

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

*Music Department*  
香港中文大學音樂系



Friday, 15 September, 2006, 1:00-2:00 Pm  
Room G03, Hui Yeung Shing Building

## Colloquium

“BRAHMS’S SIGH: A DYNAMIC REALISATION IN  
THE FIRST MOVEMENT, ALLEGRO, OF THE D  
MINOR SONATA, OP. 108”

A talk by Nelson Wu  
King’s College, University of London

**Nelson Wu** was born in Taiwan and educated in Auckland, New Zealand. He was a performance student in violin at the University of Auckland, where he completed Bachelor and Master's degrees, and he worked as a professional orchestral player in Auckland before continuing his studies at King's College, University of London. His PhD thesis title is: 'Affective and Kinetic Design in Brahms's Duo Sonatas'. He has given papers at Oxford and at Cambridge.

**Abstract:** At the very beginning of a letter to Clara Schumann in March 1865, Johannes Brahms used a musical notation to express his disappointment because she called off a visit to Vienna. Under the notation Brahms wrote: Ein so großer Seufzer wird vorweg geschickt! (I send a sigh as big as that for starters!) This seemingly innocuous expression of an emotional gesture suggests a new way of examining Brahms's music - in particular, the function of dynamic swells.

Expressive markings are often regarded as peripheral in analysis even though they are vital in performance. In addition to the traditional Schenker- and Schoenberg-based approaches, sensitivity to performance instructions in the score should play a vital role in any study of Brahms's music. Most analytical scholarship, however, functions within a three-dimensional (melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic) model. My examination of the first movement of the D minor sonata, Op. 108, brings the other auxiliary elements such as dynamics, articulation, texture, and instrumentation into consideration and observes how the changes in the presentation of the opening theme affect its affective function. In particular, this paper traces the on-going development of the principal thematic idea and observes how it reveals its full emotional content at the end of this well known D minor movement.