

Robert Schumann: Carnaval and Fantasie

Inventive and virtuosic **CARNAVAL, Op. 9**, was written by Robert Schumann in 1834 and published in 1835. It originated from his unfinished variations on a *Trauerwalzer (Sehnsucht)* by Franz Schubert, and dedicated to the violinist Karol Lipiński. Subtitled *Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes--Little Scenes on Four Notes--*this composition is a series of musical vignettes, picturing masked personalities at Carnival: Schumann himself (in fictitious Florestan and Eusebius, who embodied his split personality), his friends, contemporaries, and characters from improvised Italian comedy, *commedia dell'arte*. In 1834 Schumann was secretly engaged, although for only few months, to Ernestine von Fricken - a student of his own teacher and future father-in-law, Frederick Wieck. Schumann symbolically based almost every scene of Carnival on pitch structure with German names: his fiancée's hometown, Asch: "A" = A natural, "S" (Es) = E flat, "C" = C natural, and "H" = B. In reordering of the letters to S-C-H-A composer saw his own name = "SCHumAnn". In addition, A-S-C-H is a part of the German word **Fasching** (carnival).

From 22 sections of this piece Schumann did not number *Sphinxes* and *Intermezzo:Paganini*.

1. ***Préambule*** (Quasi maestoso; Ab Major)

The opening *Préambule* contains a section from the *Variations on a Theme of Schubert (Trauerwalzer, Op. 9/2, (D. 365)*. It is not structured around A-S-C-H pattern.

2. ***Pierrot*** (Moderato; Eb Major;)

Pierrot is a character from the *Commedia dell'arte*.

3. ***Arlequin*** (Bb; Vivo)

Harlequin is another character from the *Commedia dell'arte*.

4. ***Valse noble*** (Un poco maestoso; Bb Major;)

5. ***Eusebius*** (Adagio; Eb Major;)

Expressing the idealistic, dreamy, romantic alter-ego of Schumann. It was also one of his pen-names.

6. ***Florestan*** (Passionato; G minor;)

Expressing Schumann's fiery, passionate alter-ego. It was his other pen-name. Here Schumann musically quotes the waltz theme from his *Papillons, Op. 2*.

7. ***Coquette*** (Vivo; Bb Major)

Pictures a charmingly playful, flirty woman.

8. ***Réplique*** (L'istesso tempo; Bb major-G minor;)

A 'reply', a short conversation with the coquette.

-- ***Sphinxes***

This selection was not intended to be performed and is generally omitted in concerts and recordings. The notes are in the groups of S-C-H-A, As-C-H and A-S-C-H, organized in three sections of one bar each. There are no key, tempo or dynamic markings.

9. ***Papillons*** (Prestissimo; Bb Major)

This scene is possibly an allusion to a novel of Jean-Paul. (It is unrelated to his *Papillons*, Op. 2.)

10. ***A.S.C.H. – S.C.H.A: Lettres Dansantes*** (Presto; Eb Major)

The pattern is actually As-C-H, regardless of the title. Expression is whimsical and graceful.

11. ***Chiarina*** (Passionato; C minor)

A portrayal of young Clara Wieck.

12. ***Chopin*** (Agitato; Ab Major)

Expressive, nocturne-like tribute to Frédéric Chopin.

13. ***Estrella*** (Con affetto; F minor;)

A portrayal of Ernestine von Fricken.

14. ***Reconnaissance*** (Animato; Ab Major)

Possibly a reunion of Schumann and Ernestine, who recognize each other at the ball.

15. ***Pantolon et Colombine*** (Presto; F minor)

The characters Pantalone and Colombina, the old husband with a young wife, from the Commedia dell'arte.

16. ***Valse allemande*** (Molto vivace; Ab Major)

--. ***Intermezzo: Paganini*** (Presto; F minor)

A depiction of legendary virtuoso violinist Niccolò Paganini. It leads into a reprise of the *Valse allemande*, as if Paganini is a fleeting appearance amongst the crowd.

17. ***Aveu*** (Passionato; F minor-Ab Major)

Declaration of love.

18. ***Promenade*** (Con moto; Db Major)

In a letter to the pianist Moscheles, Schumann explained that it represents a walk, arm in arm, with one's partner at a ball.

19. ***Pause*** (Vivo; Ab Major)

Reprise of a passage from the Prélude, merging into the final section.

20. ***Marche des "Davidsbündler" contre les Philistins*** (Non allegro; Ab Major)

Finale is a symbolic depiction of right-minded Davidsbündler (an imaginary group Schumann referred to in his music and writings) as a confederation against the Philistines, with their reactionary ideals - the enemies of true art. The members of the Davidsbünd are Florestan, Eusebius, Estrella, Chiarina, Chopin, and Paganini. Philistines are represented by the old German song "Grossvalterlied", described by Schumann as a "Theme from the 17th Century", which is quoted from his *Papillons*, Op. 2. The piece ends triumphantly in bravado Prestissimo.

One of the greatest piano works of the early Romantic period, the ***FANTASIE in C Major, Op. 17***, was written by Schumann in 1836 and dedicated to Franz Liszt. (Liszt in turn dedicated his own Sonata in B minor to Schumann in 1853.) The first movement of the Fantasy was originally

composed as a piece *Ruines* during Schumann's separation from his beloved Clara Wieck, to whom he wrote: 'the first movement may well be the most passionate I have ever composed – a deep lament for you.' Later that year, he wrote two more movements, conceiving it as a sonata. It was a contribution toward funds for a monument of Beethoven in his birthplace, Bonn, being planned by Liszt. In the first movement there is a quotation from Beethoven's song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* (To the Distant Beloved), which Clara was to Schumann at that time. The original title of the composition was "Obolen auf Beethovens Monument: Ruinen, Trophaen, Palmen, Grosse Sonate f.d. Piano f. Für Beethovens Denkmal", and later – "Ruins, Triumphal Arch, and Constellation." The piece was published as *Fantasie* without titles in 1839. 'Yesterday I received your wonderful Fantasie; today I am still half ill with rapture', Clara wrote to Schumann.

Fantasie is prefaced with an excerpt from a poem by Friedrich Schlegel:

Durch alle Töne tönet

Im bunten Erdentraum

Ein leiser Ton gezogen

Für den, der heimlich lauschet.

"Resounding through all the notes / In the earth's colorful dream / There sounds a faint long-drawn note / For the one who listens in secret."

"Are not you really this note? I almost believe you are", Schumann wrote to Clara.

At the time, Liszt was one of the few pianists who could perform *Fantasie*, particularly the coda in the second movement. He played this piece privately and taught it, but never played it in public. Clara started performing the *Fantasie* ten years after Schumann's death.

Fantasie is written in a loose sonata form with three movements:

1. *Durchaus fantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen; Im Legenden-Ton*

A tumultuous whirlwind of sounds in the left hand becomes an accompaniment for a passionate and desperately longing theme in the right hand. This theme unites different parts of the movement. Middle section is titled "In the Character of a Legend" with a nostalgic melody developing into poignant passages.

2. *Mäßig. Durchaus energisch*

The second movement is a rondo in Eb major, where the main theme is a heroic march with grandiose chords, reminding of *Davidsbündler* marching against the Philistines. It is intermittent with episodes which emotionally reflect the first movement and ends with wild leaps of coda.

3. *Langsam getragen. Durchweg leise zu halten.*

The Finale is transcendently beautiful in its sublime yearning and ends in heavenly peaceful harmonies, expressing endless, pure love.

~Sophia Agranovich
