

THE “WILD BEAUTY” OF BRAHMS’S RHAPSODIES, OP. 79. STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCES

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SUMMARY. The present paper focuses on the *Two Rhapsodies*, Op. 79 which, along with Op. 119 No. 4, form the triad of Brahms’s rhapsodies for piano. Devised according to the ancient notion of the rhapsody, with the development of the epic tension, these works evoke the “Charites and the Heroes”, following the technical and compositional patterns laid out in the piano miniatures in Op. 76, at the same time, recalling the ideas that lay at the basis of the *Ballads* Op. 10. In the first part of the paper, aspects regarding the analysis of the structure are revealed, the aim of the research being the disclosure of the constituting structure, which will inspire the performing artist to convey and reveal the composer’s intentions. A system of structural ramification has been made, starting from the overall image to the smallest details, represented in tables that contain the following aspects: structure, main structural elements, thematic material, tonal scheme. Within the analysis, the harmonic and rhythmic dimensions will be indicated as well. The second objective of the research concerns three important renditions of pianists Radu Lupu, Martha Argerich, and Murray Perahia – three distinct conceptions regarding the performance, the style, and technique as well. Elements pertaining to the following dimensions will be observed: agogic accents and dynamics, phrasing, tempo, faithfulness towards the score, the identification of attack techniques, touch of the keys, and use of pedals, along with the resulting sonority and the semantic connotations of the sound.

Keywords: Brahms, piano, *Rhapsodies Op. 79*, structural analysis, comparative analysis

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Introduction

Throughout his career, Johannes Brahms was drawn towards the mythical theme of heroism, represented in various forms in his works. In the third phase of his creation, also known as “the period of the symphonies”, Brahms writes two *Rhapsodies for piano* Op. 79. Inspired by the profound emotions conveyed through these works, Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, to whom the rhapsodies were dedicated, appraised their “wild beauty”. A real treasure, the impressive correspondence between Brahms and Elisabeth, throughout the duration of 15 years, reveals the image of “Lis!”, the one so dear to the composer, his inspiring muse.

A closer analysis reveals the existence of a triad of rhapsodies, composed by Brahms for the piano: the first two form the Op. 79, while the third concludes the “*monologues*” for piano Op. 119.

The two rhapsodies in Op. 79 – composed halfway through his career, in 1879, follow the technical and compositional patterns laid out in the *8 Pieces for Piano* Op. 76, and resemble the youthful concept of the *4 Ballads* Op. 10 – are naturally continued, 12 years later, with his last *Rhapsody* Op. 119 No. 4. Regarding the rhapsodies in Op. 79, Brahms’ friend, Billroth, wrote in a letter that *in both Rhapsodies [...] there is more evidence of the tumult of the young Johannes, than the mature perspective of the composer’s last works, written at the height of his career.*³

The three works are composed respecting the ancient meaning of the term *rhapsody*, with an expansion of the epic tension, which characterizes the epic poem, thus distinguishing themselves from the style of other contemporary rhapsodies of the Romantic period that contained a pattern of folkloric origin but lacked the bright accents of Liszt’s rhapsodies. Echoing the sonatas of Brahms, real “symphonies in disguise” as his mentor, Robert Schumann described them, due to the pathos and intensity of emotions, the Rhapsodies evoke “the Charites (Graces) and the heroes”.

Rhapsody in B minor, Op. 79 No. 1

The first of the two Rhapsodies in Op. 79 is written in the key of B minor and has a distinct *compound ternary form* (A – B – A), in which the A sections bear the distinguishing features of the sonata form in small-scale, with a conflicting character between the themes and sections.

³ Walter Niemann, *Brahms, Leben und Schaffen*, Berlin, 1920, p. 194.

After the repeated presentation of the Exposition, although it carries novel thematic material that will later be developed in several situations, regarding structure, the Transition functions as a passage that enables the progression towards the Development. The tensest section of the sonata, the previously presented themes and fragments are developed and explored here in various keys, the rapid ascending scales introducing the Recapitulation, where Brahms relinquishes the material of the second subject group. With a melodious theme, extracted from the episodic theme of the Transition, the central section of the Rhapsody is divided into two sub-sections, the latter with a contrasting character owing to the oscillation between major and minor modes. The restatement of the main section A is identical to its first presentation, to which the composer attaches a coda, with the purpose of "musically resolving" the central section on the major keynote (B major).

The harmonic ambiguity is ubiquitous in the *Rhapsody in B minor*, through the alternation of minor-major modes the harmonic structure acquiring the capacity to generate multiple directions of evolution. Brahms alternates between the minor and major modes and uses the common notes as "harmonic bridges", with the purpose of suddenly modulating to distant keys. In this work, all the transitions between the various sections are obtained through common notes, or modulations to the parallel keys.

The **Exposition**, between measures 1-29, consists of the first subject (mm. 1-15), Transition (mm. 16-21), second subject group (mm. 22-27), and a short conclusion (mm. 28-29).

The first subject (mm. 1-15), in the key of B minor, presents a tense, harsh, and wild theme, domineering in its length and intensity, resembling a galloping march (different from the *Rhapsody Op. 119 No. 4*), an effect obtained by the composer using dotted rhythms in the upper voice, completed by the repetitive off-beat figure in the bass (eighth rest, followed by three eighth notes), in descending arpeggios, on the degrees I-V.

The restlessness of the first subject is amplified, through an antithetical device between the upper voices and the accompaniment. The second phrase (mm. 5-8) is the melodic inversion of the first phrase, the main theme reaching its first *climax* in the third phrase (mm. 11-12), due to the syncopated ascending chords.

E.g. 1

The musical score for the first subject of Brahms' Rhapsody in B minor, Op. 79 No. 1, measures 1-8. The piece is in F-sharp minor and 2/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Agitato'. The score consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system shows the beginning with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line. The second system continues the piece, featuring a 'cresc.' marking in the eighth measure.

Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
The first subject, mm. 1-8

Although the key of F-sharp minor is introduced in measure 10, its distinct sonority is perceived merely at the beginning of the transition (m. 16). **The transition**, in the dominant key (mm. 16-21), begins in the minor mode, which induces the listener a threatening and restless atmosphere, using a double descending chromaticism (mm. 18-20), a genuine and unexpected *Passus duriusculus*. The dominant key naturally transforms into the major key (m. 20), preparing the listener for a revival of the tonic note (*B*), a conclusion that will not be attained, however.

E.g. 2.

The musical score for the transition of Brahms' Rhapsody in B minor, Op. 79 No. 1, measures 16-19. The piece is in D major and 2/4 time. The score consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. The first system shows the beginning with a 'fp' marking in the first measure. The second system continues the piece, featuring an 'm.g.' marking in the second measure.

Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
Transition, mm. 16-19

Maintaining the pulsation of eighth notes in the Transition, the **second subject** (mm. 22-27) – alluding to Beethoven's fate motif – is derived from the first subject, through the augmentation of the note values in the bass, along with the motif of the upper voice. Thus, beginning on the same F-sharp note, the second subject starts abruptly in the harmonic scale of its relative (D major). The perception of a new tonic note is questioned immediately in

the second measure, the key of D major resembling rather the dominant key of G minor, then G major in measure 26, and again G minor in measure 27. The solemnity and calmness of the moment is emphasized by the harmonic pedal of the relative key, which serves as a basis for the construction of the second subject, terminating the Exposition with a short harmonic conclusion (mm. 28-29).

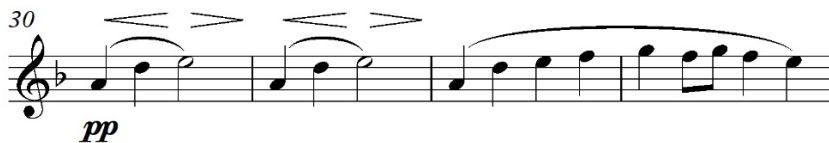
E.g. 3



Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
The second subject, mm. 22-23

The following 9 measures (mm. 30-38) serve as a transition towards the Development, marked *in tempo*. In this segment, Brahms introduces a completely new thematic material, in which timidly a supplicating theme takes form, in the parallel minor key, constructed on a harmonic pedal that persists from the previous section.

E.g. 4



Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
The episodic theme of the segment that leads up to the Development,
mm. 30-33

The motif nucleus, consisting of 3 ascending notes that form the interval of a perfect fourth and a major second, first generates the episodic theme of the transition and later is invested with diverse traits. Thus, the transition becomes valuable.

In the **Development** (mm. 39-66), Brahms elaborates various fragments from the main themes, in ascending sequences, on different scale degrees, and in diverse registers, culminating with the imitation, in both hands, of the main thematic motif. Thus, using Classical compositional techniques, he obtains unique Romantic sound structures. One may observe the reversed order of thematic elaboration, the musical discourse is vigorously attacked with the first segment of the second subject in *staccato*, and elements belonging to the first subject in a descending sequence.

E.g. 5

in tempo

Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
Development, mm. 39-42

In the following 6 measures, the second subject is presented in opposition, this time in *legato*, with the dynamic indication *piano mezza-voce*, in an ascending sequence that culminates with the first subject. The frequent repetitions of the motives, in canonic imitations (mm. 49-52), intensify the entire passage, reaching the climax of the Development in measures 60-61. Here, for the first time, the composer marks the *fortissimo* dynamic indication.

E.g. 6

Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
Development, mm. 49-52

E.g. 7

**Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
Development, mm. 60-61**

Brahms has a remarkable and original manner of creating harmonic delusions. The composer’s authentic perspective regarding the harmonic and functional dimensions of the musical discourse may be observed in the second sequence as well (mm. 56-57), constructed on the ascending chromatic scale in the bass. The sequence begins in B minor and concludes on B major, key written in its enharmonic equivalent (C-flat major), eventually reaching the key of F major in a very natural fashion.

The rapid ascending scales (mm. 62-66), a genuine “unfolded fan of notes”, adds a touch of virtuosity to the work, at the same time also leading to the “reset” and repetition of the discourse, introducing the **Recapitulation** in measure 67.

E.g. 8

**Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
Transition to the Recapitulation, mm. 62-66**

In the Recapitulation, Brahms deliberately relinquishes the Second subject, its replica being unable to find its place in the newly created context. Preserving the rhythmic formulae from the previous measures, and using elements from the Transition, the segment in measures 81-86 (marked *più f*), prepares the climax of the Recapitulation. This passage, difficult from a pianistic perspective, is devised through a game of lines and an unmarked metric acceleration (4/4, 3/4, 2/4). The time of exchange between the voices is diminished, gradually reaching an off-beat overlapping of lines.

E.g. 9

Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
Recapitulation, mm. 81-88, rewritten with metric change

The short Coda (mm. 89-93) is devised using a fragment from the episodic theme of the transition, revived in the 4/4-time signature.

With a melodious theme, obtained from the motif in the transition, the central section of the Rhapsody (the B section – mm. 94-128), marked *molto dolce espressivo*, in the parallel key (B), is also divided into two subsections, the first consisting of 10 measures, conceived in reflective symmetry (3+2 measures and 2+3 measures, indicated in the phrasing of the right hand).

E.g. 10



**Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
B Section, mm. 94-103**

The differing phrasing of the left hand may be observed, grouped 2+2+1 and 2+3. In the first phrase, this is employed to join the segments, without disturbing the unity of the five measures, while in the second phrase, both hands deliberately have a simultaneous phrasing, to mark the sudden modulation to the ascending note. At the same time, in this section 4 voices can be discerned: the internal voices, which move in parallel sixths and tenths, and the external voices, with the role of harmonic pedal.

The middle section is contrasting, due to the oscillation between major and minor modes, and is similarly followed by a conclusion (mm. 121-128).

The reiteration of the main **A** section (mm. 129-233) is identical to its first presentation, with an extended **Coda**. Here, the episodic theme is presented in the lower register, having the role of "melodic resolution" of the **B** section, in the same major tonic (B major).

Thus, the instrumental music becomes a genuine vocal dialogue, in which one voice "affirms", and the other "doubts": the affirmation is the ascending perfect fourth of the motif, while the doubt is expressed through the last interval, namely the descending major third, synthesizing the beginning and the end.

E.g. 11



**Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
Coda, mm. 233-236, rewritten in a simplified manner**

A Section												
Section	Exposition					Development						
	1-29					30-66						
Measures	First subject	Transition	Second subject	Transition	39-66	First subject	Recapitulation			67-93		
Measures	1-15	16-21	22-29	30-38	39-48	49-61	62-66	67-80	81-88	89-93		
Sub-level	4 4 4 3	6	8	4	5	4 5 4	5 4 4	4 4 4	2+4+2	5		
Tonal scheme	2.2 2.2 2.2 2.1	(1 1) 2.2	2.4 2	1.1 2.2 (1.1 2) 1	2.2 2.2 1.1 2.2 2.1 2.2 2.3 2.2 2.2 2.2	2.2 2.2 2.3 2.2 2.2 2.2	i (b)			1 (b)		
	b d f f#	e#	F#	D	e	Bb	Gb	Bb	B	F	Gb	b

B Section										
Section	Exposition					Development				
	94-128					129-233				
Measures	First subject	Transition	Second subject	Transition	Coda	First subject	Recapitulation			195-233
Measures	94-103	104-120	121-128	129-143	144-149	150-157	158-166	167-176	177-189	190-194
Sub-level	5 4 5 4 4	3+2	2+2	3+1	2+2	2+2	2+2	2+2	2+2	2+2
Tonal scheme	1 (b)	B C#	b D	B	Bb	Gb	Bb	Gb	Bb	Gb

A' Section												
Section	Exposition					Development						
	129-157					158-194						
Measures	First subject	Transition	Second subject	Transition	Coda	First subject	Recapitulation			195-233		
Measures	129-143	144-149	150-157	158-166	167-176	177-189	190-194	195-208	209-216	217-233		
Sub-level	4 4 4 3	6	8	4	5	4 5 4	5 4 4	4 4 4	2+4+2	4 4 5 4		
Tonal scheme	2.2 2.2 2.2 2.1	(1 1);2+2	2+4+2	1+1+2 (1-1 2)+1	1+1+2 (1-1 2)+1	2.2 2-1+2 2+2	2.3 2.2 2.2 2.2	2.2 2.2 2.2 2.2	2.1+2 (1+1 2)+1	1+1+2 (1+1 2)+1		
	b d	f	f#	D	F#	D	e	Bb	Gb	Bb	Gb	b

Brahms: *Rhapsody in B minor*, Op. 79 No. 1
Structural analysis

According to Dinu Ciocan, the final goal of music analysis is the performance. Sandu-Dediu writes that *"The theme of performance comparison belongs to the particular area of music criticism, but also represents a useful exercise for the performer himself, when he desires to support or deny his personal vision regarding the musical discourse"* (*Tema comentariului de interpretări comparate aparține zonei specifice a criticii muzicale, dar reprezintă și exercițiul util interpretului însuși atunci când vrea să-și confirme sau infirme propria viziune asupra textului muzical*).⁴

Case study – Comparative analysis of the performance of Brahms' Rhapsody in B minor, Op. 79 No. 1

For the following comparative analysis, the performances of three important pianists were chosen: Radu Lupu, Martha Argerich, and Murray Perahia.

Romanian pianist **Radu Lupu** (born in 1946), who lived in Great Britain and later settled in Switzerland, is one of the most important living pianists. Gifted with a broad perspective and original ideas, Radu Lupu follows his own set of rules when it comes to constructing the musical discourse. He respects the composer's indications in the score, assimilates the written music, and performs it in a thoroughly personal manner. For Lupu's discourse to be correctly understood by the listener, this requires an intimate comprehension of the maestro's manner of performance. For someone who is not familiar with Radu Lupu's perspective of structural contriving and his skillfully combined sounds, it is possible to erroneously interpret the message, considering the musical discourse to be devoid of contour and precision. The lack of elements cannot be suspected; they exist, but in a structured matrix that clearly bears the artist's mark. With a multi-leveled approach, the Romanian pianist impresses his audience with his vigorous, stable, and convincing performance. Although the architecture of his sound constructions is grandiose, paradoxically it remains supple. Details are subordinated to the work in its entirety. His special sound creates visual images, unique experiences that involve synesthesia. His recordings were made in the studio, in 1970 (Op. 79 No.1) and 1976 (Op. 79 No. 2).

With exceptional technique and unusual ease, pianist **Martha Argerich** (born in 1941) is considered one of the greatest pianists of all time. Her passionate and tumultuous temper (traits that are reflected in her choices of tempo, especially in the second *Rhapsody*), with phrases that

⁴ Valentina Sandu-Dediu, *Alegeri, Atitudini, Afecte – Despre stil și retorică în muzică* [Choices, Attitudes, Affects - About style and rhetoric in music], București 2013, p. 242.

have seemingly frivolous accents at times, and are tender and soft at others, the pianist resonates in a unique way with the complex dimensions of the *Rhapsodies* and their “wild beauty”. Argerich’s vision of the *Rhapsody in G minor* is fantastic and strange, her approach resembling rather the genre of *fantasia* or *capriccio*, than the epic image of the work, due to her unusual choices for resolution (*diminuendo* instead of *crescendo*, for example). With her almost Latin manner of performance, Martha Argerich plays the punctuated rhythm by linking the short values to the following notes, thus making the short values seemingly belong to these, unlike Radu Lupu, who chooses to link the short values to the preceding note, a choice that conveys the profoundness typical for the German style. The analysis is based on a studio recording from 1960.

Settled in Great Britain, the American pianist entitled by French journalists “the poet of the piano”, **Murray Perahia** (born in 1947) is an important figure when it comes to the performance of Bach and Mozart. In the two *Rhapsodies Op. 79*, his style is solemn, grave, majestic, and elegant. The performance is balanced, thoughtful, and respects the stylistic requirements, with its organ-like sonority, especially in the second *Rhapsody*. Perahia also respects the composer’s indications in the score. His attributes as a pianist are discernible in the current performance as well. The recording was made in the studio in 2010. Perahia’s rendition is a didactic model, as may be observed in the presentation of his perspectives relating to the score.

In **Section A** – Exposition, first subject (mm. 1-15), **Radu Lupu** clearly marks the triplet in the thematic motif. Although his tempo is balanced ($\text{♩} = 88$), he prefers to convey the *Agitato* character rather by emphasizing all the details, than by altering the agogic axis. The beginning of the second phrase, the place where the thematic levels are exchanged, is marked by a polyphonic approach. A first culmination can be observed in the final bars of the first theme (mm. 11-12). **Martha Argerich** performs the entire first subject within a single ample phrase, in a constant tempo ($\text{♩} = 96$). Beginning with the second phrase, the differences in dynamics are obvious. The climax (m. 11) is dramatic, declamatory, the descending line of the soprano is colored, while the harmonic support of the left hand is reduced in intensity. In measure 15 the pianist opts for a *decrescendo*, thus calming the conflict before the *fp* accent in the Transition. With his ample phrases, **Murray Perahia** chooses a slow tempo ($\text{♩} = 84$), thus offering the musical discourse the time to unfold. His attack is sharp, and the organ-like sonority is achieved through the timbre conveyed to each voice. The climax is prepared and treated gravely.

In the **transition** (mm. 16-21), the reverberation of the climax can still be sensed, and the vitality of the first subject is prolonged to the following two measures of this section. **Radu Lupu** prepares the second theme by calming the tempo ($\downarrow = 69$). The color of the high voice, with an almost brightening effect, alludes to the major mode. By slowing the tempo ($\downarrow = 72$), **Martha Argerich** chooses to ignore the indications in the score (*crescendo – decrescendo*) and, aided by her pedaling technique, she creates the sensation of a strange fog, a veil of mist, a spectral apparition. **Murray Perahia** respects the indications in the score, which can be observed in his manner of attack (*staccato, portato*), using the pedal with great prudence.

The second subject (mm. 22-29): rather in a *mp* dynamic, with full, generous, grave, and imposing sound, **Radu Lupu's** construction is impressive in its monumentality. **Martha Argerich** chooses to emphasize the contrast between themes, her approach is mysterious, due to the appeased tempo (as indicated in the score: *Sostenuto sempre*), the intensity is very low, the touch of the keys is velvety. In the performance of Radu Lupu, the expressive intention is directed towards the accented beat of the measure (the last note in the group of four), while in the case of Martha Argerich this begins on the first note. In the second half of the second subject, she surprises with her choice of emphasizing the chromatic accumulation in a *decrescendo* resolution and concluding the theme in *allargando*. Among the three performers in this comparative analysis, Martha Argerich chooses not to repeat the Exposition. With stable agogic accents and massive sonority, **Murray Perahia** has a global perspective of this section, including the second subject in a construction that contains the preceding sections. This approach may seem superficial, lacking depth or height, traced on the central line of the performer's perception.

The transition/thematic episode (mm. 30-38): due to his flowing and linear execution, lacking accents, clearly contoured melodic profiles, or an obvious phrasing, in **Radu Lupu's** performance the first measures of this section are prerequisites of the poetic, lyrical, nostalgia – nostalgia which bears the traces of an unconfessed unfulfillment. Despite the choice of using a slightly "glass-like" sound for the voice in the right hand, **Martha Argerich** manages to convey a warm, veiled atmosphere. Her interpretation excels in expressiveness, the episodic theme is approached in a *rubato* manner. She refrains from employing a predictable and easy method, opting to emphasize the climax of the phrase by delaying and diminishing intensity, dynamically placing it below the other notes. The right hand leads the melodic

line in *crescendo*, while the left hand follows the contrast, in a *decrescendo* phrase, thus creating the illusion of volume. The motivic iteration with later development is executed by **Murray Perahia** with growing intensity, marking the melodic maximum, the G note, supported in its turn by the accompaniment of the left hand.

In the **Development** (mm. 39-66), **Radu Lupu** assembles the constituting elements in a harmonious, authentic, convincing manner. He creates a well-defined construction that reveals the “architect”. In an ingenious manner, he recreates and rearranges the elements. Although played with vigor, the climax is not fulfilled, it does not reach its resolution; it seems to remain suspended because of the acoustic limitations of the instrument. Thus, the relationship between the unfolding of forces and the outcome is disproportional. **Martha Argerich** uses a sharp, firm, percussive attack in measures 39-42. From a semantic perspective, the menacing atmosphere in measures 43-46 is clearly declared in Radu Lupu’s performance, while in Martha Argerich’s recording one may sense the insinuation of threat, due to the clear articulation of the lines and the retaining of the mysterious character of the second subject. Through nuance, she treats (from a dynamic point of view) the motivic cells differently in various registers. She accomplishes successive accumulations in one breath. Intuitively sensing the acoustical limitations of the piano in the higher register, she accelerates the tempo and solves the climax in a single movement, within a single breath. In **Murray Perahia**’s performance, the inspired use of the pedal all through the entire measure of the climax offers support for the chords in the higher register, thus compensating for the physical and acoustic hindrances of the instrument.

The **Recapitulation** and **Coda** (mm. 67-93) are played by **Radu Lupu** in a slower tempo than the Exposition ($\downarrow = 84$). He plays the statement of the first theme in a clear, jerky manner. One possible explanation could be the performer’s desire to underline, to make the initial message obvious. The segment between measures 82-88, perceived as a “duel”, is performed with a warrior-like attitude, using a sharp attack and stable agogic accents. Lupu omits the graphic sign *diminuendo* (mm. 89-90), considering this to be unfulfilling for a first resolution. At the opposite pole, **Martha Argerich** attacks the Recapitulation in a more alert tempo, as compared to the one in the Exposition, which reveals her vision regarding the repetitive moment. The sudden unfolding of the musical events contributes to an easy resolution of the conflict. In **Murray Perahia**’s version, the Recapitulation is approached in a moderate dynamic nuance, which indicates a wise choice. Perahia seems to preserve his energy for the upcoming events. The sensation of unexpected acceleration is obtained through maintaining the tempo, and

through an overflow of musical events, which give the impression of time compression. Special importance is given to the rest before the **sf** (m. 86), which further emphasizes the tension, the prolongation of the rest increasing the effect of the suspense.

In the **B section** – “The idyllic realm” (mm. 94-128) – Brahms suggests the escape to a parallel dimension, beyond time and space, in a dream-like setting. The transition is sudden, without any harmonic preparation, as if passing through a portal, directly modulating to the parallel major key. The melody has ample, arched phrases. The imaginary sensation of floating is obtained by the composer with the help of the homogeneous accompaniment in eighth notes (quavers), through the use of the pedal point (organ point) on the off-beat (respectively on the tonic and dominant, etc.), and the frequent use of the pedal, marked *col Ped.* The whole notes (semibreve) in the high register, played on the same note, create a fairy-tale-like, dreamy atmosphere (very similar to the dream world in the second part of the *Sonata in F minor, Op. 5*). The transposition to a higher scale degree (m. 101) creates the illusion of continuous enrapture, while the conclusion of the suspended phrases strives to recall the sound of “falling stars”. The performer should avoid fluctuations in tempo and should use minimal *rubato*, thus creating the illusion of floating and ease. The interference between the two “worlds” is evoked by the composer through alternating the major and minor modes. An excellent craftsman of compositional techniques, through this major-minor game Brahms certainly did not aim to return to the home key of B minor. The last chord of the central section (m. 127) cancels the illusion of existence in an idyllic dimension, this realm may be accessed, but it is not possible to remain there.

In the central section of the Rhapsody, in the performance of **Radu Lupu**, the sound does not belong solely to the acoustic register, it also has a visual dimension, creating emotions and synesthetic sensations. Through a multi-leveled approach and access to the work, Radu Lupu avoids becoming influenced by the freedom of expression in the melody: at the same time, he skillfully and technically creates the accompaniment. His performance is characterized by a sensitive nostalgia. The fiery rendition of the first part is transformed, in **Martha Argerich**'s performance, to a warm rendering, with a more *rubato* tempo. **Murray Perahia** approaches this section in a more flowing tempo. Of the *molto dolce espressivo* indication he chooses to respect only the *espressivo* indication, adding to this a slightly passionate touch. The atmosphere is not idyllic, his vision contains real, earthly colors.

In the **Coda** (mm. 217-233), in the rendering of **Radu Lupu**, the dialogue between the theme in the bass and the answer of the upper voice, on several distinct planes that emphasize the feeling of restlessness, can be clearly perceived. **Martha Argerich** approaches the section of the coda in a flowing tempo. She creates an image of the wavy surface of the water, through the discreetly contoured arpeggiated triplets, and an insinuating response, which highlights the theme in the lower register. The subtle use of the pedal (mm. 230-231) produces an unexpected effect, bringing out the rests on the off-beat, evoking the pulsation of the heart. **Murray Perahia** maintains the unity of the work.

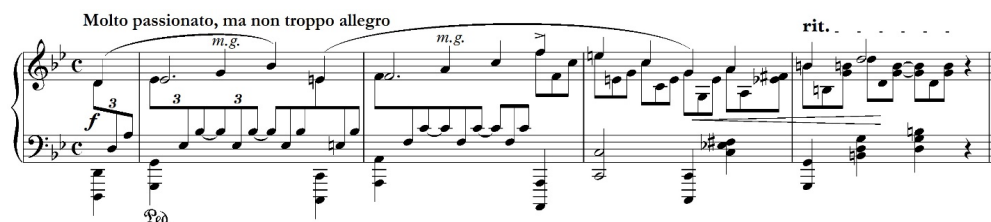
Although the above-mentioned performers belong to the same generation (the golden generation of piano players), and notwithstanding the moment when each of the three performers made the recording (Argerich – age 19, Lupu – age 25 and 31, and Perahia – age 53), the listener does not feel restricted to a certain spirit of an epoch, nor a certain performance “fashion”.

Rhapsody in G minor, Op. 79 No. 2

The second *Rhapsody* Op. 79 has the structure of a concise sonata, with a short Exposition and an unusually long Development. Regarding its sonority, the most interesting passage is the grand re-transition, which strives to regain its potential energy. In both rhapsodies one may observe the composer’s “reticence” of establishing the key in the first measures: the beginning of the *Rhapsody in G minor* can be described as having a “wandering” tonal center, which makes it even more comforting when it finally reaches the tonic.

The first subject (mm. 1-8) begins with an interrupted cadenza and a leaping, ample, ascending passage, which could suggest the ancient hero’s longing for immortality. Throughout the entire work, the unusually throbbing triplets convey the structural unity of this rhapsody. It is important to note, that all the themes of this work, including the transition, begin with an upbeat (anacrusis).

E.g. 13



Brahms: *Rhapsody in G minor*, Op. 79 No. 2 - The first subject, mm. 1-4

The transition (mm. 9-13), which usually prepares the presentation of the second subject group, here has the function of manifesting, of personifying the ideal proposed by the first subject. With its combative character, the transition contains contoured thematic possibilities, with octave leaps in the bass and flow of chords.

E.g. 14



Brahms: *Rhapsody in G minor*, Op. 79 No. 2 - Transition, mm. 9-10

The first theme of the second subject group (mm. 14-20) is brought about through the repetition of the motif in measure 14 (E.g. 15), and at the conclusion of the phrase, Brahms employs the beginning of the motif in an ascending harmonic sequence (mm. 19-20 – E.g. 16).

E.g. 15



Brahms: *Rhapsody in G minor*, Op. 79 No. 2
The 1st theme of the second subject group
(S.II.1, mm. 14-15)

E.g. 16

Brahms: *Rhapsody in G minor*, Op. 79 No. 2
The 1st theme of the second subject group
(S.II.1, mm. 19-20)

The second theme of the second subject group (mm. 21-30) maintains the tonality, as well as the march-like character, but this time it becomes somber and implacable, on the same ternary rhythm, in menacing *piano* colors, through the ostinato formulae in the inner voice of the right hand.

E.g. 17

Brahms: *Rhapsody in G minor*, Op. 79 No. 2
The 2nd theme of the second subject group
(S.II.2, “The funeral march”, mm. 21-24)

The bass and the upper voice are stable. The successive repetition of the same note in the first voice, the doubling in octaves of the ostinato triplet on the last beat, followed by the punctuated rhythm in the bass, suggests the image of a funerary procession. Gently insinuating in the beginning, the developed tension becomes more evident, emphasized by the punctuated rhythm, the dissonances, and retardations, underlined through the *crescendo*, creating the impression of dynamism. This is followed by an incredible accumulation of tension, unleashed only in the last measure of the Exposition, through a descending arpeggio that spreads 3 octaves, and is continued in the Development.

The **Recapitulation** is the restatement of the Exposition, with modulations characteristic to the structure, followed by a Coda that encompasses 8 measures.

Section	Exposition 1-32						Development 33-85						Recapitulation 86-123					
	Measures	First subject	Transition	Theme II 1	Theme II 2	Coda	D1	D2	D3	D3	D3	D3	First subject	Transition	Theme II 1	Theme II 2	Coda	
Sub-section	1-8	9-13	14-20	21-30	31-32	33-53	54-64	65-85	86-93	94-98	99-105	106-115	116-123					
Measures	4	4	3	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	3	4	4	
Sub-level	2-2	2-2	1-1	(1-1)-2	(1-1)-2-2	2-2	2-2	2-2	2-2	2-2	2-2	2-2	2-2	2-2	2-1	(1+1)-2	(1+1)-2-2	
Tonal scheme	iI (g♯G)						iii (♭)						i (g)					

Brahms: *Rhapsody in G minor*, Op. 79 No. 2 - Structural analysis

Case study – Comparative analysis of the performance of Brahms' *Rhapsody in G minor*, Op. 79 No. 2

Exposition – First subject (mm. 1-8): **Radu Lupu's** unitary vision regarding the tempo of the entire work ($\downarrow = 120$) is remarkable. Despite this, in certain sections of the Rhapsody particular values (durations) of the tempo become evident. Lupu intuitively senses the ballad-like dimension of the work, thus opting for expansive, ample phrases that comprise 4 measures, a demanding choice due to the comprising musical events that are immediately resumed, without any pause. In **Martha Argerich's** performance, one may remark the instability of the tempo in the presentation of the main theme's two phrases – the first around $\downarrow = 120$, and the second around $\downarrow = 138$. Contrary to the composer's indications, Argerich concludes the first phrase *piano* and *diminuendo*, ending the entire exposition according to Brahms' notations in the score, this latter choice dictated by considerations of persuasive nature. Owing to the compact key attack, which results in an organ-like effect, the construction of **Murray Perahia** is well-defined: every two measures the anacrusis is approached with agogic broadness and spatial distribution of sound. The flexibility of the agogic accents, which can be discovered only through an objective identification, unfolds in the ascending phrases of the theme between the duration of $\downarrow = 116-132$. The acceleration and slowing occurs in a flowing, natural manner.

In the Transition (mm. 9-13), **Radu Lupu** maintains the tempo of the previous section ($\downarrow = 126$). His rendition is descriptive, the musical narrative reflects the personal involvement of the performer, at the same time outlining the two melodic "characters" of the transition. The transition is played in a whirling, precipitated tempo, contrary to the *in tempo* indication. For this section, **Martha Argerich** chooses a rather lively, *più vivo* tempo ($\downarrow = 152$), the last chords almost "drowned" owing to the use of the pedal. **Murray Perahia** embraces a stable tempo, inspired by the pulsation of the triplets ($\downarrow = 132$), and a throbbing rhythm. The musical discourse is developed and concludes with ample final chords. Regarding dynamics, phrasing, and the use of pedals, the pianist performs this segment in the following manner:

E.g. 19

The image shows a musical score for the transition section of Brahms' Rhapsody in G minor, Op. 79 No. 2. The score is in G minor and 3/4 time. It begins with a piano introduction marked 'in tempo' (♩ = 132). The music features a variety of dynamics, including *f*, *sf*, *p*, and *con forza*. There are several triplet markings and a 'poco rit.' marking. The score is transcribed by the author.

Brahms: *Rhapsody in G minor*, Op. 79 No. 2
The Transition, as played by Murray Perahia
 (transcribed by the author)

The first theme of the second subject group (mm. 14-20): **Radu Lupu** constructs the three iterations of the first theme in the second subject group in persuasive dynamic steps, without surpassing the *mf* indication in the score. The tempo of both themes in the second subject group is situated around the values $\text{♩} = 116-120$. **Martha Argerich** creates a strong emotional contrast in her rendition, where the first theme of the second subject group is introduced in a steady, almost hesitating tempo, with fluctuating rhythm (the metronome values are between $\text{♩} = 88-108$), in much softer intensity than the dynamic marking (*mp*), the touch of the keys resembling the music of Debussy. The atmosphere thus created is strange and unreal, supported by inspired harmonies. The second theme of this subject group is prepared by the pianist through the exaggerated touch of keys and an unwritten *ritenuto*. Refraining from emphasizing the contrasting character of the second subject group, **Murray Perahia** attacks the first theme of this subject group *con forza*, in a loud, declamatory manner (*mf*, almost *f*). One possible explanation for this type of approach could be the permanent presence of the triplets, within the themes and throughout the entire work, as a supporting motor of the sound construction.

The second theme of the second subject group – “the funeral march” (mm. 21-32) – in the rendition of **Radu Lupu** is throbbing, strict, precise, suggesting the waiting of the inevitable. The punctuated rhythm is deliberately performed with impetus. The accumulation resembles an uproar, thus gradually reaching the climax, a desperate clamor. **Martha Argerich** deliberately chooses a slow tempo ($\text{♩} = 92$), which creates a state of unnatural, heavy, overwhelming, tenebrous silence. Lacking the throbbing, strict pulsation, the march conveys a strange effect. Argerich emphasizes the upbeat (anacrusis) of the motif, followed by a decrease in intensity. Increasing in

intensity and abruptly accelerating in measure 27 (returning to a *quasi tempo primo*, $\downarrow = 132$), the performer suggests the perfidious attack of death, perceived as a predator, an aspect that emphasizes again the wild dimension of the Rhapsody. **Murray Perahia** imposes a stable and moderate tempo on the second theme of the second subject group ($\downarrow = 108$). Although in the score the accent is written on the 4th beat of the measure (on the upbeat), the performer marks the strong beat of the measure, followed by a decrease in the dynamics. The funerary march does not comprise sufficient accumulations in tension. Perahia uncovers his intentions, the premature growth of intensity diminishes the dramatic effect of his performance. Although he uses a firm attack, he does not manage to convey the climax its necessary strength.

For the entire Development (measures 33-85), **Radu Lupu** adopts the value of $\downarrow = 116$. In the first section of the Development (measures 33-52) – „The mood section” – Lupu continues the invasive and expansive concept first presented in the Exposition. Following the dynamic indications, generically marked ***p***, Lupu presents the Hero in his three appearances: when he demands (mm. 37-39), when he asks (mm. 45-47), and finally when he supplicates (mm. 49-51). In the second section of the Development (mm. 53-64) – “the funeral march section”, Lupu prefers to continue in a similar manner as the one employed in the Exposition, using a well-defined rhythm and sharp accents. The last section of the Development (mm. 53-64) – “the seeking section” is evoked in a superb manner by the performer. The Hero’s spirit is eager, anxious, restless, he cannot find his peace. He oscillates between himself and his thoughts. The dialogue is, in fact, a monologue. Despite the accumulation and a seemingly short climax in *fortissimo* (m. 79), the conflict remains unsolved. The final arpeggio, with synesthetic effects, symbolizes the desperate flapping of a butterfly’s wings, the last breath.

Martha Argerich chooses an in-depth exploration. She immerses herself in dynamic depths, from which she strives to be reborn. Expressive colors, from *piano* to *pianissimo possibile*, invest the work with mystery and refinement, further emphasized by the impressionist touch of keys that evokes the works of Debussy. Maintaining the same agogic and dynamic coordinates, the mysterious approach of “the funeral march” does not have the same outcome in the Development. According to the Schenkerian theory, the same performance is experienced distinctly in different musical circumstances, the listener having distinct levels of perception in the two situations. “The seeking section” is emphasized through a supple touch of the keys, inspired by *pianissimo* colors. Compared to Radu Lupu, who chooses to express himself in a monologue, Argerich opts for a dialogue. “The seeking section” contains a

short moment of victory (measure 79) as if the key to life had been found, but not it's gone. The final arpeggio rises like steam, transformed into drops of water, suggested by the dripping sonority of the voice in the right hand.

Murray Perahia respects the score, conveying distinct nuances to the harmonic events, thus coloring the musical discourse in various shades, depending on the context. The main reference remains the pulsation of the triplets. "The march" is clearly accentuated, in a *cantabile* manner. In Perahia's performance "The seeking section" is hard, there is no way out, as suggested by the dynamic monotony. The Hero is trapped. The climax is overemphasized, from both agogic and dynamic perspectives, through a *rallentando* that conveys the sensation of slow motion. The same tempo is maintained for the final arpeggio as well, dominated by the triplets.

Radu Lupu performs the Coda (mm. 116-123) in a single phrase, resembling "the last breath". The burning flame of life is extinguished by a last rush of the wind. In the rendition of **Martha Argerich**, the tempo of the coda is dictated by the previous section. In dynamic waves, with a more dense, almost crushing touch of the keys, the pianist evokes the last pulsations of the departing soul. **Murray Perahia's** performance is accomplished at the level of discernible concreteness, with a full and grave sonority.

Conclusions

Aristotle agreed that *what lies in opposition is symmetrical and harmonious, for the most beautiful harmony is born out of distinct objects, everything being the result of struggle* (The Nicomachean Ethics). *Nature is a whole, which balances the action of hostile forces, adjusting these opposing forces that tend to destroy one another; it is a principle of overcoming and rejuvenation.*⁵ I would dare to affirm that this rejuvenation refers to regeneration, a clear change of register, from unpredictable, to the fine control of the endeavor. *The antithesis* is perceived as a process in motion, with traits that resemble a discourse able to transform into a dialogue, conversation, or dispute.

Brahms solves the conflicting character through a unitary architectural logic, bonding the opposites, in a manner that represents the mature imprint of the composer's creativity. In some situations, he only presents these contradictions, while in others he also solves these, appeasing the conflict, an aspect that reveals Brahms' aspiration towards harmony and balance.

5 Ion Munteanu, *Mit și filosofie în cosmologia lui Lucian Blaga* [Myth and Philosophy in Lucian Blaga's Cosmology], Editura Scrisul Românesc, Craiova 2016, p. 63.

With passion, the three performers tell the story of the great Heroes. The questions represent the link between the performer and the audience, they invite to reflection, with faith and inspiration they convey a vision.

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