

audite

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Complete Symphonic Works

Vol. VI

WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln
HEINZ HOLLIGER

WDR THE COLOGNE
BROADCASTS



Overture 'Manfred', Op. 115, WoO 29 13:08

Symphony in G minor 'Zwickauer' 19:26

I. *Allegro* (Leipzig version) 12:18

II. *Andantino quasi Allegretto* 7:08

Overture 'Scenes from Goethe's Faust' 7:56

Overture to Goethe's

'Hermann und Dorothea', Op. 136 9:33


Overture 'Genoveva', Op. 81 8:22

Overture to Schiller's

'The Bride of Messina', Op. 100 8:13

Overture to Shakespeare's

'Julius Caesar', Op. 128 9:18



Between Symphony and Dramatic Prelude: Robert Schumann's Overtures

This sixth CD of Robert Schumann's orchestral works concludes audite's cycle with the WDR Sinfonieorchester under Heinz Holliger. Issuing it as a supplement, adding, for the sake of completeness, the composer's less notable works, would not have done justice to these compositions. The overtures represent an essential element in Schumann's oeuvre – independent of the history of their reception. The fact that these works, apart from the overtures to *Genoveva* and *Manfred*, hardly feature in today's concert life, is mainly due to changed conventions in programming since the mid-nineteenth century. The long-standing verdict on Schumann's late oeuvre has also played its part in the marginalisation of the overtures: all except for the *Genoveva* overture have three-digit opus numbers which have been associated with works allegedly overshadowed by Schumann's late illness.

Exploring the overtures can play a vital part in revising this prejudiced view. Seen in relation to the symphonies, they take a similar position as do the *Konzertstücke* in relation to the concertos: a poetic form of reflection and addition. Alongside the larger scale works, they form that alliance of contrasts that was so typical of the Romantic age. The strong urge towards the distance, into nature, towards freedom (or a deity) corresponded to the desire for intensity and concentration as well as the courage to remain fragmentary, the view into the distance equating to an inner examination. As is also the case with the concertos and *Konzertstücke*, Schumann is not interested in dissociating the genres from each other, but instead in tracing their similarities and connections. This is exemplified by the "Symphonette", Op. 52, in three movements, composed between the first and final versions of his Fourth Symphony and headed *Ouvertüre, Scherzo und Finale*¹.

With the exception of one youthful work², the overtures were composed from 1847: well after the "year of the symphony", 1841. Except for the *Julius Caesar* overture, all were written with particular musical stage works in mind. The *Genoveva* overture opens the eponymous opera after Friedrich Hebbel. The overture to Lord Byron's *Manfred* is followed by another fourteen numbers relating to the dramatic poem by the British poet. Schiller's *Bride of Messina* was, for some time, considered for a possible second opera following *Genoveva*; before discarding the project, putting it to the test, Schumann wrote an overture, but left it at that. Goethe's epic poem *Hermann und Dorothea* was a "favourite of the composer" (Peter Jost): he considered working it into an opera,

¹ See Vol. I in this series, audite 97.677

² Overture with chorus, Op. 1 No. 3.



then a *Singspiel*, and finally a “concert oratorio”. However, none of these plans came to fruition. Composing the overture in August 1853 represented the completion of Schumann’s *Scenes from Goethe’s Faust*; in this, he followed a piece of advice from Franz Liszt. He began working on the overture to Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* eleven days after completing the overture to Schiller’s *Bride of Messina*. The former was not intended to be used in a theatrical, but instead a musical, context. On 17 January 1851 Clara Schumann noted in her diary: “Robert is working incessantly. Now he is writing an overture to *Julius Caesar*. He was so enthused by the idea of writing overtures to several of the most beautiful tragedies that his genius once again is bursting with music.” He was intending to produce works for use in concert – the type of concert overtures which harked back to Beethoven and which had found their first Romantic master in Mendelssohn.

The question as to whether an overture should be an autonomous work or serve as a prelude to a play was left open: Schumann avoided strict boundaries. Against the tradition of the time, he composed his overtures before, rather than after, the music accompanying the play³. In them, after reading the respective literary work, he summarised his impression of the character and atmosphere of the dramatic material for the first time – irrespective as to “whether the overture was intended to offer an image of the entire work or simply to introduce”. It was his aim to hit the “pitch” of the play in question, and/or to approach it by way of “introductory musical activity”. For each overture, Schumann determined anew the relationship between “plot formation” on the one hand and transit function with regard to the literary piece on the other. In the overture to *Hermann und Dorothea*, the main theme, a mixture of melancholy and hope wrought together in two parts, leads into the *Marseillaise*; for, according to Schumann, the piece “was originally conceived for a *Singspiel* based on a Goethe poem whose first scene portrayed the withdrawal of French troops.”⁴ During the course of the piece, the two contrasting characters keep approaching each other in close proximity, giving the impression of one emerging from the other. At its first appearance, however, the *Marseillaise* abruptly stops, as though a window were being closed, making the music from outside inaudible – this device was also used by Alban Berg in the third scene of *Wozzeck*, when the jealous Marie slams her window shut during the parade and the military music falls silent.

³ The *Scenes from Goethe’s Faust*, written during several stages, are a special case: originally, Schumann had not planned an overture – the performances at the Goethe celebrations of 1849 comprised only vocal-instrumental movements.

⁴ *Hermann und Dorothea*, in a series of nine poems, each headed by the name of a muse, tells the story of Hermann, the son of an innkeeper, who falls in love with Dorothea, a woman from a trek of refugees fleeing the French revolutionary forces, whom he eventually marries, despite initial paternal opposition.



Schumann had the *Genoveva* and *Manfred* overtures published as independent pieces as well, without including the subsequent stage works; the first performance of the opera was preceded by a premiere of the overture as part of a concert given by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. In it, the “spirit” and the most important forces of the opera have been sublimated into music in such a manner that they become emotionally explicit, even if one is not familiar with the subject matter⁵. The slow introduction, a masterpiece in instrumentation, is associated with the world of intrigue and evil in the opera. The “passionate” main section does not simply contrast this with the world of the good. Instead, its first theme becomes the guiding thread, running through the entire opera, mirroring Genoveva’s interior life. The second theme in the horns points towards rescue through her husband’s arrival, towards hunt, as well as freedom and salvation.

The *Manfred* overture outlines two poles between which Byron’s tragedy is set. Three syncopated chords represent the opening signal. The piece that they evoke is framed by two slow sections. The first one presents as a fragile unit the ideas which become separated in the main section. The shorter closing section extracts from the first one the essential elements as reminiscences before coming to a final ending. The main section is made up of two large-scale thematic complexes. The first one is characterised by anacrusis in triple time, syncopations and a falling, dotted finish; the second one is longer, has more pronounced subdivisions and features variants of expressive chromatic writing. Here, the two protagonists face each other, each in character: Manfred, demanding life’s greatest riches, challenges the world and the gods, whilst his sister Astarte, whom he loves as his refined female counterpart, is eventually broken by the unconditionality of their incestuous relationship. Their themes approach each other, meeting mostly by virtue of their rhythms. This occurs in the particular manner with which Schumann reinforces his ideas: almost every motif, except for the transitional phrases, is repeated. This technique seems akin to writing whilst continually using exclamation marks. The themes are connected via a form of primeval substance out of which, and against which, they emerge. The pain motif, a central element, is repeated in a circular and slowing fashion and closes the main section in written-out agony before giving way to the concluding reminiscences. It is made up of the notes A, B flat and C flat, symbolising Astarte, Byron (who had created Manfred as a projection of his self) and the four spirits who appear before Manfred in the opening and closing scenes.

⁵ Genoveva is the wife of Count Palatine Siegfried who joins the “holy war” against the Saracens, entrusting the stalwart Golo with his wife. Golo falls in love with Genoveva, who rejects him; plotting revenge, he claims that Genoveva’s child was sired by the cook. Siegfried orders both to be killed. The henchmen, however, are convinced of Genoveva’s innocence and abandon her and her baby in the forest. Both survive. Siegfried meets them whilst hunting and learns the truth. Genoveva dies only a few weeks after the happy ending.



In his overtures to Schiller's *Bride of Messina* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, composed in close proximity, Schumann followed a similar principle but arrived at entirely different formal solutions. In both cases he grasped the main affects and positions of the dramas. In Schiller's tragedy, hostility and jealousy are contrasted with reconciliation and love⁶. The contrasts are exposed as early as in the introduction: agitation and irritability on the one hand, sadness and restraint on the other. In the fast section, they are developed in two thematic areas, an angrily catastrophic main theme, and a wistful and lyrical secondary theme. Out of these, Schumann fashions an exemplary symphonic movement that feeds on staging contrasts. What normally appears as an afterword in this case becomes a grave statement: the closing section is determined by the first theme alone, and its tempo and its aggressiveness are heightened. In the end, catastrophe emerges as the victor. From the psychiatric facility at Enderich, Schumann sent the original score of the work (written in 1850/51) on 5 May 1855 to his wife as a birthday present for Johannes Brahms, also including his last letter to her which contains no signs of mental illness. In it, he makes ambivalent mention of "our beloved" (Brahms); the overture to a drama about a *ménage à trois* in which only the "bride" survives was to prove a knowing gift.

On the first manuscript sheet of his *Julius Caesar* overture Schumann noted all the important stages of the drama – reference points for the musical progression? Or a visualisation of the essentials for the musical work? The overture treats the heroic in its solemnly majestic and hopeful, mobilising manner both as a funeral march and as a restrained festive march along with appropriate fanfares, interspersed with chorale-like fragments. Thus a musical form is developed and presented in its inherent contrasting tendencies. In Schumann's oeuvre, this overture has two relatives: the *Marches*, Op. 76 for the revolution of 1848/49, and the *Solemn ceremony*, the fourth movement of the Third Symphony, written immediately before the Schiller and Shakespeare overtures.

In the *Faust Scenes*, the conception of the oratorio achieves what is normally effected by an overture, i.e. a focus on moments in the plot and development that are perceived as crucial. Schumann selected sections from Goethe's work that clarify the tragic action up to Gretchen's and Faust's salvation. In so doing, he does not create a sequence of actions but rather a constellation of ideas and situations which do not necessarily demand an instrumental introduction – as a summary of two powers that would make little sense. The motivic references in the overture (which was composed after the main body of the work) to the vocal pieces are loose. Instead, Schumann focussed

⁶ The adversarial brothers Manuel and Cesar have just made peace with one another as they both fall in love with the same woman, each unaware of the other. As Cesar finds her in an intimate embrace with Manuel, he jealously stabs his brother to death. It emerges that their lover is their sister whom they had never met. Neither she nor their mother can dissuade Cesar from atoning through committing suicide.



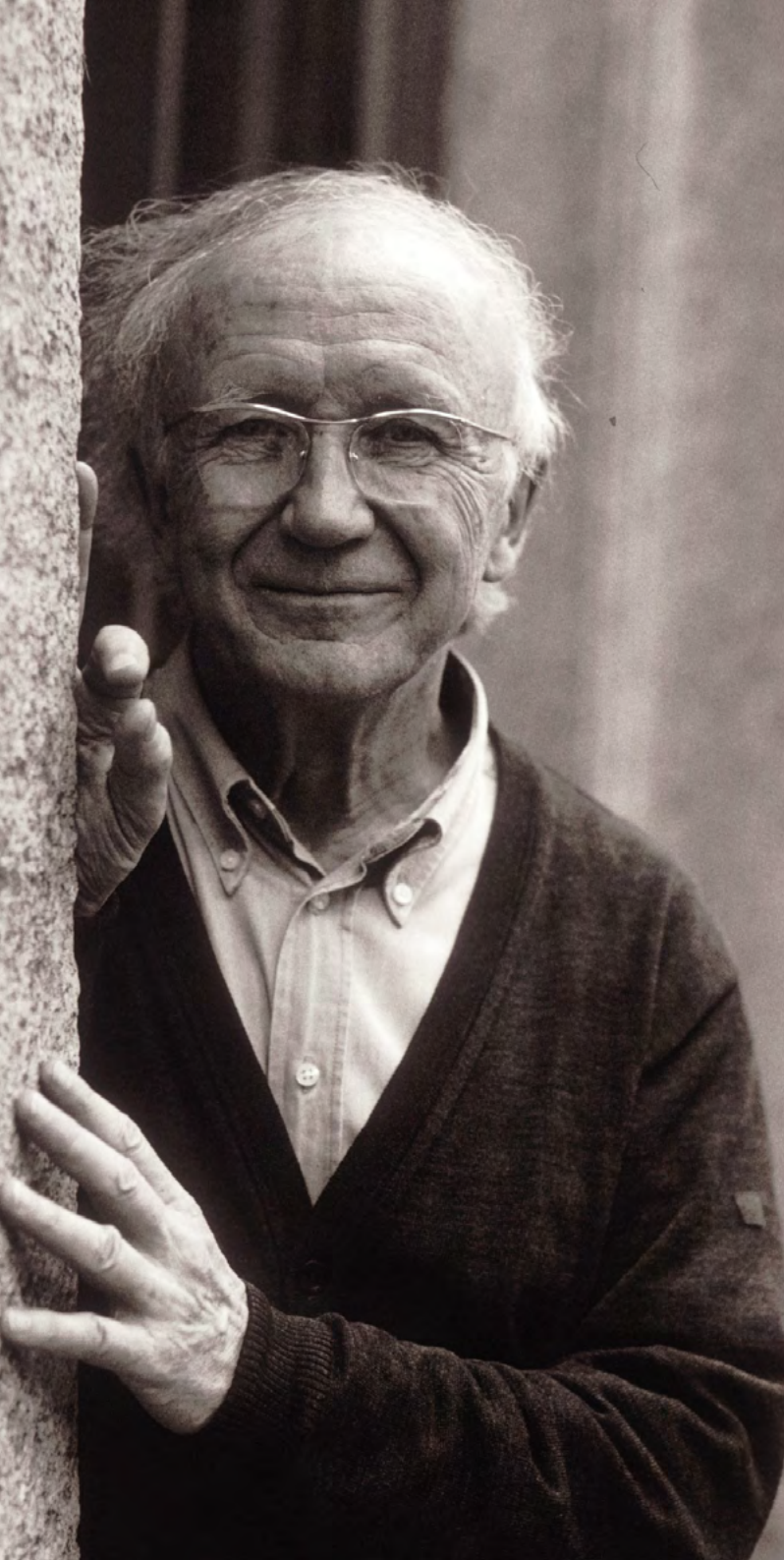
on two things: developing small motivic cells, leading them into opposing directions, and the great line of metamorphoses and the breakthrough from minor into a major-key atmosphere.

Schumann conceived all his overtures according to the outline of the Classical sonata form, with or without a slow introduction. He uses the ability of this musical form to create contrasts which then enter into battle in a multitude of concrete structures. The overtures were written in proximity to the Third and the revision of the Fourth Symphonies. With the former, they share an openness towards non-musical ideas; the common ground with the latter is that literature represents the source of inspiration. In the case of the D minor Symphony, looking towards the art of words resulted in a novel form; in the overtures, it influenced their atmosphere and progression. They therefore embody the final stage of Schumann's exploration of the symphonic form and its means of musical characterisation.

The beginning of this process was marked two decades previously by the Symphony in G minor. Schumann completed two movements; a scherzo exists as a fragment, and initial sketches were made for a finale. The opening movement was performed three times in public – in Zwickau, Schneeberg and Leipzig – and revised after each occasion. The second movement was never played, although it had been completed. At the Zwickau premiere, a thirteen-year-old pianist and composer was also on stage: Clara Wieck; Schumann's mother even then reportedly commended her son to the young girl as a future husband. This work of the twenty-one-year-old presents ingenious traits alongside technical facility. In its quasi spatial and rhythmically refined conception, the opening theme boldly moves at the peak of Romantic thinking. The secondary theme is looser in its shape, almost like a montage of formulae – a clear contrast to the main thought, but somewhat unspecific with regard to the contrapuntal tricks of the middle section. The second movement can hardly be described as slow, although it takes this place. Its fluid metre is heightened to a scherzo-like character in the central section; the regular scherzo would have needed to respond to this. The young Schumann created tempo conditions which can be found in the two final symphonies by Schubert which Schumann, at that time, did not know. However, this spiritual kinship does explain the tremendous effect emanating from his discovery of Schubert's C major Symphony: it freed Schumann to embark on his own symphonic path. His overtures became a complementary, reflecting, counterpart of the symphony genre.

Habakuk Traber

Translation: Viola Scheffel



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, he began an incomparable international career as oboist that has taken him to the great musical centres on five continents. Some of the most important composers of the present day have dedicated works to Heinz Holliger.

As a conductor, he has worked for many years with worldwide leading orchestras and ensembles. 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 Döhnányi, Zdeněk 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.

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