

A government grant enabled Grieg to visit Italy in 1869, where he showed the work to Liszt at his residence near Rome. The kindly Abbé played it at sight with unceasing pleasure (brilliantly, too, although for Grieg "rather too quickly" during the opening part). Liszt encouraged him to "go on, and don't let anything scare you," but tastelessly suggested that the second subject of the first movement be played by a trumpet instead of cellos. Grieg didn't restore it to the strings until his revision of 1905-1906.

The concerto opens with a drum-roll and solo flourish, after which the winds play a simple, unsophisticated main theme that the piano preempts, and embroiders at length, Allegro, molto moderato. The cello subject (più lento -- a little slower) is contrastingly "soulful." Trumpets usher in the development, and later on the reprise. A solo cadenza comes just before the end. In the second movement, the key shifts from A minor to D flat major. This structurally uncomplicated Adagio in 3/8 time begins introspectively with muted strings. The piano rhapsodizes until a dramatically angular version of the main theme shatters the mood.

Eventually, calm is restored, and a quiet ending leads without pause to the third movement another quick-but-not-too-quick movement in A minor, additionally marked marcato, whose structure combines sonata and rondo. The piano introduces a main theme based on the 2/4 rhythm of a Norwegian folk dance, the halling. The second subject is quirkier and more elaborate but no less folk-like. The solo flute initiates a tranquil episode, after which the main theme returns for extended development. A short solo cadenza precedes Grieg's long-delayed transition from minor to major for yet another dance, this one in 3/4 time at an accelerated tempo. During a final cadenza, Lisztian bravura blows away any lingering traces of Schumann.

Schumann Piano Concerto

Grieg Piano Concerto

Géza Anda, piano / Rafael Kubelik Berliner Philharmoniker



Robert Schumann followed up his remarkable "year of song" (1840) with another compositional *annus mirabilis*. 1841 saw the creation of the composer's first works for orchestra, including the Symphony No. 1, Op. 38, the Symphony No. 4, Op. 120 (substantially revised and published a decade later), and the Overture, Scherzo and Finale, Op. 52. In each of these works, thematic unity among movements is of central importance, an idea widely explored in the Romantic period in guises ranging from the *idée fixe* of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) to the leitmotives of Wagner's music dramas.

Schumann's other major work from 1841 is the *Fantaisie in A minor* for piano and orchestra. Though the *Fantaisie* as such has ultimately disappeared from the repertoire, it is only because it evolved into the first movement of the composer's *Piano Concerto in A minor*, completed in 1845. In this year Schumann appended two movements to the revised *Fantaisie*; the composer's wife, the remarkable pianist Clara Wieck Schumann, premiered the result, a complete concerto, in Leipzig on New Year's Day, 1846.

The shifting moods that characterize so much of Schumann's music are clearly evident in the *Piano Concerto*. Still, as in the composer's contemporaneous works noted above, and despite the interval between the composition of the Concerto's first movement and the remaining two, inter-movement unity is one of the work's primary concerns. There is a quasi-symphonic character to the Concerto, in distinct contrast to the then-prevailing view of the concerto as primarily a vehicle for virtuosic display, exemplified by the concertante works of Franz Liszt and Nicolò Paganini. Indeed, Liszt showed little enthusiasm for Schumann's Concerto and tweaked the composer (who had earlier written a "Concerto Without Orchestra") by referring to it as a "concerto without piano." Though the work's technical demands are not inconsiderable, they are almost wholly subservient to thematic interest and structural clarity. The Concerto opens with a downward-surgingly, darkly martial introductory gesture. The first theme, marked by a high-minded dignity, becomes the prime source of melodic material, spawning closely related themes that alternately brood and, in the major mode, provide respite from the

sober atmosphere. The development caroms from one mood to the next in almost dizzying fashion, all the while exploring the ambiguities of the themes' various components. Schumann cannily uses the lengthy cadenza as a battleground for further emotional conflict before ending the movement with a decisive return of the lofty first subject.

The second movement, *Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso*, amply displays Schumann's immanent melodic sense within a spectrum ranging from genial to poetic to lushly yearning. The *Allegro vivace* finale commences without pause via an affirmative major-key return of the first movement's main theme. In various episodes, Schumann makes striking use of the finale's joyful, upward-leaping theme, as when it becomes the subject of a fugato. Metric and rhythmic ambiguities abound, coloring the dance-like spirit, and the prevailing mood is one of unfettered optimism that ultimately swells to exuberant triumph.

Grieg was born on Norway's fjord-coast in the same year that Leipzig's storied Konservatorium opened under the direction of Felix Mendelssohn. By the time Ole Bull, the Norse Paganini, persuaded Grieg's parents to send their gifted 15-year old there for instruction, Mendelssohn was already dead 11 years. His successors were solid, German-schooled academicians whom Edvard hated, and against whom he rebelled. Ever after, he made five years in Leipzig sound like a prison sentence. That he learned so much from allegedly hidebound and uncaring teachers validates the soundness of their instruction. Most notably, Grieg absorbed the salient stylistic traits of Mendelssohn and Schumann (who taught there briefly before moving to Dresden). Indeed, his *Piano Concerto* could be called Schumannesque (likewise in A minor) without invalidating its Scandinavian character or Lisztian flourishes. Despite posthumous scorn for Grieg's large solo oeuvre during much of the twentieth century, his natural habitat was the keyboard. Grieg composed this music in 1868 for himself to play; however, Edmund Neupert played the first public performance in Copenhagen on April 3, 1869.

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Géza Anda, piano
Rafael Kubelik Berliner Philharmoniker

Schumann Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

1 Allegro affettuoso 15:33

2 Intermezzo (Andantino grazioso) 5:32

3 Allegro vivace 10:55

Grieg Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16

4 Allegro molto moderato 13:07

5 Adagio 7:02

6 Allegro moderato molto e marcato - Quasi presto - Andante maestoso 10:46

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