

Commentary on the Music

Part IV. Maud Powell's Original Cadenza for the Brahms Violin Concerto



Johannes Brahms, 1884 or 1885
Maud Powell Society Archive



Maud Powell
Photo by Weismantel, New York, 1894
Maud Powell Society Archive



Joseph Joachim
The inscription reads: "To my talented,
industrious and dear pupil, Miss Maud
Powell, in remembrance of Joseph
Joachim, Berlin, 1885."
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Nos. 20 and 21

Maud Powell Cadenza for Johannes Brahms' Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 77:

b. Peru, Illinois, 22 August 1867

*Manuscript facsimile*¹ and as Edited by Rachel Barton Pine

d. Uniontown, Pennsylvania, 8 January 1920

Maud Powell studied the Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77, by Johannes Brahms (1833–97) under the guidance of violinist Joseph Joachim (1831–1907), to whom the concerto is dedicated and who had played it under Brahms at its premiere in 1879. Powell had enrolled in the Berlin Hochschule für Musik at the invitation of Joachim a few months after he heard her play in London. Recognizing that she was already an artist, despite her youth, he assigned her to study directly with him when she arrived for the 1884–85 term. She performed the Violin Concerto in G minor by Max Bruch and the Beethoven Violin Concerto with the Berlin Philharmonic under Joachim's baton during that period. However, there is no record of her having performed the Brahms concerto with him.

Brahms had composed his violin concerto for Joachim in 1878. The two collaborated on the work, with Joachim deferentially suggesting changes to make it more violinistic, improving it musically in the process.² Joachim composed a cadenza for the first movement, undoubtedly in collaboration with Brahms.

Brahms conducted the first performance of the concerto with Joachim as soloist on January 1, 1879, at the Leipzig Gewandhaus. Critics initially called it the concerto *against* the violin. Even the masterful Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931) at first complained that he could not make his violin “sing” while playing it and did not perform it publicly until 1903 or 1904. He did not feel comfortable with it until 1905 when he performed it with great success in Berlin, with his own cadenza.³ Even Joachim had jokingly advised Brahms that the concerto's technical difficulties made it “unplayable,” but he recognized its musical worth.⁴

Perhaps because she was of a new generation, Powell mastered the work long before it gained public acceptance. Whether she met Brahms, who visited Joachim in Berlin from time to time, is not known.

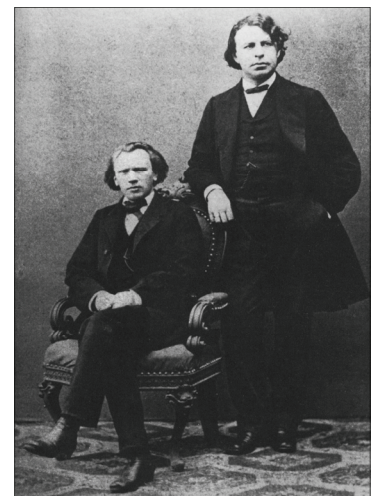
Powell composed her cadenza for the work while summering in Ellenville, New York, in 1891. Historically, it appears to be the third cadenza ever to be written for the concerto. The Hungarian violinist Edmund Singer (1831–1912) seems to have composed the second cadenza, published in 1889.

Powell performed the Brahms concerto using her cadenza with the Chicago Orchestra, conducted by Frederick Stock, on February 21 and 22, 1908. Ten years after the composer's death, the music was still hardly accepted, and skeptics doubted the ability of a female soloist to perform such a massive work, even though its early champions were primarily women.



Maud Powell in 1891, the year she composed her cadenza for the Brahms violin concerto.

Maud Powell Society Archive



Johannes Brahms with Joseph Joachim, to whom he dedicated his violin concerto.

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The Austrian violinist Marie Soldat (1864–1955), also a Joachim pupil, became the first woman to perform the concerto when she gave its second performance in Berlin with Joachim conducting.⁵ She then introduced it to Vienna in 1885 with Hans Richter and the Vienna Philharmonic. When Soldat made her 1888 London debut with the Brahms concerto, the *Times* critic declared it “a scholarly and able but by no means effective work, with which few violinists excepting Joachim himself care to deal.”⁶ She also made her Leipzig debut with the concerto in 1888, and by the time she reprised it there in 1905, it had received only seven more performances, three by Gabrielle Wietrowitz (1866–1937) and Leonora Jackson (1879–1969), two more of Joachim’s female pupils. In 1900 New York critic W. J. Henderson severely criticized Leonora Jackson, who had won the Mendelssohn Prize at the Berlin Hochschule, for choosing to perform the Brahms concerto for her New York debut.⁷

In his review of Powell’s Chicago performance in 1908, *The Chicago Daily News* critic described the concerto as one of the most “difficult, significant and imposing” of all modern virtuoso pieces for the violin. But, he wrote, “Miss Powell showed her capacity for drawing the bow . . . and after the first long cadenza which showed her mettle she steadily advanced the work. The ardent tone of the second movement found her surprisingly unflinching in the revelation of its breadth and warmth and the big, rushing octave passages of the final movement were carried with a sureness, solidity and authority delightful and convincing in all the exacting phases of the Brahms composition.”⁸

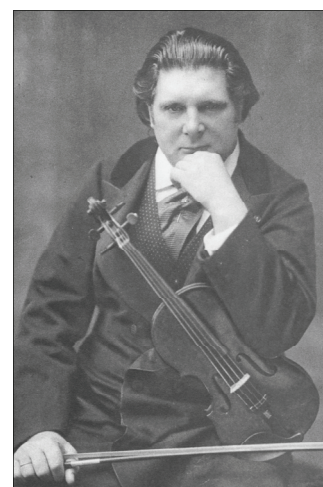
Chicago critic W. L. Hubbard reported: “The concerto of Brahms was played by Miss Powell as one would expect it to be played by a woman who, as technician, interpreter and musician, stands without a superior on the concert platform today. She is a doer of big things, and nothing that she has done has surpassed in magnificent authority, solidity, artistry and supreme beauty the reading she gave to this most exacting and most difficult of violin concertos. It was an achievement even greater than was her presentment of the Sibelius Concerto last season, and that was a masterpiece.”⁹

In a 1995 performance of the Brahms concerto in California, American violinist Rhonda B. Frascotti played Powell’s cadenza for the first time since Powell’s death in 1920.¹⁰ Frascotti reports that “it was received with interest and delight by colleagues and audience members alike.”¹¹



Marie Soldat was one of the strongest and earliest champions of the Brahms violin concerto.

Courtesy Tully Potter



Eugene Ysaÿe initially complained that he could not make his violin “sing” while playing the Brahms violin concerto.

Maud Powell Society Archive

Continued on next page

Nos. 20 and 21, continued

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Maud Powell performed the Brahms violin concerto to rave reviews in Chicago in 1908.

Maud Powell Society Archive

“Powell’s cadenza is a lovely, well-crafted gem,” Frascotti observes. “Considering her formidable technique, it is not surprising that the cadenza presents considerable technical demands, including fingered octaves, chromatic glissandi, trills, and all manner of double stops. The cadenza is not, however, merely a hollow virtuoso display. The musical content is convincing, with thematic material from the concerto proper presented in an improvisational style. As in her many tasteful arrangements for violin and piano, Powell never abandoned lyricism or classical proportion.”¹²

More recently, Maud Powell’s cadenza for the Brahms violin concerto has been taken up by American violinists Amy Beth Horman and Rachel Barton Pine, who alternates it with those by Joachim, Ysaÿe, Kreisler, and her own. Pine has prepared a performance version of the cadenza (No. 21) for this collection.¹³ The original manuscript is reproduced in facsimile (No. 20) courtesy of the Detroit Public Library, which houses Maud Powell’s collection of music.¹⁴

¹ Source: Manuscript, Courtesy of Detroit (Michigan) Public Library, Music and Performing Arts Department.

² Yehudi Menuhin, *Introduction to the Facsimile of the Holograph Score*, (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1979), xi-xvii.

³ Antoine Ysaÿe and Bertram Ratcliffe, *Ysaÿe: His Life, Work, and Influence* (London: Heinemann, 1947), 237–38.

⁴ Victor Chapin, *The Violin and Its Masters* (New York: Lippincott, 1969), 159.

⁵ Many thanks to Rachel Barton Pine, who now plays Marie Soldat’s Guarneri del Gesu violin, for providing articles on Soldat. See, Sarah Knox, *Female Violin Virtuosi: Their Emergence and Growing Acceptance in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Master’s Thesis, Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University, Australia, August 2003: 47–54.

⁶ Tully Potter, “Brahms’s understudy,” *The Strad* 107, no. 1280, December 2001: 1319.

⁷ Christine Ammer, *Unsung, A History of Women in American Music* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 36–37.

⁸ “Maud Powell Plays,” *The Daily News*, Chicago, 22 February 1908.

⁹ “News of the Theaters,” *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 February 1908.

¹⁰ College of Marin Symphony Orchestra (Kentfield, CA), Norman Masonson, conductor, 6 May 1995.

¹¹ Rhonda B. Frascotti, “Reflections on Performing a Cadenza by Maud Powell,” unpublished article, 1995, MPS Archive.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Pine has added a measure of her own at the beginning of the cadenza to provide a smoother transition into it in performance.

¹⁴ Special thanks to Jean Salathiel and her staff in the Music and Performing Arts Department of the Detroit Public Library for providing a photocopy of the cadenza.

Violin Music

Part IV. Maud Powell's Original Cadenza for the Brahms Violin Concerto



Cadenza



Johannes Brahms, 1884 or 1885
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Joseph Joachim
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CADENZA

for the first movement of Johannes Brahms' Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 77

Manuscript facsimile courtesy of the Detroit (Michigan) Public Library, Music and Performing Arts Department.

Maud Powell (1867–1920)

Composed in Summer 1891

Cadenza

For First Movement of Brahms' Violin Concerto Op. 77

Maud Powell

rit.

This image shows a page of handwritten musical notation, likely a piano score. The page contains ten staves of music, each beginning with a treble clef and a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The notation is dense and includes various musical symbols and annotations:

- Staff 1:** Features a melodic line with a fermata and the annotation "c.1".
- Staff 2:** Includes a fermata and the number "2" above the staff.
- Staff 3:** Contains a fermata and the number "3" above the staff.
- Staff 4:** Features a fermata, the number "4" above the staff, and the word "rit" (ritardando) at the end.
- Staff 5:** Includes a fermata and the number "2" above the staff.
- Staff 6:** Contains a fermata and the number "3" above the staff.
- Staff 7:** Features a fermata, the number "3" above the staff, and the dynamic marking "sf" (sforzando).
- Staff 8:** Includes a fermata, the word "cres." (crescendo) below the staff, and the word "espressivo" below the staff.
- Staff 9:** Contains a fermata and the number "3" above the staff.
- Staff 10:** Features a fermata and the number "3" above the staff.

The handwriting is fluid and expressive, with many slurs and dynamic markings throughout the piece.

Handwritten musical score for a piano piece, featuring four staves of music. The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of two sharps, and a common time signature. The music consists of a series of notes, some beamed together, and rests. A dynamic marking of *b* (piano) is present. The second staff continues the melody with a *rit* (ritardando) marking and includes some trills. The third staff features a series of notes with a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic marking. The fourth staff concludes the piece with a *ff* (fortissimo) dynamic marking and a final cadence. The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks.

Three empty musical staves, each consisting of five horizontal lines, positioned below the handwritten score.

21.

CADENZA

for the first movement of Johannes Brahms'
Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 77

Maud Powell (1867–1920)
Composed in Summer 1891
Edited by Rachel Barton Pine

ff

6

10

14

dim.

17

IV

p

20

cresc.

23

f

Brahms Concerto Cadenza

26 *f*

31

35

37 *8va*

39 *mf*

45 *dim.* *p*

53 *cresc.*

56

Detailed description: This page contains the musical score for the Cadenza of the Brahms Concerto, measures 26 through 56. The score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (D major). It features a variety of musical techniques including:

- Measures 26-31: Rapid sixteenth-note passages with dynamic marking *f* and fingering numbers 1-4.
- Measures 32-36: Slower, more melodic lines with slurs and dynamic markings *f* and *mf*.
- Measures 37-38: A section marked *8va* (octave) with slurs and dynamic markings *f* and *mf*.
- Measures 39-44: Trills and triplets with dynamic markings *mf* and *p*.
- Measures 45-52: Slower, more melodic lines with slurs and dynamic markings *dim.* and *p*.
- Measures 53-56: Rapid sixteenth-note passages with dynamic markings *cresc.* and *f*.

Brahms Concerto Cadenza

60 *sf* *espressivo*

63 **II**

66

70 *f*

75

79

82

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It consists of seven staves of music, numbered 60 through 82. The score is marked with various dynamics and articulations. Measure 60 begins with a forte (*sf*) dynamic and an *espressivo* marking. The music features a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, often beamed together. There are several slurs and phrasing marks throughout. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. Trills are marked with 'tr'. A double bar line with a repeat sign is present at measure 63, labeled with a Roman numeral 'II'. The score concludes at measure 82 with a final cadence marked with a 'V' (volta).