

A Crossed Out Coda

From Schumann's *Album For The Young*

No. 21 of Schumann's *Album for the Young* — the first of three pieces to be distinguished by the expressive absence of a title — is likely a token of gratitude for his wife Clara's steadfast love. As she herself points out, it is based on a motif from the prison trio of Beethoven's opera *Fidelio*. (Florestan is being starved in the prison where he is unjustly incarcerated. In this trio, his wife Leonora, disguised as a man, succeeds in bringing him a crust of bread.) Schumann perceived his own character as possessing two opposed identities — he named his contemplative side "Eusebius," his active and impulsive side "Florestan." In a letter he wrote to Clara in 1837, he identifies himself with Beethoven's Florestan: "Remain as faithful to your Robert as Leonora was to her Florestan." Schumann takes as the motif for No. 21 Florestan's phrase: "Oh, thank you, you have sweetly revived me."

A comparison between Beethoven and Schumann demonstrates the extent to which a melody reflects the character of its surrounding harmonies and accompanying figuration. In Beethoven, the simple tonal language and regular flowing rhythm allow the melody to express warm gratitude, but to a (presumed) stranger. The greater flexibility, both rhythmic and harmonic, of Schumann's treatment of the identical phrase suggests the informal, spontaneous manner with which one confides in an intimate.

Encountered in its familiar, published version, the piece seems complete and perfect. Yet, both Schumann's sketchbook and his manuscript reveal that, as originally conceived, it did not end with the climax (*etwas langsamer*), but trailed off in a coda — a final dreamy variant of its opening phrase. Jörg Demus, in his first publication of this material, suggests that Schumann crossed it out because it requires a large hand span. However, elsewhere in the second half of the work ("for older ones," numbers 19 through 43), Schumann hardly displays much solicitude of the limits of a child's hand. (In fact, intoxicated by his pleasure in composing the *Album*, Schumann seems to have simply forgotten the work's didactic purpose. It is the advanced sightreader who can best savor the many exquisite

pieces which are at once too difficult for teaching and too intimate for concerts.)

Schumann had a special gift for endings, and this coda is a typically poetic afterthought.

The coda, like other crossed-out passages (or even pasted-over ones, as in Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*) is a troubling reminder of the whole urtext (original text) problem. This word fosters the complacent illusion that there is one "original" and final version of a piece which the editor has simply to present in undefiled, virginal purity. Is life ever that simple? Many works pass through a messy evolution, in ill-defined stages. We do expect a responsible editor to represent significant variants from manuscripts and early editions, and to acknowledge any speculative correction he may find it necessary to make.* But, could the composer's trash basket be magically recovered, must every crumpled scribbling

be given the weight of an "alternate" reading? The editor must sometimes make choices, and these, inevitably, must rest on subjective, esthetic criteria.

Nevertheless, it does seem strange that out of the three major "urtext" publications of the *Album*, only one —

the Wiener Urtext — saw fit to include, or even mention this coda, considering that all three were published well after Demus, and furthermore, all list his manuscript sources among those consulted. In one, the editor describes as "unpublished" other extra material included in Demus's 1973 publication. (In the forties, this same German "scholar" actually doctored quotations from Schumann to make him more appealing to the Third Reich!)

Coincidentally, Schumann's monumental Fantasy Op. 15 is likewise in C, derived from a melodic germ from Beethoven, and concludes with an eloquent coda — also crossed out in the manuscript. Yet edition after edition, each trumpeting its scholarship in clarion tones, blithely ignores this crucially important variant.

*Harold Bauer's complete Schumann edition — mercifully, out of fashion — scales dizzying heights of editorial irresponsibility. Even in a piece as brief as the present one, he could not resist making unacknowledged "improvements" in Schumann's harmony, not to mention shuffling the composer's careful indications of dynamics and articulation.

**A "troubling" reminder
of the urtext problem.**

from Album For The Young
Piece No. 21

Robert Schumann
(1810-1956)

Langsam und mit Ausdruck zu spielen

The musical score is written for piano and consists of four systems of music. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking and includes a *[simile]* instruction. The tempo is marked as *Langsam und mit Ausdruck zu spielen*. The second system includes a *Langsamer* marking. The third system includes an *Im Tempo* marking. The score features various musical notations including slurs, ties, and fingering numbers (1-5) for both hands. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The piece concludes with a final cadence in the fourth system.

First system of musical notation, featuring a treble and bass clef. The music includes various notes, rests, and dynamic markings such as *p*. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above notes. A tempo instruction "Etwas langsamer" is centered below the system.

Etwas langsamer

Second system of musical notation, continuing the piece with similar notation and dynamics. It includes a *ped.* marking and an asterisk symbol at the end of the system.

Third system of musical notation, showing further development of the musical theme with various articulations and dynamics.

Fourth system of musical notation, featuring a *ped.* marking and an asterisk symbol.

Fifth system of musical notation, concluding the page with a *ped.* marking and an asterisk symbol.