string quartets, these features allowed Brahms to comment on the role of history in the public and private life of his day. Rather than thinking of these uncanny moments as encoded messages, ciphers, or secret programmes intended for specific contemporaneous audiences, we can consider them from the perspective of a performer or listener encountering familiar gestures in unfamiliar situations that prompt further reflection or discussion, or from the perspective of Brahms, whose relationship to history was complicated by his desire to uncover as much as possible about music's past while ensuring that only certain of his own secrets were preserved for the future.[62]

In Brahms's lifetime, the history of music and the study of European culture more generally became a matter of public fascination. The nineteenth century saw the first widely circulated biographies of composers and the first editions of complete works beginning with the Breitkopf & Härtel edition of Bach, initiated in 1851. Bound up with this interest in history, nationalist pride gave historians and artists a strong desire to create or continue revered German traditions, and this in turn spurred Romantic artists to promote the masterworks of the past as forerunners of modern innovations and perfection. Music played an important role in the creation of public histories of German greatness. As an accessory, it lent gravity and pomp to large celebrations such as the 300th anniversary of Albrecht Dürer's death or the unveiling of monuments to Johannes Gutenberg and

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[61] Dillon R. Parmer, 'Musical Meaning for the Few: Instances of Private Reception in the Music of Brahms', *Current Musicology* 83 (2007), 109-130. Parmer discusses instances of poetic inscriptions or associations (as in the early piano sonatas, the piano quartet, op. 60; the violin sonatas, opp. 78 and 100) and musical allusions (as in the finale of the first symphony) in relation to Brahms's tendency to give certain friends and colleagues oblique 'clues' to potential hidden meanings in these works.

[62] Brahms attempted to control history by retrieving and burning his letters and sketches in order to ensure the integrity and privacy of his personal and professional life after his death. See Jan Swafford, *Johannes Brahms: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 537-8.

Martin Luther.[63] As a historical artifact in its own right, it provided a history worthy of veneration, most notably in the 'revival' of earlier figures such as J. S. Bach.[64]

Brahms's interest in music's history and the history of German culture has been well documented.[65] His investment in historical musicology is evident in the many editions he made of earlier composers' works and in his performances of Renaissance and Baroque choral pieces with the various ensembles he conducted throughout his career. He collected autograph manuscripts and first editions. Brahms felt a very close connection to past composers, seeing them as his own musical forefathers. Thus, many of Brahms's public activities in Vienna served to promote and disseminate a history of music to be shared among the German people, and his private investigations helped him to feel connected to a community of past, present, and future artists working towards similar ideals. Three examples from Op. 51 will show Brahms's particular blending of these public and private motives for historicism in the string quartet.

The C-minor quartet's first movement engages the revivalist atmosphere of the later nineteenth century with a multi-layered allusion to Bach and Joachim. Throughout this movement, Brahms utilizes an accompaniment pattern connected to nineteenth-century performances of Bach's

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[63] For example, the young Felix Mendelssohn was commissioned to write a cantata commemorating the 300th anniversary of the artist's death for a lavish festival in April 1828. See R. Larry Todd, *Mendelssohn: A Life in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 185-86. On the importance of new national and cultural monuments in German life at this time, see Hans A. Pohlsander, *National Monuments and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), esp. Chapter 5 ('Monuments to German Culture'), pp. 103-128.

[64] On the Bach revival, see Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

[65] In addition to his work on the new Schubert edition published in the 1870s and his work with Clara Schumann on the complete works of Robert Schumann, Brahms also edited for publication music by François Couperin, C. P. E. and W. F. Bach, Mozart, and Chopin (see McCorkle, *Johannes Brahms: Thematisch-bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis*, 749-53). On his choral performances of early music, see Virginia Hancock, 'Brahms's Performances of Early Choral Music', *19th-Century Music* 8/2 (1984), 125-41, and 'Brahms and Early Music: Evidence From His Library and His Choral Compositions', in *Brahms Studies: Analytical and Historical Perspectives*, ed. George Bozarth (Oxford and New York: Clarendon, 1990). On Brahms's musical nationalism and history, see Daniel Beller-McKenna, *Brahms and the German Spirit* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), and for information on his multiple engagements with history, see Wolfgang Sandberger and Christiane Wiesenfeldt (eds.), *Musik und Musikforschung: Johannes Brahms im Dialog mit der Geschichte* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2007).

D-minor partita for solo violin, a work that Joachim frequently performed in recitals and appearances, and one that had a particular resonance for Brahms.[66] Specifically, Brahms's off-beat broken-octave figure (see, for instance, bb. 24-28 in Ex. 2 above) is the same figuration used to realize the arpeggiated chordal passage of the partita's Chaconne throughout the nineteenth century. Example 6a reproduces a 1930 edition by violinist Carl Flesch in which the lower staff (#2) shows the original version notated as chords and the upper staff (#1) shows the typical nineteenth-century realization first documented in Ferdinand David's 1842 edition. Example 6b shows the same passage from Brahms's own arrangement of the Chaconne for piano, left hand only[67]; he uses the same figuration.

[INSERT Exx.6 a and b NEAR HERE]

The accompaniment pattern in Op. 51/1 simultaneously alludes to Bach's work and to Joachim's performances of the partita. The fact that Brahms also arranged the Bach Chaconne for piano suggests it had a special significance for him. Brahms revisited the idea of the Chaconne in important works—most famously, of course, in the finale of his fourth symphony. The piece remained fixed in his mind after hearing or studying it, as he noted in a letter to Clara Schumann, and he continued to contemplate the work, reinterpreting it in various ways as one might revisit the memory of a significant conversation or event in one's life. In June 1877, four years after the publication of Brahms's quartets, he explained this reaction to Clara Schumann in a letter that accompanied a copy of his left-hand arrangement. Brahms wrote,

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[66] Beatrix Boarchard notes that the Chaconne was the most frequently performed work in Joachim's repertory. Borchard, *Stimme und Geige: Amalie und Joseph Joachim* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2005), esp. 500-502. Joachim turned to the D-minor partita when giving impromptu performances (in addition to more mundane concert appearances and private soirées), such as the jubilee celebration of his fiftieth year of active concertizing in March 1889, when his biographer and student Andreas Moser reports: 'As the applause was unceasing, Joachim at last took the fiddle from [Hugo] Olk's hands, as a sign that he would play his thanks to them, and with the words, "Let's return to Bach," he put the fiddle under his chin and gave the Bach Chaconne in a way that he wcould hardly have surpassed in his earlier years.' Moser, *Joseph Joachim: A Biography (1831-1899)* translated by Lilla Durham (London: Philip Wellby, 1901), 277.

[67] Bartholf Senff published Brahms's arrangement without opus number as one of five 'Studien für das Pianoforte' by in 1878. He designated the other four works Etude, Rondo, or Presto 'nach' Chopin, Bach, and Weber, suggesting already in the titles the compositional freedoms Brahms took in his arrangements. The Chaconne's title, however, reads 'Chaconne von J. S. Bach für die linke Hand allein', indicating perhaps his intent to faithfully transmit the original work in a pianistic version (see McCorkle, 615-19).

> The Chaconne is for me one of the most wonderful, incomprehensible pieces of music. On a single staff, for a small instrument, the man writes *a whole world of the deepest thoughts and the most powerful feelings*. [. . .] Now if the greatest violinist is not around, then the best enjoyment is probably to let it sound in one's mind, but *the piece provokes one to become involved with it in all possible ways*. After all, one doesn't always want to hear music merely ringing in thin air, Joachim is not often here, one tries it this way and that.[68]

In the C-minor string quartet, his small gesture drawn from the partita expresses Brahms's personal admiration for Bach in a genre that had come to signify a combined learnedness and intimacy that he perceived in the Chaconne itself. His recognition of Joachim's role in reviving this particular example of Bach's mastery is inherent in the allusion, as well; the accompanimental figure saturates the first movement of the C-minor quartet, but it appears most often in the first violin part, the part Joachim would have played in his quartet's public and private performances of the work.

The third movements of Op. 51 also engage Brahms's sense of music history by recalling characteristic styles associated with composers whose works he revered and who had a profound influence on his own musical development. Here, as in the Chaconne reference, Brahms connects his own accomplishments to a line of musical development that he seeks to continue, demonstrating his musical pedigree—and his music-political allegiances. At the same time, these passages allow the performer or listener to meditate on the personal relationships we maintain with such figures and their music via fresh performances and new interpretations of favourite works. To do so, Brahms borrows a compositional technique explored by Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann to evoke the idea of reminiscence, a quintessentially Romantic strategy for creating a sense of musical déjà vu. Both earlier composers used a specific set of musical gestures to effect a reminiscence, or—to borrow John Daverio's phrase—to impart a 'temporality of pastness' in an otherwise thoroughly modern work.[69]

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[68] Brahms to Clara Schumann, letter dated 'Pörtschach, June 1877'. Avins, *Life and Letters*, 515-16 (emphasis added)

For instance, Schumann's 'Florestan' from the 1837 work *Carnaval* remembers the first waltz of his earlier composition *Papillons* (1831) twice with a pointed change of musical style that draws attention to the allusion, framing it for the listener and/or performer. (The two reminiscences of *Papillons* occur in bb. 9-10 and 19-22; Example 7 shows the latter passage.) The remembered passage is not an exact quotation of the original, but merely a suggestion of it with enough similarities to catch the knowledgeable performer's attention. Schumann marks the second reminiscence with a private aside to the performer, noting '(Papillon?)'. The use of such a device in the solo piano repertoire emphasizes the intimate nature of domestic performances, when the performer engages the composer alone and has a special insight into his intentions that is not always apparent to assembled listeners.[70]

[INSERT Ex.7 NEAR HERE]

Like Schumann, Brahms uses musical reminiscences in each of the Op. 51 string quartets' third movements by drawing on the listener's supposed familiarity with both the musical repertoire and the conventions of the modern musical language. This technique allows him to bring to mind several important music historical figures and to capitalize on the exclusivity of the string-quartet genre and the availability of an educated audience of connoisseurs for such pieces.

The third movement of the A-minor string quartet is filled with reminiscences to previous Romantic innovators, including Mendelssohn and Chopin. Marked *Quasi Minuetto, moderato*, the movement is immediately designated as *not* a scherzo and not a minuet, but *like* a minuet. Thus

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[69] John Daverio, *Crossing Paths: Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 54.

[70] Mary Hunter has explored this notion in Haydn's piano trios and string quartets; see Hunter, 'Haydn's London Piano Trios and His Salomon String Quartets: Private vs. Public?', in *Haydn and His World*, ed. Elaine Sisman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 103-130.

Brahms draws on the listeners' or performers' familiarity with previously heard minuets, inviting them to engage the music in a critical, active way.

[INSERT Ex. 8 NEAR HERE]

When the music begins, it shows some traits of the minuet as we commonly recognize it, but its effect is not of the light, courtly dance that listeners might expect. (see Ex. 8). Some of the conventional minuet traits are present—3/4 metre with a strong crotchet pick-up—but the parallel motion in the upper three voices and prevalent diminished harmonies over a hollow-sounding open-fifth drone in the cello give the passage an unsettled quality. The hushed performance style indicated by the *mezza voce* designation heightens this effect. The theme's three-bar groupings also work against the minuet's characteristic four-bar pattern. All of these features combine to create an effective non-minuet, allowing Brahms to play a sophisticated joke on his listeners. As Beethoven had before him, Brahms upsets the decorum of the Classical style in this movement, referring the listener to familiar, comfortable examples by Haydn and Mozart (and, perhaps, his own Classically oriented Menuettos and 'quasi-Menuettos' in previous works), then radically departing from that framework.

The joke is carried still further in the next section of the movement, which employs a Mendelssohnian fairy-music topic beginning in b. 40 (see Ex. 9). Marked apart from the introductory section with a key change from A minor to A major and a faster tempo of *Allegretto vivace*, the mood of this passage is entirely different from that of the previous one. The skipping, skittering staccato passagework gives the section a liveliness familiar from works such as Mendelssohn's Octet, Op. 20; the Canzonetta of the string quartet, Op. 12; and his incidental music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*[71] Here again, Brahms brings a familiar work to mind only to switch gears almost immediately.

[INSERT Ex.9 NEAR HERE]

A third abrupt change of character occurs in b. 73, immediately following the fairy music described above. This change also entails a new metre and tempo designation, from *Allegretto vivace* to *Tempo di Minuetto* and from 2/4 back to 3/4.[72] Rather than a reprise of the previous *Quasi-Menuetto* passage, however, we hear a brief (six-bar) theme in a sentimental style (see Ex. 10). The first violin's solo line brings to mind Chopin's pianism; the ornamentation and gentle singing style suggest the vocalism of the nocturnes, and the rhythmic character bears some similarities to the mazurkas, works with which Brahms was very familiar.[73]

[INSERT Ex.10 NEAR HERE]

Like the earlier reminiscences, the passage is too brief to be a specific reference to the composer or one of his works; thus, it too retains a hazy, fragmentary quality. It is reminiscent of a style from another time, but does not actually quote a specific point of reference, leaving listeners to wonder what they heard and whether it was the composer's memory of Chopin or their own.

A final instance of ruminating on the past is found in bb. 129-133 of this movement, where a brief chordal passage in a new style appears (see Ex. 11). Unlike the lively fairy music or the singing Minuetto passage, this one employs double stops in all four voices, creating a dense texture and homorhythmic block chords rather than a melody-and-accompaniment style. The long note values and unresolved secondary dominants contrast with the clear, Classically oriented harmonic style of the previous two sections and halt their forward momentum. The chordal movement from D to E also resembles the evocation of modality in Beethoven's late works, such as the *Missa solemnis* and the late string quartets (especially the 'Lydian mode' of Op. 132).

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[71] Mendelssohn's Op. 12 Canzonetta, like Brahms's Quasi-Menuetto, opens in the minor mode (G minor) before moving on to the Fairy music of the second section, in G major; the movement utilizes a simple song form (A B A') as the title implies, rather than the elaborate sectional design that Brahms employs.

[72] Brahms's previous Quasi-Menuetto movements, in the Op. 38 Cello sonata and in the Op. 16 Serenade, do not contain such abrupt shifts; the cello sonata's A-minor movement is firmly in 3/4 metre and the serenade's D-major movement is in 6/4. Both follow a standard ternary form with the minuet followed by a contrasting trio (marked as such), ending with a Da Capo repeat of the minuet.

[73] Brahms was an active contributor to the first complete Chopin edition, working specifically on the Mazurkas, opp. 6, 7, 17, 24, 30, 33, 41, 50, 59, 63 (see McCorkle, 750).

[INSERT EX.11 NEAR HERE]

The *Quasi-Minuetto* of the A-minor quartet displays a procession of characters from the past that is, in some ways, very much like Schumann's *Carnaval*. It presents brief passages in styles characteristic of one personality or another from Brahms's musical pantheon in a generally dance- or ball-like atmosphere.[74] Whereas in *Carnaval* the characters were all either imaginary or living at the time Schumann immortalized them, by 1873 Brahms's characters had become ghosts, whose music remained with the composer and his listeners alike in the form of a shadow or echo. For public listeners who might hear these echoes, the dawning recognition of a familiar style might prompt a simple head scratching or further reflection on familiar pieces and their relationships to this work; but for listeners familiar with the composer and his inner circle, the same recognition could also evoke nostalgia and shared memories of mutual friends, even sadness at their loss. Brahms combines his most intimate expressions of belonging to a circle of composers and musicians who were also his most trusted allies with a public testament to his allegiance with them. The quartet movement memorializes this group in different ways for different listeners or performers, allowing each participant to consider his or her relationship to the past in a new way.

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[74] In two later works, Brahms also employs a succession of rapid style changes within a single inner movement, but these serve very different purposes than his use of reminiscences here. The middle movement of the three-movement F-major quintet, op. 88 (1882), combines elements of a slow movement with interruptions that evoke a Scherzo, allowing Brahms to create an innovative formal hybrid. The A-major Violin Sonata, op. 100 (1886) likewise utilizes a hybrid inner movement. In this earlier string quartet, however, Brahms writes four completely separate movements, and the Quasi-Menuetto Scherzo movement presents a commentary on the Scherzo form rather than a completely new form.

In the C-minor quartet's Allegretto movement, we also encounter familiar and influential musical personas as Brahms remembers them for us. Brahms juxtaposes two of Vienna's most famous musical characters, Beethoven and Schubert, in a movement that combines the 'public' learned style of the concert hall with a more private amateur style associated with the parlour. He emulates a conventional Scherzo and Trio movement by using a ternary form, though without these labels. The primary theme of the opening Scherzo presents Brahms's recomposed version of the first theme of Beethoven's 'Tempest' sonata, Op. 31, no. 2. Shown in Ex. 12a, Beethoven's theme is in the *Sturm und Drang* style, with a descending melodic line and fast-paced, rearticulated quavers. Brahms's version (in the first violin) is very similar in construction to Beethoven's theme, but the difference in character is striking (Ex. 12b).

[INSERT Exx.12 a and b NEAR HERE]

By changing the tempo markings and time signature from Allegro to a slower *Allegretto molto moderato e comodo* and from cut-time to 4/8, Brahms has removed the most memorable aspect of Beethoven's theme—its tempestuousness. Brahms's accompaniment is plodding and sombre, where Beethoven's had been light and airy. Brahms's addition, too, of a haunting counter-theme in the viola heightens the sense of foreboding. Just as Schumann drew attention to his thematic reminiscence in *Carnaval* musically by creating a temporal remove and visually by providing a clue to the performer, the uncanny character of Brahms's passage creates the effect of a remembered theme: almost of a tune remembered *incorrectly*. In this way, Brahms evokes the public image of Beethoven as a serious, dark, and troubled soul.[75]

After the repeat of the exposition section, a fanfare figure with ascending triplets in bb. 37-38 leads abruptly from F minor (i) to a new sound-world in D-flat major (VI), where a rustic duet dominates the unusually stable development section (Ex. 13).[76] The first violin and viola present the eight-bar theme to a pizzicato accompaniment played by the other two instruments. The two violins repeat the theme in its entirety with the lower instruments accompanying in bb. 46-53. This lyrical moment in a new key a third away from the tonic brings Schubert to mind, both in its musical style and formal procedures. In fact, the sixteen-bar section bears a strong resemblance to the first-movement secondary key area of Schubert's C-major string quintet (D. 956). In the quintet, Schubert presents a turbulent first group in tonic, cadences onto G, and then provides a lush twenty-bar secondary theme in E flat (flat III; Ex. 14). Schubert and Brahms both construct their themes as duets, and both composers repeat the theme in its entirety. Even the approach to the new key is similar, with a unison sonority in the strings held over by one player who is then joined by a duet partner. In Schubert's quintet, the second cello slides down chromatically to the new tonic pitch a third below the held-over G, while in Brahms's quartet, the viola's entrance on F leaves the harmony somewhat more mysterious until the downbeat of the following bar clarifies the new key as D flat major and the violin's held C flat as a retardation resolving to tonic.

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[75] In his 1876 assessment of the quartets, critic Hermann Deiters described the third movement in dreary terms: 'An earnest and gloomy character perseveres also in the following movement […] In the primary theme of the violin, to which the viola plays an independent theme, we recognize still a feeling of deep and lasting pressure in the harmonic pace and envision a dark insecure mood; indeed an awakening from the dream of the foregoing movement [the "Romanze"], but an awakening to joyless reality.' [Einen ernsten und trüben Charakter bewahrt auch noch das folgende Stück […] In der herrschenden Bewegung der Violine, zu welcher die Bratsche eine selbständige Bewegung ausführt erkennen wir noch einen auf dem Gemüthe tief lastenden Druck, in den harmonischen Gängen, und Ausweichungen eine dunkle, unsichere Stimmung; zwar ein Aufwachen aus dem Traume des vorigen Stückes, aber ein Aufwachen zu freudeloser Wirklichkeit] Hermann Deiters, "Streichquartette von Johannes Brahms" *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 13 (10, 17, and 24 July 1878), 438. Translation mine.

[76] Deiters describes this section as, 'in a more appropriate affect' [in entsprechender Bewegung], presumably meaning more appropriate for a Scherzo movement. Ibid.

[INSERT Exx 13 and 14 NEAR HERE]

The Trio of Brahms's string-quartet movement, marked *Un poco più animato*, evokes popular entertainment music (*Hausmusik* or *Salonmusik*), creating an even stronger contrast to the brooding opening theme. Through a change of metre and tempo and the use of instrumental effects, Brahms creates a simple waltz. The new section in 3/4 metre is performed at one beat to the bar in the manner of a waltz; the first violin's theme begins with a crotchet pick-up and continues with a swaying melody that utilizes a hook-shaped contour with emphasis on the sixth scale degree, typical of waltz themes (see Ex. 15a). Meanwhile, the second violin's alternation between open and stopped strings creates a hurdy-gurdy-like sonority. When the *pizzicato* crotchets in the viola and cello turn to strumming in b. 118 (shown in Ex. 15b), the melody emulates a rustic guitar to further evoke an accessible vernacular style.

[INSERT Exx. 15 a and b NEAR HERE]

Thus, Brahms's Scherzo movement as a whole presents a binary opposition between serious, contemplative musing and light-hearted popular music making (and dancing). The sensual vernacular style of the Trio recalls the simple *Hausmusik* entertainments of the mid-century Biedermeier period in Viennese cultural life, and, more importantly, Brahms's own accessible domestic style in earlier works like the string sextets.[77] The style used in this section and in the development in D flat also suggests a musical personality associated with that period in musical history. Franz Schubert's lighter pieces for piano and wildly popular song output exemplify the after-hours pastimes of the early nineteenth-century bourgeoisie.[78]

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[77] On the usual characteristics of the Biedermeier style in music, see Kenneth DeLong, 'The Conventions of Musical Biedermeier', in *Convention in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Music: Essays in Honor of Leonard G. Ratner*, ed. Wye J. Allanbrook, Janet Levy, and William Mahrt (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1992), 195-223. DeLong also discusses the inherently nostalgic mode of this style, another element of memory and reminiscing at play in this quartet.

Schubert's many waltz and Ländler collections, his songs in a folk-oriented (or *Volkston*) style, and his accessible piano pieces like the *moments musicaux* were familiar to listeners and amateur musicians in the nineteenth century; indeed, his works in the 'prestigious' genres of symphony, quartet, sacred music, and opera were largely unknown, as most of these works remained unprinted until the last three decades of the century.[79] The composer's association with *Hausmusik* forms and domestic genres in the years following his death in 1828 led to a feminized public image of him that counters the masculine, 'heroic' one of Beethoven. This image persisted in the Viennese and German imagination well into the twentieth century, as Scott Messing has shown, and it continues to colour modern reception and historiography of his works.[80]

Brahms and his circle, however, certainly knew of a more multi-facetted Schubert.[81] Brahms's earliest mature works (examples of his "First Maturity", including his early chamber music) appear to be modelled on Schubert's sonata-form works, and he famously noted that his love of the older composer was ‘a serious one, precisely because it is no passing fancy.’[82] This characterization of his *love* for Schubert’s music creates a very different image than his apparent *fear* of Beethoven, imagined as ‘that giant’ tramping behind him, as Kalbeck reports.[83] Brahms’s choice to turn away from a clearly Schubertian path laid out in the earlier chamber works in favour of a Beethovenian one as represented in the Op. 51 string quartets and the first symphony is expressed in the stark contrast we hear in this quartet between the ‘serious’ Scherzo and the light-hearted Trio. Brahms uses musical style here to articulate his move from the private sphere of his earlier works into the public sphere represented by orchestral music and genres associated with concerts, with Beethoven, and with Vienna’s musical, cultural, and intellectual elites.

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[78] Brahms's interest in and familiarity with contemporaneous Beethoven scholarship—including his close friendship with Beethoven biographer and sketch-scholar Gustav Nottebohm—and his active participation in the mid-century Schubert revival that involved performances and the creation of collected-works editions suggests that his meditation on the stuff of history and reputation would have been quite consuming, and may well have found expression in this provocative string-quartet movement.

[79] A few of Schubert's song-based chamber works were published and performed in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, such as the A-minor string quartet with music from *Rosamunde* (published as Op. 29/1 in 1824), the "Trout" piano quintet (posthumous, 1829 as Op. 114), and the D-minor quartet based on "Death and the Maiden" (posthumous in 1831 without opus number).

[80] Scott Messing, *Schubert in the European Imagination*, Eastman Studies in Music 40, 2 vols (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2007). See especially Volume 1: *The Romantic and Victorian Eras*, chapter 1 ('Robert Schumann's Schubert: Inventing a *Mädchencharakter*', pp. 8-55) and chapter 2 ('Disseminating a *Mädchencharakter*: Gendered Concepts of Schubert in German-Speaking Europe', 56-102). In Volume 2 (Fin de siècle Vienna), Messing explores the later manifestations of this reception tradition through Schoenberg.

[81] Schumann and Mendelssohn had played a leading role in the discovery of the 'Great' C-major symphony (D. 944) in 1840—it was the only orchestral work published before 1884. Joachim frequently performed Schubert's chamber music, including the C-major string quintet. See Moser, *Joseph Joachim: A Biography,* 92, 94, 251-57, and 281.

IV. Public and Private Audiences

Brahms’s entry into the ongoing musical dialogue among nineteenth-century string-quartet composers would surely have been noted by keenly attuned performers and listeners such as Joachim, Clara Schumann, Heinrich and Elisabeth Herzogenberg, and, later, by musicians such as Maria Fellinger and her family. It is likely also to have been discussed by listeners and music enthusiasts such as musicologist and Beethoven biographer Gustav Nottebohm (a friend of Brahms and participant in the Billroth soirees) and Billroth himself. Brahms’s musical style encourages an analytical listening approach that mirrors the sort of critical thinking and exploration prized by Billroth and other friends and colleagues. Tellingly, Brahms dedicated his third string quartet (Op.

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[82] Brahms to Adolf Schubring, June 1863 (Brahms, *Briefwechsel* 8 [Tutzing: Schneider, 1974], 199). Quoted in Robert Pascall, ‘Brahms and Schubert’, *Musical Times* 124/1683 (1983), 286. .On Brahms’s first maturity, see James Webster, ‘Schubert's Sonata Form and Brahms's First Maturity’, *19th-Century Music,* 2 (1978-79), 18-35; 3 (1979-80), 52-71.

[83] Kalbeck writes that Brahms made this remark (‘Du has keinen Begriff davon, wie es unsereinem zu Mute ist, wenn er immer so einen Riesen hinter sich marshieren hört.’) to Hermann Levi, who communicated it to Kalbeck. See Kalbeck, vol. 1, 165.

67, published in 1876) to another medical scientist, Theodore Engelmann, with whom Brahms enjoyed discussing the latest developments in studies of bacteria and neurology.[84]

Some listeners at public performances may also have noted these allusions and other learned elements, but descriptions of audience reactions to the quartets demonstrate the confusion they engendered in the concert hall. Reports from London performances in the 1880s indicate that concert audiences did not care for Brahms's innovations, that the works disappointed expectations based on earlier chamber works and Classical pieces such as Haydn's or Mozart's quartets, which were played on the same programme. For instance, an 1886 reviewer noted,

> Passing to the novelties, we have first to notice Brahms's Quartet in C minor (Op. 51, No. 1), [. . .] The genius of Brahms has not fully manifested itself in this class of composition, the Quartets being decidedly inferior to the Sextets, and also to the works for piano and strings. [. . . The inner movements] are worthy of the composer, while the first and final sections are too sombre and complex to be pleasing. Still, if Brahms is sometimes stern and ungenial he is never trivial, and the audience were quick to recognise the good qualities in the C minor quartet.[85]

In his review of the published score for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, Leipzig-based critic and Brahms acquaintance Herman Deiters noted that these quartets belong with the genre's greatest exemplars (the works of Beethoven) while also noting that they require the utmost concentration in order to be understood and appreciated. The works' inaccessibility to casual listeners is treated as a laudable attribute:

> On the whole, this work stands definitively in certainty and independence of invention, in symmetry and the organic shaping of its development alongside the best that this genre has to offer. That the composer disdains in parts to approach the listener in an easy fashion, demanding effort from the listener in order to penetrate the understanding of the detail and of the whole—well that is a quality which is no less inherent in Beethoven's quartets for those who hear them for the first time; beauty can not always be easy.[86]

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[84] See the correspondence between Engelmann and Brahms (Brahms, *Briefwechsel*, vol. 13) and the entry in Peter Clive, *Brahms and His World: A Biographical Dictionary* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2006), 127-29.

[85] 'Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts', *Musical Times*, 27/515 (1 January 1886), 18.

[86] 'Im Ganzen steht das Werk in der Bestimmtheit und Selbständigkeit der Erfindung, dem Ebenmasse und der organischen Gestaltung seiner Entwicklung durchaus neben dem Besten, was diese Kunstgattung aufzuweisen hat. Dass der Componist es stellenweise verschmäht, dem Zuhöher bequem entgegenzukommen, dass er von demselben eigene Bemühung verlangt, in das Verständnis des Einzelnen

Likewise, critic Wilhelm Tappert, who attended a Berlin performance of one of the quartets in 1877, suggested that the public could not possibly have understood the quartets' intricate musical language, despite their applause and apparent delight in the work. In his published review of the performance by Joachim, he asked how an untrained audience could find 'so exclusive a piece after a casual hearing so strongly beautiful', as one does with a 'pièce de Salon'.[87] These reactions point toward the growing tension between private and public musical styles in the nineteenth century and between the 'trivial' and 'serious' musics that came to characterize them.

Like Mendelssohn, Norbert Burgmüller, and Schumann, Brahms addresses his fellow musicians in these quartets—by inviting comparison with Beethoven, he engages other composers, as well as performers and connoisseurs familiar with the traditions of a shared past. By publishing them and promoting their performance in public concerts, though, he also invites the musical world to reflect on that past, offering a memorial to his honoured musical forebears that the public could share. Brahms traces his own musical lineage backwards through the recent past of quartet composition to Beethoven and beyond to the genre's roots, and the dedication to his dear friend, the learned connoisseur Theodore Billroth, strengthens that connection to informed patronage and thoughtful reception of musical works.

For the public, he shows a teleological development from Beethoven to his own style (much the way that Schoenberg would later by appropriating Brahms's techniques as predecessors of his own). In his display of chamber music's connectedness to the past, Brahms shows that these genres and their performance traditions retain their significance for the present and the future, offering a lesson to naysayers and to the younger generation of composers and musicians avoiding chamber

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und des Ganzen einzudringen—nun, das ist eine Eigenschaft, welche den Beethoven'schen Quartetten für den, der sie zum erstenmal hört, nicht minder innewohnt; das Schöne kann nicht immer leicht sein.' Deiters, Hermann. "Streichquartette von Johannes Brahms", 439 (see note 74). Translation mine.

[87] Angelika Horstmann, *Untersuchungen zur Brahms-Rezeption der Jahre 1860-1880* (Hamburg: Verlag der Musikalienhandlung Karl Dieter Wagner, 1986), esp. 98-111.

music in the 1870s and afterwards. His memorial gestures to Beethoven, Schubert, and other composers in 'conservative' genres serve as reminders of a rich musical heritage in need of support. Thus, these works serve a teaching function, provide a public service, and express his own sense of resolve and commitment to a cherished musical tradition. For his private inner circle, the connections to mutual friends and mentors serve as loving mementos to personalities and works that held special meaning to them. In these quartets, as in other works, Brahms constructs a multi-layered musical community that bridges the private and the public spheres, including personalities from his past and from music's past, and extends an invitation for membership to generations of musicians who would follow in his footsteps.