

## Brahms' Beard



**Gillian Reynolds**

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... noting the proximity of clever Mark Thompson (whose beard appeared when he left the BBC to become chief executive at Channel 4), I leaned over to give him a listening tip.

"There's a feature on Radio 3 soon, all about Brahms' beard and what it signified," I said. Thompson clenched his modishly shaped jaw. He was tired, he said, of things like beard features on Radio 3 whenever he tunes to it for music.

Having now heard the programme last Saturday night I can see his point. *Brahms' Beard* appeared in the *Between the Ears* slot, where the mind may spin between the twin poles of rage and narcolepsy but occasionally emerges richly rewarded. Not here.

This programme's argument seemed to be that people grow beards to hide or to show how they are changing, the size and luxuriance of the beard signalling the wearer's personality. I think I knew that. If anyone mentioned the disguise of weak chins, or the fashion for the sort of growth once seen only on cartoon-strip tramps, it must have been in one of the moments I dropped off.