



LAWO
CLASSICS

SCHUMANN VIOLIN SONATAS

OP. 105 & OP. 121

ARVID ENNEGÅRD VIOLIN
NILS ANDERS MORTENSEN PIANO

ROBERT SCHUMANN:

MUSIC FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

Robert Schumann was not a man for half-measures. Although he composed continuously from his mid-teens onwards, his output is characterised by a number of what one might call generic waves, where he threw himself into the composition of particular kinds of music. Thus from 1833 until 1839 he concentrated on piano music (his Opp. 1–23 are all for piano), moving on to the *Liederjahr* of 1840, when he wrote mostly songs; in 1841 he switched to orchestral music and in 1842 to chamber music; 1843 was his oratorio year. In 1845 his focus was on works with a contrapuntal basis, and in 1847–48 he produced music for the stage, devoting his efforts in 1849–50 to music for domestic performance. The last of these ‘waves’ came in 1852, which he dedicated to church music; thereafter illness closed

in, and composition became first difficult, and then impossible.

Much musicological and medical ink has been spilt on why he might have composed in this way. Given that he also suffered from frequent bouts of depression, the predominant view is that he may have been bipolar. Some scholars disagree, arguing for (for example) schizophrenia or syphilis as the origins of his mental problems, but the surges of euphoric energy that can be heard in his music suggest that some kind of mania may have been behind them. Perhaps, indeed, if Schumann had the less extreme bipolar II and so had ‘hypomanic’ phases rather than the more severe manic phases of bipolar I, his concentration on specific types of music may have been an unconscious attempt by his rational mind to channel and direct the irrational impulses caused by his condition.

What all this has to do with Schumann’s music for violin and piano

may not be immediately obvious, but it has a direct bearing on the nature of the music itself. Schumann’s best-known chamber works – the three string quartets of Op. 41, the Piano Quintet, Op. 44, and Piano Quartet, Op. 47 – all date from the ‘chamber-music year’ of 1842, and although they are written for small forces, the musical ideas are on a grand scale, one requiring public expression. Most of his music for violin and piano, by contrast, was written from 1849 onwards, when he wrote a good deal of *Hausmusik*; the heroic qualities of his 1842 chamber compositions are far less to the fore.

Schumann wrote three sonatas for violin and piano. No. 1, in A minor, Op. 105, was composed in less than a week, between 12 and 16 September 1851. But he wasn’t happy with

it: he confessed he was ‘very angry with certain people’ when he wrote it; perhaps that’s why ‘I did not like the first Sonata for Violin and Piano; so I wrote a second one, which I hope has turned out better’. That was the Sonata No. 2, in D minor, Op. 121, begun in the last days of October 1851 and finished on 2 November. These two works were published in 1852 and 1853 respectively.¹

For all that Schumann seems to have been an impulsive composer, it was an external stimulus that generated the creation of these two works. One of his closest friends was the Hamburg-born violinist and composer Ferdinand David (1810–73) – close enough to lend him money and testify on his behalf in court. And in turn Schumann trusted him enough to allow him to play through his chamber

1. The Sonata generally known as No. 3 wasn’t published in Schumann’s lifetime: in 1853 he wrote two movements for the ‘FAE Sonata’, a composite work written with his student Albert Dietrich and the young Johannes Brahms based on ‘Frei aber einsam’ (‘Free but alone’), the motto of the violinist Joseph Joachim. Schumann then added two movements to complete the Sonata but his mental breakdown soon followed, and so the Sonata No. 3 lost its place in posterity’s view of Schumann’s output; it made it into print only in 1956.

music in private before it was exposed in public. On 1 January 1850, David wrote to Schumann: 'Your Fantasy Pieces for Clarinet and Piano [Op. 73] please me so much; why don't you compose anything for violin and piano? It so much lacks something proper, new and I don't know anyone who could do it better than you.'

It may be as a result of their more private character that the two Schumann violin sonatas published during his lifetime, Opp. 105 and 121, have never achieved the popularity of Beethoven's ten or Brahms' three, perhaps because the violin part *chez* Schumann is often low in the register, in viola territory, darker, less brilliant, than with the other two composers, and it gives both works a more intimate character. The first movement of Op. 105, marked 'Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck' ('With passionate expression'), is cast in exactly such a confessional manner, almost as if the violin were confiding in the piano. It's worth bearing in mind, too, that this

sonata, like Beethoven's and many others at the time, was published as a 'sonata for piano and violin': it is the piano which dominates. Schumann always had a fondness for canon, and much of this movement, in a compact sonata form, is canonically propelled, but he builds this structure from an elaborate network of overlapping rhythms, which disguise both bar-divisions and larger spans, so that it is often difficult to work out how far the argument has evolved. And for all that the tempo indication requires 'passionate expression', it is not the kind of passion that works up to and dispels itself in a climax; instead, it is more a case of sustained intensity.

Op. 105 is the only one of Schumann's major chamber works not to observe the standard four-movement format; it compensates by rolling slow movement and scherzo together in a central *Allegretto*; formally, it is a rondo with two episodes. In its initial hesitations the F major opening theme recalls the elusive qualities of

Schumann's early piano pieces before it broadens out into a beautiful but understated melody; the second episode, a wistful F minor tune, seems briefly to put time on hold before the opening material resumes and is further developed.

The finale, back in A minor, perpetuates the emotional ambiguity of the earlier movements and retains its conversational manner, even if the discussion is rather testy at times. Opening with an astringent moto perpetuo theme canonically presented, almost in the manner of a Bach two-part invention, it pursues its jagged path through exposition and development until eventually the stormclouds part to reveal, it seems, the sunlit uplands of E major. But the respite is very brief: the jagged semiquavers of the opening of the movement return to drive the music on. Another breakthrough, into A major, is likewise dragged off in the onward motion of the semiquavers, with a brief, unemphatic recollection of the very open-

ing of the Sonata almost lost in the torrent as the moto perpetuo pushes on, unstoppable.

Whatever it was that Schumann didn't like about the A minor Sonata (and it's worth noting that musicians have not shared his opinion), he certainly took pains to make the D minor Sonata, Op. 121, rather different. The opening chordal flourish – tracing the notes D-A-F-D in homage to Ferdinand David – makes far more of a public statement than anything in the earlier work, although its rhetorical grandeur soon cedes the floor to more intimate expression before the launch, 'Lebhaft' ('Lively'), of the main body of the movement, which is cast in sonata form. The first subject is derived from the introduction and retains its passionate eloquence; the second subject is broader but reduces the temperature by only a few degrees, and not for very long. Both subjects, joined by a syncopated descending figure, are then treated to an extended development; indeed, at fourteen or so minutes in performance, the first move-

ment of Op. 121 is almost as long as the entire A minor Sonata.

The two central movements are very different in character but are thematically linked. The scherzo, cast in a driving 6/8 from which Brahms learned much, reaches its climax with the chorale 'Gelobt seist Du, Jesu Christ' ('Praised be thou, Jesus Christ'). The slow movement takes the form of a theme and four variations, interwoven with a number of brief episodes. The theme, marked 'Leise. Einfach' ('Gently. Simple'), is derived from the chorale, but it is given out in *pizzicato* chords, as if strummed on a guitar, transforming Lutheran certainty into one of Schumann's most touching inspirations. The third variation alludes to the scherzo, as does the coda that follows the dream-like waltz in the fourth.

Although the D minor Sonata was dedicated to Ferdinand David, the first performance was given by his most gifted student, the young Jo-

seph Joachim, and Schumann's wife, Clara, playing from the publisher's proofs. Afterwards Joachim wrote to a musician friend: 'I consider it one of the finest compositions of our times in respect of its marvellous unity of feeling and its thematic significance. It overflows with noble passion, almost harsh and bitter in its expression, and the last movement reminds me of the sea with its glorious waves of sound'. It might even have been the appearance of the score that suggested that idea to him: the finale opens with fierce rising figures in both instruments that look like a storm at sea. The second subject brings more contrast than in the first movement, but again it hardly lightens the intensity of the argument. The coda, in which Schumann passes his themes in review, does break into the tonic major, but even that fails to dispel the clouds.

The *Fünf Stücke im Volkston* ('Five Pieces in Folk Style'), Op. 102, date from 1849 – they were written in three

days in mid-April, as part of a series of shorter duo works composed that year, beginning with the *Fantasiestücke* for clarinet (or violin or cello), Op. 73, and the *Adagio and Allegro* for horn (or violin or cello), Op. 70, both in February; the *Drei Romancen* for oboe (or violin or clarinet) and piano, Op. 94, followed in December. The alternative instrumentation indicates that Schumann was deliberately aiming at a wide audience, one of capable amateur musicians (though that hasn't stopped them being recital favourites of professional musicians ever since). And that also explains the sunny disposition of the music: the conflict and intensity of the Sonatas are not entirely absent but they are generally kept in check. The first of the *Fünf Stücke im Volkston* – which can be played on cello as well as violin – is headed 'Vanitas vanitatum' ('Vanity of Vanities'), but that imposing title is undermined by the instruction: 'Mit Humor'. Is Schumann sending up a pompous friend? Or is he referring to a Goethe poem, 'Vanitas! vanitatum

vanitas!', in which a one-legged soldier decides to drown his sorrows in drink? No. 2 is a simple lullaby of sorts, in a comforting F major. No. 3 may be simple in construction and texture, but its plangent melody line, supported by clipped chords in the piano, suggests that some deeper tragedy informs the lyrical surface – an instinct reinforced by the end, where the music just stops, as if it might be too painful to continue. The swirling, buoyant fourth piece brings an emphatic contrast, but there's a hint of worry in the central section, and the disquiet returns in the closing bars. In this company the last of the pieces comes as a surprise: its central section is capricious, informed by spiky humour, but the outer panels have the drive and determination of a sonata finale, and the end is startlingly abrupt.

Martin Anderson



**ARVID
ENGEGÅRD**
VIOLIN

Arvid Engegård was born in Bodø, Norway, in 1963. At age eleven he led his first string quartet in concerts throughout Norway. After receiving a degree in violin from Trondheim Conservatory of Music at age sixteen, he continued his studies at Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. He later studied with Sándor Végh in Salzburg, Austria, and was invited to lead Camerata Academica, a position he held for eight years.

In 1991 Engegård was asked to lead the Orlando Quartet in Amsterdam. As violinist and chamber musician, Engegård has performed at many of Europe's most prestigious festivals, including the Lockenhaus Chamber Music Festival, the Salzburg Festival, Musiktage Mondsee, and the Mozarteum Foundation's Mozart Week.

Engegård's career as conductor has steadily advanced since 1999, working with orchestras in Norway and abroad. He has previously released two recordings as conductor on the LAWO Classics label: *W.A. Mozart* (LWC1071) – a recording of Concertos K. 299 and K. 297B – with the Oslo Philharmonic, and *Mozart, Hvoslef Sæverud* (LWC1100) with oboist David Friedemann Strunck and the Oslo Philharmonic. In 2015 he released *Duo Brillante* (LWC1080) as violinist, with double bassist Knut Erik Sundquist and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra.

Arvid Engegård is artistic director of the Lofoten International Chamber Music Festival. In 2000 he received the Nordlys Prize at the Northern Lights Festival in Tromsø, Norway. In 2006 he founded the Engegård Quartet, which performs throughout Europe and is one of Scandinavia's most sought-after chamber music ensembles.

NILS ANDERS MORTENSEN

PIANO

Nils Anders Mortensen was born in Flekkefjord in 1971. He began playing piano at age three, and in 1986 he won the Norwegian Young Pianist Competition. He studied at the Norwegian Academy of Music, École Normale in Paris, and Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hannover with Einar Steen-Nøkleberg. Other important teachers have been Tatjana Nikolajeva and Hans Leygraf.

In 1996 Nils Anders Mortensen was the recipient of the prestigious Concerts Norway 'Debutant of the Year' award. He has won international prizes and grants. In 1998 he won the Mozarteum Prize in Salzburg. In 2004 Mortensen received the Robert Levin Memorial Prize.

Mortensen has appeared as soloist with Norway's leading orchestras. He recorded piano concertos of Geirr Tveitt with Stavanger Symphony Orchestra. His first solo album *Im Freien* (LWC1032), featuring music of Debussy, Grieg, and Bartok, was released in 2012 to glowing reviews. In 2015 Mortensen released the solo recording *In finstren Mitternacht* (LWC1084), featuring music of Brahms, and *Tundra* (LWC1092), a recording of Russian music, with double bassist Knut Erik Sundquist. He has also released five recordings with mezzo-soprano Marianne Beate Kielland on the LAWO Classics label: *Früh* (LWC1033), *Sæle jolekveld* (LWC1040), *Grieg* (LWC1059), *Young Elling* (LWC1072), and *The New Song* (LWC1097).

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ROBERT SCHUMANN
(1810-1856)

SONATE OPUS 105

- 01) I. MIT LEIDENSCHAFTLICHEM AUSDRUCK (07:39)**
- 02) II. ALLEGRETTO (03:26)**
- 03) III. LEBHAFT (05:44)**

SONATE OPUS 121

- 04) I. ZIEMLICH LANGSAM - LEBHAFT (14:17)**
- 05) II. SEHR LEBHAFT (04:05)**
- 06) III. LEISE, EINFACH (05:27)**
- 07) IV. BEWEGT (08:58)**

FÜNF STÜCKE IM VOLKSTON OPUS 102

- 08) I. MIT HUMOR *VANITAS VANITATUM* (02:21)**
- 09) II. LANGSAM (02:33)**
- 10) III. NICHT SCHNELL, MIT VIEL TON ZU SPIELEN (03:43)**
- 11) IV. NICHT ZU RASCH (01:58)**
- 12) V. STARK UND MARKIERT (02:36)**