

ROBERT SCHUMANN

David C F Wright DMus

This article is more personal than any I have before but there are valid reasons for this, which will become evident.

I have often been criticised and, indeed, threatened by some correspondents for some of my articles in which I am accused of taking swipes at some composers. I received one letter which said that Schubert did not die of syphilis but it was hoped that I would also die of the syphilis that killed him!

We must tell the truth about composers even if that truth is not well received!

Sadly, people do talk rubbish!

A writer for Music Web International wanted me to tell him what key Webern's symphony was in! What a ridiculous question! He accused me of swipes at composers and yet he does it himself with Liszt and Maderna as two of his targets.

I have constantly been unfairly accused of savaging some composers. Friends have examined all my articles and found that less than 2% of my essays criticise composers strongly, but always for valid reasons which are supplied.

In a review on the Music Web site a very fine composer is savaged by the writer ten times and that makes up over 11% of the article!

A friend has opined that Schumann is 'put down' because of his mental illness. Chopin and Scriabin had mental illnesses but are not 'put down', so why is Schumann?

Why did Mahler re-orchestrate the Schumann symphonies? Who did he think he was? Schumann's symphonies are said to be thick and turgid. Elgar's symphonies are definitely thick and turgid but he does not get criticised. Some have said that Mahler's orchestration can be thick and turgid!

Poor Schumann! He wrote some fine pieces and some awful works!

What I can say is that his Symphony no 2, Op 61 of 1846, is sheer perfection and Bernstein said so at the end of one televised performance of this very great work and wept unashamedly at this 'unsurpassed masterpiece.'

Someone on the internet writes in response to the Symphony no 1, Op 38 of 1841, "I don't like Schumann. His work is poor in construction and his melodies are too bad!"

Of the Symphony no 2, someone writes, "The first movement is one of a manic depressive. Another states, "The symphony is about healing from depression and is about Schumann's illness."

And, wait for this one, "The third movement is Mahlerian!"

It is as crazy as a symphony being subtitled Buying toilet rolls at Tesco's!



The Schumann second symphony, which, in fact, is his third was completed in 1841 and Mahler was born in 1860!

People do talk a lot of rubbish!

One of the problems with any music, particularly the orchestral works of Schumann, is that they have suffered from some awful performances such as those by Karajan and Rattle and yet Bernstein and Riccardo Muti are faithful to the scores.

It is time to remove the unfair criticism of Schumann!

Robert Schumann was born on 8 June 1810 in Zwickau in Saxony and, when he was seven, he began to compose piano music but his greatest interest was in literature, his father being a novelist, publisher and bookseller. In the realm of music, Robert's first teacher was Johann Gottfried Kuntzsch who instilled in the boy a love for music.

Schumann wrote an essay on the aesthetics of music when he was fourteen and contributed to a book, *Portraits of Famous Men*, published by his father. Robert read Schiller and Goethe, the Greek tragedies and the major literary influence upon him was Jean Paul Friedrich Richter and, as a result, Schumann wrote some youthful novels. As for musical influences, the greatest probably came from Moscheles playing at Karlsbad and, consequently, Robert took an interest in Beethoven, Mendelssohn and, to a lesser extent, Schubert. This proposed musical career was sorely hindered by the death of his father in 1826 and, sadly, his widow and Schumann's other guardians did not encourage music.

Instead, Robert studied law at Heidelberg.

At Easter 1830, he heard Paganini perform and this began an internal conflict for the young man which was between Literature and Music. At Christmas 1830, he was taking piano lesson from Friedrich Wieck. While with Wieck in Leipzig, Schumann apparently damaged a finger by the use of a mechanical device intended to strengthen his fingers. His future wife, Clara, refuted this to some extent.

Between 1829 and 1830 he wrote his Opus 1 Abegg Variations for piano which refers to his fictitious friend Meta Abegg.

It is also based on the notes A B E G G and consists of a theme three variations, a cantabile and as fantasie finale. One has to ask if having an imaginary friend is an indication of mental weakness.

Another strange work is *Davidsbundlertanze*, Op 6 of 1837, which introduces two fictitious characters or aspects of his active and passive character, Eusebius and Florestan. It is said to portray King David's defeat of the Philistines but the use of the word *tanze* (dance) makes this description somewhat absurd. You do not win a war by dancing but by fighting. The composer's dual personality complex was worrying.

Opus 2 is *Papillions* for piano, an awful work. It is dance-like, waltz-like with hints of Chopin. But it is tinkling music and has no direction or purpose.

Conversely there is a gorgeous piece *Widmung* from Op 25 known as *Dedication*.

There are three piano sonatas, the third is called *Concerto* without orchestra and the impressive *Symphonic Studies* Op 13.

Schumann had given up his career as a pianist and concentrated on composition. He studied this discipline with Heinrich Dorn, a German composer and conductor of the Leipzig Opera. Schumann contemplated writing an opera on the Hamlet theme.

In 1832 he began work on his Zwickauer Symphony in G minor which remains incomplete and was given the reference number Woo29, and the following year his brother Julius and his sister-in-law Rosalie died which led Robert into severe depression.

His combining literature with music led to the description of programme music. His mother, aware of her son's feelings, told him that he should marry Clara Wieck. In 1834, he published his New Journal for Music in which he dismissed virtuoso music, advocated interest in composers of the past and promoted Chopin and Berlioz.

His promotion of Chopin was ill-advised since Chopin was rude and dismissive of Schumann after Schumann had dedicated a work to Chopin. Robert also declared his dislike for Liszt and Wagner which was ill-advised.

There is on the web a list of the ten worst classical composers who are

- Debussy
- Chopin
- Schumann and Schubert
- Offenbach
- Brahms
- Liszt
- Johann Strauss II
- Rachmaninov
- Mozart

This is ridiculous. Schumann, Brahms, Liszt, Rachmaninov and Mozart are very fine composers.

Others has suggested as worst composers Stravinsky (can you possibly believe it?) Mahler and Elgar.

But to return to Schumann. Many of his piano works are like collections of mosaics or short knitted pieces sown together as a patchwork quilt. One such work is Carnival Op 9 of 1834 which many famous pianists will not play. The musical grammar is often wrong and the second piece, Pierrot, is simply awful with that repeated three note phrase which is like a painful sore thumb. Some have said that this is evidence of his mental disability. He sometimes suffered from delusions later in life including the notion that he was slowly being poisoned.

I have heard people say that they don't care about these valid criticisms because they like the work!

Schumann's father died by committing suicide and his mental illness Robert had inherited. Shortly after this in 1837 he became engaged to Clara but her father was violently opposed to this. In one scandalous book about Schumann it is reported that Friedrich Wieck said that Schuman was mentally weak and a homosexual alcoholic. Weak, yes but the other two claims are offensive. Robert had seven surviving children following his marriage to Clara in 1840. The children are :

Marie 1841, Elise 1843, Julie 1845, Ludwig 1848, Ferdinand 1849, Eugene 1851, and Felix 1854.
Some have said that Brahms was the father of Felix.

To return to his piano music. Two of his finest piano works are Kreisleriana Op 16 of 1838 and the Fantasie in C Op 17, revised in 1839. Kriesleriana is a set of pieces of purposeful length and the second movement has one of the loviest themes in piano literature. The Fantasie also stands out with a melodious context, super piano writing, although it may be a shade too long.

Another splendid piano work is Carnival Jest from Vienna Op 26 of 1839, a colourful and strong work of great immediacy.

The Schumanns moved to Dusseldorf in 1850 where Robert became its musical director.

Recommended by Joachim, Brahms went to Dusseldorf and was warmly welcomed by the Schumanns and became a pupil of Robert. He lived with them for some time but left after a while because of his love for Clara. Many letters passed between them. Earlier at the home in Dusseldorf, Brahms helped look after the Schumann children and became very attached to them. Robert suspected Clara and Brahms feelings for each other and after Robert's death, Brahms was a helpmeet for Clara.

Schumann's mental problems increased alarmingly and this was perhaps due to overwork and that Clara could give occasional recitals and bring in money which upset her husband. He threw himself into the Rhine to drown himself. He was immediately sent to the asylum at Enderich where he died two years later.

More nasty stories circulated including the story that Clara only visited him once in the asylum and that Clara and Brahms were always together over romantic meals

This is speculation and suggestive! It is a smear campaign! I am accused and threatened because I tell the truth about some composers which can be evidenced, and yet people unfairly malign Schumann and get away with it.

People do talk rubbish!

I was pleased to read on Music Web a reviewer rightly stating that Schumann's symphonies were not the product of a mental case. In fact, they are clearly products of a fine composer being beautifully written, having form and coherence and finely orchestrated in the what Schumann wanted. I will say that the Symphony no 4, Op 125 has its few weaknesses but it is sincere, a rare quality in music, and I love it.

The Symphony no 3 Op 97 known as the Rhenish is full of tunes and is immediately popular.

He wrote three string quartets as Opus 41 of which the one in F may be the best. It has a boldness and assertiveness. The chamber works with piano are simply delightful. The three Piano Trios op 63, 89 and 110 are unjustly neglected and Clara enjoyed playing them even though her public appearances were now limited. Schumann said of the first trio, "I will take fate by the throat ; It will not overcome me."

Possibly the greatest chamber works are the Piano Quintet Op 44 of 1842 and the Piano Quartet Op 47. Both are happy works caused by his successful marriage to Clara. Both works have a charm and elegance and proved that he was a truly great composer. They were both immediate successes.

The next great work is the magnificent Piano Concerto in A minor Op 54 deservedly popular and another example of a well organised composer and certainly not the work of a neurotic mad man. There is charm and beauty which never becomes banal and an exceptional rondo. The best performance by far is Peter Katin on you tube and the worst is by Dame Myra Hess, also on you tube.

Another sublime concerto is the Cello Concerto, Op 129 a work which Schumann took a lot of care over. The orchestration is perfect and the writing for the cello cannot be better.

Many get irritated by the constant comparison of other cello concertos with that of Elgar. The Elgar is a nauseous wallow with so many faults as to make it unbearable to the discerning and intelligent listener.

There are famous cellists who thoroughly disapprove of it and with just cause. And the BBC broadcast it about thirty times a year, once three times in a day.

At all times, we must be truthful about composers even if the truth will not be well received.

The Schumann Cello Concerto is not thick and turgid but transparent and clean. It abounds in melody and is devoid of that abominable scratching we have to endure in the Elgar and other works.

A work of great originality was the *Konzertstück* for four horns and orchestra

There is a Violin Concerto Op 131 originally called *Fantasie* which has some good moments but may not be satisfying as a whole.

His songs are truly remarkable fusing his interest in literature with music. There are far more superior than Schubert with his predictable and vamping piano parts. Incidentally, Liszt, who enjoyed Schumann's work also wrote some exquisite songs.

Schumann's greatest song cycles are *Leiderkries* and *A Woman's Life and Love* Op 42

Schumann's operatic works are not successful such as *Scenes from Faust* and *Genoveva*. Nonetheless his writing for the voice and voices is usually exemplary.

It is said that great musicians live on in their music but it is also true that poor composers live on in their inferior music.

What is clear is that Schumann was a truly great composer and does not deserve the harsh criticism he gets. Two composers mentioned earlier had severe mental problems and wrote awful music. Not so, Schumann.

He died on 29 July 1856.

List of works

Note that Opus 1-23 are all written for piano solo.

- Op. 1 Variations on the name "Abegg" (1830)
- Op. 2 Papillons (1829–1831)
- Op. 3 Etudes After Paganini Caprices (1832)
- Op. 4 Intermezzi (1832)
- Op. 5 Impromptus [on a Theme by Clara Wieck] (1833)
- Op. 6 Davidsbündlertänze (1837)
- Op. 7 Toccata in C major (1832)
- Op. 8 Allegro in B minor (1831)
- Op. 9 Carnival (1834–1835)
- Op. 10 6 Concert Studies on Caprices by Paganini (1833)
- Op. 11 Grand Sonata No. 1 in F-sharp minor (1835)
- Op. 12 Fantasiestücke (Fantasy Pieces) (1837)
- Op. 13 Symphonic Studies (Études symphoniques) (1834)
- Op. 14 Grand Sonata No. 3 in F minor, Concerto Without Orchestra (1835)
- Op. 15 Kinderszenen (Scenes From Childhood) (1838)

- Op. 16 Kreisleriana (1838)
- Op. 17 Fantasie in C (1836, revised 1839)
- Op. 18 Arabeske in C (1839)
- Op. 19 Blumenstück (Flower Piece) in D-flat (1839)
- Op. 20 Humoreske in B-flat (1839)
- Op. 21 Novelletten (Novelettes) (1838)
- Op. 22 Piano Sonata No. 2 in G minor (1833–1835)
- Op. 23 Nachtstücke (Night Pieces) (1839)
- Op. 24 Liederkreis (Heine), nine songs (1840)
- Op. 25 Myrthen, twenty-six songs (4 books) (1840)
- Op. 26 Faschingschwank aus Wien (Carnival Jest from Vienna) (1839) for piano
- Op. 27 Lieder und Gesänge volume I (5 songs) (1840)
- Op. 28 Three Romances (1839) for piano
- Op. 29 3 Gedichte (1840)
- Op. 30 3 Gedichte (1840)
- Op. 31 3 Gesänge (1840)
- Op. 32 4 Klavierstücke (Scherzo Gigue, Romance and Fughette) (1838–9)
- Op. 33 6 Lieder (part songs for men's voices with piano ad lib) (1840)
- Op. 34 4 Duets (soprano and tenor with piano) (1840)
- Op. 35 12 Gedichte (1840)
- Op. 36 6 Gedichte (1840)
- Op. 37 Gedichte aus "Liebesfrühling" (12 songs, of which numbers 2, 4 and 11 are by Clara Schumann) (1840)
- Op. 38 Symphony No. 1 in B flat, Spring (1841)
- Op. 39 Liederkreis (Eichendorff), twelve songs (1840)
- Op. 40 5 Lieder (1840)
- Op. 41 Three String Quartets in A minor, F and A (1842)
- Op. 42 Frauenliebe und -leben (Chamisso), eight songs (1840)
- Op. 43 3 Duets (1840)
- Op. 44 Piano Quintet in E flat (1842)
- Op. 45 Romanzen & Balladen volume I (3 songs) (1840)
- Op. 46 Andante and variations for two pianos (1843) (also see WoO 10)
- Op. 47 Piano Quartet in E flat (1842)
- Op. 48 Song cycle, Dichterliebe, sixteen songs from Heine's Buch der Lieder (1840)
- Op. 49 Romanzen & Balladen volume II (3 songs) (1840)
- Op. 50 Das Paradies und die Peri, oratorio (1841–43)
- Op. 51 Lieder und Gesänge volume II (5 songs) (1842)
- Op. 52 Overture, Scherzo and Finale in E (1841)
- Op. 53 Romanzen & Balladen volume III (3 songs) (1840)
- Op. 54 Piano Concerto in A minor (1841–45)
- Op. 55 5 Lieder (partsongs) (1846)
- Op. 56 Studies in the Form of Canons for Organ or Pedal Piano (Etuden in kanonischer Form für Orgel oder Pedalklavier) (1845)
- Op. 57 Belsazar, ballad (Heine) (1840)
- Op. 58 Sketches for Organ or Pedal Piano (Skizzen für Orgel oder Pedalklavier) (1845)
- Op. 59 4 Gesänge (partsongs) (1846)
- Op. 60 6 Fugues on B–A–C–H for organ or pedal piano (1845)
- Op. 61 Symphony No. 2 in C (1845–46)
- Op. 62 3 Gesänge (partsongs with piano ad lib) (1847)
- Op. 63 Piano Trio No. 1 in D minor (1847)
- Op. 64 Romanzen & Balladen volume IV (3 songs) (1841–47)
- Op. 65 Ritornelle in canonischen Weisen (7 canonic part songs) (1847)
- Op. 66 Bilder aus Osten (Pictures from the East), 6 Impromptus for piano 4-hands (1848)

- Op. 67 Romanzen & Balladen volume I (5 partsongs) (1849)
- Op. 68 Album for the Young (Album für die Jugend) (1848) for piano
- Op. 69 Romanzen volume I (6 partsongs for women's voices) (1849)
- Op. 70 Adagio and Allegro for Horn and Piano (1849) (Schumann directed that the horn part could also be performed on violin or cello)
- Op. 71 Adventlied for soprano, chorus and orchestra (1848)
- Op. 72 Four Fugues (Vier Fugen) (1845) for piano
- Op. 73 Fantasy Pieces for Clarinet and Piano (1849) (Schumann directed that the clarinet part could be also performed on violin or cello)
- Op. 74 Spanisches Liederspiel (3 songs, 5 duets, 2 quartets) (1849)
- Op. 75 Romanzen & Balladen volume II (5 partsongs) (1849)
- Op. 76 Four Marches (Vier Märsche) (1849) for piano
- Op. 77 Lieder und Gesänge volume III (5 songs) (1841–50)
- Op. 78 4 duets (soprano and tenor) (1849)
- Op. 79 Liederalbum für die Jugend (29 songs) (1849)
- Op. 80 Piano Trio No. 2 in F (1847)
- Op. 81 Genoveva, opera (1848)
- Op. 82 Waldszenen (Forest Scenes) (1848–1849) for piano
- Op. 83 3 Gesänge (1850)
- Op. 84 Beim Abschied zu singen for chorus & winds (1848)
- Op. 85 12 Piano Pieces for Young and Older Children (12 Klavierstücke für kleine und große Kinder) (piano 4 hands) (1849)
- Op. 86 Konzertstück for Four Horns and Orchestra (1849)
- Op. 87 Ballad, "Der Handschuh" (Schiller) (1850)
- Op. 88 Fantasiestücke for piano trio (1842)
- Op. 89 6 Gesänge (1850)
- Op. 90 6 Gedichte und Requiem (1850)
- Op. 91 Romanzen volume II (6 partsongs for women's voices) (1849)
- Op. 92 Introduction and Allegro Appassionato for Piano and Orchestra (1849)
- Op. 93 Motet, "Verzweifle nicht im Schmerzenstal" for double chorus and organ ad lib (1849, orchestrated 1852)
- Op. 94 Three Romances for Oboe and Piano (1849)
- Op. 95 3 Gesänge (1849)
- Op. 96 Lieder und Gesänge volume IV (1850)
- Op. 97 Symphony No. 3 in E flat, Rhenish (1850)
- Op. 98a Songs from Wilhelm Meister
- Op. 98b Requiem for Mignon for solo voices, chorus and orchestra (1849)
- Op. 99 Bunte Blätter (1836–1849) for piano
- Op. 100 The Bride of Messina overture (1850–51)
- Op. 101 Minnespiel (4 songs, 2 duets, 2 quartets) (1849)
- Op. 102 Five Stücke im Volkston for piano and cello (1849)
- Op. 103 Mädchenlieder (2 women's voices and piano) (1851)
- Op. 104 7 Lieder (1851)
- Op. 105 Violin Sonata No. 1 in A minor (1851)
- Op. 106 Declamation with piano, "Schön Hedwig" (1849)
- Op. 107 6 Gesänge (1851–52)
- Op. 108 Nachtlid for chorus and orchestra (1849)
- Op. 109 Ball-Scenen (Scenes from a Ball) (piano 4 hands) (1851)
- Op. 110 Piano Trio No. 3 in G minor (1851)
- Op. 111 Three Fantasiestücke (1851) for piano
- Op. 112 Der Rose Pilgerfahrt oratorio (1851)
- Op. 113 Märchenbilder for piano and viola (1851)
- Op. 114 3 Lieder für 3 Frauenstimmen (1853)

- Op. 115 Overture and incidental music, Manfred (1848–49)
- Op. 116 Der Königssohn (Uhland), for solos, chorus and orchestra (1851)
- Op. 117 4 Husarenlieder (1851)
- Op. 118 Drei Sonaten für die Jugend (Three Piano Sonatas for the Young) (1853)
- Op. 119 3 Gedichte (1851)
- Op. 120 Symphony No. 4 in D minor (1841; revised in 1851)
- Op. 121 Violin Sonata No. 2 in D minor (1851)
- Op. 122 Declamation with piano: "Ballade vom Heideknaben" and "Die Flüchtlinge" (1852)
- Op. 123 Festival overture on the Rheinweinlied for orchestra and chorus (1853)
- Op. 124 Album Leaves (Albumblätter) (1832–1845) (includes one piece previously part of WoO 31) for piano
- Op. 125 5 heitere Gesänge (1851)
- Op. 126 Seven Piano Pieces in Fughetta Form (1853)
- Op. 127 5 Lieder und Gesänge (1850–51)
- Op. 128 Julius Caesar overture (1851)
- Op. 129 Cello Concerto in A minor (1850)
- Op. 130 Children's Ball (Kinderball) (four hands) (1853)
- Op. 131 Fantasy in C for violin and orchestra (1853)
- Op. 132 Märchenerzählungen, four pieces for clarinet, viola and pianoforte (probably 1853)
- Op. 133 Songs of Dawn (Gesänge der Frühe) (1853) for piano
- Op. 134 Introduction and Allegro for Piano and Orchestra (1853)
- Op. 135 Gedichte der Königin Maria Stuart (1852)
- Op. 136 Hermann und Dorothea overture (1851)
- Op. 137 Jagdlieder (5 partsongs for men's voices with 4 horns ad lib) [1849]
- Op. 138 Spanische Liebeslieder (1849)
- Op. 139 "Des Sängers Fluch" (Uhland) for solo voice, chorus and orchestra (1852)
- Op. 140 "Vom Pagen und der Königstochter" for solo voice, chorus, and orchestra (1852)
- Op. 141 4 doppelchörige Gesänge (partsongs) (1849)
- Op. 142 4 Gesänge (1852)
- Op. 143 "Das Glück von Edenhall" (Uhland) for solo voice, chorus, and orchestra (1853)[1]
- Op. 144 "Neujahrslied" for chorus and orchestra (1849–50)
- Op. 145 Romanzen & Balladen Vol. III (5 partsongs) (1849–51)
- Op. 146 Romanzen & Balladen Vol. IV (5 partsongs) (1849)
- Op. 147 Missa sacra (1852)
- Op. 148 Requiem (1852)

PDF Scores

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