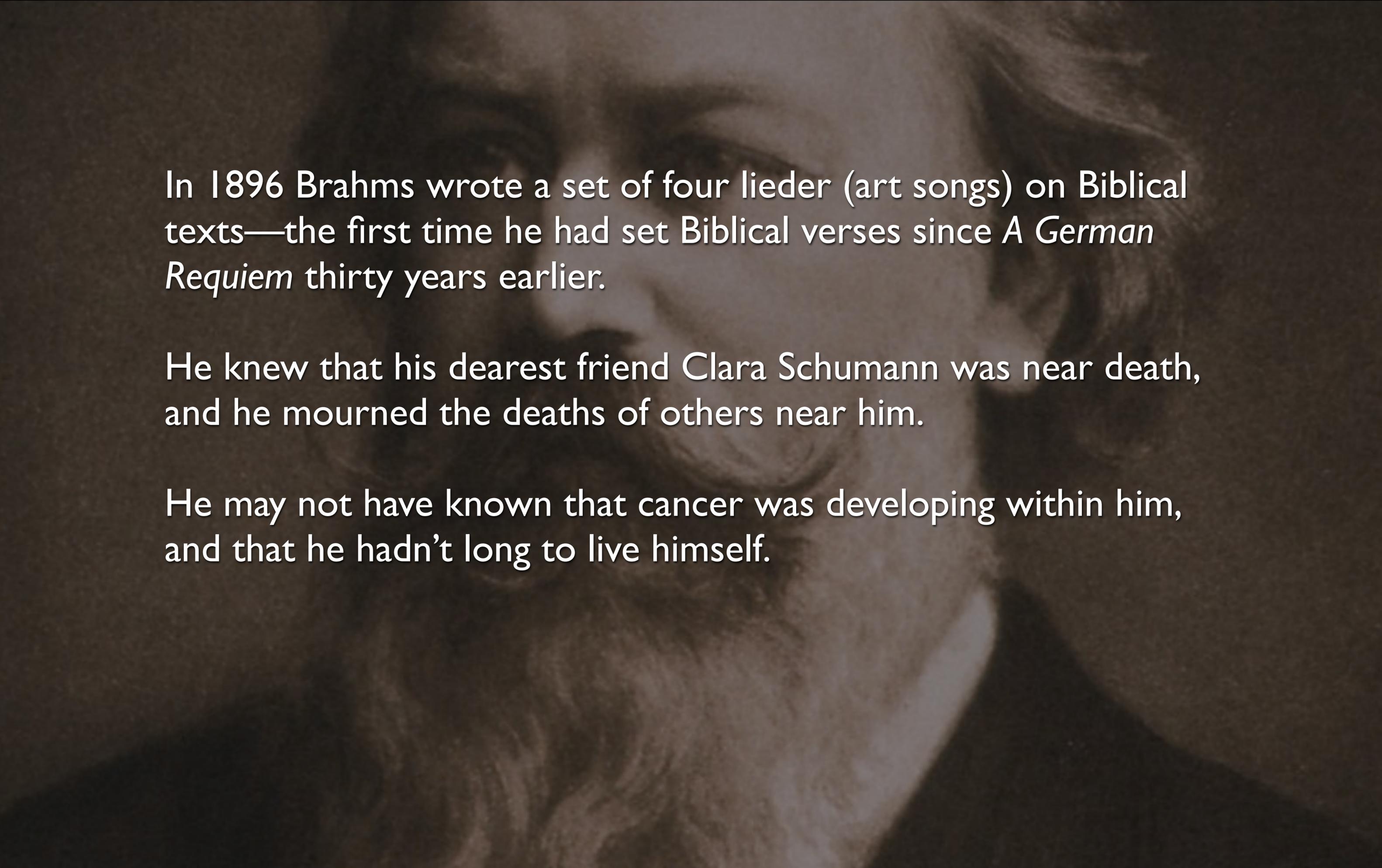




BRAHMS

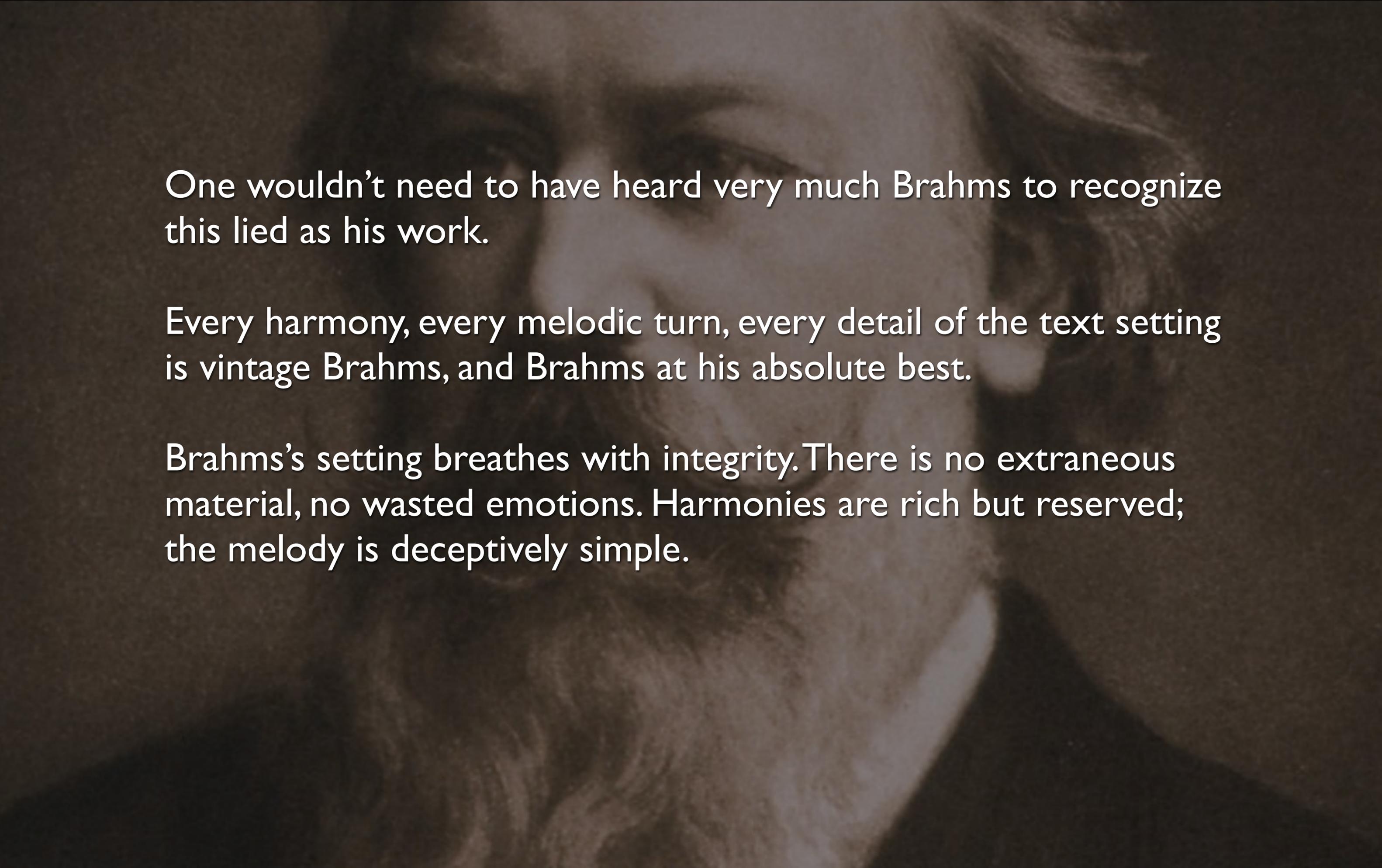
I - Out of the Cradle (1833–1853)



In 1896 Brahms wrote a set of four lieder (art songs) on Biblical texts—the first time he had set Biblical verses since *A German Requiem* thirty years earlier.

He knew that his dearest friend Clara Schumann was near death, and he mourned the deaths of others near him.

He may not have known that cancer was developing within him, and that he hadn't long to live himself.



One wouldn't need to have heard very much Brahms to recognize this lied as his work.

Every harmony, every melodic turn, every detail of the text setting is vintage Brahms, and Brahms at his absolute best.

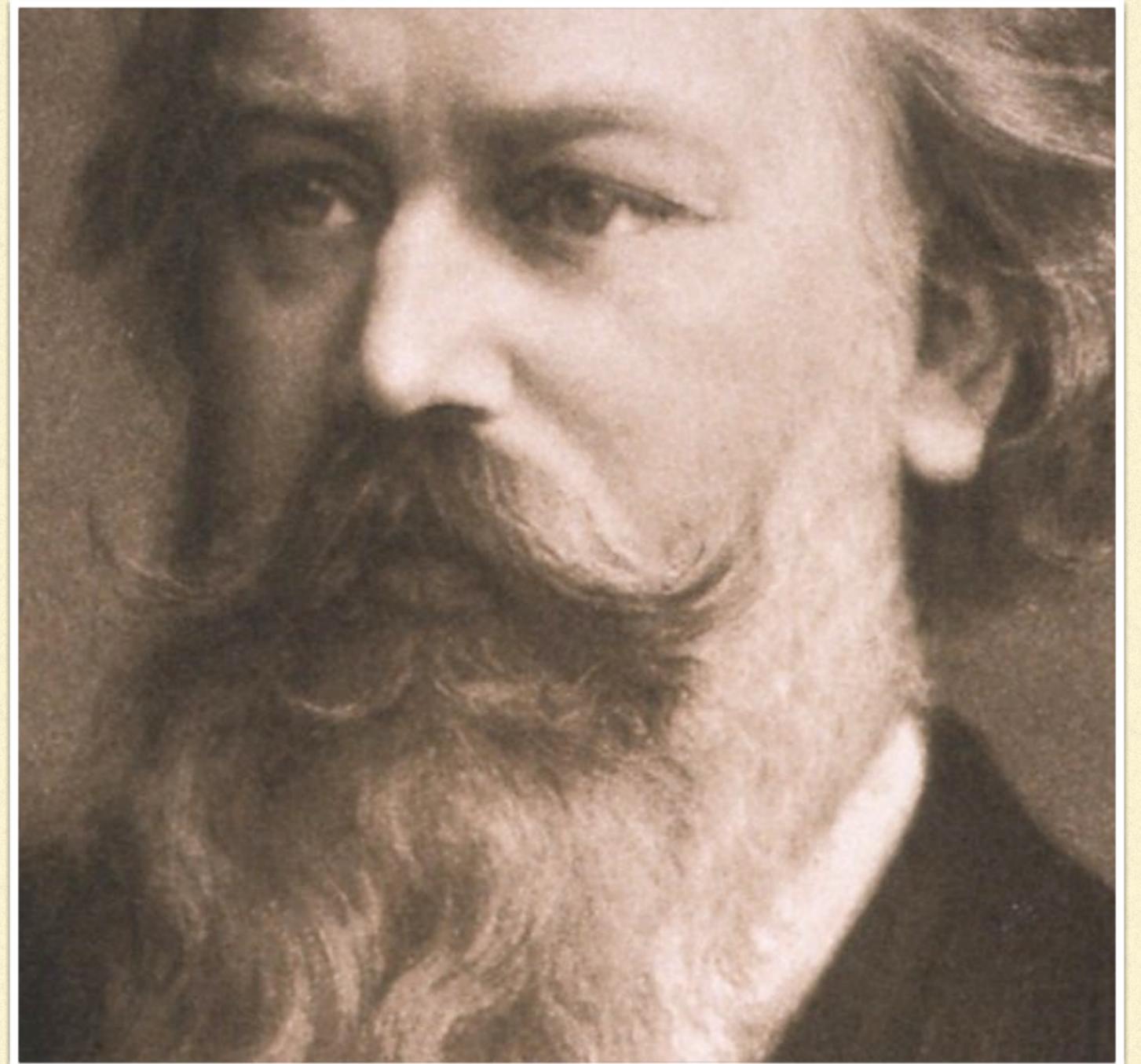
Brahms's setting breathes with integrity. There is no extraneous material, no wasted emotions. Harmonies are rich but reserved; the melody is deceptively simple.

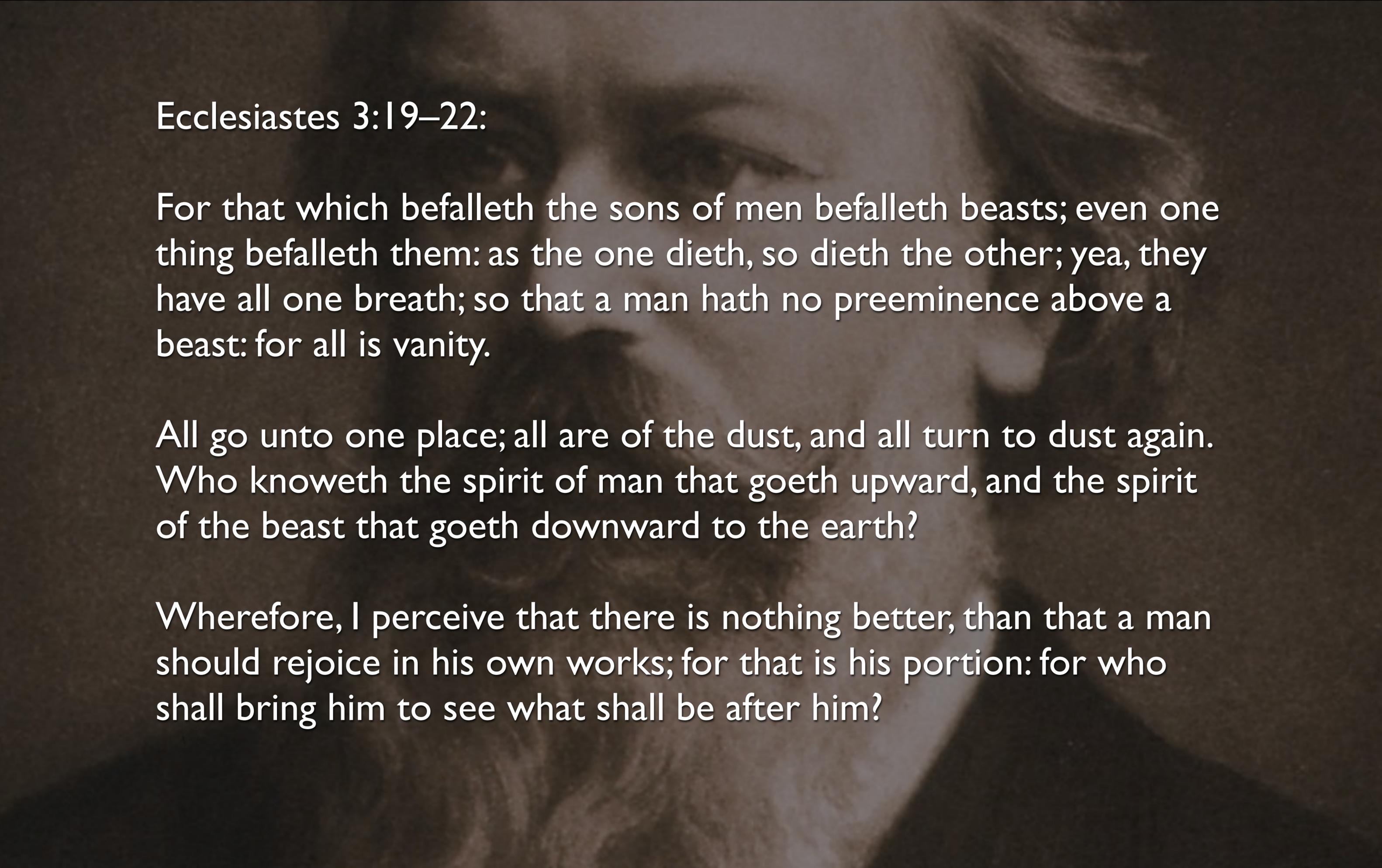
Johannes Brahms

FOUR LAST SONGS
OP. 121

DENN ES GEHET DEM
MENSCHEN

HANS HOTTER, VOICE
GERALD MOORE, PIANO





Ecclesiastes 3:19–22:

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity.

All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?

Wherefore, I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

Denn es gehet dem Menschen wie dem Vieh;
wie dies stirbt,
so stirbt er auch;
und haben alle einerlei Odem;
und der Mensch hat nichts mehr denn das Vieh:
denn es ist alles eitel.

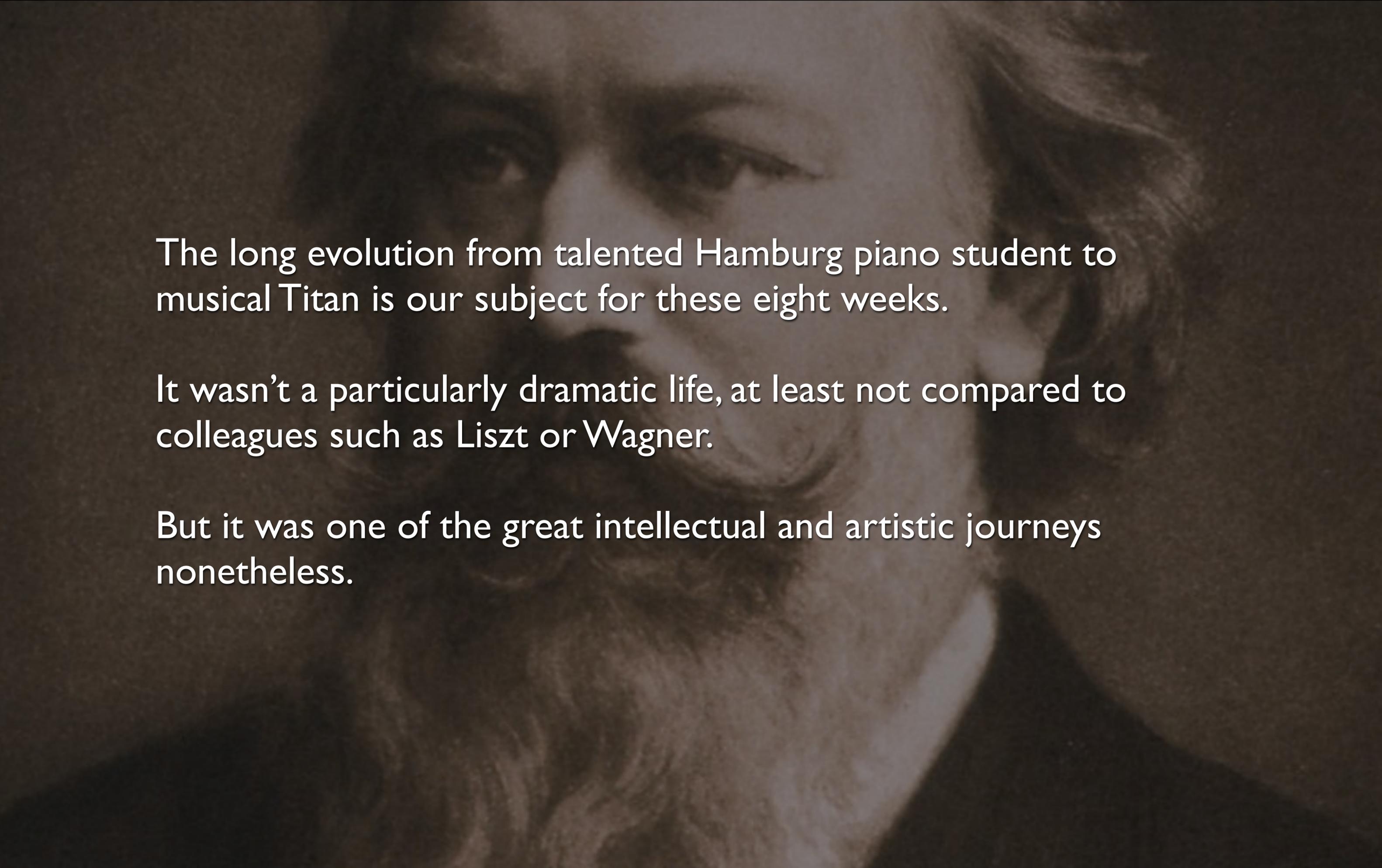
Es fährt alles an einen Ort;
es ist alles von Staub gemacht,
und wird wieder zu Staub.
Wer weiß, ob der Geist des Menschen
aufwärts fahre,
und der Odem des Viehes unterwärts unter
die Erde fahre?

Darum sahe ich, daß nichts bessers ist,
denn daß der Mensch fröhlich sei in seiner Arbeit,
denn das ist sein Teil.
Denn wer will ihn dahin bringen,
daß er sehe, was nach ihm geschehen wird?

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts;
as the one dieth,
so dieth the other;
yea, they have all one breath;
so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast:
for all is vanity.

All go unto one place;
all are of the dust,
and all turn to dust again.
Who knoweth the spirit of man
that goeth upward,
and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward
to the earth?

Wherefore, I perceive that there is nothing better,
than that a man should rejoice in his own works;
for that is his portion:
for who shall bring him
to see what shall be after him?



The long evolution from talented Hamburg piano student to musical Titan is our subject for these eight weeks.

It wasn't a particularly dramatic life, at least not compared to colleagues such as Liszt or Wagner.

But it was one of the great intellectual and artistic journeys nonetheless.

It begins:

May 7, 1833

Hamburg

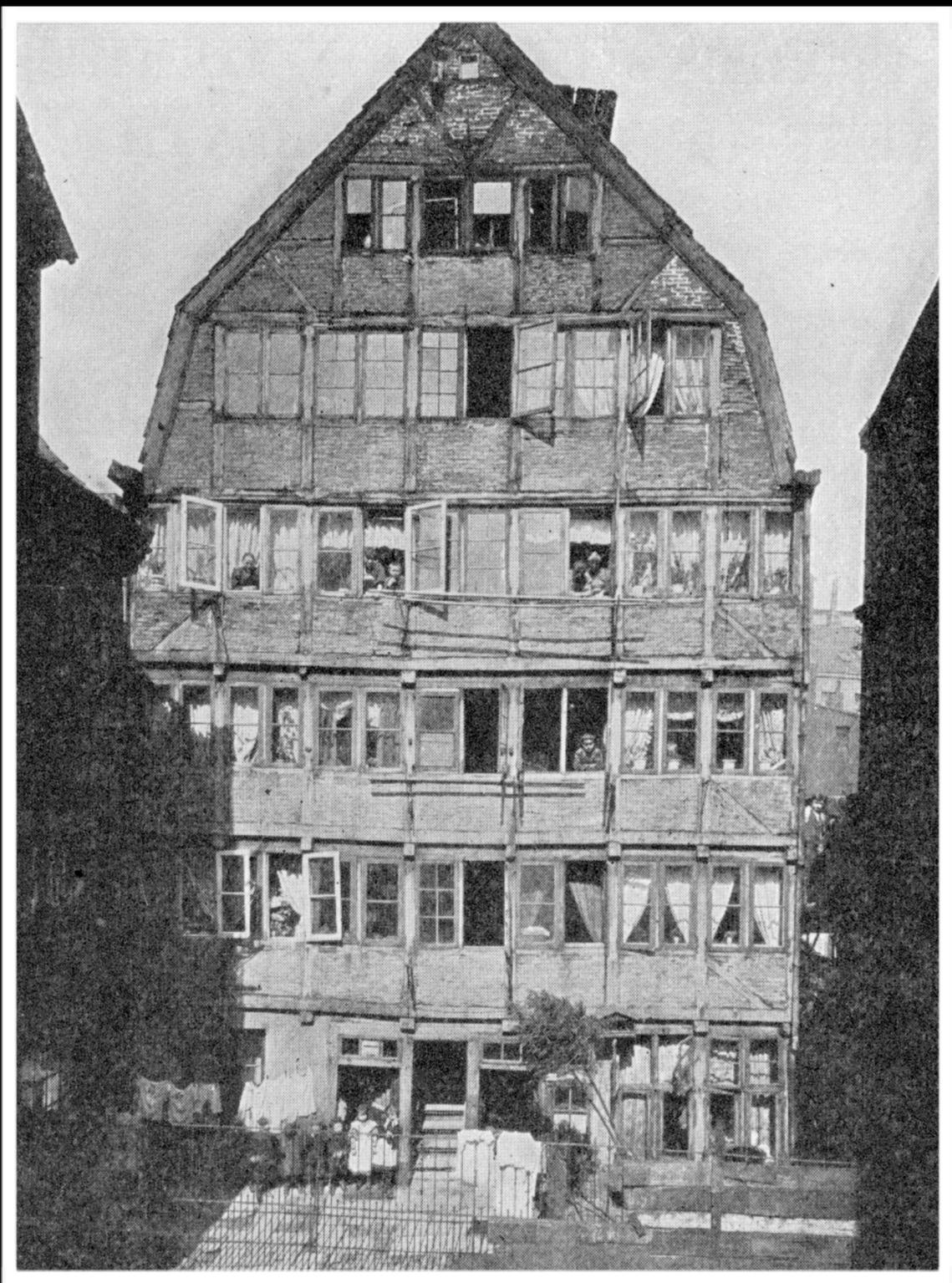


Brahms's father Jakob was a professional musician who gradually worked his way up to a reasonably liveable wage.

In 1833, however, Jakob was still near the beginning of his career as a freelance musician in Hamburg, and money was scarce.



His mother Christianne was a skilled seamstress; her ancestry was good but she was just as poor as her suitor Jakob Brahms. She was 17 years older than her husband, but their 1830 marriage appears to have been a love match on both sides. Brahms always remembered her with great affection and respect.



The year Johannes was born, they were living in this ramshackle house at 24 Specksgang—but they were soon to move out, into something much better. Jakob kept improving his situation, and by 1841 the family was living in a decent lower-middle-class neighborhood.

Johannes was the middle child: he had an older sister and a younger brother.



No matter how humble the surroundings, Brahms was born into a home in which his musical gifts could be recognized and cultivated.

He was already receiving musical instruction—mostly from his father—by the time he was four years old.



His first major teacher was Otto Friedrich Willibald Cossel, a student of renowned pedagogue Eduard Marxsen and a fine musician.

Cossel saw to it that Johannes received a rock-solid start at the piano, giving him plenty of Czerny, Cramer, and Clementi—the same stuff teachers use to torture their students nowadays—and also provided abundant inspiration and guidance.

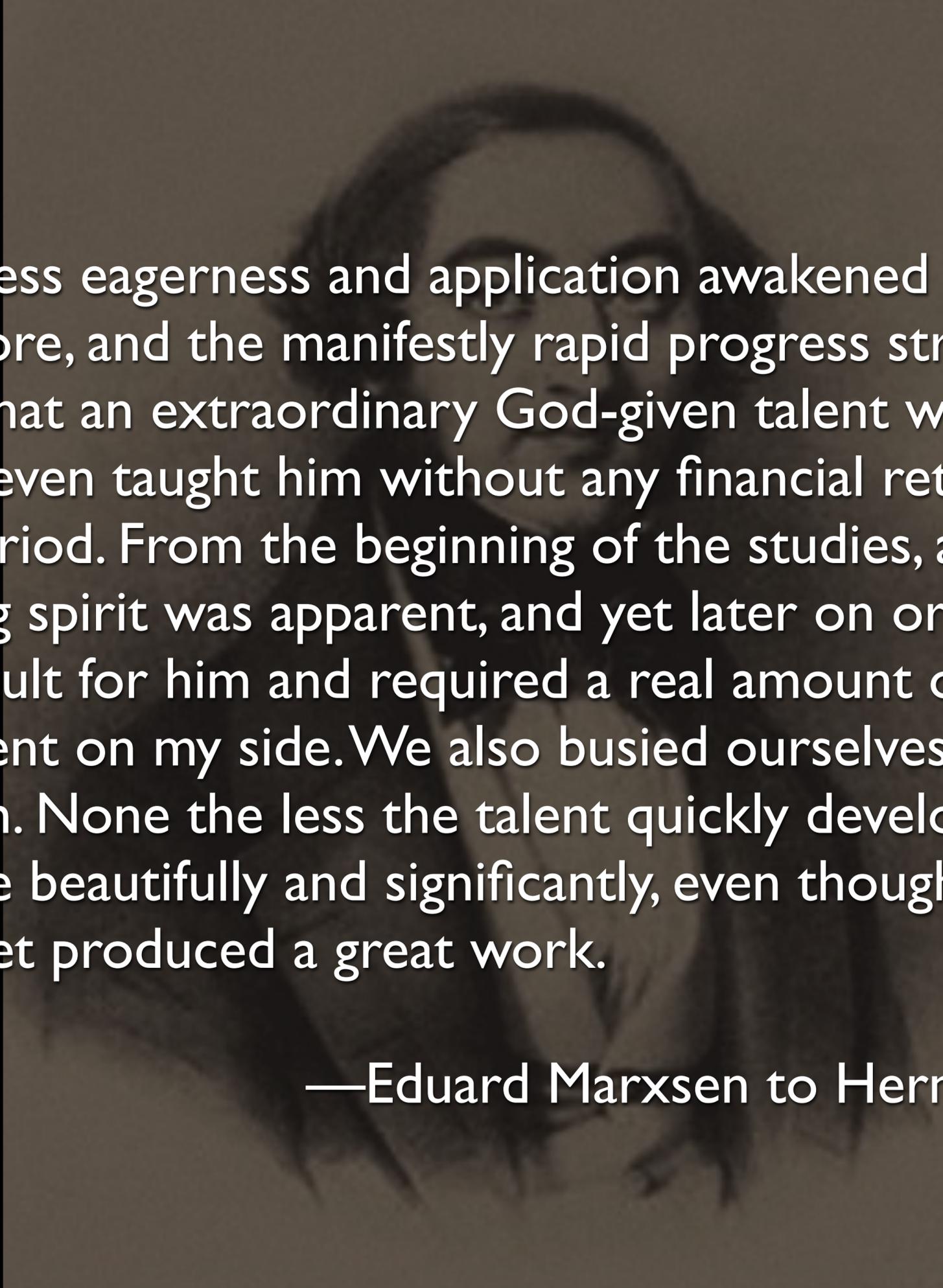


In 1845 Brahms began studying with Eduard Marxsen himself, who was to prove to be one of the formative influences on the young musician—even if later in life Brahms dismissed his teaching.

Marxsen saw mostly to Brahms's development as a composer while Cossel continued to work with his piano playing.

Most of the family, and probably even Marxsen himself, thought that Brahms had a better future as a pianist than as a composer.

Besides, almost nobody could make a living as a composer—then as now.



... [his] restless eagerness and application awakened my interest more and more, and the manifestly rapid progress strengthened my opinion that an extraordinary God-given talent was here to be developed. I even taught him without any financial return for the necessary period. From the beginning of the studies, a clear- and deep-thinking spirit was apparent, and yet later on original creation became difficult for him and required a real amount of encouragement on my side. We also busied ourselves with the study of form. None the less the talent quickly developed, in my opinion more beautifully and significantly, even though at that time he had not yet produced a great work.

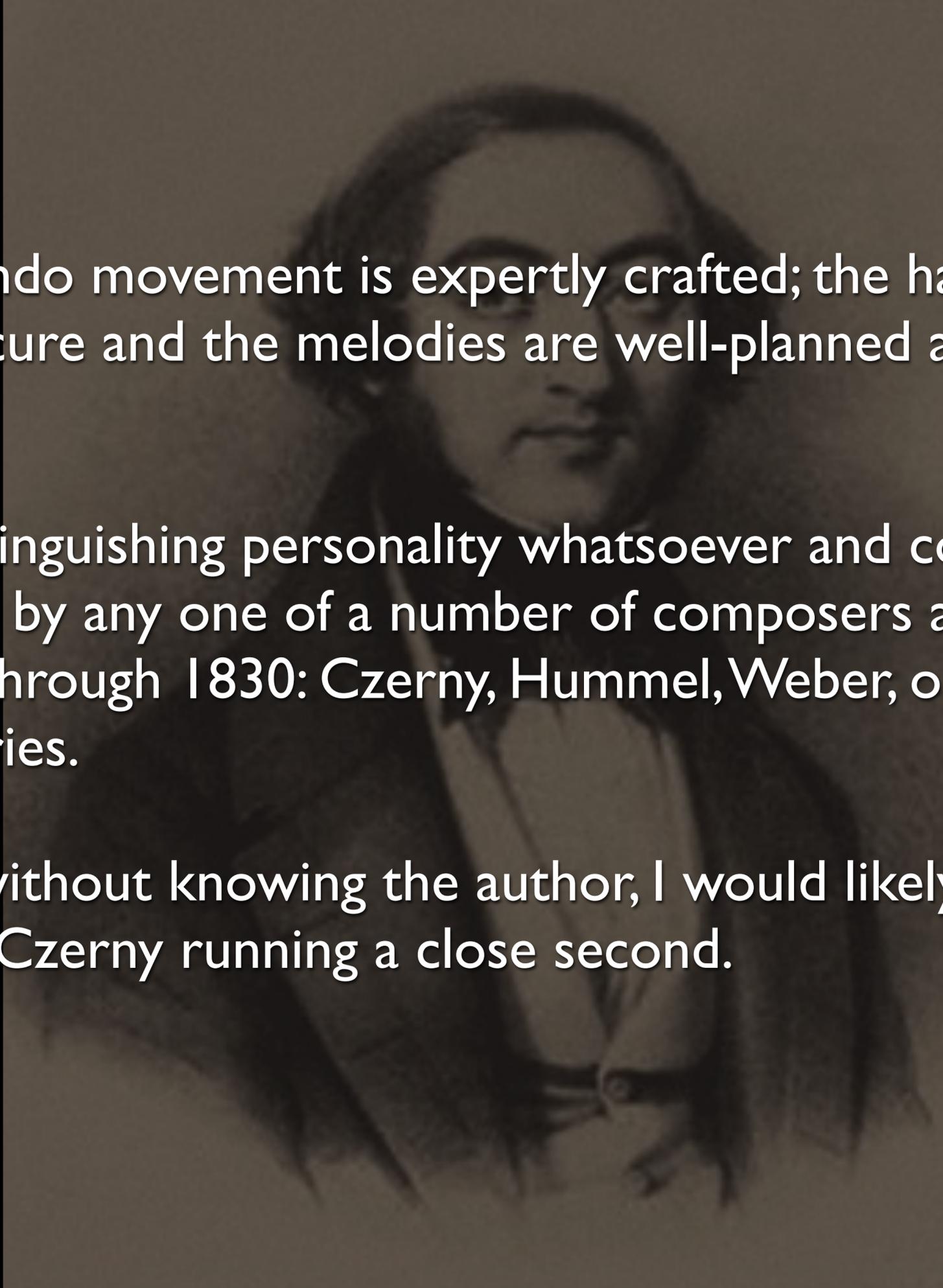
—Eduard Marxsen to Herman Levi, 1873

Eduard Marxsen

PIANO SONATA IN
B-FLAT MAJOR, OP.
8: RONDO

ANTHONY SPIRI, PIANO





This little rondo movement is expertly crafted; the harmonic motion is secure and the melodies are well-planned and developed.

It has no distinguishing personality whatsoever and could have been written by any one of a number of composers active from about 1800 through 1830: Czerny, Hummel, Weber, or their contemporaries.

If I heard it without knowing the author, I would likely opt for Weber, with Czerny running a close second.

5-Part Rondo Form

Reprise

Episode 1

Reprise

Episode 2

Reprise

Coda

Reprise

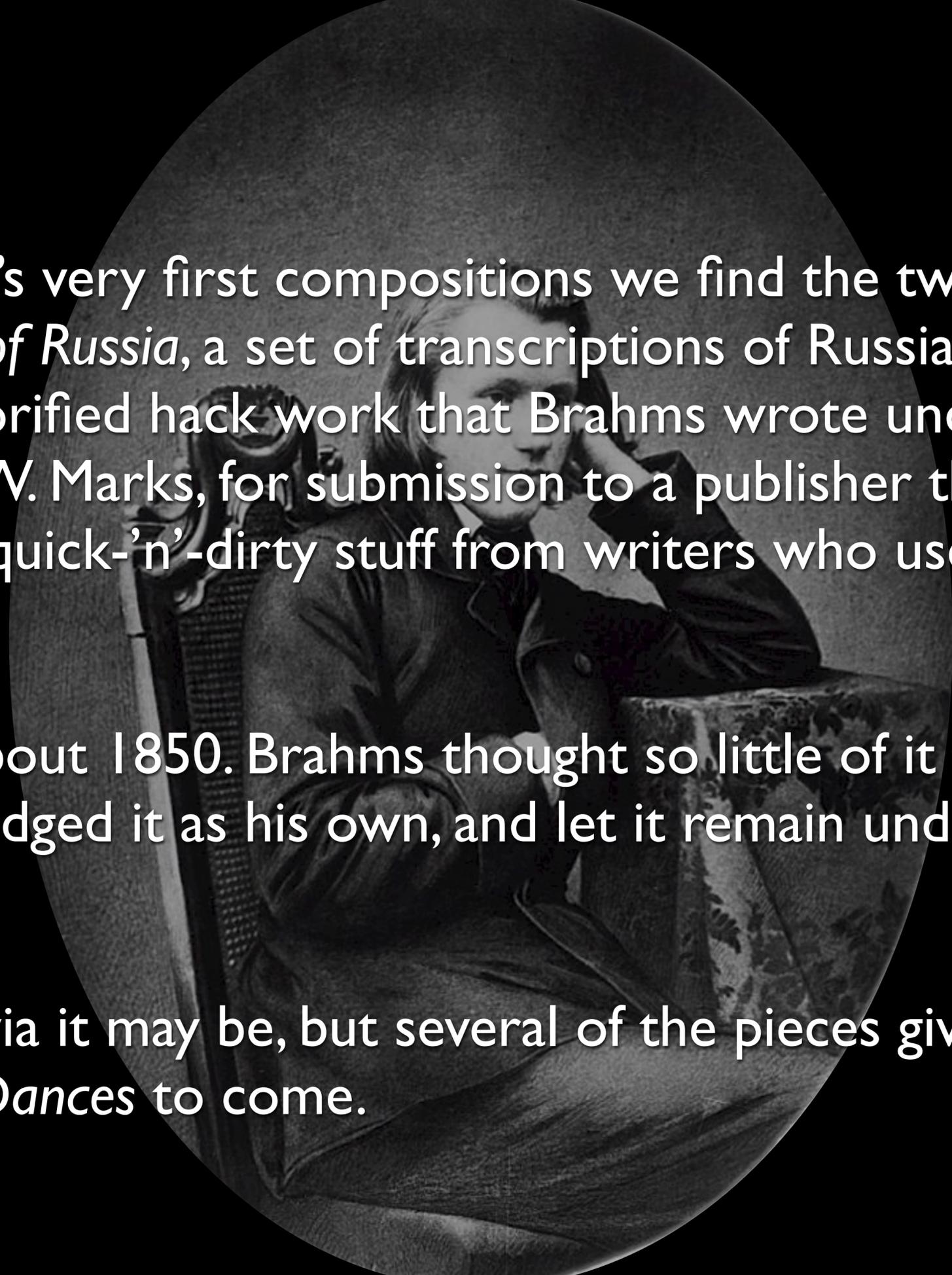
Episode 1

Reprise

Episode 2

Reprise

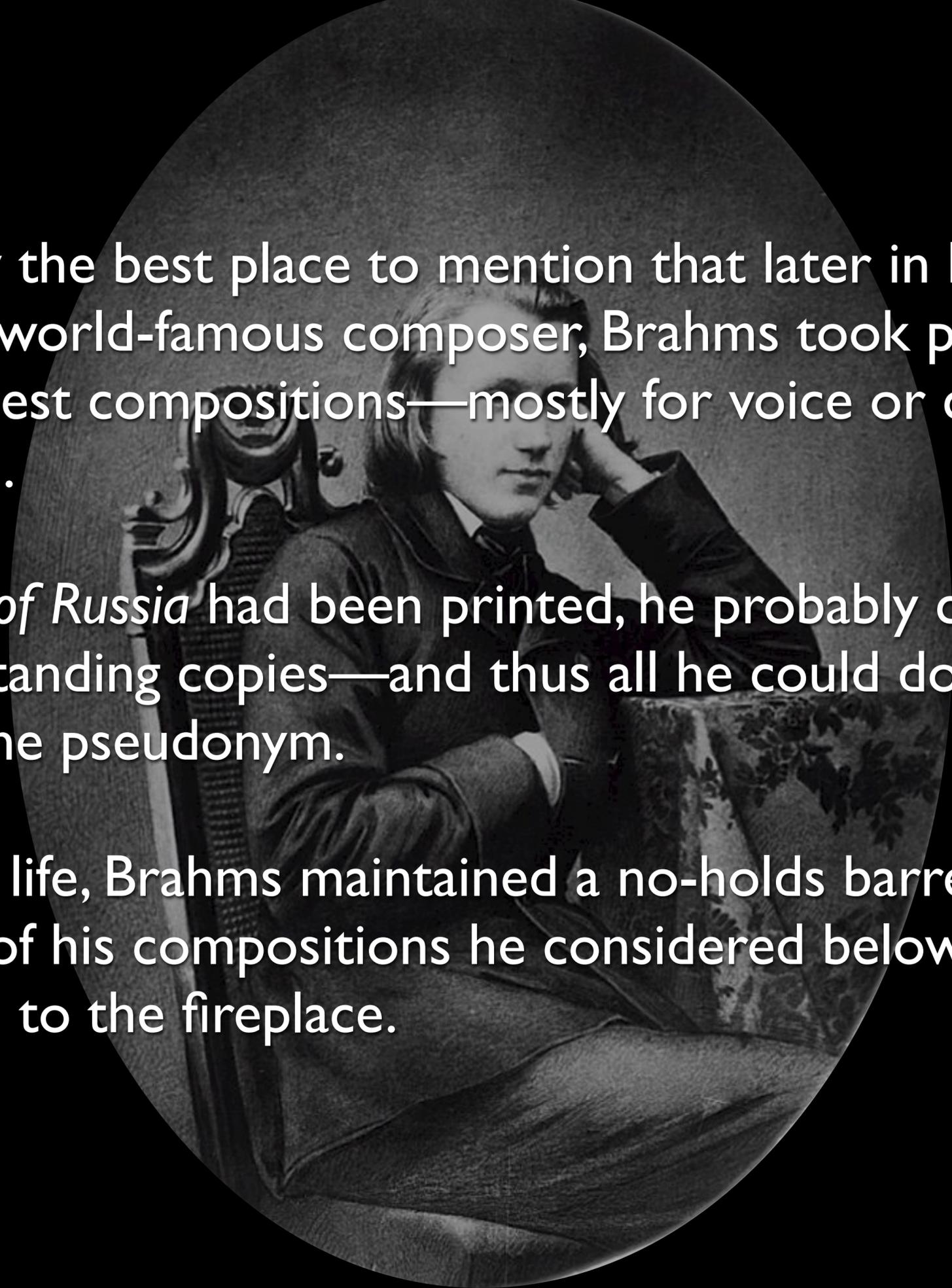
Coda



Among Brahms's very first compositions we find the two-piano suite *Souvenirs of Russia*, a set of transcriptions of Russian folk tunes. It was glorified hack work that Brahms wrote under the pseudonym G.W. Marks, for submission to a publisher that put out any amount of quick-'n'-dirty stuff from writers who used pen names.

It dates from about 1850. Brahms thought so little of it that he never acknowledged it as his own, and let it remain under its pseudonym.

Insignificant trivia it may be, but several of the pieces give a hint of the *Hungarian Dances* to come.

A circular, sepia-toned portrait of a young Johannes Brahms. He is seated at a desk, looking slightly to the right. His right hand is resting on his head, and his left hand is on the desk. A typewriter is visible on the desk to his left. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

This is probably the best place to mention that later in his career, when he was a world-famous composer, Brahms took pains to acquire his earliest compositions—mostly for voice or choir—and destroyed them.

Since *Souvenirs of Russia* had been printed, he probably couldn't acquire all outstanding copies—and thus all he could do was to leave it under the pseudonym.

Throughout his life, Brahms maintained a no-holds barred attitude towards those of his compositions he considered below par, and consigned them to the fireplace.

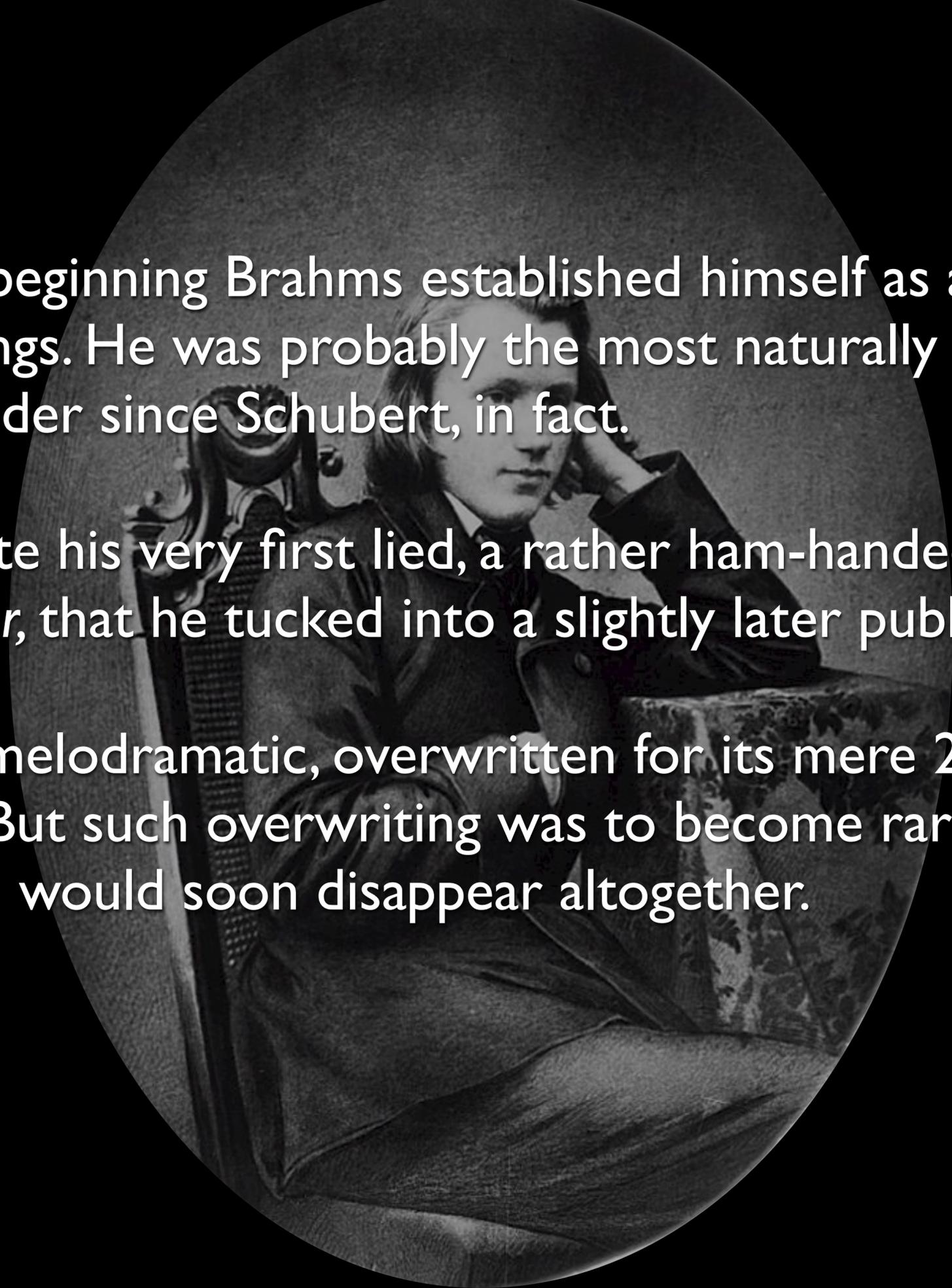
Johannes Brahms (writing as G.W. Marks)

SOUVENIR DE LA RUSSIE

“KOCA”, CHANT BOHEMIEN

ALFONS AND ALOYS KONTARSKY, PIANOS





From the very beginning Brahms established himself as a writer of *lieder*, or art songs. He was probably the most naturally gifted composer of *lieder* since Schubert, in fact.

In 1851 he wrote his very first lied, a rather ham-handed potboiler named *Heimkehr*, that he tucked into a slightly later publication.

It's fustian and melodramatic, overwritten for its mere 20-some-odd measures. But such overwriting was to become rare in the near future, and would soon disappear altogether.

Johannes Brahms

SIX SONGS, OP. 7

NO. 6: HEIMKEHR

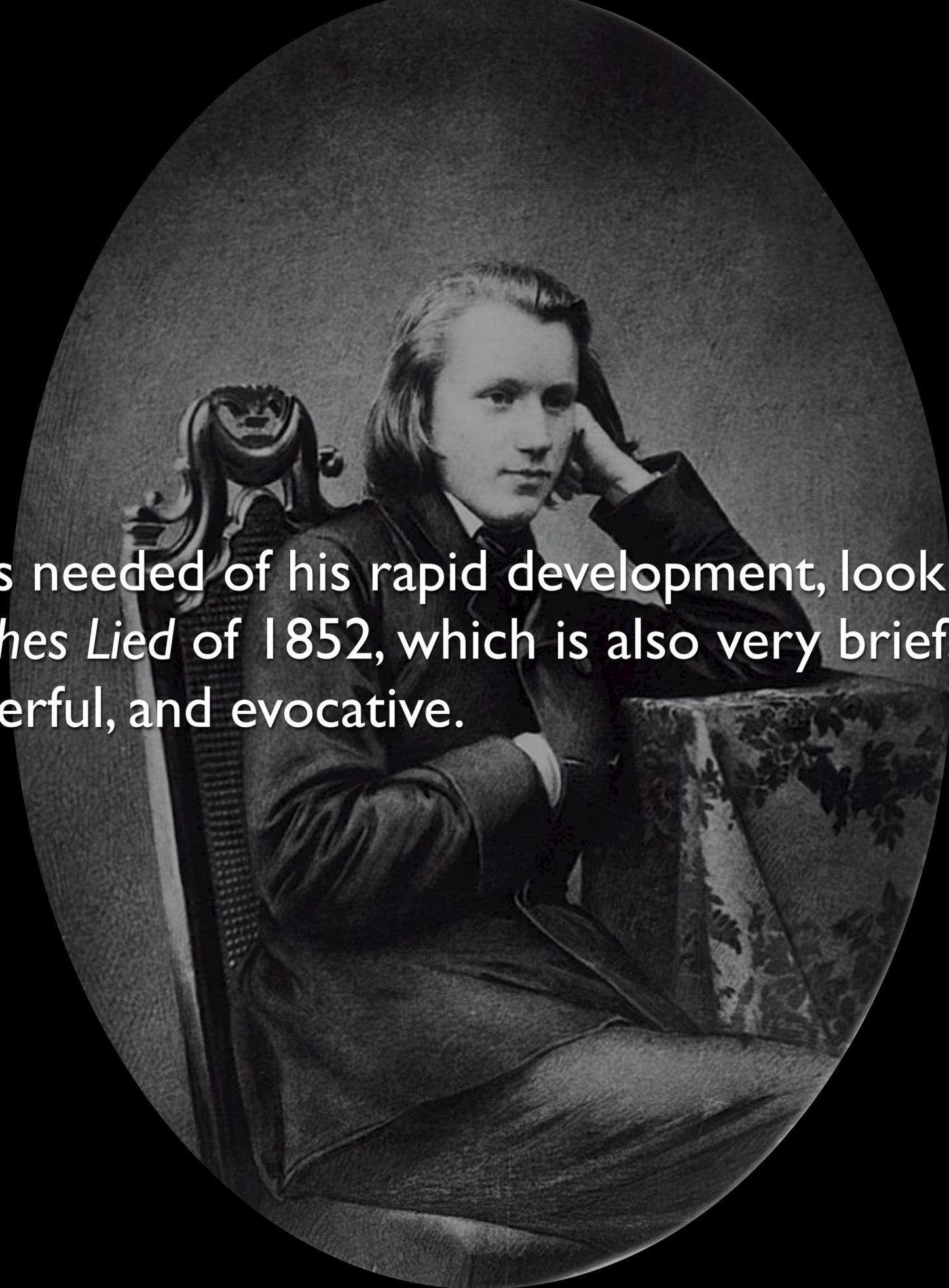
DIETRICH FISCHER-DIESKAU, BARITONE
GERALD MOORE, PIANO



O BRICH NICHT, STEG, DU ZITTERST SEHR!
O STÜRZ' NICHT, FELS, DU DRÄUEST SCHWER!
WELT, GEH' NICHT UNTER, HIMMEL, FALL' NICHT EIN,
EH ICH MAG BEI DER LIEBSTEN SEIN!

O BREAK NOT, FOOTBRIDGE, YOU SHAKE SO VERY MUCH,
O FALL NOT, ROCKS, YOU SEEM SO THREATENINGLY HEAVY,
WORLD, DO NOT END, AND SKY, DO NOT FALL,
UNTIL I MAY BE WITH MY BELOVED!

If any evidence is needed of his rapid development, look no farther than the *Spanisches Lied* of 1852, which is also very brief, but also controlled, masterful, and evocative.



Johannes Brahms

SIX SONGS, OP. 6

NO. 1: SPANISCHES LIED

JESSYE NORMAN, SOPRANO
GERALD MOORE, PIANO



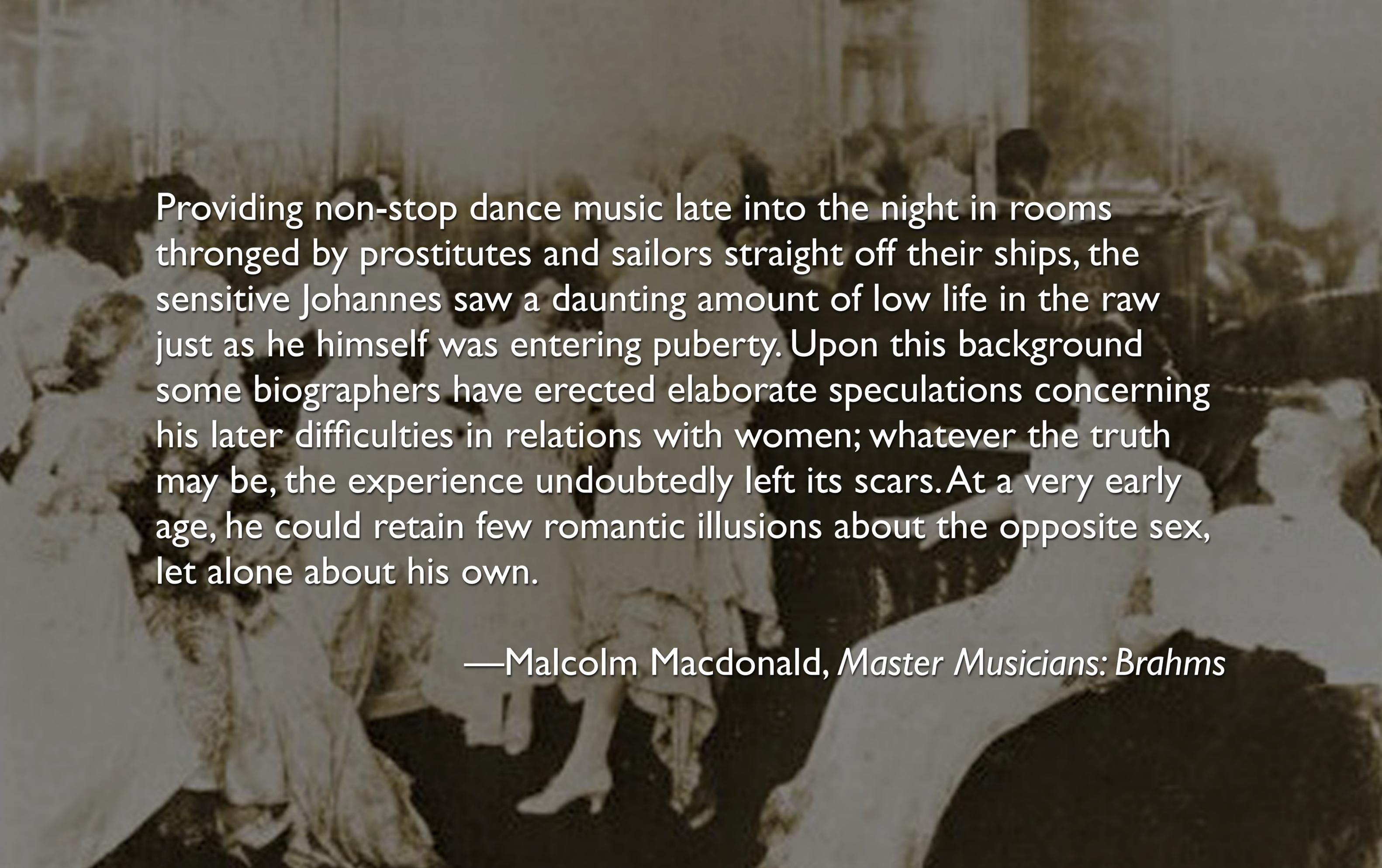
In dem Schatten meiner Locken
Schlief mir mein Geliebter ein.
Weck ich ihn nun auf? - Ach nein!

In the shadow of my tresses
My beloved has fallen asleep.
Shall I awaken him now? Ah, no!



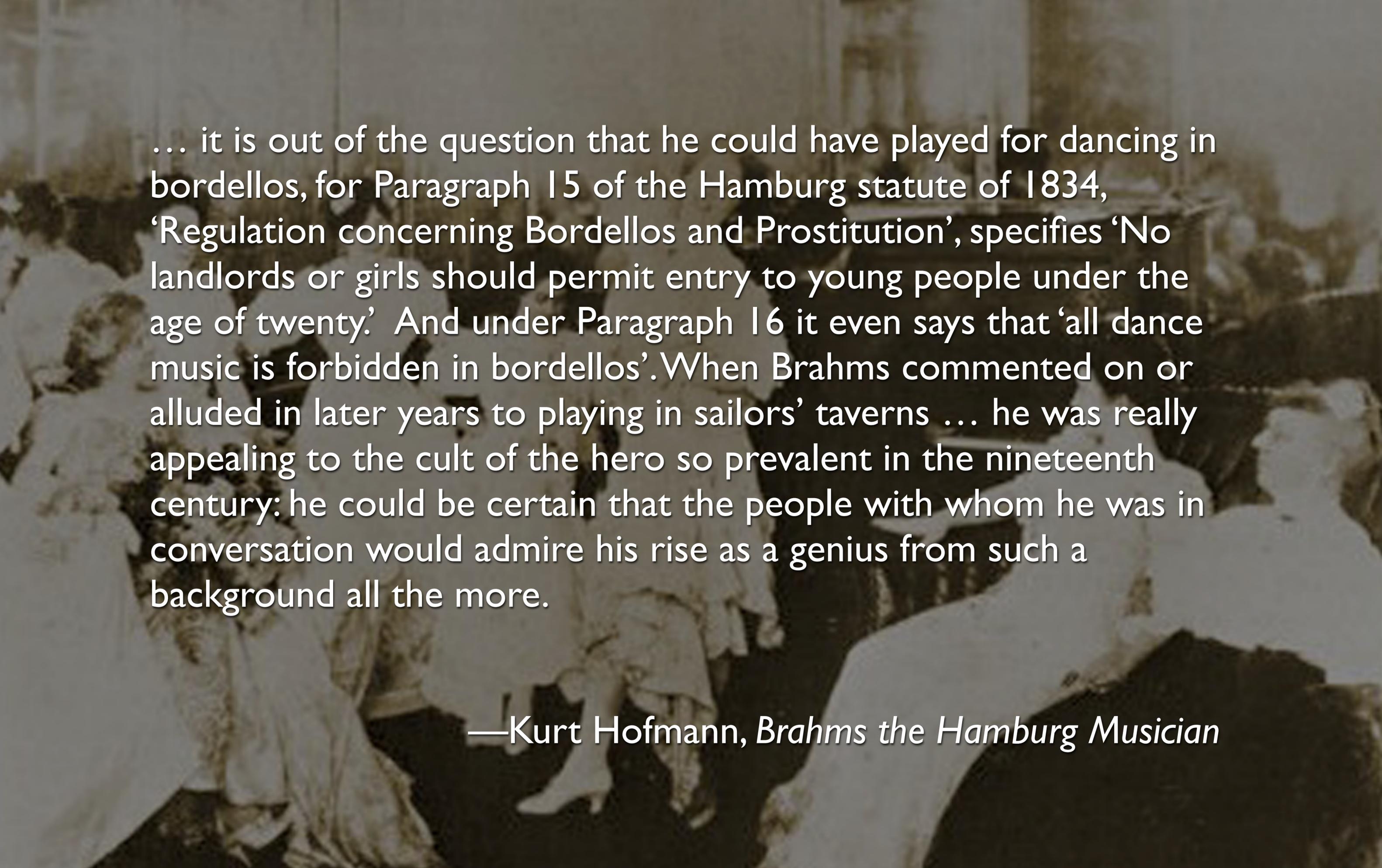
From the age of thirteen Johannes—like his father before him—was obliged to take engagements playing the piano in the many drinking and wenching dives of the notorious St Pauli area near the harbor. English accounts of his early life usually render these establishments as bars, taverns, or dance-halls; our language in fact provides no exact equivalent for the now-archaic German terms *Animierlokale* or *Animierkneipe*—literally ‘stimulation saloons’, where the stimulus on offer was musical, alcoholic, and sexual in convenient combination.

—Malcolm Macdonald, *Master Musicians: Brahms*

A faded, sepia-toned photograph of a crowded ballroom. Numerous couples are seen dancing in a circular pattern. The women are wearing light-colored, long-sleeved dresses with high collars and long skirts. The men are in dark suits. The room has a high ceiling and ornate architectural details, suggesting a grand, historical setting. The overall atmosphere is one of a busy, social event from a past era.

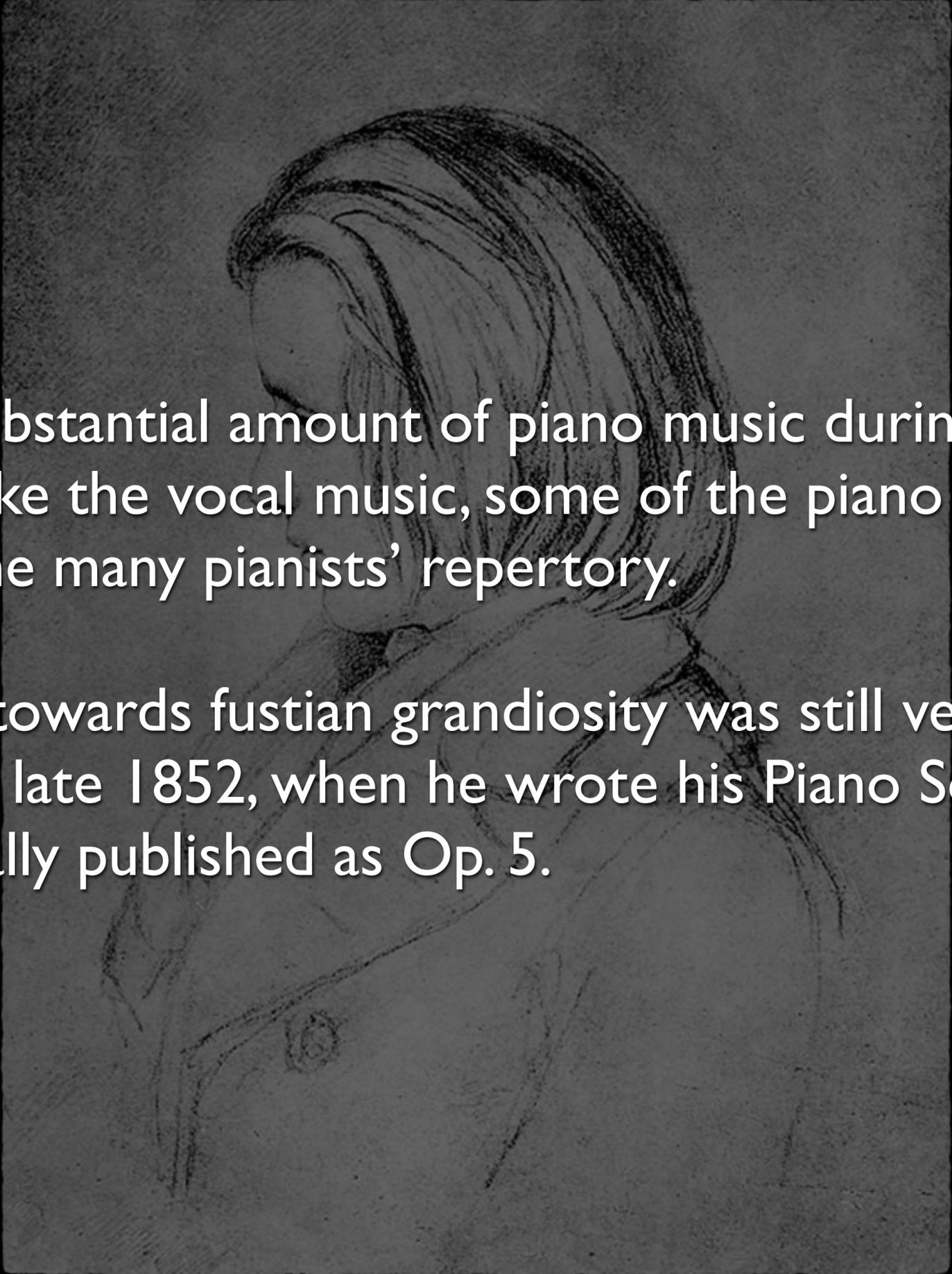
Providing non-stop dance music late into the night in rooms thronged by prostitutes and sailors straight off their ships, the sensitive Johannes saw a daunting amount of low life in the raw just as he himself was entering puberty. Upon this background some biographers have erected elaborate speculations concerning his later difficulties in relations with women; whatever the truth may be, the experience undoubtedly left its scars. At a very early age, he could retain few romantic illusions about the opposite sex, let alone about his own.

—Malcolm Macdonald, *Master Musicians: Brahms*



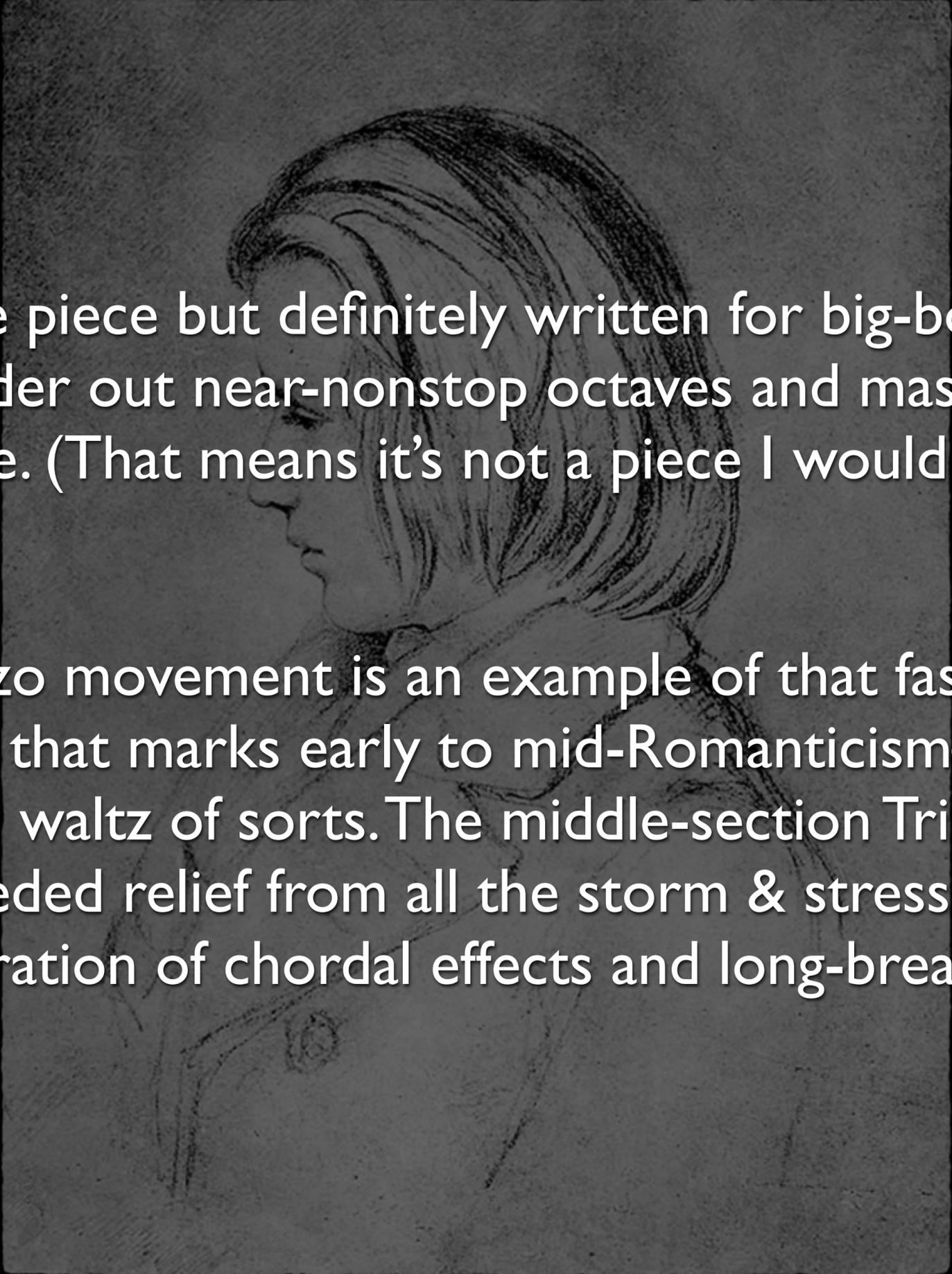
... it is out of the question that he could have played for dancing in bordellos, for Paragraph 15 of the Hamburg statute of 1834, 'Regulation concerning Bordellos and Prostitution', specifies 'No landlords or girls should permit entry to young people under the age of twenty.' And under Paragraph 16 it even says that 'all dance music is forbidden in bordellos'. When Brahms commented on or alluded in later years to playing in sailors' taverns ... he was really appealing to the cult of the hero so prevalent in the nineteenth century: he could be certain that the people with whom he was in conversation would admire his rise as a genius from such a background all the more.

—Kurt Hofmann, *Brahms the Hamburg Musician*



He wrote a substantial amount of piano music during these early years, and unlike the vocal music, some of the piano music has remained in the many pianists' repertory.

His tendency towards fustian grandiosity was still very much in evidence as of late 1852, when he wrote his Piano Sonata in F Minor, eventually published as Op. 5.



It's an effective piece but definitely written for big-boned pianists who can thunder out near-nonstop octaves and massive chords without fatigue. (That means it's not a piece I would ever consider playing.)

The big Scherzo movement is an example of that fascination with Gothic effects that marks early to mid-Romanticism—it sounds like a demonic waltz of sorts. The middle-section Trio provides not only much-needed relief from all the storm & stress, but is a brilliant exploration of chordal effects and long-breathed rhythm.

Johannes Brahms

*PIANO SONATA NO. 3 IN F
MINOR, OP. 5*

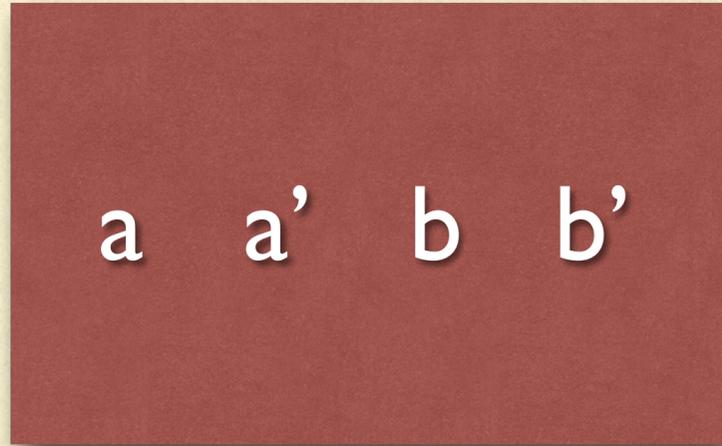
III: SCHERZO

ARTHUR RUBINSTEIN, PIANO
(RECORDED 1959)

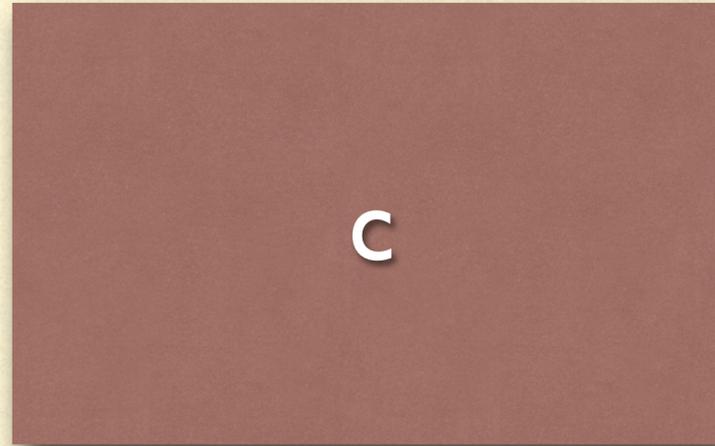


Scherzo

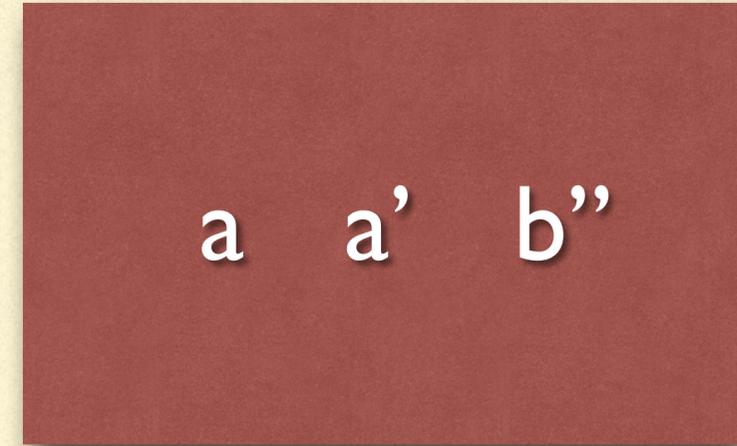
Part 1



Part 2



Part 3

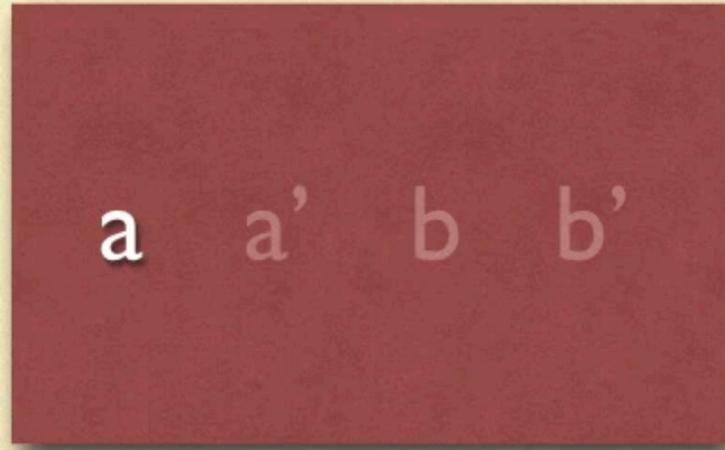


Trio

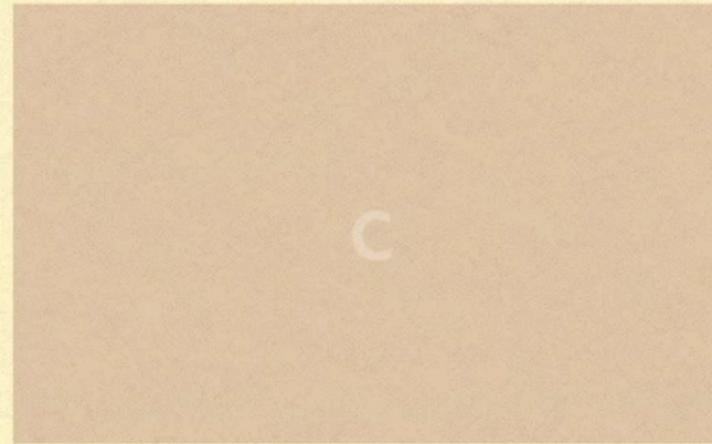


Scherzo

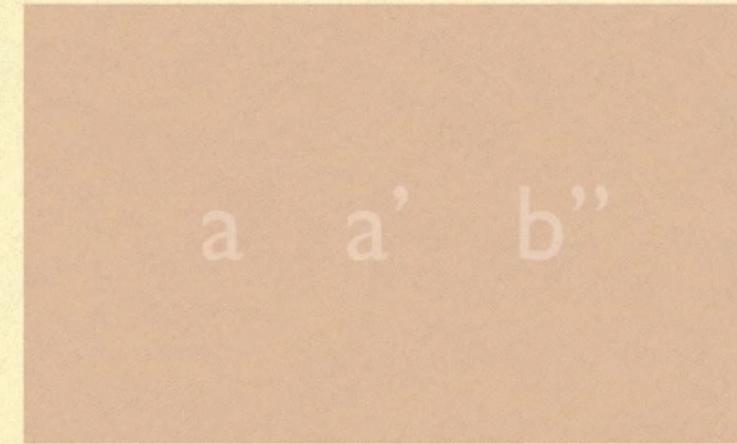
Part 1



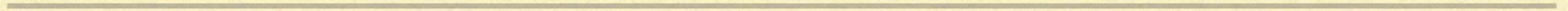
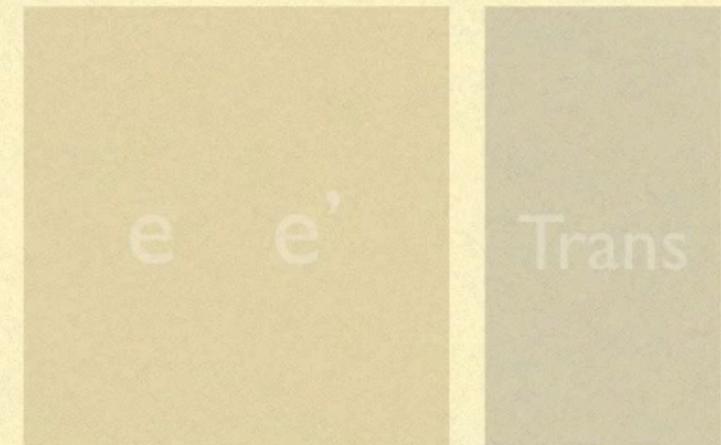
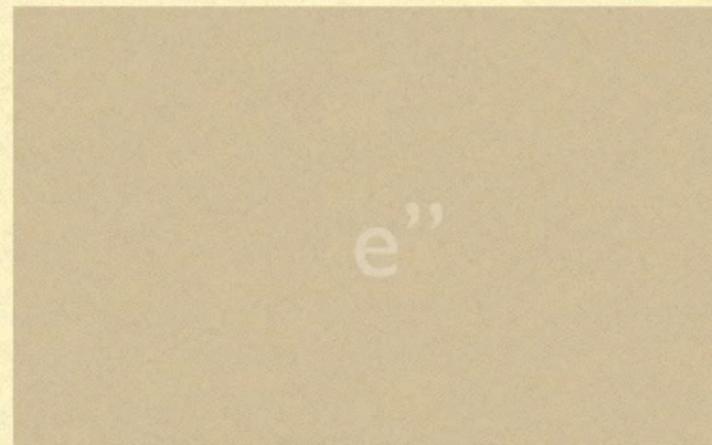
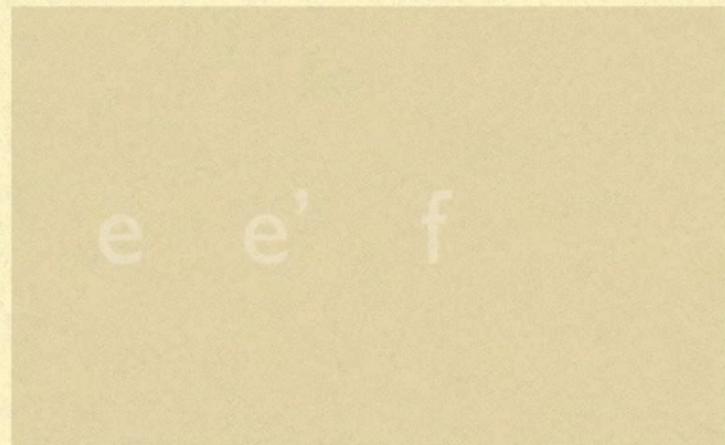
Part 2

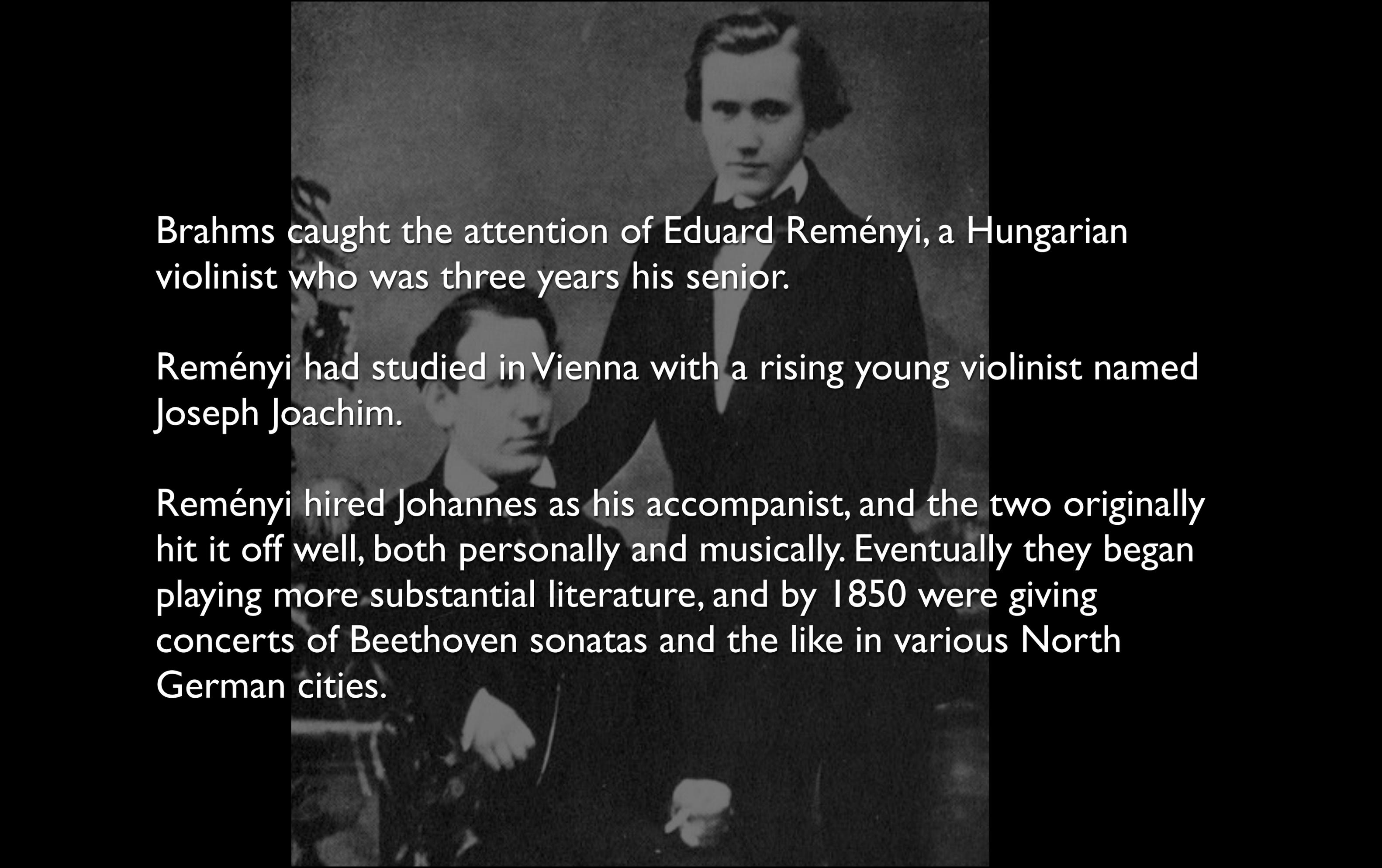


Part 3



Trio

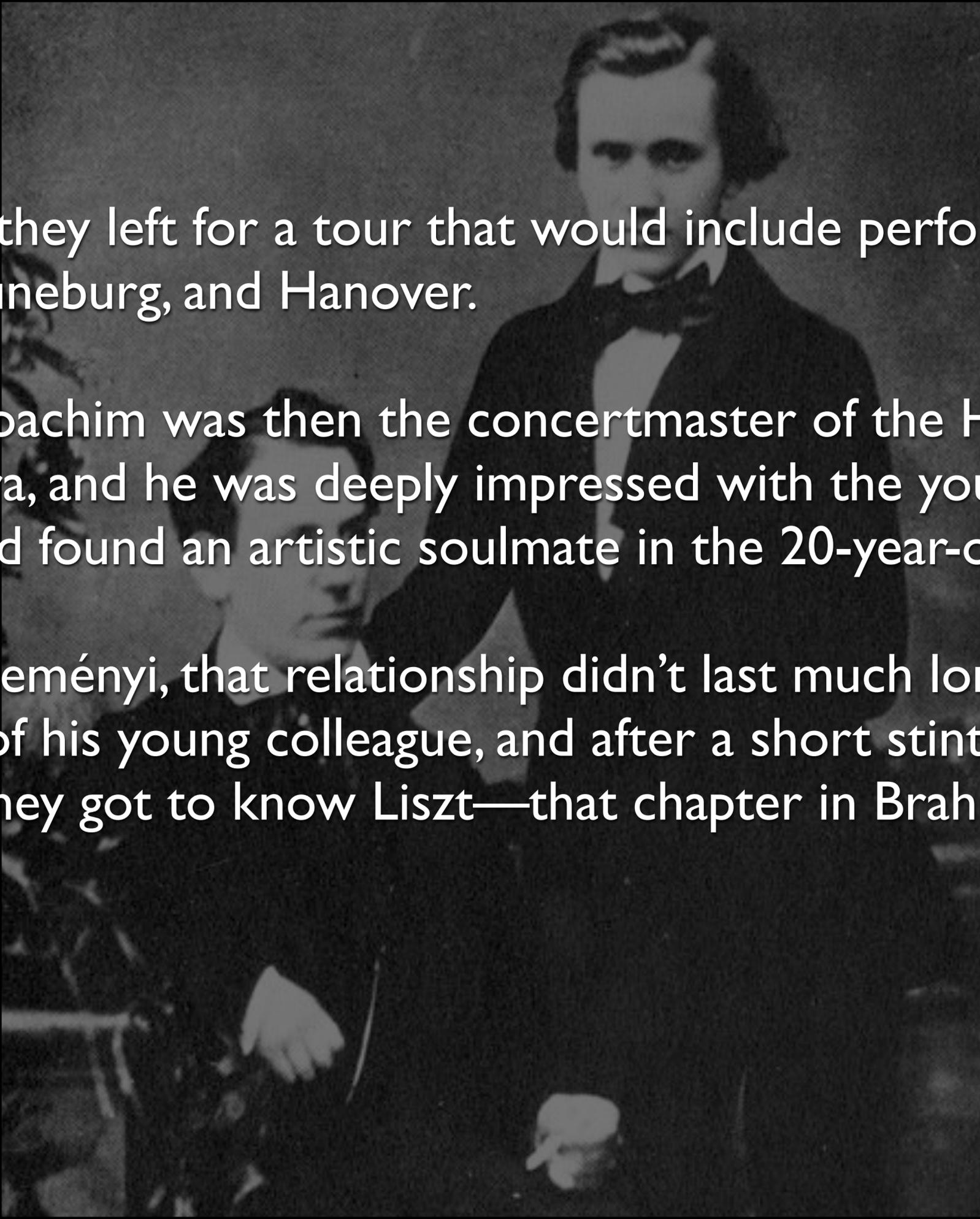




Brahms caught the attention of Eduard Reményi, a Hungarian violinist who was three years his senior.

Reményi had studied in Vienna with a rising young violinist named Joseph Joachim.

Reményi hired Johannes as his accompanist, and the two originally hit it off well, both personally and musically. Eventually they began playing more substantial literature, and by 1850 were giving concerts of Beethoven sonatas and the like in various North German cities.



In 1853 they left for a tour that would include performances in Celle, Lüneburg, and Hanover.

Joseph Joachim was then the concertmaster of the Hanover orchestra, and he was deeply impressed with the young Brahms as artist and found an artistic soulmate in the 20-year-old pianist.

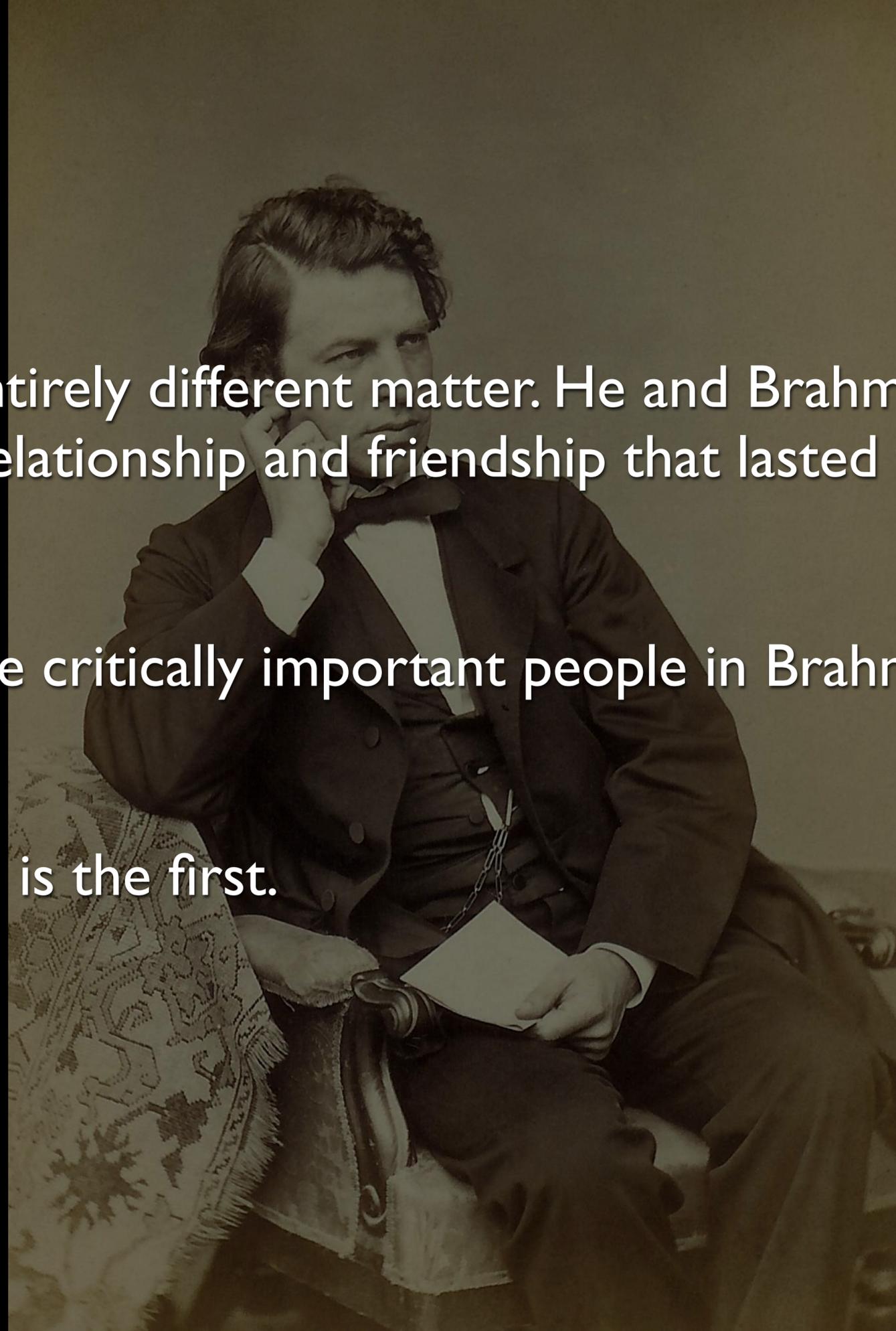
As for Reményi, that relationship didn't last much longer. He was jealous of his young colleague, and after a short stint in Weimar—where they got to know Liszt—that chapter in Brahms's life was over.

But Joachim?

That was an entirely different matter. He and Brahms formed a close artistic relationship and friendship that lasted for the rest of their lives.

There are three critically important people in Brahms's life and career.

Joseph Joachim is the first.



Johannes Brahms

HUNGARIAN RHAPSODY NO. 1

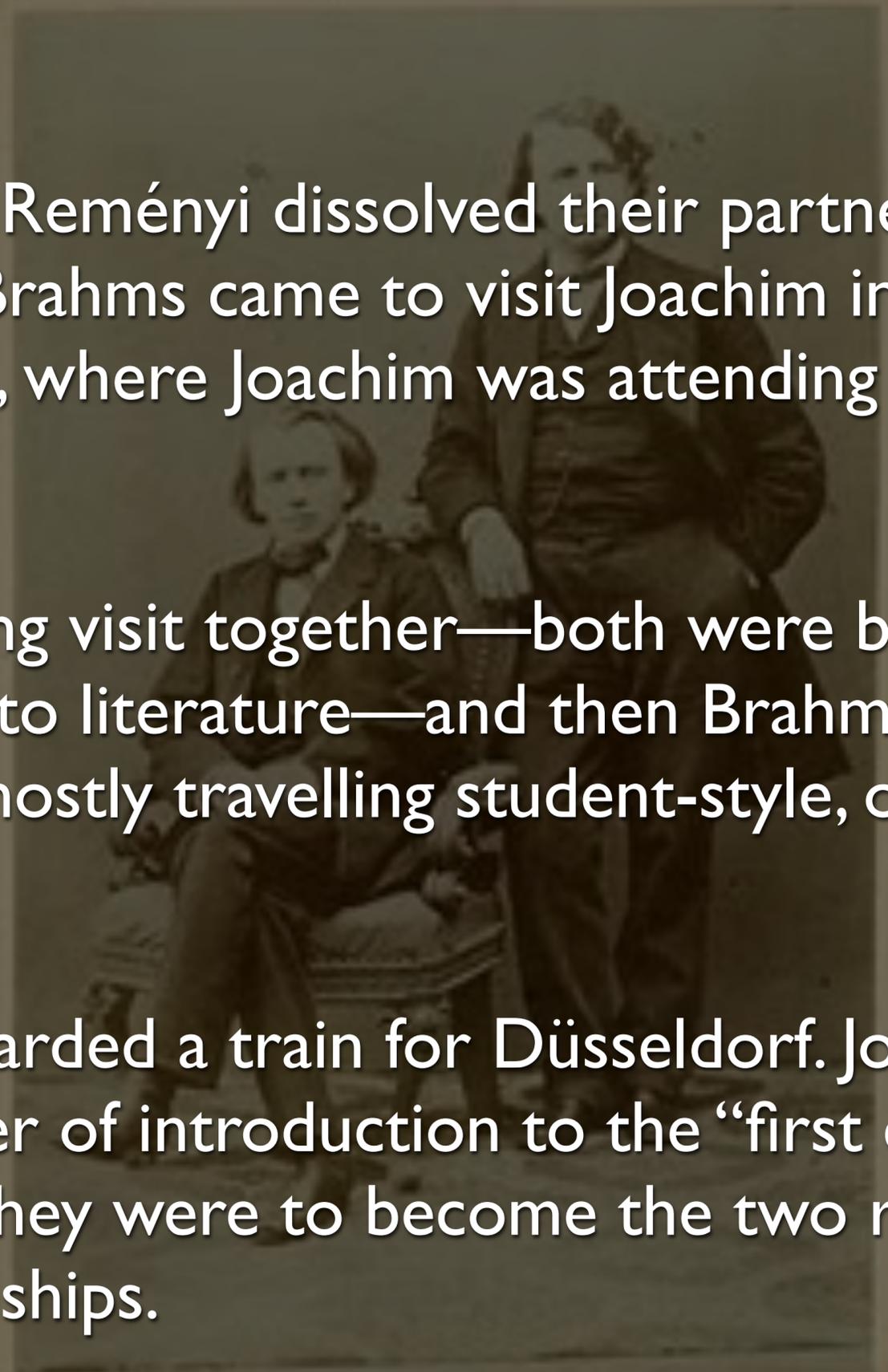
JOSEPH JOACHIM, VIOLIN
RECORDED 1903



After Brahms and Reményi dissolved their partnership following the Weimar visit, Brahms came to visit Joachim in the summer of 1853 in Göttingen, where Joachim was attending university in his spare time.

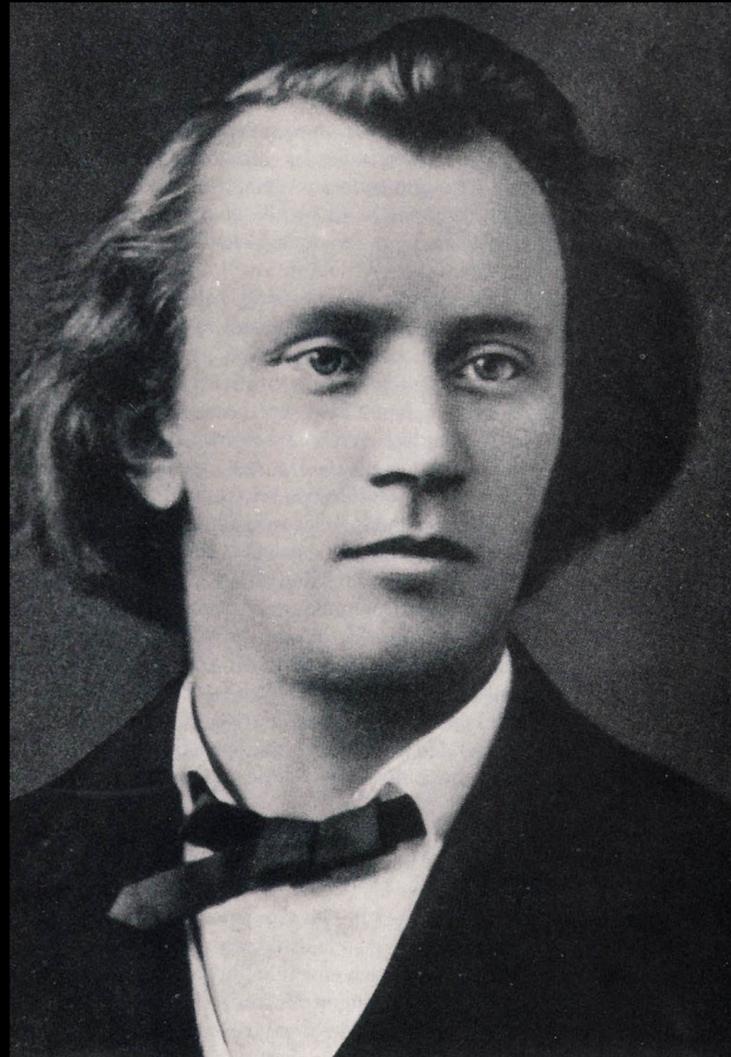
They enjoyed a long visit together—both were book lovers and intensely devoted to literature—and then Brahms made his way down the Rhine, mostly travelling student-style, on foot with a backpack.

At Cologne he boarded a train for Düsseldorf. Joachim had written him a letter of introduction to the “first couple” of European music. They were to become the two remaining critically important relationships.



It was October 1, 1853 at 11:00 am in the morning.

The youngest daughter, Marie, remembered him as “a very young man, handsome as a picture, with long blonde hair.”



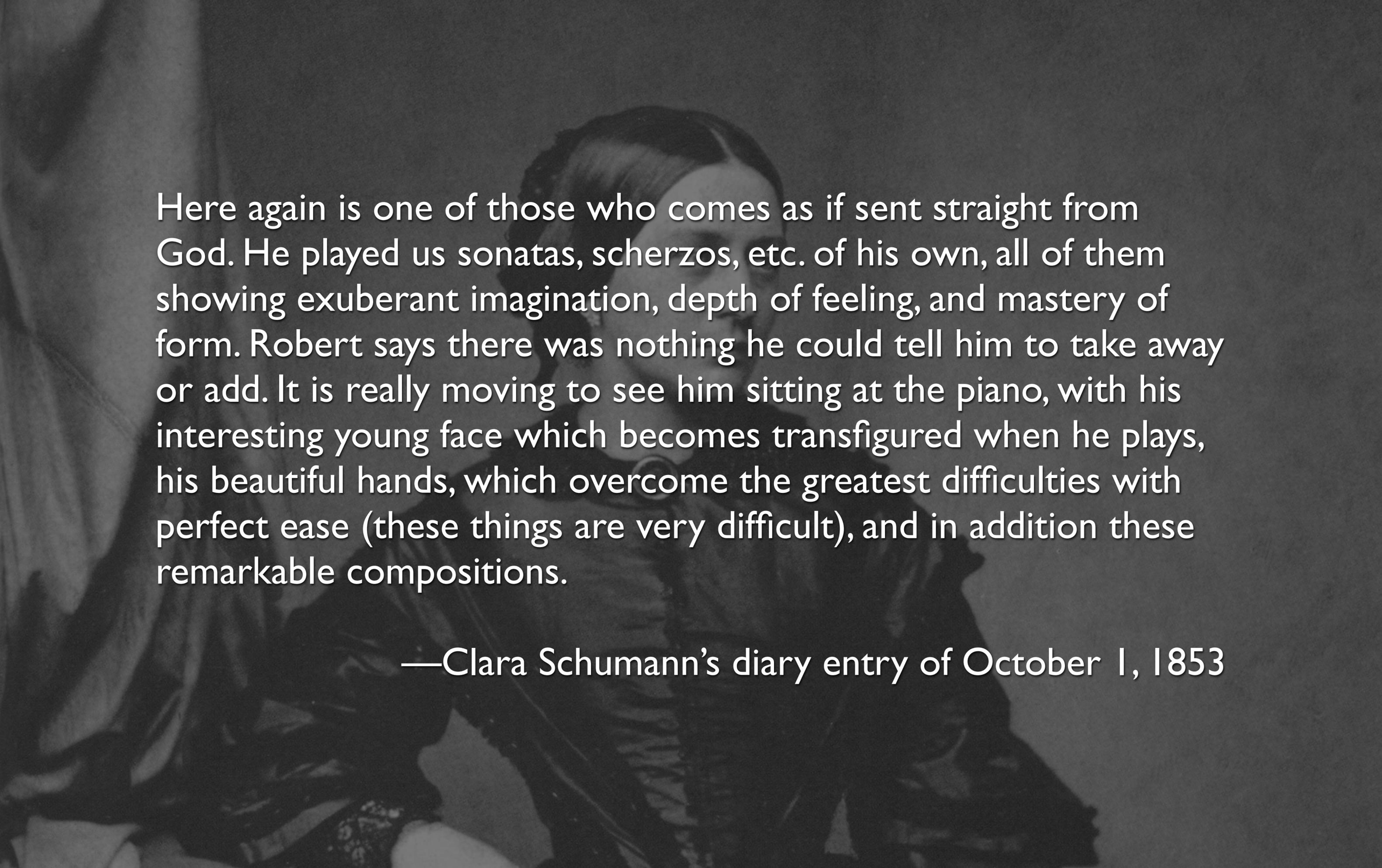
Johannes sat down at the piano and began playing his recently-composed Piano Sonata in C Major — eventually to be published as his Op. 1.



He had been playing for only a minute or so when his host stopped him and darted out of the room, calling over his shoulder “Please wait a moment, I must call my wife!!”

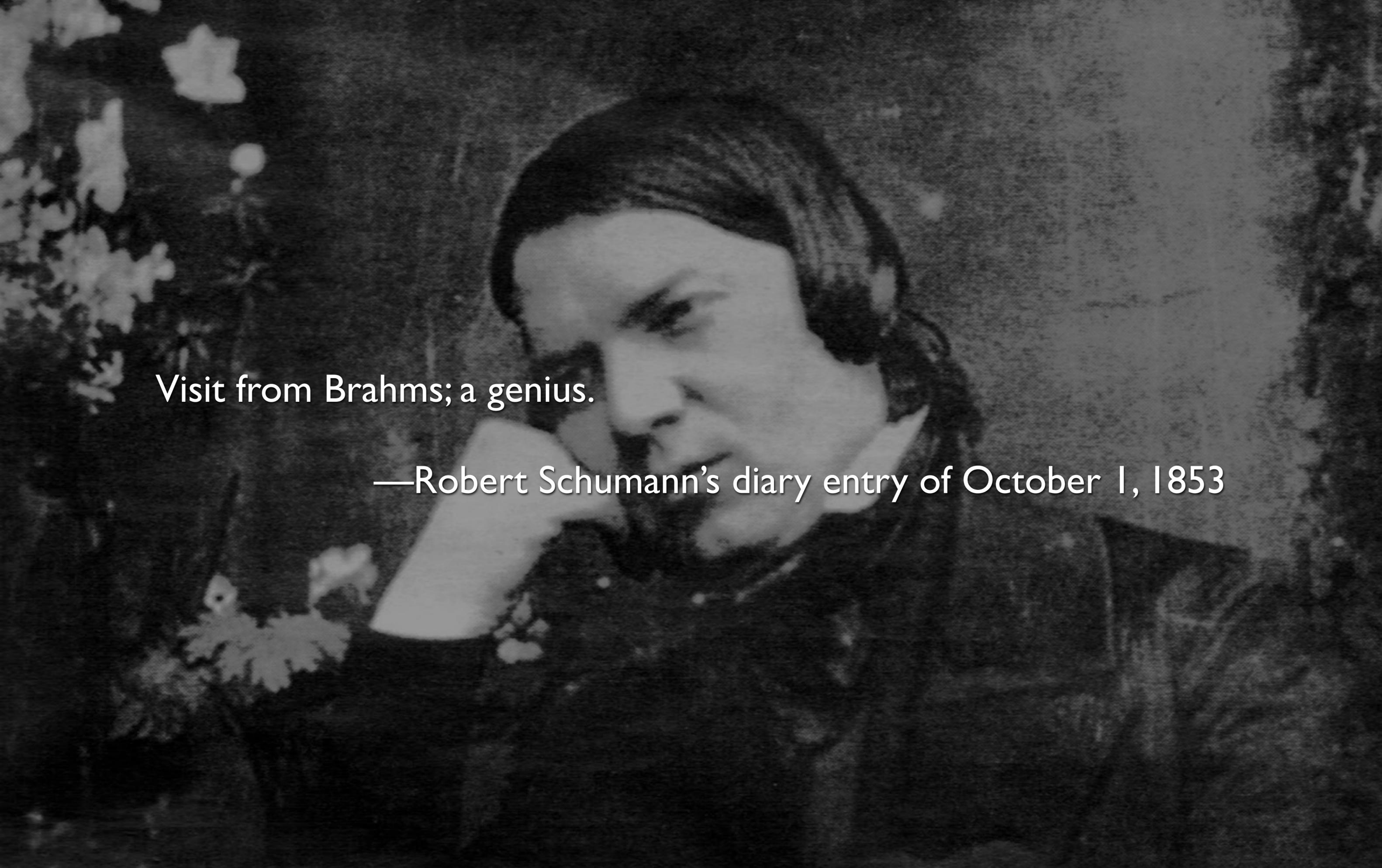






Here again is one of those who comes as if sent straight from God. He played us sonatas, scherzos, etc. of his own, all of them showing exuberant imagination, depth of feeling, and mastery of form. Robert says there was nothing he could tell him to take away or add. It is really moving to see him sitting at the piano, with his interesting young face which becomes transfigured when he plays, his beautiful hands, which overcome the greatest difficulties with perfect ease (these things are very difficult), and in addition these remarkable compositions.

—Clara Schumann's diary entry of October 1, 1853



Visit from Brahms; a genius.

—Robert Schumann's diary entry of October 1, 1853