

Analysis and interpretation of Brahms's "Clarinet Sonata No. 1 in f minor"

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Abstract: Brahms' Sonata No. 2 in E-flat Major also plays an important role in the history of clarinet music in the world. In order to improve the expressive force of the works, this paper analyzes Brahms' clarinet representative works, analyzes and discusses the playing techniques and performance effects of the clarinet, analyzes its acoustic characteristics and performance, studies its application value and significance, puts forward the balance between the clarinet and piano performance, and analyzes the rationality of its use. It helps to enrich the understanding and knowledge of the works, enrich and perfect the playing skills.

1. Introduction

Brahms's clarinet works are excellent works on the international music stage, with beautiful melody and difficult performance, and are required in all major clarinet performance competitions around the world. It is necessary to conduct a comprehensive analysis of this work from various aspects, such as harmony form and playing skills, in order to inherit and develop the musical culture.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was a mid-romantic composer. Most of his works for piano, symphonies and chamber music have become major works in modern concerts. Because of his contributions to music, the German musician Hans Guido Freiherr von Bülow (1830-1894) compared him to J.S. Bach (1685-1750) and L.V. Beethoven (1770-1827) and listed as "Germany 3B". Tingting Zhou points out that the rich emotion of the work comes from his relationship with the Schumann family. His works are usually based on romantic themes, and his emotional expression is mostly based on brokenhearted love. ^[1] K Cassisa studied problems in actual performance, including analysis of rhythm, pronunciation, emotional expression, etc. ^[2] Liu Youming analyzed the work from two aspects of musical style and playing technique ^[3]. Liu Shitong pointed out that the structure of the work was standardized, with both the clear form and structure characteristics of sonatas in the classical period and the strong, free and unrestrained musical performance characteristics of the Romantic period. He analyzed the work in actual performance and improved the performance level. Jiang Yan said that understanding the composer's intention is the key to performing the work well ^[4].

In this paper, while understanding the composer's life and creation background, the author will discuss the musical analysis and performance interpretation of this work, and explain the problems encountered in cooperation with the piano and the key points in performance.

2. The life and creation background of Brahms

2.1. The life of Brahms

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1833, and was exposed to music from an early age by his father, who was a professional musician, proficient in a variety of instruments, such as violin, double bass, flute and horn, and his mother, a seamstress who read a lot of poetry. Brahms had a good relationship with his mother since childhood, and her mother gave Brahms the greatest support and encouragement, which also influenced Brahms's life.

Brahms's musical life was started by his father, who served as his first teacher, and in 1840 he

studied piano with Otto Friedrich Willibald Cossel. In 1843 he continued his studies in piano and music composition theory with Cossel's teacher Eduard Marxsen.

In 1853, Brahms toured Germany with the Hungarian violinist Eduard Remónyl. He came into contact with some Hungarian musical styles and customs, which had a great influence on his later creation. During the tour he met lifelong friends: violinist Joseph Joachim, contemporary pianist Franz Liszt and renowned musician Robert Schumann and his wife. Because Schumann thought Brahms's musical talent was outstanding, he published an article titled "New Road" in his "New Music magazine" to praise Brahms, which made Brahms's fame started. So Brahms and Schumann had a deep relationship.

In 1857, Brahms began to draft the German Requiem (German Requiem) following the death of his mentor and friend Schumann, and he also wrote a number of other works during this period, mostly for piano. It was not until the death of his mother in 1865 that he accelerated the writing of the German Requiem, which was published in 1869 to great acclaim and hailed as "one of the most successful works after Bach's Mass in b Minor and Beethoven's Solemn Mass". Then he entered the most mature and prosperous period of his work, the completion of the "Variation on a Theme by Haydn" in 1873, the completion of his Symphony No.1 in c minor (Op.68) in 1876, and the completion of his work. Following the completion of his Symphony No.2 D Major, Op.73 in 1877, Brahms wrote his famous Violin Concerto in D Major, Op.77, for his best friend Joachim. He completed Symphonies No.3 F Major Op.90 (1883) and No.4 in e minor Op.98 (1885).

Beginning in 1890, Brahms was at the end of his creative career, and just as he was about to announce that he was not writing, he met clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, and was attracted by his exquisite performance and round and delicate timbre, and began to create some works for the clarinet. Among them are the Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano in a minor, Op.114, and the Clarinet Quintet in b minor, Op.115. In 1894, Brahms wrote two more famous Clarinet Sonatas for Richard Moorfield, Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in f minor Op.120 No.1. and "Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in Eb Major Op.120 No.2", premiered by them themselves. After Clara Schumann's death in 1896, Brahms died of liver cancer on April 3, 1897, at the age of 64.

2.2. Background for the creation of Clarinet Sonata No. 1 in f Minor

Brahms composed a total of four works for clarinet, including the clarinet Trio, the clarinet quintet, and two sonatas for clarinet and piano, all of which were completed in his later years. In 1890, when Brahms completed the String Quintet Op.111 No.2, which he considered to be the best work of his life, the public opinion considered him the "heir to Beethoven", and Brahms wanted to stop writing. However, in 1891, when Brahms heard a brilliant interpretation of the clarinet by Richard Mühlfeld, clarinetist of the Meningen Guentau Orchestra, he was attracted by the round and delicate tone of the clarinet, and inspired him to write two works for the clarinet Trio and clarinet Quintet. After listening to Moorfeld's interpretation, Brahms wrote two famous clarinet sonatas for clarinet again in 1894, "Clarinet Sonata No. 1 in f Minor" and "Clarinet Sonata No. 2 in E Flat Major".

In these two clarinet sonatas, op. 120, it can be seen that Brahms did not want to focus on clarinet technique, but showed the soft and delicate timbre of clarinet in the seemingly simple melody, using the uniqueness of the instrument to show the music, and the music showed his inner depression and dark emotion, which seemed to walk him in the sunset. Feeling preoccupied. His inner emotional expression in the works, and the opposition to the flashy surface effect is the pursuit of his life, but also in his last two works have been confirmed, can be said to be the highest masterpiece in his later years.

3. Analysis of Clarinet Sonata No. 1 in f minor

3.1. First movement

The first movement is Allegro appassionato, in sonata form, which is divided into three parts: exposition, development and recapitulation. The exposition (bars 1-89) begins with a prelude theme,

a first theme, a second theme, and an end theme (bars 1-4). The main motifs for the development of the movement are composed of the ascending fourth, connecting the descending second (A1), four descending second progressions (A2), and dotted quarter notes with three consecutive eighth notes (A3). The clarinet then brings out the first theme in the main part (bars 5-12), which consists of a continuous up and down third (motifs B), and uses two big jumps in bars 6 and 8 to increase the tension of the phrase, and the ending triplet (motifs C) material is widely used in the development of the first theme.

In bar 28, the piano uses a continuous G-drop to signal the next key, D major, and to officially enter Db major in bar 38. In the connecting part (bars 38-52), the piano adds value to the note A of the prelude, presenting it in half notes, and the Hemiola is played in alternating half notes with the right and left hands, which changes the original triple meter rhythm. The clarinet part connects the pattern of the third with a continuous upward fifth (motive D), and stops at the 7 of the i7 chord in Db major and changes to the second phrase by switching parts. In bar 60, at the most intense part of the phrase, the clarinet adds tension with the motifs of the second theme and the broken chords of sixteenth notes, while the piano adds momentum and texture to the motifs. Bar 68 Piano and clarinet play the motion-E pattern in an interleaved manner, bringing the melody into the closing theme.

In the closing theme of bar 77, the piano talks to the broken chord of the clarinet sixteenth note descending in the eighth note pattern used by the clarinet in bar 17, finally stopping in the key of c minor. The expansion (bars 90-137) is divided into four sections, mainly to change the motivations of the previous ones in different tones. The composer develops the connecting motifs D in Ab major and E major for the first and second stanzas. The third and fourth stanzas enter in a decisive manner, contrasting the style of the preceding stanzas, changing the motifs of the prelude with a short, clean dotted rhythm in c# minor and f# minor, and finally returning to f minor with a homonym (c#=d).

The recapitulation (bars 138-213) begins with the clarinet playing the first theme still in f minor, the line key is used to reproduce the connecting theme in bar 153, and the second theme is returned to f minor in bar 168, while the music returns to the tension. For the finale (bars 214-236), both the piano and clarinet maintain the dominant tone in f minor to emphasize tonality, and use the triplet C of the prelude theme to extend the melody. In bar 227, the piano plays the prelude theme for the last time with the sense of the decomposition of the pitch and the calm of the upper band, and finally stops on the major triad of the reduction of the A note in f minor level I to end the movement.

3.2. Second movement

The second movement consists of A slightly slower *Andante un poco Adagio*, ABA, and A (bars 1-22), which begins with a clarinet playing the theme melody of two small phrases, consisting of dotted quarter notes and thirty-second note grace clusters. This is followed by a continuous eighth note pattern to connect the second phrase (a2), with two melodic motifs in the theme, the clarinet F-E-D at the beginning and the B-A-G-F-E at the fifth bar showing the descending second motifs; The clarinet in bar 16 of the second piece, D-F-A-C, is the upward third mover.

B (bars 23-48) consists of two pieces and a transition piece, with the piano playing a broken chord in a sixteenth note rhythm pattern, which is the theme and rhythmic motive of B and is used throughout the passage. Tonally, the way of playing through decomposition changes frequently, and the decomposed sixteenth notes create a sense of musical flow that contrasts with the long thematic lines of A. Bar 41 reproduces part of the theme of paragraph A, but this time the theme is played and developed by the piano, and the clarinet plays the left hand part of the theme of paragraph A. The two reproductions of the theme, one in E major and the other in C major, are officially returned to Ab major and entered into paragraph A in bar 49. The main theme of stanza A (bars 49-81) is the same as that of Stanza A, except that the composer has lowered the melody of the clarinet by an octave, changed the volume from the original *poco f* to *p*, and changed the piano part from chords to a broken way of playing. The epilogue uses the same technique as the first movement. The melody echoes at the beginning and end. The piano first plays the theme of sixteenth notes in B, and then the clarinet plays the theme of melody in A as the end of the second movement.

3.3. The third movement

The third movement is the elegant *Allegretto grazioso*, with ABA. Paragraph A (bars 1-46) can be divided into five small phrases. The a1 phrase (bars 1-8) is played by A clarinet in a weak starting beat. The theme is composed of dotted quarter notes and eighth notes. Brings out the whole atmosphere and rhythm of the third movement dance. The a2 phrase (bar 9.16) is repeated by the piano on the previous a1 theme, while the clarinet responds with a rhythm of three eighth notes.

In the a3 phrase (bars 17-28), both the clarinet and the piano enter the theme in the following octave, and the clarinet plays the theme a in the same rhythm with the technique of reflection. Two bars later, the bass part of the left hand of the piano continues the melody in the way of Canon. In the a4 sentence (bars 29-38), the melody of the clarinet extends the two music, while the piano imitates the theme of a1 after four small stanzas, the clarinet continues to develop the theme melody, and the theme is expanded in the a5 sentence (bars 39-46) to end paragraph A.

Section B (bars 47-90) can be divided into four minor pieces: b1(bars 47-54) and b2(bars 55-62). The main melody is played by the piano. The left hand mainly steps up and down with successive quarter notes, while the right hand plays the intervals of the second and third degrees of the steps down with the left hand in a syngated way, forming the theme of section B. The clarinet is based on second and third intervals on the bass. The first four bars of the b2 sentence are replaced by the clarinet bass for the piano, both in the relative minor of f minor. b3 (bars 63-78) After continuing to syncopate four minor sections, the single pipe and piano play the same rhythmic pattern in an interlacing manner, using harmonic changes to shift the tone from Ab back to f minor. b4 (bar 79.90) The single pipe plays the theme of section B for the first time, three degrees off the syncopation of the piano, and a series of downturns ends section B calmly. The structure of segment A is basically the same as that of segment A, and the phrases are also divided into five small phrases, and the tonality of the whole segment returns to Ab major, ending the movement.

3.4. Fourth movement

The fourth movement is *Vivace* (*Vivace*), in circumflex form, section A (1-41) is tolled like A bell by the piano with three half notes F, and these three half notes (motive A), which are also one of the important materials of the movement, throughout the whole piece. After three half notes, the inner part of the piano plays an eighth note that goes up two degrees and connects three degrees (motive B), and pushes the music to the top through the hands in the same and opposite pattern, then plays it again in the lower octave. Bar 9 begins with the A of section a (bars 9-16), the single tube plays the theme of section A with consecutive eighth notes, with a smooth and graceful legato compared with a light staccato, and the three notes at the end act melodic motion C in a second degree. In bar 17, the tone shifts from F major to a minor. The piano plays in unison to imitate the rhythm of the eighth notes of the theme in A. The clarinet mimics the left hand of the piano one beat ahead of time after four stanzas. In bar 32, clarinet and piano alternate motive A and motive B.

Bar 42 enters the key of B (bars 42-61), coming to the dominant C major of E major, and the theme melody of B can be divided into two phrases. In the first phrase (bars 42-53), the piano and A single alarm pipe play the melody of A and B in a second rhythm pattern composed of three quarter notes, showing a soft and continuous melody line. The second phrase (bar 54-61), in which the clarinet alternates the last melody of the first phrase with the piano in a diminished manner, sounds like a continuous string of eighth note material.

The thematic motivation and tonality of paragraph A' (bars 62-118) are the same as those of paragraph A. Bar 62 reproduces the theme of the prelude to paragraph A but this time with clarinet and piano presenting motive A and motive B alternately. In bars 114-118, new material is introduced to preview the theme of paragraph C, with two adjacent notes alternating between the clarinet and the piano in the form of eighth notes followed by dotted quarter notes. The theme of paragraph C (bars 119-141), presented mainly in the form of adjacent band dotted rhythm, comes tonally to d minor. In the first sentence, the piano plays the theme melody of the preceding sentence first, and the clarinet plays the last sentence after the fourth stanza. In the second sentence, the clarinet plays the first sentence, the piano plays the last sentence, and then the clarinet extends the

theme of paragraph C and connects it to paragraph B.

The structure of B' is roughly the same as that of B' (bars 142-173), and the tonality is also returned to F major. The difference is the way the two instruments present the melody. This time, the homophone A is played by the right hand of clarinet and piano, and the theme melody begins in bar 163 of the left hand of the piano. The pattern of Mote A is constantly used to make A tonal shift to Db major in bars 163-166, to A major in bars 167, to F major again until bar 170, and then to A ". Paragraph A "(subsections 174-220) has the same structure as paragraph A. Finally, the piano pushes the momentum to the highest point with a continuous eighth note, emphasizing the F major I chord to end the whole piece.

4. Discussion on Clarinet and piano cooperation of Clarinet Sonata No. 1 in f Minor

4.1. First movement

The expression of this movement is the term "appassionato", but for the "enthusiasm" written by Brahms, it is not the external outburst of enthusiasm, but the restrained and suppressed enthusiasm, and what Brahms wants to express through music is the deep emotional expression of the heart. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the control of the timbre, including some ultra-high register parts of the sound, but also through the breath speed, abdominal support and the relaxation of the mouth to control, so that the timbre is warm and round.

The first 1-4 bars of the piano, playing the main motive of the movement at the volume of poco f, can appropriately have a little free speed, showing emotion full of heat yet repressed. The first theme melody of the clarinet needs to pay special attention to the use of breath, and make a crescendo on bar 11-12 to the piano to highlight the dotted notes that the piano appears in bar 12. Towards the end of the main part, the pianist can have an elastic speed at bar 37, slowing it down a bit and making a fade, easing the mood of the piece and entering the connecting part with a warm tone.

In the second theme of bar 53, there is an obvious change in musical personality, and the dull and low timbre of the clarinet creates a sense of mystery. The clarinet must pay attention to the tone and volume of the bass E, and play the bass range in a weak but clear manner, especially on the dotted sixteenth notes, which must be played accurately with the piano (see Example 3-1-3). At the 60th bar, clarinets should pay attention to the timbre control of the high E, and in the later long notes, they should listen to the quarter note and chord of the piano part to avoid the beat of the sixteenth note cluster.

In the development part, the tone is relatively unstable, the style of the music is mainly lyrical, and the duet part of the piano and clarinet forms a long phrase. The author suggests that there can be a difference in timbre in the part of tonal transformation. In bar 116, there is a forced f as a contrast to the previous paragraph. The main tension push is that the piano triplet and clarinet syncopation pile can be seen that the playing method of this paragraph is different from the lyrical paragraph in the previous paragraph.

For the epilogue, the composer alternates the triplet motion between the piano and the clarinet. The clarinet listens for the treble of the right hand of the piano in the long part, and connects the triplet to the piano. In bars 218 to 219, the author suggests that the clarinet can have a pause, a sense of lifting, and then a second phrase. At the end of the endpiece, the single pipe needs to listen to the decomposition of the tone of the piano, and change the tone at the exact time, and pause a little before the last homophone D, and the whole movement ends in a peaceful atmosphere.

4.2. Second movement

The slow Andante un poco Adagio in the second movement is the only adagio in the four movements. Due to the long lines of the phrases in the movement, the speed is slow and there are not many notes, so we need to pay more attention to the direction and flow of the phrases. The clarinet and the piano need to have the same idea on speed. The coordination of the air mouth and the cohesion between the melodies also need to be traced through many exercises.

In paragraph A, when the clarinet attaches quarter notes to eighth notes, it needs to listen more to the small beat given by the piano part, and drive the piano into the next bar in an active way. In the thirty-two quart group, there can be some freedom in speed, and the breath can increase the sense of driving the phrase. The accompaniment pattern composed of half notes and eighth notes of the piano also needs to move in a more horizontal direction under the flowing melody of the clarinet to avoid too much vertical harmonic development. By bar 7, the rhythm is eighth notes, and the composer notes that the *espressivo* (emotional) clarinet can be played with more air, so that the eighth notes are directed to the E in bar 9, and the corresponding volume is compared in bar 11. The second phrase of paragraph A is basically the same as the first phrase, but the composer marks *dolce*(soft), so it can be played in a softer and darker tone to highlight the climax of the 19 bar phrase. Section B is mainly composed of the flowing sixteenth notes of the piano. Due to the frequent tonal conversion, the clarinet can adjust the volume and timbre corresponding to the conversion of the tonal tone of the piano. The speed should follow the speed of segment A and push forward the sixteenth notes shuttled between the clarinet and the piano in a more fluid manner.

4.3. The third movement

In the third movement, *Allegretto grazioso* is an elegant melody played by A single table pipe. The melody lines need to have the style of triple time of dance music. The sense of rhythm promoted from the third beat to the first beat each time can produce coherence through the change of gas speed. When playing, it is still necessary to take the long sentence line as the direction, and there is no sense of pause in the sentence because the first beat is heavier. In addition, when entering the a3 phrase of the 17th bar, it is necessary to pay attention to the volume balance between the piano and the clarinet. Because the melody of the clarinet is low in the range, the volume is mainly played strongly, and the timbre should not be overly rough, but is presented in a round and thick timbre. After 2 bars, the melody of the left hand of the piano is connected, and the volume of the clarinet can be slightly lighter to make the piano melody line come out.

Section B is dominated by the piano descending tone with syncopated rhythm, and the bass line of the pipe is contrasted with the crisp sound of the piano treble. The piano can add a bit of elastic speed to the phrase, highlighting the line of the left hand while the right hand emerges on the melody with a lighter touch. When the volume between the clarinet and the piano reaches 3-3-3) to balance, it will produce a hazy and soft sound.

4.4. Fourth movement

The fourth movement is *Vivace* (lively and powerful), which is different from the depressed style of the first three movements. The fourth movement gives the people a lively and cheerful feeling, and the composer uses various expressions and dynamics symbols to distinguish the styles between the passages of the movement. Beginning with the piano playing a homophone that mimics horns and bells, followed by eighth notes in rapid clusters, the composer noted that non legato e ben marc(not smooth and decisive) pianos can create a granniness of notes with disjointed and rapid keystrokes. In the fourth bar, the composer shows the uniqueness of the clarinet's dynamic change by changing the volume one by one. When the clarinet enters, it is necessary to ensure that it is played at the exact time, and avoid making the timbre too sharp due to the performance of strength. The author suggests that the inspiration is prepared in advance to avoid the instability of the mouth.

In bars 9-10 the composer marked *grazioso*(elegant) and bars 11-12 *leggiero*(light) to show the variety of clarinet playing. In performance, the clarinet can first play the elegant melody in the staccato form of the last two bars with a relatively stable air flow, while ensuring that the air speed creates resistance, avoiding too heavy tongue and playing too short staccato. The piano part can focus on horizontal lines in the first two bars and vertical harmonies in the last two bars, helping the clarinet to show the contrast between melodies.

From the beginning of segment B, both clarinet and piano play the melody in A triplet rhythm pattern. Compared with the decisive and powerful style of segment A, the melody in segment B is more lyrical and soft with longer melody lines. When the 46 bar clarinet and piano present the melody in three degrees, the volume needs to listen to each other to achieve a balanced effect. In bar

54, when the piano and the single pipe use eighth note material to closely connect the melody line, it is suggested that the piano can bring the sound force at the end of the sentence up to connect with the clarinet in the upward tone.

The theme of paragraph C of bar 119, labeled by the composer "smplice" (simply), consists of 8 bars of music played by the piano for 4 bars, followed by the clarinet for 4 bars, and the second phrase is played by the clarinet for 4 bars and followed by the piano for 4 bars. The whole piece is presented in a relaxed style, so it can be used a little less for crescendos and crescendos, but there still needs to be a clear difference in the contrast between the volume of p and pp marked on the composer's phrase. In bar 131-136, the melody of the piano and the clarinet is connected. The clarinet needs to listen to the increasing volume of the piano in bar 133-134 and make a volume connection with it. The pp in bar 137 also needs to make a clear contrast with the previous music. The finale (bars 211-220), with the help of the upward push of the eighth notes of the piano, reaches its peak in volume and momentum. When the clarinet connects to the piano, it needs to pay attention to the level change in volume. The sextet of bar 215 needs to pay attention to the speed of playing and can end the whole piece with a slight speed buffer before the last bar.

5. Conclusion

Through the paper, I have learned about Brahms's background and creation style at that time. In the Clarinet Sonata No. 1 in f Minor, the composer fully demonstrated the characteristics of the clarinet instrument, flexibly switching between strong and weak volume, legato and staccato, while the piano part and clarinet were closely coordinated. In my own experience, I have come to the following conclusions about how to achieve sound balance between clarinet and piano:

The choice of timbre. In this piece, piano and clarinet need to make corresponding timbre changes for different harmonic changes and melody styles. Achieving volume balance in cooperation is not just about lowering or increasing the intensity, changing the timbre between the two can also make the integration between the two better.

The play of the role. In this piece, the clarinet sometimes plays a double melody lead with the piano part, and sometimes serves as an accompaniment to the piano part. It is necessary to clarify the role division of the two in the passage first, in order to cooperate with each other in performance.

The point in time when it gets stronger and weaker. When clarinet and piano crescendo on the same phrase, the piano part can choose to crescendo at a later point in time, and slowly expand the harmony while supporting the tension of the clarinet part.

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