

Borrowing for Contrast, II:

Mozart, Schumann, and Brahms

Contrast is right at the fore at the very opening of Brahms's Second Symphony. The cellos and double basses, playing in octaves, lead darkly to the autumnal opening theme, which begins in bar 2 (Example 1). But do we hear bar 1 as a mere lead-in or upbeat to bar 2? Carl Schachter, for one, has argued eloquently and at some length for an upbeat reading.¹ Others have been more skeptical: Raymond Knapp, for instance, has called upon the opening of Beethoven's "Pastoral" Sonata to suggest that bar 1 might be more than an upbeat.² David Epstein and Reinhold Brinkmann have cited what they perceive as metrical and hypermetrical ambiguity between bars 1-4, on the one hand, and bars 2-5, on the other.³

A look ahead, at how Brahms's *Allegro non troppo* continues, quickly discloses that the opening theme (bars 2ff.) is not the only element of the movement's beginning that is elaborated later: bar 1 repeatedly procreates its own groups of measures (Example 2), reaching even into the center of the third

¹ Schachter 1983, 57-60. Schachter also argues for hearing bars 1-43 as an extended upbeat to the tonic of bar 44. Schenker ([1935] 1979, §296, Fig. 147 (2), too, depicts bar 1 as an upbeat in no uncertain terms.

² Knapp 1997, 116-17, Example 4-15B. Knapp links bar 1, very suggestively, to the ominous opening of Haydn's "Drumroll" Symphony, No. 103; see p. 117, fn. 53. Knapp's discussion is replete with references both old and new to other sources of Brahms's theme. As I emphasize later, Brahms's borrowings here, as elsewhere, are cumulative, an amalgam of many sources. Knapp's sobriquet, "The allusive web," is highly appropriate.

³ Epstein 1979, 161-75; Brinkmann [1990] 1995, 63-71, and *passim*.

movement, the Allegro grazioso (Example 3).⁴ At their furthest, the groups begotten by bar 1 seem to fight off those begotten by the opening theme (Example 4).

One might say, then, that bar 1 is something of a promissory note, a simulated upbeat that appears to say, boldly, "I shall return."⁵ Within this context, it may not be going too far to hear bars 1 and 2 as two successive strong measures.⁶

Confirmation for such a reading comes from a new borrowing source for Brahms's Allegro non troppo, namely from the second movement, Andante, from Mozart's keyboard Sonata in F, K. 533/494 (Example 5).⁷ Mozart's opening gesture, unlike Brahms's, is harmonized, yet it is identical. There is no doubt that bar 1 is strong, yet the contrapuntally shocking counterstress at the downbeat of bar 2 evidently tries to have us hear bar 2 as a strong measure instead. The underlying metrical disposition of bars 1-4—strong-weak, strong-weak—will not allow bar 2 to

⁴ And even the opening of the third movement derives, through inversion, from the beginning of the first (see Example 3b).

Many of these thematic observations are by no means new; see, for instance, Musgrave 1994, 213-19, Frisch 2003, 68-75, and especially Brinkmann [1990] 1995, 63-125 and *passim*.

⁵ The notion of a musical promissory note was introduced by Edward T. Cone (1982).

⁶ Schenker alludes to the phenomenon in §296, Fig. 147/1 and 3, couching it in terms of metrically conflicting melody and accompaniment. See also Kamien 1993 and Bakulina 2017 (the latter describing the metrical and hypermetrical circumstances of canonic entrances in Mozart).

William Rothstein (1989, 58-63) has referred to this phenomenon as the *split downbeat*. It is admittedly tempting to hear Brahms's opening similarly, but the discussion below suggests that there is more to it than that, even if one's initial impression is similar, experientially.

⁷ Knapp 1997 offers a comprehensive overview of companion borrowings unearthed by Knapp himself and by other scholars.

take over metrically, but the tension between bars 1 and 2 nonetheless remains a hallmark of the piece.⁸

As Mozart's *Andante* progresses, we encounter new attempts to erode its metrical strong-weak, strong-weak boundaries: namely, the anticipatory displacement of the upper voices—i.e., the right-hand part—at the downbeats of bars 5 and 7 to the last beats of bars 4 and 6 (see the arrows in Example 5); the constantly shifting lengths of the durational groupings: 4 + 10, then 4 + 12; and the chordal and climactic counterstresses at bars 19, 20, and 21 (see the arrows in Example 6).

Things would seem to calm down at bar 24, where an ornamental arpeggiation of 16ths responds to a variant of bar 1 (Example 7). But that ornamental arpeggiataion soon turns dramatic and confrontational: it becomes a stand-alone player (bars 28-30), offering a counterstress at the beginning of each measure (see the curly brackets in Example 7). Combined with satellites of bar 1 in bar 23, 25, and 27, the now-dramatic arpeggiation suggests that Brahms may have derived several similar and enlarged passages in his symphony from it (the curly brackets in Example 8a). Indeed, the identical shape of Mozart's and Brahms's arpeggiations also suggests that Brahms may have derived the "real" incipit of his opening theme—i.e., bar 2—from Mozart's arpeggiation (the curly bracket in Example 8b).⁹

⁸ The familiar notion that in general bar 1 is foundationally strong and bar 2 is foundationally weak is challenged by William Rothstein (2008) and, to some extent, by theories of end-accenting (see Temperley 2003).

⁹ Again, these findings neither contradict nor supersede those of Knapp or other scholars. Brahms's borrowings here (as, often, elsewhere) are hybrid borrowings.

This last observation, a little breathtaking perhaps, is buttressed by Mozart's developmental passages, which follow his central double bar (Example 9). Here both bars 1 and 2 are bolstered by bass octaves, counterstresses, and nervously running passages in triplets. In prospect, the confrontation gains intensity as the octaves migrate higher and higher into the right-hand part, while the running 16ths acquire an ominous quality as they are taken over by the left hand.

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Domenico Scarlatti's Sonata in B \flat , K. 16, is a likely source for Mozart's Andante (and possibly an additional source for Brahms's Allegro). It also carries the suggestion of two strong measures at the outset, where a mock-canonic imitation (bar 2) follows a mock-fugal subject (bar 1, Example 10a).¹⁰ Note how Scarlatti's reaching-over figures in bars 5-6, and later in bars 42^b-48 and similar measures, prefigure Mozart's (Examples 10a and 10c).¹¹ And consider how the densely fugal textures in bars 34-42^a erode the hypermetrical relations between the two-bar groups, yielding the impression of adjacent strong measures (see Example 10b). It is not unlikely that Brahms knew Scarlatti's Sonata.¹²

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of such imitative metrics, see Bakulina 2017.

¹¹ Gloede 2016 investigates the complexities of confirming Mozart's Scarlatti borrowings, with further references. See also Willner 2010, again with further references.

¹² The same passages also exerted strong influence on Handel, who based the entire opening movement, *Larghetto affetuoso*, of the Concerto Grosso in A minor, Op. 6, No. 4, on them (Derr 1989, 171-73, Examples 1-2); see Example 10d here.

For Brahms's complex dialogue with Scarlatti's sonatas see Sholes 2018, especially chapter 3.

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The opening of Brahms's Rhapsody in E \flat , Op. 119, No. 4, has previously been linked to the concluding *Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins* from Schumann's Carnival, Op. 9.¹³ While perhaps not offering a full-blown borrowing, the opening three measures of Brahms's Rhapsody engage the style, manner, texture, and voicing of Schumann's opening measures in self-evident ways (Example 11a and 11b).¹⁴ Along the same lines, bars 4, 5, and the beginning of bar 6 engage the style and manner of the closing theme of the Allegro vivace from Schumann's Piano Sonata in F \sharp minor, Op. 11 (Example 11c). The contrast and opposition between these two groups—especially the introduction in bar 4 of pedal tones in the inner and outer voices, and the resulting sudden retardation in the underlying, one-to-the-bar harmonic rhythm,¹⁵ coupled with the anticipation of the tonic's outer voices at the turn of bar 6—all set up the tense, non-quadratic five-bar length of the opening phrases, as well as a certain bumpy awkwardness that (one suspects) might be resolved in the course of the Rhapsody, as bars 4-5 come into their own.¹⁶

¹³ Samarotto 2007, 85 and 99, fn 20, with further references to Thomas-San-Galli 1912, and to Kalbeck 1910-14, 294.

¹⁴ Just as Schumann's consequent migrates to the mediant, Brahms's consequent moves to the submediant at the comparable point.

¹⁵ Of course, the voices that do move create the opposite effect—a faster harmonic rhythm at the surface. For a detailed discussion of the harmonic rhythm and contrapuntal design in these measures see Ng 2018, 120-24; see also Samarotto 2007, 84-86.

¹⁶ One is reminded of Clara Schumann's remark, concerning the Double Concerto in A minor, Op. 102: "A few rough passages still remain, but those must be accepted as part of the bargain. He could easily alter them, but probably won't; it often seems as though he took delight in depriving the listener of absolute enjoyment." Quoted, in

The Rhapsody's five-bar phrases has been commented on widely in the literature.¹⁷ What has not been observed is the foundational and intentionally unresolved thematic and harmonic-rhythmic conflict between bars 1-3 and bars 4-5. Without going into a detailed analysis of the piece—that is beyond the scope of this paper, and it has in any case been attempted before¹⁸—I should like to point to the manner in which bars 4 and 5 attempt to take over the Rhapsody's thematic work at key junctures (Examples 12-17).

Throughout the center of the opening, three-part A section (bars 1-19^b-40), the pedal tones of bars 4^b-5-6^a predominate (bars 19^bff., 21ff., and similarly through to bar 40; see Example 12). Along the same lines, the pedal tones all but take over the opening measures (bars 65-76, Example 13) of the Rhapsody's B section (the Rhapsody follows an unusual ABCB¹A¹ design; the B section occupies bars 65-92).¹⁹ The pedal tones of bars 4 and 5 also permeate much of the C section (bars 93-102 and 117-128, Example 14), as well as many measures of the extended transition to the A¹ section (bars 168ff., 183ff., Example 15a).

translation, in Altmann 1920, vi. The original remark appears in Litzmann 1906, Bd. 3, 496, a transcription of Clara's diary entry for Sept. 23, 1887: "Einige störende Stellen fehlen nicht, das muss mann eben mit in der Kaus nehmen. Er könnte sie leicht ändern, aber das wird er wohl nicht; es ist manchmal, als ob es ihm Vergnügen mache, dem Hörer es nicht zu wohl werden zu lassen." Thanks to Andrew Justice and Heather Platt for their help in locating the original passage (Platt) and its translation (Justice).

For a trenchant discussion of the Double Concerto's mixed reception see Daverio 2002, chapter 7.

¹⁷ Ng 2018, Samarotto 2007.

¹⁸ Samarotto 2007.

¹⁹ A somewhat different reading of the Rhapsody's form appears in Ng 2018, 125.

The pedal tones, furthermore, occupy the five-bar premonitions of A¹ (bars 187-191, 192-196, closing into bars 192 and 197; Example 15b). Foreshortened, they are instrumental in building up the Rhapsody's climax before A¹ returns (bar 205^b-206^a; 207^b-208^a, and so on; Example 16). And they predominate in the coda (242-244, and 247ff.; Example 17). What started as a disagreement between bars 1-3 and bars 4-5 ultimately leads to a fiery conflagration as the Rhapsody nears its stark conclusion in the minor tonic.

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