

Music 320

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Biography

- youngest of 5 children, none prospered; father and a sister died when he was 16
- also around age 16 became immersed in writings of Jean Paul (Flegeljahre) ; eroded his grip on reality;
- He was equally interested in music and literature; parents were divided about his direction (father encouraged musicianship; mother law).
- He studied piano with Frederick Wieck; was convinced he could be great virtuoso, but injured finger;
- turned to composition but didn't have background
- Wieck's daughter, Clara was piano virtuoso; Robert fell in love; father opposed their marriage. They were faced with "Romantic" struggle. They finally married 1840.
- Robert's first nervous breakdown in 1833 after learning of a brother's death
- 1834 founded Neue Zeitschrift fur Musik (New Journal of Music). Journal still exists today.
- Robert contributed lots of articles written using pen names **Florestan** and **Eusebius**.
- 1830's Robert wrote only piano music; after marrying Clara had
 - Year of Song (1840) when he write 127 songs;
 - 1841 Year of Orchestral Music
 - 1842 Year of Chamber Music
- Mid-1840's had another nervous breakdown; eventually (1850) got a job as a conductor, but it was disastrous; musicians recognized his instability, asked for resignation. Rest of life his mental status deteriorated; committed to mental institution 1853, died 2 yrs later.

Piano Works

- early piano works feature idea of a **masquerade ball**: music is a series of short character pieces, each representing a different character at the ball. Musically inspired by waltzes and landler of Schubert.
 - Examples: Op. 2 Papillons. Op. 9, Carnaval
 - Carnaval has movements named for characters from the [Commedia dell'arte](#)
- Piano works typically have extra-musical associations, especially literary ones, like Kreisleriana op. 16.

Songs (esp. 1840 "Year of Song")

- favorite poets: Heinrich Heine and Joseph von Eichendorff.

- Wrote several true song cycles, including 2 each called Liederkreis ("Song Cycle"), Dichterlieb and Frauenliebe und Leben; another collection, Myrthen, doesn't qualify because several poets represented.
- Schumann featured piano parts to songs than Schubert; lots of preludes, interludes, postludes for piano
- Songs express the epitome of Romantic sentiment: e.g. longing for unattainable.

Orchestral Music

- largely ignored, highly criticized, esp. for "poor orchestration"
- Symphonic works tend to be **cyclic** (movements contain related ideas). Example: Second Symphony (1845-6, C Major) has a "motto theme" first heard in intro. This motive recurs in climactic moments of scherzo and finale.