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THIS is one of a further series of articles written for "The Listener" by BESSIE POLLARD. As with the preceding series, published some time ago, the aim is to help the student and the interested listener towards a more complete appreciation of good music.

(16) Tragic Overture, Op. 81 (Brahms)

BRAHMS wrote the Tragic Overture, Op. 81, at about the same time as the Academic Festival-in the summer of 1880 at Ischl. In a letter to Reinecke Brahms wrote of the two works. "One weeps, the other laughs." That the composer found some difficulty in finding a suitable title for the more serious overture is evident from a letter (dated September 17, 1880) he wrote to Bernhard Scholz, the director of the Breslau Orchestral Society: "You may include a dramatic or tragic overture in your programme for January 5; I cannot find a proper title for it, can you help me?" Contrary to popular belief, we have it authoritively from Brahms that he had no particular tragedy in his mind when writing the work. One of the very first to become familiar with the Tragic Overture was Clara Schumann, for on her birthday (September 13), she played a four-hand piano arrangement with Brahms himself. The first public orchestral performance was given on December 26 by the Vienna Philharmonic under Hans Richter.

Following two strong chords, the main theme is announced by strings-sotto voce—repeated later by a unison of woodwind and low strings.



In bar 21 an impassioned motif enters, given out by violins and violas ("A" below); this is answered by the basses (inverted-a "mirror-reflection" of the theme) against which we hear a triplet run in the violins, and a dotted-note figure from the woodwinds ("B" below)—



An interesting transitional section introduces some beautiful effects-against a syncopated undulating background of strings Brahms places a rather hesitant obos solo, interrupted twice by horns and bassoons, before it reaches its climax-



The second subject, which begins in bar 106, is cast as a duet for first and second violins—



Another vital passage is the closing section of the exposition, with its strong rhythmic background and wide melodic leaps-



The usual working-out and restatement sections follow.

Tragic Overture, Op. 81, by Brahms, will be heard from Station IYC on Tuesday, April 26, at 8.0 p.m.