

Introduction

This book is about four of Robert Schumann's works of the 1830s in which the writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann play a role. *Carnaval*, op. 9, composed in 1834–7, features contemporary artists and figures from the *commedia dell'arte*, and the combination may be one link to Hoffmann's carnival tale, *Prinzessin Brambilla*. In three other works, Schumann's title echoes that of a book by Hoffmann. His 1837 *Fantasiestücke*, op. 12, recalls Hoffmann's *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier*; his *Kreisleriana*, op. 16, of 1838, borrows the title of Hoffmann's essays; and his *Nachtstücke*, op. 23, of 1839–40, shares the title of a collection of Hoffmann's stories. These four works, which I shall call Schumann's 'Hoffmann works', are (along with the rather different *Papillons*, op. 2, of 1832) the Schumann works of the time most obviously related to literature; and this book aims to make one sort of sense of each of the four as music, illustrating in new ways how music and literature can enhance one another.

Is another venture into this field needed? The proof of the pudding will be in the eating; but two aspects deserve a mention now. First, studies of Schumann's piano works sometimes assume that all that is at stake in their literary relationships is a marginal or decorative title echoing a work by Hoffmann, or very general similarities of character; others, more or less unreflectively, treat the music as programmatic in some sense; and recently it has become more fashionable to claim that Schumann adopted formal strategies parallel to those in literature. By contrast, studies of the aesthetic standpoints suggested by Schumann's criticism – for instance by Edward Lippman, Constantin Floros, Michael Struck, Ulrich Tadday and Holly Watkins – have explored alternatives to such approaches.¹ But when it comes to interpreting the individual works, Lippman and Tadday explore only the atypical cases of *Papillons* or 'In der Nacht' from the *Fantasiestücke*, which elicit from them (as from others) programmatic interpretations; Floros and Struck look at none of the four 'Hoffmann

¹ Lippman, 'Theory and Practice', 310–45; Floros, 'Schumanns musikalische Poetik', 90–104; Struck, 'Litterarischer Eindruck, poetischer Ausdruck'; Tadday, *Das schöne Unendliche*, 101–36; Watkins, *Metaphors of Depth*, chapter 3.

works'; and Watkins, while she interprets the music of two of Schumann's *Nachtstücke* as 'figurative', does not treat the literary connection to Hoffmann as having any more than tenuous significance. This book takes a new path.

Secondly, all four works have appeared difficult, and some have had relatively little attention as musical entities, even in modern times. They attracted only sparse critical comment when new: rarely played in public, and unappealing commercially to publishers.² Contemporaries sometimes asked for some words as guides through the music, and Schumann seemed to sympathise.³ He wrote to a friend, Henriette Voigt, apparently in connection with the *Fantasiestücke*, that some of his music might be 'hard to read . . . but once you are on the trail, it's as though it could be no other way'. In a letter to his colleague, Carl Koßmaly, Schumann described 'difficulties in form and content' of his works of the 1830s. They were 'reflections of my turbulent earlier life when man and musician always strove to express themselves simultaneously'. Koßmaly picked up some of these ideas in his 1844 review: Schumann 'loaded [his earlier works] with too much that was pithy, compacted and laden with meaning'. In 1846, Eduard Hanslick described Schumann's works as 'too interior and too strange . . . too deep, too simple, too sharp, and too dry'; in 1861, Adolf Schubring judged that the difficulty of Schumann's work was due less to 'form' than to 'the closed book' ('verschlossenes Buch') of their 'content'.⁴ By turning in 1840 to writing songs, whose text lies on the face of the score, Schumann in a sense opened the book. But for the 'Hoffmann works' the 'book of their content' remains largely closed, their literary and wider cultural connections scarcely elucidated.

Perhaps as a result, these compositions have had too little attention as musical wholes – two of them almost none. *Carnaval* has fared best of the

² *Jugendbriefe*, 189 (9 August 1832), 197 (17 December 1832) and 201; *Neue Folge*, 101 (22 September 1837), 109–10 (8 February 1838); *Briefwechsel*, I 146 (16 April 1838) and perhaps 126 (18 March 1838; *Briefedition*, I/4 266 has 'Etüden', not 'Stücken', narrowing the scope of the comment). Compare Brendel, 'Robert Schumann' (1845), 91–2; Kapp, 'Schumann in His Time', 224–5; Newcomb, 'Schumann and the Marketplace', 265–9 and Daverio, *Robert Schumann*, 137; Ferris, 'Public Performance', 381–406.

³ For instance for *Papillons* (*Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, no. 37 (11 September 1833), transcribed in *Tagebücher*, I 432), *Carnaval* (*Zeitung für die Elegante Welt*, no. 185 (22 September 1837), 740, in Schumann *Tagebücher*, II 464–5, note 92, *Briefwechsel*, I 77 (18 January 1838) and II 353 (15 January 1839) and *Briefedition*, I/2 99–100 (11 April 1838)); GSK, I 213; *Briefwechsel*, I 75 (5 January 1838).

⁴ *Neue Folge*, 121 (11 June 1838), 227, (5 May 1843); Koßmaly, 'Schumann's Claviercompositionen' (1844), 3, 18; Hanslick as translated in Botstein in 'History, Rhetoric and the Self', in Todd, ed., *Schumann and his World*, 4; Schubring, 'Schumanniana No. 4' (1861), 213.

four. This may be because its overall title suggests a familiar context for understanding the music, the relatively concrete titles to the individual pieces provide frequent reorientation, and no overt allusion to a little-known book mystifies audiences. Thus Hans Peter Simonett has written a full treatment of its music, ostensibly from a relatively narrow point of view, though less so in practice – but regrettably it seems scarcely known. Peter Kaminsky traces sources of tonal and motivic coherence across the work, and especially in the pieces between ‘Pierrot’ and ‘Réplique’, but does not ask what produces *Carnaval*’s idiosyncratically centrifugal form.⁵ There are other partial analyses to which I am indebted: Charles Rosen offers insights into two pieces; and Lawrence Kramer’s eclectic musical interpretations bring out cultural associations from the late nineteenth century and later.⁶ As for literary connections, Erika Reiman’s extended analysis focuses on various parallels of literary strategy with a range of works by Jean Paul, and there have been attempts (to my eye unconvincing) to find a programme from his novel, *Flegeljahre*.⁷ An echo of Hoffmann’s *Prinzessin Brambilla* has been suggested by at least five modern scholars, although not registered in print outside Italy and France, and not argued in detail even there.⁸ Liszt implausibly attached the connection to *Faschingsschwank*, op. 26, perhaps misremembering what he had been told about *Carnaval* (whose title was once to be ‘Fasching. Schwänke’); he was probably further confused by haziness about *Prinzessin Brambilla*.⁹ He is not alone in that.

The character of the Kreisler of Hoffmann’s fictions is familiar enough: in Schumann’s words, ‘eccentric, wild, inspired’. This opens a field for treatments of Schumann’s *Kreisleriana*.¹⁰ Rosen illuminates aesthetic aspects of the music of several pieces; Carey discusses the first two pieces; Münch explores some aspects of improvisation in Hoffmann and Schumann; von Adam-Schmidmeier briefly surveys the whole work.¹¹

⁵ Simonett, ‘Taktgruppengliederung’ (the only treatment of any of the four works comparable in ambition to Marston, *Schumann: Fantasie* or Appel, ‘Schumanns Humoreske’); Kaminsky, ‘Principles of Formal Structure’, 210–16.

⁶ Rosen, *Romantic Generation*, 12–13 and 98–100; Kramer, ‘Carnaval, Cross-Dressing’, and ‘Rethinking Schumann’s *Carnaval*’.

⁷ Reiman, *Schumann’s Piano Cycles*, chapter 3; Chailley (*Carnaval de Schumann* and ‘Zum Symbolismus’); Nattiez, ‘Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?’ and Summer, ‘Schumann’s *Carnaval*’. Appel, ‘Carnaval’, 53, leaves the question open.

⁸ See Chapter 3, footnote 2. ⁹ Liszt, ‘Robert Schumann’, 240.

¹⁰ *Neue Folge*, 148 (15 March 1839). Compare von Seyfried, ‘Schumann, *Kreisleriana*’, 113–14; Liszt, ‘Robert Schumann’, 236; Daverio, *Robert Schumann*, 167–9.

¹¹ Rosen, *Romantic Generation*, 669–83; Carey, ‘An Improbable Intertwining’, 19–50; Münch, ‘Fantasiestücke in Kreislers Manier’; von Adam-Schmidmeier, ‘*Kreisleriana*’, 92–8.

Deahl draws out musical features linking the work as a whole, in order to develop a thesis about formal parallels with literature; like others, she relates the music more readily to a novel about Kreisler to which the title does not refer than to a set of essays to which it does.¹²

I know of no attempt to interpret the *Fantasiestücke* that is more than cursory. Rosen's musical analysis of 'Des Abends' is sensitive, but he does not discuss the other pieces in the set.¹³ In the prevailing view, the work is an assemblage of pieces linked by shared style and character, and by paired keys; no thread connects the eight pieces' titles, which are more or less incidental, and offer images unrelated to one another; the literary connection is taken to be either very generally stylistic or insignificant, and critics have not tried to say whether the music relates to Hoffmann's *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier*, or how, or what difference it might make.¹⁴ This may reflect the fact that the overall title is less specific than that of *Carnaval*, providing little context for interpretation, and the titles to the individual pieces less concrete. For this work, however, Schumann provided one piece of guidance that was not too obscure so much as too specific. He suggested to Clara Wieck that the story of Hero and Leander seemed to fit 'In der Nacht';¹⁵ and as a result what critical comment there is often resorts to that piece and that programme, neglecting the rest of the work.¹⁶

The one dedicated treatment of the *Nachtstücke*, by Moraal, views the work largely in terms of 'narrative strategies' paralleled in Hoffmann's works in general.¹⁷ Otherwise, there was until 2011 very little reception history. Appel gives a few sentences on each piece, and affirms a link to Hoffmann's *Nachtstücke*, but finds it only in bizarre humour while denying any link of content.¹⁸ Others say even less on the music, and offer by way of explanation of the link only very general parallels of spirit – described in terms like 'ghoulish', 'sombre, grotesque, threatening, and deathly', which are most plausible for Schumann's first piece.¹⁹ I am not aware that anyone

¹² Deahl, 'Principles of Organisation' (including 97–8), and 'Robert Schumann's *Kreisleriana*', 131–45; Moraal, 'Life and Afterlife', 175–85; Crisp, '*Kreisleriana*', 3–18, who also sees 'some programmatic intent' (13). See also Arnsdorf, 'Schumann's *Kreisleriana*'.

¹³ Rosen, *Romantic Generation*, 33–8.

¹⁴ Heller, 'Fantasiestücke', 68–9; Daverio, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 49–50 and 67–8; *Robert Schumann*, 156–7. Moraal discusses only a few isolated passages: 'Life and Afterlife', 170–3.

¹⁵ *Briefwechsel*, I 154 (21 April 1838).

¹⁶ Tadday, *Das schöne Unendliche*, 141–2; Jensen, *Schumann*, 165–6 and Meier, *Robert Schumann*, 59–60.

¹⁷ Moraal, 'Schumanns "Nachtstücke"'. ¹⁸ Appel, 'Nachtstücke', 129–31.

¹⁹ Jensen, *Schumann*, 171–2; Daverio, *Robert Schumann*, 180–1, and *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 59. Kofszmaly had almost nothing to say: 'Schumann's Claviercompositionen' (1844), 36. Liszt,

has discussed whether the individual titles Schumann considered bear any relationship to Hoffmann. Watkins's 2011 interpretation of the first piece (and its relationship with the last), however, brings out one compelling way of looking at a trajectory in the work.²⁰ I do not hope to improve on that, but have come at those pieces from a different angle, and added interpretations of the second and third pieces and of the work as a whole. Watkins briefly suggests that the function of the overall title, and the link it creates to Hoffmann's stories, is to 'pay homage to [the] impulse' given to the work by 'the fecundity of Schumann's synesthetic imagination'; but I will go further, trying to clarify the link between these two works in ways that do not apply equally to multitudes of works of music and literature. I explore how Hoffmann's *Nachtstücke* resonate with the music, and how the individual titles Schumann considered for his four pieces relate to Hoffmann's book, in order to bring out what I take to be dense patterns of association between the music and the fiction.

Even in modern times, then, none of Schumann's 'Hoffmann' works has benefited from thorough debate of the sort that has flourished around the *Fantasy*, op. 17.²¹ This book aims to show that each work rewards serious attention as a musical whole. It interprets aesthetic patterns giving each work shape, energy and individuality, examining how these are embodied in musical features resonating with aspects of musical and literary culture available to Schumann.²² In looking at each work, I begin by highlighting musical patterns: selected musical features are described so as to bring out their contributions both to the patterns and to an expressiveness to which Schumann draws explicit attention, for instance in titles. I juxtapose musical interpretations with aspects of Schumann's musical and literary heritage, whether German, English or ancient, bringing to bear a wide range of examples – above all, from Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Shakespeare, Goethe, Novalis and Jean Paul, as well as Hoffmann. These juxtapositions suggest cultural contexts in which musical features can be understood. The choice of contexts is prompted by and tested against the titles, the expressive nature of the music, and evidence as to Schumann's documented concerns at the time of composition. If then the book uses historical

'Robert Schumann' (1855), 237, found some gothic images. See also Hertrich in Schumann *Nachtstücke Opus 23*, Preface, III–IV.

²⁰ Watkins, *Metaphors of Depth*, 107–13.

²¹ See Hoeckner, *Programming the Absolute*, 284 (note 121).

²² I use the term 'culture' here and later in the book not as an exact concept, but as shorthand for the music, books, visual art, ideas, histories, and other intellectual inhabitants of the different, evolving and by no means solely German worlds at whose cross sections Schumann found himself through his life, and to which he contributed.

data about Schumann, it is to show how the cultural contexts may have mattered to Schumann at the relevant times – not to argue that the music presents autobiography, or that any persona imputed to the music is the historical Robert Schumann.

Each work emerges both in a new light and as it always was; and each is related to a fiction by Hoffmann: *Carnaval* only implicitly, *Kreisleriana* the most pointedly, none exclusively. *Carnaval* appears as a dizzying and exhilarating comedy, in the spirit of the German literary understanding of Italian carnival, and *Fantasiestücke* as a humorous, dreamlike sequence of images, resonating with literary tales of the artist's development, including in Hoffmann's *Fantasiestücke*. Tonal trajectories in *Kreisleriana* resonate with a central aspect of Hoffmann's *Kreisleriana* essays; its melodic patterns appear both in Bach's 'Goldberg' Variations and in trivial variation sets, which figure in the essays as emblems respectively of the profound and the philistine. *Nachtstücke* creates from plain rondos a paradoxically unsettled set, expressive of mental disturbances explored by Hoffmann's book of that name. Each of these four works uses Schumann's musical and literary culture as an echo-chamber in which its music can resonate, its expressive overtones brought out, amplified and given a larger cultural space in which to sound.

This book also reflects in more depth on interpretive concepts involved in its approach, dwelling on the question of how the music and the literature might possibly relate. This does not seem to me to admit of an obvious, definitive or universal answer. Ideally, this book would have expanded its focus to ask whether other works might have the same relationship, whether a general theory is possible, or whether any scholar has adopted concepts like those used here in discussing other works. I have not known how to conduct an exhaustive search, and if anyone has written such a work, my apologies are due. In what Schumann called 'poetic' music, I take form and content as ultimately inseparable, each subject to a musical conception; and I take the music as expressive, and as resonating with Schumann's musical and literary culture through dense webs of associations. Thus in 'poetic' music, 'content' is best treated as a way of talking about expressive aspects of the music – not as a separate schema, adequately specifiable independently, imposed on the music or shaping it (as talk of 'programmes' implies). Accordingly I reflect on how music may paradoxically be more richly associative the more its patterns are its own rather than the servant of something separate.

These reflections are consonant with but not dictated by a reading of Schumann's aesthetics. Schumann never presented a general aesthetic

system, so I derive an overall picture from statements of different purposes and contexts; but I hope to avoid the temptation to treat each individual statement as a nugget of lapidary truth, by giving weight to the context of each, and to what he said often and in different ways. I deal largely in Schumann's statements from the period in which his 'Hoffmann works' were composed. This was a period over which his aesthetic presumptions evolved, I will suggest, with a core consistency shaded by changing nuances.

There are then stories to trace. The book takes a broadly chronological approach, aiming to bring out interrelated strands. Schumann's mastery of his compositional craft, his style, his aesthetic aims and his approach to combining literature and music evolved alongside one another over the years after he wrote *Papillons* and the *Intermezzi* in 1831–2. The four 'Hoffmann works' span only five years or so, from 1834–5 to 1839–40, but they show a remarkable ability to move on, never repeating a formula. Their differences may reflect not only the individuality of varied works of art: Schumann's command of musical means grew in power, and his aesthetic aims and compositional style evolved in partial codependence on that growth. The music gained ever greater independence from supporting words, and 'poetic' threads, as Schumann called them, came increasingly to coincide with core musical processes. This seems to have been stimulated at times by repeated absorption in the works of Bach and late Beethoven. A chronological approach brings out too how Schumann's deployment of aesthetic concepts in his criticism evolved in parallel with these developments.

In summary, I hope that practical interpretation of the works and reflection on relevant aesthetic concepts might cross-fertilise one another. Chapter 1 starts from Schumann's growth into becoming a literary composer in the years around 1832, noting some weaknesses in this respect of *Papillons* (despite its charm) and what the composer may have learnt from them. Chapter 2 introduces issues about musical and literary associations and expressiveness that lie close to the book's heart. Chapter 4 dwells on how the Schumann of around 1835 viewed form and content in music, used the term 'Geist', and understood the relationships between these aspects, and reflects on how far formal parallels and programmes might be primary, autonomous elements in the literary connections. The four 'Hoffmann works' of 1834–9 are each explored in Chapters 3, 5, 7 and 9 respectively, while Chapter 6 traces Schumann's stylistic evolutions around 1836–8, not least under the influence of late Beethoven, and Chapter 8 reviews how musical and literary associations and expressiveness have functioned in those interpretations.

A more subterranean stream rises to the surface in the concluding Chapter 10. The book's approach to the music is synoptic, focusing on each work as an aesthetic entity, rather than quarrying them for (for instance) exemplars in analytical, stylistic, musicological, documentary, scientific or sociological studies. It is also eclectic, deploying presumptions about, for instance, form, tonality, rhythm, metre, texture, style, genre and sonority, as well as gesture and expressiveness. These presumptions largely depend of course on others' explorations of theory, but there is no attempt to derive my interpretations from explicit theories in each area, or to deduce from theory which kinds of aesthetic pattern will be most significant in a given work; I know of no theory yielding such deductions. And as any work of art is open to indefinite numbers of alternative analyses, the book's aim is not to give 'the' interpretation of a work, but to stimulate alternative approaches. Since my concern is partly with expressive and associative qualities in the music, my treatments dwell more on characterising the foreground than some analysts would. Some may then question the relationship to professional musicology of the book's focus. All of this raises issues about analysis, theory, plurality of interpretation, aesthetics, history and culture, on which the concluding chapter dwells, hoping less to convince sceptics than to explain its stances.

1 | Chrysalis, 1827–1834
Schumann's emergence as a literary composer

For the young Robert Schumann, how music and literature might coexist, and enhance one another, was in part an issue about the direction of his life. In 1830, as a twenty-year old, he was studying law, infatuated with both literature and music, and nurturing an embryonic critical voice; and his future could have gone in any of these directions. The next year, he was studying piano with Friedrich Wieck, alongside Wieck's eleven-year-old daughter, Clara, in preparation for a career as a virtuoso pianist; he published his opus 1, the *Variations on the Name Abegg*, and his first music review, a prescient acclamation of Chopin's genius, and planned a novel, alongside artistic biographies of Hoffmann and Titian. In the early 1830s he often described himself as a cocooned artist not yet ready to burst out.¹ In the decade that followed, he maintained a voracious diet of musical, literary and other reading; he founded a new music journal, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, established its reputation and viability, and contributed hundreds of pages of reviews; and he had twenty-six of his own piano works published or on the way to publication, several of them with literary connections. He also found in Clara a sort of muse to his genius, and after a long, wearing struggle with Wieck, a wife as well. He had chosen from the possibilities before him to emerge above all as a professional composer; but the choice incorporated rather than banished his literary and critical enthusiasms. Music, literature and criticism – and to a greater or lesser extent commerce – remained in mutual dependence then and throughout his life.²

Schumann was the son of a publisher with wide literary interests, and his own reading was diverse and often intense. Its traces are visible in literary works, diaries and correspondence from his late teens onwards; they emerge too in the critical writings and letters of the adult, and in the collection of books he left behind.³ Excerpts he made from his reading

¹ *Jugendbriefe*, 200 and 217 (10 January and 2 August 1833); compare *GSK*, I 23, 109, 128, 260.
² See for instance Daverio, *Robert Schumann*, chapter 2.
³ Appel, ed., *Schumann und die Dichter*, especially Kruse, 'Robert Schumanns Lektüre', 123–34 and Nauhaus, 'Schumanns Lektürebüchlein', 50–87; Tadday, *Das schöne Unendliche*, 101–13 and Musgrave, *Life of Schumann*, 11–12.

throughout his life are preserved in surviving albums.⁴ These form a record of ideas from a wider culture that struck him, and from them we can to an extent reconstruct what caught Schumann's eye, and when, and relate them to his compositions of the time. We should not presume that he endorsed or adopted each idea, but can at least trace threads of influence, not least from the five authors on whom I will concentrate: William Shakespeare (1564–1616), Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832), Jean Paul Richter (Jean Paul, 1763–1825), Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis, 1772–1801) and of course E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776–1822).

Schumann knew Shakespeare's work at least from 1827.⁵ He probably read what we now accept in the canon, as well as other plays since evicted from it. He seems to have used mainly the translations by August Wilhelm Schlegel and Johann Joachim Eschenburg (published in Vienna in 1811–12). The first volume contained *The Tempest* and *Twelfth Night*, which Schumann studied intently, and which to a Romantic eye are tales of the recognition of the self, its twin, and its love, in a world which, while infested with puritans, thugs and schemers, is also illumined by the creative magic of the imagination. The plays were revered by Jean Paul, Novalis, and of course Goethe.

Schumann's appreciation of Goethe grew gradually as he matured through the 1830s. He read his way through the poems, plays, novels and letters. If the young Schumann did not 'yet understand Goethe', he found him a wholesome diet, judging in 1836 that he was 'always right'.⁶ Schumann in his youth called *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1793–6) the 'non plus ultra of Romanticism', and he read it three times, he said in 1847.⁷ It is a novel of the formation of the self; its themes include self-recognition and self-development, doubled identities, madness, mediocrity and philistinism. Its hero is a young man destined for a mercantile career but infatuated by dreams of art, for whom Shakespeare 'opened a new world'. *Hamlet* is discussed and enacted and becomes a symbol in the book, which draws also on the Bible and myth.⁸

Wilhelm Meister both awed and repelled Novalis, who called it worldly and anti-poetic.⁹ The reaction befitted an 'early Romantic', and Novalis

⁴ Published in 1998 as the *Mottosammlung*: an invaluable work of meticulous scholarship.

⁵ Draheim, 'Schumann und Shakespeare', 237–44. See also Finson, 'Schumann and Shakespeare'.

⁶ *Jugendbriefe*, 17 (17 March 1828), 153 (21 September 1831) and 176 (8 May 1832); *Tagebücher*, I 372, 374 and 417; GSK, I 160.

⁷ *Tagebücher*, I 96; Nauhaus, 'Schumanns Lektürebüchlein', 67 (Schumann claimed to have read *Hermann und Dorothea* ten times by 1845: 59).

⁸ Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister*, IV/1, V/4 and 7–11 (*Werke*, IV (1973), 263–7, 275–89).

⁹ Novalis, *Schriften*, V 1988, 233(fr. 263–4).