

# Gustav Jenner's *Sonata in G Major, op. 5*: Connections and Divergences with Brahms' *Sonatas, op. 120*

Elizabeth Aleksander, D.M.A.

## **Background**

Gustav Jenner was the only composition student of Johannes Brahms, but his works have not received much attention. Jenner's output consists of choral works, Lieder, piano compositions, and chamber music, including the *Sonata in G Major, op. 5* for A clarinet and piano and the *Trio in E-flat Major* for B-flat clarinet, French horn, and piano.

Relatively little has been written about Jenner, especially in English, although many authors have commented on the similarities between Jenner's *Sonata* and Brahms' *Sonatas, op. 120*. For example, Bernhard R othlisberger asserts that "Brahms clearly casts his shadow on all four movements of [Jenner's *Sonata*]. ... [He] is ubiquitous in the structure, in the melodic contours, in the swaying rhythm, in the mastery of traditional counterpoint as well as in the use of subtle harmonies." In spite of many statements similar to R othlisberger's, very little research on this topic exists. In an effort to expand the English-language resources about Jenner and to promote his music, I have analyzed his *Sonata* and compared it with Brahms' *Sonatas*.

In order to understand Jenner's *Clarinet Sonata*, it is important to first consider his background and his studies with Brahms, who was a very demanding teacher. Neither of Jenner's parents was musically inclined. His father was a doctor who descended from physicians, and Jenner was also expected to become a doctor. He only received sporadic musical training because his father worried that he was becoming more interested in music than in medicine. However, when Jenner was 18, his father committed suicide. While this event undoubtedly took an emotional toll on Jenner, it also allowed him to pursue his musical ambitions. He started

taking piano lessons for the first time in ten years, and he also studied organ. Two years later, at the age of 20, he finally began receiving formal training in composition, although he had secretly been writing short songs and piano pieces for about six years.

At this time, another important figure entered Jenner's life. Klaus Groth was the father of two of Jenner's classmates and a close friend of Brahms. When Jenner was 22, Groth arranged a meeting with Brahms, who provided Jenner with feedback that was harsh but not unkind. Less than two months later, Jenner moved to Vienna to study with Brahms, who was an even more demanding teacher than he had been at their earlier meeting.

Ultimately, it was Jenner's "late start" in composition that made it possible for him to study with Brahms, a man whom many, like Karl Geiringer, characterize by his "impatience and lack of teaching ability." Because Jenner was a man in his early twenties, he was able to handle the harsh criticism that would have been impossible for a younger student to manage. At the same time, since he was relatively inexperienced in composition, Jenner was more open to input than more experienced composers of the same age.

However, Brahms was more than a teacher to Jenner: he was also Jenner's friend, assisting him in everyday matters and getting his works performed. Brahms also introduced Jenner to Vienna's musical scene and his own circle of friends, including clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, who would later inspire Jenner to write his *Sonata*.

Jenner most likely met Mühlfeld when visiting Meiningen with Brahms in March of 1891. In the ensuing years, Mühlfeld visited Vienna several times, and because both men were friends with Brahms, Jenner likely spent time with Mühlfeld and heard him play on these occasions. Mühlfeld's visits to Vienna culminated in the 1895 premiere of Brahms' *Sonatas*,

which Jenner attended. Two years later, Jenner and Mühlfeld presented a joint concert at the University of Marburg, where Jenner was employed as Music Director.

Having interacted with Mühlfeld and heard him perform, Jenner decided to write a clarinet sonata and dedicate it to him. The precise date of his *Sonata* is unknown, but it was premiered by Mühlfeld on February 16, 1899, only four years after he premiered Brahms' *Sonatas*. After this, Mühlfeld continued to perform the work, including for the English premiere and a performance in Meiningen, with Jenner himself on piano.

As Brahms' only composition student, Jenner incorporated many elements of Brahms' style into his own writing. This influence is especially prominent in Jenner's *Sonata*, which he wrote only four short years after having interacted with Brahms while he was writing his *Sonatas*. The most direct comparisons between Jenner's *Sonata* and Brahms' *Sonatas* involve the forms and developing variation; there are also harmonic and melodic similarities, but these will not be discussed here.

Throughout his *Sonata*, Jenner uses traditional forms in the expected order, but he modifies them to fit his needs, as did Brahms (and most Romantic composers). Since Brahms' *Second Sonata* consists of only three movements, it is most beneficial to relate Jenner's forms with those of Brahms' *First Sonata*, although we will also draw comparisons with the sonata-form movement from his *Second Sonata*. Jenner's *Sonata* consists of a sonata form movement, a ternary movement, a Ländler and trio, and a rondo. These are the exact same forms which Brahms uses in his *First Sonata*, and the forms of Jenner's first three movements align nicely with Brahms' forms; however, Jenner's fourth-movement rondo is markedly different from Brahms' rondo.

In addition, in several movements of their *Sonatas*, both Jenner and Brahms use developing variation, wherein the basic musical ideas of a movement are contained within the motives of its first few bars. Arnold Schoenberg conceived of developing variation when he was analyzing Brahms' music, and Brahms' compositions – including his *Clarinet Sonatas* – have come to epitomize this technique. Jenner was also influenced by developing variation, especially in the first and fourth movements of his *Sonata*. These are the two movements that will be discussed here, as they exhibit the most notable connections and divergences with Brahms' *Sonatas*.

**First Movement: *Allegro moderato e grazioso***

Jenner's first movement features more connections with Brahms' *Sonatas* than any other movement. Since this movement is in sonata form, it is the only movement that can be compared directly with movements from both of Brahms' *Sonatas*. Jenner's sonata form features several notable departures from the typical sonata form, but these departures reflect unusual formal features in Brahms' *Sonatas*. However, unlike Brahms, Jenner consistently defines the ends of sections of his movement with one of two form-defining figures. In addition, throughout this movement, he utilizes developing variation, which is exemplified by Brahms' music.

In Jenner's sonata form (fig. 1), the exposition's primary theme area, first transition, and secondary theme area are structured as expected, both formally and harmonically.

PA	Exposition				Development				
	trans	SA	trans	CA	sub.	sub.	sub.	sub.	retrans.
I	33	53	86	97	117	133	143	151	171
G	G, D	D	G, D	D, G	G, C, a	F, d	d	a <sup>2</sup> , e <sup>2</sup> , D	D

Recapitulation				
trans	SA	trans	CA	codetta
191	211	244	255	283
G	G	C, G	G	G

Figure 1: Form of First Movement\*

\* Throughout this document, capital letters refer to major keys, and lower-case letters refer to minor keys. In addition, the following abbreviations are used: PA: primary theme area trans: transition SA: secondary theme area CA: closing area sub: subsection retrans: retransition

After the secondary theme area, Jenner deviates slightly from traditional sonata form by adding a transition between the secondary theme area and the closing area, which Brahms does in the first movement of his *Second Sonata*. While Jenner's second transition serves to move forward in the form, its harmonic language actually regresses: it returns to the opening key of G major and then modulates back to D major, mirroring the modulation in the first transition. In the subsequent closing area, Jenner modulates from D major back to G major, where he begins the development.

Jenner's development consists of four subsections and a retransition. Although he includes references to each of the three themes, the primary theme is by far the most prominent, as in the development of the first movement of Brahms' *Second Sonata*. Jenner's first three subsections focus primarily on developing the primary theme's motives, and the fourth subsection even restates the theme twice in its entirety. The closing theme is stated by the piano at the beginning of the second subsection, and the retransition features the only reference to the secondary theme: a brief four-measure clarinet countermelody that is an inversion of that theme's first motive. Jenner then reverts to further developing the primary theme.

Following the retransition, the recapitulation seems to begin as expected, although with a slight ornamentation to the beginning of the primary theme. However, Jenner modifies the theme's second phrase, which produces the melody that is heard in the first transition, not in the primary theme area. Thus, while the antecedent phrase of the primary theme is heard, Jenner actually begins the recapitulation with the first transition instead of the primary theme area. This unusual formal treatment also parallels the first movement of Brahms' *First Sonata*, wherein Brahms omits the first of the primary area's two themes, which was originally presented in the piano, because it was the basis for the retransition and it returns in the coda.

Jenner's omission of the primary theme area is effective for a number of reasons. First, the entire development focused almost exclusively on the primary theme, including two complete restatements in the fourth subsection. In addition, the first five measures of the transition are the same as the first five measures of the primary theme area, creating the illusion of its return. Finally, for the recapitulation, Jenner moves the transition's melody, which was originally in the piano, to the clarinet. This recreates the voicing of the opening measures, thus implying that the recapitulation is beginning with the primary theme area. Other than this, the recapitulation proceeds as expected. The movement concludes with a codetta that begins with the primary theme and then features arpeggiated triplets in the clarinet, a figure that is very similar to the prominent triplets Brahms uses in the development and coda of the first movement of his *Second Sonata*.

Throughout this movement, Jenner typically signals the end of a section with one of two form-defining figures. The less common gesture, which appears three times, consists of continuing a sequence that has already been established and adding a *diminuendo* to it. The more frequent gesture, appearing ten times, consists of a relatively inactive piano part supporting the

clarinet's moving notes, usually a motive from the preceding section that devolves into a chord or a scale. Brahms uses this form-defining figure several times in the first movement of his *Second Sonata*, although not as consistently as Jenner does. Jenner even uses this technique at two significant junctures: to conclude the movement, the clarinet outlines a chord over a static piano part. In addition, to transition from the development to the recapitulation, Jenner writes a slight variation of this figure. He maintains a sparse texture but writes moving notes in the piano's right hand instead of in the clarinet. This exception is necessary to prepare listeners for the clarinet's entrance with the ostensible return of the primary theme area. Jenner's consistent use of these two form-defining figures is the only significant divergence from Brahms' style in this movement.

In addition to Jenner's treatment of sonata form, he was clearly influenced by the use of developing variation in the first movements of both of Brahms' *Sonatas*. Jenner's primary theme (fig. 2) has a clear two-part structure, with each phrase lasting three measures and containing three motives.



Figure 2: First Movement's Primary Theme (A clarinet,\*\* mm. 1-6)

\*\* Throughout this document, clarinet examples are not notated at concert pitch.

The *a* motive is characterized by an ascending first-inversion written B-flat major chord, with the first note sustained and an incomplete neighbor tone added near the end. The pitches in the *b* motive consist primarily of an A half-diminished seventh chord, which is also the underlying

harmony. This motive begins with a turn figure and then features a descending sixth and two ascending seconds. The final motive of the first phrase, *c*, is similar to the *a* motive in that its pitches comprise the tonic chord, with the first note sustained longer than the others. However, the *c* motive differs in its contour, its lack of a neighbor tone, and its function of concluding the phrase.

The three motives from the first phrase also form the basis of the second phrase. This phrase begins with the *b'* motive, which is a retrograde of the final three pitches of the *b* motive, combined with the rhythm used in the *a* and *c* motives. The subsequent *a'* motive retains the rhythm of the *a* motive, as well as its function of outlining a chord. However, the *a'* motive focuses on the subdominant chord, and the passing tone occurs after the first note instead of at the end of the measure. Like the first phrase, this phrase concludes with the *c* motive, now lengthening the third of the chord and ending on the tonic instead of the dominant.

Jenner's secondary theme (fig. 3), like both phrases of the primary theme, can be divided into three motives, which are derived from the primary theme's *a*, *b*, and *c* motives.

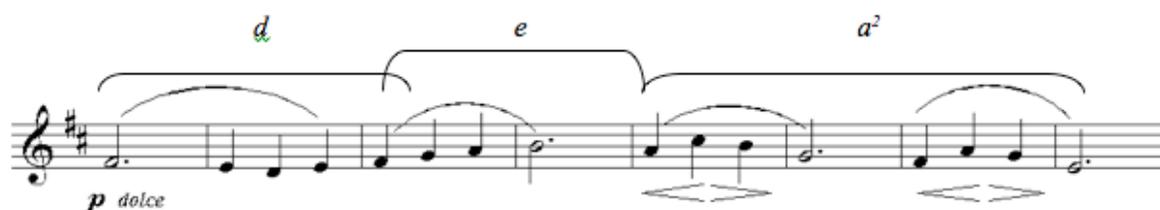


Figure 3: First Movement's Secondary Theme (piano, mm. 53-60)

The secondary theme's *d* and *e* motives are both derived from the *b* motive of the primary theme by moving all of the pitches to the same register, adding one note, and altering its rhythm. This should be considered two separate motives, however, because they are used independently

elsewhere in the movement. The *d* motive is an inverted arch featuring stepwise motion, and the *e* motive is scalar. After the *d* and *e* motives, the secondary theme concludes with two statements of the appoggiatura-like  $a^2$  motive, which is derived from the *a* motive. The incomplete neighbor tone now embellishes the highest note instead of the final pitch, and the first two notes are altered, with the first being omitted and the second being moved up a step.

The closing theme (fig. 4) is derived from the motives of the primary and secondary themes.



Figure 4: First Movement's Closing Theme (A clarinet, mm. 96-104)

The opening appoggiatura is the  $a^2$  motive, and the slurred *staccato* quarter notes are the *d* motive. The second and third measures are similar to the *a* and *b* motives, and the fourth measure is equivalent to the *a* motive with the final two notes lowered. Throughout the remainder of the closing theme, Jenner sequences the *c* motive, sometimes adding a lower neighbor to the first pitch or altering the intervals. However, he retains the function of the *c* motive, which is to conclude the phrase.

While Jenner does not observe all the standard rules of sonata form in his first movement, his formal experimentation is clearly influenced by the sonata-form movements from both of Brahms' *Sonatas*. Jenner's only deviation from Brahms' style is the regularity with which he uses form-defining figures. Indeed, in this movement, this is the only significant departure from

Brahms' *Sonatas*, as Jenner also uses developing variation throughout the movement, just as Brahms did in both of his first movements.

#### **Fourth Movement: *Allegro energico***

Whereas Jenner's first movement exhibits the most connections with Brahms' *Sonatas*, his fourth movement features the most notable divergence from Brahms' style. This movement is a five-part rondo, but it does not feature the typical focus on the recurring theme; instead, Jenner emphasizes the transitions by lengthening them and using them to introduce new themes. The only rondo in Brahms' *Sonatas* is the fourth movement of his *First Sonata*, and it does not feature this emphasis on transitions. Indeed, these two rondos do not share many characteristics aside from their overall form. Jenner appears to have retained only the idea of writing a rondo without preserving any of the specific formal traits found in the rondo from Brahms' *First Sonata*. Even though Brahms did not use developing variation in his rondo, Jenner's movement clearly shows the influence of this technique, as all four themes are based on a single unifying figure.

In his rondo (fig. 5), Jenner's first refrain features the march-like *a* theme in the clarinet.

Refrain 1		Episode 1		Refrain 2		Episode 2		Refrain 3
a	<u>trans (b)</u>	c	<u>trans (d)</u>	a'	<u>trans (b)</u>	c	<u>trans (d)</u>	a'
1	9	31	44	75	91	115	128	163
G	G, b, D	D	D, C	C	C, e, G	G	G	G

Figure 5: Form of Fourth Movement

In the first transition, Jenner begins by restating and extending the *a* theme before introducing the ominous *b* theme in the harmonic minor. Whereas the *a* theme was 8 measures long, this transition consists of 22 measures. Jenner further emphasizes the transition by using it to increase the tension. In addition to modulating from G major, through B minor, to D major, he tonicizes several other keys. Jenner also writes a more dense piano part and includes sequences to heighten the tension.

Following the transition, Jenner releases the tension with the sprightly, upbeat *c* theme and another transition, which introduces the tranquil *d* theme. Once again, the transition's proportions are unexpected: it is 31 measures long, compared to the 13-measure *c* theme. Jenner further emphasizes this transition by doing the exact opposite of what he did in the first transition: instead of increasing the tension, he produces a very serene effect by writing only whole notes in both parts. This tranquility is also reflected in how he reintroduces the *a* theme: Jenner eventually incorporates a half note into the sustained whole-note texture of the *d* theme, and then he gradually diminishes this rhythm until it reaches the dotted-eighth/sixteenth-note rhythm that characterizes the *a* theme.

Despite Jenner's unusual approach to a rondo, this movement was clearly influenced by Brahms' technique of developing variation. Jenner bases all of his themes on a single unifying figure, which consists of an ascending sixth followed by two descending seconds. Sometimes the sixth and seconds are major, and other times, minor. This figure is interesting in and of itself for two reasons. First, it is an inversion of the end of the *b* motive from Jenner's first movement. Second, Brahms uses it to begin the opening melody in the third movement of his *First Sonata*.

Jenner begins his fourth movement with the march-like *a* theme (fig. 6), which is characterized by the dotted-eighth/sixteenth-note rhythm.



Figure 6: Fourth Movement's *a* Theme (A clarinet, mm. 1-4)

This theme features leaps, short slurs, and changes of direction. The unifying figure is present in the first two articulated notes (F and D) and then the ends of the second and third slurs (C and B-flat). Jenner fills in or otherwise embellishes most of the intervals from this figure, which is only present in the clarinet in the first two measures. After that, the *a* theme presents two variations of these measures by enlarging the sixth, first in the clarinet and then in the piano, before concluding with a lyrical *subito piano* passage.

The *b* theme (fig. 7) is a continuation of the *a* theme's lyrical conclusion: it is all slurred, with a simple arch shape and fewer leaps.



Figure 7: Fourth Movement's *b* Theme (A clarinet, mm. 18-22)

However, Jenner makes this theme foreboding by writing it in the harmonic minor. He retains the movement's unifying figure, but he fills in the sixth (from A to F) with a B-flat and a C-sharp to highlight the tonal shift to D harmonic minor. Once he arrives at the first downward second

(from F to E), he restates the interval before proceeding with the second descending second to arrive on D.

In both of the first two themes, the unifying figure is followed by a descending fourth from the tonic to the dominant. In the *a* theme, which is on the bottom of the slide, this leap ends on the first note of the next phrase, thus facilitating the repetition of the first two measures. However, in the *b* theme, the descending interval serves to conclude the melody.

The sprightly *c* theme (fig. 8) consists of a descending scale followed by an inverted arch.

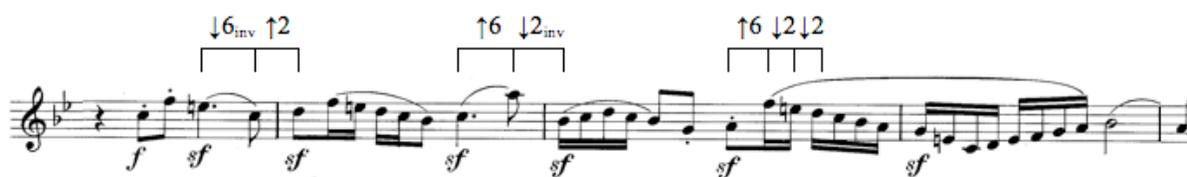


Figure 8: Fourth Movement's *c* Theme (A clarinet, mm. 31-35)

Each scale degree in the written F major scale is prolonged via arpeggiation or passing motion. The theme concludes by moving through a  $C^7$  chord. The unifying figure is not as apparent in the *c* theme as it is in the other melodies, but it is present on the third beat of each of the first three measures. Jenner alters the first two statements of the figure by omitting the final interval and inverting one of the first two intervals, first the sixth and then the second. In both cases, however, he maintains the change of direction between these two intervals. Because the unifying figure has been altered both times, these measures help propel the melody forward until the figure is stated in its entirety on the third beat of the third full measure.

Jenner's *d* theme (fig. 9) conveys the unifying figure more clearly than any other theme by stating it in whole notes, with no adornment.

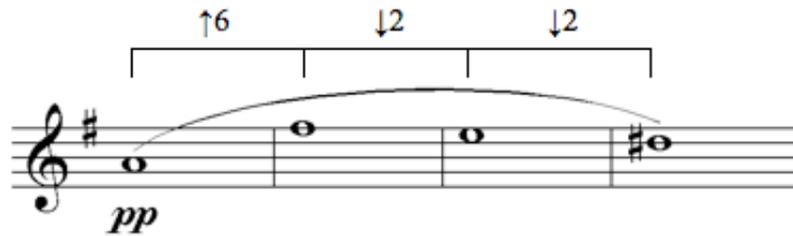


Figure 9: Fourth Movement's *d* Theme (piano, mm. 44-47)

The simplicity of this theme and the transparency of the texture allow listeners to hear the unifying figure clearly for the first time, providing them with something new to listen for in the upcoming refrains and episode.

Jenner's fourth movement features his most significant divergence from Brahms' *Sonatas*. His interpretation of a rondo is very different from the one that concludes Brahms' *First Sonata*, and his melodies are clearly influenced by developing variation. While this was a hallmark of Brahms' music, he did not use it in the rondo that concludes his *First Sonata*.

### **Conclusion**

As evidenced in the first movement – as well as the inner movements, which were not discussed here – Jenner's *Sonata* exhibits some clear connections with Brahms' *Sonatas*, particularly in the treatment of traditional forms and the influence of developing variation, which also impacts the third movement. Of particular interest are the similarities between Jenner's and Brahms' use of sonata form. Horst Heussner, who was an expert on Jenner and later taught at the same university, clearly articulated Brahms' effect as follows: "Jenner's connection with his great teacher was a decisive influence on him, in respect both of his impeccable compositional

technique and of the corresponding musical quality of his works; and it was a vital factor in the evolution of his distinctive, highly sensitive voice as a composer.”

While comparisons with Brahms’ music are interesting and persuasive, it is Jenner’s “distinctive voice” that renders the *Sonata* indispensable to both clarinetists and historians. It features some interesting divergences from Brahms’ *Sonatas*, including the form-defining figure in the first movement and the unifying figure in the final movement. Most notably, his fourth-movement rondo is a significant departure from the rondo that concludes Brahms’ *First Sonata*, since Jenner places a distinct emphasis on the transitions by lengthening them and using them to introduce new themes.

Jenner’s *Sonata* is not a mere imitation of Brahms’ *Sonatas*. It is a noteworthy work that deserves further study and increased performance, based not only on its historical significance, but also on its own merit.