

Robert and Clara Schumann, And Their Teacher, J.S. Bach

by Michelle Rasmussen

Dedicated to the memory of Susan Schlanger.¹

Prologue

Two hundred years ago, on June 8, 1810, in a town called Zwickau in what was then the central part of Germany, Robert Schumann was born to a bookseller and his wife. As he grew up, he yearned to develop his creative powers to express beautiful, profound ideas in both music and words.

Schumann started by writing music for the piano, then challenging chamber music, wonderful songs, and great symphonies. He would often write music in a single genre at a time, to concentrate on mastering each, before moving on to the next.

His beloved Clara would be his muse, his composition student, his collaborator, and the greatest promoter of his works, as well as his wife and the mother of his seven children. Their “love and life,” the name of one of his best song cycles, serves still as a role model of a marriage built on the commitment to help develop each others’ creativity—giving joy to the world.

1. Susan Schlanger fought a long, heroic fight against cancer, while she continued to be one of the leaders of Lyndon LaRouche’s political campaign in the U.S.A. until her death in 2009. She loved Robert Schumann’s music, and the first draft of this article was written for a *Festschrift* for her a few months before she died.

The First Movement

Throughout this year of 2010, Classical music lovers around the world are celebrating the 200th birthday of the great German composer Robert Schumann. This article is a contribution to that celebration. As we look back to find joy in Schumann’s musical ideas, so did Schumann, himself, look back to the creative mind of Johann Sebastian Bach.

This article is the second in a series exploring how the works of Johann Sebastian Bach, especially his groundbreaking series of preludes and fugues,² in all keys, a celebration and exploration of the revolutionary new well-tempered musical tuning system, entitled the *Well-Tempered Clavier (WTC)*,³ became teaching manuals for composers who lived after him. The first article, “Mozart, Bach and the ‘Musical Midwife,’” discussed how Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was inspired by Bach.⁴

2. In the first approximation, a fugue is a kind of advanced, freestyle canon, which will be defined more precisely later in this article.

3. *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, in two volumes, each containing a series of fugues and preludes in all keys, was written by Bach to explore the revolutionary new tuning system called well-tempering, designed to allow music to be played in all keys, and to modulate, or move, from key to key within a single composition. See the box on “The Revolution of Bach’s ‘Well-Tempered Clavier,’” page 44.

4. See <http://www.schillerinstitut.dk/bach.html>



The creativity of musicians Clara and Robert Schumann was nourished by Bach, whose works they studied together during their honeymoon, and long after.



Now, the story of how both Robert and Clara Schumann learned to compose directly from Bach will be told.

Bach was literally Schumann's music teacher, though he no longer lived. Schumann recognized that the best way to learn to write music that would move his listeners, would be to go directly to the source. It was Bach, which in German means "brook," Schumann thirsted after. It was Bach who gave Schumann his musical nourishment, and shared with him the secrets of his creative soul. Schumann did what Lyndon LaRouche has always said is the best way to learn: He strived to relive Bach's compositional method by immersing himself in his works, especially Bach's contrapuntal⁵ fugues.

Studying Bach enriched Schumann's power of insight into not only how to write music based on weaving together several, independent voices to form a living unity out of constant change, but, also, insight into the creative powers of the human mind itself, inexpressible in words, but finding expression in that wonderful world

of Classical music. Insight reaching beyond the music experienced by the senses, to the unheard principles that generate musical development, as John Keats wrote:

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone...⁶

Studying Bach increased the ability of Schumann's creative mind to resonate with the ideas of creative minds of the past, to produce revolutionary musical ideas that would, in turn, inspire young musicians, like Johannes Brahms, to produce the breakthroughs of the future.⁷

Schumann sustained that love of Bach through his

5. See footnote 22

6. From John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

7. See section of Lyndon LaRouche's May 8, 2010 webcast on musical insight and resonance, *EIR*, May 21, 2010.

life, which can be seen in his works; and Bach also became a central focus of his marriage. In 1840, Robert was finally able to marry his love, Clara, despite great opposition from her father, which drained them both. She was the leading pianist of her generation, much better known than Robert at that time. What did they do to celebrate their marriage? They studied Bach together! Robert's love for Clara, and her musicality, led him to help develop her creative compositional qualities through their joint study of Bach.

From the very beginning, they established a marriage diary, which was to become a central forum for their musical and personal dialogue. Now, it allows us to become, in a sense, a silent, but thoughtful, part of that dialogue, from our vantage point 170 years later.

Sept. 21, 1840 (nine days after their marriage on Sept. 12, 1840:

...We have started with the Fugues⁸ of Bach [from *The Well-Tempered Clavier*—MR]; Robert marks those places where the theme always returns—studying these fugues is really quite interesting and gives me more pleasure each day. Robert reprimanded me very strongly; I had doubled one place in octaves, and thus impermissibly added a fifth voice to the four-voice texture. He was right to denounce this, but it pained me not to have sensed it myself.

Clara⁹

Sept. 26:

Today it is already 14 days that we have been married! How beautifully and happily we've spent these days! But this week we were also fairly busy. Our fugal studies are continuing; every time we play one it becomes more interesting for me. Such great art with such a natural flow; one can say this about almost every one of the fugues. Compared to Bach's, Mendelssohn's fugues really strike one as impoverished, also it is too apparent how they are made, and how difficult it probably was for him at times. Perhaps



Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was the “teacher” of all the brilliant composers of the 19th Century. Much of his work had been buried until the Mendelssohn-Schumann circle of collaborators rediscovered it.

it's foolish for me to want to make a comparison, but this forces itself upon me involuntarily whenever I (as I almost always do) play the Mendelssohn fugues after Bach's. Incidentally, I truly believe there is no one alive today who could write such fugues other than Mendelssohn, who since childhood has lived only with Bach, Händel, Haydn, and other old masters. Clara¹⁰

Sept. 27 to Oct. 3 (third week):

...My Clara has been very diligent; yes, she burns for music. I heard her study new and old etudes by Chopin, also by Henselt, diverse things by Bach [and] my “Fantasie” and “Kreisleriana.” Also the F Minor Sonata by Beethoven. We are pursuing our daily studies of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. Robert¹¹

8. A fugue, taken from the Italian word “to hunt,” is the name of a piece of music where a short musical motif, called the subject, first appears alone, and then, in turn, as the other voices enter, in succession, as if they are chasing each other.

9. Gerd Nauhaus, ed., *The Marriage Diaries of Robert & Clara Schumann* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), p. 8.

10. Ibid., p. 11.

11. Ibid., p. 12.



Ludwig van Beethoven in 1803, painting by Christian Hornemann. Robert Schumann studied Beethoven's work intensely, alongside that of Bach.

Oct. 7:

...Last week we finished the first book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* by Bach, but did not continue our study of the second book—Robert wanted to rest for a week! Clara¹²

In these excerpts from the first few weeks of their marriage diary, Robert and Clara reveal to us that these two great musicians spiritually consummated their marriage by studying Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. As one author put it, "For him this was a chance to share and renew his devotion to the composer he revered above all others, for her it was a moment of revelation, a profound enrichment of her musical education."¹³ She had always composed music, and improvised daily at the piano, encouraged by her father, the piano and voice teacher Friedrich Wieck.¹⁴ Concert pianists also often

played their own works, especially to display their virtuosity, but her studies with Robert deepened her musical insight.

After Bach, they jointly studied Beethoven's symphonies, and Mozart and Beethoven overtures, succeeded by Haydn and Mozart quartets, which they played together, side by side, at the piano. Robert also introduced Clara to Goethe, Shakespeare, and other literary Classics.

As you will see below, Robert Schumann, who had no formal musical education while he was growing up, learned to compose by studying the fugues of Bach, especially from the *WTC*, and that was the gift he wanted to give Clara. Clara was famous throughout Europe for her exceptional piano playing, and her repertoire already included some works by Bach (including performances playing Bach together with Felix Mendelssohn, who revived Bach's work).^{15 16} But now, she really began to go beyond the notes, and discover the compositional principles Bach used to create his fugues, through the eyes of Robert, the composer. She also then became the first pianist to regularly play Bach fugues during her concerts.¹⁷

The joy that welled up in Robert after their marriage found its musical expression in his "Year of Song," when he wrote his masterpieces *Dichterliebe* and *Frauenliebe und -leben*, and other beautiful songs. Characteristic for many of these songs is that the piano

the authoritative book on Clara in English.

15. Three years before their marriage, in a review of Clara Wieck's composition "Soirées for Piano," Op. 6, Robert, in the guise of his *Davidsbündler* (League of David, an imaginary music society of Schumann's creation) members Florestan and Eusebius, praised both her compositions and the depths of her comprehension of the works of the great masters: "Let Bach penetrate to a depth where even the miner's lamp is threatened with extinction; let Beethoven lash out at the clouds with his titan's fists; whatever our own time has produced in terms of heights and depths—she grasps it all, and recounts it with a charming, maidenly wisdom. At the same time, she has raised her own standards to a degree that leaves one wondering anxiously where it all may lead. I venture no predictions. With such talents one is confronted with curtain after curtain; time lifts them one by one, and what is revealed always differs from what was expected. That one cannot contemplate such a wondrous phenomenon with indifference, that one must follow her spiritual development step by step, may be expected of all those who, in this singular time, acknowledge the natural intimate relationship of kindred spirits, past and present, rather than mere accident or chance. . . ." From Henry Pleasants, ed., *Robert Schumann, Schumann on Music* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1988), p. 122.

16. See the chart of the works of Bach that Clara performed in the online Appendix at <http://www.schillerinstitut.dk/drupal/schumann>

17. As well as Beethoven sonatas, Reich, op. cit., p. 256.

12. Ibid., p. 16.

13. Ronald Taylor, *Robert Schumann: His Life and Work* (London: Granada, 1982), pp. 185-186.

14. Wieck had all his piano students study singing, and taught them to play with a singing tone. Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann, The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press), p. 281. This is

engages a full dialogue with the singer, becoming much more than a mere subordinated accompaniment.

Let's see how Schumann's love of Bach evolved, and how it changed both his method of composing, and the quality of musical ideas in the resulting compositions.

Robert Learns from Bach

In 1817, at the age of seven, Robert began taking music and piano lessons from Baccalaureus Kuntzsch, a professor at the high school in his hometown of Zwickau. Robert became so enthusiastic about music that he made his first attempts to compose. His ability to improvise at the piano included funny musical character sketches of his friends.^{18 19}

While enrolled at the university in Leipzig to study law (due to pressure from his mother), he and a group of music-loving students met once a week to play chamber music. "In the intervals, they conversed on musical matters, especially of the old master Bach and his *Well-Tempered Clavichord*, even then a source of ardent study to Schumann, and always laid upon his piano."²⁰ He was also inspired to compose several pieces during this period.

In 1828, at the age of 17, Schumann met Clara Wieck for the first time, when the eight-year-old pianist performed in Leipzig. Her playing made such an impression on him, that he decided to drop his law studies to study piano with Clara's father, Friedrich Wieck. Living with the Wiecks, Robert continued his lessons for about a year. The damage to one of his fingers, due to practicing with a mechanical device he himself invented, eliminated the thought of becoming a concert pianist, and turned his destiny toward composition.

At the same time, in Berlin, his later musical co-conspirator, Felix Mendelssohn, grandson of the great Jewish

philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, one year younger than Schumann, erected a musical milestone, by reviving the work of Bach, as only a few of his works were still in circulation at that time. In 1829, Mendelssohn literally dusted off the manuscript of Bach's greatest choral work, *The Saint Matthew Passion*, directing the first performance (of excerpts) since Bach's death in 1750, at the Berlin Singakademie. This caused a great sensation, and reopened the eyes of the musical world to the forgotten works of this great master. Mendelssohn's friend and co-initiator of the project, the actor Eduard Devrient, would later write in his memoirs, that Mendelssohn exclaimed: "To think that it took an actor and a Jew's son to revive the greatest Christian music for the world!"²¹

As Robert would later write, "Mozart and Haydn had but a partial and one-sided knowledge of Bach. No one can guess how Bach would have influenced their productivity, had they known him in all his greatness."

Back to the young Robert. By now he had decided to fully devote himself to composing and writing about music. In 1831, he started a brief period of study of harmony and counterpoint²² (the basics of thorough bass, simple and double counterpoint, as far as canons²³) with the director of music at the Leipzig Opera, Heinrich Dorn, who would also teach counterpoint to the 12-year-old Clara, starting the year after.²⁴ But Robert also studied Bach on his own.

21. Steven P. Meyer, "Moses Mendelssohn and the Bach Tradition," www.schillerinstitute.org/fid_97-01/992_mend_spm.html

22. The art of writing two or more lines, or voices, of music designed to be in dialogue with each other, from "point against point," writing a contrary note to a given note, or point. For example, adding one, or more, counterpoint voice(s), to a well-known psalmic melody.

When writing counterpoint, the composer strives to enable each voice to be a coherent, melodic voice, in and of itself. However, through natural development of each of the voices, including the use of the inversion of musical intervals or themes, they come into conflict with each other, creating dissonances, or musical intervals that are uncomfortable, that create tension, and demand to be resolved. This creates an impetus for paradox, surprise, development, and change in the music. The art of counterpoint developed over centuries, and reached its highest point with Bach's music.

23. Thorough bass is the art of inventing an accompaniment to a given bass line, where the composer has given harmonic indications in the form of numbers representing the basic intervals to be used (for example "4" means a fourth above the given bass note.) Studying thorough bass is a good intermediate step to composing. Double counterpoint is the art of writing two lines of music which can be inverted—that is, each line can either be on top or on the bottom. Note that when inverting two lines of music, the intervals between them will be changed.

24. Clara would also take counterpoint lessons with Seigfried Dehn, a leading theorist, in 1837. Reich, op. cit., p. 215.

18. Joseph Wilhelm von Wasielewski, *Life of Robert Schumann* (Detroit Reprints in Music, Information Coordinators, 1975), pp. 17-18. Wasielewski, a musician who knew Schumann personally, was the composer's first biographer.

19. Especially through the influence of his father, Augustus, who was a bookseller and literary figure, Robert was also drawn to literature, an interest which continued throughout his life. While at school, he studied the works of Friedrich Schiller, Goethe, the Greek tragedians, and Jean Paul Richter, among others. (Schiller said of Richter, who Schumann said had a big influence on him, that he would have been worthy of admiration if he had made as good use of his riches, as other men made of their poverty.) It is from this period that Schumann began to write about musical aesthetics, and he would continue to communicate his insights into music, through his writings.

20. Wasielewski, op. cit.



Wikipedia Commons/Peter Zeliznak

Robert Schumann wrote that “Mozart and Haydn had but a partial and one-sided knowledge of Bach. No one can guess how Bach would have influenced their productivity, had they known him in all his greatness.” Left, Franz Josef Haydn; right, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Then, already in 1832, Schumann stopped taking lessons from Dorn, because “my entire being rebels against every external influence, and I have to discover things on my own for the first time, in order to assimilate them and put them in their proper place.”²⁵

In a letter to Kuntzsch on July 27, 1832, Schumann wrote:

A few months ago I finished my theoretical course with Dorn, having got as far as canons, which I have been studying by myself after Marpurg, who is a capital theorist. Otherwise Sebastian Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier* is my grammar, and is certainly the best. I have taken the fugues one by one, and dissected them down to their minutest parts. The advantage of this is great, and seems to have a strengthening moral

effect upon one’s whole system; for Bach was a thorough man, all over, there is nothing sickly or stunted about him, and his works seem written for eternity. Now I must learn to read scores and study instrumentation. . . .²⁶

Schumann called the *WTC* the “book of books,” which he later recommended that his students play every day. As Schumann’s first biographer put it, concerning the Winter of 1832-33, “He especially and eagerly practiced counterpoint, urged thereto by the assiduous study of the great master Bach.”

Robert was also inspired by the pedagogical sessions he had with Clara, even before they were married. He writes in his diary that he thought up a motif (G-C-D-G’) while he and Clara played four-handed piano together, sight-reading through six of Bach’s fugues. Transposed down a fifth, it became the bass counter-

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25. Cited in Peter F. Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius* (Boston: Northeastern University Press), 1985, p. 88; from Robert Schumann, *Jugendbriefe*, pp. 168-169.

26. May Herbert, ed., *Early Letters of Robert Schumann* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1888), at <http://www.archive.org>, p. 179.

The Revolution of Bach's 'Well-Tempered Clavier'

Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* (1722) has been referred to as the "Old Testament" of Classical piano music. (The New Testament being Beethoven's piano sonatas.) Book I of the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (BWV 846-69) contained 24 preludes and fugues, one for each of the major and minor keys.

A second book, *Twenty-four New Preludes and Fugues*, which repeated the procedure with 24 new compositions, was written between 1740 and 1744 (BWV 870-93).

Bach used this work to explore, in depth, the new musical possibilities that arose as a result of the development of a new system of tuning keyboard instruments, called well-tempering, which could give these fixed-note instruments increased ability to play multi-voiced, or polyphonic music, as if there were different species of human voices singing together, with similar flexibility and irony.

In 1691, the German organist and mathematician Andreas Werckmeister (1645-1706) published a treatise entitled, "Musical Temperament or ... mathematical instruction how to produce ... a well-tempered intonation on the clavier." Bach, Werckmeister, and others who supported the well-tempered system, rejected the previously held idea that musical intervals in the physical universe, had to conform to abstract mathematical proportions. This idea had put a straitjacket on the musical universe, limiting it to only those keys in which "pure" intervals could be played.

The new movement, of which Bach was a leader, created systems in which it would be possible to play music in all keys. The "comma" (the part of the octave that is left over if only mathematically "pure" musical intervals are used) was distributed unequally throughout all of the keys. (Different keys had different-sized intervals, giving each key its own nuance or "color," creating a "musical palette," which is lost in the modern practice of "equal-tempering," where all half-notes have the same value.) It were then possible both to write music in every key, and to modulate—to move from one key to any another—within the same piece of music, in a way not possible before.

The musical universe was liberated from a system

centered in the key-in-itself, or its closest neighbors, to being a system that was expanded to encompass all of the major and minor keys. In addition, Bach's use of the Lydian interval, previously banned, and other lawfully created dissonances, served as a musical transcendental bridge, to allow musical development to supercede even the 24-key system.

Musical action was transformed from being limited to change within a few keys, to becoming action based on the unlimited development of musical ideas throughout the entire "24-key-plus" musical universe, where musical development takes advantage of explicit and implicit relations between a whole range of different keys; where the possibilities to create musical change, transformation, paradox, and development are increased to the maximum.

"As any listener to a Bach composition can easily recognize," wrote Bruce Director in *New Federalist*, May 28, 2001, "the position of any note, is an ambiguity, that becomes less ambiguous, as the composition unfolds, and the intervals so generated, and their inversions, are heard with respect to the well-tempered system of *bel canto* polyphony as a whole. It is the change, with respect to the whole well-tempered system, that determines the notes, not the notes that determine the change."

Just before Bach, other composers had experimented with writing single pieces which modulated throughout all the keys, or with writing different pieces for all 24 keys. But Bach's musical genius surpassed them. Bach-family biographer, Karl Geiringer, writes that Bach realized that the new system could revolutionize the method of fugal composition. Before, change was only possible by introducing new musical subjects or "counter-subjects," or variations of the theme. Now, change was possible by writing developmental sections, called episodes, which would transport the theme from one key to another, with the establishment of the new key being solidified by the theme being announced in the new key. A greater "oneness" existed than ever before, because the material for the episodes was taken directly from the main theme, or the theme's counterpoint.

Bach continued to develop his fugal compositional method, later creating such masterpieces of creativity as the *Musical Offering*, and the *Art of the Fugue*.

From "Bach, Mozart and the 'Musical Midwife,'" by Michelle Rasmussen (www.schillerinstitut.dk/bach.html).

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point for his 1833 “Impromptus,” variations upon one of Clara’s themes.²⁷ In an autobiographical sketch, Schumann records that the “Impromptus” were the “result of the stimulation” of studying Bach’s works during the 1830s. There, he experimented with different contrapuntal principles of change, becoming “a musical realization of what we will soon encounter as the historical imperative of Schumann’s [literary] criticism: the invocation of the past as an inspirational source for a ‘new poetic age.’”²⁸

This, then, would become the idea expressed in the manifesto he wrote in 1834, upon launching his *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (*New Magazine for Music*). The goal was “to recall the old times and their works with great emphasis, thus to draw attention to the fact that fresh artistic beauties can be strengthened only at such pure sources, and then to attack as inartistic the works of the present generation—since they proceed from the praises of superficial virtuosos.”²⁹ This is the central idea of any renaissance, or re-birth, and it was this idea which became both the guiding principle of Schumann’s intellectual development, and the principle he brought to both his listeners, and his readers.

This magazine would also serve as the forum he used to wage his “Davidsbündler” battles against the musical “Philistines,” who only prized virtuoso effects, or form only, without deep content. Schumann, with help from Mendelssohn, and later Brahms, would wield his musical and literary pen against Richard Wagner, Franz Liszt, and the other Romantics.³⁰

‘The History of the Fugue’

From 1836 to 1838, Robert began his second phase of contrapuntal study. In 1837, there were two periods in which he worked on mastering counterpoint.³¹ It was during this period that he copied Bach’s masterpiece

The Art of the Fugue in order to study it from the inside. In October, he studied Marpurg’s treatise on fugues³² and also delved into Bach’s organ fugues. Yet, he was not satisfied with his own attempt to write a fugue, so he went back to his studies, which intensified by Nov. 2 into a *Fugenpassion* (fugal passion), followed two days later by a *Fugenwuth* (fugal frenzy).

The culmination was the *Fugengeschichte* (*The History of the Fugue*)—a 15-page manuscript containing Schumann’s own examples of fugal techniques taken from Bach and Georg Muffat, and quotes from Marpurg’s treatise.^{33 34}

This author has obtained a copy of the still-unpublished *The History of the Fugue* from the Robert Schumann Haus, in his birthplace, Zwickau. The first chance to gaze at Robert’s own hand-written musical notation from his examples of fugal themes and expositions, his crossing out of examples he was not satisfied with, and his own textual pedagogical notations, was an especially moving experience.

It has often been suggested that *The History of the Fugue* was written by Robert as a pedagogical workbook to teach Clara fugal composition.³⁵ Whether for Clara, for Robert himself, or others, as one plays through the fugal themes and full or partial expositions contained in the manuscript, one can relive Schumann’s search for the secrets contained in Bach’s art of counterpoint. (An exposition is the beginning of a fugue, which contains, in succession, the entrance of the theme in all of the individual voices of that particular fugue, and the simultaneous counterpoint in the non-theme voices, until the cadence³⁶ after the entrance of the last voice.) He notes which themes are good, and should be developed later, and which are not good enough to be a seed crystal for contrapuntal development.

In one case (see **Figure 1**), he develops the same theme in three different ways—that is, the theme is the same, but when he comes to the entrance of the second voice, known as the “answer,” he “tries on” three different sizes for the first interval. The theme, as heard in the

27. “Romance variée,” Op. 3, John Daverio, *Robert Schumann: Herald of a “New Poetic Age”* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 100.

28. Invertible counterpoint in No. 3; Clara’s theme as a migrating *cantus firmus* in Nos. 4 and 8; and the finale, plus the transformation of Clara’s theme throughout. Daverio, op. cit., pp. 108-109.

29. “Schumann and his Music,” by Melvin Maddocks and the editors of Time-Life, record notes, 1977, Time-Life Records, Alexandria, Virginia, p. 10, and David Shavin, “Rebecca Mendelssohn Dirichlet’s Complex Domain,” *EIR*, June 11, 2010.

30. For more about the Davidsbündler, see: <http://davidsbueundler.free-hostia.com/march.htm>

31. Material for this section is taken from Daverio, op. cit., p. 163.

32. Marpurg wrote his *Abhandlungen von der Fuge* in 1753.

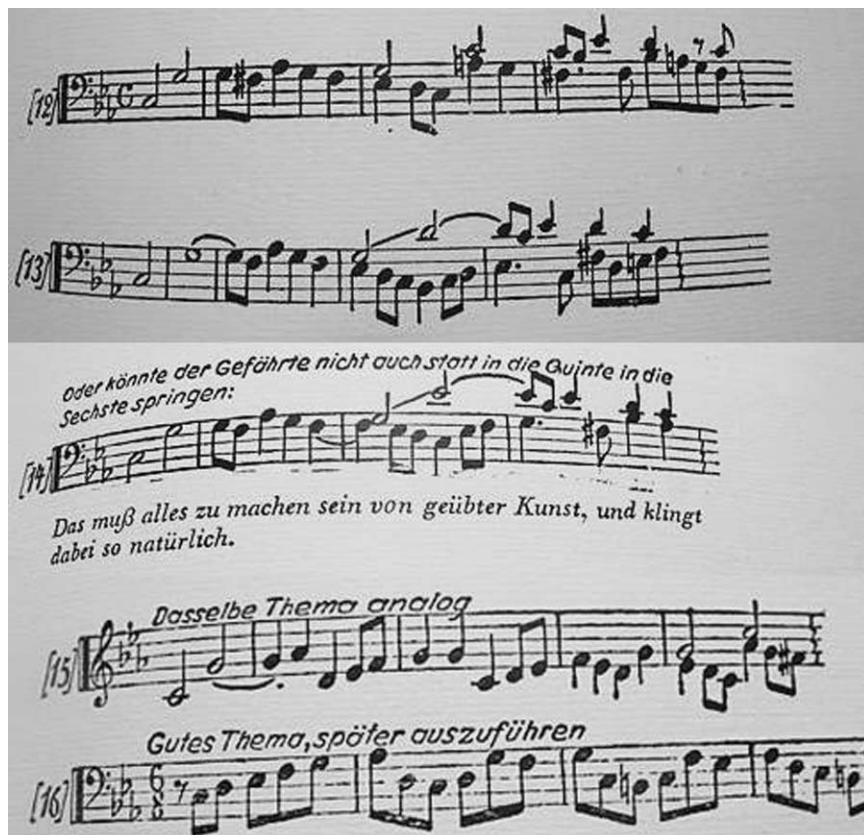
33. Daverio, op. cit., p. 162.

34. Georg Muffat (1653-1704) was a Baroque composer. He wrote *Regulae Concentuum Partiturae*, a treatise on thorough bass and counterpoint.

35. Daverio, op. cit., p. 162.

36. A cadence is a temporary harmonically pleasing resting place, like a comma in a sentence, signaling the end of a section of music.

FIGURE 1



Boetticher, 1941

first voice, begins by jumping up a fifth, from “c” to “g.” When the second voice enters, he experiments with reshaping the first interval, first writing a fourth up, from “g” to “c” (an inversion of the fifth which completes the octave from “c” to “c”), then trying again with a fifth up, from “g” to “d” (another type of inversion which duplicates the size of the original interval), and finally, with a sixth, from “g” to “e’.”

The fun part is that the counterpoint changes each time—that is, the continuation of the first voice, simultaneously heard while the second voice is playing the theme. The change of the size of the interval which begins the second voice, changes the musical “field,” and, therefore, the counterpoint also has to change. In example 16, Schumann writes a variation of this same theme, now in a triplet setting, which he thinks is good, writing that he should develop it later into a full fugue. In this case, when the second voice enters, he chooses to repeat the interval of a fifth up, the middle example explained above, for the “answer.”

Another thing that struck me is that Schumann experiments with the different contrapuntal principles of

From Schumann’s “The History of the Fugue,” examples 12-16. Examples 12-14 show the same theme with three different answers. The first interval of each of the second voices increases in size. Notice that the continuation of the first voice is therefore changed.

Schumann’s notations, corresponding to the numbering of the lines, are:

14. [above the musical line] Or could the companion [the answer] not jump to the sixth, rather than the fifth?

[below] To be done skillfully, in which case it will all sound perfectly natural.

15. The same theme, analogous

16. Good theme, to be developed later

change within his own tonal language. In other words, one can clearly hear that they are written by Schumann, and not by Bach.

And Schumann was explicit that contrapuntal devices were to be used in the service of making living, beautiful music, not dead, mechanical, almost “mathematical,” pieces. “The best fugue will always be the one that the public takes—for a Strauss waltz; in other words, where the artistic roots are covered as are those of a flower, so that we only perceive the blossom,” he wrote in a review of Mendelssohn’s “Preludes and Fugues,” Op. 35, in 1837.³⁷

Most of Schumann’s difficult-to-read handwriting in *The History of the Fugue* is deciphered by Wolfgang Boetticher in his book *Robert Schumann. Einführung in Persönlichkeit und Werk* (1941),³⁸ which may be found in the Internet appendix to this article (<http://www.schillerinstitut.dk/drupal/schumann>).

37. Daverio, op. cit., p. 309.

38. (Berlin: Der Deutschen Robert Schumann Gesellschaft, 1942), pp. 604-607.

In a letter to Clara during this second period of counterpoint study, Robert documented, “I give several hours daily to the serious study of Bach and Beethoven, outside my own studies.”³⁹ And in 1838, he wrote, “Bach is my daily bread. I refresh myself in his presence and perpetually draw new ideas from him.”⁴⁰ The love of Bach shared by Schumann and Bach-reviver Mendelssohn, was an important part of their friendship, which aided the process of reviving the great master’s work. “Mendelssohn had a lot of Bach’s great chorales copied for me, and I was just raving about them when C— arrived,” he tells Clara in 1839.^{41 42}

And how did Schumann’s Bach studies develop his ability to compose? In his early compositions, in addition to what was mentioned before on the independent role of the piano in many of his 1840 songs, you can see Bach’s influence by the way the inner, contrapuntal lines weave their way through his piano music.⁴³

To conclude this section, look over Schumann’s shoulder as he writes down his thoughts in 1838:

...I feel that my path is fairly solitary; no acclaiming crowd inspires me to fresh effort, but I keep my eyes fixed on my great examples, Bach and Beethoven, whose far-off images give un-failing help and encouragement.... The human heart is often a strange spectacle in which sorrow



Felix Mendelssohn was a close collaborator of the Schumanns, sharing with them the project to revive the works of Bach. Referring to himself and collaborator Eduard Devrient, an actor, Mendelssohn said: “To think that it took an actor and a Jew’s son to revive the greatest Christian music for the world!”

and joy are strangely blended. You have still to expect my best work; for I am conscious of a certain inward strength, and can even go so far as to say that I believe the science of sound, considered as the soul’s speech, to be still in its infancy. May my good genius inspire me, and bring this undeveloped science to maturity.⁴⁴

1845: The Year of ‘Fugal Passion’

Robert and Clara’s 1840 “honeymoon” studies of Bach were not abandoned, but continued to be a source of creative insight. 1845 became an intensive period of Bach studies and contrapuntal composition for the both of them, after Robert came back from accompanying Clara on a tour to Russia suffering from a serious nervous condition. “I lost every melody as

soon as I conceived it,” he wrote. “My mental ear was overstrained.”⁴⁵ What did he do to renew his creative powers? He went back to his source of inspiration—Bach. From his diary in January 1845, the beginning of Robert’s year of “fugal passion,” we learn that their fugue studies, (which included a counterpoint treatise by Luigi Cherubini, 1760-1842) were moving industriously ahead. And from Clara’s diary:

Today we began contrapuntal studies that gave me much pleasure, despite all the trouble, because I soon saw what I had not believed possible—I wrote a fugue and then several more since we are continuing the studies on a daily basis. I cannot thank Robert enough for his patience with me and am doubly happy when something is successful since he can view it as

39. Dr. Karl Storck, ed., Hannah Bryant, trans., *Letters of Robert Schumann* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), p. 191.

40. Taylor, op. cit., p. 71.

41. Herbert, op. cit., *Early Letters of Robert Schumann*, Oct. 10, 1839, p. 294.

42. The Schumanns and Mendelssohns were in close touch for 12 years, with regular contact during 1841-44 when they all lived in Leipzig. Mendelssohn also conducted performances of Schumann’s works. Alan Walker and Frank Cooper, *Robert Schumann: The Man and His Music* (New York: Arno Press, 1979), p. 290.

43. Ibid., p. 298.

44. Storck, op. cit., pp. 112-13, in a letter to Simonin de Sire on Feb. 8, 1838.

45. Wasielewski, op. cit., p. 148.

his work as well. He himself is in the midst of a fugue passion.⁴⁶

Schumann was conscious of the fact that the fugue passion period also caused a “completely new manner of composing,” as he put it in his diary. Whereas before, he drew his inspiration from improvising at the piano, “a mode of labor prejudicial to the creative process from within,”⁴⁷ he now developed a reflective thought process to create his musical ideas, “inventing and working out everything in my head,”⁴⁸ before putting his hands on the keys. “The most important thing is for the musician to purify his inner ear,” was the way he phrased his recommendation to musicians in 1852.⁴⁹ Author John Daverio writes of the musical effects of this new type of creative process: “Simply put, the linear development of a melodic entity begins to recede in favour of a rich web of simultaneously elaborated motivic combinations,”⁵⁰ as a result of Schumann’s contrapuntal studies. This description also gives a hint as to the essence of Bach’s genius, the understanding of which would develop Schumann’s own creative powers—the ability to create a beautiful, unified, yet dynamically changing musical process, consisting of consecutive musical development of the different voices, and of the whole, horizontally over time, at the same time that the individual voices simultaneously interact with each other as if in a drama.

Reflecting on his own changing thought processes during the transitional year of 1845, Schumann wrote to Mendelssohn on Dec. 5, 1845:

For me it is special and wonderful that almost every motif which forms within me already has the qualities which allow it to be used in many contrapuntal combinations, and in this I am not thinking in the least of formulating themes which lend themselves to development in this strict medium in this or that manner. They come

of themselves, without reflection, they are quite natural and spontaneous.

Yet at some point during the next year, when the change in Schumann’s compositional method from that of improvising at the piano, to working with musical ideas as thought objects, was more advanced, he recalled that in 1832, he had agreed with the statement: “I believe that the more an artist uses imagination, the more he is an artist. The more he uses reflection, the less he is an artist. Miltitz.” Looking back on this 15 years later, he ironically pointed out “then Bach would have had a bad nature.”⁵¹

To concentrate on reliving Bach’s method of contrapuntal composition, Robert wrote a series of works. In February and March, he again wrote “fugal passion” in the family diary. After a year of frustrated attempts to compose, he wrote his “Four Fugues,” followed by more ambitious musical projects. The G. Henle Verlag edition of these works (Gerhard Weinberger, ed., *Robert Schumann, Werke für Orgel oder Pedalklavier*, 1986) includes the following introduction:

At the beginning of 1845, Robert Schumann, together with Clara, embarked on an intensive course of contrapuntal studies in Dresden. It had long been his goal to obtain complete command of the polyphonic⁵² style, and he pursued this goal tirelessly. His demand to apply the highest artistic standards in the creation of contrapuntal forms arose from a deep, lifelong veneration of Johann Sebastian Bach. The results are apparent in several groups of works written within a relatively short period beginning in 1845, including the Six Studies in Canon Form Op. 56 for pedal piano, the Four Sketches Op. 58 for pedal piano, the Six Fugues Op. 60 for organ or pedal piano, and the Four Fugues Op. 72 for piano.

According to Clara, Robert was convinced that he had created “something entirely new” in these compositions. Lo and behold, the last piece in the book is entitled “Six Fugues on the Name BACH,” Op. 60.

46. Cited in Reich, op. cit., p. 243.

47. Wasielewski, op. cit., p. 72.

48. Entry in Schumann’s diary, *Tagebuch II*, 1846, p. 402, cited in Eric Frederick Jensen, *Schumann* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 284. However, Schumann also reported that he did not compose his 1840 songs at the piano, but in his head, while standing or walking.

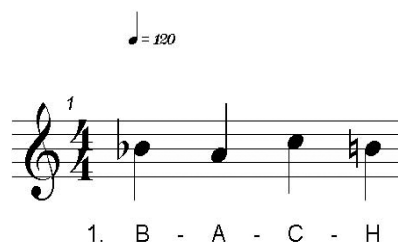
49. Ibid., May 10, 1852, p. 284.

50. Daverio, op. cit., pp. 305-306.

51. Boetticher, op. cit., p. 227.

52. Polyphonic means “many voices” woven together through counterpoint.

FIGURE 2



Bach's musical signature. In Germany, the American "B-flat" is called B, and the American "B-natural" is called "H."

FIGURE 3



The fifth variation from Schumann's *Six Fugues*, Op. 60, on the letters B-A-C-H. Note that the first four notes are B-A-C-H.

The introduction includes:

The *Six Fugues* op. 60 on the letters B-A-C-H (the pitches B-flat-A-C-B in German parlance) [Figure 2] were composed between 12 March ("evening: ideas for Bach fugues") and 22 November 1845 ("completion of sixth fugue"). . . . Schumann himself put great store in his B-A-C-H fugues, as is apparent from a letter he wrote to his publisher: "This is a work which occupied me for the whole of the previous year in an effort to make it worthy of the lofty name it bears. It is also a work which, I believe, is likely to outlive my other creations the longest." The overall conception, the thematic material and the extremely high quality of the writing all derive from Bach; this fugue cycle represents the end of a developmental phase which culminated in Schumann's study of Bach's music (the six fugues may be viewed as directly modeled on the "Art of the Fugue") and of the fugue per se. Nevertheless, the fugues are by no means derivative stylistic copies, but effective "character fugues" in the Romantic vein. In the history of organ music, they represent the earliest significant organ compositions on the name B-A-C-H. . . . [See Figure 3.]

Though Schumann wrote that he had worked on this piece for a year, "in an effort to make it worthy of the lofty name it bears," and he believed that it would be "likely to outlive my other creations the longest," ironically, today, the composition is almost totally forgotten.

The Second and Third Symphonies

How did his 1845 counterpoint studies and new method of composition affect his other types of compositions? The first major work he subsequently wrote can give the listener a glimpse of the answer. At the very end of 1845, though still suffering from "melancholia,"⁵³ Schumann started feeling the excitement of new musical ideas bubbling forth. "Symphoniaca," he wrote on Dec. 14 in the house diary, heralding the beginning of what became known as his Second Symphony.

Listen to the slow *Adagio espressivo* movement.⁵⁴ One author, who called it one of Schumann's finest, suggests that "the eight-measure theme of great beauty resembles, in its melodic structure, the aria 'Erbarme Dich'⁵⁵ from J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*." He relates that, "When Brahms later analyzed this movement, he discovered a reference to Bach's 'Musical Offering,'"⁵⁶ a sign of reverence in Classical music, as in Schumann's variations on "B-A-C-H."

Though this author has no documentation about what Brahms was referring to, he may very well have

53. Schumann himself wrote that he was in a depressed mental state while writing the first movements of this symphony, and only felt healthy again while writing the finale. The process of creative concentration needed to write the symphony helped restore his mental health.

54. For example, George Szell's version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Y0qFrngw_k. A free copy of the score is available at the International Music Score Library Project: [http://imslp.org/wiki/Symphony_No.2,_Op.61_\(Schumann,_Robert\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Symphony_No.2,_Op.61_(Schumann,_Robert))

55. "Erbarme Dich" score, International Music Score Library Project: [http://imslp.org/wiki/St._Matthew_Passion_BWV_244_\(Bach,_Johann_Sebastian\)#Selections](http://imslp.org/wiki/St._Matthew_Passion_BWV_244_(Bach,_Johann_Sebastian)#Selections)

56. Ostwald, op. cit., p. 205.

been thinking about what happens in the middle of the movement,⁵⁷ where the orchestra softly begins a double fugue, that is, a fugue with two different themes, in double counterpoint, where each of two counterpoint voices can either be on the top, or the bottom. The first fugal theme begins by hopping up in thirds and then hops a large interval down, as does the first part of Bach's "Musical Offering" theme. Right there, Schumann's second fugal theme begins, descending chromatically

(by half steps), as does the second part of the "Musical Offering" (Figures 4 and 5). After 12 measures, the strings continue playing the double fugue, while the wind and brass instruments start playing the theme from the very beginning of the movement, marked *espressivo*, now becoming the counterpoint to the double fugue. The movement continues with the dynamic development of these three intertwining themes enveloping the listener.

Here, as in other examples of fugal development in Schumann, he does not create a stiff, academic, dusty treatise, but a moving testament to his search for creative expression in music.

Listen, at the same time, to the fourth movement, marked *Feierlich*, of the Third Symphony, known as the "Rhenish Symphony," written as a musical description of the Cologne Cathedral.⁵⁸ Hear the deeply sensitive fugal development, started by the trombones, the diminution of the theme (the theme played much faster, that is foreshortened), which itself becomes a counterpoint, and then played in canon, creating a "cathedral of sound for us—with its powerfully sustained religious mood."⁵⁹

These are just a few examples of the new kinds of compositions Schumann wrote from 1845-52, which some have called his most creative period, even in light of his wonderful earlier year of song, his piano compo-

FIGURE 4



Bach's Royal Theme from his Musical Offering.

FIGURE 5



The two "double fugue" themes from Schumann's Second Symphony, Adagio espressivo. The first theme is similar to the first part of Bach's Royal Theme, and the second theme is similar to the second part of Bach's theme.

sitions, etc. It would include his year of chamber music, and other great inventions.

'A Textbook for the Composing of Fugues'

Parallel to the aforementioned *The History of the Fugue* from 1837, Schumann wrote a *Textbook for the Composing of Fugues*, completed in September 1848. In the published excerpt, he briefly describes the origin of the term "fugue," and stresses that fugal compositional principles are crucial to every masterpiece, whether written in fugal form or not:

The fugue as we now know it, is, so to speak, the keystone of counterpoint. . . . [Cherubini calls the fugue the] veritable archetype of all musical composition. And in truth, to the extent that they proceed from the very deepest understanding of the art form, practically all masterpieces—including those in a somewhat freer mode—may be traced back to the Fugue form.

57. At letter "O" in the score.

58. There are several performances on YouTube.

59. Walker and Cooper, op. cit., p. 299.

He then discusses how a fugue is composed, and the importance of choosing a good theme. (See box.)

In addition to the fugues and *fugato* sections which

may be heard in Schumann's published music, it is revealed in the sketchbooks covering his later works, that he would even take themes to be used in non-fugal set-

Schumann's 'Textbook for The Composing of Fugues'

Schumann used Fr. W. Marpurg, Abhandlung von der Fuge, 1806; and L. Cherubini, Theorie des Kontrapunkts und der Fuge, 1835, as models for his textbook, according to Boetticher (1942). However, the following crucial sections, differing from similar texts, were written by Schumann, and are translated from excerpts found in Boetticher's book:

The Teaching of the Fugue: ... The word *Fuga*, which, in Classical Latin, means "flight," and in medieval Latin, "chase," as in the hunt, or pursuit, is already to be found in compositions of the 15th and 16th Centuries [marginal note by Schumann—"Source?"]. The fugue as we now know it, is, so to speak, the keystone of counterpoint. It is here, first and foremost, that one finds applied the lessons so derived, as it may be considered the transition from the strict style to the free one, and moreover, allows possibilities which one would be entitled to expect from a complex art form. In the words of Cherubini, "everything a proper composer needs to know will appear in the Fugue in its rightful place; it is the veritable archetype of all musical composition." And in truth, to the extent that they proceed from the very deepest understanding of the art form, practically all masterpieces, including those in a somewhat freer mode, may be traced back to the Fugue form.

In another sense, [the term] Fugue refers to a piece of music elaborated in two or more voices, based on a Theme, in which the Theme appears in various places (in different voices) and retains its value right unto the end. The Theme may also be called Subject, or Dux (Leader). The Theme having once been stated, it will be repeated by the second voice in the Dominant of the main key (although this may vary at times, depending on the first note of the Dux). This re-exposition is called Answer or *Comes* (that which accom-

panies). The Dux will be set in counterpoint to the Answer, which counterpoint refers to a counter-harmony. The Answer having said its part—in a fugue with several voices—the Theme of the Dux will thereupon enter in the same position in the scale; fourthly, the Answer will enter, etc. ... All four having ended, there will begin a small interlude, freer, which may, though, be taken from the Theme; this is known as the middle-entry. Following which, whichever voice has not uttered the theme for the longest time will take it up afresh, as a new Answer in a new, though related key.

As the [fugue] proceeds, one attempts to bring the Answers ever closer to the Question (after the necessary, freer middle-entry) ... and finally closes with a Pedalpoint. ...

In relation to the Theme: how great, or slight, the effect may be, will ever depend on the quality of the theme itself. Accordingly, the student's greatest care shall go to [the finding of] a good theme. All the skill poured into a work may go to waste, if the basic theme be unsound, or if the underpinning of a substantial basic theme be lacking. However lovely, perhaps, this or that motive, it may prove an unsuitable Fugue Theme. The rigor of this style calls, above all, for a seriousness, a vigor and a dignity of thought—although it is yet a domain open to playfulness, yea even humor. The weak and sentimental lies farthest removed from this style. ...

The student must also see to it that the Theme not exceed an octave's range. ... Little is to be achieved though, by rule. Of the essence is that the Theme lie within a natural and, in fact, middle range of the voice that states it. ... The counter-subjects of a Fugue may appear at the same time as the main one. That being said, a still greater effect will be attained by introducing the counter-subject little by little, bearing in mind as well, that in order to apprehend two themes and their elaboration, considerable ability will be required of the listener's ear. ...

In relation to the Pedalpoint: This is indeed the place for remote modulations, whereupon the Theme will promptly follow through each of the voices.

tings—a waltz, for example—and investigate their contrapuntal potential as fugues, as part of his compositional process. (See the Internet appendix: “The fugue problem.”)⁶⁰

Schumann’s insight about how crucial fugal compositional principles are to all Classical music masterpieces, is key. Working with the fugal form, based on the contrapuntal development of a single theme, increases the power of the composer to create beautiful music which forms both what LaRouche refers to as “a unity of effect,” or in Plato’s terms, “the One,” and constantly changing, constantly developing music, or “the Many.” A unified composition, which is dynamically changing, in surprising, dramatic ways, is created by taking a single theme, and changing it by looking at its reflection in a non-linear mirror, which leads to developing the theme, itself, in different creative ways, in addition to counterposing other voices to it, which are beautiful in their own right, but are musical ideas born to be played simultaneously with the theme (the counterpoint).⁶¹ Transitional passages, called episodes, based on aspects of the theme or counterpoint, or related new ideas, add to the fun. All causing the music to shine with sparks of provocative paradox and irony—that which really challenges the listeners to be creative themselves.

Concentrating on the anti-entropic⁶² development of a single, simple theme, allows the listener to marvel at the process of development itself. When the theme is played at the end, although it is the same, it is different, because of the development it has undergone. The particular type of development becomes the musical idea of that piece.

The rigorous challenge of composing based on fugal development of a single theme, like Plato’s “the Same” and “the Other,” hones the composer’s ability to do this in all other, freer forms, whether using specific fugal-type development, or not. The potential for dramatic, willfull, anti-entropic development gives Classical music its ability to reflect the developmental

potential of the human mind, the most crucial element of the entire constantly changing universe known to man.

The joyous celebration of the creative powers of the human mind itself, is what makes Classical music so special.

Clara Schumann’s Compositions

And what about Clara? Her compositional skills had now advanced to the point at which she could also write fugues—based on themes of Bach, and of her husband. During that same 1845 “fugal passion” year, Clara wrote three, as yet unpublished, four-part fugues based on themes from Bach’s *WTC*, Book II (Fugues No. 7 in E-flat major BWV 876, No. 9 in E major BWV 878, and 16 in G minor BWV 885), in the space of a few days in February. In fact, two of them are based on the very Bach fugues which Mozart wrote out for string quartet, when he was learning from Bach while attending Baron van Swieten’s musical salon 63 years earlier—fugue No. 7 in E-flat major, and No. 9 in E major. This author has obtained manuscript copies of them, written out by the modern-day Dutch pianist Jozef De Beenhouwer, who recorded Clara’s complete works for piano.

Think of performing a concert expressing the historical sweep of compositions based on these same works. The program would consist of a succession of Bach’s original fugues for keyboard, Mozart’s string quartet versions, where one can hear the counterpoint between the voices much more clearly, followed by Clara Schumann’s fugues based on Bach’s themes, with her own development.

A true dialogue of the masters, and a wonderful example of what LaRouche and others have referred to as “the simultaneity of eternity”!—where humanity in physical space-time, and in eternity, becomes one.

Clara’s Bach-based fugues were immediately followed by three fugues based on themes Robert thought up for her.⁶³ He was so proud of Clara’s musical development, that he arranged for three of her fugues to be published. “I would like to surprise my wife with the Preludes and Fugues for her birthday on Sept. 13,” he wrote to the publisher Breitkopf & Härtel. In an earlier letter to the publisher C.F. Peter, he wrote that Clara may have been the first woman to compose in “this dif-

60. Boetticher, op. cit.

61. For an interactive presentation of some of the different contrapuntal principles of change, see “The Musical Offering, A Musical Pedagogical Workshop by J.S. Bach,” or “The Musical Geometry of Bach’s Puzzle Canons,” by this author, at: www.schillerinstitut.dk/moweb/musical_offering.htm

62. Anti-entropic, a term used by Lyndon LaRouche to characterize our universe, and especially healthy human societal development, is the opposite of entropic or going towards deathly equilibrium or breakdown.

63. Clara also wrote an “F-sharp Minor Prelude and Fugue” at this time. Reich, op. cit., p. 230.



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Robert Schumann's music room in his home in Zwickau, which is now a museum.

ficult genre." They were published as her Op. 16, and included preludes she wrote before each fugue.

Just a few months later, Clara composed her greatest work, her four-movement piano trio, Op. 17.⁶⁴ The development section of the last movement is a *fugato* (a fugal expositional development of themes in non-fugal surroundings). She wrote, "There is no greater joy than composing something oneself and then listening to it," although she did not think it came up to the same level as the work of her male colleagues, "There are some nice passages in the trio and I believe it is also fairly successful as far as form is concerned, but naturally it is still women's work, which always

64. Ibid., p. 244. When hearing of the untimely death of composer Fanny Mendelssohn, Felix's sister, Clara wrote that she had intended to dedicate the work to her.

lacks force and occasionally invention."⁶⁵

Yet, the Schumanns' good friend Mendelssohn was especially impressed by her achievement, and much later, the great violinist Joseph Joachim wrote to her, "I recollect a *fugato* in the last movement and remember that Mendelssohn once had a big laugh because I would not believe that a woman could have composed something so sound and serious."⁶⁶

This would remain the only composition on such a scale that she would write. Giving Robert's compositional process first priority,⁶⁷ providing for her many children after his death, through her music teaching, and the resumption of her concert career, hindered further development of her own compositional expression.⁶⁸ Yet, she had tasted the sweetness produced by the development of her creative powers. After one of her last compositions, her "Six Songs," Op. 23, written in 1853, she would write, "There is nothing that surpasses the joy of creative activity, even if only for those hours of self-forgetfulness in which one breathes solely in the realm of tones."⁶⁹

Her compositional insight was of extreme importance to both her husband and to Johannes Brahms, who sent almost every piece he wrote to her for evaluation, greatly respecting her judgment. She and Brahms would also edit editions of Robert Schumann's works.

Robert and the 'St. John Passion'

Robert Schumann also promoted Bach in ways other than through his own compositions. He revealed in an 1849 letter that he had organized a concert society to play the forgotten works of Bach and others:

65. R. Larry Todd, *Fanny Hensel: The Other Mendelssohn* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. xi.

66. Joachim, *Briefe*, 2:79, cited in Reich, op. cit., p. 216.

67. Robert wrote in 1843: "Clara has written a number of small pieces that show a musical and tender invention that she has never attained before. But to have children and a husband who is always living in the realms of imagination do not go together with composing. She cannot work at it regularly and I am often disturbed to think how many profound ideas are lost because she cannot work them out." Reich, op. cit., p. 215.

68. One of her last works, written in 1853, would, in fact, be "Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann," Op. 20. Reich, op. cit., p. 112.

69. Six Lieder from "Jucunde" by Hermann Rollett. Reich, op. cit., p. 215.



Dirk Goldhahn

The St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, where Bach was musical director for 27 years. Robert Schumann sought collaboration from the current musical director to perform Bach's "St. John Passion" in 1851.

"For about a year now I have been running a similar concert society, which affords me the delight of hearing the works of Palestrina, Bach, and various neglected compositions." In the same letter he compares Bach's *St. John* and *St. Matthew* Passions, writing that he thinks that the *St. John Passion* is "much bolder, more powerful and poetical . . . What terseness, what inspiration, especially in the choruses, and what consummate art!"⁷⁰

70. Storck, op. cit., pp. 259-260, letter to Director D.G. Otten, April 2, 1849. Here, Schumann also refers to "genuine music lovers who care about Bach, Palestrina, Beethoven's later quartets, etc." Another reference to the value he placed on Bach, and, also, Beethoven's late works, is found in a 1849 letter to Franz Liszt, after a dispute caused by Liszt's denigrating remarks about Mendelssohn, at a party held at Schumann's house: "And really, you know, our little group at Leipzig was not so bad, including as it did Mendelssohn, Hiller, and Bennett; at least, we did not

Reminiscent of Felix Mendelssohn's 1829 revival of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Robert Schumann organized a performance of the *St. John Passion*, for the first time outside of the Protestant churches of Leipzig, in April 1851, in predominantly Catholic Düsseldorf. Calling it "a treasure probably buried over 100 years," Schumann wrote in a letter asking for help to publicize the performance:

Yesterday's performance was the first bigger one that has ever occurred of this piece. The *St. Matthew Passion* has been performed here and there (in Berlin and Leipzig, also in Breslau, I believe), but the *St. John Passion* only a few times in Leipzig by the St. Thomas Church's choir, but not the complete version, and generally only a small performance. Steering the attention of the German art world to this—one of the most profound and perfected works of Bach—is an endeavor that I would like to contribute to. . . .

The significance of the performance was also its effect in helping to bring Bach's sacred music into the concert hall, to enable music lovers of all faiths to hear this great work. In January 1851, Schumann had contacted the cantor of Leipzig's St. Thomas Church, where Bach had been musical director for 27 years, in order to borrow orchestral parts, and for suggestions about performance practice. During the performance, there were probably 180-200 choristers, including 50 boys who sang the chorales, and other singers from nearby towns.

Schumann's own conducting notations, such as tempi, changes in volume, and how he handled the continuo sections, are preserved on every page of the score he used for the performance. There, it may also be seen how he dealt with instruments no longer in use, such as the viola da gamba. The former director of the Schumann

compare unfavourably with the Parisians, Viennese, and Berliners. If a common trait distinguishes our compositions as a group, call it philistinism or what you will, all artistic epochs show a similar phenomenon. Take Bach, Händel and Gluck, or Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven, respectively, and you will find a hundred instances of perplexing similarity in their work. I must except Beethoven's last compositions, although they again revert to Bach. No one is entirely original. But I have said enough. Your remark was an unjustifiable affront; but we will forget that evening. Words do not kill: the main thing is to keep pressing forwards." May 31, 1849, p. 262.

House in Zwickau discovered in Schumann's sketches⁷¹ that he had written his own arrangements for the wind instruments.⁷²

Schumann would also use his literary pen to champion Bach. In his *Zeitschrift für Musik*, he repeatedly called for a complete edition of Bach's work to be published, and he discussed with Mendelssohn the principles upon which to compile such an edition.

As late as 1852, Schumann wrote to his publisher to ask for scores of the works of Baroque composers so that he might increase his knowledge of them. And in 1852-53, amidst growing signs of the nervous condition that would lead to the conclusion of his life in a mental institution three years later, one of Robert's last creative accomplishments was a project which he called "Bachiana"—writing piano accompaniments for six of Bach's solo violin sonatas, six cello sonatas, followed by Schumann's own seven fuguetas for piano, Op. 126.⁷³ He also wrote an accompaniment for Bach's masterpiece for violin known as the "Chaconne."

The Last Movement

We have seen how Bach accompanied the Schumanns, and especially Robert, throughout their creative lives. Bach's individual musical compositions, and the creative compositional principles that lay behind them—the driving factors in the generative process that produced these individual artistic masterpieces—were the constant "brook" of inspiration from which Robert and Clara drank.

And in our day, though the great Classical composers since Bach have long been resting in their graves, the question before us, as it was for Robert and Clara, is: Will we go back to that fountain of creativity? Will young people in our day draw creative inspiration from Bach, and his spiritual descendents, so that we may, again, experience the supreme joy of hearing, for the first time, new musical masterpieces that have the power to move our souls, as nothing else in human creation does?

71. Dr. Gerd Nauhaus found them in Schumann's sketches for the oratorio *Der Rose Polgerfahrt*.

72. From Matthias Wendt, "Bach und Händel in der Rezeption Robert Schumanns," from a synopsis of "Tag der mitteldeutschen Barockmusik 2001 in Zwickau" (Düsseldorf: Die Robert-Schumann-Forschungsstelle e.V., 2001) at: <http://www.schumann-ga.de/freie-texte/86-bach-und-haendel-in-der-rezeption-robert-schumanns.html>. English translation at: www.schillerinstitut.dk/drupal/schumann

73. Wasielewski, op. cit., pp. 180-181. Schumann's Bach cello accompaniments were not yet published at the time his book was written.



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The Schumann House museum in Zwickau. Inset: The town of Zwickau celebrates the 200th birthday of its favorite son, Robert Schumann.

Epilogue

Schumann and Mendelssohn were speaking together about a recently invented telescope. Schumann reported: "When I told him about the great telescope, and about a remark I read somewhere that to the inhabitants of distant planets, we would appear, when viewed through the telescope, somewhat like mites on a piece of cheese—[he said,] 'Yes, but *The Well-Tempered Clavier* would still inspire them with respect.'"⁷⁴

Maybe if the spacecraft *Kepler*, which is searching for planets like our Earth, discovers life out there in the great universe, *Kepler* will find that they are playing Bach!

Werner Hartmann, Lotta-Stina Thronell-Hartmann, Katherine Kanter, and Karsten Werner helped with translations for this article.

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74. Daverio, op. cit., p. 327.