



SCHUMANN

Carnaval

Davidsbündlertänze

Papillons

Boris Giltburg, Piano



Robert
SCHUMANN
(1810-1856)

Davidsbündlertänze, Op. 6

Book One

¹ I. Lebhaft	1:52
² II. Innig	1:26
³ III. Mit Humor	1:35
⁴ IV. Ungeduldig	0:52
⁵ V. Einfach	1:51
⁶ VI. Sehr rasch	1:59
⁷ VII. Nicht schnell	3:25
⁸ VIII. Frisch	1:08
⁹ IX. Lebhaft	1:46

Book Two

¹⁰ X. Balladenmässig	1:40
¹¹ XI. Einfach	1:37
¹² XII. Mit Humor	0:44
¹³ XIII. Wild und lustig	3:31
¹⁴ XIV. Zart und singend	1:54
¹⁵ XV. Frisch	1:50
¹⁶ XVI. Mit gutem Humor	1:39
¹⁷ XVII. Wie aus der Ferne	2:59
¹⁸ XVIII. Nicht schnell	1:44

Papillons, Op. 2

¹⁹ Introduction and No. 1	0:58
²⁰ No. 2: Prestissimo	0:17
²¹ No. 3	0:49
²² No. 4: Presto	0:39
²³ No. 5	1:14
²⁴ No. 6	1:09
²⁵ No. 7: Semplice	0:50
²⁶ No. 8	0:57
²⁷ No. 9: Prestissimo	0:43
²⁸ No. 10: Vivo	2:03
²⁹ No. 11	2:31
³⁰ No. 12: Finale	2:16

33:32 Carnaval – Scènes mignonnes
sur quatre notes, Op. 9

³¹ Prélambule. Quasi maestoso	2:34
³² Pierrot. Moderato	1:13
³³ Arlequin	1:06
³⁴ Valse noble	1:21
³⁵ Eusebius	1:56
³⁶ Florestan	1:03
³⁷ Coquette	1:14
³⁸ Replique	0:55
³⁹ Papillons	0:51
⁴⁰ A.S.C.H.-S.C.H.A. (lettres dansantes)	0:47
⁴¹ Chiarina	1:31
⁴² Chopin	1:22
⁴³ Estrella	0:28
⁴⁴ Reconnaissance	1:49
⁴⁵ Pantalon et Colombine	1:11
⁴⁶ Valse allemande	0:54
⁴⁷ Paganini	1:25
⁴⁸ Aveu	1:26
⁴⁹ Promenade	1:59
⁵⁰ Pause	0:19
⁵¹ Marche des 'Davidsbündler' contre les Philistins	3:51

29:14

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Davidsbündlertänze • Papillons • Carnaval

"The whole is completely devoid of artistic value; only the many diverse states of the soul seemed of interest to me."

Thus Schumann in a letter to Ignaz Moscheles, writing about *Carnaval, Op. 9*. If we disregard Schumann's harsh self-assessment for a moment, the second part of that phrase resonates with the entirety of Schumann's output. Schumann was a great explorer of the soul and the heart, and his works are like the distilled essence of our own emotions, presented with utter strength and conviction, and covering a broad spectrum – while always remaining poetic, full-blooded, and life-affirming. For me it is in the small musical scenes that Schumann is at his best, his imagination unburdened by the requirements of large-scale structures, and the shorter duration of each number allowing an abundant amount of musical material to be presented.

The three works on this recording are collections of such short pieces, strung together and forming a cohesive whole – a form which Schumann himself invented, developed and brought to perfection.

Several love stories lie behind these three works. The earliest one, *Papillons, Op. 2*, can be seen as a manifestation of Schumann's twin loves for music and literature, loves in which he was encouraged early in life by his father, but then discouraged by his mother and guardian after his father's death. Written between 1829-1831, at a time when he was still studying law in Leipzig but was already on the verge of abandoning it in favour of pursuing a career in the arts, they marked a crucial point in his artistic development; after their publication Schumann wrote to his mother: "from now on my life will become different; I stand on my own."

The inspiration came, according to Schumann, from the final scene of Jean Paul's *Flegeljahre* – a favourite novel by Schumann's great literary idol. The story, very briefly: two brothers, Walt and Vult are in love with the same girl, Wina. In the final scene a masked ball takes

place, in which Vult, having lulled his brother to sleep, takes on his disguise, woos Wina and obtains her consent to marry him, only to realise that her consent was actually intended for Walt – upon which he leaves the town. And then, "almost unknowingly", wrote Schumann, "I was at the piano, and thus emerged one *Papillon* after the other".

Musically, *Papillons* is a work of a youthful, unfettered imagination – despite the division into short numbers, the work feels like one continuous flight of fancy, varied and full of invention. Those 15 minutes are filled to overflowing with musical ideas, and both between the numbers and inside them Schumann revels in abrupt changes of mood and scenery (indeed so abrupt that he himself noted, with a kind of rueful understanding, that early listeners were bewildered rather than entertained by them). The lyrical, the elegant, the rustic, the furious, the sensual and the joyful replace one another in an almost dizzying swirl – but what enjoyment to discover during the performance each unexpected turn, each satisfyingly surprising shift of colour and character.

The piano writing is imaginative and varied. Of particular note is the last number: after beginning with a quotation of the *Großvater*, an old-fashioned dance that was traditionally played and danced at the end of wedding celebrations (so one may wonder if Schumann, in his mind, had not perhaps altered the ending of Jean Paul's story), it gradually shifts into a reprise of the opening waltz of *Papillons* (at 0:35). The two dance together (at 0:44-0:58) – *Papillons* waltz in the right hand, *Großvater* in the left hand. And then, effortlessly, Schumann constructs a marvellous piece of multi-layered writing: above a seemingly endless bass note (from 1:05 on – it is to be held for 26 [I] bars), the *Großvater* continues its stately revolutions in the tenor, while the *Papillons* waltz goes on in the alto, its theme becoming shorter and shorter with each repetition: Schumann subtracts the last note each time, literally de-composing the melody until it disappears (from 1:17 on). At the same time – as if the other three components were not enough – six high A's appear in the

treble line, as distant chimes (at 1:22-1:34; a note in a posthumous edition said of this place: "The noises of the Carnival night die away. The tower clock strikes six."). It is utterly brilliant. A short coda is yet to follow, finishing with a broken chord, which is to be lifted as it was struck: note by note, starting from the bottom, until just one note remains (at 1:58-2:07) – an ingenious sound effect and a wonderful end to the work.

Carnaval, Op. 9, subtitled *Little scenes on four notes*, has its origins in a more concrete love story. The letters of those four notes formed the name of the town where Ernestine von Fricken, Schumann's then (1834-1835) fiancée, was born – Asch in Bohemia (today Aš in the Czech Republic). In a letter to her he told of his discovery that Asch was "a very musical name of a town". Its letters could represent several combinations of notes:

A – E-flat – C – B
 (in German letter notation: A-S-C-H)
 A-flat – C – B (As-C-H)
 E-flat – C – B – A (S-C-H-A)

Moreover, those four letters also appeared in Schumann's own family name, and were, as he observed, the only musical letters in it at all. And so, being "in the white heat of composition", he created a long series of pieces which were all based on or contained one of the three musical motifs above. He discarded a few, arranged the rest in order, and appended a grand opening (*Préambule*) and a grand closing scene (*Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins*).

Carnaval, like *Papillons*, is a masked ball, but this time Schumann wasn't following a literary source and had the liberty to choose the characters and scenes himself. Several characters of the *Commedia dell'arte* (traditional masked theatre) are there – the clumsy, gentle Pierrot, the boisterously bouncing Arlequin, the ferociously squabbling Pantalón and Colombine (they make up rather sweetly in the end). Characters from real life also appear: Schumann's future wife Clara Wieck ('Chiarina'), and Ernestine herself ('Estrella'); Chopin and Paganini, who

bursts in, interrupting a light-footed, elegant *Valse allemande*. (The transition back to the waltz is perhaps the most imaginative bit of piano writing on the recording: after four loud chords mark the end of the virtuoso's performance, a fifth chord, higher up and in a major key, is to be played mutely, i.e. with the keys pressed slowly, so that the hammers don't hit the strings; the pedal is to be lifted, and then, as if by magic, the pressed notes begin to resonate, a gentle shimmer far away; it's a beautiful effect, perhaps more suited to the intimacy of a musical salon – or to modern recording technology – than to large concert halls.)

Schumann is there too, in the twin guises of the dreamy, introspective Eusebius and the fiery, passionate Florestan. Those two fictitious characters, representing the two conflicting parts of Schumann's artistic ego, first appeared in the musical journal Schumann founded (*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*). Together with several others they formed a league (the *Davidsbund*), which had the purpose of fighting the 'Filisters' – the old-fashioned, learned musicians, academic and dry and opposed to everything new and fresh in contemporary music. The final number of *Carnaval* is a march of the entire League against those Filisters (who are represented in the music by the *Großvater* dance – the one we encountered in the last number of *Papillons*) and the entire scene is a marvellously staged battle and chase, ending with a complete triumph of the League.

Carnaval is theatrical to the utmost degree; even the opening is marked *quasi maestoso* – 'seemingly majestic' – as if the music did not take itself overly seriously. It might seem a grand opening, with pomp and ceremony, but there is a twinkle in its eye, and one can almost sense how impatiently it waits for the staged pomposity to end and for the joyful chaos of the second part of the *Préambule* to ensue. Though the numbers have generally grown longer, the shifts in mood are nearly as plentiful as in *Papillons*; one feels, however, that Schumann has become more mature: there are many moments of sincerity, of heartfelt feeling, of true, not theatrical, passion and tenderness. Musical posterity has fully disproved Schumann's words about *Carnaval*'s lack

of artistic value: a favourite piece of several generations of pianists, it is easily one of Schumann's most popular works today and with good reason – it is a sparkling trove of treasures, a wonderful display both of piano technique and of emotion and musicality, and also a delight to perform.

Finally, *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6, is closely related to the big love of Schumann's life – Clara Wieck. Though he knew her from when she was a young girl (indeed it was hearing the nine-year-old Clara play a recital which had initially prompted him to consider abandoning his law studies), their love did not blossom until much later, and it was in 1837 that Clara accepted Schumann's proposal of marriage. They became secretly engaged on August 15th, and *Davidsbündlertänze* was the immediate result: in his diary he wrote, "In August (20th – end) composition of the *Davidsbündlertänze*." He began the work with a quotation of a mazurka by Clara (from her *Soirées musicales*, Op. 6), set it in the same key (G major) and even changed the opus number to match Clara's. Later, in a letter to Clara, he said that the work was dedicated to her more than anything else he had composed, and confessed: "If I have ever been happy at the piano, it was when I was composing these."

Clara, however, was somewhat reserved in her initial judgement, writing that the new pieces too often resembled *Carnaval*. Schumann strongly disagreed, writing back: "I feel they are *completely* different from *Carnaval*, bearing the same relation to that work as faces do to masks." And therein, I believe, lies the key to this work: its *lack* of theatricality, its utter sincerity and

truthfulness. Though less extrovert in nature than either *Papillons* or *Carnaval*, it transcends both in depth and lyricism, in tenderness and artless simplicity. Its passions, too, seem more mature – the passions of a man who has lived and experienced more.

Nowhere, I think, is Schumann's phrase about his interest in the states of the soul more in touch with the music than here. The 18 numbers are like a series of soulscapes, encompassing shades and nuances from every corner of the emotional spectrum: from the jaunty (yet elegant) opening, through the soft, yearning melancholy of *No. 2* (it is to be recalled in its entirety inside *No. 17*, as a sweet, distant memory, in one of the most inspired gestures in this work), the Puck-like spikiness of *No. 3*, the touchingly intimate soliloquy of *No. 7* (Eusebius at his purest), the barely restrained passion of *No. 10* and happy abandon of *No. 13*, the beautiful song without words which is *No. 14*, the good-natured, somewhat rough humour of *No. 16*, and finally to the graceful, half-dreamed waltz which closes the work under Schumann's remark: "Really quite superfluously Eusebius said the following; but all the while much bliss spoke from his eyes." And, for the performer, it can offer a transforming experience – musical material of such purity that it attaches itself to you as a second skin, lowering your emotional barriers and making you feel that you have lived through all that Schumann had written in notes.

Boris Giltburg

A more detailed version of these notes can be accessed at www.naxos.com/notes/573399.htm

Boris Giltburg



Photo: Sasha Gusov

The pianist Boris Giltburg was born in 1984 in Moscow and has lived in Tel Aviv since early childhood. He began lessons with his mother at the age of five and went on to study with Arie Vardy. In 2013 he took first prize at the Queen Elisabeth Competition, having won second prize at the Rubinstein in 2011 and top prize at Santander back in 2002, and subsequently appearing across the globe. Notable débuts have included a South American tour in 2002 (and every season since), with the Israel Philharmonic in 2005, the Indianapolis Symphony in 2007, a tour of China in 2007, and at the BBC Proms in London in 2010. He has appeared with Marin Alsop, Martyn Brabbins, Edo de Waart, Christoph von Dohnányi, Philippe Entremont, Vladimir Fedoseyev, Neeme Järvi, Kirill Karabits, Emmanuel Krivine, Hannu Lintu, Vasily Petrenko, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Tugan Sokhiev and Yan Pascal Tortelier, among others. He appeared on the EMI Début label in 2006, and then in 2012 released the Prokofiev *War Sonatas* on Orchid Classics, earning him a place on the shortlist for the critics' award at the Classical Brits. A disc of Rachmaninov, Liszt and Grieg followed in 2013. In 2014 he began a long-term recording plan with Naxos.

The three works on this recording are collections of short pieces, strung together and forming a cohesive whole – a form which Schumann himself invented, developed and brought to perfection. *Davidsbündlertänze* (Dances of the League of David) was written after Schumann's engagement to Clara Wieck, to whom he wrote, 'If I have ever been happy at the piano, it was when I was composing these.' *Papillons* (Butterflies) is the work of a youthful, unfettered imagination, and *Carnaval* is one of his most popular pieces, a display of both technique and emotion. Boris Giltburg, who took first prize at the 2013 Queen Elisabeth Competition, is one of today's most exciting young pianists, lauded for his 'massive and engulfing technique, supporting interpretations that glow with warmth and poetic commitment' (*Gramophone*).

Robert
SCHUMANN
(1810-1856)

1-18 Davidsbündlertänze, Op. 6 33:32

19-30 Papillons, Op. 2 14:25

31-51 Carnaval, Op. 9 29:14

Boris Giltburg, Piano

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

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