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The symphonic character
of Robert Schumann's Piano Quintet in E-flat major, Op. 44

Theses of the DLA doctoral dissertation

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Introductory

Symphonic character in classical music refers to the fact that a given piece of music or a fragment has properties that are a general characteristic of symphonic music. It is characterized by a rich and varied instrumentation, which includes the use of strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion instruments separately or simultaneously, allowing for the plastic representation of polyphonic editing with timbres, and the simultaneous presentation of different musical events. The combination of different groups of instruments also allows for the use of large dynamic ranges and contrasts, thus achieving a dramatic effect.

When a musical work is said to be symphonic in nature, it means that it has all of these (symphonic) characteristics, regardless of whether it is actually a symphony or not. For example, a symphonic poem or a large orchestral work can also be symphonic in nature.

If we look for a subjective definition of the symphonic character, we get an extremely diverse range of answers. There are some who emphasize the importance of polyphony, others emphasize the richness of tones, and there may even be those who consider the presence of literary, artistic, and philosophical content to be noteworthy. Perhaps the most aptly summed up is the words of composer Péter Tóth, who puts it this way: “the symphonic character means the kind of piano texture that means solid chords, a thicker texture compared to the piano.”

But can the question be simplified in this way? Isn't the magic of MUSIC the realm of the indescribable, the untouchable, the invisible wonder? Is not there the mystery in which there are – there must be – images, intuitions and associations.

So let's give in to the temptation and try to articulate what the underlying... another sound world vibrating and pulsating together with the original piece of music in the background is, which captivates so many musicians and music-loving fans again and again, and of whose existence Robert Schumann's Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op. 44, is perhaps one of the most obvious proofs!

Justification for the choice of themes, personal motivation

I first heard Robert Schumann's Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op. 44, when I was fifteen. Before that, I didn't know much about the art or even the life of this genius of German Romanticism. Although I had played short pieces by Schumann as a pianist's apprentice, of course, I hadn't read about Master Raro, Florestan and Eusebius, I didn't know Clara Wieck, Schumann's later wife, I didn't know about the drama of his career as a pianist that had come to a standstill and the central role of the piano in the composer's oeuvre. I simply heard a grandiose composition that I felt even then was crying out for a symphony orchestra.

Later, during my composition studies, the study of Schumann's music served as a recurring motif. The individual scherzo voice, which combines "Mendelssohn's extremely professional classicism with a kind of snarling virtuosity," or the almost Wagnerian use of the leitmotif technique, all served as a study for me as a budding composer.

As a conductor, the picture was then complete. During the repeated conducting of all of Schumann's orchestral works, the idea was strengthened in me that, giving way to my youthful intuition and desire, I would examine the possibility of whether the Piano Quintet in E flat major really carries a symphonic character, and if so, whether this work could really be arranged for a large orchestra in the Schumannian sense. My decision was helped by the recognition of the possibility that the framework of a doctoral dissertation, as well as its methodology and process, offered an excellent opportunity to answer this question on a scientific basis. In order to carry out my work, I therefore called upon the method of artistic research and tried to find evidence that would justify my artistic intuition, proving that Robert Schumann's piano chamber music - and within it the Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op. 44 - carries a deep and significant symphonic character.

Structure of the research

I begin my dissertation logically by defining the symphonic character as a concept.

After this, Robert Schumann took his life under scrutiny. Presenting the main stages of his life, I will touch on all those defining persons, events and determinations that, in my opinion, shaped and defined his art. I will deal with the person of his mother, his wife, Clara, or his father-in-law, Friedrich Wick, as well as with literature, which was a constant source of inspiration in Schumann's work. But I will also mention journalism or the drama of the broken piano virtuoso, which is intended to answer the basic question of my thesis. Although it is a great deal of courage in the case of a musical dissertation, I will still try to touch on the impact of his illness, bipolar depression, on his art at the end of this chapter. I intend that general conclusions can be drawn from all this that can bring us closer to understanding Schumann's music.

The next major topic I dealt with was Schumann's periods as a composer and creator, then his compositional method, mentioning the central role of the piano, not least its function in songs, then I will discuss his orchestration technique through the analysis of his symphonies, and finally - as a common result of all this - I will take stock of the most outstanding works of chamber music and, above all, piano chamber music, looking for common points.

After all this, of course, the main role belongs to the Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op. 44. In my analysis, I place great emphasis on demonstrating and proving the symphonic character that I assume, and I try to demonstrate its existence with concrete examples, also listing symphonic orchestration suggestions. To this end, I call upon his great symphonic works, primarily his symphonies, and within them the Fourth Symphony, which he composed chronologically as the second symphony, but given that he did not like it, he set it aside, only to revise and – last but not least – re-arrange it ten years later, in 1851. Examining the orchestration differences between the two versions is a great opportunity to understand Schumann, the symphonic composer, and to demonstrate the symphonic character in his art.

The musical works examined in the research

The range of musical works examined actually covers half of Schumann's entire oeuvre, starting with the piano pieces:

- ABEGG Variations Op. 1 (1830)
- David's Covenant Dances (Davidsbündlertänze), Op. 6. (1837)
- Carnival, Op. 9 piano cycle (1834)
- Fantasy Pieces (Phantasiestücke), Op. 12. (1837)
- Symphonic Etudes, Op. 13. (1834, 2nd version: 1852)
- Kreisleriana, Op.16 (1838)
- Humoresque, Op. 20. (1839)

...continuing with the songs:

- Myrthen Op. 25, 26 songs in 4 volumes (to poems by Goethe, Rückert, Heine, Byron, Burns and Moore) (1840)
- Liederkreis (Eichendorff) Op. 39, 12 songs (to verses by Heine) (1840)
- Dichterliebe Op. 48, 16 songs (to verses by Heine) (1840)

... referring to his chamber music:

- Three String Quartets (A minor, F major, A major), Op. 41. (1842)
- Piano Quintet in E flat major, Op. 44. (1842)
- Piano Quartet in E flat major, Op. 47. (1842)
- Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 63. (1847)
- Adagio and Allegro, Op. 70. (piano and horn or cello, 1849)
- Fantasy Pieces (Phantasiestücke), Op. 73. (piano and clarinet or cello, 1849)

...finally reaching the most important of his symphonic works:

- Overture, Scherzo and Finale for Orchestra, Op. 52. (1840)
- Symphony No. 2 (C major, Op. 61) (1846)
- Symphony No. 3 "Rhine" (E flat major, Op. 97) (1850)
- Symphony No. 4 (in D minor, Op. 120) (1841, revised in 1851)

An important element of the study is the identification of parallels, influences and counterinfluences with other composers, such as the examination of the works of JS Bach, Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart or Ludwig van Beethoven, but also of individual opuses by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy or Johannes Brahms.

It is special pride that I have the opportunity to present a detail of my own instrumentation!

Research results

The analysis of Robert Schumann's creative periods proves that his compositions, written in different periods of his work, draw a logical path to development before us. It is easy to follow the performer who was forced to give up his dreams of being a pianist, who will not be unfaithful to his instrument and begins to compose piano works, only to then, feeling the possibilities of the piano as a creator are limited, turn towards chamber music and the symphony orchestra. The development of his music was also led by the loving presence of his mother, as well as Clara Schumann's wonderful personality and sacrificial role as a wife and creative partner, but the constant and fertilizing influence of literature, or the terrible horror of mental and physical illness, are also indispensable components in the universe of his music. However, it does not matter in which period of Schumann's work we look for or identify all these components, because all the works written for piano, the songs, the chamber music compositions, and even the symphonies carry these influences.

As for the question of whether these creative periods listed above are connected by something else in addition to the common components, it can be clearly stated that, on the one hand, the piano is the instrument that plays a particularly important role in Schumann's musical thinking. And not only as an instrument, but also as a fundamental manifesto of the composer's way of thinking, a particularly important carrier of creative logic. It is no coincidence that Schumann composed his works almost exclusively for piano in his first creative period, for almost ten years. And it is no coincidence that after this period he turned towards a genre, the genre of the song - expanding his interests as a composer - whose fundamental basis is also the constant and prominent presence of the piano. Later, the piano also plays an important role in his chamber music, creating a genre with little exaggeration, since it is no coincidence that both his piano quintet and his piano quartet are considered true classics of this genre.

However, another important connecting element in Schumann's musical universe can also be detected, the presence of the symphonic character. This is evidenced by the appearance of the "innere Stimme" (inaudible voice) in his piano pieces, the use of openwork, orchestral-like colors and effects in the songs, or the systematic use of large orchestral tutti effects in his chamber music opuses. Schumann's musical thinking is therefore not a purely pianistic or orchestral attitude, but a pianistic-orchestra substance, in which the slender, soloistic character of the piano and the monumentality of the orchestra symbolizing a communal experience can be simultaneously perceived.

Overall, it can be stated that Schumann's oeuvre, which enriches the song literature, is largely based on the results of the works he composed for piano, and he consciously uses the tools of symphonic orchestral sound when composing the piano accompaniment of his songs.

Robert Schumann: Piano Quintet in E flat major – for orchestra

As may be clear from my introduction, my investigations into the existence of the symphonic character are not an end in themselves. I also want to demonstrate its existence with evidentiary force because I hope to gain authority for my work as an orchestrator through it. This masterpiece of Schumann has been with me since I was a child, and from time to time I have been tempted by the idea of transferring it to a large orchestra.

In my opinion, the term grand orchestra denotes a performing apparatus in the Schumannian sense, and in this sense, the compositional and orchestral rules and traditions of the time must be kept in mind.

However, this work is also a learning process, and in fact, it is a combination of learning from being taught and teaching ourselves mystery, for which I receive a living admonition from Schumann, whose thought I chose as the first sentence of my doctoral dissertation, as the basis of this study, and which is also the "ars poetica" of my personal artistic existence.

"Learning never ends"¹

(Robert Schumann)

¹"Es ist des Lernens kein Ende" Robert Schumann: Musikalische Haus- und Lebensregeln, in: Neue Zeitschrift für Musik 1850, Jg. 17, Bd. 32, Beilage zu Nr. 36 (3 May 1850)

Musical examples

Robert Schumann: Piano Quintet in E flat major op. 44 for orchestra Beginning of I. movement (orchestrated by Zsolt Hamar)

Allegro brillante $\text{♩} = 82$ Hamar Zsolt

The score is arranged in systems. The woodwind section (Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets, Bassoons, Horns, Trumpets, Trombones) and strings (Violins, Violas, Violoncellos, Contrabasses) are shown with their respective parts. The percussion section includes Timpani and Zongora. The score is marked with dynamics such as *fp* (fortissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The tempo is *Allegro brillante* with a metronome marking of $\text{♩} = 82$. The key signature is E-flat major.

Hamar Zsolt

Musical score for orchestra, starting at measure 12. The score includes parts for Flutes 1 and 2, Oboes 1 and 2, Clarinets in Bb 1 and 2, Bassoons 1 and 2, Horns in F 1 and 2, Trumpets in Bb 1 and 2, Trombones 1, 2, and 3, Timpani, Zonophone, Violins 1 and 2, Viola, Cello, and Double Bass. The score features various dynamics such as *mp*, *mf*, and *f*.

Hamar Zsolt

23

Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bb Cl. 1
Bb Cl. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
F Hn. 1 & 3
F Hn. 2 & 4
Bb Tpt. 1
Bb Tpt. 2
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3
Timp.
Zon.
Vlns. 1
Vlns. 2
Vlas.
Vcs.
Obs.

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score for the piece 'Hamar Zsolt'. The score is written for a large orchestra. It begins at measure 23. The instruments listed on the left are: Flute 1 and 2 (both with rests), Oboe 1 and 2 (playing a melodic line), Bassoon 1 and 2 (playing a rhythmic pattern), Clarinet in Bb 1 and 2 (playing a melodic line), Bassoon 1 and 2 (playing a rhythmic pattern), Horns 1, 2, 3, and 4 (mostly with rests), Trumpets in Bb 1 and 2 (mostly with rests), Trombones 1, 2, and 3 (Tbn. 2 has a long note), Timpani (mostly with rests), Zonophone (with rests), Violins 1 and 2 (playing a melodic line), Viola (playing a rhythmic pattern), Cello (playing a rhythmic pattern), and Double Bass (playing a rhythmic pattern). The score is written in a key signature of two flats and a common time signature.

Hamar Zsolt

Robert Schumann: Piano Quintet in E flat major op. 44 for orchestra

Beginning of II. movement
(orchestrated by Zsolt Hamar)

Hamar Zsolt

Flute 1

Flute 2

Oboe 1

Oboe 2

B♭ Clarinet 1

B♭ Clarinet 2

Bassoon 1

Bassoon 2

F Horn 1 & 3

F Horn 2 & 4

B♭ Trumpet 1

B♭ Trumpet 2

Trombone 1

Trombone 2

Tuba

Timpani

Snare Drum

Bass Drum

Cymbal

Harp

Violins 1

Violins 2

Violas

Violoncellos

Contrabasses

p

pizz.

p

pizz.

p

pizz.

p

pizz.

p

pizz.

Hamar Zsolt

Robert Schumann: Piano Quintet in E flat major op. 44 for orchestra

Beginning of III. movement
(orchestrated by Zsolt Hamar)

Hamar Zsolt

♩. = 138

Flute 1

Flute 2

Oboe 1

Oboe 2

B♭ Clarinet 1

B♭ Clarinet 2

Bassoon 1

Bassoon 2

F Horn 1 & 3

F Horn 2 & 4

B♭ Trumpet 1

B♭ Trumpet 2

Trombone 1

Trombone 2

Trombone 3

Timpani

Violins 1

Violins 2

Violas

Violoncellos

Contrabasses

Hamar Zsolt

Hamar Zsolt

2

11

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

B♭ Cl. 1

B♭ Cl. 2

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

F Hn. 1-3

F Hn. 2-4

B♭ Tpt. 1

B♭ Tpt. 2

Tbn. 1

Tbn. 2

Tbn. 3

Timp.

Vins. 1

Vins. 2

Vlas.

Ves.

Cbs.

f

Hamar Zsolt

Robert Schumann: Piano Quintet in E flat major op. 44 for orchestra

Beginning of IV. movement
(orchestrated by Zsolt Hamar)

Hamar Zsolt

Flute 1 $\text{♩} = 120$
f

Flute 2

Oboe 1

Oboe 2

Bb Clarinet 1 *f*

Bb Clarinet 2

Bassoon 1

Bassoon 2

F Horn 1 & 3

F Horn 2 & 4

Bb Trumpet 1

Bb Trumpet 2

Trombone 1

Trombone 2

Trombone 3

Timpani

Violins 1 *pizz.* *arco*
f *mp*

Violins 2 *mp*

Violas *mp*

Violoncellos *f* *mp*

Contrabasses *f* *pizz.* *mp*

Hamar Zsolt

Acknowledgement

It is a beautiful and noble tradition that doctoral students, at the end of their thesis, thank all those who helped them complete their thesis without whom it would not have been possible. I am also happy to take advantage of this tradition.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude, first and foremost, to my family. I thank my mother, wife, and daughter for their love, support, and patience, which made it possible for me that this study was born.

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