audite

Schumann

wild mild

Jimin Oh-Havenith

audite

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Carnaval, Op. 9

Préambule 2:29
Pierrot 2:12
Arlequin 1:08
Valse noble 1:48
Eusebius 1:47
Florestan 1:09
Coquette 1:43
Réplique 0:53
Papillons 0:53
A.S.C.H. – S.C.H.A. (Lettres dansantes) 1:05
Chiarina 1:24
Chopin 1:04
Estrella 0:38
Reconnaissance 1:37
Pantalon et Colombine 1:04
Valse allemande 0:55
Paganini 1:21
Aveu 0:47
Promenade 2:21
Pause 0:21
Marche des „Davidsbündler“ contre les Philistins 4:09

Davidsbündlertänze, Op. 6

Book I

1. Lebhaft 2:02
2. Innig 1:10
3. Mit Humor [etwas hanbüchen] 1:45
4. Ungeduldig 0:51
5. Einfach 1:42
6. Sehr rasch [und in sich hinein] 1:57
7. Nicht schnell [mit äußerst starker Empfindung] 4:31
8. Frisch 1:03
9. Lebhaft 1:37

Book II

1. Balladenmäßig. Sehr rasch 1:28
2. Einfach 1:56
3. Mit Humor 0:40
4. Wild und lustig 3:27
5. Zart und singend 2:05
6. Frisch 2:24
7. Mit gutem Humor 1:27
8. Wie aus der Ferne 3:05
9. Nicht schnell 1:45

Jimin Oh-Havenith
plays Robert Schumann, Vol. 3

Not many will disagree with the observation of the great pianist Ignaz Friedman that Chopin represented both the beginning and the end of the piano. (Friedman became famous as an interpreter and editor of Chopin's works, but he was equally committed to Schumann's music). And yet it cannot be denied that Schumann's piano music holds an exceptional place in the classical-romantic repertoire canon for both players and audiences. This applies to piano novices, who may gain their first memorable experience of the unique performance possibilities on the piano courtesy of the *Album for the Young*, but even more so to many professional pianists, who have grown fond of Schumann's piano works, as if they were familiar personalities with whom one frequently meets or even shares a home. This affinity is hardly surprising, as the piano initially played a central role in Schumann's biography. The highly respected Leipzig piano teacher Friedrich Wieck, who was to become Schumann's father-in-law, wanted to make not only his daughter Clara but also his student Schumann "one of the greatest piano players of our time". However, this endeavour failed as the middle finger of Schumann's right hand became paralysed after excessive practice whilst using a mechanical contraption which had been said to strengthen the finger. It was therefore Clara Schumann who went on to realise that career ambition and became one of the most respected concert pianists on the European continent, performing Schumann's early works – which had been written with her in mind – to great acclaim. However, Schumann used the piano neither (quasi) monologically, like Chopin, nor encyclopaedically, like Liszt, but instead with a universal approach, employing all the important genres of music and – comparable to Liszt in this respect – as a composer who constantly exchanged views on music in conversation, in letters and in literary forms of criticism and essays. In this context, it cannot be emphasised often enough that for Schumann, the son of a bookseller, literature was of equal importance to music from the very beginning. In his intellectual cosmos, E.T.A. Hoffmann and Jean Paul took on almost the same level of importance as Bach and Beethoven.

The body of nearly thirty piano works, which largely fills Schumann's so-called "piano period" between c.1830 and 1840, represents far more than a cornerstone of the classical-romantic piano repertoire. Rather, it is a comprehensive intellectual concept of using a single instrument to formulate a musical and poetic statement about the self and the world. It is no coincidence that this focus came to an end when Schumann and Clara Wieck's marriage in August 1840 concluded the longstanding battle with Friedrich Wieck, who had tried hard to prevent their relationship; until then, the couple had also used these pieces to exchange coded messages between each other. 1840 was to become Schumann's (famous) "year of the song", in which the piano took on a new, though no less important, role as a partner to the voice. This was followed by Schumann's move towards chamber music, his exploration of the symphony, as well as the secular oratorio (with his 1843 masterpiece *Paradise and the Peri*, which is still underrated) and finally, five years later, the birth of his problem child, the opera *Genoveva*. Considering the astonishingly productive output of imagination and reflection, energy and discipline that Schumann achieved on the piano between the ages of 20 and 30, it is difficult to decide to which of these works to give preference, especially since many of them are highly original. With his variations, sonatas, character pieces and études, Schumann created a spectrum of individual pieces and work cycles which continually revealed new paths and also unmistakably bear his style in terms of sound and dramaturgy. A web of aesthetic, musical, literary and (auto-)biographical motifs extends over it, the exploration of which remains an artistic and musicological challenge.

Comparing the *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6, and the *Carnaval*, Op. 9, which have long mesmerised pianists and audiences, Schumann's intentions and the complex external and internal interrelationships between the works emerge clearly. As elsewhere, the opus numbers do not reflect the compositional chronology: *Carnaval* was composed as early as 1834/35, but did not appear in print until 1837; *Davidsbündlertänze*, composed during that year, were published the following year (1838) and – as other works – were re-issued later (in 1850) in a second version revised by the composer. It is this latter version which most performers favour and which also forms the basis of Jimin Oh-Havenith's recording. The works feature "graceful scenes" of an imaginary masked ball (Op. 9) and "dances" as part of an imaginary dialogue (Op. 6), which, for Op. 9, are combined in the manner of a kaleidoscope and, in the case of Op. 6, in two volumes to form a kind of suite. Each set is based on a sophisticated poetic-autobiographical programme: in *Carnaval*, the French subtitle "Scènes mignonnes [...] sur quatre notes" refers to the German cryptograms A-S ["Es" in German = E flat] -C-H [German designation for B]; AS ["As" in German = A flat] -C-H [= B] and S [= E flat] -C-H [=B] -A, which encode the programme in at least three different ways. Literally, it refers to the north-west Bohemian town of Asch (now Aš), the birthplace of Schumann's then fiancée, Ernestine von Fricken;

furthermore, "Asch" refers to Ash Wednesday, i.e. the end of the carnival season; finally, it contains the monogram of the composer's name, either with the addition of his middle name, Alexander (= Robert Alexander Schumann), or as part of his surname (= Schumann). With regard to the second and third interpretations, there is a remarkable connection to Schumann's tragic end, which was sealed by his attempted suicide by jumping from the Rhine bridge in the Düsseldorf district of Oberkassel: he chose *Rosenmontag* [the day before Shrove Tuesday, and highlight of the German carnival], 27 February 1854, for the occasion. The three variants of the ASCH code are present in countless, sometimes hidden, sometimes obvious, metamorphoses and gradations in *Carnaval*. In a way, the opening sixth chord C-E flat-A flat is already a variant; the code is first used as a motif in No. 3, "Arlequin", and in No. 10 "A.S.C.H. – S.C.H.A. (Lettres dansantes)" it even finds its way into the title. Before this number, there is an insertion entitled "Sphinx" with all three variants displayed in long sustained notes without any metre marking; as the insertion is not numbered, it can be assumed that the notes are a kind of eye music, i.e. not intended to be heard. (In the *Humoreske*, Op. 20, there is a comparable case of an "inner voice"). The listeners are not aware of this either, but they must be familiar with the titles of the numbers, which elucidate the programme in a quasi-literary way. The titles can refer to musical forms ("Valse noble", "Valse allemande"), terms ("Réplique", "Reconnaissance", "Aveu", "Promenade", "Pause"), real names ("Chopin", "Paganini"), *commedia dell'arte* characters ("Arlequin") or typecasts ("Coquette", "Estrella") and also references to Schumann's own alter egos ("Eusebius", "Florestan") or his own works ("Papillons", Op. 2). The concluding "Marche des 'Davidsbündler' contre les Philistins" points to Schumann's role in the Leipzig music scene, which he wanted to reform by founding the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in 1834.

These experiments demonstrate the *Carnaval*'s ambitions as an exuberant, hybrid work, which in its underlying concept of masking (in carnival jargon the "larva") refers to Schumann's favourite author Jean Paul, but also to the elaborate miniatures of the French masters of the *clavecin*, Rameau and Couperin. Critics were therefore not agreed as to whether they should celebrate this work as a stroke of genius or reject it as an expression of mannered "bizarrerie". (Liszt took the former position, Chopin the latter.) Stylistically and pianistically, *Carnaval* squares the circle and sets new standards in its orchestral colours and rhythmic and metric complexities.

In the first edition of his *Davidsbündlertänze*, Schumann went one step further by not even including his name as the author on the title page, replacing it with those of his literary masks Florestan and Eusebius. Schumann employed these two contrasting figures alongside that of the equalising Meister Raro in his articles for the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in order to take up arms against aesthetic mediocrity or virtuoso excess. In the first edition a number of dances are labelled with the abbreviations of "F.", "E." or "F. u. E.". On the other hand, Schumann inserted verbal transitions by a narrator figure into the musical text, which are addressed to the player (but once again not to the listener); for example, before number 18 it says: "To top it all, Eusebius said the following, but much bliss spoke from his eyes." The performance markings, which are largely identical in both versions, also add a poetic layer to the musical text. However, the focus is no longer on carnivalesque masks, but on addressing emotional states ("Innig" [Heartfelt], "Sehr rasch und in sich hinein" [Very swift and heading inwards], "Wild und lustig" [Wild and merry], "Mit (gutem) Humor" [With (good) humour], "Wie aus der Ferne" [As if from afar]). The note to his fiancée, in which Schumann confessed to having written "wedding thoughts, composed in the most beautiful excitement I have ever been able to muster", certainly forms part of the background, alongside a poem of 1838 written for her: "Florestan the wild one, / Eusebius the mild one, / tears and flames / take them together / in me, both / the pain and the joy." Also relevant in this context is his choice of a theme from a composition by Clara Wieck as a motto, which Schumann had already used in the *Impromptus,* Op. 5 (1833), and his Sonata in F minor, Op. 14 (1836). In addition, the *Davidsbündlertänze* take up and continue the conclusion of the *Carnaval*, namely Schumann's sonic criticism of a philistine, narrow-minded artistic morality. Above all, however, Schumann demonstrated in the *Davidsbündlertänze* his ability to transform short motivic-rhythmic gestures or catchy tunes into dramatic as well as subtly atmospheric passages; to do justice to this in performance is one of the most beautiful but also most delicate tasks in interpreting Schumann's piano music. The fact that Schumann completely erased the references to Florestan and Eusebius as well as the narrator's voice in the second version of 1851 is intended to signal that he wanted to avoid any proximity to illustrative programme music. In doing so, however, he gave the interpreter's own imagination greater scope to exploit the dramaturgical and expressive depth of this masterpiece.

Wolfgang Rathert
Translation: *Viola Scheffel*

audite

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 ten solo CDs.

recording: October 24 - 26, 2023
recording location: Konzerthaus Liebfrauen, Wernigerode
recording format: pcm, 96 kHz / 24 bit
executive producer: Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff
sound & editing: Dipl.-Tonmeister Justus Beyer
piano: Bösendorfer 280 (Gerd Finkenstein)
photos: Uwe Arens
art direction & design: AB·Design, Detmold

audite
info@audite.de · audite.de


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