

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) *Novelletten* notes

- German composer, married to Clara Schumann also a concert pianist and composer.
- Wrote *Novelletten* Op 21 in 1838 (the year in which he visited Vienna).
- Also wrote at this time, *Kinderscenen*, *Kreisleriana* and the Second Piano Sonata in G minor.
- Only wrote Four Symphonies, also wrote string quartets, piano trios, concertos including cello, and other piano sets such as *Carnaval* and *Papillons*.
- Schumann was forced to pursue composition after he paralysed a finger in 1832.
- He originally was a law student at Leipzig before he followed piano playing.
- In 1854 he attempted suicide and was admitted to an asylum at Eendenich.
- *Novelletten* was written two years before Clara and Robert married. On February 6th, 1838, Schumann wrote to Clara:

"How happy I have been during these last days, young and lighthearted . . . During the past three weeks I have composed a frightful quantity of music, jokes, sotries about Egmont, family scenes with fathers, a marriage, in short, as you can see, all sorts of pleasant things! I have called it all *Novelletten*, because your name is Clara, like *la Novello's*, and because *Wiecketten* [based on Clara's maiden name] wouldn't have sounded so well!"

- *Novelletten* was a secret tribute to Clara.
- There are 8 pieces in *Novelletten* - 5 in D major and the remainder in neighbouring keys, all major.

Notes taken from *Schumann* by Andre Boucourechliev. Trans by Arthur Boyars. Greenwood: Connecticut, 1959. Pages 84-86.

- *Novellette* No 1, Op 21, F major is similar in shape (rhythm, time, tempo, melody, texture, final chords) as Op 24, No. 9 *Mit Myrthen und Rosen* (song), also addressed to Clara; and wears the same expression of chivalric ardour. Op 77 No 1 *Der frohe Wandersmann (the merry wanderer)*(song) is in debt to the F major *Novellette* - the tune at bars 9-10 of this song with bars 3-4 of op 21 no 1. Perhaps this music began as a sketch for Op 24 a love-song with Clara-themes. Op 42 No 5 *Helft mir; ihr Schwestern* (song) bars 41-52 can sound like an inexplicable switch to the *Novellette* in F (eg its bars 290) unless they are played with all possible hesitancy and delicacy.

Op 36, No 5 *Dichters Genesung (the poet's recovery)* (song) Clara's theme finally ememrges into major daylight in the *Novellette* like music of bars 65 etc and the typical cadence at bars 69-71 where E# F# A B in the left hand is the Clara-theme Q.

Op 25 No 1 *Widmung (Dedication)* (song) There is yet another tribute to Clara - the melody at "mir beschieden" bars 20-21 is already well known from eg the *Novellette* Op 21 no 1 (middle section). It may well be an allusion to the Schubert song *Das Rosenband* at the words "at that look her life entwined with mine".

Bb B C A C Bb

- 'The *Intermezzo* of the third *Novellette* was an evocation of the gloomy and fantastic:
"when shall we three meet again

In thunder, lightning or in rain?" were the words it bore in quotation in the edition which appeared as a musical supplement to the review. This reference to the 3 witches in *Macbeth* has disappeared in the modern editions and it was Alfred Cortot who recalled the sinister inspirers of this *Intermezzo* in his commentary on the work.'

- 'The 8th *Novellette* was the richest of them all; it was a constant flood of ideas and forms which became entangled and worked themselves out according to a subtle rule of which Schumann alone possessed the secret. "Music was brimming over in me", he wrote. " I sang all the time while I was composing - and nearly everything was successful. Now I am juggling with forms . . .".

Clara was dazzled by the results: "everything in you sings so magnificently! It is true, all your heart is revealed in these beautiful melodies . . .". '

From *The songs of Robert Schumann* by Eric Sams.

Schumann's counterpoint of the 1830's is based on figured harmony more than the interweaving of independent voices. The impression of counterpoint is achieved often through a line harmonized by a rhythmic figure eg *Impromptus* Op 5 No 12. Many of the baroque contrapuntal devices influenced Schumann eg imitation in *Novelletten* Ab section (middle). Although this example presents a four-voice texture, the impression of more voices is given, because there are five or six entries. The number of voices is obscured further by their overlappings. *Novelletten* has more tightly organised forms than *Intermezzi* even though both sets appear similar. The *Novelletten* are, in a certain sense, a shifting kaleidoscope of emotions, rather than a tightly organized series of pieces. They are held together by an emotional framework and a series of changing tonalities. The piece can be viewed as the emotional outpouring of a romantic soul, rather than a carefully chiseled work of art.

From *The aesthetics of Robert Schumann* by Thomas Alan Brown.

Piano textures typical of Schumann include doubling soprano line in lower voices by a third, 6th or octave. Internal activity- arpeggiations in middle register, sonorous effects through chord spacing and use of inversions. *Novelletten* is similar to *Aufschwung* from *Fantasiestücke* in its structure - energetic opening, sharply rhythmical while its sequel smooths out and glides downward. Form of A B A C A B A. A begins in F minor but is in Ab major just like Op21 No 1 which begins in D minor but is in F major. A lot of his ideas influenced by poet/writer Jean Paul Richter.