



R. Schumann: Trio op. 63 in d minor

"This piece sounds like a piece written by someone for whom one can hold high expectations; so youthful and vigorous, and in its execution so virtuosic ... the first movement is one of the most beautiful first movements that I know." Thus were the words of Clara Schumann describing Robert Schumann's d minor trio, whose premiere she herself took part in, in a private performance on her twenty-eighth birthday.

In 1847, Robert Schumann was no longer a young and emerging composer; neither was he writing his first piece for piano trio. His Phantasiestücke op. 88 had already been published in 1842; Schumann had originally intended to name the d minor trio as Trio No. 2, thus consolidating this work with the character pieces in one opus.

Appropriately enough, Schumann returns to the romantic style of his earlier works with this trio, albeit with polyphony and counterpoint now playing a more prominent role. It was during a phase in which Schumann was primarily occupied with writing works for the stage (also reflected in the dramatic gestures of op. 63) that he became immersed in writing for the piano trio; he repeatedly referred to composing these works as "trio delights." The F Major trio – which followed on the heels of the d minor trio – incorporates thematic references to its predecessor as well.

Did Schumann choose the key of d minor as a tribute to Felix Mendelssohn and his first trio, which Schumann referred to as the "reigning trio of the day"? There are echoes of Mendelssohn's work, most notably in the finale. Nonetheless, Schumannesque characteristics remain prominent throughout the piece.

In the exposition of the opening movement, the impetuous melody is accompanied by irregular phrasal structures and by interlocking contrapuntal and canonic elements. The development is characterized by persistent and partially abrupt breaks, as well as by a strong thematic and harmonic focus. An outburst resignedly subsides and is followed by a

completely new idea: amidst the restlessness, as though coming from another world, F Major appears in pianississimo, played by the strings at the bridge. During Schumann's time, this must have had a striking effect on the listener.

The coda is equally important in terms of the development. In the second movement, the leitmotif – an ascending scale – appears in both the lively dance-like main section and the lyrical trio as a (main) theme. The slow third movement is marked "Mit inniger Empfindung" ("with intimate perception.") Its theme, presented by the violin in pianissimo, is characterized by painful restraint, as well as breaks and syncopation. This theme remains present – even if only barely recognizable – throughout the entire movement, even in the faster middle section, in which the melody takes on a slightly more hopeful tone than before.

This movement remains enigmatic until the finale, a release – "mit Feuer" (with fire) – into D Major. This spirited final movement moves into the coda towards its conclusion with virtuosity and effervescence. In contrast to Schumann's works for the stage from the same period, the d minor trio is one of the most-played works of the genre. Could Clara Schumann have asked for a better birthday present?

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