



SCHUMANN

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in A minor, Op. 129

Robert Schumann (8 June 1810 – 29 July 1856) was a German composer and music critic. Schumann left the study of law, intending to pursue a career as a virtuoso pianist. He had been assured by his teacher Friedrich Wieck that he could become the finest pianist in Europe, but a hand injury ended this dream. Schumann then focused his musical energies on composing. Schumann's published compositions were written exclusively for the piano until 1840; he later composed works for piano and orchestra; Lieder; four symphonies; an opera; and other orchestral, choral, and chamber works. His writings about music appeared mostly in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (New Journal for Music), a Leipzig-based publication which he jointly founded. Schumann's influences undoubtedly come from his literature background. His father, a bookseller, encouraged the young Schumann to read the works of Schiller and Goethe, among other masters. Schumann's interest in music was sparked by seeing a performance of Ignaz Moscheles playing at Karlsbad, and he later developed an interest in the works of Beethoven, Schubert and Mendelssohn. Schumann left his own influence for future generations partly through his writings in the *Neue Zeitschrift* and partly through his protégé Brahms. English composer Sir Edward Elgar said of Schumann "my ideal". Schumann suffered from a lifelong mental disorder, first manifesting itself in 1833 and recurring several times with alternating phases of 'exaltation' and increasingly delusional ideas of being poisoned or threatened with metallic items. After a suicide attempt in 1854, Schumann was admitted to a mental asylum. Diagnosed with "psychotic melancholia", Schumann died two years later without having recovered from his mental illness.

The **Concerto for Cello and Orchestra in A minor, Op. 129** was completed in a period of only two weeks, between 10 October and 24 October 1850, shortly after Schumann became the music director at Düsseldorf. The concerto was never played in Schumann's lifetime. It was premiered four years after his death, at a concert in honour of the 50th anniversary of his birth. Written late in his short life, the concerto is considered one of Schumann's more enigmatic works due to its structure, the length of the exposition, and the transcendental quality of the opening as well as the intense lyricism of the second movement. On the autographed score, Schumann gave the title *Konzertstück* (concert piece), which suggested he intended to depart from the traditional conventions of a concerto from the very beginning. With its relatively short, linked movements, the concerto is extremely unified both in material and in character, although the work's emotional scope is very wide. Schumann's use of the same themes but in very different contexts and moods throughout the three movements lends the cello concerto a strong sense of character development and an extended emotional arc, from its opening measures vacillating between deeply meditative and agitated to the brilliant, affirmative conclusion.