

PIANO
CLASSICS

SCHUMANN

DAVIDSBÜNDLERTÄNZE

CARNAVAL

KINDERSZENEN

WALDSZENEN

FASCHINGSSCHWANK
AUS WIEN

Yuan Sheng *Streicher piano* (1846)

ROBERT SCHUMANN 1810-1856

PIANO MUSIC

Davidsbündlertänze Op.6

1. I.	Lebhaft	1'42
2. II.	Innig	1'33
3. III.	Mit Humor	1'27
4. IV.	Ungeduldig	0'58
5. V.	Einfach	2'28
6. VI.	Sehr rasch	2'20
7. VII.	Nicht schnell	3'49
8. VIII.	Frisch	1'14
9. IX.	Lebhaft	1'57
10. X.	Balladenmäßig - Sehr rasch	1'56
11. XI.	Einfach	2'08
12. XII.	Mit Humor	0'54
13. XIII.	Wild und lustig	3'21
14. XIV.	Zart und singend	3'00
15. XV.	Frisch	2'03
16. XVI.	Mit gutem Humor	2'04
17. XVII.	Wie aus der Ferne	4'15
18. XVIII.	Nicht schnell	1'59

Carnaval Op.9

19. I.	Préambule	2'28
20. II.	Pierrot	1'50
21. III.	Arlequin	1'07
22. IV.	Valse noble	1'53
23. V.	Eusebius	1'26
24. VI.	Florestan	1'03
25. VII.	Coquette	1'49
26. VIII.	Réplique	1'01
27. IX.	Papillons	0'54
28. X.	Lettres dansantes	0'50
29. XI.	Chiarina	1'32
30. XII.	Chopin	1'15
31. XIII.	Estrella	0'31
32. XIV.	Reconnaissance	1'51
33. XV.	Pantalon et Colombine	1'10
34. XVI.	Valse allemande	0'58
35. XVII.	Paganini	1'25
36. XVIII.	Aveu	1'10
37. XIX.	Promenade	2'44
38. XX.	Pause	0'19
39. XXI.	Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins	3'53

Kinderszenen Op.15

40. I.	Von fremden Ländern und Menschen	1'36
41. II.	Kuriose Geschichte	1'12
42. III.	Hasche-Mann	0'33
43. IV.	Bittendes Kind	0'50
44. V.	Glückes genug	1'16
45. VI.	Wichtige Begebenheit	1'02
46. VII.	Träumerei	2'51
47. VIII.	Am Kamin	1'15
48. IX.	Ritter vom Steckenpferd	0'46
49. X.	Fast zu ernst	1'51
50. XI.	Fürchtenmachen	1'47
51. XII.	Kind im Einschlummern	2'08
52. XIII.	Der Dichter spricht	2'03

Faschingsschwank aus Wien Op.26

53. I.	Allegro	9'45
54. II.	Romanze	2'28
55. III.	Scherzino	2'12
56. IV.	Intermezzo	2'13
57. V.	Finale	5'51

Waldszenen Op.82

58. I.	Eintritt	2'15
59. II.	Jäger auf der Lauer	1'35
60. III.	Einsame Blumen	2'14
61. IV.	Verrufene Stelle	3'32
62. V.	Verrufene Stelle	1'19
63. VI.	Herberge	2'12
64. VII.	Vogel als Prophet	3'13
65. VIII.	Jagdlied	2'55
66. IX.	Abschied	3'13

Yuan Sheng *Streicher piano* (1846)

Kinderszenen (Scenes from Childhood) Op.15

'Schumann's delight in the child mind,' observed the English critic Joan Chissell (1972), 'went back to the time when he was the young Clara's 'moonstruck maker of charades'.' In the thirteen precious stones of *Kinderszenen* (Scenes from Childhood) Op.15 (1838) we meet with a grown-up remembering childhood and the make-believe of children. 'Adult reminiscences for adults,' their maker called them.

'Whether it was an echo of what you said to me once, 'that sometimes I seemed to you like a child', he tells his beloved, 'anyhow, I suddenly got an inspiration, and knocked off about thirty quaint little things, from which I have selected twelve [thirteen] and called them *Kinderszenen*. They will amuse you, but of course you must forget that you are a performer [.....] they all explain themselves, and what's more are as easy as possible' (March 1838).

© Ates Orga

Waldszenen (Forest Scenes) Op 82

Written in nine winter days, over New Year, Schumann's *Waldszenen* (Forest Scenes) Op.82 (1848-49) explore an intimate Romantic vein – a sequence of impressionistic watercolours glimpsing the mysterious and the spectral, shadows and thickets, 'the breath of evening [.....] distant peaks [saluting] the last rays of the sun'. Originally each of the nine *morceaux* was prefaced by a poetic motto, omitted on publication save for that to the slow, double-dotted D minor rhythms of No.4 – Friedrich Hebbel's 'flowers that grow so high are here as pale as death; only in the middle grows one which gets its dark red not from the sun's glow but from the earth which drank human blood'. Like *Kinderszenen*, here are perfected miniatures of rarefied tracery and infinitely stratified texture, critically testing in the importance they place on expression, characterisation and tone-painting. Music to stop time by.

Faschingsschwank Aus Wien Op.26

Fasching, which takes place in January and February and ends before Ash Wednesday, is a period of festivity; a time during which virtually every Austrian partakes – celebrating with masked balls, street festivals and the like. The English translation for Schumann's composition here is 'Carnaval Prank in Vienna'. The joke pertains to the composer's sly quotation of the *Marseillaise* in the middle of the first movement, *Allegro sehr lebhaft*. At the time of its composition in 1839, Metternich's repressive regime banned performance of the French national anthem, lest it provoke and ignite more revolution from the volatile citizenry. Schumann's spoof was all in good fun, and I dare say that some sophisticated members hearing the work for the first time might have gotten the joke (just as a very few American radio listeners 113 years later got a belly laugh on hearing Prokofiev's popular *Love For Three Oranges* March impressed into duty as the *Themesong* for a popular program 'The FBI in Peace And War' at the time of senator McCarthy's notorious *wirchhunts!*).

The first section of the *Faschingsschwank* also contains two further quotations: The first of them is from the Trio of the third movement of the Beethoven's Piano Sonata No.18 in E flat Op.31 No.3 (Saint -Saëns later made use of that same excerpt in a composition for two pianos). And, more importantly, there are references to Schubert's Ninth Symphony. Schumann had visited Schubert's bereaved brother Ferdinand in Vienna that year, and the brother had showed him the still unpublished manuscript of the sublime 'Great C Major' (which shortly thereafter received its first performance at the Gewandhaus under Mendelssohn's direction).

Schumann called this little suite 'Fantasiebilder' (Fantasy pictures). Following the surging opening section, he soothes the listener with a short, poignantly shadowy *Romanze* (*Ziemlich langsam*), a perky *scherzino*, slightly reminiscent of the 'Reconnaissance' section of *Carnaval* Op.9 (after a momentary pause for reflection, it ends impetuously with an upward chromatic flourish). In penultimate position is an *Intermezzo* (*Mit grösster Energie*) which surges and spreads its wings rhapsodically. The *Finale* (*Höchst lebhaft*), a brilliant, scurrying denouement, returns to a *bravura* militancy similar to the first movement.

Carnaval

These 'Scenes mignonnes sur quatre notes' Op.9 from 1834–36, were originally titled 'Fasching: Schwänke auf vier Noten für Pianoforte von Florestan' and dedicated to the Polish violinist-composer Karol Lipinski. 'A masked ball,' maintained Schumann's favourite writer, Jean Paul Richter (in *Flegeljahre*, the inspiration for Schumann's cycle of *Papillons*), 'is perhaps the most perfect medium through which poetry can interpret life [...] In the masquerade, everything is rounded into a buoyant, happy circle which is set in well-ordered motion as if in obedience to the laws of prosody. It moves, to wit, in the sphere of music – the region of the spiritual, as the mask is the region of the physical.' Autobiographically ciphered, metamorphically intricate, overwhelming in ardour and Romantic landscape, *Carnaval* is a journey of heady flight. In its 21 counter-balanced frames, we meet the transient and lasting loves of Schumann's life. His then-betrothed, Ernestine von Fricken ('Estrella') – 'a wonderfully pure, childlike character, delicate and thoughtful'; his bride-to-be, Clara Wieck ('Chiarina') – 'the most precious creature in the world'. We find sketches of friends and contemporaries ('Chopin', expressively *agitato*; 'Paganini', a *presto* within the 'Valse allemande'); and scenes peopled from the *commedia dell'arte* ('Pierrot,' mixing *piano* stealth and freakish *forte* laughter; 'Arlequin'; 'Pantalon et Colombine'). Hoffmannesque caprice and Callot engraving, '*fanfarons* and gipsy princesses', colour its fairyland of dance and dream ('Reconnaissance'). 'Florestan' (the man of passion and action, the confident impulsive extrovert) and/or 'Eusebius' (the shy, gentle dreamer, the insecure melancholic introvert), identify its creator's self-confessed 'double nature'.

In a climactic (perversely 3/4) *marcia* rounded off by the high-flying A flat major heroism from the end of 'Préambule', the League of David – that 'spiritual and romantic' army of musicians and radicals novelized in the early 1830s out of the passions and turmoils of Schumann's mind – declare war on the Establishment, the Philistines, the ignoramuses and self-regarding cultural high priests of the day, 'musical and otherwise'. Believing in the sufficiency of music to stand alone, Schumann added the movement headings almost by

way of afterthought. "Estrella" is a name like those placed under portraits in order to commit them more lastingly to memory'; he told his London friend Moscheles,² "Reconnaissance" a scene of recognition, "Aveu" a confession of love, "Promenade" a march like those performed in German balls, the men arm in arm with their ladies.'

Melodically, the three 'Sphinxes' buried between 'Réplique' and 'Papillons' – sentinels of the shrine watching over the pitch forms of Sch[umann] and Asch (Ernestine's birthplace) mummified within – yield the work's soul. They are marked not to be played (advice which originally came from Clara) – though Rachmaninoff and others have done so. In attendance, companions of the mind voyage from *Papillons* along with Florestan's rising octave motif. Clara brings flowers and dreams – the repeated/falling octaves of her *Valses romantiques* (1835), shadowing/anticipating the 'Valse allemande' ... the private inner voices of 'Chiarina', *passionato*. And Schubert smiles wistfully out of the 'Valse noble' and 'Préambule' – a set-piece, replete with quotation, retrieved from some abandoned *Sehnsuchtswalzer Variations* (1833).

© Ates Orga

Davidsbündlertänze Op.6

Seven years have passed between *Papillons* and *Davidsbündlertänze*. During this time, Schumann composed some of his masterpieces: *Carnaval*, *Etudes symphoniques*, *Fantaisie*, *Fantasiestücke*, to name just a few.

He has also on the 3rd of April 1834, published the first copy of the «Neue Zeitschrift für Musik», a periodical in which the companions of David were going to fight against the Philistines of the Art.

Schumann takes the role of David under three different pseudonyms: the passionate Florestan, the tender Eusebius and the wise Master Raro. But the new piece, published as opus 6, is not only the story of this artistic combat. It is also the affirmation of an unbreakable will: see his love for the young Clara triumph from the pitfalls of her father, although being himself part of the *Davidsbund* aesthetic.

At the time of the second edition, in 1850, Schumann will remove the

suffix -tänze, together with the initials F and E that were signing each of the eighteen pieces.

It is nevertheless, for twelve of them, dances alternating with six pieces of lyrical and stormy character.

It would be inaccurate to see here only a disordered juxtaposition of pieces. The tonal plan is actually one of the most interesting. The pieces 1 to 5 are playing around G major, B minor and the relative D major. Then, from 6th to 10th, Schumann takes us to flattened regions. Comeback to sharps from the 11th to 13th, then new flattened travel in the 14th and 15th pieces.

The keys from the beginning come back in the 16th and 17th, with C major, serving together for the recapitulation and opening new horizons.

The first piece opens on a Mazurka's theme from Clara, followed by a waltz of shimmering reflections, alternating major and minor, rhythmic ambiguity and setting the scene of the whole piece. On which side of the mirror are we? The second piece *Innig* is a confession from Eusebius, a slow Ländler full of agogic subtleties constituting some real traps for amateur pianists. Debussy is not so far...

The pieces number 3 and 4 belong to Florestan, *Mit Humor* and *etwas hahnbüchen* for the first being impertinently quoting *Carnaval*, and a festival of impatient syncopations for the second.

Kinderszenen before time (it will be the next composition), the fifth piece is characterized by its simplicity (einfach) that challenges any analyses, whether it has to do with its obvious symmetrical curves or the central part where syncopations and arabesques confuse the accompaniment. The sixth one is a furious tarantella, hoffmannian ride not succeeding in calming the central episode in D major.

Melody of the Goethean harpist? The two extreme parts of the seventh piece *nicht schnell* could make us think about it, with its series of arpeggios and with a melody constantly slowed down by the *ritenuiti*.

The central dialogue doesn't give any break with its chromaticisms. The numbers 8 and 10 are from Florestan's world: a breathless march, slightly noisy, a *lebhaft* composed of obsessive dotted rhythms and, to start the

second book, a dark ballade pre-Kreisleriana. Eusebius and Florestan seem to answer each other in the pieces 11 and 12, one being a simple legato melody surrounding chromaticisms in both hands, the other, a festival of staccatos seeming to dry out by the end.

The two heroes co-sign the thirteenth *Zart und lustig* but is there a real reconciliation in this alternation of ardour where the hands seem to wish to step over one another, like Brahms, with this choral that sends one to a world from which we have no idea if we will emerge from the past to a joyful future.

The number 14 is a delicate song that should be played without any overload of intentions, as the chromaticism of the accompaniment as well as the coda would not resist it.

New attempt of reconciliation between the two Schumannian facets, the fifteenth piece starts with a Ländler quite heavy and quickly cut off by a pianistic *Widmung*, a long and frenetic melody. We would almost be angry with Florestan to come and break this ecstasy. The number 16 dances in staccato quavers and is very close in spirit to the number 13.

Surprisingly, the uncertain trio does not bring back the first part but brings us to another world, in the piece number 17th, peak of Schumann's work. This *Wie aus der Ferne* is a harmonic masterpiece: 9th chords, long pedals, hold basses, chromaticisms, and syncopations of a rare flexibility... *Here the time becomes space* (zum Raum wird hier die Zeit) as Wagner said. The least of surprises is not the entire repeat of the second piece, just as a mirror effect, which the last sudden burst will not dissipate.

The piece could stop here (how many times have we heard applauses arising here!) but the triumph of Eusebius needs a conclusion *nicht schnell*, a slow waltz of an astonishing harmonic richness, *Viel Seligkeit aus seinen Augen* says Schumann.

© Philippa Houbert

Translation: Nadia Mokhtari



YUAN SHENG

Yuan Sheng has gained international recognition through his extensive performances in more than twenty countries. Mr. Sheng has performed in Carnegie Hall in New York, Cadogan Hall in London, Ford Performing Arts Center in Toronto, Seoul National Center for the Performing Arts as well as National Center for the Performing Arts, Forbidden City Concert Hall, Beijing Concert Hall in Beijing, and Shanghai Concert Hall in Shanghai, China. He has been heard and seen on WQXR in New York, WGBH in Boston, NPR in U.S.A., National Radio Station of Spain, National Radio Station of France, National Television of Poland, China Central TV, and Beijing Music Radio.

Mr. Sheng's performances and research on the music of Bach have attracted international attention in recent years. The New York Times said his Bach performance "were models of clarity, balance and proportion." The International Piano Magazine, considered Yuan Sheng "The nation (China)'s premier interpreter of Bach."

His understanding and command of harpsichord and early pianos has also generated highest acclaim. He has performed the music of J.S.Bach and other Baroque composers on harpsichord regularly in recent years. In reviewing his recital of All-Beethoven program on an 1805 Kathonig piano, the Boston Intellegencer states that "Sheng had absorbed this music so thoroughly that a listener might easily have imagined the composer at the keyboard."



Mr. Sheng records under Piano Classics label. His two recordings of works by Bach and a Three-Disc Set of works by Chopin performed on an 1845 Pleyel piano have been released internationally. Mr. Sheng's upcoming recording projects include all major works for keyboard by J.S. Bach on piano and complete works of Chopin on period instruments for Piano Classics.

Yuan Sheng was a scholarship student of Solomon Mikowsky at the Manhattan School of Music in New York City, where he completed his Bachelor and Master of Music degrees.

His interest in the music of

Bach inspired him to study intensively with Rosalyn Tureck. During his early student years in China, he had studied with Qifang Li, Huili Li and Guangren Zhou respectively.

Yuan Sheng is a professor of piano at the Beijing Central Conservatory of Music.



Recording: 25-27 October 2018 (Op.6,9&15), 21-23 September 2019 (Op.26&82),
Ashburnham Community Church, Ashburnham, Massachusetts, USA
Producer/Recording engineer: Christopher Greenleaf
Editing: Jingyuan Niu
Streicher Piano (1846) provided by Frederick Collection of Historical Pianos
This album is sponsored by Central Conservatory of Music Research Fund
Cover: Reefs by the Seashore (c. 1824) by Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840)
Artist photo: Christopher Greenleaf
Photos of the piano: Patricia Frederick
© & © 2021 Piano Classics
Piano Classics is a tradename of Brilliant Classics