

# IMAGE AND IMAGINATION IN SCHUMANN'S G MINOR SONATA

Dr. Barbara R. Barry

It may seem a curious dichotomy that one of the strongest proponents of Romantic small forms and picaresque expressiveness should have written a work so classical in its formal design as the G minor sonata, Op. 22.<sup>1)</sup> Schumann adopts the four movement plan favored by Beethoven in his early sonatas, and follows the classical precedent in having his three fast movements in the tonic, G minor. Within the overall design of the work, individual movements are also classical in their formal structure. The first movement is a paradigm of sonata design and provides the large-scale dramatic opening of a sonata as would be expected in the period post Beethoven. It is followed by two movements slighter in scale, the lyrical *Andantino* and the strongly 'markirt' Scherzo, a refrain form with two contrasting episodes rather than a single trio with repeats. The finale is another large-scale movement, a rondo, similar in tempo and texture to the first movement, and making a complementary balance to it in character and complexity. More than just a general similarity of weight, character and texture, the last movement is more particularly related

---

1) Ostwald describes it as "an almost classical perfection." Peter Ostwald, *Schumann. The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius*, 126 (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1985).

to the first in that it also has strong elements of sonata design. Superimposed on the rondo structure of the finale is a sonata form without development section.<sup>2)</sup>

As much as structure, it is gesture and process which recall Beethoven. The first movement's minor key, dramatic character and skillful use of motivic material, together with controlled pacing and build-up of tension, show Schumann's affinity to Beethoven's great middle period works, like the Fifth symphony, the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* sonatas. The Scherzo material strongly resembles Beethoven's scherzos in its brusque angularity, driving rhythm and offbeat sforzandi,<sup>3)</sup> while the last movement brings to mind Beethoven's *moto perpetuo* finales in works like the E flat sonata, Op. 31 No. 3, and the *Appassionata*. In fact, in its taut dramatic material, highly schematic structural realization and demanding technique, the G minor sonata has more than a passing resemblance to the *Appassionata*. Despite Schumann including another movement in his Op. 22 than Beethoven had used in Op. 57-and this a strongly Beethovenian scherzo-it is not inconceivable that the *Appassionata* stands behind

---

2) Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms*, 104~106, and 110(New York and London, 1980). Despite the somewhat unusual key of E flat for the second subject for a G minor movement, Schumann demonstrates a clear logic in bringing the second subject back in the recapitulation in A flat, rather than G major, or even B flat major. The exposition traces three steps of a cycle of fifths in delineating the principal keys of the section-E flat (second subject), B flat (reintroduction of sixteenths figuration) and F major (the central point of articulation of the exposition). Just before the recapitulation, the F is raised to F sharp as part of V<sup>7</sup> in G minor. In the recapitulation the cycle of fifths is A flat, E flat and B flat at equivalent points. In the rewriting of the section the B flat, as relative major, relies as E flat as pivot between B flat and G minor five bars before the final full statement of the opening material prior to the coda.

3) Yonty Solomon, *Solo Piano Music(1) The Sonatas and Fantasie*, 56, in *Schumann. The Man and His Music*, ed. Alan Walker, 41~67 (London, Barrie and Jenkins, 1972).

the G minor sonata as its model of structural design.

Yet, in another sense, certain similar formal processes and characterization of material only serve to differentiate the two composers more sharply. If the G minor sonata is Schumann's tribute to the dramatic, organically integrated sonata, it is a personalised *Appassionata*, filtered through the mind and sensibility of the composer of *Kreisleriana* and *Kinderszenen*. Probably no one saw more clearly than Schumann himself that not only did he find the form problematic for his own primarily lyrical and aphoristic genius, but for other composers of sonatas the time was also out of joint.

"It was Hummel who bravely built along the old Mozartean lines, and whose F-sharp minor Sonata alone will outlive his name. Franz Schubert, above all, sought and found a new departure from Beethoven... Weber became fierily and rapidly successful, establishing a style of his own, and many of our young writers are merely continuations of Weber. Such was the status of the sonata ten years ago, and such it remains. A few fine works in this style have since appeared and may yet be made public; but, on the whole, it looks as if this form has run its course."<sup>4)</sup> When Schumann wrote that "Form is the vessel of the Spirit",<sup>5)</sup> he was well aware that what distinguished the spirit of his generation was markedly different from what it had been in Beethoven's. For Beethoven, music was dramatic opposition, extended in dynamic development and reconciled through tonal and structural resolution.<sup>6)</sup> For Schumann, music was poetry transformed into sound and suffused with feeling.<sup>7)</sup>

4) Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, 65, ed. K. Wolff, Trans. P. Rosenfeld (New York, Norton, 1969).

5) Schumann, *ibid*, 164.

6) Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style*, 71 and 74/5 (London, Faber and Faber, 1971).

7) Eric Sams, *Schumann and the Tonal Analogue*, in Walker (*ibid*) 390~405. Sams's view follows almost exactly E.T.A. Hoffmann's vivid

Given that Schumann's most characteristic works during the 1830's were cycles of small piano pieces, each one the depiction of a mood, scene or character, as in *Carnaval* (1833~5), *Kreisleriana* (1838) and *Faschingschwank aus Wien* (1839~40), the fact that Schumann also wrote sonatas, and later symphonies, from 1841~51, indicates a no less significant adherence to the established large forms. This cannot be put down simply to a "cleavage... between the part fantastic, part lyrical world of *Papillons*, *Carnaval* and *Kreisleriana* and the songs, and the formal classical idiom of the symphonies"...<sup>8)</sup> Even though contrast is present both within individual works, characterised by Florestan's exuberant energy and Eusebius's dreamy introspection, and also between works of more romantic or classical design, Schumann's output overall has a stylistic unanimity which transcends polarisation along purely formal lines. Rather, in the larger forms, he attempted to meet certain artistic and pragmatic challenges. On the one hand, having explored the more intimate genres of piano cycle, Lied and chamber music intensively for more than eight years, after 1841 Schumann felt the need to extend his instrumental powers in the larger scale and time frame of the symphony, and perhaps make a significant contribution in the forms so consummately mastered by Beethoven.<sup>9)</sup> On the other hand, there may well have been prag-

---

description of Beethoven's instrumental music. "Every passion—love, hatred, anger, despair, and so forth, just as the opera gives them to us—is clothed by music with the purple lustre of romanticism, and even what we have underfoot in life guides us out of the infinite." Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History*, 776 (New York, Norton, 1950). John Stuart Mill described this effect as "arranged in the colours and seen through the medium of the imagination set in action by the feelings." *Early Essays*, quoted in M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, 54 (New York, Oxford University Press, 1953).

8) Ronald Taylor, *Robert Schumann. His Life and Works*, 127 (New York, Universe Books, 1982).

9) Schumann was not the only Romantic composer to feel both the weight and influence of Beethoven. Composers as dissimilar as Berlioz and

matic reasons. Even though Schumann had openly criticised uneducated and sensation-loving audiences as Philistines in his reviews, he was nonetheless deeply concerned about being recognised as an important contemporary composer by a more musically educated and discerning public. In order to achieve such recognition, not just as Clara's husband but in his own right,<sup>10)</sup> it was necessary to establish himself through the larger forms of sonata, symphony or opera, and thereby avoid the damaging suggestion to a serious reputation that he was merely a miniaturist, a composer of colorful, charming but insubstantial 'morceaux'.

But in order to write in the large forms, and not just duplicate existing models—that is, to find “a new departure from Beethoven” for himself—Schumann had to reconcile two contradictory demands: the techniques of large-scale sonata structure, based on defined motifs and clear tonal articulation, with his own more melodically conceived material often inflected by chromaticism and enriched by expressive appoggiaturas. While capable of extension and varied repetition, such lyrical material was less easily amenable to development.

In the first movement of the G minor sonata Schumann solves the problem of reconciling lyrical and sonata process in an original and individual way. The first part of the prime material is a scale-wise descending fourth, G-D, followed by a step-wise third, D-B flat, repeated.

---

Wagner claimed him as their spiritual forefather, and the Ninth Symphony as their own individual departure point and the rationale for their own innovations. See Hector Berlioz, *A Critical Study of Beethoven's Nine Symphonies*, 105/6. Trans. E. Evans (London, William Reeves, n.d.) and Strunk (*ibid*) 895~899.

10) Ostwald (*ibid*) 34/5, 176 and 187.

## Ex. 1



Just as the motifs in *Carnaval* and *Faschingschwank* constantly flit in and out in different masks, so these figures similarly appear in all the principal sections of the movement. They are a realization of Schumann's familiar techniques of motivic characterization, sometimes more overt, sometimes more disguised, but seen here in the structurally defined context of the sonata. In the development, for example, there is a clearly derived version of the third with the second beat dotted, the last note repeated so that the figure can be dovetailed in imitation.

## Ex. 2

Preceding and connecting appearances of this imitative interchange are versions of the fourth, descending and ascending, as if playing with their own reflection.

## Ex. 3

Both the use of imitation and the play of motif and reflection in the development are feature stemming from near the outset of the exposition. The opening of the movement has three statements of the prime motifs, in the second of which the two motifs make

overlapping entries. After the third appearance, the direction of the falling line reverses in the approach to the transition. The line rises, intensified by chromatic half-steps and crescendo leading to an emphatic *sforzando* on the dominant, and drives towards the cadence.

## Ex. 4

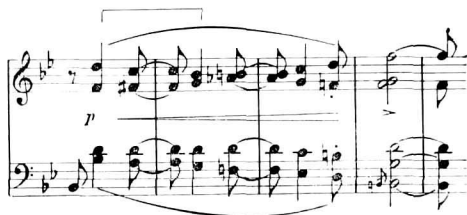
The musical score for Example 4 is presented in two systems. The first system shows the initial part of a phrase, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system continues the phrase, featuring a rising line with chromatic half-steps and a crescendo leading to a *sforzando* (*sf*) dynamic on the dominant chord.

If imitation provides the means for voices enunciating one of the prime motifs to appear, overlap and disappear again, then they reveal the motif only for it to be concealed at a later stage. Imitation as intensification of the prime motifs is a principal feature of the development, but it is not a device of intentional textural complexity, as in Bach's fugues or the finale of the *Jupiter* symphony. Rather, it rushes by, so that instead of the motif being revealed more fully by the contrapuntal working, it is only glimpsed through the rich figurative texture. This paradoxical combination of technical (i.e. compositional) skill and technical (i.e. pianistic) dexterity is typical of Schumann's idea of play. Just as in his use of musical figure and image, so the

idea of play on the two prime motifs is like a play on words, sometimes revealed, sometimes concealed, and permeates all the material of the movement.

Being concealed does not mean disappearing, but only that the motif has gone backstage and reappeared in a new disguise. The most interesting use of 're-dressing' the third motif occurs in the second subject, where it appears not only in both ascending and descending directions, like an object and its reflection, *but re-harmonises the original notes of the motif, D,C, Bflat, at their original pitch.*

## Ex. 5

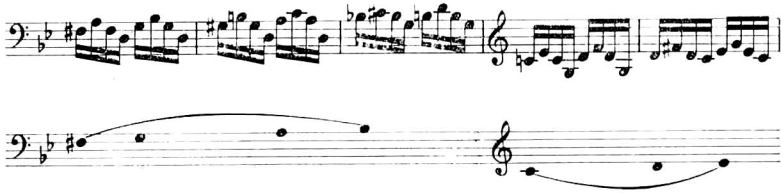


Even in the 'più mosso' section prior to the coda<sup>11)</sup> these motifs are not absent, but are again semi-concealed. As in the opening of the movement, the fourth is followed by the third, but now ascending and made chromatic. The ending of the 'più mosso' section, which marks the approach to the coda at the end of the recapitulation, mirrors, on a larger scale, the end of the opening three statements of the prime motifs and the approach to the transition in the first part of the exposition. In both parallel passages, the direction of the line is reversed to ascending, and chromaticism intensifies the cadential drive to the new section.

11) Another Schumann paradox-how can one play 'più mosso', then 'ancora più mosso' when the original tempo was Vivacissimo?



## Ex. 6



Schumann's gift for motivic transformation and concealment, while more personal in its sources and literary in its disposition than his contemporaries<sup>12)</sup> is related to Berlioz's 'idée fixe' as in the *Symphonie Fantastique* and Liszt's cyclic technique in the B minor sonata. Since both of these techniques were used to help unify a work across all the movements, it raises the interesting question whether the G minor sonata may also be cyclic—that is, whether all four movements may be expressions of the motifs on which the first movement is built, and thereby have an internal reference throughout the work. If so, then the use of half-revealed, half-concealed motifs would not only provide a means of overall coherence: it would relate the sonata to other Schumann cycles such as *Carnaval* and *Faschingschwank* more strongly than could be anticipated, or guessed, from their formal distinctions alone.

The second movement in C major, the *Andantino*, is a reworking of an early song of 1828 'Im Herbste' on a poem by Justinus Kerner and first published in 1830 as a piano piece 'Papillote'. The movement opens with a simply scored lyrical melody followed by three freely written variations, the third in A flat, variations which rescore and modify in different voice parts and elaborate the accompanying texture. The third variation is the climax of the movement, and the pitch A flat is sustained in the bass

---

12) Sams *ibid.*

against a right hand A flat seventh, subsequently reinterpreted as a German sixth in the context of C major. The return tacitly omits the dominant before returning to C, relying instead for connecting links on the common pitch C—between the triads of A flat and C—and the enharmonic respelling of E flat as D sharp, which rises to E as the mediant of C. The simple lyrical opening returns with the melody as an inner part to a new counterpoint, and the movement ends softly with a coda based on the rhythm of the opening bar of the melody.

At first sight, it would seem that the Andantino has little, if anything, to do with the first movement material—and in character, key and tempo the Andantino provides the major contrast of repose and lyricism in the sonata otherwise dominated by G minor dramatic presto movements. The Andantino melody is rich in appoggiaturas, and these provide much of the yearning ‘Getragen’ character of the movement. Yet hidden within this line—“ein leises Ton gezogen für den, der heimlich lauschet”<sup>\*</sup>—is the third motif, in ascending form, reversed in direction from its prime form in the first movement, just as the lyrical Andantino is the reverse character of the dramatic Vivacissimo.

## Ex. 7



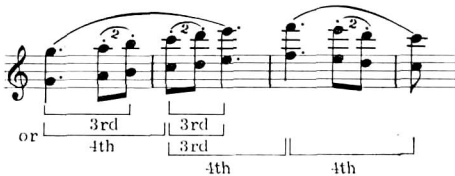
More discernible are the motifs at the cadential approach at the end of the melody. The ascending line may be read as either two

---

<sup>\*</sup> a soft underlying tone for he who secretly listens (a motto of Schlegel's, adopted by Schumann).

successive appearances of the third motif, or as the fourth motif followed by the third with a note in common. Since the melodic line has an inbuilt subtle ambiguity, the ascending motif in the second bar of example 8 may also be regarded as the ascending fourth, matched by its descending mirror form, a further use of musical figure and image.

Ex. 8



The Scherzo returns to the dramatic G minor of the opening movement, and also returns to the idea of play—in this movement, not only of material, but also of time. Schumann's triple meter is undermined from the start by the *sforzando* on the second half of the first beat and the crushed, written-out *acciaccaturas*. From bar five on, the meter is rendered even more ambiguous by phrases extending over the barline, each containing a different number of beats. The two episodes, in B flat and E flat respectively, both use syncopation which further destabilizes the already precarious  $\frac{3}{4}$  time.

Some uses of the first movement motifs are clear—for example, the use of the descending third in dotted form, as in the first movement development,

Ex. 9



or its 'back-to back' form, with a pitch in common.

## Ex. 10



The fourth motif also appears in an elaborated form, but *at the original pitches of the first movement, and at the same tessitura.*<sup>13)</sup>

## Ex. 11



The two motifs, however, do not account for all the material of the Scherzo. It is full of appoggiaturas and their extensions, upper and lower mordants. These figures have not come primarily from the first movement (although some instances of them may be found there), but from the Andantino, where the appoggiaturas provide the essential yearning ‘Getragen’ quality of the movement. What happens in the third movement is that the appoggiatura form the Andantino is absorbed into the material of the Scherzo, and is re-interpreted in and by its dramatic character.

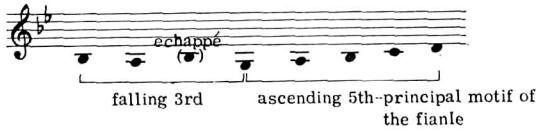
The Scherzo is accordingly not only a reworking of the prime motifs of the first movement, but is also a re-interpretation, in which they are integrated with the principal figure of the Andantino. The finale recalls the first movement most closely in

13) The concluding pitch of the motif in the Scherzo appears both at the half cadence, at the end of the first Scherzo section prior to the first episode, and at the full cadence prior to the second episode, and at the end of the movement. Whereas a Schenkerian view of the movement would see the *Urlinie* falling to  $\dot{1}$  at the final cadence, this is an inner line, and is superimposed by the emphatic D as part of the fourth motif, as seen in its two appearances at the full cadence.

material and texture, and both are large-scale movements which frame the slighter lyrical Andantino and the compressed Scherzo. As well as in material and texture, the two outer movements are also related in structural process. The presence of sonata elements in the finale underlines that relationship. Since the finale is a rondo on which is superimposed a sonata movement without development, there is no autonomous development section as in the first movement. But no autonomous development section does not mean that Schumann omits development function from the finale. Instead, he redistributes it in the two main parts of the movement, making the long extensions following the second subject into developmental sections closely based on the material and texture of the first subject. The first of these sections leads back to a restatement of the rondo theme (which would be in the equivalent place in a sonata movement to the beginning of the recapitulation), and the second developmental section leads in turn to the last full statement of the rondo theme prior to the coda.

Just as each of the previous two movements modified and re-worked the two prime motifs within the context of the individual movement, so the finale also re-presents them. The original falling fourth of the first movement, G-D, has its exact mirror form in the opening of the finale, that is, an ascent from G-D, which is a further example of musical idea and image characteristic of the entire work. This mirror form, of the ascending fifth, becomes the most strongly delineated part of the finale material, and at the opening of the movement, as at each return, it is preceded by the falling third motif with *échappé*-i.e. in the finale, the third *precedes* the fifth (the mirror inversion of the fourth), whereas in the opening of the first movement the fourth is followed by the third.

## Ex. 12



The important role of the fifth may also be seen in the finale second subject. Just as the lyrical second subject is opposite in character to the dramatic, upward-striving first subject, so the second subject underlines this contrast in having the motif in reverse direction. As well as providing a mirror of the ascending first subject motif shape

## Ex. 13



it duplicates the first four notes of the opening motif at their original pitch;

## Ex. 14



but whereas the first movement opening is in G minor, the second subject of the finale re-interprets the context of E flat major. This is closely analogous to the re-interpretation of the third motif in the second subject of the first movement, which similarly used the notes of the falling third motif at original pitch, but there re-interpreted in the context of B flat major.

Apart from its opening use with an échappé, the third is the most characteristic motif of the developmental sections, used sequentially.

Ex. 15



It also appears in contrary motion in the same passage in the left hand.

Ex. 16



Ex. 17



A similar use of the third motif occurs when it is in an inner part of the right hand (i.e. inverted counterpoint of example 15) and later in the developmental sections, it occurs in an ascending chromatic form against reiterated right hand pitches.

Ex. 18



The rest of the main part of the movement consists of figuration and elaboration in which the preceding uses of the motif are rescored in different keys and at different tessituras.

The first part of the coda is a *prestissimo quasi cadenza* using

side-slipping diminished seventh chords, comparable in its whispered eerie unsettledness to the finale of Chopin's B flat minor sonata. It begins pianissimo, and, unlike Chopin's movement, builds to a fortissimo and accelerando. The end of the movement is an emphatic restatement of the finale material, the falling third and rising fifth, which was the mirror of the opening falling fourth motif of the work.

Schumann wrote the G minor sonata for his future wife Clara, working on the first and third movements from the summer of 1833 onwards (a fact which may well confirm the kinship of material as well as similarity of character between the two movements). Schumann completed the work by October 1835 which he mentions in his diary, but some three years later-if not before-Clara complains that the finale is "too difficult" and would not be understood by the public. Schumann replaced it by the present rondo.

Since the sonata was intended for her, are its motifs 'Clara' themes, in the way that Schumann's encoded musical expressions of Clara are both the explicit and hidden material in his other piano cycles, such as *Carnaval* and *Davidsbündlertänze*, and in the Heine *Dichterliebe* song cycle? The sonata in both its material and its treatment recalls the other cycles<sup>14)</sup> and may be seen as another expression of his love and yearning for Clara transformed into music, only realized here within the classical framework of the four movement sonata as distinct from the Romantic character pieces of the piano cycle. If it is another Clara/Schumann cypher,

---

14) The linking motif Réti identifies (*The Thematic Process in Music*, 33~35, (New York, Greenwood Press, 1951)) in *Kinderszenen*, Op. 15, is none other than the fourth motif of the sonata and the third, in reverse order (in major). "These motifs are unifying, expressive, structural, reversible." Sams (*ibid*) 398.



then Schumann has not only re-interpreted the classical sonata in the usual sense of a Romantic work in a classical form, but he has also re-interpreted the motivic material, as a basis of extension, modification and development, giving it a secret, personal content of which much of his music was a Romantic expression.

## Schumann G단조 Sonata 안의 영상과 상상력

Dr. Barbara R. Barry

本 논문은 Schumann G단조 Sonata의 일관성을 2단계를 통하여 보여주고 있다. 즉 이 작품을 통하여, 서로 다른 악장들 사이에서 투과되는 구체적 요소들의 상호작용과 이들의 통일성을 성취하기 위한 방법의 제시, 그리고 Schumann의 다른 작품들에서 보여주는 보다 구체적인 조직과 이 작품과의 연관을 제시하고 있다.

E. L.