

Failed Musical Memory and Intertextuality in Brahms's op. 83 Andante

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The Andante from Brahms's Second Piano Concerto opens with a lavish theme played by a solo cello, but over the course of the B-flat major ternary form the solo piano gradually loses its ability to articulate this theme. Throughout the A and B sections, the piano plays only increasingly less-recognizable fragments of the theme, and just at the moment of the main theme's expected return, Brahms instead interpolates references to two of his lieder ("Lerchengesang," op. 70, no. 2 and "Todessehnen," op. 86, no. 6). With the slower tempo and remote key of F-sharp major, the song quotations in op. 83 hijack the Andante's form at the moment of greatest anticipation. This demands explanation, and the use of texted music suggests that poetic content plays a significant role in shaping the movement. Taken together, the fragmented motivic treatment of the main theme in the piano, the distinctively liminal formal devices found throughout, and the temporal stretching of passages with slower tempi embody a psychological struggle to access past memory. From a broader perspective, this analysis suggests that Brahms's practice of quotation is not just an intriguing use of shared melodic material; rather, it is a pivotal nexus between texted and non-texted modes of musical expression that can offer explanations for unusual compositional features.