

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)



Carnaval, Op. 9 (31:20)

1. Prélude (2:33)
2. Pierrot (2:08)
3. Arlequin (1:07)
4. Valse noble (1:01)
5. Eusebius (1:54)
6. Florestan (:52)
7. Coquette (1:43)
8. Réplique (:55)
9. Papillons (:45)
10. A.S.C.H. - S.C.H.A: Lettres Dansantes (:52)
11. Chiarina (1:49)
12. Chopin (1:35)
13. Estrella (:26)
14. Reconnaissance (1:42)
15. Pantalon et Colombine (1:11)
16. Valse Allemande (1:04)

17. Intermezzo: Paganini (1:34)
18. Aveu (1:27)
19. Promenade (2:16)
20. Pause (:21)
21. Marche des "Davidsbündler" contre les Philistins (3:53)

Kreisleriana, Op. 16 (31:59)

22. Äußerst bewegt (2:45)
23. Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch (8:29)
24. Sehr aufgeregt (4:22)
25. Sehr langsam (3:32)
26. Sehr lebhaft (3:27)
27. Sehr langsam (3:40)
28. Sehr rasch (2:12)
29. Schnell und spielend (3:26)

30. Arabeske, Op. 18 (8:02)

Vassily Primakov, piano

SCHUMANN: Carnival; Kreisleriana; Arabeske

The piano works which Robert Schumann composed in the 1830s – especially his revolutionary, freewheeling sequences of short pieces assembled around a governing and yet often whimsical poetic idea – practically redefined the potential of the medium at a time when it was already developing rapidly away from classical forms, under the impact of Chopin and Liszt. The works on this disc are paradigms of Schumann's youthful, original approach to the idea of musico-literary inspiration. They also – and this too is typical – reflect the events and affections of his turbulent personal life. This is music which finds its own forms as it seeks to reflect states of mind.

In fact Schumann began the decade more active as a writer and editor than as a composer. The first issue of his progressive periodical *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* appeared in March 1834. Through it he would attack musical Philistines (reactionary pedants and flashy virtuosi) and promote the new music of Chopin, Mendelssohn and other like-minded contemporaries, whom he collected together, with other characters from his imagination, as a band of brothers, the 'Davidsbündler'. Among these latter were 'Florestan' and 'Eusebius', two characters from a novel Schumann had started writing but who

soon came to stand for the two sides of his own nature – one fiery and ardent, the other reflective and gentle. The next month he met (and fell in love with) Ernestine von Fricken, a nobleman's daughter who had arrived in Leipzig to study with Schumann's former teacher, Friedrich Wieck. By July they were secretly betrothed, and Schumann had begun a set of piano pieces designed to allude to their as yet undeclared love – and to many other subjects uppermost in his mind. The result was the 20-movement *Carnaval*, completed in early 1835.

His interest in Ernestine had actually sent him back to a project of 1833, an abandoned set of variations on Schubert's *Sehnsuchtswalzer*. His starting-point, in the bold 'Preamble' movement of the new work, was taken from the opening bars of these abandoned variations, and he generally kept within 3/4 waltz-time for his new pieces, which are variations of a different kind. The idea of a sequence of carnival scenes enabled him to introduce many different musical characters and styles, allusions to friends and other composers and even to the campaigns of the *Neue Zeitschrift*, while allowing Ernestine to preside in spirit over the whole enterprise in the guise of a controlling motto, or rather group of mottoes.

For Ernestine came from the town of Asch, a four-letter name which could be rendered into musical notation through the German

nomenclature for the different notes of the scale. In fact it could be transcribed in two different ways, with four notes or three, for 'S' in German notation is E flat, while 'As' is A flat (as for the other letters, A is A, C is C and H is B natural). Thus ASCH could be spelt either A flat-C-B or A-E flat-C-B. And these happen also to be the only 'musical' letters (SCHA) in the name Schumann, so he could put himself in the music as E flat-C-B-A. Except for the 'Preamble', each movement of *Carnaval* uses one or more of these three mottoes. From 'Pierrot' to 'Papillons', the four-note A- E flat - C - B form is used, usually appearing at the start of each movement, though sometimes disguised. From 'A.S.C.H.-S.C.H.A' to the finale, the three-note A flat - C - B form is preferred. Schumann loved cryptograms and games and mystifications of this sort, and indeed he went so far as to include a movement *which is not to be played* – an unheard-of phenomenon in piano music up to that time – but simply to be pondered. Coming between 'Replique' and 'Papillons', it is entitled 'Sphinxes', and consists of nothing but the three mottoes in ancient long notation.

Concentrating on these germinal motifs, Schumann could not write merely decorative variations but had to demonstrate altogether new powers of organic growth and development – which he did triumphantly. It is not only in 'Lettres dansantes' that the all-important tones seem to gambol and gyrate and continually combine and re-combine before our

ears. So fertile did Schumann find this creative approach that he wrote several more variations than could be accommodated in *Carnaval* itself (they were published many years later in his collections of *Bunte Blätter*, op. 99 and *Albumblätter*, op. 124). When *Carnaval* was finished to his satisfaction he thought of titling it, in German, *Fasching: Schwänke auf vier Noten* (Carnival: Jests on Four Notes). In the end it was published with the French title *Carnaval: Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes*. In the meantime Schumann had become disenchanted with Ernestine (not least, it seems, because he discovered she was illegitimate!) and broken off their relationship, so *Carnaval* was dedicated not to her at all but to the violinist-composer Karol Lipinski.

The general conception of the work is a sort of masked ball, with waltzes of various kinds. Schumann had already explored this kind of conception in the earlier piano work *Papillons*, published in 1832. This had been inspired by the description of a masked ball in the novel *Flegeljahre* (Adolescent Years) by Jean-Paul Richter, whose penultimate chapter depicts a *Larventanz* or masked ball. by Jean Paul. *Carnaval* and *Papillons* even share the same tune in their finales, but *Carnaval* is on much the larger scale. At this 'ball', characters from the Commedia dell'arte – Pierrot, Harlequin, Pantalón, Colombine – mingle with real composers: Chopin, Paganini and Schumann himself. But Schumann is here in his double disguise as Florestan (where he quotes from his

own *Papillons*) and Eusebius, and there are female characters masked under pseudonyms, too. 'Estrella' is his portrait of Ernestine; but more interesting to us now is 'Chiarina' – his depiction of Clara Wieck, daughter of Friedrich Wieck and already Schumann's most devoted interpreter. Here he quotes a figure from one of her own piano works. Clara would soon displace Ernestine in his affections, and go on to become his wife – and one of the 19th century's greatest pianists. The end of *Carnaval* is a triumphant march (in 3/4 time!) in which the Davidsbündler are imagined as putting the Philistines – caricatured by quotations of the 17th-century *Grossvatertanz* – to flight, with the triumph of youthful and liberated art.

Schumann's idiosyncratic vein of fantasy is brought even further to the fore in his piano cycle *Kreisleriana*, composed in 1838 for Clara Wieck, but finally dedicated to Chopin. The title alludes to an archetypal figure of German Romantic fiction: Kapellmeister Kreisler, the eccentric and emotionally overwrought protagonist of E.T.A. Hoffmann's fantastic novel *Kater Murr* (*The Life and Opinions of the Tom-Cat Murr*) and several of his tales entitled *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier* (a reference to the brilliant 17th-century engraver Jacques Callot, a master of the pathetic and bizarre). Kreisler is a gifted but essentially failed composer and conductor. He believes music should be pure feeling, and in despair at his inability to realize his ideal he burns all he composes

and finds true expression only in improvisation. It was believed that Hoffmann's model for Kreisler was one Ludwig Böhner (1787-1860), whom Schumann actually met in 1834. But Kreisler must contain just as much of Hoffmann himself – for the author was a highly talented but professionally frustrated composer who only turned to literature because he could not make a success of his musical career.

Whatever Kreisler's antecedents, Schumann (like the young Brahms 15 years later) clearly felt a deep sense of identification with this ardent, idealistic figure beset by the crippling social and aesthetic restrictions of the world about him. In a truly Kreisler-like rapture he composed the half-hour *Kreisleriana* cycle in a mere four days! Yet it's clear that these pieces are not in any programmatic sense 'about' Kreisler: if there is a poetic theme it's the oddities, the reverses, the false starts, the turbulent emotions and occasional raptures of life itself. Afterwards he urged Clara to play the pieces often: 'You and one of your ideas are the principal subject', he wrote to her; and he went on to say that within the pieces were mirrored 'a positively wild love ... and your life and mine, and how you look'.

Despite the freedom of form there is nothing improvisatory about *Kreisleriana* – this is an intricate, tautly-structured sequence of eight movements, centred on a tonal axis of G minor and its relative major

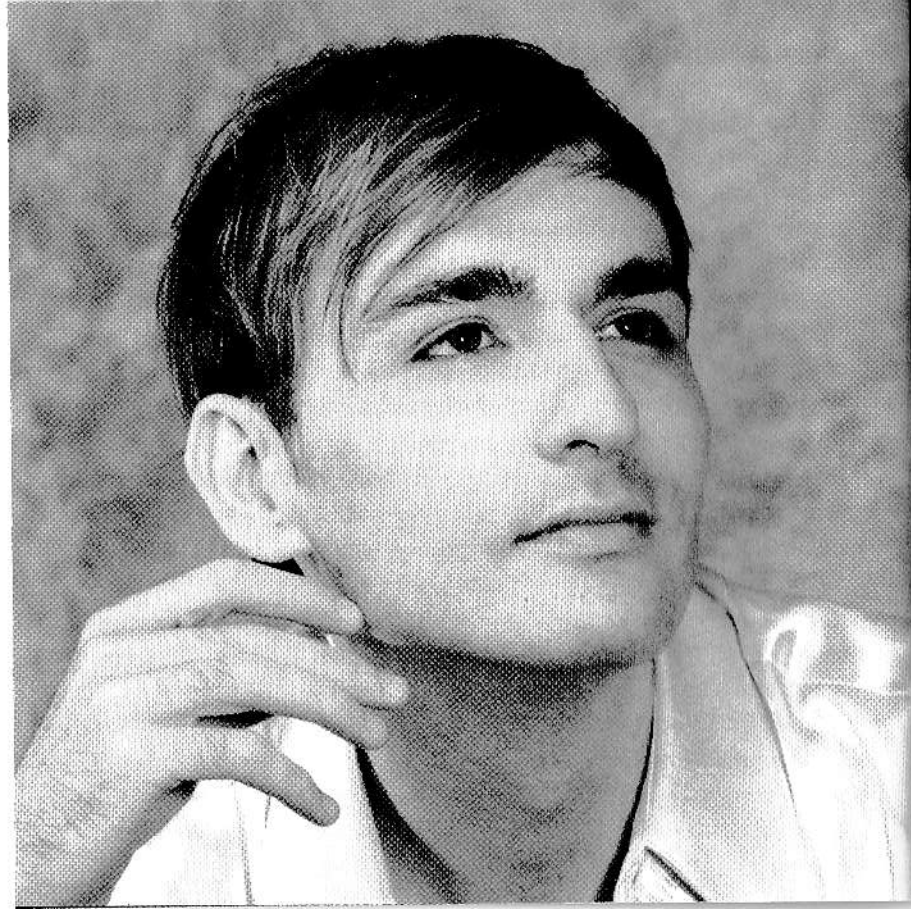
B flat, and deriving from a number of short germinal motifs which give rise to all kinds of developments. The progress of thought is more contrapuntal, more concerned with pure line, than in earlier Schumann works such as *Carnaval*. This is evidence of his study of Bach, and gives rise to an impression of introspective intensity; but every movement is imbued with deep personal emotion. Moreover he explores chromatic harmony more boldly than in any previous composition, adding to the sense of expressive uncertainty. Altogether it is a work of extremes – the six inner movements, nos. 2-7 are all marked *Sehr* (very) something or other. The mood swings between a fevered restlessness (already evident in the prelude first movement) and a spirit of contemplation, sometimes lyrical (as in the second movement, which is typically interrupted by a pair of fast, disruptive 'Intermezzi'), sometimes (as in the fourth piece) tending towards morbidity. Nevertheless the last movement, despite the passionate pathos of its middle section, opens with a more carefree dance-tune which Schumann found himself able, three years later, to quote in the sunnier surroundings of the finale of his First Symphony, 'Spring'.

Shortly after *Kreisleriana*, Schumann wrote the *Arabeske* in C major. The previous year (1837), Friedrich Wieck, disapproving of the relationship between Schumann and Clara, had sent her away to live with friends in the village of Maxen, near Dresden. But these friends –

Major Anton Serre and his wife Frederike – knew and liked Schumann and thoroughly supported his suit. They enabled the young lovers to keep in touch and, eventually, to become secretly engaged. It seems that the *Arabeske*, dedicated to Frederike Serre, was Schumann's expression of gratitude. Unlike *Carnaval* and *Kreisleriana*, the piece is in a single movement – it might almost be a miniature for the salon were it not for its superior facture and the tenderness with which it suggests deep emotion. *Arabeske* is in a fairly straightforward rondo-form, with the liquid semiquaver writing of the main subject alternating with somewhat slower, more reflective episodes in E minor and A minor. The slow coda, looking back to the first of these episodes, comes as an intensely eloquent surprise.

Notes by Malcolm MacDonald





Since the release of his recording of the Chopin piano concertos, Vassily Primakov has been hailed in the international press as a pianist of world class importance. *Gramophone* wrote: "Primakov's empathy with Chopin's spirit could hardly be more complete"; the *American Record Guide* stating that "Primakov's timing is perfect. This is a great Chopin pianist." *MusicWeb-International* called the disc "one of the great Chopin recordings of recent times. Primakov's interpretations combine grace and fire in the service of unflagging intensity. These are performances of extraordinary power and beauty." In 1999, as a young prizewinner of the Cleveland International Piano Competition, Primakov was cited by the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* for his idiomatic mastery of the Chopin style: "Primakov again played Chopin's *Sonata No. 3*, showing why the jury awarded him the Chopin Prize. How many pianists can make a line sing as the 19-year-old Moscow native did on this occasion? The slow movement overflowed with dreamy lyricism shaped with a patient and colorful hand. Every poignant phrase took ethereal wing. Elsewhere the music soared with all of the turbulence and poetic vibrancy it possesses. We will be hearing much from this remarkable musician."

Vassily Primakov was born in Moscow in 1979. He entered Moscow's Central Special Music School at the age eleven as a pupil of the renowned pedagogue Vera Gornostaeva. While in Russia, Mr. Primakov won First Prize in the Rachmaninoff International Young Artist Competition. At

seventeen, after a summer at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, he came to New York to pursue studies at the Juilliard School with the noted pianist Jerome Lowenthal. At Juilliard, aided by a Susan W. Rose Career Grant, Mr. Primakov won the William Petschek Piano Recital Award, which presented his debut at Alice Tully Hall. While a student at Juilliard, Primakov won both the Silver Medal and the Audience Prize in the 2002 Gina Bachauer International Artists Piano Competition. Vassily Primakov began his professional career after winning First Prize in the 2002 Young Concert Artists (YCA) International Auditions, an award which presented him in solo and concerto performances throughout the USA. In 2007, he was named the Classical Recording Foundation's *Young Artist of the Year*. Vassily Primakov's recordings for Bridge Records include Beethoven Sonatas (BRIDGE 9251); Chopin Concertos (BRIDGE 9278); Tchaikovsky: *Grand Sonata*, Op. 37 and *The Seasons*, Op. 37-bis (BRIDGE 9283); and Chopin: 21 Mazurkas (BRIDGE 9289). Upcoming recordings for Bridge include a Mozart Piano Concerto cycle with the Odense Symphony Orchestra; Antonín Dvořák's *Piano Concerto*, Op. 33 and solo works by Dvořák; and a solo disc of music by Johannes Brahms.

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Graphic Design: Douglas H. Holly
Photographs of Vassily Primakov: Konstantin Soukhovetski
Recorded, March 30, 31, April 2, 3, 2009; Carl Nielsen Hall,
Odense Koncerthus, Odense, Denmark;

Special thanks to the Odense Symphony Orchestra,
Finn Schumacker, Chief Executive Officer



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