

**ROBERT ALEXANDER SCHUMANN (1810-1856):**

- a. **Symphony Nr. 3 in E flat major op. 97 „Rheinische“ (1850);**
- b. **New Year's Song for Solo, Choir and Orchestra in E flat major op. posth. 144 (1849/1850).**

MARCUS NIEDERMEYR (Bass-Baritone),  
Philharmonic Choir „Gloria“ Lwiw, Singkreis Wohlen bei Bern,  
Academic Chamber Orchestra Lwiw Virtuoso, founded by conductor SERGIU VURKO  
Conductor: DIETER WAGNER

**Symphony Nr. 3 in E flat major op. 97 „Rheinische“**

1t Movement: Lebhaft  
2d Movement: Scherzo: Sehr mässig  
3d 1t Movement: Nicht schnell  
4th 1t Movement: Feierlich  
5th 1t Movement: Lebhaft

**New Year's Song for Soli, Choir and Orchestra in E flat major op. posth. 144**

- nr. 1: Feierlich (*Mit eherner Zunge*, Bass Solo and Choir)
- nr. 2: Etwas lebhafter (*Du herrschtest noch eben*, Soprano and Alto)
- nr. 3: Chor (*Heil! Neuer Gebieter der harrenden Welt*)
- nr. 4: Lebhaft, doch nicht zu rasch (*Hebt, Brüder, die Blicke*, Bass Solo and Choir)
- nr. 5: Etwas mässiger (*Lernt Sicheln zu schleifen*, Choir)
- nr. 6: Chor (*O Fürst, auf dem Throne*)
- nr. 7: Lebhaft (*Schliesst, Brüder, die Runde*, Choir)

SCHUMANN's late work stands for the most part in the shadow of his works from the time before 1845. To this his mental illness may have contributed. No less so did RICHARD WAGNER. He dismissed SCHUMANN's music as « *shallow bombast* » and thus preformed the tonality to his followers. To music critics and music historians it became a dogmatic leading principle. The great pianist and conductor HANS VON BÜLOW believed to be able to decree the year 1845 as a turning point in SCHUMANN's oeuvre. The polemics culminated in the dictum - ascribed to Wagnerian FELIX DRAESEKE: SCHUMANN „*had begun as a genius and ended as a talent*“. Even the ingenious PJOTR TCHAIKOWSKY, a declared admirer of SCHUMANN and as a music feature writer an original and autonomous mind, occasionally succumbed to the cliché. Perhaps following TCHAIKOWSKY FELIX VON WEINGARTNER – who was the successor of GUSTAV MAHLER as director of the opera of the court in Vienna – thought it necessary to recommend radical erasing of orchestral registers – in order to repair SCHUMANN's supposed weakness of instrumentation. Most recently FRANK HENTSCHEL has analysed the cords of quotations with regard to their elements of plagiarism; he has deconstructed their linguistic set phrases, and he has exposed their seeming elements of relativism as strictly unscientific self-protection.

Actually more convincing explanations than the repetition in parrot-fashion of such polemic empty formulas are available. ROBERT SCHUMANN approached the different categories of music systematically one after another and so in 1846 turned his attention to BACH's technique of the fugue. Unlike WAGNER he tried in the years of revolution of 1848/49 not to be a ringleader - in spite of his sympathies for equal rights. He remained faithful to „*absolute*“ music, he refused „*new German*“ programme music, he did not replace the symphony by symphonic poetry; and he remained attached – in contrast to WAGNER's preference for the musical drama – to the ideal of poetic truthfulness, and continued to prefer the *chorale* to the Wagnerian search for the *eternal melody*. The former innovator who – as a music writer as

well as a composer („*Davidsbündler*“) had stood up against the hollow play of a mere virtuoso („*Philistertum*“) - became externally a keeper and guardian – but not an enemy of innovation.

SCHUMANN composed the two late works published together on the CD in a total of 50 days - in two of his typical urges of creative work.

### **Symphony Nr. 3 in E flat major op. 97 „*Rheinische*“ (1850)**

SCHUMANN wrote seven symphonies altogether. Only four of them did he recognize as wholly valid works. SCHUMANN so-called third symphony is timewise the latest of them. It was produced in the third month after he moved from Dresden to Düsseldorf in autumn 1850. Its first performance took place on February 25th 1851 in Cologne conducted by SCHUMANN himself. According to TCHAIKOWSKY's analysis of the work published in 1872, SCHUMANN was « not able to work out of the orchestra those contradictory effects of light and shade, those sequences of isolated groups, in whose well-thought out mixture lies the essence of the art of instrumentation. The colourlessness and clumsy thickness of his intonation does not only weaken in many cases the impression of great and manifold beauty in his symphonic works (...) »; but the « colourless massiveness of orchestration » also conceals « the unattainable beauty of the melodic and harmonious side of the composition ». About the fourth movement (« *Solemn* ») TCHAIKOWSKY went into raptures: « Nothing of greater power and depth has emerged from the artistic creativity of a human being (...). The magic of this excellent music is further intensified by the characteristic charm of the E flat minor key, which corresponds with the gloomily sublime atmosphere – which was intended by SCHUMANN – and by the massive instrumentation, which this time is made good use of in a suitable way. » The final movement, however, TCHAIKOWSKY judged as a failure because its character of festive rejoicing was not something SCHUMANN was particularly good at – « this most competent singer of human grief ». « Only at the end of the finale a splendid and harmonious passage is heard – hold on a bass note – something at which SCHUMANN was a great and inimitable master. »

Perhaps for once it was a hindrance to TCHAIKOWSKY that he was not a member of the Russian group called mighty little heap - « *mächtiges Häuflein* » (MILY BALAKIREW, ALEXANDER BORODIN, MODEST MUSSORGSKY, CESAR CUI, NIKOLAI RIMSKI-KORSAKOW), who had themselves dedicated to create a Russian national music. At any rate, TCHAIKOWSKY does not seem to have recognized SCHUMANN's concern to write *in form of a symphony German national music*, which should combine sublimity, life of the people and local colour of the Rhine region (JON FINSON). The musically and dramatically close connection of the 4th movement and the finale is an allusion to LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN's *Pastorale* op. 68. In order to intensify the festive character the 4th movement is held in the *stile antico*. His theme of the fugue and motifs from the exposition are linked together in the creative process of the finale. So SCHUMANN conceived the end of the symphony everything but in a frivolously derisive manner. It is more likely to hold responsible for TCHAIKOWSKY's judgment on the finale of the « *Rheinische* » symphony his own trouble with ponderous hilarity. It would be the same difficulty which separated TCHAIKOWSKY from the heir of SCHUMANN, namely JOHANNES BRAHMS.

### **New Year's Song for Solo, Choir and Orchestra in E flat major op. posth. 144 (1849/1850)**

Strange developments of different kinds led to the fact that all the works in which great masters of the 19th century quote JOHANN RICKART's song of thanksgiving sung at the table after the meal « *Nun danket alle Gott* » today have virtually disappeared from the concert repertoire. In this respect FELIX MENDELSON BARTHOLDY made the same experience like

ROBERT SCHUMANN with his *New Year's Song* when MENDELSSOHN amalgamated oratory with symphony in the *Symphony Nr. 2 Hymn of Praise* op. 52 and also JOHANNES BRAHMS' *Song of Triumph* op. 71 faced the same destiny.

However, while searching editions of sound carriers, things look much worse for SCHUMANN's *New Year's Song* than the other two works.

The *New Year's Song* shares the same fate of prejudice against orchestra and choral works from SCHUMANN's late *œuvre*. The entire *œuvre* – as far as it is known - of most important composers like JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH, WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART, LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN or JOHANNES BRAHMS is today at hand not only in printed form but also on sound carriers. This is not the case with ROBERT SCHUMANN's work ! It is unbelievable as well as typical that the 20- minute-long *New Year's Song* op. posth. 144 even after 160 years after SCHUMANN's death and 120 years after the development of the record is not yet available on sound carriers.

The *New Year's Song* sets a poem of 1837 by FRIEDRICH RÜCKERT into music. The work was performed for the first time on January 11th 1851 in Düsseldorf conducted by the composer himself, who was far from happy with the performance. Further performances planned by ROBERT SCHUMANN and after his death by CLARA SCHUMANN-WIECK were shattered again and again. SCHUMANN outlined it with good reason at the turn of the year 1849/50 and finished it after a creative crisis and his move to Düsseldorf. The relationship between ROBERT and CLARA SCHUMANN and FRIEDRICH RÜCKERT was characterized by great mutual esteem. Only from HEINRICH HEINE did SCHUMANN set more poems into music than from FRIEDRICH RÜCKERT. SCHUMANN met RÜCKERT 1843 in Berlin, after the couple had together already set into music RÜCKERT's „*Spring of Love*“ (op. 37) - this to the great delight of the poet. RÜCKERT thanked the SCHUMANNs with a poem of his own, which SCHUMANN had asked for to receive in the psychiatric hospital in Enderich near Bonn after he had been admitted there. Since 1844 SCHUMANN owned an edition of RÜCKERT's poems, in which he wrote down personally what he tempted him to set into music. Much of it, fate did not grant the master any more – among other things after the death of his first son – setting into music a number of children's funeral songs („*Kindertotenlieder*“) by RÜCKERT; this was realised by GUSTAV MAHLER half a century later.

RÜCKERT's poem catches in the number of verses the course of the months, in the metrics of an individual verse the hourly stroke of the tower clock (16 accentuations for the four quarters of an hour and the 12 hours) and the week (unstressed syllables), and so symbolizes the merciless course of time. This must have appealed to SCHUMANN - to set into music the appreciating toast in the fashion of a drinking song at the end of his most creative year – precisely at the moment when he decided to retire as conductor of his Dresden choirs because of insufficient commitment of the singers. Solely at the end of the 4th movement in the 9th verse of the poem SCHUMANN slightly altered the text of RÜCKERT's *New Year's Song* personally - from „pregnant with action“ to „urging for action“ (aus „*wie schwanger von Tat*“ in „*wie drängend nach Tat*“). 18 years before BRAHMS' „*Song of Fate*“ (*Schicksalslied*) for choir and orchestra op. 54 SCHUMANN set into music what he himself had already written down in a family register as an eleven-year-old little boy: „You can buy absolutely anything, except friends and joy“. In the 7th verse – set into music in the women's choir in Nr. 4 („*not mere pleasure nor joy and good*“) – RÜCKERT had also expressed the thought.

Hans-Urs Wili/Translation: Jürg Germann