

Edexcel A Level Syllabus – Analysis

Robert Schumann (1810-1856): Kinderscenen, op.15 nos. 1,3 and 11.

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Background

On a superficial chronological level, Schumann's output can be divided into periods in which he concentrated on specific genres of composition. The set of thirteen piano miniatures that comprise *Kinderscenen* were written in early 1838 in a creative spurt that also produced *Novelletten* op.21 and *Kreisleriana* op.16. From a broader viewpoint this comes towards the end of the period 1833-39, when he concentrated on writing keyboard music. Two women feature prominently in the compositions produced during these years. Firstly, his relationship with Ernestine von Fricken was the driving force behind the early important works *Carnaval* op.9 and the *Études symphoniques* op.13. In *Carnaval* Schumann's fascination with enigmas, musical quotations and veiled allusions may be observed in the way the generating motifs derive from the name of Ernestine's home town, Asch.

By the end of 1835 Schumann had broken off the relationship with Ernestine and declared romantic intentions towards Clara Wieck, a brilliant sixteen year-old pianist with whose father Schumann had studied a few years earlier. She provided a musical stimulus to the extent that he incorporated a motif from her composition *Scène fantastique: Ballet de revenants* into the first movement of his f-sharp minor sonata, which was completed that year (he often quoted her themes in subsequent works for piano). Unfortunately, Clara's father was set against their union and banned them from meeting; despite this she remained the primary source of inspiration for many of his works of this period.

Towards the end of the 1830s, starting around the time that the *Fantasiestücke* op.12 was composed, there is a noticeable shift from large-scale forms (e.g. sonatas) to simpler, small-scale pieces; looking at his output as a whole, it seems that Schumann was more at home writing miniature forms. In this respect a parallel can be drawn between his smaller piano pieces and song accompaniments (Lieder was the next genre to which he turned after piano music), since the two are so closely related that they are hardly more than two facets of the same. The song accompaniments on their own often have the qualities of self-sufficient piano pieces, and the piano works are reciprocally infused with a singing and melodic lyricism, or invoke literary ideas. This relationship is most explicit in Schumann's use of postludes in his songs, where the piano consolidates or reflects upon the text of the poem. Perhaps the best example of this is the long postlude that closes the song-cycle *Frauenliebe und -Leben*, written in 1840.

The 13 pieces that make up *Kinderscenen* (meaning 'scenes of childhood') were selected from an original group of thirty. Despite their relative simplicity, it is interesting to note that they were not conceived for children, but, as he remarked in a letter to Carl Reinecke in 1848, as 'reflections of an adult for other adults'.

Schumann stands in the front rank of German nineteenth-century composers and is typical of them through his embodiment of a Romantic spirit that relies heavily on literary reference. This is perhaps epitomised by his allusion to two self-projections, the heroically-aspiring Florestan and the dreamily introspective Eusebius, with whom Schumann analysed his own character and upon which he drew in his critical writings and much of his music.

Analyses

Schumann: *Von Fremden Ländern und Menschen* (Of Foreign Lands and Peoples)

Key: G major

Number of bars: 22 (44 with repeats)

Structure: ABA (AABABA with repeats)

Bar	What Happens	Comment
1-2	RH presents the main motif of the piece over the progression G major - C-sharp dim7th - D major dominant 7th	
3-4	Exact repeat of bars 1-2	
5-6	The motif from bars 1-2 is presented with the second bar transposed down a tone. The chord progression is changed to G major - C major	
7-8	Perfect cadence (V7sus4 - V7 - I) in tonic key of G major	End of section A
9	The motif from bars 1-2 can be seen in the LH in a modified form, with the initial leap upwards of a sixth replaced by a falling fifth.	Schumann has turned the texture of the A section upside down with the motivic material in the bass and crotchet pulses in the treble. The arpeggiated middle texture is similar in both sections. The music appears to have moved to the relative minor (e) in bar 9, but bar 10 shows a D major - G major progression that confirms G as still being the tonal centre.
11-12	Repeat of bars 9-10 transposed down a minor third.	The chords at 11.2 and 12.1 suggest a II-V progression in e minor but the B major chord resolves surprisingly onto a G major chord.
13-14	Contrary motion between treble and bass lines leads to a pause on G major using the dotted rhythm found in the initial motif in bar 2.	Section B comes to a close
15-22	Repeat of bars 1-8, ending the piece in the tonic key of G major	

Schumann: *Hasche-Mann* (Catch-me-if-you-can)

Number of bars: 20 (32 with repeat)

Key: b minor

Structure: AABA (AABABA with repeat)

Bar	What Happens	Comment
1-2	Main motif of the piece is presented in the RH	The use of <i>sfp</i> , accents and <i>staccato</i> articulation help purvey the dashing mischief of the title.
3-4	The motif in bars 1-2 is transposed up a perfect fourth and shortened by a crotchet.	
5-8	Exact repeat of bars 1-4, closing the first section in the tonic key of b minor.	
9-12	The main motif is developed further; the initial movement of a major second rise is inverted to a falling seventh in bar 9 and a falling semitone in bar 11. At bar 9 the music leaps into G major and then in bar 12 the D-sharp in the RH suggests a move to e minor although this is interrupted by a C major chord at 13.1.	
13-14	These bars consist of a repeated perfect cadence on C major (over a C <i>pedal note</i> in the bass).	
15	The C major chord is followed by a tritonal harmonic leap onto a <i>sforzando</i> dominant seventh chord of F-sharp major at 15.2. This chord together with a rising chromatic line heralds the return of the tonic key.	Schumann has reinterpreted the chord of C major as the <i>Neapolitan</i> chord (the flattened second) of b minor (the tonic), making the surprising tritonal leap more logical than it initially seems.
17	The original motivic material is presented exactly as it occurred in bars 1-4 to provide an aesthetic balance to the piece.	

Schumann: *Fürchtenmachen* (Frightening)

Key: e minor

Number of bars: 48

Structure: ABACABA

Bar	What Happens	Comment
1-4	Melody in RH is accompanied by a descending LH, initially chromatic. The music quickly slides out of e minor and into the relative major (G major) with a I-V imperfect cadence in bar 4.	The chromatic movement in both hands together with the tritone leap in the RH at 2.1 evokes the title of the piece.
5-8	LH takes over the melodic material which is related closely in shape to the opening RH melody. Bars 7-8 are identical to bars 3-4, leading the section to end on a dominant chord.	The texture of the first four bars is inverted.
9-12	The melodic interest is in the LH, with offbeat semiquavers in the RH creating a busier texture. In bar 9 the music is back in e minor, but bar 11 sees a move to C major. The impact of the perfect cadence in C in bar 12 is lessened by the bass note sliding off the tonic and onto a B, creating an e minor chord that prepares for the return of the 'A' section (bars 1-8).	The sudden change to a faster tempo (<i>schneller</i>) and the urgency of the offbeat semiquavers add to the melodrama of the piece.
13-20	Repeat of bars 1-8	
21-24	The dynamics suddenly increase from <i>p</i> to <i>f</i> and <i>sforzando</i> chords are used extensively on offbeats. Tonally the passage is in G major although there are passing modulations with perfect cadences in a minor at 21.2-22.1 and b minor at 23.2-24.1	Offbeat accented chords and the sudden change in volume are for dramatic purposes.
25-28	Dynamics drop suddenly back down to <i>p</i> . The RH melody consists of a two bar cell made up of a pair of semitones. This cell is repeated in a transposed version	The semitone feature in the RH has the same function as the chromatic features in bars 1-2. The wandering tonality also creates an air of uncertainty. The cadence onto a B

	with the initial semitone fall increased to a tone. The first cell follows a I-IIb-V-VI progression in e minor but the second, seeming initially to hint at G major, cadences in B major.	major chord allows a return to e minor in bar 29 through its reinterpretation as a dominant chord.
29-36	Repeat of bars 1-8	
37-40	Repeat of bars 9-12	
41-48	Repeat of bars 1-8, except the final imperfect cadence is replaced with a perfect cadence (still in G major) to close the piece.	