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Author(s): George Grove

Source: *The Musical Times*, Vol. 49, No. 784 (Jun. 1, 1908), pp. 384-387

Published by: [Musical Times Publications Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/905211>

Accessed: 27-12-2015 07:23 UTC

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## SCHUMANN'S SYMPHONY IN B FLAT.

BY SIR GEORGE GROVE, C.B.

This is the earliest of Schumann's four published Symphonies. It was written, as he himself says, with a steel pen which he had picked up (surely Providence alone had placed it there) on Schubert's grave at Vienna. It was first performed at the Gewandhaus, Leipzig, on March 31, 1841, at a concert conducted by Mendelssohn, and was probably completed only shortly before that date.\* Schumann had previously composed much both for the pianoforte and for the solo voice. His first twenty-four works (Op. 1 to 24) are for the pianoforte, and on completing these an accident turned him in the direction of song-writing. He at once began with the 'Myrthen' (Op. 25), and during the whole of the year 1840 wrote nothing else but songs. He then as suddenly turned to the orchestra, and composed the work now before us. But although this is his first published composition for the orchestra, it was not his first Symphony, since one in G minor had been played at a concert at Schneeberg early in January, 1833.† This, however, has not been published, and is not known, and it must therefore be inferred that, brilliant and interesting as it may be, it is a juvenile work, and unadapted for the public. The Symphony in B flat thus remains Schumann's first important orchestral work.

In a letter written to Dorn in the spring of 1839, he complains of the pianoforte as 'too narrow a field for his thoughts,' and announces his intention of applying himself to orchestral writing to make up for his want of practice. In proof of his success Schumann might point with confidence to this Symphony in B flat. It was written at the most happy period of his life, when the long-continued obstacles to his marriage to Clara Wieck had been overcome. The marriage took place, September 12, 1840, at the church of Schonfeld, near Leipzig, and he found himself in possession of a high and recognised position as a composer and authority in music. In a letter to Carl Kossmaly, dated May 9, 1841, written some six weeks after the performance of the Symphony, he says: 'I have now a household of my own, and my circumstances are different from what they were. The time since you last heard from me has passed in happiness and work. I wished for you to hear my Symphony. How happy I was at the performance!—I and others also, for it had such a favourable reception as I think no Symphony has had since Beethoven.'

This state of things the music reflects very characteristically. So full was his mind and so great his energy that the composition of the entire work—of course without the scoring—is said to have taken him only four days. It might perhaps have been better if he had bestowed some of Beethoven's patience and consideration upon it. He is known to have entitled it originally 'Spring Symphony'; indeed, the very first mention of it which we possess gives it that name—'Fancy! a whole Symphony, and a Spring Symphony, too.‡' The connection with the bursting season of spring was evidently his original idea, and he held it to the end, for he has left on record, in an inscription on a portrait of himself, that it was inspired by a poem of Adolf Böttger's.§ After quoting the first

two bars, he says, 'Beginning of a Symphony, suggested by a poem of Adolf Böttger's. To the Poet, in remembrance, from Robert Schumann. Leipzig, October, 1842.' It is of all his orchestral works the most free from those clouds of melancholy which disturb and obscure many of his later works. Its tunefulness and fluency, and its happy expression, no less than the novelty of its material, the close and masterly manner in which it is treated, and the unbroken continuity with which one burst of emotion succeeds another throughout, are truly remarkable. No wonder it was well received. He thought, with a charming *naïveté*, that it had excited more sympathy than any Symphony since Beethoven. But it would be wrong to suppose that he rested on his oars even after such a feat. Six months afterwards he says, 'The Symphony lies quite behind me, and my eyes are fixed on fresh goals'—a good and characteristic instance of the impulsive progress which so distinguished him. How serious these 'goals' were may be inferred from the fact that before the end of the year he had composed two more Symphonies—that afterwards published as No. 4, in D minor, and the *Overture, Scherzo, and Finale*, in three movements only, like some well-known ones of Mozart's. The first movement of the Pianoforte concerto in A minor also belongs to this eventful year. The Symphony in B flat began its career at once, and was performed early in the next year [1842] at Hamburg; shortly afterwards in Russia. Its first performance in England was by the Philharmonic Society on June 5, 1854; the *Overture, Scherzo, and Finale* had been performed by the same Society on April 4 of the previous year (both conducted by Costa), and so on.

The first movement is full of brilliant thoughts and happy strokes of harmony, and there are few things in music of more elevating effect than the climax near the end, where a new and inspiring phrase is given in simple harmony first by the strings and then by the full orchestra, with all the air of a hymn of thanksgiving and happiness. (See No. 6.) Nor are the other movements without their distinct and obvious points of novelty and interest. Of these two may be named—first, the passage which finally closes the *Scherzo*, and which is not only perfectly original but also of charming effect; and secondly, the trombone passage in the second portion of the *Finale*, which, though perhaps inspired by the first movement of Schubert's great Symphony in C—heard by Schumann for the first time at Leipzig only a few months before the composition of his work—is yet treated in its own way, so as to produce a solemn religious effect not easily forgotten.\* The two *Trios* to the *Scherzo* are an innovation on established form, possibly suggested by Beethoven in the repetition of the *Trio* in his Fourth and Seventh Symphonies, but not actually found, to the writer's knowledge, in any Symphony before this one by Schumann. Indeed, the whole work is full of that earnestness and serious individuality which are among Schumann's most marked characteristics. The words which stood over the orchestra of the old Gewandhaus-Hall in Leipzig—'Res severa est verum gaudium,' would form a not unfit motto for his life. To him, as to Mendelssohn, a 'great joy' was always a 'serious thing.' That precious gift of gaiety and light-heartedness which is so enviable, and which Mendelssohn possessed in so large a measure, Schumann probably never knew, at least he never shows it. But in recompense Nature gave him other things equally precious. She endowed him with ambition, force, passion, imagination, tenderness, love of beauty—as well as with great purity and nobility,

\* Mendelssohn's Allegro brillante, for pianoforte, four hands (Op. 92), was written for this concert, and played there by him and Madame Schumann.

† Jugendbriefe, p. 199.

‡ Robert Schumann's *Briefe, neue Folge* (New Series). Edited by F. G. Jansen. (Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig.) This interesting volume has been translated by the same happy pen that gave us so correct and charming a version of the 'Early Letters.' The title of the new volume, *The Life of Schumann told in his letters* (Bentley), is perhaps somewhat misleading, and can hardly be due to the translator.

§ Hanslick, *Aus dem Concertsaal*, p. 299; and Jansen, *Davidblindler*, pp. 239, 245.

\* Schubert's Symphony in C was brought by Schumann in MS. from Vienna, and was played for the first time in Leipzig on October 29, 1840, under the direction of Mendelssohn.

and a truly remarkable power of enlisting the sympathies and confidence of his hearers, and attaching them to him as if by an intimate personal bond.

Of the truth of this we could desire no better evidence than the progress which Schumann's works have made in this country. If we look through the concert-programmes and musical criticisms of fifty years ago, it is impossible not to be struck by the comparison between the timid, apologetic manner in which concert-givers then presented his works to their audiences, or the distrust and resistance which they excited in certain quarters, and on the other hand the assured position they have now acquired, and the uniform respect and admiration with which they are received.

*Andante un poco maestoso : Allegro molto vivace. Larghetto.*

*Scherzo : Molto vivace, with Trio I. Molto più vivace. Trio II. (No tempo).*

*Finale : Allegro animato e grazioso.*

I. The Introduction is a splendid feature in three out of Schumann's five Symphonic works. Here it is *Andante un poco maestoso*, and opens, without preface, with an energetic phrase in the horns and trumpets only :



It is a curious and characteristic token of the boldness with which Schumann scored a Symphony, without even an elementary acquaintance with the instruments, that he originally wrote this phrase a third lower\* :



But when the work came to rehearsal (under Mendelssohn), it appeared that the notes G and A, being 'stopped' notes—that is to say, not in the natural scale of the instrument—could hardly be heard, and the passage had to be transposed a third higher. This was for long a great joke with him. Writing to Mendelssohn from Dresden, October 22, 1845, Schumann says : 'You are now in the middle of my Symphony' (rehearsing for the Gewandhaus Concert). 'You remember the first rehearsal in 1841, and the stopped notes in the trumpets and horns, at the beginning? It was exactly as if they had caught cold, and I am still compelled to laugh whenever I think of it.'

II. In the *Allegro* the opening phrase of the Introduction, being in the strings, is put back to its original place :

No. 2. *Allegro molto vivace.*



\* It reminds one of the curious fact mentioned in B. R. Haydon's biography, that some time after he had become a painter he 'did not know that there was any other oil than boiled oil.' Happy, simple, artistic ignorance!



The second subject of this movement is heralded by three bars of reiterated notes on the horns, and given out by the clarinets with an original and piquant accompaniment in the violas as follows :



The first portion of the *Allegro* is very concise, and contains little more than the statement of the two themes just quoted. On the other hand, the development of them, after the double bar, is both long and elaborate. In the course of it other phrases are introduced and make themselves prominent. Among these are the two following :



used as an accompaniment to the principal subject—and :



in which the *sforzandos* at the beginning and end of the phrase give it great life and character.

The phrase already alluded to as forming the climax of the movement, in the *Coda*, shortly before its termination, is as follows :



Its effect is all the more striking from its succeeding a broken *pizzicato* passage, and from its being played first, as above, with the strings only, soft, with delicate *crescendos* and *nuances*, and then repeated by the full orchestra. The impassioned point in this climax will remind many hearers of that to Schumann's favourite song, 'Widmung.' The whole passage forms a truly beautiful and affecting close to the movement.

III. The slow movement (*Larghetto*) is one long strain of adoring passion, obviously addressed to the wife whom Schumann had so recently won. The following is the melody, which, after being played by the violins, is repeated by the violoncellos, and finally by the oboes and horns, with accompaniments ingeniously varied, and increasing in elaborateness at each repetition :

No. 7. *Larghetto* VI. 1. in octaves.

IV. The *Scherzo*, *molto vivace*, might almost be called a Minuet :

No. 8.

The theme will be heard charmingly anticipated in the trombones a few bars before the close of the slow movement. Though, perhaps, rather heavier than the rest of the Symphony, the *Scherzo* is admirably relieved by the two Trios, in different rhythms, which are both characteristic and highly interesting :

No. 9. TRIO I.

No. 10. TRIO II.

and the movement closes with a *diminuendo* passage of irresistible originality and charm.

V. Nor is the *Finale*, *Allegro animato e grazioso*, in any way inferior in spirit or interest to the movements which precede it. It opens with a scale-passage in syncopated rhythm :

No. 11. *Allegro animato e grazioso*.

with all the force of the orchestra, a passage of which much use is made as the movement progresses, both in its original form and a modified shape (preserving the rhythm, and the irregular *sforzando*) :

No. 11a. Clarinet.

It becomes the groundwork of the fine sequence for the trombones mentioned at the outset of these remarks :

a truly solemn and impressive passage, which might not unfitly be labelled :

Dies iræ, dies illa :  
Solvat sæclum in favillâ.

[That day of wrath, that dreadful day,  
When heaven and earth shall pass away.]



Meantime the theme :

No. 12.

*Allegro animato e grazioso.*



with which the movement starts, after the five bars of introduction just quoted (No. 12), is as bright and gay as anything can be.

A pleasant episode in the story of this movement is formed by a kind of conversation between the following crisp and fresh *motif*:

No. 13.



which might almost have been suggested by the Canzonetta in Mendelssohn's early String Quartet\*—immediately followed by the scale-passage already quoted :



a phrase as thorough Schumann as the other is Mendelssohn—in which the lively intruder is elbowed out by its more earnest brother in a very amusing and personal fashion. A brilliant though somewhat strident *Coda* concludes at once the movement and the work.

The two following references to the Symphony from Julius Eckardt's 'Ferdinand David und die Familie Mendelssohn-Bartholdy' (Leipzig, 1888), are amusing and interesting.

I. Part of a letter from David to Mendelssohn, dated Leipzig, August 4, 1841 :

'Schumann came to me yesterday, and remained without speaking for a whole hour ; from which at last I gathered that he would not be unwilling to hear his Symphony once more in public. I hinted that it would be well for him to hear the horns rehearse ; on which he made it clear, by signs, that he would willingly pay for a rehearsal to make the work go thoroughly well. After this he smoked two cigars, rubbed his mouth twice, as if to prevent a single syllable from coming out, took his hat, forgot his glove, nodded his head, tried the false door, and at last got away through the right one.'

\* Op. 12. This (in the major) is a very old German tune to the words—

'Ich bin so lang nicht bey dir gewest.'  
[So long I've been away from you.]

It is used by Sebastian Bach in his 'Peasant Cantata,' and in the Quodlibet which closes his 'Thirty Variations.'

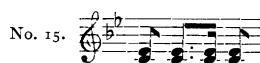
II. A letter from Schumann, evidently the sequel of the visit :

'DEAR DAVID,

'Here is the Symphony ; I confide the performance of it to you with the greatest confidence. If I could see you at the first desk, and Mendelssohn conducting, it would make me very happy. But his return is, as I hear, very uncertain, on account of the new Symphony-soirées in Berlin. And then he was so very good about conducting the first performance of it, that it would be rather presuming on his kindness to ask him to study the work again.

'I suppose it would be impossible for you to conduct and lead at the same time? That really would be the best. The orchestra know the work already, and would soon find their way about it. And you would take care not to put anything else too large or too difficult in the programme, so that there would be plenty of time for rehearsing? All this I may leave to you.

'There are some places in the Symphony about which I should like to talk to you, especially one in the first movement. The figure in the horns :



never comes out enough, when I hear the work. At the first performance it seemed to me sufficiently loud, and therefore I printed it so. I think I should like the trombones to have it—as I first sketched it ; at any rate we will try it once with them.'

[A more extended quotation from Schumann's letter of October 22, 1845, than that given on page 385, may be furnished from 'The Letters of Robert Schumann' (John Murray, 1907). This letter, written from Dresden, begins :

'Dear Mendelssohn,

You must now be well in the middle of my Symphony. Do you still remember the first rehearsal of it in the year 1841—and the 'stopped' trumpets and horns at the beginning? It sounded as if the orchestra had a cold in its head ; I can't help laughing when I think of it. And now let me thank you for again thinking about my piece and again taking trouble over it. It is with the greatest pleasure that I think of that first evening's performance. How beautifully it went, better than I have ever heard it since !'—ED. M. T.]

## Reviews.

*Tchaikovsky : his life and works.* By Rosa Newmarch. Edited by Edwin Evans, Senr.

[William Reeves.]

The biographical section of this book (pp. 1-225) is not new, as it is an exact reprint of a volume published in 1900, the misprints (including the wrong date of Tchaikovsky's birth) being repeated ! Since then Mrs. Newmarch has issued her exhaustive 'Life' of the composer which supersedes all that has been written, in the English language, on the career of the eminent Russian musician. The volume under notice professes to give Mrs. Newmarch's 'Preface to the original edition,' but one important paragraph is omitted therefrom. It reads: 'No one can be more conscious than myself of its [the book's] shortcomings, and of the patchy nature of its construction. If it has not been altogether a case of making bricks without straw, at least