

Problematising ‘Historically-Informed’ Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Performing Practices: Towards a Research-Resourced Performance of Brahms Op. 120/1 Viola Sonata

David Milsom (University of Huddersfield)

1. Aims and Intentions

When I addressed the ‘Performing Brahms in the Twenty-first Century’ symposium in Leeds on July 2nd, 2015, I took as my topic Johannes Brahms’ op. 120 no. 1 sonata, in the version for viola, which I had just recorded. I had done so – controversially in this context – on ‘modern’ instruments, with a necessarily personal fusion of historical ideals and interests within an avowedly contemporary approach. It would be tempting to claim that this was predicated on the conscious desire to bring together the riven ‘mainstream’ and ‘HIP’ communities, but this would be disingenuous. In reality, the approach (and that of the whole of a forthcoming Brahms viola/violin sonata disc) was simply a matter of playing this music in the way that is true to my own artistic ideals. Crucially, though, these ideals span a wide range of approaches. There are many of us in this position – and increasingly so – who have benefitted from the enhanced state of knowledge of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century practices, who seek to integrate such aspects into performance. Again, though, I struggle to encapsulate this in an appropriate adjectival construction. Maybe it is ‘historically sensitive’; but I struggle to claim that I would do something just because of its historical ‘rightness’. Certainly, it is ‘historically interested’. Maybe, though, we end up where we started with ‘historically informed’, as it is indeed coloured by a knowledge of the past, if not slavish in its adherence to it – either what of it we can know in performance terms (limited, of course), or what of it we have invented and formulated into a modern hypothetical aesthetic (akin, maybe, to ‘baroque’ performance approaches).

A key question here relates to how present-day musicians, in their various guises, might actually *use* a modern scholarly edition¹, such as the new Bärenreiter Urtext edited by Brown and Da Costa². The issue is, as far as I am aware, not one on which very clear research has yet been conducted. In any case, it does depend upon the nature of such a ‘scholarly’ edition. Such editions are often seen as requiring no further justification than the apparently irrefutable logic that they represent – as well as can be – a composer’s semiotic ‘instructions’ (if not intentions). The limitations of such modern editions of historical music in informing a performer as to those elusive instructions, expectations or intentions are well known and understood. It is partly through this increasing understanding of the limitations of notation – edited or otherwise – that historical annotated editions (replete with performance suggestions and markings by editorial agency) have become a prized resource. The CHASE project amply and dramatically illustrates this notion. Quite reasonably as well, one could question the extent to which obedience to notation, let alone the notoriously problematic idiom of a ‘composer’s intentions’, is necessary for an effective (or even just ‘valid’) performance. Leaving such thoughts on one side for the moment, the issue of particular relevance here is that in addition to a so-

¹ Practical experience defines the doubt and difficulties here. As an academic performance lecturer, I am often on the receiving end of students telling me how important it is to have a ‘good edition.’ In recent years, the student violinist learning a Mozart or Beethoven violin sonata is likely to select a clean, modern, ‘urtext’ edition. Nonetheless, this is often marked up with bowings and fingerings all of which (probably due to the conscious or unconscious agency of instrumental teachers brought up in a previous age) strongly suggest older, now-derided editions (such as the Carl Flesch/Artur Schnabel edition of the Mozart violin sonatas for C.F. Peters).

² Brahms *Sonaten in f und Es für Viola und Klavier/Sonatas in F minor and E-flat major for Viola and Piano op.120, Urtext, Herausgegeben von/Edited by Clive Brown, Neal Peres Da Costa* (Bärenreiter, Kassel, 2016, plate number BA 10907).

called 'urtext', this new Bärenreiter edition includes a performance realisation. The latter draws upon detailed investigations into materials such as treatises, historical scores, and early recordings, and applies their findings as performance annotations in the score, and a scholarly commentary. Such work mirrors the tripartite distinctions in previous Leeds University-based nineteenth-century performance scholarship, including my own, which is summarised in Figure 1 below. This process, I would argue, is most effectively undertaken by total immersion in the performance aesthetics under investigation, followed by re-emergence into the 'mainstream' as an artist in possession of a fuller, richer palette, if you will. There are obvious empirical drawbacks, since many of the ideas discussed are inevitably hypotheses; but the methodology seeks to widen the scope of resources for historically-informed and 'research-resourced' performances.

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
INVESTIGATION	ASSIMILATION	DISSEMINATION
- understanding style on record, in treatises, in editions	- incorporation of such traits into performance	- public performances and 'outreach' to display fruits of scholarly research

Fig. 1: Methodological Processes in Leeds University Projects (LUCHIP) c. 2004 – c. 2016³

My inspiration to record the two op. 120 sonatas arose directly from this new Bärenreiter edition. Its 22-page, double column 'Performing Practice Commentary' seeks to offer the player a range of historically-motivated performance suggestions, the overall intention being to resource a suitably 'Brahmsian' rendition. But the question remains – what might a musician *do* with such a resource?

Logically, responses to such an edition might be broadly as follows:

- [1] To follow it as precisely as possible, in deference to the scholarly authority of the editors and with uncritical acquiescence to the 'historical' ideas embodied therein;
- [2] To read it with interest, then use it as a means of questioning otherwise unreflective responses, and as a means of 'resourcing' a performance;
- [3] To (substantially, or completely) ignore it.

It seems likely that these three positions would come in this order of preference to the editors. This is only natural, and the whole conceit that is 'research-driven performance' relies, to a certain extent, upon buying into the idea that a composer's intentions should wherever possible be 'obeyed' (when they are instructions), and wishes 'respected' or 'discerned' otherwise. That the editors are internationally-renowned authorities in nineteenth-century performing practices validates their positions. In the same vein, a named 'celebrity editor' having annotated a score in the nineteenth century (for example, Ferdinand David, or Joseph Joachim) was supposed to be reason enough to implement bowings, fingerings, and any other stylistic stipulations. Available evidence points strongly to a society in that period that showed great deference towards such figures – although the extent to

³ This represents the basic intellectual framework of a number of projects under the banner of Leeds University Centre for Historically-Informed Performance (LUCHIP) including, notably, my own (2006-9) AHRC Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts, *String Chamber Music of the Classical German School 1840-1900: A Scholarly Investigation through Reconstructive Performance* (<http://davidmilsom.com/AHRC.html>) and the (2008-2012) AHRC CHASE project (www.chase.leeds.ac.uk). The CHASE website is currently in the process of being re-hosted by the University of Huddersfield (with full acknowledgement of the University of Leeds) in order that the resource can be maintained, curated, and enhanced into the future.

which even nineteenth-century musicians felt bound by score annotations is not well recorded). So too, in the twenty-first century, one might show respect if not for the editors themselves, then at least for the summation of decades-worth of careful scholarly research. This assumption (or at the very least, hope) runs as an obvious thread through much of the positivist scholarship undertaken by Clive Brown and a number of his close colleagues and former PhD students, including Neal Peres Da Costa, and indeed, myself.

It seems highly probable that, in their 2016 Bärenreiter edition, Brown and Da Costa are attempting a way of encouraging performers to practice historical traits of style, and to encourage a radical new appraisal of performance of this repertory. The incentive to do so, moreover, is widely shared. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson's recent scholarship advances the notion that 'classical music' performance is perhaps more fiercely 'policed' than any other art⁴ (although, surely, the nature of modern 'conceptual art' argues for similar orthodoxies and establishment conventions) in a 'system' that is beholden to an established industry of performance evaluation and struggles to elevate equitable means of qualitative analysis. This situation creates conditions that foster stability of interpretative decisions in a constructed 'mainstream', by definition reluctant to admit more radical alternatives – of which the more thorough-going historical renditions Brown espouses in his own writings are an example. The desire to model a more 'historically-interested' rather than fully 'historically-informed' perspective, perhaps aligning with the second of the categories above, has motivated this study, and a forthcoming recording which is the topic of discussion below.

2 Recordings Commentary

My aim in recording the op. 120 viola sonatas (along with the op. 108 violin sonata) for public release was not to undertake an academic exercise. Instead my thinking was, simply, to make the best recording I could, aligning with my own artistic ideals. If this aspiration appears a little lacking in scholarly rigour, then so be it; but in this regard it seems probable that I have acted with the performance intentions of most musicians. This is not the place to enter into speculative remarks concerning what motivates performers to perform in the way that they do. That said, it is a truism that performers perform in the light of their own experiences, and the socio-cultural contexts in which they find (or put) themselves. For my own part, my initial training and education pre-dated any of my own conscious interest in historical performing practices, and locates me within my own cultural context, learning from such British performers as Martin Milner, Peter Cropper, and Roger Bigley. Then came an academic interest in historical performing practices, under the guidance of Colin Lawson and Clive Brown, which opened out into an interest in experimenting with historical instrumentation and practices. Much of this has centred around the study and practice of 'romantic' performance at the University of Leeds, dominant in the period c. 2004 to Clive Brown's retirement in 2016. My 2006-9 AHRC Fellowship project attempted to put the fruits of my own research into practice. Since then my professional profile has been not of increasing *specialisation* (a route often trodden by period instrument practitioners), but rather increasing *generalisation*, reflected in my current role as Head of Performance at the University of Huddersfield, in which I am, necessarily, engaged with a wide range of music, and different levels of competence. Putting on the mantle of historical practice has not been a one-way ticket, and my time is divided between the performance of music of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and indeed twenty-first centuries, in a wide range of contexts. This

⁴ 'The performance police are everywhere. Teachers, examiners, adjudicators, agents, critics, promoters, producers, record reviewers, bloggers. Performance is policed from the first lesson to farewell recital.' Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, 'What's wrong with classical music?' <https://challengingperformance.com/whats-wrong-with-classical-music/>

is by no means unusual for the contemporary musician. We all have to earn a living. Relatively few have performance interests at the exclusion of all others.

This being so, it seemed appropriate to look at these works in a less specialised organological context. Not wanting to typecast either my own approach (or, indeed, the effective performance of Brahms) in an exclusively 'HIP' context, I decided to perform the works with modern instrumentation. The term 'modern instruments' is often used vaguely and/or misleadingly, but here a literal application is possible. The viola used is a 2012 instrument by Sheffield luthier John Cockburn; the piano – a Bösendorfer Imperial – is equipped with Richard Dain's 'Phoenix Agraffe' system to reduce downward load bearing on the soundboard, which increases clarity and resonance.⁵ It has long been my contention that style and taste can transcend the simple expedients of instrument sonority, string materials and the like, and I wanted to experiment not with a self-conscious 'historicism', but rather a more (dare I say it) 'natural', or at least assimilated, sense of style.

In order to provide context, I have studied the recordings made by Lionel Tertis (1876-1975)⁶ which exist as the earliest recorded viola performances of the op. 120/1 sonata. These recordings did not act as a deliberately positive influence on my own playing, however. Although the 1924 performance of the sonata by the acoustic process with Ethel Hobday is the earliest on record – an obvious historical fact that elevates its status here – it must be stated that extrapolation of nineteenth-century traits of style from Tertis' playing would be on shaky ground. Sharing a birth-date with Pablo Casals, Tertis was deeply influenced by Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962) who, perhaps more than any other violinist of the early recording era, might be seen as an exponent of a newer aesthetic (if only in terms of his regularly-applied vibrato). Indeed, as one of the first specialist exponents of the viola, and pursuing an interest in organological innovations, Tertis is perhaps celebrated in the popular mind not as a throwback to the old century, but rather as the 'father of modern viola playing', a phrase which decorates the cover of Biddulph's CD re-release of his 1924-33 Columbia recordings. Comparison of my own recordings with his (also, as contemporary photographs show, undertaken on metal-covered strings) is predicated not on my performance seeking to *emulate* an historical style (a process I have previously undertaken in respect of performances by Joseph Joachim and Marie Soldat, for example), but rather to show how the stylistic ideals I uphold perhaps pre-date those demonstrated in Tertis' performances. Thus, a test of the successful incorporation (even in this intentionally non-historically-recreative context) of a more-or-less 'Brahmsian' performing aesthetic might comprise analysing how *different* my own performance is from Tertis'.

In addition, I have made some analytical observations concerning an interpretation that might represent a more traditional, 'mainstream' approach of recent times. In view of his colourful remarks on the subject of 'historical performance', I picked out the 1998 recording by Pinchas Zukerman and Daniel Barenboim. Of course, it would be wildly remiss of me to claim that this recording is anything other than an example, and I am not implying that all such recordings are basically alike. Nonetheless, it seems sensible to contrast my own performance with one holding (quite clearly in Zukerman's case!) no evident HIP agenda, as well as the two historically-interesting Tertis renditions, in order to draw some comparisons.

In terms of attempting to embody if not a literal evocation of 'Brahmsian' performing practices then, certainly, one that is sensitive to the performance paradigm that his music inhabits, a dual process can be observed, and which was the backdrop to my performing decisions. Reductively, the elements might be enumerated thus:

⁵ <http://hurstwoodfarmpianos.co.uk/phoenixpianosystems.php?page=phoenix&catid=6&id=3>

⁶ Lionel Tertis (viola) & Ethel Hobday (piano) Vocalion X-9463 (mvmt 1), X9464 (mvmt 2), K-05117 (mvmt 3), K05117 (mvmt 4), 1924; Lionel Tertis (viola) & Harret Cohen (piano), Columbia LX 225/27 (CAX 6704/09), 1933.

[1] To seek to practice traits of style encapsulated in the work of what might even be termed a 'Leeds School' of string performing practice research and its developed interpretation of performance traits (many of which are embodied in my 2003 text under the headings of phrasing, portamento, vibrato, and tempo and rhythm⁷);

[2] To 'roll back' consciously what might be termed 'modernist' performance notions and expressions.

The first element requires little explanation, and the key conclusions regarding tempo fluctuations, vibrato and portamento usage and intentions, and so forth, have been discussed by many writers elsewhere in significant detail, and therefore need not be re-rehearsed here. The second aspect perhaps merits a little discussion. In this regard, the reader is directed to two examples that explain the thesis. One is an example of 'modernist' performance thought: Frederick Dorian's 1942 volume, *The History of Music in Performance*.⁸ This text makes frequent implicitly positive references to a new 'objectivism' in performance style. The other is Robert Hill's chapter 'Overcoming Romanticism' in *Music and Performance During the Weimar Republic*, which summarises key elements of this theory of performance aesthetics.⁹ In a nuanced but thinly-veiled polemic, Hill presents vivid examples of such thought, which he summarises thus, for example:

'The central issues separating the modernist and the pre-modernist experience of musical performance lie in two attitudes over which late-romantics and modernists of three generations ago were irreconcilable: assumptions about the nature of musical time and the acceptable extent of interpretative prerogative in the rendition of classical works.'¹⁰

By means of illustration of such divergence, I will quote two of Hill's example sources. A romantic outlook on tempo flexibility might be represented by Ignace Paderewski:

'Tempo Rubato is a potent factor in musical oratory, and every interpreter should be able to use it skilfully and judiciously, as it emphasizes the expression, introduces variety, infuses life into mechanical execution. It softens the sharpness of lines, blunts the structural angles without ruining them, because its action is not destructive: it intensifies, subtilizes, idealizes rhythm.'¹¹

By contrast, Hill quotes a late example of modernist thought on rhythm – here, Planer's criticism of Casals' 'sentimental' delivery of Bach:

'The element of music most ripe for sentimental exploitation is rhythm, particularly tempo. Sentimentalist interpretations prefer extremely slow tempos and rubato, the performer's subjective fluctuations of the pulse. While a performer can change the dynamics,

⁷ Milsom (2003), contents page.

⁸ Frederick Dorian, *The History of Music in Performance* (Norton, New York, 1942).

⁹ Robert Hill, 'Overcoming Romanticism', in Bryan Gilliam (ed.), *Music and Performance During the Weimar Republic* (CUP, Cambridge, 1994), 37-58.

¹⁰ Hill, 42.

¹¹ Ignace Paderewski, 'Rhythm is Life' in Robert Cumming (ed.) *They Talk About Music* (Bellville/Mills, Rockville, New York, 1971), Vol. 1, 107-112, quoted in Hill, 47.

phrasing, and the voicing [...], sentimental interpretations distort the tempo the most.¹²

Whilst Planer (writing here in 1989) might, perhaps ironically, show dislike of Casals' playing not only because of his 'pre-modernist' aesthetic (which is yet arguable given the 'progressive' traits of his performance in comparison to many other 'early cellists' on record¹³), but also by dint of an implicit reference to 'historically-informed' Bach performance of the late twentieth century (which many, famously, have aligned with a degree of cynicism to the tenets not of the eighteenth century, but rather twentieth-century modernism), it is notable that, even in recent times, pre-modernist performance traits – especially as regards rhythm – are not always received with stylistic impartiality.¹⁴

It is now appropriate to provide some analytical examples to illustrate these traits. I have chosen to concentrate on tempo and rhythm due to their importance as circumscribed above, as well as the tonal devices of portamento and vibrato, since the latter are equally obvious distinguishing characteristics between a later, 'international style' of string playing, and earlier, Brahmsian practices.

2.1 Tempo

Clive Brown's introduction to the Bärenreiter edition publishes a set of metronome markings from the 1928 revised Simrock edition by Oskar Schubert (1849-1935) and Carl Friedberg (1872-1955)¹⁵. Brahms, of course, did not indicate metronome markings, and therefore it is an act of speculation as to what range he considered appropriate or evidently preferred. Brown notes, in summary:

'A number of their metronome markings [...] seem problematic, as do those in other editions of Brahms' music from the 1920s and 1930s (notably the Litolff editions of the violin sonatas, which indicate some significantly slower tempos for lyrical music than those given by musicians closer to the Brahms circle and sometimes more rapid ones for faster movements).¹⁶

The implication here is that markings given by Schubert and Friedberg might be similarly problematic, up to a point, and it is notable that those for this sonata suggest rather fast tempos for fast movements (especially the first), and rather slow markings for the slow movements, if only on the basis of current (received) expectations. Determining tempos overall for movements is not an easy task, and, indeed, the data gathered from actual performances is not necessarily very revealing, given that in all performance, up to a point, tempo is variable. Nonetheless it is interesting to note a comparison of mean tempos of the four performances considered here (gained from the bar number range supply in

¹² Hill, 45.

¹³ 'Compared with many of his generation, Casals was an early adopter of the omnipresent vibrato which, unlike in the acoustic recordings of Beatrice Harrison for example, is intense, consistent, always quite narrow and economical. Reflecting prevailing trends Casals cut down his use of portamento, although it does remain evident in his later recordings.' David Milsom, *A-Z of String Players* (Naxos Educational, London, 2014), 88.

¹⁴ It is revealing, furthermore, that Bruce Haynes' text, *The End of Early Music* (Oxford, OUP, 2007), whilst usefully dispensing with a crude distinction between HIP and 'mainstream' performance by the acknowledged existence of 'romantic' performance, holes his own argument by a muddy confusion of nineteenth- and twentieth-century 'romanticism' (unhelpfully conflating nineteenth-century romantic traits with those of, for example, Furtwängler) and, in the context of a 'classical' German romanticism relevant to performance of Brahms' music, inaccurately describes romantic tempos as slow, as Planer does here. See for example 51-52.

¹⁵ Brown & Da Costa (2016) list the metronome marks in the 1928 Simrock edition, edited by Oskar Schubert and Carl Freidberg – XI.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, X.

the table below¹⁷⁾ with Schubert and Friedberg's. At this point it must be restated that my own performance did not seek to replicate the ideals set out by the Bärenreiter editors. Testing some of my performing practices against the backdrop of their remarks (many of which are of course informed but ultimately speculative) thus acts as a means of ascertaining whether my own assimilated performing practices have developed embedded performance ideals that might be considered 'Brahmsian'.

	Tertis & Hobday 1924	Schubert/ Freiberg edition 1928	Tertis & Cohen 1933	Zukerman & Barenboim 1998	Milsom & Gooing 2015
Movement I; Allegro appassionato	116	132	109	104	112
Movement I / bar 214; Sostenuto ed espressivo	85	60	55	57	70
Movement II; Andante un poco Adagio	62	69	68	64	75
Movement III; Allegretto grazioso	144	126	143	147	164
Movement IV; Vivace	108	104	99	92	95

Fig. 2: Approximate Metronome Markings in Recordings Sample, plus Schubert/Freiberg's edition

Taken as only a rough estimate of performance characteristics, it is notable that, in general, the fastest tempos are found in the earlier Tertis recording, whilst the slowest are found in the Zukerman rendition. There is evidence of a broadening out of tempo between the two Tertis performances, in the fast, outer movements, which aligns with wider performance trends. Indeed, it is in the matter of tempo and its flexibility that creates the greatest distinction between the two Tertis performances (which, both by a mature artist aged 48 and 57 respectively, are of course only nine years apart¹⁸⁾). The most significant difference is found in the change of tempo into the *Sostenuto ed espressivo* section in the first movement. The earlier performance moves along at crotchet = 85, which feels somewhat hasty by modern standards; yet the later Tertis performance takes this back significantly to 55, which is the slowest here, and slower than Zukerman in a performance that, for a variety of reasons, feels very much slower and heavier than any of the others. Conversely, the passage immediately preceding the *Sostenuto ed espressivo* section, whilst fundamentally stable in terms of average BPM in the other performances, sees a marked acceleration in the passage from bar 172 onwards in the Tertis/Hobday performance, which means that even the tempo of crotchet = 85 is a marked slowing down in comparison to what has come before. Given that most parameters of performance show distinct similarity between the two Tertis recordings otherwise, including tempo in other movements,¹⁹⁾ it seems at least possible that mechanical considerations had a part to play here. The faster tempo from bar 172, and a marked tendency to abbreviate as much as possible the longer notes (such as the tied crotchets in bars 199 and 201), substantiate the possibility of worry about recording side length, as though the slower tempo at the *Sostenuto ed espressivo* needs to be 'earnt' in the previous section.

¹⁷⁾ The mean tempos were calculated using a simple 'tap along' method using a website app which calculates a mean 'beats per minute' tempo: www.all8.com/tools/bpm.htm/

¹⁸⁾ One element I tried to take into account in my 2003 book was the age of the performer at the time of recording. It was my contention that a mature performer, already celebrated on the concert stage, was less likely to change his or her performing characteristics than a young performer at a time of stylistic and philosophical change, who might be more impressionable to changes of fashion (maybe for the simple expedient of aligning themselves with 'progressive' performing aesthetics) – see 7-8.

¹⁹⁾ With the exception of the styles of pianism practiced by Hobday and Cohen, which will be discussed a little more later.

Attention might be drawn to the tempos in my own performance. Although the mean tempo calculated for the first movement is significantly slower than Schubert & Freiberg's suggestion (which, as Brown expands in his commentary, is likely to be only a starting tempo), it is still faster than all but one of the other recordings, and only marginally slower than the fastest here, the Tertis/Hobday performance which, as discussed above, might have been influenced by the more stringent limitations of acoustic recording. The last movement is quite steady, however, showing maybe the unconscious influence of 'mainstream' Brahmsian practices which, given that my formative training engendered listening to many violinists of the Israeli/American tradition such as Zukerman himself, is perhaps not surprising. The *Andante un poco Adagio* (often taken somewhat slowly by twentieth century players) is, at quaver = 75, only a little slower than the quaver = 80-88 range suggested as 'plausibly Brahmsian' by Brown,²⁰ and it is significantly faster than the others here). The *Allegretto grazioso*, an issue rendered 'problematic' by Brown, is also given to be a Ländler, for which Brown suggests a 'Brahmsian' tempo of dotted minim = 50-54 or crotchet = 150 – 162. The Zukerman and Tertis recordings take this at a leisurely crotchet = 143-147, with my own recording being significantly faster and suggesting a different conception from them all at the upper end of Brown's suggested tempo range, at crotchet = 164 (dotted minim = 55).

What emerges from this comparison is an appreciation of both stability and difference. On the one hand, a historically-motivated performance (mine) and the chronologically 'earliest' emerge as the faster interpretations. Meanwhile, the most familiar performing practices gauged by the standards of a 'mainstream' rendition by a famous player whose sound is synonymous with the expected late-twentieth century approach, is the slowest. Attention must be drawn, too, to the similarity in this respect between the later Tertis recording and the Zukerman recording, which is perhaps surprising given the significant chronological distance between them. These matters are, however, not terribly revealing. The meaning of a metronome marking in an aesthetic in which tempo flexibility and the free interpretation of rhythmic figuration (not to mention desynchrony) was prevalent is not entirely clear in practice, and whether published or suggested markings advocate 'starting tempos' or 'mean tempos' is seldom clear. As any performer knows, tempo needs to be malleable to a range of practical factors – it is the pull and push of the tempo *within* figures that reveals the most in terms of appreciating musical conception. It is therefore to tempo flexibility and the realisation of rhythms that we shall now turn.

2.2 Tempo Flexibility

What is immediately noticeable in my own performance is a degree of tempo flexibility, with periods of intensification resulting often in hastening, but also (as at bars 129-131), slowing for emphasis. This general trait arises from my own general perception that tempo and rhythm can and possibly should be treated as expressive characteristics themselves in this repertory.



Fig. 3: Brahms op.120/1, 1st mvt, bars 129-131 as performed by Milsom/Goqing (2015)

At times (as at bar 50) I allow the tempo to move forwards on the descending and tailing-off phrase, to contribute to an effect of lightening; there is ample evidence of this approach being taken in nineteenth-century performance. Often, this flexibility, whilst usually relatively slight, can balance accelerandi and ritardandi (as at bars 29 and 30) where the notational regularity is conspicuously

²⁰ Brown & Da Costa (2016), XVII.

nuanced. This is an element of my attempt to unseat the verticality and regularity of the notation – a process that can be seen as endemic in the pianism of Schumann pupil and Brahms protégé, Ilona Eibenschutz, for example²¹.

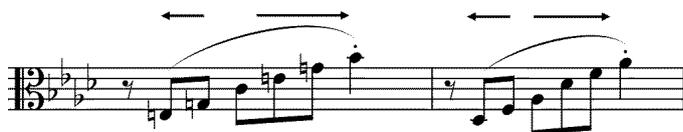


Fig. 4: Brahms op.120/1, 1st mvt, bars 29-30 as performed by Milsom/Googing (2015)

Rushing for the purpose of intensification of ideas (as in the case of the implicit hastening of rhetoric in the hemiolas in bars 21-23) reflects an intention to demonstrate a performance ideal that understands the dramatic potentiality of the musical idea. Nuancing of paired groupings in a ‘long-short’ formation is an aspect of style found in nineteenth- and indeed eighteenth-century practices, as Clive Brown observes in his 2006 article drawing comparison between Marie Soldat’s Mozart A Major violin concerto first movement performance, and eighteenth-century nuancing of equal-length notes²²).

Here, this kind of ‘inégaie’ can be heard clearly in the passage from bars 187 to 190:



Fig. 5: Brahms op.120/1, 1st mvt, bars 187-190 as performed by Milsom/Googing (2015)

More generally, my performance takes a relatively free approach to notated rhythm. This is a common feature of Joseph Joachim’s playing, where there are explicit departures from the notational text – even (and in many ways *particularly*) in the performance of his own Romanze in C²³. Most performers of an older generation to make recordings before 1920 practice more or less endemic departures from notated rhythms, either in terms of ‘over-dotting’ dotted figures, or in terms of smoothing them out – a matter that perhaps illuminates a very different approach to the musical ‘text’, and certainly the allowable ‘freedom’ of performance. The most striking examples anywhere are probably in Carl Reinecke’s piano rolls²⁴, but to practice a literal re-enactment would have required a very conscious (and concomitantly artistically artificial) approach that was not really my intention. Had I aimed for an ‘emulation’ I would, in any case, have undertaken this on period instruments as part of the performance ‘production’. Nonetheless, playing equally notated notes unequally is regularly to be encountered in my performance, and is particularly prevalent in the development and recapitulation. The aim here is to reflect the more whimsical aspect of the composition from bar 92, and this arises naturally out of the florid figurations in semiquavers later. Although such features can also be found in the exposition, my intention is to allow such departures to be a kind of performative development of the sonata structure. As a result, they are more restrained initially and become more prevalent later. Crucially, this might be said to undermine modernist notions of ‘performer as cypher’, and conceives my role as a performer as very much an extension of the compositional processes

²¹ A selection of Eibenschutz’s performances can be heard on the CD, *Behind the Notes – Brahms Performed by Colleagues & Pupils*, (Arbiter, 160).

²² Brown (2006), 39-41. This is also illustrated in my own emulation of this (1926) performance as part of an AHRC project included on my website, www.davidmilsom.com

²³ See for example, Milsom (2003), 166-7, and 254.

²⁴ A number of the Hupfeld and Welte-Mignon rolls can be heard (and seen) on Youtube, such as his performance of the Larghetto from Mozart’s Piano Concerto in D, K537, recorded on the Welte system in 1905, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYEZir3HDJk>

themselves. This is one of the higher-level implications of ‘romantic’ performance sensibilities, as I understand them.

In terms of pianism, my approach when working with colleagues is always to encourage, rather than didactically enforce practices. Thus, Jonathan Goong and I discussed together the spreading of chords, and I strongly advocated arpeggiating wherever he felt this artistically appropriate. Particular emphasis was placed on employing the rapid chord rolling that one hears in Otto Schulhof’s accompaniments of Marie Soldat in her recordings on the Union A label of 1926.²⁵ They become a conspicuous aspect of performance throughout, as at the opening itself, where there is also a process of vertical synchronicity yet horizontal unequalisation on the quavers. Further instances where the piano is the leading instrument are heard in bars 38 and 90, to take just two examples:

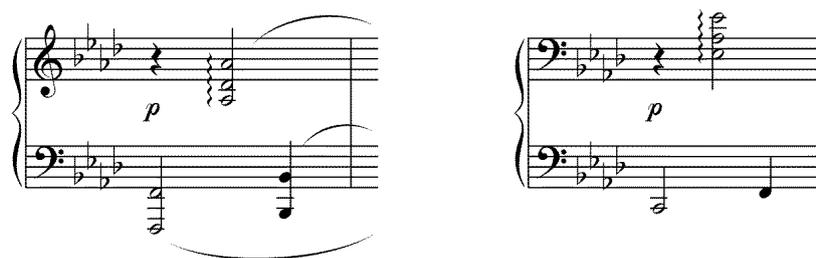


Fig. 6: Piano arpeggiation in Brahms op.120/1, 1st mvt, bars 38 & 90, as performed by Milsom/Goong (2015)

2.2.1 Tempo Flexibility Comparative Case Study: 1st Movement, Bars 1-52

The first fifty-two bars of the movement take us up to the second subject. I have employed a traditional ‘tap along’ analysis here, using Sonic Visualiser²⁶, and have mapped these inter-onset values onto graphs in conventional fashion. It must be stated at the outset, that, whilst the gathering of a certain amount of empirical data is of course part of this process, the elucidation of these graphs is not, nor can ever be, truly empirical. Nonetheless, displaying these performances side by side (the two Tertis recordings, the Zukerman recording, and my own) allows for interesting comparison between the earliest recording of this movement, a later representation via the (more faithful) electric medium by the same artist, an exemplum of an a-historical, recent ‘mainstream’ approach by one of the detractors from the HIP approach quoted above, and my own broadly and artistically historically-interested (rather than forensically recreative’) approach. It is likely that all recordings are made with various species of what might broadly be termed ‘modern instruments.’

It is difficult, of course, for one’s aural impressions to be entirely neutral, a matter made conspicuously obvious here by the fact that I find myself offering analytical observations of my own playing after the event. We are perhaps conditioned to expect to hear certain things in recorded performance of certain eras. With early (acoustic) recordings of string players this might be fast tempos, thin and tight vibrato, and obvious portamento. With players such as Zukerman who, aside from his disparaging remarks towards ‘historical performance’, is perhaps the kind of interpreter

²⁵ Here, organology perhaps plays a part. The tendency to arpeggiate is observed more in practice than in theory, as Neal Peres Da Costa’s detailed examinations of the practice show – see especially Neal Peres Da Costa, *Off the Record – Performing Practices in Romantic Piano Playing* (Oxford, OUP, 2012), 101-188. This may relate, as personal experience suggests, from trying to create a greater span of resonance (as is obviously the case in harpsichord practice). With a fine modern instrument (moreover further adapted as here to maximise the resonance and projective power of upper frequencies, a notable limitation on most nineteenth-century pianos, certainly of the vintages experienced in some of our previous ‘period instrument’ work) this is less ‘necessary’ and therefore excessive spreading of chords is less likely to be convincing, maybe.

²⁶ www.sonicvisualiser.org/

derided by some Brahms performance scholars as ignorant of and at variance with 'informed' approaches. Here, Sonic Visualiser is helpful, since it removes some of the conscious and unconscious bias and enables the analyst to focus on the (for the musician, maybe) relatively abstract activities of evaluating data sets and graphic representations.

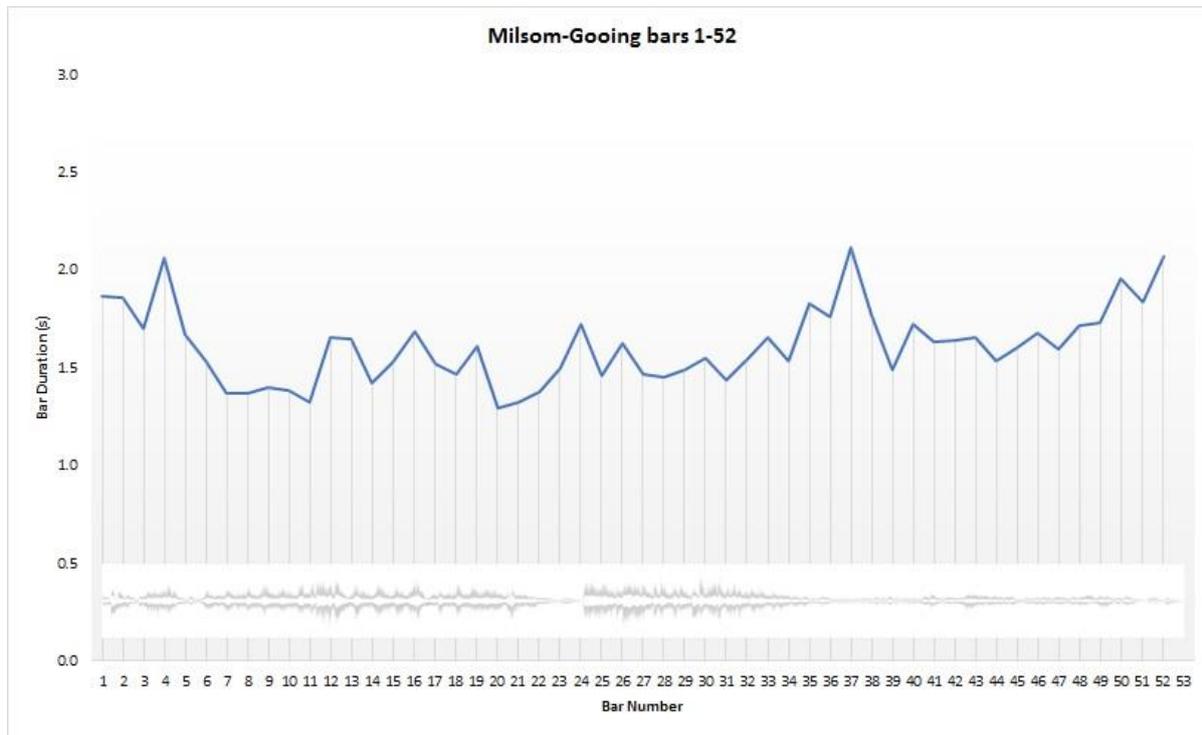


Fig. 7: Milsom/Gooing (2015) inter-onset values; Brahms op.120/1, 1st mvt, bars 1-52

My own performance (Fig. 7) demonstrates quite a volatile approach to tempo, with some regular peaks and troughs spanning 2-3 bar intervals between 14 and 20, and a gradual slowing in successive bars as the music loses energy, rhythmic definition, and on the falling phrase end bars 20-24. At the start, the piano introduction pushes forwards before a substantial slowing down in bar 4, into the viola entry. After this, there is a pronounced acceleration in the viola on the first few bars before a tempo that stabilises up to and including bar 11. Bar 12 (the dotted fanfare figure) sees a substantial slowing, as does its repeat at bar 16.

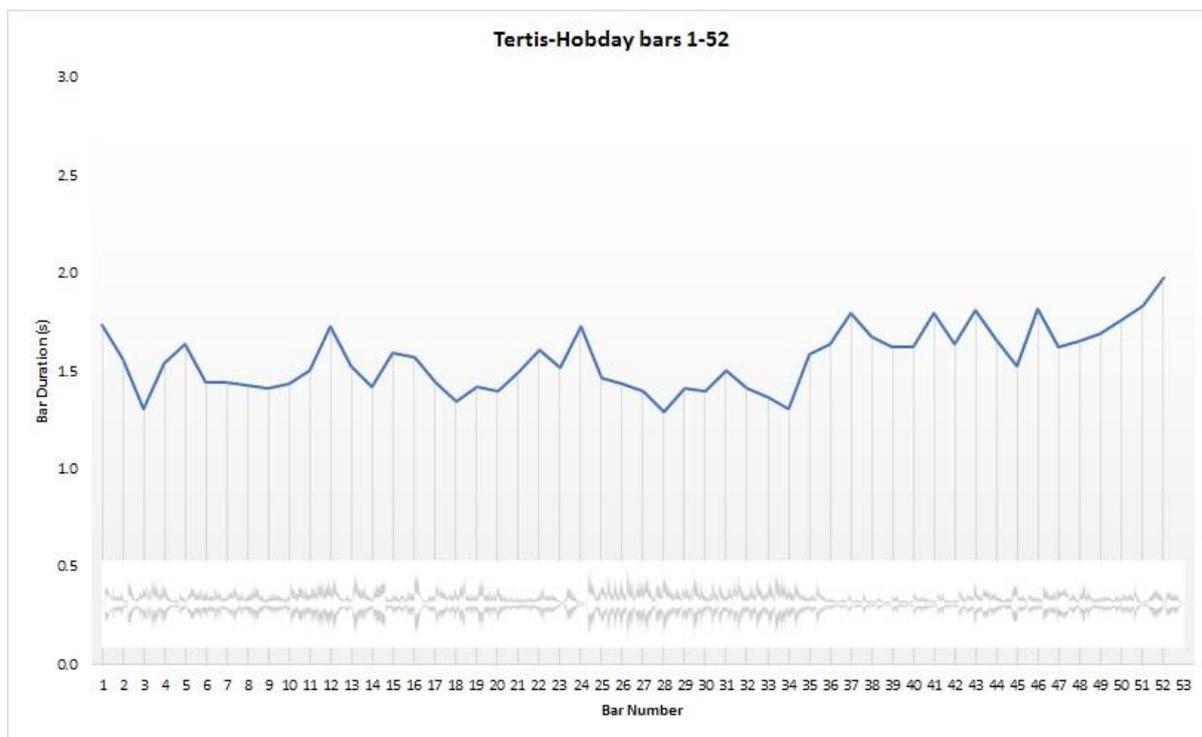


Fig. 8: Tertis/Hobday (1924) inter-onset values; Brahms op.120/1, 1st mvt, bars 1-52

The earliest recording here (Tertis and Hobday; Fig. 8) might – given global trends otherwise – invite expectations of a high degree of tempo volatility. In fact this is not especially so, and the overall impression of these measured inter-onset values suggests somewhat a less capricious and variable approach than the Milsom/Gooing recording. This might align with the hypothesis that Tertis was already within a more ‘modernist’ mind-set; his playing, of course, is typically characterised as forward-looking. Substantial differences open up between Tertis and the example of a more recent non-historical player (Zukerman). In the context of my approach, which sought to embody and assimilate earlier (perhaps Brahmsian) practices, both of Tertis’ interpretations demonstrate perhaps less of the nineteenth-century trait of tempo variation and flexibility. At the start, as with Gooing’s playing of the opening, Hobday accelerates on the initial phrase (more sharply indeed, hurrying bar 3 markedly), but slows bar 4 far less than Gooing does, suggesting (when heard) a slight ‘breathlessness’ that characterises the performance and which may, in an acoustic recording, suggest a degree of mechanical interference in the interpretation. On the entry of the viola, Tertis takes a much more spacious approach than I do, which, moreover, maps onto a much slower and more regularised vibrato, evident in the spectrograph discussion below, and (perhaps more to the point) yet more evident aurally. In bars 7-11, where tempo has substantially stabilised in my own performance (albeit at a slightly faster tempo/shorter bar duration), Tertis shows even greater tempo regularity. Thereafter, the profile to bar 25 is similar, although it is notable that, whereas my performance continues the stretched-out tempo from bar 12 into the rather painful tonal area implied by the rising diminished interval in bar 13, Tertis hastens over this, making the elongation of the fanfare-like bar 12 more fleeting. The effect is, perhaps, one of a lesser degree of reaction to the inherent expressivity of the notation, in that Tertis’ expressive use of tempo is somewhat less reactive to the harmonic and rhetorical implications than my own.

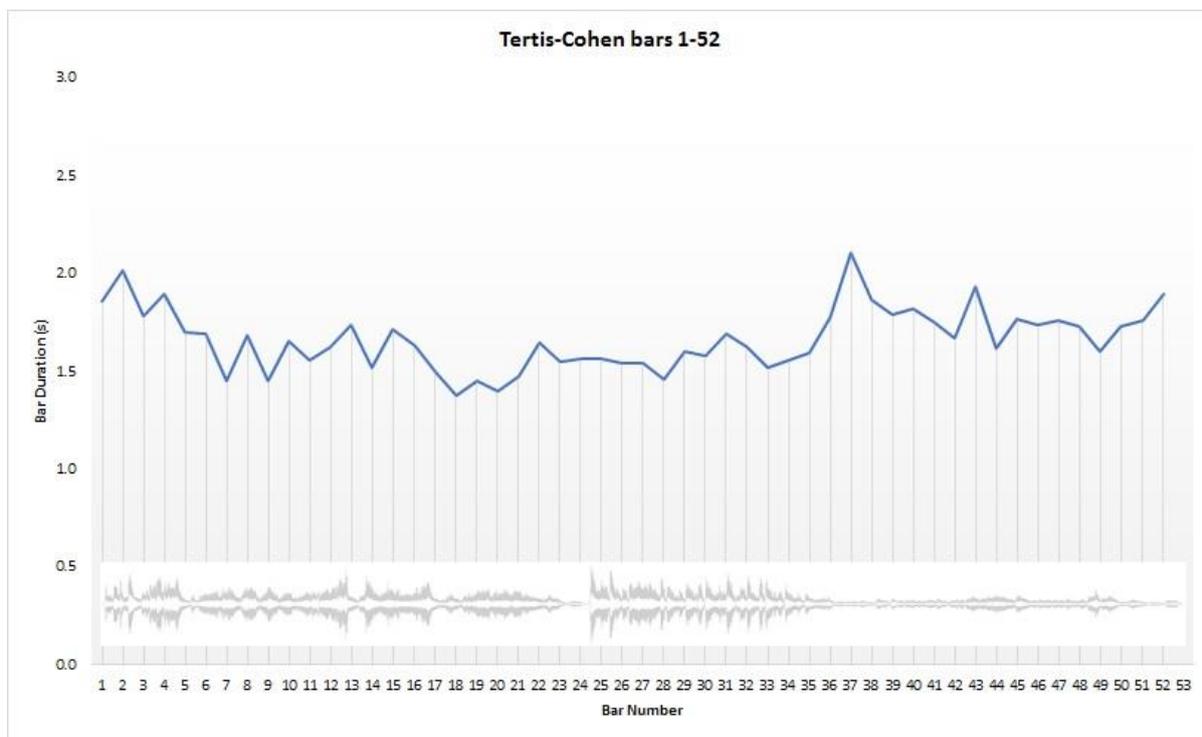


Fig. 9: Tertis/Cohen (1933) inter-onset values; Brahms op.120/1, 1st mvt, bars 1-52

Although the graph shape in Fig. 9, due to its scale, suggests some notable differences in comparison to the earlier Tertis/Hobday recording, in truth, the effect comes across as quite similar, if rather more spacious in terms of tempo. It is thus tempting to assert that, whilst it is highly probable that (and with a different duo partner, of course) the later interpretation shows some changes or evolutions in terms of performing style and tempo trajectory, it is otherwise different at least partially because of the more generous and grateful affordances of the electric medium. Caution must of course be exercised with such a conclusion. This said, my own recording has more in common with this one, with its general tendency to hasten the first few bars in a generally accelerating scheme. The piano episode seems more musically responsive than either Gooing or Hobday in the opening gesture (although differences are slight); whereas Gooing perhaps observes the twenty-first century expectation of tempo stability in the first two bars, and Hobday rushes forwards (possibly due to an awareness of acoustic side limits), Cohen slightly elongates the flattened sub-median (and therefore musically unexpected) second bar a little, before rushing bar 3 (like the others) and stabilising the tempo for the viola entry. Tertis, however, sets off with two bars of similar duration, giving immediately a more stable sense of tempo to the opening theme, slowing on bars 8 and 10, which corresponds to (and of course is linked with) the languid and pronounced portamenti – a small but signal instance perhaps of the tonal effect dictating the harmonic pacing (although, equally this might be said to be implied by Brahms' conspicuous employment of wide-spaced intervals). My own performance, whilst still using portamenti, does this much less, and there is a disassociation between the forward propulsion of the phrase, and the smaller-scale peaks and troughs of the melodic landscape – suggesting that my thoughts (at least *partly* subconsciously) were towards longer units and on a broader scale than Tertis' more small-scale-considered approach. This is partly historic, perhaps, and naturally a matter of artistic personality. This maps onto a global view that Tertis' recording feels a little more bound up in 'point-to-point' musical ideas on a more note-by-note basis – partly, it seems, by means of his evident concentration on tonal sensuousness, and partly, maybe, a broader philosophical intent to get closer to the music in greater magnitude. The latter is a trait of performing style that was to develop much further later in the twentieth century. Hereafter, manipulations of tempo are reasonably regular with frequent successive peaks and troughs, perhaps illuminating a fundamentally consistent tempo approach beneath such more detailed considerations.

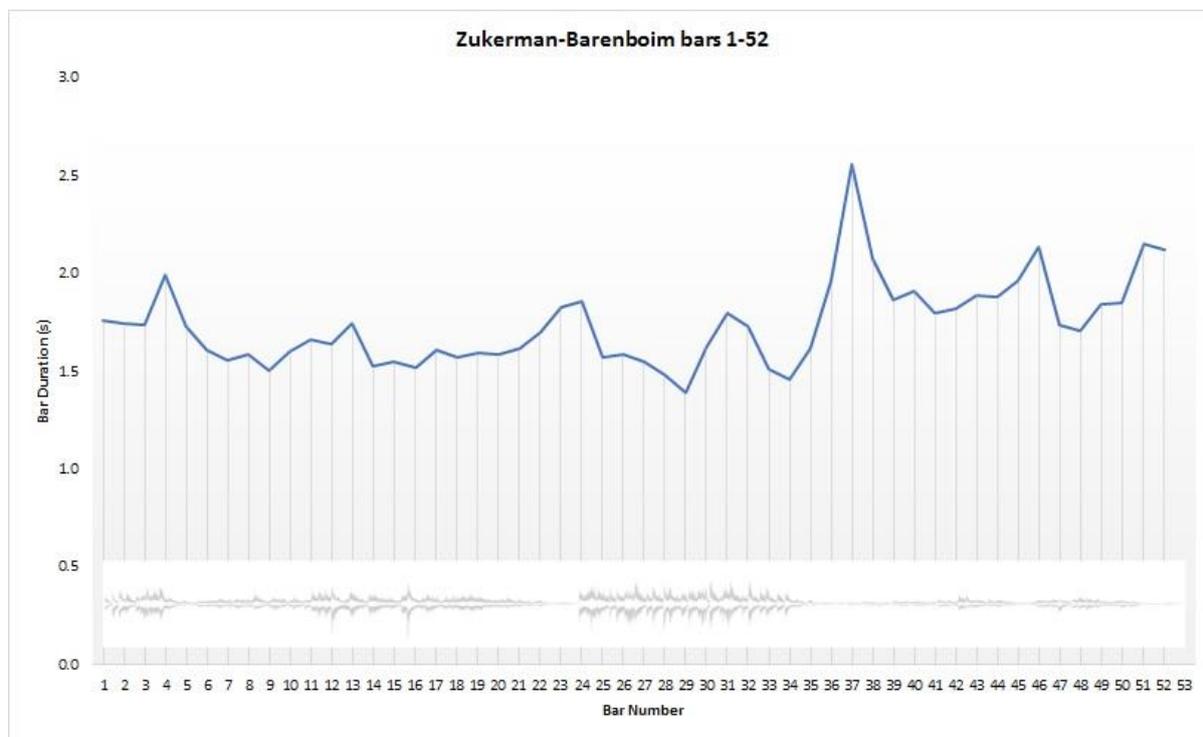


Fig. 10: Zukerman/Barenboim (1998) inter-onset values; Brahms op.120/1, 1st mvt, bars 1-52

The impression that the Zukerman/Barenboim recording (Fig. 10) creates from the outset is of a slower and more regular performance – stylistically, what we might expect perhaps from a superb but still stereotypically ‘modern mainstream’ player. In the first 25 bars, Zukerman’s tempo volatility is significantly less than the other recordings here, and there is a slower underlying pace. This perhaps confirms the (expected) characteristic here of a steady, considered, but relatively fixed style, tempo being seen (as it still often is in other contexts) as a disciplining element of the musical discourse and not so much an expressive parameter in itself.

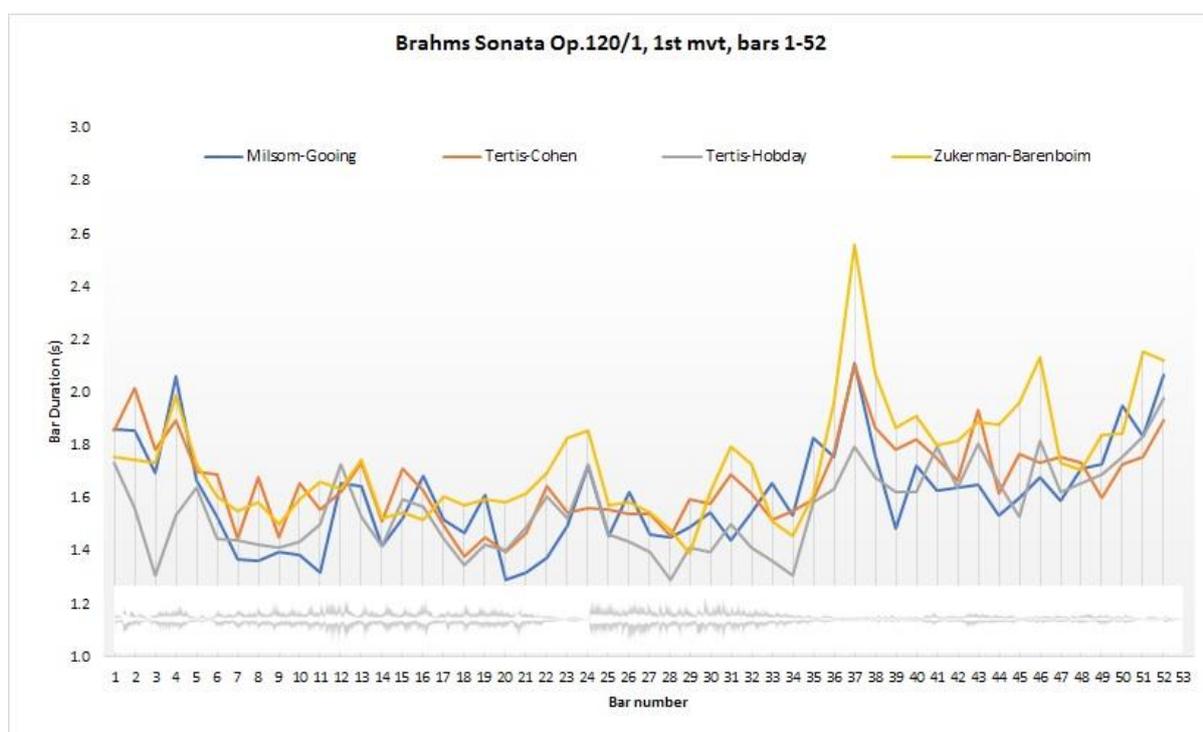


Fig. 11: Inter-onset values; Brahms op.120/1, 1st mvt, bars 1-52; all recordings

Looking at the whole passage up to bar 52, Figure 11 (displaying simultaneous mapping of our four performances) shows not only that Zukerman's performance, overall, maps onto the Tertis recordings surprisingly closely, but also that there are significant similarities between my own recording – the most volatile performance here (in which, crucially, volatility was deliberately sought!) – and Zukerman's, the most aurally consistent in terms of tempo. This illuminates the difficulties with the graphic representations generated by Sonic Visualiser, the vulnerability the analyst has when interpreting the data, and the tendency for the graph line, joining up specific inter-onset incidences, to convey at times powerful, but also misleading impressions. As ever, it compels a cautionary and corrective requirement to see such data as sets of *indications*, perhaps, and nothing more. Only to the infinitely more precise ears of the close listener can differences and similarities be more realistically determined, and then, of course, recognising the potentially distorting subjective effect of the filters of the auditors' own (pre)conceptions. Nonetheless, it is clear that Zukerman's graph line is, broadly, much flatter than the other recordings here, with the exception of a few substantial slowings. All of the recordings elongate bar 37-38 substantially via the tonic note F, which now acts as a pivot to D-flat Major as part of the stretched transitional area before the establishment of the C minor second subject at bar 53. This is one of the most important structural points in the first 52 bars, and Barenboim marks it with a very substantial broadening of tempo. This, as in the other recordings, is prepared by slowing down in the preceding few bars, but to a much more marked extent in Barenboim's case. Whilst the other recordings ease into the establishment of C minor at the end of our extract here, Zukerman and Barenboim's performance differs in not recovering the fundamental tempo, remaining slower after the start of the D-flat Major episode. This perhaps illuminates some mindset differences. Whereas my own performance is intentionally quite volatile in tempo, it exists otherwise somewhat 'in the moment', and explores the music as it unfolds. This might be said also of the Tertis recordings, although the second of these, with its more regularised and successive slowings and hastenings, implies a relatively localised perspective, perhaps concentrating on the tonal potentialities of specific notes and intervals in the interests of vibrato and portamento. Zukerman, as has already been noted, shows a more regularised approach to tempo in general, but privileges a few more fundamental structural changes – as if, maybe, the outworking of the overall structure has been carefully premeditated. The result, at a generally steadier tempo, feels less exciting, but is certainly a very considered and erudite approach. It may illuminate a more 'planned' form of musical expressivity, in comparison to the more spontaneous impression created particularly by the earlier Tertis performance and, indeed, my own. To say (in such a small illustration) that this emphasises the 'monumental' and 'learned' reception of Brahms in modern times is perhaps drawing too broad a conclusion, but it is certainly perhaps indicative.

2.2.2 Tempo Flexibility Comparative Case Study: Bars 214-236

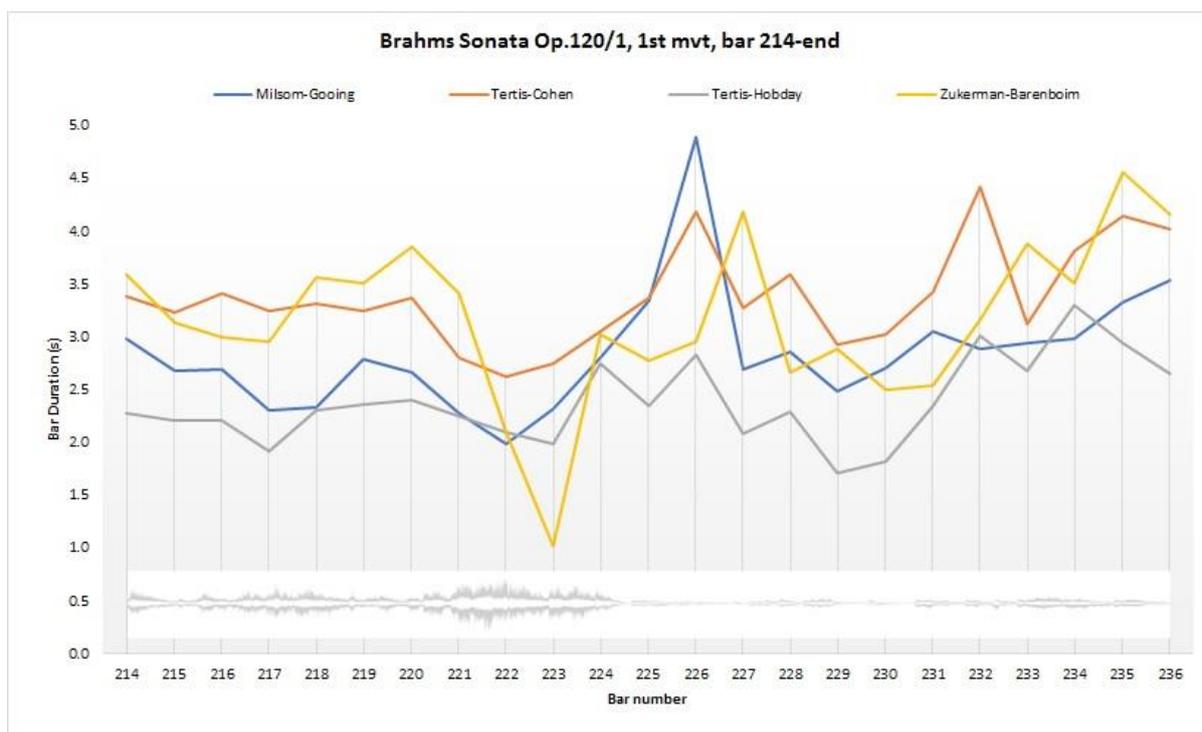


Fig. 12: Inter-onset values; Brahms op.120/1, 1st mvt, bars 214-236 (all recordings)

The final *sostenuto* section also allows for interesting comparison of the four performances. The first part (up to the solo piano episode at 225) shows notable similarities between all recordings in terms of basic tempo fluctuation architecture, with the exception of the Zukerman recording, which is characterised by a dramatic *accelerando* in bar 223 on the crescendo to the final forte, after which an equally dramatic slowing restores tempo to within the parameters of the rest of this phrase. The two Tertis recordings suggest a similar interpretative approach, albeit at notably divergent tempos (the Hobday recording is significantly faster), but similar in terms of inter-onset flexibility from bar to bar. The Tertis/Hobday performance does further hasten at bar 217, though, and thereby creates a more capricious mood here, whereas the Tertis/Cohen performance is remarkably ‘metronomic’ until a gradual slowing down in 221 and 222. The Milsom/Gooing performance here is quite similar to both of the Tertis recordings, albeit at a tempo approximately in-between them. Nonetheless, there is a greater degree of volatility here than in either Tertis recording. This allows for quite close mapping of the Milsom/Gooing recording onto the Zukerman/Barenboim performance, albeit at a swifter pace.

In the second half of this section, beginning with the piano episode of bars 225-228, the Milsom/Gooing performance is characterised by a relatively extreme broadening of tempo in 226, and an equally abrupt re-establishment of the mean tempo in 227. Although Gooing elongates 226 more than the others by some margin, like the others there is a re-establishment of the tempo afterwards, although it is notable that Barenboim is alone in this sample by stretching bar 227 on the establishment of the final theme and phrase.

Conclusions here are of course difficult to form with convincing certainty, but, with the exception of a small number of isolated instances, the reader will perhaps be struck by the similarities as much as the differences. It is perhaps noteworthy that the two Tertis performances are broadly similar in outline, whilst the capricious nature of the Zukerman/Barenboim recording perhaps rebuts any suggestion that this is a comparatively ‘metronomic’ rendition – it truth, there is much variability here also. That the two later recordings – one consciously ‘historically informed’ and the other (presumably) not – should emerge as the most visually variable here perhaps indicates as much as

anything else that over-generalisation of tempo volatility on the basis of recording date is insecure in many cases. The extent to which (in either of the Tertis recordings) the recording technology impinges upon the artistry should always be borne in mind, even if difficult to ascertain. On listening, one is perhaps most struck by differences of underlying tempo, in which the Tertis/Hobday performance seems perhaps challengingly swift according to current expectations, and the Tertis/Cohen and Zukerman/Barenboim recordings quite spacious. The Milsom/Gooing performance takes a more moderate approach (having already relaxed the tempo before the 'Sostenuto ed espressivo' marking) which makes the section appear perhaps more obviously as the *fulfilment* of earlier process in the movement, rather than a direct contrast with it.

2.3 Vibrato and Portamento

Performing practice evidence specifically dealing with string playing (and, within this, violin playing in particular) overwhelmingly supports the thesis that pre-twentieth century practices incorporated much more in the way of the portamento than was later to become characteristic; apart from written evidence, a move away from it can be heard by charting chronological trends on record. Equally, it seems highly likely that the now conventional thesis that vibrato was applied much less frequently and conspicuously is, broadly, an accurate one. There were, of course, inevitable – and before the existence of recorded sound, ultimately unknowable – variations between players and traditions. This being so, much of the scholarship to date based upon the materials compiled on the CHASE website has related to hypotheses based around these two devices as revealed by historical published or hand-annotated fingering systems. With one or two exceptions, this orthodoxy is accepted in academic and performance communities, although the nature of how such devices were applied in specific repertoires remains, necessarily, a matter for at times quite heated debate. In my own previous work, I have attempted to lay out a groundwork for understanding the interface between theoretical advice and practical application in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and have undertaken experiments to 'un-think' modern aesthetic ideals here in the interests of trying to make music convincingly with what (at the time) I understood to be likely practice.

In this context my approach was a little freer, artistically. With regard to vibrato and portamento, as with other performance aspects, I did not seek to play 'reconstructively', or as I necessarily envisaged the sonata might have been performed in Brahms' lifetime. Attempts to perform in the manner of Joseph Joachim and his protégés remains a fertile ground for experimentation, as embodied in my own AHRC-funded project, and the work of Clive Brown and many of his (recent) doctoral students. This work is valuable, and fascinating. Here, however, I attempted to 'act naturally', as with matters of tempo, although articulating this in such terms might strike the reader as naïve. One of the obvious gaps between modern attempts to realise historical style, and the original, actual 'historical styles', is scholarly self-consciousness. A performer of, for example, Brahms' circle, albeit having been trained in an un-replicable (and perhaps from a present perspective, psychologically undesirable) environment of didactic technical and stylistic teaching, is likely to have embodied performing practices much less 'consciously' than the bookish obsessions of present-day 'performer-scholars'. Engaging with an aesthetic that, unselfconsciously, allows for regular chordal arpeggiation, tempo volatility, languid sliding over intervals, and stillness of the left hand in cantabile passages is almost impossible, although traits of style can be incorporated, in some cases, with striking success. The analogy might be advanced comparing the situation with the acquisition of processes and techniques in fine art; exercises can be devised for the art student, but it is the *unconscious assimilation* of such aspects into the artist's own creativity that is ultimately necessary for gestures to be fully convincing. At the highest artistic level, such points are perhaps self-evident.

This in mind, my approach to vibrato and portamento here can perhaps be described with reasonable accuracy as influenced by a knowledge of Brahms-sensitive practice. For the most part I also follow bowings and fingerings found in Clive Brown's Bärenreiter performance realisation, which I helped to devise in the light of our pooled knowledge.²⁷ There is minimal doubt, however, that I use vibrato – which is not specifically notated in Brown's realisation – more than a player of Brahms' generation is likely to have done (although perhaps his support of the playing of the youthful Bronislaw Huberman shows that he himself was pragmatic about this up to a point²⁸), and portamenti are perhaps lighter and less conspicuous. Here, string materials do act as a practical determinant of difference. On metal-wound strings without the harmonic imperfections of necessarily irregular gut ones, portamenti feel rather less 'necessary', and the comparative smoothness of the string surface makes them less evident, maybe. Overcoming the greater friction of the sliding finger on a rougher gut string requires a more conscious process, and therefore, likely as not, a more conspicuous result. In addition, the less resonant properties of, for example, an unwound gut viola D string in comparison to an industry-standard modern item by Larsen or Evah Pirazzi, for example, is likely to make the slide be perceived as more prominent.

This is possibly further enforced by the sonic limitations of early recording processes – but this remains, for me at least, a scientifically untested speculation. Matching sonorities between recording 'takes' (although my own Op. 120/1 recording was deliberately only minimally edited) programmes the performer to try to maintain a similarity of style and practice whilst entertaining the conscious attempt to be 'spontaneous' – surely a paradox that bedevils any studio recording. Aligning the sonorities of the stringed instrument with the clarity and precision of a 'modern' pianoforte also means myriad conscious and unconscious adjustments in order to create a convincing aural 'whole', whilst a player might also be drawn to resort to more vibrato to ameliorate the tendency for so-called 'modern strings' to sound rather sterile. Arguably, the latter issue is less pronounced for the darker sonorities of the viola than it is for the violin. In other words, just as the use of so-called period instruments requires a number of compromises for the present-day player (less projective power, less reliability, difficulty of accurate stopping across strings on conspicuously different string thicknesses, etc), so too 'modern strings' require a degree of compromise when attempting to evidence aspects of historical performance style. Making sense of these limitations and navigating such choices (since they are available to the modern player unlike the choices borne of necessity in the more distant past) is therefore a pragmatic and practical matter as much as it is an ideological one.

²⁷ Brown & Da Costa (2016) acknowledge my 'valuable advice on viola fingering and bowing,' IX.

²⁸ Huberman, aged fourteen, performed Brahms' concerto to Brahms, and, revealingly, made two recordings for Berliner in 1899. These can be seen as stylistically quite revealing. As I commented, 'Both recordings (No. 3 of Schubert's *Moments Musicaux*, arranged by Auer, and Sarasate's transcription of Chopin's Nocturne, Op. 9 No. 2) feature a surprising amount of vibrato, which rather unsettles theories that its use only became continuous in the twentieth century. The Chopin performance also shows an almost continuous portamento – between all significant intervals – and this prominent use of both vibrato and portamento would undoubtedly have incurred Joachim's displeasure, notwithstanding Brahms's endorsement of Huberman's playing.' Milsom (2014), 250.

2.3.1 Vibrato and Portamento Case Study: Bars 5-12

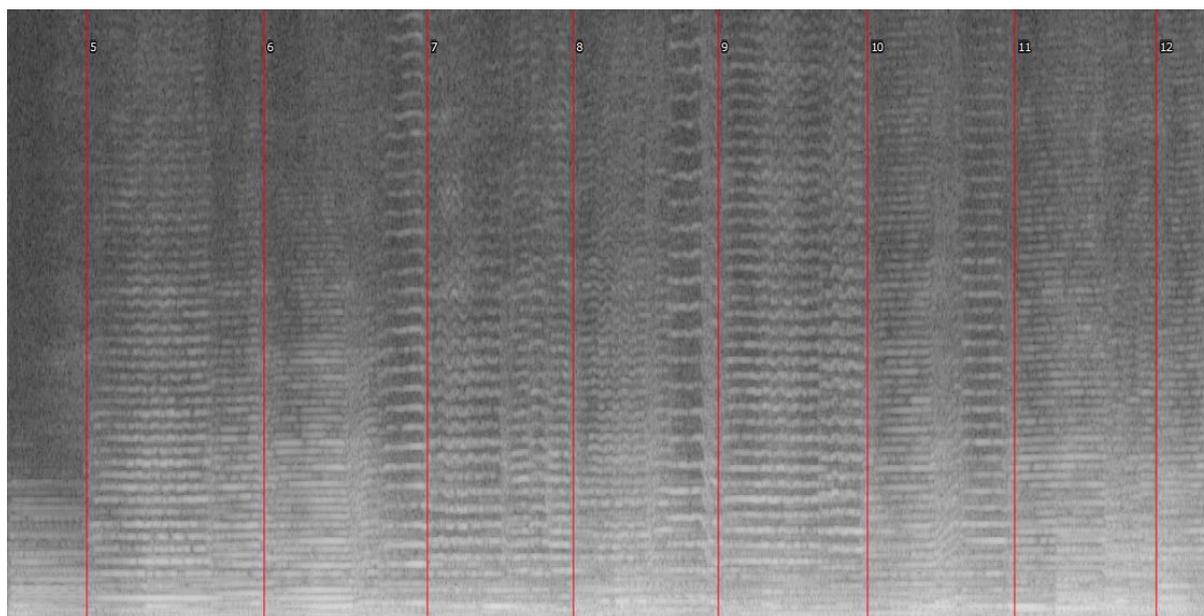


Fig. 13: Milsom/Gooing (2015) – spectrogram bars 5-12 (43Hz-12747Hz)

Figure 13 shows a spectrogram of the beginning of my own performance. It is clear that vibrato is evident throughout this passage, but the quite small amplitude of the effect and the closeness of the peaks and troughs show a relatively fast and discreet use compared with the other recordings considered here. The first note has a fairly discreet application, but this tails off on the second note and into the second bar, where it is extremely light. The portamento across the interval of a tenth is evident in bar 6, and the lighter colour of the following note shows that the higher pitch projects powerfully, increasing volume as the pitch rises (which perhaps maps onto Bériot's diagrammatic discussions correlating dynamic with pitch in his 1858 treatise²⁹). The tonic note at the start of bar 7 is executed with a pronounced vibrato. The upward and downward portamenti in bar 8 are evident, as is the powerful and somewhat elongated D-flat top note. What emerges clearly is that the high notes project much more strongly than the lower notes, which, partly a matter of artistic design, is also perhaps part of the character of the sound of this particular instrument, which tends to privilege higher pitches.

²⁹ See, for example, Charles de Bériot, *Méthode de violon/Violin-school*, op. 102 (Paris, 1858; English translation Westbrook & Phipson, London, 1876), 211, quoted in Milsom (2003), 39-40.

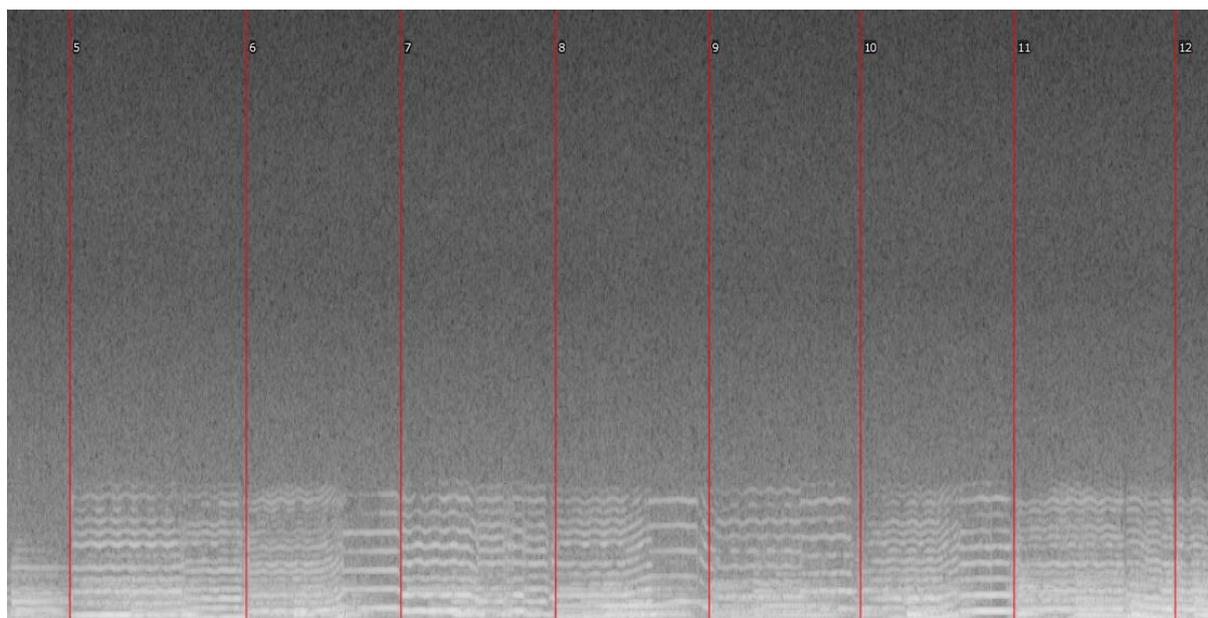


Fig. 14: Tertis/Hobday (1924) – spectrogram bars 5-12 (43Hz-12747Hz)

Turning to Figure 14, in comparison to my own performance it is immediately evident that Tertis uses a much more regular, wide and slow vibrato, with clearly-evident wave forms. Portamenti are clearly seen as one might expect in bars 8 and 10. As with my own recording, the lighter shade on high notes at the ends of bars 6 and 8, for example, shows that these notes are notably louder. Less evident vibrato here reflects the obvious fact that, on the fourth finger, this is not as technically expedient as on lower-numbered fingers. The prevailing intent, clearly, is that vibrato is already the pre-eminent expressive means, counter-poising the rather less volatile rhythmic approach. This perhaps cautions one from drawing excessively linear historical parallels; although this is the earliest recording here, and therefore the closest to Brahms' time, it is significantly into the twentieth century, and at a point at which 'modernist' performance notions were already well embedded. In string playing, of course, this meant the vibrato was favoured as a more-or-less stereotyped expressive device. More generally, the score notation was being read in comparatively literal terms.

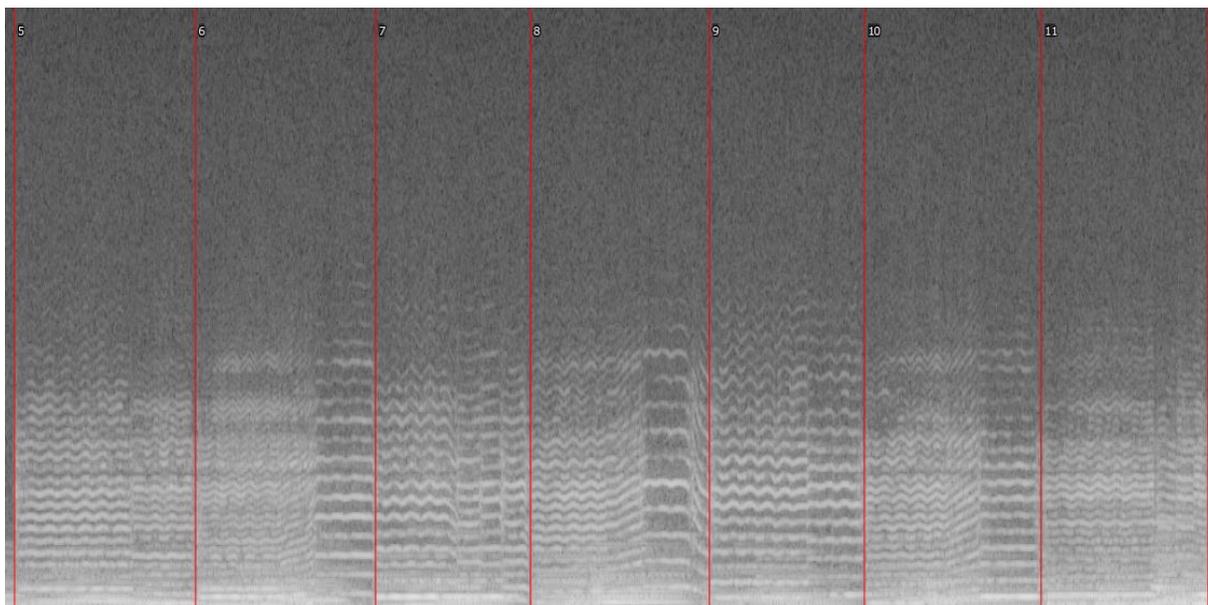


Fig. 15: Tertis/Cohen (1933) – spectrogram bars 5-12 (43Hz-12747Hz)

Tertis' approach in his 1933 recording (Figure 15) shows marked consistency with his earlier interpretation. One notes, of course, the greater number of harmonic partials captured by the wider frequency range of the new electric process. Even more clearly visible (and of course audible) is Tertis' vibrato on the upper notes in 6, 8, and 10, which is generally smaller in amplitude than on the lower notes as one would expect, but also slower. This shows clearly that, irrespective of place within the phrase, Tertis' left hand was very much 'alive' throughout.

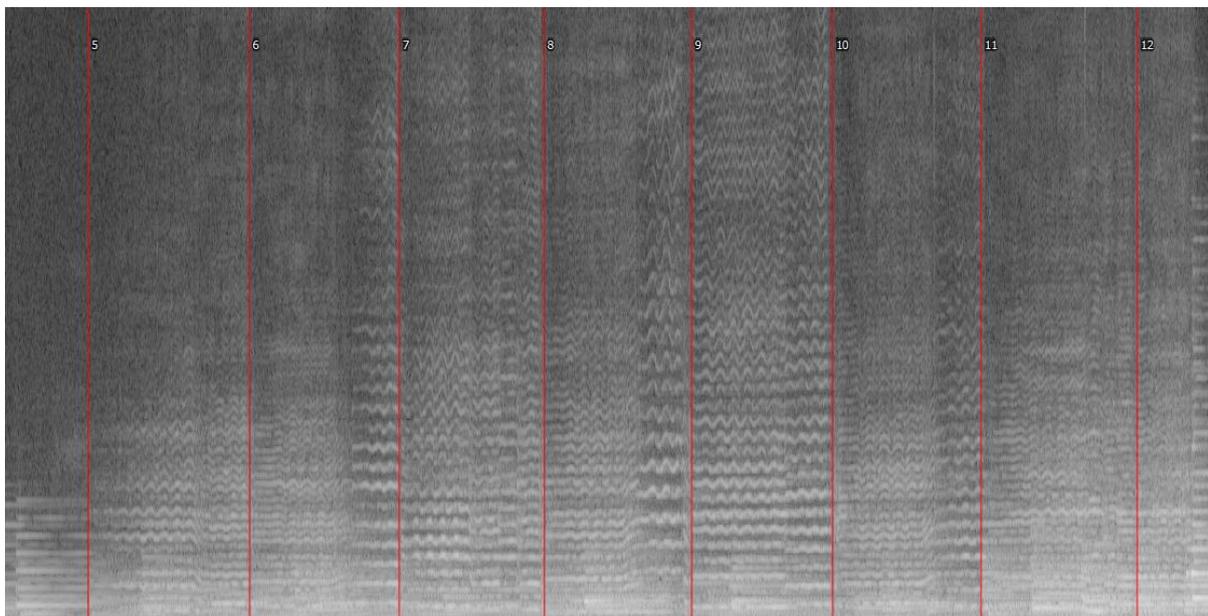


Fig. 16: Zukerman/Barenboim (1998) – spectrogram bars 5-12 (43Hz-12747Hz)

One would expect a Zukerman performance to bring vibrato to the foreground, and, more or less, to dispense with (or render discreet) the portamento, and this is evident here (Figure 16). Zukerman's vibrati are not dissimilar to Tertis', which, given the aurally obvious nature of those in the Tertis recordings, is not surprising. What is different is the magnitude of vibrati on the higher notes (as in bar 6 and 8 – the crotchets at the ends of bars). These are much less consistent and intense in Tertis' playing; with Zukerman there appears to be little differentiation in speed and magnitude at different pitches, or in reaction to the different relative metrical stresses of the notes in the triple metre of the composition. Indeed, where there is differentiation, it is to create a discreet vibrato on the lower notes and more metrically 'heavy' long notes (as in bars 8 and 10 on the minims), which might be said to

subvert expectations. This lack of correlation between vibrato intensity and note length creates, perhaps, a vibrato profile that appears even more ‘continuous’ than it actually is; that is to say, that its constant tonal properties give the impression of constant presence. Expertly handled, of course, it shows that Zukerman does not perhaps see vibrato as an expressive thrill, as espoused in Brahms’ time (and therefore practiced with great economy by violists/violinists with whom Brahms is associated, notably of course Joseph Joachim). Nor, even, does he tout it as Tertis’ ‘new and exciting expressive tool’. (Tertis, of course, aimed overtly to emulate the playing of modern vibrato pioneer, Fritz Kreisler). Rather, it is an ever-present and integral part of the sound, and the effect is one of tonal homogeneity. Differences between this application and my own (even when I was not trying to evoke a ‘literal’ re-enactment of a Brahmsian tonal sonority) are quite substantial, and this perhaps shows that when research and historical enquiry are embedded, a more varied and spontaneous approach in performance can result.

2.3.2 Vibrato and Portamento Case Study: Bars 92-98

Spectrograms for this small example also reveal a number of interesting comparisons, as can be seen in Figures 17-20:

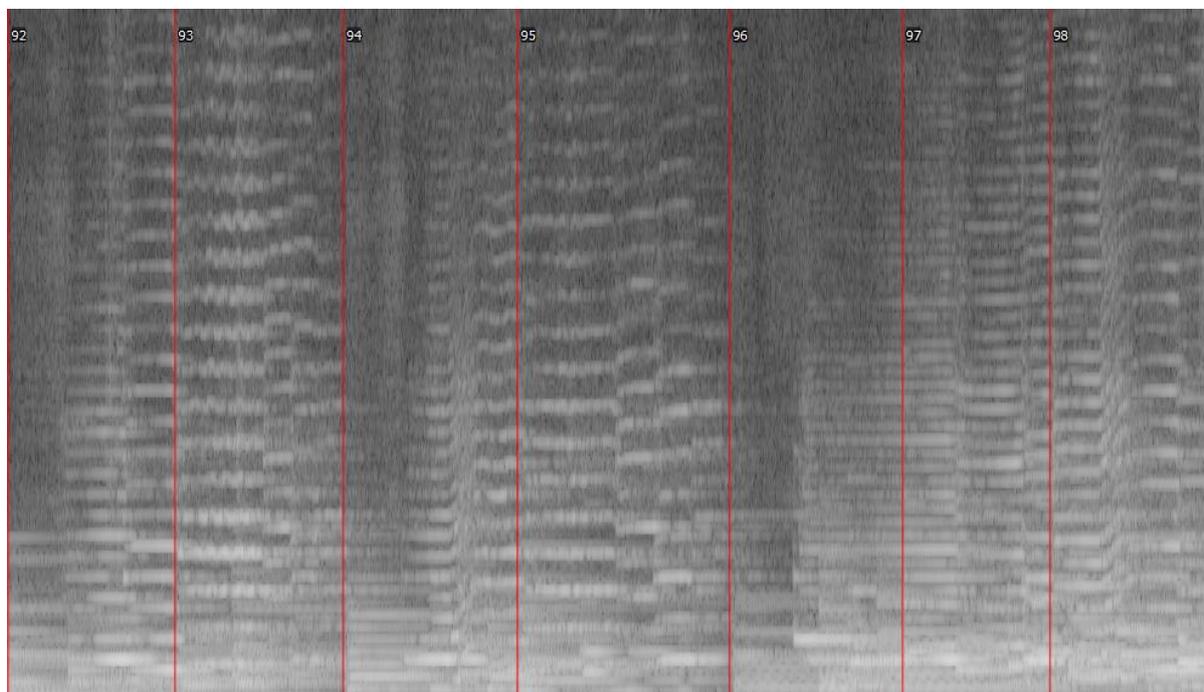


Fig. 17: Milsom/Gooing (2015) – bars 92-98 spectrogram (42Hz-7881Hz)

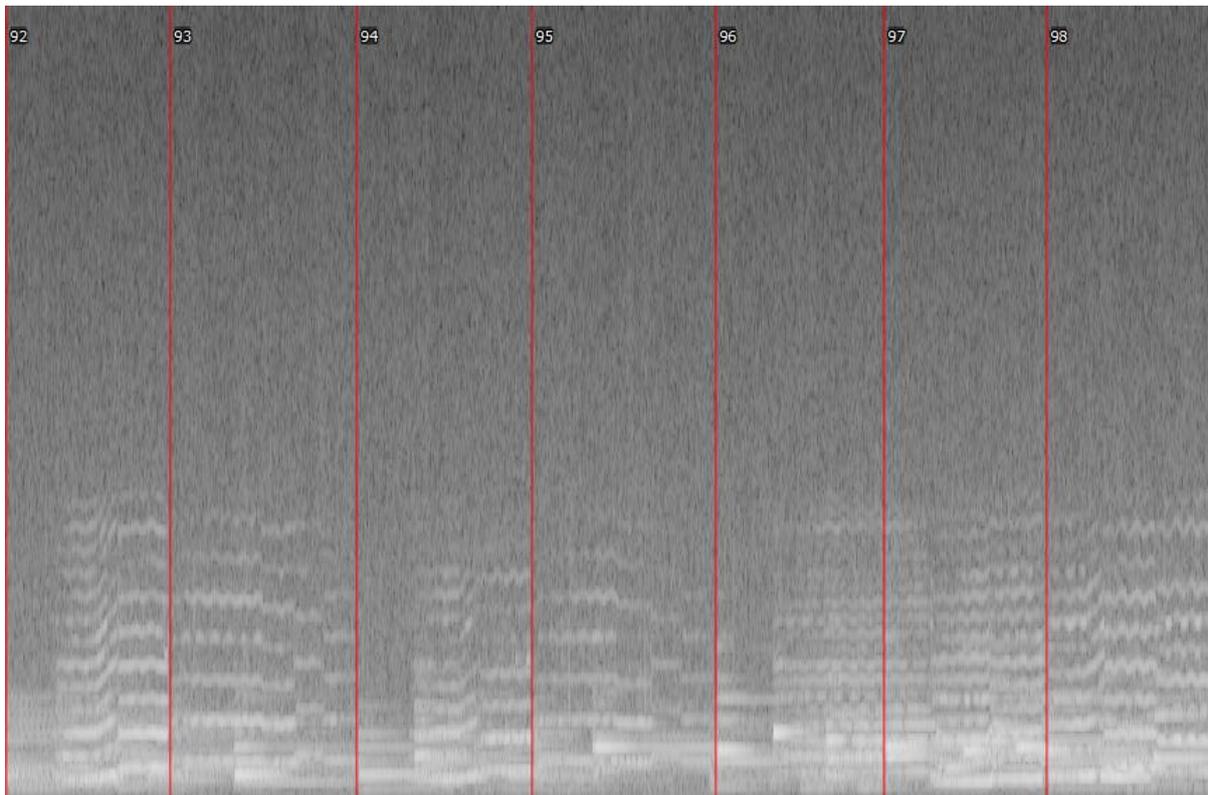


Fig. 18: Tertis/Hobday (1924) – bars 92-98 spectrogram (42Hz-7881Hz)

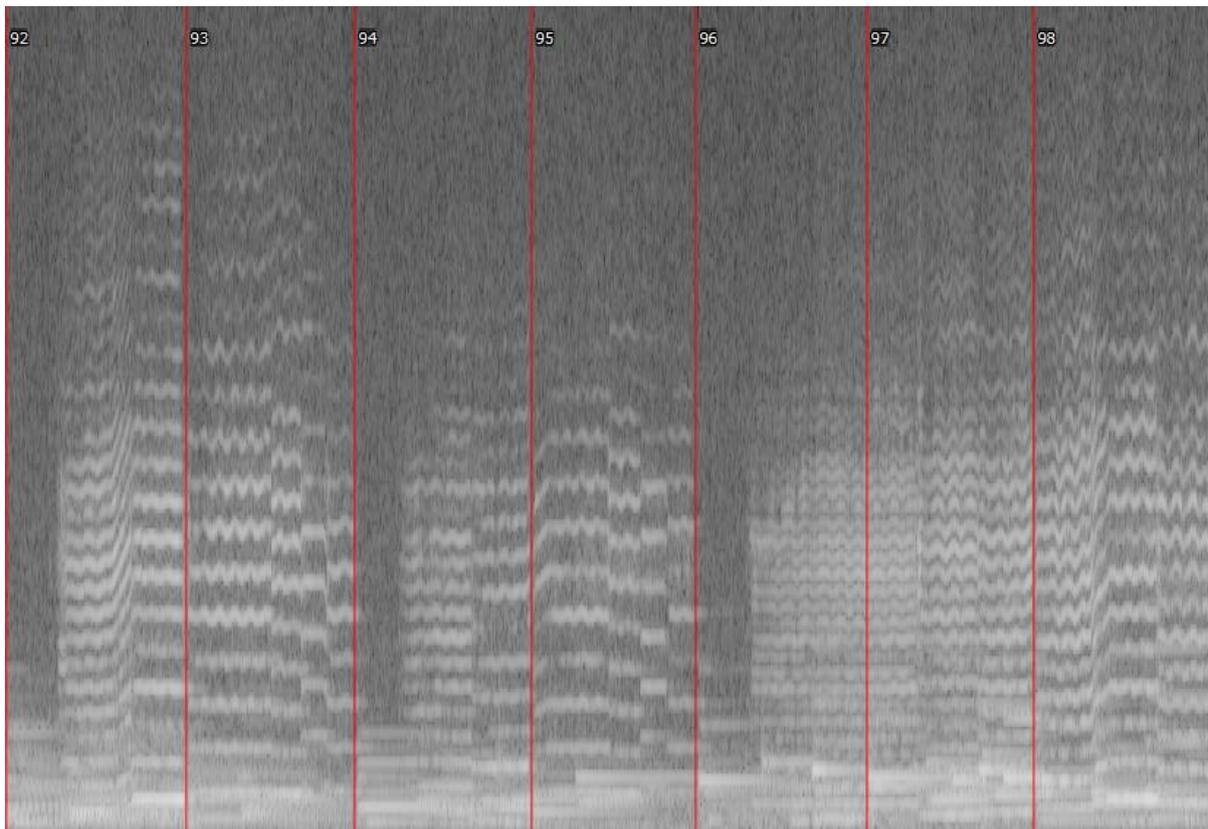


Fig. 19: Tertis/Cohen (1933) – bars 92-98 spectrogram (42Hz-7881Hz)

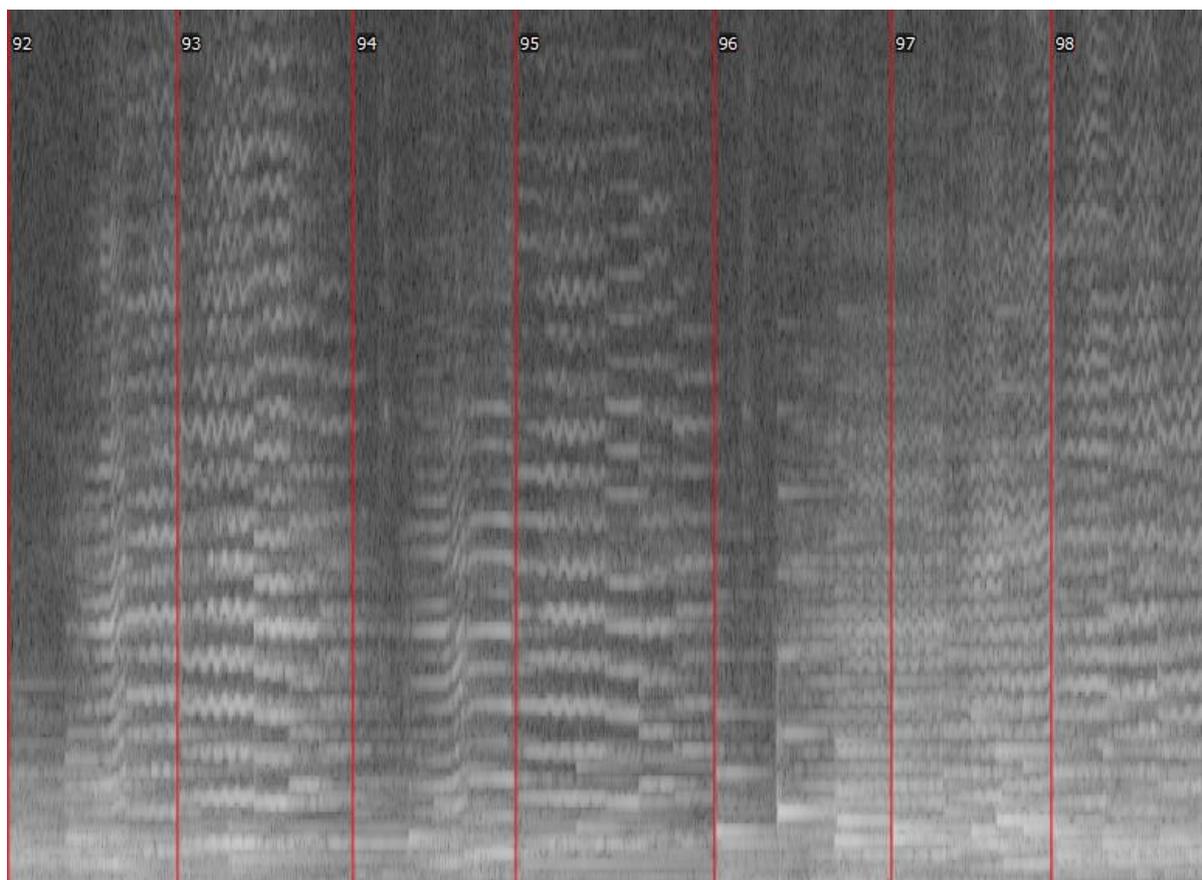


Fig. 20: Zukerman/Barenboim (1998) – bars 92-98 spectrogram (42Hz-7881Hz)

This passage reveals similar traits to those observed above. As one might expect, Zukerman uses the vibrato to obvious and more or less continuous effect, with short and fast portamenti on the rising intervals in bars 92 and 94. The visual effect here testifies to the width and speed of Zukerman's powerful vibrato in this gentle passage, marked *piano* in bar 92, and further commuted to *pianissimo* in bar 94. This perhaps renders the strength of vibrato a little unexpected, certainly within the context of a late nineteenth-century understanding of the device as an expressive ornament to demonstrate tremulousness and passion!

The Tertis/Cohen recording, which, here as elsewhere, uses the vibrato to a very noteworthy degree, looks quite similar; vibrato speed and magnitude is perhaps surprisingly close to Zukerman's given the chronological distance between the performances. The portamenti are different, however. A similar (if louder and slower) slide in bar 92 is followed by another not within bar 94, but on the bar-line into bar 95. The location of the slide to the note happening *after* the barline shows that the destination pitch of A-flat in bar 95 is reached late, owing to the use of the so-called 'L' portamento, in which the finger taking the 'leaving pitch' slides onward up to the note. This effect creates to the modern ear a particularly rich application of the device, and one that was roundly condemned by German and Austrian players, and teachers of the German tradition. Thus, although Tertis does use the portamento, this has little in common with its manner of deployment that would have been considered stylish and tasteful to those of the Brahms-Joachim tradition.³⁰ In bars 96-98 (especially 98), Tertis also executes a conspicuous use of the vibrato.

The Tertis/Hobday performance is broadly similar, with notable use of the vibrato, albeit (except for bar 98 where it is quite slow and wide) a little more narrow and focussed. One must

³⁰ This much-discussed topic is summarised in Milsom (2003), 92-93, with reference to Carl Flesch, *The Art of Violin Playing* (English text, F. Martens, New York, 1924-30), Book 1, p.30 in footnote 73, Milsom (2003), 109.

remember, though that the extent to which the acoustic recording context has an effect on perception can be tricky to establish. Here we have similar portamenti again in bars 92 and 98, although in 94 Tertis executes a portamento between the two crotchets within the bar and thus avoids the languid L-portamento of his later performance.

The Milsom/Gooing performance also uses vibrato to a regular extent, although attention should be drawn perhaps to the variety of speed and width, and the tendency for the vibrato to last for shorter durations. Examining the notes at the start of bars 93 and 95 shows, perhaps to a greater degree than with the other performances, a tendency to grade the vibrato more according to dynamic. It is appreciably less intense in bar 95 when the dynamic drops to *pianissimo*, and in bar 95 it is (perhaps showing its heritage as a 'messa-di-voce') located mostly in the middle part of the note's duration. This recording is also notable for the much slower and more accented portamenti than in any of the other recordings here, especially in bars 92 and 98.

3. Concluding Perspectives

What emerges from this brief examination of performing practices is that, contrary maybe to the more traditional postulations of scholars and critics (such as Haylock's article in *The Strad* magazine which opines that modern instrument applications of period practice is misguided³¹), it is perfectly possible for a modern-instrument performance to incorporate aspects of historical stylistic practice. It is, admittedly, a matter for the listener to decide to what extent this is artistically convincing and meretricious. It is evident that we live at a time in which questioning the established modes of practice is a matter of interest. Many performers and organisations have tried to find new ways of creating context for music performance, outside of the traditional (late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century) concert hall paradigm. This in itself is not a new thing. Others such as the performer scholars featured via Daniel Leech-Wilkinson's website [challengingperformance.com] have undertaken radical performance experiments seemingly with the intention of promoting 'difference', whether or not of historical foundation – an attempt to 'think outside the box' of current performance norms, and normative approaches to interpreting and performing (canonical, notated) music. Established period instrument ways of performing such music have for a long time sought renewal and, even, greater performance legitimacy than so-called 'mainstream' conservatoire-inspired approaches. My aim here has been simply a pragmatic and open-minded assimilation of ideas – to synthesise, if you will, many of the divergent perspectives of the present time in the spirit of open-mindedness. It is perhaps presumptuous to claim that this offers a more widely-understood and appreciated perspective to influence performance, of greater likely impact across the performing spectrum. What I am prepared to advance, however, is that approaches such as mine here might encourage a wider range of

³¹ See Julian Haylock, 'Historically informed performance on modern instruments is misguided,' *The Strad* (May 2014). Haylock's article is, in actual fact, making a much more basic point than that raised here, and in the conspicuously different context of 'baroque' organology and performing practices. The article repeats the usual clichés about 'baroque' performance (old is heavy, slow and legato, new 'HIP' is crisp, fast, and the like). He praises the very different visions of J.S.Bach's St Matthew Passion by Klemperer and Gardiner, but censures a Riccardo Chailly modern instrument performance with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra for its excessive fleetness which 'unintentionally falls between two stools by inhibiting the natural expressive potential of modern instruments while attempting to make them behave in ways more appropriate to their ancient counterparts.' Nonetheless, Haylock implicitly makes a reasonable point that a mixture of 'period style' and 'modern tools' (be it in terms of technique or the simple matter of instruments) is invariably a compromise which, of course, can be obviated by using 'period instruments.' Nonetheless, I wanted to illustrate that period-sensitive (and at the very least historically-aware) Brahms on modern instruments can adopt aspects of style likely to have been more familiar to Brahms' aural expectations, and that this can be done to interesting effect. My aim was, if you will, to 'democratise' 'historically-informed' practices and show that they are widely available to a range of specialist and non-specialist players.

performers (many of whom might be put off by increasingly judgemental postulation from some of historical performance's established advocates!) to look with interest at alternative, historically-interested approaches to playing long-established repertoire, and, indeed, to explore and experiment with the enhanced environment of performance resources offered to the performer of Brahms' music in the twenty-first century. In the final analysis, though, I hoped to deliver a performance that evoked my own understanding of this literature and in a way that was meaningful to me. For any performer to claim otherwise is disingenuous.