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The Role of the Piano in the First Movement of Brahms's *Piano Concerto in D Minor, Op. 15*

1. Brahms's Correspondence: Reason to Analyze the Role of the Piano

Brahms's *Piano Concerto in D Minor Op. 15* is commonly connected with Robert Schumann's suicide attempt in January 1854. In June 1854, Brahms began composing the piece that became *Piano Concerto Op. 15* and spent five years drafting it, initially as a two-piano sonata and then a symphony. The first movement's vertiginous opening is usually seen as Brahms in horror, thinking of Schumann's illness and suicide attempt. By the time Schumann died (July 29, 1856), Brahms had decided on a piano concerto, but he took another three years of edits and correspondences to complete it.

Brahms's letters reveal a curious gap: the piano writing is unmentioned, yet there are numerous references to the orchestration process. Brahms critiqued the score as "terribly difficult and huge", with "a disastrous first movement," and "a mess through and through, that is the stamp of dilettantism" and predicted that "It will never become anything reasonable."¹ Brahms frequently refers to orchestration issues of *Op. 15*, questioning his choices and asking Joachim to offer critique of the process work².

Yet, the piano writing of the first movement (*Maestoso*) has important and multifarious details. The piano writing evinces four possible roles that contribute to the powerful opening minutes of *Op. 15*. Such moments include imitations and conflicts between the piano and orchestra and dramatic tensions that require collaboration of soloist and orchestra in order to convey. This essay focuses on details found in Brahms's piano writing, using the roles he assigned the piano in the *Maestoso* exposition of *Op. 15*. The discussion aims to summarize

¹ Avins, *Brahms: A Life in Letters* (Oxford, 1997), 85.

² See Avins, *Brahms: A Life in Letters* (Oxford, 1997), 149, 151, 164 for examples of Brahms and Joachim exchanging edits and ideas, with references to the "role of the orchestra" (Brahms' words), and Joachim's concern that the piece "requires a very good orchestra".

the most prominent of the roles of the piano by totalling appearances of piano writing that features them. The piano writing in the *Maestoso* contains four aspects that will be analyzed and later organized into quantitative tables for discussion:

- 1) Collaboration: unified effect (mood, tonality, configuration) between soloist and orchestra, or a goal (e.g. transition, climax) achieved through similar material and expressive markings in both soloist and orchestra parts.
- 2) Conflict: orchestra and soloist playing divergent rhythms simultaneously, or playing clashing elements (dissonance, same register), or, places where soloist or orchestra interrupt one another.
- 3) Imitation: soloist repeating material previously played by the orchestra (or vice-versa), or piano writing that resembles orchestral texture (thick, expansive).
- 4) Drama: the piano giving a theme hitherto unheard or adding to a previous theme.

The analysis positions the score as the primary source for evidence supporting a classification of a given phrase or component into the roles listed. The designations “Conflict” and “Drama” are similar, the distinction between them may appear trite in some instances; hemiola, cross-rhythms, and virtuoso piano writing, placed alongside an active orchestra part, can be heard both as conflict and drama. Here, “Drama” and “Conflict” are viewed from the piano part: drama is an unexpected development on a previous idea, or the addition of an entirely new part. The longer phrases leading to structurally-significant changes may include Conflict as well, where there is a sense that the piano has overtaken the action (phrases featuring Dramatic Conflicts, when they happen, are fantastically written).

Likewise, there are differences between “Collaboration” and “Imitation”. Imitations do not always necessitate Collaboration and often use dissimilar harmonic areas. Imitation happens in small phrases and larger sections, when piano or orchestra feature material the other has played, yet it may be modified. Collaboration happens when enough common material is written for piano and orchestra together, leading to soloist-orchestra cooperation (common harmonies, textures, complimentary dynamics, resulting in a general effect, such as

grandeur, anxiety, resignation, etc.). To proceed, I pose two questions: What elements of the piano writing can be classified as *Drama, Conflict, Imitation, Collaboration*? Will tallying the four components result in an argument for the piano's role as primarily "Dramatic", "Conflicting", "Imitative", "Collaborative", or will it result in a combination of all four?

2. Exposition of the First Movement: Reading the Piano's Role

The opening tutti (mm. 1 - 90) contains five themes, the piano later adds three more (for a total of eight themes). Brahms's preoccupation with Schumann's illness and death appear to be emphasized by the anguished mood in which the *Maestoso* spends much of its time. Minor keys are prevalent in the orchestra's themes (D minor, A minor, B-flat minor, G minor) and rhythms are usually agitated. Moreover, Conflict and Drama dominate the orchestral opening of the *Maestoso*: its moodiness is palpable (five themes in four minutes).

The entry of the piano (Piano Theme 1) is imitative (m. 91), when the piano continues the figure played by the cellos in the previous six measures:

The image shows a musical score for two staves: Klav. (Piano) and Vcl. (Cello). The Klav. staff has a treble clef and a bass clef. The Vcl. staff has a bass clef. The music is in D minor. The Klav. part is mostly silent until measure 91, where it enters with a new theme marked 'p espr.'. The Vcl. part plays a melodic line with a 'p' dynamic marking.

Example 1: mm. 87 - 91

The piano bass line imitates the cello, but Piano Theme 1 (m. 91) is individualistic, announcing its presence with something to add. Brahms uses an idea from Classical Concertos (Mozart *K. 466, K. 491* and Beethoven *Op. 15* and *Op. 19*): giving the piano a new theme. Piano Theme 1 sounds new, but contains the same stepwise strands of thirds used by the clarinet and bassoon in Orchestra Theme 5, in the opening tutti. The initial role of the piano is both imitative and dramatic: it has elements of orchestral writing:



Example 2: mm. 85 - 86, Clarinet (upper staff) and Bassoon (lower staff).



Example 3: mm. 87-90, Bassoon in double thirds.

however, the thirds of the bassoon and clarinet last a few bars and employ harmony native to D major. The piano's first chord changes to D minor, and the piano first theme lasts fifteen measures of double- and triple-notes: thirds, sixths, triads, and octave chords. Piano Theme 1 has tonicizations of D minor, G minor, F Major, A Major, C Major, and finally E Major. The E Major prolongation in the last two measures acts as a secondary dominant (of A Major, the dominant of D minor), bringing about the first serious conflict between soloist and orchestra. But first, the piano first theme:



Example 4: Piano Theme 1 (mm. 91 - 105)

The drama in Piano Theme 1 is in its lengthy and exploratory character. Loosely-based on material played by the orchestra, the soloist has a fifteen-measure phrase featuring transformation of fragments found in the woodwinds (see Examples 2 and 3) into a stand-alone theme. This is the longest phrase featuring soloist accompanied by orchestra. The accompaniment is sparse, following the piano through six new harmonic areas, a logical volume of solo utterance after the piano waited ninety bars to contribute. Soon, the piano takes a stab at challenging the orchestra. The climax of Piano Theme 1 is an appearance of the “shuddering trill”³ the violins and cellos from the start of Orchestra Theme 1:

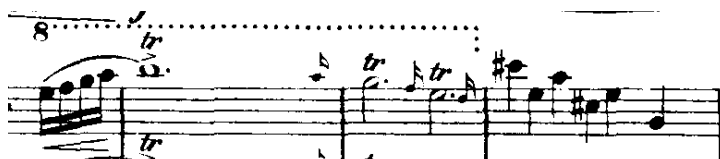


Example 5: mm. 1 - 8, violoncello parts in Orchestra Theme 1. Note the sixteenth notes in measure 7 leading to the trill in measure 8, marking the high point of the first theme.

To close first theme, the piano part features triplets from the bass to soprano register, outlining a diminished triad (Brahms adds the seventh with accent in beat 3). This arpeggiated figure expands the violin’s and cello’s one beat of sixteenths into six beats of diminished harmony leading to the trill, a trill matching the violin register it imitates:



Example 6: mm. 109 - 113, bar-long triplet lead-in to the high trill, played at the same register as violin 1 in m. 19 (see Example 7), at *fortissimo*, a moment the piano challenges the orchestra.



Example 7: mm. 18p - 20, violin 1 trill in the same register as the piano at m. 110, preceded by one-beat pickup.

³ Hepokoski, 226.

The piano part imitates the orchestra's culminating figure, apparently collaborating with the orchestra to achieve unified harmonic tension. However, this is the first moment of conflict. Not only does the piano part exclude the first six measures of Orchestra Theme 1, it is shorter than the initial phrase:



Example 8: mm. 1 - 56: violin 1, including an opening melody with two shorter trills preceding the longer trill shown in Example 5, measure 8.

The piano part uses the trill in a demonstration of wit. The orchestra prepared the trill in the first six bars (with two shorter trills), establishing its context. After omitting the first six bars, the pianist “s” the orchestra by placing the trill out of its established context: re-purposing the trill as a climax to Piano Theme 1. This surprise throws harmonic and thematic expectations into confusion. The piano part also features a full bar (rather than a single beat) of preparation leading to the trill, and the entire bar is in diminished harmony: an unstable chord (marked *fortissimo*). The orchestra and piano engage in four bars of competitive trilling. The final chords of the first orchestra-piano conflict are played in identical *fortissimo* rhythm by piano, horns, violins 1 and 2, and viola (collaboration):



Example 9: mm. 113p - 117, note the last measure including piano (centre), timpani, horns, violins, and violas all participating in the same rhythm.

After re-stating Orchestra Theme 1 in its original harmonic order (organizing the harmonic sequence the piano threw into disarray), the orchestra provides the piano an opportunity to cooperate. Here, the piano acquiesces, by playing Orchestra Theme 2 in octaves (originally played by violins, see Example 10). To this phrase Brahms adds a dramatic element by giving the piano an accompaniment in minor seconds (bass), adding tension to an already-tense key area: A Major, the dominant:

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is for the piano, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a tempo marking of *espr.* (espressivo). It features a melodic line with slurs and a bass line with a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The bottom staff is labeled "Violin 1:" and shows a melodic line that mirrors the piano's upper voice.

Example 10: mm. 123 - 127 piano solo with added bass minor seconds accompaniment imitates violin 1 mm. 27p - 31.

For the last few measures of the Orchestra Theme 2 played by the piano, the flute quietly forms a duo on the same notes:

The image shows three staves of musical notation. The top staff is for the Flute, with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The middle staff is for the Piano, with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking. Both the flute and piano parts play the same melodic line, which consists of a series of eighth notes with slurs.

Example 11: mm. 137 - 140, flute and piano soprano are exactly the same notes.

Next, the piano imitates Orchestra Theme 3 (mm. 142 - 148), and begins leading the exposition through a new key, F minor, to Piano Theme 2 (in F major). This phrase is a conflict

similar to Piano Theme 1: the orchestral tutti ended in D Major but Piano Theme 1 changed the key decisively to D minor (at m. 91). The sudden change from major to minor is an indication of conflict, which is further reinforced by the piano part changing from minor back to major, exactly when the orchestra has accepted the piano's minor key landscape.

In Orchestra Theme 3, piano accompanies orchestra in F minor (Example 12). The cello and flute outline the dominant of F, attempting to confirm the key will remain F *minor*, but the piano part suddenly changes key. After finishing Orchestra Theme 3 on the dominant (see Example 12, m. 147, the piano enters in F minor (Example 12, mm. 149). However, a key change to F major is signalled by the piano changing from D-flat to D-natural (written in a grace note for sheer rapidity) and the piano follows with an F Major tetrachord in trills:

The image shows a page of a musical score for Example 12, measures 147-152. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in B (Klar. (B)), Bassoon (Fag.), Horns 3 and 4 (Hr. 3. (F) 4.), Piano (Klav.), Violins 1 and 2 (1.Viol., 2.Viol.), Brass (Br.), Viola (Vcl.), and Double Bass (K-B.). The key signature changes from F minor to F major at measure 150. The piano part (Klav.) features a grace note (D-natural) at measure 150, signaling the key change. The score includes various dynamics such as *p*, *pp*, and *cresc.*, and performance instructions like *arco* and *Solo*.

Example 12: mm. 147 - 152, at m. 148 the Bass and Cello play the Dominant Seventh of F, as do the flutes in m. 149, and the piano responds with an alternating C and D-flat, commonly found notes around a cadence into F minor. However, at m. 150 - the key change into F major - it is the piano slipping in a D-natural grace note to signal the shift to F major.

At the downbeat of the key change (Example 12, m. 150) the piano shifts to F major but the orchestra remains on the dominant. The piano both interacts with the orchestra in two opposing ways: 1) the piano suggests a major *resolution* to the D minor key change initiated by Piano Theme 1 (m. 91), but, 2) the shift is so rapid, it is another “surprise” (Example 6) to which the orchestra must (yet cannot) react instantly. After accepting the F major change, the orchestra accompanies the piano for the remaining measures, only in dominant harmony. Narratively speaking, this transition proves the piano part is substantial enough to cause the orchestra to give way, following into the new key area. The role of the piano is to resolve conflicts, all have been in minor keys, and initiate the next section and key area: Piano Theme 2 (in F Major).

After surprising the orchestra with the new key, F major, the piano pursues a four-bar, solo-style dominant lock, freeing itself of the orchestra and preparing for the Piano Theme 2 (an entirely solo theme). The orchestra continues to provide dominant harmony for three bars (plus one beat), before subsiding. Here, the piano part creates harmonic uncertainty. Entirely solo by the fourth bar, the harmonic rhythm markedly slower than before (entirely C major), the piano oscillates around C, generating the usual tension of dominant lock:

The image shows a page of a musical score for Example 12, measures 150-154. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with staves for various instruments. The piano part (Klav.) is the central focus, showing a dominant lock with a 'dim.' marking and a '9' symbol. The orchestra provides dominant harmony for three bars before subsiding. The score includes parts for Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Fag.), Horns 3 and 4 (Hr. 3, (F) 4.), Piano (Klav.), Violins 1 and 2 (1.Viol., 2.Viol.), Trumpets (Br.), Violas (Vel.), and Double Basses (K.-B.).

Example 13: mm. 153 - 156, the orchestra gradually disappears; the violins, oboe, flute, and bassoon finish at m. 154, the horns, cello and bass finish at the downbeat of m. 156.

At last, in Piano Theme 2, the soloist has full control; there is no orchestral involvement.

Two qualities of Brahms's design result in an imitative-dramatic trajectory of Piano Theme 2: its first pair of chords, and this theme bearing marked characteristic similarities to Piano Theme 1 (Example 1).

Piano Theme 2 opens with a plot twist: having emancipated itself from the orchestra ten seconds prior (Example 13), the piano's first chords make reference to the orchestra by using the first interval of the Orchestral Theme 5. The piano imitates the violins and flutes (see Example 14), with the perfect fourth in soprano (C—F).

Example 14: Piano Theme 2 first two chords use the Orchestra Theme 5 perfect fourth, mm. 157 - 158; below, mm. 82 - 84, violins (and flutes) Orchestra Theme 5 of the opening tutti. Note that A - D forms the interval of a Perfect Fourth.

As in the beginning of Piano Theme 1 (Examples 1 and 2), Piano Theme 2 uses harmonies diatonic to its home key (F major). Shortly, Brahms departs from such harmonies to explore others. Brahms uses Orchestra Theme 5 as a departure point and develops it using chromatic harmonies and key relationships more frequently than he used in Piano Theme 1. Essentially, Piano Theme 2 contains more harmonic drama.

This drama begins instantly after the perfect fourth: the melody is a series of rising chords combined with short descending steps, supported by octaves in the bass. As in Piano Theme 1 (m. 91-105), Piano Theme 2 is texturally thick, but tempo change, augmented rhythm,

and expressive markings render it heavier and broader. Brahms marks the theme *espressivo*, *legato*, *p(iano)*, with crescendos as it evolves.

The absence of the orchestra is, in itself, somewhat a conflict. The second theme tempo (*Poco più moderato*) is ideal for accompaniment compared to the previous tempo, *Maestoso*: what a frustration for the orchestra — with its ability to execute nuances more subtly and gradually than the piano — to be excluded from this orchestrally-inspired section. In its nineteen-bars, Piano Theme 2 offers the orchestra a taste of its own medicine: material suited to cooperation, at a tempo that would flatter the orchestra's sensibilities, yet sounded entirely in piano solo. This passage is a rejection of the orchestra's resources similar to the opening tutti, which excluded the piano while the orchestra played material suited to a bravura soloist.

Collaboration in the piano role during Piano Theme 2 is found in its imitation of orchestral texture. After Piano Theme 2 imitates and develops Orchestra Theme 5:

The image displays a musical score for Piano Theme 2, measures 157 through 179. The score is written for piano (Klav.) and is divided into five systems. The first system (measures 157-163) is marked *Poco più moderato*, *espr.*, and *p legato*. The second system (measures 164-167) is marked *p dolce* and features sixteenth-note patterns with slurs and accents. The third system (measures 168-170) is marked *cresc.*. The fourth system (measures 171-176) is marked *dim.*. The fifth system (measures 177-179) is marked *ff*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 15: mm. 157 - 175, the piano second theme (all solo). Note the simplicity in what could be a string accompaniment from mm. 167 - 175, a slow and predictable harmonic rhythm which modulates intriguingly to D-flat major in m. 174.

Brahms writes an expansive, orchestral-style texture for the piano (Example 15, mm. 166-171). Most notable is the distance (measuring the intervals) between soprano and bass voices being larger than four octaves. This lasts for five measures plus one beat, leading to the culmination of Piano Theme 2 (Example 15, m. 171):

- m. 165, soprano G and bass B-Flat
- m. 166, soprano C and Bass A range
- m. 167, soprano F and Bass A range
- m. 169, soprano B and Bass G-sharp
- m. 171, soprano B-Flat and Bass C

To execute these leaps demands excellent coordination from the soloist. It also generates sounds that are full-bodied (*dolce*) and expansive (*crescendo*). A rhythmic augmentation and continuation of Orchestra Theme 5,



Example 16: mm. 82 - 85.

the piano has Orchestra Theme 5, in polyrhythms (Example 15, mm. 166 - 171), and uses the intervals noted from mm. 165 - 71 to create a texture so vast it sounds as if at least four instruments would be needed for something to sound so substantial. The root pitches in the bass are an octave apart from their corresponding harmonies, giving the impression of contrabass playing the root notes and cello playing the corresponding harmonic tones. The result is texturally thick:



Example 17: mm. 168 - 170: Piano's bass line, lowest notes are separated from the rest of the chords by an octave.

The final bars of Piano Theme 2 feature rhythmic augmentation Orchestra Theme 5:



Example 18: mm. 174 - 175, soprano voice in quarters where the orchestra played the same material in eighths during the opening tutti.

Piano Theme 2 closes with a modulation into D-Flat major, and the orchestra resumes: first winds, then strings. The orchestra has an eight-bar interlude through related keys, arriving at a re-statement Piano Theme 2 in F Major (played by strings). The piano joins, but Brahms casts it in conflict for a few measures, the soloist and orchestra are antagonist in three ways:

- 1) Invasively close range of the Piano part to the Violin, Viola, Cello, and Bass;
- 2) Piano part written in appoggiaturas for the first measure, each of the piano's non-chord tones landing with the orchestra's melody (e.g., when strings play F, the piano plays E, only resolving to a unison F on the weak part of the beat);
- 3) The piano writing subdivides the orchestra's rhythm: two bars of eighth notes and a third bar of triplets, the triplets produce an impatient effect.

A musical score for three measures, measures 184, 185, and 186. The score includes five staves: Klav. (Piano), 1.Viol. (Violin), 2.Viol. (Viola), Br. (Bassoon), and Vcl. (Cello). The piano part is marked 'p legato' and features eighth notes and triplets. The orchestra parts (Violin, Viola, Bassoon, Cello) feature quarter notes and half notes. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Example 19: mm. 184 - 186: clashes found in each of the three measures here.

Brahms writes for the piano to match and exceed the orchestra's range. Over the series of appoggiaturas, the piano accompaniment rises by a twelfth where the orchestra is limited to the span of an octave (limited to Piano Theme 2). In the next measure (Example 19, m. 185), orchestra and piano descend together but the piano still includes non-harmonic tones between orchestral melody notes. At the piano triplets (Example 19, m. 186), the piano doubles the lowest bass note at an important moment: dominant preparation for the cadence in F major. The triplets fill the chordal motion with scalar motion, and the dominant root - C - is played by the piano equally as low as the basses. I classify this as "orchestration" of the piano to maximize the piano's ability as both a member of the orchestra and a distinctive soloist.

After three measures of clashing ideas, the piano part continues in triplets, but this time in concordant harmonically with the strings (an effect Brahms will use to conclude the exposition proper):

The image displays a musical score for Example 20, measures 188-191. It is divided into two systems. The upper system features the piano part, with a treble clef on the top staff and a bass clef on the bottom staff. The piano part consists of a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand. The lower system shows the orchestra part, with five staves representing Violins I, Violins II, Violas, Cellos, and Double Basses. Each staff has a solid line for the orchestra and a broken line for the piano. Dynamics include 'cresc.' and 'f'.

Example 20: mm. 188 - 191, the same chords both in orchestra (solid) and piano (broken).

In concertos of typical sonata-allegro form, the exposition is complete when first and second themes are played by soloist and orchestra, concluding in a new key (in minor keys, the relative major). Brahms adds Piano Theme 3 (drama), in the same key structure (F Major –

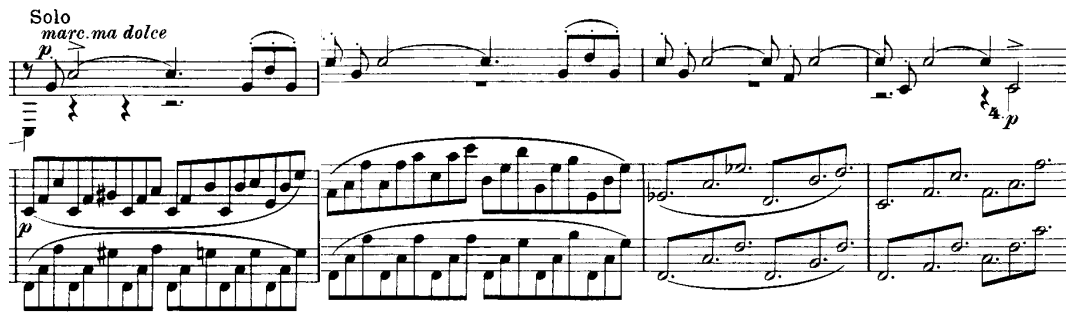
D-flat Major – F Major) in Piano Theme 2:

The image shows a musical score for Piano Theme 2, measures 201p-209. The score is in F major and modulates to D-flat major. It features three staves: Piano (Klav.), Horns 3 and 4 (Hr. 3, (F) 4), and Piano (Klav.). The Piano part includes dynamics like *p*, *piii f*, *cresc.*, *f*, *dim.*, and *legato*. The Horns part is marked *pp* and *dolce*. The Piano part includes dynamics like *dim.*, *dolce*, and *pp*.

Example 21: mm. 201p - 209, piano's third theme, in F major modulating to D-flat major.

With Piano Theme 3 Brahms adds to the dramatic potential of exposition structure (formal innovation). While shorter than the Piano Themes 1 and 2, Piano Theme 3 aligns the orchestra and piano harmonically in F Major, which triggers the *codetta* (see Example 22). As in dominant preparation for Piano Theme 2, the piano is the foundation of dominant lock on C: Brahms does not score the double basses (Example 21, mm. 208 - 209). The piano not only adds a new theme to the exposition's conclusion (unprecedented in Classical and Romantic concerti), it marks the dominant-tonic relationship that points to essential expositional closure.

By the *codetta*, the piano accompaniment has arrived at a typical style: triplet chords against duple melody. The horns, marked "Solo", have Orchestra Theme 5 (see Example 22), now in F major:



Example 22: mm. 210 - 213, the fifth theme in the horn part (marked Solo), piano part in triplets.

Brahms assigns the dynamic *piano* to the piano's accompaniment, the horns *marcato* *ma dolce*. There are two aspects of the *codetta* which point to the piano serving the orchestra: 1) there are no crescendos indicating the piano dynamic rises from beneath the horns' *marcato ma dolce*, and, 2) the accompaniment writing consists of broken chords that compliment the theme itself.

There are two other arguments possible for this passage, offering a conflicting and imitative reading. Beneath the agreeing dynamics and harmonies, the rhythm of the piano part creates a subtle conflict: Brahms writes triplets for the piano, a cross-rhythm while Orchestra Theme 5 moves in eighth notes (triple against duple). Imitation is also a plausible interpretation: the piano part imitates its earlier, triplet-inclusive accompaniments. Brahms writes triplets in three important places for the piano: 1) piano's statement of Orchestra Theme 2 (Example 12, m. 147); (2) the alto voice of Piano Theme 2 (Example 15, mm. 167 - 175); (3) Piano Theme 3 accompaniment (Example 21). The continuance of triplets in the *codetta* is germane to the material in earlier phrases as well as proceeding into essential expositional closure.

This analysis covers the exposition, but Brahms's accompaniment writing in later sections deserves mentioning. Brahms does not use exclusively triplets: he writes eighths for the piano in the development, and uses them in higher dynamic levels and collaborative passages between piano and orchestra, where *Stretto* and textural enlargement lead to

climaxes in the development and *coda* (the *coda* use the *conchetta*'s triplet-against-eighth idea to convincing dramatic/conflicting effect between orchestra and soloist). Brahms gives the piano its own rules and accompaniment traits, resulting in a piano part that can be at odds with melodies it accompanies, when duple rhythms structure the melody. Brahms creates and develops “complicated support” or “ironic accompaniment”, a style of accompanying I define as material which compliments the theme where dynamics and harmony are concerned, but conflicting in rhythmic values, thus creating subtle unrest between the theme and its so-called “support”.

3. Discussion and Tables of Examples

Some examples noted above include orchestral references, but there are expanses of piano writing that contribute the exposition's form and thus show the piano's role in the exposition as a whole. Virtuoso piano playing is not found often in the exposition, so the degree of conflict and drama is subtler. To summarize examples of piano writing, I have organized them in a table below according to their categories (conflict, collaboration, conflict, drama):

Table 1: Exposition Examples from *Reading the Piano's Role*

Example and Bar(s)	Category	Section
1) mm. 90 - 91	Imitation	Piano bass imitates figure in cellos.
4) mm. 91-105	Drama	Piano first theme (D Minor)
6) mm. 109 - 113	Conflict	Piano culminates its first theme by hijacking the orchestral trill figure, where the trill does not belong according to the identical phrase in the orchestral tutti.
9) mm. 113p - 116	Conflict	Piano and orchestra competitive trilling/same registers.
9) mm. 117	Collaboration	Piano and orchestra same chords in same rhythm, closing the first piano theme statement.
10) mm. 123 - 127	Imitation Drama	Piano imitates orchestral tutti theme 2, develops it with appoggiaturas in accompaniment.
11) mm. 137 - 140	Collaboration	Piano and flute play same notes simultaneously.

12) mm. 147 - 152	Conflict	Piano changes key, orchestra follows (F minor to F major).
13) mm. 153 - 156	Drama	Piano takes over in dominant of F Major solo passage.
14) mm. 157-158	Imitation	Piano second theme (solo), begins with P4 interval from orchestral tutti theme 5.
15) mm. 159 - 175	Drama Conflict	Piano second theme (solo) uses P4 interval in other keys, expands into self-sufficient melody, excludes the orchestra.
17) mm. 168 - 170	Imitation	Bass notes an octave apart from tenor broken chords
18) mm. 174 - 175	Imitation	Piano augmenting orchestra's fifth theme
19) mm. 184 - 186	Conflict	Piano appoggiaturas clash with orchestra
20) mm. 188 - 191	Collaboration	Piano triplets match orchestra harmonies
21) mm. 201p - 209	Drama	Piano's third theme, sparsely accompanied by strings
22) mm. 210 - 213	Collaboration Conflict	Piano part supports horn theme through dynamics and harmony; triplets in piano part clash with horn eighths.

According to Table 1, there is an equal proportion of two elements: five of Imitation and five of Drama, four instances of Collaboration, and six of Conflict. Instances of Conflict occupy the majority of instances of the piano's involvement. Dramatic elements (new themes, expanding on orchestral themes) and Imitative (referring to former themes, textural copying of orchestral style) are the second-most frequent. Since conflicts generate tension, it follows that Drama would be the next most prominent. Collaboration is the least prominently featured, but when the text is collaborative there is evidence of Brahms's developing powers as a chamber music composer (e.g. Examples 11 and 20).

However, Table 1 provides only summary of each element and no specific detail about what happens when that element enters the concerto, or how long the happenings take. Instances of Drama, Conflict, Imitation, and Collaboration vary in duration. While Conflict may have six appearances, those six appearances may be shorter in written length than aspects that appear less frequently. Frequent appearance of a given category does not mean that the musical utterances are more substantial; there must be lengthy phrases with elements (harmonic, rhythmic, melodic, imitative) that justify not only an appearance, but one that warrants building an interpretation. To clarify each segment's length, the next table shows

examples in their respective categories. If analyzed dualistically, the example is placed in two categories.

Table 2: Categories of Piano Writing by Length

Collaboration	Total	Imitation	Total	Conflict	Total	Drama	Total
9) mm. 117	1	1) mm. 90 - 91	1	6) mm. 109 - 113	5	4) mm. 91-105	15
11) mm. 137 - 140	4	10) mm. 123 - 127	5	9) mm. 113p - 116	4	10) mm. 123 - 127	5
20) mm. 188 - 191	4	14) mm. 157 - 158	2	12) mm. 147 - 152	6	13) mm. 153 - 156	4
22) mm. 210 - 213	4	17) mm. 168 - 170	3	15) mm. 159 - 175	16	15) mm. 159 - 175	16
		18) mm. 174 - 175	2	19) mm. 184 - 186	3	21) mm. 201p - 209	9
				22) mm. 210 - 213	4		
	13		13		38		49

Table 2 classifies forty-nine measures of piano writing as Drama; Drama is the longest component of the piano's role during the exposition. Conflict is next, consisting of thirty-eight measures. Collaboration and Imitation are each thirteen measures, sharing the lowest amount. This result is not surprising considering that in the exposition, the piano either advances orchestral themes (Example 13 m. 166) or develops an entirely new melody (Example 21, m. 201).

By this tally, my initial question may be answered (summarizing the piano's role in the exposition). The piano part contributes mainly Drama and Conflict by asserting elements that force the orchestra to take notice of the piano's part. The number of themes given to the orchestra and the weight of those themes is great, ostensibly Brahms writes material for the piano that is as conflicting as the orchestral writing is heavy. At structurally significant junctures, dominant lock passages which transition the piano and orchestra into new sections (Examples 4, 13, 21), the piano plays a leading role in proposing and confirming dominant-tonic resolution.

Taken together, the Conflict and Drama categories total eighty-seven measures of piano writing, nearly equal to the orchestra's opening tutti (mm. 1 - 90). Given the length of the first movement, this quantity of Conflict and Drama provided by the piano writing serves to generate sufficient momentum to fuel the remaining half (development and recapitulation are 249 bars, exposition is 235).

Considering the significance of the piano part's flare for the dramatic, it is odd that Brahms did not mention it in his letters to the Schumanns or Joachim. Perhaps he considered his piano writing would speak for itself when reviewed by professionals, who would recognize Brahms's expansion of the standard concerto form and material? Since Brahms drafted the score as a chamber work (two-piano sonata) and a symphony, it is plausible the concerto version reflects these genres, which may be why the piano writing is so suited to and imitative of the orchestra.

One does not, however, wonder why the public initially received it coldly, even in light of its current popularity. Brahms writes complex elements from the start, accessible by score study, practice, and review. After the premiere, Brahms recalled the audience "hissing", and the score was initially "savaged by critics"⁴. After working for five years on *Op. 15*, it is possible Brahms believed that the result evidenced his composing skill at new heights and he may not have worried that his complex piano writing—conflict, collaboration, imitation, drama—were not appreciated by the public.

While these designs are not necessarily accessible by listening to the *Maestoso* of *Op. 15*, general aspects of Conflict and Drama may be. Detailed analysis evinces Brahms's rich, sophisticated concept for the role of the piano in *Concerto Op. 15*.

⁴ Avins, *Brahms: A Life in Letters* (Oxford, 1997), 190.

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