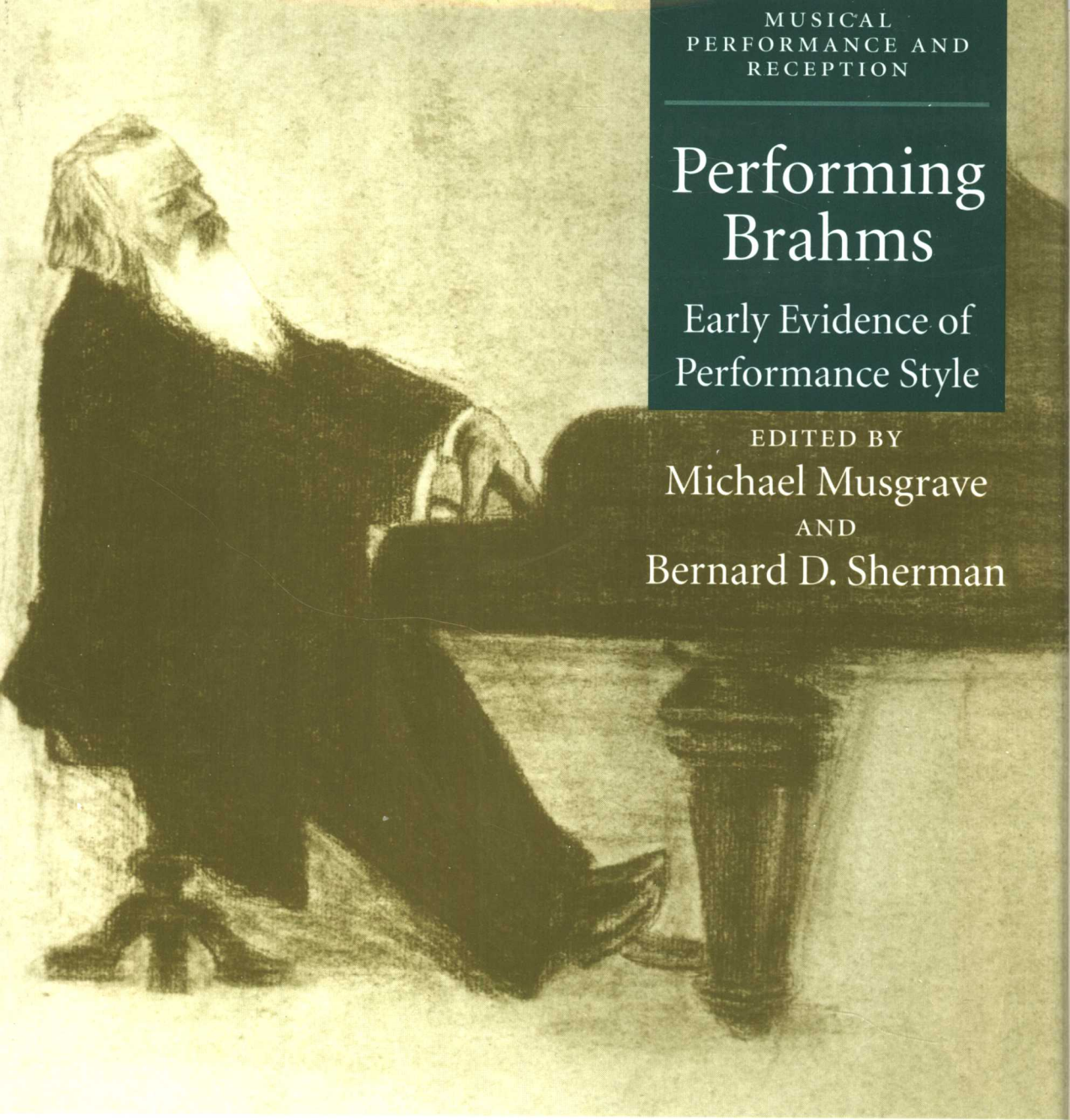


MUSICAL
PERFORMANCE AND
RECEPTION

Performing Brahms

Early Evidence of
Performance Style

EDITED BY
Michael Musgrave
AND
Bernard D. Sherman



CAMBRIDGE

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BERNARD D. SHERMAN



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AND RECEPTION

General editors John Butt and
Laurence Dreyfus

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Michael Musgrave and Bernard Sherman

*Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performance
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Michael Musgrave is Emeritus Professor of Music at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He is author of *The Music of Brahms* (1985), *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace* (1995), *Brahms: A German Requiem* (1996) and the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Brahms* (1999) and *A Brahms Reader* (2002).

Bernard D. Sherman is the author of *Inside Early Music* (1997) and the essay 'Authenticity in Music' in *The Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (1998). He contributes regularly to *The New York Times*, and his work has appeared in *Early Music*, *Historical Performance*, *The American Brahms Society Newsletter*, and many other publications.

Jacket illustrations: Brahms at the piano.
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Brahms conducting, 1894. Engraving after
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PERFORMING BRAHMS

A great deal of evidence survives about how Brahms and his contemporaries performed his music. But much of this evidence – found in letters, autograph scores, treatises, publications, recording, and more – has been hard to access, both for musicians and for scholars. This book brings the most important evidence together into one volume. It also includes discussions by leading Brahms scholars of the many issues raised by the evidence. The period spanned by the life of Brahms and the following generation saw a crucial transition in performance style. As a result, modern performance practices differ significantly from those of Brahms's time. By exploring the musical styles and habits of Brahms's era, this book will help musicians and scholars understand Brahms's music better and bring fresh ideas to present-day performance. The value of the book is greatly enhanced by the accompanying CD of historic recordings – including a performance by Brahms himself.

Michael Musgrave is Emeritus Professor of Music at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He is the author of *The Musical Life of the Crystal Palace*, *The Music of Brahms*, *Brahms: A German Requiem*, *A Brahms Reader*, and the editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Brahms*.

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Ideology, Performance**

Michael Musgrave and Bernard D. Sherman

Performing Brahms: Early Evidence of Performance Style

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Preface

If Brahms (1833–1897) had lived as long as Verdi, he would have survived into the 1920s. Yet, despite his comparatively early death at age 63, Brahms seems in many ways much closer to us than any of that great generation born only twenty years or so before him, and not merely for reasons of chronology. Unlike, for example, his most direct forebears in the concert tradition, Mendelssohn and Schumann, Brahms's career coincides with the beginnings of modern concert life in the second half of the nineteenth century. This period saw an accelerating frequency of public performance for a growing musically educated audience. Musical standards rose and became more consistent, stimulated by greater contact and travel (symbolized by the emergence of the professional conductor). The musical press became increasingly active and comprehensive, and the era of recording dawned.

Brahms was deeply involved in the musical life of his time, not as a commentator but as a performer. He was a professional pianist and conductor until well into his thirties, and thereafter was closely involved in the preparation of his works, which he often conducted. His huge impact on the musical world meant that many of the musicians with whom he worked left records, which, in addition to extensive correspondence and press responses, throw considerable light on the practical aspects of performance. Gathered together, much exists to add significantly to our knowledge of nineteenth-century – and early twentieth-century – performance, and specifically that of the music of Brahms.

However, this evidence does not come in a balanced form. In an age before performance became a natural subject for detailed analysis or comparison, it was a matter of chance and circumstances which performances were closely described or which topics revealingly discussed. We do not have all the material we might like. This book aims to present a balanced outline of much of what we do have, including extended texts on technique as well as performance descriptions and commentaries, performance scores and recordings, and extracts from correspondence.

It deals with most of Brahms's fields of composition – music for piano, chamber ensembles, orchestral and choral forces – and refers to some of the greatest performers of Brahms's time. Among them are such close associates of Brahms as the violinist Joseph Joachim, the pianist Clara Schumann, and the conductor Hans von Bülow, as well as their younger contemporaries and pupils, and other leading instrumentalists and conductors of their time and after, viewed with an eye to surviving traditions. Not least is Brahms himself in his one surviving recording as pianist, here reproduced through the latest digital process. The discussion covers major issues of technique, style, and interpretation, and includes focus on the two works that did most to establish Brahms's international renown: the *German Requiem* and the First Symphony.

But even when assembled, the documentary information is only a start. Brahms lived in a period of marked change in performance values: clearly, great variability of performance character and detail was acceptable as, indeed, were the varied physical settings in which music was still performed. Much of the character of performances before the age of recordings can never be known. We cannot travel in time. But equally, we know that much has changed. The challenge is to know why, and especially how historical knowledge might be of value to performance and understanding today. Many different interpretations can be drawn from the evidence; this book does not seek to hide the alternative views, but to expose them in the hope of opening a larger field of possibility. Issues of tempo claim particular attention in view of the bias of surviving evidence to this topic. Because of the central importance of context, the book has an introductory discussion of the key issue of stylistic difference between Brahms's time and our own, and a concluding survey of the issues explored in the book's main part, issues also opened up in a consideration of the riches of Brahms's correspondence for the performer in chapter 2, before the more narrowly focused chapters begin.

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