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## Brahms: Klavierquartett op. 25 (Arr.)



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| Title          | Klavierquartett g-Moll op. 25 von Johannes Brahms für großes Orchester gesetzt |
| Time of Origin | 1937   |
| Premiere       | 7 May 1938, Los Angeles, Philharmonic Auditorium                               |
| Duration       | ca. 40 min.  |

"I venture to credit myself with having written truly new music which, being based on tradition, is destined to become tradition." Arnold Schönberg's reference to tradition, reflected in his 1931 essay "Nationale Musik," is based on historical necessity, which does not manifest itself in technical or mechanical mastery of the material, but is rather legitimized as an existential dimension through its artistic transgression of boundaries. Tradition and novelty in art stand in dialectical tension with one another, as Thomas Mann reveals through the artist figure of Adrian Leverkühn in his novel "Doktor Faustus," which was inspired by Schönberg's "method of composition with twelve tones related only to each other:" "For as little as one can understand the new and the youthful without being at home in tradition, so must love for the old remain inauthentic and sterile if one closes oneself off to the new, which has emerged from it with historical necessity." A reference to tradition is not an expression of artistic simplification of a traditional aesthetic concept, but rather its necessary further development and reflection: "I do not put much weight in being a musical boogeyman, but much more in being someone who merely continued in a natural progression from tried and true, good old tradition." (Schönberg to Werner Reinhart, July 9, 1923) In his "Notes on the Four String Quartets," Schönberg confessed in 1949 that his musical education extended back to his personal studies of the works of his models Bach and Mozart ("primarily") as well as Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner ("secondarily"), and was unfettered by academic constraints. From an early age, Arnold Schönberg taught himself compositional technique and form, as well instrumentation, by arranging works of other composers. For the young musician, it was the arrangements of operettas (by Robert Fischhof, Richard Heuberger, Leo Fall, Edmund Eysler and Franz Lehár, for example) and the writing of piano reductions that ensured his professional survival. Through the mediation of his brother-in-law Alexander Zemlinsky (who was the artistic director of the Vienna Carltheater until 1906), Schönberg received a number of commissions for orchestral arrangements. Additionally, he wrote piano arrangements for two or four hands for publishing houses (including the four-hand piano reductions from Rossini's opera "The Barber of Seville," Lortzing's "Waffenschmid," and Schubert's "Rosamunde" for Universal Edition). Later in his career, Schönberg's primary focus was on arrangements of large-scale works for smaller ensembles, which were created for performances in the Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen (Society for Private Musical Performances). During the 1920s and 1930s, however, he also arranged works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Georg

Friedrich Händel, Matthias Georg Monn, and Johannes Brahms, solely with a view to earning royalties from concerts with renowned conductors and soloists. These are not simple orchestrations of the original works, but rather highly individualized arrangements with orchestral parts full of timbral coloring and variety. The musically self-taught Arnold Schönberg was “exclusively Brahmsian” in his youth, before he began to admire Wagner in equal measure through his mentor and friend Alexander Zemlinsky: “That is why compositions from this period, such as ‘Verklärte Nacht,’ for example, show Wagnerian technique [...] on the one hand, and on the other hand, formal elements that were shaped according to the model of Brahms’ ‘technique of developing variation’ – as I called it.” (Schönberg, “Rückblick,” 1949) However, the relationship of the “conservative revolutionary” Schönberg (as Hanns Eisler famously characterized his teacher) to “Brahms, the progressive” (the title of a Schönberg lecture from 1933) is not limited to compositional aspects. In addition to their tendency to engage in polemics, both Schönberg and Brahms also tended to encode autobiographical moments within their compositions, in whose symbolic language personal expression found an immediate outlet. At the suggestion of the conductor Otto Klemperer, Schönberg’s “posthumous” contribution to the symphonic works of Johannes Brahms was written between May 2 and September 19, 1937 in Los Angeles: it was the orchestral arrangement of Brahms’ Piano Quartet in G minor, op. 25, which Schönberg occasionally referred to jokingly but also proudly as the “Fifth Symphony” of his great role model. In the anthology “Conversations with Klemperer” (1974), edited by Peter Heyworth, a telling remark by the conductor, who gave the work its premiere, survives: “One doesn’t even like to hear the original quartet anymore, the arrangement sounds so beautiful.” Schönberg’s self-assured arrangement for large orchestra achieved a significant reconfiguration of the original chamber work; and although die-hard Brahmsians may view this arrangement as pure blasphemy and a transgression of all boundaries an arranger must respect, Schönberg himself sought to de-emphasize his contribution when he wrote that “my only task was to transfer this sound to the orchestra, and I did nothing else.” (Letter to the critic Alfred Frankenstein, March 18, 1939) Regarding his incentive to arrange Brahms’ quartet he elaborates further: “1. I like the piece. 2. it is rarely played. 3. it is always played very badly, because the better the pianist, the louder he plays, and you can’t hear the strings. I wanted to hear everything for once, and I achieved that.” Schönberg’s uncompromising liberties in his treatment of the original are considerable – and yet, as far as its compositional text is concerned, the original score remains almost dogmatically untouched. What is new is the interpretation of the musical depth perspective, which “abruptly violates the discretion of chamber music-making” (Peter Gülke); the discourse Brahms intended for four players is now transposed to a large orchestra with percussion. “My intentions: To remain strictly within Brahms’ style and not to go further than he himself would have gone if he were alive today.”