

Portfolio of Recorded Performances and
Exegesis:
The Late Piano Works of Robert Schumann

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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The University of Adelaide
March 2010

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral submission consists of 4 CD recordings of my performances of Schumann's piano works (from Opus 72 to the last piece he composed) supported by an exegesis. The works performed and discussed are: *Vier Fugen* Op. 72 (1845), *Vier Märsche* Op. 76 (1849), *Waldszenen* Op. 82 (1848/9), *Bunte Blätter* Op. 99 (1836-49), *Albumblätter* Op. 124 (1832-45), *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op. 111 (1851), *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118 (1853), *Sieben Stücke in Fughettenform* Op. 126 (1853), *Gesänge der Frühe* Op. 133 (1853), and the *Geistervariationen* WoO 24 (1854).

Recent scholarship suggests that Schumann's late piano works have been unreasonably neglected. This neglect has been justified by reference to his mental condition, which has often been assumed to have deteriorated as he got older, allegedly affecting the quality of his composition. Empirical evidence from the 1980s onwards supports a burgeoning school of thought that casts misgivings on the once commonly held belief that Schumann's late works are inferior in quality. These recordings provide a fresh interpretation of the material and are intended to contribute towards a 21st century Schumannian renaissance as we approach the 200th anniversary of his birth in 2010.

The exegesis discusses the process of researching, learning, performing and recording these works. Interpretative decisions are described and validated through an examination of the implications of the score, and specific pianistic issues arising through the maturation of Schumann's late style are also discussed. The works have been examined on the basis that historical prejudice may have prevented a fair assessment of the quality of the composer's music of this period.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the recorded performances and the supporting exegesis that comprise this submission are my original work.

They contain no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contain no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of the submission being made available for loan and photocopying when deposited in the University Library, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968. I also give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University's digital research repository, the Library catalogue, the Australasian Digital Theses Program (ADTP) and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

Paul Rickard-Ford

March 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have provided support and encouragement in the creation of this research.

Dr Diana Weekes, as my Principal Supervisor, my former piano teacher and friend, has been a constant and motivational force throughout the project. I am also indebted to her for her willingness to translate all of the German references.

Emeritus Professor David Lockett's advice and encouragement in the recording of the CDs and facilitating the use of Elder Hall, The University of Adelaide, for the recording sessions was constructive and crucial to the project's completion.

Professor Charles Bodman Rae's assistance in the latter stages of this work has been invaluable.

Silver Moon's highly professional CD engineering throughout the recording process is highly respected.

Peter Thomas and the team at ConProductions at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music amazed me with their efficiency in formatting the CDs.

Masashi Owada's contribution, through his meticulous scanning and outstanding patience deserves the highest respect and admiration.

This project would never have reached completion stage if it were not for the support given by Professor Kim Walker, Principal and Dean of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Her belief and encouragement have been an ongoing source of inspiration.

I am indebted to Emeritus Professor Michael Brimer, my former piano teacher and highly respected lifelong friend, for taking the time to proof read many chapters and for his valuable insight.

Special thanks must also go to Associate Professor Kimi Coaldrake for her understanding and support.

I would finally like to extend my gratitude to all my students. Thank you for your understanding. I hope that the outcomes of this research will inspire you all to look at this music with an open mind.

Recorded Performances

CD Number 1

Vier Fugen Op. 72 (1845)

11'55"

(Recorded in Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, July 23, 2008)

Track No. 1	<i>Nicht schnell</i>	3'19"
Track No. 2	<i>Sehr lebhaft</i>	2'38"
Track No. 3	<i>Nicht schnell und sehr ausdrucksvoll</i>	3'09"
Track No. 4	<i>In mäßigen Tempo</i>	2'49"

Vier Märsche Op. 76 (1849)

17'52"

(Recorded in Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, July 23, 2008)

Track No. 5	<i>Mit größter Energie</i>	4'15"
Track No. 6	<i>Sehr kräftig</i>	4'08"
Track No. 7	<i>Lager-Szene. Sehr mäßig</i>	3'44"
Track No. 8	<i>Mit Kraft und Feuer</i>	5'45"

Waldszenen Op. 82 (1850)

23'21"

(Live recording, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, November 13, 2006)

Track No. 9	<i>Eintritt</i>	2'44"
Track No. 10	<i>Jäger auf der Lauer</i>	1'29"
Track No. 11	<i>Einsame Blumen</i>	2'04"
Track No. 12	<i>Verrufene Stelle</i>	3'15"
Track No. 13	<i>Freundliche Landschaft</i>	1'25
Track No. 14	<i>Herberge</i>	2'07"
Track No. 15	<i>Vogel als Prophet</i>	3'23"
Track No. 16	<i>Jagdlied</i>	2'44"
Track No. 17	<i>Abschied</i>	4'10

Total time

53'08"

CD Number 2

Bunte Blätter Op. 99 (1836-49)

35'12"

(Live recording, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, November 13, 2006)

Drei Stücklein

Track No. 1	<i>Nicht schnell, mit Innigkeit</i>	2'30"
Track No. 2	<i>Sehr rasch</i>	1'04"
Track No. 3	<i>Frisch</i>	0'50"

Albumblätter

Track No. 4	<i>Ziemlich langsam</i>	2'00"
Track No. 5	<i>Schnell</i>	0'53"
Track No. 6	<i>Ziemlich langsam, sehr gesangvoll</i>	2'24"
Track No. 7	<i>Sehr langsam</i>	1'33"
Track No. 8	<i>Langsam</i>	1'22"
Track No. 9	<i>Novelette – Lebhaft</i>	2'59"
Track No. 10	<i>Präludium – Energisch</i>	1'17"
Track No. 11	<i>Marsch – Sehr getragen</i>	5'00"
Track No. 12	<i>Abendmusik – Tempo di Minuetto</i>	3'49"
Track No. 13	<i>Scherzo – Lebhaft</i>	4'58"
Track No. 14	<i>Geschwindmarsch – Sehr markiert</i>	4'33"

Albumblätter Op. 124 (1832-45)

31'27"

(Recorded in Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, February 16, 2007)

Track No. 15	<i>Impromptu – Sehr schnell</i>	1'14"
Track No. 16	<i>Leides Ahnung – Langsam</i>	1'25"
Track No. 17	<i>Scherzino – Rasch</i>	1'03"
Track No. 18	<i>Walzer – Lebhaft</i>	1'02"
Track No. 19	<i>Phantasietanz – Sehr rasch</i>	0'57"
Track No. 20	<i>Wiegenliedchen – Nicht schnell</i>	2'35"
Track No. 21	<i>Ländler – Sehr mäßig</i>	1'18"
Track No. 22	<i>Leid ohne Ende – Langsam</i>	3'58"
Track No. 23	<i>Impromptu – Mit zartem Vortrag</i>	1'12"
Track No. 24	<i>Walzer – Mit Lebhaftigkeit</i>	0'52"
Track No. 25	<i>Romanze – Nicht schnell</i>	1'35"
Track No. 26	<i>Burla – Presto</i>	1'39"
Track No. 27	<i>Larghetto</i>	1'03"
Track No. 28	<i>Vision – Sehr rasch</i>	0'52"
Track No. 29	<i>Walzer</i>	1'15"
Track No. 30	<i>Schlummerlied – Allegretto</i>	3'55"
Track No. 31	<i>Elfe – So rasch als möglich</i>	0'30"
Track No. 32	<i>Botschaft – Mit zartem Vortrag</i>	1'26"
Track No. 33	<i>Phantasiestück – Leicht, etwas grazioso</i>	2'30"
Track No. 34	<i>Kanon – Langsam</i>	1'06"

Total time

66'29"

CD Number 3

Drei Fantasiestücke Op. 111 (1851) 10'10"

(Recorded in Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, December 14, 2005)

Track No. 1	<i>Sehr rasch, mit leidenschaftlichem Vortrag</i>	2'27"
Track No. 2	<i>Ziemlich langsam</i>	4'38"
Track No. 3	<i>Kräftig und sehr markiert</i>	3'05"

Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend Op. 118 (1853) 37'29"

(Recorded in Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, July 23, 2008)

No. 1 Julien zur Erinnerung 8'50"

Track No. 4	<i>Allegro</i>	1'56"
Track No. 5	<i>Thema mit Variationen – Ziemlich langsam</i>	3'06"
Track No. 6	<i>Puppenwiegenlied – Nicht schnell</i>	1'32"
Track No. 7	<i>Rondoletto – Munter</i>	2'16"

No. 2 Elisen zum Andenken 14'05"

Track No. 8	<i>Allegro</i>	7'29"
Track No. 9	<i>Canon – Lebhaft</i>	1'02"
Track No. 10	<i>Abendlied – Langsam</i>	1'39"
Track No. 11	<i>Kindergesellschaft – Sehr lebhaft</i>	3'55"

No. 3 Marien gewidmet 14'34"

Track No. 12	<i>Allegro</i>	6'17"
Track No. 13	<i>Andante – Ausdrucksvoll</i>	2'46"
Track No. 14	<i>Zigeunertanz – Schnell</i>	1'32"
Track No. 15	<i>Traum eines Kindes – Sehr lebhaft</i>	3'59"

Total time 47'39"

CD Number 4

Sieben Stücke in Fughettenform Op. 126 (1853) 17'38"

(Recorded in Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, July 23, 2008)

Track No. 1	<i>Nicht schnell, leise vorzutragen</i>	2'07"
Track No. 2	<i>Mäßig</i>	2'04"
Track No. 3	<i>Ziemlich bewegt</i>	2'49"
Track No. 4	<i>Lebhaft</i>	2'28"
Track No. 5	<i>Ziemlich langsam, empfindungsvoll vorzutragen</i>	3'21"
Track No. 6	<i>Sehr schnell</i>	1'54"
Track No. 7	<i>Langsam, ausdrucksvoll</i>	2'55"

Gesänge der Frühe Op. 133 (1853) 12'50"

(Recorded in Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, December 14, 2005)

Track No. 8	<i>Im ruhigen Tempo</i>	2'22"
Track No. 9	<i>Belebt, nicht zu rasch</i>	2'10"
Track No. 10	<i>Lebhaft</i>	2'44"
Track No. 11	<i>Bewegt</i>	2'32"
Track No. 12	<i>Im Anfange ruhiges, im Verlauf bewegtes Tempo</i>	3'02"

Geistervariationen WoO 24 (1854) 10'57"

(Recorded in Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, December 14, 2005)

Track No. 13	<i>Tema – Leise, innig. Variations 1-5</i>	10'57"
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Total time 41'25"

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Shortly before her death in 1992, my last piano teacher in London, Edith Vogel, had introduced me to Schumann's *Intermezzi*, Op. 4. I felt compelled to learn this work and include it in several recital programs that were scheduled to be given on my arrival in Sydney in 1994. Up to this point my knowledge and experience of Schumann's piano music had been limited, but I became intrigued by the early works and soon decided to add the *Variations Sur Le Nom A begg*, Op. 1 to my slowly expanding repertoire. I needed to purchase the music, and it was during my visit to the retail store that I discovered a Henle edition of something entitled *Thema mit Variationen—Geistervariationen*, a work written by Schumann in 1854. On reading the Preface I discovered that it was actually his very last composition, that it had been first published in 1939, and that it had been re-published by Henle as recently as 1995. At that stage, \$16.45 seemed a small price to pay for what I considered to be an exciting discovery.

As soon as I arrived home and tried out this new music, I became instantly aware not only of the beauty of the theme itself, but of the incredible diversity of the variations, and this led to a desire to give several recitals with programs consisting of both early and late works. In 1996 I prepared a program for ABC Classic FM consisting of the *Intermezzi* Op.4 (1832), and the *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op.111 (1851), and in 2002 another recital was made up of *Variations Sur Le Nom A begg* Op.1 (1831), Clara Schumann's *Variationen über ein Thema von Robert Schumann* Op. 20 (1853), *Gesänge der Frühe* Op.133 (1853) and the *Thema mit Variationen*, WoO24¹ (1854). Over the years my interest in Schumann has grown to a curiosity about the interdependence of musical style, historical performance practice and personal interpretation. The following research may be regarded as the logical outcome of this fortuitous series of events and its ongoing consequences.

* * * * *

¹ Discrepancies regarding the title of this work will be discussed in Chapter 2, but for the purposes of this research it is henceforth referred to as the *Geistervariationen*.

There are conflicting commentaries regarding the relationship between Schumann's final illness and the quality of his last compositions. While any consideration of his medical condition lies well outside the scope of this exegesis, the situation is best described by the renowned Schumann scholar John Daverio, when he writes:

In the 1880s, to ascribe the stylistic features of Schumann's 'late manner' to a musical work was tantamount to delivering the kiss of death, and despite the efforts of a small band of revisionists, received opinion of the music of Schumann's later years remains largely negative over a century later.²

Mental illness was not well understood in the 19th century and was seen as an embarrassment, so it is likely that the prevailing attitudes of the time contributed to the dismissal and neglect of many of Schumann's late works. Indeed, Clara had her own role to play: by privately guarding many of the manuscripts, she may well have unwittingly encouraged the perception that they were of inferior value. Eric Jensen confirms this assumption when he states:

Clara became resolutely determined to maintain what she perceived as Schumann's unsullied and lofty reputation. She did not want it tarnished by any association with insanity, as it would have been with a public that had little understanding of mental illness and certainly little sympathy for it.³

Clara's decisions to suppress works such as the *Geistervariationen*, the violin concerto, the 3rd violin sonata and the accompaniments to Bach's cello Suites, and to destroy the five 'Romances' for cello and piano, were undoubtedly driven by a belief that they did not do justice to his talent.⁴ Tunbridge, however, goes further by writing that "Clara's suppression of these pieces has been taken as confirmation that Schumann's creative powers waned, the cause of which invariably is taken to be his mental illness."⁵ In an article by Jessica Duchon in *The Independent*, the cellist, Steven Isserlis, expressed his strong views on Clara's role in the critical reception of many of Schumann's late works:

Schumann composed several Romances for cello and piano – Brahms and their violinist friend Joachim loved them and used to argue over which was their favourite.

² John Daverio. "Songs of dawn and dusk: coming to terms with the late music." In *The Cambridge Companion to Schumann*. Beate Perrey, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 268

³ Eric F. Jensen. "Schumann at Eendenich 1: Buried Alive." *Musical Times*. 139:1861 (March 1998) 8

⁴ Laura Tunbridge. *Schumann's Late Style*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 5

⁵ Tunbridge 5

But after Schumann died, Clara decided the Romances weren't good enough and destroyed them.⁶

While Isserlis's comment assumes that Clara destroyed the work because it was of inferior quality, Peter Ostwald describes Clara's actions from a different point of view:

(They [*Romances for the Violoncello*] were not published, though, and Clara later destroyed them in the belief – which she held also for his violin concerto – that the music associated with Schumann's madness ought never be performed).⁷

Even if her actions were misguided, Ostwald's last point here is crucial in an understanding of how important Clara felt it was to maintain her husband's 'unsullied and lofty reputation'. In an interesting article subtitled "Can a composer write madness-music?",⁸ Dagmar Hoffmann-Axthelm reminds her readers that Brahms also wrote a series of variations on the Theme of the *Geistervariationen*, a piano work for four hands, Op.23 (1861). At the time, he wanted to give the date of Schumann's theme, 1854, to the publisher, but Clara is reported to have prevented this by saying: "Kein Datum, nichts weiter, die Leute brauchen das nicht zu wissen" ("No date, nothing more, people don't need to know that").⁹

Clara wrote frequently in her diary about her concerns with the complexity of Schumann's piano works. Even as early as 1839 she wrote: "I am often pained that Robert's compositions are not recognised as they deserve to be. I would gladly play them but the public doesn't understand them."¹⁰ Although she clearly felt duty bound to promote the works of her husband, she had often stated that they were not suitable for the public. Another diary entry from September of the same year explains in more detail that, at that stage, her doubts were based primarily on matters of stylistic (and possibly also pianistic) significance:

I'm so afraid that someday Robert will have to witness the fact that his compositions arouse little interest...He has much too deep an intellect for the world...his pieces

⁶ Jessica Duchon. "Clara Schumann: The troubled career of the pianist." The Independent March 7, 2006

<http://license.icopyright.net/user/viewFreeUse.act?fuid+MzQ2NjU...> (15 May 2009).

⁷ Peter Ostwald. *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985) 276

⁸ Dagmar Hoffmann-Axthelm. "'Der Werth der Compositionen nimmt deutlich ab' versus 'Ausdruck eines Genius auf der Höhe seiner schöpferische Kraft'—Kann ein Komponist 'Wahnsinns-Musik schreiben?'" .In *Der späte Schumann*. Ulrich Tadday, ed. (Landshut: Bosch-Druck, 2006) 29–49

⁹ Hoffman-Axthelm, In Tadday 43

¹⁰ Nancy B. Reich. *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman*. Rev. ed. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001) 263

are all in orchestral style and I think that is why they are so inaccessible to the public: his melodies and figures cross so much that it takes a great deal to discover all their beauties.¹¹

Many of Schumann's early piano works, with their literary and autobiographical associations, complex harmonies and rhythms and experimental sounds, were not included in Clara's concert programs until after Schumann's death. Liszt included the *Fantasia* Op.17, selections from *Carnaval*, and the Sonata in F sharp minor in his concert programs of 1850, but he wrote to Wasielewski that "they did not suit the public taste and most pianists did not understand them."¹² Clara, herself, did not play *Carnaval* in public until 1856, and Nancy Reich points out that for the next 30 years "a statement headed 'Zum besseren Verstandnis' (For better understanding) was distributed with the program to familiarise the audience with the characters portrayed in this unknown piano cycle."¹³

The composer-music critic Carl Koßmaly (1812-93), an original member of Schumann's *Davidsbund*, published the first known essay on Schumann's piano compositions in 1844. The review makes several crucial points: that in 1844 Schumann's piano music was not yet widely known; that the music was filled with bizarre mannerisms and technical difficulties that strained the understanding of the listener; that Schumann's recent piano music revealed a marked stylistic simplification; and finally, that for all its difficulties, the piano music must be counted among the most remarkable, significant artistic phenomena of the time.¹⁴ Schumann's constant striving for originality disturbed Koßmaly, and his essay notes that the earlier piano works "suffer from confusion and overdecoration."¹⁵ (In the light of more recent scholarship this description could now apply equally well to his later works.) Ostwald notes how Schumann himself stated that "the musical content of my earlier compositions was damaged by my belief that they must be especially interesting for the performer and contain technically new difficulties."¹⁶ It is probably safe to assume that Schumann always wished to express his reaction against

¹¹ Reich 263

¹² Reich 257

¹³ Reich 262

¹⁴ Carl Koßmaly. "On Robert Schumann's Piano Compositions" (1844). Trans. S. Gillespie. In *Schumann and His World*. Larry R. Todd, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 303

¹⁵ Koßmaly 308

¹⁶ Peter Ostwald. *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985) 224

the commonplace and the philistine. Furthermore, with the emergence of the “new romantics”, whose proponents saw themselves “as discoverers, prophets, and bringers of the new light”¹⁷, Schumann had just cause to compare his own musical language not only with that of his predecessors, but with his more famous contemporaries.

In the 1980s Michael Struck and Reinhard Kapp¹⁸ approached the appraisal of Schumann’s late style from a new point of view.¹⁹ Both agreed that the commonly held belief of a decline in quality in Schumann’s late works could be disproved. The notion that they are inferior is normally attributed to his final illness, and many pieces are simply dismissed as being unworthy of performance or scrutiny. Struck asserts that “Schumann’s final illness does not represent the ‘hidden meaning’ of the late music, but should rather be viewed as the stroke of fate that brought his productivity to an abrupt halt.”²⁰ Kapp goes even further and states that “Schumann’s last creative period was a time of intense exploration—of the outer limits of diatonicism, of the mystical powers of sheer sonority, and the potential of the tiniest motive for infinite elaboration.”²¹

The most recent biography of Schumann was written in 2007 by John Worthen,²² who presents a detailed refutation of the common preconceptions of Schumann’s mental illness. He states:

This is the first biography of Schumann not to consign him to Romantic lunacy, as one who lived his life (as Eugenie Schumann put it) in the shadow of his final illness.²³

He is referring here to the countless number of earlier Schumann biographers who, in most cases, categorically insist that Schumann’s deteriorating mental health affected the quality of his (late) compositions. Worthen elaborates:

¹⁷ Koßmaly 309

¹⁸ Winners of “The Robert Schumann Prize of the City of Zwickau 2009”. The awards took place on the 199th anniversary of Schumann’s birthday on June 7, 2009 in Zwickau.

¹⁹ Reinhard Kapp. “Schumann in his time and since.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Schumann*. Beate Perrey, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007) 223–251

²⁰ Daverio 276

²¹ Kapp 276

²² John Worthen. *Robert Schumann Life and Death of a Musician*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007)

²³ Worthen 389

There is no longer any reason to think that Schumann's music was affected by psychological disorder or mental instability, though this will not stop those who are determined to link them.²⁴

Worthen's recent research and opinions provide valuable insights and his findings will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters, particularly in Chapter 2 in regard to Schumann's last two piano works.

In the light of all these comments, it is apparent that there are many reasons why Schumann's later works have had neither the exposure nor the critical acclaim that they deserve. Before moving to a more specific analysis of the music itself, however, it is worth noting that many writers have alluded to the fact that there is something very special about Schumann's music—and certain works in particular—which can only be described as 'other worldly'. Dagmar Hoffman-Axthelm goes so far as to quote the learned philosopher and psychiatrist, Karl Jasper, in reference to Schumann's extraordinary genius for writing music that seems to evoke a palpable, almost physical tension between, on the one hand, the experience of life's certainty and a positive existence, and on the other, the fear of death and the terror of an unknown hereafter:

Nur das "ursprüngliche Talent kann auch in der Psychose bedeutend sein und sichtbaren Ausdruck schaffen für die sonst ganz subjektiven (spirituellen) Erlebnisse."²⁵

Only "original talent can be meaningful in psychosis, and can create visible expression for otherwise quite subjective (spiritual) experiences."

If Schumann's talent was, indeed, of this magnitude, then we must turn our attention to the music itself. In the chapters that follow, various works are discussed in terms of their historical context, stylistic features, and pianistic problems in order to justify the interpretations arrived at in the recorded performances of the submission. In the light of events surrounding the composition (and notation) of the *Geistervariationen*, it is with this work that we begin Chapter 2.

²⁴ Worthen 389

²⁵ Hoffman-Axthelm, In Tadday 49

CHAPTER 2

Geistervariationen WoO24

The title of Schumann's last composition for piano has aroused some controversy. The autographed manuscript gives the title "Thema mit Variationen für das Pianoforte, Clara Schumann gewidmet".¹ The first publication of the work by Hinrichsen, in 1939, gives the title as "Variations on an original theme". The fifth edition of Grove's *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (ed. Eric Blom, 1954) refers to it as "Thema mit Variationen, E flat major", while *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (ed. Stanley Sadie, 1980) and *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (ed. Stanley Sadie/exec. ed. John Tyrrell, 2001)² give it the same title as the 1939 edition. The title "Geistervariationen" first appeared on Jörg Demus's 1973 recording, but the exact origin of this title is unknown. One could speculate that it might have been Demus himself who invented the term, since he is also well known as a musicologist, and was undoubtedly familiar with the fact that Schumann claimed—on several separate occasions—to have received the theme from angels, or from ghosts of the past, including Mendelssohn and Schubert. The dedication to Clara that appears on the composer's "fair copy" manuscript is absent from the Hinrichsen edition, but is present in the Henle score.

There is also some dispute about whether or not the work was ever completed. Karl Geiringer, the editor of the first published version (1939) claims in the Preface that the work is unfinished. Louis Jebb's article "Schumann's last, lost variation"³ also attempts to persuade the reader that these variations were never completed, although his claims remain largely unsubstantiated. When a new manuscript copy (though it was not in Schumann's hand) of an extra variation appeared, this inevitably led to a performance, and Jebb duly notes that "here was Schumann's final work, complete at last, and as well worth reviving as his unjustly neglected violin concerto".⁴ One would hope that Jebb's positive comment about "unjust neglect"

¹ A copy of the original, showing a blank page with this inscription superimposed on manuscript paper, is reprinted in the article by Hoffmann-Axthelm, 42

² John Daverio and Eric Sams. "Schumann, Robert." In *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 2nd edition. (London: Macmillan & Co. 2001) Stanley Sadie ed. and John Tyrrell exec. ed.

³ Louis Jebb. "Schumann's last, lost variation." In *The Spectator*, 22 July, 1989, 34–35

⁴ Jebb 35

might also have stood for Schumann's last piano work, regardless of the existence (or validity) of one extra variation. Quite apart from this, however, a close look at the facsimile of the manuscript shows Schumann's signature at the end of Variation 5⁵:

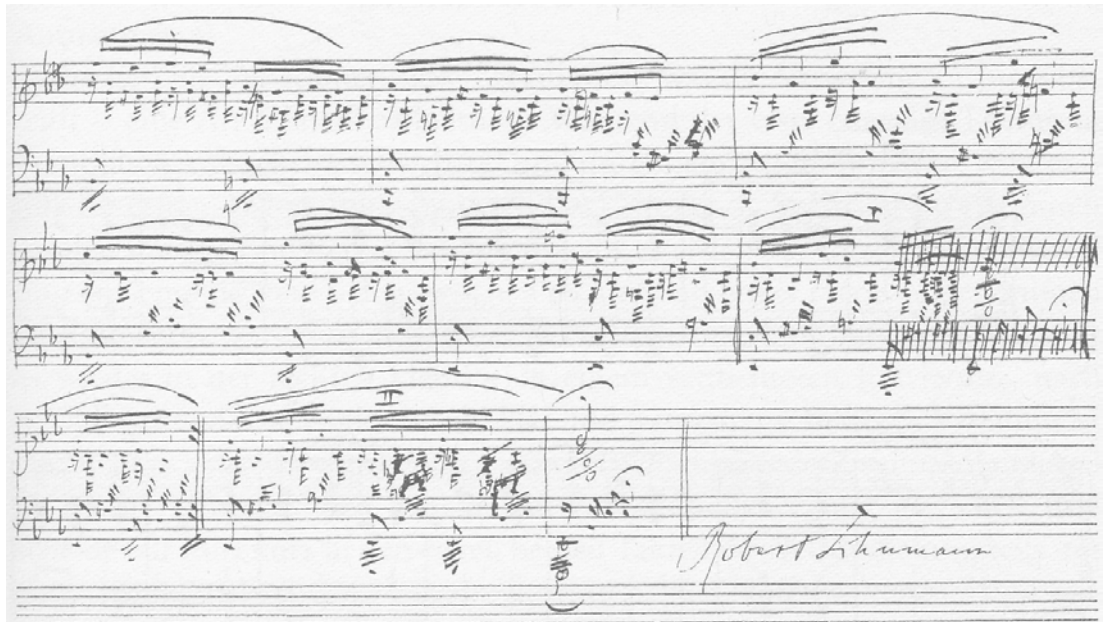


Abb. 5: Takt 24 bis 30 der 5. Variation mit abschließender Signierung »Robert Schumann«; nach: Beck, *Robert Schumann und seine Geister-Variationen* (s. Abb. 4)

Whereas opinions vary with regard to Schumann's intentions, this could certainly be interpreted as the composer's signing of a completed work. Indeed, Dagmar Hoffmann-Axthelm goes so far as to say that from our present day perspective, the whole thing looks like a musical farewell letter ("ein musikalischer Abschiedsbrief")⁶. If Clara's diary entries are correct, the Variations were written on the 22nd and 23rd February, 1854. On the 27th Schumann prepared a fair copy, but broke off in the middle of his work to run out of the house and throw himself into the Rhine. Once he had been rescued and brought back home, the doctors advised Clara to move out and stay with her blind friend, Rosalie Leser, so that he would not become over-excited. Sometime during the next 24 hours Schumann must have finished the fair copy, because Clara records having received these Variations on February 28th, along with a note suggesting that she should play them to her friend, Fräulein Leser.⁷

⁵ Hoffmann-Axthelm, In Tadday 42

⁶ Hoffmann-Axthelm, In Tadday 43

⁷ Berthold Litzmann. *Clara Schumann*. Trans. G.E.Hadow. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1913) 59–60

Interestingly, there is nothing to suggest that Robert Schumann had any doubts about his wife's ability to accomplish this task.

As mentioned above, the *Geistervariationen* (1854) did not appear in print until 1939, some 83 years after Schumann's death. The manuscripts were jealously guarded by Clara, to whom the work is dedicated, and in the *Collected Piano Works of Robert Schumann*⁸ edited by Clara and Brahms, only the theme is provided. This begs an obvious question: did Clara and Brahms feel, by then, that the variations were of an inferior quality and therefore not worthy of publication? We have already noted that in 1861, when Brahms published his own composition for four hands based on the same theme, Clara dissuaded him from including the date, saying that the public "need not know that". We might also ask why the work as a whole has been so obviously neglected, and whether its omission from the 1893 edition has had any bearing on the matter.

In terms of the compositional process, it would seem that Clara's diary provides the most reliable information about the way in which Schumann received his inspiration for the *Geistervariationen*:

Freitag, den 17. [Februar], nachts, als wir schon lange zu Bett waren, stand Robert wieder auf und schrieb ein Thema auf, welches, wie er sagte, ihm die Engel vorgangen; nachdem er es beendet, legte er sich nieder und phantasierte nun die ganze Nacht, immer mit offenen, zum Himmel aufgeschlagenen Blicken; er war des festen Glaubens, Engel umschwebten ihm und machten ihm die herrlichsten Offenbarungen, all das in wundervoller Musik (...). Der Morgen kam und mit ihm eine furchtbare Änderung! Die Engelstimmen verwandelten sich in Dämonstimmen mit grässlicher Musik; sie sagten ihm, er sei ein Sünder und sie wollten ihn in die Hölle werfen (...).⁹

Friday 17 [February], in the night, long after we had gone to bed, Robert got up again and wrote down a theme which, he said, the angels had sung to him; after he finished it, he lay down again and fantasised the whole night through, with his eyes open and gazing up towards Heaven; he was firmly of the opinion that angels were floating around him and making him the most wonderful revelations, all in wonderful music (...). Then came the morning, and with it a frightful change! The angels' voices had changed into demons' voices with ugly music; they told him he was a sinner and they wanted to throw him into hell (...).¹⁰

⁸ *Robert Schumanns Werke. Herausgegeben von Clara Schumann*, originally published by Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1879-87. Clara edited this edition from 1879-87. Brahms edited the Supplement in 1893.

⁹ Hoffmann-Axthelm, In Tadday 41

¹⁰ Trans. by D.Weekes.

The theme bears a noticeable resemblance to the opening of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 81a, *Les Adieux*: it is in the same key (E flat major), and begins with the same four notes, which suggests that there was some subconscious echo of the sonata in Schumann's mind, although the similarity is masked by a different rhythmic approach and the use of an opening *anacrusis*. Quite apart from this, however, Schumann had used what appear to be parts of the same theme on three earlier occasions, a fact which he may well have forgotten by the time he experienced various visitations from the spirits of another world.¹¹ Twelve years earlier, in 1842, Schumann used the first six notes of the theme in the first violin part (bars 31–33), in the second movement of his String Quartet Op. 41 No. 2 in F major, an *Andante con Variazioni* (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. String Quartet Op 41 No 2 – *Andante con Variazioni* : bars 30–34



In “Frühlings Ankunft” from the *Lieder-Album für die Jugend* Op 79 No 19, (1849), the similarity to the theme is recognisable, although here the harmony alters the effect (see Fig.2).

Fig. 2. “Frühlings Ankunft”: bars 1–4

FRÜHLINGS ANKUNFT.
(Hoffmann von Fallersleben.)

Nicht schnell.

Singstimme. *p* Nach die-sen trü - ben Tagen, wie ist so hell das Feld!

Pianoforte. *p*

¹¹ Wilhelm Joseph von Wasielewski. *Life of Robert Schumann*. Trans. A.L. Alger. (Boston: Oliver Ditson & Co., 1871) 185.

In October 1853, just four months before the angels are said to have sung to him, Schumann used the first four beats of the theme, marked *ausdrucksvoll*, in the solo part (bars 4–5), in the slow movement of his Violin Concerto, a movement of heartfelt intensity (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Violin Concerto 2nd movement: bars 4–7

In considering all the see examples one might argue that, when it came to the *Geistervariationen*, Schumann must have felt that the idea still had potential, or that he wanted to develop it further. While a summary of the historical context is important, however, we must now turn to a more detailed analysis of the actual score in order to reveal the stylistic and interpretative challenges inherent in this work.

The main problem in playing the theme lies in the subtle voicing of the right hand chords which are mostly in sixths with the melody in the upper voice (see Fig. 4). The need for a reliable *legato* is essential in order to achieve the *cantabile* and this therefore requires considerable finger substitutions. While this does not present any great problems, the situation becomes more pianistically demanding as the work progresses. The left hand provides a tonic pedal point and the texture is relatively thick. In order to realise the *Leise, innig* direction on the score, there is a need to consider the balance between the hands, particularly since the only dynamic indication is *piano*.

Fig. 4. *Geistervariationen: Tema* bars 1–4. CD 4 Track 13



The theme consists of a typical 8 bar *fauxbourdon* progression, and the need to shape the melody in a lyrical and expressive way is very important. In this instance, however, it is not just a matter of projecting the top voice, as over-voicing tends to sound rather artificial and actually has the opposite effect: it seems to detract from the theme's inherent simplicity. The peak of the phrase at the highest note needs to be made clear and then the phrase needs to be dynamically tapered as it heads to the cadence. The upbeat of the second statement of the phrase (bar 8) is harmonised very differently from the opening anacrusis (see Fig.5).

Fig. 5. *Geistervariationen: Tema* bars 7-10. CD 4 Track 13



Instead of the tonic chord Schumann uses the mediant chord (both chords containing the melody note G) in first inversion which also has the effect of reiterating the dominant. Its function here is that of a Dominant 13th chord. This produces a very different effect because there now seems to be more attention given to the B flat instead of the top G. For this reason it seemed appropriate to voice this re-statement of the theme differently, and to draw attention to the tenor voice that adds further textural richness and colour.

The first four variations present the theme largely unaltered. In Variation 1, inner triplet figures are awkwardly distributed between the hands and the resultant texture is more dense than in the *Tema*. Again, the only dynamic indication is *piano* and the pianistic difficulty is extended to incorporate fast moving thumb, which

must enunciate the chromatic figures underneath the *legato* theme often six times in one bar (see Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. *Geistervariationen*: Variation 1 bars 38–39. CD 4 Track 13



In Variation 3 the theme shifts to the left hand and the bass line is punctuated by wide ranging leaps. The accompanying triplet figures frequently employ repeated notes that need very light treatment to ensure they can be clearly and cleanly articulated (see Fig. 7).

Fig. 7. *Geistervariationen*: Variation 3 bars 86–87. CD 4 Track 13



In Variation 4, in G minor, the harmonic progressions and arrangement of notes between the hands becomes much more complex (see Fig. 8).

Fig. 8. *Geistervariationen*: Variation 4 bars 114–120. CD 4 Track 13



The range of expressive indications is also increased and the character of the music is distinctly different from the warm, peaceful feeling conveyed in the theme. In his notes to Andras Schiff's recording, Heinz Holliger makes the comment in relation to this variation that "the harmonic writing creates a curious effect, as though it had been turned to stone."¹²

¹² Heinz Holliger. Notes to *Schumann: Kreisleriana, Nachtstücke, Gesänge der Fröhe, Geister-Variationen*. Andras Schiff, piano. Compact disc. Teldec 0630145466–2, 1998

In the final Variation the theme is at first almost unrecognisable (see Fig. 9), but on closer analysis, both the melody and harmonic progression are entirely the same as for the *Tema*. The melody is here simply adorned by poignant *appoggiature* in a manner almost reminiscent of the first variation in Mozart's Sonata in A major, K.331. This variation presents the greatest pianistic challenges as much of the writing involves awkward stretches in and out of black keys and it is often difficult to preserve the essential *legato* qualities.

Fig. 9. *Geistervariationen*: Variation 5 bars 142-143. CD 4 Track 13



This work has had a very mixed critical reception. Clara's decision to suppress it and to allow only the theme to be published could be regarded as a negative reaction to what she might have considered a work of inferior quality, although as we have seen, at the time there were many other factors clouding and complicating the issue. She had already noted that the public did not understand Schumann's musical language, and his subsequent illness and committal to the institution at Enderich was probably something that, in her eyes, should remain private. In addition, following his death in 1856, she may not have felt herself emotionally capable of performing this, his last work, despite the fact that in her diary she noted that "he wrote touching, peaceful variations on the wonderfully peaceful, holy theme"¹³. It is therefore surprising to find that, as recently as 1986, Joan Chissell has written so dismissively about these variations:

... their naivety eventually gives way to the crude. The simple triplet and semiquaver embroidery of variations 1 and 3 respectively, the canon of var. 2, and the reharmonisation of var. 4, are those of a student; the bizarre discords in the accompaniment of var. 5 speak all too clearly of a mind strained to breaking point.¹⁴

¹³ Litzmann 56–57

¹⁴ Joan Chissell. *Schumann Piano Music*. (London: Ariel Music, 1986) 71

In the light of what has already been discussed, this criticism appears to be superficial, and lacking in substance. It certainly seems a far cry from those appraisals that point to the originality and emotional depth of Schumann's writing, bearing in mind that many of his compositional devices are no longer in any way controversial. The growing number of commercial recordings of the *Geistervariationen* serves as a testament to the growing acceptance of its credibility in terms of both style and content. Jörg Demus's 1973 recording seems to have been the earliest, and it is appreciated by a continually growing number of Schumann fans through its exposure on YouTube.¹⁵ The comments provided by viewers of the clip are enthusiastic about the work's appeal. The Henle edition of 1995 also bears witness to the work's growing popularity, as it was shortly after this publication that Andras Schiff recorded the work for Teldec in 1998. The list of recordings given in Table 1 also provides evidence of a growing interest in these variations following the 1995 Henle publication.

¹⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmM6QenS3XU&feature=related> (4 December 2009).

Table 1. Commercial recordings of Schumann's *Geistervariationen*

Artist	Year	Details
Jörg Demus	1973	Musical Heritage Society 20 LP/6 Volumes
Reine Gianoli	1974	Ades 20324
Karl Engel	1976	Telefunken 6.35287
Pavlina Dokovska	1992	Gega GEG 131
Anton Kuerti	1995	Fleur de Lys FL 23043
Tatiana Nikolayeva	1997	BMG/Melodiya 33213
Andras Schiff	1998	Teldec 0630-14566-2
Andreas Boyde	2000	Athene ATHCD 23
Michael Andres	2003	Oehms – OC366
Yael Weiss	2006	Koch – KCCD – 7650
Cedric Pescia	2006	Claves – 502603-4
Franz Vorraber	2006	Thorofon, DDD, 1999-02
Fabrizio Chiovetta	2006	Palexa CD-0542
Tobias Koch	2007	GEN 86062
Peter Frankl	2009	Bril, 9795971
Tzimon Barto	2010	OND 1162

***Gesänge der Frühe*, Op.133**

On October 18, 1853, Clara wrote in her diary: “Robert has just composed five Morning Songs, completely original pieces as always, but difficult to grasp, for a completely original tone resides therein.”¹⁶ The difficulties associated with the *Gesänge der Frühe* are readily acknowledged by Michael Struck in an essay entitled “Playing Schumann...”¹⁷ when he writes:

Ein Symptom dafür, dass der Zyklus noch immer am Rande des Repertoires steht, ist sicherlich, dass nur wenige Werke Schumanns im Konzert und bei Studioaufnahmen mit so vielen Lesefehlern gespielt werden wie die *Gesänge der Frühe*—es gibt also noch keine gefestigte Hör- und Spieltradition.¹⁸

One of the reasons why this cycle still sits at the outer edge of the repertoire is almost certainly because few Schumann works are played in the concert hall or recording studio with as many reading errors as *Gesänge der Frühe*—thus there is still no real aural or performance tradition.¹⁹

Schumann’s compositional output in 1853 was intense and very productive. He wrote the overture for *Scenes from “Faust”*, the Violin Concerto, other music for solo instrument and orchestra, and chamber works including the *Märchen-erzählungen*. Worthen notes that:

It was one of the most marvellous times of his creative career. It has, however, hardly ever been celebrated as such. Commentators have been all too conscious of what was going to happen next.²⁰

Indeed Worthen’s final remark here bears some thought, and information on the genesis and influences on the *Gesänge der Frühe* provides clarification. Schumann first met Brahms in September 1853, and there is a possibility that this meeting had an effect on his compositional style. Brahms spent much time with the Schumanns during this period and Reich notes that “the sonatas that Brahms brought with him had a masterful sweep and freshness that captured the imagination of both Schumanns.”²¹ There is an undoubted similarity in the first piece of the *Gesänge der Frühe* to the *Andante* of Brahms’s Sonata Op. 1, and many commentators have

¹⁶ John Daverio. “Madness or Prophecy? Schumann’s ‘Gesänge der Frühe’”. In David Witten, ed. *Nineteenth Century Piano Music: Essays in Performance and Analysis*. (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1997) 190

¹⁷ Michael Struck. “Schumann Spielen ...” In Tadday, 87–115

¹⁸ Struck 104

¹⁹ Trans. by D. Weekes.

²⁰ Worthen 343

²¹ Reich 118

remarked upon the effect the *Gesänge der Frühe* may have had on Brahms's late *Klavierstücke*. Worthen describes the *Gesänge der Frühe* as “luminous” and states:

He was developing a new, less rhetorical style for his piano music, as the *Gesänge der Frühe* show; in performance they exemplify the ‘ethereal waves of sound’ that Wasielewski heard in Schumann’s piano playing.²²

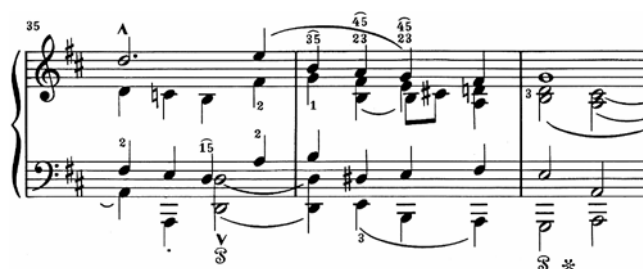
The first piece in the *Gesänge der Frühe* is in D major and contains much organ-like writing. Much of the piece is written in the lower register of the keyboard and is reminiscent of low organ pedal notes. The simple unison octave opening needs to be very understated so that the entry of the thick chords at the end of bar 2 enriches rather than overwhelms the harmonic texture. Skilful voicing is required to ensure that the top melodic line moves forward continuously and freely (see Fig. 10).

Fig. 10. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 1 bars 1–4. CD 4 Track 8



The essential *legato* qualities must be maintained throughout and as the piece progresses and thickens in texture, the need to rearrange notes between the hands becomes more evident due to the wide note-spacing that extends to a 13th in bar 36 (see Fig.11).

Fig. 11. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 1 bars 35–37. CD 4 Track 8



²² Worthen 339

There is a feeling of organic thematic development in the second piece, in D Major, as it begins very similarly to the first piece but the notes themselves are rearranged (see Fig. 12a and Fig. 12b).

Fig. 12a. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 1 bars 1–2. CD 4 Track 8



Fig. 12b. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 2 bars 1–2. CD 4 Track 9



This piece presents an interesting rhythmic challenge. Schumann often coupled a triplet with a dotted quaver followed by a semiquaver. A decision needs to be made as to whether or not the semiquaver should be played with the third note of the triplet or after it. This issue provoked quite a lot of thought in the preparation and learning process. Obviously there are many factors that could influence such a decision: the tempo, the accessibility (in terms of pianistic comfort), the musical context and its implications. In this case, the decision was made by careful consideration of the above mentioned points and a comparison of three different editions. In the Breitkopf & Härtel edition, the typography for bar 12 differs considerably from the same bar in the Henle Verlag edition and also from the same bar in the Dover reprint²³ (see Fig. 13a – Fig. 13c).

²³ *Piano Music of Robert Schumann Series III*, first published by Dover Publications, Inc., in 1980, contains all the solo piano music from the Collected Works Edition: *Serie VII. Für Pianoforte zu zwei Händen* (*Robert Schumanns Werke. Herausgegeben von Clara Schumann*, originally published by Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig, 1879-87.), and *Serie XIV. Supplement* (1893), edited by Johannes Brahms.

Fig. 13a. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 2, bar 12, Henle Verlag edition. CD 4 Track 9




Fig. 13b. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 2, bars 10–12, Breitkopf & Härtel edition. CD 4 Track 9



Fig. 13c. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 2, bars 10–12, Dover reprint. CD 4 Track 9



The Henle edition implies that the semiquavers should not coincide. The Breitkopf & Härtel edition produces a very different visual effect and is pianistically more manageable. The Dover reprint appears to be a compromise between the other two with an inconsistency in the typography, or notational alignment. In this case it was decided that the most satisfying musical result would be produced by adopting the Breitkopf & Härtel version. In so doing, it became possible to maintain the correct rhythmic tension of the dotted rhythm, as opposed to creating a triplet feel.

The third piece is in A major. The  rhythmic figure dominates the piece for its entire 63 bars. This in itself implies that the melodic, harmonic and textural issues need to be considered in order to avoid rhythmic monotony, and to create a satisfying musical effect. In preparation for performance the melodic line was studied to gain insight into its shape and structure. The main theme consists of chordal figurations followed by a rising interval; this interval constantly changes, commencing with a 6th, extending to an octave, and then fluctuating from a 3rd and

growing in intensity throughout the extended phrases. Schumann has clearly marked the shape and direction of the opening figure with a *crescendo* and a strong dynamic accent on the first main beat (see Fig. 14).

Fig. 14. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 3 bar 1. CD 4 Track 10



Harmonic direction becomes the prime musical concern when the melodic activity is confined to the inner parts, from bar 20-22 (see Fig. 15).

Fig. 15. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 3 bar 18–22. CD 4 Track 10



The pianistic challenges encountered in the preparation of this work included balancing the texture to ensure the melodic features were highlighted, and ensuring accuracy during the fast moving octave leaps in the left hand, bars 38-43 (see Fig. 16).

Fig. 16. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 3 bars 38–43. CD 4 Track 10



The extended trill passage followed by a virtuosic flourish in bars 56–57 also presented some difficulties, as one can see in Fig. 17.

Fig. 17. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 3 bars 56–57. CD 4 Track 10



The fourth piece, in F sharp minor, is the most demanding from a technical point of view. Joan Chissell notes:

Melody and accompaniment are intertwined in a totally different way from Schumann's mid-1830 norm, [this] must have made a very strong impression on the young Brahms who met Schumann for the first time in 1853.²⁴

Chissell's point is significant in that the texture here is noticeably different from that of the first three pieces. The left hand has single bass notes and the bulk of the piece is set in the middle register of the piano. The distance between the top melody and the bass is generally around two octaves and the overlapping of melody and accompaniment becomes more complex therefore making it more difficult to differentiate the individual voices. The necessity to distribute the fast flowing demisemiquavers between the hands creates fingering problems that are difficult to solve. The situation is here aggravated in that all three editions offer different solutions.²⁵ In terms of strategic planning, an ideal fingering should lead to an even distribution of weight in the hand while allowing a sufficient amount of notes to fill one natural hand position. The logical result of such planning should lead to greater physical stability, which in turn should enable greater control over accuracy, dynamic gradation and voicing. Once this is achieved, larger gestures reflecting the mood and character of the music should not present any major problems. The ultimate choice of fingering needs to be determined not only by a specific situation (eg. finding the right notes comfortably within a suitable tempo) but by general

²⁴ Chissell 70

²⁵ The Henle Verlag, and Breitkopf & Härtel editions and the Dover reprint were all consulted. The Dover was not considered as it provided no fingering suggestions at all.

stylistic features represented in the music (eg. the typically Romantic characteristic of preserving a true sense of *legato* within the melody line).

Choosing an appropriate tempo for each piece was also cause for some concern. Metronome markings were studied in each edition, but it soon became apparent that there was a wide discrepancy in the metronome speeds for the fourth and fifth pieces (see Table 1).

Table 1. Metronome speeds in 3 publications of *Gesänge der Frühe*

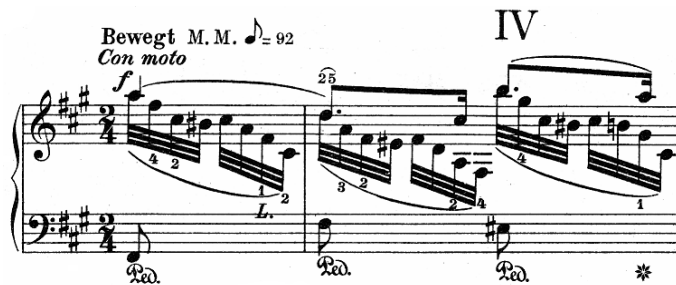
Piece	Henle Verlag	Dover	Breitkopf & Härtel
One <i>Im ruhigen Tempo</i>	♩ = 73	♩ = 73	♩ = 76
Two <i>Belebt, nicht zu rasch</i>	♩ = 190	♩ = 190	♩ = 92
Three <i>Lebhaft</i>	♩ = 93	♩ = 93	♩ = 92
Four <i>Bewegt</i>	♩ = 72	♩ = 72	♩ = 92
Five <i>Im Anfang ruhiges, im Verlauf bewegteres Tempo</i>	♩ = 68	♩ = 68	♩ = 92

The first three pieces show only slight deviations in metronome speeds between the three editions whereas the 4th and 5th pieces have very conflicting indications. In this respect the Henle edition provides more practical suggestions regarding both tempo and fingering; taking both into consideration, they help to facilitate a *legato* touch and seem to produce a more satisfying musical effect with greater technical ease. (see Fig.18a).

Fig. 18a. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 4, bar 1, Henle edition. CD 4 Track 11

By way of comparison, the Breitkopf & Härtel edition begins with the same suggested fingerings for the anacrusis but differs considerably in bar 1 and suggests an awkward finger substitution on the first beat. This is virtually unplayable considering the speed indication ($\text{♩} = 92$), which is significantly faster than the Dover and Henle publications (see Fig. 18b).

Fig. 18b. *Gesänge der Frühe* Piece No. 4, bar 1, Breitkopf & Härtel edition. CD 4 Track 11



The fifth and final piece returns to the opening key of D major and reveals Schumann's typical preoccupation with key relationships within a unified cycle. The cycle that is evident in the *Gesänge der Frühe* is both logical and conventional (see Table 2).

Table 2. Key Relationships in *Gesänge der Frühe*.

Piece Number	Key	Relationship to Tonic
One <i>Im ruhigen Tempo</i>	D Major	Tonic
Two <i>Belebt, nicht zu rasch</i>	D Major	Tonic
Three <i>Lebhaft</i>	A Major	Dominant
Four <i>Bewegt</i>	F sharp minor	Relative minor of Dominant
Five <i>Im Anfang ruhiges, im Verlauf bewegteres Tempo</i>	D Major	Tonic

The simple, hymn-like character of the fifth piece marks a return to the sentiment of the first. Here, though, there is a greater warmth and richness in the chordal texture compared to the sparse and exposed texture of No. 1. While the two pieces share the same key, the fifth becomes more animated after 8 bars as semiquaver figures gradually contribute to the growing feeling of animation. Having established the importance of the last piece in terms of the overall cycle, and having made ‘voicing’ decisions on the basis of a more detailed analysis, it was necessary to spend a considerable amount of time in practice in order to successfully realise the texture.

The decision to begin this discussion with Schumann’s last two works for piano was based, in part, on the fact that they are still the least known and the most seldom performed. In addition to this, it was important to explain the controversy surrounding the *Geistervariationen* in particular, and to present some of the difficulties which have arisen because of the discrepancies in the various editions. In Chapter 3 I propose to discuss in more detail the influence which this research has had on my interpretations, and to provide specific examples of the ways in which pianistic challenges have been met, both from a technical and an artistic point of view.

CHAPTER 3

Drei Fantasiestücke, Op. 111

Dating from the year 1851, Schumann's *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op. 111 have often been compared with the *Romances* Op. 28 in terms of their three movement structure, unified key relationships and cyclical form. In the *Fantasiestücke*, Schumann's notion of unifying a cycle is evident in the *attacca* indication at the end of the first and second pieces. Hubert Moßburger points out, however, that a comparison of the musical content of the first *Romance* with the first *Fantasiestück* immediately reveals striking differences in their character and compositional techniques.¹ There has been some speculation among scholars as to whether Schumann's work should be considered as a homage to Beethoven's Op. 111: on a superficial level, at least, they share the same opus number and tonic key (C minor). The second *Fantasiestück* is in A flat major, and the idea of modulating to the submediant was a common feature of Beethoven's compositional style.²

The first piece begins turbulently, like Beethoven's Op. 111, and here too the technical challenges are immediately evident. In the opening bar the second finger of the right hand needs to have great flexibility to be able to quickly change direction to accommodate the tritone progression between the fourth and second fingers and the thumb and second finger (see Fig. 21a, Fig. 21b).

Fig. 21a. *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op. 111, Piece No.1, bar 1. CD 3 Track 1



Fig. 21b. Tritone progression



¹ Hubert Moßburger. "Schumanns frühe und späte Fantasien". In Tadday 51

² As a representative example, one could look at Beethoven's Six Variations Op. 34, where each variation drops to a key a third below the previous one, i.e. Theme F major, (1) D minor, (2) B flat major, (3) G major, (4) E flat major, (5) C minor, (6) F major.

In bar 2 the leap to the second beat of the bar caused some problems due to its speed and awkwardness. When attempts to play the passage as notated proved unsuccessful, a decision was made to rearrange the notes between the hands. A more convincing effect was achieved by taking the top A flat in the left hand so that the arpeggiated figure fitted comfortably into the right hand, ending with B natural on the third beat. This also gave a more controlled prominence to the *sforzando* marking on the second beat. (see Fig. 22).

Fig. 22. *Drei Fantasiestücke Op. 111, Piece No.1, bars 1–2. CD 3 Track 1*



It is also worth noting here that the downward leap of a diminished seventh is possibly the most conclusive evidence concerning a *homage* to Beethoven, since it provides an unmistakable echo of the opening bar of his Sonata Op.111.

The second piece, in A flat major, is in striking contrast to the first. The opening here also presented some interpretative problems as the first note (A flat octave in the left hand) is written as a dotted minim, and this implies that Schumann wanted this tonic pedal point to sound throughout the bar (see Fig. 23).

Fig. 23. *Drei Fantasiestücke Op. 111, Piece No.2, bar 1. CD 3 Track 2*



The harmony changes on the third beat, however, from the tonic to the subdominant chord, and to retain a single sustaining pedal throughout the bar would have resulted in a rather unpleasant chromatic blurring. In order to maintain clarity of harmonic progression the *sostenuto* pedal was used to enable the bass note to be held through the bar while separate changes of the sustaining pedal were used for each change of harmony. Schumann would not have had the *sostenuto* pedal on his piano but the amount of resonance in the tone quality produced on the instruments of his time was

considerably less than the sonority that is able to be coaxed from their modern day equivalents. Some harmonic blurring would have had less impact than it does on modern instruments. The middle section in C minor becomes more agitated and the alto voice is reminiscent of the opening of the first piece (see Fig. 24).

Fig. 24. *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op. 111, Piece No.2, bar 26. CD 3 Track 2



As the mood intensifies from bar 34, the rhythmic figure seen previously in the *Gesänge der Frühe* appears. This time the musical context is quite different and the typographical layout concurs with the need to produce a musically intense effect. In the third beat of bar 34 (see Fig. 25) the execution of the dotted rhythm after the final triplet contributes to the musical effect of tension and dramatic build up. This became more challenging as the texture and tension built to a climactic point from bars 38–41 (see Fig. 26).

Fig. 25. *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op. 111, Piece No.2, bar 34. CD 3 Track 2



Fig. 26. *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op. 111, Piece No.2, bars 38–41. CD 3 Track 2



The third piece returns to the key of C minor. The texture here is thick and the rhythmic effect is like that of a march. The melody is punctuated by off beat

chords which require careful tonal balance. Initially the melody line is situated in the soprano register with accompanying chords in the inner voices (see Fig. 27).

Fig. 27. *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op. 111, Piece No.3, bars 1–2. CD 3 Track 3



At bar 9 the theme is restated, this time in E flat major. At this point the melody has moved to the alto register and the interspersed chords now move to the soprano (see Fig. 28).

Fig. 28. *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op. 111, Piece No.3, bars 8–10. CD 3 Track 3



The need to differentiate between the melody and accompaniment required careful consideration, and it was apparent that the chords needed to be treated as lightly as possible regardless of the register.

The middle section presents quite different musical ideas. The dynamics shift from *forte* to *pianissimo* and the march-like character is absent. The harmonic and rhythmic effect is also quite different from the character of the opening, as there is now an air of improvisation about the musical material. The low bass *accacciature* are clearly marked to be incorporated into the pedal (see Fig. 29), and this necessitated isolating the passage during practice in order to concentrate on the coordination required to achieve both accuracy and clarity of tone.

Fig. 29. *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op. 111, Piece No.3, bars 17–18. CD 3 Track 3



From bar 25 the melodic semiquaver figures move to the left hand and the pattern of low chromatic notes needs quite sophisticated pedalling to avoid blurring. Often it was necessary to use no pedal at all in order to achieve clarity. Instead, there was a reliance on finger *legato*, and this proved to be an acceptable means of achieving tonal clarity within the passage. This was particularly noticeable in bar 26 (see Fig. 30).

Fig. 30. *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op. 111, Piece No.3, bars 25–26. CD 3 Track 3



In preparing the *Drei Fantasiestücke* for performance, my main preoccupation was with the sonority of the instrument and its potential influence on the musical architecture. While there were rhythmic difficulties inherent in each of the individual pieces, once the technical problems had been negotiated, the *tempi* were not difficult to gauge. Taken as a whole, the work was immensely satisfying to perform, and it is repertoire that I look forward to playing at regular intervals in the future. All three pieces have an emotional depth and substance that will undoubtedly benefit from further exploration.

Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend Op. 118

The first of the *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118 (1853), is dedicated to Schumann's youngest daughter Julie, who was eight years old at the time of its composition. The four movements reveal some interesting thematic links, both melodically and rhythmically. Each movement opens with a descending motive, and the first, third and fourth movements also contain the same rhythmic idea (see Fig. 31a–Fig. 31d).

Fig. 31a. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, first movt., bar 1. CD 3 Track 4



Fig. 31b. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, second movt., bar 1. CD 3 Track 5



Fig. 31c. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, third movt., bars 1–2. CD 3 Track 6



Fig. 31d. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, fourth movt., bar 1. CD 3 Track 7



Thus the first of the *Drei Klavier-Sonaten* is constructed upon a motive which forms the melodic basis for the entire four movements of the work. It is perhaps worth reiterating here the comments made by Kapp (and already stated in Chapter 1) in relation to Schumann's late piano works:

“Schumann's last creative period was a time of intense exploration—of the outer limits of diatonicism, of the mystical powers of sheer sonority, and the potential of the tiniest motive for infinite elaboration.”³

This work exemplifies perfectly “the potential of the tiniest motive for infinite elaboration”.

³ Kapp 276

Given the simplistic nature of the melodic and rhythmic material, it was going to be an interpretative challenge to characterise each movement in a distinctive way. Schumann has been quite specific with tempo and dynamic markings so this provided a starting point, but textural considerations also helped to inform interpretative decisions. The very classical style of the first movement in G major is evident in its symmetrical phrase structure, and its typical use of harmonic progressions based on primary triads. The difficulties here concern the need for a childlike simplicity to be portrayed through an interpretation which is not overly sentimental. A straightforward approach was taken, but careful attention was also paid to stylistic conventions that belong more properly to the classical era: tonal transparency, clarity of line and a solid rhythmic structure were all given utmost priority in the performance of this movement.

The second movement, in E minor, contains more complex musical ideas than the first. The immediate effect is more solemn due to the four part chorale style writing, with the melodic line punctuated by semiquaver rests that might almost be interpreted as ‘gasps of breath’. This adds to the feeling of despair (see Fig. 32).

Fig. 32. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, second movt., bars 1–6. CD 3 Track 5



The structure is less classically organised here, since the opening phrase consists of six bars rather than the more usual four. Four variations on this opening theme follow, and Schumann uses various techniques to give each a different character. The variations are only separated by pale double bar-lines that show the sectional structure, as opposed to titles or new tempo indications. Variation 1 begins at bar 7, and presents the theme in a more *legato* and lyrical texture; an inner voice of quavers helps to add momentum (see Fig. 33).

Fig. 33. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, second movt., bars 6–8. CD 3 Track 5



Variation 2, at bar 13, sees the theme move into the bass with a new counter melody in the right hand. Often it is actually more interesting, when performing a set of Variations, to show how the composer has added or changed something. In this case, rather than emphasise the theme in the left hand, the new counter melody was highlighted to enrich the overall effect (see Fig. 34).

Fig. 34. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, second movt., bars 12–14. CD 3 Track 5



Variation 3, which commences at bar 19, gains further rhythmic momentum by the addition of triplet figures. The melody returns to the right hand, but this time it is situated below the adorning triplets (see Fig. 35).

Fig. 35. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, second movt., bars 17–19. CD 3 Track 5



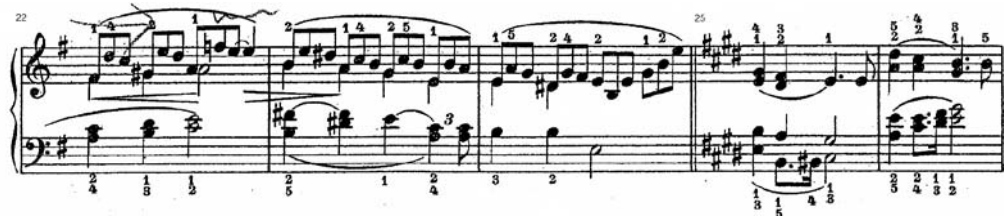
After 3 bars the texture becomes even more intense by the thickening of the left hand chords. This is the first time in the movement that the left hand has played chords: this suggests that, structurally, bar 22 is the main climax of the movement (see Fig. 36).

Fig. 36. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend Op. 118a*, second movt., bars 22–23. CD 3 Track 5



Variation 4, at bar 25, moves happily to the tonic major key, where the gloomy mood is transformed into one of hope and optimism. The hymn-like writing sees the addition of a chromatically inflected, rising figure in the bass as well as an inversion of the descending motive that characterises the whole work (see Fig. 37).

Fig. 37. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend Op. 118a*, second movt., bars 22–26. CD 3 Track 5



The final Variation at bar 31 returns to E minor and echoes the fragmented style of writing that was evoked in the theme (see Fig. 38).

Fig. 38. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend Op. 118a*, second movt., bars 27–32. CD 3 Track 5



The ‘gasp of breath’ between melody notes return. There is a sense of forward movement and direction here in Schumann’s very detailed articulation; in performance, this adds a new dimension and was considered to be a logical summation of the previous material which needed to move effortlessly into the *Coda* at bar 37 (see Fig. 39).

Fig. 39. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, second movt., bar 37. CD 3 Track 5



The *Coda*, marked *Etwas langsamer*, shows Schumann’s return to previous musical ideas where he added a new and often slower section to the end of his works.⁴

The third movement, “Puppenwiegenlied”, in C major, returns to the innocent feeling of the opening movement. The classical style is again apparent in the clear-cut layout of phrases in a logical 8-bar pattern. To interpret this movement required taking a simple, unfussy approach, although particular care was needed to maintain the *piano* dynamic throughout. The range of the opening 32 bars only occasionally goes below middle C, so this contributed to the need for a very light touch (see Fig. 40). The descriptive title also necessitated a reading which would create the peaceful ambience of a lullaby, or at least an atmosphere conducive to the idea of a “Cradle Song for a Doll”.

Fig. 40. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, third movt., bars 1–4. CD 3 Track 6



The middle section, from bar 33, changes mood . The character now shifts from calm and restful to a gitated and playful as the music becomes more animated with the addition of constantly flowing semiquavers (see Fig. 41).

⁴ As a typical example of this one could look at the end of the *Arabesque* Op. 18, which contains a similar slow section at the end.

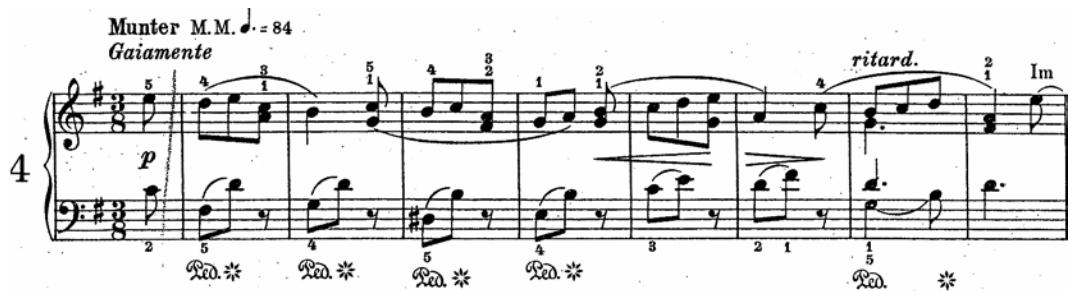
Fig. 41. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, third movt., bars 33–34. CD 3 Track 6



The dynamic extends to *forte* although the range still remains within the same boundaries as the opening section, which confirms the implication for a light-hearted approach.⁵

The fourth movement, “Rondoletto”, in G major, continues in a playful mood and in a stylised, classical vein. Texturally the writing is sparse, presumably intended to represent the innocence of childhood in both concept and playability (see Fig. 42).

Fig. 42. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, fourth movt., bars 1–8. CD 3 Track 7



As in previous movements, much of the writing has both hands playing in the treble clef. The situation changes in the D major middle section as the writing becomes more chordal. The bass clef is now introduced and the lower register of the piano is used for the first time. This was an important feature in the performance of this section, and there was a need to add more pedal to further enhance the rich harmonic texture (see Fig. 43).

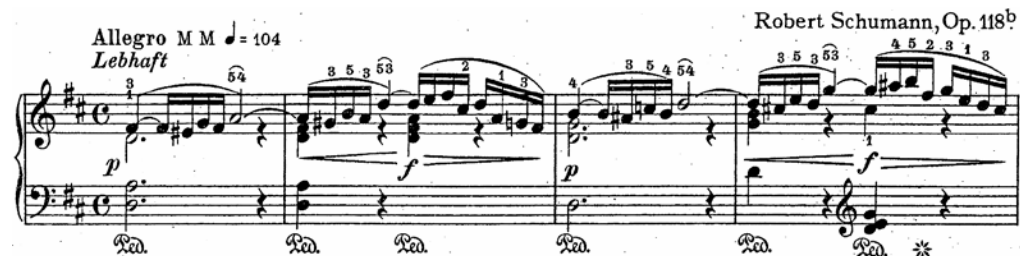
⁵ Here it appears that the doll does not want to go to sleep and wants to play!

Fig. 43. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118a, fourth movt., bars 136–140. CD 3 Track 7



The second of the *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118b (1853), is dedicated to the 10-year-old Elise. The first impression of this work is considerably different from the childlike naïvety of the previous Sonata. Each of the four movements is cast in a more complex, extended form than the first Sonata. The thematic similarities between movements, which were integral to the structural development of the first Sonata, are absent here. Instead, there is a more ambitious and poetic mood. In the first movement, in D major, the writing is characterised by rising and falling semiquaver figures which always come to a resting point, most frequently at a high pitch level (see Fig. 44).

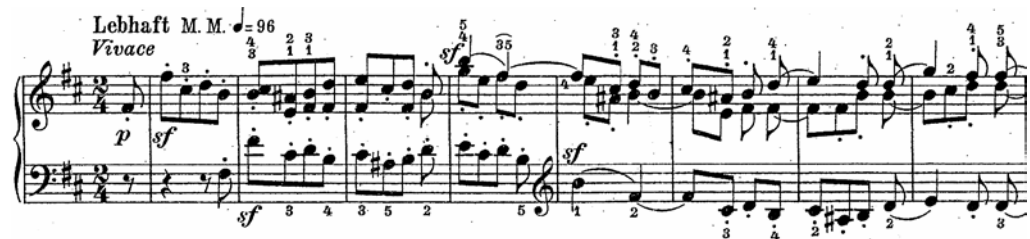
Fig. 44. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118b, first movt., bars 1–4. CD 3 Track 8



The constant topping of the melody on a long note posed some problems, and formed an important focus for interpretative reflection. It was necessary to think through the long tied notes to maintain a sense of line and a feeling of continuity. Dynamic shaping and expressive contouring of the phrases were essential in order to achieve a convincing sense of musical logic.

The second movement, “Canon” in B minor, presents even greater technical challenges. Written in three parts, this movement must have been rather daunting for a 10-year-old! The canonic imitation only occurs in the outer voices, with the inner voice filling in the harmony (see Fig. 45).

Fig. 45. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118b, second movt., bars 1–8. CD 3 Track 9



The third movement, “Abendlied” in G major, is reminiscent of the innocence of the first Sonata. The texture here is more transparent, with a simple melodic line in the top voice. The range is also interesting to note with the majority of the left hand written in the treble clef. The tempo is slow and initially the melodic line contains long note values interspersed by accompanying triplet figures. Issues of balance and the layering of parts were an important concern in the performance of this movement (see Fig. 46).

Fig. 46 *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118b third movt., bars 1–4. CD 3 Track 10

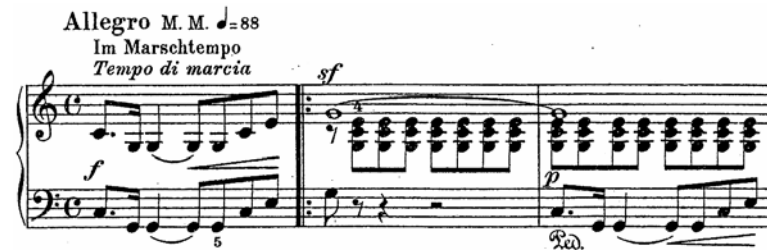


The fourth and final movement in D major, “Kindergesellschaft”, presents considerable challenges in performance. Its sheer length—and the need to maintain interest in the often repetitive material—was the main issue to contend with. In terms of maintaining interest, the solution that proved most effective was to take the title literally and try to become immersed in the behavioural patterns of a 10-year-old child, who might easily play the same game repeatedly but with slightly different twists. The detailed articulation was difficult to deliver at the marked speed, and this problem was only alleviated by choosing a tempo slightly slower than that indicated by Schumann.

The third Sonata, in C major, is dedicated to Schumann’s eldest daughter Marie, who was 12 at the time of its composition. There is an interesting amalgam of ideas and style here, as the writing shows distinctly classical attributes coupled with Schumann’s typically romantic sense of fantasy and imagination. The opening

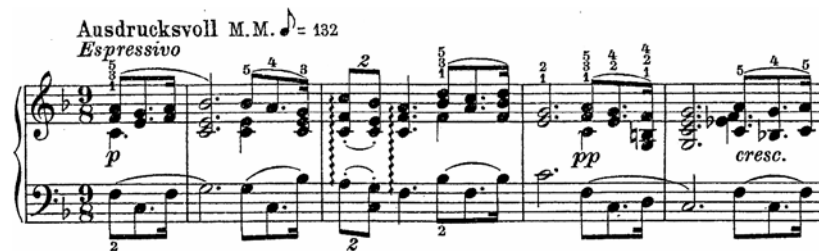
is robust and direct, consisting of a somewhat prosaic melody based on a C major arpeggio figure (see Fig. 47).

Fig. 47. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118c, first movt., bars 1–3. CD 3 Track 11



The second movement in F major, *Andante*, opens in a very Schubertian fashion. As previously seen in the first movement of the second Sonata the melody constantly comes to rest on a long note, and the chordal, *quasi*-religious writing creates a mood of peacefulness and calm (see Fig. 48).

Fig. 48. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118c, second movt., bars 1–4. CD 3 Track 12



This movement is in simple ternary form, ABA (8+8+8 bars) with a 4-bar Coda. In the B section chromatically rising semiquavers appear for the first time and are interspersed with statements of the opening theme in the tenor register (see Fig. 49).

Fig. 49. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118c, second movt., bars 6–10. CD 3 Track 12



Due to its chromatic nature and the awkward distribution of notes between the hands, pedalling was the most problematic issue in this section. In bar 12, a decision had to be made as to how to sustain the right hand chord effectively throughout the bar while still managing to play all the other notes between the two hands (see Fig. 50).

Fig. 50. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118c, second movt., bars 10–12. CD 3 Track 12



Since it was impossible, physically, to hold the right hand chord for the whole bar, the pedal was needed. Here it became a question of testing one's boundaries: what degree of overlap would be acceptable? It is often difficult to make these judgements because so much depends on extraneous factors such as the quality of the instrument and the acoustics of the performing space. For this reason, pianists need to be flexible and versatile in their interpretations to be able to adapt to the performing environment. There is often a need to change what one has practised—or to adopt a new interpretation quite spontaneously—in order to adjust to a new situation.

The third movement in A minor, *Zigeunertanz*, is a stand-alone concert piece full of character and excitement. It would present technical challenges for any 12-year-old because its opening melodic figure contains very fast moving triplets played by the weaker fingers, combined with chords played (simultaneously) by the same hand (see Fig. 51).

Fig. 51. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118c, third movt., bars 1–2. CD 3 Track 13



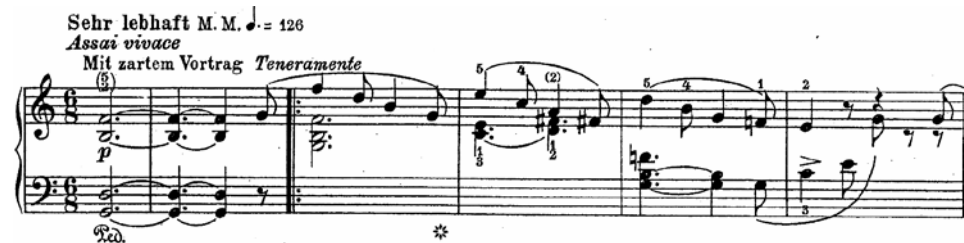
In the middle section, there is also a need for a proficient, if not virtuoso technique to play the rapid ascending scale passages in both hands convincingly (see Fig. 52).

Fig. 52. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118c, third movt., bars 41–45. CD 3 Track 13



The fourth and final movement in C major, *Traume eines Kindes*, reveals Schumann's skill in unifying a cycle of pieces. The opening appears to revert to the simplistic ideas contained in the first Sonata, but here with a more buoyant rhythmic treatment (see Fig. 53).

Fig. 53. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118c, fourth movt., bars 1–6. CD 3 Track 14



The reappearance of the first theme from the first Sonata at bar 35, and the metrical shift from compound to simple time, both come as a surprise. After 4 bars, the main theme from the fourth movement returns (bars 39–42) until there is another reappearance of the first Sonata at bar 43 (see Fig. 54).

Fig. 54. *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend* Op. 118c, fourth movt., bars 35-50. CD 3 Track 1



The quick shifting of moods needs to have a childlike, humorous effect and this was achieved by treating the interruptions of thematic material as a surprise. The musical effect here needed to sound spontaneous to represent Schumann's daughters playing together.

When it comes to performance at a professional level, even though ideally one would like to think in terms of a definitive interpretation, this is not always possible. As we have seen, adjustments must be made according to the instrument itself, the venue acoustics, and the performance situation (eg. recording studio, house concert, large or small recital hall). In preparation for the performance, however, it is important to have access to as much information as possible about the work in question, the historical context, and the composer's intentions. In preparing *Drei*

Kinder-Sonaten, my interpretations were greatly influenced by the knowledge that both works had been written for Schumann's own children. My aim to identify with the behavioural patterns and imaginative powers of an 8-, 10- and 12-year-old certainly expanded my interpretive horizons and brought a greater sense of purpose to my performances of these otherwise enigmatic works.

CHAPTER 4

Waldszenen, Op. 82

Joachim Draheim, the editor of the 1984 Breitkopf & Härtel publication of *Waldszenen* (first published in 1850), writes that:

[these pieces] are seen as a continuation of Schumann's new stylistic direction ... formal concision and clarity combined with a singular pianistic writing (in comparison with the earlier works) characterized by an equally extraordinary transparency and richness of sound.¹

Eric Jensen concurs with this description and goes on to say that:

Waldszenen (1850) embodies many of the stylistic traits characteristic of Schumann's late compositions—perhaps one reason for its comparative neglect. The nine pieces which comprise it are frequently terse (at times bordering on the laconic) and often monothematic, with a consequent emphasis on motivic development.²

This latter point is not intended to be a criticism of the work; moreover it is sympathetic to Kapp's view (see Chapter 1 p.5, and quoted again in Chapter 2) that with the late works we are entering a new stylistic world. This discussion of the individual pieces is intended to elucidate these issues with particular reference to their realisation in performance.

The cyclical unity seen in both the *Gesänge der Frühe* and the *Drei Fantasiestücke* is even more obvious in the meticulous structure of the nine pieces of *Waldszenen*. This unity is manifest first in the key relationships, which centre in B flat major, moving to D minor, E flat major and G minor. Relationships in the motivic material are of even more significance, and it is worth looking at these in some detail here. The first one appears in the direct repetition of the opening theme in bar 1 of No. 6 ("Herberge") and in bar 3 of No. 9 ("Abschied"), as illustrated in Fig.55a and 55b.

¹ Joachim Draheim, ed. *Preface* to Robert Schumann: *Waldszenen*, op.82, Neun Klavierstücke. Wiesbaden. Leipzig. Paris: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1984

² Eric Jensen. "A New Manuscript of Schumann's *Waldszenen* Op.82". In *The Journal of Musicology*, 3.1 (Winter, 1984): 69

Fig. 55a. Waldszenen Op. 82, “Herberge”, bar 1. CD 1 Track 14

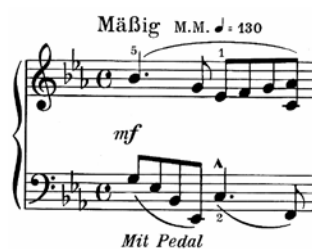


Fig. 55b. Waldszenen Op. 82, “Abschied”, bars 1–3. CD 1 Track 17



Also, the ascending passage of bars 34 of No.4 (“Verrufene Stelle”) forms the basis of the melodic material for No. 7 (“Vogel als Prophet”), shown here in Fig. 56a and Fig. 56b.

Fig. 56a. Waldszenen Op. 82, “Verrufene Stelle”, bars 33–35. CD 1 Track 12



Fig. 56b. Waldszenen Op. 82, “Vogel als Prophet”, bars 1–2. CD 1 Track 15



Finally, the opening 4 bars of No. 5 (“Freundliche Landschaft”) reoccur in bar 39 of No. 6 (“Herberge”), as in Fig. 57a and Fig. 57b.

Fig. 57a. *Waldszenen* Op. 82, “Freundliche Landschaft”, bars 1–4. CD 1 Track 13

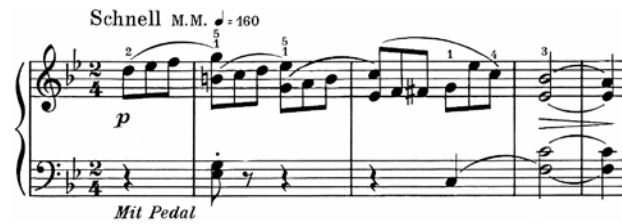


Fig. 57b. *Waldszenen* Op. 82, “Herberge”, bars 37–40. CD 1 Track 14



While it seems important to have included here musical examples of the reappearances of motivic material, the following discussion relates more to stylistic and interpretative problems, not all of which will need to be illustrated. The first piece, in *Waldszenen*, “Eintritt”, is in B flat major. Jensen describes the opening of this piece as “bucolic and pleasant”.³ The difficulty in playing the opening is to achieve a *pianissimo* within what is a relatively thick texture. Use of the *una corda* assisted here, as did a deliberately subtle voicing which involved clear projection of the top voice in the right hand chords. From bar 9 onwards, the mood and key change quite markedly. As Jensen notes, “a new sound and nebulous region has been entered”.⁴ In “Jäger auf der Lauer” in D minor, the intense mood was created by paying rigorous attention to details of articulation and rests. Observing the silences was a crucial factor in portraying the dramatic implications of this electrifying piece.

“Einsame Blumen”, the third piece, returns to B flat major and is greatly indebted to Schubert. It bears a striking resemblance to the Waltz No.13 from Schubert’s *Vierunddreissig Valses sentimentales* Op. 50 (1825), as illustrated in Fig. 58a and Fig. 58b.

³ Jensen 85

⁴ Jensen 85

Fig. 58a. Schubert Waltz Op. 50 No.13, bars 1–10.



Fig. 58b. *Waldszenen* Schumann Op. 82, “Einsame Blumen”, bars 1–14. CD 1 Track 11.



The delicate polyphonic textures required simple and ‘unfussy’ treatment, with slight agogic nuances at the peaks of phrases.

The fourth, and most sinister piece in the cycle, “Verrufene Stelle”, is written in D minor and is the only piece that bears a quotation at the beginning⁵:

Die Blumen, so hoch sie wachsen, / Sind blass hier, wie der Tod:
Nur eine in der Mitte / Steht da im dunkeln Roth.
Die hat es nicht von der Sonne / Nie traf sie deren Gluth;
Sie hat es von der Erde, / Und die trank Menschenblut. (F. Hebel)

The flowers, tall as they might grow, / are here as pale as death:
Only one, in the middle / stands there, and is dark red.
This comes not from the sun, / It never wore that glow;
It has it from the earth, / and that drank human blood.⁶

Jensen notes that “The motto affixed by Schumann to it is intended to startle”⁷, and refers to it as a ‘ macabre piece’.⁸ According to Reich, Clara always omitted this

⁵ Originally all nine pieces were provided with quotations but Schumann eventually removed all except the poem for “Verrufene Stelle”.

⁶ Trans. D Weekes.

⁷ Jensen 86

⁸ Jensen 86

piece whenever she performed *Waldszenen*,⁹ and the implications of this are somewhat daunting. While it is outside the scope of this submission to speculate on why Clara appears to have had a different version to this piece, it is certainly worth mentioning that the information had an inhibiting effect on my own interpretation. Any dynamic oragogical nuances that, under normal circumstances, might have occurred to me quite naturally, were in this case almost surprisingly absent, and instead I chose to play the piece with almost no interpretative freedom, as simply as possible.

Two more calm and peaceful pieces follow—"Freundliche Landschaft" (B flat major) and "Herberge" (E flat major)—before there is a return to a more mysterious mood in what is perhaps the most renowned piece of the cycle, "Vogel als Prophet". As previously noted, the main thematic idea, consisting of a rising and falling arpeggio figure punctuated by dissonant *appoggiature*, was alluded to at the conclusion of "Verrufene Stelle". "Vogel als Prophet" is a clear example of Schumann's late style and definitely explores the "mystical powers of sheer sonority" referred to by Kapp (see above), as well as the "infinite elaboration of a tiny motive". The daring, and quite remarkable pedal indications provided by Schumann create—for those brave enough to try them—a range of tones previously unknown in the early romantic piano *oeuvre*. Indeed, in the performance of this work there was a strong compulsion to push through the boundaries of pianistic conservatism to explore all the possibilities of sonority and colour. The live performance presented in this submission was given in the Music Workshop at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. This large hall (normally used for opera performances) has exceptional acoustic properties and this prompted me to take a risk by following Schumann's pedal markings exactly in order to create a unique, sonorous effect that would almost certainly not have been possible in a smaller or less resonant venue. This piece confirms *Waldszenen* as a preeminent example of the German *Märchen*. Jensen describes this as "a sophisticated form of fairy tale in which fantastical and often improbable occurrences were presented in a deliberately simple and guileless manner".¹⁰

⁹ Reich 266

¹⁰ Jensen 85

The penultimate piece in the set, “Jagdlied”, follows a more conventional harmonic and rhythmic structure, and is a lively evocation of a hunt, or hunting scene. The pianistic challenges in the *scherzando*-like middle section (particularly bars 65–72) required great flexibility and strength to articulate the slurred chordal figures softly, and yet at a brisk pace. The final piece, “Abschied”, signals the departure from the forest in a melancholy, reflective mood. As has been previously noted, the main theme is a direct transposition of the opening bar of “Herberge”, but now reconfigured in what could be described as compound time. Draheim’s final remark in his *Preface* is worth mentioning:

The harmonic and compositional subtleties of this tranquil closing piece are superb examples of the features of Schumann’s late style, which has long been misunderstood and has only recently been the subject of interest, understanding and admiration.¹¹

¹¹ Draheim, *Preface*.

***Sieben Stücke in Fughettenform* , Op. 126**

In order to enhance the initial learning and performance experience of the *Sieben Stücke in Fughettenform* (1853), an analytical approach was applied. The learning of Fugues requires a systematic and functional knowledge of the formal aspects of the work to ensure that there is a clear and comprehensive understanding of the compositional process. Structural understanding is an integral part of the learning process and its application in performance can have a significant effect on the interpretation of the composition. The value of musical analysis and its ability to inform a performance has been discussed at some length by John Rink:

It cannot be denied that the interpretation of music requires decisions – conscious or otherwise – about the contextual functions of particular musical features and the means of projecting them.¹²

This notion was very apparent in the preparation of the *Sieben Stücke*. Initially an objective fugal analysis was undertaken in order to recognise and establish important features of each of the short pieces: the number of voices was looked at, followed by an examination of the subject of each Fugue and the frequency of its recurrence. Following this, cadence points were identified in order to promote a clearer understanding of the structural and harmonic contexts. The value of this assimilation of analytical knowledge then needed to be measured against its impact on the actual performance. While it seemed logical that this information would assist in decision making during performance preparation, it was not the most important or influential factor in arriving at a final interpretation. Rink's idea that the initial process of analysis occurs during practice as opposed to performance,¹³ is well worth considering. He goes on to say that the “primary goal [of performer's analysis] is to discover the music's ‘shape’, as opposed to structure, as well as the means of projecting it.”¹⁴

There is a certain validity in the use of theoretical analysis, since it can engage the performer in a deeper understanding of the way the music has been crafted, but the need to produce a cohesive and expressive performance requires

¹² John Rink. “Analysis and (or?) Performance”. In *Musical Performance A Guide to Understanding*. John Rink, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 35

¹³ Rink 39

¹⁴ Rink 39

more innate musical skills than can be provided by mere analytical rhetoric. Since fugal structure is one of the most complex musical forms, there is an undeniable advantage in undertaking a rigorous preliminary analysis of these works, but in the long run the projection of the shape and structure involves the practical application of various pianistic techniques, as well as an individual, or personal approach to rhythmic hierarchy. In this respect, my research actually stimulated the exploration of a wider variety of touch, and a more sophisticated use of articulation and agogic accentuation than might have otherwise been the case, simply in order to project the musical shape and structure with more audible clarity and control.

The *Sieben Stücke in Fughettenform* were composed during a very fruitful year (1853), in which Schumann's new works included piano accompaniments for the solo violin sonatas and partitas and the violoncello suites of Bach. Daverio suggests that his return to contrapuntal writing stemmed from "his need to get his mind in order," and from "his wish to make Bach's music more accessible to the public."¹⁵ Chissell suggests that the motivation for writing the *Sieben Stücke in Fughettenform* could have come from his wish to expose his children to fugal form:

the pieces are sufficiently short and transparent to suggest that having initiated his children into the mysteries of sonata form (*Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend*) he now wanted to do the same with fugue – perhaps in preparation for the *Forty-eight*.¹⁶

The seven pieces follow Schumann's cohesive and unified cyclical structure, a feature of his compositional style that has already been noted above. The key sequence reveals a tight bond of closely related keys emanating from A minor through D minor and then to F Major.

The fifth of the *Sieben Stücke in Fughettenform*, in A minor, contains many of the features of Schumann's late style that have been previously discussed. Motivic concentration and development can be seen in the way in which the subject leads to a sighing countersubject (bar 5), in the soprano, which is based on the first three notes of the subject itself (see Fig. 59).

¹⁵ Daverio 255

¹⁶ Chissell 60

Fig. 59. *Sieben Stücke in Fughettenform* Op. 126, Piece No. 5, bars 1–6. CD 4 Track 5.

V

Ziemlich langsam, empfindungsvoll vorzutragen M. M. ♩ = 54
Piuttosto lento, con grande sentimento

When the tenor enters at bar 9, the countersubject is doubled by the top two voices. This passage needs very expressive treatment to convey the melancholic mood of the piece (see Fig. 60).

Fig. 60. *Sieben Stücke in Fughettenform* Op. 126, Piece No. 5, bars 7–12. CD 4 Track 5.

Although this submission includes works that have not been individually discussed, several pieces deserve a brief mention. The *Vier Fugen* Op. 72 were composed in 1845 when Schumann “was intoxicated with counterpoint.”¹⁷ The subject of the third fugue, in F minor, bears a striking similarity to the opening of Chopin’s posthumous F minor study (see Fig. 61a and Fig. 61b).

Fig. 61a. Schumann *Vier Fugen* Op. 72, Piece No. 3, bars 1–5. CD 1 Track 3.

Nicht schnell und sehr ausdrucksvoll M. M. ♩ = 58
Non presto, e con grande espressione

Fig. 61b. Chopin Posth. Study in F minor from *Trois Nouvelles Etudes* bars 1-4

Andantino Nr 1

¹⁷ Chissell 69

Chissell notes that “this chromatic fugue shows Schumann really making the form his own.”¹⁸

The *Vier Märsche* Op. 76, composed in 1849, are also representative of Schumann’s predilection for cyclical unity, as we have seen in so many of his late piano works. Here the key sequence of E flat, G minor, B flat and E flat confirm this sense of integration. Clara’s thoughts on the *Vier Märsche*, as noted by Chissell, offer positive insight: “Popular marches, stately in character. Extremely brilliant and original.”¹⁹ The inspiration for these works seems to have occurred as a result of Schumann’s return to Dresden following the insurrection of 1849. Worthen describes Schumann’s journey most eloquently:

Schumann set off on foot at seven in the morning and found the march home the inspiration for an exhilarating new piano piece; we can imagine him singing it as he strode along. At this stage he simply called it *March*, but over the next few days it grew into a set of four *Marches* (Op. 76). He wrote to his publisher on 17 June: ‘You will find here a number of marches – but not of the old Dessau [military march] type, instead rather republican. I could not find a better way of letting out my excitement – they were written really passionately.’²⁰

The other works included in this submission are the *Bunte Blätter* Op. 99 composed between 1836 and 1849, and published in 1851, and the *Albumblätter* Op. 124, which were written between 1832 and 1845 but not published until 1854. These collections contain 14 and 20 pieces respectively. Many of the works were rejected from earlier compositions.

It is undeniable that having a detailed understanding of a work’s historical context, stylistic characteristics and structural analysis, can only enhance the learning and performing experience. The analytical approach espoused by Rink certainly led to a clearer interpretation of the complexities of the *Sieben Stücke in Fughettenform*. However the artistic ideals associated with an individual musical realisation require skills that go well beyond objectivity. The poetic nature of Schumann’s music, and indeed its ‘otherworldly’ character, as discussed in Chapter 1, demand a considerable degree of sensitivity and musical persuasion in a performance situation. While a deeper musical understanding was gained by a study of the cyclical unity in the key relationships of *Waldszenen*, as well as many of the other works discussed in

¹⁸ Chissell 59

¹⁹ Chissell 67

²⁰ Worthen 303-4

this submission, this needed to become assumed knowledge that could contribute to the emotional conviction of a live performance. Indeed the live performance of this work included in this submission challenged some pianistic conventions and attempted to convey the composer's intentions as closely as possible.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

In embarking on this project, my aim has been to investigate the interdependence of musical style, historical context and an intuitive approach to interpretation in the performance of Schumann's late piano music. In so doing, I have become much more aware of the significance of detailed harmonic and structural analysis in the preparation of this repertoire, and the way in which this can lead to a better understanding and clearer projection of musical form.

In terms of the historical context, while much of the background material has been of inestimable value in promoting my understanding and appreciation of Schumann's late style, there is also a sense in which some of the more detailed information has remained peripheral, and of no real consequence in terms of my approach to the music. A good example of this would be Michael Struck's discussion of the original double title for *Gesänge der Frühe*, ie. *Gesänge der Frühe. An Diotima*, in which he first mentions the priestess Diotima from Plato's *Symposium*, and then goes on to explain that Schumann was probably referring to the character Diotima in Hölderlin's novel *Hyperion oder der Eremit in Griechenland* (Hyperion or the Hermit in Greece), which appeared in instalments between 1797 and 1799, and was critical of the socio-political conditions in Germany at that time.¹ Struck goes on to ask whether or not it is coincidental that the first four notes of the piece (D–A–H(B)–E), which form the motivic core connecting all five pieces, represent the only musical letters in the names DiotimA and HypErion.² This kind of musicological speculation, however interesting, appeared to be of little value in making interpretative decisions.

On the other hand, other facts which, on the surface, appeared at first to be of little significance, either had surprising repercussions or were of immense value in helping me to come to grips with the essence of the music. The knowledge that Clara had refused to play the “Verrufene Stelle” had a strangely inhibiting effect on

¹ Michael Struck. “Schumann spielen...: In *Der späte Schumann*. Ulrich Tadday, ed. (Landshut: Bosch-Druck, 2006) 105

² Struck 105

my ability to take risks, or any form of poetic license, in the interpretation of this piece. It was as if the notes themselves appeared to resist any form of expressive manipulation. Background information about the *Drei Klavier-Sonaten für die Jugend*, however, had just the opposite effect: the fact that these works were written for children aged 8, 10 and 12 respectively allowed me to indulge in a more child-like sensibility, and to cultivate a spontaneity in performance that would normally not be associated with the more formal aspects of this repertoire.

Elsewhere in this submission I have referred to the need for flexibility in adjusting to various instruments, and to the acoustic properties of a given venue. This is also true to some extent in the discrepancies in different editions. Often personal, interpretative choices had to be made simply because the discrepancies were often so extreme that choices had to be made through common sense and logic. This was especially the case in the fourth piece of the *Gesänge der Frühe*.

When reflecting on the four year period of recording the late works, it now seems evident that interpretations also need to have flexibility to enable assimilated knowledge, experience and extra-musical factors to develop. Exploring Schumann's late style, and in particular the characteristics outlined by Struck and Kapp, has been an enlightening and rewarding experience. The exposure that these works are now receiving and their appreciation by 21st century audiences is indicative of a changing shift in attitude towards the quality of the composition. Previous scholarly accounts denouncing the works on the grounds of Schumann's mental illness are now being challenged, with Worthen elaborating on the work of Struck and Kapp. Clara's role in all of this, and her influence on their critical reception remains speculative; indeed, my own opinion of the effect she had has changed significantly on more than one occasion during the course of this research. Initially I felt that her influence could have provoked a critical response which was unduly negative, an assumption which was largely influenced by earlier scholarship, and other articles which argued along those lines. Daverio's reaction to Eva Weissweiler's writings, however, is a good example of more recent academic trends. He describes them as a "noxious brew of innuendo, distorted facts and out-and-out fiction".³ I was also influenced by the critical remarks made by Steven Isserlis discussed earlier in Chapter 1. Through the

³ Daverio 272

study of Clara's diaries, however, quite a different picture emerged: that of a completely devoted wife whose actions were only ever intended to protect the reputation of her husband.

Commercial recordings play an important role in the development of a cultural tradition. The increased number of recordings of Schumann's late piano works can be seen as the start of a new wave of global familiarisation and appreciation of the works. This is an important point in 21st century society, which relies heavily on new technologies (iPod, CD, MP3 or computer downloads) in order to gain access to music of every genre. This research has attempted to contribute to this by exposing colleagues and students to works that have been unjustly neglected. It is my intention that future concerts, lectures and conference papers should continue to showcase these little known but very worthwhile works.

One might ask how much has been gained by articulating the pianistic challenges and writing about how they were solved. The process of documenting the learning, performance and recording of the works has proven to be an enlightening experience. What began as a superficial knowledge and understanding of the late piano works has grown into a deeper and insightful appreciation of a body of music which will now remain firmly in my repertoire.

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