

NOTATIO CRITICAL REPORT: Brahms Intermezzo Op. 119 no. 1

Introduction

Because Brahms' meticulous editor at Simrock, Robert Keller, had died in 1891, this piece, along with the other late piano pieces published in 1892 and 1893, did not receive the high level of critical scrutiny usual for his works. This allowed errors in the composer's autograph (**MS**) and a version prepared by a professional copyist for the engraver (**EC**) to remain uncorrected in the first edition (**FE**).

Many of the errors of the first edition were left uncorrected in Breitkopf & Härtel's *Brahms: Complete Works*, giving the impression that its editors did not utilize the primary sources or assumed incorrectly that the first edition was very correct.

Commentary

mm. 2-3 These "intensity marks", like all accent marks, should not be angled. m. 1 is correct, but mm. 2-3 are not in **FE**. The angled appearance of all these marks in **MS** and **EC** is a handwriting mannerism forced by the position of the slurs and should not have carried over into **FE**. Such intensity markings were often misunderstood by engravers as diminuendo markings, which are sometimes angled. More intensity markings occur in m. 17-18.

mm. 4, 6 The R.H. middle voices should be beamed as in m. 12 and the rest of the piece. Brahms started off with separate flags in **MS**, then decided to beam over the rests but failed to correct these first two measures. **EC** also did not make the correction and this found its way into **FE**.

m. 5 A correction visible in this measure in **EC** splits the middle voices between the hands as in m. 51 of both **EC** and **FE**. There is no split in this measure in **FE**, and **MS** has no split in either measure.

mm. 6-7 The length of the hairpin is problematic, both musically and textually. It doesn't exist in **MS** and occurs in a different form in mm. 52-53 of both **EC** and **FE**.

mm. 7, 8, 16 Slurs are missing in the R.H. middle voices (such as occur in mm. 5 and 51, 53, 54) in both **EC** and **FE**. The **MS** has no slurs in any of these places throughout the piece, probably because the composer felt that legato was self-evident.

mm. 10-11 The R.H. intensity marks are missing in all sources. This would be understandable if the pattern continued on, but the omission of these two indications is unusual and might lead to misunderstanding. See also the comment to mm. 55-57.

mm. 14-15 The unusual nested slurs in **EC** and **FE** do not occur in the **MS** and seem to result from some kind of compromise between the previous slurring of the three note motive and its new continuation in mm. 14-15.

mm. 14-15 In **MS**, there are small swell hairpins centered around the E[#] in m. 15. These were discarded in **EC**, perhaps erroneously.

m. 16 The L.H. 16th rest is misplaced or there is an upper rest missing in **FE**. **MS** has one rest only; **EC** has one for each L.H. voice.

m. 16 In **MS**, this hairpin is placed over the measure because of a lack of space between the staves. It has a wide opening, possibly to show that the downbeat is to be highly stressed, and includes the entire measure. It is similar in **EC** but placed between the staves, which narrowed the opening. It was further contracted in **FE** so that it no longer resembles the one in **MS**.

m. 17 A precautionary natural on the higher A in the R.H. is missing in all sources.

m. 18 The first L.H. interval has a down stem in **MS** and **EC**. This is probably better than the upstem in **FE**, both musically and graphically, because it subordinates the higher D as an inner voice and presents the low D—G—G[#] melody more clearly in relation to the slur.

m. 18 The second intensity mark pertains to the last note in the measure, not the first note in the next, and should not extend through the barline as in **FE**. This is clear in **MS**. The intensity mark lies at the end of the line in **EC** and spacing caused it to cross through the barline. This was misinterpreted by **FE**.

m. 20 The Last 16th-note in the R.H. has a downstem in **MS**, an upstem in **EC** and a downstem in **FE**. It appears that Brahms started with a normal down stem, but then realized that he wanted all up stems on what followed. This down stem was then corrected to an up stem to match the rest in **EC**. The **FE** applied more orthodox up and down stems to the entire passage. (See the following comment to mm. 22-24)

mm. 22-24 The decision in **FE** to change the stem direction in the R.H., starting from the last 16th-note of m. 22 through the first two 16ths of m. 24, is debatable. The **MS** and **EC** continue the previous stem direction, which avoids breaking the continuously intensifying phrase.

m. 24. A break in articulation between the first R.H. F[#] and G, as notated here in all sources, is unlikely. Since the old practice of omitting a slur between an appoggiatura and its resolution was obsolete before Brahms' time, there should be a slur between the first two notes of the R.H..

m. 25 The precautionary accidental given before the B natural in both the **MS** and **EC** is missing in **FE**. If this was an editorial decision, it is a debatable one given the chromatic situation.

mm. 29-30 A slur is missing below the R.H. middle voice in all sources. While such a slur might be implied by the L.H. slur in other circumstances, it is here inconsistent with mm. 27-28, where both moving voices are slurred.

mm. 31-32 (Compare mm. 17-18.) The L.H. slur is missing in all sources.

mm. 32-33 The two-note slur that occurs throughout this section in the R.H. melody is missing from the last note of m. 32 to the first note of m. 33 in all sources, undoubtedly erroneously.

mm. 33-35 The composer, editor and engraver faced difficulty in these measures.

The following conjectural rendering by the present writer maintains the overall melodic contour by avoiding a clef change; it also shows more clearly the relationship between the two R.H. jumps of register in m. 35 and m. 36.

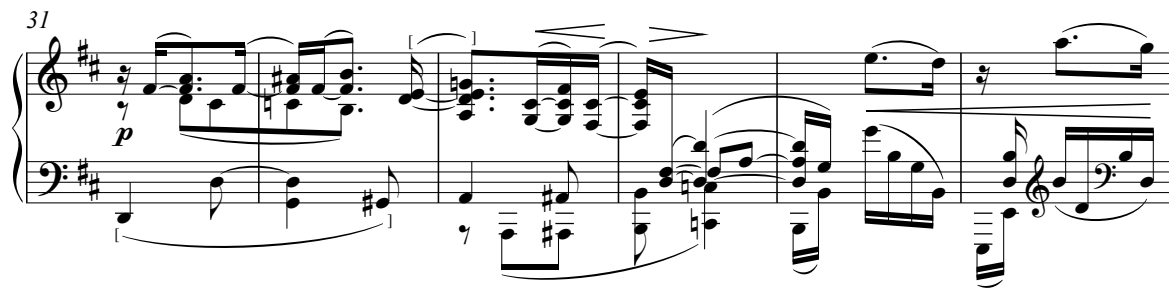


Figure 1

But the MS and EC use a less complex cross-beamed version to keep the R.H. on the upper staff, as had become more common at the time, and to keep the melody up-stemmed on the first beat of m. 33. The following excerpt is from EC:



Figure 2

FE did away with the cross-beaming, because cross-beaming was avoided in most engraving of the time for stylistic and aesthetic reasons:



Figure 3

mm. 33-34 The L.H. slur is above the notes in MS, but below in EC and FE. (See Figures 2 and 3.) There is something to be said for both readings, but the present writer prefers the reading of MS because it includes all of the L.H. notes within the slur.

mm. 34-35 The highest D in the R.H. should be tied to the first 16th-note in m. 35. (See mm. 23-24, from which this idea is derived.) The tie is clearly visible in the **MS**, but Brahms sometimes wrote short ties that did not reach back to the first note, and this created confusion in **EC** and then **FE**. As well, the top slur should connect the highest D (not the F#) to the G. (Note mm. 38-39 in **FE**, where the slur is correct.) Figure 4 shows the tie and slur in the **MS**:



Figure 4

mm. 38-39 As in mm. 34-35, the highest D in the R.H. of m. 38 should be tied to the first sixteenth of m. 39. The tie is clear in the **MS**:

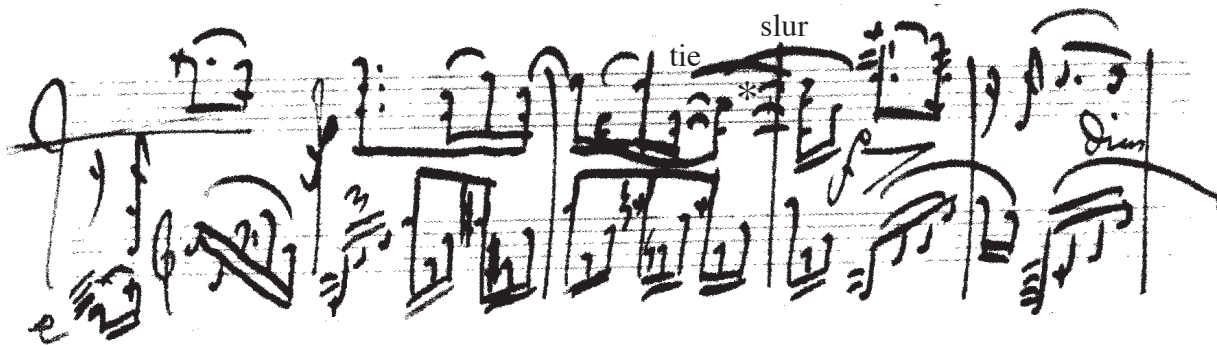


Figure 5

The strange “slur” between the A and D in **EC** and **FE** may be a misinterpretation of the extra tie that appears here at * in Figure 5, a mannerism that also occurs in measures 43 and 44:

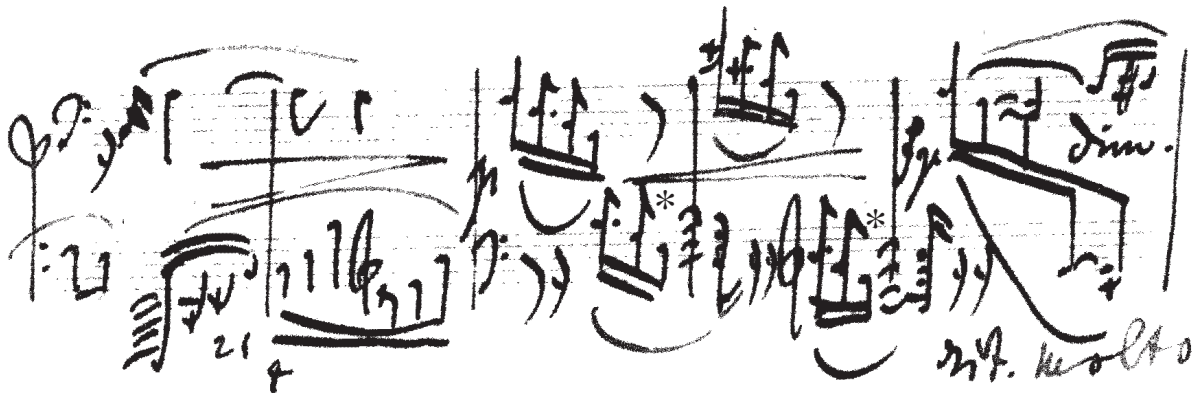


Figure 6

m. 39 A *f* originally stood here in **MS**. While it is clear enough that m. 39 is climactic, the *f* would remind us of the *f* placed under the same melody in m. 24 and thus of a past dynamic level to which m. 39 should relate. This may have been an unconscious reference on Brahms part. In any case, he decided against it or was talked out of it later, possibly because of the *f* in m. 37; or **EC** may have omitted it for the same reason or through oversight.

m. 40 A *dim.* originally stood here in **MS**. The decision to remove it in **EC** and **FE** was unfortunate, because it is not completely clear that a general diminuendo follows leading to the *p* in 43.

m. 41 The slur encompasses the R.H. 16th-note in **MS** but not in **EC** and thus not in **FE**. This was corrected in the Complete Works. While the same rhythmic pattern has occurred previously in both slurred and unslurred forms, the reading of the **MS** seems most likely, given the slur in m. 41.

m. 45 The **MS** has *rit. molto*. (See Figure 6.) This was apparently corrected to *rit.* in **EC** and then **FE**.

m. 45 The lower slur in **MS** and **EC** connecting the staves as in 46 etc. was omitted erroneously in **FE**.

mm. 45-47 The *rit.*, the following dashed line, and the *in tempo* lie above the staves in **MS** in the usual way. **EC** was forced to place it between the staves because of a lack of space. This should not have been carried over into **FE**, where the markings crowd the area between the staves.

mm. 47-49 and mm. 55-57 The final L.H. chord in each measure is a flagged 8th-note in **MS**. In **EC** and **FE**, it is beamed with the rest of the L.H. in mm. 47-49 but flagged in mm. 55-57. There is no apparent musical reason for this variation. It would seem that the copyist corrected the beaming with or without the composer's agreement but then promptly forgot the correction and copied literally from the **MS**. Given the continuous beaming of the similar figure previously (and immediately preceding in mm. 45-46), it seems most likely that the continuous style should persist throughout.

mm. 48-49 The lower slurs of **MS** are missing in **EC** and **FE** but suddenly reappear in mm. 55-57. This shows that their absence in m. 48-49 is an error.

m. 49 The first note in the R.H. is dotted in **FE**, a clear error.

mm. 50-51 In **EC** and **FE** the L.H. slur encompasses both measures in opposition to the two slurs used in the first appearance of this music in mm. 4-5. This is undoubtedly an error, because the three note motive in m. 50 has always been slurred as a unit, and continues to be in m. 52. m. 51 is actually a shortened version of this motive and deserves its own slur. Interestingly, there are no L.H. slurs in mm. 4-6 or 50-52 in **MS**.

mm. 52-53 See the comments about the hairpin in mm. 6-7. The version here in mm. 52-53 would appear to be the superior reading.

m. 55 A precautionary natural is missing before the last 16th-note in the R.H. in all sources. Its necessity is debatable.

mm. 55-57 The intensity markings are missing in the R.H. in all sources because there was a lack of space in **MS** for these markings. This was carried uncritically into **EC** and **FE**.

m. 60 The portato involves all three notes of the R.H. in **MS** rather than the last two as in **EC** and **FE**. The reading in **MS** seems more logical given the pattern that precedes.

m. 61 As it stands, the C# appears to be a dotted 16th-note rather than a dotted 8th-note in **FE**. The C# should be stemmed with the E as an 8th-note on the right side, not as a 16th on the left. **EC** misunderstood **MS**, which is correct but unclear. This was carried over into **FE**.

m. 62 The indication is a *piú pp* in **MS** rather than the *piú p* in **EC** and **FE**. The reading from **MS** seems more logical given the previous pianissimo indication.

m. 64 A dashed line follows the *rit.* through the next measure in **MS**. **EC** has a much shorter dashed line restricted to m. 64 only. **FE** has no dashed line. Since all previous ritardando indications have been followed by dashed lines (probably to show an intense holding back), one would have expected one here as well, and thus the reading in **MS** would seem to be the preferable one.

John Ruggero
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History and Acknowledgements

This critical report grew out of a proposal by Abraham Lee at the Notatio online forum to show the capabilities of present day music notation software through the engraving of a single demonstration piece by the membership, which includes users of Finale, Sibelius, LilyPond, SCORE and MuseScore. This proposal arose in turn from a document posted on the site by John Rethorst comparing the work of six engravers using different notation products.

After many pieces were suggested and considered, Knut Nergaard began engraving the Brahms Intermezzo Op. 119 no. 1, since it seemed to be an excellent candidate for the purpose, given its complexity, the engraving excellence of the first edition, and the accessibility of the source material.

John Ruggero then joined Knut by creating his own engraving and began to post a series of errata found in the various primary sources. This material and the online discussion about it between Knut and John became the basis for the present report. John thanks Knut for withholding his own list of corrections to avoid duplication and confusion and for suggestions that greatly improved this critical report.

Note: this section will be updated to include the names of all participants in the project.

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A Note About Notatio

Notatio. A Forum devoted to the Practice of Music Notation (<http://notat.io>) was founded by the composer Djuro Zivkovic ("OCTO.") on October 5 2015. Topics of interest to music engravers are discussed in depth on this website.