

Robert Schumann

Fantasiestücke, op. 12

Humoreske, op. 20

Drei Fantasiestücke, op. 111

Meridian

Sung-Suk Kang



Robert Schumann, born 8th June 1810 in Zwickau, Germany, first studied law in Leipzig. He took piano lessons there from Friedrich Wieck and in 1828 became a full-time music student in that town.

He had very little interest in theory or counterpoint and took his inspiration from the new romantic movement as expressed in the literature of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Jean Paul Friedrich Richter.

His hopes of becoming a virtuoso pianist were dashed trying to strengthen his weaker fingers by mechanical means, which ended in paralysis of the fourth finger of his right hand.

Of great importance in Schumann's life was his love for Friedrich Wieck's daughter Clara. Wieck strongly opposed their relationship, fearing it would be detrimental to the concert career of his daughter, and a court case was necessary before they were able to marry in 1840. Schumann wrote most of his piano compositions for Clara, who regularly performed his music in her concerts.

Of the works on this recording, the "Fantasiestücke" Op.12 and the "Humoreske" Op.20 were composed between 1837 and 1839, while the "Fantasiestücke" Op.111 is a much later work (1851).

The Op. 12 was a favourite of Schumann and he was keen for Clara to perform it. He was delighted too with a successful performance of it by Liszt in 1838.

Schumann was especially fond of the piece entitled "In der Nacht": dramatic music inspired by the story of Hero and Leander. It has a lovely poetic middle section, and a cleverly-syncopated left hand accompaniment.

Beginning with the atmospheric "Des Abends", followed by the tempestuous "Aufschwung", the love-duet "Warum?" is a masterpiece of imaginative poetry.

Schumann completed the "Humoreske" Op.20 during a stay in Vienna in 1838. The title has little to do with humour, but rather (as so often with this composer), with changing moods. He was the first to use this title for a musical composition, although it was common in contemporary .

It is a large and ambitious composition, and among his most successful. Its style recalls "Kreisleriana" Op.16, though more close-knit. Whereas the latter has eight distinct movements, the "Humoreske" is a continuous composition in four longish sections which include two march-like episodes. After the lovely song-like beginning, the music becomes more and more animated before gradually returning to the consoling atmosphere of the first pages.

Perhaps the most beautiful section is the third in G minor, marked "Einfach und zart": a lyrical outpouring of the highest order and Schumann at his most inspired. The quick middle-part, ("Intermezzo"), is technically demanding for the pianist.

The chromatic lyricism of the last part, "zum Beschluss", with its unstable tonality, is followed by a powerful "Allegro" coda.

The "3 Fantasiestü" Op.111 – among his last works (trio Op.110, Violin sonata Op.121 and Cello concerto Op.129) were written in August 1851, fourteen years after the Fantasiestü Op.12. One cannot help recalling Beethoven's own Op 111, almost unremittingly in same key C minor).



Schumann had, a year earlier, begun his new appointment as music director in Düsseldorf, a position for which he was unsuited. This, together with the failure of his opera “Genoveva” in 1850 fuelled the depression which eventually led to his tragic end.

The first piece (‘Sehr rasch, mit leidenschaftlichem Vortrag’), a rushing ‘*perpetuum mobile*’ of triplets, contains a quotation from “In der Nacht” of Op.12.

The lovely song-like second piece (ziemlich langsam) is reminiscent of Schubert.

The march-like third piece (kräund sehr markiert), [also in C minor] has a certain pomposity with more depth of expression to be found in the middle part with its fine modulations.

After another song-like beginning, the music becomes more and more animated before gradually returning to the consoling atmosphere of the first pages.

Sung-Suk Kang

Ever since the age of 8, Sung-Suk Kang dreamed of being a concert pianist. She was soon accepted into what is now Seoul Institute of the Arts, where she had her first formal piano instruction.

While still a teenager, Sung-Suk left Seoul to study in Singapore, where she became one of that city’s most sought-after young concert artists. Following a recommendation from John Edwards in Singapore, Sung-Suk successfully applied to the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) in Manchester, as a student of Derrick Wyndham, whose pupils included Stephen Hough and Peter Donohoe. “I was seventeen, it was my first time in Europe. I was overwhelmed by the challenge and the excitement of it all. I fell in love with the RNCM and was astonished at its facilities: brand new Steinway grand pianos in the practice rooms, a beautiful new concert hall and a high-tech opera theatre. It was like a dream come true.”

Winner of several scholarships, Sung-Suk had a busy time in Manchester working for internal and external engagements.

After graduating, Sung-Suk was invited to join Paul Badura-Skoda’s elite class at the Musikhochschule in Vienna, whose members included winners of the Clara Haskil piano competition. She was soon invited to work alongside Badura-Skoda, as his assistant.

“Studying with Badura-Skoda was a new experience. He had a method which took time to get used to, but which gradually changed my way of playing. It was based on a simple theory of heavy and light touch, using the weight of the finger - on a strong beat playing with more tone and on a weak beat with less. It sounds very simple, but applying this to every single note among the different voices in the music is difficult. Getting it right makes a huge difference, enabling you to produce beautiful phrases and lines. It was especially fascinating to apply this to a fugue by Bach, where the different voices sing separately and clearly yet mingle together. In Chopin, Badura-Skoda’s teaching was all about balancing chords, understanding the rubato



required and playing with a special 'Chopin tone'. And I learnt so much about Mozart: I began to hear comments after my Mozart concerts, that there was a discernable 'Badura-Skoda sound.'"

After being awarded her diploma in Vienna, Sung-Suk was selected along with a small number of musicians from America and Europe to attend the professional performers' course at Banff Centre for the Arts, Canada. "The facilities and the setting are magnificent. We were able to concentrate on developing as concert artists and had many opportunities to perform as soloists and chamber musicians with established artists from around the world."

Buoyed by this experience, Sung-Suk returned to Vienna to prepare for the Schumann competition in Italy, where she took first prize. Her win brought a string of engagements around that country.

Following a period in Paris studying contemporary French repertoire, ("composers like Messiaen and Boulez fascinated me, but I'd never had the time or even the courage to learn their music. I had a scholarship from the Ministry of Culture in Vienna and earned money by doing occasional teaching at one of the conservatoires"), Sung-Suk took part in the Hennessy Mozart competition where again she was a finalist.

Sung-Suk soon married: an Italian conductor, with whom she settled in Vienna and had two children. For a while the piano took a back seat, but she soon returned to the concert platform with the Mozart K466 concerto in Prague with the Prague Mozart Orchestra.

Sung-Suk has since developed a career embracing both solo recital/concerto work and chamber music. "My approach to music is constantly evolving. When I was younger my goal was to become the best player. I was very competitive. As I grow older I enjoy simply the fascination of making music; of discovering new things in familiar repertoire. My life-experience has developed my inner world and affected my approach to interpretation to simply reflect who I am. Piano playing is not just about using the

fingers, but the body and the mind. I tell my students to let their fingers be the point of conjunction between the heart and the piano. There's something magical about performing. It should never become routine. I feel the urge to communicate, to reveal my spirit and to incorporate myself into the score, with both the intellectual and passionate traits of my interpretations reaching out to the audience. There's simply nothing like sharing with other people a range of emotions through the universal power of music."

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CHOPIN
Sung-Suk
KANG

- Ballade No.1, G minor, op.23
- Ballade No.2, F major, op.38
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- Ballade No.4, F minor, op.52
- Polonaise-Fantaisie, A flat major, op.61
- Barcarolle, F sharp major, op.60
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Robert Schumann

Piano Music

Fantasiestücke, op.12

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|-----|----------------|------|
| [1] | Des Abends | 3:17 |
| [2] | Aufschwung | 3:17 |
| [3] | Warum | 2:40 |
| [4] | Grillen | 3:29 |
| [5] | In der Nacht | 4:14 |
| [6] | Fabel | 2:47 |
| [7] | Traumes Wirren | 2:53 |
| [8] | Ende vom Lied | 5:32 |

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| [9] | Humoreske, op.20 | 27:18 |
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Drei Fantasiestücke, op.111

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|------|---------------------------|------|
| [10] | Sehr rasch | 2:10 |
| [11] | Ziemlich langsam | 4:30 |
| [12] | Kräftig und sehr markiert | 3:54 |

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