

## THE ROLE OF CLARINET IN OP. 114 A MINOR TRIO COMPOSED BY JOHANNES BRAHMS FOR CLARINET, CELLO AND PIANO

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**ABSTRACT:** *Sonatas and chamber music works written for clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld by Johannes Brahms, who was one of the most important composers of the second half of Romantic period, in the last years of his life are among the irreplaceable works of clarinet training repertoire. These works which enable the musical improvement for the player are also significant to transfer the stylistic properties of the time. Op. 114 A Minor Trio composed for Clarinet, Cello and Piano by Brahms is among the most important works of chamber music training repertoire and often appears in concerts. The work consists of four parts. The first part is Allegro, the second part is Adagio, the third one is Andantino grazioso and the fourth one is Allegro. In this study, the life and musical identity of Brahms are going to be discussed first and then solo and chamber music works with clarinet are going to be mentioned. Next, the parts which can create technical and musical difficulties for the clarinet performance in Op. 114 A Minor Trio of the composer are determined and the things to decrease these are going to be suggested.*

**KEYWORDS:** Romantic Period, Brahms, Mühlfeld, Clarinet, Trio

### INTRODUCTION: JOHANNES BRAHMS

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)



German Johannes Brahms as one of the prominent composers of the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century was born on 7 May 1833 as a son of a double bass player. He took his first music lessons from his father. Brahms started piano studies with tutors at the age of 7 and when he was 10, he studied compositions with the famous pianist and composer of Hamburg, Eduard Marxsen (1806-1887). Brahms gave his first public concert as a

pianist at the age of fourteen. He met Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi (1828-1898) in 1850 and they organized concert tours together. He met Franz Kiszt (1811-1886) in a concert where he accompanied Reményi in 1853. Liszt was impressed by the piano sonatas and *B Flat Major Scherzo* of Brahms (İlyasoğlu, 2001, p. 117). Meeting Reményi had a big influence on the development of Brahms' character. The two started to perform together in ordinary venues and some bourgeoisie halls. This cooperation between the two was quite important for Brahms to adopt 'Hungarian Style'. Another important person for the intellectual development of Brahms in the beginning of 1850s was Robert Schumann (1810-1856). He met Schumann in Dusseldorf in 1853 at the end of the tour which they went on with Reményi and this date was a milestone in the life of Brahms (Yavuz, 2010, p. 3-4). Schumann described Brahms in his writings as the future of German music; he made efforts to publish Brahms' songs and piano sonatas (İlyasoğlu, 2001, p. 118). While Brahms was respecting Schumann deeply, he was infatuated with Schumann's wife Clara Schumann (1819-1896) with an increasing passion (Say, 1994, p. 399). Brahms' admiration for Clara continued after the death of Schumann. Clara who fell under Brahms' spell of being romantically loved maintained her friendship till her death (Yavuz, 2010, p. 3-4). Brahms always asked for Clara's opinion about his new works and valued her criticism (İlyasoğlu, 2001, p. 118).

Brahms had always been someone who never took the easy way out and he analyzed everything he composed in a strict and personal criticism. He never left his works unfinished; he completed them all and canalized all his energy to his compositions. Although the conflict between his bourgeois prestige and prodigy caused inconsistency, he managed to combine the things which seemed unassociated in his art. Freedom and captivity, imagination and discipline, futurism and tradition were combined as a whole in Brahms' works via his suppressed happiness in his nature (Geiringer, 1982 cited by Yavuz, 2010, p. 18).

Brahms was one of the most important composers who fought for unconditional music in 19<sup>th</sup> century. The aim of the composer here was to emphasize the importance of composing pure music instead of presenting non-musical descriptive titles for music. Brahms used the technique of counterpoint studiously especially in his variations. Among his orchestral works, four symphonies, four concertos, Festival Overture, Academic Overture and variations on a theme of Haydn of Brahms are the most important works of musical history. He was a composer who took the coherent harmony apprehension of Ludwin van Beethoven (1770-1827) and Franz Schubert (1797-1828) in his symphonies (İlyasoğlu, 2001, p. 120). With the words of Hans van Bülow Brahms was accepted along with Bach and Beethoven as one of the three Bs of German music, in fact universal music (Kırankaya, 2010, p. 13). Brahms rejected systematical music throughout his life with his conservative attitude. He believed that the context of music lost its originality when it was based on a system and he did not compose systematical music (Mimaroglu, 1999, p. 112).

The most magnificent Protestant Church music composed after Bach is the Choir music of Brahms. Additionally, the composer created the perfect combination of sound and piano in his *Lieds*. Brahms composed until 1896. The work of the composer called *A German Requiem* is the most important work and it has the most crowded number of musicians. He proved with this piece that he was a mature composer when compared to

his contemporaries. There are 24 works of the composer for chamber music. Among these works; Piano Quintet and Clarinet Quintet are outstanding masterpieces of chamber music literature (İlyasoğlu, 2001, p. 120-121).

*Brahms who established his music on elaborately created classical forms reflected his creative personality in his chamber music works completely. "It is possible to say that even if Brahms had never composed anything else, he would have had his special state in the history of music just by his chamber music pieces" (Say, 1994, p. 403).*

Brahms' health got really worse after the deaths of his close friend Elizabeth von Herzogenberg (1847-1892) in 1892, Hans von Bülow in 1894 and Clara Schumann in 1896. He got sick after he had finished composing their last piece Chorale Preludes for organ after the funeral of Clara (Say, 1994, p. 400). Brahms was defeated by liver cancer just like his father and died in Vienna on 3 April 1897.

### Objective

The aim of this study is to mention clarinet works of Brahms, who was one of the most important composers of the second half of Romantic period, briefly and to inform about clarinet performance in Op. 114 A Minor Trio composed for Clarinet, Cello and Piano as one of these works. In line with this purpose;

- The life and musical identity of Brahms,
- The importance of Brahms in clarinet repertoire,
- Technical and musical analysis on clarinet performance in Op. 114 A Minor Trio composed for Clarinet, Cello and Piano by the composer are studied.

### Importance

Brahms was one of the most prominent composers of the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The works that Brahms composed for clarinet are among the most important and most performed works in clarinet repertoire in Romantic period. In this study, technical and musical analysis on clarinet performance in Op. 114 A Minor Trio composed for Clarinet, Cello and Piano by Brahms were performed and suggestions were made for clarinet performers. In the light of obtained information, it is aimed that playing clarinet part in Op. 114 A Minor Trio composed for Clarinet, Cello and Piano by presenting a new perspective for clarinet performers in a correct and effective way. In this direction, it is thought that this study is going to be a beneficial source for today's and future clarinetists.

### METHODOLOGY

In this study, general information related to the life and musical identity of Brahms is mentioned and the importance of Op. 114 A Minor Trio in chamber music repertoire was emphasized. The study was concluded with the technical and musical analysis of sections considered to be difficult in clarinet part and its harmony with mentioned instruments in Op. 114 A Minor Trio composed for Clarinet, Cello and Piano by Brahms.

### Limitations

This study is limited to;

- Personal observations and experiences of the researcher,

- Turkish and English periodicals, dissertations, articles, encyclopedias, books, internet databases and Op. 114 A Minor Trio by Brahms' edition that was published by C.F. Peters publishing company.

## JOHANNES BRAHMS AND CLARINET

Brahms is one of the important composers who contributed to the development of Romantic Period clarinet repertoire. His tendency towards works with clarinet started after his meeting German clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld (1856-1907). Mühlfeld who went into the palace of Meiningen Duke as a violinist taught himself to play clarinet after three years and became one of the masters of this instrument. Brahms who felt tired physically in the summer of 1890 and told his friend in a letter that he had doubts about composing again, heard the performance of Mühlfeld when he visited Meiningen and got impressed very much. Brahms, who changed his mind about composing, composed Clarinet Quintet and trio for him. The Quintet was performed in Meiningen Palace in Thüringen on 24 November 1891 by Mühlfeld and Joachim quartet. On 12 December in the same year, both pieces were performed in front of the public. In this concert, Brahms played the piano in trio and Mühlfeld played the clarinet in quintet. Later, Brahms composed two sonatas for clarinet in 1894. Of these sonatas, E Minor Op. 120 No. 1 Sonata was performed on 11 January 1895, D Flat Major Op. 120 No. 2 Sonata was performed on 8 January 1895 in Vienna by Mühlfeld. Brahms composed both of these sonatas for Mühlfeld as he had done in trio and quintet (Aktüze, 2013, p. 414-425). The composer wrote this note for Mühlfeld by whose performance he got impressed too much; 'To Mr. Richard Mühlfeld, with best regards and love to the master of this extraordinarily beautiful instrument, J. Brahms, ISCHL' (Fay, 1991 cited by Ergene, 2017, p. 34).

*This tradition of working as clarinetist – composer had been existing until Brahms for more than a century. It is known that W.A. Mozart composed his clarinet concerto for the famous clarinetist of that time, Anthon Stadler. This tradition continued between C. M. von Weber and clarinetist H. Baermann, L. Sphor and S. Herstedt and lastly Brahms and Mühlfeld (Lawson, 1998 cited by Ergene, 2017, p. 33).*

Losing his close friends and family members affected Brahms' technique extremely and caused him to mourn deeply. Brahms reflected the emotional expression of the pain he had suffered in these two clarinet sonatas (Geiringer, 1947 cited by Ergene, 2017, p. 34). Brahms structured these two sonatas with lyric, pastoral and epic passages, and avoided high sounds by considering the passionate and touching characteristics of clarinet (Panahi, 2013, p. 7). Both of these sonatas are among the irreplaceable pieces of clarinet training curriculum and contests.

Brahms adapted these four works into viola; however, chamber music has never attained the success of clarinet sonatas. Op. 120 Sonatas were among the most important works of viola repertoire (Ergene, 2017, p. 34). The parts of clarinet works of Brahms are given below:

Op. 115 B Minor Clarinet Quintet consists of four parts:

- Allegro

- Adagio
- Andantino
- Con moto

Op. 120 Clarinet Sonata, No 1 F Minor consists of four parts:

- Allegro appassionato
- Andante un poco Adagio
- Allegretto grazioso
- Vivace

Op. 120 Clarinet Sonata No 2 E Flat Minor consists of three parts:

- Allegro amabile
- Allegro appassionato-Sostenuto
- Andante con moto-Allegro

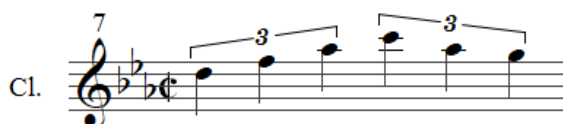
### **THE ROLE OF CLARINET IN OP. 114 A MINOR TRIO COMPOSED BY BRAHMS FOR CLARINET, CELLO AND PIANO**

Op. 114, Trio by Brahms is among the works that have been performed most and is the most important works of today's training curriculum. The composer employed A clarinet in this work. In the first performance of the work Rober Hausmann was on the cello, and as mentioned before, Mühlfeld was on the clarinet and Brahms was on the piano. The work consists of four parts:

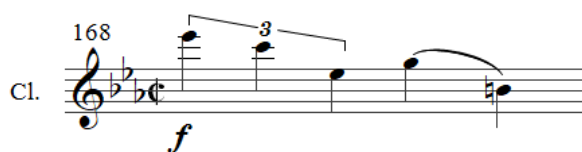
Allegro  
Adagio  
Andantino grazioso  
Allegro

#### **First Movement: Allegro**

The number of meter in the first part of the work is expressed with a C sign which has the same the number of meters with 4/4 meter. By putting a line onto this sign, alla breve is suggested. When considered that way, thinking 4/4 meter as 2/4 meter is expected. The composer's suggestion to think the meters as alla breve eases the performance of the part. For instance; trios in the 7<sup>th</sup> meter of clarinet part (see example 1) and the trio in the 168<sup>th</sup> meter (see example 2) can be performed more easily when considered as alla breve.



**Example 1. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, First Movement, 7<sup>th</sup> measure**



**Example 2. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, First Movement, 168<sup>th</sup> measure**

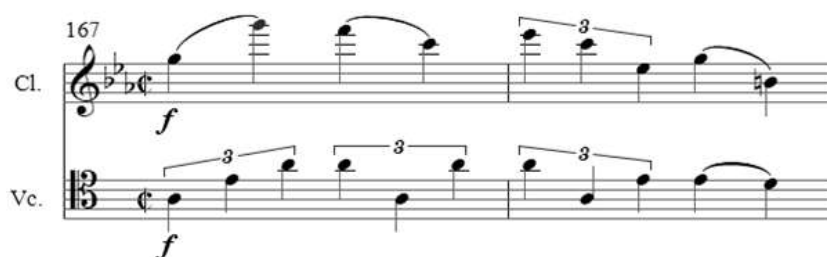
However, when semi quaver notes between the 32<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> meters (see example 3), in the 95<sup>th</sup> meter and between the 160<sup>th</sup> and 130<sup>th</sup> meters of clarinet part can not synchronize with the air. This group of notes should be practiced 4/4 in meter by thinking a quarter note as a quarter note without alla breve first, after getting accustomed to the tempo, the number of meters should be reduced by half by taking alla breve into consideration.



**Example 3. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, First Movement, measures between 32<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup>**

*Along with a complicated and polyphonic pattern, there is also an exciting and enthusiastic rhythm in Brahms' works. Opposite rhythmic figures contrast each other. One of the instruments plays two notes in a beat, and the other plays three notes in the same beat. This rhythmic technique is called "3 and 2" and it is a distinctive characteristic of Brahms music. The composer enjoyed using opposite sentences against syncopation and normal rhythm of the music (Panahi, 2013, p. 6).*

An example to the statement of Panahi is the 167<sup>th</sup> meter of the part, there are 2 notes played in 1 beat in clarinet part and 3 notes played in 1 beat in cello part (see example 4). The suggestion of the composer related to this part to be played as alla breve makes it performed more easily. If a quarter note is thought as a quarter note in this part, rhythmic synchronization between the clarinet and cello can not be achieved.



**Example 4. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, First Movement, measures between 167<sup>th</sup> and 168<sup>th</sup>**

There are semiquaver notes for 7 meters between the 218<sup>th</sup> and 224<sup>th</sup> meters of clarinet part in the first part. There are semiquaver notes for 5 meters between the 120<sup>th</sup> and 124<sup>th</sup>



meters of cello part. The clarinet and cello are played together for semiquaver notes between 120<sup>th</sup> and 123<sup>rd</sup> meters (see example 5).

The image displays a musical score for three systems of music. Each system consists of two staves: a Clarinet (Cl.) staff in the upper part and a Cello (Ve.) staff in the lower part. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The first system begins at measure 117. The second system begins at measure 118. The third system begins at measure 119. The music features semiquaver notes and triplets, with dynamics markings like 'pp sempre'.

**Example 5. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, First Movement, measures between 118<sup>th</sup> and 124<sup>th</sup>**

It is expected semiquaver notes to be played as triple croche by considering alla breve in this part. However, while practicing clarinet part in this section, it should be played by thinking a quarter note as a quarter note in other words as 4 semiquaver notes, then it should be practiced by taking alla breve into consideration. It is seen that the fingers move rhythmically on the fret with such a practice. The same practice is applicable in the practices with cello. After individual practices, the practices with clarinet, cello and piano together should be performed by listening to each other and there should be a rhythmical synchronization. In these parts, a metronome can be employed in a low tempo for a rhythmical synchronization first, and then the metronome should be increased gradually until performing in the desired tempo. It is important that the fingers both for clarinet and cello are synchronized and also hearing each note simultaneously with the air. From the beginning of the part, the clarinet, cello and piano should be played conforming to the tempo until the part which is written Poco meno Allegro, when there is Poco meno Allegro, the part should be slowed and the part should be ended at this speed.

### **Second Movement: Adagio**

The second part of the work is of 4/4 meter and Adagio. The part starts with a piano chord. The clarinet should start the work softly by controlling the breath along with the piano chord. If the clarinet starts the part with an uncontrolled breath, this may cause a sound explosion. The breath control should be maintained from the beginning through

the end of the part in order not to interrupt the musicality. Having a strong diaphragm resistance eases the performance for especially in the slow parts of works that were composed for clarinet in Classical, Romantic and Modern periods. The part should be considered not as 1/4 in meter but as 1/8. Considering that way helps the performance to get easier.

Clarinet, cello and piano should be listened to thoroughly in terms of coherence. Three semiquaver notes for clarinet in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> meters (see example 6) of the part also exist for cello and piano. Clarinet performs the note with the same meters along with the piano simultaneously; the cello which follows performs alone. In this part, listening to cello which follows clarinet and piano and the togetherness of them are quite important not to fail the tempo and interrupt the musical sentence.



**Example 6. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Second Movement, measures between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>**

Between the 37<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup> meters in the part, clarinet and cello perform the notes with the same values simultaneously throughout almost all the meters (see example 7). Performing while listening to each other is important in terms of both intonation and coherence.



**Example 7. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Second Movement, measures between 37<sup>th</sup> and 38<sup>th</sup>**

Between the 52<sup>nd</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> meters in the work, clarinet and cello perform the notes with same values simultaneously; however, the piano accompanies them with the notes with different values. Listening to each other is again important for musical coherence as it has been in general in work. The work ends with a long sound with holden with a 4 beat



note in all parts. The clarinet should finish the work by eye contacting the cello and feeling the piano (see example 8).



**Example 8. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Second Movement, measures between 52<sup>st</sup> and 54<sup>th</sup>**

### **Third Movement: Andantino grazioso**

The third part of the work is 3/4 in meter and Andantino grazioso in tempo. The part starts with the clarinet. From the beginning to the end of the part, it makes the performance easier to think the meter as 1 beat instead of 3. However, it is suggested that to think the meter as 3 beats at first then as 1 beat in the individual and group practices. An approach like this is quite important for these parts to be performed rhythmically.

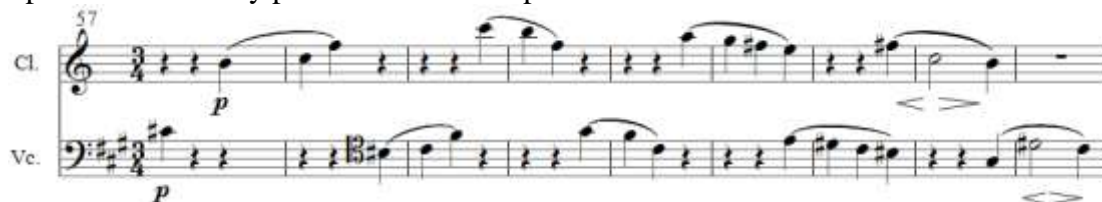
The clarinet should perform the sounds with legato without inserting different sounds between the meters 71<sup>st</sup> and 74 (see example 9) and in the meter 101<sup>st</sup> and between 114<sup>th</sup> and 169<sup>th</sup>. The clarinet should practice these passages with metronome and smooth them if necessary and should not disrupt the tempo. Technical problems can disappear by means of this practice and musical sentences come to the foreground.



**Example 9. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Third Movement, measures between 71<sup>st</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup>**

The sections between the 57<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup> meters (see example 10) and 75<sup>th</sup> and 81<sup>st</sup> meters in the part are the sections where clarinet and cello are performed as asking and responding. The clarinet is played first between the 57<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> meters and immediately cello answers it. Between the meters 62<sup>nd</sup> and 64<sup>th</sup>, cello starts at the last quaver note of clarinet. Listening to each other and not disrupting the tempo for both of the instruments are significant in terms of coherence and musical integrity. The clarinetist should move

his/her finger close to the fret and synchronize with the breath. This approach is important for an easy performance of the part.



**Example 10. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Third Movement, measures between 57<sup>th</sup> and 65<sup>th</sup>**

### Fourth Movement: Allegro

The last part is allegro in tempo. There are measure units both as 2/4 and as 6/8 in the beginning of the part (see example 11); however, a 9/8 measure unit is also used in addition to these units. Having different measure units in sequence for both clarinet and other instruments in the composition may lead to confusion. Therefore, each instrument should play by listening to each other, in this way this confusion disappears and performance becomes quite easier.



**Example 11. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Fourth Movement, measures between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Clarinet and cello are played simultaneously most in the 4<sup>th</sup> part. Togetherness of clarinet and cello started between the 30<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> measures is repeated several times with different themes until the end of the part. The same note values between the measures 30<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> also exist in measures between 129<sup>th</sup> and 134<sup>th</sup>. The clarinet should perform semiquaver notes between 30<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> (see example 12) and 129<sup>th</sup> and 134<sup>th</sup> rhythmically and always listen to cello and piano. The notes with staccato in these sections should be as short as cello's.



**Example 12. J. Brahms, Op. 114 A Minor Trio Composed by Brahms for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Fourth Movement, measures between 30<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup>**

### CONCLUSION

Brahms who followed the path of Beethoven by remaining loyal to the classical style of previous era and defending absolute music has been remembered as one of the most profound composers of history of music with his symphonies, concertos, *lieds*, choir music, piano pieces, *A German Requiem* and chamber music that he composed

throughout his life. Clarinet repertoire in romantic period got enriched with the pieces for clarinet composed by Brahms. Op. 120 No.1 F Minor Sonata, Op. 120 No.2 E Flat Major Sonata, Op. 114 A Minor Trio and Op. 115 B Minor Clarinet Quintet for Strings by Brahms are quite important works in clarinet training repertoire in terms of the transfer of stylistic characteristics of that period. These works by Brahms has never lost their significance from past to present.

Brahms who got distant from composing due to the depression he had had in the beginning of 1890s, got impressed from the performance of clarinetist of Meiningen Palace orchestra, Mühlfeld, after he had listened to him and decided to compose aforementioned works.

Op. 114 A Minor Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano by Brahms is among the leading works of chamber music training repertoire. Both having been introduced to the history of music along with many other works by Brahms and having a significant place in clarinet literature, this work lead this research to be presented.

In this study, the life of Brahms, who was one of the famous composers of the time, was discussed and analysis were done related to the role of clarinet in Op. 114 A Minor Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano. In accordance with the analysis performed on the work, technical and musical difficulties were determined and suggestions were put forward to decrease these difficulties. It is thought that this study is going to help present and future clarinetists to know Brahms and have clearer understanding of clarinet performance of this work.

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