

The Symphony No. 6 in C major (D. 589), composed in 1818, is an ambitious work in the spirit of the earlier symphonies Nos. 1-4. It is scored for the full late-Classical orchestra, i.e. with clarinets, trumpets and timpani. Only the lack of trombones distinguishes its orchestration from that of the later 'Great' C-major Symphony.

It is fascinating to compare the first movement of the Sixth Symphony with Schubert's overture style. The movement shares with the overture a serious introduction and a genial allegro theme in the context of sonata-form and it ends with a faster coda section.

By 1817 Gioacchino Rossini had become the favorite of Viennese audiences. Not even Beethoven failed to acknowledge him, and in 1817 Schubert composed his two 'Overtures in the Italian Style'

Thus, because the Allegro of the Sixth Symphony shares its form, its style, and in one case its actual thematic material with Schubert's overtures, it may also be called 'Italian' in spirit. The Andante is a masterful blend of melodic grace in the opening and closing sections, and highly articulated excitement in the middle developing section. Played at a true andante tempo, this middle part, with its staccato triplets, takes on a tarantella quality. Thus we find another mark of this work's affinity with Italy.

The Sixth Symphony is also a showpiece of harmonic variety. Schubert begins with a simple dance form, as if he means to embark on a series of variations. But what follows is soon revealed as the second theme of a sonata-form, and that section comes to a traditional close in the dominants at the fermata. In his third movement Schubert makes use, for his first time, of that scherzo form which is particularly pronounced in Beethoven's seventh symphony.

The finale is composed in the form of a divertissement; its themes, all of equal importance, are developed into whole scenes, in which the various themes are continually moving to the fore and then dropping back to make room for the others: a folk festival, a party in the Prater with typical Viennese hurdy-gurdy and merry-go-round music. No one had hitherto dared to work such a realistic piece of every-day music into a symphony. The courage to do so seems to have come from Rossini.

Schumann Symphony No.4

Adrian Boult / London Philharmonic Orchestra

Schubert Symphony No. 6

Sir Thomas Beecham / Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Robert Schumann's popular appeal as one of the masters of mid-nineteenth century piano music has been injurious to his reputation in other genres. His string quartets are frequently ignored by both public and performers due to the oft-stated but ill-informed charge that they are little better than inflated piano transcriptions, and his four mature symphonies have suffered even longer and more painful periods of neglect for similar reasons. It has become fashionable to claim that, even in those passages where Schumann's ideas are more purely orchestral in conception, he lacked enough skill at instrumentation to realize those ideas as well as a better orchestrator might have. Consequently, many conductors have taken it upon themselves to "improve" Schumann's scoring, with results that vary from the extremely effective to the indefensible, and there has hardly been a twentieth century performance or recording entirely free of such alterations.

We can freely admit Schumann's inexperience as an orchestrator, and not take offense at the subtle modifications made to his scores by such well-intentioned musicians as George Szell. On the other hand, the wholesale re-writes by Gustav Mahler have the ultimate and very unfortunate effect of removing Schumann from his element altogether (as does his similar re-write of Beethoven's Ninth).

The first of the two charges leveled above is a different matter altogether, for these four works are by no means mere piano transcriptions. Schumann was obviously a fluent composer for the piano, and some pianistic traits and mannerisms are bound to sneak across from the one medium to the other

(very few composers are immune to such "seeping" effects). This in no way, however, diminishes the impact that his wonderfully evocative, prototypically "Romantic" (in the original, mid-nineteenth century sense of the word) symphonies can have in skilled hands. A highly individual sense of a formal design, strikingly beautiful thematic and harmonic substance, and a history of influence on such later symphonists as Brahms and Tchaikovsky all recommend these musical gems to both audiences and musicians alike, who would do well to re-evaluate them on their own terms, and not compare them to the works of later composers who clearly had different means and different goals.

Schumann's Symphony No.4 in D minor, Op. 120, although last by number, is hardly his final effort in the genre. It was, in fact, originally composed immediately following the completion of the First Symphony in 1841, and thus predates either the Second or the Third symphonies. Schumann, however, refrained from publishing the work until 1853, during which interval he undertook some revisions (principally in the area of orchestration, though the work's complexity would lead us to suspect that he continued to tinker with details for some time). The work is far and away the most formally innovative of the composer's four symphonies: the four movements, each structurally incomplete, are to be played without any break. Collectively, they form a single large-scale formal design. Significantly, Schumann considered calling the piece "Symphonic Fantasia"--no doubt wondering if such a creation were still a genuine symphony.

Schumann Symphony No.4

Adrian Boult / London Philharmonic Orchestra

Schubert Symphony No. 6

Sir Thomas Beecham / Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Schumann Symphony No. 4 in D minor, Op. 120

1. Ziemlich langsam - Lebhaft 10:21
2. Romance. Ziemlich langsam 4:44
3. Scherzo. Lebhaft - Trio. Etwas zuruckhaltend 5:06
4. Langsam - Lebhaft - Schneller - Presto 7:50

Total Time: 28:01

Schubert Symphony No. 6 in C major, D. 589

5. Adagio-Allegretto 7:37
6. Andante 6:43
7. Scherzo (Presto) & Trio 4:36
8. Allegro moderato 10:21

Total Time: 29:17

Schumann Recorded 1956 by Nixa-Westminster
Producer: Kurt List Engineer: Herbert Zeithammer

Schubert Recorded 1959 by EMI Records



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