

# A Fallen Leaf

I earnestly believe that had Schumann not published his *Albumleaf* (*Ziemlich langsam, sehr gesagvoll*—rather slow, very songful), it would be more frequently performed.

In his very last years, Schumann published the volumes *Colored Leaves*, Op. 99 (1852) and *Albumleaves*, Op. 124 (1854). (One might understandably leap to the conclusion that the present *Albumleaf* is to be found among the *Albumleaves*.

However, the *Colored Leaves* also include five other pieces entitled “*Albumleaf*”—the present morsel is the third of these.)

By this final period, Schumann’s creative work had been curtailed by his mental illness, and both collections are loose catch-alls for earlier fragments dating back as far as 1832. The tender *Albumleaf*, and also the salty A-minor Waltz, dreamy Romance and fleeting *Elf* from Op. 124, were originally conceived for *Carnaval*—a connection, in fact, encoded into the pieces themselves.

In 1834, Schumann became engaged to a girl named Ernestine Von Fricken, from the little Bohemian town of Asch. Although he was to jilt her about a year later, he had by then immortalized her in his exuberant programmatic cycle, *Carnaval*. Translating the letters of “Asch,” all of which appear in his own name as well, into notes (according to the German musical alphabet), he derived three quirky, tonally ambiguous motifs from them, which inspire the entire *Carnaval*. (These motifs are explicitly stated within the work as the three unplayed “Sphinxes.”) Most of these pieces are overtly derived from one of the motifs, others smuggle one into an inner voice or the middle of a melody, and in one—well, Schumann cheats a little, interpolating other pitches between those of its motif.

One might consider it absurd to impose such a limitation on a major work; however, the very challenge of squeezing every possibility from these

strange, arbitrary melodic germs stimulated the enamored Schumann to newly daring flights of fancy. The present *Albumleaf* begins with the second Sphinx: A-Flat, C, B. (In the German system, “s” signifies a flat, and “H” is our B-Natural, “B” being reserved for our B-Flat. Who’s on first?...) Schumann may have felt that this piece lacked the eccentric quality which characterizes *Carnaval* and its programmatic titles.

Our era tends to perform opuses complete or not at all. Neither Op. 99 nor Op. 124 is really suitable for complete concert presentation, due to their inconsistency and random arrangement, despite the beauty of individual pieces. (In the past, when selected “groups” of individual favorites from different opuses were customarily programmed, the *Slumber Song* from Op. 124 was a familiar, beloved piece.) This same predilection for completeness has led musicians to “restore” to certain works material discarded by the composer—for instance, Schumann’s posthumous extra variations into the *Symphonic Etudes*, his coda to the Fantasy, or in the case of Mahler, the *Blumine* movement into his First Symphony. Thus, my contention that, had the *Albumleaf* not been published as one of the *Colored* (but obscure) *Leaves*,

but rather posthumously, identified as an omitted page from one of Schumann’s most performed works, it would be more often heard today (to the detriment of *Carnaval*’s magnificent sweep!).

Some time ago, I had a conversation with an intelligent and perceptive writer on musical subjects, during which he railed against the promiscuous restoration of omitted material. This writer attended a recital in which I played the *Albumleaf* as an encore to *Carnaval*. Afterwards, backstage, he said, “I wonder where it would have come...” I was astonished, and reminded him of his strongly stated position. “I know, I know...” he replied sheepishly, “but the piece is so lovely!”



Robert Schumann

from *Colored Leaves, Op. 99*

# Albumleaf

Robert Schumann  
(1810-1856)

*Ziemlich langsam, sehr gesangvoll*

First system of the musical score, measures 1-8. The piece is in 3/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The tempo is *Ziemlich langsam, sehr gesangvoll*. The first staff is the treble clef and the second is the bass clef. The music features a melody in the treble and a harmonic accompaniment in the bass. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is present. The bass line includes a triplet of eighth notes and a *simile* marking.

Second system of the musical score, measures 9-17. The melody continues with various phrasing slurs and accents. The bass line provides a steady accompaniment. A first and second ending bracket is shown at the end of the system, with a repeat sign at the beginning of the second ending.

Third system of the musical score, measures 18-25. The melody and accompaniment continue. A dynamic marking of *p* is present at the end of the system. The bass line features a triplet of eighth notes.

Fourth system of the musical score, measures 26-33. The melody and accompaniment continue. A dynamic marking of *p* is present at the beginning of the system.

Fifth system of the musical score, measures 34-45. The melody and accompaniment continue. A dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo) is present. The system concludes with a final cadence. Fingerings 1, 2, 3, and 45 are indicated.