



Robert SCHUMANN

Overture, Scherzo, and Finale

Robert Schumann (8 June 1810 – 29 July 1856) was a German composer, pianist, and influential music critic. He began piano lessons at 7, and studied Latin and Greek in school, developing a keen interest in literature, most likely from the influence of his bookseller father. He continued to develop as a pianist and wrote novels, but suffered a setback when he was 16, as his father died and his sister committed suicide within the same month. His father had demanded Schumann to attend 3 years of university study to receive his inheritance, and Schumann enrolled in law in Leipzig the following year. He spent most of his time on music and writing novels, and soon became a piano student of Friedrich Wieck. After hearing a performance by Niccolò Paganini, Schumann was so inspired that he wrote to his mother requesting to quit law and focus on music. With her permission, he continued studying with Friedrich Wieck, who promised him a career as a successful pianist in a few years' time. Unfortunately, Schumann suffered a permanent hand injury and was forced to devote his attention to composing. Schumann would soon find himself fighting with Wieck over his training and his relationship with Wieck's daughter, Clara, and began drinking and smoking heavily. He would become active as a critic at this time. In 1840, after a long and bitter legal battle with Wieck, he married Clara, who was now 21. Through the excitement – and signaling perhaps a "manic" episode in what would become recognized as his bipolar disorder – Schumann composed at least 138 pieces in 1840, known as his "year of song". Despite his musical partnership he enjoyed with Clara playing his music, Schumann began to experience more severe bouts of depression. In 1850, Schumann became the municipal music director in Düsseldorf, but – owing to his increasingly erratic behavior on the podium – was fired in 1853. One bright spot that occurred that year was the Schumanns becoming acquainted with the 20-year-old composer Johannes Brahms. Brahms amazed Clara and Robert with his music, stayed with them for several weeks, and became a close family friend. Things turned for the worst in the winter of 1854, when Schumann threw himself into the Rhine River after hearing "angelic" voices that quickly morphed into "tigers and hyenas." Although he was rescued by fishermen, Schumann insisted that he be institutionalized for Clara's safety, and the doctors at the sanatorium prevented Clara from seeing him for more than two years, until days before his death. Brahms, meanwhile, was permitted to visit Schumann, and continued to be a presence in Clara's life after Schumann's death, helping her to popularize Schumann's composition posthumously.

Overture, Scherzo, and Finale, Op. 52 (1841) was written in the wake of his marriage to Clara. Feeling that an orchestra best portrayed his celebratory feeling, he also wrote two symphonies — No. 1 in B-flat and No. 4 in D minor (revised in 1851) — as well as a *Fantasie* in A minor for piano and orchestra. Although the piece was written in 3 weeks, the *Finale* was revised in 1845 (shortly before publication). Essentially a symphony without a slow movement, Schumann even referred to it as his "Symphony No. 2" before calling it a suite to a potential publisher, pointing out that "the individual movements can be played separately." Earlier still, he referred to the piece as a *Sinfonietta*.

The *Overture* (*Andante con moto - Allegro*) begins with an introduction in E minor, presenting two important motives — a leaping violin passage and an aggressive, descending cello figure. These elements come back in the faster *Overture* proper, which switches to E major and marks the beginning of the sonata-form's exposition. Schumann cleverly uses the introductory motives with the *Overture*'s primary theme before heading towards the recapitulation.

The *Scherzo* (*Vivo*) is driven by theme characterized by dotted figures, which continues without much alteration until the contrasting trio section, which is very lyrical. This section consists of a gentle arching melody in the clarinets and oboes, which is then closely echoed by the strings. On its second appearance, the trio incorporates motives from the *Overture* and is introduced by the descending cello line. A return of the primary theme of the *Overture* closes the *Scherzo*.

The *Finale* (*Allegro molto vivace*) is one of the faster pieces of music Schumann wrote. The main theme, a rising stepwise line in dotted rhythms played by the first violins, is presented in fugato style. A contrasting — more graceful — theme perhaps shows Mendelssohn's influence on Schumann (who he met and greatly admired) through its gentle orchestration. The *Finale* closes with a triumphant coda built of the main theme.