



Robert Schumann: Complete Symphonic Works

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RECORD REVIEW
With this third volume completing Audite's cycle of Schumann's symphonic works, Heinz Holliger couples the Cello Concerto to the revised version of what is in many ways the most remarkable of the four symphonies, the Fourth (Volumes 1 and 2 were reviewed in January and October 2014). Unusually, the revision was something that caused disagreement between Brahms and Clara Schumann, Brahms thinking that the second version, which sets out to clarify and emphasizes a very original form, was 'too heavily draped' in the revised orchestration, going so far as to attribute that to what he frankly called the 'bad' ('schlecht') Düsseldorf orchestra with which Schumann had to contend. Without rehearsing all the arguments, the inclusion of both versions in the Audite set may be commended, and certainly a case made out for what is a stronger form in the version preferred by Clara (there is discussion of this in Volume of what are thorough and helpful insert notes).

It is still not an easy work to perform, and Holliger does admirably here, not only in seeing to it that details of orchestration are made clear but that the virtually single movement form, cyclic in its use of repeated main material, works well. He is also entirely justified in being flexible with tempos. Not only is this in keeping with the approach to tempo defended by most mid-nineteenth century German composer-conductors, Weber and Wagner prime among them, with this symphony it can help to express the overall form more lucidly. The Romanze in particular is most beautifully played (though the violin solo is surprisingly reticent); but Holliger also keeps the orchestra well balanced and lively in the outer movements, or rather sections, of the work. At the same time, he successfully moves the music across from the brooding opening to the strong, affirmative ending. The Cello Concerto is a much more problematic piece, also difficult to bring off. Oren Shevlin does well with the many passages when the cello is bustling away rather unrewardingly against the orchestra; he is clearly relieved to reach the central Langsam, when Schumann is much more recognizably himself with a song-like movement in which his own melodic genius as well as the powers of the cello are more freely released.