Playing, hiding, and seeking. The domestic(ated) celebrity of Emma Brandes (1853-1940)

by Floris Meens

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Abstract

In recent decades, interest in female musicians has strongly increased. Quite a lot has been written, especially about the most famous nineteenth-century instrumentalists and singers. Although some studies have pointed to processes of self-fashioning, not much is known about representations of female musicians made by others. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, regulating music was of great cultural and social importance. Music was seen as potentially effeminizing, threatening masculine identity and traditional social relationships. Studying the representation of famous female musicians thus enables us to reflect on the boundaries between what was considered to be private and public.

This article studies the textual and visual representation of Emma Brandes (1853-1940), a famous pianist. It investigates how people wrote about her, focusing especially, though not exclusively, on the Dutch press. First, it traces the construction of Brandes’ celebrity abroad, based on representations of her performances, her playing, her unique sound, and her artistry in German and English newspapers and magazines. After her acquaintance with Theodor Engelmann, Brandes’ life and work centred around Utrecht for about 25 years. Brandes’ fame in the Netherlands is deconstructed based on a systematic analysis of representations in Dutch newspapers and journals. The article specifically examines the role of textual and visual visibility. It also reveals the functioning of invisibility, a theme so far rather neglected in the historiography of celebrity culture. The article shows that public and personally generated views on celebrity and music shaped, but also questioned the dichotomy between public and private spheres, and vice versa. Moreover, making use of the work of Theodor Adorno, the article shows the role of changing conceptions of production and reproduction. The last section reveals how invisibility can steer past-oriented processes of heroization. Here, the concept of the ‘domestic(ated) celebrity’ is introduced.

Keywords
female pianists, Emma Brandes, Clara Schumann, classical music, female instrumentalists

To quote this article
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When, in 1837, the painter Johann Heinrich Schramm wanted to paint a portrait of the then eighteen-year-old Clara Wieck, an acquaintance of her, the journalist and satirist Moritz Gottlieb Saphir, answered: “Clara ist so ausgezeichnet, dass sie gar nicht mehr gezeichnet werden kann”. Saphir’s reaction is as interesting as the eventual painting by Schramm, which Wieck called “das Ähnlichste Bild von mir, was bis jetzt gemalt worden”. Throughout the nineteenth century, textual and visual representations of Clara Wieck appeared, some of which she had staged herself, but many more of which had been produced without any direct intervention from her side. Clara Schumann, as she called herself after her marriage to Robert Schumann, became the most famous female pianist of the nineteenth century, thanks in part to these representations. Her colleague, the composer and virtuoso pianist Franz Liszt even called her the “priestess of the piano”.

In recent decades, influenced by the emergence of women’s and gender studies, interest in female musicians has strongly increased. Quite a lot has been written, especially about the most famous nineteenth-century instrumentalists and singers. Clara Schumann, for instance, has been the focus of several biographies and thematic studies. With regards to representation, the most interesting is certainly Alexander Stefaniak’s Becoming Clara Schumann: Performance Strategies and Aesthetics in the Culture of the Musical Canon (2021). Stefaniak analyses the strategies she employed in the construction of various personas, with which she shaped her own celebrity. Stefaniak focuses on Schumann’s agency and reveals that she had a perfect understanding of how words and images can make, confirm, but also break a career. But just like many others, Stefaniak is less interested in the role of others who also created images of her.

It is not entirely surprising that historiography has paid little attention to this theme. Only in the 1980s, musicologists and music historians became more interested in the social contexts of music. From then on, the role of textual and visual representations, which had previously seemed to be connected rather exclusively to theatre and literature (the spoken and written word) and the visual arts (images), was questioned in relation to music as well. A seminal study was Richard Leppert’s The Sight of Sound. Music, Representation, and the History of the Body (1993). Leppert shows that sound in its abstraction is semiotically difficult to control. But during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, regulating

1. Weissweiler 1984, 47.
4. That theme was mentioned in an exhibition in 1994 in Düsseldorf. But central to that exhibition were (again) the ways in which Schumann herself had staged her fame, with a strong focus on the numerous engravings and photographs that were commissioned by the pianist to sell to her fans.
music was of great cultural and social importance. Music was seen as potentially effeminising and a threat to masculine identity. The physicality of women’s musical practices and their supposed erotic connotation challenged male authority. Thus, with music there was always the danger of the destabilisation of traditional social relationships.

It is no coincidence that during the nineteenth century, women playing instruments – and especially the piano – became a topos in paintings, drawings, as well as literature. Leppert interprets these images as signifiers and insurers of women’s domestic role. The patriarchal bourgeois ideology that defined the cults of woman and family depended on a simultaneous desexualisation of women (as Madonnas) and a hyper-sexualisation of them (as whores). Referring to Roland Barthes, who once stated that “[t]he sensuality of music is not purely auditory, it is also muscular”, Leppert argues that making music, unlike ‘mere’ listening, necessarily brings the sensual body back into the equation. Thus, when women play or are represented as playing music, there always lurks the danger of empowerment, of the angel in the house using all her muscles and vessels to turn men into being ‘mere’ listeners, thereby reversing bourgeois ideology.

Unfortunately, Leppert hardly studies famous female musicians, whose public appearances and representations invite us to reflect even more on the boundaries between what was considered private and public. Moreover, Leppert concentrates quite exclusively on visual representations and mainly uses texts as support. More in general, historiography has not paid much attention to the role of invisibility in celebrity culture around 1900. Modern techniques including photography helped women who had been invisible for so long, to be seen. And indeed, women’s emancipation went hand in hand with a growing number of female celebrities, as part of what the American scholar Leo Braudy has described as the “democratization of fame”. The issue of (in)visibility has so far mostly been connected to gender norms: for women, fame often meant finding a middle ground between too much visibility, which exceeded the norms, and too little visibility, which would damage their fame.

As Beatrix Borchard has argued with regard to nineteenth-century female musicians, their room to manoeuvre was limited. The dominant norm was that women should not perform as professional musicians. Moreover, the emergence of the idea of biological differences between men and women during the eighteenth century led to the gendering of instruments. Music education for girls was mostly seen as a way to prepare them for other tasks at home. But some women succeeded in performing as musicians – even if they had to contend with limitations, for example in terms of travel. Some of them simply had to, because of financial necessity. Others received more support because they came from a family of musicians themselves. In any case, historiography has made us believe

8. The same is true for another important study on music and visual culture: Shephard and Leon-ard 2014.
that most of these female musicians retired as soon as they got married; and that with their retirement, their visibility and fame came to an end.

But was this always the case? As Clara Tuite has remarked with regards to Lord Byron, who went into exile but was still very much visible to his readers, print culture shaped the experience of a “virtual presence” that went hand in hand with “dramatic absence”.12 Tuite refers to Benedict Anderson who has called the “visible invisibility” an essential part of imagined communities.13 Perhaps, around 1900, just like today, the artist’s absence or hiding from all kinds of audiences fuelled the media’s need to produce images. Studying a famous (in)visible female instrumentalist allows us to see whether this worked the same for female celebrities as it did for Byron. It also helps us to gain a better understanding of the functioning of the music industry itself, which at the turn of the century was professionalising quite rapidly.

Emma Brandes (1853–1940), a pupil of Clara Schumann, offers an interesting case study. Not much has been written about her, and for a reason: she was famous, but during the later stages of her life also (quite) invisible. In this article, I will investigate how people wrote about Emma Brandes, focusing especially, but not exclusively, on the Dutch press. First, I trace the construction of Brandes’ celebrity abroad, based on representations of her performances, her playing, and her unique sound and artistry in German and English newspapers and magazines. After her acquaintance with Theodor Engelmann, Brandes’ life and work centred on Utrecht for about twenty-five years. Based on a systematic analysis of representations in Dutch newspapers and journals, which can be consulted digitally in Delpher, I deconstruct Emma Brandes’ fame in the Netherlands. I specifically examine the role of textual and visual (in)visibility. The fact that in this case, visual sources are limited offers new insight into the role of visual means in celebrity culture around 1900. The article also reveals that public and personally generated views on celebrity in/and music shaped but also questioned the dichotomy between public and private spheres, and vice versa. Moreover, making use of the work of Theodor Adorno, I aim to show the role of changing conceptions of production and reproduction. In the last section, I reveal how invisibility can steer past-oriented processes of heroization. I thereby introduce the concept of the domestic(ated) celebrity. In addition to the material already mentioned, I will analyse some biographies, memoirs and letter collections that were published during Brandes’ lifetime.

A young, talented and modest girl, but not a prodigy

The first reports about Emma Brandes appeared in the German press after her first performances in the German lands around 1870. The Neues Fremden-Blatt described Emma Brandes’ playing as “erquickend”. The newspaper reported that “Fräulein Brandes”, although still “very young”, already had a “Lauftechnik” that reached “bis zur

Meisterschaft”. Her playing may not have been full and big, but was “ungemein lieblich”. Although she was reminiscent of great virtuosos, this “Backfisch” had nothing of the “Blasirtheit” with which the best performances of the most famous pianists were so often edged. Of course, because of her young age her interpretation could still gain independence and conviction, but the overall impression was one of a “Strom herzlicher, gesunder, dabei seiner und echt weiblicher Empfindung”. Emma Brandes recalled other truly female pianists, such as “Frau Aufpitz-Kolar”, and especially how she had played before ‘surrendering’ to “Liszt-Rubinstein’schen” ideals.\(^\text{14}\)

What is interesting in this first review is, first of all, the emphasis on Brandes’ young age – a “Bakfischchen” – and her feminine playing and sound: not hard and big, but lovely. Because of her youth, she focuses on the wrong details, but a more independent attitude may help her in this respect, according to this review. Yet the space for independence is immediately limited: Brandes should not, like a female predecessor, follow the ideals of Franz Liszt and Anton Rubinstein. It is no coincidence that this review refers to these famous nineteenth-century virtuosos who both also composed and, especially at the beginning of their careers, improvised a lot. In “On the Social Situation of Music” (1932), Theodor Adorno refers to Liszt and Rubinstein to symbolise the old musical traditions that came under pressure during the nineteenth century. Adorno argues that until the middle of the century, the productive and reproductive sides of music were well connected. In what he sees as the pre-capitalist phase, musical reproduction was characterised by tradition. Music guilds and family traditions guaranteed a stable relationship between music and the listening public. A work of music was never isolated from society: the production, reproduction and improvisation of music were connected without boundaries. During the nineteenth century, however, Adorno observes a “reduction of reproductive freedom”, which he links to the rise of the bourgeoisie:

The intervention of the interpreter in the work, still tolerated in the era before the definitive reification of the work, becomes an arbitrary and evil concern from which the rationally designed work must keep its distance. [...] The interpreter has only the choice between two demands of rational character; either he must limit himself strictly to the realization, at most to the decoding, of the exact language of musical signs, or he must adjust to the demands which society as market makes upon him and within which the configuration of the work perishes.\(^\text{15}\)

According to Adorno, Liszt and Rubinstein were the “last musical refuge of irrational reproduction”. They were expressive composers and, as interpreters, ‘re-creators’. Indeed, according to Liszt, the composer’s work was only complete with its performance.\(^\text{16}\)

The fact that Emma Brandes was warned not to go down that path, and to respect the limits of interpretative musical reproduction, fits with the decline of improvisation during the nineteenth century, which has been confirmed by recent studies. Dana Gooley

\(^{14}\) Neues Fremden-Blatt, 23 November 1871, 6.  
\(^{15}\) Adorno 2002, 412-413.  
\(^{16}\) Stefaniak 2021, 83.
has shown that improvisation began to fall out of favour with critics and the concert public around 1830.\textsuperscript{17} After 1850, it was hardly a normal practice in concert culture anymore, and even someone like Liszt, for whom improvising had always been a part of concerts, distanced himself from it. As an explanation for this decline, Gooley mentions the Romantic idea that music is connected with higher spheres, which one should not tamper with.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, improvisation was increasingly connected with intuition, which was described as feminine, and was therefore seen as a threat to serious, masculine music.\textsuperscript{19} One could therefore read the reviewer’s remark on Emma Brandes as an encouragement to play as a man.

At the same time, Beatrix Borchard has pointed out that the division that arose between composition and interpretation actually helped female musicians; after all, they were seen as experts in reproductive tasks. Limiting improvisation could thus also be seen as a way to give women and feminine elements more space.\textsuperscript{20} Apparently, by and large, both improvisation and reproduction became associated with feminine playing; the first, however, was preferred, whereas the latter was a feared characteristic. In later representations of Emma Brandes, we will see other examples of the emphasis on the importance of a faithful performance of a composition, and of the tension between improvisation and reproduction.

Already after her first concerts, however, the press tried to determine the interpretative freedom for female musicians like Brandes. Her first performance of Robert Schumann’s piano concerto was said to be “etwas farblos”. According to the critic, she still lacked the individuality one needed in order to understand Schumann’s depth.\textsuperscript{21} In a performance of Schumann’s piano quintet, however, she went too far: “Leider forcierte die treffliche Künstlerin den Ton in einer Weise, dass der ganze Zauber ihres ursprünglich so weichen Anschlags lost”. Although critical, this description still communicated the idea of a unique sound that was connected to Emma Brandes’ (not too) feminine touch. This idea disseminated relatively quickly in the German press. After a concert on the 3\textsuperscript{rd} of January 1873 in Frankfurt, one review reported that Brandes’ security had increased, and “der künstlerische Ernst (man möchte ihn beinahe einen männlichen nennen), der schon im Beginne ihrer Laufbahn so sehr zu ihren Gunsten sprach, prägt sich immer mehr aus.”

The reviewer quickly added: “Die Frische und Natürlichkeit der Empfindung ist sich aber gleich, Sentimentalität und weichlige Zerflossenheit ihr noch immer fremd geblieben.” As this sentence reveals, the counteraction of female instrumentalists quickly turned in the wrong direction: too sentimental (female) or too serious (male).

The importance as a female interpreter to remain ‘fresh’ and ‘natural’ also recurred in British descriptions of Emma Brandes. Immediately after her first performance in the Leipzig Gewandhaus, The Athenaeum reported on the 5\textsuperscript{th} of February 1870 that “many musical celebrities” had started their careers here. This pianist was clearly “a star of the first magnitude”, especially given her sixteen years of age.\textsuperscript{22} The British readers were given some more background information. Brandes was apparently the daughter of a school

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Gooley 2018, 1-24.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Idem, 155.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Biddle and Gibson 2016, 230.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Borchard 2003, 173-201.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Neues Fremden-Blatt, 23 November 1871, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{22} The Athenaeum, 26 February 1871, 301.
\end{itemize}
teacher near Schwerin, and a pupil of the court chaplain Aloys Schmitt. She had been able to continue her studies with the support of the Grand Duchess of Schwerin. Here, we see for the first time that teachers are used in the (re)construction of fame. According to this author, Brandes was destined to become famous. After all, she had celebrated “triumphs” in the German cities and “displayed a mastery over the instrument such as pleased even severe critics”. London was now preparing for a first acquaintance.

Immediately below this article, however, *The Athenaeum* printed a reader’s response, warning against too much enthusiasm. The writer acknowledged “Fräulein Brandes” as “a very young pianist of remarkable merit” and stated that she was trying to follow in the footsteps of “pianists as great as Madame Schumann or Madame Pleyel, or Madame Arabella Goddard, and we hear that she has since made progress in every respect.”23 But London was “overcrowded”, and she could better wait until her foreign reputation was more solid, “unless she brings in her hand some commanding novelty – a thing hardly to be looked for in these days.” Audiences in London and Paris were harder to win than elsewhere, this author said, and success there could only be achieved “by force”. The letter concludes that “Mdlle. Brandes” does not appear to the public in the questionable and perilous character of a prodigy.

An instant celebrity: the representation of Emma Brandes in the Dutch press

Being a child, being a woman, being married and being in contact with composers were all elements that played a decisive role in the representation of Emma Brandes from the moment she arrived in the Netherlands. At first, there were reports of concerts abroad, like Frankfurt am Main. In January 1870, the *Java-bode* reported that “this girl’s” playing caused “wonder and astonishment” in everyone.24 She played everything by heart without making the slightest mistake, in a style that was unmistakably “witty” and “beautiful” with a “powerful stroke, fine nuance, great certainty of impact, equality and purity in the passages and her extraordinary dexterity”. On top of that, “her simple, healthy and all-around lovely personality takes each and every one of us by surprise.”

The emphasis on the ‘healthy’, ‘sweet’ and ‘feminine’ side of Brandes’ personality and playing was not the only thing in which the Dutch press agreed with German and British reports. The newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* repeated these characteristics in January 1871, but stated that Brandes’ “incomparable speed” and “certainty and clarity” led to a “tasteful, clean-coloured, sensitive recitation”, with “a powerful tone”, “which causes astonishment coming from such a tender youthful being.” Here, we also find a new kind of reference to the appearance of Brandes, who was described as “charming”. The author also notes that this seventeen-year-old has nothing more to learn, as she is already the “equal of the greatest virtuosos”. No wonder, then, that the audience burst into cheers, and “called the celebrated virtuoso back twice over, and did not rest until she had once more set her-

self to the piano, in order to elicit from the instrument with her innate grace [...] the most beautiful and fullest, gentlest and most lovely sounds.” Brandes, this author predicted, “only needed to perform in public to gain the cleanest laurels.”

During the early 1870s, Dutch national and regional newspapers always added positive epithets to Brandes’ name. She was called “talented”, “feminine”, with “excellent technique” and a “powerful attacking sound”. Again and again, Emma Brandes was represented as a synthesis of qualities that were normally exclusively attributed to either men or women, to either young or old people. Soon, she was also referred to as a “heroine”, who could compete with male “heroes”, with whom she shared her “remarkable” virtuosity, that “mocked the difficulties of keyboard playing” and “overcame the greatest difficulties” in a “victorious manner”.

Historiography on nineteenth-century conceptions of heroism and creativity has linked both concepts to masculinity. Under the influence of Enlightenment thinking, autonomy, individuality and sovereignty were valued, leading to what Ian Biddle and Kristen Gibson have called the “masculinisation of creativity”. The term virtuosity expressed this, derived as it was from vir, the Latin word for man, and the associated virtus, or virtue, courage and excellence.

The narrative representation of Emma Brandes confirms Biddle and Gibson’s hypothesis that single women could also be celebrated as creative, and, on that basis, as virtuous and heroic. It is striking that the discourse confirmed the extremes. Notions like heroism were linked to warfare. These were contrasted with words describing the peacefulness and loveliness of her playing. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, for instance, emphasised the distinction between Brandes and her instrument in several articles: “it is a delight for the eyes and ears to see the tender creature sitting in front of the large grand piano, extracting the most beautiful, sensitive tones from this unwieldy colossus.” This “young”, “lovely appearance” transported her listeners to an “idealistic world”, with her “highly developed technique, certainty and strength of touch”, but also with her “clarity of recitation, consistency of measure and naughtiness of play”. Nevertheless, Brandes’ playing was also “truly feminine, that is to say, full of soul”, “[s]o fine, so delicate, so sure and ardent”.

In a short time, Dutch newspapers declared Emma Brandes a celebrity, someone who mattered and who, despite her youth and inexperience, belonged to the public sphere. Music magazines also soon came on Brandes’ trail, albeit with a little more hesitation. After a few factual mentions of concerts in Germany, the first real review followed in January 1871, after a concert by Brandes in Amsterdam. The music journal *Caecilia* considered her a “youthful”, “promising artist”, who still had to mature and gain strength. The journal soon changed its opinion. In 1873, it mentioned “Ms Emma Brandes” again, a “youthful girl, apparently barely out of her infancy, but already a master on her instrument, 25

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25 *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 10 January 1871.
27. *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 5 February 1872.
which she handles with an ease and accuracy that one normally only finds with accomplished masters". She had everything to become an "accomplished virtuoso." According to the following issue, she already belonged to the "foremost pianists of our time". After all, there was now a "pearly neatness to her playing", an "excellent touch, alternately plump and fresh", but above all "a gracefulness, a fine, truly young-female feeling", which immediately made one "feel carried away".

Quite quickly, music journals began using the same contrasting characteristics in their portrayal of Emma Brandes as did the newspapers. Some shifts happened over the first years, however. It is striking that in almost all written media, Brandes’ strength was initially doubted. Words like “soft”, “weak”, “indulgent” and “capricious” play a major role. As Biddle and Gibson have elucidated, these characteristics were associated with femininity, and often attributed to amateurs. The more Brandes performed and the more she was written about in the press, the more it accentuated her strength, virtuosity and professionalism, although these were always restricted by adding words that referred to her feminine side and youth.

Another striking aspect of the reporting in the Dutch and foreign press is the lack of visual images. Perhaps this is the reason that there was much emphasis and judgement of how Emma looked when she played on stage. As we have seen, paintings, drawings and also the new medium of photography played an essential role in the construction of fame of many nineteenth-century pianists. However, only a handful of images of Emma Brandes came into circulation during this period. On these portraits, which look rather conventional, we see her youthful-looking head. She is represented as a child, but not necessarily a child prodigy, whose talent would be more clearly highlighted, and who would perhaps be surrounded by admirers. The visual focus on Brandes’ young age fits the narrative discourse in the press. Beatrix Borchard has pointed out that nineteenth-century thinking about musical professions was highly gendered. The moment of marriage was the caesura; thereafter, women were not supposed to perform in public any more. Children were seen as genderless. Brandes’ innocence is further marked by the focus on her head, which conceals the fact that her profession, music, is also an extremely physical one, which possibly posed a (sexual) threat to the social order.

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Fig. 1, 2 and 3: Portraits of Emma Brandes, made by Jean Baptiste Feilner from Bremen (1872), Joseph Bamberger from Frankfurt am Main (date unknown), and August Weger from Leipzig (date unknown).
Music itself is conspicuously absent from all the portraits, as is any reference to listeners. Did Emma Brandes know the symbolic meanings of images of women with instruments, and did she try to avoid them? Pursuing a professional career in public, did she want her portraits to avoid becoming part of the nineteenth-century tradition of images showing women playing the piano, which emphasised woman’s role in the domestic sphere? At the same time, the depiction of an instrument could also represent too literally what Emma Brandes did and what she perhaps aspired to. The sources do not give any answers. In any case, a complex situation thus arose with visual representations: to be able to work professionally, visual representations could help women gain fame. But they had to be careful with images of music, for they could be too strongly associated with a role in the private domain, or, on the other hand, with trespassing the boundaries of what was accepted in public. The fact that the images only represent Emma as a young human being is probably not a coincidence. The same can be said about the cross she wears, which highlights her loyalty.

**Famous, yet married?**

But to whom or what was Brandes loyal? During the mid-1870s, that question popped up in the media. Emma's marriage plans were widely reported in all of the above mentioned national and international newspapers and magazines. In its first issue of 1874, *Caecilia* reported: “We learn with interest that Miss Emma Brandes from Schwerin, the outstanding young pianist whom we had the opportunity to admire last winter, will be marrying Dr. Th. W. Engelmann, Professor of Medicine at Utrecht University, who is well known as a musician and connoisseur.”³⁷ The *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* expressed its fear that Brandes’ talent would remain unfulfilled: “Hoffentlich wird deshalb die hochbegabte Künstlerin ihre Kunst nicht untrue.”³⁸ And of course, there were already female musicians who did keep performing after they married, including Clara Schumann. Two issues later, however, the editors of *Caecilia* confirmed that after her marriage to Engelmann, Brandes would “say goodbye to her artistic career”.³⁹

The idea of unfulfilled potential, of talent lost too quickly to the world of music, sometimes raises the fame of the person concerned. In the same year she announced her marriage and farewell, the media began to remember Brandes. In the other up-and-coming female talents were compared to her persona and career. In December 1874, the *Arnhemsche Courant* reported: “A very youthful pianist, Miss Nathalia Janotha, was to perform with us for the first time; her name, in many circles, was mixed the name of a pianist we will never forget, Emma Brandes we mean […]”.⁴⁰ *Caecilia* continued: “Whoever remembers Mrs Engelmann, when she visited our country as Emma Brandes (and who has forgotten her?), must have revived the memory of this artist, who was robbed of her art of music too soon, at the appearance of a pianist like Miss Nathalie Janotha from London.”⁴¹ The media

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⁴⁰. *Arnhemsche Courant*, 02 December 1874.
also compared Brandes to Alexandre Bibesco, and Emma Koch, whose performance in the Concertgebouw in 1895 was called “genius”, similar to that of “Miss Emma Brandes, nowadays Mrs Engelmann”. And when Max van de Sandt played Schumann’s piano concerto the same year, Caecilia referred to earlier performances by Clara Schumann and “Mrs Engelmann–Brandes” as the “ideal”. Thus, not only female soloists were compared to former female celebrities.

Emma Brandes’ fame continued. As we can conclude from media reports, she did not completely end her musical activities. In 1875, several newspapers and magazines reported that she performed at a jubilee concert in Utrecht. Caecilia informed its readers that Brandes’ typical playing was still present, and even more powerful than before – a subtle reference to her professionalism?

And now the heroine of the performers stepped up and took place in front of the grand piano. With the memory of her first performance still alive in us, we only had to hear a few bars to convince ourselves that no talent had been lost here, indeed that the power of her touch had definitely increased. We never remember hearing a pianist – unless it was Mrs. Schumann – ‘sing’ on the keyboard as much as Mrs. Engelmann. […] Three times lucky Utrecht, that has such a talent.

The Nederlandsche mail recalled that “Mrs Engelmann” was generally known in the art world under the name of Emma Brandes. That it had become almost a brand name becomes clear in another review of a concert in 1880, in which Brandes performed as a replacement for the French pianist/composer Saint-Saëns. The audience was wildly enthusiastic and “[w]hile this performance had remained unknown, some of the sons of the muses had still found a way to offer their ‘Frau Professorin’ a heartfelt homage with a bouquet.” Did Caecilia’s choice of words refer to Theodor Engelmann’s profession, or also to the professional activities of Emma Brandes herself?

In the years that followed, reports on public appearances became scarcer. Both newspapers and magazines noted that in 1891, Emma Brandes together with Julius Röntgen and Joseph Joachim contributed to a benefit concert for the Nederlandsche Gasthuis voor Ooglijders, which had been founded by her husband. Caecilia spoke of a “noble cause” and was very pleased with the result. Here, in public, Brandes was in the right place, it claimed:

I would like to state right away that Mrs Engelmann has exceeded this expectation. The gifted pianist proved to have continued her studies faithfully in the years

42. Het nieuws van den dag, 29 November 1887.
43. Het nieuws van den dag, 23 February 1895.
44. Caecilia: algemeen muzikaal tijdschrift van Nederland 52:8 (1895), 77.
45. Caecilia: algemeen muzikaal tijdschrift van Nederland 32:24 (1875), 203-204.
46. De Nederlandsche Mail, 31 December 1875.
47. Caecilia: algemeen muzikaal tijdschrift van Nederland 37:7 (1880), 57.
when she no longer performed before an audience. Her touch is admirable, as well as her calm, natural, unforced beauty. The tones she elicited from her instrument were wonderful and it was a pleasure to listen to her. Also, in the ensemble with her famous partner Joachim, Mrs. Engelmann showed to be perfectly at home.48

This was not the only benefit concert in which Brandes participated.49 Some other studies have already noted that such performances were a way for women to escape strict gender restrictions.50

Media reports suggest that Brandes used another strategy as well. Although she no longer performed as a soloist, during the 1890s she accompanied a number of famous musicians that she knew well, including Amalia Joachim. Algemeen Handelsblad remarked that “the formerly so celebrated pianist could not resist the temptation to accompany Madam Joachim”.51 Accompanying was not easy and required from the pianist “an attentiveness, a musicality and a complete identification with the singer, qualities that certainly not every pianist, even among the best, possesses.” Whereas previously Emma Brandes had been up to the task, now it was the same for “Mrs Engelmann”. It is interesting to see that this newspaper used a word (‘temptation’) that was semiotically connected to the private sphere and sexuality. But where the Neue Zeitschrift für Musik had warned Emma not to be unfaithful to her art, Algemeen Handelsblad suggested that she had not resisted the temptation to leave the private sphere and accompany another woman.

A domesticated celebrity. (De)constructing and participating in the artist’s biography

Emma Brandes was an established artist name in the Dutch musical landscape. She never lost her fame in her homeland, not even when she performed less. From the 1870s onwards, lexicons on music published lemmas on her life and work. In the German translation of E.-M. Oettinger’s Moniteur des Dates (Leipzig, Bernhard Hermann, 1871) she was described as “Klavier-Virtuosin”.52 In 1893, she was listed as one of the most important “Klavierspielerinnen” in A. Ehrlich’s Berühmter Klavierspieler der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart.53 And in 1894, in his Musik-Lexicon, H. Riemann called her a “tüchtige Pianistin”, and not a child prodigy like other celebrities.54 That her fame continued to resonate in the English-speaking world as well is proven by her inclusion in Henry Charles Lahee’s Famous pianists of today and yesterday from 1906.55

50. Borchard 2003, 175.
51 Algemeen Handelsblad, 6 December 1892.
52. Oettinger 1871, 33.
54. Riemann 1894, 140.
55. Lahee 1906, 298.
From the moment she retired from public concerts, Brandes’ name also began appearing in artist biographies and memoirs. An important publication were the memoirs of Gustav Putlitz in 1875, who had been the director of the Schwerin theatre. He claimed to have witnessed Brandes’ development at close quarters, and to have contributed to it. He (re)constructed her biography, recalling how her poor father had come to Schwerin to present his daughter who was making impressive improvements on the piano. She stood there, “childishly modest”, as if she had a precious stone in her hand with a value she did not understand. Her poor father now prayed for help because of his own limited abilities. Putlitz then states that he wanted nothing to do with child prodigies, since the lack of years was then used as an excuse for all shortcomings. Brandes was different: “Aber dies kleine Mädchen, in seinem sauberen, aber fast ärmlichen Anzug und der heiteren Erwartung auf den Zügen, sah gar nicht aus wie ein Wunderkind, und ich setzte es gleich in’s [sic] Werk [...]” Putlitz also states that it was no wonder that Brandes was never described as a child prodigy, “denn das wurde gleich beschlossen, dass kein musikalisches Wunderkind, sondern eine ernst und tüchtig gebildete Künstlerin aus der kleinen Emma werden sollte.” All the talents were ‘naturally’ there, however. Things moved quickly. Emma practised, and soon entered the public sphere, “her shabby clothes contrasting sharply with her talent.” Of course, she won praise and, Putlitz continues, “[d]as war der erste Schritt einer Künstlerschaft, die längst reiche Anerkennung in der Öffentlichkeit gefunden hat, aller Orten, wo sie heraustrat, und namentlich, weil sie die kindliche Naivität bewahrte und nicht herauswuchs über den künstlerisch edlen Weg, auf das beste Ziel gerichtet […].”

Putlitz is not the only one who claims to have had a share in Brandes’ success. In 1873, Charlotte Moscheles published a biography about her husband, the composer and pianist Ignaz Moscheles. She claimed that in the early 1870s, Moscheles gave Emma Brandes some lessons, advising her to remain herself and, presumably referring to Liszt and Rubinstein, “to steer clear of all fashionable tendencies.” In yet other works, such as Adreas Moser’s 1891 biography of Joseph Joachim, the emphasis was on Brandes’ withdrawal from public life: “[d]ie unter ihrem Mädchennamen Emma Brandes rühmlichst bekannte Pianistin, hat sich zwar von öffentlichen Musikleben zurückgezogen; im häuslichen Kreise aber – und besonders im Zusammenspiel mit Joachim – erbringt sie fortwährend den Beweis, dass sie trotzdem eine große Künstlerin geblieben ist.”

Increasingly, the media made it clear that Brandes had remained a great artist not only in spite of, but also thanks to her retirement and her focus on the domestic sphere. Gradually, the public was given a glimpse into that domestic life as well. The 1918 publication of the correspondence between Theodor Engelmann and Johannes Brahms played an important role. As Caecilia mentioned:

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56. Putlitz 1875.
57. Idem, 442.
60. Moscheles 1873, 301.
61. Moser 1891, 283.
Brahms has always been a close friend of his [Th. Engelmann, F.M.], and even more so of the professor’s wife, Emma Brandes. Whenever the composer visited our country, he found a home in the hospitable, artistic house on the Lucasbolwerk. They understood how a guest like Brahms should be accommodated: he was left free all day, and could do as he pleased. Brahms did not despise the goodness of the world, it was taken into account: from early morning till late at night a pot of steaming coffee was available in the guest room; wine, “schnapps” and good cigars were also available. [....]

This made him feel completely at ease in the house “of the Angel”, as he used to call “Frau Emma”. His wishes were also artistically satisfied: Professor Engelmann was a solid violoncellist (Brahms dedicated his B minor String Quartet op. 67 to him), his wife Emma Brandes, a pianist of outstanding qualities; the memory of her piano playing is still vivid in Utrecht.62

The magazine also quoted Julius Röntgen, who in the introduction to the letters called Brandes’ piano playing “vollendet” and her letters “brilliant”. How unfortunate it was, according to the book’s reviewer, that her letters, “surely the best and most amiable that Brahms ever received”, did not appear in print. “Did Mrs Engelmann, who is still alive, perhaps raise objections?” It is quite possible that Brandes did just that. But why? What kind of portrait does this edition paint of her? In his introduction, Julius Röntgen immediately makes it clear that Clara Schumann had seen Emma Brandes as her successor. She had taken Brandes under her wing and saw in this pupil the greatest talent:

Emma Brandes kam (am letzten Juni) und blieb 8 Tage bei uns. An ihr hatte ich große Freude, und mit jedem Tag war sie mir lieber. Es war aber eine sehr aufregende Zeit für mich, ich lebte meine frühere Jugend in ihr durch und bei der Freude, die ich hatte, endlich mal ein Talent nach meinem Sinne aufsteigen zu sehen, und vor allem auch eine Interpretin für Roberts Kompositionen, befiel mich doch stets der wehmütige Gedanke, nun brauche ich bald nicht mehr da zu sein – diese wird mich ablösen! Sie wird vielleicht nicht ganz die Schwärmerei und das Feuer meines Spieles haben, aber, das ist ja auch nicht nötig, zwei ganz gleiche Individualitäten gibt es ja überhaupt nicht, eine jede hat ihre Berechtigung. Mit jedem Stück, das sie mir vorspielte, erfreute sie mich von neuem. Wenn sie sich ans Klavier setzt, so kommt gleich der heilige Ernst über sie, sie ist ganz dem hingegeben, und dies habe ich bei keiner von all den jungen Mädchen, die so nacheinander aufstiegen und wieder verloschen, gesehen. Emma Brandes ist die reine Natur in allem und wer weiß, wenn erst mal die Liebe ihr Herz durchwärmt, ob nicht auch das Feuer kommt und die tiefe Innerlichkeit, die das Leben mit seinen Freunden und Leiden erst bringt.63

By quoting this letter from Clara Schumann, Röntgen of course confirmed the image of Brandes as a lost talent, that had been destined to replace Schumann as the best female pianist. But after withdrawing from public concerting, so Röntgen continues, Emma turned her house into a centre of musical life in the Netherlands. Brahms, Joachim, Clara

63. Röntgen 1918, 6-7.
Schumann, Rubinstein and Grieg had been “willkommene Gäste, die sich an dem Verkehr mit den beiden seltenen Menschen und ganz besonders an Frau Emmas herrlichem Klavierspiel erquickten.” When they left Utrecht after Theodor Engelmann had been appointed as a professor in Berlin, the Dutch suffered.

The published letters themselves reveal, above all, the close friendship between the Engelmann family and Brahms. The contact between Brandes and the famous German composer was very close. Brahms described his string quartet op. 67, which he dedicated to Theodor Engelmann, as “something similar to your wife – very cute – but brilliant.” At home, Brandes played and enjoyed the works that, as Brahms acknowledged in these letters, he had often composed with her in mind. On the one hand, the letters thus prove that the productive and reproductive sides of music in a domestic setting were perhaps not as far apart as has been assumed. On the other, the absence of Brandes’ letters reveals that this disclosure of forms of music-related domestic intimacy could pose a threat. Was Brandes indeed trying to shield her intimate life from the media? And in doing so, did she also want to get rid of the public representation related to her famous artist name, Emma Brandes?

In any case, Brandes could not prevent the publication of other texts in which she played a role. In his 1921 biography of Johannes Brahms, Max Kalbeck blamed Theodor Engelmann for the end of the career of the genius that Brandes had been:

And then Kalbeck, referring to a letter from Brandes’ good friend Elisabeth von Herzogenberg to Brahms, suggests that domesticity was also highly valued by the ones that surrounded Brandes:

Through these publications, the public became increasingly aware of the significance of Brandes’ private activities. Apparently, she gave piano lessons – to Arthur Rubinstein, among others – and surrounded herself with famous musicians and composers whose

64. Idem, 7.
65. Idem, 50.
66. Kalbeck 1921, 192.
works she played. Some, including Heinrich von Herzogenberg (who called himself her ‘servant’), Julius Röntgen, Leonhard Wolff and Catharina van Rennes also dedicated works to Brandes.\textsuperscript{67} That these were all chamber music compositions reaffirmed the image of her as a domestic musician.

![Fig. 4: Portrait of Joseph Joachim, Theodor Engelmann and Emma Brandes, maker and date unknown.](image)

![Fig. 5: Portrait of Emma Brandes and Theodor Engelmann, made by atelier Bellach, Leipzig.](image)

It is also no coincidence that in the two images that came out in this period, Brandes is surrounded by others. The first is a double portrait with her husband, the other a group portrait of the pair together with the violinist Joseph Joachim, whom she had accompanied. Although the word salon was not used in the public representations of Brandes’ life after she retired from public concerts, it is clear that, like many well-known salonnières, her private sociability offered her a new kind of public fame. This image of Emma Brandes as a “domestic(ated) celebrity” remained for a long time and is still present in recent studies on Brahms and other composers she knew well.

\textsuperscript{67} Heinrich von Herzogenberg’s \textit{Capriccio} op. 107; Julius Röntgen’s \textit{Fugen für Klavier}, op. 28; Leonhard Wolff’s \textit{Jagdstück} op. 6; Catharina van Rennes’ \textit{Drei Quartette für Frauenstimmen mit Klavierbegleitung}, op. 24.
Conclusion

After her death, on the 15th July 1940, the *Utrechts volksblad* reported:

In Berlin, at an advanced age, Mrs. Emma Engelmann-Brandes died, widow of the renowned psychologist [sic] Prof. Th. Engelmann, who was a professor in Utrecht at the time. According to “De Tijd”, Mrs Engelmann was a very gifted pianist, who knew how to gather a broad circle of interested people around her in the Dom city. In her hospitable house at the Maliebaan it was a coming and going of celebrities, among them artists of the first magnitude. The composers Johannes Brahms and Edvard Grieg, Joachim and Clara Schumann were guests there, and several young Utrecht musicians and musicians of the old guard still recount the wonderful evenings they spent there. The Engelmann family was particularly close to Brahms and corresponded regularly.

Other newspapers recalled her qualities as a piano teacher. Brandes was thus remembered for her subservient role, as the wife, supporter, and connector of others. There was not much trace of the pianistic and artistic qualities on which Brandes’ fame had initially been based.

Altogether, the representation of Emma Brandes in the press from the first moment she appeared on German stages until the very end of her life informs us about the ways in which female musicians could gain attention and build fame. It reveals how quickly late nineteenth-century media shaped, changed and framed images, of both musicians as well as their sounds. It also shows the cultural transfer of these representations. Seemingly out of nothing, Brandes became famous in various European countries through similar review articles in the press. Because the media used her full maiden name and not, as was customary, anonymous initials, hers soon became a well-known artist name, that functioned almost like a brand.

These articles (co)created Brandes’ unique image and sound. She was represented as someone whose artistic qualities combined traits that were normally strictly reserved for men or for women, for youngsters or for seniors. Brandes’ unique individual playing style was described as healthy and natural, as an essential third option. Brandes was encouraged to keep faithful to herself, to accept her individuality as a given, and not try to change it. The fact that the newspapers and magazines always avoided the word ‘dilettante’, and used concepts like ‘artist’ or ‘pianist’ instead, could be interpreted as an acknowledgement and acceptance of Brandes’ professionalism from the very first moment she entered stage.

But it was a slippery road. In assessing her musical reproductive qualities, the framework was motivated first of all by its productive side. Certain composers required more depth than others, according to the reviewers. Secondly, the assessment criteria were clearly defined. To avoid competition with men, and the association with men from the lower classes in particular, who dominated the ranks of professional musicians, it was im-

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68. *Het Vaderland*, 4 April 1942.
69. Metzelaar 1999, 63-68.
important that her style was feminine. Being too feminine was also undesirable, however, as it was associated with dilettantism. She had to be visible, but not too much; and audible, but not too loud. The repeated call to go her own way and to preserve her own sound that matched public expectations, was thus relative. So was Brandes’ freedom of reproduction. Apparently, Brandes mastered this balancing act with verve, complying with the image of a talented youth with development potential. She was proclaimed a heroine and a ‘virtuose’, some rarely used female equivalents of male concepts. And quite quickly, the press also declared that she was famous and a celebrity.

For a long time, however, the image and narrative shaped by the media remained quite impersonal: Brandes’ background was barely discussed. The image of fidelity to art was essential. A marriage to a man made that image impossible. When that happened, an alternative arose: the image of a respectable life, with public performances only when connected to good causes or to accompany someone else. This subservient role was also stressed in the image of Brandes’ domestic musical sociability. Her reputation was now linked to the celebrity of others. Her reduced visibility did not make her less talked about, however. She was a domestic(ated) celebrity. In this second phase, Emma became a point of reference. Others were compared to her, and her performances were commemorated. In the press, her fame thus became linked to the idea of unfulfilled talent. Moreover, the need arose to explain her renown, and to name the actors who had had an influence. Some contemporaries tried to reconstruct her biography; others claimed to have played a role in it. The image emerged of a girl from the lower middle class, with an excellent character, and a great will to develop her talents. She had been no child prodigy, but appeared to be perfectly capable of developing into an artist with a style of her own: youthful and profound, feminine and virtuoso, pleasant to look at but unaware of, or uninterested in it. This image fits with Braudy’s idea of the democratisation of celebrity.

Thanks to the media, Emma Brandes’ fame rapidly grew. And thanks to the media, her fame remained, even when she lived a reclusive life. The sociologist Chris Rojek has equated celebrity with public fame. He distinguishes three forms: ascribed, achieved and attributed. Ascribed celebrity refers to people who are famous because of their status, wealth or heritage. Achieved celebrity refers to people who have achieved something in art, sport or business. It is clear that the early career of Emma Brandes fits this category the most. The third category concerns people who are famous because of extensive media exposure. It is interesting that this category seems to apply to the later phase of Emma Brandes’ fame. It is telling, however, that she did not speak in any of the representations that were made of her, even though the number of people talking about her increased. In this sense, Brandes’ celebrity was one with its own (re)constructed sound, but without her own voice.

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