



SCHUMANN

VLADIMIR FELTSMAN

'Abegg' Variations
Papillons
Davidsbündlertänze
Carnaval
Arabeske Blumenstück
Nachtstücke

SCHUMANN

Vladimir Feltsman

DISC 1

Variations on the name 'Abegg' Op. 1 **9.51**

1	Tema	<i>Animato</i>	1.16
2	Variation I		1.30
3	Variation II		1.23
4	Variation III		1.06
5	Cantabile		1.28
6	Finale	<i>alla Fantasia</i>	3.04

Papillons Op. 2 **16.09**

7	Introduzione	<i>Moderato</i>	0.12
8	No. 1		0.46
9	No. 2	<i>Prestissimo</i>	0.28
10	No. 3		0.46
11	No. 4	<i>Presto</i>	1.03
12	No. 5		1.12
13	No. 6		0.57
14	No. 7	<i>Semplice</i>	0.58
15	No. 8		1.21
16	No. 9	<i>Prestissimo</i>	0.49
17	No. 10	<i>Vivo – Più lento</i>	1.57
18	No. 11		3.05
19	No. 12 Finale		2.28

	 Davidsbündlertänze Op. 6		 36.37
20	I	<i> Lebhaft</i>	1.27
21	II	<i> Innig</i>	1.38
22	III	<i> Mit Humor</i>	1.29
23	IV	<i> Ungeduldig</i>	0.56
24	V	<i> Einfach</i>	2.00
25	VI	<i> Sehr rasch</i>	2.06
26	VII	<i> Nicht schnell</i>	4.03
27	VIII	<i> Frisch</i>	1.13
28	IX	<i> Lebhaft</i>	1.41
29	X	<i> Balladenmässig. Sehr rasch</i>	1.34
30	XI	<i> Einfach</i>	1.53
31	XII	<i> Mit Humor</i>	0.50
32	XIII	<i> Wild und lustig</i>	3.36
33	XIV	<i> Zart und singend</i>	2.40
34	XV	<i> Frisch</i>	1.27
35	XVI	<i> Mit gutem Humor</i>	1.24
36	XVII	<i> Wie aus der Ferne</i>	4.15
37	XVIII	<i> Nicht schnell</i>	2.18
			 Total playing time 62.38

DISC 2

	 Carnival Op. 9		 31.35
1	Préambule	<i> Quasi maestoso</i>	2.27
2	Pierrot	<i> Moderato</i>	1.52
3	Arlequin	<i> Vivo</i>	1.14
4	Valse noble	<i> Un poco maestoso</i>	1.14
5	Eusebius	<i> Adagio – piu lento molto teneramente</i>	2.03

6	Florestan	<i>Passionato</i>	1.06
7	Coquette	<i>Vivo</i>	1.44
8	Replique	<i>L'istesso tempo</i>	1.03
9	Papillons	<i>Prestissimo</i>	0.44
10	A.S.C.H._S.C.H.A (Lettres Dansantes)	<i>Presto</i>	0.45
11	Chiarina	<i>Passionato</i>	1.37
12	Chopin	<i>Agitato</i>	1.16
13	Estrella	<i>Con affetto</i>	0.28
14	Reconnaissance	<i>Animato</i>	1.55
15	Pantalon et Colombine	<i>Presto</i>	1.03
16	Valse Allemande	<i>Molto vivace</i>	0.56
17	Paganini	<i>Intermezzo. Presto</i>	1.27
18	Aveu	<i>Passionato</i>	1.31
19	Promenade	<i>Con moto</i>	2.23
20	Pause	<i>Vivo, precipitandosi</i>	0.20
21	Marche des Davidsbundler contre les Philistins.	<i>Non allegro</i>	4.07
22	Arabeske Op. 18		6.56
23	Blumenstück Op. 19		8.02
	Nachtstücke Op. 23		19.20
24	1	<i>Mehr langsam, oft zurückhaltend</i>	4.43
25	2	<i>Markit und lebhaft</i>	6.26
26	3	<i>Mit grosser Lebhaftigkeit</i>	4.08
27	4	<i>Einfach</i>	4.06

Total playing time 65.54

Schumann - from 'ABEGG' to Nachtstücke

The whole world shines for the poet.

–Jean Paul, *Flegeljahre*

Variations on the name "Abegg" Op. 1 was written by the 20-year-old Schumann in 1830 and dedicated to the fictitious "Countess Pauline von Abegg", whose last name provided Schumann with the theme for his variations – A, B-flat, E, and double G. Although the countess was invented, the name Abegg was not; Schumann had met a talented young pianist named Meta Abegg (1810-1834) in Mannheim while he was a student at Heidelberg. In this, his first work to be published under an opus number, Schumann shows his propensity for mystification and his interest in exploring the notational (musical) representation of the names of people and places that were important to him. Many of his subsequent works will be infused with names, codes, numbers, allusions, and references that point to the extra-musical sources of his inspiration. Schumann himself would say (in reference to *Carnaval*) that deciphering the real meaning of his scores would require effort and be rewarded with plenty of "unexpected" discoveries. (A hundred years later, James Joyce said that it would take critics hundreds of years to figure out the real meaning of his *Ulysses*.) Schumann's natural inclination to mystification, misdirection, and "secret codes" accessible only to the select few was an integral part of his creativity and character.

The theme is given in straight and retrograde modes. Three variations follow. After the third variation there is a passage marked *Andante cantabile*. This could be described as a fourth variation, although Schumann has not labeled it as such. The set concludes with a *Finale alla Fantasia*. The *Abegg Variations* follows a well-established type of virtuosic piano work designed to show off the technical ability of the performer for the delight and amusement of a knowledgeable and sophisticated public. Stylistically Schumann is following in the footsteps of Mendelssohn, Hummel, Weber, and especially Moscheles,

whose *Alexander Variations* were very popular at that time, deploying such readily available tools of the trade as octaves, arpeggios, chord sequences, syncopations, and scales. The most auspicious moment happens in the *Finale* when four of the five notes of the theme are given as one chord that gradually and silently (!) releases each note in the sequence of the theme, thereby setting a precedent for understanding the real intentions of the composer not audibly, but visually. From this moment on, Schumann the Conjuror (and Deceiver) has come to life. *Abegg Variations* is a delightful, unpretentious, and elegant work free of the care, tension, and unresolvable conflicts that would haunt Schumann for the rest of his creative and personal life.

Papillons ("Butterflies") Op. 2, completed in 1831, was inspired by Jean Paul's bulky though unfinished novel *Flegeljahre* ("Awkward Years") published in 1804-5 in four volumes. According to Schumann the masked ball at the end of the book, in which all the main characters are brought together, was his inspiration. He insisted that one should read this part of the novel in order to understand his true intentions, which involve the twin brothers Walt and Vult, who represent the contrast and conflict between the emotional and the intellectual life, and the young Polish woman, Wina, with whom both brothers are in love. (Appropriately, the eleventh piece in the set is a polonaise). Schumann, like Jean Paul, believed that music can tell a story and has a power of description comparable to that of literary and poetic texts – a notion that the young Chopin dismissed out of hand as laughable. Laughable or not, this idea was in vogue at that time, and worked well for Schumann. Most of his piano works have nonmusical underpinnings and literary/poetic inspirations and programs.

Papillons comprises eleven seemingly unrelated parts and a grand finale that brings back the main tune (a waltz) of the opening piece, creating an arch that binds the set together. Like a phantasmagorical theatrical vision, the parts follow each other in a rapid succession, each having its own special character, texture, purpose, and expressiveness. Only one year separates the *Papillons* from the *Abegg Variations*, but these works are miles apart; in *Papillons* Schumann demonstrates his considerable craft and the ability to handle

complex, unconventional, and sophisticated multimovement compositions that will be his hallmark. The opening phrase clearly points to the beginning of the ball (an invitation to the dance) and the finale starts with a quotation from the "*Grossvater Tanz*," a folk melody traditionally played at the conclusion of wedding festivities. After the conclusion of the ball is announced several times, things calm down and gradually fade away while the chimes ring for midnight six times audibly on high A and then silently for six bars on a sustained middle A. In the final bars of *Papillons* Schumann plays the same trick he used in the *Abegg Variations*, gradually releasing the notes in a dominant chord before a sudden and harsh resolution in the tonic D major at the end.

Davidsbündlertänze ("Dances of the League of David") Op. 6 was written in 1836. It includes 18 pieces grouped in two volumes of 9 pieces each. (The early opus number is misleading; this work was composed after *Carnaval* Op. 9 as well as *Symphonic Etudes* Op. 13.) One of the most complex and sophisticated of Schumann's works, it vividly articulates his essential creative principles, imagination, and unique approach to composing. It is a real artistic manifesto, a self-portrait of the artist.

In the first edition of *Davidsbündler* (1837) the whole work was presented as a series of dialogues between Florestan and Eusebius (representing two opposing aspects of Schumann's artistic personality) and there are short descriptions of most of the 18 pieces, emphasizing the character and purpose of each. Schumann carefully revised the work for a second edition (1850), making numerous minor alterations in the score, adding some repeats, and removing the descriptions of the individual pieces. However, the first edition is now used more often than the second. After Schumann's death, Clara edited all his piano works in seven volumes for the publishing house Breitkopf and Hartel. She wanted her beloved husband's legacy to be accepted by the musical establishment and she was ready to take out or soften the most unconventional, controversial, and eccentric features of his music to make it less "strange" and more palatable to consumers. Let's not forget that many of Schumann's works for piano were described as "chaotic", "incoherent",

“unplayable”, and “meaningless” by the musical establishment of his time. The original editions and manuscripts are more representative of Schumann’s unconventional approach to composing, his eccentricity, and unique imagination, than Clara’s more “civilized” editions (*Kreiseriana* is a particularly telling example). Nevertheless, her edition of Schumann’s piano works should not be neglected and still has plenty of value.

Davidsbündler opens with a quotation from a mazurka by Clara Schumann. In a letter to his former teacher, Clara’s father Carl Wieck, Schumann wrote: "She [Clara] was practically my sole motivation for writing the *Davidsbündler*, the Concerto, the Sonata, and the *Novelletes*." This list is far from complete and many of Schumann’s works (*Fantasie* Op.17 in particular) could be regarded as love letters to Clara. After the opening quote from Clara’s mazurka, the theme is transformed into a sequence of ascending and descending passages in both hands, as if dancing a waltz. The second piece is dreamy and nostalgic. It will come back before the end of *Davidsbündler* as a memory of a memory, bringing us to the final piece, a coda of sorts, in C major. The last and ninth pieces of both parts are in C major, creating a tonal arch for the whole cycle, which starts in G major, the dominant. The remaining pieces of the first part explore a variety of three-time dance rhythms (seven out of the nine works in the first part are written in three-time). Five of them point to the extroverted world of Florestan (3,4,6,8,9) and three that are more introverted and intimate point to Eusebius (2,5,7). The second part opens with a fast and turbulent piece that previews the opening of *Kreiseriana* (both are in D minor). Each piece brings its own distinctive character (it is tempting to call the *Davidsbündler* a cycle of “character pieces”), pianistic textures, and expressiveness. Schumann takes us on a journey through the phantasmagoric world created by his boundless creative imagination, which somehow becomes more real and vivid than the world of our everyday life. Recalling the ending of *Papillons*, *Davidsbündler* rings in midnight with twelve Cs in the bass before dissolving into C major and coming to rest, leaving behind a glimmering trace of memory, a glow of shimmering light.

Carnaval (Carnival), Op. 9 was written during 1834-35. Its twenty-one short pieces represent masked revelers during Carnival, the festive season that precedes the austerities of Lent. The tradition of such festivities goes back to the beginning of time—once in a while it is necessary to let off steam, to let it all out. In 1834, Schumann spent a flirtatious summer in the town of Asch in the company of his then-fiancée Ernestine von Fricken, whose hometown it was. The whole piece is based on the four letters of the name of this town, letters also contained in Schumann's last name. The letters appear in three permutations: A, S (E-flat in German), C, H (B natural in German); As (A flat in German), C, H; and E-flat, C, B, A (SCHA). Each of the twenty-one short pieces of *Carnaval* (Schumann did not give a number to the mysterious 'Sphinxes', which is usually omitted in performance) contains one or more variants of these letters, some obvious and some hidden. The music is filled with cryptograms, riddles, humor and misdirection, as if he was teasing the future 'readers' of his works, challenging them to figure out what is really going on and why; as he wrote, 'deciphering my masked ball will be a real game for you'. Schumann peopled his *Carnaval* with his friends and contemporaries—including Chopin and Paganini, Ernestine von Fricken (Estrella), and his wife-to-be Clara Wieck (Chiarina)—and characters from the *Commedia dell'arte* such as Pierrot and Harlequin. The moods, emotions, temperaments, psychological situations and characters are constantly changing, drawing us into this kaleidoscopic and intoxicating action. Throughout the whole work, the presence of the author is tangible—like a true puppet master, Schumann directs his show with a sure hand and a fine sense of humor—the finale of *Carnaval*, *Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins* (March of the League of David against the Philistines) is written in triple time, although a march must be written in even time of two or four.

Carnaval was initially considered too difficult and strange to be performed in public. (Chopin said that it was not music at all.) Over time, however, it became one of Schumann's most popular works for piano and it is now a staple in the repertoire.

Arabeske, Op. 18 and *Blumenstück* (Flower Piece), Op. 19 were composed in 1839. Schumann said that these pieces were written in a 'lighter, more feminine style... delicate—for ladies'. He had left Vienna and moved to Leipzig in August of 1838 and was separated from his beloved Clara, whose father was vehemently opposed to their proposed marriage. The works written during this separation could be seen as the means Schumann used to convey to Clara his longing for her and to bridge the physical distance that divided them. *Arabeske* is a subtle, intimate and unpretentious work, beautifully crafted. The main episode is presented three times without any alteration. The two middle episodes are contrasting in character, and the conclusion (postscriptum) is dreamy and hushed. *Blumenstück* has five thematic episodes (five petals), the second of which is presented three times, making it an eight-petalled flower. The form is unique and not easy to define—it just is a flower ('A rose is a rose...'). *Arabeske* and *Blumenstück* are private and intimate works, not technically challenging. It is hard to imagine that Schumann thought such works could or should be performed in a large concert hall with a thousand-plus people in attendance.

The *Nachtstücke* Op. 23 ("Night Pieces") was written in 1839 and published a year later. While he was working on it, Schumann learned that his older brother Eduard was mortally ill. Schumann had experienced premonitions about his brother's death and he initially thought of calling this composition *Corpse Fantasy* (*Leichenphantasie*). Each of its four pieces had its own title:

1. *Trauerzug* ("Funeral procession")
2. *Kuriose Gesellschaft* ("Strange company")
3. *Nächtliches Gelage* ("Nocturnal revelries")
4. *Rundgesang mit Solostimmen* ("Roundelay with solo voices")

Clara Wieck, then his fiancée, argued in a letter that such a macabre title would turn away potential buyers of the score: "The public won't understand what you mean and it will bother them. I think you should settle for the general title *Night Pieces*." It was good

advice. The title *Nachtstücke* suggested the distinction between the vocalized romantic idioms associated with night music such as the nocturnes of Field and Chopin and Schumann's much darker visions. In the published score the titles for the individual pieces were dropped, but they continue to be used.

The first piece ("Funeral procession") opens with a sequence of short descending chords with syncopations on the third beat, confounding our expectations for a funeral march, which is traditionally syncopated on the second and fourth beats. There is a sense of uncertainty and tonal ambiguity about where Schumann wants us to go; the tonic C major is established clearly only in the eighth bar. The influence of the fourth movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* ("The march to the scaffold") with its recurring phrases and syncopations is obvious. (A few years earlier Schumann had written a long article about this symphony based solely on Liszt's piano transcription, without seeing the actual score.) Descending sequences on top are mirrored by ascending sequences in the bass and there is a sense of contrapuntal tension. The second theme repeats its opening tune three times and suddenly ends, as if not knowing where else to go. This theme is repeated four times back-to-back in different registers. The middle episode introduces the same descending tune, but in a legato singing manner. The main theme comes back, gradually gaining tension and volume, and finally appears in full chords played *ff* (fortissimo) in full power. In the last four bars the theme starts skipping, creating disorienting and unsettling gaps in the melody. (Beethoven used a similar device in his Symphony No 7 at the conclusion of the second movement: "Allegretto".)

Like the first piece, the second ("Strange company") opens with descending chords, but in a more vigorous and mischievous manner. Schumann seems to emphasize the eccentric character of this piece by making it awkward pianistically. The middle part might bring to mind the image of an automaton, an idea explored by romantic writers of the time such as Hoffmann and Poe. In the mystical Jewish tradition of Kabbalah, such a creature, created by magic means, was called a "golem". The character of Schumann's

automaton is not threatening or sinister, but rather clownish. The second piece ends quickly with joyful exuberance.

The beginning of the third piece (“Nocturnal revelries”) is reminiscent of the brilliant opening of *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* Op. 26 (“Carnival Scenes from Vienna”), which was composed at the same time as the *Nachtstücke*. There are two contrasting middle episodes (intermezzos of sorts), the first charged (perhaps overcharged) with romantic expressiveness, and the second much shorter, lighter, and vivacious.

The fourth and last piece (“Roundelay with solo voices) provides a real finale for this work. All that needs to be said has been said and there is not much else to do but to bring this strange and haunting work to a peaceful conclusion. After a short, minimalistic introduction (a door opening), the main theme appears in arpeggiated chords, reminiscent of a guitar or lute. The rhythmic formula of chords from the beginning of the work reappears, but without any tension or threat. A simple melody floats peacefully on top and inside the chords. All is well here. There are some works in which, just before the end, Schumann reveals his true intentions and authorship (with no more masks or assumed personalities). The *Nachtstücke* is one such work.

Vladimir Feltsman © 2023

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Photograph of Vladimir Feltsman by Robert Millard, 2012

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VLADIMIR FELTSMAN Pianist and conductor Vladimir Feltsman is one of the most versatile and constantly interesting musicians of our time. His vast repertoire encompasses music from the Baroque to 20th-century composers. A regular guest soloist with leading symphony orchestras in the United States and abroad, he appears in the most prestigious concert series and music festivals all over the world.

Born in Moscow in 1952, Mr. Feltsman debuted with the Moscow Philharmonic at age 11. In 1969, he entered the Moscow Tchaikovsky State Conservatory of Music to study piano under the guidance of Professor Jacob Flier. He also studied conducting at both the Moscow and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) Conservatories. In 1971, Mr. Feltsman won the Grand Prix at the Marguerite Long International Piano Competition in Paris; extensive touring throughout the former Soviet Union, Europe and Japan followed this. In 1979, because of his growing discontent with the restrictions on artistic freedom under the Soviet regime, Mr. Feltsman signalled his intention to emigrate by applying for an exit visa. In response, he was immediately banned from performing in public and his recordings were suppressed. After eight years of virtual artistic exile, he was finally granted permission to leave the Soviet Union. Upon his arrival in the United States in 1987, Mr. Feltsman was warmly greeted at the White House, where he performed his first recital in North America. That same year, his debut at Carnegie Hall established him as a major pianist on the American and international scene.

A dedicated educator of young musicians, Mr. Feltsman holds the Distinguished Chair of Professor of Piano at the State University of New York, New Paltz, and is a member of the piano faculty at the Mannes College of Music in New York City. He is the founder and Artistic Director of the International Festival-Institute PianoSummer at SUNY New Paltz, a three-week-long, intensive training program for advanced piano students that attracts major young talents from all over the world. Mr. Feltsman's extensive discography has been released on the Melodiya, Sony Classical, and Nimbus labels. Mr. Feltsman is an American citizen and lives with his wife Haewon in upstate New York.

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