



R. Schumann: Trio op. 110 in g minor

Even though Schumann's final piano trio is a "late work" that is both full of character and self-contained, it was given second-rate treatment for a rather long time. There were allegedly personal disagreements between Schumann and W. von Wasielewski, his Düsseldorf concertmaster and first biographer, who gave a less than stellar assessment of this piece and thus unfortunately influenced generations of musicians and listeners.

Wasielewski criticized the g minor trio for, among other things, not having the "momentum of the d minor trio," the work which left such a memorable impression on Clara Schumann. This is also by no means an easy piece for the listener, as Schumann himself admitted: "I am used to the fact that my compositions, especially the better and more profound ones, are not initially understood by the majority of audiences."

The reason for this is typical of Schumann's later works: a "detached language," as well as the "placelessness of development" (Wolfgang Rihm). The frequent usage of traditional forms (e.g. fugati) appears out of place and reinforces the general sense of forlornness. However, the work is, on the whole, thoroughly balanced; the thematic and motivic links between the movements account for the coherence.

In the first movement ("Bewegt, doch nicht zu rasch"), the feeling of restlessness and perpetual searching is created through never-ending, inconsistent phrases: it is only after 25 measures that the tonic is finally reached! In addition, there is a persistent sense of irregularity in phrase construction. The development is extensive: the second section is a fugue full of rough accents and crumbling motives. In the passionate coda ("Rascher"), in which the different elements of the movement are tightly interwoven, the music fluctuates between major and minor (between the tonic and the tonic parallel), foreshadowing what is to follow. The first movement ends in a questioning pianissimo in G Major.

This immediately ties into the beginning of the *Ziemlich langsam* ("relatively slow") second movement: a soft six-four chord invitingly beckons the listener to a make-believe world; these flowing melodies are nonetheless intermittently interrupted by a stormy section with distinctive rhythms relating back to the first movement. The Scherzo in c minor is "Rasch" (brisk) and impetuous; it appeared to have especially impressed Clara Schumann, who wrote that she was "swept away" by it. In the same way that the first trio of the movement (in C Major) rhythmically breaks away from its irregularly accented A section with its lyrical character, so too do the dotted rhythms and triplets of the second trio provide a strong contrast: the rhythmic patterns reminiscent of a horseman, mostly in piano, allude to E.T.A. Hoffmann's fairytale world, populated by tin soldiers, nutcrackers and other figures who come alive.

The Finale, in the style of a Rondo in G Major, marks the return of the fiery exuberance that we know from Schumann's earlier works: the energetic, rustic theme soars in "Kräftig, mit Humor." However – how should one expect otherwise! – this joyful momentum is punctuated by contrasting episodes, presented as echoes from the preceding movements. Motives, also from the different movements, reunite in the coda, in which the boisterous manifestation of the main theme finally prevails and leads to a radiant finish.

© The Oberon Piano Trio