

# Musical connotation: the Schumanns, Berlioz and Mendelssohn

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# The “public sphere”

- The press; specialized journals and dailies for the general public.
  - Critic as public spokesman vs. critic as public adviser
- Enlightenment values, basically; reason, “aristocracy of merit”
- 1798 *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (“Universal music news”)
  - Hoffman’s most important articles
  - Schumann’s early articles (before founding *Neue Zeitschrift*)
- Berlioz in *Journal des débats*, founded 1789
- Schumann founds *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (“New music journal”), in 1833

# Wunderkind

- “Data analysis revealed an increase in wunderkind reports, which reached a peak between 1821 and 1825—the historical beginning of the virtuosic era. Female prodigies performed on the piano or as singers (‘feminine’ instruments), while male prodigies played the flute, clarinet, and violin, the ‘masculine’ instruments. The association between gender and instrument choice in the nineteenth century was different compared with that today.”
  - Reinhard Kopiez, “The musical child prodigy (wunderkind) in music history: a historiometric analysis” in *Music and the Mind: Essays in Honor of John Sloboda*

# Schumann—Wieck—Brahms Quartet

- Friedrich Wieck + Marianne Tromitz = Clara Wieck (1819 - 1896)
  - Parents divorce when she is 6, father takes custody. Clara loses her mother and Johanna, a nursemaid whom she had known from birth
  - Clara < *clarus* = “bright, brilliant”
- The diary
- Robert Schumann moves in 1830 to study with Friedrich. He is 21; Clara is 12. “Am I among human beings?”
  - R Schumann: *Papillons* (Op. 2) and *Paganini Caprices* (Op 3), premiered by Clara as a birthday present to Robert.
  - C Wieck: *4 Polonaises Op 1*, dedicated to Robert
- They fall in love, as early as 1833. Friedrich strongly disapproves. Absconds with Clara on tour.
  - Separation: R Schumann founds NZM, composes many classics, including *Davidsbundlertanze* Op 6, *Fantasie in C Op 17*, and *Kinderszenen, Op. 15*
  - Also, *Carnaval, Op. 9*
- In 1838, Clara travels alone (first time) to Paris, begins to distance herself from Friedrich. Friedrich loses it, a legal battle between him and Clara + Robert follows. He loses: Clara is entitled to money that she earned while working for him on tour, and he is found guilty of slander of Robert and Clara.
- In 1840, marries Schumann. “Year of Song”
  - Robert: *Dichterliebe, Op. 48*
  - Clara: *Three Songs, Op. 12*
- Robert’s mental health deteriorates; attempts suicide in 1854, dies, hospitalized, in 1856.
- Clara, now dubbed “the priestess,” continues an exhausting concert schedule for the rest of her life, nurturing an intimate friendship with the young Johannes Brahms.

# Clara the composer

- The Wieck method included extreme feats of musicianship, including improvisation.
- Harmony, counterpoint, etc as of age 10.
- Broad and detailed acquaintance with contemporary musical developments.
- *Four polonaises, Op. 1* – published at age 10.
- *Romance Variee pur le piano, Op. 3*– first piece dedicated to Robert
  - Theme recurs in Clara's *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 20*
  - And in Brahms, *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Op. 9*
  - And in Robert's *Impromptus sur une Romance de Clara Wieck, op. 5*
  - Who wrote it? Impossible to know.
- *Variations de concert pour le pianoforte sur la "Cavatine de Pirate" de Bellini, Op. 8*
  - Frequently played on tour in 1837-8
  - "their function was clear and the impact predictable." (Reich)
  - cf. Robert's simultaneous diatribes against the "virtuosos and their 'bungling, mediocre' cations on 'vulgar' and 'hackneyed' Italian themes, in contradistinction, Schumann wrote, to 'good, boring German tunes.'" (Reich, p. 241)
- *Op. 11, Trois Romances pour le piano*
  - Clara: "I was thinking of you throughout its creation"
  - Robert: "In your romance I can hear again that we are destined to be man and wife."
- *Er ist gekommen in Sturm und Regen, Op. 12*
  - Setting of Friedrich Ruckert – text
- *Op. 16, Drei Praeludien und Fugen*
  - Studying fugues along with Robert.
  - Robert submits her last three fugues for publication without her knowledge as a birthday present.

# Clara the Composer, continued

- **Op. 17, Trio for Violin, Piano and Cello**
  - Written during time of extreme personal stress.
  - First composition for instruments other than the piano.
  - Four movement sonata form:
    - Allegro moderato
    - Scherzo (tempo di minuetto)
    - Andante
    - Allegretto
- Always lacked confidence in her compositions, even in the trio, especially comparing herself to her husband. Called the trio “sentimental and effeminate.” Still, “Clara evidently felt safe in derogating her own work but resented any criticism from others.” (Nancy Reich, *Clara Schumann*, p. 229)
- “She composed because all professional performers of her time did so. She had been trained to compose and dutifully fulfilled the expectations of her father and the concert public.” (229)

# Clara the editor

- Throughout her life with Robert, prepares many piano arrangements of his work.
- Oversaw the publication of Schumann's posthumous works
  - Re: her decision not to publish the piano accompaniments to the Paganini Caprices of 1853: "My husband is too dear to me to permit me to have something of his published which is trivial."
  - In 1893, destroyed five Romances by R Schumann in 1853.
- 1877 edits (with help from J Brahms) the critical edition of all Robert's works for Breitkopf & Hartel.
  - Recalls that R had often complained that her tempos were too fast, plus she believed that his metronome had been faulty; metro markings are meticulously notated.
- 1887 Instructive edition
  - "It is clear to me that I must do it, so that at least one correct edition will be available for students." (Reich 255)
- 1885 Collects and edits *Jugendbriefe*, R's early letters.

# Clara the virtuosa

- Three phases:
  - 1828 – 1840, child prodigy Clara Wieck
  - 1840 – 1854, “years of her marriage and childbearing, during which her concertizing was somewhat curtailed, but not nearly to the extent that popular literature would have us believe.” (Reich)
  - 1854 – 1891, tours British Isles and Europe, universally beloved, while supporting a household and 7 kids



# Concert life

- Before Liszt's 1840 "recital" in London
  - Hodgson of stuff, often not musical. e.g. Dr Langenschwarz, the "improvisor," on May 18, 1831.
- Difficulty of accommodating public taste and her own taste.
  - To Robert: "Listen, Robert, won't you compose something brilliant and easy to understand for once, something that has no titles or headings, but hangs together as whole, not too long and not too short? I want so much to have something of yours to play in public, something that suits the audience. It is indeed humiliating for a genius, but public demands it for once."
- After marriage, "the display pieces by Herz, Pixis, and Bellini all but disappeared from her programs...the dominating works are those written for the keyboard by Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Schubert and Schumann." (Reich 263)
- Precedents for recital program:
  - Bach/Scarlatti + Major Opus (e.g. Beethoven) + groups of smaller pieces (Schumann, Mendelssohn, Chopin) – a pattern still observed today!
  - Shorter programs; concentrate more on each piece.
    - Liszt stops giving concerts in 1848
    - Thalberg dies in 1853
    - Mendelssohn/Chopin dead by 1849
    - Next generation of virtuosos are in many ways modeled on Clara.
- She was largely responsible for Schumann's fame.
- Concert management. Learned the trade from her father, and, like her father, pressed her children into service.

# Schumann's criticism

- “philistinism”, “poisonous flowers”
  - Failed virtuoso? (syphilis?)
- *Davidsbund Personae*
  - Florestan, Eusebius, Raro
- Public performance of subjective experience
- “Above all, Schumann encouraged his readers to look for more than sensory stimulation in music, but rather seek in it the same mental and spiritual delight they sought in literature.” (Taruskin)

# Schumann reviews *Les Huguenots* in 1837

- “Meyerbeer’s success in our musically healthy Germany is enough to make one question one’s own sanity.”
- “Every measure is a work of calculation, every measure gives you something to talk about. ‘Astonish or titillate’ is his slogan, and he can accomplish it even with the mob.”
- “How internationally shallow it all is, and how purposefully superficial”

# Schumann reviews Symphony Fantastique, 1835

- “Be his art the flaming sword, then let these words be its protective scabbard.”
- “In Berlioz the old lust for destruction is doubly awakened, and he lays about him with a titan’s fists.”
  - Florestan
- “Try to change something, or to correct it, as any practiced harmonist can do, and see how dull it seems in comparison.”
- “As to the difficult question of how far instrumental music should go in the representation of thoughts and occurrences, I think many listeners are too apprehensive.”

# Schumann, *Carnaval* Op 9 : ASCH

- Each movement features some variation on a musical cryptogram: ASCH
- *Commedia dell'Arte*
- Irony?
- Ernestine von Fricken AND Clara!
  - Preamble
  - Pierrot
  - Arlequin
  - Valse noble
  - Eusebius --- clearest example of ASCH motif (Ab, A, C, Bb, B, Eb)
  - Florestan
  - Coquette
  - Replique
  - Papillons
  - ASCH-SCHA
  - Chiarina
  - Chopin
  - Estrella
  - Reconnaissance
  - Pantalon at Colombine
  - Valse allemande
  - Paganini (Intermezzo)
  - Aveu
  - Promenade
  - Pause
  - Marche des Davidsbundler (*contre les Philistine*)

# The case for irony in *Carnaval*

- Poetic self-consciousness
- Abrupt, fragmenting shifts in tone
- Use of language in the score (German), indicating and emphasizing authorial voice
- Quotation
  - *Papillons* appears in *Florestan*, *Promenade* appears in *Dauidsbundlertanze*
- Cliche (Commedia)
- Florestan authors “On the Comic in Music”
  - (from Heinz Dill, “Romantic Irony in the Works of Schumann,” *Musical Quarterly*, 73/2 (1989))

# *Dichterliebe*, Op. 48 (1840)

- 16 settings from Heine's *Lyrisches Intermezzo*
  - Unhappy (unconsummated) love
- *Dichterliebe* – text
  - Im wunderschönen Monat Mai (no. 1)
  - Aus meinen Thränen (no 2)
  - Ich grolle nicht (no 7)
    - “The most definite tonal assertion in the whole cycle accompanies its most flagrant lie”
  - Am leuchtenden Sommermorgen (no. 12)
  - Die alten, bösen Lieder (no. 16)

# Hector Berlioz (1803 - 1869)

- Son of a small-town doctor.
- At age 12, falls in love with Estelle Duboeuf.
  - “By day I hid myself in the the maize fields...like a wounded bird, mute, suffering. Jealousy plagued me, pale companion of all true lovers.”
  - Identification with literary precedent (Florian’s *Estelle and Nemorin*), infatuation at first sight, hopeless longing for an unattainable person.
- Studies at Paris Conservatoire, where his works are received with incomprehension.
- 1830 Symphony Fantastique
  - *Idee fixe* is actually stolen (self-borrowed) from his cantata, **Herminie** (1828)
- Oct 3, 1833 marries Harriet Smithson.
- that’s the end of the story.



# Symphony and Program

- “the composer’s intention has been to develop, insofar as they contain musical possibilities, various situations in the life of an artist.”
- A footnote to a later edition:

“The aim of this program is by no means to copy faithfully what the composer has tried to present in orchestral terms, as some people seem to think; on the contrary, it is precisely in order to fill in the gaps which the use of musical language unavoidably leaves in the development of dramatic thought, that the composer has had to avail himself of written prose to explain and justify the outline of the symphony. He knows very well that music can take the place of neither word nor picture; he has never had the absurd intention of expressing abstractions or moral qualities, but rather passions and feelings. Nor has he had the even stranger idea of painting mountains: he has only wished to reproduce the melodic style and forms that characterize the singing of some of the people who live among them.”

“When, for example, in the Scene in the Country, he tried to render the rumbling of distant thunder in the midst of a peaceful atmosphere, it is by no means for the puerile pleasure of imitating this majestic sound, but rather to make *silence* more perceptible, and thus to increase the impression of uneasy sadness and painful isolation that he wants to produce on his audience.”

(quoted in Edward T. Cone, *Fantastic Symphony*, p. 29)

# Second Program

- “If necessary, one can even dispense with distributing the program, keeping only the titles of the five movements. The symphony by itself (the author hopes) can afford musical interest independent of any dramatic purpose.”

(Cone, *Symphony*, p. 31)

# Berlioz, *Symphony Fantastique*

- 91 musician minimum (wanted 220!)
- Five movements
- Program
  - “graffiti” on the *dies irae*

Dies iræ, dies illa  
Solvat sæclum in favilla,  
Teste David cum Sibylla.

Quantus tremor est futurus,  
Quando Judex est venturus,  
Cuncta stricte discussurus!

The day of wrath, that day  
will dissolve the world in ashes,  
David being witness along with  
the Sibyl.

How great will be the quaking,  
when the Judge will come,  
investigating everything strictly.

# Berlioz, “On Musical Imitation”, 1837

- It is a means, not an end.
- The second condition to making imitation acceptable is that it shall concern something worthy of holding the listener's attention, and that it shall not (at least in serious works) be used to render sounds, motions, or objects that belong outside the sphere which art cannot desert without self-degradation.
- The third condition is that the imitation, without aping reality as by an exact substitution of nature for art, shall nonetheless be close enough for the composer's intent to avoid misconception in the minds of an attentive audience.
- The fourth and last condition is that this physical imitation shall never occur in the very spot where emotional imitation (expressiveness) is called for, and thus encroach with descriptive futilities when the drama is proceeding apace and passion alone deserves a voice.<sup>28</sup>

# Analysis (from Cone)

- Key relationships of 5 movements form I-VI-IV-V-I
  - But VI is A major, and V is G minor! Still exceptional.
  - I: in a loose sonata form, with first and second themes reversed in capitulation.
  - II: “basically a waltz,” with the idee fixe transformed to accommodate. Intro + A + B + A + Coda
  - III: Intro + A + B + A + 2- part Coda
  - IV: again, sonata form: Intro + Expo + Devel + recap + Coda. More brass and percussion. Formal ambiguity.
  - V: ‘C major-minor’ of the first mov. Clearly related to first mov.
    - Upbeat section prepares entrance of tonic.
    - Theme in I major, parodied idee fixe in clarinet.
    - Interlude
    - Repetition of theme in III in clarinet and piccolo
    - *Dies irae*, eventually in fugal treatment
      - Known from Goethe's Faust
    - Bass drum takes over where melody should have ended (G), ending the dies irae
    - Ending in major, but still Ab and Eb creep in here and there.

# Mendelssohn, *Midsummer Night's Dream Overture*

- Plot ... ?
- Themes that represent characters/images in the play.
- 17 yrs later, he wrote true incidental music for the play: we know what themes mean in the *Overture*.
- But he doesn't follow the plot; *Overture* is in sonata form, follow conventional tonal plan.