

[1] **Robert Schumann
in Words and Music**
Written by Davinia Caddy
Read by Leighton Pugh

[2] **Robert Schumann (1810–1856)**
Carnaval: Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes, Op. 9 ('Little Scenes on Four Notes') – No. 13. Estrella
from Naxos 8.573399 Track 43

[3] Leafing through the latest biographies of the 19th-century German composer Robert Schumann, it is tempting to fast-forward to the final chapters: a painful tale of professional decline, psychological morbidity and physical wasting-away. Indeed, the circumstances surrounding Schumann's death on 29 July 1856 are arguably more well-known than the details of his life – that is, his 46 years, 8 children, various municipal appointments and vast array of orchestral, chamber and vocal music. Well known, but not necessarily well understood. A large part of the lure and intrigue over Schumann's demise stems from its essential ambiguity: the lack of concrete facts. Given his reported symptoms – nervous agitation, psychosis, convulsive fits, delusions and general exhaustion – one modern-day medical viewpoint is that he died from syphilis, a venereal disease that he likely contracted during his hedonistic student days, and that could well have remained latent during most of his 16-year marriage to piano prodigy Clara Wieck. A related hypothesis is that his symptoms stemmed from mercury poisoning, mercury being a very common treatment for syphilis during the period. A third possibility relates his neurological suffering to an intracranial mass, some sort of gelatinous tumour at the base of the brain. Then there is his likely schizophrenia and manic-depressive disorder – possibly inherited from his father (who is thought to have died from a nervous episode) – that first manifested itself in the summer of 1833 and specifically in relation to the successive deaths, from tuberculosis, of his brother Julius and beloved sister-in-law Rosalie.

It is the stuff of Hollywood drama: hence *Song of Love*, a watchable but wildly inaccurate 1947 MGM biopic starring Paul Henreid and Katharine Hepburn as Herr and Frau Schumann. In fact, such is the level of interest in Schumann's psychological and physical decline – in those final years spent in a private asylum – that it is difficult to take stock of his life without being swept into the tumult. To put this another way, Schumann's death seems to have retroactively influenced our understanding and appreciation of his achievements and broader artistic pursuits – not only as a composer, but as a writer and keen intellect. Indeed, as historian John Daverio has acknowledged, Schumann – even in his mature years – was identified by his peers primarily as a man of letters, not as a composer; his musical creativity played second fiddle to his intellectual prowess and literary talent. Each of these aptitudes has been pathologized over the years, and to the extent that, nowadays, it is commonplace to read of Schumann's musical output as somehow symptomatic of his significant neuroses. Take, for example, the words of American psychiatrist and pianist Dr Richard Kogan, for whom Schumann's 21-movement piano suite *Carnaval*, from which we heard an extract a moment ago, 'stands as practically a catalogue of bipolar symptoms'. At a recent conference on composers and mental illness, Kogan was definitive on the issue, arguing that *Carnaval* 'could not have been written by somebody who did not have bipolar disorder.'

There we have it: a seemingly conclusive medical diagnosis of the characteristics of Schumann's music – the contrasting moods, fleeting interjections, motifs tumbling forth – that early listeners found troubling and bizarre. Can any more be said on the subject? The challenge, at least in this short life history, is to try to maintain a sense of objectivity: to keep a check on the urge to pathologize poor Schumann and turn his music into a kind of neurotic autobiography. For there are other straws in the wind, other biographical themes to consider. And none are more important, it seems, than the literary enthusiasm that propelled Schumann's life and career. As a composer and practising musician, not to mention a music critic, poet, novelist and dramatist, Schumann was, first and foremost, a rare poetic genius, a quintessential Romantic artist whose works were informed by fantasy and illusion. Many of these works were referential in nature: that is, they carried overt extra-musical associations or quasi-literary titles. Others were more abstract, harbouring veiled allusions – an intimate kind of musical poetry. As this biography will reveal, Schumann's interest in words, moods, scenes and stories – his literary credentials – seeped into his compositional process; his imagination took flight over his musical manuscript paper.

[4] **Kinderszenen, Op. 15 ('Scenes from Childhood') – No. 7. Träumerei ('Dreaming')**
from Capriccio C49042 Track 2

[5] One of Schumann's best loved melodies: *Träumerei* ('Dreaming') from his 1838 piano collection *Kinderszenen* ('Scenes from Childhood'), described by the composer as an adult's musical reminiscence – or, as he wrote in a letter to wife Clara, a response to her comment that he sometimes seemed to her as a child. Technically undemanding, the ingenious simplicity of the haunting movement is trademark Schumann, the musical miniaturist: the composer captures the perceived innocence and naivety of childhood, as well as a swaying, lullaby-like motion.

Schumann's own childhood, which began in the town of Zwickau, Saxony, was rich with both music and literature. Born on 8 June 1810 to August Schumann, a bookseller, translator and publisher, and Johanna Christiane (née Schnabel), Robert Alexander combined primary school tuition in Latin, Greek and French with, from the age of seven, private piano lessons from Johann Gottfried Kuntsch, organist at the local St Mary's church. Continuing his studies at the Zwickau Gymnasium or high school, Schumann took flute and cello lessons with a Herr Meissner, the municipal music director, and first appeared publicly as a pianist in performances of works by Ignaz Pleyel, Ferdinand

Ries, Ignaz Moscheles and Carl Maria von Weber. Even in these early years, though, intense creativity characterised his youthful pursuits. While embarking on a number of independent literary projects (poems, dramatic scenes, biographical sketches of famous composers), he also began a series of musical compositions: the beginnings of an opera, never completed; an overture and chorus; and a Psalm setting for soprano and alto. Better known are his first extant songs, set to texts by Lord Byron, Ernst Schulze, Justinus Kerner and Schumann himself. Of these, the Kerner settings were sent by Schumann to the now forgotten composer and Brunswick Kapellmeister Gottlob Wiedebein, for commentary and criticism. Wiedebein was positive overall ('here and there a truly poetic feeling'; 'a genuine spirit blazes'), but warned the budding composer against unbridled fantasy – perhaps a reference to the frequent tempo changes, unexpected harmonic progressions and asymmetrical phrase lengths in a song such as *To Anna, I*. Incidentally, Schumann's early songs are thought to have been inspired by a family friend and amateur singer named Agnes Carus, who visited the Schumanns' Zwickau home in 1827. The young Robert, it appears, became quite infatuated with his female house guest, penning a series of songs about unfulfilled longing and romantic seduction. *To Anna, I* is exemplary, a despairing love song about a distant beloved, 'a quiet angel of peace to hill and vale'.

[6] **Jugend-Lieder nach Kerner – An Anna I, WoO 21, No. 6 ('To Anna, I')**
from Naxos 8.557077 Track 24

[7] In late March 1828, after leaving high school, Schumann matriculated at the University of Leipzig to study Law. He did so reluctantly and following family pressure: his father, recently deceased, had stipulated that the composer must pursue a three-year course of tertiary study in order to receive his inheritance. According to all accounts, however, Schumann spent most of his time away from the lecture hall, preferring instead to practice piano, compose songs and attempt to write novels: he particularly enjoyed reading and modelling his own work on literature by the early 19th-century writer Jean Paul (the pseudonym of Johann Paul Richter), known for its narrative interruptions and digressions, and, in Schumann's own words, its 'threefold spirit of feeling, humour and wit'. At the same time, Schumann became a pupil of the esteemed local piano tutor Friedrich Wieck, thanks to whom he met the musical elite of Leipzig, as well as his tutor's then nine-year-old daughter, and Schumann's future wife, Clara. As well as songs, Schumann busied himself composing four-hand piano variations on a theme by Louis Ferdinand, as well as a *Piano Quartet in C minor*, perhaps inspired by the informal ensemble in which he regularly performed alongside three friends from university. Begun in November 1828 and completed in late March the next year, the *Quartet* represented Schumann's most ambitious work to date. Indeed, the composer spoke of plans to turn the four-movement work into a symphony, something he never did: the work itself was never performed publicly during Schumann's lifetime, following an informal rehearsal that March. Yet the composer seems to have held the *Quartet* in high regard. Some 20 years later, he wrote in his diary of 'a passage ... which seemed to me to be Romantic, and where a spirit was revealed to me that differed from the style of my earlier music, as if a new poetic life were opening up to me.' Certainly, the passage he seems to have had in mind – the central section of the second movement minuet – is evocative: listen to the wistful E minor dance tune, its lilting rhythms, expressive appoggiaturas (non-harmony notes) and delicate scoring, particularly as the cello takes over the melody, accompanied by pizzicato violin and viola, and pulsating chords in the piano.

[8] **Piano Quartet in C minor, Anh. E1 – II. Minuetto. Presto**
from SWR SWR10002 Track 2

[9] In the summer of 1829, Schumann left Leipzig for Heidelberg, ostensibly to continue his studies – his Law studies, that is – at the local university. Yet, still, he failed to attend lectures, spending his time taking private lessons in French, Italian, English and Spanish, and pursuing a variety of musical activities: four-hand piano duets with close friend Anton Töpken; run-throughs en-masse of Handel oratorios; and performances of Moscheles's variations on *La Marche d'Alexandre* – performances successful enough to earn him the epithet 'the darling of the Heidelberg public'. Indeed, Schumann was at this time practising the piano with a view to becoming a leading virtuoso: his plan was to abandon Law and concentrate fully on piano performance, returning to Leipzig and to the tutelage of Wieck, who reassured Schumann's anxious mother of her son's pianistic potential. Schumann himself likely needed no such reassurance. Experimenting with a chiroplast (or 'cigar-mechanism', as he called it) in order to strengthen his fingers, the budding pianist set about fashioning himself into a virtuoso composer-performer in the tradition of Moscheles and Niccolò Paganini. Consider his very first publication of November 1831, the so-called *Abegg Variations*, composed in the summer of 1830 while Schumann was still in Heidelberg. Dedicated to the seemingly fictional Comtesse Pauline d'Abegg, the work combines impressive virtuosity and pianistic pizzazz with careful construction – the principal theme, an elegant waltz tune, derives from the surname Abegg, encoded in the musical notes A, B flat, E, G, G. Schumann seems to have had a positive, almost rapturous impression of the work, gushing to his mother in a letter about its transformative expression: 'What hopes and prophetic visions fill my soul's heaven ... Is it not a consoling thought that this first leaf of my fancy that flutters into the ether may find its way to some sore heart, bringing balm to soothe its pain and heal its wound?'

[10] **Abegg Variations, Op. 1**
from Naxos 8.578083-84 Disc 2 Track 29

[11] Schumann departed Heidelberg for Leipzig in September 1830: by 20 October he was lodging with the Wiecks in their home in the town's Grimmaische Vorstadt and practising piano for up to seven hours each day, having temporarily stopped writing in his diary and essentially stopped composing. But his dreams of pianistic success were soon to be dashed. Disenchanted with Wieck's teaching, and experiencing quite severe pain and numbness in the middle finger of his right hand, Schumann abandoned all hopes of a career as a virtuoso pianist, immersing himself in the contrasting worlds of strict musical counterpoint (he began to take music theory lessons from composer-conductor Heinrich Dorn) and literary Romanticism, particularly the fantastical style spawned by German writer E. T. A. Hoffmann. Now attempting to embark on a career as a full-time composer, Schumann began a number of related musical projects, which existed in varying degrees of completion: an opera libretto based on Hoffmann's early novel *Die Bergwerke zu Falun* ('The Mines at Falun'); various contrapuntal studies in the style of J. S. Bach; piano transcriptions of Paganini's *Caprices* for solo violin; piano reductions of Beethoven symphonic movements; an opera on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; and a symphony in G minor. This is not to mention a series of new and

innovative solo piano works that, together, came to define Schumann's early compositional aesthetic. The first of these works was *Papillons* ('Butterflies'), a real attempt on the composer's part at a fusion of music and specifically literary ideas. Published in November 1831 as Schumann's opus 2, and comprising twelve miniature dance pieces, *Papillons* was based explicitly on a masked ball scene from the end of Jean Paul's *Flegeljahre* (roughly translated to 'The Adolescent Years'), a novel Schumann described as 'like the Bible in kind'. As the composer wrote home in a letter of April 1832: 'Read the last scene in Jean Paul's *Flegeljahre* as soon as possible, because the *Papillons* are intended as a musical representation of that masquerade.' Indeed, the final chapters of the novel were more than a crude catalyst for musical creation: Schumann's copy of the novel contains specific annotations in the composer's hand associating individual numbers in the score with passages in Jean Paul's text. The result was a constellation of contrasting musical fragments with concomitant changes of dramatic mood – lyrical, elegant, rustic, furious, sensual, joyful and comic. These kaleidoscopic fluctuations in what were essentially popular musical materials (such as waltzes, polonaises and well-known tunes) made the work difficult to understand for its first listeners. After a performance by Clara during a musical soirée at the Wieck family home in late May 1832, Schumann recorded that his audience, 'incapable of grasping the rapid alternation of the pieces, looked at one another in amazement'. A review in the *Allgemeine musikalischer Anzeiger Wien*, also from the summer of 1832, suggested a similar listener's response to the 'twelve rhapsodic pieces, some shorter and some longer, in varying keys, tempi, and rhythms, but mainly teasing, lightly and coquettish'; 'Schumann has created a new ideal world in which he mischievously revels, often with an original bizarrerie.' The final movement expertly depicts the end of the ball, the dispersal of the assembly and the chiming of a clock: it is six o'clock in the morning and the music – a quirky yet simple waltz tune from the suite's first movement combined with a quotation from the well-known popular number *Grandfather's Dance* – vanishes into thin air. A short coda offers an ingenious sound effect as the notes of an arpeggiated chord are slowly released by the pianist, one by one, until only a single pitch remains.

[12] **Papillons, Op. 2 ('Butterflies') – XII. Finale**
from Naxos 8.573399 Track 30

[13] The summer of 1833 brought with it a deep depression that would later recur at roughly evenly spaced periods throughout the composer's life. This, the first such depressive episode, was seemingly brought on by Schumann's contraction, in July, of malarial fever, followed by news of the deaths of his brother Julius and his wife. Fearful of heights, sleeping alone and, most worryingly, of going mad, Schumann began to exhibit the various neuroses and suicidal thoughts that would come to characterise his mature psychological condition. Yet this initial neurotic spell lasted only a few months, Schumann's recuperation expedited by his establishment of a new music journal – one that would develop into a major critical mouthpiece for the composer. Central to this project was Schumann's vision of a group of musicians, like-minded artists and intellectuals – based on real-life friends and associates – who together sought to 'erect a barrier against musical convention': that is, against Italianate frivolity in the opera house, and empty virtuosity in the concert hall. Coining the term 'Davidsbund' ('The Tribe of David') to describe his semi-fictional society of musical crusaders, named after biblical King David who famously fought against the Philistines, Schumann set out to lambast vulgar musical tastes and inferior composers, promoting instead the music of Mozart, Beethoven, Weber and Chopin. Indeed, the 'Davidsbund' would become one of Schumann's favourite literary inventions, popping up in his various journal articles and providing, for the composer, two important personae or alter-egos through which he could speak to his readers: the impetuous and passionate Florestan; and the studious introvert Eusebius.

Aiming 'to prepare for and hasten the advent of a new, poetic future', Schumann's journal – titled *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* – emerged at roughly the same time as the composer's first real love affair. This was an intense but short-lived relationship with an 18-year-old Ernestine von Fricken, daughter of a rich Bohemian-born noble and also a piano student of Wieck. Ernestine, to whom Schumann became engaged in September 1834 (the journal was founded in April of that year), was not only an amorous companion of the composer; she directly inspired the next two in his series of impressive solo piano works: the *Études symphoniques*, based on a melody by her father, an amateur musician; and *Carnaval*, the multi-movement suite we heard at the outset of this biography. The latter, completed in early 1835, has taken on particular importance in Schumann's life history, and not only for its dependence on a musical motif that derives from the name of Ernestine's home town, Asch – now part of the Czech Republic. As well as its clever musical cipher, *Carnaval* offers a colourful array of musical fragments titled after members of Schumann's imaginary 'Davidsbund', including the *commedia dell'arte* figures Pierrot and Harlequin, as well as the real-life characters Ernestine, Clara, Paganini, Chopin and Schumann himself – in the twin guises of Florestan (fiery and extrovert) and Eusebius (calm and deliberate).

[14] **Carnaval: Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes, Op. 9 – No. 5. Eusebius – No. 6. Florestan**
from Naxos 8.573399 Tracks 35 and 36

[15] Schumann's affair with Ernestine ended towards the end of 1835, a few months after the composer discovered her illegitimate birth – and thus that she had no dowry. At roughly the same time, however, Schumann began a relationship with Clara, his piano teacher's daughter, then 15 years old – 9 years younger than Schumann himself. This relationship was troubled from the outset – largely because of opposition from Herr Wieck: while, it seems, the piano master was happy to have Schumann as a high-achieving pupil, he thought him unsuitable as a suitor for his daughter. Clara returned Schumann's growing affections but initially obeyed her father when ordered to break off the relationship. Schumann thus found himself abandoned and despairing for what would be 18 months: that is, until early August 1836, when Clara made contact with Schumann through a lawyer, inviting him to a forthcoming performance of his own *Études symphoniques*.

During this fraught period, Schumann composed various works bound up with Clara, including his F sharp minor *Piano Sonata*, completed in August 1835, which developed a motif from one of Clara's own compositions; his three-movement *Concert sans orchestre*, from June 1836, which comprised four variations on a no longer extant *Andantino de Clara Wieck*; and his 1837 suite *Davidsbündlertänze* ('Dances of the Tribe of David'), which featured characters from his semi-fictional musical society. The last of these, which also included a quotation from the fifth movement of Clara's piano collection *Soirées musicales*, was in fact begun immediately after Schumann and Clara's reunion and engagement in mid-August 1837, an engagement that, unauthorised by her father, sparked a long and acrimonious legal battle – not to mention months of emotional turmoil, heavy drinking and nervous agitation on Schumann's part. Curiously, during this period of intense

difficulty and depression, Schumann experienced something of a creative spurt, producing yet more impressive solo piano music: not only his commercially successful *Kinderszenen*, from which we heard an extract earlier, but his eight *Novelletten* or novelettes, which quoted another work by Clara and showcased the composer's newly acquired contrapuntal technique, and his rhapsodic suite *Kreisleriana* – named after Johannes Kreisler, the fictional musician famously created by Hoffmann in the early 1810s. The last is an eight-movement emotional rollercoaster, seemingly inspired by the half-mad musical genius of Kreisler himself, an eccentric Kapellmeister, known for his mercurial mood swings, with whom Schumann clearly both empathised and identified. Composed, according to Schumann, in only four days in April 1838, *Kreisleriana* has been described by critics as an early masterpiece. Each movement comprises contrasting sections, resembling the unsettling shifts of character associated not only with Kreisler, but with Schumann's own Florestan and Eusebius, the personae used to depict his impulsive and reflexive sides. Each movement also explores a musical style pushed to extremes: according to Schumann's performance directions, 'as fast as possible', 'very intimate', 'very excited', 'very slow', 'very agitated' and so forth. Here is an extract from the tumultuous yet occasionally tender first movement, marked 'very animated' by the composer.

- [16] **Kreisleriana, Op. 16 – I. Äusserst bewegt**
from Naxos 8.550783 Track 1

- [17] 'Sometimes your music actually frightens me, and I wonder: is it really true that the creator of such things is going to be my husband?' The words of Clara, spoken in response to Schumann's latest foray into the daredevil virtuosity yet gentle lyricism of Kreisler's – or was it his own? – musical imagination. Formally engaged, though still facing opposition from Clara's father, the couple had hopes of settling in Vienna: Schumann would relocate his journal to a Viennese publisher; and Clara would obtain a teaching position at the Conservatory. But the aspiration came to nothing. While Schumann tasted and enjoyed Vienna's rich and varied cultural life – chancing upon unknown manuscripts by Franz Schubert courtesy of a meeting with Schubert's brother Ferdinand – he remained relatively depressed and inactive as a composer. His situation was to worsen on his return to Leipzig on 14 April 1839: news from Clara, writing from Paris, was that her father planned to disinherit her and confiscate her earnings if she and Schumann continued their relationship. Schumann's response was to draw up a petition to the court of appeal in Leipzig, asking permission for the plaintiffs to marry; yet this only further stoked Wieck's anger and fury, prompting his own eleven-page 'Declaration' maintaining Schumann's unsuitability for marriage and, particularly, his persistent drunkenness. Schumann again responded with a written refutation, now threatening to sue Wieck for slander; Wieck was given a six-month period by the court in which to prove Schumann's over-indulgence in alcohol; but he could not find the necessary proof. Finally, on 18 July 1840, the court arrived at its decision, granting legal permission for Schumann and Clara to marry; the marriage ceremony took place on 12 September at the local church of Schönefeld, a suburb of Leipzig – this was one day before Clara's 21st birthday.

The last six to seven months of this sorry saga saw another flurry of compositional activity. Yet whereas, until this period, Schumann had written almost exclusively for the piano, he now busily pursued the composition of songs. 1840, his self-declared 'Year of Song', witnessed the creation of no less than 138 songs, including nearly all of those on which his mature musical reputation rests, most notably the cycles *Dichterliebe* ('Poet's Love') and *Frauenliebe und -leben* ('Woman's Love and Life'). No doubt bound up with emotions aroused during his quest for Clara and the uncertainties of their future together, *Dichterliebe* – a setting of 16 poems from Heinrich Heine's 1827 *Buch der Lieder* – explored the topic of love in all its affective nuances: joy, hope, delight, doubt, sorrow, loss, anger, pain, mourning, tranquillity and reconciliation. Indeed, the various changes of mood characteristic of Schumann's early piano repertoire here found dramatic motivation as the composer traced the emotional journey of the poet-cum-protagonist, a dejected lover whose beloved has married another. Schumann brings out Heine's characteristically ironic commentary in the eleventh song of the cycle, *Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen*:

*A young man loves a maiden
Whose heart for another has yearned
The other loves another
By whom his love is returned.*

*The maiden weds in anger
The first good man she spies
Who runs into her pathway
The youth grows bitter and wise.*

*It is an old, old story
But one that's always new
And every time it happens
It breaks a heart in two.*

Listen to the ways in which Schumann's music – especially the quirky, jaunty and almost playful piano part, with strong accents on the weak beats of the bar – expresses indifference to the heartbreak of Heine's text. As critic Michael Saffle has noted, 'Irony in this song is established through the unmistakable incongruity of sorrowful words set to cheerful music.'

- [18] **Dichterliebe, Op. 48 ('Poet's Love') – No. 11. Ein Jüngling liebt ein Mädchen ('A young man loves a maiden')**
from Naxos 8.557075 Track 22

- [19] If 1840 was Schumann's year of song, then 1841 was his year of orchestral music: indeed, Schumann seemed to be living his creative life in spurts, spending roughly a year on one style or genre before abruptly moving on to another. As a result of Clara's prompting, Schumann engaged in what a recent critic calls 'a comprehensive exploration of the symphonic medium', one that gave rise to two symphonies, an *Overture*, *Scherzo and Finale*, and a *Fantasie* for piano and orchestra. Schumann's first completed symphony, titled 'Spring', was composed characteristically quickly: as Schumann noted in his diary, 'The symphony has given me so many hours of bliss; I

thank my guardian angel for letting me finish this large work with such ease.' It was an immediate success when premiered on 31 March by the Leipzig Gewandhaus orchestra, with Felix Mendelssohn conducting. According to Schumann, the symphony 'was received with such enthusiasm as I don't think has been accorded any symphony since Beethoven'. Indeed, like Beethoven's *'Pastoral' Symphony*, Schumann's *'Spring'* lies midway between abstract and programme music: inspired by a poem by Leipzig writer Adolph Böttger, the work captures what Schumann called 'the spirit of Spring' by means of a complex network of inter-movement motivic linkages. The principal theme of the first movement, for example, a lively and buoyant *Allegro*, is but a close variant of the opening fanfare of the *Maestoso* introduction:

[20] **Symphony No. 1 in B flat major, Op. 38 'Spring' – I. Andante un poco maestoso – Allegro molto vivace**
from Naxos 8.553228 Track 1

[21] 1842 witnessed another creative departure: chamber music, resulting in three string quartets, a *Piano Quintet in E flat*, a *Piano Quartet in E flat*, and his *Phantasiestücke* for piano trio. Then came 1843, a new job as a composition teacher in Mendelssohn's recently opened Leipzig Conservatory of Music, and a new concentration: the so-called 'secular oratorio' *Das Paradies und die Peri* ('Paradise and the Peri'), based on a tale from *Lalla Rookh*, an Oriental epic romance by the Irish poet Thomas Moore, published to great acclaim in 1817. His creativity sparked by a German translation of Moore's text written and sent by friend Emil Flechsig, Schumann penned another popular success. Wildly applauded at its premiere on 4 December, conducted by Schumann himself, *Das Paradies und die Peri* had to be encored the very next week, and went on to grace the stage not only in Berlin and other German cities, but in Amsterdam, Prague and Zurich. An international hit, the oratorio was second only to Schumann's *'Spring' Symphony* as his most frequently performed large-scale work during the composer's lifetime. Part of the work's appeal no doubt derived from the vocal talents of Livia Frege, who took the role of the fallen female spirit-being, the Peri, at the premiere.

[22] **Das Paradies und die Peri, Op. 50 ('Paradise and the Peri') – Part III: Verstossen! Verschllossen ('Cast out! From the golden gate')**
from Brilliant Classics BC95306 Track 20

[23] Schumann's next main musical projects were orchestral in nature: his *Symphony No. 2 in C major*, and his *Piano Concerto*, a revised version of the 1841 *Fantasie* for piano and orchestra which he had had no success publishing. Before these projects, however, came an important international voyage – a concert tour, in early 1844, with Clara to Russia – and an equally important home relocation later that year, from Leipzig to Dresden. Both events, however, were marked by Schumann's now-persistent depression and 'nervous fever'. Having failed to attract any real attention in Russia, despite Clara's personal success as a solo artist, Schumann found himself miserable and preoccupied: he once again stopped writing in his regular diary and, more drastic still, decided to give up and sell his once-beloved music journal, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. The couple's decision to move to Dresden seems to have been motivated in part by what Schumann saw as his limited career prospects in Leipzig: he had recently been rejected for the position of Director of the Gewandhaus concerts, in favour of the Danish musician Niels Gade. Dresden, Schumann thought, could offer new and different opportunities, as well as multiple spas – allowing him to continue the hydrotherapeutic treatment he had previously undergone. Nonetheless, on the couple's arrival in Dresden on 13 December, Schumann's condition worsened. Witnessing the composer's depression, nervous exhaustion, auditory hallucinations, body tremors and litany of phobias, Schumann's doctor Carl Helbig advised the composer to give up music altogether. This advice, not surprisingly, was ignored.

Settled in Dresden, where the composer had the fortune of meeting the overly loquacious Richard Wagner (then director of the Royal Court Opera), Schumann developed what he described as 'a completely new manner of composing': no longer 'in the heat of inspiration', but slowly, carefully, dependent on meticulous musical planning and calculation. Both the *Second Symphony* and the *Piano Concerto*, commenced in 1845, resulted from this new and different compositional process; and both revealed the composer's increasing concern for large-scale musical coherence: that is, motivic connections within and across a multi-movement work. In the *Piano Concerto*, for example, which premiered on 4 December with Clara as soloist, a six-bar transition between the last two movements not only recalls the first movement's main theme (clarinets and bassoons suggesting distant horn calls), but leads towards the exhilarating finale.

[24] **Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54 – II. Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso – III. Allegro vivace**
from Naxos 8.553268 Track 6

[25] 1845 also witnessed a series of works based on Schumann's continuing study of musical counterpoint, which the composer undertook together with his wife (who also produced new contrapuntal works as a result). Possibly therapeutic in nature, and probably composed away from the keyboard, counterpoint offered a disciplined, rational and objective alternative to a composer whose early music, as we have heard, had been marked by subjective fantasy and untrammelled feeling. Yet Schumann's next musical focus differed once again: forthcoming years would see him concentrate heavily on dramatic music, particularly opera – a genre in which he immersed himself while on tour of Vienna, Prague and Berlin with Clara in late 1846 and early 1847. During the previous 17 years, Schumann had contemplated over 40 subjects for operatic treatment, including Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the *Till Eulenspiegel* legend and even K. L. Immermann's *Tristan und Isolde*. On 1 April 1847, he finally settled on Friedrich Hebbel's five-act blank verse tragedy of 1841, *Genoveva*. Based on old French legend, the opera recounts the story of its title character, Genevieve of Brabant, a young wife whose loyalty is put to the test when she is accused of infidelity by a rejected suitor. Unfortunately for Schumann, who wrote the libretto himself, *Genoveva* was not a success. When negotiations to mount the work in Frankfurt, Berlin and Weimar failed, the premiere took place in Leipzig on 25 June 1850, and only a handful of further performances were to follow. Despite Schumann's innovative through-composed melody (the composer abandoned both traditional recitative and superfluous vocal display), the overture was considered the best part. The instrumental introduction foreshadows the opera's basic narrative trajectory, from tragedy to triumph, in a manner that recent critics have thought redolent of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. Also moving from a brooding C minor to a radiant C major, the overture features striking horn calls, for

which Schumann chose to combine the latest modern valve instruments with the older *Waldhörner* – ‘natural’ hand horns originally made for hunting. Incidentally, Schumann wrote several works for the modern valve horn, newly developed and becoming more popular than the hand horn in Germany at the time, including an *Adagio and Allegro* for horn and piano, *Five Hunting Songs* for horn quartet and male chorus, and his *Konzertstück* for four horns and orchestra (essentially a Baroque-style concerto grosso).

[26] **Genoveva, Op. 81 – Overture**
from Naxos 8.550608 Track 2

[27] Schumann’s new-found interest in dramatic music would give rise to two additional large-scale works: *Manfred*, incidental music based on Lord Byron’s 1817 poem; and the grand orchestral-choral work *Scenes from Goethe’s Faust* – which comprises an overture and seven contrasting scenes that capture the essence of Goethe’s drama. During his Dresden years Schumann also wrote a bestselling piano ‘Album’, a variety of choral music (no doubt inspired by his short-lived position as director of the Dresden Liedertafel), a *Requiem für Mignon* (another setting of Goethe), a song cycle titled *Spanische Liebeslieder* (‘Spanish Love Songs’), the *Fantasiestücke* for clarinet and piano, *Fünf Stücke im Volkston* (‘Five Pieces in Folk Style’) for cello and piano, the *Introduction and Allegro appassionato* for piano and orchestra, and *Four Marches* for piano. These *Marches*, as he wrote in a letter of June 1849 to the German music critic Franz Brendel (who had taken over editorship of the *Neue Zeitschrift*), had given him particular pleasure, no doubt because of their stirring and patriotic cast. Indeed, to Schumann, they harboured special contemporary significance. On 3 May fighting had broken out in Dresden, as elsewhere in Germany. Two days later a republican security brigade attempted to draft Schumann into its ranks. To avoid conscription, Schumann fled the city with Clara and their eldest daughter Marie, taking refuge at the country estate of Major Friedrich Serre, a friend, in Maxen. On 9 May, royalists recaptured the city, the Schumanns moving to Bad Kreischa, seven miles outside Dresden, until 12 June, when they returned home. This revolutionary context provides an important backdrop for Schumann’s so-called ‘Barrikadenmärsche’, with their seemingly ‘republican’ nature. The fourth movement, titled *Mit Kraft und Feuer* (‘With Strength and Fire’) even offers an allusion to the *Marseillaise* in its calm central interlude.

[28] **Four Marches, Op. 76 – No. 4 in E flat major: Mit Kraft und Feuer (‘With Strength and Fire’)**
from Naxos 8.573094 Track 4

[29] Schumann had long been trying to find a lucrative salaried position – in Leipzig, Dresden or elsewhere. So it is easy to imagine his pleasure on being offered the post of municipal music director in Düsseldorf, after the German composer-conductor Ferdinand Hiller vacated the post for another in Cologne. Officially accepting the position on 31 March 1850, and departing for the city on 1 September, Schumann commenced what would be a four-year period of a new and different kind of creative work. Indeed, his job in Düsseldorf saw him in charge of both the orchestra and chorus of the city’s music society, the Allgemeiner Musikverein, which performed between eight and ten subscription concerts in annual seasons running from October to May. Schumann was also required to oversee music in the town’s principal Catholic churches on major feast days.

Things went well enough at the outset, for Schumann was productive, composing his ‘Rhenish’ *Symphony No. 3*, inspired by Cologne cathedral, his *Cello Concerto in A minor*, and his *Symphony No. 4*, a re-write of an earlier work, from 1841, in D minor. This new version of the symphony, a resounding success when premiered on 30 December 1852, exemplified Schumann’s now-standard search for motivic unity and inner cohesiveness. For example, the second movement *Romance* contrasts a lilting oboe melody and guitar-like pizzicato string accompaniment with a new version of a dark and brooding theme from the introduction to the first movement. This borrowed theme then morphs into an elegant violin solo, before the lilting oboe theme returns:

[30] **Symphony No. 4 in D minor, Op. 120 – II. Romanze: Ziemlich langsam**
from Capriccio C49483 Disc 3 Track 7

[31] Schumann held his Düsseldorf position for three seasons, a period during which he continued to compose large-scale works intended for public performance – such as his four choral-orchestral ballades, his *Requiem* and *Missa Sacra* – and smaller-scale, more commercially accessible music for domestic usage. He also further developed his contrapuntal technique, crafting piano accompaniments to J. S. Bach’s sonatas and partitas for solo violin, as well as harmonisations of Bach’s six suites for unaccompanied cello. Yet, while his composing continued apace, his conducting was another matter. Indeed, on the basis of his erratic behaviour on the podium and general inefficiency as a conductor, Schumann was fired from his Düsseldorf directorship in the autumn of 1853, having aroused the opposition not only of the city’s musicians, but of some of its artistic administrators. Notwithstanding a successful concert tour of the Netherlands shortly after losing his job, this was a difficult period for the composer, marked by what he described as ‘intolerable aural disturbances’ – not only a tinnitus-like ringing in the ears, but fully harmonised musical hallucinations of a ‘distant wind-band’. A bright spot in the darkness came in the form of a young pianist and composer from Hamburg who, recommended by Schumann’s friend the Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim, arrived at the family home on 30 September that year. This was none other than Johannes Brahms, an obviously talented musician who would soon become a close family friend. Together with Brahms and his pupil Albert Dietrich, Schumann composed a violin sonata based on the musical letters of Joachim’s personal motto – F, A, E: ‘frei aber einsam’ (‘free but lonely’). The composer also wrote a highly laudatory article about Brahms for the *Neue Zeitschrift*, returning to the role of music critic for the first time in nearly a decade.

A downturn in Schumann’s physical condition, however, was imminent. On 15 February 1854, the composer’s friend and doctor Hasenclever was summoned to the house for advice and assessment. Two days later, Schumann suffered a particularly severe repeat of his auditory symptoms. Arising from his bed suddenly during the night, he thought he heard a ghost – purportedly the ghost of either Schubert or Mendelssohn – dictating a ‘spirit theme’ to him. This was a theme he had used several times before: in his *Second String Quartet*, again in his *Lieder-Album für die Jugend*, and also in the slow movement of his recent *Violin Concerto*. In the following days,

Schumann set about composing five variations on this theme for the piano, his last completed work, known as the *Geistervariationen* ('Ghost Variations'). Brahms published the work in a supplementary volume to the complete edition of Schumann's piano music that appeared in 1893.

[32] **Geistervariationen in E flat major, Anh. F39 ('Ghost Variations') – Theme: Leise, innig** (ed. Wolf-Dieter Seiffert)
from Naxos 8.573540 Track 17

[33] All too aware of his deteriorating condition, and afraid of causing physical harm to his wife, Schumann asked that he be removed to an asylum on 26 February 1854. Having been advised to spend the night at home, he arose the next day, spent some time tinkering with the *Ghost Variations*, then slipped out of the house and made for a local bridge over the river Rhine. There he attempted suicide, throwing himself into the water, but was rescued by nearby fishermen. On 4 March, Schumann was finally taken to a private sanatorium at Enderich, near Bonn, where he died nearly two years later. Clara, banned from visiting her husband for the bulk of his confinement, did not see him until two days before his death on 29 July 1856. He was buried in the early evening of 31 July in a cemetery near the Sterntor city gate in Bonn.

[34] **Geistervariationen in E flat major, Anh. F39 – Variation 4** (ed. Wolf-Dieter Seiffert)
from Naxos 8.573540 Track 21

[35] The story, however, does not end here: indeed, arguably the most fantastical episode of Schumann's musical history occurred decades after his death, not in Bonn, Düsseldorf, Dresden or Leipzig, but in London, March 1933, during a spiritualist séance held by one Baron Erik Kule Palmstierna – Sweden's ambassador to London and an avid psychic researcher. There, two great-nieces of Schumann's violinist friend Joachim – the sister musicians Jelly d'Arányi and Adila Fachiri – claimed to hear a spirit voice, identifying itself as Robert Schumann, directing the pair to recover an unpublished score, apparently lying forgotten in the Prussian State Library. Bent on discovery, the sisters trawled through the Library archives and found an unknown musical manuscript: a *Violin Concerto*, which turned out to have been written by Schumann in the autumn of 1853. In fact, Schumann had composed the work for Joachim himself: the legendary violinist had performed Schumann's *Fantasie* for violin and orchestra, and was the dedicatee of a violin arrangement of Schumann's *Cello Concerto* of 1850. But Joachim was unimpressed with the *Violin Concerto* specifically, a product, he assumed, of Schumann's debilitating insanity: the work, he claimed, displayed a certain exhaustion of creative intent, 'which attempts to wring out the last resources of spiritual energy'. Aware of Joachim's negative opinion, Clara decided that the concerto was not to be released to the general public. Indeed, when he bequeathed the score to the Prussian State Library, Joachim stipulated that it not be published until one hundred years after Schumann's death. It was only through the intervention of Joachim's great-nieces that the *Concerto* came to public attention in 1937, premiered by the German violinist Georg Kulenkampff and the Berlin Philharmonic. The work, now a staple in the violinist's concert repertoire, remains a testament to Schumann's musical imagination, however impaired or indeed enhanced by its composer's characteristic psychology.

[36] **Violin Concerto in D minor, WoO 1 – III. Lebhaft, doch nicht schnell**
from Naxos 8.570321 Track 6