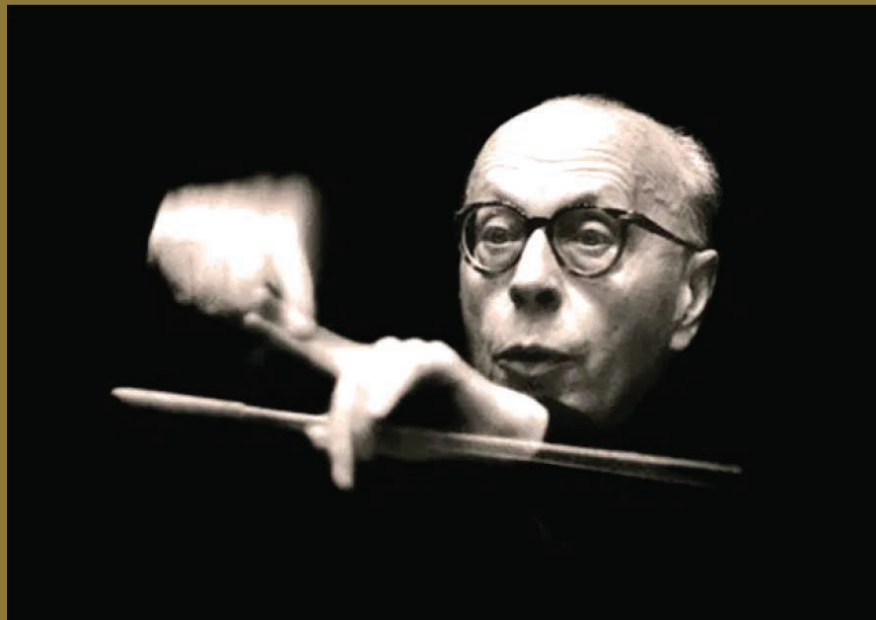


Schumann Symphony No. 2 & 4

George Szell

The Cleveland Orchestra



Franz Liszt! Thus, what should have been a featured work came along as an afterthought on a program which also featured the Op. 52 work.

Whatever the reasons, Schumann withdrew the work, and it remained in the dark for a decade. Hearing it now in its original version is enlightening. It is immediately lighter and more compact and more economically scored than the composer's later works, placing it more squarely in his earlier output and shining a light on the revised version as being sort of a belt-plus-suspenders fleshed out afterthought designed to accommodate the tastes of a later generation.

The opening movement -- there are only four compared to five in the 1853 version -- is taut and nods again toward Mendelssohn. It pushes beyond this, however, and is more dramatic and aggressive in nature, if not as brilliant. Jumping, insistent stomps are heard throughout and Schumann's emerging style is more in evidence than in the earlier symphonic works.

A brief, touching Romanza leads to what is essentially the same scherzo found in the later version, and the finale contains a brief Largo and bridge to an Allegro vivace finale, which two parts become mysteriously separate movements in the revision. The finale itself is also -- to overuse the word -- taut compared to the revision and is extremely effective.

Overall, the listener may come away wondering why Schumann so distrusted his original instincts and constructs. The 1853 revision does not ruin the work, but in spite of its additions, does not add to it as music nor improve upon it as symphonic experience. This original version is more authentically representative of the brilliant composer in his formative years, already in command of his musical voice and pushing to emerge from the shadows of Beethoven and a fickle musical public.

In the autumn of 1844 Clara moved the Schumann household to Dresden, where Robert recovered enough from a terrifying attack of nerves to complete the A minor Piano Concerto for her in July 1845. Soon thereafter he began thinking about a new symphony, which eventually became the third of his four, although published as No. 2. To fight the symptoms of syphilis, he steeped himself in Bach, out of which came several contrapuntal works for organ, pedal-piano, and conventional clavier. At last, on December 12, a sudden wave of inspiration lifted him so high that he sketched the first movement of a new C major Symphony in three days, had proceeded to the finale by Christmas Day, and on December 28 completed preliminary sketches. His tinnitus worsened, however, interfering with long-term concentration until February 12, 1846, when he began to orchestrate the blueprint. Schumann completed the scoring of Symphony No. 2 only 17 days before its Leipzig premiere in November, conducted by Felix Mendelssohn, and immediately after that added three trombones to existing parts for double winds, horns, and trumpets, string choir, and timpani.

As in the "Spring" First and D minor symphonies of 1841, he created a unifying motif, and gave this new motto theme to the brass in a deeply sonorous introduction (*Sostenuto assai*) to the sonata-structured opening movement. A masterful segue ushers in the craggy, edgy, *Allegro ma non troppo* -- "moody, capricious, refractory" music in Schumann's own words -- this, too, derived from the motto.

The motto also underlies all three song sections of the ensuing Scherzo: *Allegro vivace*, which has two trio sections (as the "Spring" Symphony did): the first one charmingly bucolic, in G major; the other one lyrical, with an embedded theme based on Bach's name (B flat, A, C and B natural, which the Germans call H).

This is followed by a tragically expressive Adagio in C minor, whose principal subject resembles the first trio sonata of Bach's Musical Offer-

ing. This is the only Adagio movement in Schumann's symphonic canon, verily a *cri de coeur*; he began a fugue midway but did not complete, much less develop it. The floodtide of melody swept everything before it.

Unable to work for several weeks after completing the Adagio, a "cured" Schumann took up the finale. The principal subject of his aptly marked *Allegro molto vivace* quits the sickroom in order to exercise out of doors. While he borrowed its second theme from the heartsick Adagio, he expurgated all traces of melancholy. The subsequent development of both themes ends quietly in C minor, whereupon the solo oboe quotes a melodic phrase from the last song of Beethoven's *To a Distant Beloved* cycle (whose text begins, "Then accept these songs"). This and the original motto combine in the celebratory coda of what is surely Schumann's symphonic Mount Rainier.

Although the revised version, published in 1853, is now known as Schumann's fourth and final symphony, the D minor work was actually the composer's second and followed both the B flat First Symphony and the puzzling, three-movement Overture, Scherzo, and Finale, Op. 52, near-symphony in what has come to be known as his *Symphonic Year* -- 1841. It was coolly received initially. Schumann himself was not certain the musical public was ready for his work. It was large, although not particularly long, and leaned forward in its romanticism and scoring. Equally perplexing was the presentation of the work in a lengthy concert without the Gewandhaus' regular conductor -- Felix Mendelssohn -- but rather the orchestra's concertmaster, Ferdinand David. A pale imitation of Mendelssohn, David did not construct a convincing interpretation nor elicit an inspiring performance and the work languished. Finally -- another item on the program would seem to have stolen the thunder of the entire concert, this being a rendition of the *Hexameron Duo*, performed on two pianofortes by none other than Clara Schumann and

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Symphony No. 2

1 Sostenuto Assai-Allegro Ma Non Troppo 10:36

2 Scherzo (Allegro Vivace) 6:36

3 Adagio Espressivo 11:05

4 Allegro Molto Vivace 7:51

Symphony No. 4

5 Ziemlich langsam. Lebhaft 8:40

6 Romane: Ziemlich langsam 3:51

7 Scherzo : Lebhaft 5:10

8 Langsam. Lebhaft 7:36

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