

## 12 The compositional reception of Schumann's music since 1950

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### Schumann: a model case

As a composer, Robert Schumann was particularly conscious both of the necessity and of the difficulties of a creative engagement with the music of earlier times. This explains his famous saying that history, because of the examples it holds up to the present, is an 'Angel of Death'. While he occasionally seems to have been driven almost to despair by his predecessors, he nevertheless also trained himself by an intensive study of their works. The exemplary intellectual alertness that this demonstrates is something of which later composers who find themselves responding to his music should be aware.

This chapter will focus on concepts that aim to illuminate one particular aspect of the past and bring out its most fascinating features, or the specific questions it raises. Following a few general remarks, we shall look at a series of paradigmatic works that, insofar as they are marked by an engagement with Schumann, show in an exemplary way how he was seen as so inspiring by other composers even in the second half of the twentieth century. This influence was particularly due to his compositions, but it also stemmed from his life and thought. Schumann's own Bach reception anticipates key aspects of the examples I have selected: for more recent composers, Schumann functions as a catalyst, as well as helping them to become more self-aware and more sure of their own creative powers.

Nowadays, when it comes to the influence of Schumann's work on contemporary composers, we find hardly any of those aesthetic concepts that (especially when prompted by fortuitous occasions such as anniversaries) might tend towards a reverential homage and thus perpetuate the obsolete idea of the 'great man' theory of history. Nietzsche, who categorized such ideas as 'monumental' history, rightly stated that 'an excess of history is detrimental to life'.<sup>1</sup> In comparison to the celebrations that marked the 200th anniversary of the death of Bach or the 100th anniversary, in 1928, of Schubert's death, there were, characteristically, no attempts to embrace Schumann and turn him into a cultural monument in 1956, on the hundredth anniversary of his own death.<sup>2</sup> However, the reasons for this are not only to be found in the music: it also reflects the fact that times have changed.

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In addition to the examples on which this essay will focus, it must be admitted that there can always be types of influence that go beyond any explicit reference to Schumann. The importance that Schubert's music had for Morton Feldman is a striking case. But any search for traces of influence is difficult when we do not have at least some verbal indications pointing to such relationships. However, tracking these influences down would be well beyond the scope of this study. This also means of course that any delineation of compositional reception will always remain inconclusive. There are however a few significant phenomena that might help to form an initial, provisional overview.<sup>3</sup>

### **Abstinence and contrived rapprochement**

Perspectives on the history of influence and the reception of a composer or of a compositional trend can be all the more significant when, instead of a specific presence, there is evidence of a conscious avoidance.<sup>4</sup> In the 1950s, it became almost normal among many European composers to renounce musical Romanticism. Although Bernd Alois Zimmerman's stage music to William Saroyan's play *Sam Ego's House* (1953), which quotes from Schumann's Piano Concerto might seem to be the one notable exception to this rule, it was also, significantly enough, a relatively unimportant work in the composer's overall output.

The widespread avoidance of Romanticism at that time coincided, at least in German-speaking circles, with a general feeling that 'it appears worse than anachronistic to invoke the spirit of Romanticism in music', as Willibald Gurlitt, one of the most influential German musicologists, stated in his 1950 lecture 'Robert Schumann und die Romantik in der Musik'.<sup>5</sup> He suggested that the use of the term 'Romantic' had started to carry 'an aftertaste of disapproval, indeed disparagement', while also emphasizing 'the continuing musical supremacy of Germany in our century' and a 'German movement in music' that 'reaches from Schumann, Brahms and Reger to Paul Hindemith'.<sup>6</sup> Despite its intention to open itself up to the present, it becomes clear how much this text remains imprisoned in 'great man' historiography when the author demands, in closing: 'Think of the quiet heroism of today's composers, those young unknown musicians in search of new paths, and the future of German music, which lies in its artistic efforts alone.' Precisely in the connections he makes with the present, Gurlitt's lecture appears retrospectively as a desperate effort to summon up and salvage a continuity that was already on the point of dissolution.

Of course, this kind of thinking found less and less resonance among the middle-aged and younger generations of composers, even if the rallying

call for ‘new paths’ was itself an acknowledgement of a sense of heroism. One of the main reasons for the often strict avoidance of any connection with Romanticism was probably the idea of a fundamentally new aesthetic beginning, perceived by many (as never before in musical history) as an absolute necessity. Sometimes, the exaggerations of reception history have a certain plausibility. Thus the widespread reservations regarding genuine Romanticism were, at least in part, a reaction against the frequent distortions to which the music of the nineteenth century had been exposed, most significantly as a result of the disastrous extravagances of ideology and nationalism. (It was precisely the ‘German’ aspects of Romanticism, stressed by Gurlitt and linked to Schumann, that were for obvious reasons no longer particularly highly prized.)

For a time, such ideas were radicalized, particularly in the centres for the newly emerging, internationally significant musical avant-garde – the Darmstadt summer courses, for example. Yet rather than this being a watershed, a ‘year zero’ as the legend has it, people were still in fact reacting to earlier music. But it was the structural aspects of this music that were emphasized, rather than the expressive ones. The most prominent example of this is the reception of Anton Webern’s music, in which the strongly post-Romantic colourings were to a great extent underplayed and the numerous progressive elements were accentuated. In retrospect, this was, at least in part, a misunderstanding, albeit a productive one. However, such misunderstandings in the reception history of earlier art by later artists should, generally speaking, never be underestimated.

What is important for us here is a further significant change of perspective in the aesthetics of music during the twentieth century: a remarkably high number of works dating from the 1970s established connections with works by composers of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, in order to reflect and elaborate on aspects of these works. Especially with regard to this last point, the preoccupation with Schumann has to be seen as part of a wider development that included the compositional reception and critique of Beethoven, Schubert and Mahler. It is not just from today’s perspective that compositions that were more or less explicitly ‘music *about* music’ came to be understood as responses to a one-sided and rigid exclusion of tradition. It was already customary for critics of the 1950s avant-garde to emphasize the markedly anti-historical attitude that had come to fruition in the idea of serial music. Evidently, in some cases another particular emphasis came to the fore: the tendency – certainly not always justified – to associate an inflexible denial of tradition with almost totalitarian motives.<sup>7</sup> Those who did return to Romanticism were granted the psychological reward of being able to retrieve what had been to some extent ignored.

What is most interesting in this situation, from a music-historical point of view, is – retrospectively speaking – not so much the polemical controversy over the relevance and acceptance of an often consciously ahistorical avant-garde. More important is the recognition that different circumstances had cleared the path for composers to create a kind of music that succeeded in productively developing a number of substantial approaches inspired by their musical predecessors. ‘Productive’ here means, first and foremost, escaping from the conservative reverence afforded the ‘heroes of music history’. Yet ‘productive’ also means that contemporary approaches to earlier music consciously aimed to avoid picking up on musico-historical truisms – and thus endorsing what Walter Benjamin had called the ‘crippling’ weight of continuity – and instead emphasized specific aspects that had remained unnoticed up to that point. Typically, there was less interest in relatively unproblematic works such as Schumann’s ‘Rhenish’ Symphony.

One thing that is certain is that, since the above-mentioned ‘change of direction in reception history’<sup>8</sup> (at whatever precise point we may consider it to have begun), there have been many works that do indeed reflect aspects of Romanticism, but do so without a polemical tone – perhaps even without the feeling of being taboo. This attitude is only mentioned since it was evident among a few decidedly conservative composers, mostly of German origin, to whom the undeniably vague label *Neue Einfachheit* (New Simplicity) was quickly applied. At this time, the terrain of Romantic art, in the stricter sense of the term, still seemed for many to be associated with the lure of the ‘forbidden’, for even in 1971 (i.e. roughly at the time of this ‘change of direction’), Hans Werner Henze indicated (in the guise of the quotations from Schumann in his second Violin Concerto) his distance from Romanticism: in this gesture, the aforementioned purism of the post-war years still clearly resonates. The theatrical texture of the work aims to represent a Romantic virtuosity in the solo part that projects passages from Schumann’s *Bunte Blätter* so as to distance itself from this foreign element. In his commentary, Henze clearly emphasized the inauthenticity of his reference: ‘The virtuoso appears exactly as Romanticism saw him: as magician and tragic wizard.’<sup>9</sup>

### **The perceptible effort of development**

‘What is different about Schumann’s music?’<sup>10</sup> asked the German composer Wolfgang Rihm in 1984 after having intensively explored Classicism and Romanticism and their aura in his own works from the 1970s – something that put him consciously at odds with the aims and goals of the

Darmstadt avant-garde. One of the most significant compositional results of this preoccupation with an earlier repertoire is a cycle for string trio in three parts of 1982–4. Its title, *Fremde Szenen* (*Foreign Scenes*), seems to suggest a distancing from history. However, the pieces under this title follow a dialectical process, typical of Rihm, which succeeds in obscuring this ‘distancing’ at certain points. In those of Rihm’s works that allude to Romanticism, the composer aims at referring to, reconstructing or reflecting the emphatic idiom of Romantic chamber music and its urgent, persistent, intense elements, as well as its ‘big’ gestures. What is essential for Rihm’s compositional procedures is that these elements will in many places in his compositions take on much more weight and force than would have been conceivable in the nineteenth century, to the extent of producing an almost manic expressive concentration.

Rihm’s three *Foreign Scenes* emulate the ambience of Schumann’s three piano trios. But nowhere do they suggest that Schumann’s music represented an idyllic world that many longed for. On the contrary, this world in itself represents a degree of conflict. Characteristic for such aesthetics of conflict are the abrupt changes between seemingly lyrical and fleeting, elegiac or euphoric soundscapes on the one hand, and energetic outbursts on the other. Rihm’s music is torn between form and formlessness. It establishes motivic connections and their development but then allows these to fall apart. There are several obvious resonances with Schumann’s music in all three parts of the cycle. However, these have been introduced through the back door, so to speak, as can be heard at the beginning of the closing piece. As if peeping from behind a curtain, these Schumannesque resonances emerge as if by stealth, and become concrete enough to produce a consciously disorientating dialectic between the foreign and the familiar, between the immediately graspable and the unattainably distant: we get the impression that these isolated ‘Romantic’ components belong to a reservoir of references that are familiar and yet taboo. What also becomes clear is that a complete restitution of their expressive potential has long become completely impossible and absurd.

It is characteristic of Rihm’s intensification of ‘Romantic’ elements that they often disrupt, erase or cancel continuity – itself often tenuous to begin with. This is a response to what Rihm sees as achieved or at least hinted at in Schumann’s own music. The cycle *Foreign Scenes* in particular is closely related to views Rihm has expressed in various texts about Schumann. In answering his own question as to what distinguishes Schumann’s music, he writes: ‘[It is] music whose efforts are palpable . . . It is different from music where we can follow a clear trajectory with a goal and a purpose. This music is difficult to “place” or “situate” (more in terms of its development than its style). Thus Schumann’s music, especially in his late works, is rather

difficult even for the previously initiated musical mind ((*Vor-*) *Verstand*). He prefers concrete artistic reality (*Zuständlichen in der Kunst*) to academic consistency.<sup>11</sup>

We can see how Rihm's approach negates the traditional reservations about the structure of some of Schumann's works; but he also reinterprets their core—their seeming inconsistency and intrinsic interruptions—thereby offering new interpretative perspectives. It is also true that the quality Rihm is indicating, the increasingly significant notion of 'reality' in music, seems to be opening up new paths in Schumann's music. As is the case with comparable compositional procedures in Schubert's oeuvre, these can be analysed as a conscious alternative to more teleological or linear and discursive conceptions.<sup>12</sup>

Rihm's own Schumann pieces emphasize a certain aimlessness but also a certain rootedness – to such an extent that even those tonal passages that *do* allude to Romantic chamber music (without directly quoting them) never seem like someone nostalgically flicking through the faded pages of a photo album. This differs significantly from many other compositions of recent decades by various composers who have also experimented with elements of the Romantic aura, but in such a way that the ghosts they summoned up could never again be dismissed. In contrast, Rihm's Schumann-related works exhibit an ambivalence that turns aside from some higher (imaginary) position. This indirectness, however, sits squarely in the tradition of Romantic irony in general, and, more specifically, of Schumann's preference for ambiguity. At the same time, in works like these, the Rihm who is in some sense committed to Adorno's idea of a *musique informelle* is also paying tribute to the aesthetic of the Romantic fragment. In addition to adopting Schumann's initiatives, Rihm radicalizes them even in works that do not refer explicitly to the Romantic repertoire.

Rihm's aesthetic views entail his conviction that only music after 1950 was capable of sensitizing and alerting listeners to Schumann as a role model. 'Our ears have been sharpened to perceive rapid shifts of densities, states of mind and soul, different types of movement (in the musical sense), the juxtaposition of clarity with darkness, and the kinship between places of ill repute and lofty aspirations (*verrufene Stellen und Aufschwünge*); we can hear the agonizing battles between musical ideas, and how the music is paralysed or else drills deep into the ground; we can perceive the melancholy gaze and the sense of going round in circles.'<sup>13</sup> Here Rihm's image of Schumann coincides with that of Roland Barthes, who emphasizes, in similarly unacademic and exaggerated terms, how Schumann's music depends on bodily expression: he also foregrounds its fragmentary nature, its intermezzo-character, its non-discursiveness, the way it is full of surprises and often seemingly obsessive: 'In Schumann's *Kreisleriana* . . . I actually hear no note, no theme, no contour,

no grammar, no meaning, nothing that would permit me to reconstruct an intelligible structure of the work.<sup>14</sup>

The intrinsic fragmentariness of Schumann's music is central to Rihm's assertions about the significance of Schumann for contemporary composition. Schumann's partial deviations from conventional formal patterns associated with the Viennese Classics can be seen to parallel Rihm's own attitude toward a number of tendencies in the musical avant-garde. Rihm's Schumann-related music is often in search of a kind of expressivity that the 1950s shift of aesthetic paradigms had marginalized.

It should also be noted that Rihm is perfectly aware of the conservative ethos emanating from his choice of instrumentation;<sup>15</sup> yet he has been able to transcend it through his dialectical zeal. This indeed lies at the core of Wolfgang Rihm's musical thinking, even beyond any specific references to Schumann. And this is an important strand of contemporary European composition.

### Poetic miniatures

'Strange pirouettes by Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler' is the title of the first, miniature-like movement of György Kurtág's *Hommage à R. Sch.* composed in 1990. It is in this work consisting of six movements for clarinet, viola and piano that Kurtág most explicitly follows in Schumann's footsteps. The first movement, which one might call the impulse for the whole work, was conceived during a period when Kurtág was preoccupied with Romantic chamber music, in this case Schumann's chamber piece *Märchenerzählungen*. Kurtág had used this approach once before for a different work, the *Kafka-Fragmente* of 1985–7, of which one section is called 'Hommage à Schumann'.

We can indeed find analytically verifiable motivic correspondences between Kurtág's *Hommage à R. Sch.* and Schumann's own music, especially in relation to the *Fantasiestücke*, Op.12.<sup>16</sup> But more important is the expressive intensity by which Kurtág, whose music (like Rihm's) has found real resonance among younger composers all over Europe, is linked to Schumann's world. Schumann's notion of a 'poetic music' filled with curious, marvellous elements distanced from strict Classical formal models is particularly relevant here. Although one can find a great number of connections to earlier composers in Kurtág's work, none is as substantial and aesthetically significant as the connection to Schumann. Again and again, Kurtág writes lyrically dense, miniaturist, character pieces that are the very antithesis of more discursive processes and for which Schumann can be seen as one of the progenitors. Apart from Johannes Kreisler, the poetic focus of Schumann's *Kreisleriana*, Kurtág's *Hommage à R. Sch.* contains

other concrete points of reference: Florestan, Eusebius and Master Raro, the three scintillating *Davidsbündler* characters in whose name Schumann articulated, and actually composed, his artistic vision. They reappear in the titles of single movements in Kurtág's work.

Kurtág, like Schumann, composes music of poetic hues that alludes to moments of existential significance while being counteracted by accents pointing in the opposite direction. The *Davidsbündler* often speak, as Schumann himself emphasized, with a humorous and ironic edge. Likewise, Kurtág's fragmentary constructions are often able to embrace similar, slightly disorientating effects. In the smallest space they can contain feverishly tempestuous tones as well as subdued, almost resigned, ashen tones. But constant interruptions and flashes of doubt give none of these basic elements sufficient room to consolidate or elaborate. This is directly comparable with the intentional breathlessness of some of Rihm's compositional reflections on Schumann, although in this case without the need for pseudo-citational allusions mentioned earlier. After five movements characterized by Kurtág's brevity and succinctness, the final movement lasts a whole six minutes. This is a calm and twilight *adagio* movement ending with the clarinetist playing a bass drum. The end, like a deliberately heterogeneous, curiously surreal death-blow, sounds like a response to the earlier fugitive and tentative moments of virtuosity and vigour, which themselves allude to Schumann's fascination with Paganini. That Schumann's Master Raro is introduced in connection with Machaut in the last movement can also be associated with the fact that this figure in Schumann's semi-fictional critical writings pleads for more differentiated dealings with the old masters. Kurtág has written a *Passacaglia* that refers to Machaut and Schumann at the same time – as well as to Bach! However, if Kurtág tracks Schumann and other composers in this way, it is not in the spirit of monumentalism, but rather in order to explore poetic ideas at the heart of which lies an internal contradiction.

### **Insecurity and quest**

At the première of György Kurtág's *Hommage à R. Sch.* in 1990, there was surely no-one, among either composers or critics, who would have judged Kurtág's references to Romanticism to be out of kilter with present times: thirty or forty years earlier, the composition would most certainly have been received quite differently in most parts of Europe. Meanwhile, however, it had become perfectly natural, even for an ex-representative of the Darmstadt avant-garde such as Luigi Nono, to associate himself openly with Schumann. His remark from 1980 is particularly striking in this respect: 'I



have developed the technique of serialism not in the light of Webern, but through the study of the Netherlands school (Ockeghem) as well as a composer such as Schumann.<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, this comment is typical of the later Nono who aimed to distance himself from the conceptual narrow-mindedness of the 1950s. On the other hand, it shows how Schumann, even among avant-garde composers, was not exclusively perceived (at least privately) as a representative of his epoch and its specific aura. But Nono also intimates where his fascination with Schumann lies and this, as it happens, coincides with Wolfgang Rihm's views: 'Today it is more important for me to present material from a number of different aspects, to derive new properties from it, than to compose closed forms. To choose a historical example: Schumann, rather than Brahms.' Various of Nono's works of the 1980s, such as *Prometeo* (1984) und *La lontananza utopica futura* (1988/9), refer directly to Schumann's work. In *Prometeo*, the key work from Nono's last creative phase, the beginning of Schumann's incidental music *Manfred* is quoted altogether nine times. Nono explores here, via subtle links with material from Schumann's *Prometheus*,<sup>18</sup> aspects of Byron's poetry as well as aspects of Schumann's music. Interestingly, it is the lack of metrical clarity at the beginning of this overture that becomes Nono's reference-point – as a conscious gesture of insecurity. Furthermore, it may not be entirely coincidental, from an ideological viewpoint too, that Nono here returns to Schumann: throughout his life, he always favoured artists of all kinds who could be identified as in some way 'rebellious'. As far as the emphasis on moments of vacillation is concerned, Nono's Schumann reception obviously corresponds with that of Kurtág and Rihm. At the same time, this aspect in Nono seems also to relate to the central notion of his 'late work', and all that that implies: 'searching' and 'wandering', in a figurative as well as a political sense. For Nono, Schumann is, among various other literary and philosophical influences, one of the few spiritual and conceptual ancestors in the musical field.

### In the footsteps of madness

It has often been observed that the aesthetics of works of art may not always coincide with the modes of thinking that prevailed at the time they were created. While art may well seem to be in advance of its own time, the problem may in fact be that aesthetic discourse cannot measure up to the substance of contemporary artistic issues. Conversely, one could ask if, and to what extent, art works manifest a perceptible change in the basic beliefs of *scholarly* discourse. This is particularly relevant with regard to music that reflects on already existing music. In the case of the composition reception of

Schumann after 1950, this question focusses on whether the change (evident to specialists, at least) in the assessment of Schumann's music – and in particular his puzzling late work<sup>19</sup> – finds an echo in the trends of those contemporary compositions that concern themselves with Schumann. The response to this question is clearly 'yes', and especially in relation to Schumann's last creative phase, which was marked by severe psychological problems and to which more attention has recently been paid.

Someone who has addressed this issue thoroughly is the Swiss composer and renowned oboist Heinz Holliger.<sup>20</sup> The following remark about Schumann's reception history characterizes Holliger's position well: 'Bearing mental illness like the mark of Cain, Schumann, more than all other composers, is susceptible to misunderstanding. On the one hand, certain works of his early and middle period are praised to the skies, while on the other hand a pious veil of silence obscures the more sober, austere and concentrated works of the late period.'<sup>21</sup> This interest in the late Schumann, i.e. the Schumann who was under immense mental stress, recalls the reception history of the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin. The image of Hölderlin spending close to forty years in his Tübingen tower has become a symbol of the artist's fate on the edge of madness. There is indeed a whole range of composers who have adopted this 'new' Hölderlin reception, one that considers the poet's late work to be of particular artistic value, and they have reflected this view in their compositions. Concurrently, in the reception of Schumann, too, a number of related topics have attracted special interest in recent years, namely the way one can suffer from the world, go mad (in appearance or reality) or collapse in the confrontation with it.

For Heinz Holliger, drawing the parallel between Hölderlin and Schumann became the very stimulus for one of his works reflecting both artists: the *Gesänge der Frühe* of 1987 for choir, orchestra and tape. It contains some of Hölderlin's late poems signed with the imaginary name 'Scardanelli', as well as the harmonization of a chorale from Schumann's own *Gesänge der Frühe* for piano, written in 1853, to which Holliger adds the text of one of Hölderlin's poems about the seasons. Holliger's composition also contains extracts from the medical reports on Schumann, comments taken from letters by the poet Bettina von Arnim about the mental illness of both artists, and extracts from Schumann's diary. Thanks to the diary, we know that the composer originally intended to call his *Gesänge der Frühe* 'Diotima' – the name of Hölderlin's beloved who has become the symbol of a highly individualized kind of poetry and who is the most famous of his dedicatees. What characterizes this piece by Holliger is its alternation between collage-like and highly complex multidimensional sonorous planes, its striking anti-Romantic sobriety and the singers' and

instrumentalists' heightened expressivity. The composition's main message is clear from its opening, thanks to a quotation from a letter by Bettina von Arnim, to whom Schumann dedicated his *Gesänge der Frühe*: 'We use the word madness, I realize, to denote that which finds no resonance in someone else's spirit. It does, however, find a resonance in me. In fact, rather than being merely a concept, it resonates in me to the innermost depths of my spirit. In my soul it is as in the thundering mountains where one echo awakes another; and it is in this way that the madman's words will forever resonate in my soul . . .'<sup>22</sup> Those passages of Holliger's work that lead away from the analytical sobriety of its spoken text seem to represent the strongest argument for the thesis that apparent madness is, in truth, an exemplary condition of authentic art. This idea – highly contentious, given that Schumann's mental illness is undeniable – reflects controversies of the last few decades, notably represented by Michel Foucault's famous *History of Madness in the Age of Reason* with its core thesis that light can only shine in the 'darkness of madness'. In the Schumann literature a link has often been made between the composer's assumed madness and the unusual and disturbingly anticlassical moments in his music. Charles Rosen, for example, concludes in *The Romantic Generation* that Schumann had been 'the composer who achieved the most powerful musical representations of pathological states of feeling before Wagner [. . .] Schumann can effect a kind of shock denied to Wagner and Verdi.'<sup>23</sup> Rosen was here particularly referring to the suspension of traditional musical logic as, for example, in Schumann's famous *Toccata*, and to the manic quality of some of its rhythmic patterns.

Other examples of the compositional reception of Schumann's music from a similar perspective are Wilhelm Killmayer's much noticed chamber-music piece *Schumann in Eendenich* (1972); Peter Ruzicka's *Annäherung und Stille* (Moving Closer and Silence) of 1981 with the sub-title *Vier Fragmente über Schumann* (Four Fragments about Schumann), associating Schumann with the poet Paul Celan; and Aribert Reimann's *Sieben Fragmente für Orchester (in memoriam Robert Schumann)*, (Seven Fragments for Orchestra (in memoriam Robert Schumann)) of 1987/8. The main trait of Killmayer's piece, historically among the first to undertake this kind of approach to Schumann's music, is its marked austerity. In contrast to Holliger's piece, which combines passages of great sobriety and economy with passages full of pathos, *Schumann in Eendenich* shows the composer as the ancestor of a mysterious kind of simplicity that consciously renounces the riches of compositional means – offering a rather convincing interpretation of Schumann's late work. Eendenich, the place where Schumann spent his last few years in a mental asylum, has become his *Tower of Tübingen*, as it were. As Killmayer explains: 'Schumann exemplified the conflict between inner and outer world. He saved himself – but as a broken man.'<sup>24</sup>

### Schumann as poet (too)

The tendency to take into account not only Schumann's compositions but also his artistic profile as a whole is an approach shared by various other composers. In Mauricio Kagel's Lied-opera *From Germany* of 1977–80, for example, the aim was to reflect German Romanticism in general. At the work's centre lies the question of identification with Romanticism, and Kagel uses idiosyncratic means such as ironic reflection and dramatic, occasionally twisted exaggeration to reflect the 'seductive' pull of Romanticism as developed on various levels involving sound and text. The yearning for death – *Todessehnsucht* – which in this work is synonymous with the yearning for Romanticism, is therefore an important motive. As Kagel sketches his picture with reference to Schumann's famous song cycles based on poems by Heinrich Heine or Eichendorff, he conjures up the Romantic world (including that of Schubert's song cycles) by throwing some of its defining features into relief: features such as contradiction, iridescence of tone and colour, *Ungemütlichkeit* (a feeling of unease), mystery and menace. Such an appearance of the unfamiliar in a seemingly familiar context becomes an ironic commentary on today's post-Romantic, and sometimes indeed anti-Romantic, sensibility, and the line between cliché and reality is obscured, often deliberately. No doubt such procedures point more to Romanticism in general than to Schumann, yet they allude to a number of prejudices, much discussed in philosophical, historical and literary circles, with which this period of intellectual history in the twentieth century has often been confronted. It is in this more indirect way that the reference-points in Kagel's composition are of significance for the reception of Schumann's music.

Kagel's *Mitternachtsstück* (Midnightpiece) of 1980–1 and 1986, for four vocal soloists, speaking choir and instruments, is conceived with a similar perspective, but focusses even more directly on Schumann. It is a musical setting of four fragments from Schumann's diary, first published in 1971. The piece explores, as its title indicates,<sup>25</sup> the eeriness of midnight, its disturbing as well as magical quality. It evokes, by using particularly modern compositional techniques (a speaking voice, unusual ways of playing instruments and *musique concrète*), the spooky experiences of Selene, a character described by Schumann in a diary entry of November 1828. The literalism and realism in Kagel's shaping of sound thus seems to be raised at the same time to the level of surrealism. By means of an unusual dialectical move, both distance and proximity in relation to Romantic sentiment are simultaneously appreciable, so that Schumann appears to be Jean Paul's direct heir. The composer's intriguing psychological situation also seems to resonate here. As Kagel writes in the preface to the score: "This interpretation may perhaps express those "psychic dreams" that preoccupied Schumann

so much.' In hearing, in Part IV of *Mitternachtsstück*, something of the magical powers of music as well as its distorted reflections ('suddenly it seemed like a tone spoken in a broken voice, as if in slumber'), we are led to look out for similar fissures in Schumann's original music. We almost automatically associate Kagel's work not only with Schumann's words but with his music too. As Kagel's composition uses both of the latter, the implication is to proceed similarly in our own attempts at interpreting Schumann, and not to underestimate the richness of his many-faceted verbal utterances. After all, Kagel himself, as a director of film and radio plays as well as other kinds of text-centred works, can hardly be seen as fulfilling the usual role of classical composer, but rather should be considered in this regard as one of Schumann's direct descendants.

### Playfully serious dreamwork

In a post-modern age, the techniques of collage or montage no longer attract as much attention as they did in the 1960s. At the same time, a more playful aspect has come to the fore. Luciano Berio's famous *Sinfonia* (1968–9), however, is an example of how such playfulness occasionally surfaced even as early as the end of the 1960s, however deeply embedded in a network of philosophical ideas it may be. This work presents a small but important new perspective on Schumann in that one of its main sections, the *Scherzo* from Mahler's Second Symphony, itself reflects the Schumann Lied 'Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen' from his song cycle *Dichterliebe*. Since Mahler's *Scherzo* is itself based on the song 'Des Antonius zu Paduas Fischpredigt', there is a fascinating chain of alternating quotation and invention. This tells us something about the potential resilience of music in general, and Schumann's in particular, especially in its acute sense of futility. Mahler knew how to intensify through orchestral means the generally bitter and bizarre tone of Schumann's Lieder.<sup>26</sup> This is what is radicalized by Berio. Biting irony, based on Schumann's reference to a wedding ball, is deepened through a further quotation from the second movement, the 'ball', of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*.<sup>27</sup> It is this network of quotations that makes this passage from Berio's *Sinfonia* a model for a creative approach to history. Once again, Schumann's role is that of the inspiring initiator whose own approach passes, thanks this time to Mahler, into the music of the present.

Such procedures continue to be at work in *Dichterliebesreigentraum* of 1991–2 by Henri Pousseur who, like Berio, was a member of the Darmstadt avant-garde. Here again, the above-mentioned Lied from Schumann's *Dichterliebe* re-surfaces at different moments in the piece and invariably succeeds in transmitting its original atmosphere, even if surrounded

by contrasting musical material opening up yet other perspectives from *Dichterliebe*. In comparison to the various hands through which these perspectives had already passed, Pousseur's deviations are no doubt the most pointed and poignant.

Pousseur's *Dichterliebesreigentraum* is a work for singers, chamber choir, two pianos and chamber orchestra that, in its complexity and dissolution of linear continuity, reminds one of his music-theatre work, *Votre Faust*. In *Dichterliebesreigentraum* each song from Schumann's *Dichterliebe* becomes the focal point of an accumulation of curiously de-familiarized elements that overlie the original songs. They remain intermittently recognizable, but often only sketchily so, and as if seen through a distorting mirror. Identities are dissolved because both musical and, especially, textual elements taken from different songs are filtered into each number of Pousseur's work. The aim here is to reflect the idea of unity in *Dichterliebe* dialectically, in other words to reflect both its coherence and its non-linear, non-homogeneous structure. While composing this piece Pousseur wrote a lengthy analytical essay in which he offers his particular reading of Schumann's *Dichterliebe*.<sup>28</sup> Here he emphasizes – apart from somewhat forced systematizations<sup>29</sup> – the quality of freedom in Schumann's music. For Pousseur, Schumann's shunning of linear continuity is a 'chief factor in the achievement of freedom'<sup>30</sup> and initiates a historical development leading from Schumann to Webern and beyond. This can be interpreted as an instance of reconciliation between the reception of Webern's music by the Darmstadt avant-garde and a newly created Schumann image. Pousseur's *Dichterliebesreigentraum* is an attempt to demonstrate this thesis. Both essay and composition converge further in that Schumann's biography, with all its discontinuities, represents an important point of reference here. As a result, the conspicuous incongruity of *Dichterliebesreigentraum* can be read as a compositional commentary on it.

The word *Reigen* in the title of Pousseur's 'composed interpretation'<sup>31</sup> *Dichterliebesreigentraum* is characteristic of a playful tendency that determines various constellations, like kaleidoscopes, in this work. These constellations contain emphatic, sentimental, but also, at all levels, curiously contradictory moments. The word *Traum* (dream) points towards a rather surreal quality in the work as a whole that is heightened by the miniaturism of some of its elements. Those who know Schumann's song cycle well will find themselves constantly thrown off the scent, but they will also come to discover new, unexpected potential connections. At times, by way of a kind of role-play, the dialogical quality of Schumann's original music is conveyed and intensified. Following in Schumann's footsteps means for Pousseur aiming for a playful approach that captures and perpetuates the seriousness and intensity of Schumann's music. Above all, however, it means making use of

the vitality of his music, pitted with breaks and fissures as it may be, a music that is often pure exuberance and triumphant joy, but that is also, in its own strange way, often full of doubt and pain.

## Notes

1. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen II: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols., vol. I (Munich, 1980), p. 258.
2. On Schumann's Bach reception and reception history more generally see Martin Zenck, 'Bach reception: some concepts and parameters', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, ed. John Butt (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 218–25.
3. See also Wolf Frobenius, 'Schumann in der Musik seit 1950', in *Robert Schumann: philologische, analytische, sozial- und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Aspekte*, ed. W. Frobenius, Saarbrücker Studien zur Musikwissenschaft, N. F., 8 (Saarbrücken, 1998), pp. 199–218.
4. Cf. Carl Dahlhaus, 'Problems in reception history', in *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 150–65.
5. W. Gurlitt, 'Robert Schumann und die Romantik in der Musik' (1950), in *Musikgeschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft, vol. I, part 1 (Wiesbaden, 1966), pp. 182–97. Quotation here pp. 182–3.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 195 and 197.
7. Cf. Helmut Lachenmann, 'Zum Problem des Strukturalismus', in *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung. Schriften 1966–1995*, ed. Josef Häusler (Wiesbaden, 1996), pp. 83–92.
8. Cf. Thomas Schäfer, *Modellfall Mahler. Kompositorische Rezeption in zeitgenössischer Musik*, Theorie und Geschichte der Literatur und der schönen Künste, 97 (Munich, 1999), p. 16.
9. Hans Werner Henze, *Musik und Politik. Schriften und Gespräche* (Munich, 1984), pp. 164–5.
10. W. Rihm, *Fremde Blätter (über Robert Schumann)*, in *Ausgesprochen. Schriften und Gespräche*, ed. Ulrich Mosch (Winterthur, 1997), 2 vols., I, pp. 229–33 (p. 230).
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 230–1.
12. Cf. *Abschied in die Gegenwart. Teleologie und Zuständlichkeit in der Musik*, ed. Otto Kolleritsch Studien zur Wertungsforschung, 36 (Wien-Graz, 1998).
13. Rihm, *Fremde Blätter*, p. 229.
14. Cf. Roland Barthes, 'Rasch', in *The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 299.
15. He speaks of 'crowded instrumentation' in the commentary to his own work in Mosch, ed., *Schriften und Gespräche*, vol. II, p. 333.
16. Cf. Friedrich Spangemacher, 'Hommage: György Kurtág und die Musik Robert Schumanns', in Frobenius, ed., *Robert Schumann: philologische, analytische, sozial- und rezeptionsgeschichtliche Aspekte*, pp. 219–27.
17. Quoted after F. Spangemacher, *Ein Arbeitsgespräch mit Luigi Nono, September 1980*, unpublished manuscript, p. 5.
18. Cf. Lydia Jeschke, *Prometeo. Geschichtskonzeptionen in Luigi Nonos Hörtragödie*, Beihefte zum Archiv für Musikwissenschaft, 42 (Stuttgart, 1997), pp. 143–55.
19. See John Daverio on Schumann's late work in this volume.
20. In this respect he resembles Hans Zender, who in his *Schumann-Phantasie* for orchestra, composed in 1997, demonstrates the benefit of his experience as a conductor of Schumann's music.
21. Quoted from *Düsseldorfer Symphoniker TonhalleMagazin*, Düsseldorf: 1998, p. 438.
22. See Holliger's score (Mainz, 1988).
23. Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), p. 648.
24. Quoted from Norbert Linke and Gustav Kneip, *Robert Schumann. Zur Aktualität romantischer Musik*, Materialien zur Didaktik und Methodik des Musikunterrichts, 4 (Wiesbaden, 1978), p. 5.
25. Note the deliberately archaic spelling of '-stück' in the title *Mitternachtsstück*, instead of the usual spelling '-stück'.
26. See Beate Julia Perrey, *Schumann's 'Dichterliebe' and Early Romantic Poetics: Fragmentation of Desire* (Cambridge, 2002).

27. Cf. Schäfer, *Modellfall Mahler*, pp. 144–5.
28. H. Pousseur, 'Schumann ist der Dichter. Fünfundzwanzig Momente einer Lektüre der *Dichterliebe*', in *Robert Schumann*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, Musik-Konzepte, Sonderband 2 (Munich, 1982), pp. 3–128.
29. See the commentary by Peter Jost, 'Komponieren mit Schumann. Henri Pousseurs *Dichterliebesreigentraum*', *Musiktheorie*, 15 (2000), 121–36.
30. Pousseur, 'Schumann ist der Dichter', p. 4.
31. This term, 'composed interpretation' (*Komponierte Interpretation*), has originally been used by Hans Zender in his arrangement of Schubert's *Winterreise*.