

Thesis of DLA Dissertation

Mariann Kerényi

The Role of Piano in *49 Deutsche Volkslieder*

by Johannes Brahms

Supervisor: Ferenc János Szabó PhD

Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music

Doctoral School No. 28 for the History of Art and Culture

Budapest

2019

I. Antecedents of the research

In the choice of topic of my DLA dissertation, I have been guided by my enthusiasm for the German Lied literature. The Lied as a miniature genre conveys the innermost feelings of the composer. Working as an accompanist of singers, my aim has been to choose a composer in whose songs the piano plays a principal part. I have decided to choose the collection of *49 Deutsche Volkslieder* by Johannes Brahms which provides the opportunity to analyze the particular intimate relation between the composer and folk songs, from the point of view of the piano. Performed relatively seldom, these artistic settings of folk song are less in the focus of general interest than the composer's art songs. My approach on this topic primarily takes the performer's perspective as a basis of analysis.

I'm investigating the *49 Deutsche Volkslieder* focusing on the piano part. There hasn't been any comprehensive detailed analytical work, placing the piano part in focus, about this collection of songs involving all the pieces contained so far.

The guiding source for my dissertation has been a book by Max Friedlaender titled *Brahms's Lieder*, especially the chapter *Deutsche Volkslieder mit Klavierbegleitung*. Friedlaender discusses the songs of the collection based on the 1894 sheet music edition by Simrock, which version has also been the basis for my musical analysis. In her study titled *How to make a 'Volkslied'* Natasha Loges examines Brahms's relation to the *Volkslied*, pinpointing the composer's conception of this subject, which was highly influenced by the thoughts of Gottfried Herder.

As to the original sources of Brahms's folk song collections, I have relied on the book *Johannes Brahms. Thematisch-bibliographisches Werkverzeichnis* by Margit L. McCorkle listing the work of art of the composer.

Furthermore, I have referred to the relevant studies by the authors George S. Bozarth, Walter Frisch, Virginia Hancock, Peter Clive, Karl Geiringer, Graham Johnson, John MacAuslan, Eric Sams, Matthias Schmidt and Walter Wiora. In the comparative analysis of both art songs and the 28 *Deutsche Volkslieder*, I've been using the 1926 Breitkopf & Härtel editions respectively.

The objective of my dissertation is to summarize the findings of the preceding studies focusing primarily on the aspects of performers. Based on the results of the mentioned preceding sources, I'm making new observations on the relation between the lyrics and music typical of Brahms; his particular methods of making an artistic elaboration of a melody; as well as on the interpretation challenges of strophic songs.

II. Sources

When analysing the songs, I've been relying on the 1840 edition *Deutsche Volkslieder mit ihrem Original-Weisen* (German folk songs of original theme) edited by August Kretschmer and Anton Wilhelm von Zuccalmaglio, which can be considered as the original source of most of the settings of Brahms's 49 *Deutsche Volkslieder*. I make a comparison of Brahms' setting of the folk song *Es steht ein' Lind* (WoO33 Nr 41) with another artistic folk song setting by Wilhelm Tappert (see Nr 24 in *Deutsche Lieder aus dem 15., 16. und 17. Jahrhundert für eine Singstimme mit Begleitung des Piano forte frei bearbeitet* by Wilhelm Tappert, published in the 1870s'). Regarding the lyrics, in addition to the volume mentioned, I have consulted the collections *Volkslieder Nebst untermischten andern Stücken* by Johann Gottfried Herder and *Deutsche Märchen und Sagen* by Johann Wilhelm Wolf.

The collection of the 28 *Deutsche Volkslieder* WoO32 (1857) can be considered as a predecessor work to the 49 *Deutsche Volkslieder* (1857). In their comparison, I have been relying on the preface by Max Friedlaender of the collection *Brahms: Neue Volkslieder. 32 Bearbeitungen nach der Handschrift aus dem Besitz Clara Schumanns*. Brahms's letters have also been precious sources for my dissertation, just as the preface of the Anthology *Deutscher Liederhort* by Ludwig Erk – Franz Magnus Böhme (1893).

III. Methodology

My dissertation is divided into six main parts. In the first one, I am discussing the relation of Brahms to folk songs referring to the original sources of his settings. In this chapter I am presenting the complexity of the composer's thinking of folk songs and that specific standpoint which he represented and which was fundamentally in opposition to that of the official canon of his era. I discuss Brahms's preference to choose and give privilege to the melodic material – considered as musical quality by him – rather than to authenticity, thus creating his special aesthetic style. For Brahms, folk songs meant an idealistic poetic image representing an idea alienated from reality. In this sense, he can be considered a follower of Herder. Brahms criticized Erk and Böhme who had collected in their volume *Deutscher Liederhort* everything the people would sing, without any means of selection. The composer would give preference to the Anthology *Deutsche Volkslieder mit ihren Original-Weisen* by Kretzschmer-Zuccalmaglio (1838-1840). Other collections of Brahms's folk songs along with their sources are also discussed in this part.

In the second part of my dissertation the piano part of Brahms's folk song settings are put into focus. Based on the type of musical illustration, I am subdividing strophically varied and strophically constant accompaniments into

further groups. This systematization allows one to compare the two types, the composer's intention becomes apparent in the context of lyrics, as it also reveals what aspects inspired Brahms to choose the particular way of setting. In case of the settings with varied piano part, I have also subdivided the works, the structure of which is defined by the type of lyrics. The stand-alone piano parts without voice, namely the parts of prelude, interlude and postlude are discussed separately.

In the third part of my dissertation, I am focusing on Brahms's choice of tonality. Beside the notation of the source of tonalities, in this part, I am mentioning interesting tonal phenomena of certain folk song settings, and the tonal-contentual correlations of the settings. The examination of the tonal conception of the collection raises the question of cyclic thinking, to the question of which I am searching for the answer in this part as well.

The volume *49 Deutsche Volkslieder* and *28 Deutsche Volkslieder* WoO32 were written about forty years apart, which gives us the possibility to compare the composition method of the young Brahms with that of the mature composer. In the fourth part, I am comparing the piano parts of settings of folk songs which feature in both collections. Comparing *49 Deutsche Volkslieder* to the earlier settings, *28 Deutsche Volkslieder* do shed a different light on the later works.

In some cases, Brahms would set a folk melody more than once: he would add different melodies to certain lyrics or compose a different piano part. In the fifth part I am comparing art songs of identical lyrics with the songs of *49 Deutsche Volkslieder*.

In the brief conclusion of my dissertation, I am sharing my ideas regarding performance through an analysis of the first 42 settings. I am presenting samples of music notes representing the most important musical

phenomena, and I am providing charts to show tonalities, alterations of the tonalities, as well as the musical instructions specifying the atmosphere of a particular song.

IV. Results

When analyzing the piano part of the settings, I am intrigued especially by the aspects which prove that further than providing a musical illustration, the piano part reflects the composer's innermost thoughts, hidden feelings; conveying coded messages – as if Brahms would sometimes add a second layer of meaning to his settings by the means of the piano accompaniment. The content of the lyrics can be followed in the folk songs of dialogues, and ballads, through the changing of mood and affections depicted by the piano part. Through the analyses of the piano part, Brahms's incredible creativity, his richness of ideas and characterization skills are revealable. For him, there was no strict limitations of genre between art songs and settings of folk songs; he would move freely between these two as confirmed by the fact how he would issue the Lieder of lyrics identical to folk songs, under opus numbering.

Doing the analyses has convinced me of what care to the minute detail Brahms would proceed about the composition especially of the piano part; which appears to prove his special personal attachment to folk songs. The simple structure of folk songs is enlivened and made exciting by the piano parts. Unchanged piano parts between subsequent stanzas often of opposite characters means a great challenge to the performer. Brahms would often compose musical materials which would adapt to lyrics even of opposite content in a wonderfully smooth way. This influence of folk song settings can be observed also in his art songs as the accompaniments of these often present experimental

variations similar to that of the settings, as well as folk song-like more regular forms.

Editing the settings into a volume provided the opportunity to the composer to highlight certain pieces, by the way of placing them into a particular order. This leads me to believe that Brahms must have applied a cyclical logic in compilation of the volume. The settings in different tonalities seem to follow each other apparently in random order. During my analysis, however, I have arrived to the conclusion that Brahms was in fact equally circumspect in placing the songs in the right order as he had been in composing the settings themselves. The pieces of the collection follow one another rather smoothly thanks to the careful way of forming of postludes; the position of the resuming chord, as well as the relative order of tonalities between either pieces next to each other, which I believe must have been the effect of purposeful planning, reflecting the artistic intention of the composer.

Comparing of *49 Deutsche Volkslieder* to the preceding collection of *28 Deutsche Volkslieder* composed much earlier, we can have a glimpse of the creative process and observe the changes of the piano part. While the settings of the earlier collection are of a character typically designed for performance at home with the piano playing more of the role of accompaniment exclusively, the later compositions of *49 Deutsche Volkslieder* operate with more sophisticated instruments, where the piano is considered on a par with the voice, as an autonomous part, without any idea of subordination.

The interpretation of Brahms's folk songs is just as diverse as that of his art songs; moreover, the former sometimes providing more opportunity for artistic creativity to the performer. The analyzed correlations revealed in my dissertation can add new aspects to performers in their artistic ideas of these songs.

V. Documentation of activity related to the topic of the dissertation

28. March 2019, Szeged, SZTE ZMK

Songs from Johannes Brahms *49 Deutsche Volkslieder*

Nikolett Zöldi - sopran

23. April 2019, Szeged, Rektori Hivatal Díszterem

Songs from Johannes Brahms *49 Deutsche Volkslieder*

Éva Kovács - sopran

20. November 2019, Subotica, Serbia, City Hall

Songs from Johannes Brahms *49 Deutsche Volkslieder*

Tímea Zita Somogyvári - sopran