

NAXOS

# Laureate Series • Piano



**SCHUMANN**

**Abegg Variations**

**Novelletten**

**Fantasiestücke**

**Kotaro Fukuma**

**First Prize:**

**2003 Cleveland**

**International Piano**

**Competition**

## Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

### Abegg-Variations • Novelletten • Drei Fantasiestücke

Until he was thirty, Schumann wrote keyboard music almost exclusively, music which expressed the broad range of his thoughts and feelings and the passionate and reflective aspects of his personality. Through the influence of his parents he learned much about literature, especially the poetic works of Goethe and Byron. His ill-fated attempt to attend law school, at his mother's insistence, was soon abandoned in favour of the irresistible attraction to music.

Schumann was always intrigued with games and puzzles, particularly when he could include them in his own music. His first published work, the *Abegg Variations* of 1830, reflects this fascination with puzzles. The variations take their title from the name of a young pianist, Mme. Meta Abegg, whom Schumann met in early 1830. This is a set of variations with a theme based on the letters of her surname, in German notation A - B flat - E - G - G. The theme is in waltz tempo. This may be simple on its opening presentation, but the three variations are quite complex and brilliant. The theme is marked *Animato*, presented in a gentle theme in triple metre. The first variation is more stormy with rapid passage-work, and with the rising motif then inverted creating a capricious nuance of harmony. The second features a syncopated rhythm, perhaps expressing a light-hearted conversation. The third variation starts in a running style with rapid triplet figures in the right hand, marked *corrente*, suggesting a happy young boy running around playfully. A middle section, in cantabile style, in a Sicilian rhythm, almost serves as a fourth variation, but builds up to the conclusion. The *Finale*, marked *alla Fantasia* in 6/8 metre, features chromatic descending passages, and could be considered a fifth variation in which Schumann expresses his dreams and expectations. In the middle of the finale, Schumann brings the music to a stop and presents two chords marked *ad libitum*. The second chord contains the notes of the *Abegg* theme, and

Schumann releases each of these notes in turn until only a solitary G is left echoing quietly. As each note is released, it is as though his friends are leaving one by one until he is alone. Suddenly the theme from the finale returns and rushes away excitedly, ending in both a sophisticated but innocently humorous mode.

In *Novelletten*, Op. 21, written in 1838, the title, rooted in the word "novel" here becomes a collection of story-like short pieces. Schumann wrote in his letter to Clara describing his new composition, referring jokingly to the well-known soprano Clara Novello:

"Then again, I have written such a frightful amount of music for you over the past three weeks – pranks, Egmontian tales, family scenes with fathers, a wedding, in short, extremely engaging things. I gave this piece the title *Novelletten* because your name is Clara and *Wiecketten* does not sound good enough." (Letter to Clara Wieck, February, 1838)

Schumann also features Florestan and Eusebius, the characters borrowed from the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann. Florestan plays the rôle of the extrovert, contrasted with the introverted gentle character of Eusebius. The first section, *Markiert und kräftig* (Marked and strong), in F major, is a powerful march in full chords with lyrical contrasting trios. In the polyphonic chorale-style third section each voice alternates the melodic line. This is followed by the D major *Äußerst rasch und mit Bravour* (Very fast and bravura), in three-part form. The semiquavers in the first section suggest dashing horses contrasted with playful girls in paradise in the middle section. In the first edition the title of *Sarrasin and Suleika*, a reference to Goethe's *Westöstlichen Divan*, appears. The third part, *Leicht und mit Humor* (Lightly with humour), in D major, begins with dancing fairies in staccato chords, but changes to a

battlefield in the central *Intermezzo*. This was first published separately in a musical supplement to Schumann's *Zeitschrift für Musik* with a quotation from the opening of the witches' scene at the start of *Macbeth*. This is followed by a section marked *BallmäÙig, Sehr munter* (Dancing, very lively), in D major, a Viennese-style waltz with cross-rhythms and lively syncopations, and a middle section which suggests a conversation between a couple. The D major *Rauschend und festlich* (Rustling and Festive) is in rondo form and suggests a festive wedding scene for him and Clara, but his future father-in-law, who opposed their marriage, appears several times in the intervening sections, clouding the festive atmosphere. The sixth part, *Sehr lebhaft, mit vielem Humor* (Very lively with great humour) is in A major. The movement opens with a simple folk-tune but gradually increases in intensity through a modulating melody. Here Florestan dominates, although Eusebius appears just before the final chord and the section closes quietly. This leads to a passage marked *ÄuÙerst rasch* (Very fast), in E major and in three-part form. This begins with a fast waltz contrasted with a cantabile section, *Etwas langsamer* (Somewhat slower). The section marked *Sehr lebhaft* (Very lively), in F sharp minor, is the longest and most episodic. The aggressive theme suggests a man forcing his way through a storm, interrupted by a short gallop, the first Trio in D flat major, a childhood reminiscence. After another stormy episode, the horns announce a triumph over the storm in the second Trio. One episode, *Noch lebhafter* (Still

livelier) includes what Schumann described as *Stimme aus der Ferne* (A voice from afar), quoting a theme from Clara Wieck's *Notturmo* in her *Soirées musicales*. In *Fortsetzung und Schluss* (Continuation and Ending), the mood changes into a festive carnival, returning to the first theme for a majestic ending.

Five years before his death Schumann wrote a set of three pieces, *Drei Fantasiestücke, Op. 111*, revealing his deeply troubled emotions and his deteriorating health and spirits. Played without pause, the pieces are strongly connected by the tonalities, C minor in the first, A flat major partly with C minor in the second, and C minor in the third. The first, marked *Sehr rasch, mit leidenschaftlichem Vortrag*, (Very fast with passionate presentation) is an agitated piece, with its sighing motifs and continuous arpeggios, suggesting a man crying in despair as he rushes through a dark forest. The second piece, *Ziemlich langsam*, (Somewhat slowly), features an expressive chordal song, very Schubertian in character, with a more agitated middle section, then returning to the song. The melody resembles his *Liebeslied* from the *Dichterliebe*. The third, *Kräftig und sehr markiert*, (Strong and well-marked), is a robust march with a melody alternating between soprano and alto lines, framing a trio with repeated chords answered by graceful mystical descending arpeggios, a texture which then returns in the coda.

**Kotaro Fukuma and Karen Knowlton, with assistance from Sarah-Theresa Yoshiko Murakami**

## Kotaro Fukuma

Kotaro Fukuma was born in Tokyo in 1982. He was fascinated by piano music from an early age despite the fact he was born to a family of “non-musicians”. He began his piano studies at the age of five with Kyoko Sato and later studied with Kazumi Igeta until he graduated from high school in Japan. In 2001, he entered the Paris Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique, where he currently studies the piano with Bruno Rigutto and chamber music with Marie-Françoise Bucquet. Kotaro Fukuma was the first-prize winner of the 2003 Cleveland International Piano Competition, where he played Brahms’s *Piano Concerto No. 1* with the Cleveland Orchestra in the finals. In the competition he was also awarded the Chopin Prize. Under the sponsorship of the competition, he made his début recital in the Lincoln Center (Alice Tully Hall) in New York and fulfilled a number of concert engagements in the United States over two seasons. Before coming to Cleveland he had, in 2002, won second prize at the Helsinki International Maj Lind Piano Competition, where he was also awarded the special prize for the best performance of a Finnish piece. In 1998 he won top prizes in four national piano competitions in Japan, including the PTNA Piano Competition, the Sakai Piano Competition, the Young Artists Competition, and the All-Japan Classic Competition. In 1997, at the age of fourteen, he won sixth prize in the Gina Bachauer International Young Artists Piano Competition in Salt Lake City. Kotaro Fukuma has given solo recitals in Japan, France, England, Poland (the 59th Chopin Festival in Duszyni), Italy, Austria, and the United States. In addition to his appearance with the Cleveland Orchestra, he has played with orchestras in Helsinki, Idaho, Oregon, New York, Ohio, and Florida. His performances have been broadcast on radio and television in Japan, France, Finland, Poland, and America.

<http://kotarofukuma.free.fr>



**Kotaro Fukuma**  
Photo: Jack Liebeck

NAXOS

DDD

8.557668

Playing Time  
63:30

WWW.NAXOS.COM

© & © 2005 Naxos Rights International Ltd.  
Booklet notes in English  
Made in Canada

Born in Tokyo, Kotaro Fukuma began his piano studies at the age of five. He entered the Paris Conservatoire in 2001, studying the piano with Bruno Rigutto and chamber music with Marie-Françoise Bucquet. Before his triumph at Cleveland in 2003, when he also won the Chopin Prize, he had already won a number of awards in Japan and in Finland, and at the age of 14 had taken sixth prize in the Gina Bachauer Competition. Kotaro Fukuma has given recitals in Japan and the United States and in a number of countries in Europe.

## KOTARO FUKUMA

### Piano Recital

Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

1 Thème sur le nom Abegg, varié pour le pianoforte, Op. 1 6:55

Novelletten, Op. 21 46:13

2 Markiert und kräftig 4:48

3 Äußerst rasch und mit Bravour 5:43

4 Leicht und mit Humor 4:21

5 Ballmäßig, Sehr munter 3:25

6 Rauschend und festlich 8:42

7 Sehr lebhaft, mit vielem Humor 4:10

8 Äußerst rasch 3:05

9 Sehr lebhaft 11:58

Drei Fantasiestücke, Op. 111 10:22

10 Sehr rasch, mit leidenschaftlichem Vortrag 2:10

11 Ziemlich langsam 4:48

12 Kräftig und sehr markiert 3:24

Recorded at the Performing Arts Centre, The Country Day School, King City, Ontario, Canada,  
9th-12th August 2004

Producers: Norbert Kraft & Bonnie Silver • Engineering: Norbert Kraft • Editing: Bonnie Silver  
Cover Photograph: *Kotaro Fukuma* by Daniel Milner