friend, the German poet Heinrich Heine. In many respects, this symphony, “tightly” organized in a manner typical of Schumann, is a polemical counter-assault against the Romantic perversions of such composers as Hector Berlioz, and a defense of the polyphonic method of J.S. Bach. (For those who doubt Schumann’s indebtedness to Bach, it is a wonderful discovery to see how many of his Lieder playfully borrow piano accompaniments from Bach’s keyboard works.)

In the symphony, the orchestra is organized around a polyphonic dialogue, in which modal and harmonic development unfold in a clear pathway, culminating in the final movement, in a surprisingly energetic fugue that provokes the listener to think of another composer, the Ludwig van Beethoven whom Schumann so revered. Because much of the buildup to that point is not as technically demanding as Beethoven’s own symphonies, the piece is perfect for developing an orchestra’s capability to “vocalize” musical ideas from one section across to another. Schiff gained ground as even the string players began to realize that such designations as “soft” and “loud” are not traffic signals on a musical score, but part of a musical language based on human singing.

The final composition of the evening was Beethoven’s first piano concerto, Opus 15 in C major. Because of the work done on the Schumann, the Beethoven performance was nearly spectacular. The transition between the first and second movements, from humor to melancholy, successfully conveyed Beethoven’s grasp, even in this composition written in his youth, of the Schillerian concept of the Sublime. The energy-throughput in the orchestra kept improving; the soloist gave of himself to the fullest; and the young Beethoven’s eternal Promethean view of man filled the hall.

In sum, the concert was truly an experience to remember. Thank you András Schiff, welcome to America, and please come back many times more.

—Renee Sigerson

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change (the One).

In this “symphony in one movement,” Schumann was determined to master that principle. After a powerful slow introduction in D minor, the main subject proceeds in groups of four sixteenth notes, which take different forms, including a vocal “turn” [SEE Figure 1]. This idea dominates the first movement, and soon becomes an appoggiatura, another idea from the belcanto voice [SEE Figure 2]; but it also comes back, in recognizable form, in the transition to and opening of the fourth movement [SEE Figure 3], which is itself a direct quote from the first.

More becomes clear, when you discover the role that these bel canto turns play throughout the work, such as in the song for solo oboe in the second movement [SEE Figure 4]. See if you can discover for yourself, the Bach-like transformation of the turn in Figure 1, and the appoggiatura in Figure 2, in another “theme” from the first movement [SEE Figure 5].

Then, look at the seemingly completely different slow introduction [SEE Figure 6]. Not only does it end with a turn, but the first six notes, F-E-D-C#-D-E, bear a resemblance to these six notes that stand out from the main “subject” [SEE Figure 7]. These first six notes of the introduction also undergo an ironic transformation from slow and serious, to quick and playful, in the third movement scherzo [SEE Figure 8]. The scherzo also quotes the characteristic intervals of Bach’s Musical Offering, and the pieces it inspired by Mozart and Beethoven [SEE Figure 9].

All this barely scratches the surface, and does not even look at polyphonic ironies. Those inclined to investigate farther, will find, more and more, how the work unfolds from a single, ironic concept.

For about 25 years, this reviewer has used a 1953 performance by Wilhelm Furtwängler as a metric for all other performances. Compared to Furtwängler, most performances are unlistenable: they treat the symphony as a lightweight piece, and play it far too quickly. (Furtwängler told his orchestra, that there was nothing to this piece if simply rattled off.) Particularly bad are those of the “period-instrument/period-practice” people, such as Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Roy Goodman, who make a bloody mess of the music. Harnoncourt produced a purported version of the early 1841 edition, which only succeeds in castrating Schumann.

András Schiff’s performance, although different from Furtwängler’s, was in the same spirit, and does not suffer by comparison.

—Fred Haight