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ROBERT SCHUMANN

Complete Symphonic Works

VOL. II

HEINZ HOLLIGER

WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln

WDR

THE COLOGNE
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Symphony No. 2 in C major, Op. 61	36:10
I. <i>Sostenuto assai – Allegro ma non troppo</i>	12:01
II. <i>Scherzo. Allegro vivace</i>	7:03
III. <i>Adagio espressivo</i>	8:26
IV. <i>Allegro molto vivace</i>	8:40

Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 97 'Rhenish'	30:35
I. <i>Lebhaft</i>	8:58
II. <i>Scherzo. Sehr mäßig</i>	5:40
III. <i>Nicht schnell</i>	5:08
IV. <i>Feierlich</i>	5:04
V. <i>Lebhaft</i>	5:45

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Robert Schumann's Symphonies

A peculiar contradiction has marked the reception of Schumann's symphonies. Especially after their premieres, contemporary critics praised the masterly instrumentation of these works, above all in their writing for brass and woodwinds. During the decades following the composer's death, however, orchestration was declared to be their primary weakness – and this verdict has persisted up until very recent times. Critics were quick to point out the reason: Schumann thought in terms of his own instrument, the piano, not in terms of the possibilities of the orchestra. How could this change in aesthetical verdict come about? Jon W. Finson has called our attention to the fact that Schumann, in contrast to present-day compositional practice, had relatively small orchestras at his disposal; the body of strings, in particular, was significantly smaller. Through his orchestration, he was able to help small ensembles achieve “a more solid, almost massive

instrumental sound – the sound towards which Brahms and Franck also strove” (Jon W. Finson). He attained it, above all, through careful orchestration in the middle ranges. With larger string forces, however, the fine design and final crowning of the sound in the winds become weaker; one easily gains the impression of the relatively “thick” writing of which Schumann has been frequently accused. For their recordings, Heinz Holliger and the WDR Symphony Orchestra have therefore chosen the orchestral size with which the composer himself rehearsed and performed his works, thus restoring the sonic balance that he originally intended. Before the backdrop of the above remarks, Gustav Mahler's revisions of Schumann's instrumentation do not merely appear as interpretative adaptations, but also as attempts to rectify the imbalances that have arisen for the modern orchestra. They aim to show the ideas behind Schumann's works to their best advantage, once again, under altered historical conditions of performance practice.

The C-major Symphony

If one were to count Schumann's Symphonies according to their order of composition, then the two works in C major, Op. 61 and in E-flat major, Op. 97 would be the Fourth and Fifth. If we included the extensive sketch for a C-minor symphony made in 1841 and ultimately shelved by the composer, they would be the Fifth and Sixth. They are separated by four and nine years, respectively, from the works of the “symphonic year” including the First Symphony in B-flat major, Op. 38, the Symphony in D minor that was counted as the Fourth and received opus number 120 after its revision, and the *Overture, Scherzo and Finale*, Op. 52. Altered methods of production came with the composer's new creative phase. Schumann had formerly written down works, even large ones, all at once within a relatively short time. He now took more time to work out the character and arrangement of the whole, considering various alternatives that were often

not only sketched, but also developed. He also spent more time revising works, both during their preparatory stages and in the aftermath of performances. For instance, he revised the C-major Symphony at least thrice prior to its publication, changing not only the instrumentation in some spots, but also making cuts in the first and final movements.

The decisive impulse for the composition of the Second Symphony (according to the customary reckoning), as with the First, came from Schubert's C-major Symphony (“The Great”), which Schumann had heard again in 1845 as performed by the Gewandhausorchester under Hiller's direction. Contemporaries, however, primarily placed it in a line of development with Beethoven's Ninth. They believed that its course of ideas – one could speak of a “plot” in the sense of a novel – led, as in Beethoven's work, from depression to triumph, from the gloomy catacombs of (spiritual) life into bright regions of existence. “The struggle of the individual subject, crowned by

victory after the most complete penetration into and absolute merging with loving, spiritual universality, is also the idea of the Ninth Symphony”, as Ernst Gottschald wrote in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, the journal that Schumann had earlier founded.

The explicit and implicit references to Johann Sebastian Bach appear no less significant when viewed from a present-day historical vantage point. Schumann creates them on various levels and with differing degrees of clarity. They remain rather hidden in the first movement, appearing more or less in a mediation of the second degree. The principal theme of the fast part resembles the beginning of the Second Fugue on the Name BACH in its rhythmically accentuated opening figure; like the other five pieces of his Op. 60, Schumann composed it immediately prior to the Symphony. In the second movement, the scherzo, he makes a secret of the sequence B-A-C-H in the second trio which assumes the penultimate position in the order of

the movement’s five parts according to the scheme A–B–A–C–A; its character is like that of a silhouette of a romantic chorale. The third, slow movement is composed in the manner of Bach; at times, the composer points out the relationship between his work and the Trio Sonata from the *Musical Offering* and to the *Erbarne dich* aria from the *St. Matthew Passion*. Only a loose connection can be established in both directions, however; the relationship primarily exists on the level of musical language, in the representation of a romantic interpretation of Bach and at dramaturgically decisive spots in the gesture of an historical, retrospective view. The various more-or-less hidden Bach references, however, hint at a compositional awareness in which the musical past is constantly present; this presence expresses itself in various forms in the specific work at hand.

Albeit in a different way, these remarks also apply to Schumann’s relationship to Beethoven. His intensive confrontation with that composer is confirmed

by three observations: the unfinished, shelved C-minor Symphony, sketched alongside the corrections made to the Symphony B-flat major, very clearly took up where the last Viennese classicist left off. The fact that Schumann neither finished it nor considered publication and performance was due to the work’s overly-restrictive stylistic proximity to Beethoven; this pushed his own individuality into the background. In addition, the arrangement of characters of the Second Symphony’s movements is reminiscent of Beethoven; as in the latter composer’s Ninth, the scherzo is the second movement, energetically continuing the insistent motion from the first movement in its recurring main section, intensifying it and creating, in the trios, forces which clearly oppose it. The slow movement is allocated a significant role in its position preceding the finale; in the logic of drama, it would represent the peripeteia, the place at which the ensuing course of events is decided. In his article about Schumann’s Op. 61, Ernst Gottschald

even went so far as to extol the finale as an historical achievement that surpassed Beethoven: “Ludwig couldn’t yet manage it just with instruments, he had to borrow the word from the art of poetry; Robert achieves it for the first time with nothing but instruments.” In both works, the finale serves “as a triumphant conclusion, quoting passages from the preceding movements and extensively varying a cantabile melody. With this,” in the words of Jon W. Finson, “the parallels between Schumann’s Second Symphony and Beethoven’s Ninth are, of course, exhausted.”

Gottschald’s verdict – both his enthusiasm and his conception of categories – is a product of his time. Two decades after his death, Beethoven was considered the measure of all things musical, throughout all of Europe. Not to be measured according to him was tantamount to disqualification. Schumann’s opinion that the emergence of Schubert’s Great Symphony had prepared the way for symphonic music after Beethoven, and opened up

new horizons, had not yet gained wide acceptance. Today, in light of our overview of music history, Schumann's relationship to the two Viennese masters is evaluated differently. Beethoven was probably more important for him as an

historical standard of excellence than as a direct model.

This appears to be contradicted by the third and clearest reference to Beethoven in Schumann's score. Approximately in the middle of the finale, after

Schumann recalls motifs from the first movement, the music breaks down and retreats, as if it wanted to bow out in a demonstratively unsymphonic manner. A new theme now steps in at this point. It is taken from Ludwig van Beethoven's song

cycle *An die ferne Geliebte* (To the Distant Beloved) and bears the text: "Nimm sie hin denn diese Lieder" (Accept them, then, these songs). The composer had already conjured up lyrical thoughts in his Fantasy, Op. 17 and in the finale of his



String Quartet, Op. 41 No. 2; he resolves the preceding conflict as if from the outside whilst declaring an homage: to his wife, Clara.

The E-flat major Symphony

Schumann's Symphony in E-flat major was, as far as the composition of the work is concerned, his last one. Its epithet "The Rhenish" did not originate with him, but with his first biographer, Eduard von Wasielewski, who was the concertmaster at the work's premiere. The epithet is appropriate, not only in terms of the story of the work's origin but also of the music's specific character. The Rhineland, where Schumann moved in the autumn of 1850 to assume the directorship of the General Music and Choral Societies in Düsseldorf, must have been in accordance with his nature and purpose. As the main witnesses of a long history, the early 19th century primarily honoured and sang the

praises of Cologne Cathedral, alongside the fortresses that lined the course of the river. Its construction, begun in the 12th century, was still incomplete in 1850; its completion was propagated as a national task and mission. The Rhine, the "holy river" as Heinrich Heine (ironically) called it, symbolised both patriotism and a sense of liberty. An outcry was heard throughout Germany when France, in 1840, somewhat cheekily considered the Rhine as its eastern border. The outrage found an echo in countless suggestions for a hymn to the Rhine and to Germany. Schumann also participated in this competition but did not win. On the other hand, the Lower Rhenish music festivals, which had been held annually since 1818 in alternating towns, were amongst the pioneering institutions of a bourgeois-democratic musical life in a country which was still, politically, far removed from a free association of its inhabitants.

Schumann's unmistakably "liberal tone" found an exemplary manifestation in numerous Lieder that he composed

about and concerning the Rhine. The first movement of the "Rhenish", especially the principal theme with its expansive gestures, is rhythmically resolute, sometimes bordering on the character of a march – signs of an optimism, in sound, that wants to find its way to self-assurance. In the third movement, this élan is projected into the symphonic dimension; with Schumann, this means that it does not appear unbroken. The opening theme primarily moves in a descending direction, with the striking upsurges working against it. The rhythmic structure, sometimes bringing together two bars to form one and thus displacing accentuations, makes use of an old means of design. The first movement contains possibilities which are not exhausted in the development of its themes, but rather map out the future course of the symphony as a whole. From the proud, euphoric pathos of the beginning, the tempo slows down from movement to movement. The scherzo should be taken "very moderately". In his principal theme, Schumann combines

the expressive minuet of middle-period Beethoven with the popular Ländler; instants of the tone of liberty echo in the upswings. The intermediary sections are reminiscent of the poetry of the character pieces that Schumann wrote for the piano and for chamber ensembles – one is scherzo-like, the other in the style of an old Lied. He combines and juxtaposes the themes in the stylised dance movements more intensively than otherwise. This conception reminds us of the "Novellettes" and their narrative tone, not bound to any specific content. The tender, inserted Intermezzo (as the third movement was initially called) should be played "not quickly". It closely follows the previous movement in its motifs and character.

Schumann originally indicated the tempo "Adagio" for the fourth movement, which was created out of sacred material. The theme has noble relatives: the works in E-flat major and E-flat minor from Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the fugue from the Piano Sonata in A-flat major, Op.110 of Beethoven

(himself born in Bonn) and a Lied of Schumann's own invention (*Die wandernde Glocke*); the apodosis makes direct use of the chorale *Jesu meine Freude* in Bach's version. What is this entrance of church music doing in the Symphony? On 12 November 1850, five days after the scoring was begun, the Schumanns visited Cologne, experiencing the solemn elevation there of the Archbishop of Geissel to Cardinal. The fourth movement of Opus 97 is the echo of this clerical festivity: the movement was originally superscribed with "In the Character of the Accompaniment of a Solemn Ceremony". Peter Gülke gave a convincing explanation: "Since he was already at work, the impression of the ceremony might have struck him like a password that had finally been found, and it therefore belonged to the inspiration for which the ground had already been prepared." The Rhine and Cologne, the Cathedral and the sound of trombones had already entered into a close symbiosis in 1840 in the Op. 48 song cycle.

The fourth movement has a special role in the plan of the Symphony. It begins with a motif made up of fourths – the intervals that formed the structural grid for the themes in the first movement. The more animated counter-motif to the sacred gesture varies an idea from the second movement. The main lines of the works are solemnly bundled up before we move on to the lively finale. Here, shortly before the symphonic home stretch, ends the permanent inward-turning of the musical processes. Here, in the penultimate act of the Symphony, the signs of a new departure are readily apparent. Powerful, festive calls in the brass hint at the new upsurge. They are prior intimations of the breakthrough which is the later goal of the Finale.

Thus the movement with the clearest programmatic background simultaneously achieves the highest intellectual concentration. The messenger of old becomes the interface that interlocks the work to form an integrated whole; as in the C-major Symphony, the retro-

spective view takes on the function of a peripeteia. It opens the Symphony to its conclusion. Its first theme, in the markedly hymn-like tone of liberty, harbours turns of phrase from the solemn theme of the fourth movement. Its summarising, intensifying function is not so much due to the fact that themes from previous movements are integrated into the final process with superficial clarity, but rather because it takes place as it would in a literary drama – as lines of events that come together. The "tone" is linked to the urgency of the first movement, close to the "tone of the common man" and, in a liberated form, to the solemnity of the fourth movement. This tempo modifies the previous ones: compared to the fourth movement, it is doubled and slightly accelerated, slightly faster than the scherzo and almost identical to the opening movement in its basic pulse. The transition from the fourth to the final movement provides a model for and premonition of the breakthrough leading to the final section of the finale. Gustav

Mahler particularly admired this dramaturgy and orchestral realisation accomplished by Schumann.

Habakuk Traber
Translation *David Babcock*

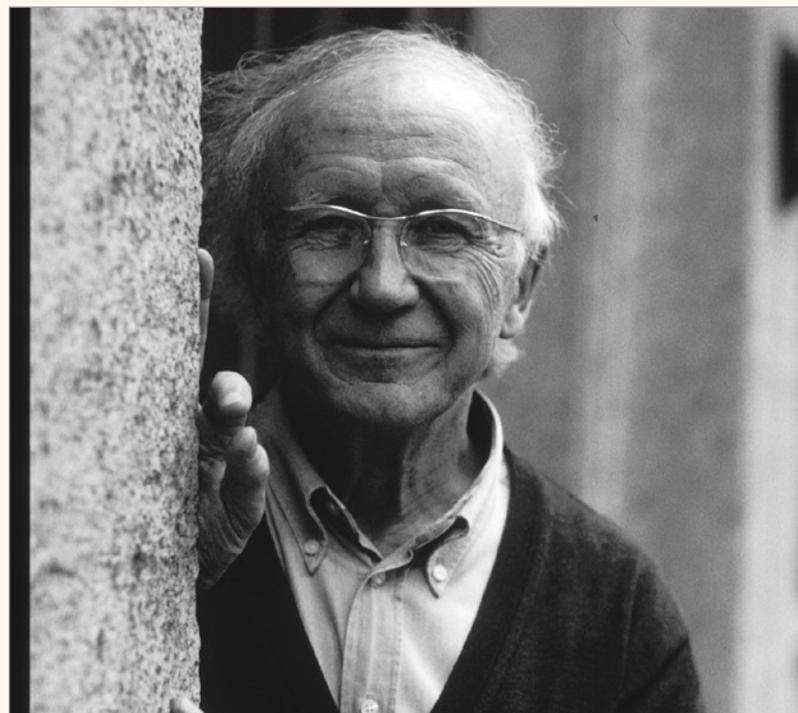
HEINZ HOLLIGER

Heinz Holliger is one of the most versatile and extraordinary musical personalities of our time. He was born in Langenthal, Switzerland, and studied in Bern, Paris and Basel (oboe with Emile Cassagnaud and Pierre Pierlot, piano with Sava Savoff and Yvonne Lefébure and composition with Sándor Veress and Pierre Boulez).

After taking first prizes in the international competitions in Geneva and Munich, Mr. Holliger began an incomparable international career that has taken him to the great musical centres on five continents. Exploring both composition and performance, he has extended the technical possibilities of his instrument while deeply committing himself to contemporary music. Some of the most important composers of the present day have dedicated works to Mr. Holliger.

As a conductor, Heinz Holliger has worked for many years with leading orchestras and ensembles worldwide. The artist's many honours and prizes include the Composer's Prize of the Swiss Musician's Association, the City of Copenhagen's Léonie Sonning Prize for Music, the Art Prize of the City of Basel, the Ernst von Siemens Music Prize, the City of Frankfurt's Music Prize, the Abbiati Prize at the Venice Biennale, an honorary doctorate from the University of Zürich, a Zürich Festival Prize and the Rheingau Music Prize, as well as awards for recordings; the Diapason d'Or, the Midem Classical Award, the Edison Award, the Grand Prix du Disque, among others.

Heinz Holliger is in high demand as a composer. His opera on Robert Walser's "Schneewittchen" at the Zürich Opera House received great international acclaim. Other major works are the Scardanelli Cycle and the Violin Concerto.



WDR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA COLOGNE

The WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne was formed in 1947 as part of the then North West German Radio (NWDR) and nowadays belongs to the West German Radio (WDR). Principal conductors were Christoph von Dohnányi, Zdenek Macal, Hiroshi Wakasugi, Gary Bertini, Hans Vonk and Semyon Bychkov. Celebrated guest

conductors such as Fritz Busch, Erich Kleiber, Otto Klemperer, Karl Böhm, Herbert von Karajan, Günter Wand, Sir Georg Solti, Sir André Previn, Lorin Maazel, Claudio Abbado and Zubin Mehta have performed with the orchestra. The WDR Symphony Orchestra tours regularly in all European countries, in North and South America and in Asia. Since the season 2010/2011 Jukka-Pekka Saraste is the Chief Conductor of the orchestra.

