

audite

Schumann FOR CLARA



Jimin Oh-Havenith

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Piano Sonata No. I in F-Sharp Minor, Op. II

- I. Introduzione. Un poco adagio – Allegro vivace 15:15
- II. Aria 3:45
- III. Scherzo – Intermezzo 5:56
- IV. Finale. Allegro un poco maestoso 14:14

Fantasie in C Major, Op. 17

- I. Durchaus phantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen 15:03
- II. Mäßig. Durchaus energisch 8:32
- III. Langsam getragen. Durchweg leise zu halten 11:45

Sonata or Fantasie – what's in a name? Robert Schumann's Opp. 11 & 17

“Individual beautiful appearances in this genre will certainly emerge here and there, and already have; but for the rest, it seems, the form has completed its circle of life, and this is, after all, according to the order of things, and we should not repeat the same concepts for centuries, but also consider the new. Feel free, therefore, to write sonatas or fantasies (what's in a name!), only, don't neglect the music, and as for what remains, you may turn to your good genius.” This is a much-quoted passage from Robert Schumann's review of new piano sonatas, which appeared on 26 April 1839 in his *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. While most of the works reviewed in this appraisal (including one by his own teacher, Heinrich Dorn) have long been forgotten, these sentences themselves have made history. For in this famous review, Schumann looked back on a genre of piano music whose career, from the eighteenth century onwards, had been unprecedented. However, he was not referring to the monumental legacy of Domenico Scarlatti's 555 piano sonatas (all written in bipartite, one-movement form), whose stylistic and pianistic agility Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Joseph Haydn took up in their piano sonatas, but to the “great” sonata which established itself in the Viennese classical period from the 1780s onwards. Schumann regarded Beethoven's piano sonatas as the pinnacles of the genre, but his 1834 review of four Schubert sonatas shows that he was also aware of their special status – which was not recognised by pianists until much later. (The famous final three sonatas were not known to him at the time of the review quoted above, since they were published posthumously later on in 1839).

The deaths of Beethoven (1827), Schubert (1828), Hegel (1831) and Goethe (1832) represented profound caesuras in Schumann's life, signalling to him that an epoch in European intellectual and cultural history was coming to an end. What followed from this for him and the other leading representatives of the romantic generation of composers (Chopin, Liszt and Mendelssohn Bartholdy) was, however, ambivalent: on the one hand, the achievements of Beethoven and Schubert seemed unattainable; on the other hand, the opportunity presented itself to fill the vacuum they had left behind. This is probably how Schumann's statement is to be understood, that the sonata, in its erstwhile form, had “completed its circle of life” and that it was now time for something new. It is no coincidence that Schumann mentions the fantasy in the same breath as the sonata. This genre, which had been present in keyboard music since its beginnings, initially represented a free, improvisatory ornamentation of a given melody or bass model, and during the baroque period became part of a fixed pairing alongside the fugue (as in J S Bach's monumental *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*), before acquiring a new, expressive independence during the age of sensibility in the form of C P E Bach's “free” fantasies, to which Mozart and Beethoven referred in their works of this nature (K397 & 475 and Op. 77, respectively). It is one of Beethoven's greatest artistic achievements that he combined the two opposing creative principles of sonata and fantasy in the conception of the “fantasy sonata” and then, in his later work, going on to fuse them with the third central element of his compositional thinking, the variation, in order to create forms at once monumentally sublime and poetically contemplative. Schubert, who began his exploration of the piano sonata whilst Beethoven was initiating the final phase of his sonata oeuvre (with his *Piano Sonata Op. 101 in A major*), followed a similarly poetic idealisation of the sonata idea, but remained formally conservative.

When Schumann announced the “end” of the sonata, he was able already to look back on significant sonata solutions of his own. In 1830, for example, he had composed the first movement of what was to be his *Piano Sonata No. 2 in G minor*, Op. 22, which he completed in 1835 but did not publish until 1839. In 1833, he simultaneously tackled the sonatas in F sharp minor, Op. 11, and F minor, Op. 14, whose completion also took until 1835: Op. 11 was ultimately deemed to be the first sonata due to its publication in 1836, while Op. 14 was initially not even designated a sonata, but a “Concert sans orchestre”. Even though each of the three sonatas displays an individual dramaturgical concept, they resemble each other thanks to the central role of the programmatic narratives. In the case of Op. 11, this connection is already a complex one, for the title page of the first edition bears the addition of “Clara zugeeignet von Florestan und Eusebius” [Dedicated to Clara by Florestan and Eusebius]. On the one hand, this wording alludes to Schumann's literary models, Jean Paul and E T A Hoffmann, in that Schumann names as authors his two alter egos, the tempestuous Florestan and the contemplative Eusebius; alongside the wise and balancing character of Meister Raro, they were fictitious members of the Davidsbund, founded by Schumann in Leipzig, which took up arms against musical philistinism. On the other hand, the 26-year-old publicly admits for the first time to

his (romantic) relationship with Clara Wieck, the musical prodigy nine years his junior and the daughter of his former piano teacher, Friedrich Wieck. In subsequent piano works, Schumann reacted to Wieck's resistance to their relationship – which Schumann had revealed to Clara's father in 1835 – by way of using coded musical messages to Clara. Schumann's Op. 5 Impromptus of 1833 were already based on a theme from a composition by Clara Wieck. Here, in the first movement, he links the fandango theme of the "Allegro vivace" (which follows the splendid and vehemently passionate introduction) with a motif taken from No. 4 of Clara Wieck's *Quatre pièces caractéristiques*, Op. 5, which incorporates a lively rhythm of repeated fifths, imitating timpani. The motif returns, much shortened, as the accompanying figure of the main theme of the "Aria", which Schumann borrowed from his own early song, *An Anna* (1828). In the Intermezzo, which initially recalls the march-like scherzo from Beethoven's Sonata Op. 101 and later imagines a gripping operatic scene, the fandango theme's use of seconds is combined with a falling fifth. In the resolutely propulsive main theme of the symphonically conceived finale, on the other hand, a rising fifth is "filled" with steps in seconds before a leap of a fourth – the inverse interval of the fifth – reaches the top note of the octave. Such leitmotivic threads hold together a jagged soundscape whose traversal became a particular challenge for the dedicatee. In 1835, Clara Wieck thought she had wriggled through the sonata like "a worm", and after a performance in Vienna in 1838 she reported to her fiancé – they had secretly become engaged – that "someone thought there were passages in it which could make one fear you – I am not afraid."

Still feared by many pianists, however, is a notorious passage with leaps at the end of the second movement of the *Fantasie* Op. 17, which the music critic Joachim Kaiser once aptly called an "exploded chorale". The three movements of this work, which Schumann began immediately after completing his Op. 14 and which he originally named the "Great Sonata for Beethoven", were to be called "Ruins, Trophies and Palms". The proceeds of the planned publication were intended as a donation for the erection of a monument to Beethoven in Bonn, initiated by Franz Liszt. In 1839, following several changes to the title and with the addition of a dedication to Liszt as well as a motto, which Schumann had taken from the poem *Die Gebüsche* [The shrubbery] by Friedrich Schlegel (one of the most important authors and theorists of the early romantic period), Schumann's work was published by Breitkopf & Härtel. The lines „Durch alle Töne tönet / Im bunten Erdentraum / Ein leiser Ton gezogen / Für den, der heimlich lauschet“ [Sounding through all sounds / within the colourful earthly dream, / One faint note rings out / To the one secretly listening] are ambiguous. Autobiographically, they refer once again to Clara Wieck, who, "secretly listening", is able to decipher the coded clues; in a letter to her, Schumann also described the work as a "real cry of the heart for you". These codes include, above all, the quotation of the melody to the lines "Nimm sie denn hin, diese Lieder" [Accept them, these songs] from Beethoven's song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*, Op. 98 (1816), which appears at the end of the first movement. However, a theme by Clara Wieck herself is also woven in again, which Schumann had already used as the basis for the variation movement of his *Sonata in F minor*, Op. 14. Thus, on a second semantic level, the Schlegel motto also characterises Schumann's method of creating a musical form from a dense network of his own and other themes; that the early romantic utopia of an inner unity of all things seems to have been realised. Of all Schumann's piano works, his Op. 17 *Fantasie* probably comes closest to his ideal of a simultaneously free and strict sound speech, whose complex and elaborate construction renders it poetically compressed. The course of the work can therefore also be described as a single gigantic arc of suspense, spanning the improvisatory-rhapsodic opening, which begins in the dominant key of C major, through the triumphant march of the second movement (in the *Eroica* key of E flat major) to redemption via the coda of the finale. The finale, in turn, leads from A flat major, the "key of graves", back to the clear light of C major, revealing another Beethoven quotation, namely the theme of the middle section from the "Allegretto" of the *Symphony No. 7 in A major*, on which Schumann had written variations in 1835 which remained unfinished. And what is more: the first movement of the *Fantasie* already features the combination of chords which later would make musical history as Richard Wagner's so-called "Tristan chord". Thanks to Schumann's well-nigh boundless imaginative powers, also evident in the refinement of his metric and rhythmic superimpositions, the classical legacy of the sonata is transferred into an aesthetic present which foreshadows a bold sound-world of the future. Schumann himself was therefore the first to fulfil the demand of creating a new "circle of life" of musical forms, dissolving narrow genre designations.



JIMIN OH-HAVENITH

An exceptional sonority and fidelity owed to the text determine Jimin Oh-Havenith's piano playing. Her warm sound, which is always embedded within the rhythmic structure, lets music come alive in all its richness. Synchronicity of sound and rhythm, not arbitrary changes in tempo and dynamics determine the clarity of her interpretation.

Jimin Oh-Havenith was born in Seoul, South Korea. After studying piano with Jin-Woo Chung (Seoul National University) and Aloys Kontarsky (Musikhochschule Köln) she performed as a soloist and recorded for radio and CD, also as a piano duo with her late husband Raymund Havenith (†1993). The pianist taught at the Hochschule für Musik Mainz and the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt am Main. Since 2013 she has been active again as a soloist and has recorded eight solo CDs.



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info@audite.de · audite.de
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