Johannes Brahms’s Ballades, Opus 10

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The pianist faces a unique situation, with which only the vocalist can sympathize, and that is the immeasurable amount of literature and repertoire written for the solo piano. There is simply too much solo piano music for the pianist to encounter, hear or learn all of the repertoire. Each pianist is forced to select from each genre, era, and composer the “best” music, or best representative music, to study and perform, and then to reject the rest. Sometimes a given composer’s rejects are labeled with their musical crime: inferior quality, lack of musicality, uncertain origins, failure to be musically satisfying, and so forth; often pieces are simply undervalued in comparison with the composer’s more popular favorites and standards. Johannes Brahms’s Op. 10 Ballades is one of these undervalued set of pieces that has suffered harshly at the hands of academics.

Brahms’s Ballades have not fared well under the scrutiny of musicologists and experts in piano literature. In many biographies or composition studies of Brahms, the opus receives little to no attention, and is often ignored. When discussed, the Ballades often receive critical or negative attention. Since Brahms’s death, biographers have discussed if the pieces are indeed ballades, and how they fit into the genre. The heading under the first ballade, known as the ‘Edward’ ballade, has invited the imposition of literal programmatic interpretations, and the subtitle “Intermezzo” under the third ballade has called into question the validity of applying the genre ‘ballade’ to all four pieces; these headings have caused serious debate and contributed to the devaluation of the opus as a whole. Because they were composed when Brahms was only 20, the Ballades are often dismissed as ‘young Brahms’ material, and musicologists devote their attention to the early sonatas and variation sets, or to the later, “mature” character pieces. Through a brief examination of the materials, including letters and the musical score, that Brahms himself wrote; and a discussion of the historiographic understanding of the Ballades, genre placement, popular interpretations, and given value; I intend to return the Ballades to a more prominent position among Brahms’ compositions and to provide a framework for uncomplicating the genre and musical interpretation of the Ballades.

**Ballades, Opus 10**

In 1854, Brahms was living and working in Hamburg, Germany, after completing tours with both Eduard Remenyi and Joseph Joachim. By that time, Schumann had prophesied about the upcoming pianist Brahms, and Brahms had become very close with Robert and Clara Wieck Schumann. Brahms was heavily
influenced by Schumann during and after their short relationship, and drew heavily on the ideas of his musical mentor. Schumann attempted suicide during the summer of 1854, and Brahms became a support to Clara Schumann until Robert’s death in 1856. The Ballades, published in 1856, are generally considered the last composition of Brahms’s early years, and are the last composition written before Schumann’s death.

The compositional history of the Ballades can be derived from the collection of Brahms’s existing correspondence with various friends. The Ballades were first mentioned by Robert Schumann to Brahms in a letter from December 1854, in which Schumann wrote that Clara had mentioned Brahms’ Ballades, and requested more information on this new composition.\(^1\) Around the same time, Brahms wrote to Clara that he had “just written the first chord of the Ballades,”\(^2\) presumably for publication, and that he planned to send them to Schumann for advice. A month later, January 1855, Brahms wrote to Joseph Joachim, from whom Brahms often sought compositional advice, that the Ballades had been composed during the winter.\(^3\) Why Brahms delayed having the Ballades published is uncertain; Brahms admitted to J. O. Grimm that he intended to have the composition published but had not yet done so.\(^4\) Brahms’ correspondence contains no information on the nature or character of the ballades.

When he did have the Ballades published, Brahms provided some information in the published score. The opus is simply titled “Balladen,” and dedicated to Julius O. Grimm\(^5\). Each ballade is titled by its tempo/character marking: Andante, Andante, Allegro, and Andante con moto. The first ballade contains the description “Nach der schottischen Ballade: “Edward” in Herder’s “Stimmen der Völker.” The ‘Edward’ ballade is clearly based on this Scottish vocal ballad, and this connection has lead to programmatic interpretations and readings of Brahms’ first ballade. The third ballade is given the subtitle “Intermezzo”. Brahms did not provide any further explanation for this subtitle; the official designation of “ballade” but subtitle of “intermezzo” has inspired a large part of the furious debate over the appropriate genre of the Opus 10 pieces.

The reference to the ‘Edward’ ballad deserves some detailed attention. The vocal ballad is a narrative poem that tells a story; this one is of Scottish descent, though Brahms used a popular German

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\(^2\) Avins, Johannes Brahms, 77.
\(^3\) Avins, Johannes Brahms, 83.
\(^4\) Avins, Johannes Brahms, 88.
\(^5\) Avins, Johannes Brahms, 88. In is February 2, 1855 letter to J. O. Grimm, Brahms’s stated his intention to dedicate the Ballades to an “1854-er,” someone who had also been close to Clara Schumann after Robert’s suicide attempt. Grimm was one of those.
translation as his source. The ballad is entirely comprised of dialogue between Edward and his mother. It opens with the mother asking Edward why his sword is covered in blood; Edward responds twice with excuses and lies. The third time, Edward confesses that he has killed his father, and, lead by his mother’s questions, Edward elaborates on the future punishment coming to him. His mother queries what Edward will leave for his mother when he leaves, to which Edward responds that he leaves the curses of hell for her, because it was she who told him to kill his father.

The Opus 10 Ballades are clearly constructed to be a cohesive set of pieces. This is evidenced in the overarching structure of tonality, the consistent utilization of ternary form, and the use of unifying or motivic elements. The home keys of the four ballades are connected through relative and parallel minor relations; D minor, D major, B minor, and B major, respectively.

The first ballade stays centered around D minor in the A sections and quasi-major in the B section, with short tonicizations of G minor. The second ballade fluctuates between D major, and B major and minor throughout the ballade. The middle sections center around B major and minor with a short F# section; the beginning and end however clearly set D major as the central key. The third ballade fluctuates between modes from measure to measure; the A B A’ form utilizes a B minor – D# minor – B minor tonal scheme, with a short coda concluding the piece in B major. The fourth ballade constantly vacillates between the major and minor of whatever key it is tonicizing; Brahms used B and F# in the A and B sections respectively.

All four ballades are constructed in some kind of ternary form. The first ballade is A B A’, with an incomplete restatement of A themes in the A’ section. The A section presents a dialogue between two themes. The bass line of the second theme is combined with a triplet motive, and then developed through chromatic scalar motion in the B section; the B section concludes with a grand statement of the second theme that transitions into the A’ section. The A’ section restates the first theme over a broken triplet motive, coming to an eerie and fatal conclusion. The second ballade is an arch form, A B C B’ A’, but the relation between the B and C sections suggests a complex ternary form of A B A’. The sweet A section, which vacillates between relative and parallel major and minor keys based on D, returns in the A’ section in the warmer key of B major.
before transitioning back to the home key of D for a singing coda in the bass. The B and C sections, titled
*Allegro non troppo (doppio movimento)* and *molto staccato e leggiero*, respectively, are more confident than
the sweeping lyricism of the original melody. The third ballade, the “Intermezzo,” is the quickest of the
ballades, and is reminiscent of a scherzo with a form of A || B A’. The startling opening upbeat chords throw
the entire piece into limbo and metric ambiguity that complements the modal ambiguity. Rippling scales and
arpeggios prevent the listener and performer from finding a sense of settlement. The middle section is a
pianissimo chorale in the high registers of the keyboard, an eerie contrast to the bombastic and unsettled A
section. The A’ section is a more compact and revoiced restatement of the A section, with a delicate chordal
coda that ends in the major key. The piece as a whole is a series of decrescendos, from the opening forte to
the pianississimo that concludes both the A and A’ sections. The final ballade has the most complex ternary
form, A B A’ coda; both the A and B sections utilize rounded binary form of a :|| b a’. The gentle A melody
soars over a continuous accompaniment of downward eighth-note runs; a slight change of voicing in the
opening of the A’ section creates a glass-like clarity under the first part of the opening melody. The slower,
intimate B section that separates the A melodies contains a middle-voice melody surrounded by a hemiola
accompaniment of two against three. Its deep, cello-like melody causes the return of the A melody to sound
clear and dainty. The restatement of the second A section melody in the A’ section is encased in a small
chorale-like section of uneven three and five measure phrases in the low-middle register. Brahms returned to
the B material for the coda, and the ballade concludes with a deep but tender ending that tonicizes *B major.*

Brahms utilized several musical ideas to unite the individual ballades into one piece. These common
elements are shared between all four of the ballades, or between only two or three of them. Of the elements
shared between all four ballades, three have already been discussed: tonality, modal ambiguity, and formal
structure. Another element shared between all four ballades is a chorale-like section. The dialogue-like
opening of the first ballade is contained in chordal structure. The chorale sections of the second and third
ballades are in the middle of the form. In the fourth ballade, the extension of the A’ section is a middle-
register chorale. The chorale section of the third ballade is in the highest register presented in all four pieces,
and has the most unique and distinct sound of the entire opus. The chorale sections of the second and fourth
ballades occur in the lower registers and are very warm. In the first ballade, the dialogue-chorale opening is
uneasy and open, a sound produced by a consistent absence of the third of important chords and cadences.
To create modal ambiguity in the ballades, Brahms frequently used open fifth and octave intervals in all of the ballades. In the second ballade, an offbeat octave $D - A - D - A$ progression in the bass suggests some mode of $D$ as the tonal center, but allows the harmonies to fluctuate between major and minor because no third is stated in the bass. After the bass ostinato moves to $B$ and $F\#$, Brahms easily shifted between modes by altering the third step of the $B$ scale; the first phrase begins on $d$ natural, the immediate restatement begins on $d$ sharp. The shift between major and minor requires no transition or modulation because the bass $B$ keeps the ear centered on the key of $B$, be it minor or major. The opening crashes of the third ballade, an interval of a fifth based on $B$, set the piece in the key of $B$, but it is not until the arpeggio in the second half of the third measure that the listener knows the key is minor. Another example is the octave accompaniment in the B section of the fourth ballade, which allows constant scalar movement in the melody. In the end of the A section of the first ballade, the tonic chord of the authentic cadence in $D$ minor that concludes the section lacks the third of the chord; this sets up the B section to enter in the parallel major. For each of the ballades, the open intervals create modal ambiguity that adds a sense of tension and mystery.

The pedal point is another common element between ballades. Brahms used the pedal point for various reasons. In the transition between the B and A’ section of the first ballade, the low pedal prepares for the return of the home key, $D$ minor. In the second ballade, the pedal point functions first as an ostinato that allows the modal ambiguity already discussed. In the middle of the larger B section, the pedal $B$ provides a tonal center for the scalar motion in both the melody and bass. In the third ballade, the pedal point appears towards the end of the chorale-like middle section, and establishes the tonality. Later, it serves the secondary purpose of preparing for the return of the A motive because the pedal is the dominant of the key into which the ballade is transitioning.

Another common element between ballades is scalar motion. The middle of the B section in the second ballade is constructed of contrary scalar lines between the left and right hand over a pedal $B$. The transitions within the B section and between the B and A’ section are scalar lines a third apart in the left and right hands that lead into choral modulation. The B section of the fourth ballade uses the same kind of scalar motion over a pedal point to create its very intimate melody and countermelody. The chromatic lines in the bass create tension and drama to invigorate the melody. In the first ballade, contrary scalar motion between the left and right hands forms the harmonic movement for most of the B section. The third ballade does not
use scalar lines so much as arpeggio motives, some of which are spelled out with chromatic leading tones. Whether common between all or two of the ballades, these common motives hold the individual ballades together so they form a cohesive set.

**THE WORLD OF GENRE**

As mentioned before, Brahms' Opus 10 Ballades have raised many questions among musicologists. Most importantly, they ask if the Opus 10 pieces really are ballades, and if they are, how the pieces should be interpreted. To understand the question of genre, it is best to first define the genre of the piano ballade. In his book on the history of the piano ballade, James Parakilas described the piano ballade as “a wordless music which would somehow remind a varied audience of [vocal] ballads” through narrative music and the imitation and exploration of drama. Chopin's ballades captured the general or universal character of the vocal ballad, so that, even if a piano ballade did not have a specific ballad source, it drew from the overall source, the ballad. In his study on Chopin’s ballades, Jim Samson also underscored the nonprogrammatic narrative style of the ballade in his definition: “The title ‘ballade’ signifies no particular program, then, but it does invite the listener to interpret musical relationships at least partly in the terms of a literary narrative.” The Grove Music Dictionary online also confirms the narrative style of the ballade. The Brahms Ballades certainly fit this description: the lyrical melodies sing above the pianist accompaniments, and each ballade is narrative in its own right.

Within such a broad definition, Parakilas divided the piano ballade into three smaller genres: narrative ballades, character pieces or lyrical ballades, and folk ballades. Narrative ballades, those that follow the tradition of Chopin’s ballades, consist of complex forms and key relationships. Both Moscheles’s 1842 ballade and Tausig’s ballade “The Ghost Ship” are modeled after and narrate actual stories; Fontana’s Op. 17 ballade (1849) is based on the epigraph from Bürger’s “Die Entführung”. These ballades are large works with complex structures, and are often programmatic. Lyrical ballades are character pieces that are songlike.

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7 Parakilas, Ballades without Words, 92.
10 Parakilas, Ballades without Words, 95.
11 Parakilas, Ballades without Words, 126.
12 Parakilas, Ballades without Words, 125.
but lack the narrative character and complex form of the more serious ballades; Brahms’ ballades are included in this category. Parakilas classified Clara Wieck’s 1836 ballade from her Op. 6 “Soirees musicales,” Schumann’s 1837 “Balladenmässig” from his Op. 6, and Gottschalk’s 1849 ballade in this category because they consist of a “sweet melody without demanding attention to complex musical processes.” Folk ballades are also short character pieces, with folk-like melodies and styles. Parakilas included the ballades of Tellefson, Heller and Glink in this category.14

Despite the broad definition and complexity of the piano ballade genre, there has been confused discussion among musicologists concerning the genre of Brahms’s Opus 10. The four movement structure of the ballades, with a scherzo-like third movement and the large amount of similar motivic elements, could suggest a broad sonata-like form. In his study The Unknown Brahms, Robert Haven Schauffler called the Op. 10 an “unconventional sonata” because of these elements.15 This suggestion however, is denied by both J. A. Fuller-Maitland (1911) and Burnett James (1972) in their respective studies on Brahms’s works. That various authors have dealt with the possible implication of sonata form has given weight to the possibility that the Opus 10 pieces are instrumental based, and not vocal based. The similarities between sonata and sonata-allegro form have complicated interpretation of the ballades.

Instead of sonata form, a better way to understand the Opus 10 is as a ballade cycle. The common elements, tonal relationships, and individual character of the ballades combined make a cohesive unit, or cycle. The Opus 10 is not a “true cycle” in the Classical sense of the words, and the whole work does not form a cycle like that of Beethoven, Schubert, or even Schumann.16 Brahms, however, used similar form and structure, and common motivic elements, to shape his other instrumental and song cycles; as in his other cycles, Brahms’s ballades are not based on just one narrative, but on one theme or idea, in this case, the vocal ballad. Brahms is the first and only composer to publish a ballade cycle: some composers, like Chopin, composed and published their ballades as separate stand-alone pieces; other composers, like Wieck and the older Brahms, incorporated a ballade into a set of a variety of character pieces. According to Parakilas, “The

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13 Parakilas, Ballades without Words, 138.
14 Parakilas, Ballades without Words, pp. 148-151.
15 Robert Haven Schauffler, The Unknown Brahms (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1933)
common title “Ballade” makes sense, then... it suggests that they belong together, and should be performed together, like a purposefully constructed set of songs.”

OTHER POINTS OF VIEW

Having gained a context in which to understand and investigate the ballades, there are two obstacles to overcome in this endeavor. The first issue is dealing with those who deny the validity of the title “ballade”. The second issue is dealing with those who try to find a program in the ballades, and are disillusioned with their attempts. Both of these discussions have enabled the devaluing of the ballades. Grappling with these two issues enables deeper conversation with the Opus 10 Ballades, and, when answered correctly, allows for the restoration of the ballades to their rightful place in Brahms’ repertoire.

Two authors who attack the validity of the ballade are Anthony Hopkins and William Horne. In his article “Brahms: Where Less is More,” Hopkins questioned Brahms’s usage of the title “ballade”. Hopkins pointed to Schumann’s use of descriptive titles, suggesting that Brahms was simply following his mentor’s example. A conversation with his publisher over titles for Brahms’s Opus 76 implies that Brahms was “often at loss for titles,” and Hopkins hypothesized that this was another instance of Brahms needing a title for his composition. To Hopkins, “the word “Ballade” does not imply any similarity to Chopin’s far more extensive compositions sharing the same name.” He concluded his discussion of the Brahms ballades by suggesting that other pieces are more deserving of the ballade title: “There is such a suggestion of narrative in [Brahms’s Rhapsody in G minor, Op. 79 No. 2] that it is surprising that Brahms did not choose to call it ‘Ballade’.”

It is hard to take Hopkins’s accusations seriously. As has already been discussed, the broad spectrum that is covered by the ‘ballade’ genre allows for great dissimilarities between Chopin’s ballades and those that followed. Character piece ballades comprise a higher portion of the ballade genre than do large scale works. In addition, brief study of the first ballade, ‘Edward,’ reveals clear connections between it and the vocal ballad. To dismiss the opus as a descriptively titled work does not do justice to the information given by Brahms about the work.

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17 Parakilas, Ballades without Words, 147.
In his essay “Brahms’s Op. 10 Ballades and His Blätter aus dem Tagebuch eines Musikers,” William Horne raised serious questions about the origins of the Opus 10 Ballades. In addition to the letters already mentioned, Horne examined a pair of letters between Brahms and Joseph Joachim. In June, 1854, Brahms mailed a manuscript of four Blätter to Joachim, describing the individual pieces and requesting Joachim’s criticism of the pieces. From the descriptions given by both Brahms and Joachim, Horne decided that the third and fourth Blätter pieces correspond with the third and fourth ballades, respectively.22 After rejecting the first two Blätter, Brahms composed the ‘Edward’ ballade and second ballade to accompany it, paired it with the remaining two Blätter pieces, and transposed the last piece up a half-step to create the close tonal relationships.23 With these alterations then, Brahms gave the entire set the title Ballades and published this as the Opus 10. In defense of his theory, Horne noted that Brahms typically discussed his compositions in his correspondence with friends before the final pieces were ever produced; the Ballades, however, are first mentioned in December, 1854, as complete pieces.24 The correspondence between Brahms and Joachim, then, must be an earlier discussion of the compositions that became the Ballades. Therefore, the third and fourth ballades do not have a vocal background and are instrumental pieces, not ballades.25

Unfortunately for Horne, his thesis is entirely speculation. Though initially convincing, Horne cannot conclusively argue his conclusion because there are no manuscripts to confirm his hypothesis. The circumstantial evidence merits consideration, but the lack of concrete evidence cannot support this argument. Furthermore, there is no evidence to demonstrate if or how Brahms might have altered Blätter pieces before finalizing the Opus 10 Ballades. Horne easily assumed that the fourth piece was transposed up a half-step from A# major to B major; a change in key should not be taken this lightly. Composers choose certain keys for the feeling or emotion associated with the distinct sound it produces; to change the key is to change an integral part of the composition. In addition, there is no way to know if and how Brahms could have altered the Blätter pieces to make them more narrative or vocal-based before titling them ballades. While worth consideration, Horne’s argument is not convincing, and should not damage the ballades’ integrity.

24 Avins, Johannes Brahms, 77.
The second issue that arises for the Opus 10 Ballades is that of finding a literal musical program. The need to program rises from several areas. The first area is that an instrumental work based on a vocal ballad must tell some kind of story. Second, Brahms’s inclusion of the ‘Edward’ ballad text for the first ballade inspires the need to match the text of the ballad to the structure of the ballade. Finally, the acceptance or rejection of a programmatic reading of the first ballade colors the comprehension of the other three ballades.

The need to attach a program to the ballades is present in many academic accounts of the Opus 10. In his study of Brahms’s music, Michael Musgrave indulged in explaining the ‘Edward’ ballade in association with its source text, and attributed the revelation of the true victim, the father, to the A’ section.26 Though he construed the ballades as sonata form, Schauffler identified a programmatic theme for each ballade from ancient or modern literature.27 Horne, having disabused the reader of all vocal connections, claimed the Opus 10 pieces were inspired by the literature of ETA Hoffman, a famous author with whom Brahms was obsessed. Though he denied vocal sources, Horne selected passages from Hoffman’s work that could be the literary inspiration for the other three pieces.28 These examples of speculation have not helped attempts to reconcile the Ballades within their genre.

Attempts to programme the ‘Edward’ ballade have also caused much confusion among musicologists. In his chapter on Brahms’s ballades, Parakilas explained the form and structure of the ‘Edward’ ballade by aligning the ballad text with the ballade structure. The German translation of the opening stanza fits exactly with the opening of the ballade; the A section, then, must be the opening dialogue between Edward and his mother.29 As the voices absorb into one voice in the B section, Brahms moved from dialogue to narrating the growing intensity of the conversation in the ballad. As for so many other programmers, the reversal of the dialogue lines, and the inclusion of the Edward line in the B section and seclusion of the mother line in the A’ section effectively ends Parakilas’s program. Parakilas claimed that Brahms “recast” the structure of the ballad by reversing the order of the opening dialogue between Edward and his mother. Parakilas concluded by rejecting a programmatic reading of the ‘Edward’ ballade and the other three ballades because Brahms clearly did not mean for them to be programmed or understood that way.

27 Schauffler, The Unknown Brahms.
29 This exact alignment is disputed by few, promoted by many, and difficult to disagree with.
30 Parakilas, Ballades without Words, 142.
Parakilas is correct in one way: Brahms’s ballades do not need to be programmed measure by measure to be understood as narrative, story-telling forms. A more successful attempt to understand the program of the ‘Edward’ ballade may, however, better illuminate and explain Brahms’s manner of narration. In her essay “From Poem to Performance: Brahms’s “Edward” Ballade, Op. 10, No. 1,” Charise Hastings explained the ‘programmatic’ understanding of the ‘Edward’ ballade that she had developed while preparing the piece for performance. For Hastings, the form of the ballade follows the not-chronological revelation of information provided in the ballad. The A section embodies the dialogue between Edward and his mother, the event that occurs last chronologically but is mentioned first in the ballad. The B section, the development of a fragment of the Edward line and ending with the a triumphant yet strangled declamation of the entire Edward theme, is the narration of the crime committed, the murder of Edward’s father. The A’ section, the unsettled, whispered restatement of the mother’s theme, is the event that is mentioned last but initiated the entire ballad: the mother’s whispered counsel to murder her husband. Hastings’s depiction of the ballade, then, is not so much a programmatic reading, but a narrative reading of the original ballad onto Brahms’s ballade. The drama, then, is not so much the story itself, but the tension between Edward and his mother and the revelation of their true characters: “for the characters themselves do not change, it is our perception of them that does.”

This understanding of the ‘Edward’ ballade is the key to understanding the individual ballades, and the set as a whole. It is not necessary to program a specific story to the ballades. They narrate the drama, the tension, conflict, and resolution, contained in a vocal ballad through instrumental music. Parakilas missed his point in his attempt to program. When Brahms moved from describing dialogue to narrating events in the B section, Brahms began what Parakilas called the ‘ballad process’ or ‘narrative process’, the instrumental narration of the tension and conflict in a vocal ballad, not the actual events of a specific ballad.

This version of programming, then, can be applied to the remaining three ballades. It is fair to state that the validity of the other ballades is somewhat damaged by the inclusion of the ‘Edward’ text in the first ballade; because these ballades do not contain a source, they are taken less seriously as ballades, and musicologists have enjoyed applying interesting programs to the pieces. Brahms’s ‘ballad process,’ however,

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32 Parakilas, Ballades without Words, 142.
applies to these ballades as well. Each piece contains its own narrative of conflict and resolution to be told with the same diligence as the ‘Edward’ ballade, even though there are no characters. The second ballade has a beautiful singing melody, contrasted with the energetic middle section that takes off. The restatement of the A melody in the major key a minor third below the original key and the transition back to the home key has a unique tension-resolution that adds to the conclusion of the piece. The large form of the third ballade, the intermezzo, is the story of the decrescendo; each section diminuendos to the quietest sound the keyboard can produce. The crashing chords and rippling arpeggios suggest a dramatic conflict, contrasted with the archaic sounding chorale section in the middle. The fourth ballade is the juxtaposition of two lovely, warm melodies; the fluctuation between key and mode in choral-like section in the A’ section provides an underlying sense of unsettled or sinister contrast. Rather than add another unnecessary program to the mix, perhaps it is best to leave the programming to the personal decision of individual performers who live with the ballades for extensive periods of study.

CONCLUSION

Brahms’ Ballades are an exquisite composition. They capture the extreme passion of young Brahms through essential Brahmsian components, such as his extended harmonic language, deep emotion, and beautiful singing lines. Brahms utilized coherent but often complex ternary forms, allowing him to capture a mood in each piece, while exploring its nuances. The narrative presence in each ballade is unmistakable, and the generalness of interpretation allows for diverse and personal interpretation. Dramatic and engaging, the ballade cycle is aesthetically pleasing to both the performer and the listener. Brahms’s unique composition should not be ignored or brushed aside.

Their mysterious origin and complicated historiography have detracted from the Ballades. The high quality of all of Brahms’ works has also contributed to this negative view. Instead of damaging perceptions of the Ballades, however, engaging in conversation with these questions provides a more intimate understanding of the Ballades, revealing their complexity and the narrative accessibility. Understanding the Ballades’ place in the piano ballade genre, as well as an appropriate method of interpretation, will introduce both the performer and listener to one of Brahms’ most intimate and passionate compositions.
Bibliography


