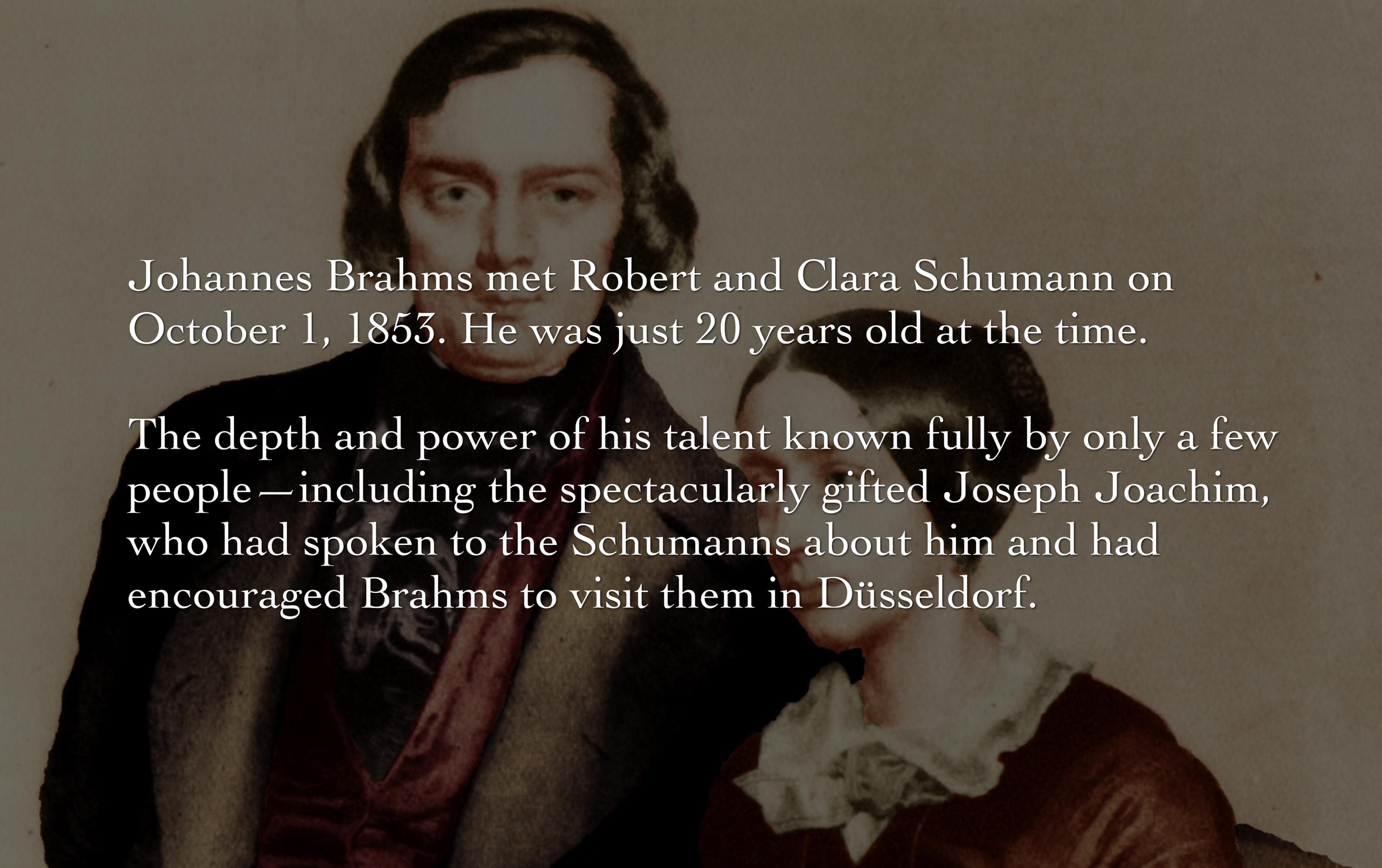


Brahms

2 - Entering the Stream (1854—1860)



Johannes Brahms met Robert and Clara Schumann on October 1, 1853. He was just 20 years old at the time.

The depth and power of his talent known fully by only a few people — including the spectacularly gifted Joseph Joachim, who had spoken to the Schumanns about him and had encouraged Brahms to visit them in Düsseldorf.

Zeitschrift für Musik.

Robert Schumann was soon moved to write a glowing assessment of the young Hamburg composer's prospects in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*:

Erstvertheilung (die Buchh. u. Musikh. (Verlag) in Berlin.
J. Fischer in Prag.
Gebr. Hug in Zürich.

P. Mechetti gm. Carlo in Wien.
B. Westermann u. Comp. in New-York.
A. Friedlein in Warschau.

... [he is] destined to give ideal presentation to the highest expression of the time ... springing forth like Minerva fully armed from the head of Jove ... He is called Johannes

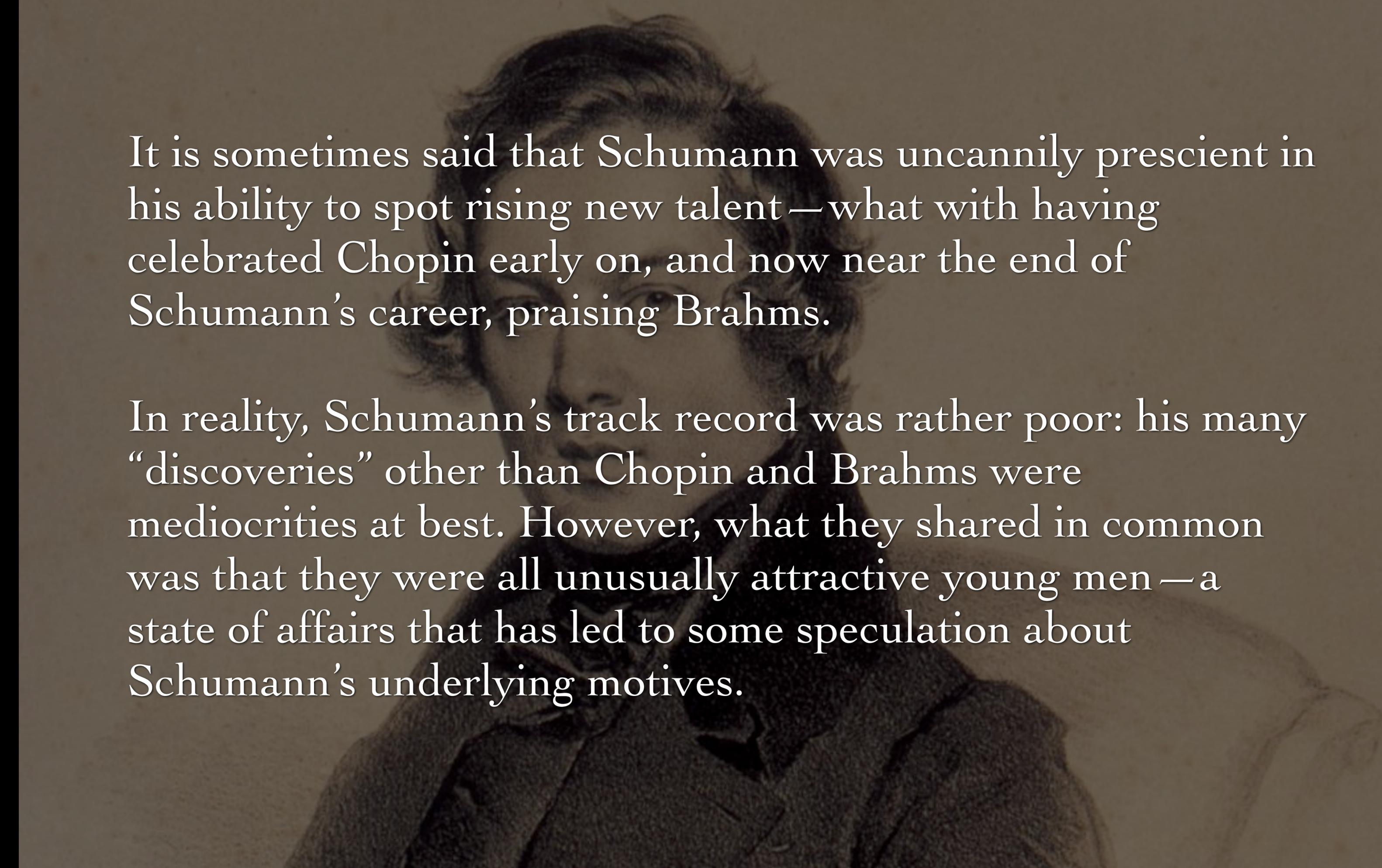
Brahms.

Inhalt des Heftes. — Kammer- und Hausmusik. — Instructives. — Briefe aus Carlruhe (Fortf.). — Kleine Zeitung, Tagesgeschichte, Vermischtes. — Kritischer Anzeiger. — Intelligenzblatt.

... His companions greet him on his first course through the world, where, perhaps, wounds may await him, but laurels and palms also.

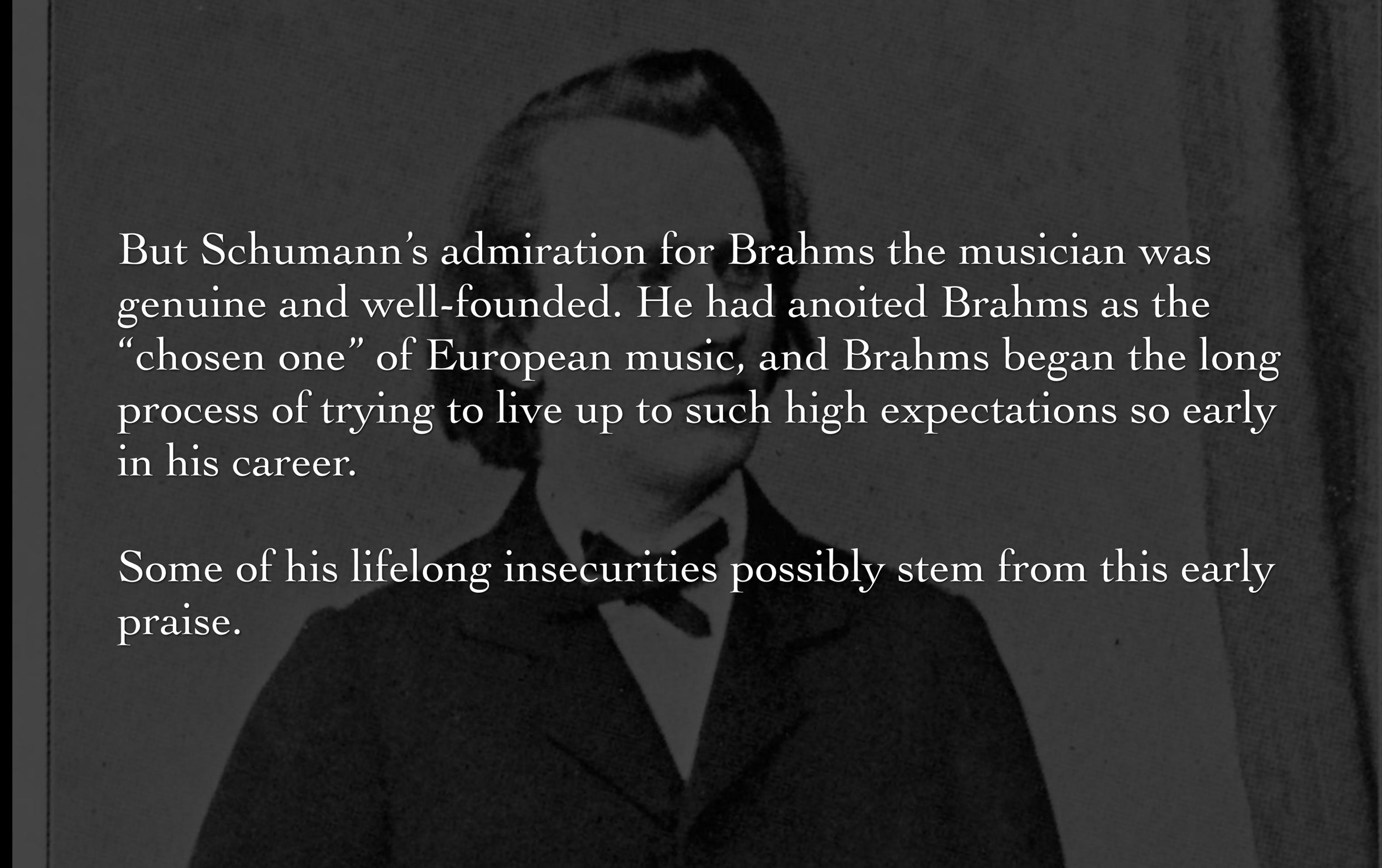
Neue Bahnen.
Es sind Jahre verfloßen, — beinahe eben so viele, als in der ersten Hälfte dieser Blätter widmete, nämlich zehn —, daß ich mich auf diesem an Erinnerungen so reichen Terrain einmal hätte vernehmen lassen. Oft, trotz angestrenzter productiver Thätigkeit, fühlte ich mich angetregt; manche neue, bedeutende Talente erschienen, eine neue Kraft der Musik

kommen gepanzert aus dem Haupte des Kronion her. Aber erst als ich im Jahre 1833 in die Welt kam, dessen Wiege Grazien und Helden Wache hielten. Er heißt Johannes Brahms, kam von Hamburg, dort in dunkler Stille schaffend, aber von einem trefflichen und begeistert zutragenden Lehrer*) gebildet in den schwierigsten Satzungen der Kunst, mit kurz vorher von einem verehrten bekannten Meister empfohlen. Er trug, auch im Aeußeren, alle Anzeichen an sich,



It is sometimes said that Schumann was uncannily prescient in his ability to spot rising new talent—what with having celebrated Chopin early on, and now near the end of Schumann’s career, praising Brahms.

In reality, Schumann’s track record was rather poor: his many “discoveries” other than Chopin and Brahms were mediocrities at best. However, what they shared in common was that they were all unusually attractive young men—a state of affairs that has led to some speculation about Schumann’s underlying motives.

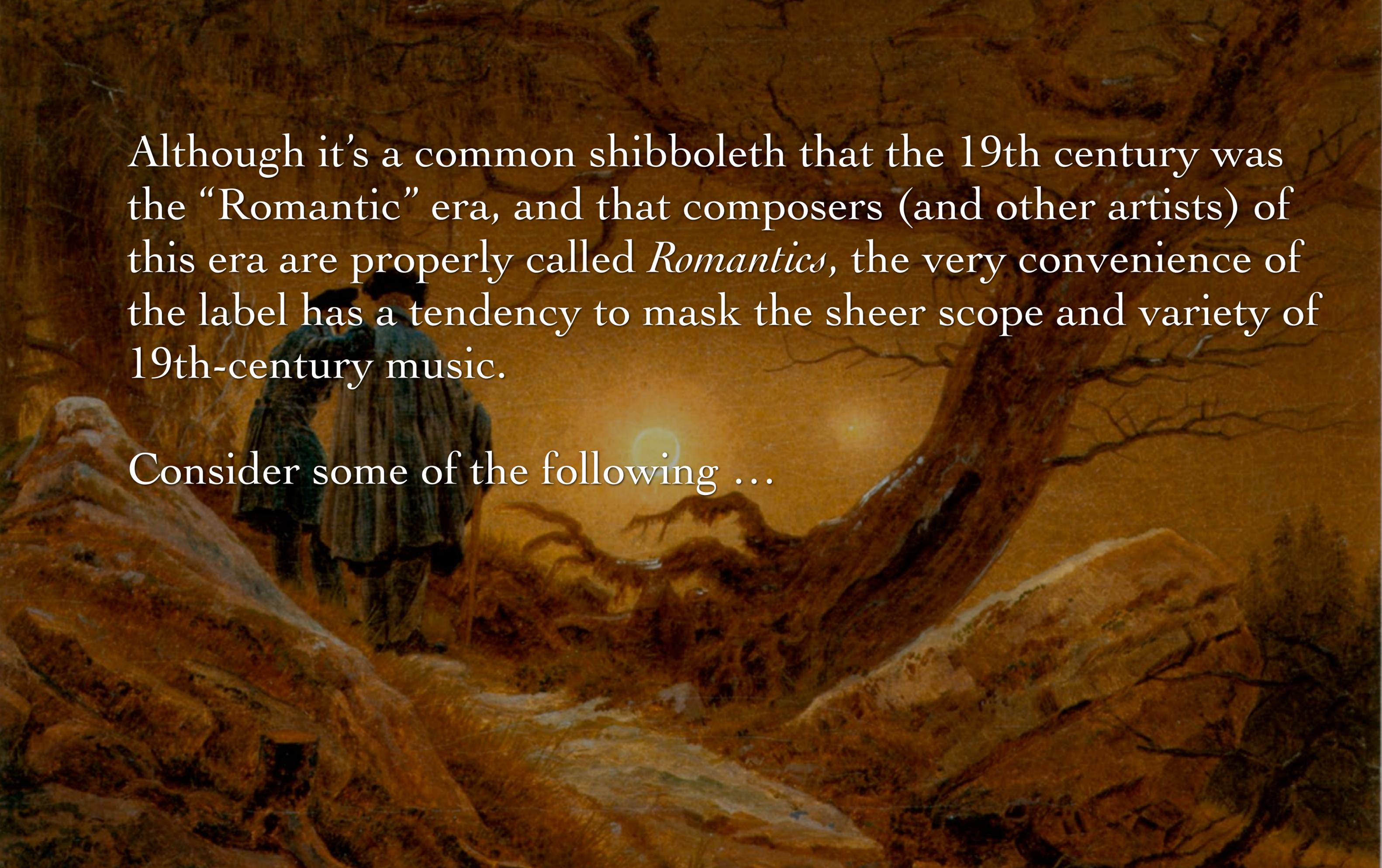


But Schumann's admiration for Brahms the musician was genuine and well-founded. He had anointed Brahms as the "chosen one" of European music, and Brahms began the long process of trying to live up to such high expectations so early in his career.

Some of his lifelong insecurities possibly stem from this early praise.

Thus Brahms plunged into the malestrom of mid-19th century
European music ...



A Romantic-style landscape painting. The scene is dominated by warm, golden-brown tones. In the foreground, a large, gnarled tree trunk curves across the frame. In the middle ground, two figures in dark, heavy clothing stand on a rocky outcrop, looking out over a valley. The background shows rolling hills and a bright, hazy sky. The overall mood is dramatic and evocative.

Although it's a common shibboleth that the 19th century was the “Romantic” era, and that composers (and other artists) of this era are properly called *Romantics*, the very convenience of the label has a tendency to mask the sheer scope and variety of 19th-century music.

Consider some of the following ...

“Magical” operas

Weber: *Der Freischütz*



Virtuosos

Liszt, Paganini



Hybrid symphonic-drama

Berlioz: *Romeo et Juliette*, *Symphonie fantastique*





Tone poems

Liszt: *Les préludes*, *Mazeppa*

Tchaikovsky: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*



Character pieces/Lieder

Chopin (piano works)

Schumann (piano and lieder)

Schubert (lieder)

Grand opera

Meyerbeer: *Les Huguenots*

Rossini: *William Tell*



Bel Canto opera

Bellini: *Norma*



Italian dramatic opera

Verdi: *Rigoletto*



Symphonic spiritual works

Mendelssohn: *Elijah*, *St. Paul*





Epic symphonies

Bruckner: Symphonies



Nationalism

Borodin: *Prince Igor*

Rimsky-Korsakov: *Russian Easter Overture*

Smetana: *The Bartered Bride*

Dvořák: *Slavonic Dances*

Gesamtkunstwerke — Music Drama

*Wagner: Ring Cycle, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Parsifal**



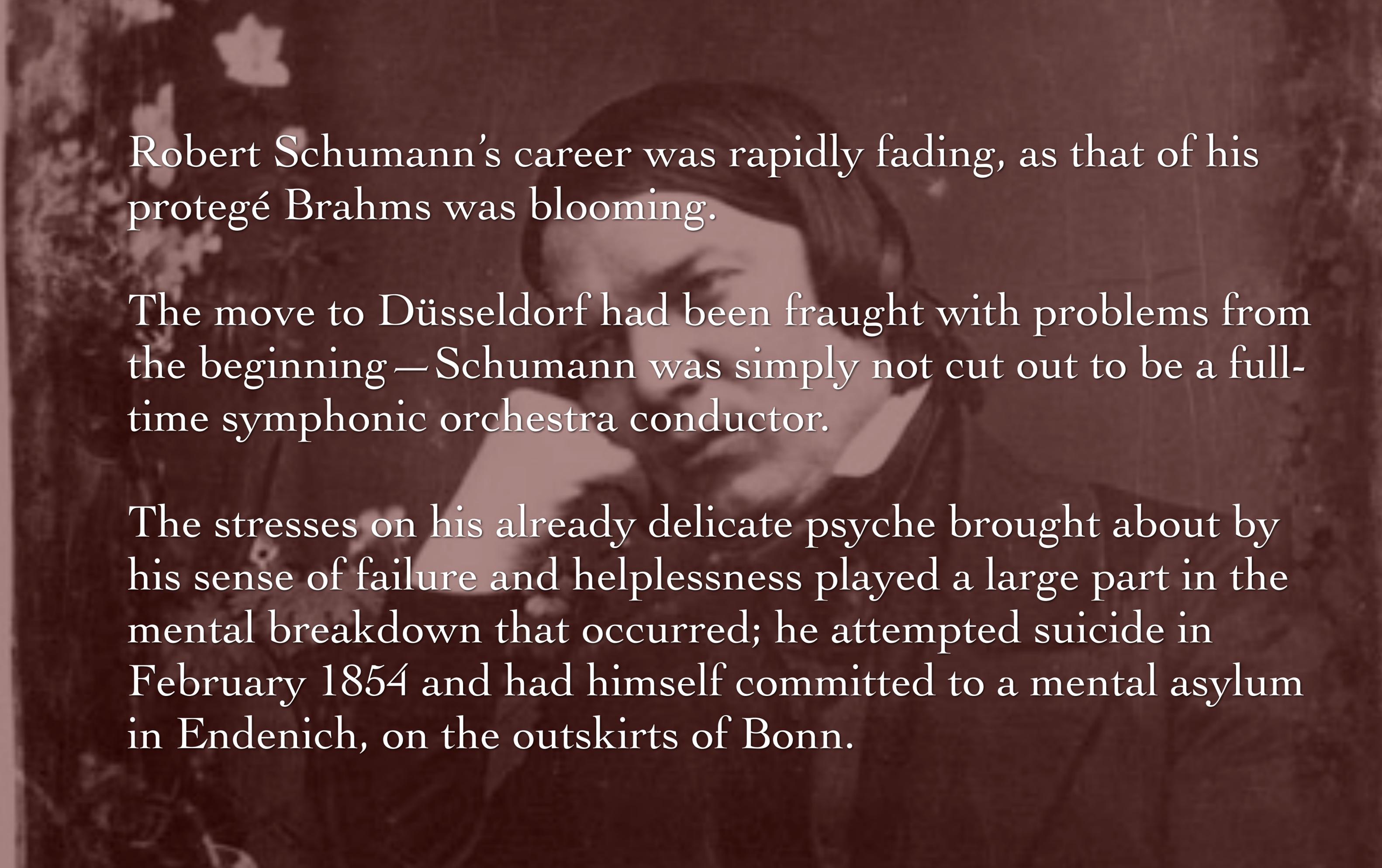
Evocations of the past

Bach revival (Mendelssohn and the *St. Matthew Passion*)

Bach Gesellschaft

Handel Gesellschaft

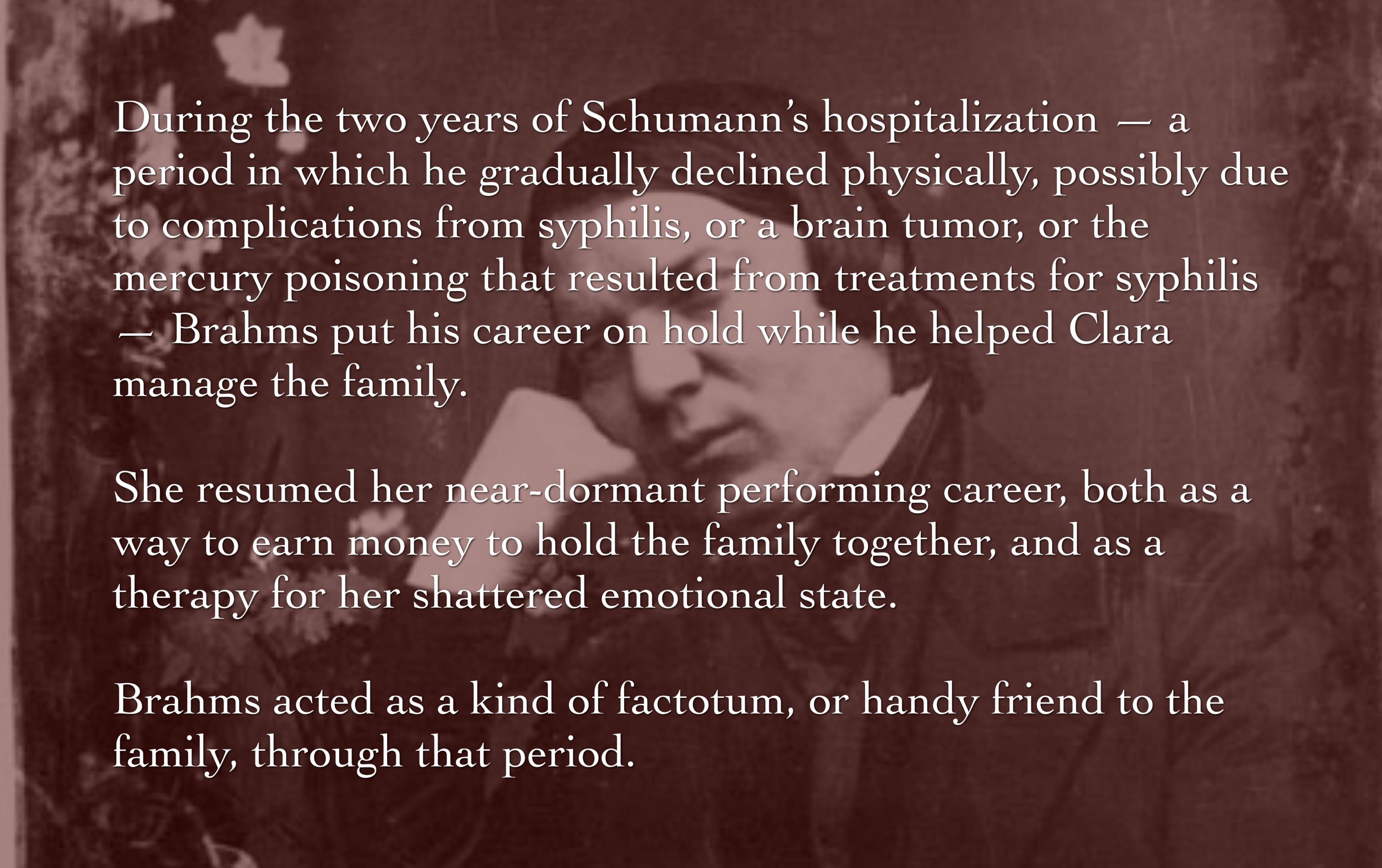
Complete works of François Couperin



Robert Schumann's career was rapidly fading, as that of his protégé Brahms was blooming.

The move to Düsseldorf had been fraught with problems from the beginning — Schumann was simply not cut out to be a full-time symphonic orchestra conductor.

The stresses on his already delicate psyche brought about by his sense of failure and helplessness played a large part in the mental breakdown that occurred; he attempted suicide in February 1854 and had himself committed to a mental asylum in Endenich, on the outskirts of Bonn.



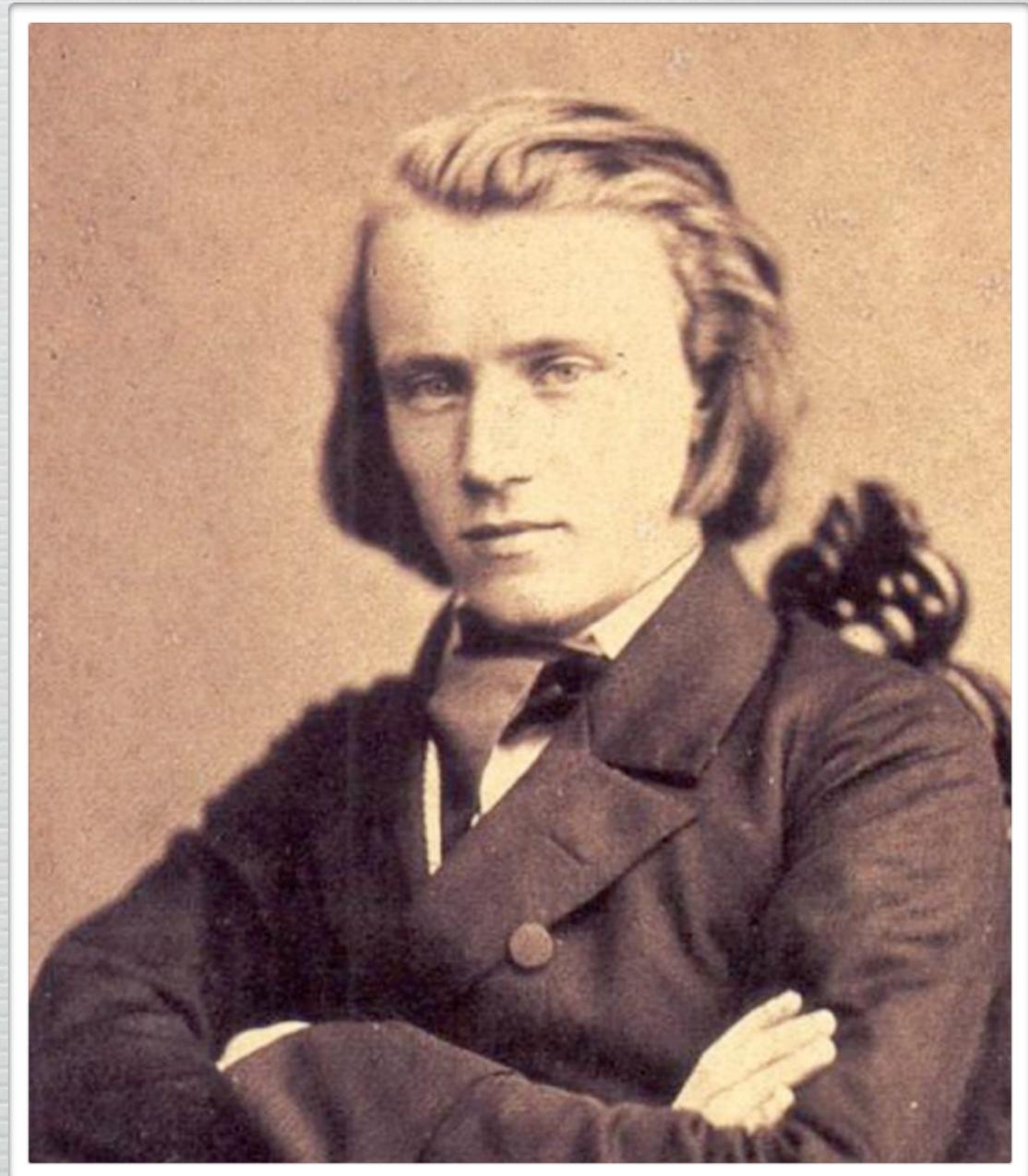
During the two years of Schumann's hospitalization — a period in which he gradually declined physically, possibly due to complications from syphilis, or a brain tumor, or the mercury poisoning that resulted from treatments for syphilis — Brahms put his career on hold while he helped Clara manage the family.

She resumed her near-dormant performing career, both as a way to earn money to hold the family together, and as a therapy for her shattered emotional state.

Brahms acted as a kind of factotum, or handy friend to the family, through that period.

The Music before 1860

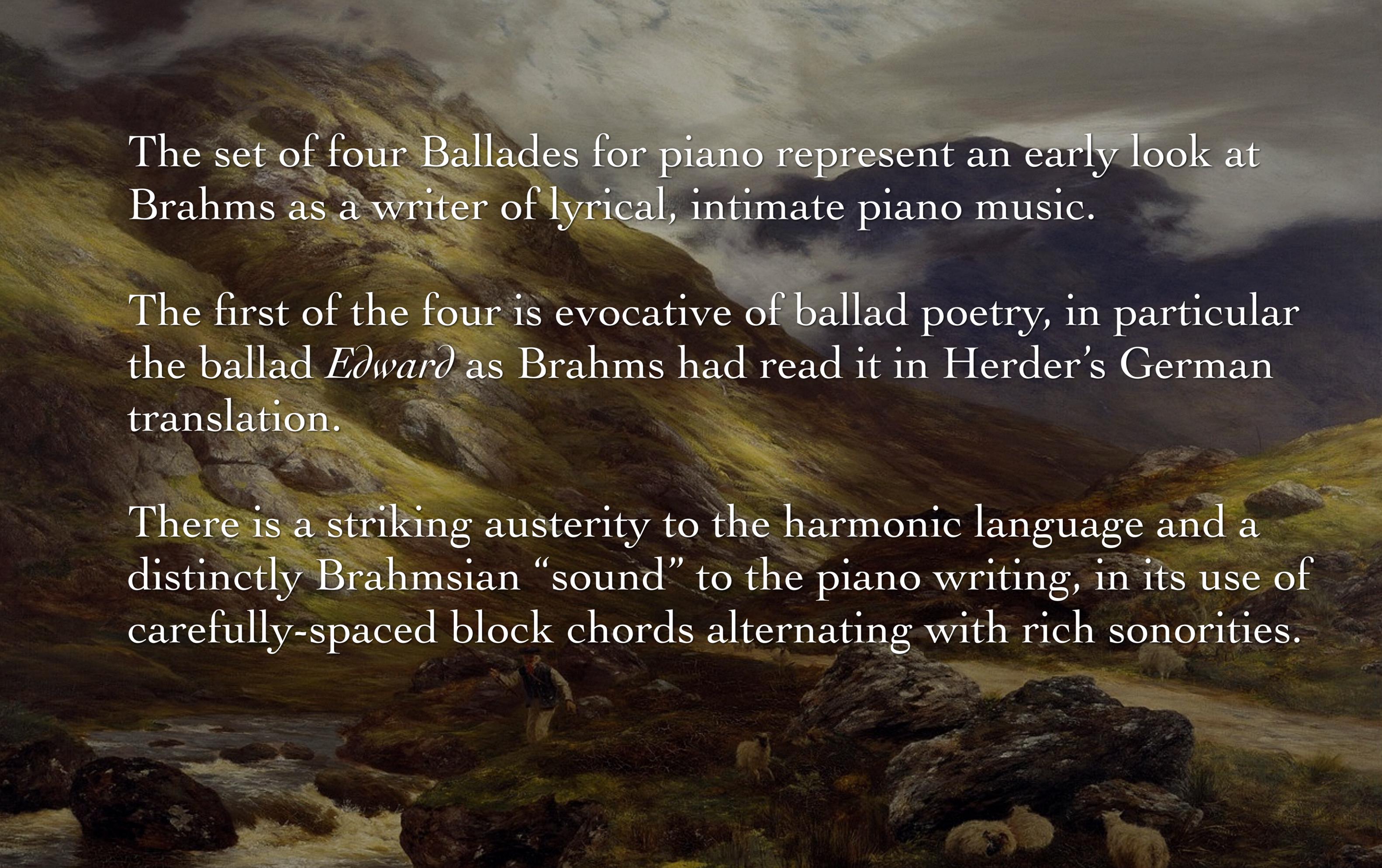
During and After Robert
Schumann's Life





Ballade, Op. 4 No. 1

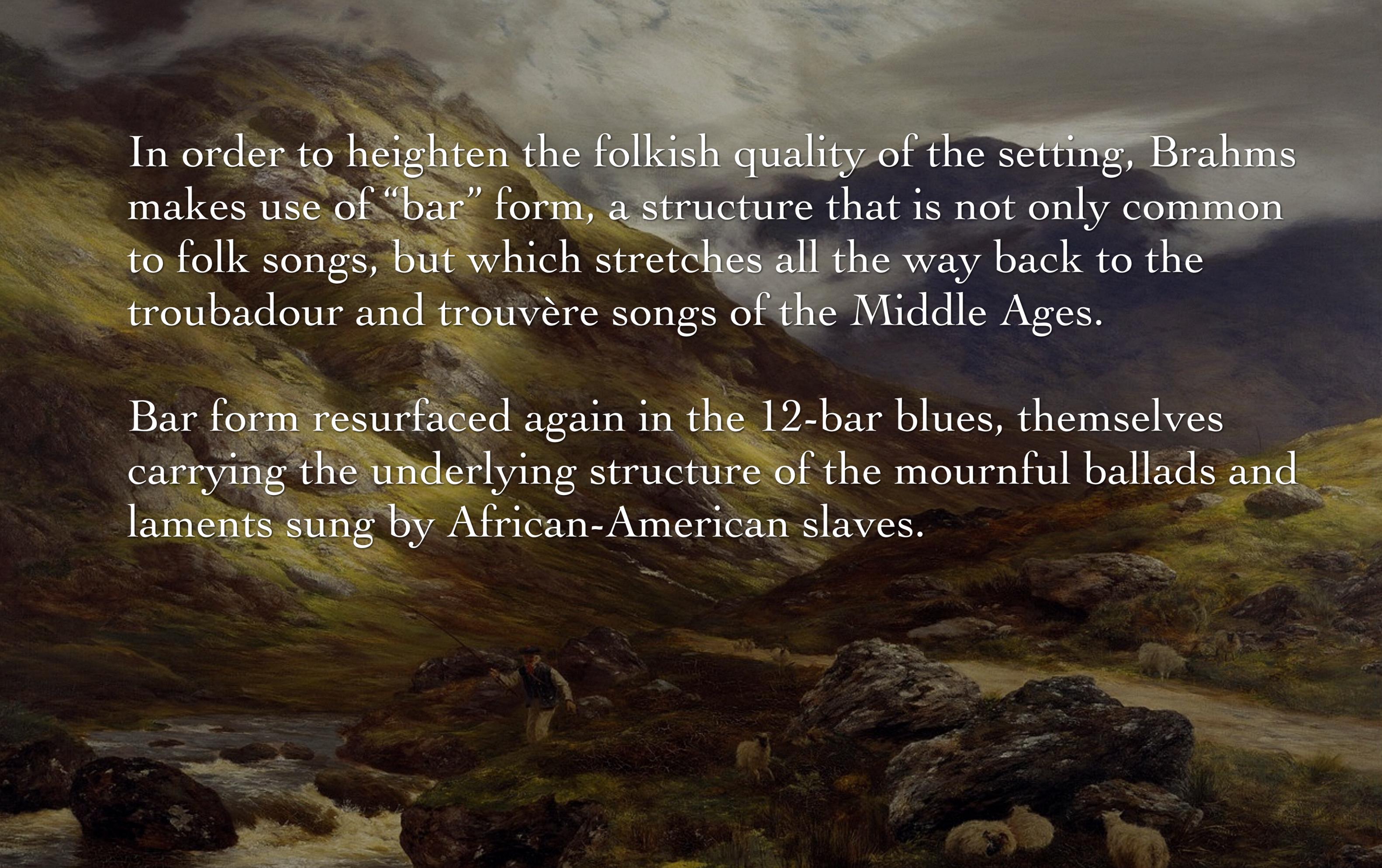
Arthur Rubinstein, piano

A dramatic landscape painting of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a river flows through a rocky, mossy terrain. Several sheep are grazing on the grassy slopes. In the middle ground, a man in a dark coat and hat stands near a large rock. The background features steep, rocky mountains under a cloudy, overcast sky. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

The set of four Ballades for piano represent an early look at Brahms as a writer of lyrical, intimate piano music.

The first of the four is evocative of ballad poetry, in particular the ballad *Edward* as Brahms had read it in Herder's German translation.

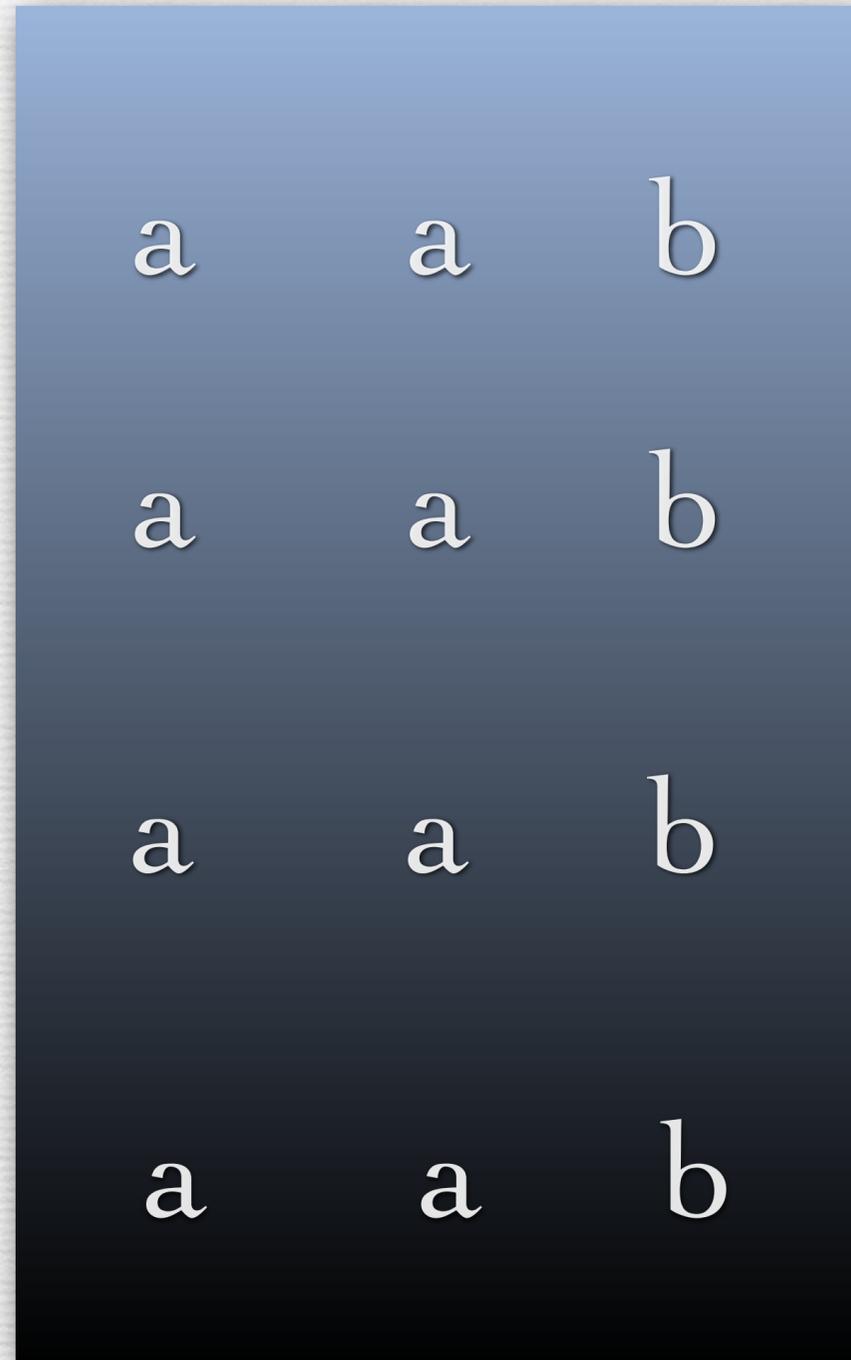
There is a striking austerity to the harmonic language and a distinctly Brahmsian "sound" to the piano writing, in its use of carefully-spaced block chords alternating with rich sonorities.

A dramatic landscape painting of a mountain valley. In the foreground, a river flows through a rocky, mossy landscape. A shepherd in a dark coat and hat stands on a rocky outcrop, holding a long staff. Several sheep are scattered around him. The middle ground shows a valley with a dirt path and more rocky terrain. The background features steep, misty mountains under a cloudy sky. The overall mood is somber and atmospheric.

In order to heighten the folkish quality of the setting, Brahms makes use of “bar” form, a structure that is not only common to folk songs, but which stretches all the way back to the troubadour and trouvère songs of the Middle Ages.

Bar form resurfaced again in the 12-bar blues, themselves carrying the underlying structure of the mournful ballads and laments sung by African-American slaves.

About Bar Form



Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

Coda

a a b
a a b

trans (b)

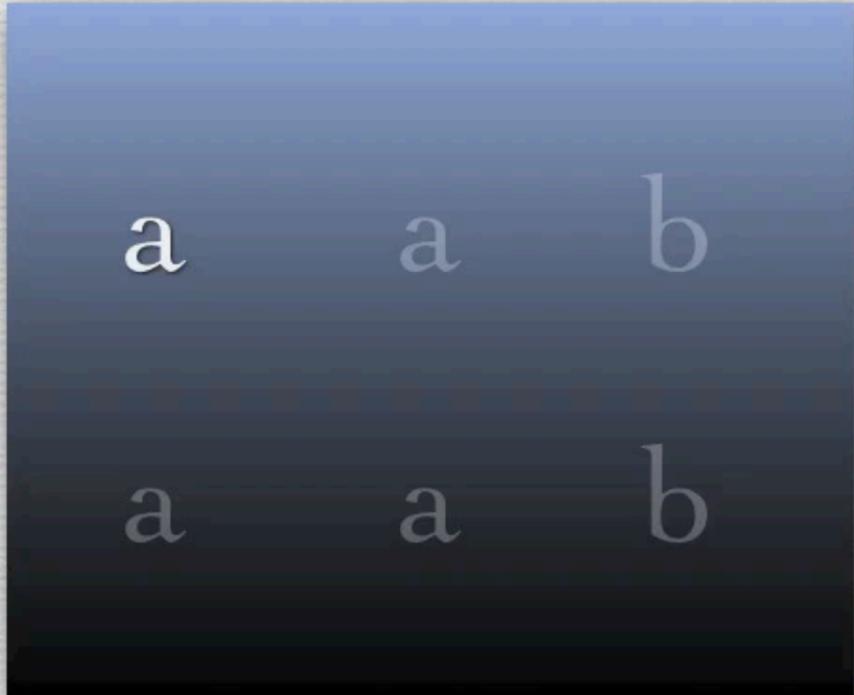
a a

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

Coda



a a b
a a b



trans (b)

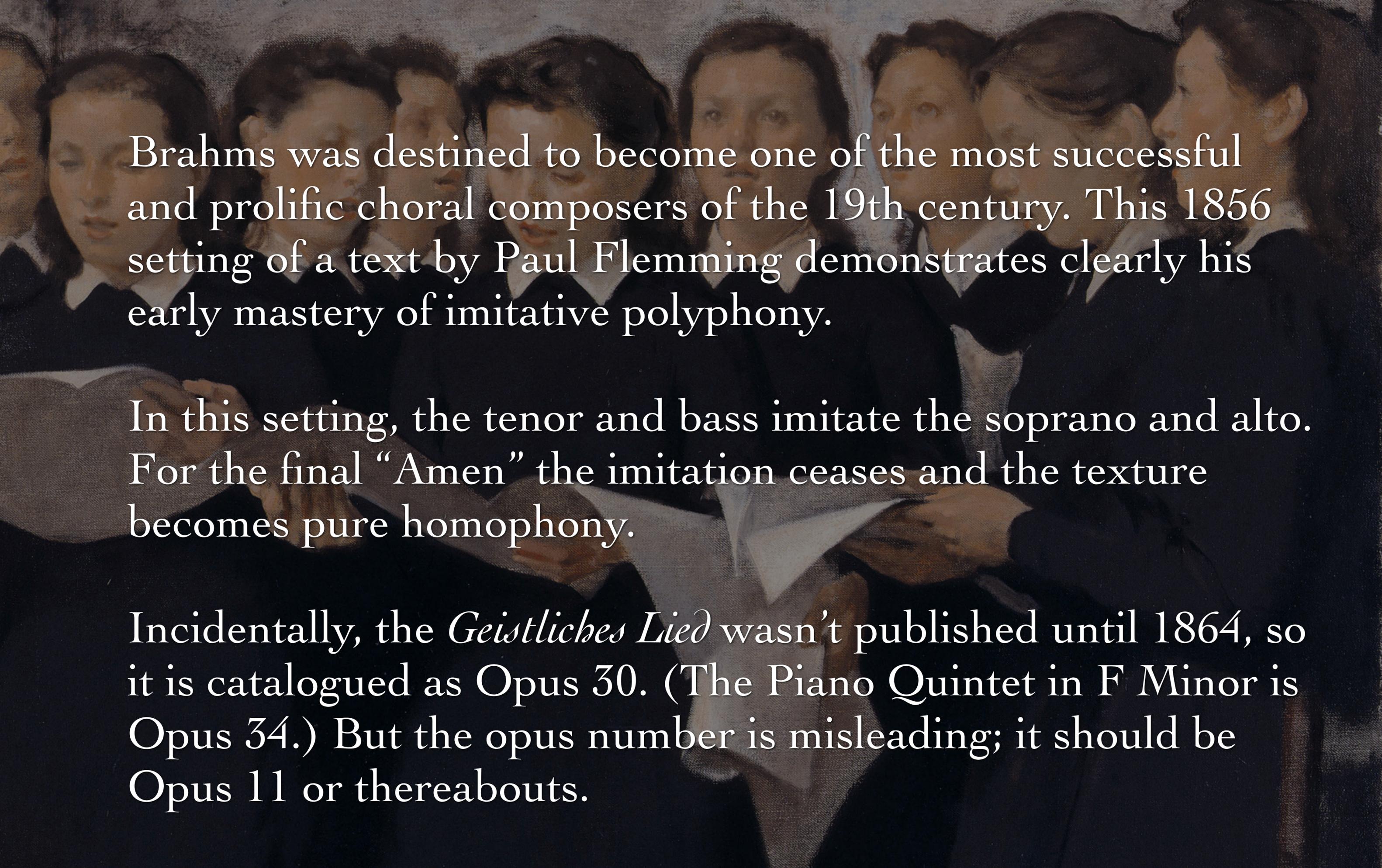


a a



Geistliches Lied, Op. 30 (1854)

Chor des Norddeutschen Rundfunks

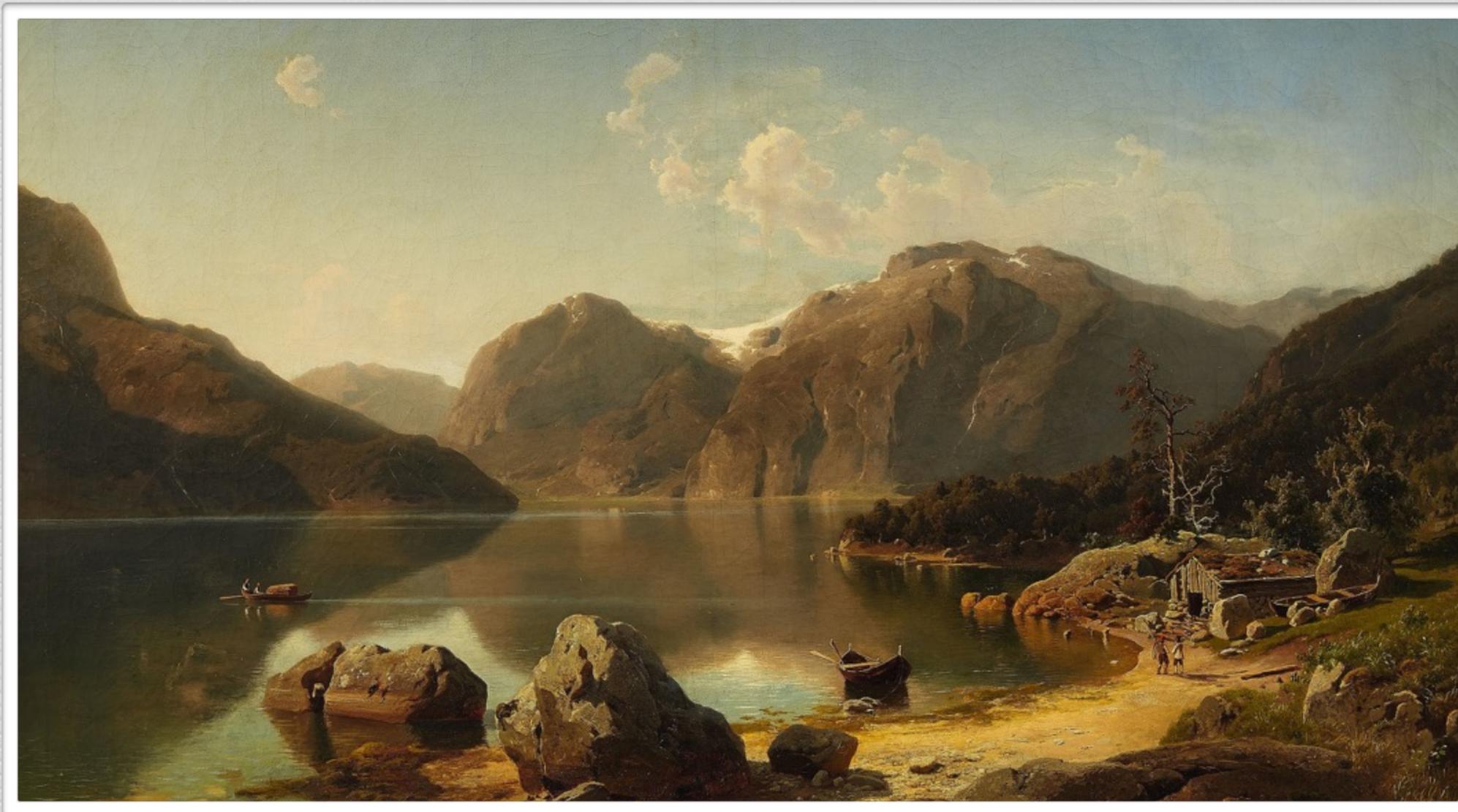


Brahms was destined to become one of the most successful and prolific choral composers of the 19th century. This 1856 setting of a text by Paul Flemming demonstrates clearly his early mastery of imitative polyphony.

In this setting, the tenor and bass imitate the soprano and alto. For the final “Amen” the imitation ceases and the texture becomes pure homophony.

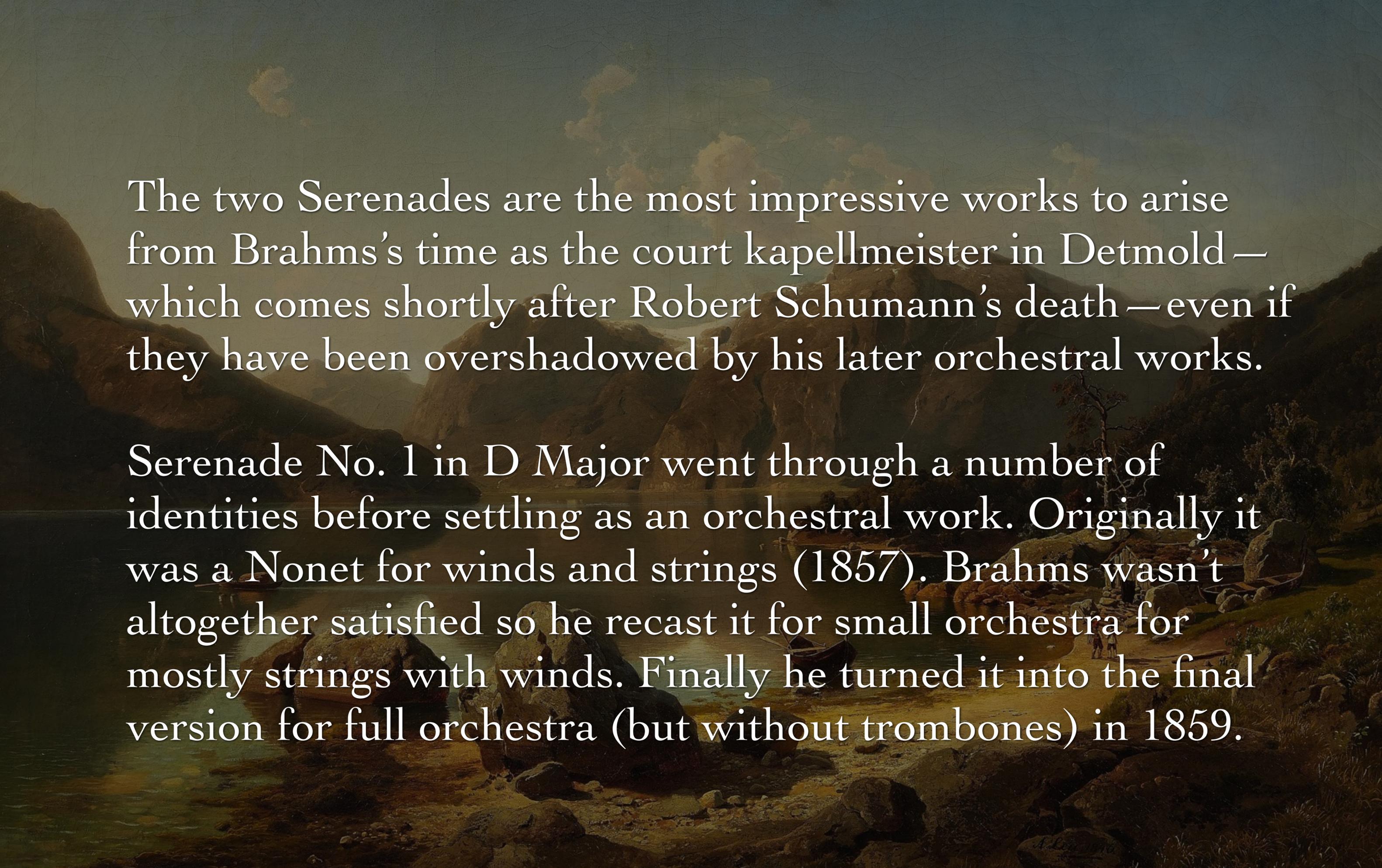
Incidentally, the *Geistliches Lied* wasn't published until 1864, so it is catalogued as Opus 30. (The Piano Quintet in F Minor is Opus 34.) But the opus number is misleading; it should be Opus 11 or thereabouts.

Organ Prelude



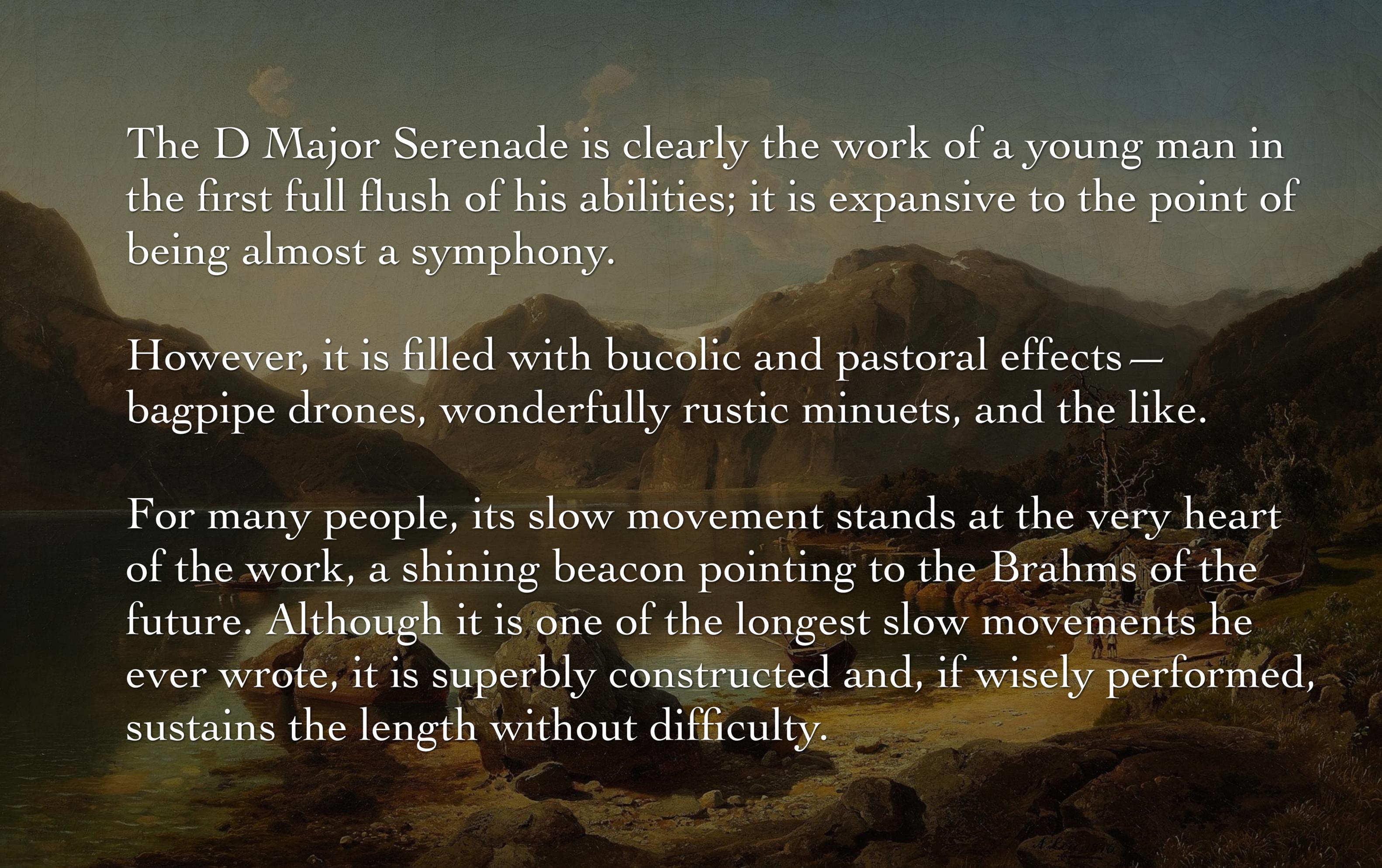
Serenade No. 1, Op. 11: III - Adagio non troppo

Bernard Haitink / Concertgebouw Orchestra

The background is a detailed landscape painting. It shows a wide river valley with steep, rocky mountains on either side. In the distance, a small town or village is visible on a hillside. The foreground is dominated by large, dark rocks and a sandy or pebbly shore. The lighting is soft, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning scene. The overall tone is somewhat somber and atmospheric.

The two Serenades are the most impressive works to arise from Brahms's time as the court kapellmeister in Detmold— which comes shortly after Robert Schumann's death— even if they have been overshadowed by his later orchestral works.

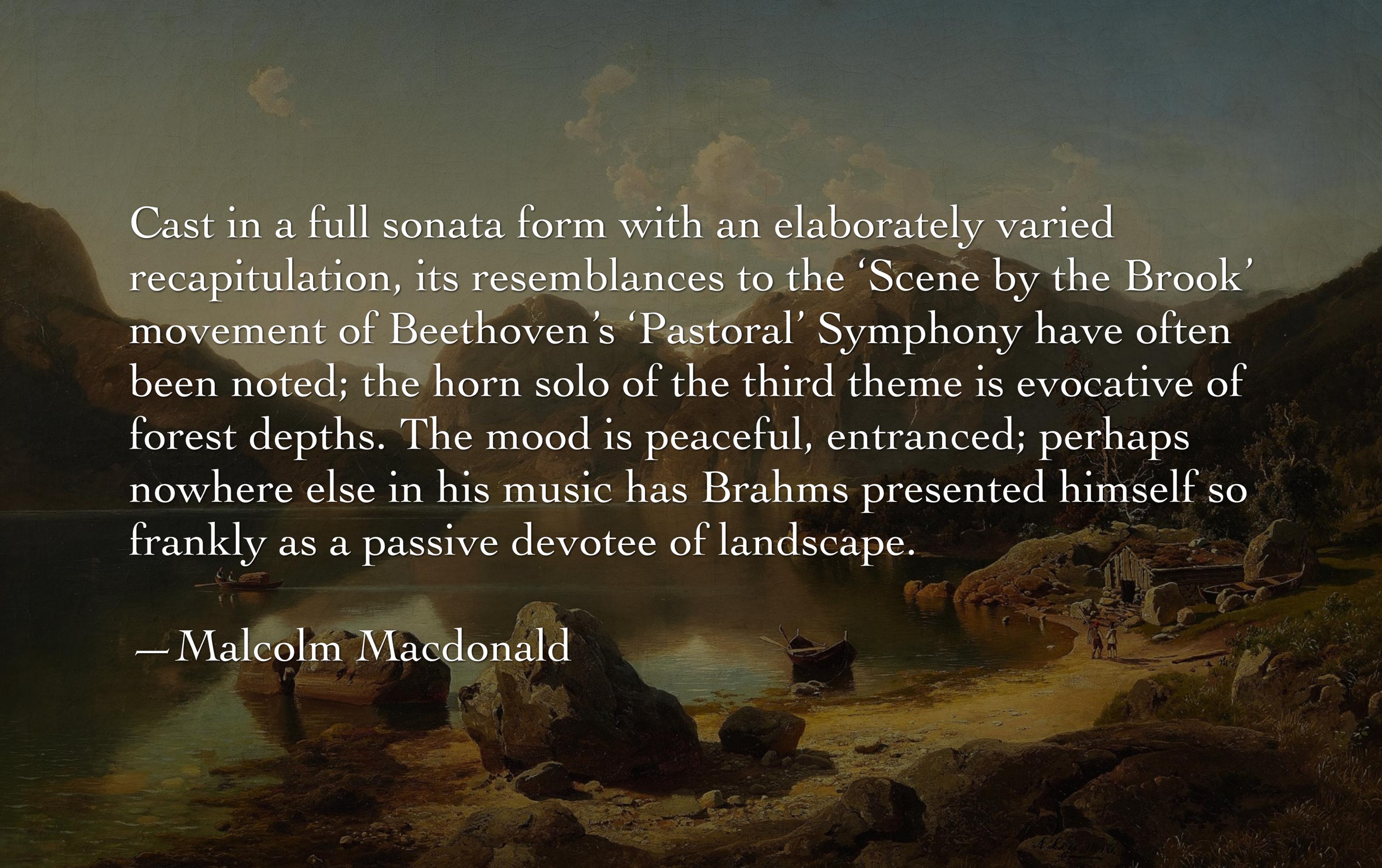
Serenade No. 1 in D Major went through a number of identities before settling as an orchestral work. Originally it was a Nonet for winds and strings (1857). Brahms wasn't altogether satisfied so he recast it for small orchestra for mostly strings with winds. Finally he turned it into the final version for full orchestra (but without trombones) in 1859.

The background is a detailed landscape painting. It shows a wide valley with rolling hills and mountains in the distance. In the foreground, there's a river or stream flowing through the valley. On the right bank, there's a small settlement with several buildings and a few figures. The overall color palette is muted, with earthy tones of browns, greys, and soft blues, suggesting a hazy or overcast day. The lighting is soft, creating a sense of depth and atmosphere.

The D Major Serenade is clearly the work of a young man in the first full flush of his abilities; it is expansive to the point of being almost a symphony.

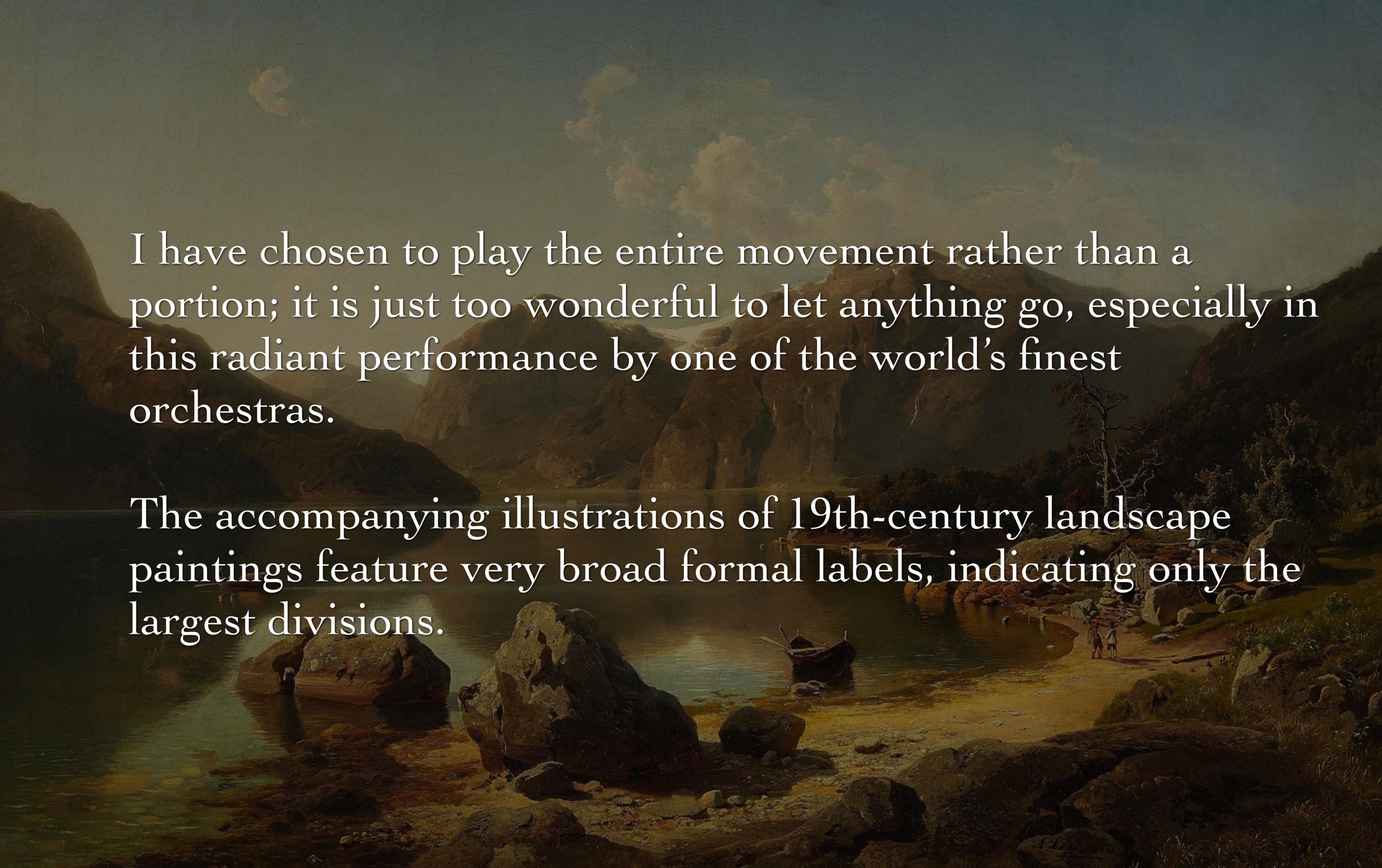
However, it is filled with bucolic and pastoral effects — bagpipe drones, wonderfully rustic minuets, and the like.

For many people, its slow movement stands at the very heart of the work, a shining beacon pointing to the Brahms of the future. Although it is one of the longest slow movements he ever wrote, it is superbly constructed and, if wisely performed, sustains the length without difficulty.

A detailed landscape painting of a river valley. In the foreground, large, dark, jagged rocks are scattered along the riverbank. The river flows through the center, with a small boat on the left and another on the right. On the right bank, a small settlement with a wooden building and a few figures is visible. The background features rolling hills and mountains under a cloudy sky. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

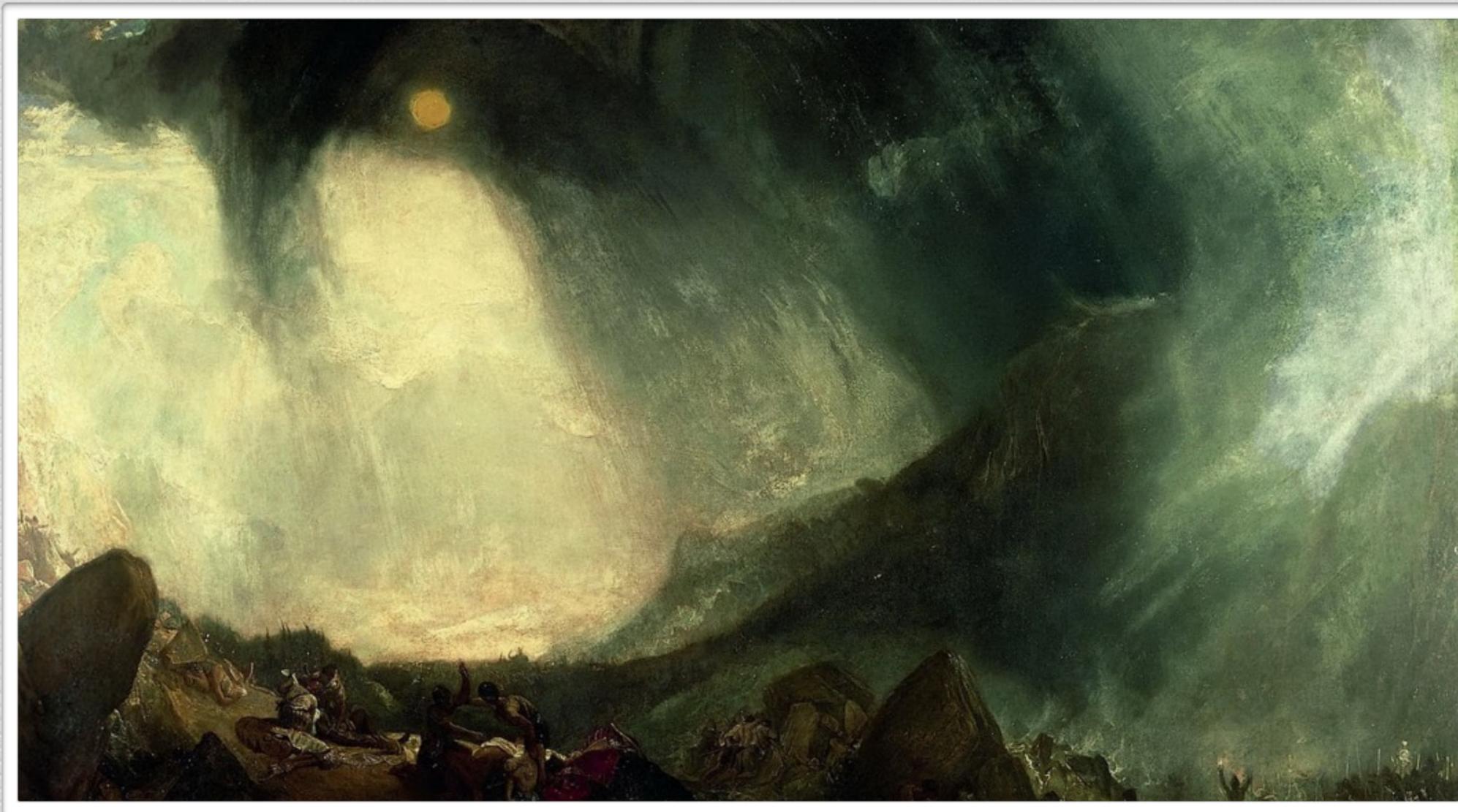
Cast in a full sonata form with an elaborately varied recapitulation, its resemblances to the 'Scene by the Brook' movement of Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony have often been noted; the horn solo of the third theme is evocative of forest depths. The mood is peaceful, entranced; perhaps nowhere else in his music has Brahms presented himself so frankly as a passive devotee of landscape.

—Malcolm Macdonald

A detailed landscape painting of a river valley. In the foreground, large, dark, craggy rocks are scattered along a sandy and pebbly riverbank. A small wooden boat is moored in the shallow water. To the right, a small group of people stands on the bank near a simple wooden structure. The middle ground shows a wide river flowing through a lush valley. In the background, majestic mountains rise under a sky filled with soft, white clouds. The overall atmosphere is serene and naturalistic, characteristic of 19th-century landscape art.

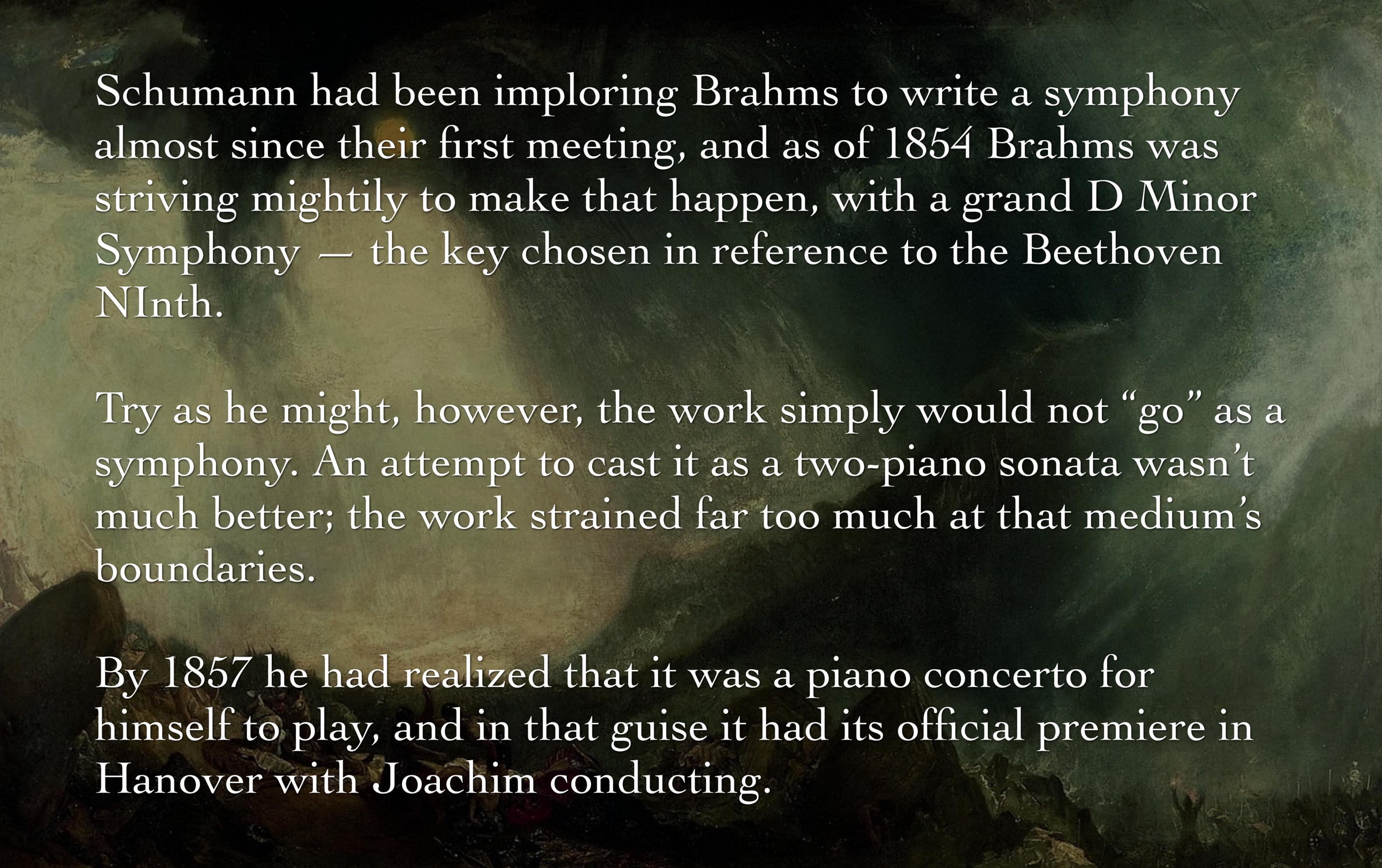
I have chosen to play the entire movement rather than a portion; it is just too wonderful to let anything go, especially in this radiant performance by one of the world's finest orchestras.

The accompanying illustrations of 19th-century landscape paintings feature very broad formal labels, indicating only the largest divisions.



Piano Concerto No. 1: III

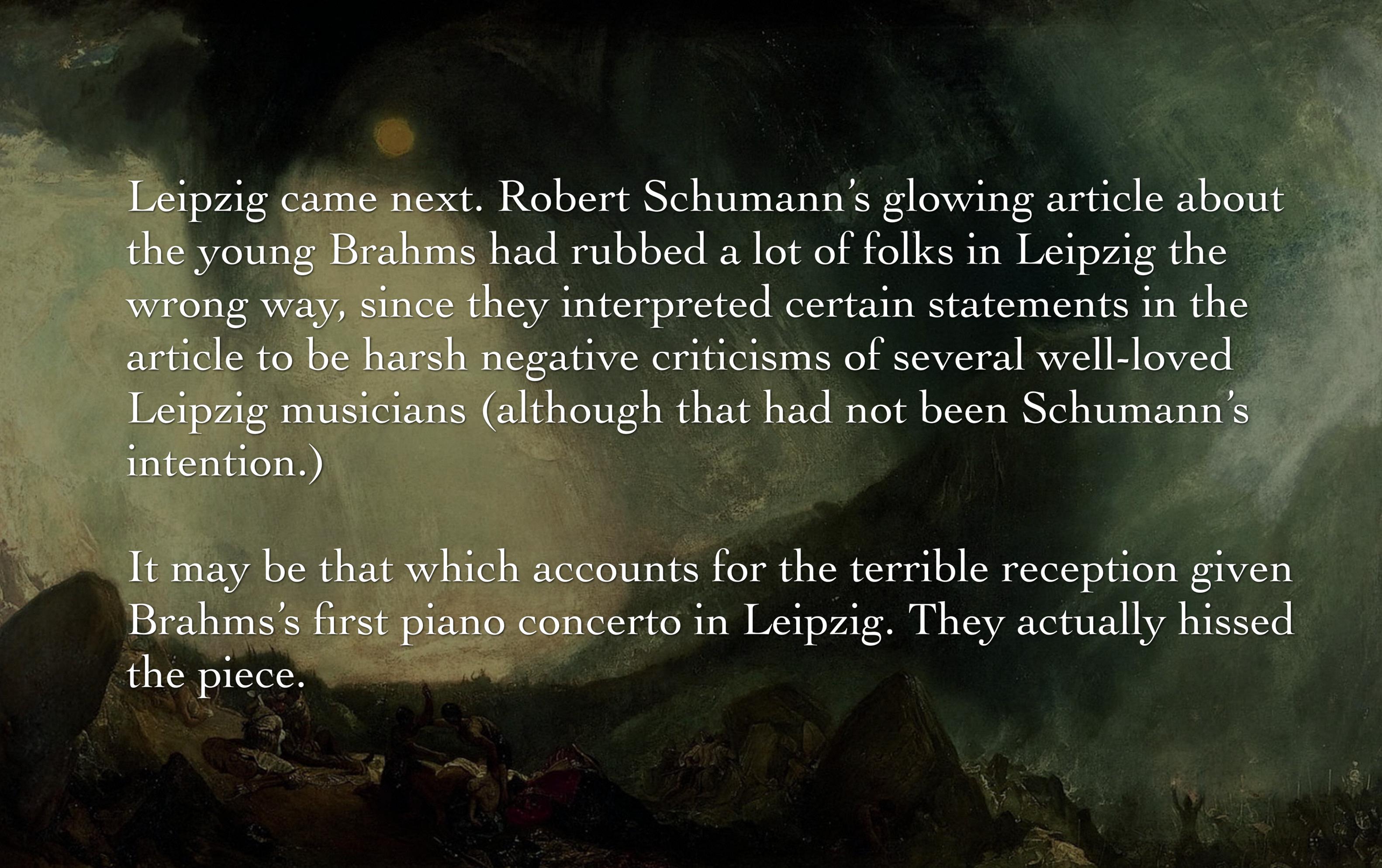
Clifford Curzon, piano / George Szell, conductor / London Symphony Orchestra



Schumann had been imploring Brahms to write a symphony almost since their first meeting, and as of 1854 Brahms was striving mightily to make that happen, with a grand D Minor Symphony — the key chosen in reference to the Beethoven Ninth.

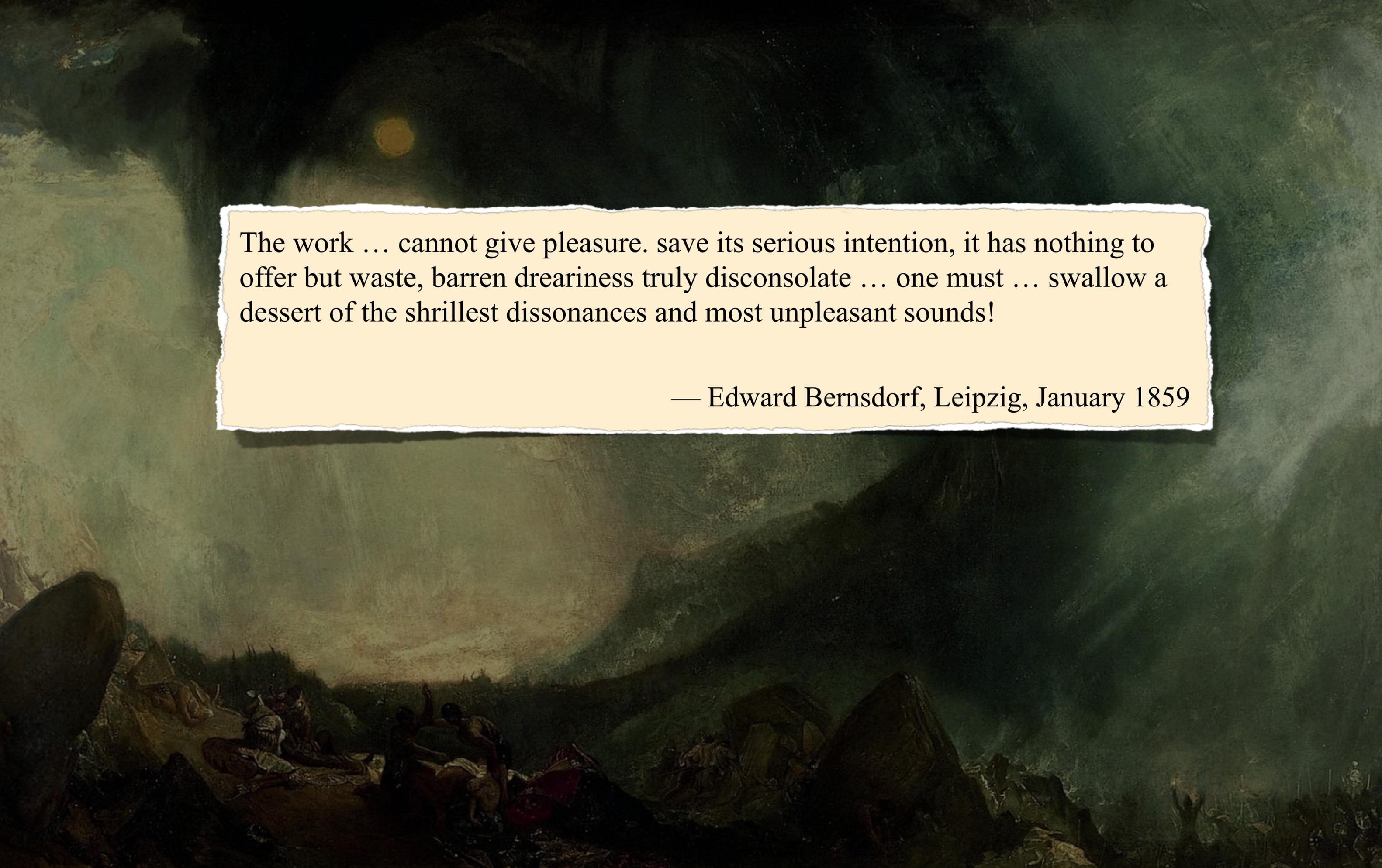
Try as he might, however, the work simply would not “go” as a symphony. An attempt to cast it as a two-piano sonata wasn’t much better; the work strained far too much at that medium’s boundaries.

By 1857 he had realized that it was a piano concerto for himself to play, and in that guise it had its official premiere in Hanover with Joachim conducting.

The background is a dark, atmospheric painting. It features a landscape with a bright, circular light source in the upper left, possibly a sun or moon, casting a glow over the scene. The foreground is filled with dark, silhouetted figures and structures, suggesting a scene of activity or conflict. The overall mood is somber and dramatic.

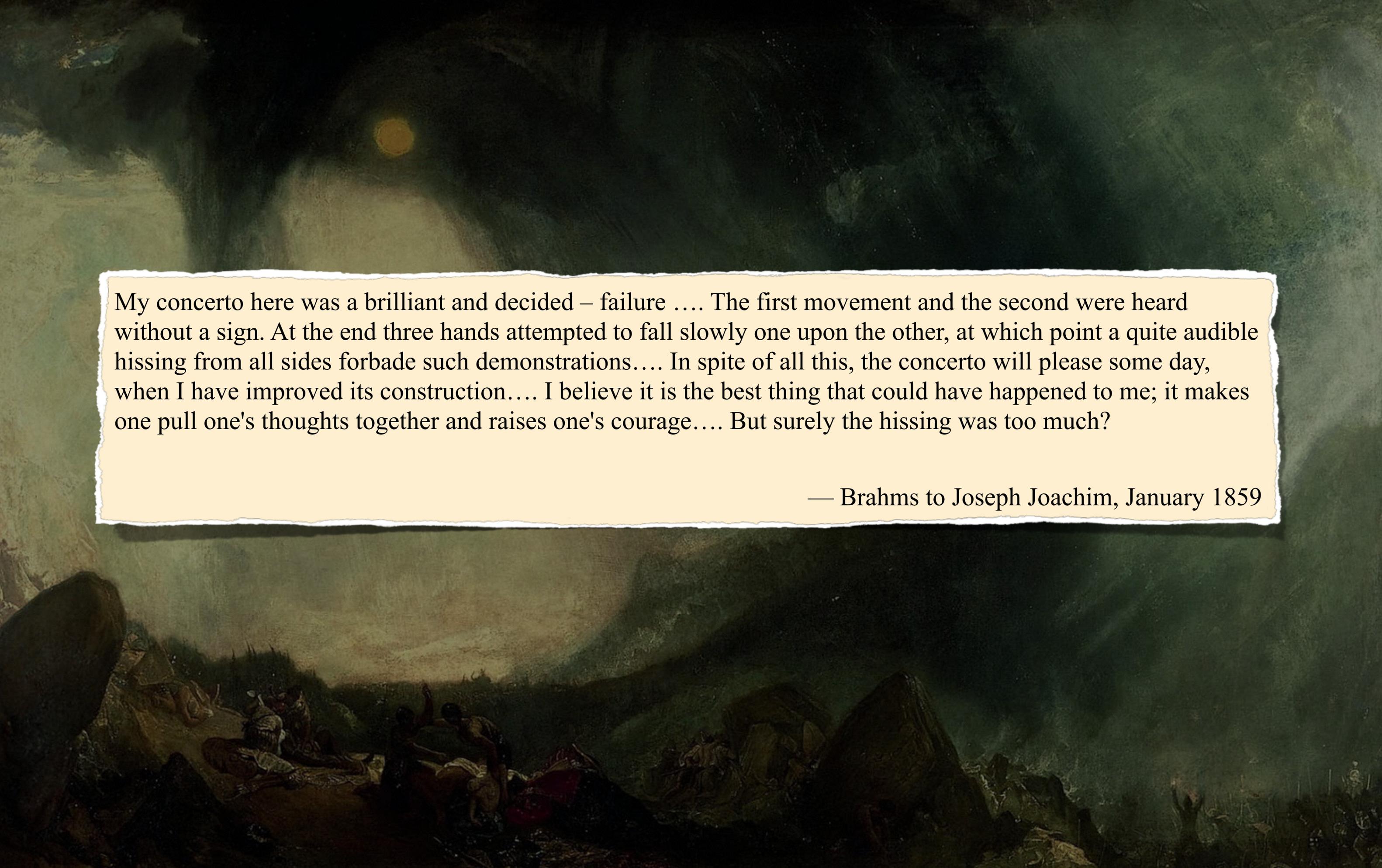
Leipzig came next. Robert Schumann's glowing article about the young Brahms had rubbed a lot of folks in Leipzig the wrong way, since they interpreted certain statements in the article to be harsh negative criticisms of several well-loved Leipzig musicians (although that had not been Schumann's intention.)

It may be that which accounts for the terrible reception given Brahms's first piano concerto in Leipzig. They actually hissed the piece.

The background is a dark, atmospheric painting. In the upper left, a bright yellowish light source, possibly the sun or moon, is visible against a dark, cloudy sky. The foreground is dark and shadowy, with several figures or objects that are difficult to discern clearly. The overall mood is somber and dramatic.

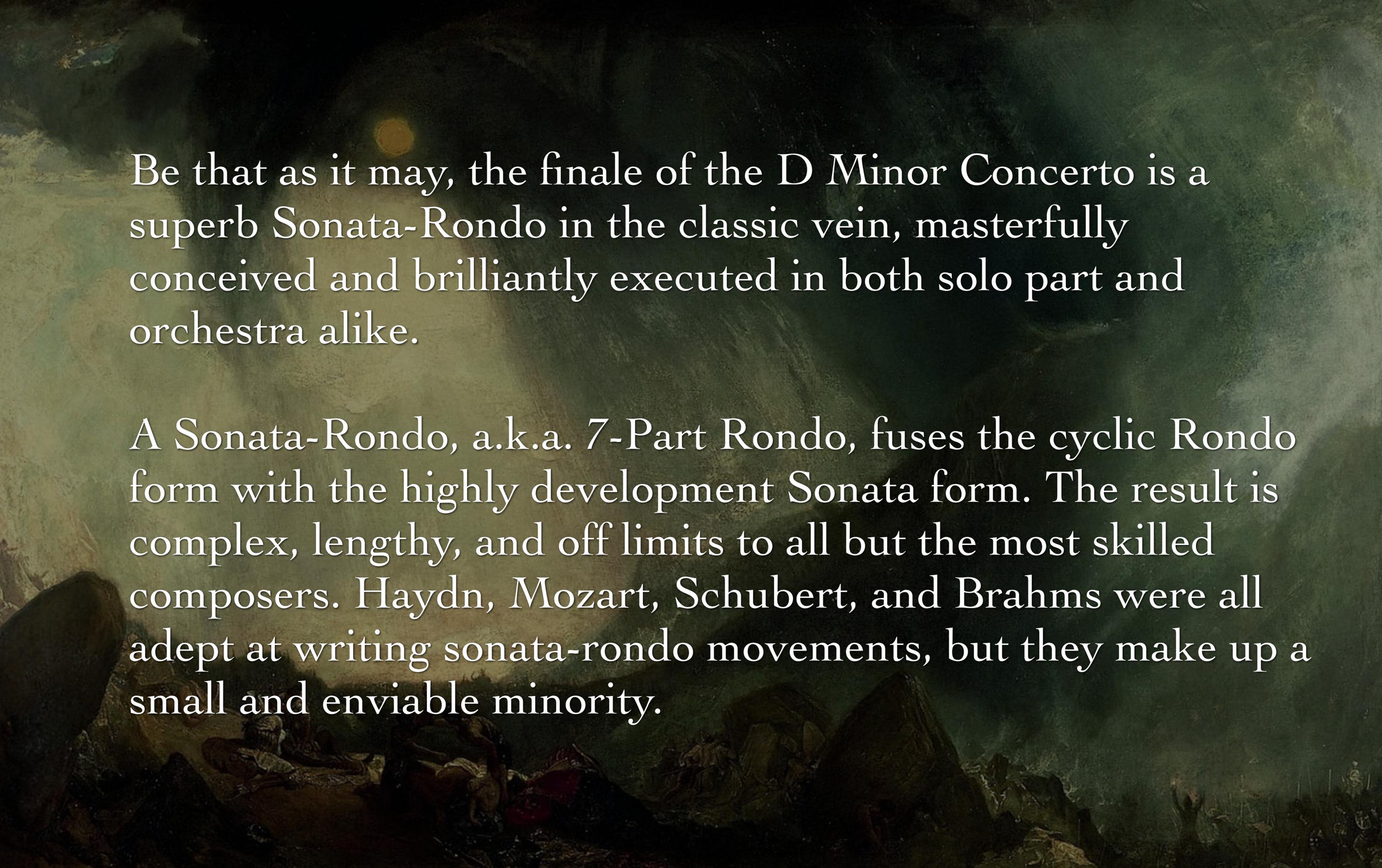
The work ... cannot give pleasure. save its serious intention, it has nothing to offer but waste, barren dreariness truly disconsolate ... one must ... swallow a dessert of the shrillest dissonances and most unpleasant sounds!

— Edward Bernsdorf, Leipzig, January 1859

A dark, atmospheric painting of a landscape. In the upper center, a bright, circular light source, possibly the sun or moon, glows against a dark, cloudy sky. The foreground is dominated by dark, silhouetted figures and structures, possibly a camp or a group of people in a rugged, mountainous terrain. The overall mood is somber and dramatic, with strong contrasts between light and shadow.

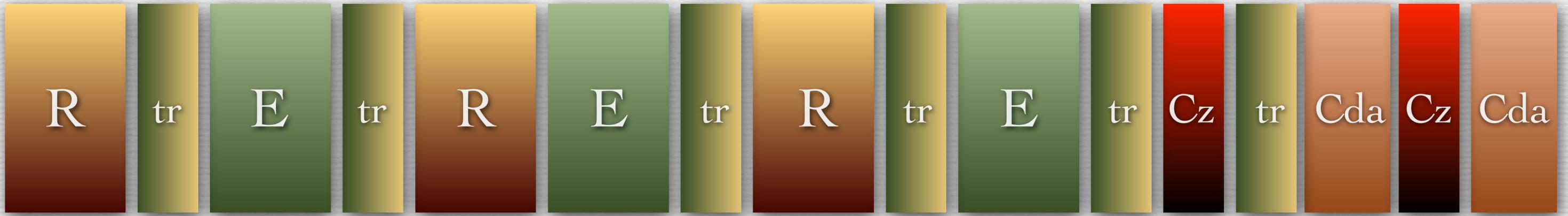
My concerto here was a brilliant and decided – failure The first movement and the second were heard without a sign. At the end three hands attempted to fall slowly one upon the other, at which point a quite audible hissing from all sides forbade such demonstrations.... In spite of all this, the concerto will please some day, when I have improved its construction.... I believe it is the best thing that could have happened to me; it makes one pull one's thoughts together and raises one's courage.... But surely the hissing was too much?

— Brahms to Joseph Joachim, January 1859

A dark, atmospheric painting of a landscape. The scene is dimly lit, with a small, glowing light source in the upper left sky area. The foreground is dominated by dark, shadowed rocks and what appears to be a body of water or a path leading into the distance. The overall mood is somber and mysterious.

Be that as it may, the finale of the D Minor Concerto is a superb Sonata-Rondo in the classic vein, masterfully conceived and brilliantly executed in both solo part and orchestra alike.

A Sonata-Rondo, a.k.a. 7-Part Rondo, fuses the cyclic Rondo form with the highly development Sonata form. The result is complex, lengthy, and off limits to all but the most skilled composers. Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, and Brahms were all adept at writing sonata-rondo movements, but they make up a small and enviable minority.



Pr

Sc

Pr

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Exposition

Development

Recapitulation

Key 1 → Key 2

Key 1 → Key 1



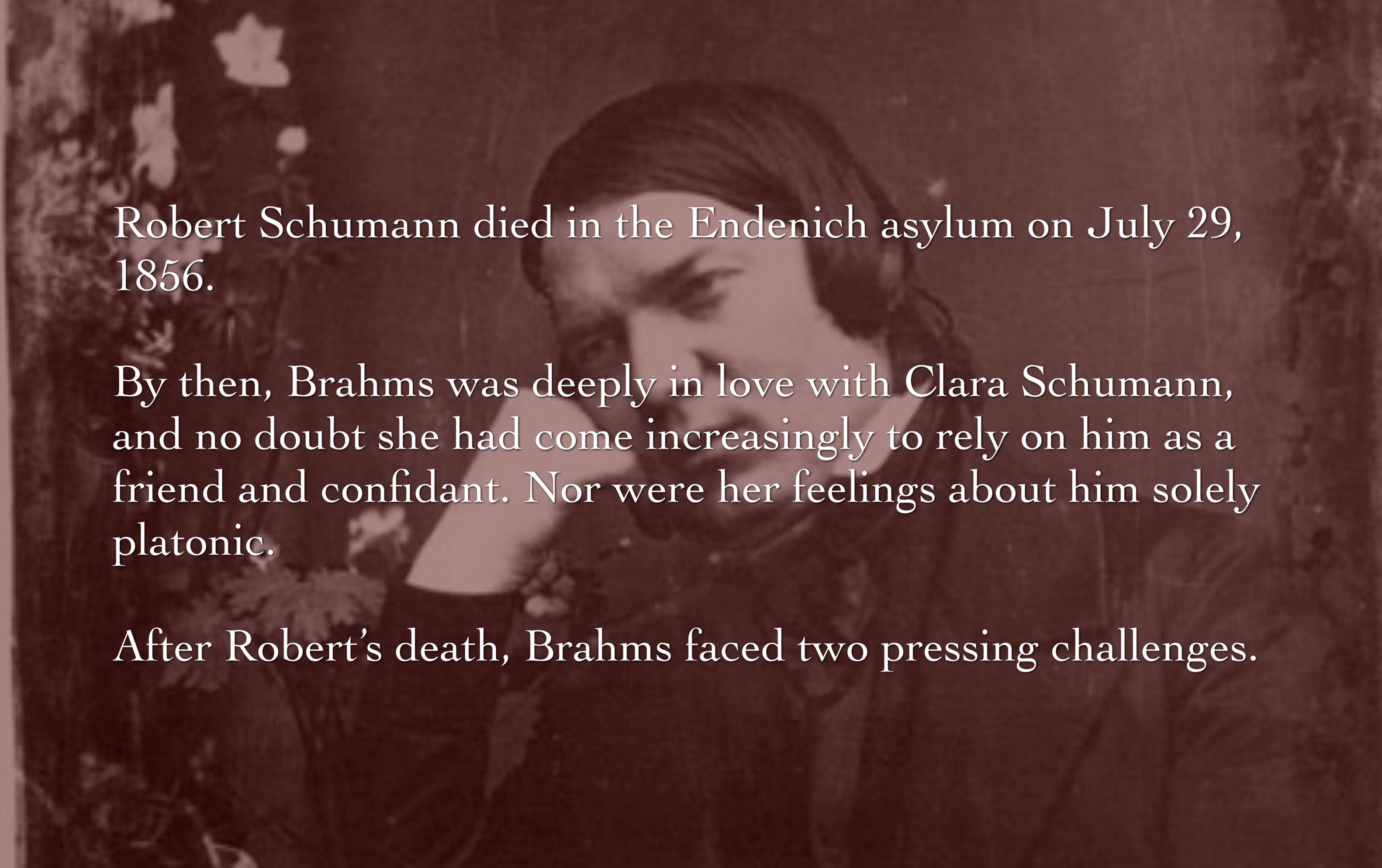
Reprise

a – Piano solo

a - Orchestra

b - Piano solo

a - Piano and orchestra



Robert Schumann died in the Endenich asylum on July 29, 1856.

By then, Brahms was deeply in love with Clara Schumann, and no doubt she had come increasingly to rely on him as a friend and confidant. Nor were her feelings about him solely platonic.

After Robert's death, Brahms faced two pressing challenges.

Neue

First:

Zeitschrift für Musik.
He had to resume his career, which had been partly stalled during Schumann's illness.

Herausgegeben

durch einen

Berein von Künstlern und Kunstfreunden.

Erster Band.

(April bis December 1834.)



Second:

Johannes and Clara had decide what happened next.