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*Aus alten Märchen:*  
The Chivalric Style of  
Schumann and Brahms\*

JONATHAN BELLMAN

**I**t is well known that, in the German culture that fostered musical Romanticism, tales of pious crusaders and chivalric knights errant enjoyed substantial popularity. Two discrete but related themes found voice in these stories: emergent nationalism and nostalgia for a mythical German Golden Age. For all their cultural resonance, though, such romances have not commanded much critical attention in recent times. Discussions of this period in German cultural history almost invariably make only passing reference to them, and then drop the subject.

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The possible reasons for this are manifold. Certainly, undue attention to any German glorification of a specifically martial past still provokes discomfort. Moreover, recent reevaluation of the historical realities that underlay these chivalric stories makes the nineteenth century's love of them look painfully naïve. Related to this is our unspoken disbelief that such simpleminded stories might actually have inflamed the imaginations of some of the greatest musical minds in history. Finally, the two-dimensional themes of such stories—innate nobility vs. evil, adoration of the courtly love-object, the ability of a hero to prevail over seemingly impossible odds—seem, in our Critical age, frankly trivial.

Studies of nineteenth-century music have not had to spend much time coming to terms with such uncomfortable content. We have been more interested in questions of evolving forms and narratological

\* This paper was given, in different form, at the 1993 national meeting of the American Musicological Society in Montréal. I am indebted to Steven Whiting and John Michael Cooper for several helpful suggestions.

strategies than the content of the stories themselves. The extent to which much nineteenth-century music drew on the more content-specific language of the previous century, either the gestures themselves or simply the *process* of indicating content with widely-understood musical formulas, has gone largely without comment.<sup>1</sup>

The danger here is that the surface of the music disappears. Long before any narrative can unfold, the musical language itself establishes a clear frame of reference. If this is overlooked or unacknowledged in the critical, interpretive, or analytical process, a substantial amount of relevant musical content is ignored, and the resultant picture skewed. For purposes of telling a story, delivering a message, or making a point, the choice of musical idiom has to be considered the most immediately striking and significant choice a composer can make.

Nowhere in the nineteenth-century canon is this clearer than in the works of Johannes Brahms. From idealized German folksong to neo-Baroque dance and polyphony, from the exoticism of the *style hongrois* to the deft gaiety and melancholy of the Viennese waltz, there was no “public-domain” musical style over which he had less than absolute command. This is a generalization, be it said, that cannot be made about any of his major contemporaries. While the ability to personalize various discrete but common musical idioms had been a necessary compositional skill at least up through the end of the eighteenth century, by Brahms’s time this was no longer the case. Thus, his unique brand of musical polylingualism may be seen as, if not specifically gleaned from his study of historical music, certainly an indication of his conservative approach in this respect.

But what I call the “Chivalric Style”—the language Brahms repeatedly chose to evoke a heroic, noble mood in a specifically medieval context—is something of a special case.<sup>2</sup> It does not seem to have belonged to the musical community at large in quite the way that the aforementioned styles did, but nonetheless its appearance and attendant implications are unmistakable. Part of the reason for this is extramusical: when Brahms set texts using this style (the op. 33 cycle of Romances on Ludwig Tieck’s *Magelone* poems, the song *Entführung*, op. 97/3, and a major section of the dramatic cantata *Rinaldo*, op. 50 are three examples), they dealt with a single complex of associations.

<sup>1</sup> One exception to this oversight would be an article by R. Larry Todd, “On Quotation in Schumann’s Music,” in *Schumann and His World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton, 1994), 80–112.

<sup>2</sup> I have previously called this the “Epic Style,” but the Epic literary genre (as opposed to Dramatic and Lyric) implies a layer of associations that are inappropriate to this discussion. “Chivalric Style” was the excellent suggestion of Karol Berger.

These associations include nobility, heroic quests, and in general the great deeds of a sunny medieval past painted on a broad canvas. Although the component musical gestures of the Chivalric Style are relatively few, it is this economy of means, and the fact that the gestures themselves seem to emanate from these heroic romances, that makes the style itself so vivid.

The central characteristics of the Chivalric Style include fanfare figures, horn fifths, trumpet-call repeated notes, and in general clarion melodic lines that stress chord tones in a triumphant, heraldic manner. Another common feature is a galloping 6/8 meter, or continuous triplets in a brisk common time, suggestive of hoofbeats. This is frequently made even more rhythmically compelling by a duplet overlay, which produces a heroically *agitato* 2:3.

But the most arresting feature of this style is its harmony. In typical Brahmsian writing, suspensions and anticipations are used with great rhythmic subtlety to make fundamentally triadic harmonic progressions sinuously chromatic. This technique is absent in the Chivalric Style, where pure major and minor triads remain for the most part undisguised by nonharmonic tones. The progressions themselves are frequently modal and conspicuously archaic-sounding. Brahms's control of harmonic direction was as sophisticated, probably, as that of any composer in history, so the occasional adoption of a language that included the free and unprepared use of triads well out of the home key represented a striking change from his usual approach. To the Romantic sensibility it implied modality, and symbolized the music of an uncorrupted past.

These were the most striking and essential features. Other self-consciously archaizing gestures were also part of this complex, however. For example, Brahms could hint at a Baroque ground bass (the fourth of the *Magelone* Romances), or evoke a lute song ("Ein Sonett," op. 14/4) and a Tenorlied ("Ich schel' mein Horn," op. 43/3). Harder to codify, though, is a certain expansiveness of pacing, a capricious shifting of meters and textures, that suggests the allusive and episodic nature of a recounted story. Most of the *Magelone* Romances avail themselves of this narrative discursiveness, which here is no structural or formal weakness (as has been suggested) but rather a necessary part of the style.<sup>3</sup> This aspect, by its very nature, requires a certain amount of time to be heard, to make itself apparent. Such is not the case with the Chivalric Style as a whole, which produces an immediate effect: two or three archaic gestures immediately call to mind a distant

<sup>3</sup> Schumann's op. 94 *Romances* for oboe and piano also maintain this varied, luxurious pace.

and idyllic time when moral issues were not complex, when good and evil were clear-cut, and when innate human nobility prevailed.

Unquestionably, Brahms's most explicit use of the Chivalric Style is in the *Magelone* Romances, his musical setting of the adventures of the twelfth-century Count Peter of Provence as retold by Ludwig Tieck. The stage is set with the first romance, "Keinen hat es noch gereut," the opening of which consists of a sequence of horn fifths in the piano, an arpeggiated fanfare-type melody for the words "No one has ever regretted mounting his steed," followed by a lively galloping figure. In this way, the very first notes of the cycle establish a mood of adventure and heroism. This passage is shown in Example 1.

The second romance, "Traun! Bogen und Pfeil," dealing with a doughty warrior's faithful weapons, is characterized by Tieck as "an old song." (Max Friedländer would later describe Brahms's setting as "a defiant melody of archaistic type, which at first seems almost repellent."<sup>4</sup>) Example 2 gives two excerpts from the first strophe: the melody has a vigorous *altdeutsch* cast, the minor i to flat VII gesture at the beginning is clearly archaic, and the major I to flat VII fanfares of bars 17–24 are even more so.

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Such musical sigla recur throughout the *Magelone* Romances. This style appears in even more distilled form in the dramatic cantata *Rinaldo*, op. 50. The work tells the story of a crusading knight who has been lured to the island of a temptress and who is won back, by the entreaties of his concerned comrades, to the glory of battle and his knightly duty. The text for the "chivalric" section translates as: "Back then, back, back across propitious seas! To the mind's eye, the standards, the armies, the dusty field appear! By the virtue of his ancestors, the hero recovers his mettle!" The Chivalric Style appears here in concentrated form: there are prominent trumpet-call figures in the accompaniment, horn-fifth fanfares in the choral writing, and a harmonic environment of latter-day modality. Two excerpts from this section are shown in Example 3.

While the presence of text is helpful in demonstrating the Brahmsian associations with the Chivalric Style, it is not a prerequisite. The travails of medieval knighthood remain in the air when the Chivalric Style is used in a purely instrumental context because brass figures, galloping rhythms, and quasi-modal harmonic references conjure up images so clear that little or no explanation is required. This heroic posture is seen in, among other works, the scherzo movements of the op. 34 piano quintet and the op. 8 and op. 87 piano trios; the musical language needs no words to suggest ancient heroism and grandeur.

<sup>4</sup> Max Friedländer, *Brahms's Lieder*, Trans. C. Leonard Reese (London, 1928), 42.

EXAMPLE 1. Brahms, *Magelone-Romances*, Op. 33, no. 1, opening.

Allegro

Singstimme

Pianoforte

Kei -

- nen hat es noch ge - reut, der das Roß —

— be - stie - gen,

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system shows the vocal line (Singstimme) and the piano accompaniment (Pianoforte) starting with a forte (f) dynamic. The piano part features a prominent bass line with a melodic contour that is mirrored in the vocal line. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics '- nen hat es noch ge - reut, der das Roß —' and the piano accompaniment. The third system shows the vocal line with the lyrics '— be - stie - gen,' and the piano accompaniment, which transitions to a piano (p) dynamic.

But the ability of musical formulas to retain their customary texted associations in the absence of texts certainly did not originate with Brahms. As Leonard Ratner has demonstrated, this was the genesis of the pan-European “topical” musical language of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: gestures originating in theater music became common in instrumental music, with their extramusical meanings remaining essentially intact. (Consider the Siciliano: originally used in opera and ballet to accompany bucolic scenes with shepherds, flocks of sheep, and so on, it eventually became a stock musical symbol

EXAMPLE 2a. Brahms, *Magelone-Romances*, Op. 33, no. 2, mm. 1-4.

Singstimme **Kräftig**

Traum! Bo - gen und Pfeil sind gut für den Feind, hilf -

Pianoforte *f*

EXAMPLE 2b. Brahms, *Magelone-Romances*, Op. 33, no. 2, mm. 17-24.

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dem Ed - len blüht Heil, wo Son - ne nur scheint, die Fel - sen sind

steil, doch Glück ist sein Freund, doch Glück ist sein Freund.

for pastoral serenity in the complete absence of scenery or text.) This pattern would not have been lost on Brahms, the passionate student of historical music.

It is in this respect, however, that the Chivalric Style is different from other familiar musical idioms: it did not go through a long evolutionary process. While other styles had substantial periods of



EXAMPLE 3a. Brahms, *Rinaldo*, Op. 50 (reduction), mm. 718–30.

718

Zu - rück nur! zu - rü - cke durch gün - sti - ge

723

Mee - re zu - rück! Zu - rück nur! zu -

727

rü - cke durch gün - sti - ge Mee - re zu - rück!

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EXAMPLE 3b. Brahms, *Rinaldo*, Op. 50 (reduction), mm. 795–808.

rück! *ff* Zur Tu - gend der Ah -

nen er - mannt sich, er - mannt sich der Held zur

Tu - gend der Ah - nen, zur Tu - gend der

development within the sphere of theater music, that pattern cannot be discerned here. In the eighteenth-century works that sought to evoke the distant past, there seems to have been no standard and relatively finite body of musical gestures that served this purpose.

A famous piece by Grétry underscores this point. One of the most celebrated instances of operatic archaism is the Romance *Une fièvre brûlante* from *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* (1784). Since Grétry described the piece both as “in the ancient manner” and “the old style capable of pleasing modern listeners,”<sup>5</sup> the intent of this piece is well known: he was seeking to evoke a medieval song.<sup>6</sup> Even the genre designation points in this direction: Rousseau had defined *Romance* as “of a simple and touching style, and of a slightly antique character.”<sup>7</sup> Example 4 (the opening of Blondel’s Romance) shows that, for Grétry, “antique character” in this instance consisted of no more than a pedal tone in the bass, a simple melody, sweet parallel sixths, and an occasional delicate syncopation. The harmonic language throughout is thoroughly tonal. This Romance seems no more antique, in other words, than an *Air de ballet* from Grétry’s own century, and it demonstrates the French preference for subtle musical reminiscence over a complete change of musical language.<sup>8</sup>

We might also look for the roots of the Chivalric Style in the students of the Abbé Georg Joseph Vogler, the indefatigable composer, inventor, folksong collector, and general student of music.<sup>9</sup> A

<sup>5</sup> David Charlton, *Grétry and the Growth of the Opéra Comique* (Cambridge, 1986), 237.

<sup>6</sup> The composer is further quoted, *ibid.*, 239, “a hundred times I was asked whether I had found this air in the *fabliau* that provided the subject.”

<sup>7</sup> “*D’un style simple, touchant, & d’un goût un peu antique. . .*,” Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de Musique* [1768] (Hildesheim, 1969), 420.

<sup>8</sup> *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* was not Grétry’s only historical essay. His opera *Aucassin et Nicolette* (1779) includes parallel fifths and delicately modal harmony in an effort to evoke a “gothic” mood (Charlton, *Grétry*, 192–194). Elegance, however, represents a key difference between this kind of harmonic use and that of Brahms’s Chivalric Style. The examples of French archaism retain their voice-leading, for the most part, and tickle rather than shock the listener’s harmonic sense. (Berlioz’s later *Le Roi de Thule*, one of the Faust scenes, is another example of this restrained Gallic approach.) German taste leaned more toward modal changes brought about by leaps, as opposed to step-wise motion, and abandonment of voice-leading. The archaizing effect in such circumstances is sudden, somewhat shocking, and therefore more intense. Actually, the only number associated with *Richard Coeur-de-Lion* that is anywhere near the Chivalric Style is not by Grétry; it is German. It is an instrumental march by Bernhard Anselm Weber (1764–1821; the Royal Capellmeister in Berlin) that was added for German productions around the turn of the nineteenth century). It does use horn-like figures, but is a thoroughly undistinguished piece, entirely lacking in the rousing character of the Chivalric Style.

<sup>9</sup> So much of Vogler’s music is unavailable that no conclusions about his musical language can safely be drawn. However, there is at least one fascinating, quasi-modal harmonic sequence in a keyboard work from 1806, the third of his *Zwei und dreisig*

EXAMPLE 4. Grétry, *Romance* ("Une fièvre brulante") from *Richard Coeur-de-Lion*, opening.

BLONDEL

R

COUP U - ne fiè - vre brû - lan - te Un jour me ter-ras - sait . . .

Cor I

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later piece by Giacomo Meyerbeer, a German transplanted to the French orbit, is somewhat more literal than Grétry. The trio of defrocked monks in the first act of *Le Prophète* (1824) uses pseudo-chant and archaic-sounding harmonies to establish the religious overtones of this episode and the drama as a whole. This is dramatically very effective, but again unrelated to the later Brahmsian idiom. Meyerbeer's fellow student Carl Maria von Weber might have been a more likely source, given his command of contemporary popular styles, mastery of local color (*Singverein* style, *style hongrois*, etc.), and sure sense of popular taste and cultural climate. But there is no discernable archaic flavor at all in the one place there should be, his famous *Concertstück* in F minor for piano and orchestra. This is a program work that tells of a *Châtelaine* waiting disconsolately for her husband, a crusading knight absent many months, and his triumphant return.<sup>10</sup> The absence of such musical flavoring in the works of Weber illustrates the point that despite the well-established tradition of operatic and dramatic evocations of the past, a set musical vocabulary for it did not yet exist.

To be sure, certain gestures within the Chivalric Style did draw on a widely-shared musical vocabulary. Horncalls, fanfare figures, and galloping triplets belong to a group of formulas associated since the seventeenth century with "outside" music, music that evoked the

*Präludien*. The passage in question, mm. 27–29, seems to foreshadow a progression from the first movement of Beethoven's fifth piano concerto. Interestingly, an earlier passage (mm. 19–24) is reminiscent of another passage from the same concerto movement.

<sup>10</sup> The program is readily available in, among other places, Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis IV* [1936] (Oxford, 1948), 61–62.

out-of-doors and activities that took place there. But while such gestures did occur (often in relative isolation) in the song repertoire, they seem to have been more common when suggesting the hunt rather than crusading knighthood (cf. Schubert's *Jägers Liebeslied*, op. 96/2, which also has an attractive modal alternation between D major and B-flat).

To the best of my knowledge, the idea of using a relatively fixed group of musical conventions to suggest a medieval topos originated in the highly literary imagination of Robert Schumann. The leisurely-paced op. 94 Romances (again, note the genre designation) for the piano and oboe, for example, are peppered with evocative gestures such as ringing fifths in the bass, modal inflections, and strummed piano chords reminiscent of a harper punctuating his own lay.<sup>11</sup> The same breezes blow through the first movement of his piano concerto (op. 54 in A minor), with its flickeringly antique chordal changes and serious, heroic stance. (The concerto's mood was not lost on Frederick Niecks: "in the bold *Allegro affetuoso* the composer gives expression to all the heroic moods in him, loftiness, dignity, and pride."<sup>12</sup>) But Schumann's evocations of a historical, outdoor topos are most evident in the songs.<sup>13</sup>

"Auf einer Burg" (op. 39/7), the seventh song from the Eichendorff-*Liederkreis*, is one clear example of an archaizing tone. The opening of this song, which situates an ancient knight in the castle scene, features an alla-breve accompaniment that follows the vocal line with *stile antico* imitation and a sparse, antique harmonization. (See Example 5.) For more of an *al fresco* feel, the sudden appearance of riders in "Im Walde" (also from the Eichendorff-*Liederkreis*, op. 39/11) occasions a sudden drop to the subtonic triad and a vocal line reminiscent of a hunting horn. (See Example 6.) While the text of "Im Walde" implies no explicitly archaic orientation,

<sup>11</sup> Similar effects are used in Schumann's dramatic cantata *Des Sängers Fluch*, op. 139, and the declaimed song *Ballade des Harfners*, op. 98a/2.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Niecks, *Robert Schumann*, ed. Christina Niecks (London & Toronto; New York, 1925), 235.

<sup>13</sup> It is also interesting to note where the style is *not* used. Schumann's opera *Genoveva* (1847–49), based on a medieval legend as told by Ludwig Tieck and C. F. Hebbel, uses this style but rarely and in a fairly vague way, such as in no. 5, "Auf, auf in das Feld" (a warriors' chorus that could well be a fairly close ancestor of the aforementioned "Zurück, nur" chorus from Brahms's *Rinaldo*), and the finale. It is even less evident in *Des Sängers Fluch* (1852), a dramatic setting for soloists, chorus and orchestra. It tells of an old harper and a young singer who visit a castle and seek to soften the heart of the king within; their powerful music only enrages him, he murders the singer, and the harper pronounces a curse on his castle and kingdom. Despite the setting, characters, and nature of the parable, there is little if anything archaic about the musical language, save perhaps the *Ballade*, no. 7, which bears some relation to the second *Magelone* Romance, "Traun! Bogen und Pfeil."

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EXAMPLE 5. Schumann, *Auf einer Burg*, mm. 1–8.

Adagio.  
*p*

33. Ein ge-schla-fen auf der Lau-er o-ben ist der al-te Rit-ter;  
dri-ber ge-hen Re-gen schau-er, und der Wald rauscht durch das Git-ter.

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EXAMPLE 6. Schumann, *Im Walde*, mm. 12–15.

*f*

da blitz-ten viel Rei-ter, das Wald-horn klang,

such a mood does recur throughout the Eichendorff poems Schumann chose for this cycle; other examples would include no. 3, "Waldeggespräch," which retells the Lorelei legend with the help of modal harmonies, and the brief modal excursion on the words "ein altes, schönes Lied" in no. 2, "Intermezzo."

But Schumann's version of the Chivalric Style is seen in its clearest and most concise form in "Aus alten Märcchen," from *Dichterliebe*. Heinrich Heine's text speaks of an imaginary, idyllic land "out of old fairy tales." The first two stanzas run as follows:

Out of old fairy tales  
a white hand beckons forth;  
singing and sounding come  
from a magic country

where bright flowers bloom  
in the golden evening light,  
and glow, lovely and fragrant,  
like the face of a bride;

A modal jump from the home tonality of E major to C major is then followed by the words "and green trees sing ancient melodies." The brisk 6/8, variety of horn motifs, and above all the sudden shift from E to C identify the musical language of this song as precisely that which Brahms would later use and develop. (See Example 7.)

One connection between *Dichterliebe* and the *Magelone* Romances involved Julius Stockhausen, singer and friend of Brahms. On April 19, 21, and 30 of the year 1861 Stockhausen performed *Dichterliebe* with Brahms at the piano, and years later he reappears as the dedicatee of the *Magelone* cycle. Since by 1861 Brahms's place in the Schumann circle was well established, he surely had been acquainted with *Dichterliebe* long before these performances; it is nonetheless suggestive that he would dedicate a cycle of Romances that were wholly reliant on the musical language of "Aus alten Märcchen" to the singer with whom he performed it.

But ultimately, Brahms's initial point of contact with Schumann's song is far less important than what he took from it, and the way in which he would develop its musical vocabulary. His use of the Chivalric Style is even more eloquent than Schumann's because he maintained the style's original context while expanding Schumann's harmonic and gestural vocabulary. Both with and without texts, Brahms's uses of the style evoke the same images Schumann did, perhaps even more vividly.

I would also like to suggest that Brahms's adoption of this style enabled him to pay a kind of tribute to its originator. There is a famous and much-discussed passage in the development section of the first movement of Brahms's first symphony that is, I believe, a clear use of this style. It features a vigorous 6/8 meter, trumpet-call motives, and a *very* distinctively retrospective harmonic sequence. It

EXAMPLE 7a. Schumann, *Aus alten Märchen*, mm. 8–16.

*mf*

Aus al-ten Märch-en winkt es her-vor mit wei-Ber Hand, da  
singt es und da klingt es von ei-nem Zau-ber-land; wo

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EXAMPLE 7b. Schumann, *Aus alten Märchen*, mm. 24–32.

sicht; und  
grü-ne Bäu-me sin-gen ur-al-te Me-lo-dein, die

*f*  
*cresc.*



has long been felt to be a quotation from or allusion to another work: Brahms's early biographer Max Kalbeck pointed out this relationship to a motive from a Bach chorale, and its similarity to a figure from the end of the fourth movement of Beethoven's sixth symphony has also been noted.<sup>14</sup> It begins the same way as a hymn by Friedrich Silcher (1789–1860), *So nimm denn meine Hände*.<sup>15</sup>

The "allusive" quality of this chorale-like passage is intensified by the way Brahms sets it apart from the music on either side. It occurs in the midst of a very tempestuous section, in which the prevailing harmonic environment is murky, consisting of diminished and minor chords, and fragmented melodic figures overlap on both strong and weak beats.<sup>16</sup> When this passage appears, the harmony suddenly turns major, the chord changes occur regularly and cleanly on the half-bar, horn-call figures echo in the background, and while the vigor remains, all the turbulence has vanished. A mood of absolute triumph results. The Chivalric Style, gesture for gesture, sits in stark contrast to the disturbed, roiling music from which it here emerges. A piano reduction of this passage is shown in Example 8.

The source of this melody is not Bach or Beethoven, it seems to me, but Schumann. The melody that suddenly appears in Brahms's First and just as suddenly disappears forever is one note shy of being identical to the opening piano figure from Schumann's song "Ballade des Harfners," op. 98a/2, which was one of his settings from Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. This passage is shown in Example 9, and a pitch-normalized comparison between it and the Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms melodies is given in Example 10.

Certainly, the melodic resemblance stands on its own. While the Bach and Beethoven melodies are shorter than the Brahms, the Schumann melody is identical to it with the exception of a reiteration of the third scale degree before the final prime. Moreover, a Chivalric Style treatment of this melody seems especially appropriate, despite the unadorned original, because of the song's text. Schumann's song describes a king who hears a harper singing outside his gate, summons him in and bids him perform for his noble company. This the harper does, to the King's pleasure, but the King's offered reward for the

<sup>14</sup> Raymond Knapp first heard this idea from R. Larry Todd. Raymond Knapp, *Brahms and the Problem of the Symphony* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1987), 91–92.

<sup>15</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Elfrieda Hiebert for pointing out this similarity.

<sup>16</sup> For criteria by which one might ascertain if something is allusive or not, see Kenneth Ross Hull, *Brahms the Allusive* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 1989), 62–91.

EXAMPLE 8. Brahms, Symphony no. 1, I, mm. 232–60, piano reduction.

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performance is gracefully refused; the harper requests only a beaker of wine, explaining that simply to sing the song was reward enough for him.

It is hard to imagine the Romantic composer who would not be attracted to this little vignette, with its historic setting and musician who seeks no rich reward but who, in Goethe's words, "must sing as the bird sings in the branches." The arpeggiated chords that open Schumann's song represent the preluding strains of the harper, and become his emblem as the song proceeds. In Brahms's symphony, the Chivalric Style supplies all the knightly splendor that the absent text cannot, giving Schumann's melody the resounding character of a credo, or a call to arms.

What remains unexplained is the final nine bars of the Brahms passage, which are modal, archaic-sounding, yet do not come from Schumann's song. In his overview of Schumann's motivic vocabulary Eric Sams identifies the I–IV–I progression, the first three chords in *Ballade des Harfnerns*, as signifying royalty or nobility in this and other

EXAMPLE 8. *continued*

The musical score consists of three systems of piano music. The first system shows a piano introduction with a forte (*ff*) dynamic. The second system features a piano accompaniment with markings for 'wnd.' (wind) and 'str.' (string) instruments. The third system continues the musical notation with similar markings.

songs.<sup>17</sup> (Two more such instances are the triplet subdominant gestures for the Princess in “Der Gärtner,” op. 107/3, and a subdominant fanfare for King Franz in “Der Handschuh,” op. 87.) He also states that the flat seventh of any given key was connected, in Schumann’s mind, with the skies or heavens.<sup>18</sup> (Further examples include the flattened seventh in the bass for the word *Himmel* in “Widmung,” op. 25, and the subtonic chord preceding the same word in “Venezianisches Lied I,” op. 25/17.) Given this musical symbolism, the end of Brahms’s passage, in which Schumann’s melody is abandoned in favor of a I–IV–I progression that alternates with I-flat VII–I, seems to be a tribute and farewell from Brahms to his friend and mentor: the “nobility” progression and “heaven” gesture are repeatedly juxtaposed by different instrumental choirs, growing forlorn as the IV and flat VII chords shift into the minor mode before the development proper resumes.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Sams, *The Songs of Robert Schumann* (New York, 1969), 218–19.

<sup>18</sup> Sams, 20.

EXAMPLE 9. Schumann, *Ballade des Harfners*, opening.

Op. 98<sup>2</sup> Nr. 2.

Mit freiem declamatorischen Vortrag. (♩ = 104) *f*

Was

Mit Pedal.

EXAMPLE 10. Pitch-normalized comparison of Brahms, Schumann, Beethoven, and Bach melodies.

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Brahms (orig. G-flat)

Schumann (orig. B-flat)

Beethoven (orig. C)

Bach (orig. B-flat)

Because it depends on Sams's identification of Schumann's harmonic patterns and my own conviction that Schumann's song is the origin of Brahms's melody, I cannot claim that this reading constitutes actual proof. But it is generally acknowledged that Brahms did use musical symbols in his compositions, some of them derived from Schumann's own secret vocabulary (that is, secret to those outside his immediate circle). He used these symbols, in the words of Brahms's recent biographer Malcolm MacDonald, "to express secretly the 'specifics' that music allowed him to avoid saying outright."<sup>19</sup>

With the Chivalric Style in general, the symbolism is clear: musical references to horses, the horns and trumpets of hunt and battle, and archaic harmonic practices are reminiscences of an idealized, noble past. Such gestures as these drew on a pan-European cultural experience, and are not particularly obscure. When used with heroic texts,

<sup>19</sup> Malcolm MacDonald, *Brahms* (New York, 1990), 34.

or for rousing scherzo movements in chamber works, use of the Chivalric Style makes perfect sense. But the case of Brahms's First Symphony, with its thirty seconds or so of Chivalric Style (not to mention the German Baroque brass chorale in the fourth movement), is more of a puzzlement. Mahler's famous remark, "from Beethoven onwards, there is no music that has not its inner program,"<sup>20</sup> comes to mind here: we recognize the heroic medieval topos in this situation, we know that it is radically different from the rest of the movement, but we don't really know what Brahms means by it.<sup>21</sup> Surely, it would make no sense for such a drastic but temporary style change to occur for no particular reason. More likely he was using this style to tell some kind of story, personal or otherwise. But of course such an observation cannot be made without immediately remembering that it can be a risky business to read personal meanings into music, as one study of the *Magelone* Romances has (perhaps unconsciously) demonstrated.<sup>22</sup> Such problems of interpretation represent a perennial interpretive challenge to those of us schooled to be skeptical of programs and hidden meanings in instrumental music, but who are constantly confronted with music that can be explained convincingly no other way.

What is undeniable about the Chivalric Style is that Brahms was using a nineteenth-century musical dialect, one not of his own making, to evoke a much earlier time, in much the same way that eighteenth-century composers had used their own contemporary musical language to evoke other things. For Brahms, living at a time when other composers were striving to create their own languages out of whole cloth, the expert use of topoi and preexistent musical idioms, and this one in particular, represents a strand of musical thought at odds with our received standard teleological view of style development. It also represents a rather different, wholly Brahmsian angle on the emerging nineteenth-century field of musical historicism: languages, styles, and (more important) procedures of the past being studied, not for purely investigative and documentary purposes, but in the service of an ongoing compositional process. Research served not only the emerging *Musikwissenschaft*, in other words, but also the living, breathing, musical present.

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<sup>20</sup> From a letter dated by Knud Martner as January, 1902. Ed. Knud Martner, *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler* (New York, 1979), 262.

<sup>21</sup> A similar puzzle is posed by the Chivalric Style horn-calls and modal changes that recur in the second movement of Brahms's second piano concerto.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Boyer, "Brahms as Count Peter of Provence: A Psychosexual Interpretation of the *Magelone* Poetry," *Musical Quarterly* LXVI (1980), 262–86.