

New Digital Resources for Brahms Scholarship

Hanslick Online and Brahms-Online are recent projects of the Austrian Academy of Sciences's Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage.¹ The Brahms-Online project is led by Vasiliki Papadopoulou, and Hanslick Online is led by Alexander Wilfing.

The last twenty years of the digitization of nineteenth-century sources have transformed the scope of studying a composer's reception. Almost forty years ago, Angelika Horstmann published her groundbreaking dissertation on the reception of Brahms from 1860 to 1880.² Her distinction between reviews of publications versus performances and her interest in the critics themselves were important steps forward. I do not know exactly how Horstmann worked, but for my dissertation on the history of German music criticism in the first half of the nineteenth century,³ I looked through the music journals available in US university libraries. I transcribed journal articles by hand, translated them with a dictionary, and finally typed the text and translation into a word processing program. Each stage of this process could take hours.

I am still trying to grasp the ramifications of the speed with which one can now access, transcribe, and translate reviews that have been buried in the mountains of Vienna's daily newspapers. With the use of Brahms-Online, ANNO, and AI translators,⁴ a translated review can be produced in minutes. The process is so much faster because, first, the review has already been provided: Brahms-Online has retrieved and indexed the texts.⁵ Since ANNO allows the Fraktur type to be captured as plain text, and since this can be translated with a single click, the manual reproduction of the text has mostly been eliminated.⁶ What remains is the process of proofreading, making corrections, and reading for content.

The texts of Brahms-Online's reviews and announcements about performances of Brahms's works are accessed through links to ANNO, that is, the Austrian National Library's digitized collection of newspapers and periodicals.⁷ Brahms-Online's indexing makes it easy to filter these reviews for performances by certain soloists or ensemble, as well as by musical work. The range is mostly Vienna and Brahms's lifetime; the timespan listed is 1862–1902. Some of these reviews are given a helpful short summary and/or quotation, making it unnecessary to transfer to the original source on the ANNO platform. But for most, the user will need to work with the text in Fraktur.

One reason I like the ANNO links is that the review appears as part of the whole newspaper. For instance, in November of 1872 there was a performance of Brahms's Op. 25 Piano Quartet in G minor with the Hellmesberger Quartet and the composer at the piano.⁸ Browsing the rest of the page shows that there were two other concerts with works by Brahms. Besides acquiring a sense of Brahms's popularity on concerts in Vienna, Brahms-Online makes evident how many critics were active. There are six reviews of that Hellmesberger Quartet concert!⁹ These other writers can now be used not just for "sound bites," but in an informed way, with an awareness of their tendencies and biases. Brahms-Online allows their work to be read chronologically and synchronically, in comparison to others.

Not everything on the website comes from ANNO. Some features (that are in progress and only in German) are found on the dropdown menu "Brahms's Wien," which includes pictures of performance venues in Vienna and profiles of some performers. Under "Projekt" there is useful background information on the newspapers and some of the critics.

Hanslick Online

There is a separate website and platform devoted to Eduard Hanslick's writings. The first project of Hanslick Online was a TEI/XML edition of the ten versions of *On the Musically Beautiful*, which facilitates the comparison of variants. A documentation of the reception of the book through contemporary reviews is forthcoming.¹⁰ The other part of the website is dedicated to completing the collection of Hanslick's writings, with a similar linking of the differences in reviews that appeared in multiple versions.¹¹ The project of publishing a scholarly edition of Hanslick's work was begun by Dietmar Strauß.¹² The series overseen by Strauß was discontinued in 2011; it covers the years up to 1865, the year following the crucial year of the founding of the *Neue Freie Presse*. This newspaper was home to Hanslick's criticism for his final forty years and is the primary source for Hanslick Online. Brahms-Online does not draw upon the *Neue Freie Presse*, but does include Hanslick's reviews of Brahms in *Die Presse*, from 1864 and earlier. It appears that the two websites were coordinated to avoid duplication of reviews of Brahms by Hanslick.

Like Brahms-Online, Hanslick Online is a work in progress. There were 471 reviews as of this writing (April 2025), and the total will be 900 when the project is completed. Currently there are no reviews for the years 1872–1887.¹³ Some of the features of this platform are different than Brahms-Online. The most noticeable and user-friendly is that the reviews in the *Neue Freie Presse* appear as text, with the facsimile of the original appearing next to it. There is also a full-text search of these transcriptions. The transcription's appearance can be adjusted to see names, work titles, and places that are tagged with identifying information. The website also features registers for places, persons, and works, with the two last-named being interlinked.¹⁴ A list of all the reviews can be downloaded as an Excel spreadsheet. One more handy feature to mention is the list of Hanslick's anthologies with links to digital copies.¹⁵

Using both websites allows one to compare Hanslick's reviews to others, including other reviews he wrote. For instance, using Hanslick Online I located one of Hanslick's comments about Brahms's playing. In November of 1867, when Brahms and Joachim gave two concerts together in Vienna, Hanslick initially commented that Brahms's piano playing seemed inhibited: "The fear of the 'virtuosic' often seems to be a veil between his fingers and the keys."¹⁶ I found that after the second concert, Hanslick was much more impressed by Brahms's playing, especially of his piano arrangement of a Bach organ "Phantasie." "When Brahms pulls out all the stops in music such as the 'Phantasie' and lets a magical world of chords roar with full organ over an unmissable, booming organ point, he is truly unique. In this area he has no colleagues, let alone a rival."¹⁷ Reviews on Brahms-Online reveal that other critics were similarly "blown away" by his imitation of an organ.¹⁸ Further, several critics of Brahms's concerts in 1867

were positively in awe of his ability to play huge programs entirely from memory. Eduard Schelle, Hanslick's successor at *Die Presse*, was especially enthusiastic ("Finally, a piano player who knows how to pack a proper punch!"¹⁹) He offered an intriguing clue to an untold episode in Brahms reception when he called out some nay-sayers of the "officielle Kritik" who apparently were calling Brahms the musical "Antichrist,"²⁰ and pointed to the halls filled with Brahms fans as evidence to the contrary.

This is just a glimpse into the treasure trove the two websites offer about Vienna's musical events by making the vast coverage found in the city's daily papers accessible. The musicological "Brahms-Bild" has been constructed so far using only a fraction of the writing in newspapers. The nuances to explore, misconceptions to clear up, and new factors to discover will undoubtedly transform our understanding of Brahms.

Sanna Pederson

Notes. 1. They first appeared in 2022 and 2024, respectively. <https://hanslick.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/index-en.html?lang=en> and <https://brahms-online.oeaw.ac.at>. Other digital archives of Austrian composers and topics are listed here: <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/acdh/research/musicology/resources>. 2. Angelika Horstmann, *Untersuchungen zur Brahms-Rezeption der Jahre 1860–1880* (Hamburg: Karl Dieter Wagner, 1986). 3. Sanna Pederson, "Enlightened and Romantic German Music Criticism, 1800–1850" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995). 4. Such as <https://www.deepl.com/en/translator>. 5. To fully appreciate how much time this step can take, try using the platform for digitalized German newspapers, ZEFYS. There is no full-text search to help find the music reviews, and the newspapers must be viewed one page at a time. See my review in "Digitized German-Language Newspapers," *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 19, no. 1 (2022): 199–204, doi 10.1017/S1479409821000422. 6. Google Books has also the feature of capturing other typefaces as plain text, and for translating this text. Functionality varies, depending on the quality of the scan. 7. "ANNO Historische Zeitungen und Zeitschriften," Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, <https://anno.onb.ac.at/node/15>. 8. Hellmesberger Quartettabend, 21 November 1872, Vienna, Kleiner Musikvereinssaal, <https://brahms-online.oeaw.ac.at/EA-000125.html>. 9. Hanslick mentioned the concert in a review of 29 November 1872, <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=nfp&datum=18721129&seite=2&zoom=33>. 10. For information about this section of the website, see <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/acdh/research/musicology/research/composers-editions/hanslick-under-scrutiny>. 11. Eduard Hanslick, "Schriften für die *Neue Freie Presse*, 1864–1904," edited by Alexander Wilfing in collaboration with Katharina Bamer, Daniel Elsner, Anna-Maria Pfiel, and Fernando Sanz-Lázaro. Open access edition, including TEI markup (472 items as of January 2025). <https://hanslick.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/toc.html>. 12. Eduard Hanslick, *Sämtliche Schriften*, Historisch-kritische Ausgabe, Aufsätze und Rezensionen, edited by Dietmar Strauß (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1991–2011). 13. The reviews for 1872 and 1873 will be the next to appear. 14. For Brahms, see https://hanslick.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/hsl_person_id_41.html, where all mentioned works by Brahms are listed, as well as the edited

reviews that feature Brahms himself as a performer. 15. For the section "Eduard Hanslick's Writings," see <https://hanslick.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/bedeutung-hanslick-engl.html?lang=en>. 16. "Die Furcht vor dem 'Virtuosenhaften' scheint sich oft wie ein Schleier dämpfend zwischen seine Finger und die Tasten zu legen." *Neue Freie Presse, Morgenblatt* 1157 (19 November 1867): 2. Since Hanslick Online has the ability to specify the exact location of a quotation, this link goes directly to the quoted sentence: https://hanslick.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/c__1867.11.19.html?pbs=on#_p6_lb186. 17. "Wenn Brahms in Tonstücken wie die 'Phantasie' alle Register zieht und über einem unabsehbaren, dröhnenden Orgelpunkt eine Zauberwelt von Accorden mit 'vollem Werk' erbrausen läßt, da ist er geradezu einzig. Auf diesem Felde hat er keinen Nachbar, geschweige denn einen Rivalen." Hanslick, *Neue Freie Presse, Morgenblatt* 1165 (27 November 1867): 2. https://hanslick.acdh.oeaw.ac.at/c__1867.11.27.html?pbs=on#_p5_lb125. 18. "With the aid of the damper pedal, Mr. Brahms simulated the effect of organ playing, and even the full organ, most ingeniously, and finally even let us hear the organ pedal and the 32-foot pipes with his left hand. The effect of this manner of playing was extremely powerful and grand." Translation taken from Valerie Woodring Goertzen, "Brahms's Performances of Bach's Organ Works," *This Newsletter* 37, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 1–5, here 4. "Mit Hilfe des Klavierpedals ahmte Herr Brahms den Eindruck eines Orgelspiels, und zwar eines mit vollem Werke ausgeführten, auf's Täuschendste nach, und zuletzt ließ er uns gar mit der linken Hand das Orgel Pedal und die 32füßigen Pfeifen vernehmen. Die Wirkung dieser Spielweise war eine überaus mächtige und großartige." "R," *Neues Fremden-Blatt, Morgenblatt* 3, no. 325 (26 November 1867): 4–5 (ANNO). Also: "Especially when it comes to the production of organ-like effects, Brahms should not be afraid of any rival." "Besonders wenn es um die Wiedergabe orgelartiger Effecte handelt, dürfte Brahms so leicht keinen Rivalen zu befürchten haben." *Die Presse* 20, no. 326 (27 November 1867): 1 (ANNO). 19. "Endlich doch einmal ein Klavierspieler, der einen gehörig zu packen weiß!" E. Schelle, *Die Presse* 20, no. 78 (20 March 1867): [3] (ANNO). 20. "Johannes Brahms hat am vergangenen Sonntag ein zweites Concert mit dem glänzendsten Erfolg gegeben, trotz dem ihn die officiële Kritik in die Acht erklärt, ja sogar bei den Franzosen in der 'France Musicale' des Herrn Escudier als den musikalische Antichrist denunziert hat." E. Schelle, *Die Presse* 20, no. 101 (13 April 1867): 1 (ANNO). <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=apr&datum=18670320&seite=3&zoom=33&query=%22brahms%22&ref=anno-search>.