

“Toward a better understanding”: Schumann’s *Carnaval*, Op. 9

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"TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING": SCHUMANN'S CARNAVAL, OP. 9

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In a letter dated 15 December 1830, Robert Schumann wrote, "If only my talent for music and poetry would converge into a single point, the light would not be so scattered, and I could attempt a great deal."¹ Schumann sought further to reconcile these arts in an essay from the same period, "*Über die innige Verwandtschaft der Poesie und Tonkunst*," in which he described both music and poetry as "the most beautiful of all the arts," able "to surround the senses with magic" and "to elevate humans to the highest form of beauty."² Although his agenda in this early essay was to point out an intimate relationship between text and music as manifested in song settings, for example, Schumann was not to explore seriously this most apparent solution for another ten years. He turned instead, in 1831, to music criticism. Schumann's use of the imaginary alter egos Florestan and Eusebius in his first published review³ had clear literary precedents: E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) adopted the voice of an invented alter ego in his music criticism,⁴ and the double was a favourite device in the novels of Jean Paul Richter (1673-1825).⁵ Indeed, Schumann originally created Florestan and Eusebius as protagonists for a

¹Leon Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 63. "Wäre mein Talent zur Dichtkunst und Musik nur in einem Punkte konzentriert, so wäre das Licht nicht so gebrochen, und ich getraute mir viel." *Jugendbriefe von Robert Schumann*, ed. Clara Schumann (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1886), 136.

²..."die schönste aller Künste,"... "die Sinne mit holdem Zauber zu umgaukeln," ... "zum höchsten Schönen den Menschen hinaufzutragen"; see *Gesammelte Schriften über Musik und Musiker von Robert Schumann*, 5th ed., vol. 2, ed. Martin Kreisig (Leipzig: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1914; repr. Westmead, England: Gregg International Publishers, Ltd., 1969), 173-75.

³For Schumann's review, originally published in *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in 1831, of Chopin's Op. 2 see "Ein Werk II," *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5th ed., vol. 1, 5-7.

⁴See also Bernhard Appel, "Schumanns Davidsbund: Geistes- und sozialgeschichtliche Voraussetzungen einer Romantischen Idee," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 38/i (1981): 22-23. For discussions of Schumann's admiration for E.T.A. Hoffmann, see Wolfgang Boetticher, *Robert Schumann: Einführung in Persönlichkeit und Werk* (Berlin: Bernhard Hahnfeld, 1941), 144, 319 and L.A. Whitesell, "E.T.A. Hoffmann and Schumann," *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, 13 (June 1983): 73-97.

⁵Other examples of the nineteenth-century fascination with the "double" are Robert Louis Stevenson (*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*), Fyodor Dostoyevsky (*The Double*), and Sigmund Freud. See Peter Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 26.

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novel, and in 1833 the early *Davidsbündler* articles were published in *Komet*, a literary, rather than a musical, journal.⁶ The founding of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* in 1834 further attests to Schumann's heightened critical awareness—both musical and literary—in the mid 1830s.

The duality of Schumann's artistic interest is reflected just as clearly in his first mature compositions as in his music criticism.⁷ Indeed, Frederick Niecks recognized in 1925 that "it is an interesting task to pursue the inquiry where, when, and in what degree the poets moulded the style (subject and manner) of Schumann."⁸ Given Schumann's grounding in German literature and his holistic approach to art,⁹ his transfer of literary ideals to musical composition might appear an almost inevitable process, yet it finds precedents in the aesthetics of most of the German romantic novelists whom Schumann admired: Tieck, Wackenroder, Novalis, Jean Paul, and Hoffmann. It was during the time when his fascination with these literary figures and his preoccupation with artistic synthesis were at their peak that Schumann began to compose *Carnaval*, Op. 9. To appreciate more fully the aesthetic conjunction in *Carnaval*, then, we must first examine Schumann's ideals in the context of the early nineteenth-century aesthetic values voiced by his literary heroes.

* *

Dissolving inherited distinctions of genre in a poetic synthesis remained a consistent preoccupation for the German romantics. Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829),

⁶Indeed, until he began his piano studies with Friedrich Wieck in 1828, Schumann's formal literary training far surpassed his musical instruction. His education at the Zwickau Lyceum was supplemented by hours of reading in his father's bookshop, and in 1825, he helped found a *Schülerverein* dedicated to the study of German literature. See Gerald Abraham and Eric Sams, "Robert Schumann," *Early Romantic Masters I* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985), 101. For a discussion of the secret clubs with which Schumann was involved, see Bernhard Appel, "Schumanns *Davidsbund*," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 38/i (1981): 1-23.

⁷Edward Lippman has also noted the basic formative force of literature in Schumann's early works. See Edward Lippman, "Theory and Practice in Schumann's Aesthetics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 17 (1964): 342.

⁸Frederick Niecks, *Robert Schumann* (London: J.M. Dent, 1925), 123. Niecks's thesis that Goethe exerted a much stronger influence on Schumann than Jean Paul is perhaps more applicable to Schumann's later compositions (sonatas, symphonies, etc.) than to his piano cycles.

⁹Florestan's aphorism, "The aesthetic principle is the same in every art; only the material differs," echoes Schumann's early statement that "poetry and music spring from one source." See Robert Schumann, *On Music and Musicians*, transl. Paul Rosenfeld, ed. Konrad Wolff (New York: Pantheon Books, 1946; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 44.

for instance, described romantic poetry as an attempt "to reunite all separate genres and reestablish contact with philosophy and rhetoric, [to] embrace all that is poetic whether artistically articulated or not, combine poetry and prose...."¹⁰ This conception of the poetic overtook the aesthetics of the German romantic novelists as well, such that from around the turn of the nineteenth century, they approached their genre as an essentially poetic, rather than a prosaic, form. Indeed, Novalis went so far as to admonish that "a novel must be poetry through and through."¹¹

The most extensive nineteenth-century characterization of the poetic novel occurs in Schlegel's literary criticism, particularly in his *Gespräch über die Poesie* of 1800. In his early writings, Schlegel distinguished between poetic novels—which he designated either "fantastic" or "sentimental"—and prose novels—either "philosophical" or "psychological";¹² his belief that the ideal complete poetic novel would synthesize both types found expression in his concept of the "fantastic sentimental mimic" novel, where "the mimic represents the fullness of life, the fantastic means the free play of fancy, and the sentimental embodies love."¹³ Such a work hence embraced the ideals of Romanticism, which Schlegel defined as "that which portrays a sentimental subject in fantastic form."¹⁴

As even its label implies, paradox was fundamental to the conception and form of the poetic novel: contradictions between the real and the unreal (the mundane and the fantastic), the rational and the irrational (intelligence and feeling), unity and variety (form and digression). This perception of the poetic novel involved what Schlegel described as "an absolute chaos of character," where "chaos" referred to a "unitary although manifold whole."¹⁵ Furthermore, Schlegel perceived the novel as elliptical—as having two centres, and hence, moving in two simultaneous planes, the worldly and the transcendental. At all times, romantic poetry was to be a

¹⁰See Eric Blackall, *The Novels of the German Romantics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 22.

¹¹"Ein Roman muss durch und durch Poesie sein." Blackall, *Novels of the German Romantics*, 16.

¹²"Fantastic" novels were "for the senses and the imagination," while "sentimental" novels were "epic in material, elegiac in spirit, and idyllic in form." "Philosophical" novels were primarily concerned with ideas or philosophies, while "psychological" novels were centrally concerned with characters. See Blackall, *Novels of the German Romantics*, 24.

¹³Blackall, *Novels of the German Romantics*, 29.

¹⁴"... was uns einen sentimental Stoff in einer fantastischen Form darstellt." See Blackall, *Novels of the German Romantics*, 30.

¹⁵Blackall, *Novels of the German Romantics*, 28.

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combination of the real with the imaginary. The transcendental, the irrational, the fantastic, the digressive were perceived as manifestations of the individual and the inner life—indeed, Schlegel described poetic novels as "compendia of individuality"¹⁶—and as such, enveloped the poetic novel in a confessional, contemplative tone. In the truly poetic novel, therefore, the balance between inherent contradictions was weighted towards the individual, so that the novel emphasized characters over events, reflection over action, characterization over depiction—in short, the lyric over the narrative. This conception of the poetic novel may also inform our reading of *Carnaval*.

Certainly Schumann held in highest regard those novelists who most emphatically embraced the ideal of the poetic novel.¹⁷ The poetic coexistence of reality and fantasy is evident in the novels and criticism of E.T.A. Hoffmann, for example. A reflection of Schlegel's ideals, Hoffmann's *Kreiseriana* is characterized by its paradox of inner and outer reality and its emphasis on introspection and reflection.¹⁸ Poetic diversity is central to Jean Paul's works, too; indeed, the purposely digressive, discordant style of his novels is so strong that even Schlegel found the effect overwhelming. Nonetheless, as the most celebrated manifestations of the poetic conception of the novel, Jean Paul's works—and particularly *Flegeljahre*—became Schumann's undeniable literary ideal.

The impact of Jean Paul's style upon Schumann's aesthetics was profound, as the composer himself admitted. As early as 1828, Schumann pondered what he might have become had he not known Jean Paul's works.¹⁹ His diaries from the early 1830s are filled with reverent references to the author,²⁰ and in a notebook

¹⁶Blackall, *Novels of the German Romantics*, 24.

¹⁷For a discussion of Schlegel's impact on Schumann's conception of the novel, see Arnfried Edler, *Robert Schumann und seine Zeit* (Laaber: Laaber, 1982).

¹⁸David Charlton, ed., *E.T.A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, transl. Martin Clarke (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 6.

¹⁹"Ich fragte mich oft, wo ich seyn würde, wenn ich Jean Paul nicht gekannt hätte." Robert Schumann, *Tagebücher, 1827-1838*, ed. Georg Eismann (Leipzig, 1971), 82.

²⁰Peter Ostwald, *Schumann: The Inner Voices of a Musical Genius* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 40ff.

from 1832, Schumann proclaimed that Jean Paul had "exercised a great deal of influence" on him.²¹

Although scholars have long noted the pertinence of Jean Paul's *Flegeljahre* to Schumann's earlier piano cycle, *Papillons*, Op. 2, they almost always dismiss *Carnaval* as a higher kind of *Papillons*; its singular relationship to literary models, and particularly the novels of Jean Paul, has yet to be closely examined.²² Moreover, until recently, scholars have concentrated on the quasi-programmatic, narrative relationships between Schumann's works and his literary models. Linda Siegel, for instance, broached the question of the relationship between Schumann's piano cycles and Jean Paul's novels, but only to formulate programs for the cycles, based on the "plot" of *Flegeljahre*; her study completely ignores the more fundamental structural relationship between the works.²³

Anthony Newcomb and John Daverio have proposed more promising alternatives to the analysis of literary models in Schumann's music. Newcomb's notion of the paradigmatic narrative plot, however, is probably more easily applied to Schumann's later works, which are based on classical formal outlines, than to the piano cycles of the 1830s, which deliberately are not. Newcomb implicitly concedes this point, in fact, for his examples are drawn wholly from the later repertoire.²⁴ Daverio's explanation of the digressive elements of the C-major Fantasy in light of the literary arabesque, on the other hand, is entirely relevant to an analysis of *Carnaval*, as he himself points out:

Thus it is in these sets of character pieces [opp. 6,9,16] that Schumann approached Schlegel's structural ideal—the form that is fragmentary in form and content.... Taken as individuals, many of the fragments are not very impressive; some even fail to make much sense. They only

²¹Willi Reich, "Schumann the Man," in *Schumann: A Symposium*, ed. Gerald Abraham (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 3.

²²Gerhard Dietel has discussed in detail the relationship between Jean Paul and Schumann's *Papillons*, but does not extend his discussion to include *Carnaval*. See *"Eine neue poetische Zeit": Musikanschauung und stilistische Tendenzen im Klavierwerk Robert Schumanns* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1989), 179ff.

²³Linda Siegel, "The Piano Cycles of Schumann and the Novels of Jean Paul Richter" *Piano Quarterly* 18 (Fall 1969): 16-22. The occasional inaccuracies in Siegel's research often lead her to false conclusions. For example, Siegel parallels the "four sphinxes" of *Carnaval* with the versification of a poem in *Flegeljahre*; that there are only three sphinxes calls into question her thesis.

²⁴Anthony Newcomb, "Schumann and Late-Eighteenth-Century Narrative Strategies," *19th-Century Music* 11/ii (Fall 1987): 164-74.

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take on a special meaning when related to other fragments in Schlegel's cosmos of miniatures.²⁵

Because Op. 9 can be construed as completely, rather than momentarily, digressive, however, the explanatory power of the arabesque is less compelling in *Carnaval* than it is within the context of the sonata principle of the C-major Fantasy. Yet *Carnaval* is not as fragmentary as it first appears, as various structural analyses of the large-scale formal connections of the work have demonstrated.²⁶ Indeed, the cycle more closely fits Schlegel's description of poetic chaos, a "unitary though manifold whole," than the digressive character of the arabesque. Although both Clara Schumann and Liszt performed truncated versions of *Carnaval*,²⁷ Schumann's request that Friedrich Kistner publish the work in a single volume "since it is a whole" confirms the composer's conception of it as a unity.²⁸ Thus, although Daverio's application of the arabesque *topos* begins to explain the structural principles behind *Carnaval*, it does not fully account for them.

In this cycle, Schumann seems to have broadened his literary model beyond the arabesque to the ideal of the poetic novel—the "fantastic sentimental mimic"—described by Schlegel. The cycle exhibits all the characteristic features of the poetic novel, particularly as they were manifested in Jean Paul's works. Schumann often described his favourite musical works in analogous literary terms: he saw Jean Paul reflected in Beethoven's works,²⁹ he considered Schubert's works to be like composed novels,³⁰ and he likened the "heavenly length" of Schubert's C-

²⁵John Daverio, "Schumann's 'Im Legendenton' and Friedrich Schlegel's *Arabeske*," *19th-Century Music* 11/ii (Fall 1987): 163.

²⁶Most of these analyses appear within doctoral dissertations on Schumann's piano cycles. The most recent and thorough of these analyses is Peter Kaminsky, "Aspects of Harmony, Rhythm, and Form in Schumann's *Papillons*, *Carnaval* and *Davidsbündlertänze*" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1989).

²⁷Liszt performed only ten of the pieces from *Carnaval*. Clara habitually omitted "Florestan," "Eusebius," and "Chiarina." See Tovey's review of Clara's performance in Sir Donald Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Illustrative Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 109-112.

²⁸Quoted in Robert Schumann, preface to *Carnaval für Klavier*, ed. Clara Schumann, new printing rev. by Joachim Draheim (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1987).

²⁹"Wenn ich Beethovensche Musick höre, so ists, als läse mir jemand Jean Paul vor...." Schumann, *Tagebücher*, vol. 1, 97.

³⁰"Die Schubertschen Variationen sind das vollendetste romantische Gemälde, ein vollkomner Tonroman—Töne sind höhere Worte." Schumann, *Tagebücher*, vol. 1, 96.

major Symphony to reading a Jean Paul novel "in four thick volumes."³¹ It seems reasonable, therefore, to apply the same analogy to the works of Schumann himself.

* *

Carnaval is rife with the plurality and poetic contradictions that define the German romantic novel. Indeed, in the twentieth century, Mikhail Bakhtin used the very term "carnivalisation" to describe this sort of polyphony or layering of discourse. Edward Lippman's theory of "multiple causation"—that is, the confluence of influences, inspiration, and hence, meaning—within Schumann's works also complements Schlegel's notion of the elliptical novel.³² And like Schlegel's *Fantastic Sentimental Mimic*, *Carnaval* emerges from a confluence of disparate experiences that exist simultaneously on both real and fantastic planes.

In its evocation of real and imaginary characters through descriptive titles, the cycle is elliptical at its most surface level. "Chiarina" (Clara), "Chopin," "Estrella" (Ernestine von Fricken), and "Paganini" refer to real persons in Schumann's experience, while "Pierrot," "Arlequin," and "Pantalon et Columbine" refer to fictional prototypes. "Florestan" and "Eusebius" transcend the contradiction between reality and fantasy, for they represent Schumann's perception of his own reality. They serve as Schumann's mode of confession, and even though the mode might be fantastic, romantic aesthetics perceived the act of confession itself as part of reality rather than fancy.

The complex tonal structure of *Carnaval* further simulates the lyric character of the poetic novel. On the one hand, the work is a collection of small character pieces combined into a larger whole. Although individually the pieces are not remarkable, when taken together they suggest Schumann's alternative to large-scale structure. In light of his comment from 1830 cited above, it is noteworthy that Schumann integrates the whole with musical techniques that foreshadow those used later in the song cycles. For one thing, some individual movements are harmonically incomplete, finding their resolution only in the opening chord of the subsequent movement. "Florestan," for instance, ends on a diminished seventh chord in G minor, which resolves to the relative major, B flat, in the first measures of "Coquette." Similarly, the final tonic chord of "Coquette" is reinterpreted in the beginning measures of "Replique" as a secondary dominant (V/VI). Schumann later used these same techniques to harmonically unify the movements of his vocal cycle, *Dichterliebe*. The

³¹Robert Schumann, *Music and Musicians*, trans. Fanny Raymond Ritter, 6th ed. (London: William Reeves, 1877), 54.

³²Lippman, "Theory and Practice in Schumann's Aesthetics," 330.

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local connections in *Carnaval* point to larger harmonic structures. The keys of the individual movements comprise a structural arpeggiation of the "tonic" triad, A flat, in which the first half prolongs the dominant and the second half prolongs the tonic by way of the submediant (see Diagram 1). Hence, the apparently digressive key scheme actually disguises a structural symmetry which unifies the components of the cycle.

The last movement, "Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins," completes the harmonic structure of the cycle (see Diagram 2). In this movement, Schumann explores the mediant relationships within the tonic key: A-flat major, C minor, and F minor; the dominant key of E-flat major, which pervades the first half of the cycle, is conspicuously avoided. The tonic of the entire cycle is hence affirmed and substantiated in this, the longest movement of the cycle.

The sense of the March as synthesis of the cycle is sustained by motivic references to the preceding pieces, to the ASCH motto which pervades the cycle, and in the coalescence of the cycle's alternating duple and triple time signatures—it is a march in triple metre, itself something of a contradiction. On a purely musical level, this retrospective "commentary" affirms Schumann's conception of the work as a large-scale, cyclical form. It is even more provocative, however, that this technique parallels a characteristic feature of Jean Paul's novels. In *Flegeljahre*, for instance, Jean Paul includes as the last chapter a "novel within the novel"—a structural and symbolic synthesis of the entire novel up to that point³³—and it was this chapter in *Flegeljahre* that Schumann cited as the inspiration for his earlier cycle, *Papillons*. In *Carnaval*, he explicitly references both the finale of the *Papillons* cycle, in the "Grossvaterteranz" which appears at m.51, and the story of Jean Paul's chapter, in the twelve strokes of the clock that end the "Marche."³⁴ Furthermore, in so alluding to his earlier cycle, Schumann exhibits the same self-reflexive character that marks the German Romantic novel, and which Eric Blackall explains as a deeper manifestation of the contemplative character of the poetic novel.³⁵

³³Schlegel did something similar in his novel *Lucinde*. See Blackall, *Novels of the German Romantics*, 39.

³⁴Tovey obviously found it difficult to see past the overt program implied by the movement's title, for he describes these twelve chords as "the heads of twelve goliaths fly[ing] through the air like twelve turnips." See Donald Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Illustrative Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 112.

³⁵Blackall, *Novels of the German Romantics*, 19.

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Diagram 1: *Carnaval*, op. 9, structural outline

1. Préambule	Ab	(no sphinx)	
2. Pierrot	Eb	ASCH	
3. Arlequin	Bb	ASCH	
4. Valse noble	Bb	ASHC	
5. Eusebius	Eb	[CASH/ASHC]	
6. Florestan	g	ASCH	SPHINX 3
7. Coquette	Bb	ASCH	
8. Réplique	Bb-g	[ASCH]	
9. Sphinxes		1.SCHA (EbCBA)	
		2.AsCH (AbCB)	
		3.ASCH (AEbCB)	
10. Papillons	Bb	ASCH	
11. ASCH_SCHA (Lettres Dansantes)	Eb	AsCH	SPHINX 2
12. Chiarina	c	AsCH	
13. Chopin	Ab	[ASHC]	
14. Estrella	f	AsCH	
15. Reconnaissance	Ab	AsCH	
16. Pantalon et Columbine	f	AsCH	
17.Valse allemande Intermezzo (Paganini) Tempo I (Valse)	Ab f Ab	AsCH	
18. Aveu	f-Ab	AsCH	
19. Promenade	Db	AsCH	
20. Pause (recalls Préambule)	Ab	(no sphinx)	
21. Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins	Ab	AsCH	

ARPEGGICATION OF A^b TRIAD

(V)

(II)

Diagram 2: Structural Diagram
"Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins"

Measures:	1	25	52	88	82	83	121	125	147
Thematic Material:	Sphinx 2: AsCH		Grossvateranz (Op.2 Finale)		g (8ves)	Préambule quoted	cf. m.25		
Local Harmonic Areas:	(Ab-f-Ab)		(Eb)	c)	g	chromatic ascent (c-eb)	c	f	Ab Eb C (V/Ab) (V/f)
Structural Harmonic Areas:	Ab	c					c		

Measures:	178	179	202	225
Thematic Material:	c (8ves) cf. m.82	Préambule quoted	highest note (c ⁴)	
Local Harmonic Areas:	c	chromatic ascent f-ab	(V7-I)	(V7-I)
Structural Harmonic Areas:			Ab	Ab

Schumann's reference to the story of *Flegeljahre* and its symbols encourages us to look beyond *Papillons* to *Carnaval* for the same coexistence of "real" and "fantastic" elements found in the German romantic novel, or, put in the more traditional terms of musical analysis, to consider the fundamental paradox in *Carnaval* between its "absolute" and "programmatic" elements. The descriptive titles of the individual pieces appear immediately programmatic: "Arlequin" and "Pierrot" evoke images of these *commedia dell'arte* characters, "Coquette" suggests a mood, "Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins" suggests a dramatic encounter with ideological implications. Moreover, the title of the complete work, *Carnaval*, adds another layer of "meaning" to these disparate headings: the variety of characters, moods, and dances conjures images of the eclectic atmosphere of a carnival-time masked ball.

Yet knowledge of the details of Schumann's life and career widens the scope of interpretation well beyond the descriptive titles: "Papillons" not only evokes images of butterflies, but again alludes to Schumann's earlier piano cycle, and in light of Jean Paul's description of the masked ball in the last chapter of *Flegeljahre*, the masked ball of Schumann's carnival takes on new, literary significance. Jean Paul's belief that the masked ball was the most perfect medium through which poetry could interpret life only enhances this interpretation.³⁶ Recognition of Schumann's pet-names and their literary stimulus adds to the web, as "Estrella" and "Chiarina" become not simply "Ernestine" and "Clara," but competing love-interests, perhaps even symbolic competitors for the role of Wina in Jean Paul's novel. Finally, appreciation of Schumann's predilection for secret societies and his critical stance against mediocrity in music informs our understanding of his choice of characters as "members" of his imaginary society. At this level of interpretation, even the apparently "absolute" "Préambule" carries extramusical connotations. It begins with the vestiges of Schumann's variations on Schubert's *Sehnsuchtswalzer*, D. 365, an allusion which, when considered in light of the frequent parallels Schumann drew between Schubert and Jean Paul, suggests Schubert's honorary membership in the League of David.

Despite the dense web of extramusical elements within *Carnaval*, however, the work cannot be called "programmatic" in the usual sense of a narrative. Schumann was quick to assure his friends and publisher that he applied the titles *after* the work was completed.³⁷ Whether true or not, the impulse for such a disclaimer suggests a wariness of insinuations that anything but "pure" music was inferior. In either scenario, the individual pieces are not literal descriptions, but brief reflections on the ideas or qualities which the titles evoke. This is perhaps most clearly evident in

³⁶Dale, "Piano Music," 39.

³⁷Schumann made such statements on at least two occasions. See *Music and Musicians*, transl. Ritter, 153 and Lippman, "Theory and Practice in Schumann's Aesthetics," 322.

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"Chopin," in which Schumann suggests the character of Chopin's nocturnes, but makes no effort to disguise the marks of his own rhythmic style—the movement becomes, in other words, Schumann's reflection on, rather than an imitation or description of, Chopin. Like the poetic novel, then, *Carnaval* is not essentially narrative, but remains a collection of seemingly disparate lyrical digressions connected in some way in the composer's experience. Their often personal relevance need not be understood by or revealed to the listener; the emphasis is on characterization and introspective reflection rather than action and plot.

In the poetic novel, *Witz*—the faculty of perceiving similarities and making quick connections among disparate elements—was the underlying agent that reconciled its fundamental contradictions. As Daverio has noted, Schumann's perception of *Witz* was particularly affected by Jean Paul, who carefully disguised the synthesizing thread of his novels with subtle wordplay and titles. His novel *Die unsichtbare Loge* (1793), for instance, is a particularly digressive work in which the arabesques are unified by the idea of the secret society; the only hint at this unifying principle, however, occurs in the novel's title.³⁸

In *Carnaval*, Schumann used the ASCH motto as the reconciling force. Unlike Jean Paul, however, Schumann revealed his unifying element in "Sphinxes," the enigmatic movement between "Replique" and "Papillons." Inasmuch as they sketch versions of the ASCH motto that appear as motives throughout the cycle, the three sphinxes present both riddle and key to the unity and variety of the work. The musical motto parallels the literary function of *Witz* in that it not only functions as the unifying thread among the pieces, but it also directs the structure of the cycle: the first half features the third sphinx (ASCH: A,E-flat,C,B), while the second half of the cycle uses the second sphinx (AsCH: A-flat,C,B) (refer to Diagram 1). The point at which the sphinxes switch is "A.S.C.H. _S.C.H.A. Lettres Dansantes," the title of which "solves" the riddle and incorporates the first, silent sphinx.

The use of the term "sphinxes" is itself cryptic and has various layers of interpretation. Most obviously, the sphinx evokes the mythical creature who propounded the riddle eventually solved by Oedipus. In *Carnaval*, however, the sphinxes themselves offer the key to solving the structural riddle of the cycle. In so doing, however, they pose an additional riddle: the performer must understand that, like the mythical creature, Schumann's musical sphinxes are silent.³⁹ Furthermore, Schumann's placement of the sphinxes immediately before the movement "Papillons" suggests another more remote, private layer of meaning which in turn reinvokes the

³⁸Blackall, *Novels of the German Romantics*, 72-73.

³⁹I am indebted to Kim Kowalke for pointing out the mute character of the sphinx.

essential paradox of the poetic novel: Jean Paul used the term "Papilio" to refer to "day thoughts," or reality, and the term "Sphinxes" to refer to "night thoughts," or fantasy.⁴⁰

With the ASCH motto, then, Schumann not only justifies the disparate foreground of *Carnaval*, but also reconciles the fundamental contradiction between the work's "real/absolute" and "fantastic/programmatic" elements. In purely musical terms, the motto "means" the musical motives supplied in the sphinxes and heard throughout the cycle. Yet the motive also evokes Schumann's relationship with Ernestine von Fricken, since its letters were derived from both his surname and the town in which Ernestine was born. In Schumann's description of *Carnaval* to Moscheles, he noted the unifying motto, and even admitted to its personal consequence, but refrained from pointing out that the "musical friend" to whom he referred was the "Estrella" characterized in the work. Rather, Schumann objectified "Estrella" in commenting that the title was simply a name "placed under portraits in order to commit them more lastingly to memory."⁴¹ The structural key, therefore, is at the same time confessional in nature, and hence, is itself inherently elliptical.

This conception of *Carnaval* as rooted in the aesthetics of the poetic novel demands that the work be essentially expressive rather than explicitly and narrowly "programmatic." This is easily reconciled with Schumann's belief that no one program ever adequately "solved" a musical work, and hence his ambiguous attitude towards titles. For Schumann, even overtly programmatic music did not narrate a program, but rather the program clarified after the fact various musical qualities evident in the work.⁴²

A document recently discovered by Nancy Reich amongst Clara Schumann's concert programs in Zwickau suggests the complexities of such a position, for it appears that Clara included an explanatory program note whenever she performed *Carnaval* in Germany:⁴³

⁴⁰Eric Sams, "The Tonal Analogue in Schumann's Music," *Proceedings of the Royal Musicological Association* 96 (1969-70), 109.

⁴¹Quoted in Schumann, *Carnaval*, new printing rev. by Joachim Draheim, preface.

⁴²Plantinga, *Schumann as Critic*, 120.

⁴³Nancy Reich graciously provided a transcript of the German document, which I have included in Appendix A. I must also acknowledge Harald Krebs for his invaluable comments upon the original transcript and corrections to my translation. Unfortunately, specific information regarding the document from which the programme is drawn (date first used, number of times used, etc.) remained inaccessible for this study. According to Reich, there is no evidence that Clara used the program when she performed *Carnaval* in England; this supposition is borne out by the fact that Tovey did not mention any such program in his

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"Towards a Better Understanding of *Carneval* [sic]
by Robert Schumann."

This composition can be regarded as a portrait/image [*Abbild*] of fleeting carnival life, as it concentrates itself at a masquerade ball and unfolds in colourful succession. Individual figures appear as if in a shadow-play—some of them stock characters, such as Pierrot and Arlequin, Pantalon and Columbine, and others very specific, such as Chopin [and] Paganini. But the individual is visible only for a brief moment, to be quickly supplanted by a new one or engulfed by the flow of the surrounding crowd. So much [for the work] in general.

As to the particulars, only a couple of words [are needed] about the last number, "The March of the League of David Against the Philistines." At the time when this composition originated, a lively band had been formed of impassioned intellectuals enthusiastic about art, who called themselves the League of David and at whose centre Robert Schumann stood. In [spoken] word, writing, and action, they fought against the pedantry and hypocrisy that express themselves in art—for example, by seeing the general well-being of art in the pattern-like imitation of forms which have taken shape over the course of time, and which in their essentials to be sure have been elevated to eternal standards by great masters—and which would like to elevate simple, sober correctness to the highest throne as [being] the actual "classicism." The entire composition is rooted chiefly in this mood—except for one purely musical joke [*Scherze*], a discussion of which would be too lengthy here. It finds its most decisive expression, however, in the last piece. The melody of an old, very familiar folksong forms the basis of this same number.

All the rest is left to the fantasy of the listener.

B.

This program—clearly meant to be read in advance of hearing the work—raises a host of questions for the critic, for there is no evidence that Schumann intended that any such "explanation" be published. The program's true purpose, however, is implied in its title: "Towards a Better Understanding of *Carnaval* by Robert Schumann."

review of Clara's performance (see Tovey, *Illustrative Music*, 109-12). The identity of "B.," the author of the program note, remains a mystery. Although Brahms did sign himself "B." upon occasion, the connection ends there; there is no external evidence to suggest he wrote the note which, furthermore, is incongruous with his usual style. Ken Hull has suggested to me what seems a more promising alternative: Wolfgang Bargiel. It seems likely that Clara might have asked her half brother, himself a composer within Schumann's musical circle, to write an explanatory note which she could use for her concert performances of *Carnaval*.

In his review of the first public performance of *Carnaval*, in 1840 by Liszt, Schumann conceded that the audience found the work incomprehensible:

Liszt met my doubt as to whether such rhapsodical sketches as mine of carnival life would make any impression on a general public with the decided assurance that he hoped they would. And yet I think he was mistaken....Though certain traits in [*Carnaval*] may please certain persons, its musical moods change too rapidly to be easily followed by a general public that does not care to be roused anew at every moment.⁴⁴

Liszt, too, confessed that the work did not elicit "his usual applause."⁴⁵ Clara, who saw the work as "a lovely painting in tones,"⁴⁶ was particularly dismayed by the public's lack of understanding. In its structure, *Carnaval* remained remote from the archetypes familiar to a nineteenth-century audience, and hence would have been perceived as formally unpredictable and confusing. As Schumann himself admitted, descriptive titles could direct the listener's perceptions, but in *Carnaval* even the titles were difficult to reconcile. Liszt, in fact, performed only excerpts from the cycle, under the title *Carnavalscenen*, and included those pieces with titles most appropriate to the image of the literal carnival: "Coquette," "Replique," "Pantalon et Columbine." He also renamed two pieces whose titles appeared distant from the image of the literal carnival: "Chopin" became simply "Notturmo," and the cryptic "Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins" became the generic "Finale."

Clara's programme similarly reflects an explicit effort to direct the audience's understanding of the work. Her program also focuses on the images suggested by the overall title of the cycle—fleeting glimpses of a carnival. Yet the reference to the passing images as "shadow-play on a wall" supports the view that the individual pieces were not intended as clear, explicit descriptions of the characters named in the titles, but merely hints of or reflections on their personalities.⁴⁷ The program

⁴⁴Schumann, *Music and Musicians*, transl. Ritter, 153.

⁴⁵Schumann, *Music and Musicians*, transl. Ritter, xvi.

⁴⁶In letter to Franz Grillparzer, 11 January 1838. Quoted in Schumann, *Carnaval*, new printing rev. by Joachim Draheim, preface.

⁴⁷Schumann invoked the same image of shadow-play on a wall in reference to a set of Schubert's *Deutsche Tänze*: "'And it would be an excellent idea,' Florestan shouted [to the deaf painter], 'if you fetched your laterna magica and followed the masked ball on the wall with shadows.'" See Schumann, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, 203; translated in Lippman, "Theory and Practice," 321. It seems likely that the author of the program note knew of this review and made the connection because of the parallel images of the

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attempts particularly to "explain" the title of the "Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins" in terms of Schumann's musical aesthetics and his *Davidsbündler* criticisms in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*—criticisms with which a German musical audience might well have been familiar. Yet the program specifically avoids explaining the ASCH motto with the disclaimer that such an explanation "would be too lengthy here," even though it is primarily this motto which affords the cycle its structural coherence. The motto's autobiographical significance consequently was suppressed also, remaining as silent as the sphinxes; the program's insistence that the motto was a "purely musical joke" suggests Clara's eagerness to bury its autobiographical connotations. Her program, which focusses on the most surface level of the cycle, hence veils the poetic quality of the work beneath an authoritative monologue. It functions as an external, extramusical filter through which the average listener could more easily approach the work, yet at the same time protects its inner meaning.

Davidsbündler gegen die Philister. "Es hatte sich, in jener Zeit, da diese Composition entstand, ein Bund lebhafter, für die Kunst enthusiastisch entflammter Geister gebildet, welche sich die Davidsbündler nannten, und in deren (sic) Mittelpunkt Robert Schumann stand."

Although *Carnaval* is informed by extramusical influences, connotations, and references, the work is not essentially "programmatic" in the sense that it depicts a series of specific images or tells a story. The cycle is a collection of introspections and ideas gleaned both from Schumann's inner and outer worlds, and hence is primarily expressive rather than pictorial or narrative. Like Schumann's later *Dichterliebe*, the titles hint at a loose narrative, but the construction of such a story is essentially left "to the fantasy of the listener," as Clara's program states.

Composition—von einem damit verbundenen reinmusikalischen Scherze abgesehen, dessen

In its dualism between inner and outer reality, its confessional tone, and its construction as a "unitary although manifold whole," *Carnaval* reveals its conceptual roots in the German romantic novel. As such, the work constitutes an early attempt by Schumann to conjoin his literary and compositional interests, and to experiment with the synthesis of poetry and large-scale structure explored by Jean Paul, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and Schlegel a generation before him. It is precisely this poetic synthesis that would have made the work difficult for a nineteenth-century audience to comprehend; even with the benefit of one hundred years of musical scholarship and the objectivity afforded by time, the cycle's many layers challenge critics today. Indeed, as Dahlhaus has pointed out, if we want the romantic literary aesthetic of the poetic "to shed light on musical reality, we must not make the mistake of trying to

carnival. A further connection with *Carnaval* exists in this review, however, for Schumann originally commissioned the deaf painter Johann Peter Leyser to design the title page for *Carnaval*; the cycle was eventually published without the title page, however, and if it was ever completed, no copy exists today.

iron out its contradictions, but must let them remain as they are."⁴⁸ Although further study of the literary context in which the work was created will not bring us to a single solution, it will doubtless lead us towards Clara's apparent purpose of a "better understanding" of Schumann's *Carnaval*.

⁴⁶ In letter to Franz Grillparzer, 11 January 1838. Quoted in Schumann, *Carnaval*, now printing rev. by Joachim Draheim, preface.

⁴⁸ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, transl. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 142.

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APPENDIX A

"Zum besseren Verständniss des 'Carnevals' von Robert Schumann"

Diese Composition mag als ein Abbild flüchtigen Carnevalslebens angesehen werden, wie es sich etwa auf einem Maskenballe concentrirt und in buntem Wechsel entfaltet. Schattenspielartig treten einzelne Gestalten auf, theils allgemeine, wie Pierrot und Arlequin, Pantalon und Columbine, theils ganz besondere, wie Chopin, Paganini; aber nur für wenige Momente wird das Einzelne sichtbar, um rasch von einem Neuen verdrängt, oder von dem umflutenden Strome verschlungen zu werden. So viel im allgemeinen.

Im Einzelnen nur ein Paar Worte über die letzte Nummer, "Marsch der Davidsbündler gegen die Philister." Es hatte sich, in jener Zeit, da diese Composition entstand, ein Bund lebhafter, für die Kunst enthusiastisch entbrannter Geister gebildet, welche sich die Davidsbündler nannten, und in deren [sic] Mittelpunkt Robert Schumann stand. In Wort, Schrift, und That bekämpften sie jene Pedanterie und Heuchelei, welche in der Kunst z.B. sich dadurch äussern, dass sie in dem chablonenartigen Nachahmen von Formen, welche sich im Laufe der Zeit gebildet haben und durch grosse Meister in den Grundzügen allerdings zu ewigen Normen erhoben werden sind, das allgemeine Heil erblicken [erblicken?] und die blosse, nüchterne Correktheit gerne als die eigentliche "Classicität" auf den höchsten Thron erheben möchten. In dieser Stimmung wurzelt wohl hauptsächlich die ganze Composition—von einem damit verbundenen reinmusikalischen Scherze abgesehen, dessen Erörterung hier zu weitläufig wäre—sie findet aber in dem letzten Stücke ihren entschiedensten Ausdruck. Die Melodie eines alten, sehr bekannten Volksliedes bildet die Grundlage desselben.

Alles Uebrige bleibe der Fantasie des Hörers überlassen.

B.