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## The Art of Lamenting: Resurrection of the Past in Brahms's 'Es steht ein Lind' WoO 33 No. 41

### ABSTRACT

#### Background

Scholars have shown that Brahms's transcriptions and settings of pre-existing folksong melodies and his interest in their original sources span his career from the eighteen-fifties through the eighteen-nineties. Studies by Virginia Hancock and Margit McCorkle of Brahms's handwritten folksong collections, held at the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* (GdM), suggest that Brahms collected folksongs throughout his life and knew the provenance of folksong melodies that he set. In a description of Brahms's handwritten manuscript of folksong incipits, held at the GdM (A128), McCorkle attributes the melody for 'Es steht ein Lind', which Brahms likely copied into the collection in the late eighteen-fifties, to a contemporary collection of folksongs by the composer Friedrich Wilhelm Arnold. But in the A128 manuscript, Brahms also attributes the 'Es steht ein Lind' melody to an earlier source, titled *68 deutsche, französische, lateinische mehrstimmige Lieder*, published in 1550 by the company Berg & Neuber in Nuremberg. Although we can only speculate about Brahms's knowledge of this source, my paper will address possible intertextual connections between Brahms's song 'Es steht ein Lind' WoO 33 No. 41 and a *Tenorlied* 'Es steht ein Lind' by the composer Caspar Othmayr (1515–1553) that appears in the publication by Berg & Neuber.

In addition to elucidating facets of Brahms's study of folksong, his WoO 33 collection also raises issues regarding Brahms's original intent for the collection, which served as a musical manifesto — alongside his ultimately discarded written statement — on the art of folksong composition and collecting in the late nineteenth century. The musicologist Imogen Fellinger has shown that late in his life, Brahms revisited his earlier study of a folksong collection by Ludwig Erk, which Franz Magnus Böhme edited and revised in 1893. Brahms's disregard for Böhme's edition prompted him to renew his study of folksong sources, and perhaps even to arrange the contrapuntally sophisticated songs in WoO 33 for publication.

As Fellinger shows, Brahms's markings in his own copy of Böhme's collection from 1893 show his interest in the entry for 'Die Linde im Thal' (No. 406), which contains two different versions of the melody — one by Jobst vom Brandt and the other by Caspar Othmayr. (Brahms's markings indicate his knowledge that the version by vom Brandt appears in Georg Forster's *Frische teutsche Liedlein*, published in 1556, which he thoroughly studied.)

Furthermore, a lengthy poetic text derived from a version by the poet Ludwig Uhland that exists alongside both melodies in Böhme's collection differs from the two main sources for Brahms's setting: 1) the Berg and Neuber publica-

tion (1550); 2) a collection of folksongs by Brahms's contemporary, Wilhelm Tappert, titled *Deutsche Lieder aus dem 15. 16. und 17. Jahrhundert für eine Singstimme mit Begleitung des Pianoforte* (published c. 1870). I will examine discrepancies among the texts in each of these three sources, highlighting their emphasis of contrasting imagery and temporalities. For instance, both Uhland's and Berg & Neuber's versions of the text focus on the speaker's present lack of love, but the text from Tappert's collection depicts a lament for the past and a lost beloved.

#### Aims and Repertoire Studied

In this presentation, I will compare some of the musical and textual sources that might have influenced Brahms's setting of 'Es steht ein Lind', including a *Tenorlied* by Caspar Othmayr that appears in the collection *68 deutsche, französische, lateinische mehrstimmige Lieder*, published in 1550 by Berg & Neuber. (Othmayr was a revered sixteenth-century composer and associated with a group of composers in Heidelberg that was interested in preserving German folksong.) I will show how these sources might have affected Brahms's setting of 'Es steht ein Lind', which expresses nostalgia and longing for the lost past. The accompaniment in Brahms's setting, for instance, resembles the imitative counterpoint in Othmayr's *Lied*.

In addition, I will discuss a manuscript page from Brahms's collection of folksongs (A128) on which 'Es steht ein Lind' appears. In this sketch, Brahms indicated barlines above the folksong melody, suggesting that he might have reconsidered its meter when he compiled the WoO 33 set. I suggest that Brahms's seeming allusion to Othmayr's *Tenorlied* as well as his expressive metrical treatment of a melisma in the original folksong melody imbue his setting with nostalgia. These features help to cultivate expectations for musical events that are postponed until the end of the song.

#### Methods

To illustrate that Brahms's accompaniment for the 'Es steht ein Lind' melody cultivates feelings of nostalgia and longing for a lost past, I use Schenkerian voice-leading graphs to show how expected harmonic and melodic events are delayed until the end of each strophe. In the piano introduction (bb. 1–4), Brahms harmonizes the C-major folksong melody as if to suggest that D (scale degree 2) will resolve to C (scale degree 1) above an authentic cadence. Yet throughout the setting, Brahms repeatedly aligns the tonic pitch C, which begins the melody's expressive melisma, with deceptive motions in the bass (V–VI) that undercut (and delay) the expected authentic cadence.

As my narratological analysis of temporality in the poem clarifies, each denial of the expected authentic cadence coincides with infinitive verbs ('trauren', 'klagen', and 'weinen')

that describe the present act of lamenting for a lost *past*, which only Tappert's (and Brahms's) version of the poem emphasizes. My Schenkerian voice-leading graphs will also show that delays of the expected authentic cadence keep the dominant (G major) active for long spans of the song. The prolonged dominant staves off the C-major tonic just as the poetic speaker postpones his acceptance of the lost past by dwelling in the present act of lamenting.

### Implications

My interpretation sheds new light on this song, which has not been analyzed in depth before, by discussing: 1) possible intertextual connections between Brahms's setting of 'Es steht ein Lind' and Othmayr's *Tenorlied*; as well as 2) Brahms's musical expression of nostalgia through the denial of authentic cadences beneath a melisma in the folksong melody. I suggest that Brahms emphasizes a lament for the lost past in 'Es steht ein Lind' (WoO33 No. 41), a temporality that only Tappert's version of the text underscores.

My claim that Brahms's accompaniment for 'Es steht ein Lind' and its possible allusions to Othmayr foreground the present act of lamenting for an irretrievable, happier past also extends Fellingner's argument that WoO 33 offers a manifesto on the art of setting German folksong. Thus, nostalgia for the past within the setting alone mirrors Brahms's personal nostalgia for a lost musical past. Just as the poetic speaker in Brahms's text laments for a lost beloved and postpones an acceptance of loss, so does Brahms seem to mourn for the lost art of setting German folksong, which his study of early sources and arrangement of the WoO 33 collection in 1894 attempts to resurrect.

### Keywords

Johannes Brahms, 'Es steht ein Lind' (WoO 33 No. 41), German Folksong, Temporality.

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