

Robert Schumann

Martin Helmchen

piano

Symphonische Etüden, Op.13

Waldszenen, Op.82

Arabeske, Op.18

Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856)

Waldszenen, Op.82

1	Eintritt	1. 58
2	Jäger auf der Lauer	1. 33
3	Einsame Blumen	2. 13
4	Verrufene Stelle	3. 28
5	Freundliche Landschaft	1. 12
6	Herberge	2. 04
7	Vogel als Prophet	3. 42
8	Jagdlied	2. 33
9	Abschied	3. 32

Symphonische Etüden, Op.13

10	Thema	1. 37
11	Variation I	1. 14
12	Variation II	1. 28
13	Étude III	0. 56
14	Anhang Variation I	0. 50
15	Variation III	1. 05
16	Variation IV	0. 58
17	Variation V	0. 55
18	Anhang Variation II	2. 19
19	Anhang Variation III	1. 13
20	Variation VI	1. 09
21	Anhang Variation IV	2. 38
22	Anhang Variation V	2. 28
23	Variation VII	2. 20
24	Étude IX	0. 40
25	Variation VIII	1. 30
26	Variation IX	2. 29
27	Finale	6. 07
28	Arabeske in C, Op.18	6. 05

Martin Helmchen-piano

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Executive producer: Stefan Lang
Recording producer: Sebastian Stein
Balance engineer: Everett Porter
Recording engineer: Everett Porter
Editing: Sebastian Stein
Piano Technician: Thomas Hübsch

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Robert Schumann

"[...] I am affected by everything that is happening in the world, politics, literature, people – in my own way, I think about everything, which then bursts to the surface through music, trying to find a way out. That is why so many of my compositions are so difficult to understand – because they are linked to distant interests – and often also striking; for all that is strange grabs my attention, and I then have to express it again in music." Thus Robert Schumann wrote to his fiancée Clara Wieck in 1838. Until 1839, the piano was Schumann's favourite medium. As he was wont to say: "What people cannot give me, music can; and the piano expresses all the higher emotions that I cannot express."

Symphonic Etudes

In 1834, Robert Schumann met the 17-year-old Ernestine von Fricken, a new pupil of his former teacher, Friedrich Wieck. The girl had been adopted by Ignaz Ferdinand Freiherr von Fricken, a fervent amateur musician, who was a reasonable flautist. Although at that time, Schumann was already seeing Wieck's daughter Clara, this did not prevent him from seeking out Ernestine's company. He wrote as follows: "[She has] a marvellously pure, childish nature, [is] gentle and sensitive, loves me as well as anything that has to do with art. She is extraordinarily musical; in short, precisely as I had imagined my future wife to be." The couple got engaged in strict secrecy, but their happiness was not to last long. Friedrich Wieck saw the relationship as a means to ban Schumann from the life of his own daughter, and recommended him to the baron as a "somewhat moody, stubborn, but noble, glorious, enthusiastic, highly talented composer and writer; a genius with a most profound intellectual development." However, the baron was not in the least impressed, and summoned his daughter back home to Asch. And that was that. Schumann made a matter-of-fact notation in his diary: "Broke up with Ernestine." However, Clara did not attempt to conceal her jealousy, and wrote cynically: "The sun was burning down on her too fiercely – i.e. Herr Schumann". Schumann did not give Clara an explanation for his behaviour until four years later: "At the time, you did not concern yourself much with me, and you were also in the transitional stage from child to young woman. And then Ernestine turned up – a girl as good as the world has ever produced – and I thought, she is the one; she will save you. I wanted more than anything to cling to a female."

As far as music was concerned, the affaire with Ernestine left its mark. The letters in the name of the town of Asch (A – S – C – H = in English, the note names for A – E-flat – C – B) combine with the motif S – C – H – A (SCHumAnn = in English, the notes E-flat – C – B – A) to form the musical material for the piano cycle *Carnaval – Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes*, Op. 9 (= little scenes on four notes). When questioned

about the significance of the name Asch, Schumann later declared without any show of emotion that it was the name of a little town in which a "musical acquaintance" dwelled.

In addition, Schumann used a theme in C sharp minor composed by the baron in the style of a funeral march as the basis for a series of variations: the *Symphonic Etudes*, Op.13. The Etudes have a long and complicated history. Schumann began work on the cycle in 1834, but repeatedly set it aside in favour of other compositions. This also changed the structure and character of the piece. Initially, Schumann wanted to use the baron's theme in a series of character variations – analogous to Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* – culminating in a major triumph march. Later on, he decided against this and introduced a new theme in the finale, based on a refrain with the significant title "Du stolzes England, freue dich!" (= you proud-hearted England, rejoice) from the opera *Der Templer und die Jüdin* by Heinrich Marschner. This was in deference to the English composer William Sterndale Bennett, to whom the Etudes were dedicated.

The title of the work was also subject to change. After discarding choices such as *Variations pathétiques* and *Etüden im Orchestercharacter von Florestan und Eusebius* – Schumann's alter egos from his *Davidsbund* – he finally selected *Symphonische Etüden* (= symphonic etudes) as the title for the first edition, which appeared in 1837. The references in these titles to the orchestral and the symphonic are well-chosen; for despite all their virtuosity, these etudes are not so much finger exercises for the pianist as studies concerning the suggestion of orchestral effects on the piano.

In 1852, Schumann revised the work and deleted two of the pieces. Moreover, he gave the work a new title that expressed its variation character more thoroughly: *Études en forme de variations*. In 1861, five years after Schumann's death, Friedrich Wieck published an edition compiling the various versions of the work. This was also the edition used by Clara Schumann in her concerts. But this was not the end of the story: for the edition published by Johannes Brahms in 1890 contained five additional variations formerly deleted by Schumann before publication. Some pianists have since included these, as has done Martin Helmchen in this CD. **Arabeske (= Arabesque)**

One year after the completion of his *Symphonic Etudes*, Schumann wrote that he had composed "an awful lot". And he was not far wrong; his compositions that year – 1838 – included the *Kinderszenen*, *Kreisleriana*, the *Fantasie in C*, and the *Piano Sonata No. 2*. For one more year, Schumann dedicated himself almost exclusively to composing piano music; after that, he turned his attention mainly to the art-song.

Around the end of the year 1838, Schumann was in Vienna com-

posing a minor piano work: the *Arabesque*, Op.18. The title “Arabesque” here refers mainly to the literary form described by Friedrich Schlegel, in which the material structures itself in a natural, seemingly chaotic, but totally organic manner. Nevertheless, Schumann’s *Arabesque* is composed in a fairly classic rondo form, with two couplets and a coda. The style is remarkably light and, in Schumann’s own words, “weiblich” (= feminine); and the chosen key of C major is in keeping with that. In Christian Schubart’s book on musical aesthetics, which Schumann studied with great attention, this key is associated with the simple, the naïve and the natural.

Waldszenen (= Forest Scenes)

“As they entered, they saw Dorian Gray. He was seated at the piano, with his back to them, turning over the pages of a volume of Schumann’s *Forest Scenes*. ‘You must lend me these, Basil!’ he cried. ‘I want to learn them. They are perfectly charming.’”

“Perfectly charming”: thus Oscar Wilde defines Schumann’s *Waldszenen*, Op. 82 in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Unlike the Symphonic Etudes, which were conceived as music for the concert hall, the *Waldszenen* from 1848/49 are intimate salon pieces, or, as described by pianist and musicologist Charles Rosen, “harmless urban fictions of country life”. Although ... the music is not really quite so innocent. Some parts, such as *Verrufene Stelle* (= disreputable place), contain a threatening, underlying suspense. Nature – raw, menacing and demonic, but also as a source of strength, new life and spirituality – is one of the main themes in the art of the nineteenth century. Thus it is also in the work of Schumann, with an emphasis on his songs to texts by Eichendorff and Heine.

Written between December 29, 1848 and January 6, 1849 in Dresden, the nine short pieces in *Waldszenen* represent his last major piano cycle – indeed, although his *Bunte Blätter* (= coloured leaves) were published in 1852 as Op. 99, they were actually composed between 1836 – 1841. In a certain sense, the work can be seen as an extension of his

Kinderszenen (= scenes from childhood) from 1838 and his *Album für die Jugend* (= album for the young) from 1848. Whereas in these two works, Schumann submerges himself in the world of the child – referring to the *Album*, he mentions “false pretences, premonitions, future situations for the young” – his *Waldszenen* depict an internal musical monologue taking place during a walk in the forest.

His source of inspiration for the cycle was Heinrich Laube’s *Jagdbrevier* (= hunting breviary) from 1841; and a line from the latter’s poem *Böser Ort* (= evil place) served as a motto for the above-mentioned *Verrufene Stelle*. Some of the other pieces also originally possessed literary headings, for instance, by Joseph von Eichendorff and Gustav Pfarrus. However, Schumann deleted these texts before publication.

Compared to other works composed for the piano, the simple design and lack of contrast have led to the work being under-appreciated. However, this is not fair. The thoughtful and mature character is indeed a characteristic of Schumann’s later style, as Charles Rosen also remarks when reviewing the work: “*Waldszenen* is one of Schumann’s most exquisite achievements: it gives the lie to anyone who thinks that Schumann’s genius disappeared after the great year and a half of Lieder writing – but it also betrays how true it is that much of the earlier energy had abandoned his genius [...]. The *Waldszenen* are autumnal in character, the work of a truly aging composer, although Schumann was not yet forty when he wrote them.”

Martin Helmchen

Martin Helmchen was born in Berlin in 1982. He received his first piano lessons at the age of six. From 1993 until graduating from school in 2000 he was a student of Galina Iwanzowa at the Hanns Eisler Academy in Berlin. After 2001, he studied with Arie Vardi at the “Hochschule für Musik und Theater” in Hannover. His career received its first major impulse after winning the Clara Haskil Competition in 2001.

Orchestras with which Martin Helmchen has performed include: the Deutsche Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin, RSO Stuttgart, Bamberg Symphoniker, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Royal Flemish Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the chamber orchestras of Zurich, Amsterdam, Vienna, Lausanne, Cologne and Munich. He has worked with conductors such as Marek Janowski, Philippe Herreweghe, Marc Albrecht, Vladimir Jurowski, Jiri Kout, Bernhard Klee, and Lawrence Foster.

Martin Helmchen has been a guest at the Ruhr Piano Festival, Kissinger Summer Festival, the Festivals in Lockenhaus, Jerusalem, Spoleto (Italy), the Rheingau Music Festival, the Spannungen Chamber-Music Festival in Heimbach, the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival, the Schwetzingen Festival, the Schleswig-Holstein Festival, as well as the Marlboro Festival in Vermont (USA).

Chamber music is a highly valued part of Martin Helmchen’s life, which he always includes in his performance programme. For years now, he has collaborated closely with Boris Pergamenschikow till his decease in 2004; at present, he regularly gives concerts and recitals with Heinrich Schiff and Danjulo Ishizaka. Furthermore, he has partnered Gidon Kremer, Christian Tetzlaff, Isabelle Faust, Daniel Hope, Antje Weithaas, Tabea Zimmermann, Sharon Kam and Lars Vogt.

The young pianist Martin Helmchen has already been awarded two of the most important prizes in the music scene: the Crédit Suisse Young Artist Award and the ECHO Klassik. He received the Crédit Suisse Award in September 2006. The prize included his début with the Vienna Philharmonic under Valery Gergiev, performing Schumann’s Piano Concerto during the Lucerne Festival. He was awarded the ECHO prize jointly with cellist Danjulo Ishizaka, as “Nachwuchskünstler des Jahres” (= up-and-coming artist of the year).

Martin Helmchen has signed an exclusive contract with the Pentatone Classics label.

