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The compositional history of the 'Fantasie'

Between 10 and 13 August 1845 the town of Bonn was *en fête*. The reason for the festivities was the unveiling of the Beethoven monument or *Denkmal* on the Münsterplatz. Among those present were Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, and the King and Queen of Prussia. Before the unveiling took place, around midday on 12 August, Beethoven's Mass in C, Op. 86 was sung at a service in the Münsterkirche. At four o'clock there was the second of two concerts directed by Liszt and Spohr, both of whom had played a major role in the monument project. Among the works performed were the 'Emperor' Concerto, conducted by Spohr with Liszt as soloist; the Fifth Symphony; the 'Harp' Quartet; and numerous other pieces, including excerpts from *Christus am Oelberge* and *Fidelio*. One reviewer estimated that the audience numbered some three thousand people, all crammed into a concert hall about two hundred feet in length. Quite apart from the considerable discomfort which the audience must have suffered, they also forfeited the opportunity to witness one of the more visually imposing events of this *Beethoven-Fest*, the illumination of the Rhine at Cologne.¹

Robert and Clara Schumann planned to attend the celebrations. Schumann's diary records that they left their home in Dresden on 31 July and reached Leipzig that evening. Early the following morning Schumann wrote to Liszt telling him that he would be present in Bonn. But he suddenly became ill, and on 2 August he decided to alter his plans. The trip to Bonn was aborted; while the revels there and in Cologne were continuing, the Schumanns were travelling back to Dresden where they arrived at about 7 o'clock on the evening of 12 August, the very day of the unveiling.²

This was not Schumann's only attempt to demonstrate his solidarity with the Beethoven monument project. Indeed, he would have seen a special significance in the unveiling. The monument was not merely a memorial to the composer whom he revered as the fount of the Romantic movement in music; it was also in part the physical realization of the inspiration for his *Fantasie*, Op. 17. The compositional history of the *Fantasie* is closely bound

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up with the idea of the Beethoven monument, although in the event the work appeared several years before the monument itself. The genesis of the *Fantasie* can be reconstructed from a variety of sources: Schumann's copious correspondence, above all with Clara Wieck; his diaries; the surviving manuscripts of the work; and the first edition, published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1839. Scrutiny of all these documents allows a detailed picture to emerge; we shall begin with the literary as opposed to the musical sources.

Letters and diary entries

Plans for a monument to Beethoven reach back to 1828, the year after the composer's death, but it was not until 1835 that serious work began.³ A committee, the *Bonner Verein für Beethovens Monument*, was formed to oversee the project. Members included the influential literary critic August Wilhelm von Schlegel, who was appointed as the first president. (Schlegel's brother Friedrich, himself a major literary theorist of the Romantic school, also features in the history of the *Fantasie*, as will become clear below.) It was under Schlegel's presidency that the committee drew up its first public statement on the project. Dated 'Bonn, on Beethoven's [sixty-fifth] birthday, 17 December 1835', this 'appeal to Beethoven's admirers' (*Aufruf an die Verehrer Beethovens's*) was widely distributed among musicians and others connected with the arts, as well as more generally among influential and wealthy personages. Exactly when Schumann first learned of the project is unclear, but he certainly knew of it by early April 1836, for in that month the front page of his own *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* was given over to the committee's *Aufruf*.⁴

Not surprisingly, the committee's main task was to raise public funds sufficient to provide for a suitably grandiose monument. The appeal notice solicited private donations and encouraged benefit concerts and stage performances in aid of the cause; in effect, the arts-loving and practising public was exhorted to use any means at its disposal to raise the necessary amount. Nevertheless, the results were disappointing, so much so that in November 1838 a second *Aufruf* was published. The saviour of the project proved to be Liszt, who in November 1839 offered to donate whatever sum remained necessary for the success of the appeal. His contribution of 2,666 Thaler was much the largest single donation: little wonder, then, that he played such a large part in the 1845 celebrations.⁵

Schumann's response to the initial appeal was very enthusiastic. In publishing the *Aufruf* in 1836 he explicitly aligned the *NZfM* with the

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fundraising effort and provided an editorial address to which donations could be sent.⁶ His personal interest in the project went much further. In June 1836 he published the four-part essay *Monument für Beethoven*,⁷ and in his diary for 9 September he noted that he had had ‘an idea for a contribution for Beethoven’. The ‘idea’ became a ‘Sonata for Beethoven’ which Schumann recorded as being ‘finished down to the details’ by the beginning of December 1836.⁸ Later that month, on 19 December, he approached the publisher Carl Friedrich Kistner and wrote as follows about the new composition:

I am addressing myself to you because I know how willing you are to turn your hand to the realization of an attractive idea.

Florestan and Eusebius are keen to do something for Beethoven’s monument and for this purpose they have written something under the following title:

Ruins. Trophies. Palms.
 Grand Piano Sonata
 For Beethoven’s Monument
 by –

But how is one to contrive that in publishing [the sonata] composer and publisher do not have to pay in cash out of their own pockets, and yet that something remains for the memorial?

Here is what I think. Should you wish to take the work under your wing, I would ask you to send the Bonn committee one hundred complimentary copies, which the committee would soon sell. Let the resulting profit (about 80 Thaler) go towards the monument.

Given the general interest in the affair you would certainly sell enough from your own hand to offset the one hundred presentation copies and the production costs, which should not amount to more than was the case with the earlier sonata [Schumann’s Op. 11]. Also, if the production were lavish we could even charge a higher price than normal. It will sell well anyway.

I have my own particular ideas about the design, and given the dignity of the object I think them quite wonderful. A black cover, or better still a binding with a gilt edge, on which these words would stand in gold:

Obolus for Beethoven’s Monument

On the main title-page palm leaves could perhaps overhang the principal words. On the following page this would be placed as a dedication:

For B[eethoven]’s Memorial
 by

Composer and Publisher

Please – give it some thought: I am on fire about it and can promise that the venture

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Excerpt

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will bring credit to you as well as to me. Moreover, the sonata is noteworthy enough in itself. In the ‘Palms’ [movement] there is a quotation from the Adagio of the A major symphony.

That is all for today, tomorrow I would like to speak with you at greater length about all this. It is my ardent hope that we will soon come to an arrangement and that you will set the matter in hand straight away.⁹

Kistner was evidently unswayed by these grandiose ideas, for by 31 January 1837 Schumann was trying to interest the firm of Tobias Haslinger in the work. On this occasion he committed himself to taking fifty copies while continuing to insist that the monument committee should be given one hundred. Haslinger was no more persuaded than had been Kistner, and on 22 May it was to Breitkopf & Härtel that Schumann turned, though he now made no mention of the Beethoven connection and gave the ‘sonata’ a new title. He had, he wrote, intended for some time to seek a publisher for two of his compositions: ‘One is called “Carnaval”; the other: “Fantasies for Pianoforte”.’¹⁰

All these negotiations are a reminder of the difficulty which Schumann experienced in getting his music accepted for publication at this time. Publishers were wary of its novel, even eccentric features, and exercised a good deal of commercial caution when approached.¹¹ Nevertheless, Schumann’s faith in his new composition remained undiminished. It is next mentioned in a worklist which he entered on the back cover of a diary for the period 28 July 1836 to 28 October 1837.¹² The list consists of a numerical sequence of opus numbers from 1 to 16, the appropriate composition being entered against each number. With the exception of the blank number 6, Opp. 1 to 11 correspond to the works carrying those numbers today. Op. 12, however, is the Sonata in G minor eventually published as Op. 22 in 1839. Opp. 13 and 14 again correspond to their present-day counterparts, while Op. 15 is the ‘Sonata for Beethoven’ and Op. 16 is a sonata in F minor. Schumann had been sketching a sonata in this key between December 1836 and February 1837; and in March of the latter year he had noted that the Sonata in G minor was in order ‘except for the last two pages, which I cannot finish.’¹³ The worklist thus represents a catalogue of Schumann’s publications and projected publications; and since it does not include the *Davidsbündlertänze* or the *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12, both of which were composed in the period July–August 1837, it may be that it was written earlier than its position in the diary suggests. Whatever the publishers thought of it, then, Schumann clearly still regarded his ‘Sonata for Beethoven’ as a viable work in the early months of 1837. In view of its projected numbering as Op. 15 he may even

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have expected it to appear towards the end of the same year: the *Concert sans orchestre* had appeared as Op. 14 in 1836, and the *Etudes symphoniques* were published as Op. 13 in the middle of 1837.¹⁴

The ‘Sonata for Beethoven’ was eventually published as the *Fantasie*, Op. 17. In order to trace the next stages in its compositional history we must examine more closely the publication of the similarly-named *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12. Schumann recorded in his diary that these pieces had been composed in July 1837. On 6 November he noted that he had ‘checked through the *Fantasiestücke* ready for printing’; and it was presumably some of these same pieces which he had played to a visitor, the cellist Fritz Kummer from Dresden, some days earlier on 1 November.¹⁵ It was not until the following year that Op. 12 actually appeared in print, however: Schumann told Clara on 5 January 1838 that ‘the *Dauids[bündler]tänze* and *Fantasiestücke* will be ready in eight days – I’ll send them to you if you want’. The former work was recorded as being ready by 27 January; the latter fared less well, for in a letter of 6–7 February Schumann told Clara, ‘I have just received the “*Fantasiestücke*” from Härtel’s’, and promised to send them to her on the following Saturday. By the date of her next letter to Schumann, written from Vienna between 2–8 March, Clara had received the *Dauidsbündlertänze* and the *Fantasiestücke* and had decided that her favourite pieces from the latter were ‘*Fabel*’, ‘*Aufschwung*’, ‘*des Abends*’, ‘*Grillen*’, and ‘*Ende vom Lied*’.¹⁶

The diary entry covering the period 24–7 January is a particularly happy one: ‘hardworking and on excellent form all the time, and lived and composed in raptures over my sweetheart – also looked out the old *Fantasiestücke* again and tidied them up’.¹⁷ What pieces was Schumann referring to? He could not have meant the *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12, for these had been ‘checked through’ back in November 1837 and were now about to appear in print; thus the ‘old’ pieces must have been the ‘Fantasies’ offered to Breitkopf & Härtel in May 1837 – in other words, the ‘Sonata for Beethoven’ of 1836. The title ‘Fantasies’ reappears in two further letters to Breitkopf & Härtel, written on 4 and 6 February 1838. In the former he told Härtel that ‘I am presently occupied very enthusiastically with the completion and partial copying of several new pieces: 2nd piano sonata, – Fantasies for piano, – Novelletten for piano – and 3rd piano sonata, – the only [works] which I propose to publish in the next two years’; in the latter he introduced another potential new title when he referred to ‘the Fantasies (which I should like to call *Fata Morgana*)’.¹⁸ Two further sources also capture some of these details. In a laconic diary entry Schumann noted that the *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12 had appeared in print by 12 February and that he had ‘sold my compositions to Breitkopf’s’. This is borne out in

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the *NZfM* for 13 February, which carried a notice from Breitkopf & Härtel announcing that Schumann's '2nd sonata', '2 books of *Novelletten*', 'Fantasies', and '3rd sonata' were their sole property and were to be published as the composer's *Opp.* 15–18.¹⁹

Schumann's renewed work on his 'old *Fantasiestücke*' seems to have occupied him from January to the end of March or thereabouts. On 18 March he wrote to Clara, then in Vienna, recounting his intense compositional activity:

In addition, I have completed a fantasy in three movements which I had sketched down to the last detail in June 1836. The first movement is probably the most passionate thing I have ever written – a deep lament for you – the others are weaker, but need not exactly feel ashamed of themselves. In addition there are *Novelletten*, three whole books of them – *Kinderszenen*, which are in fair copy throughout – the *Novelletten* are likewise ready for printing apart from a few minor details.²⁰

There is a complementary entry in the diary for 14–20 March: 'composition must now be put to one side – the *Novelletten* have still to be put in order – *Fantasies* and *Kinderszenen* are in fair copy throughout and will march off to print in a few days'. Finally, in a summary of the period 26–31 March Schumann noted that 'nothing at all out of the ordinary happened during these days – worked hard all the time – checked through the "*Dichtungen*"'.²¹

Several important issues arise from these last strands of evidence. First there is Schumann's mention of a work called *Dichtungen*, meaning 'poems'. This is yet another intermediate title for the eventual *Fantasie*, Op. 17. The title *Dichtungen* also appears on the title-page of the *Stichvorlage* of the *Fantasie*, from which the first edition was published. Since this copyist's score, which is discussed in more detail below, contains numerous revisions in Schumann's hand, it must have been precisely this manuscript which he had been checking through at the end of March. This is also suggested by a letter to Clara which occupied Schumann between 14 April and 9 May 1838. In a section written on Easter Monday, 16 April, he wrote: 'Then the next thing to appear in print are *Fantasies*, which I have called "*Ruins, Triumphal Arch and Constellation*" and "*Poems*", however, so as to distinguish them from the *Fantasiestücke* [Op. 12]. I searched for that last word [*Dichtungen*] for a long time before finding it; I think it a very noble and significant term for musical compositions.'²² From this it emerges that beyond giving the work a new general title Schumann had renamed the second and third movements, formerly called 'Trophies' and 'Palms'.

Secondly, there are various discrepancies between Schumann's letter of 18

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March 1838 and his diary entries for 1836. In the letter he claimed that the ‘fantasy’ had been written in June 1836; but the diary entries quoted above record that his ‘idea for a contribution for Beethoven’ occurred on 9 September 1836, and that he had finished the ‘Sonata for Beethoven’ at the beginning of December. Obviously, by early 1838 Schumann may simply have forgotten the exact date of composition back in 1836; but this seems unlikely in view of his extraordinarily careful diary-keeping throughout most of his life. Thus we should perhaps reconsider the ‘idea . . . for Beethoven’ of September 1836. The remark need not necessarily record Schumann’s very first idea for the work which became the *Fantasie*. He may already have begun composing it in the summer of 1836 and only subsequently have conceived the way in which it might serve to raise money for the Beethoven monument project. Allied to the apparent discrepancy in dating is the mismatch between what Schumann told Clara of his inspiration for the work, or at least its first movement – ‘a deep lament for you’ – and what he told his diary and Kistner: the work was a ‘sonata for Beethoven’. The letter to Clara of 18 March 1838 makes no mention of the Beethoven connection whatsoever. Was Schumann silently rewriting events now that the intended fund-raising object of the work was no longer relevant? In effect, was the original inspiration for the *Fantasie* Beethoven or Clara? One might point initially to the strong musical reasons, centring on the celebrated allusion to the final song of Beethoven’s *An die ferne Geliebte* in the first movement of the *Fantasie*, for believing that this movement is indeed a response to Schumann’s enforced separation from Clara in 1836.²³ But the true explanation is probably rather less straightforward.

A crucial piece of evidence is provided by Schumann’s autograph score of the first movement. This manuscript is inaccessible at present, but descriptions of it are available.²⁴ According to these the title-page originally read *Ruines. Fantaisie pour le Pianoforte dédiée à [obliterated name] par Robert Schumann Op. 16a*. This ink title was crossed out in red crayon and the following substituted in that medium: *Ruinen, Trophaeen, Palmen. Grosse Sonate für das Pianoforte für Beethovens Monument von Florestan u. [nd] Eusebius Op. 12*. This revised title is almost identical with the one Schumann gave Kistner in his letter of 19 December 1836. The most important point, though, is that comparison of the two titles strongly suggests that Schumann originally composed the first movement as an independent ‘fantasy’ called *Ruines*. The addition of two further movements and German titles for all three came only later. Moreover, in June 1836 Schumann had very good reason to compose a passionate piece of music with this title. In that month he and Clara, acting on Wieck’s orders, returned their love letters to one another. Wieck was

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even scheming, with some success, to make Schumann believe that Clara no longer cared for him. A further blow to Schumann must have been Clara's failure, again owing entirely to paternal pressure, to respond to the presentation copy of his Sonata in F minor, dedicated 'to Clara from Florestan and Eusebius', which he had sent her in June. His distress is made abundantly clear in a letter written to his friend Anton von Zuccalmaglio on 2 July, in which he apologizes for having been out of contact for so long and blames his silence on the 'deep emotional pain' which he has been suffering and out of which he has been unable to lift himself in order to work: 'at last music, my own inward creative [musical] urge . . . brought me strength and courage again'. His life must have seemed to him to be quite literally in ruins.²⁵

Although the autograph manuscript of the first movement of the *Fantasie* is undated, then, we may confidently surmise the following series of events. In June 1836 Schumann composed a 'deep lament' for Clara which he called 'Ruins' and intended to publish as Op. 16a. Subsequently, in September, he had the idea of using this composition as part of a work to raise funds for the Beethoven monument. He wrote two further movements, and the 'Sonata for Beethoven' with movements called *Ruinen*, *Trophäen*, and *Palmen* was ready to be offered to Kistner by the beginning of December. Thus it was Clara who inspired the first movement and Beethoven who inspired the other two. And the continuing autobiographical significance of that first movement is surely shown by the fact that it uniquely retained its title in 1838 when Schumann altered those of the last two movements to 'Triumphal Arch' (*Siegesbogen*) and 'Constellation' (*Sternbild*) and renamed the entire work 'Poems' (*Dichtungen*). His remark to Clara on 18 March 1838 that he has 'completed a fantasy in three movements which I had sketched down to the last detail in June 1836' is not strictly true, therefore; yet it hides an important truth about the genesis of the *Fantasie* which seems hitherto to have gone quite unsuspected.

After revising the *Stichvorlage* of *Dichtungen* towards the end of March 1838, Schumann must have sent it off to Breitkopf & Härtel. On 6 July he wrote to Raimund Härtel asking him to send back the manuscript of *Dichtungen* because he wished to change the title.²⁶ Precise details of the change were not forwarded until 19 December, however, when Schumann, now in Vienna, again wrote to Breitkopf & Härtel to inform them that the work was to be published as 'Fantasy . . . Op. 17'.²⁷ Schumann's eagerness to see the work in print is evident in his next letter, dated 6 January 1839, in which he reminded Breitkopf & Härtel that they had numerous works of his in their hands: 'If it is at all possible for you, please commit yourselves truly to speedy publication of the Fantasy dedicated to Liszt, following which you might then

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like to put out the *Novelletten* after a little while.²⁸ And to Clara he wrote on 26 January that ‘the *Kinderszenen* have now appeared; also soon to appear is the *Fantasy* (of which you know nothing) which I wrote during our unhappy separation and which [is] excessively melancholy; it is dedicated to Liszt’. Clara was eager to see the new work, for on 28 February she wrote to Schumann asking whether he might wish to use some passing opportunity to send her a copy of it and of his other new compositions.²⁹

Breitkopf & Härtel were ready to meet Schumann’s demands, for on 2 March Schumann wrote to Härtel informing him that he had that day sent off the corrected proofs of the ‘*Fantasy*’ by fast mailcoach. On 13 March he promised Clara that he would send it and the other pieces by post from Leipzig, if this would not be too expensive for her.³⁰ ‘Publication of *Kinderszenen* and proofreading of the *Fantasiestücke*’ is mentioned in the diary for 20 March, on which day Schumann again wrote to the publishers, this time concerning arrangements for posting copies of the ‘*Fantasy*’ once it was published. If these could be in his hands in Vienna by 4 April, he would forward one to Liszt in Rome. If not, he requested that no copies be sent to Vienna, for he was leaving there on 5 April and would not be returning to Leipzig until the middle of the month.³¹ On his way back to Leipzig, he reported to Clara on 7 April that ‘the *Fantasy* is already [finished] at Härtel’s; I will send it to you immediately from Leipzig, together with the paper [the *NZfM*] and perhaps my picture, that is, if you want it’; and a further letter, written from Leipzig on 10 April, states that he had arrived there early the previous day.³² By 17 April he had changed the arrangement: Mendelssohn was now to take the ‘*Fantasy*’ and the paper as far as Frankfurt (Clara was in Paris at this time). Schumann remarked: ‘You can understand the *Fantasy* only if you think back to the unhappy summer of 1836, when I renounced you; now I have no reason to compose such unhappy and melancholy music.’ From a subsequent letter it appears that Mendelssohn left Leipzig on 23 April, and Schumann estimated that the ‘*Fantasy*’ would be with Clara by the end of the month.³³ However, it was not until 22 May that Clara first saw the score, as she wrote to Schumann on the following day:

Yesterday I received your wonderful *Fantasy* – today I am still half ill with rapture; as I played through it I was drawn involuntarily towards the window, and there I felt like leaping out to the beautiful spring flowers and embracing them. I dreamed a beautiful dream during your *Fantasy*. The *March* is enchanting, and bars 8–16 on page 15 [that is, bars 8–16 of the second movement] make me quite beside myself; just tell me what you were thinking of in them? I have never had such a feeling, I heard a full orchestra, I can’t tell you how I felt. It hurt me much and made me unhappy to think

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how long it is since I heard a single note of yours – and yet your notes are still so vivid in my memory! Don't you want to arrange the March for orchestra?³⁴

More prosaically, Breitkopf & Härtel announced in the *NZfM* for 17 May 1839 that the 'Fantasy for Piano by Robert Schumann Op. 17' had 'just appeared'.³⁵

Clara lost no time in getting to work on the new piece. By 28 May she could tell Schumann: 'I have already learned the March from the Fantasy and revel in it! If only I could hear it played by a large orchestra! I'm always going hot and then cold again in it. Do tell me what kind of inspiration is in you.' And on 4 June she once again enthused about the work, and especially the second movement: 'I always play the Fantasy with true rapture, with such truly inner delight – the March, Robert, is really sublime.'³⁶ Schumann, on the other hand, was more interested in Clara's response to the first movement: understandably so, in view of the events which had inspired it. Replying to her on 9 June he asked: 'Write and tell me what you think to yourself in the *first* movement of the Fantasy. Does it also conjure up many pictures for you? I like the melody [bars 65–7 are notated] best of all. Are not *you* really the 'note' in the motto? I almost believe you are.'³⁷ The 'motto' in question was a quotation from a poem by Friedrich Schlegel with which Schumann had prefaced the score; Clara's earlier comments about Schumann's 'notes' [*Töne*] are also to be understood as punning references to Schlegel's text:

Durch alle Töne tönest	Through all the notes
Im bunten Erdentraum	In earth's many-coloured dream
Ein leiser Ton gezogen	There sounds one soft long-drawn note
Für den, der heimlich lauschet. ³⁸	For the one who listens in secret.

This may serve as a bridge from the literary to the musical sources for the *Fantasie*, for the latter show that the motto was not part of Schumann's original conception of the work.

The sketches

Study of Schumann's sketches is still in its infancy. It is important to establish over the Schumann sketch sources the bibliographical control achieved in relation to Beethoven's sketches in recent years. All the sources must be located, identified and 'reconstructed': that is, their original physical state when used by Schumann must be discovered. Only then will it be possible to begin to understand the relationship of the sketches to the finished works.