

audite

# Schumann inSANE



Jimin Oh-Havenith

## ROBERT SCHUMANN

### Kreisleriana op. 16

1. Äußerst bewegt 3:10
2. Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch 9:14
3. Sehr aufgeregt 5:36
4. Sehr langsam 4:03
5. Sehr lebhaft 4:18
6. Sehr langsam 5:34
7. Sehr rasch 2:35
8. Schnell und spielend 4:36

### Humoreske op. 20

- Einfach – Sehr rasch und leicht – Noch rascher –  
Erstes Tempo – Wie im Anfang 5:55
- Hastig – Nach und nach immer lebhafter und stärker –  
Wie vorher – Adagio 4:48
- Einfach und zart – Intermezzo 4:43
- Innig – Schneller (Tempo I) 2:13
- Sehr lebhaft – Immer lebhafter – Stretto 2:02
- Mit einigem Pomp 1:34
- Zum Beschluss – Allegro 6:53

Jimin Oh-Havenith plays Robert Schumann, Vol. 2

In the current classical music world, two of Schumann's principal works, the *Kreisleriana* Op. 16 and *Humoreske* Op. 20, enjoy a widely different presence to this day. While the *Kreisleriana* is one of Schumann's most popular piano pieces in both concerts and recordings, the *Humoreske* is chiefly addressed to "connoisseurs and enthusiasts." This gap reflects the development of Schumann's musical language as it became ever more refined and ethereal in the space of a few years. However, the starting point remained the same, involving as it did a fundamental question of the Romantic era (and Schumann was a child of this era): what are the features of an art that combines subjectively amplifying one's own artistic stance with reflecting on it from a distance, thus redefining the relationship between exploration of the self and worldly experience?

The *Kreisleriana* is fully deserving of its popularity. Even if there is no shortage of masterpieces by Schumann dating from the decade from 1830 to 1840, during which he composed nearly thirty works for piano, the *Kreisleriana* together with the *Dauidsbündlertänze* Op. 6 reveal the characteristic contrast between rhythmic and linear energy on the one hand, and meditative absorption in sound and melody on the other.

The pianistic challenges of the *Kreisleriana* are not quite as enormous as in the *Carnaval* Op. 9, the *Symphonic Etudes* Op. 13, or the *Fantasie* Op. 17, but the unified dramatic arc formed by the alternation of livelier and calmer sections together with the technique of so-called "metric dissonance" (i.e. accents against the beat corresponding to the delayed resolution of harmonic tensions or even lack thereof) require an interpreter who has to place his or her total mastery of the instrument entirely at the service of the imagination. One could even say that the *Kreisleriana* embodies the spirit of the piano itself. And without belabouring a gender-role stereotype, it is obvious that this also applies to the relationship between "male" and "female" aspects of the instrument, given that Schumann sought here to paint a musical portrait of his fiancée Clara (Wieck) and himself. The subjectivity of the musical language, unleashed with such passion and relish at first glance, is underpinned by a sophisticated structure. Taking a closer look at the form of the *Kreisleriana*, we find that it is based on that of the Baroque partita, which Bach brought to perfection in his *Six Partitas* BWV 825-830 (published by the composer himself in 1731 under the title "Piano Exercises Part I"). Their basic model is the succession of different instrumental movements or dances, which can combine into the fixed sequence of a suite or else be supplemented by further movements such as a prelude, fantasia, or sinfonia. This changing succession is contrasted by a constant factor, namely the same key for all the movements, which serves as the stable framework that holds together the stylistic differences of the individual movements or variations.

The *Kreisleriana* can be described as a modification of this principle; instead of a framework, however, we have a vanishing point which is repeatedly approached by the individual movements. At the center is G minor, the key of three of the eight movements (3, 5, and 8). But even the first movement begins in the "wrong" dominant of D minor (masquerading as the tonic), while in the middle section, instead of the expected F major we encounter B-flat major, the parallel major of G minor. B-flat major remains present in movements 2, 4, and 6 and, in the second half of the fourth movement, leads into G minor. But with C minor and E-flat major, the seventh movement enters a new, subdominant realm of G minor. This gives rise to the overall key schema D minor/F major – B-flat major – G minor – B-flat major – G minor – B-flat major – C minor/E-flat major – G minor; grouping together the major and minor keys, we have the fifth- (or fourth-) relationships *C minor – G minor – D minor* and *F major – B-flat major – E-flat major*. If we were to order the movements as an ascending sequence of fifths, this would form the series E-flat major – B-flat major – F major – C minor – G minor – D minor, the framing notes of which yield the sharp dissonance E-flat – D minor. Thus behind the outer cohesion of the *Kreisleriana* there is a strong centrifugal tendency of its parts to diverge. This is apparent in No. 5 in an expressive outburst that anticipates Scriabin, and in the work's coda, the (sound) world seems to have finally fallen to pieces with the elaborate metric asynchronicity between the two hands. Here we can almost see before our eyes the eponymous figure of the mad Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler from E.T.A. Hoffmann's story. The latter, in turn, forms part of the *Fantasiestücke nach Callot's Manier*, from which Hoffmann took as his model the bizarre, nightmarish visual world of the Lorraine painter and draftsman Jacques Callot (1592–1635). Thus the subtitle of the *Kreisleriana*, "Fantasies for

the pianoforte,” is to be taken literally. In dedicating the work to “his friend” Frédéric Chopin, Schumann emphasized their spiritual affinity expressed in shared artistic intentions, imaginative expression, and classical formal rigor elevated to a higher unity.

Characterized by Schumann researcher Arnfried Edler as one of Schumann’s “most peculiar and personal works,” the *Humoreske* Op. 20 is a pivotal composition, the summary and culmination of a ten-year-long process of artistic and personal maturation that was devoted exclusively to the piano. In a letter to his Belgian admirer Simonin de Sire from March 1839, Schumann, looking back on this development, offered the following comments on the title of the *Humoreske*: “[The] word ‘humoreske’ is not understood by the French. It is a shame that for precisely the features and notions most deeply rooted in the German nationality, such as *gemütlich* [leisurely, cosy] and *schwärmerisch* [rapturous, enthusiastic, effusive], as well as the humour which is the happy fusion of *gemütlich* and *witzig* [funny, witty], there are no good and suitable words in the French language. (...) Are you not familiar with Jean Paul, our great writer? I learned more counterpoint from him than from my music teacher.” *Gemüt* and *Witz* are fused in the concept of humour, literally the “moistening” element which, according to Jean Paul, is capable of overcoming the gap between the celestial/infinite and the earthly/finite. This is precisely what Schumann was aiming for in the *Humoreske*: namely, the dissolution (or at least calming) of the fundamental tension between feeling (*emotio*) and reason (*ratio*), which had long been battled out in the figures of Florestan, Eusebius, and Meister Raro – and thus also the overcoming of the inner strife that made Hoffmann’s Kapellmeister Kreisler the prototype of the Romantic artist. Schumann attempts this overcoming in the novel form of a musical essay no longer underpinned by an external literary stimulus (as in the *Kreisleriana*) or framed as an imaginary scene (as in *Papillons* Op. 2 and *Carnaval* Op. 9). This results in a highly characteristic ambivalence: the ten consecutive parts (if one counts the “intermezzo” as such) also give rise to a kind of suite, but – in contrast to the *Kreisleriana* – the cyclical procedures of motivic economy and limited use of keys characteristic of sonata form are also present. The ensuing circle of “dark” B-flat keys, however, also reveals that the *Humoreske*, along with the *Kreisleriana* and the *Nachtstücke* Op. 23, share the common idea of a metaphorically – and thus autobiographically – charged use of key characters.

It is thus no coincidence that as a symbol of this idea, we find an “inner” voice in the *Humoreske* (similar to the “Sphinx” in *Carnaval*), which though notated is not meant to be played; it appears in the third part, marked *hastig* [hurried]. Forming an ironic contrast is the polonaise theme, situated symmetrically in the eighth part and to be performed with “a certain pomposity,” which sounds almost like a quotation (or “music about music”). We thus find ourselves before a sort of hall of mirrors, since Schumann is here alluding to the eleventh movement of his early *Papillons* as well as to his series of polonaises for piano four hands, which he composed during the 1830s.

The two-part coda (*Zum Beschluss* – To conclude) is thoroughly enigmatic. It begins with the reminiscence of a yearning, melancholy theme in G minor already heard in the fourth part (*Einfach und zart* – Simple and tender), which is now passionately amplified and expanded into an elaborate, convoluted figure that surges upwards and pauses. This is followed abruptly by a brief allegro in Baroque style, in the parallel major and initial key of B-flat major. Here, Schumann brings together a chromatic (sorrowful) Baroque figure, surrounded by chords, in the right hand with an ornamented figure vigorously rising up in the left hand. The opposed tendencies in this passage seem to present a contradiction: neither its twofold, amplified repetition nor the following decisive cadence in major really succeed in resolving it. And so it remains open whether Schumann was thus signalling, in Jean Paul’s sense, a humoristic reconciliation of the self with the world, or whether he was returning to E.T.A. Hoffmann’s fractured worlds.



### **JIMIN OH-HAVENITH**

An exceptional sonority and fidelity owed to the text determine Jimin Oh-Havenith's piano playing. Her warm sound, which is always embedded within the rhythmic structure, lets music come alive in all its richness. Synchronicity of sound and rhythm, not arbitrary changes in tempo and dynamics determine the clarity of her interpretation.

Jimin Oh-Havenith was born in Seoul, South Korea. After studying piano with Jin-Woo Chung (Seoul National University) and Aloys Kontarsky (Musikhochschule Köln) she performed as a soloist and recorded for radio and CD, also as a piano duo with her late husband Raymund Havenith (†1993). The pianist taught at the Hochschule für Musik Mainz and the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Frankfurt am Main

Since 2013 she has been active again as a soloist and has recorded nine solo CDs.

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when resting!  
masters, the grand  
uncontrolled.

VORSICHT GEFAHR!  
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Ungleichmäßige besteht die Gefahr des  
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