

Johannes Brahms's Autograph of "Die Kränze"

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Music autographs can be elusive. After the composer puts finishing touches on a work, the manuscript may remain in the possession of the author for a while longer, or in the hands of the publisher to whom the work is sold, or it may be given as a present to a friend in gratitude for loyalty past or to ensure continuing goodwill or as a more straightforward act of generosity. Autographs are destroyed in wars or by accident, or they may simply disappear from sight, often for generations. They may emerge briefly in the form of items in an auction catalog (just to tease collectors and scholars), only to be submerged again in the anonymity of the private domain. Collectors invest in autographs in the hope of selling them at a later stage for profit or keeping them as a ready source of funds in time of need. Autographs listed as missing or lost (or even destroyed) reappear, mysteriously, often in unexpected corners of the world.

Our story about this Brahms manuscript begins on October 6, 1909. The Russian pianist and conductor Ossip Gabrilowitsch and Clara Clemens, daughter of Mark Twain (whose real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens) and herself a contralto of considerable renown, are getting married in a small but lavish ceremony at the bride's rural residence of her father in Redding, Connecticut. They have known each other for quite some time, but they decided to join their lives only two weeks earlier after a benefit concert for the Redding Public Library. "My daughter has not attained the fame of these two gentlemen," Mark Twain reportedly said in reference to the other performers of the recital, Gabrilowitsch and the renowned baritone, David Bisham, "but I am sure you will all admit that she is much better-looking." And when his daughter confesses a little later that she has just gotten engaged to one of these gentlemen, the old man is delighted: "Any girl could be proud to marry him. He is a man--a real man." Clara Clemens's husband-to-be had toured widely, both in Europe and the United States, and on one of the European trips had acquired a manuscript of the Brahms song "Die Kränze" (The Garlands), the haunting setting of a love poem by Daumer, full of melancholy tears, devotion, and a faint glimmer of hope. The treasured autograph was kept in a hard-cover folder with a gold-embossed descriptive label in a mixture of English and German: "Johannes Brahms / Musical Manuscript / Die Kränze / Op. 46 No. 1 / Baden-Baden d. Juni 1885 / aus Polydora von Daumer" and presented by Gabrilowitsch to his bride as a gift on a gorgeous fall day when the leaves were revealing their autumnal splendor. The gift was a wonderful bond between the two musicians as they began their married life, signifying their love for each other and for music, especially for Brahms, whose compositions both had frequently performed. (Shortly after the wedding Clara and Ossip Gabrilowitsch left for Europe, not knowing that they would not meet Clara's sister Jean again and be cabled to return to the United States in April 1910 to witness the death of her father.)

Verfahren mit wenig Bewegung

Lebe die dein Leben glücklich befristet ist

Amica, so bewegt es bewegt von mir selbst geschrieben zu. gep! dem mein zu

früher Hoffend das Aug' der Liebe. bis.

Example 1

Ant. Haydn von Jamer

Ad. - Wied. 2.264 Juni 1807

Example 2

The events just described form a likely scenario, embellished perhaps in a few details but, for the most part, true to the evidence accompanying the manuscript now in the Moldenhauer Collection of the Library of Congress.

For nearly ninety years the Brahms manuscript did remain elusive. Margit McCorkle, in her thematic catalog of Brahms's works (1984), described two autographs of "Die Kränze" (about whose existence she learned from various secondary sources) and reported them as missing. One of the manuscripts had briefly emerged in 1930 as an item offered for sale in Sotheby's catalog. Unlikely though it may sound, this seems to have been the treasured Gabrilowitsch wedding gift. Did they consider parting with it because of financial difficulties that they had perhaps incurred as a result of the stock market crash in 1929? Whatever their motivation, the sale did not materialize. The Gabrilowitsches's manuscript remained in their possession even after Ossip's death and Clara's remarriage and divorce in the mid-1940s. Upon Clara's death in 1962, Phyllis Harrington--housekeeper, secretary, and long-time confidante of the family--became the owner of the manuscript; after she died in 1985, Scriptorium, a Beverly Hills autograph dealer, sold it to Hans Moldenhauer.

While there is sufficient evidence to trace the provenance of the autograph from 1909 to the present, it is much more difficult to chart its sojourns before the Gabrilowitsch wedding; and some of the following is, admittedly, conjecture. McCorkle listed two autographs for "Die Kränze" as being lost. Her brief description of these items suggests that not one (the Sotheby) but both bear resemblances to the auto-graph under consideration here. The first, owned by the conductor Hermann Levi as early as 1873 and shown at the Meiningen Brahms exhibition in 1899, consisted of two oblong sheets (or four pages) and, according to Levi, contains some variants in measures 10-13; the Library of Congress manuscript indeed has the same format and shows an *ossia* in the vocal part with text underlay (not in Brahms's handwriting but perhaps preserving an authentic variant) concerning those very same measures (see example 1). The second, dated in the aforementioned Sotheby catalog of 1930 as "Baden-Baden, 26. Juni 1885," has a wording almost identical with the one given on the binding of our manuscript. In short, there is strong evidence that the two lost autographs are one and the same and have now been "found" in the Library of Congress. In this case, the manuscript of "Die Kränze" must have been passed on after the death of its first owner, Hermann Levi, to Ossip Gabrilowitsch and purchased by him in or before 1909.

One more problem can now be resolved; the date given on the binding (and in the Sotheby

catalog) is wrong. Brahms's characteristically hasty handwriting caused a "6" at some point to be read as an "8": the actual date at the end of the manuscript is "1865" (see example 2). Presumably the mistake originated with Gabrilowitsch when he wrote out the information for the embosser preparing the binder before the wedding. The date of 1865, by the way, coincides closely with the Brahms biographer Kalbeck's statement that "Die Kränz" might have been composed as early as 1864 and with the fact that the song was published by Simrock in October 1868.