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Robert Schumann and His Magic Circle - Is it Synesthesia or Ekphrasis?

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

ROBERT SCHUMANN AND HIS MAGIC CIRCLE – IS IT SYNESTHESIA OR
EKPHRASIS?

By

Marion Wilkinson Scott

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Coral Gables, Florida

June 2012

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SYNESTHESIA OR EKPHRASIS?

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Robert Schumann and His Magic Circle
Is it Synesthesia or Ekphrasis?

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The purpose of this study will be to examine Robert Schumann's unique perceptive abilities. Most notably, it will serve as an argument that Schumann composed and understood music in a synesthetic way. In order to support this assertion there will be an examination of Schumann's: medical records, autopsy, letters and other relevant bibliographic literature surrounding the composer's life. In accordance with this, this document will also review the psychological, physiological and religious factors that underlie Schumann's perception of reality and his compositional process. With this in mind, this paper will also attempt to shed light on Schumann's writings through the vantage point of synesthetic experience. In summary, this paper will weigh the probabilities of ekphratic versus synesthetic composition in Schumann case and build the argument that Schumann decries programmatic description for poetic truth.

To my wife Rosita with all of my love

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to Schumann's Magic Circle

On the night of September the 8th 1837 a young man of twenty-seven years entered the back of a concert hall in Vienna. He stayed in the shadows to avoid the revelation of his identity. The performer he had come to see was a certain prodigious young lady of only eighteen years. The man was in love with her. From his vantage point in the balcony he saw the delicate figure of his beloved emerge to great applause from the audience. Hastily, the young man reached into his satchel to procure a piece of paper and writing implement and proceeded to sketch the following illuminating words:

“Vision at 9 in the evening / To Clara Wieck / An angel-child descended / Now she sits at the piano, musing on old songs; / And when she touched the keys, / There appeared above, / Floating in a magic circle / figure upon figure / Image upon image: / The old Elfking / And gentle Mignon, / And defiant knights, / Their lustrous weapons poised, / And nuns on bended knee / Lost in pious devotion. / Those who heard her raved, / Praising her as if she were a renowned prima donna; / But dismayed and feather-light / She vanished into her homeland.”¹

Thus is my imagination of Robert Schumann based on his writing about the concert of young Clara Wieck. At this time in Schumann's life he was suffering because of the enforced estrangement from Clara dictated by her father. This necessitated that the poem which Schumann sketched during the concert on September 8th was secretly given to Clara the next day.

¹ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. (Pg.171 ref 141)

The effusion of imagery contained in this particular writing strike me as, in a way, odd. Certainly Schumann was a visual writer. However, the phrase: ‘And when she touched the keys, / There appeared above, / Floating in a magic circle/ Image upon image’ played over in my mind as something even more innately evocative in Schumann’s psyche than mere metaphor. Certainly, her playing must have conjured up nostalgic memories of their earlier years together (when he played fanciful games with her as a child). Perhaps this is partly true. However, as I continued to examine Schumann’s writings I have been struck by the plethora of extraordinary imagery which he seemingly subconsciously pours forth and which, in combination, ties together the fragile threads of his reality.

What is this ‘magic circle’ of which he speaks? I have found that Schumann mentions it in many of his writings and in various capacities. Also, in the writings that exist about Schumann I certainly found no shortage of information. The amount of bibliographic and analytical work compiled about Schumann’s life by fascinated scholars is nothing short of impressive. In addition to this, the comprehensive list of nearly twenty thousand letters which Schumann left us as a musicological heritage indeed provides us with ripe fodder for research. However, I felt that there was something missing; an aspect of his life which hadn’t yet been explored or addressed. I found my answer in Schumann’s ‘Magic Circle’.

During my research on Schumann’s life I have noticed that much attention has been lavished on Schumann’s mental illness and the factors which contributed to the deterioration of his mind and body. Nearly every topic regarding Schumann’s life has been addressed. This ranges from his aesthetic views to his favorite pastimes. However,

in isolation these tell only part of the story of this extraordinary individual. It is my opinion that Schumann's true genius lies in his ability to innately synthesize reality from music (and vice versa).

Fortunately for us, Schumann left us his inner most impressions (in the form of diary entries and letters to his close friends and family) and his most outspoken opinions in the form of music criticisms and concert reviews. This was not an easy task for the dreamy poet. Rather, it was a discipline that was consciously undertaken. This is reflected when Schumann writes:

“It is certainly true...where feeling speaks the loudest, where the heart is filled with many rushing true dreams, there the cold hand cannot move the pen to note down those happy hours, during which one's dreams come true – I mean to enter it in a cold, spiritless diary”²

In Schumann's writings I found ample evidence to suggest that Robert Schumann had synesthetic experiences. This led me to believe that his music also reflects these experiences. Hence, when beginning to work on this document a quest was beginning to brew; a quest to discover if Schumann was truly a synesthete; a quest to find a unified approach to understanding Schumann's music; a quest for his 'magic circle'.

² **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.24

Chapter 2

Medical Evidence

It is definite that Schumann suffered from mental illness. However, the question remains, what kind of mental illness did he suffer from? Even more importantly, what physiological and psychological factors were involved in the inception, growth and result of these disorders? Much speculation has been spent on these topics (and many differing conclusions have been drawn by various scholars). The most widely accepted theory regarding Schumann's illness rests on the assumption that he suffered from progressive Syphilis. However, under closer inspection, this diagnosis crumbles due to extreme speculation and relatively little supporting evidence. Therefore, the goal of this medical review will be to ascertain the most probable cause (or causes) of his mental illness and to examine the implications that these conclusions have on the nature of Schumann's Synesthesia.

The Autopsy and Medical Records Revisited

Relatively recently (1973 and 2005), new documents regarding Schumann's illness (including his autopsy and medical records in Endenich) have come to light. The autopsy, although antiquated in its description, reveals several concrete descriptions of notable physical abnormalities in Schumann's brain. The post mortem examination was performed on Robert Schumann by a certain Dr. Richarz. This doctor also happened to be the director of Endenich (the private institution in which Schumann was interned).

Assisting him in this autopsy was Dr. Peters (his assistant). The first notable diagnosis that the autopsy contradicts is that Schumann died of paralytic brain atrophy.

The idea that Schumann's brain literally deteriorated was abhorrent to his wife Clara. Consequently, in an effort to dissuade this myth she released Schumann's letters after his death. Unfortunately, this medical theory relies on the spindly assumption of a single musicologist from the 19th century. This is reflected in the following quote by Lise Ostwald:

“The popular view, that Schumann had a deteriorating, essentially organic disease of the brain, stems from Josef von Wasielewski's famous biography of the composer, first published in 1857. Still widely read and quoted today, it reflects the prevailing views of nineteenth-century psychiatry.”³

This diagnosis is disproven by Schumann's brain weight at the time of the autopsy. Namely, Schumann's brain weighed 1,336 g (for men of his age, this is close to the average brain weight). Also, this weight in correspondence with the volume of his cranium (1,510 cm³) indicates that the chances that Schumann died from brain atrophy are relatively slim.⁴ Also the smallest discrepancy in weight can easily be attributed to extreme dehydration and self-starvation (which is the only concrete fact surrounding Schumann's final death). The psychological basis for the assumption that Schumann died of brain atrophy is found in the work of psychiatrist Paul Mobius. This man constructed his diagnosis for *dementia praecox* from a study of Robert Schumann in 1906.⁵

³Ostwald, Peter. *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. xvii

⁴<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/3538703>

⁵Ostwald, Peter. *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. xvii

The next most commonly held view of Schumann's illness is that he suffered from Syphilis. Ultimately, this theory is based on a single statement made by Schumann to his doctor while he was in a state of hallucination in 1855. Dr. Richardz records this by writing:

‘..In 1831 I (Schumann) was syphilitic and treated with arsenic...’⁶

It is also often cited that in 1855 and 1856, after hallucination attacks, Dr. Eberhard Peters noted that Schumann's right pupil was smaller than the left one which can be an indication of neurological conditions caused by Syphilis. However, these symptoms can also be caused by many other potential neurological disorders. Also, in general, Schumann's lifelong symptomologies have little to no similarities with characteristic syphilitic infection. In fact, it seems that Schumann received no medications in his final two years (1854 – 1856) that were typically administered to Syphilis patients in Endinich.⁷ Also, as the Schumann scholar Peter Ostwald observes:

“Schumann began to manifest his mental disorder long before he could have contracted syphilis. He continued to be aware of severe mood swings as he grew older, and to note with amazing precision his anxieties, conflicts, and helpless indecisiveness, as well as his momentary joys and brief ecstasies.”⁸

This quote points to a degree of continuing lucidity which is not common for victims of Syphilis. In fact, Schumann was aware of all his writing until the age of forty-three with his attempted suicide (Even after this point he was able to write many letters to

⁶ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. (Pg.484 ref 79)

⁷ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.311

⁸ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. xviii

Clara). There is also reason to believe that his attempted ‘suicide’ in the Rhine may have been a cry for help or an attempt at self-treatment by a disturbed mind (Schumann’s doctors had told him to take cold plunge baths in the Rhine in order to cure his previous phobias – especially as they regarded height and falling). Also, rather than Syphilis, Schumann’s psychological and physical problems can be traced genetically to other members of his family who suffered from similar disorders (most notably his sister). Also, it seems strange to me that the effects of this disease were not passed on to his wife or his children. Proponents of the theory that Schumann indeed died of Syphilis claim that Schumann must have contracted malaria earlier in life with a fever that would have killed syphilis spirochete.⁹ However, it seems to me that this is highly speculative seeing that such a grave illness as malaria would have necessarily been mentioned in his letters. Also, in terms of the autopsy itself, there were no signs of lesions on the brain (symptomatic of tertiary phase Syphilis). This is reflected in the following statement by Peter Ostwald:

“Though several of the symptoms Schumann exhibited could indicate a syphilitic infection, it seems unlikely that this was the cause of his behavior and death. The autopsy, which focuses almost exclusively on the brain, indicates no findings that can be understood as gummas within the brain tissue. In fact, the autopsy states: ‘The consistence of the substance of the cerebral hemispheres while taken off the different layers seems to be altogether normal to the touch of the finger.’”¹⁰

The findings of the autopsy regarding a lack of evidence for a prognosis of syphilis are further strengthened by the observation that Schumann’s autopsy describes

⁹ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. IV Pg.341

¹⁰ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. IV Pg.341

no concrete information regarding chronic inflammation. This is expounded on by Lise Ostwald when she states:

“The indentations and protuberances of the cranial bones in the region of the middle cranial fossa were regarded as reflecting prominent indentations of the gyri [folds or wrinkles in the surface tissue of the brain] and were attributed no pathological significance [i.e. not due to illness]. A small osteophyte in the region was not regarded as clinically important. The thickenings and scattered adhesions [Scar tissue] of the arachnoid membrane described in the report cannot be pathologically interpreted. Moreover such findings are so uncharacteristic as to provide no compelling evidence for a resolved or on-going chronic inflammatory process.”¹¹

Also, the abnormalities of cranial structure described in Schumann’s autopsy seem to have less to do with inherent disorders as they do with individual anatomical variation.¹² Hence, we find that the autopsy does not support the diagnosis of Syphilis in Schumann’s case. If this is indeed true, we can assume that Schumann’s hallucinations are a result of mental disorders, medicinal hallucinogens and/or overwhelming synesthetic perception. In Schumann’s case, the lack of evidence for previously asserted illnesses is reflected in the following statement:

“The rediscovered document contains no information which persuasively supports any of the hypotheses about Robert Schumann's underlying illness which have appeared in the literature.”¹³

Schumann’s Final Illness

Schumann’s life was fraught with mental tensions and near-breakdowns. This can be seen even in his writing as a teenager. However, the degree with which Schumann’s breakdown in 1852 seized him would prove catastrophic for his mental health and it

¹¹ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/3538703>

¹² **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. IV Pg.340

¹³ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/3538703>

would prove fatal in his final illness. It is interesting to note that this mental illness began to manifest symptoms well before his famed ‘suicide’ attempt in 1852. For instance, in 1851 Schumann was released from his job as a conductor after he was unable to distinguish between the music that he heard in his mind and the music that the musicians were actually playing. In fact, during one concert of the season, Schumann is said to have continued conducting even after the musicians stopped playing. Doubtless, losing his job came as a harsh revelation that he may also be losing his wits. This tension is reflected in the following commentary by the musicologist Joan Chissel when she states:

“The strain of the (concert) season caused Schumann another breakdown same as on previous occasions: nervous irritability, hypochondria and auricular delusions, but this time an inability to express himself clearly in speech added to his discomfort. His doctor ordered a treatment of cold-water baths, and Clara in consequence took him to Scheveningen; yet no one guessed the true state of his mind or the terrifying fear which lurked at the back of his consciousness.”¹⁴

Perhaps it was this fear of death that fueled his fascination with otherworldly communication. In 1853, three years before his death, Schumann became obsessed with table tipping as a way of divination (It is interesting to note that the musicologist Peter Ostwald hypothesized that communication with spirits actually might have been a way for Schumann to rationalize his own psychosis).¹⁵

Schumann’s actual mental breakdown in 1854 began on February 10th. After finding out that one of his critic’s pen names was that of a friend he started to have worsened aural hallucinations. These ranged from:

¹⁴ **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.78

¹⁵ **Tunbridge, Laura.** *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.2

“sustained pitches to imagined music, including the chorale *Ein’ feste Burg ist unser Gott* for distant wind band.”¹⁶

The auditory hallucinations grew over the next few days. Apparently, on February 17th Schumann began to write down music that was dictated to him by spirits. For instance, the *Thema mit Variationen für das Pianoforte* was supposedly written with a melody given to Schumann by the spirit of Schubert.¹⁷

On the evening of February 27th, 1854, the music in Schumann’s mind and his fear of going mad drove him to the point of distraction. In desperation, he attempted to take his own life. This is reflected in the following quote by the Schumann scholar Laura Tunbridge when she says:

“At the height of carnival season, Schumann slipped out of the house and leapt from a bridge into the Rhine. Fishermen who had noticed his odd behavior (he was wearing his dressing-gown and had offered his handkerchief as payment at the toll booth) immediately saved him and prevented him from jumping from their boat back into the water. The bedraggled composer was led back home through the Carnival crowds.”¹⁸

After his breakdown, Schumann realized the degree to which he had wandered from conscious reality and committed himself (against Clara’s wishes) to confinement in the mental hospital at Endenich. Sadly, Clara would not see him again until he lay emaciated on his death bed.

In Endenich, Schumann was generally kept in isolation from friends or family. The exceptions to this rule are relatively few and generally involve visits from his friends Brahms or Joaquin. Apparently, according to the friends who were allowed to spy on him from a distance, Schumann’s mannerisms remained intact. He was even allowed

¹⁶Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.4

¹⁷Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.4

¹⁸Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.4

supervised walks to Bonn where he could contemplate Beethoven's existence next to a statue of the deceased composer.

It was noted by his doctors and nurses that he often mumbled to himself and regularly experienced auditory hallucinations. Hence, the doctors of Endenich also considered that music was the chief expression of his mania. Therefore, they forbade him many times from composing. In this reclusive environment Schumann's sensitive mind was further unable to cope with harsh reality. His horror about existing in a mental institution can be seen in a quote from 1849 regarding the notice of an insane asylum in Düsseldorf:

“...But possibly the notice is altogether incorrect, and the institution may be merely a hospital, such as one finds in every town. I have to be very careful in guarding against all melancholy impressions of that kind. And though, as you are aware, we musicians often dwell on sunny heights, yet when the unhappiness of life comes before our eyes in all its naked ugliness, it hurts us all the more. At least, that is my case, with my fervid imagination.”¹⁹

It is doubtless that Schumann suffered a good deal here. However, there is good evidence that Endenich, for its time, was otherwise a modern institution. For instance, Schumann was granted the request to stop treatment with ice cold water baths in 1856.²⁰

Schumann's bi-polarity increased during his time at Endenich. In accordance with his swings of moods from taciturn to passionate; Schumann's ability to exist in reality also fluxed rapidly. From 1855 onwards, Schumann's rational behavior and dementia alternated at even closer intervals. This is reflected in the following observation by the musicologist John Daverio when he states:

¹⁹ **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.74

²⁰ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.310

“In 1855, Schumann wrote perfectly lucid letters to Simrock, asking for a copy of the recently published piano-four-hand arrangement of his *Fest-Ouverture*... But the next day, after suffering a convulsive attack, he claimed that he was being ‘pursued by Nemesis’ and that ‘a demon had taken away his power of speech’”.²¹

These seizure patterns are typical of manic-depressive dementia cases. Hence, the two sides of his personality (Eusebius and Florestan) had taken complete possession of Schumann and became ever more disparate from each other. In 1855, Dr. Richarz notes that Schumann’s mania was often expressed on the piano. This is reflected when he says:

“...afterwards [he] played the piano in a wild and crazy manner for almost two hours, hollering all the while...”²²

Here, raging at the piano, Florestan won the day. However, his love for Clara was found in the spirit of Eusebius. She had awoken in him such tenderness of heart that one cannot help but be in awe of their final encounter. Heartbreakingly, after two years of isolation, Clara paid him a final visit on his deathbed. On the 27th of July, 1856 Clara writes the following in her Journal:

“I saw him between 6 and 7 in the evening. He smiled, and put his arm round me with a great effort, for he can no longer control his limbs. I shall never forget it. Not all the treasures in the world could equal this embrace. My Robert, it was thus that we had to see each other again, how painfully I had to trace out your beloved features! What a sorrowful sight it was! Two and a half years ago you were torn from me without any farewell, though your heart must have been full, and now I lay silent at your feet hardly daring to breathe; only now and then I received a look clouded as it were, but unspeakable gentle...”²³

²¹ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.484 ref 75

²² **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.483 ref 71

²³ **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.84

Medications and Synesthesia

Synesthesia is a somewhat controversial in definition. This is mostly due to the fact that synesthesia manifests itself differently in every individual that it affects. However, the underlying principle of synesthesia is that the mind combines two (or more) senses into an altered perception of reality. In this way, a synesthetic individual could theoretically ‘taste’ sound or ‘hear’ color (or the reverse).

My underlying conclusion remains that Schumann was an innately synesthetic composer (these perceptive abilities manifested themselves before his final mental illnesses). However, it has been noted by various studies that hallucinogenic induction of an aural-visual synesthetic state can be caused or enhanced by long term exposure to toxic metals. Hence, it may also be possible that Schumann’s conscious resistance against his synesthetic tendencies could have been further uninhibited or increased by means of various medications he received as a young man and during his stay in Endenich. Mercury, for instance, can induce both hallucination and synesthesia when taken as a medicine.²⁴ Incidentally, Schumann received mercury as part of his treatment for local paralysis of the finger (focal dystonia).

Mercury was by no means the only hallucinogen that Schumann received. For instance, when he first appeared at the asylum in Endenich (1854), Schumann was given ‘quinine and mixtures containing arsenic’ (This treatment was stopped upon Schumann’s request).²⁵ While this might seem barbaric to us now, we must keep in mind that these medications were standard treatments in Schumann’s time for nervous conditions. Even

²⁴ http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1194947331729

²⁵ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.311

more potent than these, however, were other drugs he received during his stay in Eendenich. According to the medical records, Schumann received many other medications from the doctors in Eendenich. Some of these are listed in the following quote Lise Ostwald:

“The pills and drugs that Schumann so abhorred consisted of a powerful stimulant and narcotic, ferruginous sulfur-ether spirit, similar to vitriol ether, an iron compound that is hard on the stomach...”²⁶

These particular medications were supposedly meant to rouse one out of lethargy. Perhaps this worked while Schumann was in his depressive phase in the cycle. However, when he switched to his manic phase, Dr. Richardz prescribed relaxants, mental capacitors and hunger inducers which were equally toxic. This can be seen as follows:

“Another metal was a mixture of copper ammonium chloride, said to strengthen the body, increase one’s appetite, treat difficult nervous conditions, and produce a noticeable exhilaration of the mind.”²⁷

These powerful medications were administered generously. In fact, by his second year at Eendenich, Schumann was consuming up to fourteen or fifteen pills a day.²⁸ These are not the only medications he received however. These compounds do not include the natural remedies and herbs that were prescribed for Schumann. For these, Dr. Richarz also prescribed one gram of aloe daily as a laxative.²⁹ In addition to this, Schumann received various other concoctions and herbal brews which were meant to either calm or

²⁶ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.311

²⁷ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.311

²⁸ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.311

²⁹ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.311

excite the nerves (or to stimulate the bowels). For instance the following was a popular recipe according to the recently recovered medical records:

“A rheum composite of rhubarb extract, aloe extract, jalap, and medical soap, in a gray-brown, bitter tasting powder, was administered as a laxative on a nearly daily basis.”³⁰

In May of 1855, Schumann’s doctors deemed it necessary to begin treatment again with arsenic in a strange concoction called a ‘Fowler Solution’. Ironically, this was medication was necessitated not to treat the symptoms of Syphilis, but rather to abate additional epileptic seizure patterns.³¹ After this medication was administered unsuccessfully, doctors turned to even more exotic formulas. One such medication consisted of the extract of the Brazilian root *Ipecacuanha*.³² There is reason why this plant is colloquially named ‘the vomiting root’. In this way, it may come as no surprise that Schumann’s ultimate death of starvation was precipitated by such diuretics. This specific medication is mentioned many times in Schumann’s medical records from his stay in Endenich. Schumann soon grew tired of this abuse and desired to find a lawyer to defend him and sue his doctors. However, little defense could be found for a man deemed to be insane. Indeed, much of his treatment in Endenich would be illegal now. For instance, without his knowledge, many of his medications were secretly slipped into his food and drink.³³ Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Schumann’s medical records were withheld from disclosure for a nearly a century and a half.

³⁰ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.311

³¹ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.324

³² **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.326

³³ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.329

In conclusion, Schumann's mental illness was certainly not helped by the extremes of isolation, physical stress and toxic medications that were forcefully given to him in Endenich. Indeed, it is arguable that even if they did not directly kill him, they made his physical and mental health a good deal worse. Unfortunately for Schumann, he was receiving traumatic and potent (and perhaps toxic) medical treatments far before he arrived at Endenich. For instance, some of his treatments with Mercury can be traced back to his nineteenth year. It has been well documented that the kinds of medications received by Schumann can result in an induced state of synesthesia. However, in my personal observations, it seems that these physical narcotics did not ultimately cause his synesthetic experiences (witnessed in his letters). Rather, they caused him to lose his ability to control his senses. In this way, the parameters of Schumann's magic circle burst and he was inducted into a strange and bewildering world in which he had very little control.

Phobias and Synesthesia

Schumann's various phobias and paranoia have been analyzed and re-analyzed by various scholars and doctors. In general, it seems most likely that Schumann suffered several mental illnesses. Most probable among these are: Bi-polar disorder (this also includes manic-depressive behavior, depression and multiple personality disorder) and towards the end of his life Schizophrenia. However, fluctuation of mental stability often makes it difficult to label Schumann's disorders correctly. Having said this, it seems that early manifestations of these disorders occurred in the form of extreme anxiety. This is reflected in the following observation of Joan Chissel when she states:

“In spite of the restful loveliness of the surrounding country side, which for a little while had given Schumann new life, his health still stood between himself and any intensive work. His letters continuously mention exhaustion and despair...”³⁴

Schumann himself comments on this many times in his letters. For instance, in a letter from October of 1845 to Mendelssohn, Schumann writes:

“Unfortunately I have still not recovered my full strength. Any sort of disturbance of the simple order of my life throws me off my balance and into a nervous, irritable state...”³⁵

In this nervous state of anxiety Schumann developed many of his phobias (some rational and other irrational). It is perhaps ironic that one of Schumann’s most debilitating fears was that of going mad. This can be seen as early as the year 1833 when he writes to his mother: “I was seized by an *idée fixe*: the fear of going mad.”³⁶ This, in turn, held Schumann in dread of changes in his environment that could cause him to lose his mental and emotional equilibrium. For instance, Schumann experienced increasing reluctance to travel. In a letter to his mother from 1833 this can already be seen:

“I was hardly more than a statue, without coldness, without warmth... Can you believe that I don’t have the courage to travel to Zwickau by myself, for fear that something could happen to me? Violent flushing, unspeakable dread, shortness of breath, and momentary lapses of consciousness fluctuate rapidly...”³⁷

Other oddities and phobias appear early in Schumann’s life. For instance, his debilitating fear of heights can be seen in letters dating as early as 1831. This can be discernible in the following observation by Joan Chissel regarding his trip to the mountains in Harz:

³⁴ **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.67

³⁵ **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.67

³⁶ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.109 ref 15

³⁷ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – Music and Madness.* London, England: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985. Pg.103 ref 15)

“Dr. Helbig...found him in a morbid condition, with a strange fear of death and a dread of high hills or tall houses.”³⁸

This irrational fear actually induced many symptoms similar to those which he experienced in Eendenich. For instance his bodily reaction included shivering, faintness, cold feet, insomnia and aural hallucinations.³⁹ In 1833 Schumann experienced a more complete breakdown than in 1831. However, vertigo was still associated with suicidal thoughts and he was constantly afraid that he might be tempted to jump out of his fourth-floor lodgings in a moment of agitation.⁴⁰ It has also been noted that in August of 1838 Schumann asked his friend Fischhof how high his apartment would be in Vienna (telling him that sickness and giddiness kept him from staying upstairs for very long.⁴¹

It is very probable that the traumas that Schumann received in his youth caused considerable instability in his mental health. His father died when Robert was only seventeen years old. Shortly after this, his brother Julius died of tuberculosis and his older sister committed suicide. His most notable fear in his youth was illness. After the death of his brother in 1830, Schumann wrote to his mother the following:

“I have to admit a tormenting, almost childish fear of cholera...The thought of now dying...drives me wild...For several days I’ve been in a kind of feverish state...”⁴²

In spite of this, Schumann’s fear of illness often gave way to mistrust of doctors. Perhaps this is also understandable considering the amount he suffered in the medications administered to him to cure focal dystonia in the hand (these included electroshock therapy, concoctions of arsenic and placing his hand in the still warm body of a newly

³⁸Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.63

³⁹Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.63

⁴⁰Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.63

⁴¹Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.63

⁴²Ostwald, Peter. *Schumann – Music and Madness*. London, England: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985. Pg.84 ref

killed ox). This fear rightfully turned into an obsession during his stay in Eendenich.⁴³ His doctor in Dresden (Dr. Helbig), took note of this tendency in 1831. This can be seen in the following diary entry:

“As he studied every prescription until he found some reason for not taking it, I ordered him cold plunge baths, which so far improved his health that he was able to return to his usual occupation of composition. As I had made a study of similar cases, especially among men who worked immoderately at one thing (for instance, accounts, etc.), I was led to advise that he should employ himself and distract his mind with something else than music. He first chose natural history, then philosophy, but abandoned them after a few days and gave himself up, wherever he might be, to his musical thoughts.”⁴⁴

While Dr. Helbig’s conclusion may or may not be correct, it is undoubtedly an interesting observation of a man who lived obsessively. It is this irresistible draw of Schumann’s musical circle that wrestled against all reason. He wrote music because he was compelled to do so. Indeed, in a synesthetic way, this also shows us that Schumann’s musical experience must have presented an irresistible alternative to the fears and sorrow reality.

The Effects of Schumann’s Bi-Polar Disorder and Schizophrenia on Synesthetic Experience

Many studies have concluded that early manifestations of Schizophrenia are tied to Synesthesia.⁴⁵ Likewise, one recent study from the University of Berkley in California shows that a disproportionately high correspondence exists between bi-polar disorder and occurrences of synesthesia (bi-polar individuals are up to six times more likely to

⁴³**Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.311

⁴⁴**Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.64-65

⁴⁵**Gimmestad, K. D.** “Behavioral assessment of synesthetic perception: Color perception and visual imagery in synesthesia.” University of Missouri. 2010. Pg.3

experience synesthesia). Since Schumann most likely suffered from both Bi-polar disorder and Schizophrenia, it is valuable to see this correlation.⁴⁶ Likewise, these two conditions have also been tied together in various studies regarding creativity and creative curves. These curves closely resemble Schumann's own spurts of creative productivity. For instance, in the paper *Relationship between hypomania, creativity, and creative achievement in a non-clinical population* the scholar Allison M. Erdman says in regards to Schumann's creative abilities:

“...Schumann conceived two or more antithetical ideas, images, or concepts simultaneously (in connection with hypomanic cases)...Rothberg (1979) argued that the concept of trying to find a union between mutually exclusive things is very difficult for many people to conceive and is the premise of creativity, and that mania produces a kind of dedifferentiated thought that finds a commonality between the two different things.”

Here we also find a neurological indicator for Schumann's synesthetic experience. Namely, Schumann was able to reconcile the ideals of the musical realm with the visual, emotional, relational and sensory realms. Indeed, it has often times been noted that Schumann's three most creative years occurred during a manic phase. This constitutes nearly four times as many works as during his depressive phases.

Nerve Damage, Meningioma, the Basal Ganglia and Synesthesia

Surprisingly, Schumann's autopsy indicates that his hallucinations could have been caused by a brain tumor. It seems that the autopsy successfully locates a meningioma tumor on the base of the basal ganglia (a part of the brain which deals with nerve function) and on the pituitary gland. One instance this appears in the autopsy is as follows:

⁴⁶**Berman, Brady.** “Pseudochromesthesia and Psychosis Proneness”. Hofstra University, 2010.

“The pituitary gland surrounded with a quite big mass of yellowy, slushy substance which partly reaches the consistency of the fibro cartilage.”⁴⁷

This is especially interesting to note because it indicates that Schumann’s earlier neurological problems could also have stemmed from sustained damage to the basal ganglia. For instance, the paralysis of the third finger of his right hand is often attributed to a condition known as focal dystonia.⁴⁸ This condition can be caused by nerve damage to the basal ganglia. This condition is also seen as early as Schumann’s twentieth year. For instance, in 1830 Schumann first describes it as ever worsening weakness in his right hand and numbness in his third finger.⁴⁹ Eventually, Schumann’s inability to use this hand was even used as an excuse from military duty. Dr. Moritz Emil Reuter (a friend of Schumann’s) issued the medical order in 1845.⁵⁰

It is not entirely clear if the problem in Schumann’s hand was exacerbated by the use of an odd mechanical device which he had first invented to make his fingers stronger. The opinion that this indeed caused paralysis is seen in the following quote by the Schumann scholar John Devario when he states:

“For a long time the continued use of a machine that pulled these fingers strongly toward the back of the hand resulted in a paralytic condition, manifested first in that they possessed only weak feeling, and second in that so far as movement was concerned, they no longer responded willingly. In this way Schumann was forced to give up his career; the fingers have remained in the same paralyzed condition...in spite of numerous

⁴⁷ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. IV Pg.340

⁴⁸ **Yebenes, Garcia.** Did Robert Schumann have Dystonia? *Movement Disorder* 10, no. 4 (July 1995): pp. 413-7.

⁴⁹ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Hearld Pg.77 ref 90

⁵⁰ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – Music and Madness.* London, England: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985. Pg.89 ref 41

attempts at treatment. When playing the piano [he] cannot use his middle finger at all, the index finger only partially, and is in no condition to grasp an object and hold it firmly.”⁵¹

Unfortunately, Schumann’s condition only grew worse. In fact, the condition had progressed so much by 1832 that Schumann describes his third ringer as ‘incurable’ and ‘completely stiff.’⁵² Devastated by the consequences that this condition promised for his career as a concert pianist, Schumann turned to less traditional forms of medicine. Professor Kühl recommended that Schumann obtain the carcass of a freshly slaughtered animal. He then charged Schumann to insert his hand into its entrails.⁵³ Schumann himself describes this as follows:

“The cure is not the most charming, and I’m afraid that some of the animal nature will seep into my own, but otherwise it’s very invigorating.”⁵⁴

When this did not work, Schumann turned to the novel therapy of electroshock. He also received an unspecified powder with every meal.⁵⁵ This brew most likely consisted of toxic materials such as mercury and arsenic. This medication was taken for a substantial period of time and it is arguable that it worsened Schumann’s dystonia and contributed to the growth of his meningioma tumor. By the time he was admitted in Endenich, Schumann not only suffered from severe mental afflictions, but he was also

⁵¹ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – Music and Madness.* London, England: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985. Pg.89 ref 41

⁵² **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Herald Pg.78 ref 96

⁵³ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Herald Pg.78

⁵⁴ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Herald Pg.78 ref 97

⁵⁵ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Herald Pg.79

physically racked with symptoms consisting of often ‘uncontrollable shaking and trembling’⁵⁶ This is characteristic of a man who suffered from neurological impairment.

It must be stated that cause of dystonia is not known. However, many researchers believe that focal dystonia results from an abnormality in or damage to the basal ganglia (or other brain regions that control movement).⁵⁷ This may be due to abnormalities in the brain’s ability to process a group of chemicals called neurotransmitters that help cells in the brain communicate with each other. In cases such as these, there also may be abnormalities in the way the brain processes information and generates commands to move. In most cases, no irregularities are visible using the modern practice of magnetic resonance imaging or other diagnostic imaging.⁵⁸

The fact that Schumann’s tumor was specifically located on the basal ganglia is particularly interesting in this study. The essence of the basal ganglia’s function in the body is to manage nerve cells which control motor function. If there is excessive damage to the basal ganglia it can cause such diseases as Parkinson’s (the loss of control of motor neurons) or Hutchinson’s (paralysis caused by the need to consciously have control of all motor function). It also controls the motor neurons needed for eye movement.⁵⁹ It has also been shown that damage to the basal ganglia can lead to depression and a lack of

⁵⁶ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.311

⁵⁷ **Yebeles, Garcia.** Did Robert Schumann have Dystonia? *Movement Disorder* 10, no. 4 (July 1995): pp. 413-7.

⁵⁸ **Hikosaka, O; Takikawa, Y; Kawagoe.** *Journal of clinical neurology Seoul Korea* (2007) Volume: 3, Issue: 3, Publisher: Korean Neurological Association, Pages: 150-153

⁵⁹ **Hikosaka, O; Takikawa, Y; Kawagoe, R** (2000). "Role of the basal ganglia in the control of purposive saccadic eye movements". *Physiological reviews* **80** (3): 953–78.

motivation.⁶⁰ Many of these characteristics are displayed throughout Schumann's life as well as during his stay in Endenich.

In review, Schumann's autopsy shows a tumor that placed pressure on the basal ganglia. As it has already been stated, this tumor could have been caused or exacerbated by Schumann's prolonged exposures to mercury and diluted arsenic earlier in his life. In modern terminology, this tumor specifically represented a colloid cyst, a craniopharyngioma, a chordoma, or a chordoid meningioma. It is generally agreed upon that Schumann's particular tumor shares the most common characteristics with a meningioma. This is due to the autopsies visual description and the fact that a meningioma often causes focal seizures (such as Schumann possibly experienced from damage to the basal ganglia). Also, meningioma has been known to cause bi-polar behavior.⁶¹ It has been linked to progressive spastic weakness in legs and incontinence (This is characteristic of Schumann's final illness). In addition to this, a meningioma is not only genetic caused, but it can also be induced by exposure to toxic metals (particularly mercury - which Schumann was exposed to earlier in life).

What does this all of this mean in terms of our study of Schumann's synesthetic abilities? It is important to note that a meningioma (in particular) is known to produce musical auditory hallucinations when they are attached to the basal ganglia.⁶² It also corresponds with studies that indicate that specific synesthetic states can be induced by chemicals (or by specific types of tumors attributed to exposure to these chemicals).

⁶⁰ Niv, Y.; Rivlin-Etzion, M. (2007). "Parkinson's Disease: Fighting the Will?". *Journal of Neuroscience*. Volume 44

⁶¹ Scott M. "Musical hallucinations from meningioma", *JAMA* 1979; 241:1683.

⁶² Scott M. "Musical hallucinations from meningioma", *JAMA* 1979; 241:1683.

Perhaps the most compelling argument for this comes from the recent article *Auditory-Visual Synesthesia - Sound-Induced Photisms*. In this study it has been shown that damage to the basal ganglia produces the specific type of synesthesia (aural-visual) that Schumann experienced. In this article it also states:

“...an interaction between the auditory and visual systems may become manifest in some diseases of the anterior visual pathways”⁶³

Conclusion

In conclusion, strong medical evidence exists which suggests that Schumann’s synesthetic tendencies were enhanced by medications and/or a meningioma tumor. Still, through all of this, Schumann’s final illness speaks to us most poignantly on the human and emotional level. It was on the 4th of March in 1854 that Schumann was taken to a private asylum at Endenich. It was subsequently two and a half years until Clara was able to see him again. This time it would be on his deathbed.⁶⁴ Here (regardless of the manner of illness which drove him to the point of self-starvation) we observe Schumann’s humanity espoused in the love he carried in his heart for Clara. Earlier in his life this love would reflect in his music. Now, Schumann could once again only express it to her in letters. This is reflected in the following diary entry by Clara from October of 1854:

“There was his dear writing once more, and his noble spirit in every word, asking so gently and so lovingly for the children and for me, and speaking so kindly of my playing, I could not help saying all the time, that such a letter could not come from a sick man.”⁶⁵

⁶³ *Auditory-Visual Synesthesia - Sound-Induced Photisms*

⁶⁴ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.9

⁶⁵ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.315

Thus, like Clara, it is our response to treat the issue of Schumann's final illness with respect for the man who wrote music that touches our hearts in its vision and character. In this way, when studying his music and life, we see the mind of a genius and the heart of a poet.

Chapter 3

Glimpses into the Magic Circle

What is a magic circle? In my thoughts many definitions present themselves. For instance, it may be a realm of magic and fantasy. Or, inscribed in its finite limits one can see visions of the infinite. In other words, the idea of a magic circle conjures visions of an enjoyable afternoon spent daydreaming or images of mystical spells practiced by ancient wizards. These are controllable ideas. I can make them vanish in an instant when I feel the urge to return to reality. When I first encountered references in Schumann's writings to the 'magic circle' I thought that this may also be case. However, as I progressed in studying Schumann's life I realized that this was not necessarily true. Schumann could not always control these visions (In fact, it is arguable that towards the end of his life these sound-visions controlled him in correlation with Schizophrenia). Rather, in Schumann's case, his references to these magic circles seem to be a matter of perceptive states and innate synesthesia.

The medical study of synesthesia is a relatively new field of pathology. Hence, it is important to remember that, in Schumann's time, the terminology and study of synesthesia did not exist. Therefore, Schumann describes his induced sound perceptions in terms which he understood. These terms, though sometimes difficult to decipher, cumulatively piece together the puzzle of Schumann's extraordinary perceptive abilities.

Typically, sound based synesthesia is associated with involuntarily seeing colors in accordance with pitch, or tasting specific flavors on the tongue in conjunction with harmony. In Schumann's case, it appears that his senses are associated with his music in

an even more tangible way. Namely, it seems that Schumann's entire perception of reality was entangled with sound. This, as we shall see, was at first containable in the psychological confines of his magic circle. Then, as his life progressed, images and realities of this circle were unleashed in an uncontrollable torrent which Schumann could no longer consciously battle.

As a young man Schumann entered into the realm of sound-visions when he sat at the piano forte. From a psychological perspective it is perhaps understandable that inside this circle of sound Schumann found a realm of escape and refuge from the troubles of his life (his father died while Schumann was still a teenager, his brother died of tuberculosis and his sister died from a suicide (all before Robert Schumann reached the age of twenty). In the piano forte Robert found an outlet for his imagination, emotions and loneliness. This is reflected in the following statement:

“If heaven has gifted you with a lively imagination, you will often, in lonely hours, sit as though spell-bound at the piano forte, seeking to express your inner feelings in harmonies; and you may find yourself drawn into a magic circle...”⁶⁶

Here, in his circle, Schumann was transported from the ordinary into the realm of the extraordinary. Visions present themselves to his lively imagination and found their embodiment in tone. On the surface we could write off Schumann's experiences as mere day dreaming or as a means of escape from harsh reality. However, if this was the case, the consistency and intensity of Schumann's visions strike me as unusually potent. For instance, while composing his *Nachtstücke for Pianoforte* Op. 23 Schumann wrote that he experienced the following vision:

⁶⁶(Musical Improvisation; art, education and society Pg.288)

“As I was composing I continually saw funeral processions, coffins, unhappy, despairing men; and when I was finished with the composition and sought a title for a long time, I kept coming back to this: “Funeral Fantasia” – Isn’t that remarkable – As I was composing I also was so moved that tears came to my eyes and I still did not know why.”⁶⁷

One would think that if Schumann was using his music merely as a means of escape he could have chosen a more pleasant day dream. Here, we see that Schumann’s emotions are innately tangled with the music that he produces. Also, this rather morbid vision seems to be sustained as a reaction to his composition rather than as a daydream. It is also interesting to note that Schumann chose the title for this work after completing it. Hence, there does not seem to be an effort to etch in the music a premeditated day dream. Rather, it seems that Schumann found the title to fit his visions. In this way, we also see that Schumann’s experience when composing at the piano was as much a reaction as an action. We also see that Schumann’s possessed the rare gift to instill his compositions with an external form without superimposing a plastic, impersonal character. Rather, it appears that Schumann’s perceptive abilities were organic in nature and, at the same time, retained a degree of control (at least in his early life).

The question of whether or not Schumann composed from a premeditated sketch or from spontaneous synesthetic experience is addressed by Schumann himself when he writes:

“In what way, incidentally, the sketch originated, whether from the internal to the external or vice versa, does not matter and no one can decide. Usually composers themselves do not know; one (composition) originates like this, the other like that; often an external picture points the way, often a sequence of tones conjures up an external

⁶⁷ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.97 ref 190

picture. If only music and independent melody remain, one should not brood but enjoy it.”⁶⁸

From the last part of this statement we see that Schumann desired to enjoy music independently of external influence. However, it seems that composing is, in some way, inseparable from experience for him. In this way, we also see that composition is both synesthetic and objective. Namely, for Schumann it originates simultaneously in the heart and in the mind.

Schumann’s synesthetic experience extends beyond his own compositions into his visual interpretations of the works of other composers and performers. For instance, when he writes about the German violinist Louis Spohr he says:

“Since he views everything through tears, all his ideas run together into formless, ethereal figures...”⁶⁹

It seems that Schumann had especially vivid visual experiences when hearing or playing the works of Frederic Chopin. Upon receiving a score of Chopin; Schumann writes:

“...I turned the pages without thinking – such vicarious enjoyment of soundless music is something magical. Besides, it seems to me that every composer’s note-pattern has a distinctive visual appearance... ‘So, let’s hear it,’ said Florestan. Eusebius obeyed. Pressed into a niche near the window, we listened. Eusebius played and seemed enraptured. He conjured up countless figures of a most lively animation.”⁷⁰

The first item I found interesting about this quote is Schumann’s ability to audiate (hear the written music in his mind) without literally hearing pitches. This also seems to

⁶⁸**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann*. New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.163 Ref 232

⁶⁹**Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – Music and Madness*. London, England: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985. Pg.108 ref 34

⁷⁰**Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – Music and Madness*. London, England: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985. Pg.83 ref 8

indicate that the score lives within Schumann's mind before it is ever realized on paper. It has been asserted that the reference to a 'distinctive visual appearance' inherent in the score refers solely to the composer's handwriting. However, I would argue that, in his preceding statement ('every composer's note-pattern') refers to the content of pitches rather than their written signature. I also found that Schumann chose the more passive side of his personality (Eusebius) to perform Chopin's music (rather than the boisterous Florestan). Perhaps this is a reflection on a more introspective character that Schumann perceives in Chopin's music. Regardless, it seems that the visual realization of Chopin's music manifested itself in the form of 'figures of a most lively animation' (or, in other words, remarkably vivid images).

Chopin was by no means the only artist-magician that Schumann encountered. The vividness of other musical spell casters was also strong. However, these other composers had different methods of entrancing Schumann's synesthetic perception. This is described by Schumann in regards to the violinist-composer Henri Vieuxtemps when he says:

"Other artist-magicians have different formulae. With Vieuxtemps it is not the individual beauties that hold us, nor Paganini's gradual concentration, nor yet the gradual expansion worked by other great artists. From the first tone to the last we find ourselves quite unexpectedly in a magic circle drawn around us without our knowing where it began or where it will end."⁷¹

Here, we see a very interesting aspect of Schumann's magic circle. Namely, the boundary of his perceived circle expands or contracts dependent on the formal structure used in the music. Schumann himself contrasts Nicolai Paganini's 'gradual

⁷¹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. pg.19-20

concentration’ (crystallization of the subject in variation form) with Vieuxtemps ‘gradual expansion’. It seems that Paganini’s method lends itself more effectively to seeing ‘individual beauties’ in music while Vieuxtemps draws Schumann into a more overwhelming state, of observation. Perhaps this quote could also explain Schumann’s ability to objectively see the circle of images floating over some performers (Clara’s performance for instance) while other performers seem to expand the circle until he is enveloped within its limits.

Some performers and composers are specifically able to lure Schumann into their realm of sound. For instance, in 1833 Schumann’s good friend Ludwig Schunke died of consumption. In his eulogy for Schunke, Schumann said the following:

“Ludwig (Schunke) sat more or less in front of the piano, as if transported there by a cloud; without knowing quite how, we were drawn into the stream of this work, unknown to any of us – I still see everything before me, the fading light, the walls silent, as if listening, friends gathered round, hardly daring to breathe, Florestan’s pale face, The Master (Raro) deep in thought, and Ludwig in the center, who like a sorcerer held us in a magical ring.”⁷²

It is interesting to note that Schumann was often terrified of the visions he perceived in his own works. For instance, Schumann noted that his work *Overture to Faust* (one of his last compositions) was so terrifying to him that he could barely bring himself to take it out of his desk. This phenomenon, however, is not relegated to Schumann’s late life. For instance, Schumann records his terrifying experience of writing the Paganini Etudes for piano in June of 1832 by stating:

“A picture that made a shocking impression - Paganini in a magic circle – the murdered wife – dancing skeletons and a train of dim, mesmerizing spirits...while making the

⁷²Daverio, John. *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.112 Ref 30

arrangements of the G-minor Presto the picture often hovered before me and I think the close reflects it.”⁷³

Once again we see a magic circle. This time it hovers terrifyingly in front of him as he composes. Regardless, it is here, in his circles, that music comes to startling reality. It may be difficult for me to define or imagine, but in a vicarious way, understanding Schumann’s circles has given me (as a musician) a new appreciation for Schumann’s music. And, through the lens of synesthetic understanding, these realms of enchantment have given me a glimpse into the inner workings of a rare soul.

The Magic Circle - Synesthetic Artistry

It seems that Robert Schumann’s view of composition does not consist of fitting together aesthetic puzzle-pieces. Rather, for Schumann, all aspects of art are related to each other. In this way, differing art forms illuminate not only themselves, but also artistic works which surround them. In this sense, Schumann believed in ideals (I might even say absolute truth) regarding aesthetic ideals. This interrelationship between the arts is reflected in the following quote by Schumann when he writes:

“As to the difficult question in general, to what extent instrumental music may go in presenting thoughts and events, here many seem too scrupulous. It is certainly wrong to believe that composers take up pen and paper with the torturous intention of expressing, of portraying, of painting this or that. Yet outward influences and impressions should not be underestimated.”⁷⁴

Robert Schumann certainly draws upon many trans-sensory stimuli in his perception of music. Particularly for Schumann, it seems that there exists an unusually

⁷³**Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg. 5 ref 154

⁷⁴**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.164 Ref 223

strong synesthetic correlation between musical abstraction and reality in terms of vision. In addition to this, his writing evidences complete sensory interconnectivity as imperative for completing the visualized image of sound through aural-visual interpolation. The necessity of combining all sensory elements when perceiving the meaning behind music is expounded upon by Schumann himself when he states:

“For the sense of sight every language has the greatest number of and most characteristic expressions. For the eye an object is light or dark, for the eye there are colors and forms, height and depth, breadth and length. It is a completely different matter with that which we perceive through hearing. Here we can distinguish only in terms of concord and discord. As soon as we want to embark on finer differentiations, we must call upon other senses for help.”⁷⁵

What is especially unusual about Schumann’s synesthetic experience is the degree of detail in which he perceives and describes the visions of his aural-visual synesthesia. In his writings this is prevalent to such a degree that one can imagine Schumann subconsciously experiencing a complete parallel sound-image world by employing all of his senses. Because of this, we must ask the question what are the senses (besides vision) which Schumann draws upon in his perception of images through music?

For Schumann, it seems that the translation of artistry between sensory mediums can even extend into the realm of the olfactory. This is reflected in the following observation by Schumann in 1834:

“Perhaps the flower is as fragrant for the deaf as the tone is sonorous for the blind.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.26

⁷⁶**Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.128 ref 97

Artistic interconnectivity such as this is crucial for understanding Schumann's extended abilities of perception. It is also important to note (in favor of the argument that Schumann was innately synesthetic) that he admits that his perceptive correlations between sight and sound existed in a subliminal and compulsory dialogue. This can be seen in the following observation by Schumann:

“Unconsciously along with the musical image an idea continues to operate along with the ear, the eye; and this, the ever active organ, perceives among the sounds and tones certain contours which may solidify and assume the shape of clear cut figures.”⁷⁷

It is my belief that ultimately, these sound-figures would take shape as reflections of Schumann's personality. This means that, beyond his physical senses, Schumann also created an analogue for music out of introspective insight. In terms of combining all elements of his synesthetic experience to maximize the involvement of creating and interpreting art, it seems to me that Schumann was consciously aware of some of his senses and subconsciously influenced by others. Still, these all work together to create a true work of genius. Schumann himself expounds upon the cumulative effect of this kind of compositional process when he says:

“The more the elements contain within themselves thoughts and forms produced by tones related to music, the more poetic or graphic expressions the compositions will have; the more fantastically or acutely the musician perceives in general, the more his work will uplift and captivate.”⁷⁸

Hence, Schumann's physical realization of his musical world came into focus through the sincerity, musical analogy and the mystical combination of his senses into a synesthetic whole.

⁷⁷**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.164 Ref 223

⁷⁸**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.164 Ref 223

Chapter 4

The Role of Aesthetic Philosophy in the Magic Circle

“The laws of morality are also those of art.”⁷⁹

This quotation is found in advice that Robert Schumann gives to young composers. If this was truly at the root of his aesthetic philosophy, then we can also surmise that Schumann viewed musical aesthetics as a reflection of nature. In this way, art and nature are reflections of each other. Thus, the life and morality of the composer is necessarily portrayed in his work (Perhaps Schumann’s ultimate success as a composer can also be attributed to this high degree of transparency and interconnectivity between his life and works).

It is arguable that never was a musician more influential as a composer and a music critic in his time than Robert Schumann. For instance, his reviews and commentaries helped to uncover the talent of the young and upcoming composer Johannes Brahms. Interestingly, what made his criticisms and commentaries on music so effective was the rich literary imagery he poured into them. These writings demonstrated his remarkable ability to combine reality with fancy and aesthetic philosophy with resonant imagination. This is reflected in the following quote by the noted Schumann scholar John Daverio:

“Art and life are perhaps more closely interwoven in Schumann’s music than in that of any other composer of the nineteenth century.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹Walker, Alan. *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.188-193

Even more remarkable than Schumann's ability to inscribe his impressions in words is his ability to transcribe his experiences into music. For Schumann, life was the basis of all genuine music; and, in turn, music evoked life (such was the strength with which the threads of his reality and artistry were intertwined). Because of this, Schumann held contempt for composers who, in his opinion, wrote music which attempted to manipulate emotions through superfluous clichés and sentimentality. It was his opinion that this music was not grounded in the same poetry which bound together his own compositions. This is reflected by Schumann himself in the following letter from April of 1838:

“I am affected by everything that goes on in the world and think it all over in my own way, politics, literature and people, and then I long to express my feelings and find an outlet for them in music. That is why my compositions are sometimes difficult to understand, because they are connected with distant interests; and sometimes striking, because everything extraordinary that happens impresses me and impels me to express it in music. And that is why so few (modern) compositions satisfy me, because, apart from all their faults of construction, they deal in musical sentiment of the lowest order, and in commonplace lyrical effusions. The best of what is done here does not equal my earliest musical efforts. Theirs may be a flower, but mine is a poem, and infinitely more spiritual; theirs is a mere natural impulse, mine the result of poetical consciousness.”⁸¹

While this statement could come across as being narcissistic, it also points to something very interesting. Namely, it shows us that Schumann regards his own music as a manifestation and expression of reality. In other words, Schumann would burst if he was not able to express all aspects of his life through music. Therefore, inscribed in Schumann's music we can expect to perceive a mirror of his life. However, it seems to me that it is not entirely possible for us to understand Schumann's musical conception

⁸⁰ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.131

⁸¹ **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.46

without first understanding his manner of perception. This need for perceptive understanding is echoed by Schumann when he says:

“Music mischievously hides behind its tinkling musical figures...with wonderful sound-meanings which knock at every human heart with the quiet question ‘Do you understand me?’, but are by no means understood by everyone.”⁸²

This quote seems to point to Schumann’s opinion that music contains an entity (or entities) disguised by figuration (This also corresponds with the earlier quotation in which he states that lesser composers deal merely with ‘common lyrical effusions’). In this statement, Schumann raises another issue in addition to the composer’s ability to inscribe meaning into the soul of a musical work. Namely, Schumann challenges the assumption that both artists and audience alike are able to perceive the underlying reality behind the music. For the performer this points to a greater need for musical understanding and for the listener it directs us to the concept that learning through listening can be its own art form.

There is certainly no lack of writing on Schumann’s part regarding his views on aesthetics and perception. Among his essays, music criticisms, poems and letters (as well as in the music itself) Schumann delineates in increasing detail his expectations of art and artist. As a young man Schumann started to develop his own theory of aesthetics. His first commentaries began as rather candid appraisals of his own abilities (These artistic abilities he regards as being innate). This can be seen in the following quote by Schumann as a young man:

⁸² **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.167 Ref 245

“What I actually am, I do not yet clearly know. I believe I have imagination and which, moreover, no one will deny me. I am not a deep thinker; I can never logically continue the thread of thought which perhaps I have begun successfully. Whether I am a poet – since one can never become one – future generations should decide”⁸³

I think that it is safe to say that, by and large, history has established Schumann as a poet. What I consider most fascinating, however, is Schumann’s idea that poetry must be intrinsic for the poet. In other words, it cannot be learned. This idea also lends itself well to the idea that Schumann considered himself to have innate perceptive abilities.

It is also interesting to note that Schumann’s opinion of himself as a philosopher is somewhat tepid. This deficiency, according to his words, stems from an inability to continue a conscious thread of thought to its conclusion. From this statement we can also draw a correlation. Namely, Schumann links imagination with poetry and logic with philosophy. Certainly, when viewing Schumann’s compositions and writing we find that the realm of imagination, intuition and fancy blossoms while the pieces which are most carefully planned typically are considered his weakest. In terms of philosophy, however, we must not completely underestimate Schumann’s abilities. It seems that Schumann, ultimately, was more interested in philosophic concept than in logical progression. This can be seen in the following quote by the scholar Thomas Brown:

“One of the most common criticisms leveled against Schumann is that he was not a philosopher. In the strict sense of the terms he was not, but he was deeply interested in those philosophic concepts which provided the aesthetic basis for his music.”⁸⁴

Therefore, in a sense, the concepts of aesthetic philosophy provided Schumann with a stable trellis upon which the tangled vines of his imagination could shoot forth

⁸³**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg. 24

⁸⁴**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg. 8

their musical blossoms. In this way, aesthetic philosophy also provides Schumann with a means of justifying his perceptive eccentricities by aligning them with ideals in art. It does seem that, from time to time, Schumann was in conflict with his own philosophies. This especially holds true when it conflicts with his ideas of music as an absolute entity. Schumann states this by saying:

“The main point remains whether music in itself, without words and commentary, is the thing, and preferably whether the spirit of music dwells within.”⁸⁵

From this quote we can surmise that Schumann regarded abstract description as subservient to the spirit of the music. Therefore, aesthetic philosophy must not be used to crush music with laws and regulations, but rather, it should be used as a light through which one can illuminate the underlying message of the music.

Indeed, it seems that free fantasy (rather than predetermined philosophy) was at the root of Schumann’s aesthetic values. Music, for him was a realm of escape and enchantment. Therefore, in my opinion, Schumann was not as interested in persuading others to an aesthetic view point as he was in presenting a compelling picture. This is the essence of his art. This is reflected in the following quote by the Schumann scholar Thomas Brown when he says:

“Schumann was never the lonely, questing philosopher wrestling with the world’s insoluble problems – not even in his later life. His world was essentially the world of his own personal experiences, and his experiences were inevitably limited by their domestic, ‘fireside’ character...He found delight in life’s more simple things – butterflies, rainbows, daffodils and the whimsical fancies of children...”⁸⁶

⁸⁵**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.163 Ref 231

⁸⁶**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.163 Ref 231

For the purposes of arguing that Schumann was a synesthete, however, it is pertinent to reinforce the view that Schumann perceived music as its own entity and that he considered himself as one of the few poets who could properly see its hidden ‘sound-meaning’. Perhaps, in this way, we can imagine that Schumann also used aesthetic philosophy as a means to inscribe his magic circle. In other words, Schumann used philosophy as a method to contain the wild and rampant specters and images which the music conjured from breaking forth and invading his sanity. As we shall see, towards the end of his life, these subjective and philosophical paradigms of aesthetics corroded.

As Schumann’s mental health deteriorated, so did his ability to place the already fragile barrier of austere subjectivity between himself and the contents of the music-visions which so longed to escape from the inscribed boundaries of their magic circle.

Chapter 5

Musical Visions of the Divine

When Robert Schumann received his first appointment as a music critic in 1833 he immediately had artistic friction with the views of the music reviewer Hofmeister (his predecessor). This conflict began when Hofmeister insisted that the title of their combined music journal should be “Tone-world”. Schumann, in objection to this name scathingly writes:

“I am inexorably opposed to the title ‘Tonwelt’; the expression ‘tone-sea’ might be applied, say, to Beethoven, but ‘tone-world’ would be fitting only for God Almighty.”⁸⁷

The phrase ‘would be fitting only for God Almighty’ echoes in my mind as being important. Is this reflective of the regard and respect that Schumann holds for the realm of sound? As I continued my study on this issue I concluded that this was indeed the case. And, in my opinion, this religious zeal for guarding (with reverence) the integrity of the ‘tone-world’ is at the heart of Schumann’s argument with Hofmeister.

In matters of professed faith, it is always speculative to assume a position regarding Schumann. He was Lutheran by profession, but his religious works also show a bent towards the Catholic faith. However, in matters of art and its relationship to the Divine, Schumann was far more defined in his opinions and outspoken in the defense of his views.

⁸⁷Plantiga, Leon. *Schumann as Critic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.5 ref 10

It seems that art (in all its forms) holds deep spiritual connotations for Schumann. Namely, he believed that underlying all real art one could find the artists impressions of a true Divine source. This expression by the artist, in an attempt to uncover Divine truth, takes the form of artistic language. The superiority of music as a form of this language is expressed by Schumann himself when he states:

“Music is poetry raised to a higher power; spirits speak the language of poetry, but the angels communicate in tones.”⁸⁸

In his opinion, the ability to become a true artist depended on the ability of an individual to speak in a form of heavenly language. Therefore, the artist is required to be, in a way, multilingual. This is reflected in the following quote from Schumann’s writing:

“There are two languages of art, the common earthly one which the majority of disciples of art learn to speak in school with diligence and good will, and the higher one, the celestial one, which mocks the most persistent studies, and to which men must be born.”⁸⁹

According to this quote, the requisites for understanding and communicating in this language are inherent and cannot be learned.

From my experience in studying Schumann’s writings, it is my conclusion that he believed in a core of aesthetic values which could be transferred between artistic mediums. This, in and of itself, forms an ekphratic (if not synesthetic) experience. For Schumann, this also stems from a belief in objective truth. In other words, the fibers of sensory artistic expression (visual, aural, tactile) are the result of unwinding a fundamental thread of Divine origin.

⁸⁸ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.43 ref 100

⁸⁹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.32

It seems that certain great composers, in Schumann's estimation, still create art through more humanistic facets. Ludwig van Beethoven is an example of this kind of composer. For instance, in 1835 Schumann wrote a review of Beethoven's 7th Symphony making the following commentary:

"...But most of all my fingers itch to get at those who insist that Beethoven always presented in his symphonies the most exalted sentiments: lofty ideas about God, immortality, and the courses of the stars. While the floral crown of the genius, to be sure, points to the heavens, his roots are planted in his beloved earth."⁹⁰

Hence, for Schumann, Beethoven's music exhibits the struggle between heavenly inspiration and earthly conflict. Perhaps this is a reason for Schumann's fascination and reverence for Beethoven's music. Namely, for Schumann, Beethoven's music acted as a medium between temporal appearance and underlying eternal states. This vision of eternal states is reflected by Schumann in prose when he writes about the slow movement of Beethoven's 7th Symphony:

"...Now it becomes very still in the village outside; only a butterfly flits past or a cherry blossom falls...The organ begins; the sun is high in the sky, and single long, oblique rays play upon the particles of dust throughout the church..."⁹¹

Here, we step into another magic circle with Schumann. Surely, this music is rooted in Beethoven's 'beloved earth', but the allegory behind Schumann's descriptions points to an underlying depth of meaning. Like the authors Jean Paul and E.T.A. Hoffman (who Schumann so admired), this quote points to the extraordinary that underlies the ordinary.

⁹⁰ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.67 ref 27

⁹¹ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.98 ref 27

In a similar way to the novel *Siebenkäs*, Schumann uses the organ to describe fundamental artistic truth. Metaphorically, we can see the vision of man as dust which is caught in the light of the church windows as it falls. This interpretation of Schumann's comment may be personal. However, in my opinion, it is true that Schumann's use of prose points to underlying philosophical states. Therefore, this interpretation stands as my reflection on observances of Schumann's commentary regarding his own works and writings.

It seems that Beethoven held a special significance for Schumann in terms of poetic insight. Still, there are also other composers who strike a resonant chord with Schumann's aesthetic and poetic desires. For example, Schumann states regarding Hirshbach's music:

"... Words can hardly describe how his music is put together, and all the things that it expresses. His music is itself speech, such as the flowers speak to us, or as mysterious tales are related by the eyes, or as kindred spirits commune together from afar – the speech of the soul, profound, rich, genuine musical life."⁹²

This soul-speech can indeed be effective. Sometimes, however, it can also be terrifying. In July 1837 the mentally unstable Robert Schumann poured forth piano music in abundance. In response to these works Clara responds to him by writing:

"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?"⁹³

For Schumann, music could be a source of terror. In many ways, it is no wonder that Clara had this reaction to his music. At the time that she wrote this Schumann was

⁹²**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.185 ref 30

⁹³**Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a "New Poetic Age."* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.168 Pg.130

being ‘tortured internally by demonic music’. On the 31st of July 1837 Schumann can be quoted as writing:

“[I was] up the entire day and night, the most horrible in my life, thinking I might burn up with anxiety...one moment more and I might not have endured it any longer – I couldn’t sleep a wink amidst horrifying thoughts and eternally tormenting, tortuous music.”⁹⁴

Towards the end of his life (and his mental breakdown) Schumann often claimed that both the angelic and the demonic spoke to him in music. One offered visions of celestial bliss. The other inflicted auditory torment. Between these two extremes Schumann fought. Simultaneously, heaven and hell appeared to him as he struggled to maintain control of the forces unleashed in his magic sound-circle.

⁹⁴**Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.170 ref 137

Chapter 6

What is in a Name?

Robert Schumann's use of titles fascinates me. In my opinion, the evocative names match perfectly the character that Schumann intends to portray in his work.

Schumann's method in finding the proper title for a composition derives from the story that he first portrays musically. This is reflected in the following statement by Schumann:

“...that a well-chosen sign always enhances the hotel and the store, and that the crowd can be nourished not only with bread, but also with words. Titles, therefore, are necessary to us for our work...I simply choose a meaningful title which has both validity and significance for the whole story.”⁹⁵

In this way we see that Schumann viewed titles as necessary for giving the listener direction towards the substance of the work. Therefore, for Schumann, titles exist in order to enhance understanding of a work rather than providing original inspiration. For instance, Schumann's piano cycle *Carnaval* bears inscriptions based on the images which the music brought to Schumann's mind. We can see this when Schumann states:

“...Later I gave titles to the pieces and called the collection *Carnaval*...”⁹⁶

This general statement is not the only instance in which he on the use of titles in this work. Schumann also expounds further on this title-piece relationship in *Carnaval* in the following writing from his essay *Advice for Young Musicians*:

⁹⁵ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.162 Ref 228

⁹⁶ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.177 ref 262

“I attached the titles afterwards. Is not music always in itself sufficient and expressive? ‘Estrella’ is a name, such as is placed under portraits, to grasp the picture more firmly.”⁹⁷

In short, Schumann considered it absurd that one would consider his compositions as stemming from premeditated programmatic means. Rather, as coincides with his synesthetic condition, Schumann forms reality through his music. In fact, Schumann’s ire was often kindled when it was suggested otherwise. For instance, in 1839 he can be quoted as saying:

“Anything more inept and narrow-minded I have never easily come across, than what Rellstab has written about my *Kinderszenen*. He really thinks that I place a crying child before me and then search for tones accordingly. It is the other way around.”⁹⁸

In my opinion, these rather vitriolic remarks stem from Schumann’s deep aesthetic convictions which are rooted in synesthetic perception. This non programmatic aesthetic would coincide with a less Ekphratic approach on Schumann’s part towards composition; thereby strengthening the argument that Schumann was, indeed a synesthete.

It is also important to note that Schumann’s resistance towards being labeled as a ‘romantic’ composer indicates a degree of reluctance towards implied constraints of genre. For instance, in 1837 Schumann stresses his separation from images of romanticism when he says:

“I am heartily sick of the term romantic, though I have not spoken it ten times in my entire life.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Walker, Alan. *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.188-193

⁹⁸ Brown, Thomas. *The Aesthetics of Schumann*. New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.178 ref 264

⁹⁹ Plantiga, Leon. *Schumann as Critic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.104 ref 85

Hence, in Schumann's opinion, the term romantic places a constraint on the organic nature of his creative genius.

Now we must ask the question, if Schumann was not a programmatic composer, how did he become widely recognized as the master of the genre known as the character piece? The solution for this can be found in his innate abilities to live vicariously in music. In this way, his music was never a superficial description of external events, but a reflection on his perceived musical reality. Clara, for instance, was part of his reality, but she also existed in a musical form. In Schumann's mind her musical dialectic consisted of an ethereal combination of instruments. This can be seen in a letter from 1841 when Schumann writes:

“Really, my next symphony will be called ‘Clara’ and I will portray her with flutes, oboes, and harps...”¹⁰⁰

(Consequently, Clara's musical realization would unfold into existence as the D minor Symphony). As Schumann progressed in age, the perceived reality between these sound-images became increasingly entangled with his reality. Another example of this can be found in Schumann's work *Peri*.

The noted musicologist Benjamin Walter categorizes the work *Peri* as a ‘dialectical sounding image’.¹⁰¹ The mythical airy creatures that are known as Peri have been described in the *Damen Conversations Lexikon* (1837) as follows:

“They were thought to be completely ethereal in nature and satisfied their hunger on the aroma of blossoms...their beauty, namely that of the female Peris, is so unearthly that no

¹⁰⁰ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.241 Ref 90

¹⁰¹ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.284

description is capable of doing it justice. Their essence is angelic; they are elfin in lightness and airiness, and yet they are far more sublime in nature than elves...¹⁰²

Schumann attempts to capture this sublime nature in his work. If this is the case, however, one might argue that the work is indeed programmatic. A natural response for this concern can be found in an observation by Clara Schumann in 1843 regarding his composition of the work when she says:

“[Robert] has already played for me the First Part from the sketch, and I think it’s the most splendid thing he’s done so far; but he’s working with his whole body and soul, and with such intensity that I sometimes worry he might become ill; nonetheless [his work] also makes me happy, for I think it must be pleasing to Heaven for a human being to create something so noble, and therefore [I hope] that my Robert will be kept from harm.”¹⁰³

Here we see that Schumann worked at such a feverish height that it consumed him entirely. For me, the ability to plunge body and soul into a composition indicates an innate connection between the music and the composer. In this way, it is fascinating to consider that, through music; these wispy creatures may have drawn Schumann into yet another enchanted realm.

¹⁰² **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.275

¹⁰³ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.273 Ref 27

Chapter 7

Observations of Schumann's Character

In terms of our explorations of Schumann's magic circle it is imperative that we also examine characteristics of his personality and mental facility. This, in turn, provides us with clues as to the nature of his visions. For instance, do Schumann's sound-visions reflect any aspects of his own personality or are they observances on characteristics of others? If so, this gives us valuable insight into the nature of his synesthetic experience. When beginning this study it must be noted that voluminous quantities of sources can be cited in regards to Schumann's psychology. However, for the purposes of the topic at hand I have limited most of the information in this chapter to Schumann's personal assessments of his abilities and characteristics. This approach provides an authoritative source on the topic.

It has often occurred to me that trying to sum Schumann's personality and mental facility in terms of general statement can be both counterproductive and inaccurate. This stems from the fact that Schumann's personality and abilities were never static in either their growth or decline. Therefore, I have decided to divide the study of this subject into three sections according to Schumann's age. While still generalized, approaching the topic in this way gives a more accurate picture of Schumann's developing personality and mental acuties. Hence, we shall begin by examining Schumann's characteristics as a young man.

It is important to note that Schumann was a fearful young man. In his youth, Schumann often was paralyzed by the idea that he would contract cholera (Perhaps this is understandable seeing that his younger brother died of this condition). In regard to his fear, it is also important to note that he came from a family with extensive psychological issues.¹⁰⁴ It is conceivable then that his fears of becoming mad were not unwarranted. After all, they are founded in observations of his own family. It is also conceivable that, in his day, Schumann's aural-visual synesthesia also held both a promise of the magical unknown and a fear of impending madness. Still, at this young age, curiosity was stronger than fortitude and Schumann's poetic nature lured him into the promises of this mystical realm. Or, in Schumann's own words:

“...like everything mysterious, it has a special power.”¹⁰⁵

Schumann began his professional career by studying law. It is interesting to note that law schools in Schumann's time required students to familiarize themselves with Greek philosophy and literature. (Hence, it is most likely that Schumann was familiar with such dialectic ancient aesthetic philosophies as ekphrasis). However, his poetic nature soon desired to break free from the constraints of the legal profession and exercise itself in more fanciful realms. This led young Robert Schumann to quit his study of the law at the age of nineteen. The following years proved formative for the young artist. In a rather candid self assessment from 1831 Schumann describes himself in the third person when he writes:

¹⁰⁴ Walker, Alan. *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.3

¹⁰⁵ Plantiga, Leon. *Schumann as Critic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.71 ref 43

“S[chumann] is the young man I’ve loved and observed for a long time. I would like to portray his soul, but I don’t know it completely...[he possesses] talent for many things and unusual, individual traits distinguish him from the common horde...His temperament [is] melancholic because therein the power of feeling expresses itself more strongly than the power of observation; hence there is more subjectivity than objectivity in his judgments and creative work...[He has] a lively memory and re-collective faculty. Acumen, intellection, and wit [are] not so strongly developed...[He is] more inclined to artistic activity than to speculation – excellent in music and poetry – but not a musical genius – his talents as musician and poet are at the same level.”¹⁰⁶

In this quote we see a verbal self-portrait. Schumann identifies himself primarily as an artist. However, it is interesting to note that he did not consider himself at this time to be either a musical or poetic genius (even though he identifies artistic propensities). Later this lack of artistic self-esteem would disappear as he discovered that he possessed rare abilities to grasp the mechanics of composition intuitively rather than from a pedagogue. Still, Schumann’s conflicted youth can be marked with these bouts of self-doubt.

Simultaneously, we see that Schumann held relatively little regard for his abilities in terms of thinking in the way required to practice law (‘acumen, intellection and wit). In terms of his personality, Schumann identifies the melancholic temperament as his desired conduit for expression.

Perhaps, most interestingly, this quote reflects a tendency to objectify by separating himself from the issue at hand. Namely, by addressing himself in the third person, Schumann is able to quantify his abilities and characteristics more accurately. It is my opinion that this splitting of his personality later developed into increasingly discreet compartmentalization of the various aspects of his individuality.

¹⁰⁶ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.61 Ref 24

As a musical analogue to this psychological state, we can view Schumann's 'magic circle' as a way to understand the inner workings of his own synesthetic impulses. In other words, his innate ability to view musical works objectively increased simultaneously in vivid description and as manifestations of his personalities.

In October of 1831 Schumann once again found himself looking for a new profession. He had entered the study of piano performance as a career. Now, his third finger was crippled. Schumann's tried all kinds of alternative 'treatments'. These unhelpful solutions doubtless had an impact on the mind and confidence of such a sensitive soul. In a more holistic solution to his problem, Schumann decided to forgo copious amounts of alcohol, smoking and late sleepless nights (which had previously come to be a staple of his existence).¹⁰⁷ This temporarily produced a more positive result. Still, the overall effect of his treatments doubtless had a psychological effect on the young Schumann; further stressing him to escape the cruelties of reality by living in his realms of sound-vision.

In addition to his fearful youth and developing bi-polarity, it also strikes me that Schumann was both impulsive and compulsive by nature. In terms of his compositional output this can be seen in a superficial glance of his works categorized by time period. For instance, in the year before his marriage to Clara (1839) he only wrote piano compositions. Or, the following year (1840), he poured forth multitudinous works of lieder and relatively little otherwise. This trend can be seen throughout his life (i.e. the chamber music year, the symphonic years etc.) This, seems to indicate a neurotic

¹⁰⁷ Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.32

tendency to only compose what and when he feels like it. Schumann reflects on this impulsive nature in a letter to Clara in June of 1839 when he writes:

“In years to come you will often worry about me, so much is still needed to make a man of me; I am often too restless, too childish, too yielding; and I often abandon myself to whatever gives me pleasure without considering other people...”¹⁰⁸

Schumann’s compositional timeline also provides us with the insight that his works were created in spurts of overabounding inspiration. This inspiration could come from suffering (from his estrangement from Clara for instance), or from joy (from a marriage, good health, natural beauty or a new child in the family). An example of this happy condition can be seen in the following quote from 1832:

“Today is a heavenly day in May, thus, I want to create and work, and with diligence and action be thankful to my genius which sustains me.”¹⁰⁹

Impulsive Thoughts and Musical ‘Butterflies’

A circle of sound-visions could be especially interesting to an compulsive mind. The visions Schumann sees in sound might metaphorically flit in and out of existence like his beloved papillons (butterflies) and provide him with inspirations based on visual-aural impulses. In Schumann’s own writing it is apparent that these butterflies formed organically from subconscious inspiration. This can be seen in the following letter which Robert Schumann wrote to the music critic Rellstab:

¹⁰⁸ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.97 ref 191

¹⁰⁹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.97 ref 191

“I kept turning over the last page, for the end seemed to me only a new beginning – almost unconsciously I found myself at the pianoforte, and so one Papillon after another came into being...”¹¹⁰

This quote seems to suggest that Schumann gave birth to these ‘butterflies’ through music, but not with conscious intent. For Schumann, it also appears that these illusory musical images manifest themselves in surprising synesthetic detail. This is reflected by Schumann when he states.

“Even smaller, more specific pictures can lend such a charming, enduring character, that one is surprised how it (music) can express such features. Thus a composer explained to me, that while composing, the picture of a butterfly perpetually appeared, which swam along on a leaf in the brook; this gave to the small piece a delicacy and naiveté as perhaps only the image may possess in reality.”¹¹¹

Once again we see that Schumann refers to himself in the third person. Perhaps he uses this as a way to protect himself from ridicule because of his ability to perceive visual images in sound. Regardless, it is important to note that, according to this statement, Schumann considered these pictures as an aid in appreciating his own works as well as the works of others. In a letter to his mother Schumann describes other visions induced by his work *Papillons* which appeared to him through his circle of sound:

“In many a sleepless night I saw a distant picture like a goal - while writing down *Papillons*, I really feel how a certain independence tends to develop itself, which, however, the critic usually rejects. – Now the butterflies flutter in the wide heavenly world of spring, spring itself is at the door and looks at me – A child with heavenly blue eyes – and now I begin to understand my existence – the silence is broken.”¹¹²

¹¹⁰ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.147 letter to Rellstab

¹¹¹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.168 Ref 248

¹¹² **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.170 Ref 252

This quote denotes that Schumann experienced his visions in a realm of perceived time (as we shall see later in this exploration of Schumann's magic circle, key and time perception had a fundamental connotation for Schumann). Namely, for Schumann, spring objectively personifies itself as a child and reveals itself to Schumann through his own music. This statement also has important implications regarding Schumann's perception of himself through music. Most notably, Schumann states that he begins to understand his existence through his own musical work.

It is important to note that this statement also comes at a pivotal point in Schumann's life. At this moment he was as close to a mental breakdown as he would be until the loss of his sanity in 1845. Schumann learned to encapsulate these 'butterflies' in his composition *Papillons*. With it, Schumann also found a means of controlling his visions. The silence of fear, which caused Schumann to distance himself from his inner musical dialogue had been broken. A new epoch in Schumann's life had begun. Now, the momentary 'butterflies' of his impulsive imagination would unfold into more extended sound-stories within the ever expanding boundaries of his magic circles.

Schumann the Active and Reactive Listener

In 1839 Hector Berlioz' *Waverly* overture was reviewed by Robert Schumann as follows:

“It would be easy for me to depict the overture either in a poetic fashion by reproducing the various images it evokes in me, or in a dissection of the mechanics of the work.”¹¹³

I find it interesting to note that Schumann outlines two modes for describing the work. The first approach, description through evocative images, expands perception of

¹¹³ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.77 ref 64

the work through poetry. The second method, description through theoretical analysis, dissects the works into component parts. It seems that Schumann is capable of achieving both. However, the very fact that Schumann is consciously aware of the dichotomy between these two modes of description is remarkable. It implies that Schumann himself perceives music both actively (through conscious analysis) and reactively (through perceived aural-visual images). In my opinion, this way of listening is also reflected in his method of composition.

As we have seen, composition, for Schumann, was an art of seeing images while he was composing (reactive composition) and actively writing the notes that begat these images. Hence, for Schumann, composition also became an introspective art as he analyzed his own compositions to derive connections between implemented compositional technique and synesthetic effect (this will be addressed in greater detail later in this document). From this self-examination Schumann was able integrate his own synesthetic abilities for great compositional use. His reactive listening can be seen in a rather humorous impression of his own work *Kinderscenen* when he says:

“...I am very proud of them, make a great impression – especially on myself – when I perform them...”¹¹⁴

It is also important to note that, in certain cases, Schumann’s ability to perceive images and stories only occurs once the work is finished in its entirety. For instance, of his character piece *In Der Nacht (Op.12 No.4)*, Schumann writes:

“After I had finished I found to my joy the story of Hero and Leander in it. When I play *Die Nacht* I cannot forget the picture – first, how he plunges into the sea – she calls – he

¹¹⁴ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg. 186

answers – through the waves he safely reaches land – then the cantilena where they embrace – when he must away again, he cannot bring himself to part – then night once more shrouds everything in darkness...”¹¹⁵

It may seem amazing that Schumann discovered the meaning of his work only after its completion. Unlike the reverse phenomenon of programmatic writing (which desires to fit music to a story), this manner of writing only recognizes its subconscious synesthetic root once it has fully composed itself.

In Der Nacht is not the only instance in which Schumann discovers the hidden meaning of his own works. Interestingly enough, in certain instances, Schumann uncovers hidden meaning within the musical tableaux of a larger cycle both simultaneously with its composition and in retrospect after its completion. For instance, while writing the cycle of eighteen dances entitled *Davidsbündlertanze* Op.6 Schumann remarks that at the end of dance nine he saw the character Florestan. He describes this vision as follows:

“Hereupon Florestan finished, his lips quivered painfully”¹¹⁶

Likewise, in the final dance (number eighteen), Schumann sees the character Eusebius and inscribes in the score the following description:

“Quite superfluously Eusebius remarked as follows, but his eyes beamed blissfully the while.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.182

¹¹⁶ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.173

¹¹⁷ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.168

However, it was only after the completion of the work that Schumann discovered a deeper subconscious analogue for the closing repeated tone ‘C’. He codifies this in the following commentary:

“...At the end of the *Davidstänze* it strikes twelve (The great bell), as I have discovered (twelve repetitions of the Great C crotchet near the end.)”¹¹⁸

The fact that Schumann states that he ‘discovered’ this musical reality, rather than saying that this was merely his superimposed interpretation of the music, points to the idea that Schumann viewed an kind of reality underlying his music.

It is also important to note the symbolic significance that the tolling bell holds for Schumann. In the novels of Jean Paul the strike of twelve signals the hour of midnight and the ending of the masked ball. For Robert Schumann this also came to represent the moment of death. Interestingly enough, the chime of bells also carries the connotation of marriage for Schumann. For instance, in a letter to Clara dated March 18th 1838 Schumann writes his impression regarding *Ende vom Lied* (*Op. 12 No. 8*) as follows:

“I thought that everything had reached the end, everything would resolve itself in merry wedding. But as I thought of you sorrow came over me, and the result was a chime of wedding bells mingled with a death knell.”¹¹⁹

Perhaps in a prophetic way, this vision of the postlude for his future wedding procession fades into the distance of pianissimo tones until the only note which we can perceive is the tolling of a bell in the distance.

¹¹⁸ Bedford, Herbert. *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.173

¹¹⁹ Bedford, Herbert. *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.176

Chapter 8

New Musical Frameworks

By and large, Schumann's most important works during his years of compositional and artistic formation (1810-1839) are found in his music for the keyboard. This began in 1829 with his composition of the piano variations on the name of A.B.E.G.G. Op.1. During the next ten years the majority of his major compositions were written for the piano (i.e. *Carnival*, *Fantasie*, *Dauidsbündlertanze*, *Fantasiestücke*). During this time an overarching aesthetic trend which reverts towards classicism can be detected in Schumann's music. This can be seen in the following quotation from the noted Schumann scholar Thomas Brown:

“By examining four representative works, *Papillons*, *Carnaval*, *Kinderszenen*, and *Kreisleriana* a trend from a romantic to a more classic style of composition can be noted. In a chronological study of the four compositions a decreasing dependency on literature can be seen. The romantic conception of a union of words and music plays a much less important role in *Kreisleriana* than in *Papillons*.”¹²⁰

Hence, music and counterpoint began to be the basis of Schumann's sound-stories rather than the sole result of literary inspirations. Here, for Schumann, musical magic increased as complete tales were spun in sound rather than in momentary illusory impulses (such as the ones found in *Papillons*).

Robert Schumann's middle period is marked by an expansion into compositional genres beyond solo piano writing. While this extension is diverse in nature, it is important

¹²⁰ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann*. New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.168

to note that Schumann still focuses his compositional intent almost obsessively on one specific genre at a time. For instance, the year ‘Year of Song’ burst into bloom in 1840¹²¹. In this year Schumann devoted his complete compositional attention on the creation of lieder (This is witnessed by the 168 songs that poured forth from his pen in 1840). This fixation with song writing can perhaps be attributed to his philosophy (first stated in a letter from 1833) that: “Song unites the highest, word and tone.”¹²² However, even within this context, Schumann still maintains that music is a higher art form than verbal poetry. Thus, the text of the song is subservient to the music. For instance, in his advice to young musicians he states:

“I must mention that I added the text to the music, not the reverse – for that would seem to me a silly beginning...”¹²³

In this way, Schumann is able to maintain the intent of his composition and simultaneously elevate the text of the poetry to a higher artistic plane. Also, through song, Schumann has combined his two highest disciplines in art (music and poetry) into a cohesive unity. Hence, we see that his early period of piano solo writing began to be gradually supplanted by an extension into realms of differing musical idioms.

The natural fractal branching of Schumann’s compositional tree extends in the following year (1841) into pieces for larger ensembles. This is reflected in the following quote by Thomas Brown:

¹²¹**Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. pg.142

¹²²**Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.203 Ref 67

¹²³**Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music.* London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.188-193

“After the songs of 1840-1841 Schumann concentrates on more classical forms, such as the symphony, concerto, string quartet, piano trio, oratorio and opera.”¹²⁴

Specifically, in 1841 Schumann began his orchestral and concerto writing¹²⁵.

However, the ever restless Schumann was soon eager to branch into new territories of sound. In fact, Schumann’s compositions took a new turn the very next year.

The year 1842 is commonly called ‘The Year of Chamber Music’¹²⁶. This year saw the prodigious birth of: three string quartets, his piano quintet, a piano quartet and his piano trio. Unfortunately, the effort of this creation took its toll on Schumann both mentally and physically. By the end of the year he had a minor mental breakdown. Perhaps this condition was also exacerbated by the pressure of having to support his growing family. Schumann refers to this breakdown as ‘weakness of the nerves’.¹²⁷ Fortunately, Schumann recovered from this setback with the aid of more leisure time and a teaching position which eased his financial burdens.

The following five years of (1843-1847) saw an expansion of his compositions into new genres and synthesis of his theoretical training with his natural abilities. For Schumann, this stems from discovering music and composers from the past. Schumann delved into the music of Baroque and Classical composers. This caused Schumann to produce his first oratorio *Paradise and Peri* in 1843. By the year 1845, Schumann’s fascination with Bach also caused an increase in his fugal and contrapuntal writing. This is reflected in the following quote by the Schumann scholar Joan Chissel:

¹²⁴ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.181

¹²⁵ **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.259

¹²⁶ **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.156

¹²⁷ **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.59

“Schumann’s intensive study of Bach resulted in 1845 in an outpouring of contrapuntal music, including Studies for pedal-piano (Op.56), Sketches for pedal-piano (Op.58), six Fugues on B.A.C.H. for organ or pedal-piano (Op.60) and four Fugues for piano (Op.72).”¹²⁸

This study of counterpoint resulted not only in a bounty of contrapuntal works; it also led Schumann towards a new approach for his compositional style. Here, in this more mentally objective tactic, Schumann found control over his work. This new form of composition is reflected in the following statement by the Schumann scholar Joan Chissell when she states:

“Schumann declared that he changed his compositional method in the mid – 1840s; he began to sketch and plan, rather than letting music pour out from poetic inspiration. This ‘new manner’, together with his turn to large-scale symphonic forms, has been characterized as a more ‘objective’ and classical approach, in contrast to the ‘subjective’ and Romantic attitude of before.”¹²⁹

In short, this is a time of relative contentment for Robert Schumann. No longer was he the tortured musical ‘free radical’. Also, relatively peaceful domesticity had replaced the ire of the warring Davidsbündler. In other words, rather than causing Schumann increased interpersonal dissonance, his relationships forced him to begin the process of aligning himself in harmonious counterpoint with the world around him. Even the strained relationship with his father-in-law was eased when Weick came to celebrate Christmas with the Schumann family in 1845. Still, the ethereal figures beckoned Schumann back into their magic circle. Hauntingly (and perhaps prophetically), Schumann confides that while he was working on *Paradise and Peri* a mysterious voice occasionally whispered in his ear these words:

¹²⁸ Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.67

¹²⁹ Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.8

“What you are doing is not completely in vain”¹³⁰

Yes, the images he saw and the voices he heard were temporarily contained and neatly inscribed in a safe place; far from the reaches of his sanity. However, the time was soon coming when Schumann’s sound-visions would break forth from their crafted sphere as they lured Schumann into a new form of divination.

¹³⁰ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010.

Chapter 9

Schumann's Late Writings

1848 was Robert Schumann's most 'fruitful' year according to his own statement¹³¹. This year saw a torrent of compositions. It is also characterized in Schumann's output by an increase in vocal, choral, operatic and dramatic writing. Thus, his last years of composing began on a cheery and productive note. This was not to last however. Schumann's psychological state became increasingly withdrawn. This is reflected in the following statement from his friend Richard Phol:

“His (Schumann's) mood was deeply serious; completely absorbed in the score, forgetting the audience altogether, taking little notice even of the orchestral musicians, he lived in his tones...”¹³²

This statement from 1851 regards Schumann conducting his melodrama *Manfred*. His absolute focus on the music would eventually not only eclipse his audience, but surprisingly the orchestra that he was conducting as well. In fact, Schumann was relieved of his final conducting position with the Dusseldorf Symphony because he was, at the time, so absorbed in the music of his mind that he would simply forget to continue conducting. This extreme audiation of sound became so real that it eventually precluded Schumann's relationship to actualized sound. By the time of his mental breakdown in 1854, Schumann heard entire symphonies in his mind. According to Schumann, these sounds came not from his own mind, but from otherworldly voices. In response to this

¹³¹ Bedford, Herbert. *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.194

¹³² Bedford, Herbert. *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.239

Schumann sought a way to dictate this heavenly music. The answer, for Schumann, came in the form of a new kind of medium. Namely, Schumann found a connection to his ghostly apparitions through the occult tradition of table tipping.

In brief, the practice of table tipping involves individuals gathering around a circular table with their hands on its surface. Supposedly, in the séance, the table would become off balance and tap messages from ghosts or spiritual entities. It became Schumann's obsession for many years until his final breakdown. From the experience of table tipping, Schumann claimed to have been in contact with the ghosts of Beethoven and Schubert in addition to angelic beings. Schumann, according to his own words, also used these divinations as foundations for his late compositions. Thus, Schumann found a new connection to his magic circle (and perhaps a new way of keeping his sanity). This time Schumann's metaphysical sound-circle was grounded in a physical reality rather existing solely in the haunting sound-specters his magic circle.

It is my opinion that through this form of composition Schumann no longer sought to inscribe the petty nature of temporal whims (papillons) and worldly characters. Rather, he perceived that he was in contact with eternal states of being. Some argue Schumann's underlying motivation for composition was still subconsciously driven by society and interpersonal relationships. From this point of view, Schumann's encounters with otherworldly specters were merely subliminal projections of the world that surrounded him. Hence, underlying the surface of Schumann's late works we can see echoes of the poet in a troubled world. The Schumann scholar Laura Tunbridge reflects on this when she says:

“On the surface, Schumann’s late works have a contradictory, alienated relationship with society; the composer is often described as having ‘withdrawn’ from the world...”¹³³

Regardless, the point remains that Schumann’s perception (whether or not it was grounded in fact or fiction) understood and communicated with spiritual beings through sound. Here, the sound-images which he had previously viewed objectively as a synesthetic experience had found a manifestation (through his obsession with table tipping) that he viewed as a concrete connection. Perhaps this, in turn, could also give some validity in the eyes of society for his synesthetic experiences (since table tipping was typically practiced as a communal activity). In this way, Schumann could justify his own aural-visions to others in a more socially acceptable way. It is perhaps surprising then that the reception of Schumann’s late works is generally more negative than his previous compositions.

Part of the negative critical responses towards to his late works can perhaps be attributed to Schumann’s lack of stylistic consistency between his compositions towards the end of his life.¹³⁴ However, it has been argued that Schumann’s lake of uniformity in compositional style may not portray a weakening of his mental capacity as much as it displays the summation of his previous styles. For instance, Laura Tunbridge once again illuminates this issue by citing the opinion of the celebrated Schumann scholar John Devario when she says:

“John Devario, the most influential recent American scholar of Schumann, describes the composer’s late music as recapitulating, ‘in microcosm, the achievements of an entire creative life’. Thus ‘it embraces a broad diversity of styles’; the products, according to Daverio, ‘of a varied array of personas’, that range from the lyricism of lieder and the

¹³³ Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.7

¹³⁴ Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.6

public style of symphonic works to Schumann as storyteller, ecclesiastic, collector, pedagogue and Davidsbündler.”¹³⁵

This opinion echoes my own in regards to Schumann’s late works. Typically, I have found that the examples used to describe Schumann’s late style are chosen discriminately to strengthen the argument that Schumann was losing his mental faculties due to the tertiary symptoms of syphilis. However, it should be noted that not all of his late compositions are simple in form or compositional technique. In fact, many of these compositions are among his most complex works.¹³⁶ Even the ‘simple’ music that Schumann composed late in life reflects a conscious awareness about the world surrounding him. This can be seen in the following quote by Tunbridge:

“However, by sometimes writing ‘simple’ music in the 1850s, Schumann was not being untimely but rather participating in the culture around him; a world of choral societies, music festivals, and nationalist *Volkstümlichkeit*.”¹³⁷

Hence, the lack of consistency between Schumann’s stylistic considerations can be interpreted as a planar approach to composition. Namely, it is my opinion that Schumann uses this disparity to separate the plane of the worldly from the realm of the supernatural. Therefore, it is also arguable that his separation of compositional tactics may also be a reflection of an increasingly bi-polar state of mind.

It is interesting to note that, while his later works were more heavily criticized during his lifetime, Schumann did not reject them. Rather, his more successful works were the ones that he generally did not desire to be republished.¹³⁸ In this way, Schumann gives us his stamp of approval for his late works. Because of this, it is my opinion these

¹³⁵ Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.7

¹³⁶ Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.8

¹³⁷ Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.7

¹³⁸ Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.5

works should not be underestimated as compositions. It must be remembered that, at this point in his life, Schumann straddled two perceived worlds. One was natural and the other supernatural. To connect these two worlds Schumann depended on his magic circle. This time the circle came in the form of direct divination.

Chapter 10

Magic Circles and Evocative Desires

It has come to my attention that Schumann's music often reflects erotic aspects of his synesthetic perception. This is partly due to the fact that many of his most intense periods of composition existed due to either: romantic passion, sexual frustration or married bliss. However, at a more elemental level it also reflects a degree of synesthetic interconnectivity between music and reality. In regards to women, this is reflected upon by Schumann himself when he states:

“It's amazing that there are no female composers... Women could perhaps be regarded as the frozen, firm embodiment of music.”¹³⁹

In regards to his love for Clara, it seems that this was also the case. Namely, for Schumann, her music was indistinguishable from her nature. The following letter from Schumann to Clara from March 18th of the year 1838 tells us much regarding his connection between music and physical reality in regards to Clara:

“What a joy your music will be to me, too! If I once said I only loved you because of your goodness, it was only half true. Everything is so harmoniously combined in your nature that I cannot think of you apart from your music – and so I love the one with the other...”¹⁴⁰

It is interesting to note that Schumann also sees a musical portrait of himself in the works of his beloved (an instance of this can be seen when Schumann claims to see

¹³⁹ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – Music and Madness.* London, England: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1985. Pg.87 ref 29

¹⁴⁰ **Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann – Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979. Pg.188-189

himself in Clara's G-minor Romance for the piano).¹⁴¹ Regardless, this simultaneously physical and musical love that Schumann holds for Clara is reflected in a special way through his early piano cycles of the 1830s. The work *Novelletten* Op.21, in particular, seems to be of particular intensity in its portrayal of Clara through music. Schumann writes about this in the following note to Clara:

“In the *Novelletten* you appear in every possible attitude and situation and all else that is irresistible in you...I assert that *Novelletten* could only be written by one who knows such eyes as yours and has touched such lips as yours. In short, better things might be made; similar ones, hardly...”¹⁴²

Hence, in Schumann's eyes, we find that Clara is seen as a physical manifestation of her inner music being. Indeed, it is my belief that Schumann's copious outpouring of piano music between the years of 1835 and 1840 can largely be attributed to this synesthetic understanding of love and his consequent struggle to gain Clara as his wife. Schumann comments on this himself when he writes:

“Certainly much of the struggle which Clara has cost me may be contained in my music, and surely may have been understood by you. The concerto, the sonata, the *Davidsbündlertänze*, *Kriesleriana*, and the *Novelletten* she, almost alone, brought about.”¹⁴³

These pieces may even represent a conservative estimate of the piano works produced from the passion of his love for her. For instance, Clara was also the intended recipient (and performer) for the *Phantasiestücke* Op.12, the *Kinderszenen*, and the *Phantasie* Op.17. Schumann's reflections on the topic of Clara's importance in his

¹⁴¹ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.188 ref 19

¹⁴² **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.201

¹⁴³ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.98 ref 197

production of piano music can be seen in the following note to his theory teacher Dorn when writes:

“Some traces of the battle I had to fight on Clara’s account may perhaps be discernible in my music, and you will not fail to comprehend them.”¹⁴⁴

In my opinion, the tension that existed in Robert Schumann’s separation from Clara seems to be at the heart of his creative genius as a youth. This longing nearly drove him to an early mental breakdown. However, many psychologists have noted that this insanity was held at bay because of his ability to channel his tension into the creation of music. Schumann himself reflects on this when he states:

“I have found that suspense and longing are the best spurs to the imagination, I have had my full share of these the last few days, as I sat waiting for your letter and writing whole volumes of wonderful, crazy, gay compositions, which will make you open your eyes when you play them.”¹⁴⁵

As a youth, Schumann had come to revere passion as a transformative element which is able to affect (as one scholar states) both its ‘subject and object’.¹⁴⁶ Here, in a world of evocative desires, Schumann channels his energy into creating works that he hopes will speak to Clara’s heart. Consequently, Schumann’s voluminous effort still stands as a testament for his overflowing love and musical vision.

¹⁴⁴**Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann –Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979. Pg.132

¹⁴⁵**Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann –Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979. Pg.187

¹⁴⁶**Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.28

Chapter 11

The Role of Tone in Schumann's Magic Circle

The role of tone in Robert Schumann's life, aesthetic values and musical compositions holds a distinctive significance. The Schumann scholar Thomas Brown can be quoted as saying:

“A discussion of Schumann's aesthetics might consider first his remarks on tones and their properties. For him tones have a special intrinsic value”¹⁴⁷

In Schumann's innate correlation between life and music, tone played a fundamental role. In other words, for Schumann, tone was the single fundamental thread that bound the entire tapestry of music (and the threads of his reality) together. For instance, in a fragment from Jean Paul's (the author of highest estimation for Schumann) chilling early poem-novel *Siebenkäs* he writes about the protagonist Selene and her companions as they hear a singular emanating tone from the organ loft of a church:

“Silence – then a single, deep tone wandered quietly (as if it were afraid to breathe), hardly audibly, though the nave – new tones joined in – then everything overflowed with tones, then the stones, the statues, the portraits of the saints seemed to come to life in tones and everything resounded as if bewitched...”¹⁴⁸

These words struck a resonant chord with young Robert. In a deeper psychological sense, this poetry reflects Schumann's conception of life. First, it starts from the Divine. This fundamental tone-life sparks the creation of new tones. These, in turn, create the harmony which governs life; a harmony that breathes life into the

¹⁴⁷ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.25

¹⁴⁸ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.42 ref 98

otherwise cold and lifeless cathedral of silent images. All of this begins with a single tone.

Another example of the importance that a single note could hold for Schumann can be seen in his work *Fantasie Op.17*. Schumann entitled the first movement of his *Fantasie Op.17* as ‘Ruins’. This title was eventually erased before it reached the point of publication. Still, it speaks volumes about Schumann’s life at the time of its composition. When he wrote this work Schumann was deeply in love with Clara (from whom he was in an enforced estrangement). The inscription of the work reads:

“Through all the tones in Earth’s many-colored dream (notice the synesthetic connotation of tones and colors) there sounds one soft long-drawn note for the secret listener.”¹⁴⁹

Later, in a letter to Clara, Schumann mentions to her:

“Tell me what you think in hearing the first piece of the *Fantasie*. Does it not call up pictures to you?...Don’t you think the ‘note’ (he later writes to Clara that this note is ‘F’) in the motto is you? I almost believe it.”¹⁵⁰

Hence, the driving force of his existence seems to have changed. He identifies Clara as the tone which unifies his existence and breathes life into the ‘ruins’ of his debauched life. Hence, the empty silent cathedral of the novel *Siebenkäs* has become a ruin (Indeed, his despair in this period of his life nearly drove him mad and caused him to contemplate suicide as evidenced in letters). Clara became the object of all his attention; the ‘note’ that emanated for her ‘secret listener’.

¹⁴⁹ **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.188

¹⁵⁰ **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.189

In terms of synesthesia, it is interesting to note that Schumann compares tones to liquefied sensation. However, in Schumann's case, this synthesis not only includes color, tactile sensation and visual images; it also encompasses emotional and spiritual states.

This can be seen in the following quote by Schumann:

“Thus music is the spiritual dissolution of our sensations. Not until we have experienced a pain or a joy in its entirety, does it excite us deeply – The spiritual realm of tones becomes alive, however, it becomes deeper and brighter in the soul... Whoever possesses tones, does not need tears, both are equivalent – dissolved sensations of the soul.”¹⁵¹

Once again, we see that the unifying thread of tone is woven into the ether of Schumann's reality. These perceptive abilities also allowed Schumann to translate tears into tones and music into sensation. This fusion of music and magic is, in my opinion, seated at the very root of his magic circle. In this way, music (the translation of the angelic into the audible) even transcends Schumann's esteem for poetry (the translation of soul and art into speech). This is evidenced by Schumann when he says:

“Music is poetry raised to a higher power; spirits speak the language of poetry, but the angels communicate in tones.”¹⁵²

These words resound in my ears. Yes, perhaps Schumann did speak in the tongues of angels. But, in his sound-visions, it seems that the supernatural also seemingly spoke to him. In an early novel by Schumann *Mitternachtsstück*, he describes a desolated church yard as follows:

“The pale stars glimmered magically over the hilltop graveyard, a teary meadow, and the cypresses whispered quietly, and in their own tongue, among themselves – the silent gravediggers towered over the flowers that staggered in the wind, and the tombstones

¹⁵¹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.25

¹⁵² **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.43 ref 100

threw great, long shadows, like the hands of a time-piece wound for eternity, as if to say: ‘behold, we mark the spot where you now lie buried’ – the moon shone quietly, and long drawn-out swan-songs, monotonous and gloomy, intoned in the ether.”¹⁵³

Certainly, this quote shows a propensity towards the chilling and metaphorical ‘ghost story’ style of one of his favorite authors (E.T.A. Hoffmann). However, what I find fascinating is the role of tone used by the ghosts. Namely, what fascinates me is the song that is ‘intoned in the ether’. ‘Ether’, in this case, refers to the 19th century theory of physics wherein invisible lines of force support the universe. According to physicists of the time, reality was supported by this network of force lines. Hence, the music of these ghostly voices remains unheard as it appears in the spaces in-between reality. Perhaps, for Schumann, this apparition of sound and image between reality and nothingness held a special significance. If we take this from the perspective of the synesthete it makes perfect sense. The images he sees when music is performed do not exist in reality, but they do exist in his synesthetic reality. Hence, these involuntary synesthetic specters are also ‘intoned in the ether’ of his imagination.

Alas, at this point we must turn to the morbid role that tone played in the closing act of his life. Perhaps it is true that magic circles also contain prophetic images. Unfortunately for Schumann, his visions (both induced through his music and reflected in his poetry) are often hauntingly reminiscent of his own demise. As we shall see, in Schumann’s case, the beginning and end of his reality not only emerge, but also diminish, from a single note.

¹⁵³ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.42 ref 96

In 1852 Robert Schumann took a turn in his composition towards religious music¹⁵⁴. His intent to take this turn in his works can be seen when he wrote in 1851:

“Devoting one’s strength to religious music remains the supreme goal of an artist.”¹⁵⁵

Indeed, when 1852 arrived, Schumann created works such as his *Messe* Op.147 and *Requiem* Op.148 and commenced composition on an Oratorio based on the life of Martin Luther.¹⁵⁶ It may seem a bit surprising then that the very next year Schumann began work on *Faust Overture*. This piece caused an abnormal reaction in Schumann to the point that he was even afraid to see the score that his own hands had written. Hence, between the contrasts of these works we observe the ever growing dichotomy of the angelic and the demonic in Schumann’s music (as it coincides with the increasing split in his personality). In 1853, Schumann wrote the following ominous letter to his friend, the famous violinist Joachim:

“...But I have often written to you in spirit, and there is an invisible writing, to be revealed later, underlying this letter. I will close now. It is growing dark...”¹⁵⁷

What was this invisible writing? Why would it only be revealed later? Perhaps, in a chillingly prophetic sense, Schumann was referring to growing gathering darkness of his own sanity. And, when his sanity finally reached the breaking point it was brought about, once again, by a single tone.

On the 10th of February 1854 Schumann heard a single, constant, solitary note. This lasted for an entire week; driving poor Schumann to the point of nervous frenzy.

¹⁵⁴ Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.78

¹⁵⁵ Ostwald, Peter. *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.244

¹⁵⁶ Tunbridge, Laura. *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.51

¹⁵⁷ Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.82

This must have been very difficult for the composer to endure. Indeed, he described it to Clara as a:

“Very strong and torturing auditory disturbance”¹⁵⁸

In a hauntingly similar way to Jean Paul’s novel *Siebenkäs*, Schumann began to hear new tones which joined the first and grew into what he describes as a strange kind of music. He describes it as: “more wonderful and played by ‘more exquisite instruments than ever sounded on earth.’”

By the evening of the twelfth, the music in Schumann’s head manifested itself as the choral ‘*Eine Feste Burg*’ (This chorale was first written by Martin Luther during the Protestant Reformation. Perhaps, the emergence of this chorale stems from the fact that he had recently been working on an Oratorio about Martin Luther).¹⁵⁹ The role of this specific chorale should not be overlooked. In a letter to Robert Phol in 1851 Schumann says for his dramatic work *Luther*:

“The chorale *Ein’ feste Burg* must be saved for the grand finale, and sung as a chorus.”¹⁶⁰

This chorale had been saved for the grand finale. Unwittingly, Schumann had placed it at the finale of his own life and it was to be sung by a chorus of otherworldly voices!

¹⁵⁸ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.4 ref 15

¹⁵⁹ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010.Pg..4 ref 18

¹⁶⁰ **Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann –Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979. Pg.209

Once again the single tone had spawned birth to harmony and timbre. On February 13th these harmonies began to take form in terms of musical structure. In alarm Clara writes:

“His auditory disturbance had escalated to such a degree that he heard entire pieces from beginning to end, as if played by a full orchestra, and the sound would remain on the final chord until Robert directed his thoughts to another composition.”¹⁶¹

In Schumann’s perception this was no ordinary orchestra. The boundaries of Schumann’s magic circle had now been broken and in the inscription of these sounds into a composition, the phantasms of his sound-images were soon to be released. The next day (February 14th) Schumann tries to describe to the concert master of the Düsseldorf Symphony (Ruppert Becker) the nature of these supernaturally beautiful sounds. This is reflected in the following quote by Becker:

“Schumann unburdened himself about a strange phenomenon...It is the inner hearing of wondrously beautiful pieces of music, fully formed and complete! The sound is like distant brasses, underscored by the most magnificent harmonies.”¹⁶²

Schumann reinforces the supernatural aspect of this music when he tells Becker:

“This must be how it is in another life, after we’ve cast off our mortal coil.”¹⁶³

The next two days (February 15th and 16th) were ones of vast ecstasies for Schumann. Now, it was as if he were Selene from the novel *Siebenkäs*. As he roamed this new cathedral of sound, dormant sound-images were again brought to life and began to take form. He was transfixed by these ethereal sound-creatures that gave him melodies to

¹⁶¹ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.5 Ref 19

¹⁶² **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.5 Ref 19

¹⁶³ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*. Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.5 Ref 20

dictate. His attempts at writing them on paper unfortunately failed. Of these experiences

Clara writes:

“It was his fixed belief that angels were hovering around him offering the most glorious revelations, all this in wonderful music; they called out to welcome us, and before the end of the year we would be united with them.”¹⁶⁴

Unfortunately for Schumann, in unbinding the magic circle that contained these creatures it turns out that he also unleashed the demonic forces of Pandora’s Box into the innermost recesses of his mind. On the 17th of February 1854, the distraught Clara writes:

“...A frightful change! The angels’ voices transformed themselves into the voices of demons, with horrible music. They told him he was a sinner, and that they wanted to throw him to hell. In short, his condition grew into a veritable nervous paroxysm; he screamed in pain, because the embodiments of tigers and hyenas were rushing forward to seize him.”¹⁶⁵

Thus, the powers unleashed from his sound-circle had come to possess him. He was now thrown into a battle. This battle between the heavenly and the horrible raged within Schumann mind. At one moment he was in ecstasy. In the next, he was driven to distraction with fear. This would continue (with brief interludes of calm) until his death. Of his funeral the poet Klaus Groth wrote:

“[The people of Bonn] came flooding from every street and alleyway as if to see a prince pass by...”¹⁶⁶

Yes, Schumann had been the prince of his magic circle. Now, his music had allowed the people of Germany to catch glimpses of the fanciful specters that had been

¹⁶⁴ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.6 Ref 23

¹⁶⁵ **Ostwald, Peter.** *Schumann – The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius.* Boston, Massachusetts: Northeastern University Press, 2010. Pg.6

¹⁶⁶ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.488

his companions and inspiration. In my opinion, the character of Schumann's work still speaks to us. It beckons for us to also enter into his magic circle. Of his death, Clara would write:

“The funeral was at 7 o'clock [in the evening] on Thursday, the 31st [in Bonn]. I was in the little chapel at the churchyard. I heard funeral music. Now he was lowered into the grave. Yet I had a clear sense that it was not he, but his body only – His spirit was with me – I never prayed more fervently than in that hour...”¹⁶⁷

In my mind's eye, I envision the chorale of Schumann's funeral fading and the moon rising over the still chapel graveyard that marks the place where Schumann's 'mortal coil' lay. The sonorous fundamental tone of his earthly existence has faded. Meanwhile, in our hearts and minds, Schumann's ghostly swan-song continues to 'intone in the ether'.

¹⁶⁷ Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.84

Chapter 12

The Role of Harmony in Schumann's Magic Circle

If tones constituted Schumann's foundation for perception, then harmony and key are the areas in which his synesthesia was realized. In other words, fundamental tone provided the screen upon which the images created by his sensory synthesis could be projected. However, it is interesting to note that Schumann's sound based Synesthesia manifested itself in truly unique forms and connotations. For instance, on August 16th of 1828 Schumann can be quoted as saying:

“Love the past, act in the present, and fear the future. In this way a beautiful harmony, a powerful triad comes into being.”¹⁶⁸

We could write this statement off as mere metaphorical conjecture. However, Schumann's connotation of time with triadic structures appears many times in his writings. In another of his letters from 1834 he adds specific details to his statement from 1828 when he says:

“Triad = epochs. The [interval of a] third, as present, mediates the past and future”¹⁶⁹

From these statements we can surmise that Schumann saw the root of a triad as the fundamental tone, not only for harmony, but also for time. In Schumann's view it represents the past. Consequently, for Schumann, it also determines what kind of future will be built on it. In this way, the third of the triad represents a relatively unstable

¹⁶⁸ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.119 ref 58

¹⁶⁹ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.119 Ref 58

companion for the root. Depending on which way it goes it will dictate what function the chord has. For instance, the third of the triad that resolves upwards would declare that the root of the chord was founded in a dominant harmony. The fifth of the chord, therefore, is also the most volatile. It is often perceived as the weakest of the tones in a chord (even less important than the 7th). Still, without the 5th the triad of time would be incomplete. Hence, according to Schumann, the fifth of the chord must be treated with 'fear'. Without it, the equilibrium of his sound-time continuum would be incomplete.

Hence, the triadic structure inherent in tonal harmony gives a framework of time in which Schumann's three dimensional sound-images can be manifested. Conversely, it can be argued that, for Schumann, the clockwork of the universe runs on celestial harmonies. This is by no means a new idea. Centuries earlier, Johannes Kepler had conjectured that the ratio of distance between planets in our solar system corresponded with the natural ratios found in the overtone series in a kind of celestial music (This can be found in Kepler's treatise *Music of the Spheres*). However, in my opinion, Kepler's model, even if more specific in detail, does not seem to originate as organically as Schumann's tonal analogue for time.

Schumann's synthesis of time with tonality is indeed impressive. Sometimes, in Schumann's case, music is even able to innately conjure images of specific times and places involuntarily by key. For instance, Schumann can be quoted as saying:

“If I think about my childhood or the year 1826, A minor and similar keys come to mind, if I think about last September, it dissolves itself as if of its own accord in hard, dissonant pianissimo notes.”¹⁷⁰

For me, the most interesting aspect of this statement is when Schumann says ‘it dissolves itself as if of its own accord’. This signifies that this associational pattern is not forced, but innate in Schumann’s mind. In another (perhaps more systematic) listing of his key-time associations Schumann says:

“May is the A minor key in nature and dissolves itself luxuriantly in June in C major. Perhaps the twelve keys which exist could be traced back to the twelve months. E major might be August, D major would be July, etc. Of course the minor keys would be missing, but Nature certainly has none, and is eternally young, eternally glorious, and only when the month bids farewell does it appear sad.”¹⁷¹

Involuntary perception of sound in terms of colors and images suspended within musical time-space is indeed a very strong form of synesthesia. In a slightly more oblique way, Schumann refers to specific people as owning characteristics reminiscent of certain keys. For instance, Schumann referred to his friend (and possible lover) Henriette Voigt as his “A-flat Major Soul”¹⁷². What hidden sound-meaning this tonality represents for Schumann could be anyone’s guess. Still, the principle remains, that Schumann’s associations between sound and reality also bleed over into the arena of people and personalities (This will be manifested to an even greater degree once Schumann creates his fanciful *Davidsbundler*).

¹⁷⁰ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.167 Ref 246

¹⁷¹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.112 Ref 204

¹⁷² **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.186 Ref 16

The theory of time-sound synesthesia may raise certain questions. For example, could this be another form of Schumann's famous (or perhaps infamous) cipher method of composition? This would mean that instead of a synesthetic experience, Schumann would be trying to literally spell out places and people by using a fixed system. My rejoinder comes from Schumann's character. His compositions were admittedly organic and impulsive in origin. Schumann's understanding of structure (as we shall see later) was also organic in origin. In terms of choosing a key that describes his state of soul this is also the case. This is reflected in his writing when he says:

“The true composer comes of his own accord upon the right key, as the true painter his colors. The difference between major and minor must be admitted indisputably. The former is the active masculine principle, the latter the suffering feminine. Simpler creations have simpler keys; complex creations prefer to move around in a foreign region and are, therefore, for keys which the ear has heard less often.”¹⁷³

Hence, we see that the choice of tonality must be achieved innately. I also find it interesting to note that, in this quote, Schumann likens tonality with color in a rather oblique way. While this metaphor provides a tenuous basis for an argument on Schumann's sound-color synesthesia, it should be kept in mind (this will be explored further in a later section of this document).

In terms of key, it can also be noted that Schumann addresses the importance of distinction between modes by pointing out his association of major keys with masculine characteristics. Second, Schumann also associates major tonalities with an active aesthetic. Hence, we understand that major tonalities carry a double implication in Schumann's estimation (i.e. characteristics of gender and degrees of energy). Conversely,

¹⁷³ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.112 Ref 205

Schumann treats minor modes as containing feminine characteristics and suffering. This also demonstrates the importance that Schumann places on gauging the use of tonal complexity. Namely, Schumann specifically suggests that simple keys should be used to portray simple messages (or characters) and complex tonalities and foreign key areas to describe more complex messages and visual characteristics in music.

Once this information is compiled, one can surmise that, for Schumann, tonal symmetries place the characters of his composition in dimensional sound-time. Also, characters are described by using keys and modes and the complexity of the narrative depends on tonal ambiguity and gauged simplicity/complexity. Additionally, all of this must be grasped innately by the composer. This may seem like a rather simplistic view of Schumann's approach to composition. Still, sometimes I have found that the simplest axioms work the best.

I believe that the elegant simplicity with which Schumann naturally inscribes his works in this aesthetic method is necessitated due to his inborn perceptive abilities. In other words, these aesthetic principles are not a compositional gimmick. Rather, they are reverse engineered methods of capturing the contents of his magic sound-circle. Robert Schumann reflects on this by saying:

“The process which makes the composer choose between this or that fundamental key to express his emotions, is as inexplicable as the creation of the genius itself, which, along with the idea, offers the form, the vessel, which securely encloses the idea.”¹⁷⁴

Here, besides reinforcing the idea that Schumann chose his keys involuntarily, we also see a triptych of logical progression in composition. Schumann states that the

¹⁷⁴ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.29

composer is not only presented with an idea, but is responsible for molding a vessel of form in which to contain it (if this is true, Schumann must have had very complicated ideas indeed. His formal and tonal analogues can be very complex). In accordance with this, it has been noted by the renowned musicologist Charles Rosen, that Schumann, more than any other composer, used distinctive and unconventional keys.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps this was a means of portraying the increasingly complex figures which had emerged from his various personalities. In agreement with this the Schumann scholar Roe-Min Kok reinforces this by saying:

“Keys may appear in unusual formal placements or interact with form in novel ways; they may overlap, or tonal boundaries may be indistinct; there may be what is commonly called ‘ambiguity’ of key, with the presence of multiple tonic possibilities of varying degrees of clarity and stability.”¹⁷⁶

In a way, this presents a small miracle of composition for me. Like the apparitions of butterflies which appear and vanish in the twinkling of an eye, Schumann’s tonal analogue is accommodated to fit the whim of the moment while simultaneously preserving and generating form (it may be noted that perhaps this method of composition was not as conducive to successful large-scale formal structures as in the composition of smaller character pieces which are prized among Schumann’s writings). This method of composition also created a degree of chromatic coloring and unexpected harmonic shifts that were rarely equaled during his time. The musicologist David Kopp states this as follows:

¹⁷⁵ **Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura.** *Rethinking Schumann*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg. 300

¹⁷⁶ **Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura.** *Rethinking Schumann*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg. 300

“...Schumann certainly wrote some harmonically adventurous music, and his harmonic practice and use of chromaticism are in fact consistent with what I have called mid-nineteenth century common-tone tonality.”¹⁷⁷

I'm sure that such 'harmonically adventurous music' must have been controversial when Schumann composed it. At the very least, Schumann's music would have been considered relatively avant-garde during his time. Still, the idea that certain keys sustain specific characters was not new when Schumann was writing (the belief in musical affect from the Baroque period, for instance, presents an earlier theory of universally perceived tonal correlation between key and emotional states).

In the late 18th century a slightly differing theory was offered by the writer Daniel Schubart.¹⁷⁸ This theory was written in an aesthetics essay entitled *Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst* (Characteristics of Keys and Tonalities). Schumann was aware of this theory even when he was still a very young man of thirteen.¹⁷⁹ In 1834 Schumann wrote a review of his impression in the *Damenkonversationslexikon*. Schumann refers to much of the structure of the theory as 'graceful and poetic'¹⁸⁰. However, in this article he admits that Schubart's perception of keys was vastly different from his own. Consequently, this disagreement negates the question of whether or not Schumann learned a system for categorizing the qualities of tonalities in his youth from Schubart.

Besides the key relationships which Schumann specifies for us in his letters and reviews, it is often difficult to define concrete interactions between Schumann's perception and particular tonalities. This could be partially due to the incredibly complex

¹⁷⁷ **Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura.** *Rethinking Schumann*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg. 300

¹⁷⁸ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.70 ref 40

¹⁷⁹ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.70 ref 40

¹⁸⁰ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.70 ref 40

and tangled relationship between Schumann's perception of music and reality. Still, the attempt has been made. The musicologist Wolfgang Boetticher for instance made a study of associating Schumann's moods with his use of individual keys. However, his study is limited only to what the author could derive from the interaction between text and tonality in Schumann's songs. Hence, Boetticher's study of the instrumental and symphonic music is largely neglected.¹⁸¹ Still, even if Boetticher's theory is relegated to a rather narrow field, it is interesting to note his discoveries. This is condensed for us by the musicologist Thomas Brown when he states:

“...He (Boetticher) relates D major to happiness and youth...F sharp minor to something magical, but partially enshrouded in darkness...G sharp minor to tragedy which has hidden implications...and B flat minor to the contrasting feelings of deepest pain...or comfort.”¹⁸²

In conclusion, tonality was, in a way, as integrally organic to Schumann's being as was his visual reality. Harmony is the domain in which the colors and personalities of his music (and himself) would come to life. These would exist in the perceived time of his inscribed sound-circle. Here, his synesthetic fantasies would emerge organically as a fluttering *papillon* from the cocoon of musical theory. Here, in harmonic vessels, Schumann would become the sculptor who gracefully separates and encapsulates the dueling characteristics of his own personality and perception by chiseling them into the notes of his character pieces. This mastery of tonality, in Schumann's view, was the mark of a compositional master. This is reflected by Schumann himself when he says:

¹⁸¹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.106 ref 203

¹⁸² **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.106

“More than in the works of the pictorial arts, where the single torso can identify a master, in music the interrelation, the tonality, means everything, on a small scale as on a large.”¹⁸³

¹⁸³ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968.
Pg.49 ref 120

Chapter 13

Sound Circles and their Improvisatory Roots

Schumann's innate synesthetic connections to music are reflected in his unlearned improvisational gifts. Subsequently, it is my opinion that these inborn abilities are at the heart of Schumann's musical and compositional roots. Later in his development as a composer, Schumann thought very little of the importance inherent in his early improvisations. This is reflected in the following letter to his friend H.J. Hummel in 1831:

“From my earliest childhood I have had a passionate love for music, though the fact that I sat at the piano all day improvising proves nothing.”¹⁸⁴

However, in his second childhood (towards the end of his life), his underlying respect from the art of improvisation is reflected in his encouragement for young composers to first prepare themselves as improvisers. This is seen in the following exhortation from Schumann to aspiring young composers written in 1852:

“Accustom yourself...to conceiving music freely in your imagination, without the help of the piano,” for it would enable him to produce music of “ever greater clarity and purity”.¹⁸⁵

Schumann was certainly not the only person to comment on his extraordinary improvisatory abilities. He was often asked at parties or gatherings (or even in salons of great musicians) to display his gifts of personifying individuals (or even places and

¹⁸⁴ **Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann – Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979. Pg.64

¹⁸⁵ **Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura.** *Rethinking Schumann.* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg. 129

inanimate objects) through sound. Subsequently, this game would later earn him the title of the ‘musical portraitist’. His early ability to understand, engage and portray individuals through sound is reflected in the following commentary by a musical acquaintance when he writes:

“Schumann as a child possessed rare taste and talent for portraying feelings and characteristic traits in melody – ay, he could sketch the different dispositions of his intimate friends by certain figures and passages on the piano so that everyone burst into loud laughter at the similitude of the portrait.”¹⁸⁶

It is my opinion that Schumann’s abilities to portray characters through music are inherently tied to his abilities to perceive through music. This would explain the organic ease with which Schumann was able to capture and imitate aspects of the world around him. Once again we see that the portal created by Schumann’s magic circle bridged his two worlds (the fanciful and actual). This also accounts for the sincerity with which Schumann portrays the personalities of his inner most feelings with ease and fluidity. This is reflected in the following review of the poet Grillparzer from 1831:

“...This is the first time we have met this probable young composer, who is one of the rarities of the age. He follows no school, but draws his inspirations entirely from himself and does not adorn himself with strange feathers gathered in the sweat of his brow; on the contrary, he has created a new and ideal world for himself, in which he revels almost recklessly, and sometimes with quite original eccentricity.”¹⁸⁷

Perhaps, one poet is able to recognize sincere artistry in another poet. It is my opinion that this is certainly the case in Grillparzer’s review. However, Schumann’s revelry in this world of sound-visions needed solid structure upon which to grow and take form. The discipline required to build these musical structures were rather difficult to

¹⁸⁶ Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.4 ref 2

¹⁸⁷ Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.32

achieve for the rash young composer. This is reflected in his early impetuous distaste for theoretical study. Indeed, it took Schumann until his twentieth year to realize his need for formal compositional study. This is reflected in the following quote by the Schumann scholar Laura Turnbridge when she states:

“For Schumann, however, improvisation came first and “organically.” Only later, around 1831, did he pursue “theory”.¹⁸⁸

As we shall see, Schumann’s abilities to write formally structured music also (like his improvisational skills) could only be grasped ‘organically’. Still, the often neglected aspects of Schumann’s early improvisations are, in my view, one of the most important. Namely, the magic circle created by improvisation was the first tangible realization of a realm in which Schumann candidly conceived and connected his reality with music.

Improvisations and Schumann’s Mastery of the Character Piece

Schumann has often been cited as the master of the character piece. It is my opinion that Schumann was able to achieve this mastery by innately associating figures and personalities in his life with musical ‘impersonations’. Likewise, it has been commented on by one of Schumann’s friends that the efficacy of Schumann’s ability to capture these impersonations came through improvisation. On one occasion it was commented on that:

“His (Schumann’s) harmony seems more to be formed from the movement of the fingers along the keyboard, than to emanate from premeditated logic.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ **Tunbridge, Laura.** *Schumann’s Late Style*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pg.133

¹⁸⁹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann*. New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.66

In accordance with this, Schumann was able to tap into his inner most impressions of reality through innate improvisational abilities. This is reflected on in the following quote:

“...Schumann privileges here the affective immediacy of improvisational performance, the tactile connection to a keyboard that stores affective memories and the continuity between improvisation and counterpoint.”¹⁹⁰

It has been noted that, in his youth, Schumann often entertained houseguests and friends by characterizing them through musical impersonations. The game of the party then consisted of guessing who was being depicted in the music. Subsequently, this earned the young Schumann a reputation as a musical portraitist.¹⁹¹ Hence, we can see the synesthetic connection in which Schumann was able to translate his inner impressions into music and vice-versa.

Improvisation and Imagination

It is my belief that Schumann was a dreamer at heart. In other words, his preference was for things imagined rather than items actualized. This by no means implies that he was a shallow thinker. On the contrary, it is my impression that Schumann’s depth of thought (in cooperation with his perceptive and descriptive abilities) resulted in the remarkable nature of his compositions and improvisations. This is reflected by Schumann himself when he says:

“Whatever thoughts come in the moment will seek expression in tones. The heart has already felt each tone on its keys, just as the keys on the piano must first be touched

¹⁹⁰ **Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura.** *Rethinking Schumann.* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg. 130

¹⁹¹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.164

before they sound. In the moments when one thinks of nothing or of trivial things, the fantasy becomes flatter and the playing paler...”¹⁹²

Thus, according to Schumann, the spontaneity of the performer produces sincere impressions of the heart. Consequently, to make these impressions into meaningful music the composer must necessarily dwell upon things that are not shallow or trivial. This philosophy also implies that the inner workings of a genius temporarily surfaces through the temporal medium of music. In this way, we can see that Schumann drew from the depths of his philosophical ‘well’ the sweet waters of musical inspiration. However, on an innate level, it seems that Schumann’s ability to tap into the wealth of his own imagination occurred with very little conscious effort. This fluidity of realization in improvisatory imagination is reflected by the following quote from his friend Anton Töpken when he describes Schumann’s abilities as follows.

“...Ideas flowed to him in inexhaustible richness. Out of a single thought, which he made appear in all different guises, everything streamed and poured forth as if from within itself and thereby drew characteristic feeling to its depth and with all poetic magic...”¹⁹³

Indeed, this spontaneously conjured music must have seemed magical to the listener. In fact, it seems that Schumann surprised even himself with the degree of prowess with which he musically described his inner most thoughts. Schumann reflects on this when he states:

“I sat down at the piano, and it was to me as if flowers aloud and gods came out of my fingers, the thought streamed so out of me”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹²Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura. *Rethinking Schumann*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg.129

¹⁹³Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura. *Rethinking Schumann*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg.132

This imagery is (in my opinion) quite vivid. However, in an even more synesthetic sense, Schumann's imagery is innately tied to abstract ideas. Indeed, the connotation between image and idea for Schumann seems to be quite strong. For instance, in the following quote he mentions them side by side.

“The musician's mode of creation is completely different; and when an image, an idea floats before him, only then indeed will he feel happy at work.”¹⁹⁵

Hence, through the spontaneity of improvisation Schumann could tap into the fundamental aspects of his own philosophical thought and find a translation that overlapped both the musical and physical realities in which he existed.

¹⁹⁴ **Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura.** *Rethinking Schumann.* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg. 131

¹⁹⁵ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.65 ref 161

Chapter 14

Structural Roots for Magic Circles

It may seem counter-intuitive that Schumann's synesthesia would manifest itself more clearly in a structured work than in free improvisation. After all, wouldn't a synesthetic experience necessarily need to align itself with the sensory vision that passes by at that moment? However, it seems that in Schumann's case, the more definition the underlying musical form and counterpoint contains, the more clearly his aural-visual synesthesia is perceived. For me, this is the place wherein Schumann's greatest genius is unearthed. In fact, it seems that these elements of musical structure are even inextricably linked to his realm of 'sound-magic'. For instance, in a letter from April of 1834 Schumann can be quoted as saying:

“Fugues and the canonic spirit pervade all my fantasizing...”¹⁹⁶

Further strengthening this argument we can see that Schumann identifies the ease of producing structurally coherent music as an underlying (and interwoven with) musical intent. This is reflected in the following statement by Schumann:

“...when one thinks of music itself, contrapuntal phrases and fugues come forth easily.”¹⁹⁷

Here, in my opinion, is the mark of a great composer. Namely, the quality of the structure is innately derived from the purpose of musical intent. In Schumann's case this

¹⁹⁶ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.164

¹⁹⁷ **Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura.** *Rethinking Schumann.* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg.129

intent was driven by the musical-visual images which he wished his music to contain. In a letter to Clara, Schumann further expounds upon this astonishing correlation by saying:

“It is most extraordinary how I write almost everything in canon, and then only detect the imitation afterwards, and often find inversions, rhythms in contrary motion, etc.”¹⁹⁸

From this quote we can see that Schumann is often not consciously aware of the intricate musical fabric that he is weaving. Hence, we find that the underlying principles of Schumann’s creativity are found in his innate genius. In this way, we can see that Schumann’s combined: inspiration, being and reality were tied inseparably to his world of music. Here, the fabric of his musical reality was dependent on musical structure in order to exist. This form dependent definition of musical existence is reflected in the following quote from Schumann:

“Only when the form grows clear to you, will the spirit become so too.”¹⁹⁹

Still, while encouraging young musicians to pay heed to musical form, Schumann also cautions young musicians against formal considerations above musical intent. This is seen when he says:

“The first conception is always the most natural and the best. Reason errs, but never feeling.”²⁰⁰

Hence, from these statements Schumann draws a kind of musical axiom. Namely, musical structure gives inner feeling a realm in which to exist through sound. Therefore, without form, these inspirations would exist only as a wraithlike abstraction. Conversely,

¹⁹⁸ **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.96

¹⁹⁹ **Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music.* London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.188-193

²⁰⁰ **Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music.* London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.188-193

the opposite also proves true. Namely, a realm wherein structure dominates musical intent is void of meaning. This correlating paradigm can be seen in the following quote by Schumann.

“The more specific a composition is, the more individual pictures on the whole it unfolds to the listener...”²⁰¹

Once more we see that, for Schumann, the number of unfolding pictures is defined by the musical presentation of the composition. However, Schumann also encourages the young composer to not limit potential by trying to portray only one sound-picture. Rather, Schumann desires compositions that are rich in amiably aligned musical content. This is reflected in the following quote by Schumann:

“The more elements are congenially related to music which the thought or picture created in tones contains within it, the more poetic or plastic will be the expression of the composition; and in proportion to the imaginativeness and keenness of the musician in receiving these impressions will be the elevating and touching power of his work.”²⁰²

In addition to a varied musical palette, Schumann also encourages composers to work in diverse realms of formal structures. In some cases, he even wishes composers to spin new forms. In his opinion, this allows the composer to refresh creativity. This can be seen in the following quote by Schumann.

“Whoever always works in the same forms and conditions will become at last a mannerist or Philistine. There is nothing more harmful for an artist than continued repose in a convenient form; as one grows older the creative power itself diminishes and then it is

²⁰¹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.168 Ref 247

²⁰² **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.211

too late. Many a first-rate talent only then recognizes that but half of his problem was solved.”²⁰³

Interestingly enough, in addition to his warning about stasis in terms of formal structure, Schumann also criticizes proponents of purely non-experimental harmony. This can be seen in the following statement by Schumann:

“The anti-chromatic school should remember that, once upon a time, the seventh startled just as much as the diminished octave now does and that, through the development of harmony, passion received finer nuances by means of which music has been placed among those high mediums of art which have language and symbols for all spiritual states.”²⁰⁴

In terms of his own works, Schumann often created new forms to join the disparate elements of his own short character pieces. These, in turn, would prove useful for composers who would follow in his footsteps. For instance, it is arguable that Brahms’s extensive use of relationships at the interval of the third can be traced back to Schumann. An example of this structural intervallic relationship can be found in Schumann *Fantasiestücke* Op.12. The musicologist John Daverio expounds on this when he writes:

“...The cycle as a whole is governed by a more or less consistent pairing of third-related keys: D-flat and F. While Schumann had employed third pairings *within* the movements of his works in the higher forms (in the first movement of the *Fantasie*, for instance, he consistently pairs C with E-flat and D minor with F), here he employs the strategy to ensure coherence over the span of the entire multi-movement composition.”²⁰⁵

Ultimately, we can see that Schumann’s structural and musical intent work together to make art. He lived in a malleable reality of sound which could be organically

²⁰³ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.153 Ref 212

²⁰⁴ **Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music.* London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972 Pg.188-193

²⁰⁵ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.156-157

shaped through musical structure. Hence, rather than forcing his ideas to exist through the rigid requirements of prescribed theory; he creates fanciful realms (often influenced by the success of his musical predecessors) in which to place the objects of his dreams.

Chapter 15

Schumann's Innate Grasp of Music Theory

Robert Schumann had a dreadful time learning music theory as a youth. He often complained about the issue and even exploded about it in his writings from time to time. His music theory (and composition) teacher Heinrich Dorn was rigid in his scrutiny of Schumann's works and the impetuous Schumann could not have been the most malleable student. This is reflected in the following commentary by the Schumann scholar Thomas Brown:

“In view of his lack of formal musical training, it is perhaps understandable that Schumann mistrusts theoretical analysis, often complains about theory, and wishes he had enough talent to be able to bypass the burdensome matter”²⁰⁶

In this way, we can ascertain that Schumann viewed the art of composition as a discipline to be grasped innately. This is summed up for us by Schumann himself when he states in a letter from 1832 to Dorn (in regards to learning theory and counterpoint):

“It seems to me that I can only assimilate ideas which I evolve for myself.”²⁰⁷

This independence of thought doubtless was the product of musical genius. It is arguable that his uniquely ‘evolved’ ideas would eventually give him novel insight regarding the nature of music (this in turn led him to success as a music critic). An example of one such independent observation can be seen when he says:

²⁰⁶ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.28

²⁰⁷ **Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann –Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979. Pg.73

“It is with music as with chess. The queen (melody) has the greatest power, but the king (harmony) always decides the game.”²⁰⁸

Still, it must be stated that Schumann held a certain respect for what he learned from Dorn. The principles he learned would eventually prove helpful in sharpening his ear and shaping his improvisations. A small appreciation for this is seen in a letter from the same year (1832) in regards to Heinrich Dorn:

“He wants to persuade me that music is nothing but fugues. Good heavens, how different people are! But I certainly feel that theoretical studies have a good influence upon me. Formerly I wrote down everything on the impulse of the moment, but now I follow the course of my ideas more, and sometimes stop short and look round to see where I am.”²⁰⁹

Indeed, the perspective given by theoretical study must have been appreciated for the youth lost in the wilderness of musical imagery. This appreciation (though only briefly stated in Schumann’s letters) later manifests itself in his love of the great contrapuntal composers of the Baroque and Classical period. One could also make an analogy to this in the visual arts. Namely, in the same way that a poorly designed frame could distract from the artistic genius of a painter; poorly constructed counterpoint and structure detract from artistic genius. Hence, the impatient Schumann struggled with counterpoint, but eventually came to regard this conflicted relationship as a necessary step in natural progress rather than as a regress of time wasting procedure. This is reflected in the following commentary by Schumann:

“In order to unearth something great, of quiet beauty, grains of sand must be stolen from the hourglass of time; the whole, complete work does not come all at once; much less does it snow down from heaven. That now and then moments come in which one believes

²⁰⁸ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.112 Ref 206

²⁰⁹ **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.31

oneself regressing, although this last is often only a more or less vacillating progress, lies in nature.”²¹⁰

Hence, in nature lies the true organic root of musical genius. In this way, Schumann was of the opinion that the time used in theoretical analysis (and other such compositional tools) is part of a necessary oscillating compositional cycle. In this way, we can also see that Schumann’s greatest instructor would ultimately be the insight he learned from himself and the music of the master composers.

²¹⁰ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg. 68 ref 176

Chapter 16

Viewing the Skeletons of Giants

For Schumann, greatness was proved by posterity. In this way, he revered the great composers of his past (Bach, Beethoven, Mozart et al) with such sincerity that he could not help but incorporate the giant musical structures which they left behind (with a flare of his specific compositional taste he ensures that these musical amalgamations are never stale). This is reflected in the following commentary from the musicologist Reimann when he reviews Schumann's *Six Fugues Op.60* from 1849:

“...the best proof of how deeply Schumann had penetrated, in thought and feeling, into the spirit of the old master. Everywhere the fundamental contrapuntal principles of Sebastian Bach are recognizable. They rise up like mighty pillars; but the luxuriant tendrils, leaves, and blossoms of a romantic spirit twine about them, partly concealing the mighty edifice, partly enlivening it by splendor of color and varied contrast and bringing it nearer modern taste...”²¹¹

These composers were his teachers. Bach taught him counterpoint. Beethoven works were the colossus of form. Mozart was, in his opinion, the master of melody. In a way infinitely more satisfying for Schumann than repetition of rote form; he both consciously and subconsciously incorporated these techniques as a majestic framework upon which his inner genius could climb.

It is most interesting to see Schumann's personal views about great composers. Fortunately for us, Schumann is often outspoken in his musical commentaries and

²¹¹ Bedford, Herbert. *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.242

criticisms about composition. Consequently, these writings give us rich insight into his unique opinions. The first composer we will investigate through Schumann's eyes is Bach.

For Schumann, as with many other great composers, Bach is the master of counterpoint. However, Schumann's distinctive opinion of Bach also pays homage to him as the master of the genre of the character piece. For me this was quite a surprising realization. It also reinforces the argument that Schumann's connection to musical structure was visual in nature. This is reflected in the following commentary by Schumann in 1839:

"...Most of Bach's fugues are character pieces of the highest sort, at times genuinely poetic creations, of which each demands its own expression, its peculiar lights and shadows."²¹²

It seems that Schumann found in Bach's music a never ending source of musical imagination, depth and insight. Indeed, the counterpoint underlying Bach's work had a very special impact on the development of Schumann's compositional and aesthetic opinions. This is reflected in the following commentary by Schumann when he says:

"It occurred to me again that one is certainly never finished with Bach; that he will always become more profound, the more one listens to him."²¹³

The reverence Schumann holds for Bach's music also reflects a degree of appreciation for concrete musical realizations rather than meaningless effusions of glittery sounds. Schumann certainly had very little patience for the brilliant (and often meaningless) show pieces of his day. This especially holds true for his reviews regarding

²¹² **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967, Pg.87 ref 20

²¹³ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.48 ref 119

pieces that are based in formless musical ‘dust’. For instance, Schumann’s fury regarding musical anathema and clichés can be seen in the following review of the *Fantasia and Variations Op.17* by Theodore Döhler:

“There are two ornamental figures with which we hope composers will not enrage us again... They have gradually become such clichés that one really can no longer bear to hear them. A curse on anyone who writes them once more. If someone wants us to suggest other decorations for cadential passages, we are ready to provide thousands.”²¹⁴

Döhler was by no means the only target of Schumann’s invective wrath. It seems that few romantics remained unscathed by his musical sensibilities. For instance, the great romantic virtuoso Thalberg infuriated Schumann with his compositions of unimaginable virtuosity and relatively little musical substance. This is reflected in the following commentary by Schumann:

“Thalberg has contributed immeasurably to the advancement of technique, but has done nothing for art.”²¹⁵

Hence, in Schumann’s opinion, the clichés that this kind of music relies on represents a lack of musical ‘back bone’. Therefore, the unsupported composition collapses in Schumann’s estimation. Even Richard Wagner received a hearty pen-lashing. However, in the case of Wagner, Schumann was more noticeably irritated by Wagner’s ignorance of counterpoint and harmony than by superfluous figuration. This is reflected in the following criticism made by Schumann in 1845:

“But of course, what does the world know about pure harmony?...The aristocracy is still raving about Rienzi, but I declare he cannot write or imagine four consecutive bars that are melodious, or even correct. That is what they all lack – pure harmony and capacity for four-part choral composition. What permanent good can come of such a state of things?”

²¹⁴ Plantiga, Leon. *Schumann as Critic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.200 ref 5

²¹⁵ Plantiga, Leon. *Schumann as Critic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.214 ref 26

And now the full score lies beautifully printed before us, and its fifths and octaves into the bargain...²¹⁶

Schumann would eventually retract such vitriolic statements about Wagner. This is in part due to Schumann's regard for Wagner's later style. However, his overall opinions about Wagner were malleable and temporary. In contrast to this we can see the timeless legacy Schumann perceived in the music of Ludwig van Beethoven. The reverence that Schumann holds for Beethoven's accomplishments can be seen when he writes:

“See the lovely, floating butterfly! Yet brush away his colored dust, and he becomes a miserable, un-regarded creature; but after the flight of centuries the skeletons of gigantic creations exist, to the astonishment and admiration of posterity.”²¹⁷

Indeed, posterity has proven to be an excellent judge. Many people look in awe at Beethoven's monolithic structures while few even recognize the name of Theodore Döhler. Hence, the ‘colored dust’ of Schumann's imagination needed structure in order to manifest. This realization of his dreams in solidified musical form was what Schumann yearned for. In this sense, it seems that Bach and Beethoven held a special significance for Schumann. They also gave Schumann much in terms of poetic insight. In accordance with this, it seems that Schumann's frustration with many composers (and much of the music produced in the romantic period) is also due to their inability to live up to the standards of these musical giants. This is reflected in the following quote by Schumann:

“Should I wish for the highest sort of music – as Bach and Beethoven have given in certain of their works – should I speak of rare states of the soul that the artist ought to reveal to me, should I demand that in each of his works he lead me one step further in

²¹⁶ Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.65

²¹⁷ Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.208

spiritual riches of the art, should I demand, in a word, poetic depth and originality of thought...”²¹⁸

Interestingly enough, Schumann found Beethoven to be useful for study not only in terms of form, but also in terms of melody. This is reflected in the following statement regarding Beethoven’s *Eroica Symphony*:

“In the first two chords of the *Eroica Symphony*, for instance, there lies more melody than in ten Bellini melodies. This, of course, cannot be explained to musical ultra-modernists.”²¹⁹

Indeed, Schumann owed much to Bach and Beethoven. However, it seems that Schumann also learned from the composers Franz Schubert and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. From these composers he discovered much in terms of classical style.

Schumann’s commentaries of Schubert’s works are abundant in rich visual description. I believe that this is due to an especially strong synesthetic connection with the music that Schubert writes. Schumann seems to understand Schubert’s music as if he was reading a book. Schumann himself reflects on this when he says:

“When I play Schubert, I seem to be reading a Jean Paul novel turned into music.”²²⁰

In fact, Schumann even describes the experience of hearing Schubert Symphony in C Major as if he was reading a complete ‘four-volume novel’.²²¹ This literary analogue is arguably induced by the strong visual images that accompany Schumann’s aural experience. For instance, this can be seen when the scholar Joan Chissel makes the following observation on Schumann’s writing about Schubert:

²¹⁸ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.184 ref 29

²¹⁹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann*. New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.58 ref 146

²²⁰ **Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.391

²²¹ **Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.279

“It is frequently when writing of Schubert that Schumann’s imagery is most fanciful. At one time the composer is described as ‘the imaginative painter, whose pencil was steeped now in moonbeams and then in the full glow of the sun’; at another his music is likened to ‘a lovely tale of enchantment.’ His first waltzes are called ‘little, lovely genii, floating about the earth at about the height of a flower.’”²²²

Once again, it seems that Schumann’s increasingly synesthetic relationship to music causes him to view sound with progressively more solidified visual connotation. This can be seen in the following letter that Schumann wrote describing Schubert’s music later in life:

“He (Schubert) has tones for the finest feelings, ideas, even events and circumstances of life. Just as human passions and human striving have a thousand different forms, so diverse is Schubert’s music. Whatever he sees with his eyes and touches with his hands is changed into music; from the stones he casts there spring, as with Deukalion and Pyrrha, living human figures.”²²³

While Schumann regards Schubert’s music in terms of vision, it seems that he learns from Mozart the art of balance and civility. In Mozart’s music he sees the timeless qualities of ancient Greek thought (which Schumann was familiar with through his study of law). This is reflected in the following quotation of Schumann regarding Mozart’s music:

“Tranquility, grace, ideality, and objectivity – these are the marks of ancient works of art, and of Mozart’s school as well. Just as the humane Greek pictures his thundering Jupiter with a serene countenance, so Mozart withholds his bolts of lightning.”²²⁴

Again we see a strong and specific visual connotation about the music of a given composer. It also seems that the qualities that he valued the most in the compositions of

²²² **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg. 208

²²³ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg. 220 ref 4

²²⁴ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg. 92 ref 34

his contemporaries are the same as those he valued in the composers of his past. Namely, Schumann desired music to contain: character, clear counterpoint, structure and individuality. Interestingly enough, it seems that among his contemporaries, Schumann thinks of Chopin's music as the realization of these aesthetic ideals. In an aural-visual way he states this by saying:

“Chopin always has form; and under the marvelous structures of his music he always spins out a red thread of melody.”²²⁵

Indeed, Schumann was surrounded by the evidence of musical greatness. It was with this approach that he approached his position as music critic. His synesthetic abilities gave him special powers of description which served as an aid in illuminating the monuments left by these musical masters. In combination with his love for verbal-poetic beauty these visual-aural images take surprising detail in his critical prose. Schumann's view regarding this is seen in the following commentary by the composer himself:

“We (the Davidsbündler) will not venture to decide in what manner art is best and most quickly served, but we must declare that we regard that criticism as the highest which leaves behind it an impression resembling that awakened by its subject. In this sense Jean Paul, by means of a poetic companion-picture, may contribute more to the understanding of a Beethoven symphony or fantasia (even without mentioning either symphony or fantasia) than a dozen so-called art critics, who place their ladders against the Colossus and measure him carefully by the yard. But to awaken such impressions as a great poet, somewhat similar in gifts, is required.”²²⁶

In conclusion, Schumann believed in measuring the artistic breadth of these musical ‘Colossus’ not only from the mundane form of theoretical analysis, but also through the sublime illumination of poetic ‘companion-pictures’. Hence, the realm of

²²⁵ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.216 ref 30

²²⁶ **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann.* London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.207

visual description takes an increasingly important role in both facilitating music criticism and allowing Schumann to innately grasp the structural and spiritual shadows left by the skeletons of these musical giants.

Chapter 17

Compositional Eccentricities and Synesthetic Leanings

It seems that Robert Schumann, like many other great composers, had many neurotic eccentricities in his compositional approach. This can be seen both in his methods of composition as well as in his state of mind while he was composing. For all of this he left us bountiful clues in his writings. Perhaps the most well-known compositional eccentricity for Schumann was his early attempt at creating a cipher method for composition.

It is my personal opinion that Schumann methodology of literally encoding messages in his compositions has been given a bit too much focus from musicologists over the years. It seems that Schumann himself (after his initial inception of this method) considered it to be an inferior method of compositions (or a method that could be used by inferior composers to enable them to write about something in their music). In fact, Schumann rejected this method entirely after his early piano compositions. Still, as a young man Schumann used this as a check for his unbridled improvisatory instincts. In 1832 Schumann even writes a challenge to composers to see if they were capable of writing down an entire menu via pitch ciphers. The purpose of this, according to Schumann, is to force composers to think of new compositional methods. This is reflected in the following commentary by Schumann:

“Perhaps composers, who generally lack new ideas, would thereby come upon better themes [in using this cipher method] than when they sail about without any compass in the unbounded sea of emotion.”²²⁷

More than his cipher method, what I find to be interesting in his neurotic compositional approach is his ability to audiate music abstractly. An interesting instance of Schumann’s ability to hear a piece in his head without hearing the work performed live can be found in his review of the young composer Julius Schalper’s string quartet:

“Unfortunately, I have not heard the quartet. It has been sounding inside my head, however, and I find no blemish in it.”²²⁸

This ability to hear unrealized music in his head was doubtless enhanced by his work as both a composer and performer. Later in his life this analogue would even become stronger than the presence of literal sound. This would also eventually lead to Schumann losing his job as the conductor of the Dusseldorf Symphony (as he lived in the score above the actual realized music of the symphony) and to his increasing insanity. Still, as a composer, this ability proved useful. In fact, the reciprocal of this audiation also proved to be true. Namely, from the abstractly heard sounds in his head, Schumann was able to weave entire symphonies. For instance in a letter to Mendelssohn from 1845 Schumann states:

“For days my head has been a whirl of drums and trumpets in C. I don’t know what will come of it.”²²⁹

²²⁷ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.67 ref 53

²²⁸ **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg..188 ref 37

²²⁹ **Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann –Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979. Pg.249

Consequently, we have the C-Major symphony. However, what I find fascinating about this phenomenon is that Schumann himself documents his progress in audition-composition. This is reflected in the following quote by the Schumann scholar Alan Walker:

“In an often cited diary entry, Schumann wrote that he had initiated around 1845 a new mode of composition in which he worked out ‘everything’ in his head before writing it out, in contrast to his early years when he wrote out his inspirations immediately as they came to him.”²³⁰

Still, as Schumann’s mental condition deteriorated, he was often unable to grasp pieces (which he heard in their entirety in his head) for long enough to write them down. For instance, Schumann ambitiously wished to set the epic poem *Genoveva* to music. At first, Schumann seemed to have a fully realized musical depiction of the poem already worked out in his head. This is reflected in a letter of Schumann to the author of the poem. In this letter he asks the poet for permission to render the poem in musical form by saying:

“In reading your poem *Genoveva* (I am a musician), I was struck by the magnificent material which it offers for music. The oftener I read your unrivalled tragedy – I will not attempt further praise – the more vividly did I see it in its musical form.”²³¹

However, much to Schumann’s consternation, this proved too much for his mind to grasp all at once. As Schumann himself says of composing *Genoveva*:

“I lost every melody as soon as I had thought of it. What I heard inside my head took too much out of me.”²³²

²³⁰ **Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura.** *Rethinking Schumann*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg. 129

²³¹ **Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.332

While this quote displays Schumann's later inability to physically manifest his audited musical analogue for poetry on a large scale; it seems that the relationship between poetry and music indeed existed subconsciously.

Many Schumann scholars have remarked on the metric similarities between Schumann's music and the poetry which he read. For instance, the conscious and subconscious use of poetic meters in his melodic lines and phrases is reflected in the following statement by the Schumann scholar Joan Chissel when she states:

"The melodies of the eleventh *Davidsbündlertanz* and the F-sharp major *Romanze*, Op.28, provide further excellent examples, and there are enough others to suggest that words coursed through Schumann's mind far more frequently than he ever admitted."²³³

Hence, we can again see Schumann's synesthetic extra-musical connection between word-image and sound-image. We can also see that Schumann's initial pouring forth of compositions (before their painstaking revisions) could be partly attributed to his inability to keep fully realized works in his mind for long periods of time. This sporadic pacing of compositional writing can be seen in the following statement by the Schumann scholar John Daverio when he states:

"Several peculiarities of Schumann's approach to composition during the second half of the 1830s are worth of our attention. In the first place, the creative process often involved a remarkable quick commitment of ideas to paper...But often as not, the initial white heat of inspiration gave way to a protracted reflective stage marked by revisions great and

²³² Walker, Alan. *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.333

²³³ Chissell, Joan. *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.102

small, polishing, and much experimentation with the order of individual movements or the sections within them.”²³⁴

In this way, the synesthetic and emotional visions which inspired Schumann to compose did not lose their initial integrity. Rather, these ideas were committed to manuscript rapidly. Likewise, the process of uncovering the proper formal settings of the work was the most time consuming part of the compositional process.

Robert Schumann’s compositions (as a young man) displayed a higher degree of haste in their physical realization than his later works. This, of course, is typically attributed to his passionate and tumultuous youth (as well as his thwarted relationship with Clara). Schumann himself expounds upon his compositions of the 1830s when he says:

“...They are for the most part reflections of my turbulent earlier life wherein man and musician always strove to express themselves simultaneously; such is the case even now that I have learned to master myself and my art better. Your sympathetic heart will discover how many joys and sorrows lie buried together in these little bundles of notes.”²³⁵

I have observed that, as Schumann progressed in years and maturity he became increasingly introspective. In accordance with this, an ever shifting, never stable, landscape of compositional approach presents itself over the course of Schumann’s life. As is the case with all great composers, stylistic considerations are not static. For instance Schumann’s ‘Neo-Classical’ revival can be seen in the following commentary by the musicologist Thomas Brown when he says:

²³⁴ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.132 ref 4

²³⁵ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg. 136 ref 8

“In studying Schumann’s music from 1830-1840 a transition from a romantic to a more classic composer can be seen, a trend which is reflected in his treatment of smaller forms.”²³⁶

From this commentary we can arrive at the conclusion that Schumann’s growing appreciation for the composers of his past had a concrete impact on his compositions.

One more interesting facet of Schumann’s compositional eccentricities can be seen in the relationship he draws between geographical location and compositional style. In this way we can see that Schumann not only drew inspiration from elements of nature, but also correlated the physical-visual elements of a location with the music produced in that place. For instance, Schumann vicariously (through Florestan) expounds upon this phenomenon when he says:

“Tell me where you live, and I will tell you how you compose.” There is some truth in this paradox of Florestan, who even wants the reversed situation to be found correct. Walks, journeys are hardly to the point, even though they exert a momentary influence. But lock Beethoven for ten years in a little corner and see whether he finished a D minor symphony there.”²³⁷

In conclusion, Schumann truly was affected by everything that went on around him. Whether it was interpersonal, introspective, retrospective or sensory; his realms of existence sought to express themselves through tones. This synesthetic approach ultimately resulted in unusual stylistic and compositional realizations. In my opinion, the resulting works of Schumann cannot be summed up any better than it has been already by the Schumann scholar Thomas Brown when he observes:

²³⁶ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.153

²³⁷ **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.98 Ref 194

“His conception (of music) is derived from a curious blending of classicism and romanticism, restraint and freedom, study and inspiration, literature and music.”²³⁸

²³⁸ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg. 8

Chapter 18

Magic Circles and Imaginary Friends

In 1833 Schumann wrote a letter to his mother describing a mysterious group of both physical and fictional characters who supported and inspired him. This can be found when Schumann writes:

“A group of talented young people, mostly music students, have drawn together in a circle about me, which I have in turn drawn about the Weick house.”²³⁹

Here we find a new kind of magic circle; a circle of friends and a network of support. What Schumann’s mother did not know is that most of these were ultimately disparate sides of his own personality. They appeared and manifested themselves in accordance with music. It is probably not surprising that Schumann needed to revert to imaginary friends as support. After all, he had failed as a law student (in this field he found very few agreeable persons), and Weick (his piano instructor) thought relatively little of Schumann’s burgeoning musical talents as a performer. Therefore, the support of friends (even if imaginary) became necessary.

As is the case with all the aspects of Schumann’s life, the creation of the *Davidsbund* is connected with Schumann’s other pursuits and perceptions. For instance, the inception of the *Davidsbund* was enabled by Schumann’s love of literature. Most particularly, we find Schumann’s fascination with the works of Jean Paul. It is from this

²³⁹ Plantiga, Leon. *Schumann as Critic*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.5

author that he would discover the idea of a double nature (*Doppelnatur*).²⁴⁰ Schumann was fascinated with this concept of multiple sides in his own personality. The two primary figures in this new division of his temperaments are represented by Florestan and Eusebius. This is expounded upon for us by the author Thomas Brown when he states:

“The two sides of Schumann are crystallized later in the figures of Florestan, who represents the personification of poetic illumination and tempestuousness, and Eusebius, who represents the withdrawn and melancholy.”²⁴¹

The general nature of this new band of friends is further expanded upon in April of 1834 when Schumann became the editor of the *Neue Leipziger Zeitschrift für Musik*. Here Schumann finds a new use for his imaginary friends. This is described by the Schumann scholar Joan Chissel when she says:

“Fanciful pseudonyms were allotted to many of his contributors, but even more mystifying to the reader was his incorporation of all his friends, dead as well as living, into the *Davidsbund* – a fictitious society of his own creation.”²⁴²

As a music critic, these *Davidsbund* would prove to be invaluable. For instance, we can see this when Schumann reviews the etudes of Hummel through the objective vision of his split personalities. In 1834, the sensible and sensitive side of his personality (represented by Eusebius) wrote a review of the Hummel Etudes as follows.

“The experienced, reflective master writes etudes differently from the young fantasist. The former knows intimately the forces with which he must deal, their beginning and end,

²⁴⁰ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann*. New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.166

²⁴¹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann*. New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.166

²⁴² **Chissell, Joan.** *The Master Musicians – Schumann*. London, England: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1948. Pg.36

their means and goals; he lays out his circle of activity about him and steps over the line...²⁴³

Here we see that Hummel's circle of magic is neatly inscribed and that, in Eusebius's opinion, the composer steps over the line of his own circle to view his creations. In Eusebius's view this is the positive attribute of a master composer. Florestan (the imaginary representative of Schumann's flamboyant and active personality), however, reviews the same etudes and points out Hummel's lack of fantasy in his circle. Florestan points to the music in Hummel's circle as retaining a character, but in the end representing a circle of dry protocol. This is reflected in the following statement from Florestan regarding Hummel's Etudes for Piano-Forte:

“Who could deny that most of these etudes show an exemplary play and execution, that each has a distinctive, pure character...But that which is necessary to enchant the youth and to make him forget all the difficulties of the work because of its beauties is utterly lacking – imaginative originality...I speak of fantasy, the prophetess with covered eyes from whom nothing is hidden, and who in her errors is often most charming of all...”²⁴⁴

It seems that the magic circle is, in this case, is void of interest for Florestan. Also, the statement ‘who in her errors is often the most charming of all’ also seems to reflect a tendency on Florestan's part to take compositional risks.

In short, by splitting the modes of his personality into contrasting characters, Schumann is able to objectively view musical experience from various perspectives. Perhaps, his skill and popularity as a music critic can be attributed to this bi-polar objectivity as well. Notwithstanding, the role of these figures in Schumann's synesthetic experience is shown in the fact that these figures appear and disappear for Schumann in

²⁴³ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg. 65 ref 23

²⁴⁴ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg. 65 ref 23

accordance with the music that he is composing or listening to. In this way, the Davidsbund become a kind of crystalized embodiment of Schumann's inner personalities and his perception of musical character. In this unique way, Florestan and Eusebius serve as primary commentators on the very music which they represent.

Chapter 19

A Realm of Fantasy

For Schumann, the realm of fantasy is where synesthetic impulses, poetic narrative and compositional intrigue unite. This is seen in the following statement by Schumann:

“In free fantasy, the highest unites in music, which we certainly miss in pieces of strict composition.”²⁴⁵

In this realm Schumann is not merely trying to describe music or events. Rather he tries to reveal musical and moral truth. This is reflected in the following statement by the Schumann scholar Roe Min Kok when she says:

“Considering their narrative content, Schumann’s declamation ballades fit the paradigm of the melodramatic aesthetic proposed by the film scholar Linda Williams: “a dialectic of pathos and action” enabling “dramatic revelation of moral and emotional truths.”²⁴⁶

Further, Schumann believed in the realm of poetry as a reflection of this truth. This is witnessed by the writing of his aesthetics essay *Poetry and Truth*. It also seems to me that Schumann’s act of composition has less to do with rhetorical value than it does with a reaction; a digging into his inner most understanding if you will. This is reflected in the following quote from 1853 regarding the playing of the young Brahms:

“Seated at the piano, he began to disclose wondrous regions. It was also most wondrous playing, which made of the piano an orchestra of mourning or jubilant voices. There were

²⁴⁵ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann*. New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.66 ref 163

²⁴⁶ **Kok, Roe-Min and Tunbridge, Laura.** *Rethinking Schumann*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pg.161

sonatas, more like disguised symphonies; songs whose poetry would be intelligible even to one who didn't know the words...And finally it seemed as though he himself, a surging stream incarnate, swept them all together into a single waterfall, sending aloft a peaceful rainbow above the turbulent waves, flanked on the shores of playful butterflies and the voices of nightingales...²⁴⁷

Here, Schumann's synesthetic imagination draws upon his subconscious interpolations. It is interesting to note that Schumann's synesthetic fantasies seemingly embody themselves differently according to the music at hand. For instance, rather than the pastoral and natural visions invoked by the music of Brahms, Schumann sees in Chopin's Variations Op.2 an entirety of farcical characters. This can be seen when he states:

"...How it all changes in the third variation! Here is moonlight and fairy magic, with Masetto standing apart and cursing loudly..."²⁴⁸

It is also interesting to note that, in this case, Boetticher's theory (that B flat minor indicates deep deepest pain and B flat major comfort) for Schumann's reactions to key is correct. In addition to this, Boetticher's theory corresponds to Schumann's schematic/visual interpretation of this work. This can be seen as Schumann continues his literary description of the Chopin Variations:

"The Adagio is in B flat minor, to be sure, but I can think of nothing more appropriate. It seems to imply a moral admonition to the Don. It's naughty, of course, but also delightful, that Leporello should be eavesdropping – Laughing and mocking from behind bushes; that oboes and clarinets should pour forth their charming seduction and that B flat major, in full bloom, should signal the first amorous kiss."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ **Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music.* London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.182

²⁴⁸ **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.16

²⁴⁹ **Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music.* London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.180

In this realm of synesthetic fantasy it was possible for Schumann to translate inspiration from nature or literature into music and vice-versa. The ability of the composer to capture these elements of the use in musical works (and music to inspire the composer towards the eternal) can be seen in the following quote by Schumann:

“Why should the thought of immortality not occur to Beethoven in the midst of his improvising? Why should the memory of a mighty fallen hero not inspire him to a work? Why should the memory of a blissfully spent moment not occur to another? Or do we wish to be ungrateful to Shakespeare for having evoked from the breast of a young composer a work worthy of him, ungrateful to nature, and deny that we borrowed from her beauty and serenity for our works? Italy, the Alps, the image of the ocean, spring twilight – should music have not told us anything about all these?”²⁵⁰

Indeed, it seems that the visual aspects of nature gave inspiration to Schumann’s music.

For instance, his *Spring Symphony* from 1842 was quite literally inspired by nature’s renewal in springtime. Schumann reflects on this when he writes:

“...I wrote the Symphony in that flush of spring which carries a man away even in his old age, and comes over him anew every year. Description and painting were not part of my intention, but I believe that the time at which it came into existence may have influenced its shape and made it what it is.”²⁵¹

Schumann continues on this train of thought when he writes that it is necessary for musicians to feel this same longing in order to perform the piece correctly. Even more importantly, in Schumann’s opinion, it is necessary for the musicians to dwell in this land of aural fantasy while performing the work. This is reflected in the following quote:

“Try to inspire the orchestra with some the spring longing...At the very beginning I should like the trumpets to sound as if from on high, like a call to awaken. In what

²⁵⁰ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.164 Ref 223

²⁵¹ **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.219

follows of the Introduction there might be a suggestion of the growing green of everything even of a butterfly flying up...But these are the fancies which came to me after the completion of the work.”²⁵²

Schumann fantasized not only about the synesthetic images which occurred in his own works, but also the works of others. It is then the job of the composer to give voice to his inner fantasy and the job of the listener to visually perceive it. For instance, Schumann wrote in regards the Symphony *The Consecration of Tones* by Ludwig Spohr:

“If a listener could be found who, uninformed about the poem and titles of the symphony’s individual movements, could give us an account of the pictures which they arouse in him, then this would be a test as to whether the composer had successfully completed his task.”²⁵³

It is interesting to note that Schumann felt that fantasy was a realm that he shared with his wife Clara. Even before their marriage, Schumann enjoyed playing games of make believe with her. In 1832 wrote to Clara that he included many new stories for her contained in his music. This is reflected in the following quote:

“While you have been away I have been to Arabia for fairy tales likely to please you. There are six new ones of a man haunted by his double, a hundred and ones charades, eight droll riddles, some delightfully creepy robber tales, and a white ghost story, which positively makes me shudder.”²⁵⁴

Indeed, it seems that the fantasy inherent in his music was often inspired by literature. In a letter to his mother from 1831 we can see this fascination with the freedom that poetry brings as he writes:

²⁵² **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.219

²⁵³ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.168 Ref 249

²⁵⁴ **Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann –Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979. Pg.73

“What hopes and prophetic visions fill my soul’s heaven! The Doge of Venice, as he wedded the sea, was no prouder than I, as I celebrate my nuptials with the great world within whom the artist may roam or rest at will.”²⁵⁵

It is doubtless that part of Schumann’s familiarity with poetry and literature comes from the work he had as a child editing the writing of his father. Schumann’s father was a man who believed firmly in the importance of literary works. This is reflected when he says the following:

“What binds the Germans as a nation is their literature.”²⁵⁶

Like his father, Schumann believed in the importance of literature in society. I believe that this is due, in part, to his familiarity with great literature (not only of his time, but also of the ancients). This respect for written literature is reflected in the following statement:

“It is the duty of every cultivated individual to know the literature of his fatherland...”²⁵⁷

Indeed, Schumann revered the great authors of his fatherland (after many years he expanded this palate to include authors of different countries). The authors that are generally considered to have had the great impact of Schumann were: Jean Paul, Wackenroder, Tieck, Thibaut, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Hegel, and Schopenhauer.²⁵⁸ From my personal observation I have come to the conclusions that these authors generally espouse a combination of: metaphorical prose, romantic ideology and poetic insight. In

²⁵⁵ **Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann – Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979. Pg.68

²⁵⁶ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.21 ref 4

²⁵⁷ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.24 ref.23

²⁵⁸ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.7

Schumann's works we can see many of these same principles at play. This is reflected in the following quote by Thomas Brown:

“Schumann believes that music is enhanced through poetic ideas, and he adheres to an *Inhaltsästhetik* (the aesthetic concerning beauty and form of content) to the extent that his compositions are enlightened by the addition of a literary element.”²⁵⁹

It must be noted that not all composers in Schumann's period adhered to the philosophy of interconnectivity in art forms (indeed, it was fairly rare during his lifetime). Thus, it is my belief that Schumann takes this aesthetic path due to his innate synesthetic abilities. This fight against the current of absolute music is reflected in the following quote by the scholar Thomas Brown when he states:

“He seems to affirm the unity of the musical and literary imagination which many other composers, who limit themselves to absolute music find irrevocable.”²⁶⁰

Hence, Schumann not only revered great pieces of literature, he also delighted in the philosophical insight and the enhanced perception that the poetic life brings. This is reflected in writing when Schumann writes:

“The poet lives a charmed life; his eye becomes dark and weak during the bustling day, but it awakens clear and serene in the solitude of Nature.”²⁶¹

This perhaps also points metaphorically to Schumann's perception of reality as being different than others. He is able to see hidden things clearly in the figurative night when most people cannot perceive it. Likewise, in this hidden knowledge, Schumann

²⁵⁹ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.164

²⁶⁰ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.165

²⁶¹ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.26 ref 35

finds his true genius. This is revealed in the following letter to his mother from 1831 when he says:

“The flame that is naturally clear always gives the most light and heat. If I could blend my talent for poetry and music into one, the light would burn still clearer, and I might go far.”²⁶²

This letter comes as an explanation to his mother for the reasons why he abandoned the legal profession. Here we see that Schumann rejects his convenient vocation for a more meaningful existence. This, for Schumann, is not made out of selfish ambitions. Rather, it is made out of conviction that he is bettering mankind through artistic truth. This is seen in the following quotation of Schumann:

“To send light into the darkness of men’s hearts - such is the duty of the artist”²⁶³

In order to maximize his artistic influence, Schumann found it necessary to combine his talents as a poet and a musician into a single synesthetic message. This realization is visible when Schumann states:

“...It must be more and more obvious that poetry and music spring from one and the same source.”²⁶⁴

In this way, Schumann considered that bettering himself as a musician would help him understand the dialectic sounding image and that by understanding poetry and literature he could create more compelling synesthetic portraits. Therefore, in terms of his artistic growth, Schumann united the power of literature and music to develop his

²⁶² **Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann –Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979.Pg.63

²⁶³ **ThinkExist.com Quotations.** “Robert A. Schumann quotes”. [ThinkExist.com Quotations Online](http://en.thinkexist.com/quotations/robert_a_schumann/) 1 Feb. 2012. 28 Mar. 2012 <http://en.thinkexist.com/quotations/robert_a_schumann/>

²⁶⁴ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.27

synesthetic modes of perception. This inner fantasy and outer perception is reflected by Schumann himself when he states:

“The poet’s eye is the most beautiful and richest; I do not take objects as they are, but just as I perceive them subjectively within me, and so one lives more easily and freely. The more restricted the world is from the outside, the more it grows through fantasy on the inside.”²⁶⁵

In another instance of written aesthetic philosophy, Schumann continues his insight into the nature of poetry in understanding reality by saying:

“Poetry is the bright crystal, in which the spiritual life of generations is mirrored purely and clearly; the glittering prism which reflects all colors etherealized in a more beautiful and purer light...”²⁶⁶

At this point it must be noted that the highly effusive rhetoric of Schumann’s early romanticism (found in these quotes) diminishes a little over time. Eventually, it is moderated by the balance of form with function in a more classically oriented style. This is reflected in the following quote by the Schumann scholar Thomas Brown when he says:

“Schumann, although basically a romantic, follows this pattern in miniature. Before 1830, he is influenced by classic ideas on art; during the 1830’s by romantic concepts; and sometime after 1840 to his death he reverts to more and more classic principles.”²⁶⁷

Ultimately, however, Schumann’s artistic values stem from a common root. In this way, the fantasizing of his poetic mind is able to pervade his musical thought. This

²⁶⁵ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.27

²⁶⁶ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.27

²⁶⁷ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.8

commonality and interconnected dialogue between art forms is reflected in the following letter by Schumann:

“The educated musician will be able to study a Raphael Madonna as advantageously as the painter a Mozart symphony. Moreover: for the sculptor the actor will become a quiet statue, and for the actor the works of the sculptor will become living figures; to the painter the poem becomes a picture, the musician transfers paintings into tones.”²⁶⁸

From this quote we can determine that Schumann viewed artistic mediums as supportive and strengthening for each other rather than detrimental and distracting. We can also surmise that Schumann never conceived a work in artistic isolation. Music, for him, was tied to image, dance and poetry. Language specifically is tied to music in Schumann’s case. This is observed by the musicologist Eric Sams in the following quote:

“This is what he meant when he spoke of music as a language, and musicians as poets. Music, for him, was the word given a new freedom by a change of existence from one mode to another, as a chrysalis changes into a butterfly. The change is natural and inevitable, an *élan vital* in each case. The result is small, frail, effusive, colorful, moving and beautiful: *Papillons musicaux*.”²⁶⁹

These musical-literary portraits have been argued by many musicologist as the basis for his most successful pieces. For instance, the scholar Mosco Carner suggests that Schumann’s best loved works represent:

“...a succession of musical tableaux, whose progress and purpose are chiefly determined by extra-musical thoughts and such general aesthetic considerations as contrast and formal balance.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann*. New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.27

²⁶⁹ **Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.395

²⁷⁰ **Walker, Alan.** *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.396

The underlying question throughout these observations is whether or not Schumann was consciously aware of shaping these artistic interrelationships (ekphrasis), or whether they were innately tied to his perception (synesthesia). In my opinion, Schumann used the later to shape the former. In other words, his innate perceptive abilities gave birth subconsciously to his aesthetic descriptive abilities. My reasoning for this conclusion comes largely from the Schumann's character which I have observed through his writings (both musical and literary).

My first observation of Schumann's character is that he seems far more spontaneously impulsive than organized (For instance, it has been noted from several sources that Schumann was never very good at maintaining finances or managing domestic matters). Hence, for the purposes of arguing that Schumann indeed had synesthesia, we can derive that it is likely that innately Schumann experienced and composed music of fantasy on an impulse as well.

Chapter 20

Specific Literary Models

The work of Jean Paul stories made a significant impact on Schumann as a young man. He held this author as more than an inspiration. Namely, he believed the artistry in these works could relieve some of the unhappiness of mankind. The sixteen year old Schumann comments on this artistry by saying:

“If the whole world read Jean Paul, it would certainly be a better, but unhappier place – he’s often brought me close to madness, but the rainbow of peace and of the human spirit always hovers delicately over all the tears, while the heart is wondrously elevated and tenderly transfigured”²⁷¹

Soon, Schumann began to make his own delicate musical butterflies which inducted him into a similar world of fantasy and which fluttered across the realm of musical imagination. This idea is reflected by Schumann as a young man when he states:

“I gave the Dutch maiden a soft sweet kiss, and when I came home about nine o’clock, I sat down at the piano...At the piano the thought of the Fandango occurred to me – Then I was exceedingly happy. As I stopped, I looked out of the window up to the beautiful spring sky...and as I thought about butterflies, a beautiful night butterfly fluttered toward the window. That had a beautiful meaning for me...”²⁷²

In these delicate creations of fantasy Schumann found exceptional beauty and perhaps even a degree of spirituality. After all, according to Jean Paul, fantasy was a realm that

²⁷¹ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.36 Ref 75

²⁷² **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.97 ref 189

was uniquely human and which distinguished humanity as a species. This is expounded upon by Jean Paul himself when he writes:

“The power of imagination is the prose of creative power...It is nothing but a highly intensified, brightly colored memory which animals also possess, since they dream and fear...But fantasy or creative power is something higher...”²⁷³

It is also interesting to note that specific pieces of Jean Paul’s work elicited unique synesthetic musical impression on Schumann. For instance, in a letter he wrote in 1834 to Frau Henriette Voigt (a friend and possible lover) he comments:

“If you have a spare moment, I pray you read the last chapter of *Flegeljahre* (*Dance of the Larvas* by Jean Paul), where everything is there in black and white even to the giant’s boot in F sharp minor...”²⁷⁴

Certainly this image is a colorful musical interpretation of his favorite novel. However, it is not the only time in which Schumann specifically relates music to literature. For instance, the interconnectivity of musical perception and literary image is also commented upon when Schumann states:

“Through these I learned to understand and decipher Jean Paul’s veiled words, Jean Paul’s dark spiritual tones first became understandable and clear to me through that magical clothing of its tonal creations.”²⁷⁵

Here, we see that Schumann held a very special innate musical connection with the works of Jean Paul.

²⁷³ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg. 15

²⁷⁴ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.171 ref 256

²⁷⁵ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.165 ref 236

For Schumann, this double reality also existed in the words of other authors. For instance, when writing about Marschner's setting of Sieglitz' *Bilder des Orients*

Schumann states:

“Everyone should be stimulated by the effect of such a work – of this double existence between language and music.”²⁷⁶

As an abstract concept, this may be easy to understand. However, it seems that, for Schumann, the structure of a work of literary artistry extended into a concrete realization in terms of musical form. For instance, in a letter from 1840 directed to Simone de Sire he comments:

“You know our great author Jean Paul? I have learned more counterpoint from him than from my music-teacher.”²⁷⁷

For Schumann, it seems that both counterpoint and rhythm were perceived in the writings of Jean Paul as well as in the ancient Greek authors. This is seen in Schumann's early theory of aesthetics when he states:

“Evening Fantasy in X major; the free fantasy unites the highest elements in music – the law of the measure and alternating free lyric, metric groupings – a union lacking in compositions in the strict style. Poetry accomplishes this in Jean Paul's Polymeter and in the choruses of classic Greek drama; syntactic liberty is in every instance more imaginative and more ingenious than metric regularity, hence my displeasure with rhymes”²⁷⁸

In this way, Schumann expounds upon the freedom of the very composition which he garnered from poetic beauty. Tonality is also innately perceived in Schumann's

²⁷⁶ **Plantiga, Leon.** *Schumann as Critic.* New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1967. Pg.168 ref 66

²⁷⁷ **Schumann, Robert.** *The Letters of Robert Schumann – Selected and Edited by Dr. Karl Storck.* New York, New York: Arno Press, 1979. Pg.128

²⁷⁸ **Daverio, John.** *Robert Schumann – Herald of a “New Poetic Age.”* New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pg.44 ref 105

interpretation of Jean Paul's literary works into music. For instance, the musicologist Eric Sams (in his essay *Schumann and the Tonal Analogue*) made a study which points out the implied literary implications of the final statements in Jean Paul's *Papillons* with the ending of Schumann's *Carnival*. The closing words of *Papillons* capture this wistful analogue when Jean Paul states:

“He took his flute and went, blowing it, out of the room, down the stairs, out of the house and down the road. Walt heard with delight the vanishing tones speaking to him; for he never dreamed that his brother was vanishing with them.”²⁷⁹

In fact, we can see this vanishing tribute of the music in the endings of many of his early piano works (i.e. *Davidsbundlertanze* Op.6, *Papillons* Op.2, *Carnival* Op.9, *Fantsie* Op.17 and *Fantasiestucke* Op.12). In this magical alternative reality we see the mirror of Schumann's own psyche. In this realm, the flutes of his magic circle enticed him to follow. Would Schumann follow this siren of synesthetic fantasy or would he watch comfortably in cold reality until all enchantment disappeared? In my opinion, Schumann chose to follow, and his works reflect this choice.

²⁷⁹ Walker, Alan. *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.394

Chapter 21

The Most Influential Authors for Schumann

Jean Paul was by no means the only author that held great influence on the young Schumann. The early 19th century was generally a time of great philosophical upheaval and Schumann was subject to a flood of literary and philosophical ideas. For instance, Schumann learned from the philosopher Tieck the concept that music is more powerful than words. This philosophy is stated by Tieck as follows:

“Language counts, names, and describes its metamorphoses in alien material; music pours it forth to us herself. . . In the mirror of tones the human soul learns to know itself; it is through them that we learn to feel emotion; they give living consciousness to many a dreamy spirit in the obscure corners of the soul and enrich our inner being with completely new magical spirits of emotion.”²⁸⁰

In this instance, music embodies reality rather than describing it. We also see that, in Tieck’s opinion, the ‘mirror of tones’ enables man to understand not only his surroundings, but ultimately himself as well. It is doubtless that Schumann heard these words with a special degree of empathy. Schumann often saw himself as the ‘dreamy spirit’ and the idea that music could give voice to this realm of consciousness must have been irresistible. Another influential author in Schumann’s life was E.T.A. Hoffmann.

Hoffmann, in addition to being the founder of the ‘ghost story’ genre, is perhaps the closest to Schumann himself in syntactical descriptions. For instance, E.T.A.

Hoffmann can be quoted as writing:

²⁸⁰ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg. 16

“Radiant beams penetrate the dark night of this realm, and we become aware of gigantic shadows, weaving up and down, embracing us ever more tightly, crushing all within us except the pain of endless longing, in which every sensual impulse first surges upward in joyous tones, then falls and disappears, leaving nothing but this pain which, consuming love, hope and pleasure, destroys nothing, but seems rather to burst our breast with a full-voiced polyphony of every passion...”²⁸¹

In comparison to this, we can see Schumann’s similar use of descriptive narrative in a review from 1835 (of Mendelssohn’s *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt*):

“...And the sea lay stretched out before us, motionless and monstrous; far out on the horizon a distant tinkle, as if the little waves were conversing in a dream. Thus it coils and shimmers in ‘Meerestille’. One dozes, more lost in thought than thinking. Beethoven’s chorus, also based on Goethe, with its accentuation of every word, sounds almost rough compared with this sounding spider web of violins. A harmony unleashed toward the end that seems to suggest a daughter of Nereus casting a seductive eye at the poet, as if to lure him down. But then, for the first time, there comes a higher wave, and little by little the sea grows everywhere more sportive, and sails flutter in the breeze, and gay pennants, and now away, away, away!”²⁸²

In addition to being a clearly synesthetic interpretation of the work, Schumann uses the same illustrations of tangled impressions (here embodied in his description of violins as ‘sounding spider webs’) and metaphorical undercurrent that E.T.A. Hoffmann so adored.

The use of syntax was by no means the only item that Schumann shared in common with Hoffmann. He also shared Hoffmann’s appreciation for meaning in art and the ongoing battle against musical ‘Philistines’. In fact, it was with these exact words that Schumann established his fictitious ‘Davidsbund’. This similarity is reflected for us by the author Thomas Brown when he writes:

²⁸¹ Walker, Alan. *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.185

²⁸² Walker, Alan. *Robert Schumann – The Man & His Music*. London, England: Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., 1972. Pg.186

“Hoffmann emphasizes the artist who is misunderstood by the world. He attacks the tasteless Philistines who, when they display any interest in art, exhibit it as an ornament, rather than experiencing it as an integral part of their lives. Their taste is old fashioned; they are opposed to modern trends.”²⁸³

Here, in progressive expression, Schumann found a battle worthy to fight in. He would conquer with artistic excellence and depth of insight. In this way, his synesthetic abilities would be put to good use in helping him to draw upon and unite art forms through music.

²⁸³ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg. 19

Chapter 22

Conclusion

In conclusion, Schumann was a man whose life was marked by conflict, illness, madness and sorrow. Still, through the cloud of these miseries we can see the soul of a poet. He loved the fantastic, the passionate and the sincere inner workings of the poetic life. He loved nature and beauty. He loved his family and his friends. Ultimately, he was a man who carried conviction that life was more than the appearances of a mortal shell. This is reflected in the following commentary by Schumann:

“In man dwells a great awesome something...we feel it at sunset or at the sound of soft tones. Why does the dream and happiness always vanish for me at the beginning of consciousness? To know is little, to feel is more and to desire is most. He who wants to experience this will get to know himself best.”²⁸⁴

For Schumann, the significance of music (as with nature) could be found as a reflection of the Divine. He sought this thread of heavenly thought which could tie together the tapestry of his existence. In this way, his view of artistic skill depended on the ability of the composer to catch this thread in one form and change it into an alternative manifestation. Schumann was aided in this pursuit through the means of synesthetic interpretation.

In terms of aural-visual synesthetic perception, Schumann's natural abilities are witnessed by a plethora of references in his own hand. Also, it is my observation that

²⁸⁴ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.29

Schumann's synesthetic leanings were eventually incorporated in forming the characters which represented aspects of his own personality. This can be seen when Schumann states:

“Genius in art and eye does not include merely the idea of the beautiful and lofty, but the association of all ideas expressed in one individual.”²⁸⁵

In other words, Schumann coalesced various facets of his own perception and personality by giving them life as fictional characters. By the time he wrote his *Dauidsbundler Tanze Op.6* Schumann had already incorporated these characters into his works to such a degree that he considered them to be inseparable from the composition he had produced.

Schumann wrote the following inscription for the *Dauidsbundler Tanze Op.6*:

“In each and every age / Joy and sorrow are bound together: / So remain pious in your joy / and be ready to face sorrow with courage”

Here we see the conflict that Schumann encountered on an emotional level. Indeed, he had suffered a good deal. However, his resolution to ‘meet sorrow with courage’ ultimately allowed him to prevail in winning Clara as his bride.

In short, it is my opinion that Schumann's compositions reflect his perception. He spins a musical tale from the same threads of meaning that run throughout his own life.

These undercurrents are commented on by Schumann himself when he states:

“...Sympathy from far and near assures me that I am not working in vain. So we spin and spin away, and at last spin ourselves in...”²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ **Brown, Thomas.** *The Aesthetics of Schumann.* New York, New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1968. Pg.29

Indeed, Schumann at last had spun his magic circle around him. By the end of his life, Schumann's madness had closed him into a world which resembles ours very little. Unfortunately, Schumann's life was characterized by conflict and ended with great sorrow and confusion. However, his poetic spirit still speaks to us through his works. In these compositions we find the enchantment of a world with mystery and meaning. Here, like Robert Schumann, we are also offered a glimpse into his magic circle.

²⁸⁶ **Bedford, Herbert.** *Robert Schumann – His Life and Works.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1971. Pg.246

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