Brahms in Context offers a fresh perspective on the much-admired nineteenth-century German composer. Including thirty-nine chapters on historical, social and cultural contexts, the book brings together internationally renowned experts in music, law, science, art history and other areas, including many figures whose work is appearing in English for the first time. The essays are accessibly written, with short reading lists aimed at music students and educators. The book opens with personal topics, including Brahms’s Hamburg childhood, his move to Vienna and his rich social life. It considers professional matters from finance to publishing and copyright; the musicians who shaped and transmitted his works; and the larger musical styles which influenced him. Casting the net wider, other essays embrace politics, religion, literature, philosophy, art and science. The book closes with chapters on reception, including recordings, historical performance, his compositional legacy and a reflection on the power of composer myths.

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BRAHMS IN CONTEXT

EDITED BY
NATASHA LOGES
KATY HAMILTON
Dedicated to the memory of our dear friend Robert Pascall, whose brilliant scholarship and boundless generosity have been an inspiration to Brahmsians around the world.
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Notes on Contributors

Preface

Natasha Loges and Katy Hamilton

Fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground . . . fiction is like a spider’s web . . . attached to life at all four corners . . . when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in.

Virginia Woolf, A Room of One’s Own

It is unusual to write a book about a composer which does not focus on their works. However, putting those works to one side, as these essays mostly do, allows us to sense the web which attaches that composer to the world. If we have omitted repertoire, we have managed to include reading habits, religion and recipes. Our hope is to inspire new ways of understanding this endlessly fascinating figure. We have also sought to reflect the ways in which musical scholarship is changing and how the word ‘context’ is expanding ever outwards. To that end, we have drawn together scholars from different traditions, disciplines and countries, aiming for a balance between established and emerging figures, older and newer perspectives.

The chapters are organised in broad sections. We open with the people and places that were most important in Brahms’s life, beginning with his family in Hamburg, taking in the pivotal meeting with the Schumanns and his settling in Vienna, and considering his extended circle of friends and colleagues in two other major cities. Next, we turn to more private matters: his habits, letter-writing, holidays and finances. The focus then shifts to his various interlocking professional musical roles aside from composition, the spaces for which he wrote music, the genres in which he wrote and the broad musical styles which shaped his work beyond his immediate contemporaries and predecessors. In order to convey the sense of interconnectedness which inspired the book, each essay includes copious cross-references to other essays in the volume and is also supplied with a short,
dedicated reading list of key texts (in both English and German) to encourage further exploration.

We have aimed to give a sense of the importance of Brahms’s collaborators, the numerous fine musicians who brought his work to life across Europe and beyond. Those figures are one part of his public interface; others include the instruments of his day, his astute publishers and the state of copyright law during his lifetime, all of which shaped his life and music in subtle ways. The notion of context is then expanded still further outwards to confront, within this brief format, the vast topics of politics, religion, literature, philosophy, visual arts and science and technology – the grand sweeps of historical change which transformed the world in which he lived and worked.

The book closes with essays which consider Brahms’s afterlife in different ways. Space only permits two explorations of reception history, but the idea of reception is stretched to include his contribution to the shape of musical analysis, the editing of his music today, the recent shifts in historical performance practice, the vast discography of his music, and the ways in which he has inspired more recent composers. The closing chapter aims to pull together on a small canvas various factual and less factual depictions of the man and his music. Because the definition of context is limitless, a book of this sort can never be comprehensive. Apart from omissions we have not yet identified, we have had to exclude considerations of topics that other editors may regard as crucial: essays on Brahms’s relationships with specific musicians such Clara Schumann, Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner, Anton Bruckner and others; the musical influences of such significant figures as Bach, Handel, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert; issues of identity such as gender; the War of the Romantics; and we have not attempted to define what it meant to be a freelance musician in Brahms’s lifetime. As the late nineteenth century recedes further from the present day, the notion of reception becomes infinitely more geographically and chronologically complex and diverse. Brahms societies exist in Japan, for example, but this volume only permitted considerations of Brahms’s reception in Germany and England. In terms of later reception, we chose to focus on one pivotal historical moment – the period of National Socialism – but space limitations precluded detailed consideration of other major historical periods since Brahms’s death. And, although this volume is in itself motivated by historiographical imperatives, we could only touch briefly on historiography itself. Nevertheless, we have covered what is hopefully a rewarding range of perspectives; for example, we have deliberately not reconciled the
various translations of Schumann’s seminal review article ‘Neue Bahnen’, but sought to retain each author’s individual reading of this elusive text.

The following chapters were translated by Natasha Loges: 1. ‘Childhood in Hamburg’, 2. ‘The Schumanns’, 6. ‘Correspondence’, 7. ‘Holidays’, 8. ‘Finances’, 9. ‘As Pianist’, 12. ‘As Editor’, 13. ‘As Teacher’, 15. ‘Concert Life’, 24. ‘Publishers’, 25. ‘Copyright’, 31. ‘Germany’ and 35. ‘Editing Brahms’. All work titles have been rendered in English except where the German titles are more familiar to an English readership in the original language, or where a translation results in loss of accuracy, e.g. the distinction between Lieder and Gesänge.

We wish to thank the following individuals and institutions for their generosity with assistance and permissions: the Brahms-Institut Lübeck, the Kiel Brahms-Forschungszentrum, the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Graz, the Library of Congress, the Verlagsarchiv Breitkopf & Härtel Wiesbaden, the Royal Academy of Music in London, the Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Darmstadt, Staatsbibliothek Leipzig, the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, the Kunstmuseum Basel, Wiley Publishers and the image libraries Bildarchiv Austria, Alamy Limited and ArenaPAL. Thanks are also due to James Gaddas-Brown, for setting the music examples; Wendy Baskett for preparing the index; Janos Darvas for providing a copy of his film documentary on Brahms, Wären nicht die Frauen; the Royal College of Music for invaluable financial support; and Victoria Cooper, Kate Brett and the excellent team at Cambridge University Press for their patience and encouragement.
Abbreviations

The following standard texts are presented with short titles throughout this book:

**Avins**  

**Brahms Handbuch**  

**Briefe**  

**Heuberger**  

**Kalbeck I–IV**  

**Litzmann I–III**  

**May I–II**  

**SBB I and II**  

**Werkverzeichnis**  
List of Abbreviations

Abbreviations for Scores from the *Johannes Brahms Gesamtausgabe* /New Complete Edition of the Works of Johannes Brahms

*Johannes Brahms Gesamtausgabe (JBG)*: until 2011, ed. *Johannes Brahms Gesamtausgabe* e. V., Editionsleitung Kiel, in cooperation with Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna; thereafter ed. the Musikwissenschaftliche Institut of the Christian-Albrechts-Universität, Kiel in cooperation with the *Johannes Brahms Gesamtausgabe* e. V. and the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna.

- **JBG, Violinkonzert** *Violinkonzert* D-Dur op. 77 (Series I, vol. 9), ed. L. Correll Roesner and M. Struck (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2004)
- **JBG, Doppelkonzert** *Doppelkonzert* a-Moll op. 102 (Series I, vol. 10), ed. M. Struck (Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 2000)